

Introduction, location and historical outline:

MOTTO:

"A czy znasz ty, bracie młody,

Twoje ziemie, twoje wody?..."

W. Pol "Pieśń o ziemi naszej"

("Do you know, my young brother,

Your land, your waters?..."

W. Pol "The song about our land")

Nowadays, when visiting and appreciating foreign countries is rather an usual thing, we need to remember that it should always be essential to expand our knowledge about the homeland – its values, geography, history and culture.

Nearby Polish town Ciężkowice there is a tiny village Falkowa. Falkowa is situated on the foothills of Ciężkowice.

Its history goes back to the times of Casimir III the Great (the 14th century). Falkowa was then a noble village.

The next, respective owners were:

- the Trestka Family of Trestczyn from the Gryfit clan,
- Marcin from Wrocimowice, of Półkozice family crest, a castellan honored with seigniorage by king John I Albert,
- Adam Błędowski,
- Anna Brzańska,
- the Przytkowski Family,
- Jan Potocki.

In 1461 Falkowa along with the neighboring Brzana and Sędziszowa were connected to the district of Czychów. Before the Second World War, Falkowa was a part of the district of Grybów.

Currently the village is situated in the administrative district of Tarnów, Lesser Poland Voivodeship. The nearest post office can be found in Bruśnik.

Falkowa is surrounded by such villages and towns as: Bruśnik, Brzana, Lipnica, Bukowiec, Siekierzyna, Jamna.

One part of the village is located in the regional landscape park. It's a tourist destination famous among hiking enthusiasts who trek through Falkowa on their way from Bukowiec to Jamna.

How to reach Falkowa and enjoy as many monuments and as much nature as possible?

The most convenient way to start a trip is to leave at Bogoniowice – Ciężkowice station. As we pass Kańska Dolna, we see Ignacy Jan Paderewski's (1860-1941) only manor house. We get to learn about the world-famous Polish pianist and politician. In 1919 Paderewski was the Polish Prime and Foreign Minister. Currently the manor house is the main office of the local Music Society.

Then, as we cross the bridge on the Biała River, we enter the so-called *tourist capital of the region* – Ciężkowice. Once a royal city, Ciężkowice regained its charter on January 1st 1998.

Worth seeing are here definitely: 19-th century town hall building initially designed by Jan Matejko, 1895 chapel with a stone statue of Saint Florian funded by I.J.Paderewski when the local fire department was established, St Andrew the Apostle church and the 18-th century houses with arcades placed on decorative columns, covered with a half-hipped roof. Make sure to visit the inanimate nature reserve (14,91 ha) called *Skamieniałe Miasto* – the Fossil Town.

From Ciężkowice we walk to Zborowice, where the historic, built between 1530 and 1541, St Mary Magdalene church is located. This church was mentioned in works written by Jan Długosz (1415 – 1480), a historian who was also a teacher of Casimir III the Great's sons.

After taking the Biała river valley, we get to Bruśnik and visit the, founded in 1903, church of the Blissful Virgin Mary. Mary was glorified here by Wincenty Witos (1874 – 1945). Witos served thrice as the Prime Minister of Poland and met with the locals of Bruśnik. The inhabitants carried Witos in their arms all the way from Pławna train station to Bruśnik. Zofia Śmierciak mentions this as she was the Polish Rural Youth Association *Whips* (Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej “Wici”) member and welcomed PM Witos herself.

Then we pass the Filhausser family manor house, once a beautiful mansion decorated with flowers.

And so, sticking to the blue trail, we finally reach Falkowa. On its highest hill (over 400 meters above sea level) grows a largeleaf linden (585 cm girth). Under this particular tree rested the Polish knighthood on their way back from the won Battle of Vienna in 1683.

When standing next to the tree, you may admire the beautiful view. There are houses spread all over the village and deep gorges - impassable in the winter time because of the snow. All the foothills and Low Beskids are also to be seen from this point. Yet, when the weather is nice, Tatra Mountains appear on the horizon. The blue trail encircles Falkowa and leads us to Bukowiec.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Church is situated in Bukowiec on a hill, 503 metres above sea level, moved here from Kamienna, originally built as a Greek Orthodox Church in 1805.

Right behind the church stretches a famous reserve *Diabie Skaty* (The Evil Rocks). What makes it special are sandstones in original shapes called *Grzyb* (Mushroom), *Kapa* (Cope) and *Diabeł* (Devil). There is also one of the longest caves in Beskids (about 350 meters of corridors) known commonly as *Diabla Dziura* (The Evil Hole). Legend says that devil used to live there. Highland robbers and partisans were hiding there over the Second World War. There are also records proving that caves were used as catacombs for the first Christians in this area. Coins from the Roman period were found in the vicinity. The cave is home to many bats species, including the very infrequent in Poland - lesser horseshoe bat.

Neighbors – a village burnt down completely during World War II as its inhabitants were involved in anti-German partisan forces. The sound of despair was heard also in Falkowa. Church services take place each September to commemorate the victims of this inhumanity.

Skierczyna is a beautiful village situated in the woods, a little lower than Jamna. As we walk through the woods we may enter Falkowa from its heart side which is the school.

It took three generations to finish building the school. Involved were great-grandparents, grandparents and parents of current pupils.

Cows helped to transport stones and wood, horses helped with bricks. People of Falkowa worked very hard to enable their children, grandchildren and the grandchildren of their grandchildren proper education.

Ancestors of the present-day inhabitants had extremely difficult work conditions. There was no macadam road connecting Falkowa with other villages and towns, the only road was so muddy that it was impossible to pass it after heavy rains. The macadam road was finally built in the 1970s. Unfortunately, the dream road is in a very bad state now, as drivers have to deal with many pot-holes. Road services don't see it. Also in the 1970s Falkowa was electrified. Finally, in 2000 the village became full access to phones and gas.

Nearby school there is Elevation of Holy Cross Church, a new fire station and a shop. The church is relatively new, its builder was a great clergyman, long serving parish priest in Bruśnik, Władysław Kurdziel.

A little piece of Falkowa's, partly forgotten, history can be found in legends.

Zofia Śmierciak's cellar

Polish lands were under foreign partition. Polish nobility was ready to start an uprising but had no support from the peasants. Exceptional places were Chochółów and Miechów – villages free from feudal service.

The Kraków Uprising of February 1846 directed at the Austrian Empire lasted only for 9 days. Its quick end was, among other things, caused by angry and insurgent peasants whose tough situation in Galicia led to many tensions. They had to give away up to 50% of their incomes, yet pay various taxes, remember about their feudal service and help the nobility with chores for free. Peasant families were usually hungry and so they eventually were ready to do everything for food.

Austrians were aware of this fact and, hence, decided to use determined peasants as they found out about the upcoming Kraków Uprising.

Rumor had it that nobility wanted to fight peasants. One of the most effective trouble-makers was Tarnów's district head – Breinl.

And so the accumulated hate exploded. On February 17th organized peasants started attacking nobles and destroying their manor houses, ruthless incarcerating and killing the landowners, taking their food and cattle away and destroying the lists of peasants' impositions.

Jakub Szela was a Polish leader of this peasant uprising against the Polish gentry.

Over 1000 people were killed and about 470 manor houses were destroyed over that time.

The Austrians suppressed all rebellions.

The Kraków Uprising influenced other countries in a very visible way. Foreign peasants also decided to start the fight for their rights. Szela was notorious even in England. Events in Poland gave a clear signal to peasants all around Europe and caused European Revolutions of 1848, the so-called *Spring of Nations*.

Reflection of these difficult times was evident in Falkowa.

Some members of the gentry tried to run away but the local insurgents were very alert. This is how the pursuit of life started.

Both – the escape and the chase took place on foot. Many lacked energy. One of the noblemen was too heavy and used to his carriages. He was caught on the way, not far away from Falkowa, in Siekierczyna and killed in a cruel way – cut through with a hand saw and buried in the place of his death. To this day there is a cross and fence around his buried body, on Mr Szczepanik's property.

The confusion was used by other fugitives. They made it to the woods, ran down the river as they didn't want to cast their lot with the killed friend.

Then, just off the road, they noticed a cellar. The door opened itself and they spotted the housekeeper. She carried potatoes and, when asked, agreed to give shelter to them. They entered the cellar and she, slightly panicked, closed the door. She simply couldn't leave them – they begged her in the name of God.

The sun went down. Nobody looked for the fugitives. She took a loaf of bread, some milk, a kerosene lamp and went to the cellar. The men were scared. She fed them, gave them water and a bundle of straw as bedclothes.

They begged her in the name of God and she helped them. She knew they were bad people who rode roughshod over the poor peasants. But she helped them, hoping they would eventually change.

Fugitives spent a couple of days in the cellar. The housekeeper was very scared but she didn't tell anyone. Anyone. When she ran short of bread, she gave them potatoes with cabbage. Oh, God! It was so tasty.

