

Aleksander Ziemny

Aleksander Ziemny

Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Marta Janczewska

Date of interview: January-May 2004

Aleksander Ziemny is a Polish Jew who has distanced himself from religious tradition but remains strongly linked to secular Jewish culture. He is a representative of the extremely numerous stratum of the pre-war Polish Jewish population whose members participated in the life of two parallel cultures, the Polish and the Jewish, and, without detriment to their Jewish identity, were active contributors to Polish culture. Mr. Ziemny is a journalist, essayist and translator from several European languages and also from Hebrew. We talked in his apartment, in a room full of books; on his desk lay an article he was working on about Russian writers. Mr. Ziemny turned his mind back to the events of his life with concentration, giving dates and facts with precision; he speaks colloquially and often roughly, for once not caring to polish his language.

[My family history](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

My family history

I was born on 11th June 1924 in Cracow, and although I only spent the first five years of my life there, I consider myself a Cracovian. My father's family came from Wadowice, a small town not far from Cracow. It was there that my grandfather, Adolf Keiner, was born. My grandmother's name was Gusta. Unfortunately I can't recall Grandma Keiner's maiden name, but I do know that she was born in some other small town in Galicia [1](#) and only moved to be with her husband in Wadowice after her marriage. I can't give any precise dates, but I think that both my grandparents were born in the 1860s, and that they married in the 1880s, because their elder son Samuel was born in 1889.

Grandpa Adolf Keiner was both a merchant and traveling salesman; he was a traveling agent for cosmetics companies and he sold mostly soaps, washing powders, and so on. I can't say much about their life in Wadowice, because I didn't visit them there. In the 1920s they decided to move to Cracow.

In Cracow the Keiners lived on Zielona Street, now Sarego. The name of the street was changed in the 1930s. Grandma kept house and Grandpa opened a tiny shop selling cleaning agents on Mikolajska Street, but he was barely able to make ends meet. They lived in terrible poverty - there were an awful lot of traders in Cracow, Grandpa did hardly any business, and in the end he closed the shop down. They probably lived off savings. They led a below-average existence, with absolutely no high points, no servants, holidays, etc.

I remember that apartment of theirs on Sarego Street a little - small, dark, two little rooms and a kitchen I think, although there certainly would have been a bathroom with running water. I remember that when I went to visit my grandparents, Grandpa Adolf would give me a little bar of Elida soap as a present.

My grandparents knew Yiddish, but they spoke Polish between themselves. I have no idea what their political convictions were. They are sure to have had a religious wedding and to have been registered in the kile, but on the whole they weren't particularly religious, although they respected tradition. They both dressed in the European fashion, Grandma didn't wear a wig, and they didn't keep kosher. Twice a year, at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they went to one of the synagogues in Kazimierz [2](#). Grandpa certainly knew all the Jewish prayers - he was taught in childhood - and in childhood my grandparents would definitely have observed the kashrut, but later on they no longer did. This was the area where Polish culture and Jewish culture met, though there was no question of them trying to blur their origins.

Grandma and Grandpa Keiner had two sons, Samuel, born in 1889, and Ferdynand, born in 1893. Uncle Samuel Keiner, known to his family and friends as Staszek, was born in Wadowice, and graduated from the Law Department at the Jagiellonian University [3](#). Uncle Staszek married Maria, nee Lamensdorf, and they had two sons - Jan, born in 1919, and Jerzy, born in 1927. My uncle had had a thoroughly secular education and had a secular world view. He was a doctor of law and practiced as an attorney in Cracow.

The other son was my father Ferdynand, who came into the world in Wadowice and went to gymnasium [high school] there. Then he moved to Cracow and also studied law at the Jagiellonian University. He became a doctor of law and after doing his articles in Cracow opened an attorney's office in Rabka [a small town south of Cracow, on the river Raba; large spa resort, mainly for children, known for treatments exploiting its beneficial climate].

What I know of the Keiner family is fairly scant, because I was far closer to the Kleinbergs, my mother's family. My mother's father, Wilhelm Kleinberg, came from Drogobych [today Ukraine], where he was born in about 1867. In his daily affairs he used the Germanized version of his first name, though on his birth certificate he was 'Wolf'. [Editor's note: Actually, the names Wolf and Wilhelm are not equivalents.] He was my darling Granddad, and altogether a marvelous man.

Granddad, like the majority of small-town, provincial Jews, set huge store by education. Unfortunately he hadn't been able to get an education; he had to do physical work, but I don't know what kind of work. But he was a devilishly talented self-starter and spoke a delightful, beautiful Polish, although in practice he didn't have his school-leaving certificate.

As a very young man he went into service with Count Borkowski [Polish aristocrat, owner of the land between Borislav and Drogobych], and later became his secretary. Those were the most sublime years of his life in his reminiscences, because first of all as a secretary, he learned calligraphy. And secondly, Count Borkowski took him on his travels to the Middle East, more or less following Slowacki's route [4](#). [Juliusz Slowacki described his travels to the Middle East in his epic poem 'Journey to the Holy Land from Naples.'] Granddad returned from those travels absolutely enchanted.

Once, as a young boy, I got a slap around the chops from my granddad, something that happened only once in my life. What happened was, as a little kid I was ferreting around in the wardrobes in my grandparents' apartment and I found something astonishing. This piece of headgear in the shape of a flowerpot, with a tassel. It was a fez, which Granddad had brought back as a souvenir from his journey of a lifetime. I was chasing around the apartment in this fez when Granddad came in, was absolutely furious, slapped me round the face and didn't even attempt to explain what for.

After Granddad stopped working for Count Borkowski, he settled down in Cracow. There, he married a woman born and bred in Cracow - Antonina, nee Kirschner. Children came along, there was a family to be kept, and so Granddad learned a new trade - photography. And then, in this wooden hut on Swietej Gertrudy Street, just below Wawel [a hill in Cracow on the bank of the River Vistula, site of a Renaissance palace, the seat of the Polish kings], he opened a photography firm, where he specialized in photographing kids. At first the firm was called 'Zofia,' like Granddad's eldest daughter, and later 'Kamera.' I know that Granddad won commemorative medals and prizes for his photographs at exhibitions in Belgium and Paris. It was in the 1920s. He didn't go to those exhibitions himself, of course, but someone or other sent the photographs off. That was before World War I.

Granddad had this mentor for his photography, Mr. Szczepanik [Jan Szczepanik (1872-1926): inventor, worked on the electrical television, photography and cinema in color; in 1898 created color film]. He was a Pole, later known as the Polish Edison, because he really did invent all these different optical and photographic instruments; after the war someone even wrote a pamphlet about him. Thanks to Szczepanik, Granddad became a protégé of Wyspianski [Stanislaw Wyspianski (1869-1907): dramatist, poet, painter, theater reformer, one of Poland's greatest dramatists].

And that was how Granddad came to take the first photographs of the world premiere of 'Wesele' ['The Wedding' - Wyspianski's foremost play, premiered in 1901] at the Slowacki Theater in Cracow, and of the world premiere of Rydel's 'Zaczarowane koło' ['The Enchanted Wheel' by Lucjan Rydel (1870- 1918), Polish poet and dramatist; his work 'The Enchanted Wheel' was first performed in Cracow in 1899]. Wyspianski was ill by then, and had turned eccentric, but he rewarded Granddad and had him do some more photography jobs.

Granddad Wilhelm, in spite of his lack of schooling, was an 'amateur' in the noblest sense of the word - a lover of poetry, art, and the theater. He recited poetry wonderfully. His beloved poets were Slowacki, Mickiewicz [5](#), and Heine [Heinrich Heine (1797-1856): journalist, essayist, and one of the most significant German romantic poets], but he also valued and knew intimately all the areas where the Jewish, Polish, German, Ruthenian and Russian cultures overlapped. And Granddad spoke all those languages. He would often drop in turns of phrase that I didn't understand. They were all kinds of Ukrainianisms, but words in Yiddish too; for instance Granddad would call me loving nicknames in Yiddish. For instance, he would grab me by the nose and say: 'pipl' ['my boy']. At home my grandparents spoke only Polish.

My grandmother, Antonina, nee Kirschner, was born in Cracow in around 1869. She had a beautiful voice, and in her unmarried days sang in the city choir, 'Echo,' which performed in all sorts of institutions, including churches. Grandma was well known for her beautiful voice among young people in Cracow. She had a huge repertoire of songs, from the songs of Niewiadomski [Stanislaw

Niewiadomski (1859-1936): composer and music critic], Chopin and Moniuszko [Stanislaw Moniuszko (1819-1872): composer, founder of the Polish national opera] to folk songs, often witty. Grandma had a sharp tongue altogether. I'm 80 years old now, but Grandma's songs are still with me to this day.

