

Oral Interview with

## Danuta Bachowski

Interview Conducted by Reid Geyer on November 5, 2011

### Summary:

**Danuta Bachowski** (born Danuta Worobel) was born in Lezachow, Poland on November 15, 1926. In this interview, Bachowski describes the time her father was sent away to Auschwitz and she was hit by shrapnel from a German bomb during World War II. She then tells how Polish secret police harassed and beat her for refusing to spy for them after the war. Finally, Bachowski tells the story of meeting her husband and the difficulties of their immigration to the United States.

### Interview Details (with timecode):

#### **Biographical Information :: 0:00:00**

*Name:* Danuta Worobel Bachowski

*Date of Birth:* November 15, 1926 in Lezachow, Poland

*Mother:* Dodos Eaos Worobel, occupation: housewife

*Father:* Jan Worobel, occupation: principal of school (Listed in Auschwitz registry as "Iwan Worobel" DOB 02-17-1902 in Odrzechowa, died 03-01-1942)

*Brothers:* Bogdan Worobel & Slawek Worobel

*Sons:* Jan Bachowski & Andrzej Stanislaw Bachowski

Description of family members

#### **Description of Town and House :: 0:03:52**

Lezachow was a small town, 1,000 people, had a supermarket, went to private school and then teaching college

#### **Description of Typical Day as a Child :: 0:05:45**

Went to school, did homework, played with dolls, sleighing in the winter, kayaking in the summer, getting ice cream, playing music together as a family, visiting her grandmother on a farm

#### **The Beginnings of War :: 0:10:23**

Hearing about war, panic as people in Poland were not prepared, people running and hiding from bombs early on, family decision to stay put, first sighting of Russians, description of her first encounter with a German soldier, citizens required to turn in all radios and weapons to the Germans, description of black market for food and goods, dreaming about having just a piece of bread, grandmother's house burning down, all livestock were branded and accounted for so that it all went to Nazi army

### **War Time :: 0:19:08**

Wanted to be a doctor when she grew up, but gave up on dream after father died, father was in jail for month in 1942 after being accused of being a Communist, despite never being a Communist (he was part of the 'intelligent class', including priests, lawyers, doctors and teacher who were all arrested), then sent back for two months, mother tried to get him out of jail but was dissuaded under penalty of death for whole family, when mother went to visit him one day they say he's been transferred to a different jail, mother searches every jail around and can't find him, a little while later they receive a letter from him from Auschwitz – a place they had never heard of before, he was at Auschwitz from November 1942 until February 1943 when the Gestapo called to say that he had died, values she learned from her father, rumors about Germany losing

### **The Bombing :: 0:23:26**

The Red Army coming into town, Germans bombing the town, running for shelter, got hit by shrapnel from German bomb, lost consciousness, rescued by older man while bleeding heavily, her grandmother telling her she will probably not live, looking for family, begging Russian soldiers to shoot her to put her out of her pain, bandaged by Russian doctors, wounds cleaned by iodine which made her pass out from pain, received surgery, laid on straw on stomach in makeshift hospital, woman laid next to her stopped crying after a while, when Bachowski asked her if she was feeling better she found out she was dead, finally sent to regular hospital that didn't have much food or medicine, spent five months there, still has five pieces of shrapnel in her body

### **End of War :: 0:32:44**

Germans controlled the press, but some in village learned through illegal radio that Germany was losing, people were skeptical until German soldiers started to say that they were losing the war

### **Being Arrested :: 0:33:30**

She met up with a friend after the war, found out later friend was involved in resistance movement against the Polish government, friend escaped from Polish police, who questioned Bachowski on her friend's whereabouts, was whipped with metal wires by Polish police trying to get her to confess, began bleeding from her ear (which damaged her hearing in one ear), went and searched her grandmother's house and attic, discovered her uncle's clothing and stole it, her mother pays \$50 to get her out of jail, slept in barn in November out of fear of sleeping at home and the police coming back, police ask her to sign agreement to become a spy for the police and she refuses

### **Further Harassment by Police :: 0:39:50**

Moved to Ozimek, Poland to try and avoid further police harassment, policeman who originally beat her found her at factory and told her that they would talk more in her apartment, two policemen arrive at her apartment, place their guns on the table and talk to her from 4:00 pm to midnight asking her to sign agreement, two weeks later they return, this makes her have trouble sleeping, eating and performing at work, a second search of her grandmother's house where they steal more clothing, Bachowski was sent to a prison with nothing but straw and rats on the cell floor, beaten again and then sent home, police continue to visit house every two months to ask her to sign the agreement until she gets married

### **Work and Meeting Husband :: 0:47:08**

Describes how school was free on the condition that you work for an assigned Polish company after school, she was sent to a military factory to work in administration, future husband worked as an engineer, he started following her and lead Bachowski to assume that he was a member of the secret police, she later found flowers on her desk from him, her future husband brought her flowers 3 more times, later she found out the flowers were stolen from the secretary's desk every day, he kept coming by her desk to compliment her every day and she would ask him to leave, one day she threw a stapler at him, hitting him in the face and he didn't talk to her for a month

### **Marriage and First Years Together :: 0:54:44**

Her future husband asked if he could accompany Bachowski on a weekend home to her family, soon after he proposed, description of husband, they were married for 50 years, her husband convinced her they could move to US and be free, story about the long lines at the butcher shop in Poland, desire to move to America

### **Moving to America :: 1:00:20**

Took train, Polish government only allowed citizens to have \$25 when they left the country, searched them while Bachowski was smuggling \$5 Canadian, but police ran out of time to check her, went through East and West Berlin, went to Germany, remembers seeing a black person for the first time, gets on boat and gets seasick, stays with uncle in New York, walked around with a tourist translation book, went to night school to learn more English, decided to move back to Poland because life was difficult in America but sister talked them out of it citing Poland's poor economy and lack of jobs, they visited Poland for a week and agreed that America was better, husband worked in factory for the rest of life

### **Advice to Next Generation :: 1:08:21**