

Anna Mass

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Interviewer: Magda Cobel-Tokarska

Mrs. Mass is a wonderful old lady, charming, cheerful and witty. She lives alone in Warsaw.

Following her husband's death, she has developed an interest in alternative medicine, parapsychology and astrology.

She keeps learning new things. I was entranced by her fascinating stories, interwoven with numerous digressions.

Her story is like herself – full of humor, irony, and tenderness.



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My family history

Ab ovo? Where was I when I wasn't there? I know little about my paternal family.

My father's name was Szwarc. Jankiel. Everyone called him Jakub, the Polish version of his name. Interestingly, my grandmother, my father's mother, was also nee Szwarc. Her first name was Ita.

My father was born in 1893, 13th March. In the 1890s there was flu pandemic. His father died, leaving his mother a widow. My father was born in Przedborz [ca. 130 km south of Warsaw], that's near Piotrkow Trybunalski.

He was raised by his grandparents, because his mother was busy working as a teacher. But I think it was in a Jewish school because I can't imagine she could have been working in a Polish one.

My father was brought up in an orthodox home because his grandparents, as was standard those days, were religious. From age of 3 years old he went to the cheder. Then to a yeshiva in Przedborz.

Also he told me that if, on his way home in the winter, he wanted to go sliding on the Pilica, his grandfather would grab him by the ear and say, 'You shaigetz, you hoodlum, there's no ice-sliding for you!' His job was to pore over the Torah and learn, nothing more. A little kid! I know that by the age of 16 he was already a practicing watchmaker.

I didn't know my father's grandparents, the age difference was too great. My grandmother Ita, this is his mother, I saw only once, just one time. It was such a long way from Piotrkow to Lublin that visiting each other was out of the question [ca. 200 km].

So my father wrote his mother, she wrote him, and that was it in terms of staying in touch. It was only one time, so it happened that I was down with scarlet fever, that Grandmother Ita came to visit us. There was an orange on my bedside table. And I remember she said, 'I don't like oranges.'

As if it was for her. During that stay, Grandmother used an old dress to make a beautiful, huge woolen scarf for my mother. A brick-red one. (That scarf would later prove of service to me in the Soviet Union). I was 6 then and thanks to Grandmother I learned to crochet.

At first I only managed doll hats because instead of adding line so that it was flat, I went round and round in circles. Then I finally caught on and by the age of 10 I was dressing the whole family in sweaters.

As far as my maternal family is concerned, I know a little bit more. My mother was nee Rot, no 'h' at the end, just like that. Her grandparents were well off, owned a tenement house.

Because Jews aren't allowed to turn on the lights on Saturday, if my grand-grandfather, whom I never met, my grandmother's father, wanted [to turn on the lights], he invited the caretaker for a glass of vodka.

The caretaker knew, came, turned on the light – you had to have light to drink the vodka, didn't you? If he was mean, he turned it off when leaving. And returned like that several times until he drank enough, then he left it on.

My grandmother, Perla Kac nee Rot, had two brothers. She was married at the age of 15 to a boy not much older than her who knew the whole Talmud very well, but I don't think ever had any job in his life.

Before getting married, my grandmother had such beautiful hair that the caretaker's wife came to comb her. Braids to the very ground. She cut her hair before the wedding and made three sheytls with them, for wearing in turns. A married orthodox Jewess couldn't go around with her head bare.

Grandmother Perla received a dowry and the couple's parents decided they would live 'one year with us, another year with you,' as was the standard those days if the bride and groom were young.

I remember my grandmother told me on the first day after getting married they simply sat on the floor and played gite. The stone game. That's the mature married couple they were. Eventually, however, they picked the apple from the tree of knowledge and my grandmother had ten children.

Not every year but, let's say, every two years, because as long as she breastfed, she didn't get pregnant. And when she had the tenth child on her lap, her husband died of tuberculosis. He

developed it while poring over the Talmud.

Grandmother's brothers had all married by then and squandered their money. On cards, things like that. So, Grandmother told me, not only was she left with a child number ten in her lap, she also had her mother to feed, because where was the old lady supposed to go?

Grandmother wasn't lucky as far as her children were concerned. Two died at young age, my mother Sara was the third from the end, it is the eighth child. My mother had one sister and besides her only brothers.

Unfortunately, I don't know, I don't remember their names. My mother's sister got married. Grandmother married her off to a wealthy widower, she didn't want to, she was unhappy, but those days they didn't care whether the girl liked the match or not.

She'll be well off, she'll have everything, won't live in poverty. She gave birth to a son and on Yom Kippur – well, it's autumn, cold – she went to the synagogue barefoot, caught a cold and died. All of her brothers died at the age of 15, 16. One was 18, had a wife, and a baby on its way. So in the end of the whole ten only my mother was left.

We were Grandmother's most beloved part of the family, she lived with us in Lublin. She loved my father like her own son. And she was really very good. She remained active until the very end. She was 90 when the war broke out [in 1939].

She was selling newspapers on the street, in Lublin at Lubartowska, but not in a booth. She had a place on the sidewalk, and the newspapers lay on a special rack. During winter time, she was keeping a bucket with hot coals between her legs to warm herself up.

Whether she was murdered by the Nazis or died of old age, I don't know. I know that throughout her life she was a very cheerful person. She was religious, but didn't force religion upon us. Which didn't prevent her from saying things like, 'How good God doesn't live on earth.

If he did, people would have long smashed all the windows in His house. They'd be taking revenge for everything.' I'm old myself today but I've taken it to heart what she used to say. 'Don't curse, curses create a bridge. Whom they leave they return to. He who curses is cursed himself.' And I never went beyond 'Oh brother!' I haven't learned to curse to this day.

My mother... well. She was 9 when she had to go to work. So she got a job at a stockings factory. Unfortunately, I know nothing more about the place. There obviously was some progress because I went to work when I was 13.

So that was a bit later. Always when there was poverty at home or something, my mother went to the factory, took the yarn, she had a machine at home for making socks, and made some extra money that way.

How did my father meet my mother? Father went from village to village and earned his living by repairing clocks and watches. And, traveling so, he ended up in Lublin, where he met my mother. He fell in love, and he was very shy.

My mother was about 27, he was 24. He was still a young boy, and it was my mother who finally told him it was necessary to decide: this way or that way. So he, of course, agreed to marry her.

Mother and Grandmother lived in a small apartment at the time, and a month before the wedding someone broke into it, but he stole nothing.

Those days, when a girl reached a certain age, she automatically started preparing her trousseau, just in case. And my mother did too. When she saw there had been a break-in but nothing was stolen, she was afraid to leave the place unattended at all.

But once, just one time, she allowed my father to convince her to go out somewhere. And when she returned, there was nothing. Nothing! Not even the matches. Everything had been stolen.

She wanted to postpone the wedding, because, well, she had nothing but the clothes she wore. But my father disagreed, said, 'What it's going to be it's going to be,' and they got married.

But the best thing was that my father's last name was Szwarc, and my [maternal] grandmother's married name was Kac. So my mother was nee Kac. Szwarc Kac is 'black cat.' So when they went somewhere together, people called, 'The black cat is here!' They even called me 'Blacky' at school.

My father had dark hair, and my mother's hair was so dark her neighbor called her 'Ms. Navy Blue.' Because her hair was so black it was almost navy blue. My father started turning gray very early on, and my mother, when she was already around 50, had one white streak that she could comb back and hide it from sight. She never wore a wig.

• Growing up

My sister Elka was born 18th May 1919 and was a small baby when the war started in 1920 [Polish - Bolshevik war]. My mother told me that she had nothing to eat, so she gave the baby water to drink because she had no milk.

My sister suffered from serious stomach problems. Then I was born. It was on 23th May 1921. Mother had the two of us and, to say the truth, she was happy. Because there would have arisen the problem of circumcision had she had a boy.

My father, as I said, was a watchmaker. At first he went from village to village to earn money, then he set up a small shop where he worked. It was at Pijarska Street in Lublin. As we always barely made the ends meet, if we bought something, it was on credit.

Those bills of exchange had to be eventually repaid, and there was always some hectic searching for the money. In the summer, my father always went to Kazimierz [resort town on the Vistula, some 100 km south of Warsaw], there was work there. People dropped their watches into water, into sand, you had to clean them.

And that's why Kazimierz is like a second home town for me. I always spent the whole summer there. After I had gone to work, I took a free leave in the summer and was able to spend two months in Kazimierz.

Mother went with us, chiefly because of me, because I was very sickly. She was always worried I'd stop eating in Kazimierz and get even thinner. And I hated the beach, to this day I don't like baking in the sun. In the water I felt cold, on the beach I felt hot, I lost my appetite. My mother could sit on the beach for hours, she loved the sun.

Kazimierz was also a Jewish town. It was inhabited almost solely by Jews. There were some Poles there, but those were rather the peasants from the nearby villages. The soil there was excellent. But I saw how the peasants lived.

The peasant ate a chicken only when he was dying or when the chicken died, if he slaughtered a pig, he salted the meat and stashed it away in a barrel for winter, for Christmas. Normally they ate fatback. Or used the blood to make blood sausage. The peasants were poor.

There was a family that went by the name of Gorecki there, the grandmother was a converted Jewess – she fell in love, married a Pole. And the whole family had the characteristic looks – black hair and blue eyes.

We lived with her in the summer. I was very bold – perhaps too bold – and one day I asked her whether she didn't regret having changed her religion, living among the Poles. And she told me, 'Well, you know, my child, yes and no.'

Because the issue looked like that: there was that writer, Leo Belmont [born Leopold Blumental, 1865-1941, writer, translator, lawyer, founder of the Polish Esperanto Society]. I remember a preface to a book where he wrote that after he converted to Catholicism, he lost friends among Jews but didn't gain any among the Poles.

For the Poles, he was forever a Jew, and for the Jews he was a convert. And, interestingly, I was from a non-religious home but I also believed it was a transgression. You were born that way, you should stay that way. Why change your religion?

Though Jewish, Kazimierz was a clean town. There was a disastrous flood in 1933. And the market square, which is far above the Vistula level, was all flooded. I've never learned to swim.

My father swam quite well. When a child, he lived on the Pilica river, when he was 2 or 3 he played with kids, they used to push each other into water near the mill, he had to learn to swim if he didn't want to drown. But I was afraid to, I had seen too many drowning swimmers.

The swimming suits of the era were the suspended, tricot kind of ones. You didn't wear what you wear today – bikini, or even topless. Here, breasts and stomach, everything had to be covered, even though I was flat as a board. There were boats, kayaks... Even though I couldn't swim, I liked the boats very much. And, strangely, I wasn't afraid.

In Kazimierz I saw for the first time how they made the so called eiruv. Those days, a religious Jewess couldn't even pick her purse up on the Sabbath because that would have amounted to working. So you cheated God.

You surrounded an area with a fence and led God to believe, as if He could believe that, that it was a living quarters, so you could carry things there. And I saw it for the first time in Kazimierz how they surrounded the downtown, where the synagogue was located, with a wire fence so that you could go to synagogue carrying a purse or a prayer book.

For me, that was a new thing, because I saw nothing of that Lublin, living in the Polish quarter, playing with Polish girls at school.

The Saski Garden in Lublin... It certainly wasn't smaller than the Lazienki in Warsaw. In the summer there was always a military band on Sundays, a concert bowl, you could listen to concerts. In the winter there were toboggan runs. Huge ones. You could really go far...

Before the war, the garden was open until dusk. Then a janitor went around with a clapper, announcing it was time to leave. And everyone went, they closed for the night. If someone uttered a profanity on the street or dropped a cigarette butt, a policeman would spring up out of nowhere and you had to pay two zlotys. A fine.

The Jewish quarter was down Swietoduska to Lubartowska and the surrounding area. And the Poles who lived there spoke fluent Yiddish. They played with Jewish kids from early childhood. I always laughed that a Jewish Friday smelled of kerosene and cake. Kerosene, because you washed children's hair and rinsed it with kerosene, which allegedly prevented lice. I also had my hair rinsed with kerosene. Perhaps that's why it was so black?