At the end of Galician Slaughter men left the cellar, rented horses and rode away, promising to pray for the cellar's owners so that they never lacked bread and always experienced God's blessings.

The cellar is still there. It's over 200 years, it was already very old when the gentry used it as their hiding place. The house right next to this famous cellar was old as well. It was dismantled in 1975. Originally wooden, covered with thatch house was built without a single nail – nothing but little, wooden studs.

This special place needs proper maintenance. Everything, including ceiling is made of small flagstones. It's situated underground, only the roof (which was finished later) can be seen from the outside. Flagstones are joined with clay, as people didn't know cement back then. The builders did a marvelous job! Zofia Śmierciak owns the cellar at present.

The story of Falkowa's fugitives was published in *Rabacja tarnowska* (Galician slaughter) brought from Russia by Paweł Gnutek. Mr. Gnutek lived in Russia through the First World War and October Revolution (1917).

He saved the book from a burning pile.

He also knew a lot about the 1846 events since his grandfather survived the slaughter and shared a lot of his memories with the offspring.

Paweł Gnutek wrote it all in *Kronika Falkowej* (Chronicles of Falkowa). Unfortunately, the chronicles got lost.

The historical lime tree - *Lipa*

The lime tree of Falkowa is over 500 years old.

When someone mentions *lipa*, everyone in Falkowa knows that it's the particular, historical linden.

Stick to the blue trail if you want to reach the tree, situated on the highest hill in the village (over 400 metres above sea level). With a trunk diameter of 5,85 meters, the linden is one of the most historical trees in Poland. Worth mentioning is its older (1300 years old!) relative – oak tree called *Bartek* with a trunk diameter of 13,40 meters. *Bartek* impresses those who visit the Świętokrzyskie mountains.

Lipa has been growing in the mountainous, divided by deep gorges, area around Falkowa for ages. The old tree proudly overlooks the Tatra mountains and sends greetings to *Giewont* (a famous Polish mountain massif). It remains alert because over 320 years ago, right underneath its huge leaves, the almighty God was asked by his faithful people to keep the village away from various disasters.

The tree witnessed very special moments:

Tired knights with their beloved king John III Sobieski were on their way back home after the Battle of Vienna in 1683. The horse-ride was demanding. Both people and animals were very tired and thirsty. Then they saw Falkowa's *Lipa*.

Largeleaf linden impressed the Polish king John III Sobieski who felt invited to rest in the shadow of this tree.

And so he did.

His group rested on the fields of Falkowa, in the friendly shadow of *Lipa*. The village hosted many brave knights and their king who enjoyed the place as well as healthy, fresh and spring water brought from the Falkowa's well. It was a beautiful day, the king could admire his Polish views of Tatra mountains and felt delighted with hospitality and kindness of poor Falkowa's inhabitants. Thankful for the opportunity to share the good moments with the locals, on behalf of John III Sobieski, the military chaplain entrusted Falkowa to God's safekeeping.

There is a cross in the site of chaplain's prayers which were later answered. God's blessings have been noticeable in Falkowa for ages. Big disasters luckily avoid Falkowa and its people.

As time goes by, *Lipa* gets older, weaker and needs proper protection and conservation. It asks for help, it literally begs for it. People need to pay more attention to this natural monument as it witnessed some very important events connected with our history.

Lipa has to be saved.

Additional information: *Lipa's* holy power was especially visible in the 19th century. There was a cholera outbreak in the neighboring Bruśnik in 1873 but people in Falkowa stayed healthy. It was like an invisible wall separating these two villages. Nobody died in Falkowa.

There used to be a bar, now it's Falkowa's *haunted place*.

But only on some days at midnight.

Why is that?

No one knows although many wonder. The old ones, the young ones and the very young ones wish they

knew the answer.

It's a mysterious, hundred-year old story spread between generations.

Before the quarry, there used to be a plain and on this plain there was a bar. Its Jewish owner – Mr. Josek had a great wife. Mrs. Josek was a very kind, friendly person. She would help anybody who was in need: orphans, miserable people. Mrs. Josek was always there for them. Both: locals and tourists enjoyed Falkowa's bar. Many rode there horses, many walked to the bar. There was even a special room for the horses, they got to drink from the nearby rivers. Among the clients were merchants and traders, bringing and selling many things. Pottery and craftsmanship were popular especially in this area. Pots of good quality were made out of red clay. Other convertible products were handmade tablecloths, blouses, small tapestries, slips which were all linen and valuable. Typical were also various laces.

Bar was always very bustling. People enjoyed sitting, talking, listening to the news, trading, drinking and sharing interesting, sometimes weird stories.

One of the loyal customers was a boy named Wawrzek who worked as a helper at Mr. Rojek's farm. Mr. Rojek was Ms. Dzibaczkowska's father. Wawrzek was always interested in the stories told by the elderly. He once heard a legend about the Evil Hole in Bukowiec and learned about the possible long, underground tunnels and amazing treasures watched over by Devil.

One of the travelers asked: "Anybody knows whether these tunnels lead to Falkowa's bar? This bar has huge cellars, the owner is rich." Wawrzek heard that and started wondering. He came up with an idea that if he could enter the cellars, there was a slight chance of finding the entrance to the treasure. And so he would become rich. This thought got him very excited and so he kept thinking. One Saturday after work he decided to visit the bar. He sat at the table, then left unnoticed. He sneaked down to the cellars and disappeared forever. Nobody has seen Wawrzek ever again. Soon after this accident the bar burned down and the cellars collapsed. Since then it's the Falkowa's haunted place. In the 1970s, when a macadam road was built, river bed had to be changed. Excavators worked in the old bar's location. No treasures were found but in one of the cellars there was a bunch of human bones. Possibly Wawrzek's bones...

Devil watches over his treasure very carefully. Wawrzek disappeared and so did the bar. It's been a haunted place for over 100 years now.

Historical well and healthy water

A tired wanderer walked a long way home to his beloved Falkowa. The war was over and he also survived the October Revolution of 1917.

He was only a dozen or so meters away from a well located in the center of Falkowa. This well offered fresh, healthy water. He kept this well in mind over long, war years. He fought in the First World War and witnessed cruelty of the October Revolution. The wanderer dreamed about water from this particular well as it tasted exceptionally. Wanderer finally reached the well and worshiped the great God. He carried a hip flask and very quickly filled it with the ideal water. He took the first sip and enjoyed the refreshing taste. Great water! He drank it up very focused so that no drop was wasted. God! He revived! The power was back! His home was only several dozen meters away. Solider sat near the well because he needed to rest. He started wondering: who made this well? No one knew it, no one remembered it. It's been there for decades. Right by the river in the middle of Falkowa. Wanderer's grandfather used mention that the great king John III Sobieski enjoyed water from this wall on his way back from Vienna. He rested under a lime

tree, delighted with Falkowa's tasty and refreshing water. Such a long time ago! The battle of Vienna took place in 1683. Who told his grandfather all that? His own grandfather probably. Important details are always spread from generation to generation.

Many knights drank this water, the spring was very big. One of the weak, injured knights got back in shape after drinking it. The wanderer - Paweł Gnutek also got better. Locals and neighbors from Bukowiec, Siekierzyna and Brzana knew that water from Falkowa's well provides extra strength.

Men who hid in Falkowa in 1846 drank this water during Galician Slaughter. Also travelers who stopped by at the nearby bar tasted water from this well. Water was used in the bar, bar's owner – Mr. Josek would always praise its values. Wanderer's grandfather had to mention this all. And so Paweł Gnutek took another sip and went home. Falkowa's well served many inhabitants. Over the Second World War partisans drank this water on their way from Bukowiec to Jamna. Soon after the war, Jan Śmierciak and Jan Semla carefully reconditioned the well using flat stones. They put a huge plate on its top which they later covered up with sand. Access to water was possible only from one side. Over long years this well provided water to 11 farms as well as the elementary school and fire station. In the end of 1970s a macadam road was built in Falkowa and so the traffic increased. This led to major changes of the well's structure. It needed repairs eventually. The local government in Ciężkowice paid for the renovation and so the historic well serves Falkowa's inhabitants and hikers who stop by on their way to *Evil Hole* in Bukowiec and on their way to Jamna – the neighboring village pacified by Germans during the Second World War because of the active partisan movement. Also vacationists, before leaving for Cracow, Warsaw or even Vienna, fill up various jugs with Falkowa's water. The well reminds of the old days and asks for respecting its water. Water is an invaluable and priceless treasure – it's the gift of life.

Paweł Gnutek's house

Owned later by Adam Jurkiewicz

A house, just like a person, can be either happy or sad. It's joyful when it's full of life, light and bright.

A dark house with the curtains drawn back is sad and misses its inhabitants.

As we go to Falkowa's center from Siekierzyna's side there is a little, standing on the left side, behind the river, on the top of a steepy, covered with forest hill, house. Currently it's abandoned and looks rather sad. It used to be a very full of life place, owned by Falkowa's elementary school manager Paweł Gnutek. He was a great example of punctuality, reliability and kindness. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather lived there too. Stories about Falkowa's people and places were published in *Chronicles of Falkowa*. The owner was almost 100 years old when he died and witnessed many interesting things himself.