Granddad and Grandma Kleinberg got married in the early 1890s and went to live just below Wawel Hill, on Na Groblach Square. It was a large tenement house built at the beginning of the 19th century. My grandparents had three rooms, plus a vestibule and a bathroom. They had electricity, and hot and cold running water. The apartment was terribly cluttered and very cramped, because in those three rooms even up to ten people lived in the last years - my grandparents, their six children, and then also my mother with her husband and me.

I was born in my grandparents' apartment and lived there for the first five years of my life. I remember that in the living room, which was my grandparents' bedroom, above their marital bed, in plush frames of a dirty green color, hung two portraits, daguerreotypes of Chopin and Mickiewicz. My grandparents' neighborhood was mixed Polish and Jewish. There were a few Jews in the same house; I vaguely remember shouts in Yiddish. Before the war my grandparents moved to Sarego Street, to no. 14, into two tiny rooms, so they were living very close to Grandma and Grandpa Keiner.

The Kleinbergs, like the Keiners, weren't particularly religious. It was more tradition that they respected. Granddad Kleinberg went to Tempel Synagogue on Miodowa Street [a progressive synagogue founded in the 1840s; sermons were held in Polish and German; during the occupation the building was used as stables for horses; it was restored in the 1990s] two or three times a year. But he would stroll over there more as if he was going to a Greek Agora, to meet friends.

My grandparents didn't eat kosher food. Grandma Antonina loved cooking and made wonderful traditional Jewish dishes, but they were treated more as delicacies, and weren't kosher. I don't remember there being a traditional Sabbath at my grandparents'. I remember how Granddad Wilhelm's father, my great-grandfather, once paid a visit to Cracow. He came from Drogobych. He was a very aged man, he had a long, white beard, as wide as a spade. He certainly observed all the religious laws, but his son didn't.

Wilhelm and Antonina Kleinberg had six children: first they had three daughters, and then three sons. I was very friendly with my aunts and uncles. The eldest daughter was Zofia, born in 1894. Aunt Zofia was the most wonderful person in the family, and basically she looked after the whole family. That was typical for larger Jewish families in Galicia: caring for relatives and for people from the surrounding community in general.

Zofia was terribly overworked and highly regarded as a tailor, because she'd been to these cloth-cutting academies in Prague. Even the wife of Beck, the minister [Jozef Beck, politician, Polish foreign minister 1932- 1939], would stop off in Cracow to be measured up by Aunt Zofia on her way to Krynica [mountain spa resort in the Cracow region]. My aunt lived and had her studio at 3 Golebia Street. Later on she got married to Izydor Minder, a lawyer, Cracow Bund [6](#) activist and eminent bibliophile. Zofia and Izydor had one son, Jerzy, three years older than me.

The second daughter of Wilhelm and Antonina Kleinberg was my mother, Paulina, born in 1896. Mama studied chemistry for two years at the Jagiellonian University, but unfortunately she couldn't

continue her studies for lack of money, and she became a typist and secretary. In 1922 she married my father.

After my mother, my aunt Irena was born, in 1898. Irena had been trained as a pianist and music teacher, but because the crisis of the 1920s hit the music world hard and groups of music lovers fell apart, in the end Irena went to work as a cutter in an underwear factory. Irena's first husband was called Maurycy Kirsch and he was the secretary at the Hebrew gymnasium in Cracow. Her next long-time boyfriend was an attorney, a Pole, and he was called Antoni Serafinski.

After Irena, twins were born in 1900, Juliusz and Edward, and in 1902 the youngest son, Roman. Juliusz was an accountant; he married Sabina and they had a son, Eryk. Edward was an oil engineer in Jedlicz, and he married a Catholic, Maria; they had one daughter, Ewa. The youngest, Roman, was a dentist in Rabka, and he married Alicja Paster, with whom he had two daughters - Ewa and Anna.

So as you can see, Granddad and Grandma Kleinberg gave all their children an education, each one in their own way in a different field. When Granddad Wilhelm turned 52, and he was ill, Zofia called a family gathering and it was agreed that they would all make a monthly contribution, if you like, for my grandparents, pay them something like a pension. And that way my grandparents survived - vegetated - through to the war in the small apartment on Sarego Street, because basically the pension that they'd drummed up was very meager. Only Roman - the dentist - and Edward - the oil engineer - were doing a bit better for themselves; the rest of the children had to work hard. And my grandparents were poor, but proud. I remember that once we were living in Rabka we would send my grandparents postage stamps so that they could afford a card to write to us.

Of the more distant family of Granddad and Grandma Kleinberg I remember Granddad Wilhelm's sister and Grandma Antonina's sister. Granddad Wilhelm's sister was called Malwina, and she got married to a Mr. Grinberg, who had a mill in Cracow.

Grandma Antonina's sister bore the surname of her first husband, Grodzicka, and that was how she was known: 'Aunt Grodzicka.' She was older than Grandma Antonina. After the death of her first husband she married an Austrian police inspector, Stein, and became a very ardent Catholic. She started working with Adam Chmielowski [Brother Albert (1845-1916): monk, canonized, ran many charitable institutions in Galicia] and collecting donations for his shelter in various Cracow coffee houses. Both aunts died during World War II, but unfortunately I don't know the circumstances of their deaths.

As for my parents, Ferdynand Keiner and Paulina, nee Kleinberg, they had met much earlier, before World War I, as very young people, but they had not yet got together. During World War I my father was a private soldier in the Austrian army [7](#) and was taken prisoner by the Russians in some battle, unfortunately I have no idea in which one. He remained in prison in Russia right up until 1921 and, not without some difficulty, returned to Poland. Then he and Mama got married. My parents certainly had a religious wedding.

They lived with Grandma and Granddad Kleinberg. My father worked in an attorney's office, but in Cracow and in Galicia in general, lawyers, not just Jews, were as common as muck. There were many graduates from the Jagiellonian University's Law Department every year. So to keep a family you had to move away. My mother's brother, Roman Kleinberg, had been living for some time in

Rabka and was a dentist there, so he persuaded my parents to move to Rabka.

We moved from Cracow towards the end of 1929. My parents started from nothing. There was already one attorney in Rabka, Mr. Dorfman, but he lived in poverty too. My father was a very conscientious man who didn't demand much from life, so the local highlanders, who went to court at the drop of a hat, trusted him to represent them in their cases in the local court in the nearby town of Jordanow.

Growing up

It would perhaps be an overstatement to say our life got better and better, but our standard of living did improve somewhat. For the first two years we lived in a musty wooden shack, which fell down before long. Then we moved into a log cabin that was called 'Wierchy' ['The Peaks Villa'], but that didn't have running water either. There was electricity but it was always out of order. In the end we moved into a villa called 'Hojnowka.' That had a bathroom with a toilet and a bath. My parents rented a floor in 'Hojnowka' from the owner, Mrs. Hojnowa, and Father had his office there too.

The environment in Rabka was mostly Christian. Father was a member of the local elite, although he didn't like being treated as such. The elite comprised the pharmacist, Mr. Mietus, Father Surowiak the priest, the doctors, Engineer Grochowalski, and the other poor attorney. They were Poles for the most part, these glorious provincial characters, colorful personalities. Father was friendly with Doctor Tadeusz Malewski, who was from a very poor family but was a keen doctor in Rabka. Father died in his arms.

We lived opposite the church and Father would go to the parish priest, Surowiak, to play cards. Father was friendly with Jews too, of course. A few Jews had come to Rabka from Slovakia, what were known as Hungarian Jews. My father's friends were Tibor Kleinman, Lajos Brich, two friends from near Bratislava, forestry technicians, who had moved to Rabka in search of work and were employed at the sawmill there, and someone or other else, but the Jews were nevertheless in the minority. I remembered Lajos very well. This was a hugely amiable fat guy and drunk. I think there were about 200 Jews in Rabka at that time. In comparison with the local poor highlanders, who would usually have one cow and a bit of land, the Jews were a little wealthier.

In their free time my parents would go out with their friends to this dance hall, 'Pod Gwiazda' ['The Star']. There was dancing, vodka, herrings, and guest performances by Lopek Krukowski [Kazimierz 'Lopek' Krukowski (1902- 1984): a popular cabaret actor of Jewish descent]. They would organize amateur 'live tableaux', something like short plays without words. I don't remember Mama taking part in them, but Alicja - Roman Kleinberg's wife - did.

In any case, my parents didn't have too much free time. Father worked hard; twice or three times a week he would go by train the 14 kilometers to Jordanow, to the local court. Mama helped Father in his office, and kept house. We didn't have a servant. Later on Lola was taken on, who mainly took care of my upbringing.

My parents didn't have any particular political convictions. Mama was totally apolitical, with slight Bund sympathies. My father, on the other hand, favored the Zionists [8](#), and although he didn't get particularly involved in their cause, he did pay some subscription or other. Mama had inherited a

love of Polish literature from her father, and read a lot of belles-lettres. At home my parents spoke Polish; they didn't really understand Yiddish. Sometimes they would speak German to each other, if they didn't want me to understand what they were saying.

