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GARKLAVA, Anna

Latvia Documentation Project

Latvian

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### **Tape 1**

In this interview Anna Garklava, born in 1928, talks about the first days of the war in 1941 in a small town, Limbazi. She talks about the German invasion and how the Germans arrested the local Jews of Limbazi. She says that the Germans brought all the Jewish families from their apartments and put them in the basement under the old post office building, the current local history museum building. She saw the Jews working on the streets, cleaning the streets. The Jews had to wear clothing with a special yellow star. She recognized her Jewish classmates among the Jews working on the streets.

She says that several days later, she found some pieces of clothing, blood stains and even some pieces of human scalp near a fresh grave in the local forest. This took place in July 1941. She also says that the Limbazi people said that it was a grave of the Jews of Limbazi. The night before the local Jews were taken to the forest, killed and buried there. She notes that the Germans also killed the Soviet activists of Limbazi about the same time and there is no concrete information that can document who was buried in the forest grave- the Jews or the Soviet activists. However, after the day she discovered the forest grave, she did not see any Jews in Limbazi anymore. Her parents and other people told her that the Jews were exterminated, that they did not exist anymore.

Anna Garklava states that she was only 12 years old in 1941 and she does not know all of the details about the killings and the grave because the adults did not share the terrible news with her.

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0:00:49 – 0:01:58

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Good afternoon. First, I would like to thank you for meeting us. Please tell your name and where and when \_\_\_\_\_

A: Good afternoon .I am the resident of Limbaži from birth. I have lived all the time in Limbazi .That is why I know very well all the people who lived in Limbazi all the time during my childhood.

I have born in 1928 and from that time I have not lived anywhere else except Limbazi.

Q: Did you live in Limbazi with your parents?

A: With parents, yes, with parents.I went to school.

Q: And what did they do?

A: My parents -- father was a shoemaker, he made shoes.And mom worked in the household.They raised -- we were three children-- they raised us.And so we lived in Limbazi all the time.Nowhere else.

0:01:58- 0:02:49

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Do you remember how it was in Limbazi before the war?

A: Yes, I remember very well.

Q: Did Jews also live in Limbazi in that time?

A: Yes, they lived there.We had a pretty, pretty small town Limbazi.But we had pretty much Jews who were shopkeepers and did other different works .I studied at school together with Jewish children.There were several Jewish children in my class

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with who we played together. So, there were Jews in Limbazi until the war, until that time, until the year 41 when extermination happened.

0:02:49- 0:05:06

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Do you remember the first days of the war? How did it happen?

A: Well, I remember, of course, the first days of the war, when-- it started-- Germans invaded. Well, there started like, as they say, arrests of Jews. I, of course, I was only 12 years old, I was just a such a girl. I saw on the street --when Jews were on the streets of the town-- were made to sweep streets. They were not allowed to walk on sidewalks. They had to walk on roadway, in the gutter, as they say. And it happened, when walking on the street, I saw that there were also my classmates.

Q: Did they work, or, what did they do?

A: They worked, they swept the street. There was that yellow star sewn on their clothes. Well, that was a very short period of time. It did not last too long because it was for several—well-- how many-- it is difficult to tell. It could not have been a full month, more or less. I can not tell it exactly when they have not been seen on the streets anymore.

Q: Did you see where did they go? Or that \_\_\_\_\_

A: No, I did not see where they went. Then only they were arrested. They all were put in that building where we have a museum now, a local history museum. There was a basement under the building. It was such a big, old building. There was a post office, a telegraph office. Well, the basement was used. They said-- I did not see that-- I have not been there-- but they said that they were put in that basement. They were brought there from apartments. I can not tell it, I just heard it from people, as they say, when they told and spoke that it was there.

0:05:06- 0:07:03

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: And could your classmates be there too?

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A: Yes, yes, certainly. I understood that there were all the Jews who lived in Limbazi. With families. With all the families.

Q: What did happen with their apartments, with their stuff?

A: You know, it is difficult to tell. I do not know it because my parents have not been in situations like this. That cases-- where there --were some \_\_\_\_\_. I understood there was some --what it was some commission or something like that-- I can not tell it now-- that handled all these cases, all these Jewish apartment cases. What kind of people they had there, I can not tell it. We did not have such a connection with all that group to know what kind of people were there. But they said that all these belongings were listed. But where they went from there, or, what they did with it, that I can not tell, I do not know it.