His son-in-law Adam Jurkiewicz was a frequent visitor in the summer and over holidays. He enjoyed resting in Falkowa and spending time with the local youth. Most of Adam's memories were unfortunately sad. During the Second World War he was taken with the first mass transport to the German concentration camp Auschwitz in Oświęcim which was built to exterminate the Poles, Jews, Gypsies and other nations.

As he was tattooed with a prison number (467), he was placed in one block together with Father Maximilian Kolbe. Jurkiewicz was an eye witness to the assembly when Father Kolbe volunteered to take another prisoner's place in the underground bunker which was equal to death sentence. God helped Jurkiewicz escape from Auschwitz – this can be seen as a miracle! Later he joined *Armia Krajowa* (The Home Army which was the dominant Polish resistance movement). He survived years in partisans

movement to testify in the proceedings for the beatification of Father Kolbe. Adam Jurkiewicz died in 1998.

The house has become sad. It's usually very dark inside. Only when children and grandchildren of Mr. Jurkiewicz stop by, the house lights up with joy again.

There are also other memories connected with this place, probably the most important ones. The house remembers happy faces of local children who were taught religious education there. Back in a day there was no church in Falkowa and preaching about Jesus Christ was forbidden at schools. Priests had their classes in various houses, including the one on the top of the steep, forest hill.

Customs and manners - Polish linen

Polish linen has been famous all over the world for ages. There was a huge demand for sheets, and hand-embroidered tablecloths.

People will always be interested in getting beautiful handicrafts.

It's therefore difficult to understand why the linen industry was destroyed and people became jobless. Linen could help the local farmers. Thousands of people could find jobs in manufacturing, embroidering and exporting linen – like it used to be in the past. After the Second World War there were big linen industrial plants in the area. Over the last 10 years all machines were destroyed, people fired and the industrial plants sold to foreign investors for a song. If the domestic policy was reasonable, thousands of unemployed would work and earn good money. Also, people could profit from linseed. Linen should still be Poland's national wealth.

How special was linen for Poland? A Polish poet and novelist Maria Konopnicka had answers for this question.

And so it was: Farmers sowed and weeded linen since it needs a lot of care. Linen fields were blue, full of little blossoms. Ripened linen was collected, sheaves were stored and sun-dried on windy days. Then it was manufactured. The job was hard and arduous, everything was done by hand. Removed were linseed and the thickest chaffs. *Październik* – October in Polish took its name from the chaffs – *paździe* which used to be removed in this particular month. We can therefore state that linen is a typically Polish plant.

Linen was later kept in water and dried afterwards. Once the product got completely dry, it was separated from chaffs. After being completely broken, flax only needed brushing. Then the beautiful, golden "hair" was finally ready for weaving.

Basic items needed for manufacturing were to be found in almost every household. Not many people owned a loom. Linen was produced in two versions: thin and thicker – of very good quality.

Woven pieces had to be bleached. The act of bleaching was taking place on sunny days. Pieces were placed on the ground, watered and sun-dried. This was repeated until flax got whitened completely.

Thick pieces were used as sheets and in making every-day clothes. White pieces of high quality were later embroidered. Tablecloths, blouses, small tapestries and slips were all handmade. Linen underwear and shirts were also very popular. Foreigners purchased mostly tablecloths and tapestries. Many families in the country made a living out of manufacturing flax.

As it was mentioned before, after the Second World War changes in contractations and manufacturing were introduced and so linen was one of the key agricultural produces in the region.

And what about the present days?

Well, linen products still could be Poland's prominent symbol – just like it used to be in the past.

Customs and manners –feather-plucking parties

Back in the day people used to sleep on featherbeds, under feathers, with smaller and bigger pillows under their heads. Everybody understands what feathers and pillows are. Featherbeds are not that popular anymore. What are they? Simply mattresses filled with feathers.

There was a huge demand for feathers and only one way to get it, namely geese. They provide feathers and so in each household many geese were breed. Geese were plucked three times a year. Then feathers were kept in sacks and placed in airy rooms.

People plucked the geese over the long, winter nights. Feather-picking competitions were popular among the elderly, children but mostly teenagers. Feather-picking was taking place in the kitchen which was very big and warm. Guests sat on various benches, stools and birch trunks. There were always many competitors, each picking one portion and placing it in a container in the middle of the kitchen. Once it filled up, the picked feathers were moved to another special box. Everything, including the rejected feathers, was eventually collected and used for various products such as pillows - saddles.

The nights of feather-plucking were very interesting and joyful. Many stories were shared – real and made-up. People shared legends and tales, parables and allegories. Singing was forbidden, otherwise the feather could fly up and away. Of course, there still were unforeseen situations when the feather started flying around the room to land on those who plucked. It looked so funny! And was always recalled in the future.

Local people worked hard until all feather was picked.

And then the time for a feather-plucking party has finally come!

Only on this particular night, work could remain undone. After cleaning, the landlady used to invite everybody to sit at the table and try her fresh cake with linden or lemon thyme tea. Then guests enjoyed their quality time to the sounds of the mouth organ and many other instruments, usually the violin. There was a lot of singing and this singing was really beautiful.

People plucked feathers in many houses of Falkowa. There was enough work for the whole winter season.

Harvest time

Harvesting is the process of gathering a ripe crop (mainly cereals – rye, wheat, barley, oat) from the fields. The whole process includes scything, reaping and storing the crops. This job is very hard and demanding, yet very joyful since people are aware of the fact that harvesting means bread.

Before the Second World War, people harvested using sickles. Neighbors worked together, doing each step very carefully. When the nights were bright, they worked in the moonlight. Although the tasks were hard, they had a lot of fun, they joked, sang and laughed a lot. Kindness was visible in almost every job at that time. People worked much harder than we do nowadays, they lived modestly and were much poorer, yet had a lot of positive energy and helped one another.

Young people swam after work in local rivers or rested in wooden baths where water was heated by the sun.

There was no running water or bathrooms in the wooden houses of Falkowa back then but the local people paid a lot of attention to cleanliness and their personal hygiene. Wooden tables, benches and floors were scrubbed with sand intensely and effectively.

People harvested with both: sickles and scythes. The first scythe was introduced by Józef Bania in Siekierzyna in 1914, right before the WWI outbreak. Many neighbors gathered to watch the demonstration of scything. They were outraged by the number of ears wasted during the process. When sickles were popular, all ears were used. The forefathers had a lot of respect towards bread.

At the end of each harvest time the reapers were making a beautiful, big and decorated with different flowers, sheaf of grain. Each householder who owned a harvested farm got a decorative sheaf as a present. It had a very special spot in each house – either on the table or on the shelf. Householder always offered his guests fresh cake, cabbage with peas, vodka and rose wine. Bailiffs and the poor always received a portion of cereal. Then, when everyone was done with eating, the local youth organized a little party. The guests danced outside, on the threshing-floor, on the grass – simply everywhere. They danced to the sound of harmonium, violin, harmonica, pipe or even comb. Many locals played the instruments by ear, they were self-taught.

There were no loud clubs but happy, joyful shindigs combined with live music performances. Youth, children and the elderly – they all knew songs for different occasions and enjoyed singing them a lot.

Singing farm workers hired by Mr. Filhauser would always bring him a decorative sheaf. The Filhauser's manor house was very well-kept. There were flowers all over the building and a very rich garden cultivated by Mr. Nowak, full of flowerbeds and vegetable patches. Around the manor house there was a park with interesting paths and a pond with musically talented frogs.

The Filhausers were very kind, good people who followed the harvest and had always a lot of respect towards the farmers. Together with the beautiful sheaf they got once a golden, round bread on a linen, embroidered cloth. When taking the present, the family members kissed the bread – this action comes from an old Polish tradition. Then all participants received presents from the manor house's owners.

In 1927 a sheaf was replaced with a wreath that symbolizes an annual crop. Since then Poland celebrates the so-called harvest home which can be describe as either communal or parish feast.

Each harvest home takes a lot of preparations, integrating the whole country community.

Before the Second World War, people weaved and prepared the wreaths in their private houses. Currently they do it in the local fire station. Every person who wants to weave brings ears of good quality. This tradition is observed and spread across generations. People bring to the station the most beautiful flowers from their gardens and decorate the wreaths with them. This celebration gathers the whole families.

In the first place the wreath's shape is planned, then foundation is made and wires are installed. Then the actual implementation starts. Some choose the ears of grain, others pass or wind them. Everybody sings traditional songs. It takes a couple of evenings in the households. Two wreaths are made – one is designed for the communal feast, other for the parish event.

A beautifully decorated wreath is placed on a hay rack wagon on the day of harvest home.

