

REPORT BY TAMARA MISCH AFTER HER TRIP TO SEE THE FAMILIES IN
POLAND

NAUMBERG. MARCH 21, 2005

We've been back home for over a week now. I don't know how I should describe our impressions of the trip.

We looked up 6 families where we could still find elderly people from Podhajce. There were 5 women (aged 88, 87, 76, 72 and 65) and a 76-year old man, all living in various states of wealth, relative affluence or poverty. I was taken in everywhere as a long-lost sister. Up to that point I had had correspondence only with the 72-year older, Eleonora. She found us a hotel and a medical student as translator. She also contacted a woman journalist in order to enlist the help of the newspaper in searching for a woman from Podhajce who had perhaps known our family.

I was very much moved by the love, embraces and joy with which this woman received us (me, Gerhard and our son) upon our arrival.

We had similar experiences with the other families who are living in a different town.

You can well imagine how these people felt, suddenly transported back into the dark past again. They had a lot to tell, but unfortunately we learned nothing about our parents.

On the other hand they confirmed all of our memories of our life at that time - the local conditions and the situation in Podhajce during the war.

They all regretted that we had shown up so late, because most of their family members who could have helped us are dead. They thought it was impossible that no one could respond to my brother's questions when he visited Podhajce 30 years ago. In their opinion no one wanted to say anything because many Ukrainian nationalists took part in the atrocities. Their families were in part involved in such experiences since half of them were Polish and the other half Ukrainian.

One woman could remember the SS-home and recounted that there were also children there whose parents had been murdered by the Bandera gangs.

I am now trying to find out more details about 2 families who my brother and I suspect had something to do with our family. Some (of those we spoke to) could recall one of the families.

He (the father) was a civil servant and had 2 daughters. No one could tell us whether one of the daughters was married.

Two others (the man and another woman) were able to say something about the other family, but they were young at that time and didn't live in the vicinity. They could only report that this family had 3 children, but no one could tell what had become of them.

For me it is no wonder that these people can remember a government official more clearly than an ordinary family. Moreover, one of them lived in the same part-of-town where the families we are looking for

did, and the other lived in a section-of-town in the opposite direction. At the time they were either young adults or children. The woman who served as a housemaid to the government official couldn't be located. It remains to be seen if the Polish newspaper has any success. I'd like to tell you about the experiences of the 81-year old woman. When we showed her the pictures and city map of Podhajce, she began to talk vividly about the situation during the war. She came from the same part of the town as I, which she called Höllände. At that time she was about 18-20 years old. She can't remember the exact year in which the following occurred: She was attending service in a Catholic church. As she came out of the church, she saw a large crowd of people coming from the ghetto and which was being driven past the church with shouts and gunshots. She was overtaken by fear and panic, held her rosary up high and prayed that she would not be hit by a bullet. She ran away, taking a different route home, fell into a puddle and was happy to have escaped and gotten home. From her parents' home she and others in the family could look onto the hill where the site of the execution was located - at the Obelisk of St. Anna. They could hear machine-gun fire as the children, men and women were being killed. One could hear the shooting from afar. No one could maintain that he (she) didn't hear or see what was going on, the woman said. She even described to us how the dead were lying in 2 ditches covered with earth and that the earth was still moving when the town's inhabitants later visited the site. One woman gave us the address of a relative who, she said, could help us. Although she was just a child at that time, there are others from Podhajce living in this town, which is not too far from the German border. So we want to go there also as soon as possible. Incidentally, the father of the woman who gave me the address had been transported as a forced laborer to Germany and then finally to Auschwitz. He was still alive in 1997 and could have told me about Podhajce. Perhaps he even knew my parents. He had sent an application claiming compensation to Germany, but had received nothing. I read the application which had been returned to him with an accompanying letter and saw that it had been sent back with a request to have his father sign the form also. He had forgotten to do so. He didn't understand the text and believed it was a rejection. He then burned all of his documents. What a tragedy! Now he's dead, but his daughter could have used the money. She is living in impoverished circumstances. I felt very bad about it. I am enclosing a photo of the 81-year old woman who told us about the murder of the Jews and also her address, because you might be especially interested in her.

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Hamburg - March 21, 2005