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Polina Efimovna Sinitsina. Interviewed 17 October 2015

Summary by Joseph Bradley, 23 February 2020

Born 22 November 1923 in Zalozh'e village, Rudnya district, Smolensk oblast, near the border with present-day Belarus. Before 1933, father worked in a Jewish collective farm in Ukraine. She grew up near the Jewish village of Liubavichi, and she knew Yiddish. She remembers several Liubavichi Jewish families by name, including Epstein and Zalman.

The German occupation began in July 1941. The Liubavichi Jews were herded into a ghetto, created out of several Jewish streets, centered on Shilovskaia street, and surrounded by barbed wire. [Polina refers to this as a camp, but it was more likely a ghetto.] Polina's mother gave food to Mrs. Epstein. Germans and local (Russian) police guarded the ghetto. Polina frequently walked past the ghetto and witnessed beatings of Jews by Germans and Russian police. Nikolai Astrakhanskii was an especially cruel policeman. (Some Russian police were hanged after a military tribunal after the war.) Jews were forced to wear yellow armbands. Polina did not witness executions of Jews, though some Russians were forced to watch and she heard about them. Most [all?] of the Jews of Liubavichi were murdered. Asya Rohm, a Jewish woman from the town of Rudnya, and an acquaintance of Polina's at school, hid in the forest and survived. The Germans forced the local population to clear the roads of snow. Polina recalls one incident, when "very pretty" Jewish girl students passed by her in a sleigh, guarded by Germans and Russian policemen. The girls waved goodbye; it was apparent that they were being taken to be shot. A fellow bystander remarked, "Today them, tomorrow us."

Polina's interviewer refers to something she has written.