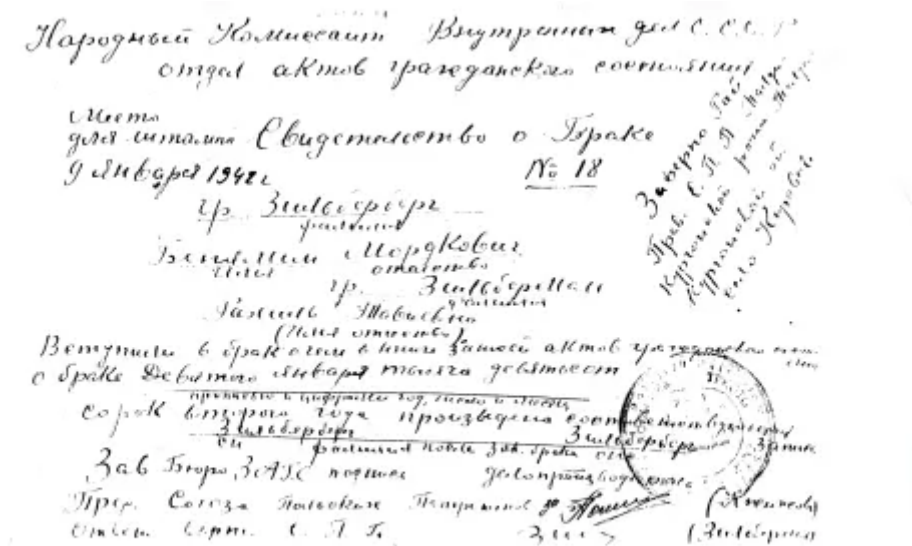


Benjamin And Rachela Zylberberg's Marriage Certificate



I have preserved this document since the war. This is my marriage certificate, which was issued by the Soviet authorities in Gorky in 1942.

In 1960 Mieczyslaw Moczar [then junior minister for internal affairs, in 1968 instigator of the anti-Semitic campaign] wanted to have me thrown out of the army on disciplinary grounds, because someone had told him that I had called him anti-Semitic. But fortunately, his superior, the minister of internal affairs, was a decent man, who annulled the dismissal and ordered the head of the personnel department to find me another job. And I was on first-name terms with the head of the personnel department, because we had done our school-leaving exam together after the war. He said, 'We'll pay you as if you were on regular service, and you can do a full-time degree.' He was an anti-Semite as well. And that's how, thanks to two anti-Semites, I did a degree; I'm a Master of Economics, a graduate of the Institute of Planning and Statistics [SGPiS]. After my degree somebody gave me a leg-up into the Institute of Economics and Industrial Organization on Aleje Jerozolimskie [Warsaw's main thoroughfare]. 1968 was drawing near, and unfortunately the head of the Institute was Professor Ilia Epszajn. It was a small research institution, with a dozen or so employees. As well as the Jewish professor, there were also one or two other Jews and myself, and it wouldn't have done to throw those few Jews out, so they closed the entire institute down. That was the end of my academic career. As by then I could speak five languages well: Polish, Russian, Yiddish, German and English, and I had mates in Orbis [the Polish state travel agency], I became a tour guide taking Polish people on holidays abroad.

In spring 1940 I decided to escape, not so much from the Germans as from the dark blue police [popular name for the Polish police under the German occupation], because I was a suspect to them. They were constantly coming to our house. On 1st May they locked me up for 24 hours so that I couldn't stage a Bolshevik Revolution in Krasnik. I was afraid they would lock me up for

longer. In June I managed to cross the river border on the Bug in a boat at night with a group of a dozen or so others. In Vladimir-Volynskiy there lived a Jewish family from Krasnik, and there we were given our first night's accommodation and supper.

When I went to register, I was detained, like everyone in that group, Jews and Poles. We were an unknown quantity, 'beznadiozhny' [Russian for 'no-hopers']; the Russian authorities didn't trust us. They kept us locked up for a few days, and then we were herded onto a goods train under escort. Without any investigation they sent us to clear forest, to the Vologda district on the River Unzha, near a place called Manturovo [today Russia]. Vyetka 53, something like a settlement, was a labor camp where we were prisoners. We slept in barracks on straw mattresses, and during the day we cut down trees. Clearing forest is hard work. The work lasted from sunrise to sunset. There's a vast pine forest there. We cut the trees down with axes and saws. There was a minimum of two people to a saw, maybe even four: two at each end, but the axe I had to wield myself. Then these specialists would throw the trees into the Unzha, where they bound the trunks together into rafts, 'kletka' in Russian. They floated downstream into the Volga. I had been deported there with Rachela. My wife ran the kitchen there.

There were more than a dozen people living in our barrack, Poles and Jews. There were a few women there, too. The ones who proved physically unable to survive we buried in the ground near the barrack. Among them was a very dear friend of mine, with who I had been in the Polish prison. There were a lot of people who had been inside for communism there. We felt that we had been done a great injustice, and so we wrote letters to Moscow, addressed to Stalin. Evidently someone in the Kremlin read them, because sometime around January-February 1941 we were liberated from that slave labor. We were told, 'You can go where you please. But only into the heart of Russia. So we, five or six of us, went to Gorky. In Gorky Rachela and I got married. We lived with a Jewish family in the very center of that huge city. I set myself up in a big firm, in Russian 'promkombinat': they had furriers and tailors and cap-makers there, several hundred people worked there.