I lived in the Polish quarter. At a small street called Peowiakow. Grandmother had wealthy relatives, nieces. One of those owned a tannery plant. But a wealthy family wants nothing to do with the poor one.

I mean, when my mother got married, they wanted to give her an apartment in their house, but my mother rejected the offer. She simply didn't want anyone's generosity. We lived in the very center of Lublin, but the apartment was rather small, two rooms with a blind kitchen. We lived there until the war.

There was an iron warehouse in the back of our house, owned by a man named Wolman, a distributor for the entire Lublin province. I remember a story how an anti-Semitic priest said he wouldn't buy rails for his house from a Jew, he'd go to the factory and buy straight from there.

And later Wolman bowed deeply before him and thanked him for sparing the trouble, because he got his money anyway and didn't have to deliver the goods... and the other guy almost exploded. [The factory was owned by Wolman too].

The iron warehouse was closed after 7 pm and on Saturdays. And all the kids from our street, there were seven or eight houses alongside it, came to us to play. You could really play great hide-and-seek among all that scrap. I was a major hoodlum. I was small and thin, in fact I'm even more petite today. Still, even boys were afraid of me.

Near where we lived was the Bernardynski Square. Lublin is within the reach of the continental, Russian climate rather than the oceanic one. In early December there was already snow. And on Bernardynski there stood green trees, the Christmas ones. It was beautiful!

The cawing crows, the green trees, and the white snow. Ours was a Jewish home; there was no Christmas tree or anything of the sort. But in the afternoon, after getting back from work, Grandmother took me and my sister by the hand and led us to the city.

The shop window displays were all set for Christmas and were full of movement. Sleds riding out from behind little houses, snowmen dancing, everything was moving in that window. And Grandmother led us down Krakowskie Przedmiescie so that we could watch the displays.

As we weren't rich, I stood in front of the store and wondered how the pineapple could taste if one ring cost one zloty. The sweet canned ones were sold by ring. And for one zloty you could buy one kilogram of sugar. Or twenty buns.

So on and on – it was expensive. Oranges, lemons, in turn, you could buy from street vendors, for 10 groszy [100 groszy = 1 zloty], so I could afford to eat an orange. There was also St. John's bread.

A pod-shaped, oblong loaf, you gnawed at the sides, a sweetish taste. It's no longer, I don't regret, it wasn't anything to die for. You bought it by piece and ate it. There were no deli stores before the war. There was either the usual grocery, or the so called colonial store which sold all those imported foodstuffs.

What can I say about our Jewishness? Though we lived in a Polish neighborhood, we had many Jewish friends, and they visited us. My father spoke poor Polish. He spoke, as was typical for Jews before the war, ungrammatically, poorly.

There are four cases in Yiddish, and seven in Polish. He couldn't always decline the cases properly. And at home we spoke Yiddish. If father had gone somewhere, say, to Kazimierz, and I wanted to write him a letter, I had to write in Yiddish; otherwise I wouldn't have received a reply.

Those days I spoke Yiddish fluently, but today I don't. Today I stutter, am at loss for words. When my father died, I was in my thirties. And for so many years I spoke and wrote and read Yiddish. Read I can to this day. If a friend from Israel writes to me in Yiddish to spite me, I can read what he writes.

I prefer to reply him in Polish. Because if I do it in Yiddish, it's 'Noah seven errors.' It's this Jewish saying: that in the word 'Noah,' which has only two letters in Hebrew, you make seven errors.

On the Sabbath you sang all kinds of songs. It was the only day when my father was home because on the other days he was either at the Bund [1](#) or at work.

My mother had the habit of taking us to picnics. On a nice spring day, on a Saturday, when father wasn't working, we took rucksacks with a blanket, with food, and went to the woods. There were plenty of woods around Lublin. I remember how we drank spring water, it was tasty, cold and good. I liked those excursions.

On weekdays I had an hour's lunch break, but to eat lunch at home I had to wait for my father to come back because you didn't eat without him. By the Jewish custom, the father was the master of the house.

But I and my sister knew that the true master of the house was our mother, that she, the saying was, 'wore trousers.' Because she always asked him about things in such a way that he agreed with her and did what she wanted.

I remember this silly story: my father was a 'Jewish drunkard,' this is he never drank, and if he did drink a single glass, he was instantly drunk. He wasn't able to hold his liquor. We had a neighbor, a Jew, worked as an upholsterer.

And he could have lived well and earned well, but he was addicted to cards. His wife, who had three kids, learned that if he had any money on him, she had to grab the opportunity to buy whatever she needed, because on the next day the money wouldn't be there. And one day, on some feast, he knocked to us and asked my father to come to his place for a moment. Mom said, 'Don't go, it's going to be a bash.'

'Well, you know, I don't have to drink much.' Off he went and vanished. And Mother got malicious and whoever came to see Father, she sent them there. And that person went there. Later, in the evening, came Father, completely drunk, and a good friend of ours – also drunk.

We had a large double bed, so my mother put them both there, gave them a wet cloth to put on the head, placed a bowl near the bed, and left. They weren't used to drinking, so they upchucked [threw up] for a long time.

On the next day, my father, all with a hangover, was saying it was all my mother's fault. Whoever she sent, that person paid for another bottle. And later, when there were so many of them, they brought a whole crate...

So they got drunk well. And that was the first and only time that I saw my father drunk. But my mother did what wise women did those days. You shouldn't argue with a drunk man. You should tell him, 'Go to sleep.'

My father was an active Bund member before the war. The Bund was something like the PPS [2](#) for the Poles. Socialist. I think he joined as a young boy. In truth, he had communist inclinations.

But because he was a coward as far as physical pain was involved, he was afraid that if they arrested him for communism – and so much as threatened with torture – he would give everyone away.

So he preferred to be on the Bund, which was socialist but not communist. I'm not the party member type. I joined the Jung Bund on a follow-up basis, but I wasn't particularly active, after all, I had to work.

Off peak season I worked for eight-ten hours a day, but in peak season, carnival, holidays, I sat there until midnight. In fact, I was busy all the time. Young people came to visit us. We talked, sang. I once knew very many Yiddish songs but today I can no longer sing.

Our place was a communist den before the war. Whenever someone was to come from Lublin and didn't have a place to stay – the five of us lived in two rooms – my mother would set up a cot and sleep the person.

We didn't know their names, it was all conspiracy, after all. And in a Bund member's house they wouldn't look for a communist, so they could stay there safely. I remember one whom we dubbed 'comrade X.'

Because he told us, 'I can give you a name, but it won't be mine anyway, so what's the difference?' I don't know whether 'comrade X' survived the war or not. If he fled to Russia, they murdered the communists there, said they were all spies, and if he stayed in Poland, he could have died too, as a Jew...

I know Pilsudski [3](#) has a mixed image. I remember a drawing in the Robotnik, the PPS newspaper, before the war: the PPS are riding on the train, and Pilsudski leaves at the station 'Independence.' I know he can be blamed for Bereza Kartuska [4](#), for various other things, but as long as he lived, Poland wasn't a fascist country.

It was a country where Jews could live. There were the endeks [5](#), the ONR [6](#), various excesses, but, all in all, you could live. After Pilsudski's death, however, the country took a sharp turn towards fascism.

Then I, who was always very valiant, constantly picked up street fights, if someone leapt at me or slapped me with a newspaper – 'oh, you this and this' – I hit back. And as you read and derive some knowledge from those readings, I learned that if you kick a boy in a certain place, he will be in too much pain to continue fighting.

So I simply assessed the distance and always kicked infallibly. He cried, 'Oh God' and ran to the nearest gate. Thus I defended myself.

In the Saski Garden we had the following encounter once: I was with a girl friend of mine, Andzia Borensztajn, we were about to go home. We were sitting on a bench, the last five minutes. And there suddenly come two girls with two boys.

We are to vacate the bench because they want to sit here. And there were empty benches around. We said, 'We sit here. If you don't like it, don't want to sit next to us, very well, there are empty benches around.'

So they attacked us. And what I liked the most about the situation was that the two of us fought against those two girls, and the boys stood at the side and didn't interfere. We won, and we ostentatiously sat on the bench for five more minutes, only for five because we had to go home. And then we got up and left. We won so we could leave.

As far as religion is concerned, I don't know much. Once, when my paternal grandmother visited us, for those few days my father had to put on the tephilin in the morning and pray before going to work. And she immediately asked which utensils were for milk and which for meat, and so on.

Well, there were enough utensils, so my mother divided them and didn't interfere with the cooking anymore, afraid to do something wrong. We didn't have separate milk and meat cutlery.

True, there was a special basket for the holiday matzah, the apartment was cleaned up for Pesach, but it wasn't cleaned up the Jewish way. Because the traditional way you have to boil, bake the plates to remove any traces of flour, and so on.

At the very end you find some piece of bread in some corner and throw it out triumphantly. This is the classic Jewish holiday clean-up. We did it without all those stunts. We ate matzah, but we also ate bread.

Grandmother fasted, didn't eat, didn't drink. And our home was always full of people, they couldn't eat at home so they came to us to eat and drink. Unfortunately, I remember none of them – only Wajzman, who died in the Soviet Union.

When my grandmother went to the synagogue, she threw a silk shawl over her sheytl. I was in synagogue once or twice in Lublin. I think it was on Lubartowska – certainly in the Jewish quarter, but I don't remember precisely where.

My father didn't go. I was talked into going by Grandmother, so I went with her once, but I didn't like it that the men sat and saw everything whereas the women, off to the side, saw nothing. But the boy choir was beautiful. Because there was no organ.

After the war, I was surprised when at the Nozykow synagogue [7](#) in Warsaw I saw a choir, I don't remember whether they were from Wroclaw or Jelenia Góra. A mixed synagogue choir. With women. Strange, because it was different before the war.

In the Jewish quarter, I remember, I once saw through the basement window a rabbi dancing with his students. They were dancing to music. These days they don't dance at the synagogue. They only dance with the Torah [on Simchat Torah]. It had to be somewhere on Lubartowska, but I don't remember precisely where.

Once we successfully begged our mother to consecrate the candles on a Friday. There were candles in everybody's windows, only not in ours. So she showed to us how to do it, after all, she was brought up in a religious home, wasn't she?

So she lit the candles and said prayers for the family, and I have to say me and my sister liked it very much. Besides that, we once asked our father to prepare a genuine seder. It's a holiday, let him show us how the festive dinner looks like.

And because there was no son, I was the youngest child, it was me who asked the four questions. I remember how we looked at the chalice to see whether Elias had come and drunk some or not. I liked the holiday, there had to be raisin wine, of course, Grandmother made it herself, and besides that there was cherry liqueur.

Mother didn't give us, the children, alcohol, but she permitted us to crumble the matzah into the liqueur and eat. I liked it very much. Cherry liqueur and matzah.

Purim. The hamantashen was a wonderful thing, Mom made a triangle-shaped pastry with poppy seeds, very tasty, and you went around with rattles... On the streets, in the Jewish quarter. Everyone had them.

In the Polish quarter the Polish kids bought them too sometimes, simply because they liked them. You could buy them in the Jewish quarter in stores, of course. I also remember that you made pastries, whatever one could do best, and went to visit friends with that pastry.

On the Purim, you could trick others. I cheated our neighbor several times that I had seen her husband, he had come back, and she was all unhappy. Her husband was a wheeler-dealer, she liked it when he went away to Warsaw and wasn't home.

There were the masqueraders, there was theatre. You can have fun, it's a good thing. I can be an atheist and do not care about a religious holiday but the food and everything else – why not?

It's the same with those masqueraders on Epiphany day these days [traditionally, children dressed up as Biblical figures visit neighbors' homes on Epiphany day, a religious feast falling shortly after

Christmas].

For Whitsunday [Shavuot] you made a cheesecake. Around June. Take half kilogram of cottage cheese, a quarter kilogram of butter, mince. Add half glass of sugar, some aroma, whisk in an egg...

