

Memories of Sabina Kicińska

My name is Kicińska Sabina, nee Kulesza. I was born on December 23, 1929 in the village of Radowicze, Turzysk commune, district Kovel, voivodeship Volhynia.

My parents came from Zasmyki. I do not exactly remember in which year my father sold the entire economy there in 1920 or 1922 and bought it in Radowicze. At the same time, my uncle Rak - my father's brother (only after his mother) bought him, and Pawlisz (my mother's sister) lived on the other side. There were only these three Polish families in this colony. There were three more Ukrainian families who purchased land together. The land was bought from Mr. Sumowski or the heir of Szumowski, I do not remember that well. One of these neighbors was this Mr. Laszko. I would like to add that Mr. Laszko warned my dad, because when he was returning to his home he passed the Bandera followers, whose commander was his son. When they came to us and found no one else, everything was clear - my father warned the Poles. The son returns home and out of rage that he could not murder us, he wanted to shoot his father. But his buddies didn't let that happen. This is what Mr. Laszko's grandson told from his second son.

As for our neighbors' family members, I'll start with my uncle. The family consisted of five people - parents and three children. The eldest son Józef - 19 years old, daughter Sabina - 13 years old. The son was in self-defense, then he took part in the battle in Rymacze and died there.

When the war started, I was 10 years old and I remember very well that our neighbors were mostly Ukrainians, with whom we lived in the best harmony, and even friendship. There has never been the slightest quarrel. What happened next? When the German invaded Poland, the Soviets invaded on the other hand and torn Poland into two parts. Our part of the country was occupied by the Soviets. And immediately they started to purge the Poles. First, they murdered policemen, officials and teachers, and when there were no more, they started working on farmers. What richer farmer was for them a kulak. But only Poles and Ukrainians were not attacked.

They also put my father on the kulak list and he and the whole family were assigned to take him to Siberia. I remember once we were in the church in Turzysk and there one friend of my mother said that they were to take us to Siberia that night. Mom was terribly upset. When we got home, we found a few Ukrainian women - they came to us to give them cows and pigs because we don't need it anymore, because they will take us to Siberia. Mum cried and told them "I will not give my honest work voluntarily, if they take us away, then whatever may be." But they were not supposed to take us away on the day that the German attacked the Soviets (June 22, 1941) and they escaped in this transport themselves. When the second invader, the German, came, we initially breathed a sigh of relief. We stopped being afraid of Siberia, but the worst was ahead of us.

The year 1943 has come, the year of great conflagration and the shedding of Polish innocent blood.

At the instigation of the Germans, the Ukrainians began murdering Poles. At first singly, i.e. military, more enlightened, in a word, those they feared, those who could direct their self-defense. Relations began to deteriorate between the neighbors.

I remember we used to invite girls to tear their feathers, the so-called "feathers". My mother invited girls to these feathers, and since we had Ukrainians neighbors, future Ukrainian girls and boys came with them. And they sang such a song, I only remember the refrain: "Smert lachom, smert the Jewish-Moso-communion". Their mother started to embarrass them, she said "what did the Pole do to you," she started to cry. They didn't answer anything, they just fled. My mother fell seriously ill that night and died shortly thereafter.

The first deaths in our village were the Leśniewski family, father and two sons. It was April 1944. After this event, it was more and more often heard that it was here and there that Poles died. First individually, then with whole families. Suddenly we heard about the attack on the church in Kisielin and other towns, and about the murder of Dominopol. My mother's aunt lived there with four children - they all died.

Of the entire village of about 500 people, only five probably survived. One survivor I spoke to had seven stab wounds. At night he got out of the dead bodies and crawled into the forest. He got to Zasmyki through the forest and then to the hospital in Kowel and that's how he saved himself.

After the murder of Dominopol, several families from Radowicz left for Zasmyki and immediately formed a self-defense. However, the majority of Poles remained in Radowicze. Among other things, we, the colonists, that is Uncle Rak, Uncle Pawlisz and us, stayed. Not far away from us, but two Polish families belonging to another village: Dzięciołów and Babiarzów.

We were surrounded by a tight ring of Ukrainians, most of them hostile to Poles. You don't know what to do, run away - where ?, sit and wait - for what? And so time passed in the fear and uncertainty of tomorrow. And so we survived until the end of August. Then the mass slaughter of Poles began. I remember my sister and her children who lived in Wierzbkowo - and crying that the Ukrainians have attacked Wierzbiano and are murdering Poles.