In Rabka before the war I completed six grades of public elementary school from 1930-36 and three grades of gymnasium from 1936-39. They were Polish schools. Gymnasium made a permanent impression on me. The school was called Dr. Jan Wiczorkowski's Private Sanatorial Gymnasium with public school entitlements. Sanatorial because some of the boys lived in a boarding house that was in an old manor house and some lived in the Benedictine Fathers' boarding house in town. Parents sent their children to Wiczorkowski's gymnasium partly for the treatment but mainly to ensure that they had a decent upbringing and education, because it was a famous school.

Wiczorkowski himself was from a poor peasant family. My teachers at gymnasium - a Latinist, a mathematician and a historian - were peasants by descent. They truly loved young people. I remember the Polish teacher, Jan Kucza, and the Latin master, Jan Baystak - marvelous people! The school was well equipped, there were playing fields, laboratories, etc. And as for the pupils, it was a very bizarre mixture. Wiczorkowski took a few highlanders, the best pupils in the elementary school, because as a peasant he took the part of the peasantry. Then counts and landowners, common as muck there, they were: Krasinskis, Malachowskis, a Dunin, a few Sobanskis [names of famous, worthy Polish aristocratic families]. Then there was the Jewish plutocracy, rich as hell: some Kagan from Lodz, etc.

In my class there were only a couple of Jews. At that school it was irrelevant who was Jewish and who Polish. It's inexpressible. There was this one boy there from near Tarnopol, called Friedman. Small, hunchbacked, very ugly, spoke in a hoarse voice. Really, looking at it from a distance, he should have been isolated, but he was accepted. We had our teachers, our masters to thank for all that.

There could be no question of anti-Semitism. I remember this one instance. One time we were playing 'two tails' [a ball game popular among children] and as I was throwing the ball I accidentally hit the nose of Count Jas Krasinski from my class; well, and it started bleeding. He started blabbing, and screamed at me: 'ty zydziaku' [pejorative name for Jews]. And I smacked him in the chops. The director, Wiczorkowski, got wind of the whole thing, of course, and he had two mothers in to see him: one of them was mine, from close by, from Rabka, and the other from some estate somewhere a long way away. The Krasinskis are a big historic family. Countess Krasinska came down, and Mr. Wiczorkowski read most of his lesson at her. Madame Krasinska was very concerned by what had happened.

My closest friend at gymnasium was a highlander, Wladek Papierz, from an old Rabka highlander family. We had spent six years together at elementary school, and then all the time at gymnasium. Papierz's parents had one cow, and a scrap of field sown with oats and potatoes. When Wladek got into gymnasium his father bought him a uniform at the market. Wladek went all the way through to the war in that uniform, his sleeves only came down to his elbows. But he was my true friend, I could count on him. He didn't even have the money for some of his textbooks, so he came to my house to study every day. Our friendship survived the war. After the war Wladek Papierz became probably the best specialist in sanitary installations for hospitals in Poland.

My teacher in the humanistic sense at that time was my cousin Jerzy Minder, the son of my aunt Zofia and Izydor. Jerzy was a god to me. He came to Rabka every summer and winter vacation because his parents couldn't afford to send their son on any more expensive holidays, so on an exchange basis Mama gave Jerzy food and Aunt Zofia gave me the clothes that Jerzy grew out of.

Jerzy impressed me a lot because he knew a lot. He was the star pupil at the best gymnasium in Cracow, no. 3, the Jan III Sobieski School, and he tortured me with books. I remember how he ordered me to read 'Faust' [a philosophical epic poem by Johann Wolfgang Goethe], in the Polish translation, of course, and then he tested me on it, and I wasn't at all interested in that 'Faust,' well, not much, at any rate. Dear God, what I went through with that! I read it so as not to look a fool.

At the same time, of my own free will, at age 14, I started reading the literary press, mostly 'Wiadomosci Literackie' ['Literary News,' a culture and literary weekly published between 1924 and 1939 in Warsaw], which was my 'Bible,' and the Lwow-based 'Chwila' ['Moment,' a Polish-language Jewish magazine published in 1919-1939 in Lwow, which played a key role in shaping Jewish literary circles]. 'Chwila' had a great influence on my thinking. As a child I also had piano lessons, but I drove my teacher to despair, and I never got further than practicing scales.

In my schooldays sport was the most important thing for me. I played soccer in an amateur club, I boxed, and I swam. In Rabka there was a wonderful swimming pool, which had a through flow of mountain water, so the pool was awfully cold, but that didn't put anyone off. I started playing tennis, but I got along very poorly, and in the end I stopped, because you had to pay larger sums. In the winter I went wild skiing and skating. I have wonderful memories of Rabka in that respect!

I also remember the 'Slonko' [Sunshine] cinema in Rabka, and films with Tom Mix [(1880-1940): American actor], westerns, dramas. But best of all I remember 'Snow White,' the first Disney version. In fact, I saw that film in Cracow, in the 'Skala' cinema, where the seats were upholstered in soft plush. A ticket to the movies didn't cost a lot but you couldn't even afford to go to the cinema very often.

For unusual outgoings, like a fountain pen or a bicycle, the whole family chipped in. I had a bicycle before the war, a very good make - Rybowski. I remember how it arrived from Warsaw at the little station in Rabka, and I unpacked it with beating heart. I rode around on that bike for three or four days, left it for a moment outside Uncle Roman's house, and it got stolen.

In Rabka before the war there were two, maybe three cars. Even the doctors didn't have cars. One of the cars belonged to Lajos Brich. His car was an old two-cylinder Tatra [a Czechoslovak brand] that you could hear 2 kilometers away, and people would always say 'Oh, here comes Lajos.' Lajos always stopped outside our house and called me out to the car. For me a spin out like that was a red-letter day, and there was always a girl in the car, and they took me along as a chaperon, to keep up appearances, because reputations did matter in such a small town.

I didn't go away anywhere on holiday, because there was no money, but once in a while I would go to Cracow with Mama to visit family. I remember what an impression a trip to the Skalka Church and the tombs of great Poles made on me. I was moved by the very sight of it. [Skalka, district of Cracow, 18th-century church and monastery; the crypt of the church houses the tombs of great Poles]. Another thing I remember from Cracow is a visit to the theater to see the play 'Kosciuszeko

at Raclawice' [play by W.L. Anczyc, performed in Cracow theaters from 1880].

In Cracow there were two sports clubs that rivaled each other for popularity among the Jews: Maccabi [9](#) and Cracovia [the oldest sports club in Cracow, founded in 1906, first Polish football champion in 1921]. Cracovia is a famous football club, very open and liberal, and it had several Jews in the team. Among Maccabi's players were the two Ritterman brothers who played water polo for Poland, and Freiwaldowna, the Polish women's hurdles record holder [Felicja Freiwaldowna was seven times champion of Poland in athletics in the 1930s]. So my heart was torn between those two clubs, I wavered, but as a fan I preferred Cracovia. I didn't go to the matches, of course, because I lived in Rabka, but I was interested in and supported Cracovia.

I went to the Atlantic cinema in Cracow once. Because in that cinema there was to be a showing of a full-length film of a boxing match for the title of world champion between Hitler's heavyweight darling Max Schmeling [Max Schmeling (1905-2005): German boxer, world heavyweight champion 1930-32, during World War II a parachutist in the German army], who later took part in the Greek expedition [during World War II], and a Jew, Max Baer [Max Baer (1909-1959): American-Jewish boxer, world heavyweight champion 1934- 35], who had been thrown out of Germany.

I got to see that film thanks to a railway conductor, a former client of my father's, who smuggled me to Cracow for a few groszy. I'll never forget that film! Eighty percent of the audience were Jews with sidelocks who had never had anything to do with boxing. They went absolutely crazy, pulling hair out of their beards, even though they knew in advance what the outcome of the match would be - the Jew won.

As a teenager I had one fad: I joined Betar [10](#) in Rabka. There were three levels in Betar: alef, beth, gimel. I never went beyond alef, but I went to the meetings, sang Hebrew songs, I had the olive-colored uniform with the menorah on the shoulder. We had machine guns whittled from sticks. I went a bit crazy over that. I don't remember how long it lasted, about six months, I think. My Polish school friends didn't care, I carried on playing football with them, I played in goal, and that was the most important thing to them. There were no conflicts or clashes in my circle on that count. In any case, Betar was well thought of by some of the Polish political elite, because they thought they would get rid of the Jews.

My parents weren't too religious. In Rabka there was a wooden prayer house and my parents went there once a year on Judgment Day [Yom Kippur]. They spent an hour or two there, that was all. I don't remember them fasting. Neither did they keep the Sabbath in the traditional fashion. But when I was 13, they organized me a bar mitzvah, just to be with the crowd, among their own. Loyalty to the crowd and to tradition is a strong thing.

