

Some Were Neighbors Online Exhibit

Neighbors / “Benefitting From the Destruction of Communities”

Interview of Regina Prudnikova, Pilviskia, Lithuania

Regina Prudnikova

...Many Lithuanians lived poorly. They did not have something to live on – served at Jewish homes. They brought water for them because during the Sabbath they could not bring water themselves. They didn't work at all then. So Lithuanians had to do the work. People would go, you know, women mostly. Men worked at Jewish bakeries. Well, Jews were compassionate people.

Question

Have you ever worked for the Jews?

RP

I did serve for a short time. I went to take care of a small child, but then I was told – I was very young and had a very red and full face and everything, you know. I was told that Jews cut you and take your blood, put you in a basement, in a vat with nails that stab you – so I left everything, because I was afraid that I would be stabbed.

Question

You believed that?

RP

Yeah, well, you know. I was young and I believed it. I know that they say that Jews can't live without Christian blood, that during their holidays they had to have at least a drop of that blood to taste, or something like that. Well, when the Germans arrived, the Jews sensed that something bad would happen to them. So the shops and everything else were looted, you know. The Lithuanians took everything away. The head man, this Vincas Ambrasas, took everything, did this, you know. And the Lithuanians were taking everything home. I did as well, but my brother told me to return it.

Question

What did you take?

RP

Some fabric, shoes and the like. The shoes were not of the same pair, so my brother told me to return them. So I went and returned them.

Question

Where did you take them from?

RP

From the store.

Question

Whose?

RP

From Jewish stores, from a Jewish store. When I arrived, everything was looted. All the stores were. And the Jews had no right to anything anymore.

Question

So the Jews lived at their homes?

RP

Yes and all of those people who had guns surrounded their homes, took them from their homes, and led them to the square, where they were made to stand in lines. Everyone was taken there.

Question

Which of the “white stripers” from Pilviskiai did you see leading the Jews?

RP

Well, there were not only “white stripers” there because they were promised some belongings, you know. They were given houses, apartments, homes – and they lived there. A man named Pijusas Buraga lived in one, also Petras Strimaitis, lived off Jewish property and so did Baltusis.

Question

Were many Jewish possessions brought here?

RP

Oh, there was an auction, and people were buying, tearing apart, elbowing each other, you know.

Question

Did you see the auction?

RP

Yeah, they were throwing things out of the window. People were grabbing whatever they could lay their hands on. Jesus, what was going on here. Lipkee's restaurant was loaded with those clothes that had been brought with horses. Oh my Jesus, what was going on, it was horrible.

Question

So, the auction took place next to Lipkee's restaurant?

RP

Yeah, yes. And in other places they were throwing bedding, pillows, blankets, all kinds of bed linens out of the windows, you see. They were throwing things out of the windows, and people were grabbing them. People had come from surrounding villages. Well, they were all the same people who had participated in the massacre. They were the ones who were throwing, all of them. They kept the more valuable things for themselves, such as furniture, you know, and they went on to live in Jewish homes.

Question

So, when you would come to visit them, you would see the Jewish furniture standing there, right?

RP

Well, I came over, and I knew that they had nothing. They were beggars, you see. And then the wife of Kazlovas donned an astrakhan coat! How much did it cost, where could they have gotten it, the coat that Kazlovas' wife was wearing. Just think about it. I'm telling you, there was a pile of shoes, so I took a pair, but they noticed and came after and took them away from me.

Question

Who came after you?

RP

Kazlovas's mother-in-law. Kazlovas was my cousin.

Question

And where was that pile of shoes located?

RP

It was in the hallway. There was a big hallway as you entered, the size of half of this room. I went to visit them, and as I was leaving, I took a pair of dark red suede shoes. Well, she looked around and noticed that they were gone after I had left, so she ran after me and took them away.

Question

So, what did she say when she took them away?

RP

She said, "Give it back! You took ours!" I responded, "They aren't yours. They belong to the Jews."

Question

What did she say?

RP

I gave them back. She said nothing.

Question

Well, but the Jews – they must have had all kinds of golden rings.

RP

Well, yeah, they did have. They probably were searched at the spot because they were forced to undress until they were naked there, you see. Some of them, the richer ones, were undressed naked and their teeth were extracted too. Even I bought one tooth, because I needed an implant.

Question

You bought a tooth?

RP

Yeah, yes.

Question

Oh, so one could buy a tooth?

RP

Yes, a gold one. I don't know how much I paid, but not much. When the Russians came, I bought the tooth from a woman named Mrs. Didzjunas.

Question

And where is that tooth now?

RP

Here (points to it in mouth).

Neighbors / One Woman Emerges From the Crowd

Manfred Wildmann, Philippsburg, Germany

Around 8:00, policemen came to tell us that we had one hour to pack our bags and to be ready to leave, without being told where we would be going. I remember the answer told us don't take too much because you'll have to carry it a long time, to which my mother responded "We can always throw it out then." So, we were taken an hour later to the main square of the town and the truck was there and we were all put on the truck to be taken away. Of course, the whole town was assembled around it, looking at the Jews leaving; people we knew. And one woman had the courage to come out and praise my mother, to say goodbye. Nothing happened to her. If more people had done something like that, things may have changed.

