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

Today Wielkie Oczy is a little village located in the woodlands of the county of Lubaczow, near the Polish-Ukrainian border. How great was the influence of the military operations carried out here during World War II? Before the Russian and later the German armies entered Wielkie Oczy, there were here two alcohol distilleries where spirit was produced, two brickyards and two mills. One of distilleries, brickyards and mill belonged to the landlord Karol Czerny.

Before the war, the people of Wielkie Oczy shared a harmonious and interdependent way of life. The Jews, who were murdered during the war and who had enjoyed life generation after generation, as well as Poles, who were murdered by bands of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, would be alive today. Jews would work in their shops and workshops. They would pray in the renewed synagogue and wouldn't have to emigrate to other countries around the world. Jews and Poles would be friends and share their joys and sorrows and even marriage between women and men of the Catholic and Jewish faiths would be possible. People would live in partnership and treat each other as equals. Children would grow in piety and faith in the only God. Marriages between people of different faiths would be filled with harmony and happiness. Parents would be devoted to the care of children to the fullest extent of their means to ensure them a good and honest life. Jewish holidays would be as important as catholic ones. The representatives of the Catholic Church would be greeted in the same way as Jewish *tzaddik*<sup>1</sup>. I have to add that also Ukrainian population would try not to cause conflicts and live within the community. Peasants would work in agriculture and perhaps there will be cooperatives to develop their activity.

If not for the military operations the fate of the village would be other than what it has become and prospects of the people for better life would be more real and optimistic. First of all industry would be developed; more shops and craftsmen's' workshops would exist. Wielkie Oczy would grow and became a town and people from the surrounding villages would come here to the market, to the shops and church. Alcohol

distilleries, brickyards, mills and bakeries, which existed here before the war, would have modern equipment and produce goods of high quality. The local population would find work in the village instead having to look abroad. Most Jews would stay in Wielkie Oczy. Some would create shops, coffee bars, museums, employment agencies, etc. Also Poles would open bars, shops or clubs. The people of Wielkie Oczy wouldn't have to go to Lubaczow, or even further to shop for major purchases. Wielkie Oczy would have a lot of job opportunities and people wouldn't have to leave to find work.

Sport clubs would not only improve the physical condition of young people, but good soccer players would create a winning soccer club that would invite other clubs and draw fans to matches in Wielkie Oczy. It would make the life of citizens more pleasant.

More primary and secondary schools would be built. New and talented local artists and performers would be discovered. Children would learn new professions, for example firefighter. Teachers who are unemployed would find work in programs to teach children who are sometimes undereducated. The youth of different faiths would build a stadium and participate in races, long jumps and many other athletic activities. A senior care center would be built, where older people would feel secure and have the care and resources for tranquil life. To enable secure life of citizens, peoples of different professions would be taught, such as fire fighting. A professional fire department would be created to safeguard life and property. People would also be policemen to protect society from evil and crime. Maybe a radio station would be created to broadcast news about Wielkie Oczy, Lubaczow and other localities. Journalists would learn their profession at the College of Wielkie Oczy

In the town market different shops would be located, mainly food stores and drugstores. Between the shops would be exists newsstands and video-rental kiosks. There would be a health center with a pharmacy, and thanks to them people would be assured of having proper healthcare and medicines. There would be a farmers market dairy products. Workmen's residences would be built where during the summer when school is let out there would be organized activities for the children of workers. Other kinds of markets would be

<sup>1</sup> Yiddish literally, "righteous one." The term refers to a completely righteous individual, and generally indicates that the person has spiritual or mystical power. [ed.]

established where people would sell all kinds of products. If not for world War II Wielkie Oczy would be in Jaworow county and the border of Poland—as it was in old times—would cross territory which is now Ukrainian. The towns like Lwow, Jaworow and Swidnica would belong to Poland.

A library would be created. People would read more widely and be interested in world affairs. Near the synagogue Jews would build a museum with photographs and remnants of their culture. Such a museum would enrich the knowledge of youth and middle-aged persons. Older people would recall the old times. The museum would be open to people of all religions.

Beside the museum a child care center would be built for the children of people who are busy with their work. A kindergarten would be needed for older children where they would play and learn. Town authorities would organize different fairs with participation of the famous Band of Lwow. At these fairs other performances by clowns, comedians, singers and dancers would amuse even the most ill humored. The profit from these attractions would be dedicated to laudable aims, such as medical treatment of poor people. A hospital would be a wonderful enterprise in our village. And later an amusement park—a true paradise for children who like roundabouts, carousels and other rides—would also be created in Wielkie Oczy. And on the grounds of the amusement park there would also be animals from all over the world. The animals would attract children and their parents would be happy to see that children respect animals.

Every month in the church a special mass would be said. People would pray for order and tidiness in Wielkie Oczy and above all for health. After the mass they would go to the church fair to rest and to hear music of different religions. To such a church fair people would come from different places. In the middle of the town square a park would be created where people would rest during Sunday walks. In the park people of different faiths would get to know each other and be friends. The park would be a place for people who love Nature. They would see birds, trees, animals, etc. The park would be a model for development to show how Nature can co-exist in the commercial center of a town surrounded by many shops.

Despite the fact that World War II disturbed the development of Wielkie Oczy, destroying the distilleries and brickyards, Wielkie Oczy has developed and in the place of these buildings new ones were built such as a bakery and the village hall that now houses the *gmina* authorities.

I regret that my vision of a Wielkie Oczy that might have been had World War II not happened is not very real, but is it so hard to realize it? I very regret that I can't see how Wielkie Oczy looked before the war with

all those Jewish shops and craftsmen, singing Ukrainians, the life of my compatriots, the estate and its manor house. But what about my imagination? Thanks to it everything is possible. When I close my eyes visions of past life appear and I see all the good parts of those times. I can't see—maybe I don't want to see—all the evil things. I try to see only good things, as if evil passed Wielkie Oczy by. But World War II killed so many human beings. So many Jews and Poles were murdered. So many unnecessary deaths. We, who don't know the horrors of war and what hunger is, we should enjoy freedom and life, and we owe respect and memory for the dead and care for the neglected cemeteries.