That day, towards the evening, the brother of the boy who was herding our cattle (he was Ukrainian) came and told him not to stay with us. He brought the cows from the pasture and goes home, although he has always stayed with us. My brother asks "why are you going home?" and he initially did not want to speak, but when his brother started asking him, he cried and said that his brother Piotr told us not to stay with us because it was dangerous here. Everything was clear, the ax was hanging over our heads. You cannot move from the spot, because there is an enemy everywhere. From then on, we didn't stay at home. Two more days and three nights passed. That third night was terrible - gunfire and fires. None of us squinted. In the morning, when everything was quiet, we returned home to prepare something to eat.

The boy who grazed our cattle came from the pasture shouting: "run away because they have already murdered the Wiśniewski family." The Wiśniewski family lived about one kilometer from us. From our pasture you could clearly see their buildings, he could see everything. There was no time to think about horses to the cart, bedding for the cart, and quickly to the forest.

My dad did not want to run anywhere - he said that he would rather die on his job than go into the unknown to be spoiled. There were already two families in our forest: Dzięciołów and Babiarzów. Mr. Woodpecker remembered that he had a gun hidden, so he leaves his family and returns for the gun. You

don't know what to do, you have to run away. Dzięcioł's wife started asking my brother to go get her husband. My brother, looking at her pain, could not refuse and went to get her husband.

At that time, there was great chaos. Let me start by saying that the self-defense boys from Zasmyki went to Wierzbicz and Osiecznik to help their families. The son and son-in-law of Brzezicki were also in this unit, so they sent a messenger to their parents to flee to Zasmyki, because this is the last moment to use. This message was also passed on to us. Time is pressing, we have to run away, and Mr. Dzięcioł and my brother are not here. Wacława and dad stayed at home. The carts left for the forest and are waiting there. At that time, my father, a neighbor, Laszko, came to my father and begged him to run away, because he would die cruelly. Dad went to our forest, where we all ran away first. Finally, we are all, going as fast as possible. On the way, we drive to Brzezicki, pick them up and run away along unknown roads. There was no question of escaping through the forest, because many Poles from Radowicz died in this forest. We are going through Ukrainian villages, Mr. Dzięcioł asks for directions to Zasmyki, and they do not. Then Mr. Woodpecker cursed terribly and pointed the pistol at them, and then they put their hands together and say "tudoju to the tudoj pan." Finally, we reach the coveted Zasmyki. We stayed with my uncle, my mother's brother.

Whoever did not escape that day stayed there forever. The Ukrainians murdered all Poles in Radowicze at night. I don't know exactly, but I've heard about 60 people. For now, we were saved, because in Zasmyki there was a self-defense facility organized after the murder of Dominopol, the attack on the church in Kisielin and mass murders of the Polish population.

Ukrainians planned an attack on Zasmyki. The UPA attracted rezuns from all sides, they were enormous forces. And then the Germans, without knowing it, rode to Radowicz with a contingent, and the Ukrainians started shooting at them. A fight ensued between the Germans and the Ukrainians. The Germans withdrew to Kowel. On the second day, the Germans drove in armored cars with a large amount of troops and there were also planes and they crashed this gang. There were many killed, and the rest fled into the woods. And so the Germans, knowing nothing, helped the Poles a lot. And the Ukrainians thought that the Germans had come to the aid of the Poles on purpose. After this event, the Poles who hid in Zasmyki began to go to Radowicze to their farms to dig some potatoes and make some grains because you wanted to eat, and there was nothing. Brother Wacław was already in self-defense, he came to us and told us to go to our house as well, maybe something was saved, he would take it. So they left. Dad and both brothers came back in the evening happy, because although the house and buildings were looted completely by the Ukrainians, the neighbor who daddy warned when he found out that dad had come, came and said to go to him, because he took our three pigs. He took it with the thought that if it was possible he would give it back to us. And so it happened - they brought these three pigs, threw some grain and dug up potatoes.

Encouraged by this, the next day we went again, this time I went too. Dad and my older brother were threshing the grain, and my younger brother and I were digging potatoes. Before the evening, my dad and younger brother went to Zasmyki, and I stayed with my older brother in our buildings. It was a terrible night. I haven't slept all night. In the morning it was quiet and peaceful, so we left the hideout and went to work, digging potatoes.

Around noon, my dad came with his brother, uncle and Mr. Pałka (he also lived with his uncle and escaped from under the Ukrainian ax from Kisielin). They came on two wagons.