When I was 12 my mother hired this old geezer who hung around the area and knew a bit of Hebrew, to prepare me. But he didn't prepare me at all, and during the bar mitzvah he stood behind me and prompted me, and I muttered something or other. I didn't feel forced into it, but I couldn't really say that it made an impression on me. That was just how I comprehended Jewishness, as a loyalty to tradition, but without a religious character.

In Rabka I didn't know anyone of my age who had a traditional religious education; there was no cheder or yeshivah. On Judgment Day I went to shul with my parents, but I wasn't particularly interested in what went on there. I respected the fact that people prayed in tallit, but I was too

absorbed by sport to think any more deeply about it. Both in Rabka and in Cracow I saw Purim revelers on the street, for instance, and I was generally aware that it was a happy holiday, in memory of Haman and Esther, but nothing more.

At Christmas we had a Christmas tree like everyone else around us. All the Jews we knew treated it like that. If we had a servant I would sing carols with her. From the church opposite May songs and Lenten songs floated across to our windows. I liked those tunes and words a lot, but before the war I had never been in a church during a mass, never even looked in out of curiosity. I don't know why, it just never came about. At school, when there was the Catholic religion class, my Jewish friends and I left, and that was perfectly natural.

In terms of symptoms of anti-Semitism, the climate in Rabka was more or less neutral in that respect. I myself didn't have any direct bad experiences. But it was tangible that from the mid-1930s anti-Semitism in Poland and in Europe intensified. In Cracow Jewish students were beaten up. That was something we talked about at home, and echoes of those racial tensions reached Rabka. Hitler became increasingly popular in Polish nationalist youth circles.

My father was deeply saddened. The general climate, the crazed nationalism, certainly contributed to his death. My father was a very sensitive man. He died on 12th January 1938. He had suffered from angina pectoris for a long time. A few days before his death some local nationalists had smeared the plaque outside his office with cow dung. But the duality of the situation was such that when Father died, the director of our gymnasium came into our class and said that he had had news that Aleksander Keiner's father had died, and he therefore asked the whole class to go to the Keiners' house, where his father was laid out, the next day, and pay their respects, but not to take their caps off.

Already before the war my mother married again, a construction entrepreneur from Rabka, Leopold Goldman. Goldman had built a very nice guest house in Rabka, 'Riwiera,' in which after the war the state opened a sanatorium for children with tuberculosis. I didn't get on badly with my stepfather, but I gradually drew away not only from him but also from my mother. So I only lived with them at the 'Riwiera' for a very short time, and then I moved to a friend's house. That was a good lesson in independence, I was 15 years old, and I had already started to earn a bit of money as a ball boy at the tennis courts.

During the war

I first heard of Hitler in the middle of the 1930s. The Jews are this accursed people who follow the newspapers from their youth, so I knew from the press that Hitler was screaming that the Jews had sold out the German fatherland, etc., but of course I didn't realize what it could lead to. I took satisfaction in Polish sporting victories over the Germans.

Rabka was situated right by the Czechoslovak border, and there were some border incidents, some acts of aggression there even before 1st September 1939 [11](#). Seeing what was happening, my stepfather, my mother and I escaped to Cracow. My stepfather and my mother holed up somewhere in Cracow, and I went to stay with my aunt Zofia Minder. That was where I was on 1st September 1939. I remember the bombardment of Cracow, literally just a few bombs fell on the city, but it was nothing terrible compared to what happened later.

Uncle Izydor Minder and his son Jerzy resolved to escape east. I set off with them. After a few days we reached Lwow, where the Polish military administration was still in power. But shortly afterwards the Germans surrounded the town and began bombarding it very intensively. I remember how we would go down into the shelter, how the shells rained down. And all of a sudden it all stopped. The Germans had come to an agreement with the Soviets [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact] [12](#).

We were left on the Soviet side. The post was still functioning perfectly then, so we would get letters from Aunt Zofia and my grandparents, who had stayed in Cracow. They were very circumspect in what they wrote about what was happening under the German occupation; in fact they were constantly worried about us - they were still in their own homes, everything was still functioning relatively normally there.

In October 1939 I made it to Podhaicy, an extremely strange little town in Podolia [today Ukraine], drowning in mud, but in beautiful countryside. After that my mother and her husband joined me in Podhaicy. I stayed in that little town until 29th June 1940 and that was a period of great love for me. There was this girl of my age there, a local, her name was Dziunia Friedman. Even after I had been exiled to the Urals, for a year and a half Dziunia continued to send me packages, even though they were very hard pressed for food themselves. In the packages there would be half a kilo of sugar, or flour, or grits. That was a big thing. Then the Germans got there and murdered all the Jews, and most likely Dziunia Friedman with them.

In Podhaicy I fell out with my stepfather again, I lived apart from them, and that was why when the NKVD [13](#) came on 29th June 1940 to arrest me, I was exiled alone [there were mass deportations of the local populations of areas occupied by the USSR way out to the east - the Urals, Siberia, etc. First to go were the intelligentsia, social activists, etc.]. Anyway, my mother and stepfather were also exiled about the same time.

It all happened in a very primitive way. At 4 or 5am two NKVD officers would come round with bayonets and order you to pack. I packed one cardboard case, they loaded me onto a cart, and sent me to the station in Podhaicy. I thought it was all great fun, and I treated it as an adventure. At that age a man is a silly goat. And that is how I ended up in exile in the Urals. It was different from a 'lager' [German for 'camp'] in that they didn't beat us. We were building barracks in the forest under the eye of the NKVD and Russians on conditional release from the camps. And in the end I became a decently qualified carpenter.

In exile with me were Jews from Sosnowiec, Bedzin, but also Jews from Bukovina [14](#), German Jews, from various different places. They often talked to each other in Yiddish and in that way I refreshed the language. I understood a lot, largely because I'd had German in gymnasium. I remember there was this one, Goldberger, a Jew from Bedzin, 'bedziner yid,' a great joker. He always had this idiotic, grinning face. And when our guard Kazantsev, who persecuted us terribly, came towards us, there was only one thing for it - Goldberger. At the sight of Kazantsev, Goldberger would get up, beaming like Svejik [Hero of the book 'The Good Soldier Svejik and His Fortunes in the World War' by the famous Czech writer Jaroslav Hasek (1883- 1923)], give him a big bear hug and pour out all the worst Jewish curses in his face. Kazantsev would ask us what it meant. And we would say to him: 'Ah, that you are such a good, wonderful man.'

I was in the Urals until the signing of the Sikorski-Majski pact [15](#). I heard of Anders' army [16](#) at once, and together with another Jewish friend I set off from the Urals for the army. We reached Anders' army, but we were not taken on due to our origins. That was disgusting. But those were not times for political manifestations; we had to find ourselves work of some sort, find ourselves a place.

When in 1943 a people's Polish army was created in the USSR [the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division] [17](#), I volunteered. My unit was called the 2nd Reserve Corps of the First Polish Army. We didn't really fight; we just followed behind the Russians. And that is how I crossed the Polish border again. And that is also how I returned to my home town. The Russians entered Cracow on 17th January 1945, and I was back in Cracow on 2nd February.

I arrived in Cracow absolutely unaware of what had happened. I started going round different addresses. I went to 4 Potockiego Street to Mrs. Helena Lgocka, a friend of my aunt Zofia's, and only then did I find out that there was no point in my going to my grandparents' apartment. I was young, I was 21, I was stupefied by my freedom. I didn't comprehend what had happened. I understood it but I wasn't paralyzed. It was really only as the years went on that the awareness of that loss, of that wild, terrible tragedy came to me.

Straight after that I was sent with my officers' school from Cracow to the front near the Pomeranian Ridge [Pomerania was an integral part of Germany that was partly awarded to Poland in 1945.], because battles were still going on. They wanted us to get a taste of soldiering. I don't remember exactly where I was on 9th May 1945 [the day on which Germany signed the capitulation]. In any case it was somewhere near the Pomeranian Ridge. Victory was no surprise; it had long been evident that the Germans were in their death throes. I rose to the rank of lieutenant in the army.

I found out about everything gradually, after the war. My grandparents on my father's side - Adolf and Gusta Keiner - were first sent by the Germans to Plaszow [18](#), and they were later exterminated in Belzec [19](#) I don't know any more details about their fate under the occupation.

Their son, Uncle Samuel Keiner, my father's brother, and his son Jan saw the war out in the Soviet Union, and after the war came back to Poland. My uncle died at the age of 80. His son Jan, after his experiences in the Soviet Union, was terribly emaciated and ill. He died at the age of 59. Samuel's other son, Jerzy, who changed his name to Korczak, fought on several fronts during the war; including being a volunteer in General Swierczewski's army [Karol Swierczewski (1897-1947): second-in-command of the Polish armed forces in the USSR]. Jerzy lives in Cracow now and is a writer. After the war we hardly kept in touch; now we are very close to each other.