There are more highlights to the event than the wreath itself. Falkowa's inhabitants wear traditional clothes, there are also orchestra and freshly baked breads. Young people ride dressed horses. Everyone

sings, people simply have fun.

After each presentation wreath and bread are handed over in a traditional way.

The second wreath is placed in the church as people are thankful for the harvested crops. In the church there is also an altar made out of bread. People who celebrate the harvest home also leave their breads in church.

Then people sing one of their harvest folk songs:

“open the gate,

open the portal,

we are coming with the wreath

made out of solid gold.

It's not the gold

But our will

We've made it

On our farm..”

Customs and manners – tradition of making sauerkraut

The Poles traditionally enjoy eating cabbage in various forms: in salads, soups, with sausage and mushrooms or meat.

Sauerkraut was always very popular. In the past it was a very common dish. People were poor, they barely could afford to buy bread. And so they ate a lot of cabbage, mostly with peas and mushrooms. This combination was nutritious and rich in vitamins.

But before all that... Cabbage brought from the field had to be pickled. Making the sauerkraut was a very special ceremony.

Barrels with cabbage were taller than an adult person so it took more than two hands to carry out the whole process. Families, neighbors and friends were involved in sauerkraut-making.

Cabbage was brought to the kitchen in barrels.

Each barrel needed scrubbing, washing and blanching. Polish kitchens were traditionally very big as several generations lived in one house. Families gathered at modest but nutritious meals.

Big family meant a big table. The table was always located in the middle of the room, it was a long piece of furniture with benches on both sides. Tables were always scrubbed with sand and sparkling clean.

Besides, a big table had to be placed in a big room. Big Polish kitchens had bread ovens, cauldrons and cooker hoods to preserve fresh air in the building.

There were also other machines such as hand-mills. Cereals were milled in the afternoons. It was a

demanding job but people enjoyed singing when doing it. People generally sang every time they worked.

In the neighboring corner there was our barrel, waiting for the process of sauerkraut making.

Participants of the event, as making sauerkraut was indeed an event, sat on the long kitchen benches. Every participant was busy with another action suggested by the householder.

Little cabbages were placed on a white, linen sheet. Some people peeled off the dirty leaves and placed them in wicker storage baskets which could be found in special sheds. The cabbages were shredded by experienced workers. Barrels were full of the shredded parts.

The actual party was taking place inside of the barrel. Two young men would literally jump on the cabbage. This was a whole ceremony. Pants had to be all rolled up, feet washed and carefully toweled. Entering the barrel was only possible after going up the ladder. These two had a very responsible job – the cabbage had to be well-prepared before next stages of the process.

Time of making sauerkraut was always very joyful. People were together sharing stories, legends, fair-tales, jokes, riddles and singing. Singing connects people and releases their inner good.

Our forefathers were very intelligent people. The practical wisdom was passed on to us in their legends and songs.

While some were involved in the process of sauerkraut making, others had to prepare meals out of cabbage. Some would make stuffed cabbage rolls, other cabbage soup with bread or tiny cabbage dumplings. They all worked long hours, lightning the house with kerosene lamps.

There was always a little party afterwards, since at least one of the sauerkraut makers could play the violin, harmonium, mouth organ, pipe or even the comb.

Over the parties people had a chance to socialize and set dates for another working sessions.

Sauerkraut had a magic power and saved many from starvation between winter and the harvest time. People ate it usually with peas and potatoes. They didn't have much money and there were no shops in the area. The nearest one was in Cieżkowice but it was hard to reach as there was no road connecting Falkowa with this town.

Customs and manners –Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve (December the 24th) is the evening preceding Christmas. This is always a very special day, completely different from all other days. One had to wake up early on Christmas Eve. The first important routine action was the morning wash-up. Some washed in the local spring, others at home - in the spring water turned at home with coins into a wishing well. It was supposed to be a good luck charm for the New Year.

Then, after very modest breakfast (it's traditionally fast on Christmas Eve), people decorated Christmas Tree. The fir tree was already waiting after being brought from the woods – very big and fragrant. Also, Christmas decorations and ornaments were ready to be placed as the production would start in the beginning of Advent.

The Christmas Tree had its special place in the corner. The whole decorating process was the most joyful job – everybody wanted to hang something on it. Popular decorations were: red apples, nuts in little,

colorful baskets, angels, stars, hedgehogs, glass balls, tiny hares and ducklings – made out of blotting paper. On the top of Christmas Tree there was always a beautiful star. Paper chains were additionally decorated with feathers and straws. Little candles were always stuck to the branches.

In some houses decorated Christmas trees were hanging from the wooden ceiling.

When the tree was all beautifully decorated, members of a family had to start preparations for the Christmas Eve supper. A long table was covered with a linen, embroidered tablecloth. Under the cloth a little bundle of hay was placed. In the kitchen's corner big sheaves of rye were placed. In the middle of the table, on a little bundle there was a napkin, some wheat and *opłatek* (the Christmas wafer). Right next to this bundle there was a candle, which burned throughout the whole supper.

When the first star appeared on the sky – Christmas Eve supper was served. Family members prayed and wished each other all the best, sharing *opłatek* (the Christmas wafer) before they actually started enjoying the very special meal.

There were always many dishes.

The most typical here were: cabbage with peas, famous Polish *pierogi* (this time stuffed with apples) and dried plum compote. One place at the table was left empty – just in case somebody would knock on the door. After supper family gathered to sing Christmas carols ready to leave for the Christmas midnight mass.

Between Christmas and the Epiphany, carol singers visited houses with a star, a black animal, angel, death and devil and performed Nativity play.

Boxing Day was related to the animals – before the sunrise, cows were served with hay, hens with wheat. On this day animals also ate *opłatek*.

The period between Christmas Eve and the Epiphany was off for the service. It was their only vacation, worth mentioning is here the fact that they were also paid on these days. Yet, it was the only period when changing the place of employment was possible.

Customs and manners – potatoes digging

It always took a long time before the potatoes were finally dugged out. There were no excavators or any other helpful machines. For digging people used hoes and so they dug only a few rows a day. Days were getting shorter and shorter between September and November. The job was heavy, yet, farmers had to hurry up as winter was coming. Powdery soil was not a problem. Clay soil was much more demanding, especially when it froze over.

Our forefathers were very wise. They knew that teamwork is a key to success and so they dug in groups. Neighbors worked together, digging potatoes in one farm after another.

In the morning, right in the middle of the field, there was always a cart (sometimes, if the landlord had more money, two carts) pulled by cows or work-horses.

Each worker had one row to dig. He would always place a wicker basket behind him. Every few digs he had to move the basket so that worker in the next row could place there his potato. Baskets full of potatoes were then placed on the cart.

Children and teenagers were bringing brushwood. Bonfires were prepared regularly. The potatoes were

baked – it was very delicious. Work was hard but people were happy. They laughed and joked around. Once in a while they sat around the bonfire and sang folk songs as it was helping them to accumulate extra strength needed for this demanding job.

In the afternoons people transported potatoes placed on the cart. Then young and strong boys were moving the potatoes to cellars. Some potatoes were left underground over the wintertime. Girls prepared potato pancakes – they were healthy, made on stove top and of course fat-free. Nobody makes such pancakes anymore. Too bad since they were very tasty! By the end of the day there usually was party going on. People danced to the sound of harmonica, comb or the violin – depending on what instrument was available on that day. People danced barefoot, sang, laughed and had fun. Singing was an activity that always connected generations – everybody, including the oldest and the youngest workers sang. They knew many folk songs and so they sang them. The nights were bright because of the kerosene lamps.

For many years there had been no elementary school in Falkowa. Local children went to schools in the neighboring villages: Bruśnik, Siekierczyna, Brzana (mentions Zofia Dziubaczka). The way to school was very hard, especially in the winter time with all the snowdrifts sculpted by wind during snowstorms. Mounds were sometimes even two meters high. Winters were very cold, windy and snowy. Falkowa's inhabitants needed school and so they had been doing everything to finally establish one in their village.

Children born in 1932 were the first Falkowa's Elementary School graduates. The institution was located in the so-called *Symelówka*, in a bicameral, little house owned by Piotr Mróz. One of the first pupils was Stanisław Jamka – a farmer awarded after the Second World War with "Virtuti Militari" – Poland's highest military decoration for heroism and courage.

School's first manager was Miroslaw Maciejewski who stayed at Wojciech Rojek's place. During the war he was an active member of the Home Army. There was a time he hid in Jan Pyrek's barn (mentions Ewa Kurzawa).

Falkowa's inhabitants kept dreaming of a beautiful building for their school. Paweł Potok decided to donate hectares of his field and so there was enough space to start building. Construction Inspectorate was located in Ciężkowice. The whole village was involved in building. Everything was done by hand. The major workers were: Tomasz Próchnicki, Stanisław Chrząszcz and Jan Jamka. Cows and work-horses transported stones from Tomasz Głabia, lumber from the woods and bricks from Stróże. All of those activities were very hard because there was no actual access road to Falkowa. Yet, there were many rivers and barely passable muddy paths that eventually turned into marshes.