And here we were lucky that the horses from the cart were not laid out, but were given food at the cart and already started threshing. The older brother went to get our plow from one of the Ukrainians, and my younger brother and I started cooking dinner, and since the stoves in the apartment were ruined by the Ukrainians, we made a makeshift kitchen outside from the forest side, and this saved us. At one point we saw a group of rezuns rushing from the forest. We screamed into the yard that the Ukrainians were flying. We jumped on the carts and when the horse jumps out we started to run away. How many were there - I don't know exactly. But I saw that they were flying in a line about 100 meters and shooting at us with their rifles. We were driving parallel to the line, because this is how the road ran, and then the turn, I thought that we would move away from them to the turn. Then I see that two "rezuns" are flying in front of us. Terrible thoughts run through my mind, they already have us. Believe me, despite the fact that I was a child, I was not afraid of death - I was terribly afraid that they would not catch us alive, because I knew what they were doing with Poles when they would fall into their hands alive. One of the rezuns was about to grab the reins, but my uncle turned abruptly to the side. The second one, seeing that we would run away, threw a grenade at us, but the grenade burst behind the car without hurting us. They also started shooting after us, but all the bullets were off target. We are already moving away from them. At this point, I look at where the other cart is. Seeing what is happening, Dad is not following us, but across the fields, but the gang anticipated it and made an ambush. After a while the grenades started to explode there as well. Smoke and dust blocked my view, and I lost sight of them. I thought they were already dead. When we went up the hill, I saw a wagon driving through the meadows. We met in the village, because, as I wrote in the beginning, we lived in a colony about 5 km away from the village. Our village was very large.

There was a German staff in the village and they only let them in with a pass. When we got to the staff, the guard came out with an interpreter and asked everything. We told them everything. And I cried terribly because my older brother stayed there because he had gone to get that unfortunate plow. So I thought they already murdered him.

The Germans rattled something among themselves and the interpreter told us that the army would go there now. They sent 50 well-armed soldiers, and although my brother had already come, the Germans said that if we wanted to, they would go there. And they went, dad and brother also went to pick up the threshing grain and potatoes. I never saw my family home anymore. And today only one lime grows here. We had a beautiful orchard, an apiary, 5 hectares of forest, beautiful buildings - they destroyed everything.

After this pogrom, we returned to Zasmyki and for some time it was quite peaceful with us. Poles continued to die in other places. There were several Polish villages near Zasmyki. There were Janówka, Stanisławówka, Radomle and Lublatyn in the direction of Kowel, and on December 25, 1943, on December 25, 1943, on December 25, 1943, these villages were attacked by Rezunyas in German disguise and murdered over 40 people. They burned down a lot of buildings. The second attack was on Zasmyki. On January 19, 1944, in the morning hours, they attacked and killed 7 people and burned a large part of Zasmyki.

The Ukrainians continued to attack, burn and murder Poles. We had nothing to eat or where to sleep, and there were various diseases such as typhus, eczema, and bloody dysentery. I was seriously ill, there was no doctor or medication, only suffering and fear.

In April 1944, the Soviets came to us again and began mobilizing for the army. Our defenders, on orders from above, had to leave us, cross the Bug River and go towards Warsaw, whoever did not go in this direction was taken to the army.

We were left alone - women, children and the elderly. And again the fear of rezunami, because although they were taken into the army, there were still plenty of them in the forests. The front was in Kovel at that time. We were about 16 km from the front. The Soviets started to drive us out from the front, they say "tut nilezja, tut front, ride 15 km". We go 15 km and so they keep on rushing us. We already thought he was rushing us to Russia. We joined the Polish army and stayed there in the forest until July 22, 1944, when the front collapsed, the army went with the front and we went to Zasmyki again. There was nowhere to live because the buildings were burnt, and there was nobody to protect us from the Ukrainians. What to do next? We were even more unsure of tomorrow.