Q: Did your family have friends among Jews?

A: Well—see-- in our family my father was a shoemaker , and he made shoes. By the way, one person--one person from our town had something like a shoe shop--shoe shop . Belinka was the family name. She also was a Jew. And father sometimes made some shoes also for her shop. Well, these are all the connections. But that was all, there were not any other connections. Well, taken into account, I was such a girl then. I-- I did not go anywhere, as far as I heard from people talking, but I can not tell exactly because I was at such an age. You know, what do they tell to such a child. They do not tell anything. We also did not go anywhere.

0:07:03- 0:08:43

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Was life difficult for Latvians, for your family during the war?

A: Well-- you know—it was difficult , in my opinion, for everybody during the war. There was nothing—well--it was-- as say say-- the year 41 started with different -- as they say--deportations. People were arrested, deported. It was very stressful. The German times started, again everything with all the tragedies. That was a very difficult time—that-- you know--people could not believe in anything- what will happen, what

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will be next. Overall, they lived in a big depression when they did not know what can happen next.

Q: Were there times of famine too?

A: Being honest-- I can tell you-- in fact, our family did not feel it. We were not rich people, we did not have anything like that. But, you know, everybody grew food in gardens in the provincial town. Potatoes and all the other vegetables that is not necessary to buy. Well, to buy a bread-- let me say-- even bread-- some other time-- to buy a flour and bake a bread by themselves. I can not tell particularly that we starved.

Q: But, did you go to pick berries to the forest?

A: Yes, we went to pick berries to the forest. Because forest berries need to be preserved. Well, children have the need in winter. And we went from the town to the forest to pick berries. They also go now, they also go to pick berries now.

Q: Where did you go in that forest? Where we are now?

0:08:43-0:10:38  
0:25:58- 0:25:58

A: Well, we went there where the berries grew. There where they are, and, where we knew we could get them. Well, of course, for kilometres. There were no cars, nothing back in the day. As far as you can walk by foot. Well, of course, everybody is looking for the closest forest not to walk so far and not to carry berries home so far.

Q: And, have you been in this place during the war?

A: Yes-- you know-- we-- there were bilberry fields in this place. There is a lake further in the forest. Not far. Maizes lake. And we-- this place was very well known because people came to the lake for swimming. It was very shallow-- such-- very well that children wanted to go there. The water warmed up, there are forests around, and bilberries grew there. We know that here-- we have already picked berries before here. Then we with mom thought-- well-- the bilberry time started the month of July. We came here to pick those berries. And the closest-- you can go there-- there is further also

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a road going in-- but this is the closest road.They usually rode horses here.It was such-- through the forest.There are homes, country homes back in the forest.And they who lived in these country homes, you know, they had the closest road with Limbazi. If they rode around over there, it would take several kilometres.They usually rode through here.It was rutted by horses-- cart rails-- such a normal-- you know--if the forest road is used then it does not have lots of grass growing in it.It was such a passable, practicable.Such a forest road.

Q: And did you walk there?

0:10:38- 0:11:15

0:25:58- 0:25:58

A: Yes, we went in by this road.Because we have already been here.And further there is that bilberry field.You can pick berries there.

Q: Did you go often to this place?

A: Well, we came only when there were berries.Otherwise, we did not have any need to go there.Only when there were berries in the forest, then we came here.Then we went-- I do not remember any more-- it was month of July, maybe the first days of the month.

Q: Which year was it?

A: It was in 41.

Q: And what did you see in the forest?