Heat up slowly until the mixture boils. When it does, it becomes transparent. You take it off the heat, and for half kilogram add a spoon of either potato flour or pudding with a little bit of water, and put it away for a moment to thicken. Then you line up the form with butter cookies, pour in the cheese mixture, and put away. After it has chilled, you put in a fridge.

For a wedding, you made a sponge cake. The best food for me, when I was still a small kid, was sponge cake spread with marinated herring. I know one thing: some foods we never ate. And not even because my mother observed kosher, but because of habit.

You didn't add either butter or gelatin to fish because that was something you didn't do. Today there are no seasonal foods, you can eat everything fresh or frozen all year round. But in the past it was like that:

in the spring there was only chicken, in the summer it was only duck, in the autumn it was goose, and in the winter it was hen and of course rooster. There was a season for everything. And in the autumn, the goose-slaughtering season, you bought goose fat in the Jewish butcher shops.

You could buy it with skin and have beautiful cracklings, or just the fat, which melted fully. Whole stone pots of that fat stood in the basement, and it didn't go rancid.

Fish is the so called parve food, neither meat nor dairy. You can eat anything after fish. Because ours was a Jewish home, there had to be fish on Sabbath. And for many years, as long as my father lived, I had gefilte fish on Saturday.

Of vegetables, you take: a bit of parsley, a lot of carrot, and even more onion. At least a tablespoon of sugar per one kilogram of fish. A lot of pepper. Fish should be relatively salty, sweet, and peppery. You hash raw fish with onion.

For a kilogram of fish, two or three eggs, to hold it all together. We also added matzah flour. And you cook it. I make compressed balls and put them into boiling water with vegetables. Fish should cook for two hours.

No one mixes fish with a spoon. You shake the pot lightly. When it's cooked, you take the fish out carefully and leave the sauce. It will turn into aspic automatically if you've added carp's head. Carp's head is the Jewish treasure. At home, everyone fought for the head. It's fatter and better than any other part.

Meat used to be meat. Prystor's meat... Prystor was a parliament member who said that it was unaesthetic to slaughter animals, that it was better to electrocute them [8](#). And as electrocution wasn't kosher, because blood wasn't drained, Jews had a limit, so much to kill. Hind beef was non-kosher, even if ritually slaughtered.

That was because it's impossible to remove the veins from the hind part. It's easy, though, with the front part. So Jews ate the front meat, smoked the brisket, and that was the Jewish ham.

I don't remember where we bought meat, whether in the Jewish quarter or the Polish one. There was this butcher called Suchodol in Lublin, he made really good cured meat. The best cured meat in Lublin. I know I ate Polish cured meat too, because it wasn't like it's forbidden.

When Grandmother prepared meat, it was the Jewish way. There was a wooden box, with walls, legs, and a groove for the juice to trickle. After washing the meat, you salt it thoroughly from six sides and put away for two hours. Then you rinse it and only then cook. Whether my mother did it like that, I don't remember, but my grandmother certainly did.

It was worse when she prepared liver. First she salted it well, then – we had a coal stove – she put it on the coals to roast, so that there was no blood, and only then started to fry. As a result, liver was always tough. But good. Salty, good. And tough – well, what could you do. That was the way they prepared it.

My mother prepared all kinds of things. Goose necks. Mince flour with poultry fat, add salt and pepper, stuff the neck with it and cook in broth. Yummy! Or sweet rice. Cooked with raisins or apples, with eggs, and casseroled.

Cooked noodles, mixed with eggs, layered with fruit like a layer cake, and baked sweet. When my mother made something like that and I took it to work, I had to take a really large chunk because all my colleagues wanted me to treat them. Because it was really very good.

Dumplings with matzah flour. To serve four, you take half a liter of water, four eggs, some chopped onion fried on poultry fat, add salt and pepper to taste, and matzah flour about a cup, a cup and half.

This is at first rather runny, but after it has stood for some time with the matzah flour, it gets thicker and you can form dumplings. I also add a pinch of baking soda. You cook it in salted water, and then pour broth over it. This is an Easter dish.

My mother also made potatoes to accompany chicken soup. Potato pancakes. You make it like that: one mid-sized potato per person and one egg per person. You mix the cooked potato with the egg, salt, pepper, to taste of course, add a beaten egg white, and fry the pancakes on fat.

Then you pour chicken soup over it. This is an elegant potato dish for a festive chicken soup, not for Easter, but for Sabbath.

My mother also made a buckwheat groats pie. She certainly made it with rough puff pastry. She cooked the groats beforehand. Then she roasted them with onion. That she baked and cut into pieces, and it didn't fall apart, it held together, so I guess she added eggs. It was quite good.

Chopped liver with egg and onion, fried liver of course, always with chicken fat, very good. Kidney beans cooked and then minced – to hull it – in a mincer, and then with egg and onion, also other things.

Those were the appetizers, my mother made them. Sometimes she fried a piece of meat, because my father could abstain from eating for the whole day but dinner had to be with all the supplements, an hors d'oeuvre, and dessert.

You made all kinds of things. My mother made something that today would be regarded as a poor man's dish. If she had any stale bread or challah, she cut it into pieces, poured boiling water over it, added salt and a piece of butter.

That's a kind of poor man's soup. For me, it was great. Not because she made it out of poverty, she simply had various uses for that stale bread. And war taught me that you never throw bread away.

My grandmother made borscht. She never cooked it with raw beets, but always pickled them first. And she didn't season it – as the Poles do – with cream, but with egg yolks. Cream was forbidden because that would have made the soup a dairy dish.

That borscht was like wine. My mother always said, 'Mum, how many yolks have you added?' 'Not many, only two!' came the answer. Eggs used to be cheap. For three eggs you could buy a pack of cigarettes.

The best thing was matzebrei, my daughters like it to this day. Matzebrei means 'fried matzah' in German [editor's note: actually 'matzah mash']. I make a lot of onion with fat, chicken fat is the best, goose fat as a last resort, you have to brown the onion a bit, so that it gives off the scent.

You add soaked, broken matzah, fry it a little so that the matzah absorbs the salt, pepper and fat, then you add an egg, mix it all, and you have a delicious dish.

We made cholent, the classic one, with kishke. My mother peeled the potatoes, onion was added too, of course. Salt, pepper to taste. You bought beef intestine by the meter, with suet on the surface.

My mother stuffed the intestine with flour, salt, and pepper, and – stuffing – turned the suet side inside. She sewed up the ends. Then she scalded it again and cleaned thoroughly. That intestine went on the top, on the potatoes, you wrapped the pot with rags, newspapers, whatever, to make it tight.

In the Jewish quarter you took the pot to a baker, to a bread oven, but we had a stove with an oven of its own. You put the pot into a hot oven and on Sabbath you took it out, and you had regular cholent. Crisp brown kishke and crisp potatoes.

That was Jewish cholent, our own. But when I lived in Warsaw, my sister-in-law made it differently. Hulled barley, fat flat rib, kidney beans, and potatoes. Simmer the meat with the beans and the barley, so as to boil away almost all water.

Add raw potatoes, salt, pepper, onion, of course, then wrap it up tightly and put into an oven, on a very low heat, 100 degrees Celsius, no more. It roasts for a whole day, then another – I turn the heat off for the night just in case – and on the third day the guests come and eat. As my birthday falls in February, when it's cold – I won't be making in the summer – I make cholent in the winter. For my birthday guests. They love it.

I completed an elementary school. My sister, who was two years older than me, went to a Jewish school in the Jewish quarter. An ordinary school, elementary, it was called at the time. It was at Lubartowska, far from home.

Because my father was a Bundist and above all he was a Jew. We were never ashamed of being Jews. Even today, when I strike up a friendship with someone, I tell them right away, so that there's no embarrassment when they say something about Jews, and here I am, a Jew. So my father believed we should go to a Jewish school.

I spent two years at the Jewish school together with my sister, even though they didn't want to admit me, I was only 5. But my sister went, so was I to sit at home? I went with her. And because the teacher was a friend of my mother's, she tolerated my presence in the classroom. I kept very quiet, unlike on the street. I kept very quiet so eventually she started asking me questions.

And then a decision was made that we should change the school because there was a Polish one right near our house, at Bernardynska, we wouldn't have to walk to the other side of town. So we transferred to a Polish elementary school number 9.

My sister was taken back a year because her Polish was poor. And I was admitted to first grade. In that school, I was a particularly shy kid. Quiet, calm. I went to the teacher and told her I didn't want to be in first grade, because I was bored.

That I could read and write, and count, so that perhaps I could be moved to second, to be together with my sister. Later I regretted it a bit when I saw how the first graders played, and there was none of that in the second.

But I went together with my sister and it was like that: I was small and skinny, but had a strong fighting spirit. I mean, at school I was quiet. But if someone stepped on my toes, I knew how defend myself. I was always ugly but I laughed a lot.

I always looked well in photos, I was photogenic. Trousers were unfashionable those days; I had a pair made by a tailor because I wanted to wear trousers. Elka was more similar to my mother's brothers, whom I didn't know. She was very non-photogenic, though a pretty girl. Brown-haired. She had plaits so thick you could barely grab them with your hand. She was tall, taller than our parents...

At first she was also slender. Only after turning 11 she put on weight, blossom. At 11 years old, she was 165 centimeters tall and weighed 70 kilograms. And if someone tried to pick up a fight with one, the other stood in her defense.

My sister irritated me a little. If we went for a walk to a park together and I disappeared from her sight, she'd run and around shouting, 'Where's my child!' I am her child! Well, but still we lived harmony, we were two sisters, we lived together.

We studied together, but it looked like this: when she was reading out a poem or anything to memorize it, I wasn't. I had already memorized it.

I was a very good student throughout school, straight As. I loved math, physics, chemistry. All science subjects, but my smooth talk shows I wasn't bad at Polish literature either. My essays were always ten pages long, the teacher always said, 'Write shorter ones!'

Because how long would it take her to read them if all were that long? We had our own religion teacher. The other girls had a priest, whom they loved very much and whom we loved as well. A

really good man. But we had our own [Jewish] religion teacher.

I had a grievance against her once, very serious. It was Easter and I came to school with kosher matzah with scrambled eggs. It happened so that I swapped that matzah with a friend of mine for a butter-and-ham sandwich. And that friend then told on me to the religion teacher.

The religion teacher put me to kneel in the corner. She explained to me later that I had committed a sin, more than a double one: not only did I eat ham; it was also with butter and bread, all of which is forbidden on a high holiday. A triple sin with a single sandwich! Isn't this horrible?

For thirty students in my class, there were seven Jews, and the history teacher never called us 'Jews' but always 'Israelites.' Every time she said that, I felt like someone slapped me in the face. Why Israelites? Why not Jews? I assumed she was a Jew-hater.

Today I think I was wrong, she simply tried not to hurt our feelings. But I couldn't study history. When I studied it, it went in this way and out that way, leaving little in the head. And she kept asking me, 'Szwarcowna, you're good at all other subjects, why aren't you good at history?'

What was I supposed to say? 'Because I don't like you, madam'? For the final report card, however, in order not to spoil it, she gave me a B instead of a C. I had all As and that single B. That I will never forget her, in the good sense, that she didn't want to hurt me.

And then it began. My tutor called my parents and told them, 'Because your daughter has been such a good student, she should go to gymnasium.' The tuition fee was forty zlotys a month. An unimaginable sum. I knew I wasn't good for giving private lessons, because it annoyed me that my pupil didn't know what I knew.

I knew that if I proved a good student, they'd reduce the fee after several months to just ten zlotys a month. But that was still a lot of money. So I sat down with my parents, like a grown-up with grown-ups, talked to them.

I told them I knew there was no money at home. If I went to work, I'd start earning. Otherwise, I'd be studying for four more years and there'd be even less money. And it was me who convinced my parents rather than the other way round. And I went to work.

Though a friend of my mother's believed I'd make a great dressmaker, judging by the dresses I made for my dolls, I said had no patience for that, and that I'd go mad before I made a dress. I better make hats, I said.

I went to make hats to a milliner. But because I was 13 and the age requirement for an official contract was 15, I didn't make any money until I turned 15. Except as tip from time to time for delivering a client's hat to her home.

