

WHY DID ORDINARY PEOPLE COMMIT ATROCITIES IN THE HOLOCAUST?

Video transcript: Ordinary people

A few years ago, the BBC series *Who Do You Think You Are?* asked me to research my family history. I discovered many things, one of which was particularly tragic and has affected the way I think about family.

Extract from Who Do You Think You Are? BBC One (2007)

Expert: This is Avraham - Abraham. . . Abraham Kaplinsky, who died in Baronovichi in February 1942.

Natasha: So he has two children - one child who doesn't have a first name and the other, Shulamit..... This one is the girl without a name.

Expert: Yes. And she died on 5 March, 1942, which is the second day of the action. At the age of nine.

Natasha: This is horrendous, somehow, the fact that she was only nine, is just. . .

It's haunting and harrowing to watch and to think that my two young relatives were among around 6 million Jews that were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators in extermination camps and in massacres that they called 'actions'.

A small number of Jews did manage to escape the Nazis – and some settled in places like this - Golders Green in North London. They were the lucky ones. The millions that remained in Germany and occupied Europe faced systematic torture and murder.

But atrocity on such scale wouldn't have been possible without the involvement of ordinary people like you and me – people prepared to assist in or carry out the mistreatment and murder of children, elderly people, whole families and communities.

Photograph of Abraham Kaplinsky and his family, courtesy of © Simon Kaplinsky

Extract from Who Do You Think You Are, courtesy of Wall To Wall productions