When the inhabitants were laying foundations there, they also mounted a bottle with a list inside. Listed were all school builders, the first pupils and teachers.

School's building started in 1938, before the Second World War. Everything went very fast, in the beginning of the war workers were finishing the metal roof. Responsible for this part was a Jewish expert – Usier. Then he was transported by the Germans with his whole family to the ghetto in Zakliczyn.

In the wartime children were taught in both: Symelówka and the new, almost finished building.

The new school had two big classrooms, a corridor and an office. Upstairs there was a flat – two bedrooms and a kitchen. Manager Maciejewski moved there with his family. Later principal Gnutek turned one bedroom into another classroom.

There were two teachers before the war: principal Maciejewski and Ms. Pyrek. It changed in 1941 when Paweł Gnutek returned to his home village. He became school's manager soon after the liberation.

Paweł Gnutek held the manager office for many years and was an example to follow: always very reliable and punctual. He was right by the historical well every day at 7 in the morning, 2 minutes away from the school building. He lived in a little, family house in the forest. In the evenings he spent hours on writing the Chronicles of Falkowa – kerosene lamps worked well. The light was on in his office for many long hours in the winter nights.

School's manager took many pictures of old houses, trees, items and historical places in the area. He asked people various questions about their background and roots, then wrote the answers down in his chronicles. Conferences important for his career development were taking place in Pławna – 1,5 hours away by train. He never missed any of the meetings. Falkowa's locals remember how much respect Gnutek had for each and every inhabitant. He was always there to say hello, ask about health and help with problems. Gnutek himself had been through a lot. He survived the October Revolution in Russia, interwar period and the Second World War.

In the war period, children had to spend at school 7 years – one year in the first grade, one year in the second grade, three years in the third grade and four years in the fourth grade. There were no coursebooks. Teachers dictated the necessary information. Reading comprehension was possible because of the printed texts in "Ster" newspaper. Calligraphy was very important and so teachers paid a lot of attention to the writing skills. Younger children practiced writing on little boards using stylus pens. Older ones learned how to use ink. Each desk had an ink pot. In every desk there was enough place for four students. Teachers always made sure that their pupils sat straight. They knew how important for a healthy back it is to sit properly. Over the lectures each student held hands on his back – it improved the posture. Children compulsorily had to drink cod-liver oil.

In the first years of Falkowa's school activity science lessons usually took place outdoors and were rather practical. Each student had to distinguish the cardinal directions and identify the basic constellations. There were little gardens around school where children learned how to weed flower and vegetable beds as well as run nurseries of fruit trees. The manager imported new, unfamiliar cultivars of flowers and vegetables. Children grew them and brought the products home. After the Second World War, due to parceling out house owned earlier by a Jewish resident Wasyl, the school received around two hectares of land. This field was supposed to do good to the future generations. Unfortunately, this area is a very controversial and divisive space now. This is a very worrying problem as land dedicated to the students should always be their property.

Children were always taught to respect their own work and the work of others. Society hasn't come up with actions such as *Clean Up the World* yet. Our world was clean. People cared about our environment. It was impossible to notice kids leaving litter in classrooms or on their way to school.

When Paweł Gnutek was school's manager, the building and its surroundings were all green. The building was bordered with beautiful hedge-rows. Pupils also grew mulberries which were later used as nourishment for silkworms raised by them. In front of the building there were grapevines leaning on little, wooden ladders. These grapes were very tasty.

Back then all members of school community enjoyed singing. There were even special singing games during breaks between classes. Children sang also on their field trips and had special singing lessons. These lessons

were accompanied by violin music. Paweł Gnutek was a violinist himself.

Czesław Mika became a new manager when Paweł Gnutek retired. With Mr. Mika at the head of Falkowa's school and Mr. Ignacy Stanisła Śliwa as Falkowa's provost, the building was finally expanded. Again, adults and children were very enthusiastic about the possibility of helping and worked very hard to improve the conditions for future pupils.

The most memorable period in school's history was unfortunately the time of sudden distractions.

Beautiful hedges were cut down completely, grapes and flowers disappeared. Falkowa's school has become one, sad building. At that time school's chronicles were lost.

Then another change occurred. There were no "managers" anymore. Ms. Maria Ciepielowska become the "principal" in 1972 and she was followed by Ms. Maria Śmiertka.

The school was still Falkowa's heart with all the cultural activities involving children and teenagers. Under school's principal's supervision various performances, commemorations, harvest home events, meetings and literary clubs were prepared.

From its beginning until the 1990s, school had its own library which was open for all inhabitants. The majority of people in Falkowa are bookworms, they love reading. The local school was a friendly place. Activities within this institution aimed at connecting members of the community. It was all until the beginning of various problems which caused big changes.

The level of Falkowa's school was lowered to a four-grades educational institution. One of the officials responsible for this change was the then Communal Inspector Mr. Pytlik.

Thanks to the social commitment and help of always very kind and dear to the village children Mr. Stanisław Opałka, school in Falkowa regained its status. It was a six-grade and then eventually an eight-grade elementary school.

After the state education reforms, Falkowa has a six-grade elementary school.

In 2002 school's reins were taken by Ms. Małgorzata Zagórska who wished to continue Mr. Paweł Gnutek's actions and keeps on trying to reproduce texts from the missing chronicle.

Memories - The Second World War

The period between September 1st 1939 and January 17th 1945 was a big "nightmare" for residents of Falkowa and the neighboring villages. On 1st of September 1939 the Second World War broke out. Without declaring war, the Germans entered our Polish land. On September 5th 1939 columns of German tanks drove from Ciężkowice to Bobowa. Poland was under occupier's rule. Gestapo stationed in Paderewski's manor house in Kąсна Dolna and Fihauser's manor house in Bruśnik. They were Poland's new governors. People in the region had therefore many new, tough responsibilities. And so the locals were providing for contingents of German troops. All farmers had to give their grains, potatoes, meat, milk and peas away. Those who didn't do this were exposed to the risk of death. Germans organized roundups – caught people were kept in a transitory camp in Bobowa, then sent for forced labor in Germany. Apart from mothers with small children, all residents had to build reinforcements for the German troops. Working in trenches was very demanding. People worked long hours each day, often despite of heavy rains. People were hungry and cold. Their hands and feet were freezing. Workers missed bread, food, literally everything

was taken away from them by the Germans. They often ate pigweed. They wore paperclothes and wooden shoes. Falkowa had partisans but helping meant death penalty for the brave ones. Bread for partisans was baked in Bruśnik's parish. Equally dangerous was helping the Jewish residents. People of Jamna were burnt alive and the village was pacified after inhabitants were caught helping the partisans. The anguished scream of people dying in Jamna was heard even in Falkowa. For helping the Jews, Germans executed Mr. Ignacy Fryga and his whole family. Only one son survived this slaughter – he wasn't at home at that moment. A miracle happened to father Józef Grabowski in the parish in Bruśnik –. Gestapo came to capture him when two babies – sick twins were brought to the church for baptism. Germans agreed and the children were baptized. The faithful prayed for father Grabowski during the mass. Then, when they left the church, the Germans were gone. The baptized twins live to the present: Maria Myśliwiec (Padoł) residents in Ciężkowice, her brother – Roman Padoł lives in Siekierczyn. Germans were capturing the locals and imprisoning them in Tarnów for 10 days. Then, every 10 days, prisoners were changed. If partisans had done something over these 10 days, people held in hostage were killed. Falkowa's inhabitants were also transported to Auschwitz. People in Falkowa were continuously terrified. Partisans walked through the village in the night-time, Germans in the daylight. There are not many people left who remember the war. Not many people remember how happy everyone was on September 17th 1945 when Germans were running away, scared of the Soviets. Falkowa regained the independence. Tragic memories of the Second World War period are still very difficult to cope with.

Memories - Life in Falkowa in the wartime

The Second World War was the most cruel conflict in the history caused by the fascist forces of Germany, Italy and Japan. These three countries aimed at taking control of the whole world and destroying the whole nations. The conflict lasted from September 1st 1939 to September 2nd 1945.

"On the first day of September 1939 - mentions Mrs. Zofia Śmierciak – the moon was full, then the weather was beautiful. You simply remember such moments. I decided to go to Ciężkowice – continues Mrs. Zofia. To Ciężkowice you either walked or rode a horse. No, there was no actual road, no buses. On my way I met school's then manager – Mr. Józef Zięba. He was a military officer in service during the First World War. Mr. Zięba was always interested in politics and taught his pupils patriotism. He owned a radio receiver and this wasn't a usual thing back then. Mr. Zięba stopped me and asked to return to Falkowa and inform our men that the war had broken out. He wanted the men to gather and join the Polish army which was stationing nearby Tarnów. I was myself involved in the Polish Rural Youth Association *Whips* and also enjoyed politics. Therefore, I went back to Falkowa, our men immediately gathered in my father's (Józef Bania) house. They were all getting ready to carry out Mr. Zięba's orders. The situation has changed – some men, instead of joining the army, went alone to the woods and started forming there their own partisan squads. These well-organized squads were active in this area throughout the whole war. On September 5th a whole column of German tanks drove from Ciężkowice through Zborowice and Pławna to Bobowa. People were terrified. Each person who joined the partisans kept this fact as a secret. Joining or helping them was punished by death of not only one person but the whole family or even the whole village. This is how Jamna was pacified. People were burned alive in their completely destroyed houses. This is what you got for helping the bandits which were, according to the Germans, our partisans.