My boss was such a person that she kept me in the shop until midnight. And there was still of a way to walk home. I worked near where we lived, one bus stop, let's say, but who used buses before the war. You always walked on foot.

Twenty groszy the single fare was a lot of money. Until one day my mother went to ask her, that I'm only 13, to let me go home earlier, and on that same day she kept me until after midnight, and she asks me whether I'm the only child that my mother is so protective towards me.

She herself had just one son and was really overprotective towards him. But I didn't matter. I don't know her name. I've never had a good memory for names, not that I've forgotten because of old age.

My last boss was the best one. I was already 15, so during those two years when I worked for free I had already learned something. When she took me, I could sign a proper contract. It was called an apprentice course.

I started actually making the hats. But not only that. As I had good visual memory, she'd send me on the street to look out for original designs. Every [milliner shop] had its own designs which were made in very short series. So I'd return to the shop and use a kind of rigid muslin to form a semblance of what I had spotted.

My boss was very satisfied with me, shortly before the war I was making thirty zlotys. So I was able to pay for myself. All those milliner shops were very elegant. All my bosses were Jewish, and I know that the last one survived the war. She lived in Warsaw at Waszyngtona Avenue.

I learned, don't remember from whom, that she still lived there, and I went there. She was glad I had survived, I was glad she had survived, and that was it.

My sister too had already gone to work by the time. Elka was serious, quiet, my opposite, because I was a little devil, which you can tell even today. She had a boyfriend, but believed he laughed a lot, was unserious.

She went to gymnasium after completing elementary school, but we didn't have money for that. Finally, after a year she gave up and went to work, first as a babysitter, and then she worked at some hops plant.

I had a boyfriend, he was my father's apprentice. Berek Rainer. When he started working for my father, he was 20, and I was 13. At first he treated me as the boss' daughter, but then, slowly, slowly, we became a couple.

He never proposed to me, never said he'd marry, but everyone laughed Szwarc was rearing himself a son-in-law. And shortly before the war within three months that boy lost both his parents. He had three younger siblings and had to take care of them. And he stayed in Lublin.

• During the war

The war broke out and everything ended. We didn't know yet what Hitler would do to the Jews. We knew it would be bad, but we didn't anticipate just how bad. When my father was fleeing east during the war, a friend of his wrote him that it was a pity my father had left because, as a councilor, he'd be on the Judenrat [9](#).

He'd be on the Judenrat and would be very happy sending Jews to camps and everywhere, right? A pity. How did people imagine that business?

My best friend was Andzia Borensztejn. On the eve of the outbreak of the war, they announced a call-up in Lublin. And the two of us were just returning from Bystrzyca, which was a small river. We were walking down Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street and someone made us a photo.

We saw those large call-up posters. And then I ask her, 'How do you think, Andzia, will you survive the war?' And she says, 'No, I won't.' 'And I will.' And that proved true. She didn't survive, I did.

My father was rather sickly, and my mother was terribly worried that if they took him – they were taking men as hostages – he wouldn't survive. And it was my mother who forced my father to flee from Lublin. Eastwards, beyond the Bug [1939 – 1942 the border river between Germany and USSR].

My father went with a group of friends and vanished. Others were sending letters, my father was sending nothing. My boyfriend ran the watchmaker's shop and German soldiers were coming to us.

One was telling me poor Jews had nothing to fear because Hitler was only interested in the rich ones. He didn't know himself what he was talking about. And one day it was so: it's after curfew, and there's a knocking on the door.

A soldier. He must have his watch because tomorrow he goes to the front. And the keys are with my boyfriend in the Jewish quarter at the other side of town. We tell him it's after curfew. He'll accompany me.

So my mother begs him to then escort me back, because what, I'll have to sleep at the shop? And so we're walking, in the night, through the town, there are guards everywhere, with dogs, German soldiers, and time after time they stop us.

Those dogs were trained: the dog stands in front of you, sideways, so that you can't pass. When the guard had been through – he talked only to the soldier, not me – he patted the dog, the dog stepped back.

When we got close to the Jewish quarter, there was no ghetto yet, it was really swarming with them. They were staging pogroms, all kinds of things. I went into the alley where my boyfriend lived. I started calling him.

Finally someone answers me. Who am I? I introduce myself with my full name and say I want to talk to Berek. 'Just a moment.' A gate opens, they let me in. I say, 'You have to go with me.' He told the others he might have to spend the night at my place, and off we went.

He put that watch together, and the soldier saw me off. He refused to see Berek off, though. 'What, I'll be walking like that the whole night?' he said. So Berek spent the night with us.

I remember one more picture from the occupation period. I was in Poland for only a short time, because the Germans entered in September, and in November I left in search of my father. So I remember, a German was walking down the street – an elderly man – and he dropped something.

So I, a well-mannered person, picked it up instinctively and ran to hand it to him. God, how a Polish woman got down on me. How she hurled abuse at me for lackeying the Germans. And I simply didn't think about that.

Then my mother comes to me one day at six in the morning. He wakes me up. 'You'll go to the headquarters and obtain a paper that you have to go to the border.' I say, 'Why me? My sister's older than me.' But my sister was saying all the time, 'I'll die because of the Germans,' she wasn't leaving the apartment at all.

I walked around, worked in the shop with Berek. I was the brave one, so it was me who'd go. I secured the paper, brought it home, and my mother says, 'Alright, and now pack your things and your father's things.'

And so: warm clothes for me and him, his winter coat, warm boots, for me too, all the watchmaker's tools, for what kind of a watchmaker are you when you don't have the tools? A gloomy, rainy day, you know how it is in November. Someone will take us across the Bug.

And they'll take us somewhere. Not true. They only took the money for getting you across the river, and on the other side they left you, and do what you want.

I traveled with strangers. The smugglers took us to a German checkpoint, because they had a deal with the Germans they'd rob us first and then we could go. First of all they asked who had a pass, it turned out only I had it.

And because it said they also had to assist me with my luggage, they said to me, 'Take your things and step aside.' Someone put his suitcase next to mine, he was delivering clothes for his wife, so that they didn't take it. On the next day they took us across the Bug. And left there.

We walked around in circles for the whole night. And as I have good visual memory, I kept telling them: 'Listen, we're walking in circles, returning to the Bug all the time. We must go straight ahead.' But who will listen to a teenage girl!

I was 18, so who was I, those were grown-up people, after all! Eventually, in the morning, we arrived at some village and spent the whole day there.

And in the evening I went to Brzesc [presently Belarus, city on Polish border, 200 km east of Warsaw] by train. I get off at the station and meet the man my father went with! He says, 'Your father is here!'

My father told me later, 'Yes, I felt on that rainy night that someone was going towards me.' Because I found my father, it was like that: it didn't make sense to return to the Germans. And it was impossible to bring my mother to that side.

My mother was born in Lublin, they wouldn't let her pass. If she had been born, say, in Brzesc... She could also pass if she married someone fictitiously. But those days a thing like a fictitious marriage was out of the question.

So we stayed with my father in Brzesc. There I went for some time to a Jewish school, learned in Yiddish about our beloved Stalin, even received an award at the end of the term. After which it turned out they were telling us to accept Soviet passports. Some people did.

And immediately they had to go into the interior, to Kazakhstan, other places... because "uncertain elements" couldn't stay near the border. And those who didn't accept the document, they were "potentially hostile elements", and had to be sent somewhere far.

They started preparing freight trains, the kind of ones you use to transport cattle. I had a friend in Brzesc who was courting me, wanted me to marry him and go away with him. Instead, he joined the army and died, I think. And he comes to me and says, 'Listen, they'll be taking you away!' I say, 'How do you know?'

'Those trains, they're preparing so many trains at the station.' And indeed they were. They came in the night, told us to pack our things and leave with them. I had stashed a medical insurance ID.

Birth year 1921, I added a dash, first I tried the ink so that the color matched, now it was a '4' and I was three years younger. Because I was afraid they'd separate me from my father. And so: families they sent to the north, to Komi [republic west of the Ural mountains], to Siberia, various places. And singles – to a camp.

- **In Komi**

We traveled for a month. At first by train, in the night. We'd stop somewhere and they'd bring us something to eat. A soup made of nettle or some other weed, we could draw some water.

At first they locked the cars and set up a semi-toilet in the middle. What – everyone will sit and look at the others looking at him? So we kept losing the locking rings. Until they gave it up and left the door unlocked. But no one ran away.

Where were we supposed to run without any papers? They'd have caught us right away. Then we sailed for so many days on a ship, a kind of hollowed out barge, there was one toilet on the top and that was it. Then they let us off in the taiga and we had to walk for some... Twenty five kilometers? Into the taiga.

There we lived in barracks, some twenty families per barrack. Those who had sheets, had sheets; those who did not, did not. And work, usually in the forest. All women didn't have their period for a year after coming to Komi.

The different climate. I was a maiden, I knew I wasn't pregnant, but the married ones were worried. And there, in Komi, we stayed in the forest for something like two years.

Perhaps it's the flow of time that it seems to me like ten years, but no. And then they let us go to the countryside. And in the countryside we started working as watchmakers. I also worked as a watchmaker. I could install a spring, clean a watch.

But I didn't do much because my father never wanted to agree for me to be a watchmaker. I was for a total of four years in Komi with my father.

The local 'folklore' is the more pleasant part of the story. We rented a room and lived with a family. Unfortunately, we had to sleep together because we had one blanket, one pillow, and one bed. The blanket and pillow were ours.

Later they gave us a little single-room house, we made a partition with boards, and here you worked and there you slept. At the side stood an iron stove that during the winter you heated around the clock. With wood of course. We kept chopping and sawing wood.

The houses there were built with logs. A stove in front and a bread oven. Under the house there was a clearance, a meter and half tall. If there was a pig or a cow, it stood there, underneath.

The clearance had to be there because the stove not to stand on the ground because it would have collapsed. It would collapse during the spring thaw. There had to be some isolation between the

oven and the living room.

That isolation was a pigsty or a cow shed. Moss was stuffed between the logs, and in the winter, when it was -50 degrees Celsius outside, those houses were very warm. Wood is a poor conductor.

The windows were tiny, just two vents, but they didn't open them during the winter at all, couldn't imagine you could air the house. The house is a semi. You enter from both sides up the stairs to a hallway where there stand barrels with sauerkraut, barrels with cranberry, because you store cranberry in spring water during the winter, and so you do with blueberries.

Dried mushrooms hanging from the ceiling. Salted mushrooms. Huge numbers of brooms. All kinds of things, everything you can store, stood in that hallway. The toilet is behind a partition wall, there's a bench made with wood blocks, you sit on it, and there, in the bottom... hmm... it all drops there. There's even no stink. In the summer you spill it over with something, in the winter it freezes.

From there you enter the room. The winter part has a large bread oven. Where I was were two rooms: one tiny one where we lived, and another one a little bit larger. The floor is clean, scrubbed so you can lie on it, no problem, and the oven is covered with bearskin coats. And there you can sleep. It's snug-as-a-bug-in-a-rug there. It's the top part, up under the ceiling.

That's the winter part. The summer one is similar, only there's no oven. There are plenty of bugs, though, because it's warm. So in the middle of the winter, during the worst cold, they move to the summer part for a couple of days and here it all freezes out. For a couple of years you have nothing to worry about, no bedbugs, no cockroaches. Nothing.

One more thing about those houses. Each had its own bathhouse. But the bathhouse was a hundred and fifty meters from the house. Also made with logs. You entered a hall where you drew water to barrels, because otherwise it would freeze.

The surface was frozen anyway. In the main room there were large holes in the walls which normally you plugged with pegs, but when there was fire under the round stone oven into which a huge cauldron with water was set, you had to unplug them to let the smoke out. That's why it was a black bath, 'chyornaya banya,' because the walls were all in soot.

You burned wood until the stones were red hot, and after all wood had been burned, when there was no more smother, you plugged all the holes, brought the cold water from the hall in bowls, poured it onto the stones and made a steam bath... like hell! And now: who will endure for how long. They sat at the very top. I sat at the bottom and thought I'd die! And it's like this: everyone bathes together.

