

ZHELEVSKAYA-SAVCHENKO, Lubov
Ukraine Witnesses Documentation Project
Russian
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Tape 1, Box 1

In this interview, Lubov Zhelevskaya-Savchenko, a former inmate of the Auschwitz camp talks about her arrest in Kharkov and her life in Auschwitz. She focuses on the relationships between prisoners and between prisoners and the guards in the camp. She also remembers many details about working in fields and surviving in the camp. She concentrates on the extermination of the Jews in the crematorium. She describes the procedures and formal and informal policies in the camp. She goes on to talk about camp discipline and punishment for noncompliance.

[01:] 00:30:01 – [01:] 09:11:29

She introduces herself and talks about the place of her birth in 1924 in the Kharkov region in the village of Gubarevka; states that Kharkov was under German occupation during World War II; remembers the Germans rounding up the Jews from Kharkov and the announcements on the streets; comments on the common knowledge that the Jews were not going to labor camps but to death camps; focuses on continuous movement of Jews in a big crowd; [*cries*]; focuses on the composition of the crowd as being made up of mainly old people and children; remembers an incident when a crowd of Ukrainian people saved a Jewish child; points out that most of the Jews in the group originated from Lemberg (Lwów), Poland; mentions the feeling of helplessness and fear; talks about her stepmother being a Jew and saving herself through falsifying documents.

[01:] 09:11:30 – [01:] 19:31:07

She talks about the hangings of four partisans in Kharkov and a hanging of a man and a woman after the blowing up of a bridge; talks about Germans expropriating all of their food supplies and shooting the villagers' hens; explains the reasoning for taking the children to Gubarevka separately from their parents; discusses her arrest; talks about staying in prison and the conditions; mentions her neighbor **Kolka** who was a policeman and his role in her arrest; explains the logistics of how the prisoners were taken to camps; talks about being driven to Auschwitz; mentions that more than half of prisoners died on the way; talks about hunger and starvation; discusses the way the prisoners were treated.

[01:] 19:31:08 – [01:] 29:17:59

She talks about her arrival to Auschwitz and her first impressions about the camp itself and the prisoners; talks about the procedures they underwent upon the arrival; talks about the numbers that each prisoner was assigned; remembers her number, 44233, and how to say it in both German and Polish; describes the uniform and explains the different symbols on the uniforms

used in order to differentiate between prisoners; discusses Polish women-prisoners who worked as guards; describes the former stables they were kept in; describes the living conditions in the barrack; describes the morning roll call; talks about the attitude of guards towards the prisoners.

[01:] 29:18:00 – [01:] 39:24:05

She talks about SS women, mentions a woman named **Haasa** in particular; discusses the Soviet prisoners' lack of shock at the treatment of prisoners; talks about being accustomed to death and the way the dead were disposed of; explains the way the camp was set up, mentions the division of the camp into a working camp and a quarantine camp; talks about the everyday routine in the camp; talks about food rationing and diet; explains that camp was self-sustaining as the inmates worked in the field and kept livestock; explains the process of getting the number on her arm, she explains that it was done using needles [*shows the scar on her hand where the number was*]; describes the way the prisoners were checked for any valuables, including the gold in their teeth; describes **Haasa** once more; talks about **Haasa's** appearance, clothing, and her dog Rita; talks about other women prisoners who worked in the camp as guards.

[01:] 39:24:06 – [01:] 49:07:59

She describes the crematorium in the camp; talks about the way the bodies were assembled and how they were taken to the crematorium; mentions the lice; says that as time went on the crematorium did not have enough capacity to deal with all the bodies and they were left rotting; describes the building of the crematorium's two chimneys; explains that after one month in the quarantine zone she was transferred to the working part of the camp; talks about the typhus epidemics; remembers an incident when a woman kissed a guard's legs who then kicked the woman in the face; talks about her illness and how she was saved by a woman named **Katya**; mentions an agreement between the Soviets and the Germans not to cremate either side's prisoners; talks about the unity of all Soviet prisoners; mentions that there were many Jews among them but they were not cremated.

[01:] 49:08:00 – [01:] 59:11:59

She explains how she was treated for typhus; describes the health center and its location; remembers an incident when she felt cold at night and realized that the woman next to her had been dead all night long; [*laughs*]; explains that only the healthy people survived; talks about the diet in the health center; describes how she was transferred to Block 13; mentions that she only survived thanks to a strong will and a desire to live; recalls the story of her recuperation; talks about living in a concentration camp and its working conditions; talks about the physical weakness of the prisoners; explains that they were made to sing during work; explains how field work gave the prisoners a chance to feed themselves better; recalls one time when the prisoners saw children being burnt not far from the work site; describes **Hess** and **Haasa**; explains the relationship between the prisoners and the SS personnel.