The wartime was difficult to survive. A ridiculously huge fear of everything. No bread, cloths and shoes. Partisans often ate pigweed. They wore paperclothes and wooden shoes. Farmers had to give their products away as they were forced to provide for contingents of German troops. As a reward, they could get ration cards to obtain food, clothes and vodka. Grains, potatoes, meat and milk were all for the

Germans. If a farmer couldn't provide these for the Germans, he was exposed to death. Human life was ultimately meaningless.

Apart from mothers with small children, everybody had to work in trenches. It was very demanding – people were digging in solid soil and building fortifications. Trenches were located in Zborowice, Bruśnik and in Falkowa. The locals worked long hours each day, often despite heavy rains. Germans organized roundups and sent people to transitory camps in Bobowa and forced, slave labour in Germany. Mr. Stefan Żaba (aka "Silly Stefek") from Bruśnik used to help prisoners from Bobowa. Mr. Tomasz Pruchnicki, Mr. Feliks Zięcina, Mr. Paweł Paczuła and Mr. Jan Stawiarski were transported to Germany and forced to work. They have never received any form of compensation. Only Mr. Jan Gucwa was paid damages but he was sent to work directly from a prison camp.

Mr. Gucwa was a serviceman, captured in the Battle of Pszczyna. Falkowa's residents were also sent to Auschwitz with the first mass transportation. Mr. Jan Kurzawa died in the concentration camp. Mr. Adam Jurkiewicz was placed in one block with Father Maximilian Kolbe and was an eye witness to the assembly when Father Kolbe volunteered to take another prisoner's place in the underground bunker which was equal to death sentence. He escaped from Auschwitz and joined the Home Army forces. He also testified in the proceedings for the beatification of Father Kolbe.

Falkowa's residents also helped their Jewish neighbors. Such actions were extremely dangerous and often led to slaughters of whole families. Jews were treated even worse than the Poles. Mr. Ignacy Fryda was executed for helping the Jewish inhabitants. Among Falkowa's people there were also two residents resettled to Siberia. Nobody really remembers about Stawiarski brothers: Stanisław and Wincenty. They both were military servicemen in 1939 and fought on Poland's eastern borders. They survived one of the biggest tragedies of those times – on September 17th they had to fight both enemies: Russians and Germans. They were captured by the Soviets and sent to Siberia. Mr. Stanisław Stawiarski returned home after 15 years of punitive captivity. His brother Wincenty died on the way back to Poland. Nowadays in Falkowa not many people can recall these tragic events. Most of the witnesses are dead. Yet, there are Ms. Ewa Kurzawa, Ms. Niemiec, Ms. Janina Krakowska, Ms. Kantor, Ms. Aleksandra Ligęza and Mr. Stanisław Bacia who worked in trenches as children and solicit retirement bonuses.

People were constantly scared. Partisans walked through the village in the night-time, Germans in the daylight. Germans were taking the locals captive and sending them to prison in Tarnów for 10 days. Then, every 10 days, prisoners were changed. If partisans had done something over these 10 days, people held in hostage were killed. I remember when Mr. Jakub Pocięcha, Mr. Wojciech Śmierćka and my father Józef Bania were taken to Tarnów. These 10 lasted forever. Thank God they returned home. But there were others, who weren't that lucky and died in Tarnów executions.

I precisely remember the 17th of January 1945. We all had been waiting for that day throughout the whole German occupation. Germans started running away once they noticed the Soviet troops shooting at them. Those who died were buried in a common grave next to Mr. Pyrek's house. People could finally breathe a sigh of relief. Unfortunately the relief was again, very temporary."

This is how Mrs. Zofia Śmierciak summed up her war testimony. After sharing stories of Falkowa's residents in the wartime she added: "Today we have various possibilities, we can travel the world but it should be essential to remember about Poland's history and the people who built, fought and died for Poland. We shall never forget this."

Memories - The Jews of Falkowa

Nearby the historical *Lipa* there was a Jewish manor house with 80 hectares owned by Mr. Wasyl (Waserlal). His wife – Mrs. Mojka was originally from Bruśnik. They had 7 children. On the fields they hired many regular workers – local farmers with children. Jan Pyrek was one of the regular workers, hired as a gardener. Wojciech Nosal and Paweł Fryda were the local handymen. Agricultural products such as vegetables, fruit, dairy produce, meat and hay were transported to Krynica. Mr. Franciszek Muszyński was responsible for hay. Ms. Maria Brończyk worked there too when she was a child. The locals were mainly paid in cereal or hay. Jewish residents were always taking care of their children. They paid a lot of attention to their education and possible professions. Mr. Wasyl wanted his two sons to become rabbis. They probably even participated in the last Jewish congress in Bobowa. Another resident of Mr. Wasyl's manor house was owner's close relative – Ms. Najman. She later moved somewhere close to Nowy Sącz where she married Mr. Oleksy. Rumor has it that she gave birth to Józef Oleksy – a famous Polish politician. In the wartime, the manor house was inhabited by Mr. Wolski who was earlier displaced from Warsaw. The liberation caused parceling the Jewish manor house out. The next resident was Mr. Ludwik Pyrek – gardener's brother. Currently on this ground stands a whole new house.

From the, originally owned by Mr. Waysl field, two hectares were given to school and were supposed to provide for the future pupils.

Apart from the manor house's residents, there were also two other Jewish inhabitants in Falkowa: Mr. Usier and Mr. Josek.

Mr. Usier ran a general store, traded in leather and owned a body shop. He was a great roofer who installed roof shingles on Falkowa's school in the beginning of the Second World War. His wife – Jojna was Mr. Josek's daughter. The Usiers had two daughters and a lot of respect from the local community. In 1943 the Germans placed the whole family in a ghetto in Zakliczyn. Falkowa's inhabitants wanted to help the Usiers but there was nothing they could do. There are signs that Mr. Usier could flee from the transport.

After the liberation, Usier's house was inhabited by Ms. Maria Jurek, then the house with surrounding fields were bought by Mr. Biel. In 1997, a few years after a big fire that completely destroyed the house, a beautiful larch burned to ashes.

Mr. Usier's father-in-law owned the local bar. It was situated in Falkowa's center, right by the trade route from Ciężkowice to Bobowa. He was a very enterprising type, trade (for example various barter) was very common in his bar. Merchants were coming with different goods. Village residents were bringing their handmade products: pots and beautiful, linen, embroidered tablecloths. Mr. Josek was involved in each deal. It was very common for members of the Jewish community to have a head for business and so the bar was a popular place. Political meetings, news transmissions and discussions were also taking place in the bar. Radio and TV sets were very uncommon and only people who were very into politics owned these. Mrs. Joska was a very kind person. She helped as a midwife. The bar burned down before the war and so the owners left Falkowa.

Jews had their services in a synagogue in Bobowa. The Jewish house of God is still open for the Faithful. The last Rabbi – Najman wore a crown with the Ten Commandments.

During the Second World War Falkowa's residents helped their Jewish neighbors as much as it was possible.

When the Jews were running away, Polish inhabitants were secretly passing them bread slices. Everything had to be done in secret – otherwise they were exposed to death.

Mr. Ignacy Fryda hid a Jewish resident. Somebody informed the Germans about it. There were no informers in Falkowa but some lived in the neighboring villages and shared with the opponent information about such *forbidden* acts. Germans came unexpectedly, they killed the hidden Jew, Mr. Fryda and his whole family. Only one son who was absent at that time survived the slaughter. Survivor's son visited lately his father's and killed grandfather's home village. In another place called Brzana families, including the Galczewski and Nowak families, were also helping the Jews.

Jewish residents built before the Second World War a train station in Bobowa. The most horrific tragedy the local Jewish community experienced happened on August 14th 1942 when 700 Jews were killed in Bobowa. They were buried in a Jewish cemetery called *Kirkut* in Bobowa.

Memories - *Sybiracy* – Poles exiled to Siberia

Stanisław...

Everybody knew it was Stanisława Stawiarski although his last name was barely ever used.

Stanisław was a good man. He never had offspring of but other children adored him. He was a handsome, tall and a well-built person with a kind face and deep eyes. He always wore a long, fashionable coat. Unfortunately, he never managed to get married and start a family.

He often repeated that he missed this opportunity because he didn't have time. He returned home from Siberia way too late. He was tired of his life and the experiences he went through. He lived by the road and often visited us. He talked a lot with my husband and cried a lot but I didn't hear much.