'What, you want to bathe alone, and who'll wash your back?' So there went the peasant, his wife with a three-month child on her hand, they entered the bathhouse. Then I jumped in, didn't last long, I felt like water was running from my eyes, nose, ears. And I ran the hundred and fifty meters back home. Who thought about dressing! The housewife went out in an undershirt, naked and barefoot.

Almost -50 degrees Celsius. He in his underpants, barefoot and naked. The baby had a diaper. And so you went the hundred and fifty meters home. And only there you could catch your breath, dry

yourself, get dressed. And you didn't catch cold. You were so hot you didn't have time to freeze.

When one time I popped out while washing the floor to throw out the water, the way I was dressed and barefoot, the next day I had 40 degrees Celsius fever. A Russian woman who lived with us applied the following remedy: one third glass of spirit, two thirds hot tea. And an aspirin. She told me drink it. And the next day I had no fever. Miraculous therapy. My father caught rose of the face.

A very dangerous disease. When he went to a doctor, she gave him Prontozil, the first sulphamide; it tinted your pee red. And she told him to use the common, folk method – take a copybook cover, red or blue, pour a lot of chalk on it, cover the face, wrap around so that it didn't slip off, draw the curtains. And my father got well. When I got twilight blindness, the village women told me I had to have seal fat and they brought me some as well.

It was a shaking kind of jelly, almost transparent, amber-colored. Dripping with stinking, fish oil. And believe me, after the first spoon of that fat I started seeing again. But you don't throw something as good as this away. I fried potatoes on it; they had a fish aroma, yummy.

It was like that: you work, but in the summer they send everyone to the forest for the forest produce. I fell in love with the forest only in the taiga. Most of the trees there are of the northern variety, spruces. They were sky-high.

Covered to half-height with gray moss, they looked like standing whitebeards. Beautiful! There were water holes, swamps. There was permafrost. During the heat of the summer there was still snow in the deep ravines. Doesn't it look strange? Berries larger than cherries. It was there that I saw the bog bilberries for the first time.

When it's, say, harvest time, everyone goes to help. The first time I took a sickle, I cut myself here and I still have a mark. I cut it to the bone. Because I couldn't operate the sickle, I handled it the wrong way.

They said I didn't deserve to eat bread if I couldn't harvest it. No peasant there owns his own cow. He doesn't because during the two summer months he won't be able to mow enough grass for food and litter.

So, if the family has many members, he owns half a cow. If the family has few members, he owns quarter of a cow. What does it mean? It doesn't mean the cow is today here and tomorrow there, because everyone would count on the other to feed it and the cow would starve to death.

The cow spends one week with one farmer, one with the other one, one with the third one, and so on. And when it goes to graze, it knows perfectly well: this barn is closed, so it goes to the other one, the second one is closed, she goes to the third one.

They milk those cows but don't know what to do with the milk. They'll pour some for the dog, some for the cat, drink some themselves, and in the winter freeze the rest. They take a one liter bowl, pour milk into it and put the bowl into snow.

The milk freezes, you shake it out of the bowl and put deep into snow, so that the dogs don't reach it. In the winter, you dig it out and melt it. I remember how once a peasant brought a sack in return for repairing his watch.

My father says, 'You'll see it's milk he brought.' 'In a sack?' I ask. And the guy shakes out ten pieces of milk. So I did like that: I put the whole ten liters to curdle. I gathered the cream and made a bit of butter.

With the rest I made curd cheese. How happy we were. We had cheese, we had butter. And the peasants looked at us puzzled. And if that were not enough, my friend's son took all the whey, mixed it with buttermilk, we drank some, he took the rest, went to the train station and sold it for some kopeks per glass. And he made some money. So you can make do everywhere if only you want to.

Once they gave us a patch of land. It's called a 'whole,' land that hasn't been cultivated yet. We planted some potatoes, and had our own. How many did I get? Ten kilograms to plant? You were hungry...

So you cut those potatoes in half. There are many spots on one side, so you cut that part off and planted it carefully on a handful of ash. The rest you ate. And from those cut-off pieces – those were Michurin's varieties – I obtained a huge amount of potatoes.

There were four or five tubers under each plant. You don't wait there for them to ripen in the soil because in September temperature already falls below zero degrees Celsius. You plant them in late June and you have to pick them in late July, and each potato weighs almost one kilogram.

I knew the Komi language, or Zyrian. So they said to me, 'Te, Aniuta, achid mort, you're our guy. You speak our language.' They treated me like one of their own, taught me all kinds of things.

How to salt the mushrooms, because for them, no mushroom is poisonous. Either you have to boil them several times, changing the water each time because the poison moves to the water, or place them in a sack and put the sack into fresh water, and the poison will rinse away. They have a thousand ways. The boiled mushrooms are then heavily salted.

There's no dill, for where would they be supposed to take it from, in fact no spices whatsoever. In the winter, when I already had my own potatoes, when I boiled them and added a handful of those salty mushrooms, it was a feast! Who would have thought.

If you managed to get hold of some rutabaga in the summer, you did like this: you peeled it, cut into pieces, stuffed into a pot, wrapped the pot up in rags, in the morning placed the pot in the oven, and went to work.

When you returned in the evening, that rutabaga looked like cholent! It was dark, sweet as honey. Fantastic! I don't know whether I'd eat it today, but I loved it then!

When you repair a watch, you have to put it on, carry around to see how it works, what's wrong with it. I went to the forest and I come back without the frame with the glass. My God, it's somebody's watch! What am I to do? They'll kill us. I followed my own tracks back to the forest. And there it was! Miracles happen.

The river was beautiful. Vychegda, much broader than our Vistula and very deep. We, a team of ten girls, worked for some time making bricks. That was work for women. You had to dig out the clay, tread it through with water... horrible work.

Then you formed a brick, placed it in a frame so that it dried, discarded the frame and only then fired the brick. Then they gave us a horse to tread on the clay. Ten girls stood around him with whips lest it jumped out of that hole, because it wasn't stupid to tread on coal.

It was a mare and she left a colt in the stable. So they told us to milk her because otherwise she'd get sick. No one wanted to do it, only I agreed. And when I tried the milk, it was very good. Something like tea with milk and sugar.

But when the girls started teasing me, I poured it all out, though with regret because it was really good. It was then that I understood what they said there.

That a bucket of water is a kilogram of bread, and a ton of water is a kilogram of fatback. I didn't drink a bucket of water, but when we sat in the evening around the samovar to drink tea... it wasn't really tea, it was a kind of herbal tea, made with remnants from various fruits if you had made a compote or whatever.

Dried peelings, stones and pips, all that was pressed together, brewed, and you had a kind of sour tea. And if we sat and drank like that, we could easily drink a liter each. What's a liter? You drank it and you felt full, didn't you?

Six hundred grams of bread, our daily allowance, was a small piece. And my father forced me to divide that into three and have a thin slice of bread three times a day. So that I don't eat it all right away because I'd be hungry for the rest of the day.

And the soup in the canteen was very good. As the Russians say, 'Shchi da kasha, pishcha nasha.' [Shchi and kasha is our food]. Shchi is cabbage soup, and kasha is groats. Cabbage soup was a bit of water with two cabbage leaves, we ate the cabbage, but what to do with the water? And kasha... it was the first time I saw oat groats.

They were clumped together into a mass, they gave you some with a large spoon, you made a hole in the middle and it was just enough for a spoon of oil. Mmm... How good it was! You dipped every spoonful of kasha in that oil and ate.

Sometimes they gave us fried cod. Stinking. I can't eat fish, I feel sick right away. But my father stood over me, 'Eat, or you'll be hungry, eat, you must have strength.'

That was the life in freedom. Because we were in exile, but free. My husband [Borys Mass] spent several years in a [Soviet] camp. It was like that: you have to cut so many trees, so many cubic meters.

If he cut that many, he got his allotment of bread, some unsweetened coffee in the morning and evening, and a spoonful of soup for lunch. A table spoon, I mean, not a ladle... Of some wish-wash thin cabbage soup.

If he did more than the quota was, he got an extra piece of bread. But if he did less, he got less. The weaker you were, the less you did, and the less you did, the more hungry you were and the less you did. People eventually starved to death. That's how it looked in the camps.

Once we were trimming a tree trunk, one guy stood behind another, and when the one in front stepped back - the axes were sharpened every night, they cut themselves - the other took a

swing... and cut half of his buttock off. Fortunately, not entirely.

They took him to a hospital, sewed up and it grew back together. But he spent a month in a hospital. And there was also an investigation whether that wasn't an act of sabotage. We, the female brigade, had a similar story. We were working in the forest, grubbing out small trees.

The area is marshy, of course, there's a rivulet, a narrow one, if you take a good run-up, you'll jump over.

But it's deep, there's permafrost there, so it washes it away deeper and deeper. It meanders and we have to cut and grub out all the trees around it because there'll be a meadow here. We threw the trees over the water to bridge it.

We were taught to keep our axes behind our back, tucked behind the belt. You mustn't carry the axe in your hand because it's very sharp. The slightest loss of balance and a girl could cut herself.

One was passing over the river and stepped on a free branch. And fell into water. We ran to pull her out, and it was deep. She went with her head down. We pull her out, and she cries: she's lost her axe. She pulls her leg out of the water, and the boot is all bloody.

Blood trickling out of it. We look, and she had stuffed her axe right into the boot. So we say, it's five kilometers home, as long as it doesn't hurt you yet, we made a tourniquet with handkerchiefs, for what else did we have? We took her under the arms and went running home.

She walked some two kilometers herself, and then we had to carry her. She was in a hospital for a month. Sewing up and so on and we dived for the axe the following day and we found it. But still there was an official investigation, how did it happen that she had lost the axe in the first place?

Why was the axe in the hand instead of behind the belt? Sabotage! It was frightening.

I had a very close relationship with my mother, also a telepathic one. One story: I caught a cold before the war, got very high fever. And it turned out I had pleural exudate. I was ill for a very long time then. I was in bed for almost eleven weeks.

I put on eleven kilograms of weight because that's how they fed me. Then I went to Miedzeszyn, there was a Bund sanatorium there. There I caught quinsy, had an ulcer in my throat. I was choking. And that last night, the worst one, I was pacing around the room and thinking: if only my mother was here, she'd surely help me.

And I hadn't written home I was sick. I didn't want them to worry. Besides, what am I, being sick while in sanatorium? And my father woke up in the night, my mother stands by the window and says, 'You know, I feel she's choking there.' And she sent me a wire.

The ulcer burst in the morning. Another time it was a different kind of story. That was during the war. We were in Komi, two thousand kilometers from Lublin. I remember, it was April 1943, we were sitting besides a smoking lamp and reading.

My host said, 'Aniuta, if someone comes, take a note.' And left. They never lock the door there. And a moment later I hear how the door opens and closes, and I hear steps. I was engrossed in reading, so I raised my head and said, 'Is it mum?'

And only my father's astounded look made me realize... What am I saying? Have I gone mad? But after the war, after I had returned home, I found out that it was at that time that my mother was murdered in Belzec [10](#). I don't remember the day, but it was April 1943.

So, dying, she said goodbye to me. Whether she was happy we'd survive, I don't know. But I did receive her last thought.

There was one Polish guy up there in the north, Piotr Kobzan, I fell deeply in love with him. But he joined the Anders army [11](#) and later wrote me on his way that it was because of me. He was a career cadet officer. And I was a great patriot, I was telling him I'd join the army myself if it weren't for my father. And my beloved felt embarrassed, he went to fight, only because of me.

Well, obviously I wasn't meant to marry a Pole. After the war, his family was looking for him. He was from the Vilnius region, and I even wondered whether I should write them to tell them what I knew. But I already had a husband and a baby, and I thought, and what if he decides to contact me?

Returning to those Komi peasants. Were they bad people? No! People like people. A mixed lot. First of all, the kind of teeth they had I haven't seen anywhere else. All their life they chew tree resin.

