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## **WHAT WIELKIE OCZY WOULD BE LIKE HAD WORLD WAR II NOT HAPPENED**

Many years ago Wielkie Oczy was a wonderful and beautiful town, where there lived people of three different cultures and customs. These people, despite the fact that they observed different religions, knew how to live in harmony. Maybe it could have lasted if not for World War II. Let's imagine that the war never happened.

Wielkie Oczy would have become an important trade and economic center. Poles, Jews and Ukrainians would have created a powerful city that had no equal among the nearby towns. Poles and Ukrainians would work in agriculture and create agro-tourist enterprises. Jews would work mainly in trade. Descendants of the Weiss family, which once had a little shop selling cloth and hats, would see their family business prosper and they would go on to create a fast growing enterprise producing cloth, hats and suits. The Giecel family would create a stud farm to breed horses that would attract many tourists. There would also be a Jewish bakery, and it would bake the best bread in the region.

The population would have increased. There would be 1,536 Poles, 594 Ukrainians and 974 Jews.

In the span of eighty years the University of Wielkie Oczy and the Wielkie Oczy Museum would have been established. These would have drawn many new people to Wielkie Oczy. Investments would have brought about breathtaking development as the cooperative efforts of Poles, Jews and Ukrainians succeeded. One of the largest soccer stadiums in the region and a big shopping center where local products were sold would have been built in Wielkie Oczy.

Thanks to a good education system and co-operation the children would learn mutual respect for different cultures and religions. This was the reason that our town would have become strong and free of discrimination. Wielkie Oczy would have been an integrated community where better relations among its inhabitants would lead to prosperity. Other towns would fail to assimilate the diverse groups within their communities.

All this could have been if not for the war. Maybe the ruined synagogue and orthodox church would today be beautiful buildings full of praying people and smiling children, who after services would meet together in the town square and play together.

Unfortunately, the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 obliterated any hope of achieving such a reality. The war was the beginning of the end of the Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish nations. Jews suffered much more than others. Wielkie Oczy lost all those things that could have allowed our town to develop, that could have enriched us and made us prosperous. We have only small reminders left of the Jewish and Ukrainian cultures.

Some people claim that what happened was inevitable, that the differences among people who had lived so near to one another for so many years were destined to tear them apart. They who say this claim that World War II provided a pretext to "get rid" of those who had been their neighbors. I have tried to imagine something that might have been, but in reality what might have been is today just an illusion.