

# Julian Gringras

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Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Anka Grupińska

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*Julian Gringras lives on a high-rise estate in Warsaw. Amid thousands of people, in a tiny apartment, alone (his wife died at the end of the 1980s). He is 94, and has been sightless for a couple of years.*

*He can no longer read or look at pictures. He listens to cassettes. He even has 'Ulysses,' recorded by the Association for the Blind.*

*He likes talking about history, and recalls Greek and Latin aphorisms or recites his beloved haiku and Cummings.*

*On reflection, he reassures himself, he hasn't led such a bad life, though he could have been warmer towards others.*

*He looks forward to my visits, urging me to try the poppy-seed cookies that he baked himself – he could do it blindfolded, he jokes. I leave with a few cookies in a plastic bag – three for my little boy and one for myself.*



- [Family background](#)
- [Our photographic studio](#)
- [My brother, sisters and me](#)
- [My school years](#)
- [Fela Baum](#)
- [The war](#)
- [My life after the war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

## • Family background

My [paternal] grandfather was probably called Mendel. He emigrated [to Switzerland] well before my father – how long, I don't know. And he lived in Switzerland, and might have been a watchmaker, I seem to recall hearing.

He lived in a place called Schautfon or something like that, in the French part, I think, spent 30 years or so there, and retained all the attributes of a religious Jew. Was he very religious or only fairly religious? I don't know, but he was definitely a normal, god-fearing Jew. I don't know at all if

his wife went too, and what she did there.

I never knew why Grandfather left Poland. I never asked, even when I met him after his return from Switzerland to Kielce in the [early] 1930s. He lived only a few years in Kielce and died tragically. He shared one tiny room with this cousin of mine from my Mama's side – name of Czarny, but what his first name was I don't remember, although I used to see him; the name escapes me. There was a coal-burning stove, and the stove had obviously not been shut properly, or something like that had happened, and Grandfather suffocated.

Father's eldest brother was called Artur too, I think [Mr. Gringras's brother was called Artur]; he lived in France, and I think Ania [Mr. Gringras's daughter] even met him in Paris when he was 87 [around 1965]. His second brother lived in Britain; he was called Leopold, and lived to at least 90 [he died in the 1960s or 1970s].

I saw him on a photograph of the family in Israel, the ones that emigrated from Poland. And the youngest – there was only one younger than Father – he's on the chess photograph; he lived in Switzerland too. That was Moric. Moric was about ten years or so younger than Father. Totally bald as your knee, looked like Mussolini [1](#).

My [other] grandparents, Mama's parents? I never saw either my grandmother or my grandfather on my mother's side. And I didn't know my grandmother on my father's side either. Where they came from I don't know either. Probably from one of the small towns near Kielce, maybe Busko, or Chmielnik or Pinczow.

Father's name was Koppel according to the official papers. Later that was changed to Jozef, but he was still known as Koppel, like the hero of one of Singer's novels ['The Family Moskat']. Mama's name was Fajgla; I don't remember the name exactly, because we called Mama Mama. How my mother came to marry my father, when they met, I don't know either. All I know is that when she left Pinczow she emigrated to Switzerland with Father.

My parents spoke Yiddish mostly, but because of the photographic studio Polish had to be mastered as a tool. My Mama spoke very correct Polish in my view, unlike Father, who spoke Polish terribly. But she didn't read – she probably wouldn't have had time for that with all those children and her extra work in the studio. My mother was very fond of and grew flowers. Oleanders and a ficus. There was a palm, not very tall, but the ficus was big.

Those plants stood in the parlor. And she liked dressing up, in this satin dress; she liked dressing up on holidays. She liked making food [also]; she made preserves, baked cakes, baked challot. She tried to keep the place clean, and she would always note that the doctor's wife who she'd lived with in Switzerland [a neighbor] used to wash the stairs too.

And what stood out [about her character]? Her attitude to her sister, Chitler. I don't remember her first name. She was the wife of this guy Chitler, who they spoke ill of. Mama's sister was very poor, and she had three sons.

The eldest boy was called Moric and he later worked in the Moderne photographic studio [Mr. Gringras's father's studio]. He learned the art of photography and I think he had achievements, but he was killed during the occupation. The other two – the youngest one was called Motek – ended up in the Orion factory [Mr. Gringras's father owned a small factory].

The middle brother – if he's still alive – lives in Florida, in Miami, and the third, Motek, went to live in Germany. They [the Chitlers] lived in this two-story wooden house on Kapitulna Street, near the church; they lived on the second floor. They were beam, not plaster walls, I remember, so it was this kind of country cottage.

Mother's sister was small, far smaller than my mother, with beautiful black eyes, very quiet; she used to come round to her wealthier sister's more or less once a month, and she'd get some better food for her family, and perhaps a scrap of clothing. In any case, she'd sit by the sideboard, this poor, quiet thing – even I just used to walk past her, pass her almost without seeing her. But she would always have this slight smile, she'd be smiling quietly.

Mama had a brother, probably in Kielce, who we had virtually no contact with; I think he owned a shop and a cobbler's workshop. Mama had other brothers and sisters too, but we weren't in touch with them either. I think they lived in Sosnowiec. I know that they got in touch in the 1980s from Israel.

### • Our fotografic studio

How did the Moderne studio come into being? A long road. First somewhere holed up in the provinces, Pinczow or somewhere like that, then my father's emigration with his wife and two sons [Simon and Artur]. Father might have been about 25-28 at that time, by my reckoning.

He went to Switzerland, via Hungary. In Switzerland Father learned the art of photography. He lived there for more or less six years with his wife and children. And then his next two sons came into the world, Maurycy and Leopold, and my sister Roza, so my memory tells me. The whole family lived in a townhouse, a four-story one, I think, in Zurich.

After six years in Switzerland they came to Kielce; they probably had some money saved up. To be a [recognized] craftsman you had to buy a license, I seem to remember. I suspect it was in around 1908, maybe 1909 or 1910 that the Moderne photographic firm was opened, and it soon began to grow.

The studio was on the main street, Kolejowa. We lived in the same building. The entrance to the studio was opposite our apartment, which was through the courtyard, on the mezzanine floor. The photographic studio was built in the courtyard, a very light construction.

Frosted windows, a glass roof, and frosted window panes shaded from the inside with short, dark blue curtains that you pulled across with a pole to get the right amount of light for a photograph. On one side the whole wall was glass. When it hailed heavily, hailstones the size of chicken's eggs, it shattered good and proper.

There was a photograph of a hailstone like that, the size of a chicken's egg. I was about eight then, I think, I ran out into the street. I had this very nice shirt on, maybe it was a holiday, maybe a Saturday – in any case I had this good shirt on, and I went picking up these hailstones and put them in my shirtfront, and ran proudly home, which brought a cry of despair from my mother:

'How dirty you are! What have you done? And I worked so hard!' I'd collected all those hailstones and here I was getting ticked off!

The studio had a two-story stone annex. You went up wooden steps, quite steep, to the upper floor, and that was the laboratory. There was a machine for making enlargements, that was where the photographs were developed, enlarged, trimmed, etc. There was usually another person working there – one, two or three people worked there. As far as I remember the principal employee was my cousin, my mother's sister's son Moric Chitler.

There was a cashier too – in front of the entrance to the studio there was a little room where the cash desk was and orders were taken. Customers would come, place their orders, and then go through into the studio and there the photographs were taken.

It was usually Father who took the photographs, until his last years, until the 1930s, and then later Artur and my younger brothers took the photographs. And of course there were props in the studio – columns and whatever. Background to suit the customer. One of those props was a rocking horse; there's a photograph of me, as a two-year-old kid with our little dog Milka, holding that horse.

The clientele were small-town folk, just small farmers; sometimes wealthier people, a doctor or a lawyer, would have their photograph taken there. Once, the later US chess Grand Master happened on us. How was that possible? Well, he was this little lad of maybe ten, by the name of Szmulek Rzeszewski or Rzeszowski, dressed in the regular Jewish fashion, a long coat, Jewish cap, a kind of flat, peaked cap.

He'd come from some tiny village where he'd been discovered as a wunderkind who played incredible chess. And he was traveling via Kielce, via Hamburg, to America, where some relatives evidently had had him come over. Afterwards, many years later, I found out that it was 'the' Rzeszewski, who was the US Grand Master for a good few years.

And he had his photograph taken there [in Moderne]. My father, who was a great chess lover, used to say with reverence that he had taken that Rzeszewski's photograph. And I was standing by him, and saw the photograph being taken.

The fittings in the studio changed [over time]. Initially the lighting was natural, in the form of the curtains that Father or his assistant would adjust using a long pole. Later on electric lamps were installed, known as 'Jupiters,' spotlights, but that wasn't until the 1930s, when electric lighting became more accessible, although very expensive. A kilowatt-hour cost around 50 groszy, or two and a half loaves of bread. How much did we spend in Kielce? Hard to say, but I suspect around 200 or 300 zloty a month on overheads, certainly.

Glass negatives? Quite simply, there was no film. Instead of paper, glass was used as the base for applying the emulsion. And that was gelatin with a silver chloride or bromide solution (the compounds are more complex today). There were no x-rays on film at that time either.

The Kodak technology, whereby a photograph can be taken directly onto paper, did not exist. At that time the photograph was taken on a negative, on which there was a glass plate coated in emulsion, and the paper print, or the positive, was made from that plate.