Friends / Friendship in Time of Peril

Jack Pariser / Judlowa, Poland

The decision was made by my Dad that we will not steal because if we did, then the farmers would organize and hunt us down and we will not survive. So he had a friend whose name was Leo, Leo Swierczek, and Leo was really a great guy. I didn't tell you this at the beginning when the Germans came in, one of the things that they ruled was that the Jews must not own any stores or any assets. So you were required, like we had a store, we were required to give all this up at that point. It was for the Wehrmacht. But my father didn't do that. He hid half of it and he gave up half. And at first, it was in the house and we didn't feel comfortable with that so he dug a hole in the ground in the garden and we hid it there. And he wasn't comfortable with that. So, my sister and I don't know who else, and I think I was involved, wrapped the stuff around us and we went to this guy, Leo. And he hid it for us. So, Leo had a great deal of our possessions at that point. And we went to Leo for food and he gave us food. And we also went to Leo to get some of the fabric back and we bartered that with some other Christians. Now I must press upon you as to the character of Leo. Leo already had all the stuff that he could ever get from us, except maybe for some land. And all he had to do is tell us to get lost and he would have never seen us again. But he never did. He fed us all along.

Workers / Women Betraying Women

Ibolya Grossman / Hungary

We had to go out in front of the house and form a line, five of us. And as I said, I just grabbed a knapsack with a little tea or crackers or apple and things for the baby. And I grabbed one blanket and we went out. At that time, my father was still home. On the street, if I was not there, I would not believe what the people did to us; all those people from the neighboring house, the hairdresser who I went to every two weeks. They all lined up on the sidewalk. They were happy. They spit on us. They said ugly words. They grabbed anything they could. One smashed my father's eyeglasses. The other took off a coat from a man's shoulder. The other one grabbed out the blanket from my hand. And that is only one voice among the thousands and thousands of onlookers who said, "Can't you see this is for a baby? Give it back!" But of course, I was not allowed to even look back, not to wait for the blanket. And I was wondering who could be that one person who spoke up?

Policemen / Betrayed to Police

Saul Wiesel, Veliky Bockov, Czechoslovakia

Saul Wiesel

So one Friday night I says to my neighbor there, the guy non-Jew there playing cards. So I says to him, "John, you know, I have a bad feeling that I don't want to sleep in my room. Can I sleep at your house?" I says to him, "I'm going to pay you. I'm going to pay you." And I said, "How much?" And he says, "Twenty dollars." So I says, "Ok, no problem." Paid him the twenty dollars so I could sleep at his house.

Question

What that a lot of money?

SW

Was a day's work for a working man. So I pay the twenty dollars and then we went into the room to sleep. And, I can't remember, but I think I slept on the table, put some blankets down there with a pillow. Slept there on the table. In the morning, like 6:00 or 7:00, all of a sudden, somebody was touching me. "Hey, wake up, wake up." I open my eyes and who was standing there? The police. Two policemen.

Question

What kind of police?

SW

The Slovaks. Two Slovak policemen were standing there. So, they says to me, "Get dressed. You have to come with us." I says to one of them, one of them was friendly, "How did you know to find me here?" He says, "Well, John came to us and he reported that you sleep in his house." So I says, "I know there's a price on every Jewish head." I says to him, "How much he got for it?" He says, "He got 5 kilos of sugar."

Workers / Ties That Endured, Ties That Frayed

Steven Fenves, Subotica, Yugoslavia

The order came to move the possessions that you could carry in through this row of dilapidated houses along the freight trailer yard. One of the nastiest memories I have is getting going on that journey and people were lined up, up the stairs, up to the door of the apartment waiting to ransack whatever we left behind... cursing at us, yelling at us, spitting at us as we left.

Question

Did you know any of these people?

SF

Not that I remember. I don't know. I don't know.

Question / Statement

They're like vultures.

SF

Like vultures at night. Except among them was our cook.. (pauses) She went in, she grabbed the cookbook and she grabbed this folder, or this binder, and shoved into it all the artwork that she could shove into it.

Question/Statement

That's quite an act.

SF

(Chokes on words / clears his throat) Yep. Then she gave it back to us when... when we came back.

Policemen / "He Started Screaming At Me"

Henry Kanner, Kety, Poland

The police that was in charge of the prison were just town police and the head of the prison was... yes, his name was Heinmeister Schneider. His name was Schneider and he was a big, fat, jovial type of fellow. And I do recall that he, every time I went by, when the cells were open for cleaning, we were cleaning the cells, and he went by, he stood and he looked at me. He looked at me in a very strange way. And one day I was taken to his office. And he started screaming at me, yelling at me in German and that I am to clean his office, and if I don't clean it, I wouldn't find that a single bone in my body that wasn't broken. But I notice that he was screaming at the wall, and he was pointing for me under his desk. I had no idea what he wanted from me, so I finally crawled under the desk, and under the desk there was a bottle of milk, bread, and a piece of sausage. And now he screams, "Now you better clean everything because if I find any speck of dirt over there again..." You know, threatening me all kind of bodily harm. He was a very decent human being, and again, screaming like heck, you know, making believable noises like he was kicking me. I went back to my cell and that became a routine twice a week where he would feed me.

