

Tomasz Miedzinski With His Sister Rywka Lichtensztein And Family



This is my oldest sister Rywka Lichtensztein, nee Szwach, with her husband Majer Lichtensztein and their son Szloma Lichtensztein and me. I'm the first to the left and Majer is the first to the right. The photo was taken in Klodzko in 1946. Rywka was born in 1924. Before the war she went to the Polish elementary girls' school. There wasn't really a Jewish school, just a semi-private Hebrew school and we couldn't afford it. After the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 Rywka didn't go to grammar school; she went to nursing school. Shortly afterwards she escaped to the Soviet Union with Aunt Frydzia and her husband Herman Wajcman. Only Rywka and I survived the war. She lives in Israel today. In fall 1944 I got in touch with my sister, who was in the Urals, in the Soviet Union. She, like many other residents of Horodenka, in fact, had written to the town council asking whether they knew what had happened to such-and-such a family. And I had a good friend at the post office, with whom I arranged that if there were any letters from Jews to Jews or about Jews, she would give me those letters. And I was the first person to take charge of that whole Jewish pseudo-office thing. Many of Horodenka's Jews received information about the fate of their family from me. Those letters were these little war-time triangles, folded like clown's hats. And they reached the addressees without franking. There were no envelopes then, sometimes people would even write in the margins of newspapers. And one day I got my sister's letter asking whether the authorities knew what had happened to the Szwach family. Towards the end of 1944 the Komsomol secretary invited me to see him. And he offered me a secondment to the naval officers' school in Cherson, near Odessa and the Black Sea. For me, the war ended then. That was at the time when the First Kosciuszko Division was still in existence, and Anders had led the Polish army east through Persia. As it happened, I didn't pass my practical exams in the naval college and they fired me. By then my sister had moved from the Urals nearer to Poland, to Ukraine, and she was living in a place called Snigirevka, near Mykolayv. My brother-in-law, Majer Lichtensztajn, worked in a mechanics workshop; he was a good wood-turner. The Wajcmans were there too, with their twins. I went to

visit them; it was the first time we had seen each other for many years. I spent some time there, I met Jewish families who had come back from evacuation way out in Asia or the Urals. And I started training as a metalworker and wood-turner in the same workshop.