He was born in Falkowa and had 5 brothers: Jan, Piotr, Józef, Wincenty and Wojciech. Once the Second World War broke out, he was an active serviceman on the Polish eastern border. His brother Wicek was also a soldier. They were both captured on September 17th 1939 and imprisoned by the Soviets. Both, Stanisław and Wicek were sent with thousands of others to Siberia. They were walking barefoot. Hungry and thirsty. Many people died over this march. The dead ones were left on the foreign ground – nameless, without funerals or even crosses. Those who were stronger kept on walking. Many lost their damaged shoes. They drank water from the puddles and ate offal and disgusting carrion. Lucky ones slept in manure – it was warm and soft and therefore had qualities that everybody longed for. Those who didn't fall reached the Soviet prisons in the far Siberia.

Stanisław was lucky – he made it to the Soviet destination point. Yet, he was even more lucky as he was assigned to work with horses. He also worked with the others in the woods where he had to cut down the trees. He also transported it. Prisoners lived in huts. They ate what they caught. Prisoners were leaving their main workplace in the woods on Sundays at about noon. They worked every day. They were back in their huts only for a quick bath, repairing their tools and a short period dedicated to rest. There was no church, no masses to attend. People didn't want to try escaping because such attempts could have tragic effects. They missed Poland a lot as they spent over 15 years in Siberia. Then a significant change has finally come. Stalin died and they could return to their homeland. Not every survivor could but Stanisław was lucky enough and so he came back to Poland.

Stanisław was traveling in a cattle wagon. He had to stand still in the crowd of people desperately wanting

to return home.

Everybody wanted to enter the train. Others were less lucky – they spent this journey on the stairs or even, like Wicek – Stanisław's brother – on the wagon's roof. Wicek didn't notice the tunnel and died on the way to Poland. He wasn't the only one. Luckily Stanisław returned home. To Poland, to Falkowa.

And what now?

Do many current residents remember about two brothers imprisoned in Siberia?

Maybe in Ciężkowice there were even more inhabitants exiled to Russia? Maybe they are also forgotten? Just like Stanisław and his brother Wicek.

Stanisław died... Before his death he asked to be kept in thoughts and prayers. Maybe in heaven Stanisław is lucky too.

Memories - Cholera in the Bruśnik parish

The epidemic broke out in 1873. Parishioners had in that year bad dreams and even worse feelings. Animals were nervous and anxious, dogs howled – some danger was looming.

And then it happened.

A message that white, tall as the poplar trees, women are dancing in Marek's backyard spread as quickly as a lightning. Marek was a Jew from Bruśnik.

Women were phantoms forecasting the upcoming plague.

The epidemic was huge. People were dying like "flies". In the mornings dead bodies were placed on the cart and buried in common graves. Those who survived for long years remember the "Is there anybody out there?" calls. Cholera hospital is situated close to the Bruśnik-Falkowa border.

Rumor has it that cholera was only dangerous in Bruśnik and never crossed the Falkowa border.

People felt that there was an invisible wall dividing Falkowa and Bruśnik and so the illness was bouncing back from it.

Where did the wall come from?

Apparently it's the, sent in 1687 by John III Sobieski's chaplain under the historical lime tree, prayers that were answered. These prayers concerned Falkowa and its inhabitants – chaplain asked for health and luck for the local people. "Holly power" worked, indeed.

Interview with Mrs. Zofia Śmierciak – one of the oldest residents in Falkowa

Mrs. Zofia's house

- What is your name?

My name is Zofia Śmierciak, maiden name Bania.

- Please, share with us your place and date of birth.

I was born on April 1st 1917 in a village called Siekierzyna.

- For how long have you been living in Falkowa?

I married Jan Śmierciak in 1940 and I've been living in Falkowa since then. My mother-in-law married below her station and so my husband was a son of a very sophisticated lady from the wealthy Jaskulski family who fell for a simple, basic boy. She was punished and excluded from her family. Times were hard. My in-laws had to run away and this is how they ended up in Falkowa.

- Please, tell us about your childhood, family, siblings and school years. Do you see any major differences between your teenage years and what the youth experiences now?

My grandfather Grzegorz Padoł was a pre-war governor. He held the office for over 30 years. At that time people usually were not able to read or write. My grandfather was and yet, he had his own secretary. My father had to move to America and make there a good amount of money in order to marry the governor's daughter – my mother. After four years overseas he returned to Poland, bought a couple of hectares of field and built a house surrounded by outbuildings. And so he was finally ready to get married. I started my education in 1924. Our school was then located in Mr. Gnutek's private house but the building of a new place was just about to start. School's manager was Mr. Józef Zięba – an officer who, like my father Józef Bania participated in the First World War. From the early stages of my education I have vivid memories connected with the Independence Day and Constitution Day assemblies. These were taking place in November 11th and May 3rd. I remember recitations of a famous Polish poem *Kto Ty jesteś?* ("Who are you? A little Pole.") written by Władysław Bełza and singing Rota ("The Oath") written by Maria Konopnicka. At school we often discussed Polish independence and how Poland regained it in 1918 after 123 years of captivity. We were all very involved during the elections. All students were delivering promotional leaflets and voting cards. Number 1 was reserved for Józef Piłsudski, number 25 for Wincenty Witos. In retrospect, I realize how well I remember our school performances and assemblies. At school, we were also taught many practical subjects: we were weeding flower and vegetable beds, running nurseries of fruit trees which were later taken home by each pupil. In front of every house in the village there was a beautiful little garden with flowers and medical herbs. My dear mom died in 1926. There was 7 of us and my dad had to teach us everything and help us become very independent. I had very good grades at school and always wanted to continue my education. Unfortunately, our financial situation wasn't really satisfying. It was very expensive to study back then and so I had to start working. I became a maid and I helped Miss Gąsiorówna – a teacher from Sędziszowa and the Witkowski family. I was also a secretary in the Polish Rural Youth Association *Whips*. I had a huge honor to meet and greet the then Polish Prime Minister Wincenty Witos who visited Bruśnik probably in 1931. I enjoyed the cozy evenings at home – we hosted neighbors and relatives who shared different stories, tales, legends but mostly their memories from the WWI period. Our house was always very Polish. We were brought up to become responsible, hard-working, honest and kind people. Our evening meetings were very musical. Everybody enjoyed singing back then. There were no discos but people knew how to have fun to the sound of music and played various instruments. We danced in private houses where the floor was usually very dirty. I remember how kind and helpful towards each other were people at that time. After returning from the States, my dad was the first person in the region to use the scythe. Farmers were very outraged – they thought scything led to destroying crops. Still popular were sickles but in the course of time there were more and more scythes. In our region there were many beautiful manor houses, for example the nearest one in Bruśnik. My dad often spoke with Mr. Fihauser – the owners were very nice. Mr Fihauser was an engineer, his wife was a doctor. Mrs. Fihauser always helped everyone who was in need and couldn't afford an expensive appointment. Often people's only

source of income was work either in the local manor houses or in the parishes. Everything had to be done handmade, there was no electricity and hence no machines, no radio or TV sets, no actual roads and buses. Mrs. Fihauser was a great person who respected and helped everyone. She asked to be buried just like every other resident – in a simple, wooden coffin.

- Do you have any special moments, experiences or adventures from the war- or post-war years that you could share with us?

The Second World War broke out in 1939. I was walking to a shop in Ciężkowice when I met Mr. Zięba who told me to return and inform everyone in Siekierczyn that the war had started and all men are asked to join the Polish army. Our troops were stationing nearby Tarnów. I did what he asked me to. Some men went to the woods instead of joining the army and this is how the local partisan-movement started. The war period was extremely difficult to survive. People were all the time terrified and constantly needed such basic products as bread, clothes or shoes. They often ate pigweed, wore paper clothes and wooden shoes. Farmers had to give their products away as they were forced to provide for German troops. As a reward they could get ration cards to obtain food, clothes and vodka. My husband and I weren't originally from Falkowa and so the local governors were giving us extra responsibilities to provide for the Germans. It was very tough. Later, after the war period we were promised to receive compensation but this problem hasn't been solved until today. Apart from mothers with small children, everybody had to work in trenches. Germans organized roundups and sent people to transitory camps in Bobowa and forced, slave labor in Germany. This is how my sister Waleria Kasprzycka ended up in a labor camp. Mr. Stefan Żaba (aka "Silly Stefek") from Bruśnik was famous for helping prisoners from Bobowa. I survived the pacification of Jamna. Germans were marching from Bobowa early in the morning in groups of four soldiers. We heard the shooting and saw the fire. Germans blocked the way from Falkowa to Siekierczyna and we were stuck. Later we found out that this chase was organized because of two Home Army soldiers who eventually ran away. Germans burned down the whole village and all its inhabitants who were earlier sent to the cellars. Their graves can be found in a cemetery in Paleśnica. My husband's brother - Józef Śmierciak was also an active partisan. He inherited the entire wealth from their uncle, Mr. Baronowski. Luckily my husband was never accused by the Germans - he wasn't involved in any organized form of anti-German movement because of his poor health. My husband's brother Józef was finding accommodation for people in need which was always kept as a huge secret. People didn't have much information, yet everybody knew that the brother can find a place to stay. In January 17th 1945 the Germans were running away from the Soviet army – their way led close to our house. We saw them dying. I saw terrifying pictures – piles of naked German dead bodies transported to the common grave next to Mr. Pyrek's house and I still have nightmares. Actually the post-war period was much worse, everyone had to donate money, the money we didn't have, for Warsaw's reconstruction. The world didn't believe we could rebuild our capital city. Farmers were forced to organize mandatory deliveries. Governors were founding collective farms which Polish villages didn't want.

