

Oral history interview with Stanisław Bogucki

Oral History | Accession Number: 1998.A.0300.318 | RG-50.488.0318

*This Oral History Interview with **Stanisław Bogucki (SB)** took place on August 1, 2010.*

*The **Interviewer was: Patrycja Bukalska (PB)**.*

*The Translation/Summary from Polish into English was provided by **Lucien Weisbrod (LW)**.*

PB asks **Stanisław Bogucki** to introduce himself.

PB: What year were you born?

SB: Basically, I was born in 1929, on February 28th. At birth, I weighed 5 kg. Following my birth, my mother died and I was taken by someone else to be raised. My father couldn't be bothered with raising a child, since at that time he was busy building a tobacco factory and a saw mill in Żyrardów. My mother was buried there, but I did not find that out where until the German occupation began.

When my real father brought me "home", he actually brought me to the home of his sister-in-law and her husband. I stayed there for some 2 to 3 weeks, when the husband of his father's sister-in-law told her that he didn't want this newborn around. It was she, who finally brought me to the Boguckis. The Boguckis waited for more than a year, before they had me christened and registered officially as their child. That is why in my official documents I am listed as being born in 1930--a year later than I was actually born.

Some people alleged that the Bogucki's bought me from some Jews. For that reason, I suffered a lot of verbal abuse from other children because of all the rumors that circulated about my origin.

My stepfather was a well to do man. He owned a very large garden and many Jews used to come to buy his fruit. Some would travel with it to sell it in Żyrardów. Later on, I would occasionally go with him to his assigned stand in the market in Żyrardów to sell their produce.

PB: We visited with you a few weeks ago and then we spoke about your recollection of the war period. We have returned to repeat that discussion and to record it with a video camera. You just told us about the circumstances that shaped your early years. Now, I would like to ask you where you were when the war broke out.

SB: I was right here in Wiskitki at the start of the war. Everything around me was planted with orchards and gardens. My stepfather, Bolesław Bogucki was a skilled gardener. He'd bring wild plants from the forest graft them and would transplant them all around. When he went to serve in World War I, before I was born, he disappeared for 12 years. He traveled to China and Japan. He came back with many curious souvenirs. He loved me as his stepson. He would take me hunting, and would have me accompany him everywhere.

PB: And when the war started, did life here change a lot?

SB remembers on September 1st seeing on his way from school, Polish soldiers fleeing from the approaching Germans. He recalls an unusual incident when a Polish soldier stopped to look at himself in a mirror. An officer in his unit noticed him and killed him for passing information with the mirror to the enemy.

PB: Later, when Polish soldiers were no longer there, and Germans were in charge, what was going on here? How were people treated? Did any Jews live in the area?

SB: Jews did occasionally come by. But because there were barracks occupied with imprisoned Jews nearby, and Germans who lived in the town where SB's father was born warned him not to harbor Jews or he would be killed, those that came by did not linger. However, there were these two young Jewish tailors from Żyrardów who stayed with the Boguckis for some two months. They lived in the barn. SB's stepfather brought them a sewing machine so that they could sew some clothes for Stanisław. But when the Germans learned of the tailors' whereabouts, they sent someone to warn SB's father that he was at risk of suffering serious consequences for providing shelter to Jews. He took the two of them to his brother who lived in the Bogucki's native village, Babskie Budy. After some two months, these Jews were killed in the nearby woods. SB and his step father went there to identify them. They were lying dead, undressed, with their hands tied with a rope and their chests pierced multiple times with bayonets.

PB: How did you learn that they were killed?

SB: A gamekeeper friend named Markoski let his step-father know about this murder. It turned out that it was the gamekeeper's sons who killed them. After the war they became policemen.

PB at this point asks **SB** about the barracks that were built on Bogucki's land, to house Jews from Żyrardów. These barracks were built on German orders. They were built on Bogucki's land because he was the only one in the village who spoke German and the village administrator recommended Bogucki for this task. Although Bogucki himself did not have time to supervise such work he assigned his servant, Dąbrowski, to visit the construction site from time to time while the foundations were laid. Then some private German civilians came to finish building these barracks. It had a separate kitchen and a chimney. The building was 50 m² and housed 400 Jews. Further away were a guardhouse and an outhouse. SB was able to observe these facilities since they were on his way to and from school and they were near the fields where he grazed their cows after school.

