

Summary of Oral History: Oral history interview with Waław Kijowski

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Summary

Waław Kijowski, born on April 17th, 1936 in the city of Stryj, however, his family is from Lwów (now L'viv, Ukraine).

He describes his family situation before and after the war, and his life near the ghetto in Lwów. He describes the tough circumstances that the Jewish community was facing during the occupancy.

Before the Russian invasion, his father, Bronisław Kijowski, worked as the director of Railway's Factories and Power Plant, and to avoid likely exile to Siberia in 1940, he joined the Anders Army. He escaped through Hungary to Yugoslavia and, with many others, was transported to Syria, where he received military training and fought against Nazis across Europe.

After the German invasion, his mother left to Kraków, where she worked at the German headquarters and was providing information to the Polish underground army. Waław learned about his mother's activities only after her death in 1968 since she never felt safe to talk about it.

During the war, Waław was living with his grandmother Karolina Kijowska in Lwów. His grandmother was a nurse and a therapist; she worked at the hospital and provided medical support for Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews. During the Russian occupation, they lived in Kleparów, a neighborhood in Lwów. After the German invasion, since the house was located within the future boundary of the ghetto, they had to move out. In the fall of 1941, Waław and his Grandmother moved to an apartment on Źródlana street, only 500m from one of the ghetto's gates.

The ghetto was located between the river and the railroad. There were three gates: from Źródlana street, Kleparowska street, and Słoneczna street.

He remembers that his grandmother was trying to stay in their old house, like many other Polish and Ukrainian citizens, but the German army relocated everybody from the future ghetto. Most likely, Waław and his grandmother moved to an apartment that belonged to a Jewish family before.

Because of the property, located in the ghetto, Karolina Kijowska had a pass that allowed her to visit her house at any time.

Waław, with his grandmother, delivered food to the Jewish family in the house, inside the ghetto once a week. The family of seven (parents and five sons) was allowed to stay in the house for many months since the father was a policeman. His aunt was also delivering food to the ghetto in her baby's stroller.

He remembers people in the ghetto living in houses and one barrack.

He described trains with Jewish people arriving into the ghetto and leaving shortly after. He remembers trains full of people asking for food and water, some of them were trying to escape. He remembers one man in particular who injured his legs while jumping from the train, and he could not move. Waław and his grandmother were providing food and water for this man for three days, but he does not know what happened to him after that.

Later, while playing near the ghetto with his friends, in Piaskownia from Kleparowska street, he discovered mass graves, where the German army murdered Jews from the ghetto.

He describes piles of clothes, shoes, and other belongings near this place as well.

Most likely, in 1944, right before the Russian invasion, the German army killed most of the people living in the ghetto. As a child, he remembers that on a rainy day, the water coming from the ghetto was red with blood.

After the German army left, Waclaw went with his grandmother to check on the house; however, they did not enter the ghetto. The bodies of dead Jews were everywhere, and they were not able to pass.

After the war in May 1946, he evacuated from Lwów with his grandmother. They moved West, knowing that the city would belong to USSR.

Waclaw joined his mother in Jarosław, and his grandmother went to live with the family in Kraków.

The father joined the family in 1947. He came back to Poland from London after many years of fighting against Nazis across Europe.

Waclaw presents a map of Lwów in order to precisely show the different locations.