As for my mother's family, both my grandparents, Wilhelm and Antonina Kleinberg, were murdered in Rabka. They escaped from Cracow, because they thought that it might be easier to survive in the provinces, and because they had some acquaintances, family, in Rabka, they fled there, but it didn't help them at all. In Rabka there wasn't a ghetto, but there was something worse than a ghetto. [Editor's note: There was a ghetto in Rabka, created in 1941, and liquidated on 30th August 1942; the Nazis transported its inhabitants to the Belzec extermination camp]. Namely there was an SS school there, where young SS men practiced killing Jews. The commandant of the school, Rosenbaum [Wilhelm Rosenbaum, a commander of an SS school in Rabka, 1941-1943], made a pastime out of killing Jews.

In Rabka, my grandparents were looked after by my nurse, Lola Schiffeldrim, whose married name was Schreiber, and her husband Leon, an engineer from Cracow. They are absolutely marvelous people, thank God; they are both still alive in Israel. In 1942 my grandparents were shot, and they are buried on Grzebien Hill in Rabka, among scores of other Jewish victims.

My grandparents' eldest daughter, my beloved Aunt Zofia, could have saved herself, she had everything it would have taken; she was a well known tailor, liked by Christians, and had a good set-up in Cracow. But she didn't want to save herself. There were rumors going round that her husband and son had perished in Russia, and she simply didn't want to live. She was in the Cracow ghetto, and then she ran the clothes-making workshops in the camp in Plaszow. She was sent for by various Nazi dignitaries' wives to their apartments to sew for them. And at the beginning of 1945 she was taken to Stutthof [20](#) and murdered there.

There's a story connected with Aunt Zofia. When my grandparents were murdered in Rabka, my nurse Lola Schiffeldrim moved to Cracow, to Zofia. Zofia had this one client, the secretary of a high-ranking official in the Nazi administration, and she asked her to take Lola on as a servant. But they took the risk and told the German woman that Lola was Jewish. The German was a decent woman and Lola served her until the end of the war in relative safety. They rounded her up once somewhere and took her in to the Gestapo, but the German woman went round there and made a terrible fuss, that they were persecuting an Aryan.

After the war Lola and the German woman kept up a close correspondence with each other. And Zofia didn't give herself a similar chance. As for her husband and son, who I fled east with in September 1939, they were transported way into Russia and went through a very harsh camp. Uncle Izydor died of emaciation in Samarkand [Uzbekistan] shortly after being released from the camp.

Jerzy, his son, was very ill. Back in the Cracow days, Izydor had been a well known bibliophile, a member of the 'Rara Avis Fraternity' [a pre-war association of bibliophiles, Rara Avis 'rare bird', Latin expression for curiosity, rarity], and from there he knew Professor Kot [Stanislaw Kot (1885-1975): ambassador of the Polish government to the USSR in 1941-42, after the war Polish ambassador in Rome, subsequently emigrated to the UK]. Professor Kot found Jerzy in the USSR - unfortunately Izydor was no longer alive by then - and via his diplomatic channels got him out of Russia and smuggled him to Edinburgh, to Scotland. Jerzy, very ill, died there in 1945.

My mother's other sister Irena, together with her partner, a Christian, fled Poland in 1939. In the end they wound up in London. Irena was a secretary in the Polish government in London. She died there in 1974. My mother's brother Juliusz, his wife Sabina and their son Eryk died in 1942, shot by the Germans on the road from Nowy Targ to Szczawnica. My mother's second brother, Edward, survived the war thanks to some good Christians; he went into hiding in the provinces, in eastern Galicia [annexed to the Soviet Union], in the Jedlicz region, where he worked as an engineer. His wife Maria, who was a Catholic, expended all her efforts during the war on saving their only daughter, Ewa. They both lived in Maria's native province of Krosno [100 km south-east of Cracow].

There is a terribly dramatic story surrounding that. Edward, in hiding, every so often had to find himself a new hideout. When the Germans were onto him, he decided to seek shelter with his wife. He managed to reach Maria, but she said that unfortunately she couldn't take him in. She probably considered the safety of her daughter more important. But all three managed to survive the war,

and they were still a family after the war. Edward was active as an oil engineer. He died in Cracow in 1969, and Maria died literally a few days after him. At present their daughter Ewa lives in Canada, in Vancouver.

Mama's youngest brother Roman, as a soldier in the Polish Army during the September campaign in 1939, was taken prisoner by the Russians, from whom he managed to escape. He spent some time in Lwow, from where he was taken by the Russians to a very harsh camp somewhere on the Volga. After the Sikorski-Majski Pact Roman got to Uzbekistan, where he died. After the war I met a witness to his death - a woman from Przemysl who told me how Roman had died, emaciated with dysentery and typhus.

Roman's wife Alicja, with their daughters Ewa and Anna, were in hiding in various villages in the south of Poland. The problem was that although Alicja was a blue-eyed blonde, her daughters had what was known as 'the wrong looks' [i.e. they had Semitic features]. Alicja worked miracles to keep them in hiding. Towards the end of the war she met a man, a Pole, who had escaped from the Wielkopolska region in north-west Poland and they saw the war out together. After the war that man married her, and they lived together in Cracow. Alicja worked in a shop and brought her daughters up. She died in 1970. I saw Alicja and Roman's daughters recently in Cracow. One is a doctor, an oncologist, and the other an urban planner.

My mom survived the war in the USSR. She and her husband were taken from Podhaicy east at almost the same time as I was. In Russia my mother was a teacher in a Polish three-grade school organized by the Union of Polish Patriots [21](#), and later she worked in a kolkhoz [22](#) on the Black Sea. In the USSR Mama split up with her second husband and after the war, in 1946, came back to Cracow alone. After the war she did a nursing course and became a nurse in the Healthcare Society at 38 Długa Street in Cracow. That was where she worked until the end; she knew the remnants of Cracow's Jews.

Her love of Polish literature remained with her until the end of her life. I remember her letters, written in beautiful Polish. She died in 1987 in Cracow, at the age of 91. Mama wanted to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, and so she was; she is at rest in the Jewish cemetery on Miodowa Street in Cracow. Mama, being a non-religious person, felt bound to the Jewish community, sensed a tie with the fate that in effect the outside world had apportioned to the Jews. That was why she wanted to be buried among her own.

After the war

How my life worked out after the war? After the liberation I had no idea what life would be like in Poland. Wiser folk foresaw what would happen, but I somehow stupidly imagined that things were getting better. Aunt Irena, the one who emigrated to London, desperately wanted to get me to the West. And I just didn't want to.

I remember how just after the war Professor Kot came over from London. I met him in Cracow in the Hotel Francuski, because he had some news for me from my aunt. I was surprised that Kot was so pessimistic; he said that there was no life to be had in Poland at all. He regretted that I was adamant about staying here.

Already then I was scribbling, writing poems and articles. O, how unbelievably important having something published is to a young upstart, and published not in any old rag, but in a good journal, 'Odrodzenie' ['Renaissance,' the first postwar social and literary weekly; played an important role in shaping Polish post-war literature]. I had things published in the 'Dziennik Literacki' ['Literary Daily'], a supplement to the 'Dziennik Polski' ['Polish Daily,' published from 1945 in Cracow]; I polemicalised with Przybos [Julian Przybos (1901-1970): Polish poet, co- editor of Odrodzenie] on poetry. I found all that incredibly interesting. At the time I didn't really have any political views. Just to live, and for things to get better.

Of course I met people who were emigrating to Palestine or to the West. I took that as something natural. I remember how wonderfully Natan Gross [Israeli literature specialist, publicist and director, b. 1919 in Cracow, emigrated to Israel in 1950] recited poetry in this society club in Cracow; he was studying at some film school then, but he soon left for Israel.

I was interested, of course, in what was happening in Palestine, in Israel, but to tell the truth it wasn't deeply important to me. In fact it was only the Six-Day-War [23](#) that came as the breakthrough relation for me. On that occasion all the so-called cultured West behaved contemptibly. It wouldn't have taken much for those murderers to throw the Jews into the sea, because there were 110 million Arabs.

It was then that I realized the importance of the existence of the State of Israel and of the physical and spiritual survival of the nation. The situation in Israel came home to me. I realized that Europe is a bunch of cynical rogues and Israel has to cope on its own, with the help of American money, of course. Even to this day I can't understand how Israel did it then with such a small army. I don't know. In a word, it was then that I realized that the fate of Israel is in a sense my fate.

I have been to Israel twice, the first time in 1984, and then in 1987. I visited the country as a traveler and writer, but first and foremost as a seeker of links between the ancient and the contemporary. I was successful in finding many such elements. I do not have family in Israel, only friends, among them my nurse from Rabka that I mentioned, Lola Schiffeldrim and her husband Leon.