0:11:15- 0:14:32

0:25:58- 0:25:58

A: Well, we came this way in to pick berries there.Well, we went and looked when usually-- you know--people did not drive so many cars.Then--well-- there were not so many trucks here in the town.Well-- there were-- of course--some trucks of companies.But we are coming by that road and we see that there are trails of truck tires.Usually, when they ride horses, there are only two such potholes.And there is not any surprise that a truck could drive there.We went ahead-- and I can tell-- for about

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kilometer in the forest from this road of Valmiera .Further, walking we saw that the sod was dug up.You know--the trail of the cart is only-- and further in the middle is grass.And when --dug up--the sod dug up with a shovel.Seeing what was going on here I see that the sod-- that there are blood marks-- blood marks.Further the grass is covered with blood.And, clearly, dug up just because to cover the blood. Because to cover it.And then--we began--we were seized with--because we--you know--such a horrible foreboding--why there is a car and why there is blood.And then--we began to look around and we saw that here from that path—how it could be—about six, seven metres from that forest road. There were bushes—as they say—there is different—as it is in a forest—that there is a very big such—well-- a dug up dirt.Well, well, a digging, it could be said so. Something is buried.And looking further—we are looking—that there are some scraps of clothing, that there are some peeled off clothing, that there are some rags and combs. And—and—and—and—you know—and overall—there was such a sight that we were seized with horror. We understood that some horrible tragedy had happened there.It was even visible—you know—that some hair with skin from a head. Well, apparently a scalp, it could be said so.Not a big one but some pieces. We understood that some fight had happened here.And we were seized with such horror that we did not look any more for berries—we got out—we turned around—and fast away by road to home.Because it was such a horror—we had a horrible feeling that—that we got in such a place where some horrible tragedy had happened.Well, after that, they were talking about it in the town.People—you know—it does not go away –people discuss such events.And they told us that our Jews of Limbazi were taken there.To this place.

0:14:32- 0:15:57

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: And who did tell you that?

A: Well--you know—I can not tell anymore who told it.People talked by themselves in the town.I can not tell who it was that talked. Because in the town—you know—how people are.There is an event, and everybody talks, everybody talks.They said that there was such an event.That they had been taken here and they had been buried there.

Q: Did you see how they were taken?

A: I did not see.You know, that happened at night.That was at night of the day before.We, for example, had been coming that morning, but that was—the night before—it had happened.We arrived in the morning.

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Q: Did you find out the blood was fresh, the blood that you saw?

A: Yes, yes, it was fresh. It was. And the sod dug up around,--you know—because to cover it.

Q: Was that place you saw big?

A: Yes, that area -- it was—well—if we can call it a grave—then--then—it was—well—certainly—I can not tell—how—but the diameter could be some six, seven metres--maybe—I can be inaccurate. Look—as they say—I was twelve years old back in the day. Such a child. I was seized with such horror that I totally—we with mom did not look around anymore—no where—no further. We turned around and as fast as possible—out of that forest. That was—that was—such a—I am telling—the sight was very unpleasant.

0:15:57- 0:17:43

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Do you remember -was the clothing of women, men, children?

A: I can not tell, I can not tell. You know—they were not whole ones—they were such—the separate pieces of the clothing. I can not tell from what kind of clothing they were. I do not know it. I can not tell it. And I also can not tell today what colour—that they were. I only remember that they were rags—were—you know—and I was seized with such horror that I even did not want to look at them. And it was seemed to me that somebody looked at me from all the bushes. And I got ready to get faster out of the forest.

Q: And did you find out that the Jews were buried there?

A: In that moment—I—you know—when we saw it, I did not know who was buried there. Because—look—in that time, the year 41, there also happened some other different—lets say—who were soviet activists— and they took them somewhere- and somewhere—buried somewhere—and—were they Jews, I can not tell. Because you know—I do not know who was in that earth. Only after that—I am telling—that they

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talked about in the town—that here—that they have been taken here—and—that they were our Jews of Limbazi.

Q: Were there still the Jews in that basement after that day you were in the forest?

A: I did not see, I did not see them. They did not walk on the streets. I do not know if they were in the basement. I do not know it. What about me, we did not go there. Well—you know—back in the day in the town there was —such a—well—such a—such a very stressful situation. You know—when regimes change immediately. We preferred not to go anywhere . We stayed in our house. You know, who knows what can happen.

0:17:43-0:19:52

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: But, did you know those people who could take people to the forest?

A: I did not know, I did not know those people. Because, first of all, nobody told us who were the brigade leaders who exterminated the people. We—nobody knew it. Maybe, the police knew it. Maybe, somebody who handled such things knew it. But—who specifically was—we also did not know who shot or who, lets say, exterminated here those soviet activists of the year 41. They also were exterminated. There were militia people, other activists—or—who were taken here and there, shot and buried. Such a thing was not popularized, who they were.

