

BRANDNER, Valentina
Ukraine Witnesses Documentation Project
Russian
RG-50.575*0008

In this interview, Valentina Fedorovna Brandner, born on February 2, 1925, a former resident of a neighborhood in Odessa, discusses her wartime experiences during the Romanian occupation of Odessa. She describes witnessing the deportation of two Jewish families and shares the trauma of the experience of seeing dead bodies hanging alongside a road.

File 1 of 1

[01:] 00:00:00 – [01:] 00:11:25
00:00 – 12:23

[01:] 00:00:00 – [01:] 00:04:24
00:00 – 04:45

Q: First of all, I would like to ask you to give your name, and state the year and place of your birth.

A: My name is Brandner, Valentina Fedorovna. I was born in Odessa, on the second of February in 1925.

Q: Were you in Odessa during the occupation?

A: *[Interrupts.]* Yes, I was in Odessa during the occupation.

Q: I would like to ask you, then, if possible, what do you remember about the persecution of Jews during the occupation? What have you seen with your own eyes?

A: I was, as a matter of fact, still—according to the level of development—even though I was 16 years old, I was still a child. Because I was sick for a long time, and I was always sick, and for that reason, when the war started, we lived at the 11-ya Stasiya Bol'shogo Fontana (11-я станция Большого Фонтана: 11th Station of the Fountain; the full name is the 11th Station of the Big Fountain): I was there at a dacha (a summer country home in Ukraine and Russia) together with our relatives and my mother. So, about ten days had probably passed, and we had to go back to the city. In the city, we lived on Kolontayevskaya *[street]*, 45. It is in Moldavanka district, the edge of Moldavanka. So, when we came there, at that time, two Jewish families that lived near our—our apartment—to the left and to the right—started to pack their things. Some Romanians came, but in any case, he was a soldier. Obviously, a soldier with his assistants. So then—one of the Jewish families was not very large – there was a child, a mother, and then a grandmother. At that time—she was probably an optimist, and,

besides, she was probably not listening to those conversations that were spread all over the city: Jews are being driven somewhere. I remember that I rushed to her and said, “Aunt **Fanya**, what is going on? Where are you going? You have a little child.” He was still in a stroller. She answered, “Come on, honey, don’t worry, we will make it somehow. We will leave, and later we will come back to our apartment.” But the other family, which lived to the left, they had a very large family, very large. There was a grandfather, a grandmother, parents, and there were sons—two sons—there was a daughter, and little children. I suddenly heard shouts, cries there – hysterical cries, not simply a cry, but a hysterical cry. I went there, too. After all, we were neighbors. Our neighbors were very nice to us. So, I went there and saw that the whole family started to pack something, there were shouts and wails, then hysterical wails, not simply—“Where are we being driven, what will happen to us!” And I am asking, “What is going on?” “We are being—we are being driven somewhere, all of the Jews, to the ghetto.” For the first time, strictly speaking, I learned that Jews are being driven somewhere, to some—

[The interview is interrupted by a child’s voice in the background.]

[01:] 00:04:25 – [01:] 00:06:05

04:46 – 07:00

A: On the other side of where we lived, there was a big Jewish family. I knew that family very well, because I was a child, I often ran there, played with their children, and so on. That is why, for me, it was—but I have heard terrible cries, wails, truly those—hysterical wails, not simply wails, but hysterical wails. Mostly women, because there were many women at their place—in their family. They were crying, “What will be there! **O vey vey!** What will happen to us? What will happen to us?” The mother kept saying the same thing, because she had many children, she had three children. And when—of course I was interested, as a child—went to their place, because they were our neighbors, with whom I used to play, with children. I said, “What happened?” “We are being forced out,” she said. “We are being sent to a so-called ‘ghetto’ where we will be living, only Jews. What will happen to us there? I have little children! How will we be feeding them? What will that be?” Those cries were horrible. And even one of the Romanian soldiers—even approached her and pushed with the butt of his rifle, lightly, though, not too strongly, but pushed anyway. But still, the woman kept shouting. With that cry, that horror—because I still did not understand what that was, and how, and why this was happening. Why would our neighbors whom I was friends with in my childhood, whom I used to run to—with games—are suddenly being forced out somewhere. And what is that “ghetto?” Later I started to ask my parents what the “ghetto” was, because it was a completely new word to me. Like this.