Just like it's fashionable here to chew American bubble gum. They collect it when it congeals slightly on a spruce. It cleans the teeth and protects them. Even old people have white, strong teeth there. In the spring, it's birch juice: you cut a birch like you cut a tree to collect resin, hang a bucket, and drink the juice that has dripped into it. That was really good!

And if you walked or rode through the forest, the world was beautiful! The trees all in snow, the roads white. And I sang, sang out loud, because I used to have a very nice voice. Soprano. The world was beautiful, so what that it was hungry, cold, and far from home?

White nights, superb. And the northern lights. It's so wonderful. The colorful, beautiful curtain hanging in the sky. You saw many things. And what you saw, no one will take away from you. Everything there was interesting.

I could go on and on... Then Sikorski [12](#) and Wanda Wasilewska [13](#) finally arranged for us to be released from Komi. In 1944 people were going where they wanted. Some went to Central Asia, and that was really stupid.

From the northern climate into the sweltering heat, to Tashkent. And some didn't survive that change of climate. We decided we wouldn't go to Asia but closer to Poland, so Ukraine at most. At first we worked on a farm, or rather a kolkhoz [14](#), in Ukraine.

Near Bakhmach [small town 100 km north-east of Kiev]. It was two hours' way to town. Because there were no horses following the German occupation, we drove cows. You yoked a pair of cows and they pulled the cart.

We were hungry as usual, I tried to milk a cow in the field. But either I didn't know how or she didn't want to give milk to a stranger. In fact, they don't use boiled milk there. It's melted milk, they call it 'toplyenoye.' [Russian for heated] When you take milk out of the bread oven, there's a skin of butter on the surface. Melted butter and brown milk. I didn't like it.

Ukraine was beautiful. I loved to sing. And they sing so much there. Like the lead singer, the 'zapevaylo' they call him. It's like in the army: one soldier starts to sing and the others follow.

The same was here. One girl sings first, the others follow. A strong alto is the first voice. I was a soprano, but such a powerful one I had to be the first voice because otherwise I drowned the soprano out. Overall, to be honest, I received no harm from the Ukrainians.

But I don't like them. I don't like them for the UPA gangs [15](#) and all that. Though they didn't harm me... But when I hear that we [the Poles] don't love the Russians, I think to myself: my God, you don't have to like your neighbor, but you have to live in harmony with him, and we can't do that.

• My husband

We spent the summer in that kolkhoz. Then they allowed us to move to the village, so we moved there to work as watchmakers. But soon we decided there wasn't much to do there and it was decided that my father would go to Bakhmach.

He went there and at the station got all confused: where he should go, what he should do. He met a young man at the station. The man saw that my father stood helpless, so he asked him in Russian whether he was looking for something.

When he heard my father's Russian, he switched to Polish. But my father's Polish wasn't much better. So they switched to Yiddish and they were home. That young man told my father where he should go, what he should arrange.

Upon his return, my father told me he had met a very good man at the station, his name was Mass, and that he liked him very much for helping him. And as I have good intuition, I thought, 'That Mass will be my husband.'

We moved to Bakhmach, and there was a sugar-making kolkhoz there. I knew that guy Mass worked there. There were two girls from Poland there against thirty boys. So when I suddenly turned up, the boys immediately beset me.

And that boy Mass isn't showing up! So I thought, 'You scoundrel! I can do without it!' I started meeting another boy and suddenly there turns up Mass. I still remember that unbuttoned shirt and freckled chest. He said hello and went.

Oh, so you're like that? Okay, no big deal. But then any time he learned I was to visit friends on Sunday, he'd show up there. And as I was meeting another, he always crossed our path. And my then-boyfriend started pulling out. So I thought, 'Well, what kind of a boyfriend are you if you don't fight for me?' And so I started meeting Mass.

And then he proposed to me. And that's how I met my husband. Those features, besides the physical looks, that I had chosen at the age of 13 that my boyfriend should have, he had them all. Strong will, a sense of humor, that's very important, and a good ear, because I used to sing a lot.

What else can I say? My husband's name was Borys Mass. He was born 10th December 1910 in Warsaw. In fact, he spoke Polish better than Yiddish. He was brought up in a rather progressive family... How to say that?

He knew more and was more religious than myself. Because his family, though seemingly assimilated, cared more about religion than mine. They were rather poor.

He completed the Wawelberg college before the war, it was a very good school for mechanics (which proved useful to him during the war). He worked as a mechanic, then he moved to a textile plant where he worked as accountant.

They lived in Warsaw at Leszno Street. It was such a large apartment that if the phone rang in the anteroom, they were seldom in time from the living room to pick it up. I don't know why they didn't install the phone in the living room.

My husband had three sisters, all younger than him. The first sister, Emilia Mass, completed a gymnasium run by nuns. And by mistake, when filling out the graduation certificates, instead of 'Mosaic denomination,' they wrote 'Roman-Catholic.'

She didn't continue her studies, she started working as a seamstress. Her name after the war was Helena Marganiec. It's an interesting story. Under her own name, as Emilia Mass, she was pulled out of the Warsaw ghetto [16](#). And she was caught by the Germans in a street round-up.

And when she sat in a cell waiting whether they'd send her to Germany for forced labor [17](#) or anything else, she sat with a Polish woman. And that woman cried that she wanted to go to Germany so much, that she'd have it good there, but she had epilepsy and they wouldn't let her.

So they swapped their papers. That woman went to Germany as Emilia Mass, and my husband's sister became Helena Marganiec.

The second sister, Marysia – my younger daughter is her namesake – studied in Warsaw and became a bacteriologist. She was murdered in Bialystok. When the Germans entered [in 1941], they didn't look at who was Jewish and who wasn't but killed everyone at the hospital – doctors, everyone – and her too.

And the youngest one, Wanda Mass, she started her studies before the war but earned her psychology degree only after the war. She left the ghetto using the same ID as her elder sister. And she became Emilia.

Mass they changed to Majewska, so Emilia Wanda Majewska. The oldest one and the youngest one survived. On the Aryan side, thanks to Wladzia. Our Polish 'sister-in-law.' She pulled her out of the ghetto, but she wasn't in time to pull out the parents.

They spoke poor Polish, so they would have been conspicuous anyway. But she tried. But the mother had been taken to Treblinka [18](#) and the father didn't want to leave the ghetto, wanted to join his wife. So my husband's parents both died.

My husband believed that the eldest one, Emilia-Helena, had survived. She had brown hair and didn't look like a Jewess, plus that Roman-Catholic school diploma... Yet the second one survived too, thanks to a Pole, and he didn't know that.

They survived the war and neither married, they lived all together and were happy. At first they lived in Gliwice [industrial city in the Upper Silesia region, 300 km south-west of Warsaw], then the younger one got a job as teacher in Warsaw.

They found a burned-out house at Narbutta Street in Warsaw, took a part of an apartment they renovated with our help, and moved in there. And after they had renovated it, the pre-war housing cooperative showed up and took over the house.

- **After the war**

I remember, in Ukraine, there was a loudspeaker in every house, always on. And suddenly, at three in the morning, Stalin spoke. He said an agreement had been signed, the war was over.

When the war was over, the whole village took to the streets. At first we drank moonshine, because that was all they had. From three in the morning to twelve noon I drank moonshine.

At twelve noon the moonshine ended, they started drinking beer. I don't like beer... So I said to myself, 'Anka, you're drunk, go to sleep.' God! How much we drank then! Everyone with everyone. Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, refugees... People were kissing each other and drinking on the street. The war was over. Wasn't it? That was joy.

But they didn't let us go just then. We left only the following year, 1946. They said if you couldn't prove you were Polish, you couldn't go. And they had taken whatever IDs we had. Only I had hidden the medical insurance ID.

When I showed it to them, I thought they'd kill me [out of wrath]. The NKVD [19](#), I mean. But they couldn't do anything. And so we returned home. They sent us to Lower Silesia [20](#), to Rychbach...

Originally the town had a different name, then it was called Rychbach, and eventually it was renamed to Dzierzoniow. To honor Dzerzhinsky. [Editor's note: contrary to what Mrs. Mass believes, it was called so to honor Jan Dzierzon (1811-1906), the parish priest of the church of Karlowice, Europe's most outstanding apiculturist of the time].

Very many Jews had come from the Soviet Union, and [Dzierzoniow] was full of them. My husband worked in a textile plant. Then he started working with my father as a watchmaker.

My father was a member of the Bund but when the Bund merged with the PZPR [21](#), he didn't join. In 1948, when Israel was founded, many Jews started leaving. In 1949, his sisters brought my husband to Warsaw and he started working in the accounting department of the Office of the Council of Ministers [URM].

In 1950, we [Mrs. Mass with her daughters and then her father] moved to Warsaw. My husband wasn't a party member, but he managed to get a job at the Office of the Council of Ministers. We lived in the Zoliborz neighborhood.

Then we moved to our second apartment, and then here [Mrs. Mass's present dwelling place]. For a short time in 1968, during the anti-Semitic campaign [22](#), my husband left the URM and worked at the Measures and Weights Office on Filtrowa.

He spent perhaps a year there, and then they brought him back to the URM. My father, in turn, upon coming to Warsaw didn't have a job for a year. The doctor said it wasn't Parkinson [Parkinson's disease] but his hands and the head slightly too were shaking.

And no one wanted to give him a job, because what kind of a watchmaker are you when your hands are shaking. Eventually, a certain jeweler gave him a job as watchmaker, and he worked there almost until his death.

He was active until the very end at the TSKZ [23](#). When my father died, on 30th December 1959, and I notified them, no one came for the funeral. No one from the TSKZ was present. I felt a bit sad, I thought: he was such an activist and all...

Me and my husband got married after returning to Poland. And a daughter was already on the way. I believed we should have four children. Because if my husband's sisters have no kids, I should have more, but my husband didn't want to.

I had light deliveries, could go on. But my husband worked, and I didn't. He provided for us. That's how it looked. I have two daughters, Irena and Marysia, and three grandchildren. Irena was born 30th October 1946, and Marysia 18th April 1949.

When I was pregnant with my second daughter – in Dzierzoniow, after the war – one of the tenants in our house was a young man who was a shoet and also made circumcisions for the whole Wroclaw province. And he asks me, 'What will you do if it's a son?' And I say, 'There'll be no circumcision.' The war taught us that it's a distinguishing mark.

If I lived in Israel, among Jews – yes. But here – no. How many Jews on the Aryan side died, perished because of that? I thought his eyes would pop out, so angry he was at me for saying that. Well, but I delivered a daughter and the case was closed.

Irena completed a high school, and Marysia has a law degree from the Warsaw University. And she has also recently completed a two-year psychology course. Irena is a healer and works three times a week in her son's shop.

Marysia held a directorial position at the bank PKO SA [one of the biggest banks in Poland], and today she's retired and she's involved in... things of beauty, her latest hobby are watercolors. Irena has one son, Radoslaw Adam Zabawa.

He was born in 1978. He runs a store called Fraida where you can buy all kinds of New Age stuff, for healers, and so on. He completed a high school but didn't want to take the graduation exams. Marysia has two kids, Katarzyna Liwia Bucyk, born in 1977, and Marek Winicjusz Bucyk, born in 1981.

My whole family perished. Some cousin of my father's from Przedborz had survived, he was looking for relatives through press ads after the war. But when he came to Poland in 1946 and got hold of that newspaper, it was already a year old.

He was no longer there. Whether he left to America or somewhere else, I don't know. All the others perished, friends, relatives, everyone. In Lublin we were on friendly terms with the caretaker of our house. He helped my mother in the ghetto, brought her food, and so on.

So after the war I wrote to the Lublin city hall to ask about my family, and stated his name as the person who might know something. It turned out he had landed in Gdansk. He didn't write us, but they sent us his testimony that my mother and sister had gone to Majdanek [24](#).

After some time it turned out it wasn't Majdanek but Belzec. I learned from a distant [maternal] cousin of mine who had survived the war in Lublin. He was given shelter to by a Polish woman whom he later married, he changed his name from Rot to Rotkowski.

He came to Dzierzoniow and I met him. I don't know whether he later broke off any ties with us because he didn't want his children to know he was Jewish? Or wasn't there enough enthusiasm from my side?