PB: Was it known during the construction of this barrack that it was meant to house Jews?

SB: No one knew about that. It was a secret. We learned about it only when they started to bring truckloads of Jews. They were all men ranging in age from 22 to 35. Where they came from wasn't known to SB. They weren't plain workers. They were craftsmen who were brought here to regulate the flow of the river. SB learned that they were Jews because he was asked by them on many occasions for favors and he would bring them a range of food items and medications.

PB: Who watched these Jews?

SB: They were watched by the worst Poles, who were brought from Warsaw, since these Poles already worked for the Germans in Warsaw. The Commander of this barrack was a German, Antonin Czarnota, who at that time was maybe 40 years old. He boarded at the Bogucki's. Later on he was caught by the Germans in a raid and was deported to Germany. After the war he came to visit SB's father. He wanted to give him a pistol, but SB's father declined.

PB: Were there any Germans who guarded this barrack?

SB: No, only at the reception that celebrated the conclusion of the river project, which was held at the Bogucki's, a German baron from Łowicz as well as some other elderly Germans came.

PB: Have you seen any situations where Jews were being punished?

SB: Next to the guard house there was a cell for solitary confinement. If someone transgressed he would be kept in solitary confinement a few days. There was an incident when two Jews escaped. The guards saw where they headed and brought them back. On the way back, the two fugitives were beaten. One was killed. The other one died the next day. A number of Jews also died in the barrack. SB claims that there may have been a total of 6 deaths in the barrack. He would know, because the guards would come to the Boguckis to borrow their horses to take them to the cemetery.

There was also a punishment when Jews were forced to go into the river. This punishment was meted out in October, when the water was cold. They were kept in the cold water for about an hour. But SB does not know what transgression provoked this punishment.

PB: How long did this camp exist?

SB: This camp was here for about 1.5 years. The surviving inhabitants were supposed to have been transferred to Czerwinek, but that did not happen. It's not clear where they were taken.

PB: What happened to the Jews who lived in this area, once the Germans arrived?

SB: Many Jews lived in Wiskitki and Bolimowo. Before the war, they would come to buy foodstuff from SB's stepfather. After the Jews from this barrack were transferred, Poles, who refused to remit a levy in kind, imposed by the Germans, were kept there.

The Jews in Wiskitki and Bolimowo, before they were deported, managed to store some of their possessions and valuables in Bogucki's warehouse and in Józefów in Śmigera's warehouse. Once these Jews were in the Warsaw Ghetto, on a number of occasions they would send a girl named Sioja—an attractive girl—to SB's stepfather, who would send with her some money to the ghetto. In exchange for this money, SB's stepfather would sell some of the goods that these Jews left behind for safekeeping. Later Sionja stopped coming. It's possible that she was killed.

PB: You mentioned that before these Jews were deported they had to ransom themselves 3 times. What did you mean by that?

SB: To postpone or possibly cancel their deportation, the Jewish population would collect a tribute which consisted of money, jewelry and precious metal that would then be given to the Germans. This, SB's stepfather learned from Jews in Wiskitki, since they knew each other well. This collection of a tribute happened three times. Once they didn't have any more things of value, they were deported to the ghetto anyway.

PB: Did Jews who avoided being deported to the ghetto, hide in the area?

SB: They did hide partially. SB was familiar with the case of 5 people and a child. At night they slept in a dug-out in the Bolimów Forest. During the day they would forage for food in the villages in the surrounding area. One day a local farmer named Waław Fedder went out to pick mushrooms and accidentally fell into the dug-out.

Fedder promptly informed the gendarmes in Bolimów of the whereabouts of these Jews. They in turn went to find them and killed them. They were buried in the woods where they were killed. After the war, Fedder went into hiding from the Polish authorities. He was caught and ended up serving 10 to 15 years in prison for having betrayed these Jews during the war.

PB: In our previous conversation, you mentioned that one night you and your stepfather were returning home, when first you heard some gunshots and then you saw a dead Jew.

SB: Yes, we were returning from Babskie Budy, where my stepfather's brother and sister lived. We were delivering to them and their servants some 2kg packages of boar meat, which my stepfather shot earlier that day. It was our custom to share the game that they killed. It was late fall and the night was dark and foggy. Suddenly, some 100 meters in front of them, they heard two or three shots. They did not wait to see what was happening and just ran home through the fields. The next day, SB's stepfather returned to that area without SB, and was told that in that area was a dead Jew. The body was totally undressed. No one seemed to know who killed him.