That was the coating technique that my father later realized [propagated] in Kielce when he built a small factory making photographic plates and paper sometime in the 1930s. The factory was called Orion. It manufactured not only for his own use but primarily for sale.

And the glass plate is a separate story which also involves my mother. There were times of great poverty in Poland and he had to save on staff, and there were times when he had staff. And so my mother [often] helped my father out. Aside from having to feed the children, bring whatever she could buy from the bazaar, etc. Some years there was a maid, so most likely she went to the bazaar.

So Mother helped Father, sitting at the photography desk at night in the room where I and my three brothers slept – you see the four of us slept in two beds. There were two stands set up on the table, sloping, with opaque glass in them.

You put the plate on the opaque glass, and Mother examined the plate. She had a brush in her hand and she would dip the brush in this fluid, we could call it very pale ink, and she pointed up, covered in, the light patches on the plate. That was retouch. And that was done by Mother. Incredible, but with all those children to look after she still found time for that!

Maurycy was responsible for retouching the big enlargements, and he retouched the big enlargements in the studio. That kind of retouching didn't involve patching [what his mother did] – he would even draw bits in, because he had artistic talents, so he would create this kind of sketched semi-portrait. And we sold them too, as something along the lines of artistic photography.

You couldn't sell photographs with [blank] patches, because nevertheless there was competition; across the road was the Rembrandt photographic studio, Jewish-owned too. Hard to say [anything about it]. I know Rembrandt never visited us and we never visited them; I think he was enemy number one.

I don't know what the owner of that studio was called. We knew him as Rembrandt. Just like they used to call Father Moderny, they'd never say 'Gringras,' 'Mr. Gringras,' only 'Mr. Moderny.'

In the 1930s a branch of the Moderne photographic firm began to produce photographs of dead people fired onto porcelain. They were oval, fairly small porcelain photographs to go on gravestones. We among the Jews didn't have this practice, it was just for Christians. In Kielce about two thirds, I suspect, were Catholics [2](#). A regular trade.

Father was technically gifted; for instance, he converted a camera that stood on a tripod, quite a big camera, which you put a plate in to take a photograph using natural lighting. Well, in later years, Father altered that camera to save on plates.

At that time plates were imported from abroad: either German Agfas, or there were the Belgian Gevaerts. He made an insert that held a plate and allowed him to divide the plate up into four sections so that one frame could be exposed without the other three being exposed.

Father hadn't been to a Polish school. I suspect he'd been to cheder, because back then in those small towns there wasn't a Jewish family whose child didn't go to cheder, was there? Well, Father learned enough German to be able to subscribe to a photographic magazine from Vienna, which came regularly.

I even remember the colors of that magazine – this pale sepia. It wasn't very thick, and didn't have any photographs to speak of. Even the silliest rag has beautiful prints these days, doesn't it? But those were very pale prints. Fotografische Rundschau, I think it was called. Father received that

magazine regularly – he not only received it but used it too. He mastered a technique called ‘Bromöldruck’ [Bromoil Process].

Why am I going into this in such detail? Well, again it’s to do with my childhood memories. Lying in bed – I was nine or ten then – before I fell asleep, I would watch Father. He would sit at the table with two larger, thicker glass plates in front of him. Ink was spread on one plate and on the other was a bare, blind photograph.

The photograph looked like a regular blank sheet of paper, but it was a photograph, the photograph had already been fixed on it. In his hand he had a little spring, this wire with a little ring on the end, and in that ring there was a stiff-haired brush – it wasn’t hard, it was delicate, but stiff. He’d dip the brush in the ink, knock [the excess] off, and then gently, springily, tap it over the photograph-to-be.

And after 10 minutes or so you could see an outline of, say, a head. Then he would carry on tapping and tapping, then he would bring out some parts more, black or brown stronger – there was either black or brown – he would tap over the white, and a beautiful grainy photograph would emerge.

My [elder] brother Artur latched on to that technique later on; he was really Father’s spiritual heir in terms of photography. Artur got married and moved to Czystochowa, around the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, and built himself a photography studio called ‘Sztuka’ [Art], before the war.

He did well – he even got into Jasna Góra [3](#) and took photographs of pilgrimages and what have you. Then he even got into that ‘Bromöldruck,’ but that was after the war, when he emigrated to Israel, where he had a photography studio too. There he got into another technique, called ‘Gummidruck’ [gum bichromate] – that technique is still used today by some photographers.

My father often went to Vienna in connection with the firm. When he came back from Vienna, I remember, he brought me cookies, cookies that I remember to this day. Wonderful!

Father liked chess. Moric [Mr. Gringras’s father’s brother] liked chess, and Grandfather liked chess. Though at one point chess became an addiction for Father. And an addiction that cost. In Kielce, you see, there were two patisseries. One was called Smolinski’s and the other the Royal.

It was probably the Royal where for some time Father and Moric would sit and play chess for money, they tried to win and make money. That met with great disapproval from my mother, because the winnings probably didn’t bring in any profit. Only losses, I presume.

I learned to play chess in Kielce too; I think we all [all the men in the family] could play chess a bit. In the patisserie it was not only Jews playing amongst themselves, but various different people played – true-blue Poles, Catholics. Religion, profession played no role there, because the chess itself was something we could call an ecumenical calling. People got together because they liked chess – and they played.

### • My brothers, sisters and me

I was the youngest of five sons; there was one sister before me as well, and three younger sisters. There were nine of us. My brothers were older than me – there could have been quite an age



difference. The eldest is Simon, who we often called Zygmunt, he could have been eleven to twelve years older. Artur six or seven, maybe eight.

Two of my brothers, Simon and Artur, were born in the Kielce region. Maybe in Busko, Pinczow, or Chmielnik. It could have been Pinczow, because Chaskiel Majtek [the husband of Mr. Gringras's sister Ziuka] told me not so long ago that my father's family came from Pinczow; I thought they came from Chmielnik.

Simon, Zygmunt or Symche – in his Polish and French papers. Simon went to Palestine, in 1921 or 1922, I think. It was a well-known fact that an awful lot of lads from Jewish families tried to dodge their draft, and they used various techniques.

I remember that there was even the technique of starving yourself and drinking black coffee. Simon was probably a Zionist, or maybe he was draft-dodging. Later on he was in some kibbutz, he contracted malaria, and then he turned up in France.

He worked in a cinema, but towards the end of his stay in France he was the owner of a cinema. He had a certain interest in painting – I remember a drawing of his: a man in prophet's robes sitting on a huge boulder, a sunset, and behind him desert.

My brother from France was betrayed and ended up in Auschwitz. I don't know, but apparently the woman he lived with, a French woman, turned him in, or so the rumors had it. That cousin of mine [Czarny] met him in the camp in Auschwitz.

Czarny went through several camps and coped admirably, but my brother gave in very quickly and turned into what they call a 'muselman' [camp term for a person who lost the will to live]. And he died. On a stone [monument] in Paris are the names of several hundred Jews deported to the camps, and Symche Gringras is listed.

The boy in the glasses or pince-nez [on the photographs] is Artur, or Adolf, but after Hitler's rise to power <sup>4</sup> he changed it to Artur – but what his Jewish name was I don't know. I suspect that Artur, who neared the age of conscription slightly later [than Simon], also tried to dodge his draft. He used to drink black coffee like that, I remember. In any case they didn't call him up. Artur graduated from gymnasium; he didn't matriculate.

The third boy is Maurycy. He was born in Switzerland. Maurycy was born in 1905, 1906; he was five years or so older than me. My brother Maurycy went gray at the age of about 16 or 17. He went gray suddenly. I went gray much later, at the normal age, 30-something. But that was at the time I was in the Soviet Union. He was terribly highly strung, talented, played the piano and painted well. He was artistically gifted.

Then there's Leopold, born in Switzerland too. Leopold was perhaps four years older than me. In Yiddish Leopold is Lipe, or Lipek, I think. He used to be called Lipek. Roza was officially called Eugenia – she was born in Switzerland. We used to call her Rozia, Rozka, she was older than me too. Maybe two, three years. Children were born close together there [in Mr. Gringras's family], as you can tell. But nine children!

Then there was me, born in 1911 in Kielce. Julian. I probably had a Jewish name. I don't remember when I changed it. From being a child they always called me Julek. I don't remember my Jewish

name.

Ziuka was [properly] Edzia, in Yiddish Estera, she was my younger sister. After the war she lived in Israel until she died, at 85, three or four years ago. She was the only one of the four sisters to survive, because the others died at the hands of the Germans. Ziuka's husband is Chaskiel Majtek, who lives in Israel, in Holon; he calls me up sometimes.

Next was Bala, or Bela. I think we used to call her Bala, but how it was written I don't know. I remember Bala well. I was very fond of her, a very lively, intelligent girl, active, very handsome, in my view. Nice eyes, and she had dimples on her face.

Mania didn't, nor did Ziuka. Mania was the last in the line, the 9th child. But by the time she was growing up I was in Warsaw, I hardly met them, except in the vacations, and then very rarely. Whether Bala and Mania had their admirers, that I don't know.

The girls worked in the photography studio; I think they spent some time learning retouching too, and then they worked in Orion. I don't think they had any schooling. They could read and write, and were good with figures, of course, and spoke proper Polish, but what school they went to I don't know. There were schools with four grades or six grades.