In any case, I know nothing more about that this sole, distant cousin who survived the war in Poland. I survived only because my mother wanted me to go and search for my father. Had I stayed at home, I'd have faced the same fate as all others.

My sister didn't have Semitic looks, could have survived, but she didn't want to leave our mother. I don't return to that these days, I didn't even tell my children much. I didn't want them to share my pain. I didn't want them to experience all that. Telling the story, I'd be conveying the emotions.

My daughters knew from the very beginning they were Jewish, we never made it a secret, and also my grandchildren know they are half-blood Jews. Or even full-blood ones according to Israeli laws, because their mothers are Jewish.

My elder grandson feels half-Jewish, half-Polish. My younger daughter's children don't feel Jewish, but my granddaughter told her boyfriend she had Jewish roots. He said to that his roots were Romany.

Marysia got married, took a civil marriage, and changed her religion for the father-in-law. She didn't even tell us. She knew I wouldn't react, but that her father would be angry. I learned only after my husband's death. The grandchildren have all been baptized. Even Irena's daughter. She baptized him so that he's no different from the other kids at school.

After the war I completely accidentally ran into Frajnd, my pre-war friend from Lublin, two years younger than me. He left in the 1950s, in the early days of Israel. He left with his two kids. So he had a hard life there. And because he's a textile plant worker by profession, he eventually got a job at a plant and his life changed for the better.

After he left for Israel, we lost contact, my husband worked for the government, couldn't show he had any contacts with Israel. We had no relatives there, there was no one to write to.

I've never joined at Zionist organization. I really wish Israel the best, because it's the Jewish state. But I believe you can't come after two thousand years and say: this is my land. We see what's going on there. I don't know who's to blame, the Jews or the Arabs. It's certainly both.

But a nation that suffered the worst moments because of racial discrimination should not treat other people like that. There was a time, after the war, when there was talk of us emigrating to Israel. But my husband's sisters lived with that quasi-sister-in-law of theirs and didn't want to leave her.

And my husband didn't want to leave his sisters. Then we could go to Australia, we even received the immigrant visa promises. But it was the same story: they didn't want to go. We gave our children, already grown-up then, a free hand.

If you want to go, go. But then they didn't want to go to a strange country. And so we stayed in Poland. Is it good or bad? Hard to say. I manage, my daughters manage too, don't they? So I don't complain.

Young people today have no idea what communism was about, they only want to hear about the empty store shelves. But everyone had a job. 'Do or don't, it's two thousand every month.'

Everyone had an apartment, you got it for free. I had a month's summer leave, went on vacation. As a non-working mother with two children. Only they didn't let us go abroad. Jews weren't allowed to go abroad.

My husband worked at the Office of the Council of Ministers, and if he's a Jew, then certainly a Zionist. But he never joined the party. People believe today that it was Solidarity [25](#) that restored capitalism in Poland. Solidarity wanted communism with a human face. 'Socialism yes, distortions no.' And young people today are for what's happening, and the old are against it. But we're passing away anyway.

I'm already old, I'll be 85 in February 2006! Isn't that old? I'm also a war veteran today for spending all those years in the Soviet Union. I'm not one of the Children of the Holocaust [26](#), I was grown-up.

Though I was lazy all my life, I never had time to yield to laziness. At first I studied, then I went to work, worked with the crochet, knitted. You made a shawl collar, kimono sleeves – a dressing gown.

A great lady, upon getting up from bed or when she was sick, put on a dressing gown. The material cost me two zlotys, and I put that into a shop for ten. And I kept doing something.

If I had any free time, I liked to read. Then there was my husband to take care of, the house... Now that I've been left alone I no longer have to do anything, I will prepare food for several days in advance, won't I? I haven't had to clean either now that I don't have a dog anymore.

I'll vacuum clean once a week. So I can finally indulge in laziness. I have the right to do that now, haven't I?

We spent almost fifty years together with my husband and we lived in harmony. He really was a good man, my father was right. My intuition that he'd be my husband proved true. My husband died twelve years ago [1993].

Even Jews who never experienced the war don't realize what it means to lose not only your relatives and friends but to lose the whole Jewish-Polish folklore. Russian Jews are different, Israel is completely different, America is different. There'll be no Jewish folklore in Poland anymore. Never. And this 'never' literally sits deep in my heart and hurts me.

Recipes:

For Whitsunday [Shavuot] you made a cheesecake. Around June. Take half kilogram of cottage cheese, a quarter kilogram of butter, mince. Add half glass of sugar, some aroma, whisk in an egg... Heat up slowly until the mixture boils. When it does, it becomes transparent. You take it off the heat, and for half kilogram add a spoon of either potato flour or pudding with a little bit of

water, and put it away for a moment to thicken. Then you line up the form with butter cookies, pour in the cheese mixture, and put away. After it has chilled, you put in a fridge.

And for many years, as long as my father lived, I had gefilte fish on Saturday. Of vegetables, you take: a bit of parsley, a lot of carrot, and even more onion. At least a tablespoon of sugar per one kilogram of fish. A lot of pepper. Fish should be relatively salty, sweet, and peppery. You hash raw fish with onion. For a kilogram of fish, two or three eggs, to hold it all together. We also added matzah flour. And you cook it. I make compressed balls and put them into boiling water with vegetables. Fish should cook for two hours. No one mixes fish with a spoon. You shake the pot lightly. When it's cooked, you take the fish out carefully and leave the sauce. It will turn into aspic automatically if you've added carp's head. Carp's head is the Jewish treasure. At home, everyone fought for the head. It's fatter and better than any other part.

But when Grandmother prepared meat, it was the Jewish way. There was a wooden box, with walls, legs, and a groove for the juice to trickle. After washing the meat, you salt it thoroughly from six sides and put away for two hours. Then you rinse it and only then cook. Whether my mother did it like that, I don't remember, but my grandmother certainly did.

It was worse when she prepared liver. First she salted it well, then – we had a coal stove – she put it on the coals to roast, so that there was no blood, and only then started to fry. As a result, liver was always tough. But good. Salty, good. And tough – well, what could you do. That was the way they prepared it.

My mother prepared all kinds of things. Goose necks. Mince flour with poultry fat, add salt and pepper, stuff the neck with it and cook in broth. Yummy! Or sweet rice. Cooked with raisins or apples, with eggs, and casseroled. Cooked noodles, mixed with eggs, layered with fruit like a layer cake, and baked sweet. When my mother made something like that and I took it to work, I had to take a really large chunk because all my colleagues wanted me to treat them. Because it was really very good.

Dumplings with matzah flour. To serve four, you take half a liter of water, four eggs, some chopped onion fried on poultry fat, add salt and pepper to taste, and matzah flour about a cup, a cup and half. This is at first rather runny, but after it has stood for some time with the matzah flour, it gets thicker and you can form dumplings. I also add a pinch of baking soda. You cook it in salted water, and then pour broth over it. This is an Easter dish.

My mother also made potatoes to accompany chicken soup. Potato pancakes. You make it like that: one mid-sized potato per person and one eggs per person. You mix the cooked potato with the egg, salt, pepper, to taste of course, add a beaten egg white, and fry the pancakes on fat. Then you pour chicken soup over it. This is an elegant potato dish for a festive chicken soup, not for Easter, but for Sabbath.

My mother also made a buckwheat groats pie. She certainly made it with rough puff pastry. She cooked the groats beforehand. Then she roasted them with onion. That she baked and cut into pieces, and it didn't fall apart, it held together, so I guess she added eggs. It was quite good.

Chopped liver with egg and onion, fried liver of course, always with chicken fat, very good. Kidney beans cooked and then minced – to hull it – in a mincer, and then with egg and onion, also other

things. Those were the appetizers, my mother made them. Sometimes she fried a piece of meat, because my father could abstain from eating for the whole day but dinner had to be with all the supplements, an hors d'oeuvre, and dessert.

You made all kinds of things. My mother made something that today would be regarded as a poor man's dish. If she had any stale bread or challah, she cut it into pieces, poured boiling water over it, added salt and a piece of butter. That's a kind of poor man's soup. For me, it was great. Not because she made it out of poverty, she simply had various uses for that stale bread. And war taught me that you never throw bread away.

My grandmother made borsht. She never cooked it with raw beets, but always pickled them first. And she didn't season it – as the Poles do – with cream, but with egg yolks. Cream was forbidden because that would have made the soup a dairy dish. That borsht was like wine. My mother always said, 'Mum, how many yolks have you added?' 'Not many, only two!' came the answer. Eggs used to be cheap. For three eggs you could buy a pack of cigarettes.

The best thing was matzebrei, my daughters like it to this day. Matzebrei means 'fried matzah' in German [editor's note: actually 'matzah mash']. I make a lot of onion with fat, chicken fat is the best, goose fat as a last resort, you have to brown the onion a bit, so that it gives off the scent. You add soaked, broken matzah, fry it a little so that the matzah absorbs the salt, pepper and fat, then you add an egg, mix it all, and you have a delicious dish.

We made cholent, the classic one, with kishke. My mother peeled the potatoes, onion was added too, of course. Salt, pepper to taste. You bought beef intestine by the meter, with suet on the surface. My mother stuffed the intestine with flour, salt, and pepper, and – stuffing – turned the suet side inside. She sewed up the ends. Then she scalded it again and cleaned thoroughly. That intestine went on the top, on the potatoes, you wrapped the pot with rags, newspapers, whatever, to make it tight. In the Jewish quarter you took the pot to a baker, to a bread oven, but we had a stove with an oven of its own. You put the pot into a hot oven and on Sabbath you took it out, and you had regular cholent. Crisp brown kishke and crisp potatoes. That was Jewish cholent, our own. But when I lived in Warsaw, my sister-in-law made it differently. Hulled barley, fat flat rib, kidney beans, and potatoes. Simmer the meat with the beans and the barley, so as to boil away almost all water. Add raw potatoes, salt, pepper, onion, of course, then wrap it up tightly and put into an oven, on a very low heat, 100 degrees Celsius, no more. It roasts for a whole day, then another – I turn the heat off for the night just in case – and on the third day the guests come and eat. As my birthday falls in February, when it's cold – I won't be making in the summer – I make cholent in the winter. For my birthday guests. They love it.

GLOSSARY:

1 Bund

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevik position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet

power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

2 Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in 1892, its reach extended throughout the Kingdom of Poland and abroad, and it proclaimed slogans advocating the reclamation by Poland of its sovereignty

It was a party that comprised many currents and had room for activists of varied views and from a range of social backgrounds. During the revolutionary period in 1905-07 it was one of the key political forces; it directed strikes, organized labor unions, and conducted armed campaigns. It was also during this period that it developed into a party of mass reach (towards the end of 1906 it had some 55,000 members). After 1918 the PPS came out in support of the parliamentary system, and advocated the need to ensure that Poland guaranteed of freedom and civil rights, division of the churches (religious communities) and the state, and territorial and cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities; and it defended the rights of hired laborers. The PPS supported the policy of the head of state, Józef Pilsudski. It had seats in the first government of the Republic, but from 1921 was in opposition. In 1918-30 the main opponents of the PPS were the National Democrats [ND] and the communist movement. In the 1930s the state authorities' repression of PPS activists and the reduced activity of working-class and intellectual political circles eroded the power of the PPS (in 1933 it numbered barely 15,000 members) and caused the radicalization of some of its leaders and party members. During World War II the PPS was formally dissolved, and some of its leaders created the Polish Socialist Party – Liberty, Equality, Independence (PPS-WRN), which was a member of the coalition supporting the Polish government in exile and the institutions of the Polish Underground State. In 1946-48 many members of PPS-WRN left the country or were arrested and sentenced in political trials. In December 1948 PPS activists collaborating with the PPR consented to the two parties merging on the PPR's terms. In 1987 the PPS resumed its activities. The party currently numbers a few thousand members.