[01:] 59:12:00 – [02:] 05:13:12

She talks about **SK (SC)**, a unit in which special prisoners were kept; describes the unit and the treatment of the prisoners in it; she does not know what the crimes of the prisoners who were there were; talks about the mange, a skin disease prominent in the camp; describes the treatment for the skin disease was four baths in a special mixture; talks about the options being either getting cured of the mange or being burnt in the crematorium; remembers her bedsores; mentions how she was almost sent to the crematorium because of them.

Tape 1, Box 2

[03:] 00:30:09 – [03:] 09:59:00

She describes how the rail track was built specifically to deliver people to the crematorium; talks about Jews from Greece and Yugoslavia; describes how the Jews were sorted out, children separate from parents; explains the procedure of delivering the prisoners to the crematorium, mentions the gas chambers; talks about the children's screams; [*sighs, remains silent*]; explains the location and living situation in the work camp; talks about strict discipline in the camp; describes the Russian police in the camp; states that the Russians and Hungarians were the worst guards; recalls an incident when a Russian girl called a guard a traitor and he shot her; says that there was no fear of the German soldiers; talks about working extra days in the field for food.

[03:] 10:00:00 – [03:] 19:51:19

She talks about her diseases during her imprisonment in the camp; discusses her vitamin deficiency; [*shows the scars of rotten sores*]; explains the kinds of work she performed, mostly agricultural; explains that the food was for the SS; talks about punishment for noncompliance with the camp rules; remembers an incident in which an old woman was dragged by a motorcycle for not showing up to roll call; says that there were no public punishments; talks about relationships between prisoners in the barrack and the kind of hierarchy that was established; talks about packages from home for prisoners; explains the unspoken rules for sharing and not sharing between prisoners; talks about theft in the barrack.

[03:] 19:51:20 – [03:] 30:19:20

She talks about the relations between the women in the barracks; discusses the groups of 40–45 women based upon their nationality; talks about emotional support and competition between groups; mentions occasional fights between group members [*shows a finger she broke*]; says there were no men in the camp and no relations between prisoners and the SS men; returns to discussing the groupings of women and about friendship across the camp; says there was no specific attitude towards other Jews across the camp or within national groups except for compassion for one another; differentiates between Jews from different countries; talks about being used to seeing death every day; describes the sorting of the dead people's belongings and mentions a special team that carried it out; recalls an incident in which a woman tried to hide a ring and was burnt for it.

[03:] 30:19:21 – [03:] 39:44:07

She mentions that by the beginning of 1945 it was common knowledge that the Germans were retreating back into Germany; discusses the sexual relationships in the camp; starts talking about lesbian relationships [*becomes shy, asks to turn off the camera*]; describes the hierarchy of power between the prisoners; talks about the guards; describes the system of having “kapos” and followers in the barrack; mentions a specific “kapo” who was murdered by the prisoners for her cruelty; talks about the separation of prisoners into healthy and unhealthy in the quarantine zone and health center; talks about “unloading” of the health center and the quarantine zone of the sick people when the crematorium had enough capacity.

[03:] 39:44:08 – [03:] 48:31:59

She talks about the Gypsy camp, their work, appearances, and about the extermination of Gypsies (Roma and Sinti); points out the impossibility of escape from Auschwitz; talks about the barbed-wired fence and the area around the camp; explains the work and the guards; talks about leaving the camp; mentions the death march; tells about the multiple deaths on the way out of Auschwitz; talks about the arrival at Bergen-Belsen; mentions the arrival of the English and the situation with food; tells about British canned goods which led to many people dying from stomach problems; [*drinks water, coughs*]; elaborates on the journey from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen; mentions the weakness and sickness of the prisoners; discusses the life in Bergen-Belsen.

[03:] 48:32:00 – [03:] 57:15:00

She returns to her situation with her neighbor **Kolka** and being arrested; discusses her number and the reasons for eliminating it; talks about the situation when former camp prisoners were imprisoned in the Soviet Union after returning home; tells the story of her lawsuit against the German officials for reparations, explains the reasons for the lawsuit and making a new number [*shows her new number and the scar from the former one*]; talks about the attitudes of Soviet citizens and their misunderstanding of her situation; discusses her impression of going from one concentration camp to another upon return to the USSR; talks about regular meetings of former concentration camp prisoners in Kharkov, mentions that some of the regulars are former Auschwitz inmates.