- What do you consider the biggest success of your life? Are you content with your life?

After many years of dealing with an illness, my husband died in 1958. I brought up our four children alone. There was no financial aid for families like our. It was incredibly difficult for me, yet I had enough motivation to do my best for the children. I think the biggest success is what my children have received from me: education, sense of responsibility and honesty as well as respect for other people. Three of my daughters have academic degrees, the fourth one has graduated from the Agricultural Accounting Technical Institute. As a widow, I built a house surrounded by outbuildings. These are my achievements. I always tried to respect and live in peace with everyone: parents, children, neighbors, people who were

dear to me and those whom I only met. I taught these values my children and I teach it my grandchildren. Their every successful day is also my big day. I mean here their passed *matura* (final) exams, beginnings of their studies and the graduation days as well as positive moments in their job careers and private lives. The biggest tragedies I had to deal with were the death of my youngest daughter – M.Sc., engineer Stanisława Łaś who orphaned two babies and then the death of my beloved grandson Janusz Śliwa.

- What are your dreams, desires, goals and needs to fulfill?

A person needs to go through a lot. I still have many dreams but I keep thanking dear God for everything, for many achievements that I can be proud of. I'm thankful for the people who were always willing to help me and I always keep them in my warm prayers.

- Do you feel a strong emotional connection with the region you've been living in?

Do I feel such connection? There is a saying that even hell can be good when one gets used to it. But yes... I try to share with the young generations what's best in Falkowa, Siekierzyna, Bukowiec and Jamna. I tell legends about the Fossil Town in Ciężkowice, the Evil Hole in Bukowiec, the famous Lipa under which king John III Sobieski rested after the Battle of Vienna, the quarry and the local bar, our cellar which rescued some men during the Galician slaughter in 1846 etc... I also talk with locals about the great people of our region who were, for instance, Mr. Józef Zięba – WWI officer who taught patriotism and love for the home village, always accurate school's manager Mr. Paweł Gnutek who was writing our lost chronicle after work, Mr. Adam Jurkiewicz – one of the first Auschwitz prisoners who witnessed Father Kolbe's heroic act and then testified in the proceedings for his beatification or Mr. Stanisław Stawiarski who had to go on foot to Siberia and returned from the deportation. People interested in these stories can still be found in Falkowa. There are many memories that I haven't shared yet so maybe we can talk about them in the next interview.

Mrs. Śmierciak was interviewed for the after-school club as a part of a school council task connected with the program: The Regional Education – cultural heritage in the region.

Subject: We interview the oldest residents of our village. May 2001

Agnieszka Śmierzka and Edyta Gąsior – 5-graders from Falkowa's Elementary School interviewed Mrs. Zofia Śmierciak.

Teacher- Małgorzata Zagórska

First prize!!!

Zofia Śmierciak from Falkowa won the first prize at the, organized by the Regional Center for Social Policy in Kraków and *Gazeta Krakowska* (a big, local newspaper), literary contest *Ludzie znają mnie tylko z jednej, jesiennej strony* (People know me from one side, the Autumn's side). We present the prizewinning work and congratulate!

Guests present at the ceremony included the Mayor of Ciężkowice – Mr. Stanisław Haraf, the councilor of Falkowa – Mr. Michał Koralik and Falkowa's village administrator – Ms. Ewa Kurzawa. Ms. Danuta Urbanik from Radio Kraków was also there and so the report from the ceremony and interview with Mrs. Śmierciak were broadcast on January 28th 2005.

All activities coordinated by Mrs. Zofia Śmierciak's have one aim – it's all done to "save the past from oblivion".

My life after retirement

I moved to Falkowa, a village situated on the district's (formerly even voivodeship's) boarder in 1940. Back then there was no road to Falkowa. There was literally nothing. Nothing but very hard-working people of course. They were fulfilling their dream and building a school.

A very poor village

Farmers mainly used cows, some richer ones owned work-horses. The closest train stations were in Pławna or Bobowa – both about 6 kilometers away from Falkowa. My husband and I went through a lot together – we survived hard war- and post-war periods. We both were newcomers here and so everything was more complicated. I was soon widowed with four little children and my situation was very difficult. Because of my small farm I had to work part time for other people. I kept teaching my children honesty and respect for others, for animals and plants. Three of my daughters graduated from universities, one from Agricultural Accounting Technical Institute.

Long, demanding years were passing by.

People in the village worked very hard to have an actual road, school, fire station, shops, church, light, hotline, power and buses running a couple of times a day. In the beneficial 1970s (the 4th First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party Edward Gierek period) local farmers were receiving agricultural pensions. Farmers finally started gaining more respect in the society but this process was very slow. Until the 1990s, children had a library at school – many locals were devoted readers. Teenagers (but not only) had a community center with current newspapers and magazines and a TV set. In the evenings, especially the long fall and winter ones, locals had a place to meet, share opinions and discuss important issues.

And today?

Falkowa has no community center, no library, our macadam road keeps getting worse. Youth is seen as bad and this subject is widely discussed in TV.

Why is that?

Why do some want to liquidate our school – the only educational and cultural center in the village? I've started receiving my agricultural pension when I was over 75 years old. Because of changes within the political rules, I couldn't get one earlier.

I never stumbled over any "threshold" when starting a new chapter in my life.

If my health was good, I always tried to be active. Time flies. I'm 88 now. I try to rescue the most important values, save memories from oblivion.

The roots. I'm invited to schools to talk to our children which are very nice and eager for knowledge. I tell them stories about the old times, about life, work, customs, traditions, legends etc.

Children also ask for interviews. Falkowa was always very lucky to have great teachers who remind their pupils to respect the elderly, nature, to be nice and love the homeland. Frequent meetings with the young ones here in Falkowa convinced me to start writing. And so I've written our local legends down.

I've written down the memories from occupation and post-war periods, I've written about our prisoners in Siberia, about the Jews, about our customs and traditions. Many great people lived in Falkowa and I wish I

could write something more about them. And maybe publish it all together. I think that sharing this is very important, especially in united Europe. We shall not forget our roots. I live in the village center. My house is open for everybody. On their way to shop, school, chapel or bus – neighbors and relatives stop by. We talk a lot. They borrow books and newspapers from me.

I always loved reading.

And I always read a lot although it's becoming a problem now as I'm experiencing a constant loss of vision and books with newspapers are becoming more expensive. Whenever there is some anniversary or kermess I always invite my neighbors and priests for tea. I've mentioned the teachers, but our priests are equally great. They not only preach, they also give examples. I love flowers – I always have a lot of them around my house. My house has a very beautiful location: greenery, streams, singing birds (also nightingales) and old trees in the orchard. It's all very charming. Our guests are delighted.

God blesses me and helps me a lot.

I felt it in particular when recovering from stroke and effusion. At my age medications are indispensable but they are very expensive. I spent almost half of my pension for medications. Everything costs more than it used to and hence life is much harder. I don't always have money to pay for my groceries and so I have to ask for loans. It's very humiliating. It happens that I feel simply aggrieved – I've been working so hard and I can't live worthily.

No appreciation

I feel like there is one more thing. As a widow I raised alone four children, I built a house and other buildings. I worked very hard and nobody appreciated it. People are recognized, they receive medals, prizes and are honored on special occasions. No politician has ever expressed his words of appreciation for a single mother who educated four children. It's very sad. It hurts!!! I was raised to always get involved in work for others and I tried to teach my children to behave this way. I think I succeeded.

I care about our common good and I therefore demand:

1. Increasing the agricultural pensions up to the national average.
2. Extra points in the recruitment for the youth from villages who can't have the same opportunities that their richer peers.
3. Not closing our school in Falkowa – this place is absolutely necessary and was built by all residents, including children.

Mrs. Zofia Śmierciak with the late husband Jan.

daughters: Janina, Zofia, Maria – Michalina, the late Stanisława – Franciszka,

and grandchildren: Bożydar – Gracjan, the late Janusz, Paweł, Jan, Wiesław, Maria, Ewa, Stanisław, Józef.

Closing remarks

Master's thesis of Małgorzata Zagórska was used in the part about Falkowa's history. Falkowa 2004