

**Transcript of Olga Kvitka Interview  
Ozeryany, Ukraine  
November 30, 2014**

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I engaged the services of Nataliia Poltavska to visit the village of Ozeryany. Ozeryany is located in Rivnens'ka oblast, Ukraine (50°28' N, 26°02' E). I provided Nataliia with background information, a detailed list of questions and three photographs for possible identification. Nataliia was tasked with the job of finding and interviewing the oldest person in Ozeryany, Olga Kvitka. Reportedly, Olga is the only Ozeryany resident alive that pre-dates World War II.

Nataliia Poltavska with Olga Kvitka, November 23, 2014:



The following is a transcript of the interview with Olga Kvitka, conducted in her home in Ozeryany on November 23, 2014.

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What is your full name?

*Olga Kvitka. Before marriage it was Olga Nesviga. For 20 years I have been a widow.*

Where and when were you born?

*I was born in Ozeryany in 1927.*

How long have you lived in Ozeryany?

*I have lived here my whole life except for a five-year period when I was imprisoned for anti-communist activity.*

Where were you imprisoned?

*Kazakhstan.*

What did your parents do for a living in Ozeryany?

*My father was the head [?] of the local municipal government during the Polish time. When the Germans came, they put their own person in that position.*

What can you tell me about the village of Ozeryany when you were growing up? What was it like living there?

*It was a very nice big village with a lake and near a railway station. It was a good place for living.*

When you were growing up, about how many people lived there?

*Something like 250 houses.*

Approximately how many Jews lived in Ozeryany?

*Very many, difficult to say. More than half were Jews but the number always changed. There were two synagogues and one Torah school.*

Before World War II, describe how the Jews and the Christians got along? Did they do business together or did each group stay separate?

*All was good. There was one school and all the children went to the same school. Jews were staying a bit aside but just because of traditions and religion. They were friends between people. There were no mixed marriages, but there was some story about a girl from the Jews who was married with Polish man.*

What do you think it was like for Jews living in Ozeryany at that time?

*Many were in commerce so they normally had higher income than the farmers. Much more money than other village people.*

Was there one section of the village where the Jewish people lived?

*No. It was all mixed. The people bought land everywhere and they built their houses on their land and it was all assorted so they could have a Ukrainian neighbor, a Polish neighbor or a Jewish neighbor.*

Can you remember the names of any of the Jewish families who lived there? Please list those names if you remember them.

*There were not much last names, people used nicknames in the community. As a small child, I knew people by nicknames.*

Did you know any people living in Ozeryany by the name of Graber? If so, what were their names and what do they remember about them? What occupation did they have and where did they live? Is there anything else about them you can remember?

*Yes, I knew Hershko [Hersh] Graber. I don't remember his wife's name. They had a bakery. He was a baker. They had kids, Chaya and Dudyā [David]. I knew Dudyā well and was a very good singer. He and I had the same music teacher and took part in competition for singing. The competition was in Rivne, the main town. Dudyā was a very good singer and knew many songs.*

*[Note: Olga indicated that the Graber family name was pronounced "geh-rob-ber," not "gray-ber." Nataliia went on to say that the Graber name would be spelled Грабер in both Ukrainian and Russian].*

What do you remember about the daughter, Chaya?

*Chaya was married with Shulim [Schmul?]. There is still the house of Hershko Graber in the village. The daughter Chaya had a little shop in the center of the village.*

What kind of shop?

*She sold little things. It was a shop for small little things. Household things, like soap, pots and pans.*

What else can you remember about the family Graber?

*Hershko was nice man. I remember one time I didn't have money for bread and he give to me anyway. I lived in that house of the baker Hershko Graber for about one year during the war-time. The Grabers tried to hide their things when they knew they were coming for them.*

When you lived in that house, where was Hershko Graber at that time?

*When the Jewish people had to move to the ghetto, when the baker and family were sent to the ghetto. After some time, I ask my father permission to move to Hershko house. Hershko and his family were out of their house, living in the ghetto. Hershko and family hid things in their clothing and in their house—in the stove, in the floorboards of the house before moving to the ghetto. Later, Hershko sneaked out of the ghetto in the night and came back to the house to get his valuable things and we give him everything.*

Do you have any memory of an American visiting Ozeryany in 1936? A visit by a man who lived in Ozeryany, moved to America and came back for visit in 1936?

*No, I don't remember.*

I know you would have only been about nine years old at that time, but we were hoping you would remember because it would have been unusual for someone from America to come to the village.

*Actually, it would not have been that unusual or special for someone to come back to the village. Many people had left Ozeryany over time and there were some people that came back to visit.*

My friend in America told me that his grandfather, Abraham Graber, left Ozeryany for the United States in 1913. He returned to Ozeryany in 1936 to try to bring his two sisters back with him to the United States. The story he heard was that the one sister could not leave Ozeryany and come to America because her child had a bone deformity would not have been allowed entry into the United States. The other sister refused to leave her sister behind, so both sisters stayed in Ozeryany.

He thinks one sister may have been named Feiga or Zsaga Graber and she was married to a man named Morgel or Mergel. The second sister may have been named Chaya Graber.