So our apartment was on the mezzanine; three rooms with a kitchen, without a bathroom; there was a toilet, I think; there was cold [running] water. All the rest of the children – I mean the girls – came into the world in that apartment. And I was born there. That apartment, that courtyard, is still there – Jakub [Mr. Gringras's grandson] saw it a few years ago.

Underneath it [the apartment] was a bakery in later years, which of course caused great problems, especially in summer: the vermin that bred there! But then a baker – that had its advantages: you could send the chulent there for Saturday. For many years we used that bakery to heat up our chulent.

In chulent there were potatoes, beans, bits of meat – blood pudding probably, and the whole was a kind of brown color, as if it had been covered in gravy. Very heavy. And after a few years we gave it up, and it didn't appear on our table any longer. I wasn't very fond of it. Father may have liked it, but it went. And we baked matzah in that bakery.

The kitchen was a place where not only meals were cooked, but once a month, perhaps once every two months, a big wash was done. There was a big washtub, I remember a mangle too – that was major technological progress, a mangle fixed to the washtub somehow.

The washerwoman came – hired for three days. So then they had to make room for everything there: cooking and washing, and in the corner of the kitchen there was an iron bed, a very primitive one, where the maid slept. The maid was usually a Polish girl. Some girl would come from the countryside for shorter or longer, depending on the situation [in the household].

There were harder times, when we used to make sauerkraut ourselves, for instance, which was rare in Jewish households. As a child I used to tread the cabbage. They used to stand me in the barrel and I stamped on it with my feet; I might have been four. We used a barrel like that, which we put in the cellar somewhere, all winter.



So two quite large [rooms], the third was much smaller – that was my parents' bedroom. We were in the first room: our bedroom, the dining room and the photographic workshop. Four boys slept in two beds. The table was lit with a lamp, not an electric one back then, but a kerosene lamp with a gas mantle: that was a much brighter light.

That first room was an all-purpose room. In the first room there also was a sofa covered in oilcloth, with a high back. The bedsteads were metal. I slept in one with Artur. Where the girls slept I don't know. Where they were born I don't know! I didn't know when Mother was pregnant either, it was never talked about, and I didn't pay any attention to it.

On the floor there were floorboards painted red. A proper floor came when we moved into our new apartment: wooden blocks that fit together, parquet flooring they call it today. In that all-purpose room there was a big, heavy table, there was a dresser, I remember – I used to try to get into the dresser when I was older.

The dresser was made of this pear wood, a warm sepia color, there were these little columns, probably typical of Jewish furniture, the glass panes were colored of course, a little bit like stained glass windows. Above the panes and at the sides there were grapes carved into the wood, that I remember. That dresser was the nicest thing in the house.

In the other room there were plants on the windowsill and on the floor, because Mama was very fond of flowers. I remember a cottage piano also, because when I found out I hadn't got into gymnasium, I sat at that piano, on this swivel stool, and I leaned against the piano and I think I cried then, I remember.

I don't know how we came to play [music]. I suspect Father was a kind of klezmer, playing at weddings, that's what I think. He could play this and that on the fiddle, but it was the country type of playing, I'd say, klezmerish, of a poorer standard.

Well, I can't say whether it [music making] was common, but I came across it in at least three homes [before the war in Kielce]: in our house there were several instruments: the piano, violins, cellos, there was an ocarina too.

There was a piano in my wife's house, but nobody learned to play that piano; one of her brothers learned to play the fiddle, and the photographer, my father's rival, Rembrandt, had a son Wilek, who played the violin very well.

I played the fiddle, not the violin, because I was small. Fiddles are not made by professional violin makers; they're mass-produced, you can buy them in shops very cheaply. I only learned the fiddle for a very short time, but both Leopold and Maurycy learned well and systematically.

I suspect they learned for at least five or six years. But none of the girls played. They probably didn't have the leaning, weren't interested. Leopold could play proper things, he played a Mendelssohn concerto, for instance. In Sweden, where he settled after the war, he belonged to a quartet, which he still played in at the age of 70.

I had lessons with a music teacher, a German, who had moved to Kielce with his family to live. He was called Rommel. Leopold learned with him too. He was a colorful figure, tall, with a closely shaven head, quite strict – I felt the strap across my hands a few times, with the addition of: 'du

verfluchter Kerl,' 'you accursed rogue,' when I played out of tune.

I went to those lessons because I was forced to, and waiting my turn, because he had a few pupils, I would sit in this garden at his house – the garden was well kept up – and there we would sneakily eat his gooseberries. It was quite a way out of the center of town.

I went there for about six months, maybe even a year. I think I was about ten or eight then. During the occupation his son was elected mayor of Kielce, apparently. But he himself never demonstrated any anti-Jewish or anti-Polish tendencies as such.

The window [of our room] looked out on the courtyard. There were two courtyards: one where a tall, mysterious willow grew and there was a pump operated by a crank, and there was another courtyard where we played. They were connected.

One bordered on the Silnica brook – but that brook was more like an open sewer. In the courtyard there was a row of cubbyholes where the residents kept wood for the winter and junk they didn't need, and there was also a large, mysterious lean-to. Mysterious to this day, because I never went in that lean-to.

In the courtyard I played with my sisters, with Adas Bryczkowski, who lived on the second floor, and the Rzedowskis played with us. We would play hide-and-seek, chase, and rounders. There was a well with a crank, and the children used to swing on the crank. Once I fell off it and made a hole in my forehead, which I stuck a postage stamp over, I remember. I was ten when I got a bike – a heavy German bike. It was so big I couldn't get on the saddle.

A few years later Gustaw Herling Grudzinski [1919-2000, writer and journalist, after World War II an émigré in Italy, colleague of Jerzy Giedroyc, and co-founder of the Literary Institute and the monthly cultural journal *Kultura*] and his elder brother Morek, or Maurycy, may have played in the same courtyard. Gustaw was nine to ten years younger than me, so I have no way of knowing if they played there. But they lived in the same house, at the front, on the third floor.

There were only Jews living in that house, all assimilated apart from our family. The only Polish family – the Koziks – had a grocery shop on the street front. The Lubczynskis' barber shop was there too. All those businesses fronted onto Sienkiewicza.

I spent my entire childhood in the yard with children who only spoke Polish. The yard was Polish, even though the families were Jewish. I had contact with Yiddish at home, because Father spoke it fluently, it was his native language, Yiddish, and Mother's too. But we brothers and sisters used half and half.

That was partly to do with the economic situation, because the photography firm required contact with customers who for the most part were Polish, and so the people who worked in the firm had to use Polish.

As Father spoke Polish poorly, my brothers, who started working in the photography firm from a very young age, spoke Polish fluently, and the sister who died a few years ago in Israel [Ziuka] worked in the photography firm too, and to the end spoke and wrote Polish excellently.

- **My school years**

We didn't go to cheder or yeshivah, because my parents didn't hold with religious schools. I didn't go to public [elementary] school at all, I don't think. Even I myself am amazed how I learned to read and write. I went to what they called a Jewish gymnasium for two years when I was eleven or twelve.

It was this small Jewish gymnasium with Polish the language of instruction. I can't say much about that Jewish gymnasium, almost nothing. It was quite a long way out of the center of town, on the outskirts, and when you went in the morning and then came back you just forgot about it. We didn't have any contact with the gymnasium.

There was Hebrew, but I didn't pay attention, I didn't work at Hebrew. One mistress I remember. The history teacher, I think, but I only just remember her, very vaguely. I don't know any names. How I came to go to that gymnasium I don't know, why I stopped going I don't know either. I do remember the cap, though, because I had my photograph taken, quite a good photograph it was too. The cap was: blue trimmings, the crown was white, a round cap, white felt on top, colors nicely selected. There weren't any uniforms.

Then I had a break [didn't go to school] and I prepared for the state gymnasium. [Private Jewish gymnasiums were not qualified to hold matriculation examinations.] On the whole my parents decided what I did; I don't even know why I took the state gymnasium exam when my brothers didn't go to that gymnasium. They probably went to the Jewish gymnasium, I think.

There were two gymnasiums [in Kielce], boys' gymnasiums. Mine, the Mikolaj Rey [Gymnasium], is called the Zeromski Gymnasium today. The building looked as if it had been a monastery building, because adjoining it was the building that housed the seminary. What the street was called? Jednosci Narodowej, something like that, I can't remember.

The gymnasium was very old, the plaster badly crumbling. The other one, the Sniadecki Gymnasium, was richer, I'd say, that was where children from fairly wealthy families went. And there was a girls' gymnasium too, which my fiancée went to, the Zimnowodzina Gymnasium [the Stefania Wolmanowa-Zimnowodzina Girls' School was on the corner of Wolnosci Place and Slowackiego Street], Zimnowodzina was the headmistress.

I got into the Polish one [gymnasium] by passing an exam, in 1926, I think. I sat mathematics, Polish; Latin started once you got into the gymnasium, I only had it for four years. But two of us took the examination, my future brother-in-law [Mosze Baum] and I.

He did better than me; he was taken at once, but I had to re-sit the exam six months later. Four years of gymnasium, from 5th to 8th [grade], 4 grades. In 1927 [I started], something like that, more or less. Matriculation was in 1930.

I was in a class that numbered around 50 students. The class teacher was Konradi, the Latin master. 50 pupils, three of them Jewish, with surnames that made up a tiny fragment of landscape. You see, there was Baum – a tree; there was Gringras, or green grass; and there was an apple, he was called Jablko [a Polish, not Jewish surname], the third one, not Appel, but Jablko [Mr. Gringras is translating the surnames].