[01:] 00:06:06 – [01:] 00:09:24

07:01 – 09:55

Q: Did you see them leaving their apartment?

A: Yes, I saw them leaving the apartment.

Q: Did you notice something after that? On the street?

A: I don't know anything after that. The only thing is that, after the war, we were no longer living in Odessa already—after the war that was—I already don't know what year that was—but we returned, my mother and I, in 1954. So, in 1954, our neighbor—I met—came to us and said, “You know what, that **Fanya** came back, with a little child. She was lucky. But those neighbors, who were shouting, the large family, they have not returned. But **Fanya** returned. Returned, and returned to her apartment. So, that is—as for—then, when our things were packed, we headed, again on foot, to the Fontana, where we lived during the war. The war, as a matter of fact, was still waging, waging around Odessa. It was approximately the beginning of September already. This means it was becoming cold. And so I—

Q: In September of what year?

A: 1941—the war has started in June—[19]41. So, I was walking with my father, on foot, of course, and so on the 7-ya Stasiya (7-я станция Большого Фонтана: 7th Station of the Big Fountain)—what not only has impressed me, but is ingrained deep in me, touched me—because I was just a girl, and I was worried sick. “Daddy, what is all that about? What is all that?” I asked him. We saw gallows; moreover, there were many of them—I don't know how many, I was not counting of course—a child can not count. There were many gallows, and women were hanging on those gallows. Not only women, but men were also there—there were around seven or eight gallows there. This was 7-ya Stasiya, and those gallows were along the road. So somebody—somebody had said—that this was allegedly—who was being hung? Allegedly, they were Jewish women. There was a young woman, I remember vividly. And there was also an old woman hanging. They were hung there. That made a very big impression on me, and even today, I recall this with such emotion—I recall this episode with a terrible feeling.

[01:] 00:09:25 – [01:] 00:11:25
09:56 – 12:22

Q: Did you get closer to them, or didn't you?

A: We were passing by. I was not scrutinizing.

Q: Did you see some distinguishing signs on these people? Or some specific clothes? Was there anything like that?

A: No, no, there was nothing on them. They were simply dressed in their clothes. No, nothing specific. They were dressed the same way as everybody was dressed back then in Ukraine and in Russia.

Q: I see, and the last question. Were they gallows?

A: Yes, they were gallows.

Q: Built specifically for that?

A: Yes, they were built. They were not telephone—what do you call those—posts, no. Those were gallows. I remember the white one.

Q: Apart from you, were there other people there, too?

A: Of course, because trams were not operating then.

Q: Did you hear the reaction to something? How were people reacting as they look at all of that?

A: People were mostly turning away, because it was painful to look at the hanging people. Some were crying, but that's, you know—who has what—depends on personal perception. But, in any case, people were passing and turning away, because surely it is painful to look at the hung, especially at the hung women. Younger girls were hung there also.

Q: I see. Can you recall anything else?

A: No. Basically, because we moved again to the Fontana, and there we were isolated from all the atrocities that were happening in the city. We were simply isolated. And we returned [*to the city*] when it was very cold already, and we had to leave the dacha, we had to return home. But the two families that I was close with—I played with them in my childhood—I did not see them anymore. But, obviously, one of the families—a family—survived, if that aunt **Fanya** returned.

Q: Thank you, I see.

A: You are welcome.

Q: Thank you very much, and sorry for the inconvenience and discomfort.

A: No, no, that is not a problem. That is all easily reparable. I just hope that, as they say, it will prove useful, will bring some result.

Q: Positive.

A: Positive result.

Q: I understand, sure. I would like to believe so. Thank you.

A: Good bye. Thank you, thank you too.

[01:] 00:11:25

12:22

Conclusion of Interview

RG-50.575*0008

07/27/2005

PAGE * MERGEFORMAT 3