

## 6. A German Soldier Tells My Father about the War

John Guzlowski

Where did I kill my first Jew?

I don't remember. Some small town in eastern Poland. They brought us in on trucks. Gave us 10 bullets each and told us to shoot.

We shot the mothers first. They were protecting the children. Then we shot the children. They were so close. We couldn't miss. They were closer to me than you are. We only stopped to eat bread and drink vodka.

I remember at one point I was so drunk I missed the girl I was shooting at. She was young, maybe 17. I shot again and I kept missing. She kept pleading and weeping. My friend finally shot her.

I remember the bodies burning too. We watched the flames, their transparent colors, intense reds and yellows, softening blues. The body of one of the women, a woman with one high heel, didn't look as if it was burning. She seemed just to be getting darker, the color of old leather, the color of charcoal. Then her blonde white hair was gone in a moment. It burned like straw in a dry autumn.

I make it sound like we were bad men, but we weren't. We were just men, like the people you see at work or church or in a tavern drinking beer.

Driving back to our barracks that night, I kept looking at the sky. The darkness was so complete that not even one star lit our way home.