As it happened, in terms of level, we, the three of us, were top of the class. There were a few clever Poles, but not many. Some of them were one-sided, mastered literature well, for instance. Our

classmates used to go to Baum's house; he helped them in math, Polish, etc., he was very helpful. They didn't come to me.

The three of us didn't keep apart from the rest of the class. We mixed with the others. There was no isolation within the class. There were no insults, name-calling, etc. The number of pupils dwindled fast. In the next grade there were not 50, but 40 or so, and about 30 of us made it to matriculation.

They dropped out, didn't move up from grade to grade, or the economic situation was such that they couldn't carry on. They were boys from the countryside there. There was this one, Bezak. You could tell he was from a very poor family. There weren't too many wealthy children in my gymnasium.

My friends at gymnasium? I've got these photographs taken near Kielce, it was in Dabrowka, in the forester's hut. One of my classmates lived there, he was called Marian Pilichowski, he's on the photograph.

We would go on these 7-km walks from Kielce to Dabrowka, and sit there and talk. That was all. That was all for that lad [Pilichowski], because a year or two later he died. He'd most likely been ill the whole time, with his lungs, even though he was the son of a forester. A very decent, nice lad.

We had a school uniform: a stand-up collar on our jackets and kepis on our heads, with crowns, like the kepis the French policemen wear. That was the compulsory gymnasium uniform. The boys on the photograph are in uniform. That was after matriculation, but they were poor boys and their gymnasium uniform was also their best suit. They hadn't had it altered into 'civilian clothes' yet.

As for girls, we didn't mix with Polish girls at all except in our political activities later in Warsaw. But the Polish girls – who we did look at, of course – went to the St. Kinga Gymnasium. They wore these dark blue hats, but they were girls we couldn't go up to, because that would have had consequences.

We knew it could end in a fight. At school my favorite sport was skating; I skated well, I was good at gymnastics. And although Polish girls did go there [to the ice rink], we never tried to chat them up, as you say, flirt with them – never!

I don't remember the teachers much. There's one photograph of the pupils in the classroom. You can see a tiled stove, benches with desks that opened, and sitting among us, in the center, is Irena Breneisen, the German teacher.

I took all the class photographs, assembled the group, with the camera on the tripod. I would put on what we called the 'autoknips,' the timer, and run to my place. Very often on these photographs I'm peering at the camera to check if it's working. My face is a little different to the faces of my other classmates on the photograph.

The photographs of my class weren't taken with a Leica. Back then it was a regular small bellows camera. They don't make those at all any more. That camera had a foldout baseboard, and the lens was at the front in the bellows, a pleated bag like a diminishing accordion; I probably had a camera like that. I had a Leica later, when I was at the Polytechnic.

Then I would make the prints, myself. I developed them, because that camera took glass plates, about 6 cm by 9 cm in size, not film. And I made the enlargements in the laboratory at my father's photography firm. I developed and enlarged them myself, and made 50 or so prints. For all my classmates.

You could say that from a very early age I dabbled in corruption, with giving out those photographs. I didn't get anything from my classmates, but today you could bring out evidence, if I ended up before a commission of inquiry, that I was bribing the teacher to get better grades [an allusion to the parliamentary committees of inquiry in Poland that investigate corruption].

I suspect Mama's family was averagely religious. Mama observed the Sabbath and lit the candles regularly. Our house was kosher, but towards the end [in the late 1930s] my parents definitely kept kosher but we [children] didn't: we mixed milk and meat.

We didn't make a show of eating ham, but in town or at school I ate ham sandwiches. I was non-religious, as they say, from 12 or 13, I think. I broke with religion very early on. I stopped going to the prayer house with Father.

I wasn't made to go. I didn't have a bar mitzvah. Perhaps the influence of Switzerland was very strong. That could have been the difference. All that together created this atmosphere – it wasn't assimilation, but there was a tendency that way, probably.

The prayer house was in the same neighborhood as our apartment. On the next plot; it was a single-story building, quite long, a tiny plot; the prayer house was there, and on weekdays the cheder. Father at first every Saturday and then only on the bigger holidays went to that prayer house.

In the 1920s it was more like the 19th century [in terms of observation of Jewish law], but later on he went less and less frequently. Father wore a hat, but then everyone wore a hat, or a peaked cap. He even had a bowler hat for a few years.

There was a synagogue on Starowarszawska Street [Editor's note: the synagogue on Nowowarszawska Street was erected in 1903 thanks to the support of Mojzesz Pfeffer]; that synagogue is still there in Kielce, I think.

A synagogue [as opposed to a prayer house] is an impressive building with all the ornamentation; it has this little platform, podium – I don't know what it's called [bimah]. It's a two-story building, spacious, that can accommodate some 200 people, say. But a prayer house is small. That one was the size of an apartment.

We observed a certain ritual. Easter [Passover] was observed with great care because the food was tasty. Sponge cake made from matzah flour! I can make it to this day. You make it the same way as with ordinary flour. And it's best to make the flour yourself – grind the matzah.

That's what's called paschal cake, and with that we drank raisin wine, which was homemade. We bought the raisins, the raisins were pickled – just soaked in warm water – I don't know if you added sugar – and after a few days that made this drink, which we called raisin wine; it perhaps had a trace of alcohol, but a very meager one.

Everything on that table was traditional: eggs, brine, some kind of meat. The matzah was round. In my time there was never square, factory-made matzah, only hand-baked matzah, round, baked wonderfully, unevenly, with an incomparable taste. Better than the Hungarian matzah that was imported into Poland after the war.

While we're talking about holidays, the prewar tastes are coming back to me. On the top shelves of that dresser with the grapes were delicacies that Mother made: sometimes sugared preserves – cherry or plum, strawberry... – no, strawberries started appearing very late on; in the 1920s we didn't eat strawberries.

But there were marvelous sour cherries, there were bilberries, there were much disliked [by me] cranberries. Woodland fruits and garden fruits were cheap, too; we bought the first pears, they were these small, hard, red pears, very sweet, called 'witarnie.'

When Mother brought the basket back from the bazaar loaded with various provisions, what she'd been able to buy, which was: milk, cheese, apples, vegetables (she lugged it herself) – there were, among other things, pears in it.

And outside the house we fell on that basket; nobody remembered that we had to help Mother, little hands just dived into the basket and we'd pull out those pears on the spot – Mother, hot and red in the face, would stand there and smile. Her flushed cheeks and the color of those pears was almost the same – I've remembered that.

Bilberries were very easy to come by [cheap]; they took the place of jam, which we didn't buy, because it was too dear, and we spread bilberries on bread and that was breakfast. The bilberries were gathered in the woods around Kielce and a woman from the countryside would bring them to the house.

Just as popular were gherkins in brine, which we ate in one particular way: the cucumbers weren't sliced but cut into four, four quarters [lengthways]. And you took a piece of bread and butter too for breakfast, and a piece of cheese, this wonderful [soft] white cheese, a heart-shaped cheese.

Dairy products were bought from peasants, even though that wasn't kosher. There was no other option, you see, no prohibitions could do anything at that level: you could separate milk from meat, kosher, and so on, but the butter, cream and eggs had to be bought. And they weren't koshered in any way afterwards.

Bought bread varied. I remember this one scene, from 1920, I think. My eldest brother brought home a loaf of army bread from somewhere, it was known as a 'komisniak' [commission bread]. That was bread baked in a mold – you see [normally] bread wasn't baked in tins then; loaves were round.

And we sat down at the table, and Father, who could slice bread wonderfully, cut these even slices, and then Mother handed the slices round. The butter was traditional, shaped like a whetstone, it was cheap too, eggs were cheap, dairy produce was very cheap then.

My [future] brother-in-law [Mosze Baum] and I sat for the Polytechnic. Why? I don't know what drove me. 180 boys sat for the first year, about 10 percent of whom were Jews. So something in the way of numerus clausus did exist. Not nullus but clausus [5](#).



One other boy from Kielce took the examination, Gliksman. We were friendly, but in a casual way. Theirs was a petty bourgeois family, not very large, but very poor. What I remember is a terribly threadbare rug in the middle room, and almost no furniture.

Gliksman was always impoverished, poor, he had very bad teeth – they had no money for the dentist. He always went about in his school uniform, and at the Polytechnic he also wore this collar band and he had a rubber collar. It was a stiff, white collar, buttoned up, and then he had a tucker, that was how you dressed: a shirt and tucker. But we used to laugh that Gliksman had stiff cuffs attached to his collar with string: just his tucker, string, and cuffs, that's what we used to joke. He probably only had one shirt.

I came to Warsaw [in 1931 or 1932] and we [Mr. Gringras and Baum] took a lodging, a room with Madame Fürst. I think Mrs. Fürst was a Jew. She was round about 60 or so then. She was a peculiar person, originally came from Germany, spoke fluent German, good Polish, sometimes told these not particularly refined anecdotes, a bit coarse.

Our floor was the 6th floor, a little room. It was on the main street, Marszałkowska. In the courtyard, of course, not at the front, but in the courtyard, no elevator, but we had a superb view from there. From our window you could see the Cedergren, the former telegraphic switchboard on Zielna Street, it's the Nissenbaum Foundation today. And we used to flirt with the telephonists through the window, at a distance of a good 100 meters.

