

Leopold Sokolowski In The Polish People's Army



This is me, Leopold Sokolowski, shortly after the war in the Polish People's Army.

I wanted to be a doctor very much. I talked to Doctor Lipszyc, from Lubsk. I told him how much I would like to study, but that I had to make a living and had no base, no home. He said there were so-called academic companies in the army. For a year they prepared you for the final exam and those who passed signed commitment papers to the army, for 12 years, I think, and were moved to Lodz. In Lodz there was the Military Medical Academy. At the time it was called WCWM, Wojskowe

Centrum Wyszkolenia Medycznego [Military Center for Medical Training]. One could study there and remain in the army.

I said, 'Yes! Right away!' But he said there is one condition: not to reveal Jewish descent. So I said, 'Doctor, I was scared for five years. Am I to remain scared for another five? You are a man, so you know. I am circumcised. I go to take a shower with the whole company and what? I cover myself, because I had it circumcised?' He said, 'Somehow you have to manage.' So I said, 'No, I'm not up for this, not now.' Because of that I didn't become a doctor. Though I liked that idea very much.

In 1947, when I was going to the army, a Russian officer, from Ukraine, Major Dymitrij Solopienko, says to me, 'So where is your family?' I say that no one's alive. So he asks, 'Are you Polish?' 'Yes, I am.' 'Do you have any family?' 'No, nobody.' 'So you won't reject your family, or hurt your father's, mother's, uncle's feelings if you change your name? If you have no close ties, why should you have a German name when you can chose a Polish one? In the Soviet Union where I'm from there is no anti-Semitism, but in Poland some of that still remains. Why should you have a bad start just because you're a Jew?'

At my level of awareness at that time, these were all convincing arguments. So I said, ok, I won't hurt anyone's feelings, I'm alone in the world. Had I been a son of some count... Why not Sokolowski. I came up with Sokolowski just like that: 'S' would be such a nice letter to start your signature with. I was just a kid then. Only 22. He said, 'Ok, that's done. We'll deal with the formalities later, no one should know here, and that's that.' And so I became Sokolowski. Obviously later I formally changed my name at the registrar's.