3 Pilsudski, Józef (1867-1935)

Polish activist in the independence cause, politician, statesman, marshal. With regard to the cause of Polish independence he represented the pro-Austrian current, which believed that the Polish state would be reconstructed with the assistance of Austria-Hungary. When Poland regained its independence in January 1919, he was elected Head of State by the Legislative Sejm. In March 1920 he was nominated marshal, and until December 1922 he held the positions of Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. After the murder of the president, Gabriel Narutowicz, he resigned from all his posts and withdrew from politics. He returned in 1926 in a political coup. He refused the presidency offered to him, and in the new government held the posts of war minister and general inspector of the armed forces. He was prime minister twice, from 1926-1928 and in 1930. He worked to create a system of national security by concluding bilateral non-aggression pacts with the USSR (1932) and Germany (1934). He sought opportunities to conclude firm alliances with France and Britain. In 1932 owing to his deteriorating health, Pilsudski resigned from his functions. He was buried in the Crypt of Honor in the Wawel Cathedral in the Royal Castle in Cracow.

4 Bereza Kartuska

a town in Belarus which used to be on the Polish territory before the war. Polish authorities established an internment camp there in 1934. By the decree of the President of the Polish Republic in reference to persons who constitute a threat to public safety and peace, suspects could be held there without trial, only by administrative order, for a period of three months, which could then be extended by another three months. The first prisoners were members of the nationalist Polish organization Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR, suspected of having organized the assassination of the minister of internal affairs, Bronislaw Pieracki. The prisoners of Bereza were mostly members of radical political organizations: communists, Ukrainian nationalists, ONR members. The conditions in Bereza were very harsh, the prisoners were tortured.

5 Endeks

Name formed from the initials of a right-wing party active in Poland during the inter-war period (ND – ‘en-de’). Narodowa Demokracja [National Democracy] was founded by Roman Dmowski. Its members and supporters, known as ‘Endeks’, often held anti-Semitic views.

6 ONR – Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (Radical Nationalist Camp)

a Polish nationalist organization with extreme anti-Semitic views. Founded in April 1934, its members were drawn from the Nationalist Democratic Party. It supported fascism, its program advocated the full assimilation of Slavic minorities in Poland, and forced Jews to leave the country by curbing their civic rights and implementing an economic boycott that would prevent them from making a living. The ONR exploited calls for an economic boycott during the severe economic crisis of the 1930s to drum up support among the masses and develop opposition to Pilsudski’s government. The ONR drew most of its support from young urban people and students. Following a series of anti-Semitic attacks, the ONR was dissolved by the government (July 1940), but the group continued its activities illegally with the support of extremist nationalist groups.

7 Nozyk Synagogue

The only synagogue in Warsaw not destroyed during World War II or shortly afterwards. Built at the beginning of the 20th century from a foundation set up by a couple called Nozyk, it serves the Warsaw Jewish Community as a house of prayer today. The Nozyk Synagogue is near Grzybowskiego Square, where the majority of Warsaw’s Jewish organizations and institutions are situated.

8 Prystor Decree

In pre-war Poland the issue of ritual slaughter (Heb. shechitah) was at the heart of a deep conflict between the Jewish community and Polish nationalist groups, which in 1936-1938 attempted to outlaw or restrict the practice of shechitah in the Sejm, the Polish parliament, citing humanitarian grounds and competition for Catholic butchers. In 1936 Janina Prystor, a deputy to the Sejm (and wife of Aleksander Prystor, 1874-1941, Polish prime minister 1931-1933), proposed a ban on shechitah, citing principles of Christian morality. This move had an overtly economic aim, which was to destroy the Jewish meat industry, which meant competition for Christian butchers. Prystor met with fierce resistance among Jewish circles in the Sejm. In the wake of a debate in the Sejm the government decided on a compromise, permitting shechitah only in areas where Jews made up

more than 3% of the local population.

9 Judenrat

German for 'Jewish council'. Administrative bodies the Germans ordered Jews to form in each ghetto in General Government (Nazi-occupied colony in the central part of Poland). These bodies were responsible for local government in the ghetto, and stood between the Nazis and the ghetto population. They were generally composed of leaders of the Jewish community. They were forced by the Nazis to provide Jews for use as slave laborers, and to assist in the deportation of Jews to extermination camps during the Holocaust.

10 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.

11 Anders's 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.

12 Sikorski Wladyslaw (1881-1943)

a military and political leader, general. During WW I he fought with distinction in the Pilsudski's

Legions, then in the newly-created Polish Army during the Polish-Soviet War (1919 to 1921). Sikorski held government posts including prime minister (1922 to 1923) and minister of military affairs (1923 to 1924). He didn't support Jozef Pilsudski after his May Coup (1926), he fell out of favor with Polish authorities and was barred of the active military service. He was one of the co-founders of the Front Morges and the Work Party, the political movements opposing Pilsudski. During WW II he became Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, and a staunch advocate of the Polish cause on the diplomatic scene. Sikorski was killed in a plane crash into the sea immediately on takeoff from Gibraltar. The exact circumstances of his death remain in dispute, which has given rise to ongoing conspiracy theories.

13 Wasilewska, Wanda (1905-64)

From 1934-37 she was a member of the Supreme Council of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). In 1940 she became a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. From 1941-43 she was a political commissary in the Red Army and editor of 'Nowe Widnokregi'. In 1943 she helped to organize the Union of Polish Patriots and the Polish armed forces in the USSR. In 1944 she became a member of the Central Bureau of Polish Communists in the USSR and vice-chairperson of the Polish Committee for National Liberation. After the war she remained in the USSR. Author of the social propaganda novels 'Oblicze Dnia' (The Face of the Day, 1934), 'Ojczyzna' (Fatherland, 1935) and 'Ziemia w Jarzmie' (Earth under the Yoke, 1938), and the war novel 'Teczka' (Rainbow, 1944).

14 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.

15 UPA - Ukraïns'ka Povstans'ka Armiya, (Ukrainian Insurgent Army)

an Ukrainian independence military organization fighting between 1942 -1947 in Western Ukraine. The UPA was the military branch of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. At the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944 the UPA had 40.000 members. At first it was led by R. Klachkivski, and from October 1943 by R. Shukhevych. The UPA created partisan units which fought the German army and the Soviet partisans and between Spring of 1943 and the beginning of 1945 led ethnic cleansing in the Volhynia, Polessia and Eastern Galicia regions in which ca. 100.000 of Poles were killed. After the Red Army entered these areas, the UPA led succesful sabotage actions against it. The UPA was crippled in Ukraine in April 1946 and in Poland in 1947.

16 Warsaw Ghetto

A separate residential district for Jews in Warsaw created over several months in 1940. On 16th November 1940 138,000 people were enclosed behind its walls. Over the following months the population of the ghetto increased as more people were relocated from the small towns surrounding the city. By March 1941 445,000 people were living in the ghetto. Subsequently, the number of the ghetto's inhabitants began to fall sharply as a result of disease, hunger, deportation, persecution and liquidation. The ghetto was also systematically reduced in size. The internal

administrative body was the Jewish Council (Judenrat). The Warsaw ghetto ceased to exist on 15th May 1943, when the Germans pronounced the failure of the uprising, staged by the Jewish soldiers, and razed the area to the ground.

17 Forced labor in Germany

from the beginning of the occupation German authorities in Poland kept recruiting Poles to work in Germany. At first only volunteers were sent to Germany, but because of insufficient interest, starting in the spring of 1940, people were forcefully sent: young people were getting orders to work in Germany, people were also caught on the streets. The status of forced workers was also given to POWs - privates and non-commissioned officers. This lasted until 1944. It is estimated that during the occupation about 2.8 million citizens of pre-war Poland were taken away to Germany. The work conditions varied greatly - the worst were in heavy industry plants, the best - on farms. Most depended on the personal attitude of the owner of a plant or a farm towards foreign workers. Being sent away to Germany for forced labor was dramatic, it meant isolation and separation from one's family, therefore Poles in Poland who were not employed in German facilities, often arranged false documents about such jobs, or went into hiding. Jews were not being sent to Germany to work, but some attempted to get there under a false name, since work in the Reich gave a chance of survival.

18 Treblinka

village in Poland's Mazovia region, site of two camps. The first was a penal labor camp, established in 1941 and operating until 1944. The second, known as Treblinka II, functioned in the period 1942-43 and was a death camp. Prisoners in the former worked in Treblinka II. In the second camp a ramp and a mock-up of a railway station were built, which prevented the victims from realizing what awaited them until just in front of the entrance to the gas chamber. The camp covered an area of 13.5 hectares. It was bounded by a 3-m high barbed wire fence interwoven densely with pine branches to screen what was going on inside. The whole process of exterminating a transport from arrival in the camp to removal of the corpses from the gas chamber took around 2 hours. Several transports arrived daily. In the 13 months of the extermination camp's existence the Germans gassed some 750,000-800,000 Jews. Those taken to Treblinka included Warsaw Jews during the Grossaktion [great liquidation campaign] in the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942. As well as Polish Jews, Jews from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia and the USSR were also killed in Treblinka. In the spring of 1943 the Germans gradually began to liquidate the camp. On 2nd August 1943 an uprising broke out there with the aim of enabling some 200 people to escape. The majority died.

19 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.

20 Jews settling in Lower Silesia after World War II

The Jews of the German province of Silesia either emigrated or were killed during the Nazi regime. In 1939 there were 15,480 Jews living in the region, most of whom perished during the war. A new influx of Jews began in 1945 after the region was incorporated into Poland. Of the 52,000 or so Jews that arrived there (mostly from Eastern Poland incorporated into the Soviet Union), 10,000 settled in Wroclaw (Breslau), others moved mainly to Legnica (Liegnitz), Dzierzoniow (Reichenbach) and Walbrzych (Waldenburg).

21 Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)

communist party formed in Poland in December 1948 by the fusion of the PPR (Polish Workers' Party) and the PPS (Polish Socialist Party). Until 1989 it was the only party in the country; it held power, but was subordinate to the Soviet Union. After losing the elections in June 1989 it lost its monopoly. On 29th January 1990 the party was dissolved.

22 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..

23 TSKZ (Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews)

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. However, it is primarily an organization of older people, who have been involved with it for years.

24 Majdanek concentration camp

situated five kilometers from the city center of Lublin, Poland, originally established as a labor camp in October 1941. It was officially called Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin until 16th February 1943, when the name was changed to Concentration Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin. Unlike most other Nazi death camps, Majdanek, located in a completely open field, was not hidden from view. About 130,000 Jews were deported there during 1942-43 as part of the 'Final Solution'. Initially there were two gas chambers housed in a wooden building, which were later replaced by gas chambers in a brick building. The estimated number of deaths is 360,000, including Jews, Soviets POWs and Poles. The camp was liquidated in July 1944, but by the time the Red Army arrived the camp was only partially destroyed. Although approximately 1,000 inmates were executed on a death march, the Red Army found thousand of prisoners still in the camp, an evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

25 Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc)

a social and political movement in Poland that opposed the authority of the PZPR. In its institutional form – the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc) – it emerged in August and September 1980 as a product of the turbulent national strikes. In that period trade union organization were being formed in all national enterprises and institutions; in all some 9-10 million people joined NSZZ Solidarnosc. Solidarity formulated a program of introducing fundamental changes to the system in Poland, and sought the fulfillment of its postulates by exerting various forms of pressure on the authorities: pickets in industrial enterprises and public buildings, street demonstrations, negotiations and propaganda. It was outlawed in 1982 following the introduction of Martial Law (on 13th December 1981), and until 1989 remained an underground organization, adopting the strategy of gradually building an alternative society and over time creating social institutions that would be independent of the PZPR (the long march). Solidarity was the most important opposition group that influenced the changes in the Polish political system in 1989.

26 Children of the Holocaust Association

a social organization whose members were persecuted during the Nazi occupation due to their Jewish identity, and who were no more than 13 years old in 1939, or were born during the war. The Association was founded in 1991. It's purpose is to provide mutual support (psychological assistance; help in searching for family members), and to educate the public. The group organizes seminars, publishes a bulletin as well as books (several volumes of memoirs: Children of the Holocaust Speak...) The Association has now almost 800 members; there are sections in Warsaw, Wrocław, Cracow and Gdansk.