I used to get 50 zloty from home [a month], and once a month Mama would send up these generous parcels of food, and that was enough, because the lodging cost about 20 zloty, I think. That 50 zloty had to serve me to pay for my lodgings and keep myself, without extra private lessons. In 1932, 1933. I took my clothes from home, too; I had them made in Kielce. Having clothes made wasn't particularly expensive.

As for eating, we didn't eat at Madam Fürst's; we ate in town for 50 groszy. Mostly in cheap lunch bars. Near our house, for example, which was no. 100, I think, at 120 or 127 there was this restaurant – today we'd call it a snack bar – where you could get gefilte fish, or sausage with cabbage, seasoned marvelously.

You took a bread roll, and that cabbage and sausage, and that was your dinner. That was dear. We didn't eat there every day, of course. But for 50 groszy, sometimes 70, you could eat dinner on the corner of Sniadeckich Street and what is Konstytucji Place today: a roast, with potatoes, beetroot, a piece of beef. Mr. Rajmer, he was called [the proprietor], as far as I remember. There was an upstairs bar where you could get meatless meals, such as a potato, mushroom and egg bake, for 50 groszy, a large portion.

Opposite Rajmer's was one of the most exclusive shops: the Pakulski brothers'. The Pakulski brothers sold everything from the best teas and coffees through pheasants and chickens. Of course they had sugar and so on. In that shop you could get the best fish; you could buy caviar.

And there was this one lunch bar that I went to once, the Silver Rose. You could eat very well for 2 zloty there. And there was one on Marjanska Street, too, that's at the entrance to the Jewish quarter, for one zloty you got a five-course meal.

That was super-luxury, because you got a starter; that was liver and onions, of course, or some sort of herring, for the second course clear chicken soup with noodles, for the third some kind of roast or chicken. Chicken with all the trimmings, of course. Then there was a dessert: a piece of cake, and on top of that there was compote. They were home-cooked meals. 20 people could eat there. You went in, ate, paid and left.

I didn't have much of a social life during my studies. Those matters connected with politics were very absorbing. I came into contact with the socialist organization OMS Zycie [6](#) at the Polytechnic. Both Jews and Poles belonged to Zycie; the Poles were usually from proletarian backgrounds, as you used to say. Later on I was also a member of the Communist Union of Polish Youth [KZMP] [6](#).

Baum and I were given a task for the Zycie organization: we had to make a copier to print the newsletter. We had to make a metal frame, which we cobbled together out of parts from a machine; then we had to add rollers, drive-wheels, cables.

The rollers were coated with this thick, hard gelatin-like substance, and their job was to take up the ink spread on the plate. Of course there was the typeface, the typeface was arranged in a cassette. It was practically done by hand, but you could make a few hundred copies a day.

And we cobbled together that machine, using the facilities that the workshops on Gesia and Pawia Streets offered. That's where all the Jewish workshops, little manufactories were, you see, that made bags, and metal fittings, and door locks, and cut keys, and they mended wheel spokes and bikes and so on, and there were bakeries there, too.

So we built this machine and set it up on the 5th floor of the house, in a Jewish apartment, and for a few months it was operated by this girl, an 18-year-old, a poet who spoke only Yiddish. I don't know what she was called. We avoided giving our names because you could 'sing' to the police. That girl operated it until the raid, when the police took the apartment, along with the machine and the girl, who got six years. And went down.

There was this factory on Ciepla Street, I remember. We were supposed to be organizing a mass demonstration. That involved getting up on a folding chair or bench as the workers were coming off their shift, and starting shouting:

Comrades!!, and then the speaker would come up and start declaiming that we here are living in a fascist Poland, that there are the Nazis, etc., you know, a short, concise speech about the government being fascist. It lasted five minutes and then you scattered. My thing was probably, so I remember, to attract the people.

But there were others [other activities]. For instance smuggling, if you like, to Czechoslovakia, where the communist party was legal, and we had to smuggle our bosses across, or rather the boss, i.e. the secretary of the KZMP, who was Zambrowski at the time. [Roman Zambrowski, real name Rubin Nusbaum (1909-1977): communist activist, member of the KPP; 1930-1938 one of the leaders of the KZMP; during the war one of the organizers of the Union of Polish Patriots in the USSR; up to 1968 in the communist party leadership in Poland, then charged with Zionism and expelled from the Party]. The Zambrowski, whose son Antoni went over to Solidarity [8](#). Well, and then we would help him get to Zakopane, find a guide, etc., to help him get over to the other side. He would go across via a pedestrian route, of course. And the guide, who was also from the left, on

the whole, would take him over [the border]. So there were various kinds of assignments.

I was arrested before the war. My student rights were suspended. I was in the third year, charged with involvement with a communist organization. They confiscated two Russian books from my lodgings. They were poems by Sergei Yesenin [9](#). I liked Yesenin very much, and to this day I remember half of the beautiful poem Pismo k zhenshinye [Russian for 'Letter to a Woman'], a beautiful poem.

How did a Polytechnic student come to know Russian? Well, technical books in Poland were published in translation from German and were very expensive. The Russians didn't respect copyrights and published the same books in Russian, on poor paper, and exported them to Poland. They were affordable for me.

I was inside for two months: in the prison on Danilowiczowska Street, and then in Pultusk. That was in 1933 or 1934. I faced trial. I had a good lawyer, Cyranek. And my parents and brothers spent several hundred zloty of their money on that, 600, I think. They never had anything against me for that. In the end I was acquitted, or rather the case was dismissed.

#### • Fela Baum

I met Fela [Mr. Gringras's partner, whom he refers to as his wife, although they never formally married] when she was 17, and I was 23, when I was at the Polytechnic. I used to go visiting that friend of mine, Baum [Fela's brother]. Well, and I got friendly with the family, somehow. Fela was still at gymnasium. She was born in 1917, 20th September 1917. She went to Zimnowodzina's [the girls' school in Kielce]. She left school, but she didn't matriculate. That's what I seem to remember.

Fela's father was a tailor and also the co-proprietor of a shop with dress materials. The shop was on the street front and the workshop at the back. It was a large family. Several of the brothers had a shop together on Kolejowa Street, later Sienkiewicza. They took in work, took measurements and sewed on the spot, in the shop. Her family lived on Czysta Street, later Fosza, in a house that may still be there.

Fela's mom – I don't know what she was called [Balbina], and her father – Szymon. They were probably a few years younger than my parents, but I don't know when my parents were born. I don't know where they [Fela's parents] came from. My wife's family were religious, but moderately so. Her father certainly wore a kippah, and probably went to synagogue every Saturday; they lit the candles every Saturday, but there wasn't any particular emphasis on their Jewishness, no.

I know that one of the family traded in dairy products, he had this little shop on Kolejowa, they called him Pachciarek. From the Polish word 'pachciarz.' And a 'pachciarz' was just that: a Jew who traded in dairy products. [Editor's note: Polish dictionaries give the definition of 'pachciarz' as someone (usually a Jew) who rents an inn, an orchard, cattle, etc. from someone else.]

The firm [Mr. Gringras's father's photographic business] was the main source of income and the genesis of the Orion photographic manufactory and our move from Kolejowa Street to Czysta Street, later known as Marshal Fosz [Fosze] Street. I suspect Father took out a loan on that house.

My brother-in-law [Chaskiel Majtek], who I talked to just very recently [on the telephone], mentioned that Father was verging on bankruptcy, that he was terribly in debt just before the war. That may have been sometime around 1930, 1932, 1931 [when the factory was built]. It was a small plot. On that plot, a three-story house was built.

We were on the third floor – a three-room apartment: in that apartment there was a bathroom, very modest, but a bathroom it was; and there was a small balcony. I wasn't at home by then, I only came home for the vacations, with the exception of a month's internship somewhere in a factory. I had internships in Andrychow, and in Lodz, in a number of factories, and in a factory near Kielce.

The one apartment on the second floor was made into the shop floor, where the photographic paper was made – the glass plates were made in a more primitive way involving lots of manual work. Most of the machinery in the factory was designed by me and my father.

My brother Leopold also worked in the factory, as a chemist. But I don't think Artur worked in the photographic manufactory, because he moved to Czestochowa. Maurycy may have worked in the photographic firm as a retoucher, and apart from that, by then he already had significant artistic interests. He did quite a lot of painting.

A large photograph has survived – perhaps it is at Ania's apartment, with the factory owner on it – my father – with the entire staff. At that time, on that photograph, the staff numbered some 30, 40 people, of which about 10 were family – sisters and cousins. There are quite a lot of faces there.

I designed the pipes for the factory using the technical literature that I had at the Polytechnic, and they were made by a tinsmith called Cyna [a nickname meaning 'zinc']. An immensely pleasant, skilled man, in this Jewish cap, he made those pipes. Cyna was chiefly a roofer. And why did we call him Cyna? Because drops of the zinc alloy that he used to solder the metal roofing used to splash onto his face and they left these blackened marks, [and his] face and hands were covered in these black spots.

I only became interested in [Jewish] trades and professions when I started writing my memoirs, my book Okruchy [Remnants]. I often used to wonder why they used to call Jews 'chandeles' [a facetious Yiddish-style Polonization of the Yiddish word for 'merchant,' 'tradesman'].

Jews are basically tradesmen, aren't they? But I think to myself: well, Cyna wasn't a tradesman, Cyna was a tinsmith. My wife's father was a tailor – so he had a shop where his customers came to be measured up for the clothes he made – so what? He made the clothes, his brothers were tailors too, my father was a photographer, and as such a craftsman by trade.