At that time, our neighbor, Mr. Zamościński, who had a radio and listened to news from abroad, came to us and found out that the Polish border would be on the Bug and we had nothing to wait for here. People fled en masse. They agreed and a few families started looking for happiness in their beloved homeland. We arrived in Ustroń one day too late, the border was closed. A lot of families have gathered and we don't know what to do next. Some came back and some bribed the Soviets, and under the pretext that they were taking forszpan, they put their various things on the wagon and thus transported them across the bridge to Bug. Worse with cattle and kids. My brother, I and my older cousin, also at my age, took a cow and went in the indicated direction. You had to walk 7 km along the forest, pass the sawmill and then run as fast as you can towards Horodło. And yet on the bridge in Horodło she was worth, if they noticed us, they would surely kill us. But before we got to the sawmill, we were attacked by armed and drunk Ukrainians. They ask us where are we going? Fortunately, someone explained to us that if we were asked, we should say "on Czerniawek" and that saved us. Believed, they told us to go through the forest, it will be closer. We went in the indicated direction so as not to arouse suspicions that we are Poles - because death. As soon as they left, we got back on our way and, with our soul on our shoulder, we rushed forward. We pass the sawmill and run towards Horodło. We run to the river and the guide was waiting for us there. We are finally among our own people, happy, but not for long. We quickly understood that there was no place for us here as well. After a few days of wandering, we reach Grabowiec in the province. Lublin, where we live to this day. And here a large part of people treated us as grandfathers from behind the Bug. But where were we supposed to go? It was already September, winter was approaching and we had nowhere to live or eat. In Grabowiec there was an empty flat of the Kalinowski family, who were deported to forced labor in Germany. So, with the consent of Mrs. Kalinowska's parents, we settled there. Everything had to be plowed for them. We used to go out to people to dig potatoes, I remember giving us half a meter of potatoes for the day of digging. The men worked on horses in the fields, earning straw and grain. And so we survived until the end of the war. In May 1945, after the announcement of victory and the end of the war, my uncle went to the recovered lands, but Dad did not want to go because he still hoped that he would return to his economy. I regretted that I didn't leave, there were people like us and they understood and sympathized with each other. And here I was constantly humiliated, because more than once I heard, "Paśa won za Bug" oh how it hurt. There is no place for you there, and you also have no place in your homeland. Dad got a small economy in exchange for the property left behind the Bug. We already had a place to live and a piece of the field, but in 1948 a fire broke out in Grabowiec and all the buildings burned

down. The local people received the compensation, but my dad didn't get it - they said that we don't have the right to compensation because it's post-Ukrainian. My dad was so depressed by all of this that he gave up. And one more example of how the authorities treated us here. When I got married, my father gave me two hectares of land, but the commune recognized it as a state land fund. I had the choice to either buy from the state or leave the field. Well, you have to buy your land from the state.

Dad had lived in exile for twenty years, so many years of humiliation. He was a farmer on 35 hectares of land, had beautiful buildings, a beautiful orchard, an apiary - and here he was a grandfather until the end.

Our family - as I wrote before, my father and two brothers Wacław, 20, Józef, 15 and I, 13. Brother Wacław, as soon as we came to Zasmyki, joined self-defense, fought with Ukrainian gangs, was wounded. In April, when the entire division was to cross the Bug River, they were surrounded by the Germans in the Musurian forests. Many soldiers died there, only some made it through the Bug. My brother and many others were in these forests from April until July 22, 1944, when the front crossed the Bug River, they all left the forest, but immediately took them to Berling's army. The brother was at the front, survived the war and came back to us, but in 1963 he left. He was in the Wrocław Province and died in 1995. In 1948, brother Józef went to active military service and became a professional soldier. He lived with his family in Cieszyn, died in February 1999. My sister and I live in Grabowiec.

I do not understand anything anymore, how often I watch TV and hear what harm has happened to the Ukrainians (Action Vistula) - I am crying. They were hurt because they gave them enough carts to load everything. They took them to the train station, took them to everything ready, they also gave them a non-repayable loan, and they were hurt. Kuroń felt sorry for them, Kwaśniewski apologized, and nobody apologizes to us, they murdered us too little. These mass graves will not be discovered, let the world know that hundreds of dead bodies, and half alive, were buried in one pit.

What I have described is not a fantasy, these are facts. If anyone ever reads about my experiences, he may doubt whether it was really so. This is the most holy truth. I believe God has protected us. Because as far as they were shooting at us, all shots and grenades were inaccurate. They failed to kill us or hurt our body, but the soul is wounded for life. This wound will never heal. And the more it hurts that a lot is said about the tragedy of the Jews, about the harm done to the Ukrainians (Action Vistula) and even about the expulsion of the German population. But the tragedy of Poles is never mentioned, especially in Volhynia.

O Lord, do not forget about those innocent victims who most often died in cruel torments, and on their graves the Ukrainians most often sow grain and graze cattle, and the bones are scattered around the fields, meadows and forests. Why is nothing said about it? I keep asking myself and others this question. But there is still no answer to this question.

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