Israel made a great impression on me, because it's a miracle. It's a terrible country, I mean the rocks, the sands, the dryness. For five months of the year not a drop of rain falls there at all, and what they have done! It's quite simply incredible. Only work gives the right to the land. That's my opinion. When the Turks, the English, the Arabs and others ruled there, for hundreds of years they did nothing there. It was a desert. And now it's a garden. The Israelis have built up industry and agriculture. Unbelievable. I'm too old to think about aliyah [immigration to Israel] now, but if I were younger, I don't know, I'm not sure. To this day I have very strong emotional ties with Israel.

My whole life in post-war Poland has been connected with journalism and writing. Initially I traveled a little, anyhow, all over the Western Lands [Regained lands] [24](#). I tried to put down roots there, but I didn't like it. In the end I went back to Cracow and worked first in 'Przekroj' ['Cross- section,' an illustrated weekly published from 1945 in Cracow and now in Warsaw]. After my move to Warsaw in 1948 I worked in the editorial offices of 'Zycie Warszawy' ['Warsaw Life,' a daily paper published since 1944] and 'Swiat' ['World,' a weekly illustrated magazine published 1951-1969 in Warsaw].

I wasn't a party member; I was fairly insubordinate, listened to my common sense, so my superiors didn't trust me. Common sense was the enemy of the [Polish] People's Republic. In 1968 I was thrown out of my job [cf. Gomulka Campaign] [25](#). I was given a few warnings, taken for interrogations. I was out of work for a while. This director of journalistic affairs called me in and said to me, 'I have to tell you straight that there is no room for you in our press. If you can find something yourself, then we'll see.'

I already had a dozen or so books in print behind me, but I realized that there was a serious possibility that I might have to leave Poland. Here, some good people directed me to Maria Borowska [Maria Borowska, wife of Tadeusz Borowski, well-known prose writer and poet, author of chilling short stories about Auschwitz; his wife Maria was also a prisoner in Auschwitz], who was the editor-in-chief of 'Ty i Ja' ['You and I,' illustrated women's monthly published in Warsaw in 1960-73], and a bold, wonderful person. Borowska stood up to those dogs and she took me on at once. I worked there until I retired.

Now I am a regular contributor to 'Midrasz' ['Midrash,' a Polish social and cultural monthly magazine on Jewish themes, published in Warsaw since 1997]. Another important part of my life beside my journalism and publicistic work is translation. I know German, Russian, English, French and Hebrew. I have translated from all those languages. I have no particular sentiment for Hebrew. I learned it only after the war, because all that remained in my head from my pre-war study was the alphabet. I consider it a very rich, marvelous language. I started translating from it in 1988, but for me German is a better tool.

Besides translations I have always been and still am active as an essayist and poet and as a writer. Privately, the work I value the most is my volume of 'Wiersze wybrane' ['Selected Poems'] published in 1989 by the publishing house Czytelnik, and my 'Pozne sonety' ['Late Sonnets'] written over the last four years and published in 2003 by Wydawnictwo Literackie.

My change of surname from Keiner to Ziemny is connected with my writing. When I worked on 'Przekroj' I was called Keiner, but I signed myself Ziemny. The name Ziemny comes from the word 'ziemia' [earth, land, soil]. I just thought it up, out of my head. That was my pen name, which in time became my surname.

The Austrians sent the worst idiots to Galicia as civil servants, and it was they who gave the Galician Jews their surnames [cf. Jewish surnames] [26](#). The more offensive, the better and the funnier. I was called Keiner, meaning 'none', and my cousin Minder, 'lesser, worse.' If you had money and paid one of those pen-pushers, you could be called Himmelblau [literally 'Heaven-blue'] or Silberstein [literally 'silver stone']. I saw no reason to cling to such a surname, and officially over 50 years ago I changed my name to Ziemny.

If I were to comment on the events of 1989 [27](#), I have to admit that I sympathized with that clown Walesa [28](#), but initially I wouldn't have given a crooked ha'penny for his abilities and knowledge. Now Polish politics is one big mess, a theater of grim puppets, irrespective of whether they're left or right-wing. That's what I'd say.

As for my personal life, in 1948 I married a Jewish woman, Maria, nee Zipper, born in 1922 in Cracow. After our marriage I moved to Warsaw. I already knew my wife before the war, but not very well; our mothers were simply school friends. After the war we found each other again; all that

largely depended on a series of coincidences. At the time, people wanted to live, to get together with somebody, you didn't ask about specific traits of character, it was irrelevant whether or not the other person was Jewish.

After ten years of marriage we divorced and that is my only formal marriage. Before that we had two daughters: in 1948 Alina Barbara, and in 1954 Malgorzata Zofia. I'm this Jewish family man, so even after the divorce I had a say in the upbringing of my daughters, we had frequent contact, my wife didn't put obstacles in the way of that.

Both my daughters consider themselves Jewish. The elder, who studied horticulture at the Warsaw School of Rural Management, emigrated to France. She lived in Paris for a while, and then settled in Metz. She is married to an architect there - Gerard Cahen, who comes from an old Jewish family. Although my daughter's family isn't very religious, they uphold the custom of celebrating the Sabbath. They also go to synagogue once or twice a year. Alina has one daughter, who is married to a Mexican. My granddaughter is currently expecting a baby.

My other daughter Malgorzata lives in Warsaw and is single. At present she works as a secretary, but she trained as an optician. Malgorzata isn't religious, she doesn't go to synagogue, but she likes attending events organized by the TSKZ [29](#). She has a lot of friends there, although she also has a lot of Polish friends, of course.

I personally came to the spiritual side of Jewishness gradually. I never doubted my origins, of course, that was clear. As for religion, my attitude hasn't changed since my youth. I don't go to synagogue in Warsaw, but I respect religion. Although the religion is the foundation of the culture, thought and traditions, Judaism simply isn't important to me, but Jewishness is. On my school certificates before the war I gave my creed as Jewish. But I and my parents always gave our nationality as Polish. But that hasn't lasted, because in the meantime there was 1968, and then I began putting 'Polish Jew.'

Two years ago, though, during the last population census, I gave my nationality as Jewish. With full conviction. I came to that conclusion in the light of a number of experiences, but not in terms of bitter reflection. Quite simply, I am a Jew and I consider myself a Jew. What is important to me is that I have learned that Jews have a deep-rooted need for truth and justice, and that is something that over the years has come to play an increasingly important role for me.

Glossary:

1 Galicia

Informal name for the lands of the former Polish Republic under Habsburg rule (1772-1918), derived from the official name bestowed on these lands by Austria: the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria. From 1815 the lands west of the river San (including Krakow) began by common consent to be called Western Galicia, and the remaining part (including Lemberg), with its dominant Ukrainian population Eastern Galicia. Galicia was agricultural territory, an economically backward region. Its villages were poor and overcrowded (hence the term 'Galician misery'), which, given the low level of industrial development (on the whole processing of agricultural and crude-oil based products) prompted mass economic emigration from the 1890s; mainly to the Americas. After 1918 the name Eastern Malopolska for Eastern Galicia was popularized in Poland, but

Ukrainians called it Western Ukraine.

2 Kazimierz

Now a district of Cracow lying south of the Main Market Square, it was initially a town in its own right, which received its charter in 1335. Kazimierz was named in honor of its founder, King Casimir the Great. In 1495 King Jan Olbracht issued the decision to transfer the Jews of Cracow to Kazimierz. From that time on a major part of Kazimierz became a center of Jewish life. Before 1939 more than 64,000 Jews lived in Cracow, which was some 25% of the city's total population. Only the culturally assimilated Jewish intelligentsia lived outside Kazimierz. Until the outbreak of World War II this quarter remained primarily a Jewish district, and was the base for the majority of the Jewish institutions, organizations and parties. The religious life of Cracow's Jews was also concentrated here; they prayed in large synagogues and a multitude of small private prayer houses. In 1941 the Jews of Cracow were removed from Kazimierz to the ghetto, created in the district of Podgorze, where some died and the remainder were transferred to the camps in Plaszow and Auschwitz. The majority of the pre-war monuments, synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in Kazimierz have been preserved to the present day, and a few Jewish institutions continue to operate.