Take a brass smith. In every Jewish home there was a candelabra, wasn't there? Larger or smaller, but there was one. Well, a brass smith was a man who cast candelabras in brass, and probably cast other things too. There were Jewish goldsmiths, watchmakers. Carriers, who transported goods, for instance a water carrier transported water; there were hackney cab drivers, there were porters. Patchers were cobblers who patched up shoes. Some of those professions were not very honorable. My family, for instance, were not very well disposed towards my wife-to-be, or at least that's what my wife claimed to the end of her days, because her father was a tailor. There were furriers.

There were artisans, traders and merchants. Grand merchants like Szejnfeld, who had a wine shop, that was a better class. A patcher cobbler was one of the lowest categories of Jewish craftsmen.

And there was this one patcher who lived in the house that my wife's father, Baum, owned or co-owned. And that Jew was in this cubbyhole under the stairs, with his large family – it's unbelievable that a family could have fitted in there.

Some of the family must have gone somewhere else for the night, because it would have been impossible for him to have his workshop there, where he performed these complicated tasks, and his family. And there was a little girl in that family who was afflicted with polio, or had problems with her hip. She was called Chajka, I remember that little girl perfectly. I must admit I've started dictating a mini novella about her.

I met Chajka when I was already 18 or 20, as I used to run up the stairs to see my friend Baum, or Fela, my future wife, and that little girl would be sitting on the stairs. She was maybe eight or ten, and she'd be singing to herself, humming, beside her a pile of blank paper and some glue, and she would be cutting up the paper to make envelopes, and gluing the envelopes.

She made envelopes to sell. Such were the riches of the Jews in Kielce! And Chajka would sing that famous American hit, it was called 'I'm in Heaven.' 'I'm in heaven, seventh heaven, tralalala.' Do you know it? And I used to walk past her indifferently, as if – I don't know – she were a stone lying there, I didn't care in the slightest. She hobbled around, and played in the courtyard among the children, who didn't take the least notice of her defect.

Chajka can't have survived the war. In my story she got to America, but [in reality] she didn't survive the war, no. They all went, died, the Baums died, the whole house went to Birkenau [10](#).

At the polytechnic [in Warsaw] anti-Semitism began to spread gradually under Pilsudski's [11](#) rule. The origins of that anti-Semitism go back to the time of the Polish-Soviet War [1920]. The Jews were resented for having welcomed the Bolsheviks [12](#) so enthusiastically in many small towns, which is quite probable given the poverty and misery of the Jews.

Sometime after the death of Pilsudski, and very quickly after 1936, when Nazism was spreading fast and furiously in Germany, anti-Semitism spread simultaneously in Poland.

I remember there was a point when we were thrown out of the Polytechnic. Młodzież Wszechpolska – Pan-Polish Youth [13](#). We were pushed out: both Jews and so-called communists – Poles who defended those Jews – pushed out of the gate of the Polytechnic. As the police didn't intervene, because the police had no right of entry on the polytechnic campus, it all went off without interference, and the rector was around, and calmed things down, but didn't intervene. He was called Warchalowski.

Then there were incidents like this in Warsaw: students from student fraternities [14](#) had sticks, in these sticks they would set razor blades, and they would hit people on the back of the head. I remember a friend of mine, Czerskier, came to me from the Polytechnic. We dressed his wound. He had this terribly thick mop of hair and a cut in the back of his head made with a razor blade.

As for instances of drastic anti-Semitism, I didn't have immediate contact with any. I don't know where I can have remembered these two names from: Jegier and Owsiany? I overheard something somewhere [as a child], and it stuck in my mind, but it might not be true. Anyway, it sticks in my mind that these two Jews were killed in the pogrom in Kielce in 1918 [15](#). But I'm not certain of that information.

But there was one instance [from later] that aroused my antipathy towards the then [Polish] Republic. And that was that I wasn't taken for military service, although I was of that age. The ostensible reason for my not being accepted was that I had 'technical defects.' In a word, I wasn't given category A because as a student I would have had to go to officer cadet school, which wasn't looked upon favorably by the then military authorities, for one more Jew to get into officer cadet school.

In Kielce even then there was a beautiful swimming pool that we used to go to. On the outskirts of Kielce, in this young wood. A swimming pool where there was even a diving tower. And I used to go to that swimming pool with Fela, we would bathe, swim, dive into the water, I even broke my nose, I remember, trying to dive off the springboard. You didn't feel in that town what you felt in Warsaw. Well, in any case nobody harassed us at the swimming pool. And the war was approaching fast.

I had moved back to Kielce from Warsaw for that period. I was due to have my graduation examination right after the vacations [1939]. And as you do in the vacations, we still went swimming, we would go out of town to the summer resort of Bialogon, to Slowik, 7 km from Kielce, and we would swim in that river [the Biebrza]. There was calm in the city.

No-one suspected, no-one talked of war. In Warsaw before the vacation it hadn't been tangible either. Though we knew what was going on in Germany, we knew about the Kristallnacht [16](#).

I spent most of my time with Fela. I rode a motorbike. That motorbike belonged to my brother-in-law Obarzanski, this big, heavy motorbike. Obarzanski was the husband of Roza, my eldest sister. On the last day of peace my wife, who was a girl of about 22 then, even cycled to Slowik to swim.

My family was in Kielce. Only Artur was in Czestochowa – he already had a wife, Anka, and two children by then. Maurycy and Leopold lived with their wives, but in Kielce. And the girls: the youngest, Mania, and the second-youngest, Bala, were at home, and Ziuka and her fiancé or husband – I don't remember whether that was after their wedding or not – Chaskiel Majtek. And we were in touch with Simon only by letter – he lived in Paris, the eldest.

### • The war

The last day [before the war] was absolutely no different from the previous days. In the early hours of the [next] morning – 4 or 5 in the morning – I was woken by the boom of bombs. Kielce was bombarded very early on, on 1st September.

I dressed quickly and ran – aha, I think I'd spent the night at the Baums' – ran to my parents' house. And I remember the empty street, with just glass from the shops [crunching underfoot], because the panes had fallen out of the windows.

And I saw one or two hackney cab horses, horses lying dead, and this silence. There was only me running along on that glass. And I got home, and there of course a great to-do, everyone gathered, even those two brothers and their wives were there, one lad was injured.

By the time we went out [onto the street], there was a reyvakh [Yiddish for commotion], as the Jews say. Noise, screams, no idea what was going to happen. The first bombardment of Kielce in effect totally paralyzed the town.



On 1st September the lights, water mains, etc., stopped working – it took one day. Families left, most hired a hackney or a cart and the family would be loaded in and they fled. Fled east, for the most part [17](#).

In fact, only those who the Russians deported to the Far East survived. This is a paradox that isn't talked about, that if they hadn't been deported they would have been killed to the last one. The ones who fled to Lwow – they survived. All those who I met [after the war], all those who were killed in the Kielce pogrom in 1946, were people who had come back from the Soviet Union. Yes, a paradox.

So what to do? Flee the town? Every man for himself. Father procured some means of transport and [off he went] with the little girls. Where the rest, where the Baums, I don't know. I went back for my better half to her house and we began to pack a rucksack.

I remember that 2-zloty coins were silver, and it occurred to us that it would be easier to pay with those 2-zloty pieces than with paper [money]. I had this wonderful small but very strong bicycle. We loaded the rucksack onto the bike and left the town on the road to Bodzentyn [a small town approx. 20 km east of Kielce]. With us was her eldest brother Artek, this tall guy, and I think Andzia [Fela's sister].

In a monastery we spent the night, and went on, towards Lublin. We were headed for a place called Wierzbnik, I remember that name. We met other people fleeing and somebody said the Germans were just a few kilometers away.

Well, so we put on a spurt at once, fled at such speed, about 40 km a day. We were fleeing for 12, maybe 15 days. On the way you saw crowds of people on the roads. There were air bombardments on the crowds, and then people would scatter into the roadside ditches.

There were rumors, people passed on information, as they do on the road, that English [British] planes were on their way, that they would soon have the Germans on the run. You were constantly peering up at the sky, but there were neither Polish nor English planes to be seen.

And there were also stories that the state administration, President Moscicki and the prime minister, Slawoj-Skladkowski, the defense minister Kasprzycki and his wife, that they had all fled Warsaw towards Zaleszczyki and on to Romania. [18](#)

We got to the river Bug, to a Polish village in Western Belarus. The Belarusians ferried us across to the other bank by night. And the other bank was the Soviet bank [19](#). Well, and we stopped off there. We spent the night in a hut with some Soviet soldiers. There were ten or twelve of them there.

There were no attempts at harassment: you from Polsha [Russian: Poland] or not from Polsha. And from there we set off deeper into the USSR, we steadfastly tried to go east, to Volhynia. And there we split up with Andzia and Fela's brother somewhere, and I was alone with Fela.

We traveled however we could: carts, wagons, trucks. I [often when talking about himself and Fela, Mr. Gringras uses the first person singular] got to the town of Rowne [town in Volhynia, 170 km north of Lwow, now Ukraine], and in Rowne I met some friends from Warsaw, who we stayed with for a few days. They'd already got a room.

I started looking for work, because things had calmed down. Well, that was later than the middle of September. I reported to some local authority. By that time [after the occupation of Eastern Poland on 17th September 1939] the authorities were Soviet.