*I remember the name Morgel. There was a man named Morgel and the first name was Shul [Schmul?] or something like that. I remember one more thing. The house of Shul Morgel was near the rabbi's house. I think I remember a Zsag Graber, spelled Sara.*

How about the other sister, her name was Chaya Graber?

*The Chaya Graber I knew was daughter of Hershko Graber I spoke about, the baker's daughter. [This suggests that there must have been two Chaya Grabers, one the daughter of Hershko Graber and the other the sister of Abraham Graber and daughter of Elie Graber. The two Chaya Grabers were undoubtedly related].*

Here is a photograph believed to be taken in Ozeryany in 1936. Do you know who the woman in the photograph is? [Olga was shown the following photograph taken by Abe Graber and believed to be of one his sisters, Feiga/Zaga or Chaya]:



*I am not sure but for me she looks like Chaya, the daughter of Hershko Graber, the baker. Chaya was nice and a bit tall and stout [husky]. It is hard to tell. The memory works well but the eyes not so much anymore. [Olga had trouble seeing the photograph].*

Where there any other people from the Graber family that you remember?

*They was an older woman and some other people in that family but I don't remember their names. I was too young. There were a lot of people that came to the baker's house and left from the baker's house, a lot of people that could have belonged to the baker Hershko Graber family.*

I know that the World War II period was very difficult time for everyone—Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Czechs and Jews. It is important for my friend in America to learn what happened to the Jews of Ozeryany. He only knows that teams of Nazi killing squads came through the area and killed all the Jews. Do you remember the first time you saw the Germans arrive? What was it like and what happened?

*Germans came a few days after war was announced in 1941. Here is a railway station so Ozeryany was very important. The first time the Germans came to the village they came with cameras on autos. They made many pictures of everything— children, old people and houses in the village. [Possible propaganda films?] Then the Germans left and came back quickly and made one man responsible for village.*

Who was that man?

*I don't know, some German.*

Did anyone that you know see the Jews being taken away? If so, what did they see or hear? How was it done? Where the Jews taken to a ghetto first or were they taken out to prepared pits? What do you remember about that or what were you told about that day?

*First the Germans organized ghetto on one side of main street of village. This was 1941 when the Jewish people were made to live in ghetto in Ozeryany. It was difficult for Germans to make a ghetto for the Jews in Ozeryany because there was no one place in Ozeryany where the Jews lived, they were living mixed together with the other people's houses.*

*During the day the Jewish men could leave ghetto for work on the roads for the Germans. In 1942 they took the people from ghetto and brought them to Varkovichi. Most of the people were woman and children. This was around July or August time, around the harvest time. Not all of the Jews were killed; some of the Jews were able to run from the Germans to woods. Many Jews joined partisan troops. There was no killing in Ozeryany.*

Where were the Jews taken to be killed?

*Varkovichi. [Village three miles west of Ozeryany].*

Does anyone know the exact location of the killing field? This is very important. I would like to be able to have the exact location of where the massacre took place. Can someone can draw a map or sketch of the location of this place or even take me there?

*The place is west of Varkovichi. Outside Varkovichi is the place where they were killed.*

Is there a name to the place?

*No, it is outside Varkovichi.*

Can you find the place on this map and tell me where the killing place was?

*No. [Although Olga Kvitka was mentally sharp for 87 years of age, her eyesight was very poor and she was unable to see the map that was provided.]*

My friend in America told me he spoke with a man about 20 years ago who had lived in Ozeryany and this man joined the Polish army during the war. This man was captured by the Germans and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. When he returned to Ozeryany, he was told that the Jews were taken into the woods between Ozeryany and Varkovychi and shot. This area may have been near a farm called the Gruferman or "Gof-a-man" farm? The place may be near something called Jaškowej Górze. Does that sound familiar?

*The place name is not familiar to me. Gruferman or Gof-a-man, is not familiar. We are probably talking about the same place but I do not have specific name for it.*

What else do you know or heard about the killing place?

*By that time it was mostly women and children who were taken from Ozeryany. The men were mostly gone before that. They were able to escape to the woods to hide or became partisans.*

During the War, in some villages in Ukraine, some Jews were helped by their neighbors to hide from the Germans or were helped to flee the area. Where any of the Christian neighbors (Ukrainians, Russians, or Czechs) in a position to help in Ozeryany? If so, do you know the names of the people who helped?

*In Ozeryany almost everyone helped in some way. People did what they could do. As mentioned, we gave the money back that belonged to the family of baker, Hershko Graber. In general, people tried to help but they were also afraid because the Germans would kill them straight away if they found out you tried to help. It was very dangerous to hide people.*

Do you know this building and have any idea which family used to own it? [Olga was shown the following photo, the building previously identified in 2009 as a bakery]:



*That is the home that I spoke of, that is the home of the baker Hershko Graber.*

How about this building? Do you know who used to own it and if so, what do you know about that family? [Olga was shown the following photo, the building previously identified in 2009 as a store]:



*That is the store that Chaya Graber had, the baker's daughter.*



Is there anything else you can tell me about the Graber family or the Jewish people of Ozeryany?

*Last year two groups of people from Argentina and Australia came here also looking for information on relatives from Ozeryany. The people wanted to make a memorial with names of the Jewish people from the village. [Nataliia said Olga mentioned some of the nicknames of the relatives these people were seeking at the time, but Nataliia did not record them because she did not think it important to me].*

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