3 Jagiellonian University

In Polish 'Uniwersytet Jagiellonski,' it is the university of Cracow, founded in 1364 by Casimir III of Poland and which has maintained high level learning ever since. In the 19th century the university was named Jagiellonian to commemorate the dynasty of Polish kings. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagellonian_University)

4 Slowacki, Juliusz (1809-1849)

One of the most outstanding Polish Romantic poets and revolutionaries, alongside Mickiewicz and Krasinski, called 'the national bard.' Born in Krzemieniec (Kremenets, Ukraine), he graduated from the University of Vilna (Wilno, Vilnius, Lithuania), later went to Paris as the Courier of the National Government and settled there. He spent several years in Switzerland, traveled all over Europe, to Egypt, Palestine and Syria. His poems deal with the struggle for independence, the past of the nation and the causes of the partitions. After the Wielkopolskie Uprising (1848) broke out, Slowacki went to Poznan (Posen, Prussian partition) in spite of advanced pneumonia, later he joined the Polish expatriates in Paris, where he died. His best known works include the plays Kordian, Balladyna, and Sen Srebrny Salomei (The Silver Dream of Salome), and the epic poems Beniowski, Anelli, Krol-Duch (King-Spirit). (Source: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/s/slowacki.asp>)

5 Mickiewicz, Adam (1798-1855)

Often regarded as the greatest Polish poet. As a student he was arrested for nationalist activities by the tsarist police in 1823. In 1829 he managed to emigrate to France and worked as professor of literature at different universities. During the 1848 revolution in France and the Crimean War he attempted to organize legions for the Polish cause. Mickiewicz's poetry gave international stature to Polish literature. His powerful verse expressed a romantic view of the soul and the mysteries of life, often employing Polish folk themes.

6 Bund in Poland

Largest and most influential Jewish workers' party in pre-war Poland. Founded 1897 in Vilnius. From 1915, the Polish branch operated independently. Ran in parliamentary and local elections. Bund identified itself as a socialist Jewish party, criticized the Soviet Union and communism, rejected Zionism as a utopia, and Orthodoxy as a barrier on the road towards progress, demanded the abolition of all discrimination against Jews, fully equal rights for them, and the right for the free development of Yiddish-language secular Jewish culture. Bund enjoyed particularly strong support in central and south-eastern Poland, especially in large cities. Controlled numerous organizations: women's, youth, sport, educational (TsISHO), as well as trade unions. Affiliated with the party were a youth organization, Tsukunft, and a children's organization, Skif. During the war, the Bund operated underground, and participated in armed resistance, including in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as part of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) led by Marek Edelman. After the war, the Bund leaders joined the Central Committee of Polish Jews, where they postulated, in opposition to the Zionists, a reconstruction of the Jewish community in Poland. In January 1949, the Bund leaders dissolved the organization, urging its members to join the communist Polish United Workers' Party.

7 KuK (Kaiserlich und Königlich) army

The name 'Imperial and Royal' was used for the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as for other state institutions of the Monarchy originated from the dual political system. Following the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy, Austrian emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph was the head of the state and also commander-in-chief of the army. Hence the name 'Imperial and Royal'.

8 Zionist parties in Poland

All the programs of the Zionist parties active in Poland in the interwar period were characterized by their common aims of striving to establish a permanent home for the Jews in Palestine, to revive the Hebrew language, and to further political activity among the Jews (general Zionist program). They also worked to improve the lot of the Jews in Poland, and therefore ran at the Polish elections. In the Sejm (Polish Parliament) Zionist parties gained 32 of the total 47 seats won by the Jewish parties in 1922. Poalei Zion, founded in 1906, and divided in 1920 into Left Poalei Zion and Right Poalei Zion, represented left-wing views. Mizrachi, founded in 1902, united religious Zionists with a conservative social program. The Zionist Organization in Poland advocated a liberal program. Hitakhdut (Zionist Labor Party), established in 1920, combined a nationalist ideology with a socialist one. The Union of Zionist Revisionists, set up in 1925 by Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, sought the expansion of its own military structures and the achievement of the Zionist movement's aims by force. The majority of these parties were members of the World Zionist Organization, an institution co-ordinating the Zionist movement founded in 1897 in Basel. The most important Zionist newspapers in Poland included: Hatsefira, Haint, Der Moment and Nasz Preglad (Our Review).

9 Maccabi in Poland

Clubs of the Worldwide 'Maccabi' Jewish-Sports Association were created on Polish lands since the

beginning of the 20th century, for example the club in Lwow was created in 1901, the club in Cracow in 1907, the club in Warsaw in 1915. In 1930, during a general assembly of the 'Maccabi' clubs, it was decided that 'Maccabi' would merge with the Jewish Physical Education Council and create one Polish Branch of 'Maccabi' with a strong Zionist character. 241 clubs were part of 'Maccabi' in 1931, with 45,000 participants. All Zionist youth organizations were part of 'Maccabi.' 'Maccabi' organized numerous sports events, including the 'Maccabi Games,' parades, instructors' workshops, camps for children. The club has its own libraries, choirs, bands and the Kfar ha-Maccabi fund for settling in Palestine.

10 Betar

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

11 German Invasion of Poland

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

12 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

13 NKVD

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

14 Bukovina

Historical region, located East of the Carpathian Mountain range, bordering with Transylvania, Galicia and Moldova. In 1775 it became a Habsburg territory as a consequence of the Kuchuk-Kainarji Treaty (1774) between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. After the fall of Austria-Hungary Bukovina was annexed to Romania (1920). In 1939 a non-aggression pact was signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact), which also meant dividing Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of interest. Taking advantage of the pact, the Soviet Union claimed in an ultimatum from 1940 some of the Romanian territories. Romania was forced to renounce Bessarabia and Northern-Bukovina, including Czernowitz (Cernauti, Chernovtsy). Bukovina was characterized by ethnic and religious pluralism; the ethnic communities included Germans, Poles, Jews, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Romanians, the most dominant religious persuasions were Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. In 1930 some 93,000 Jews lived in Bukovina, which was 10,9% of the entire population.

15 The Sikorski-Majski Pact

Concluded on 30th July 1941 between the governments of Poland and the USSR in London, it contained a declaration by the Soviet authorities that the Soviet-German pacts of 1939 regarding territorial changes in Poland were no longer valid, a joint declaration of the resumption of diplomatic relations, mutual aid and support in the war against the Third Reich, and Soviet consent to the creation of a Polish Army in the USSR. Auxiliary protocols provided for the amnesty of Polish citizens imprisoned in the USSR (on the basis of the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR of 12th August 1941 several hundred thousand people were released).

16 Anders' Army

The Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, subsequently the Polish Army in the East, known as Anders' Army: an operations unit of the Polish Armed Forces formed pursuant to the Polish-Soviet Pact of 30th July 1941 and the military agreement of 14th July 1941. It comprised Polish citizens who had been deported into the heart of the USSR: soldiers imprisoned in 1939-41 and civilians amnestied in 1941 (some 1.25-1.6m people, including a recruitment base of 100,000-150,000). The commander-in- chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR was General Wladyslaw Anders. The army never reached its full quota (in February 1942 it numbered 48,000, and in March 1942 around

66,000). In terms of operations it was answerable to the Supreme Command of the Red Army, and in terms of organization and personnel to the Supreme Commander, General Wladyslaw Sikorski and the Polish government in exile. In March-April 1942 part of the Army (with Stalin's consent) was sent to Iran (33,000 soldiers and approx. 10,000 civilians). The final evacuation took place in August-September 1942 pursuant to Soviet-British agreements concluded in July 1942 (it was the aim of General Anders and the British powers to withdraw Polish forces from the USSR); some 114,000 people, including 25,000 civilians (over 13,000 children) left the Soviet Union. The units that had been evacuated were merged with the Polish Army in the Middle East to form the Polish Army in the East, commanded by Anders.

17 The 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division

Tactical grouping formed in the USSR from May 1943. The victory at Stalingrad and the gradual assumption of the strategic initiative by the Red Army strengthened Stalin's position in the anti-fascist coalition and enabled him to exert increasing influence on the issue of Poland. In April 1943, following the public announcement by the Germans of their discovery of mass graves at Katyn, Stalin broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile and using the Poles in the USSR, began openly to build up a political base (the Union of Polish Patriots) and an army: the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division numbered some 11,000 soldiers and was commanded first by General Zygmunt Berling (1943-44), and subsequently by the Soviet General Bewziuk (1944-45). In August 1943 the division was incorporated into the 1st Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, and from March 1944 was part of the Polish Army in the USSR. The 1st Division fought at Lenino on 12-13 October 1943, and in Praga in September 1944. In January 1945 it marched into Warsaw, and in April-May 1945 it took part in the capture of Berlin. After the war it became part of the Polish Army.