And back then I think I had my full grade transcript [from the Polytechnic] with me, and so this Russian says: 'You don't have any experience, so we can only offer you work building the road leading from Kiev, or to Lwow,' – I don't remember – 'and on that section you could work as a physical [laborer].' 'Well,' I say, 'as a physical, as a physical will do.'

He seconded me to a place called Warkowicze [a small town some 15 km from Rowne]. And Fela and I moved into this farmstead [from October 1939 to June 1940 there was a POW labor camp in Warkowicze, whose inmates worked building this road], the farmer's wife, a very nice woman, as it happened, the lady of the manor, a Polish woman, Dawidowska or Dawidowicz gave us a room.

[Editor's note: Before the war, there were 2,712 landed estates of over 50 hectares owned by Poles in the Lwow, Volhynia, Stanislawow and Tarnopolski provinces; during the Soviet occupation they were seized by the state.] The house wasn't very big – this little country manor-style house.

So I started working. It was a road being widened for strategic purposes, of course, a metaled road. I was there for about two months, at least. At first physical, and then I was what they called a technician. My work involved at night, when the truck drivers – they were Polish prisoners of war – went off somewhere to rest, they returned the trucks to the base and I had to fill those 20, 30 trucks up with gas overnight.

I didn't have any equipment other than a rubber hose, so I had to suck the gasoline up. Well, I learned very quickly that you don't swallow the petrol, just suck it up, and then you put the hose into the tank and the gas poured in.

I also cleaned the trucks, scraped them underneath, cleaned the mud off of them. As a technician I headed a two- or three-man gang. Once the snow began to fall the trucks often got stuck and we had to pull them out.

In the night I would be called out at 1 or 2 o'clock, I would go with this truck that had a suitable hook, and a few guys with shovels, we'd drive up to the truck and we had to pull it out of the snowdrift. There were huge snowfalls there at the turn of 1939–1940.

We managed to contact Andzia, Fela's sister, by letter. She had turned up in Augustow [a town 80 km north of Bialystok]. She was teaching there in some school and wanted to persuade her sister to go and join her. So Fela packed her things and went.

She traveled parallel to the Russian border, northwards. But I intended to go to Lwow, because her brother Mosze, who had stopped off there and got straight into Lwow Polytechnic, was urging me to go to Lwow. Lwow Polytechnic was a Polish polytechnic but by that time was under Ukrainian, i.e. Soviet authority.

Perhaps I also should mention the banya [bathhouse]. Fela described something phenomenal called a banya in a letter to me. I still have it somewhere to this day. Fela went with her landlady, Mrs. Witkowska, to bathe. Mrs. Witkowska said that she hadn't been to the banya for a year, so off they went. The banya was this hut made of wooden beams.

The floor was earth, clay, just a few planks laid down. In the center a stove, around the stove a few benches, and that was where the girls sat. They had ladles and these huge bowls, and they scooped up water, which was boiling in this big kettle, this pot. And that was how they washed. And when they were all hot and steamy, they would jump out naked into the cold. And she [Fela] said: 'Even if I had a cold, I wouldn't feel anything!'

I met up with my parents in Kovel [a small town in Volhynia, approx. 160 km north-east of Lwow]. Kovel made an awful picture at that time. Papers on the streets, wind, cold – that was the end of the year [1939], December was approaching.

The Kovel landscape reminds me of late, cold fall. Deserted streets, shops closed, boarded up, newspapers drifting around, just a wasteland, the awful sight that town made! To this day my vision of Kovel is of something drab and awful.

I tried to persuade my father not to go back to Kielce. But he was being persuaded by my eldest sister's husband, Obarzanski, who said that you could work things out with the Germans, you could get along, that it was not so bad, well, there were unpleasant things, sometimes you could get a fist in your face, but on the whole, he said, if you tuck him [a German] a goose – a roast one, of course – under his arm, then you can get along with a gendarme. It's livable with, come back.

And Father, who was getting on in years – whichever way you look at it he was over 50, with Mother and the two girls, without a real foothold, preferred to go back. Because he knew the Germans, he knew the Austrians, spoke German. 'It's peaceful there, why should we carry on knocking around here, what for?' And they went back, although I tried to persuade them, I remember as if it were yesterday, not to go back.

My parents went back to Kielce and I stayed in Lwow. That Lwow period is the Polytechnic. They honored my Warsaw grade transcript – you have to remember that this was a time when some of the Warsaw professors were lecturing at the University in Lwow, among them Boy-Zelenski [Tadeusz Zelenski, ps. Boy, 1874-1941, literary and theater critic, satirist, journalist, translator of French literature]. The food, I remember, was not wonderful – we even ate horsemeat, which at the time was considered unpleasant, because horsemeat wasn't eaten in Poland.

While I was in Lwow a few parcels of clothing came from my parents. They were probably still living in their own houses, but in 1942 we were no longer in contact. We lost touch with the outbreak of the war [between Germany and Russia in June 1941] [20](#).

And after that I no longer had any contact with either Kielce or Warsaw, only with Moscow, with the people who were in the Union of Polish Patriots [21](#), who also sent parcels, small ones. An overcoat, a good, navy blue overcoat – but unfortunately some mice nested in the sleeve and then I had to throw it away, yes, that's what happened.

I didn't know what was going on, because being in Russia we didn't know, you see. We didn't know that there was a ghetto, we didn't know about the deportations to Auschwitz, we didn't know about the uprising in the ghetto [22](#), for instance.

The Russians probably didn't have either the time or the inclination, nobody talked about what was happening in Warsaw, because they had their own troubles, such as Babi Yar [23](#) in Kiev, where those 100,000 people were killed.

On Soviet radio, which was on from morning to night, and on the squares there were loudspeakers set up from 1941, there was mostly military-type news. The famous presenter Levitan would be talking: 'Nashe vayska adstyupili v tyazholykh bayakh' [Russian: Our troops have withdrawn after heavy fighting]. And that was all the news that you got from the radio. What happened to my parents I only found out after my return to Poland. In 1946, in May.

For another few years they lived in Kielce under the German occupation, until the liquidation of the Kielce ghetto [24](#). What my sisters did in that time I don't know. Only one photograph from that period has survived that they are also on: Father, Mother, a group of people, a wedding – it was 1941. The ghetto in Kielce was organized in 1941 [1st April 1941] and the deportations took place in 1942. [From 20th to 24th August 1942 the Germans liquidated the Kielce ghetto; the selection was held on Okrzei Street.] And ultimately, of course, it ended as it had to end. Both the girls went to the Birkenau camp. Mania died at the age of 18 or 20. Nobody knew anything about them. They were liquidated by the Germans very quickly.

After finishing my studies [in Lwow] I got a job in this [enterprise] Kavkaz Energomontazh, which I clung to throughout the war. My jobs included gang foreman in the Bachewski vodka factory. [A factory producing vodkas and liqueurs, founded in 1782 in Wybranowka near Lwow by the Baczewski family; from the 1840s a huge, world-famous company; nationalized in the USSR.] There were these tanks to hold alcohol, these huge vats, and they had to be welded; I supervised the welders.

I found myself a little place to live, a tiny room, on the outskirts of Lwow with a Mrs. Granat, and then my beloved came back to me from Augustow.

Although that was on the Belarusian side, the language of instruction there was Polish and she had been teaching Polish. The village elder had paid her in food. But she threw that job in and came to Lwow to be with me, and from that time on we didn't split up again.

Where we had skis from I don't remember, but we laid a straw mattress out on those skis and that was our rock-a-bye, and in the morning we went into town. She went with me, because otherwise there was nothing to eat, and she would walk through the snow in these summer slipper things. You were very hardy back then; your nerves have something to do with it, and your resistance increases fiendishly. She wasn't working anywhere then. And so we knocked around there.

After that job in Lwow they sent me to Tarnopol, not to the town itself but to the village of Berezowica Wielka, a few kilometers from Tarnopol. And I think I worked there until the outbreak of war [1941]. There I had to install a small boiler system. I was given very nice lodgings in the village. A large room, hollyhocks and trees growing outside the window; I had ample food, we swam in the river, the Seret, a well-known river. And there the two of us lived.

The Germans had long since crossed the border [in July 1941], and my gang and I were still finishing off a job. Only on the sixth day or something did we realize we had to get out, because the Germans were just around the corner. We rustled up a sturdy cart, and there were also a few of my friends from Lwow, Tarnopol, Jews, who piled onto that cart with me, and off we went. We set off from Tarnopol in the direction of Kiev. The road was crowded; there were Ukrainian women working on it, all with white aprons on their head, shovels in hand; probably reinforcing the verges. And so we roamed from village to village: fields of maize and fields of beans for kilometers.

And in the end we stopped in Poltava, where there was a railroad station, and by then we were planning to try to go to Asia. We sold the cart and we waited for a goods train, because there were no longer any passenger trains. Going to Asia. And in the end we got onto some platform; corruption worked, probably – a sweater or something worked, and we found out there was a train going to Tashkent.

We were in that train for a few weeks. At stations you could fish [a mugful of] kipiatak [boiling water], and the local residents sold this and that – a round of sheep's cheese, or 'vobla' – dried fish, tough as the sole of your shoe.

After a few weeks we reached Tashkent. The start of life in Uzbekistan and then in Tajikistan. I made contact with my professional organization, Kavkaz Energomontazh, which had a tiny, branch in Tashkent comprising one man. I remember what he was called – Monakow. He gave me a job in Shurab [location uncertain] – that's a place about 1,200 meters above sea level, a place with no greenery, three trees grew there.