Q: Were there locals or some newcomers in the police?

A: There were locals in the police. Yes, locals. Who was—the chief was a local person. Well—who were his subordinates—I do not know it—I can not tell it. I even can not tell the names who was there. Because I did not have any connection with them. And my parents also did not have any connection with them. Who were his subordinates, I do not know it.

Q: Do you know what happened with this place after the war? Maybe some historians were there or \_\_\_?

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A: I have not heard about it, I do not know. Well, after the war when there was the Soviet regime again—then—you know—they looked where the activists were buried. And then one part of them was exhumed, dug out—or not. And, and took to—there was such a military cemetery—we—they took them there. And they were reburied there to have them in one place. But as for the Jews I have not heard that there could be some places where they could be exhumed. And also here—I do not know—I have not heard that they could be exhumed here and they could be reburied somewhere else. I have not heard such a thing.

0:19:52- 0:21:31

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Could we look at that place a little bit and you could show it to us?

A: You could look at it, but today I can tell you that 60 years have passed. The forest has changed, it has grown over. And that place is from this road of Valmiera—it is about some kilometer in the forest. The place—specifically—where it is, I can not show you today precisely. Because I—I can not know anymore. Look—so many years have passed, the forest is grown over. Approximately—so far I can trust to my memory—it is about—I am telling—some kilometer by this road in the forest. And—and on the road—if we go in that direction—then that place is on the right side of the road. Approximately—as I said—six, seven metres from that country road. Approximately over there—but where it is now, I can not show, I will not be accurate.

Q: Did you tell after the war what happened during the war to some journalists, historians?

A: You know—well—there were many—here—yes—here in the town. The teacher from the school who collected about those events in the year 41. Well—I think—that there were some discussions, there were some discussions about all those events of the year 41 when the regimes changed. Otherwise, I have not had other interviews.

0:21:31- 0:22:09

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Thank you very much about everything you told us.

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A: You are welcome, you are welcome.

Q: Thank you very much.

0:22:09- 0:23:33

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: You said that you saw the Jews working in Limbazi in the first days of the war. Did you see, maybe, also some moments of the violence in that time?

A: The moments of the violence I did not see, indeed. Because—look—they worked on the streets quietly- as it is daily. I did not also see who ruled them, I did not see it either. Because—look—it happened when I went to the stores—mom sent me to the store. I walked on the sidewalk and saw that they were on the street but I had a very bad feeling. I hurried up very much because I \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: Maybe your parents or neighbours told you something about it?

A: No, no. Nobody told me that they could be practically mistreated there. There was no such discussion. I have not heard something like that. We only knew that they were replaced from the apartments. That they worked at different cleaning works. Well—I am telling—maybe I saw it only once or twice because it was such a short period of time from the moment all these, as they say, repressions started. Well—it was such a short moment, it did not last long .

0:23:33- 0:24:38

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Maybe your parents or neighbours or friends told you who took those people to the forest here?

A: No, there was no a such a discussion, there was not. You know—people were very stressed about all of it. But, who exactly were the executioners—in my opinion—that nobody knew it in the town—if somebody knew it, than only some could know it—or police or some all sort of—but the discussions in the town—who exactly they

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were who did it—nobody could tell it. To name the family names—or that or who took part there. There was no such concrete discussion. Well, we have to consider that I was only a girl. You know—what about me—nobody told me such a thing, did not tell.

Q: And nobody told- were they Latvians or Germans?

A: Did not tell. They even did not know who they were. I think, it is very difficult to tell. They did not know who they were.

0:24:38-0:25:14

0:25:58- 0:25:58

Q: Did you see the Jews in Limbazi after you got back from the forest?

A: I did not see, I did not see, I did not see. I did not see them anymore. Were they—were still they in that basement —or were they—I do not know, I did not see. Overall, they were not seen on the streets anymore. After that they just discussed and talked that they were exterminated, that they did not exist anymore.

Q: Did your parents tell you that ?

A: Well, yes. So—so—they talked so in the town that they were exterminated. Clearly, that they did not exist anymore.

Q: Thank you.

A: You are welcome.

0:25:14/0:25:58

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