18 Plaszow Camp

Located near Cracow, it was originally a forced labor camp and subsequently became a concentration camp. The construction of the camp began in summer 1940. In 1941 the camp was extended and the first Jews were deported there. The site chosen comprised two Jewish cemeteries. There were about 2,000 prisoners there before the liquidation of the Podgorze (Cracow) ghetto on 13th and 14th March 1943 and the transportation of the remaining Jews to Plaszow camp. Afterwards, the camp population rose to 8,000. By the second half of 1943 its population had risen to 12,000, and by May-June 1944 the number of permanent prisoners had increased to 24,000 (with an unknown number of temporary prisoners), including 6,000-8,000 Jews from Hungary. Until the middle of 1943 all the prisoners in the Plaszow forced labor camp were Jews. In July 1943, a separate section was fenced off for Polish prisoners who were sent to the camp for breaking the laws of the German occupational government. The conditions of life in the camp were made unbearable by the SS commander Amon Goeth, who became the commandant of Plaszow in February 1943. He held the position until September 1944 when he was arrested by the SS for stealing from the camp warehouses. As the Russian forces advanced further and further westward, the Germans began the systematic evacuation of the slave labor camps in their path. From the camp in Plaszow, many hundreds were sent to Auschwitz, others westward to Mauthausen and Flossenbug. On 18th January 1945 the camp was evacuated in the form of death marches, during which thousands of prisoners died from starvation or disease, or were shot if they were too weak to walk. The last prisoners were transferred to Germany on 16th January 1945. More than 150,000 civilians were held prisoner in Plaszow.

19 Belzec

Village in Lublin region of Poland (Tomaszow district). In 1940 the Germans created a forced labor camp there for 2,500 Jews and Roma. In November 1941 it was transformed into an extermination camp (SS Sonderkommando Belzec or Dienststelle Belzec der Waffen SS) under the 'Reinhard-Aktion,' in which the Germans murdered around 600,000 people (chiefly in gas chambers), including approximately 550,000 Polish Jews (approx. 300,000 from the province of Galicia) and Jews from the USSR, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Norway and Hungary; many Poles from surrounding towns and villages and from Lwow also died here, mostly for helping Jews. In November 1942 the Nazis began liquidating the camp. In the spring of 1943 the camp was demolished and the corpses of the gassed victims exhumed from their mass graves and burned. The last 600 Jews employed in this work were then sent to the Sobibor camp, where they died in the gas chambers.

20 Stutthof (Pol

Sztutowo): German concentration camp 36 km east of Gdansk. The Germans also created a series of satellite camps in the vicinity: Stolp, Heiligenbeil, Gerdauen, Jesau, Schippenbeil, Seerappen, Praust, Burggraben, Thorn and Elbing. The Stutthof camp operated from 2nd September 1939 until 9th May 1945. The first group of prisoners (several hundred people) were Jews from Gdansk. Until 1943 small groups of Jews from Warsaw, Bialystok and other places were sent there. In early 1944 some 20,000 Auschwitz survivors were relocated to Stutthof. In spring 1944 the camp was extended significantly and was made into a death camp; subsequent transports comprised groups of Jews from Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Lodz in Poland. Towards the end of 1944 around 12,000 prisoners were taken from Stutthof to camps in Germany - Dachau, Buchenwald, Neuengamme and Flossenburg. In January 1945 the evacuation of Stutthof and its satellite camps began. In that period some 29,000 prisoners passed through the camp (including 26,000 women), 26,000 of whom died during the evacuation. Of the 52,000 or so people who were taken to Stutthof and its satellites, around 3,000 survived.

21 Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP)

Political organization founded in March 1943 by Polish communists in the USSR. It served Stalin's policy with regard to the Polish question. The ZPP drew up the terms on which the communists took power in post-war Poland. It developed its range of activities more fully after the Soviet authorities broke off diplomatic contact with the government of the Republic of Poland in exile (Apr. 1943). The upper ranks of the ZPP were dominated by communists (from Jan. 1944 concentrated in the Central Bureau of Polish Communists), who did not reveal the organization's long-term aims. The ZPP propagated slogans such as armed combat against the Germans, alliance with the USSR, parliamentary democracy and moderate social and economic reforms in post-war Poland, and redefinition of Poland's eastern border. It considered the ruling bodies of the Republic of Poland in exile to be illegal. It conducted propaganda campaigns (its press organ was called 'Wolna Polska' - Free Poland), and organized community care and education and cultural activities. From May 1943 it co-operated in the organization of the First Kosciuszko Infantry Division, and later the Polish Army in the USSR (1944). In July 1944, the ZPP was formally subordinated to the National Council and participated in the formation of the Polish Committee for National Liberation. From 1944- 46, the

ZPP resettled Poles and Jews from the USSR to Poland. It was dissolved in August 1946.

22 Kolkhoz

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

23 Six-Day-War

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

24 Regained Lands

Term describing the eastern parts of Germany (Silesia, Pomerania, Eastern Prussia, etc.) annexed to Poland after World War II, following the Teheran and Yalta agreements between the allies. After 1945 Germans were expelled from the area, and Poles (as well as Jews to some extent) from the former Polish lands annexed to the Soviet Union in 1939 were settled in their place. A Polonization campaign was also waged - place names were altered, Protestant cemeteries were destroyed, etc. The Society for the Development of the Western Lands (TRZZ), founded in 1957, organized propaganda campaigns justifying the right of the Polish state to the territories, popularizing the social, economic and cultural transformations, and advocating integration with the rest of the country.

25 Gomulka Campaign

A campaign to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The trigger of this anti-Semitic campaign was the involvement of the Socialist Bloc countries on the Arab side in the Middle East conflict, in connection with which Moscow ordered purges in state institutions. On 19th June 1967, at a trade union congress, the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR], Wladyslaw Gomulka, accused the Jews of lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War. This marked the start of purges among journalists and people of other creative professions. Poland also severed diplomatic relations with Israel. On 8th March 1968 there was a protest at Warsaw University. The Ministry of Internal Affairs responded by launching a press campaign and organizing mass demonstrations in factories and workplaces during which 'Zionists' and 'trouble-makers' were indicted and anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia slogans shouted. Following the events of March, purges were also staged in all state institutions, from factories to universities, on criteria of nationality and race. 'Family liability' was also introduced (e.g. with respect to people whose spouses were Jewish). Jews were forced to emigrate. From 1968-1971 15,000-30,000 people left Poland. They were stripped of their citizenship and right of return.

26 Jewish surnames

Polish Jews began using surnames in the 18th century; earlier they only used first names and cognomens. In 1787 Joseph II seeking a modern, centralized and German-speaking state ordered the Jews to take German surnames in the whole Habsburg Empire, including the previously Polish province of Galicia and Lodomeria (acquired in 1772). The registration of surnames cost money, attractive ones more than common ones. In 1796 a similar law came into force in the Kingdom of Prussia, that gained the Western parts of the Kingdom of Poland between 1772 and 1795 and finally also in 1804 in the Russian Empire, which possessed the Eastern and Central parts of the previous Poland starting in 1795.

27 Poland 1989

In 1989 the communist regime in Poland finally collapsed and the process of forming a multiparty, pluralistic, democratic political system and introducing a capitalist economy began. Communist policy and the deepening economic crisis since the early 1980s had caused increasing social discontent and weariness and the radicalization of moods among Solidarity activists (Solidarity: a trade union that developed into a political party and played a key role in overthrowing communism). On 13th December 1981 the PZPR (Polish United Worker's Party) had introduced martial law (lifted on 22nd June 1983). Growing economic difficulties, social moods and the strength of the opposition persuaded the national authorities to begin gradually liberalizing the political system. Changes in the USSR also influenced the policy of the PZPR. A series of strikes in April-May and August 1988, and demonstrations in many towns and cities forced the authorities to seek a compromise with the opposition. After a few months of meetings and consultations Round Table negotiations took place (6th February-5th April 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronislaw Geremek, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki). The resolutions it passed signaled the end of the PZPR's monopoly on power and cleared the way for the overthrow of the system. In parliamentary elections (4th June 1989) the PZPR and its subordinate political groups suffered defeat. In fall 1989 a program of fundamental economic, social and ownership transformations was drawn up and in January 1990 the PZPR dissolved.

28 Walesa, Lech (b

1943): Leader of the Solidarity movement, politician, Nobel-prize winner. Originally he was an electrician in the Gdansk shipyard and became a main organizer of strikes there that gradually grew to be nation-wide and greatly influenced Polish politics in the 1980s. Co-founder of the Solidarity (Solidarnost) trade union in 1980, representing the workers (and later much of the Polish society) against the communist nomenclature. He was one of the promoters of the thorough reconstruction of the Polish political and economic system, the creation of a sovereign democratic state with a market economy. In 1983 he received the Nobel Peace Prize. From 1990-1995 he was president of the Republic of Poland.

29 Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews (TSKZ)

Founded in 1950 when the Central Committee of Polish Jews merged with the Jewish Society of

Culture. From 1950-1991 it was the sole body representing Jews in Poland. Its statutory aim was to develop, preserve and propagate Jewish culture. During the socialist period this aim was subordinated to communist ideology. Post-1989 most young activists gravitated towards other Jewish organizations. However, the SCSPJ continues to organize a range of cultural events and has its own magazine - The Jewish Word. It is primarily an organization of older people, who, however, have been involved with it for years.