PB: Earlier you mentioned that there were Poles who were known for killing Jews. Who was known for such things?

SB: There was a Rutkowski. His first name might have been Stanisław. He was married to a German woman. After she passed away, rumors started spreading that he'd kill Jews and in winter, when the soil was frozen and it was hard to bury them, he would drive the bodies to an orchard to bury them under fallen pears. Then these bodies would be torn apart by dogs.

PB: Did you see these bodies?

SB: I saw one such body under a pear tree. It was a man. Women did not try often to hide. It was mostly men. When the Germans heard about Rutkowski's deeds and of similar crimes committed by a Lasocki in Żyrardów, they took them away as well as a Czesiek Broniak. Czesiek Broniak, together with another Pole, named Daruszewski, exhumed a deceased, named Kowalski, and removed his suit. When I and two classmates ran from school to the cemetery to see what was going on, I recognized Kowalski as a client of my stepfather's uncle.]

PB: You mentioned that local Jews, before being deported to concentration camp left things with your stepfather and with Mr. Śmigera. Did anyone come back to claim these things?

SB: Sioja used to come. A portion of these goods his stepfather sold and gave the proceeds to Sioja when she came by. SB took Sioja to Józefów and told Mr. Śmigera to give her some money. Śmigera denied taking anything for safekeeping or selling, and refused to give her any money. But Sioja was quick to point out that their curtains were hanging in the windows of the house. Despite this fact, the Jews who left many things with Śmigera, were cheated and received nothing for their belongings.

PB: Where was the nearest German gendarmerie outpost in this area?

SB: In Bolimów. Patrols would come to Wiskitki, if people filed accusations and complaints. Once the criminal element learned that SB's stepfather kept various things that belonged to Jews, they would come at night and steal everything: books, shoes. These were Polish, bandits. They called themselves partisans, but they would steal chickens, ducks and pigs. [SB conveys this with a tone of sarcasm.]

PB: Initially, when you were talking about the two tailors, you mentioned that the Germans warned your stepfather and they needed to be relocated. What Germans issued that warning?

SB: Every Sunday my stepfather he was drawn to his native village where he visited his relatives and the three gardens that he had there. On the way he always had a gun and he would kill some game and would leave it for his kin.

PB: But what Germans warned your father about possible consequences of giving shelter to Jews?

SB: A German came on foot on purpose, before sundown. He was his stepfather's friend. They went to school together. [Beyond our village lived four Germans.] He said: "Bolek [Stepfather's nickname], don't keep Jews because you are accused." Apparently, he learned this from the German gendarmes in Bolimów. That's when he took the two Jews to his brother in Babskie Budy.

PB: I wanted to ask you about one more thing. During our last break you started to tell a story about a Jew named Matejko, who was murdered. How did this come about?

SB: This Matejko had two warehouses in Żyrardów. One was for building materials, and the other one, across the tracks was a warehouse for coal. My stepfather knew him and got along with him. When Jews were being rounded up by the Germans to be deported to the ghetto, he escaped and came to the Bogucki's by a horse-drawn cab and brought two large suitcases. He left those suitcases with his stepfather. He instructed two of his employers, the Adamiak brothers to sell off the contents of the suitcases. Although they did sell everything that was in the suitcases, they refused to give the proceeds to Matejko. One brother bought a house with the money and the other one built hothouses for himself.

Later, Matejko came to SB's stepfather distraught and stayed two weeks. He would have stayed longer, but it wasn't safe since Germans were milling around. Next, he moved to the Kołakowskis in Baranów. He was with them for about a month and during that time he lost one suitcase. He came back to the Boguckis for the second suitcase. Since it wasn't safe for him to stay here, he moved to the next village called Różanów. There he lived with two brothers-in-law. There he lost the other suitcase and was killed in the forest by the two brothers-in-law. With proceeds that they realized from the content of the suitcases, one bought himself a new house in Wilanów and a Russian car a "Volga". The property that they had in Różanów, the brother-in-law who bought a house and car in Wilanów, transferred this entire household to the other brother-in-law.