There was a coal mine there. Fela didn't work in Shurab. She only worked once we were in Kokanda [Kokand, a town in the Fergana district of the Uzbek SSR, approx. 160 km from Tashkent], in a sugar refinery. In Kokanda I did an installation of a steam boiler with the help of some 100 people, at least. They started building the sugar refinery there because the areas where the sugar refineries were, mostly Ukraine, had been occupied by the Germans.

From Kokanda I was relocated to Aktyubinsk. Aktyubinsk today is a large city of 300,000, but then it was a one-horse town, a largish settlement. I got a terribly infested room there, with an incredibly beautiful view of the vast, blooming steppe, and on the horizon a railroad and trains with transports of armaments shunting this way and that all day. Three kilometers from those lodgings we were installing boilers again, this time American boilers.

The Americans had signed an agreement with Russia for the supply of what they called lend-lease goods. As well as arms, there were also industrial supplies such as electric power stations and turbines. Once I commissioned a small American electric power station. I was assisted that time by a detachment of Japanese prisoners of war, excellently dressed, efficient. I communicated with them in sign language, but they understood everything so efficiently!

In Aktyubinsk there were also prisoners with criminal sentences working, not political ones, at least that's what they said. And there were 2 Poles there. I mean 2 Jews, prisoners, Jewish singers from Warsaw, Dzigan and Szumacher [25](#). I didn't meet them, but they were working in that area and I know they had an excellent life. They worked in what was called KO [cultural and educational], they worked in culture.

They were locked up in a camp at night, but they didn't have stripes [prison uniforms]; they were dressed in these miserable rags. And during the day they sang for the workers. In a forge they did a concert, and you should have seen the faces of those prisoners, entranced by the singers.

One of the women prisoners was some artiste from Asia, she sang beautifully, and Dzigan and Szumacher sang Jewish, Hebrew songs, and they listened as if they'd been bewitched – people were starved of music of any kind, you see. Dzigan and Szumacher got out to Iran, and then into the wider world with the armies organized by Anders [26](#).

I met up with Artur in Asia, in Fergana [a district capital in the Uzbek SSR, approx. 240 km from Tashkent]. I even have a few photographs from Fergana, very small ones, but clear. Those [Artur's] children, Rysio and Lilka, were brought up in the care of our sister Ziuka, who afterwards left for Israel. She was there with her husband, Chaskiel Majtek. Artur's wife [Anka] crossed the Soviet-German border several times, because until the outbreak of the war [1941] you could travel like that.

[Editor's note: to cross the German-Soviet border legally special permits were required, that were rarely issued.] But her last journey to Poland ended in her not being able to get back to Lwow. And she stayed in German territory, in Czestochowa, and as a result ended up in a munitions factory. She wasn't killed, she turned up after the war.

### • My life after the war

Well, and on 8th May the war ended. The authorities in Lublin were getting organized. I was probably late in receiving notification to return to Poland, that a train was being organized; I wasn't returning alone – 700 of us from that district were returning.

The situation was such that they were mostly people of Jewish nationality, because those of Polish nationality returned via Iran. Several thousand Jews also went that way. I think about 200,000 people [Jews] survived thanks to getting sent out to those remote regions of Russia. [Editor's note: The Central Committee of Jews in Poland registered 136,579 Jewish repatriates from the USSR.]

I was on the train for over a month. From Kokanda in Uzbekistan. I was one of two head stewards on the train. The other one had been a scout at one time, of Jewish descent, an assimilated type. We took charge of supplies, because we had to procure bread along the way.

The real head steward was some captain of Kazakh descent, constantly drunk. We weren't given too warm a welcome on the Polish-Soviet border – the local population there gave us hostile stares, and you could hear shouts of: 'The Yids are back!' but there were no attempts at attack [27](#).

I landed up at the PUR, the State Repatriation Office, I didn't go to Kielce, but was sent to Lodz. I went around dressed in this yellowish-colored top and trousers – I'm sure I looked like a Vietnamese refugee or worse. And I read 'apteka' [Polish: pharmacy] as 'arteka,' because I was still pronouncing 'p' like 'r' ['r' in the Cyrillic alphabet used in Russian looks like 'p' in the Latin alphabet].

And in Lodz I landed a Warsaw contact, as they say; you see in Warsaw in 1946 the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, PRL [28](#), were forming. Then I was summoned to Warsaw by one of my Polytechnic friends who had already taken up posts in the government authorities – or lower down, but high enough up to summon.

And so I went to Warsaw, where I was at once billeted to an apartment on the 6th floor, on Stalowa Street, with a family. Still with my wife. Inseparable by that time, we were. It lasted 63 years, a good spell. And I got a job straight away. At that time the [government] ministries were being set up in Poland.



I was put in power engineering, because in the Soviet Union that's what I'd generally worked in. I was promoted fast, because they lacked people; there weren't any experts, people with experience, and I became someone on the Central Power Engineering Board. I was this chief inspector.

I returned from the Soviet Union in 1946, two months before the Kielce pogrom. Strange, but I don't have much of an opinion on that. News of the pogrom reached me much later. My brothers managed to hide. I was engrossed in industry, nobody talked to me on the matter, I didn't know anything of the pogrom. I didn't talk to the family either.

They were living in Wroclaw, we extremely seldom met up. And when we did see each other we talked about other things. During the elections in 1947 [29](#) I traveled around Poland as an agitator, and on trains I had to listen to many anti-Semitic opinions.

Not so long ago I heard the opinion of a researcher into the history of Kielce, who claimed that the 1946 pogrom wasn't the work of Poles but the work of the Russians, that in fact it was someone in the NKVD [30](#), acting through the SB [31](#), that had organized the pogrom in Kielce.

There are such theories. It's understandable; nobody wants to take the blame for something like that, do they? I don't believe it was a communist provocation. That's rubbish! Well, where would it have got them?

I had no intention of going to Kielce at all, and never once went to Kielce. How I got in touch with the family I don't remember, but it was probably they who found me, because they were already here, almost all the family, those who had survived in exile in the Soviet Union.

Artur and his two children survived, and my sister Ziuka, and Majtek her husband. When they came back they met up with Artur's wife, who had survived the occupation in Czestochowa. Maurycy and his wife and little son came back from Russia. And Leopold came back, from Russia – probably, because we never talked about that at all – with both daughters and his wife.

And so then that was when I learned about my parents and about my sisters. From my brothers. I think it was about six months or a year later that we met up, because I was very taken up with my job. I couldn't afford to take time off and go away. There was no question of any time off, because everything was in statu nascendi, everything was still coming together.

The only news about my parents was that they'd been deported from Kielce. We didn't know exactly where, we knew that to a concentration camp. For decades I was convinced that they had been taken to Auschwitz. It was only that guy Czarny, my cousin, who had also been in Auschwitz, who told me that they'd been in Birkenau.

My brothers didn't even talk to me on the matter; we didn't go into detail about it. There wasn't really any opportunity, there wasn't anything like that. Well, they perished, such a terrible number of people perished, that town with 20,000 inhabitants perished [an estimated 21,000 Kielce Jews perished]. We didn't talk about what death our parents died, we didn't go into ovens, crematoria, all that came to light later, later, much later.

It's only now, recently, that I found out from my brother-in-law, by telephone, from Israel, from Majtek, that Roza's husband, Obarzanski, also died in Kielce in a terrible way. Apparently he was

tied to a car and dragged through Kielce. Roza was killed in the quarries near Wisniowka, a few kilometers outside Kielce.

She was killed with her children Bobek and Giga. I don't know the details. [Editor's note: according to *Żydzi w Kielce* [Jews in Kielce], Emes, 1996: Rozalia Obarzanska was shot in the quarries in Wisniowka in 1941, and her children Szymon and Giga were murdered in the Kielce ghetto.]

My eldest brother Simon, who was taken to Auschwitz from Paris, deteriorated so much that he became a musliman. But he didn't die there, after that he was taken to another camp, perhaps during a reshuffle of people who came from Western Europe. And, well, I never found out and never tried to find out how my parents died, how my sisters died.

My wife's brother, my close friend, survived. Edzio Filipowski [previously Mosze Baum: after the war he changed his name, like many Jews]. He was born in 1912. He died at the age of 65, more or less. He would have been 94 now too [like Mr. Gringras].

Until 1941 he was in Lwow, and then, after the outbreak of the German-Soviet War, moved to Polish territory. He was in hiding but taught at the same time, what was known as secret teaching, he traveled round villages and taught Polish children [during the occupation schools were closed and teaching was illegal]. After the war Baum married Lida. She was a Pole.

From the beginning of 1947 until the end of 1948 I worked as the head of an investment procurement mission in Czechoslovakia. I built up this little organization, a dozen or so people worked in it. In 1948 I worked in the PKPG [State Economic Planning Committee, the most powerful institution in Poland], in 1949 I was director of the Central Power Engineering Board, and then I moved to work in the heavy plant industry.

I never considered the possibility of emigrating. I had my well-defined views, very firm communist convictions. Even before the war I'd dreamed of a Poland where life would be good and fair. Where Jews wouldn't be discriminated, there would be no anti-Semitism.

That was a dream of mine, probably straight out of books by Zeromski [Stefan Zeromski (1864-1925): prose writer, dramatist, journalist, author of novels on contemporary social and political issues], who was my idol at the time. I suspect that was it. But my brothers were neither communists nor Zionists. And they emigrated.

When they [Artur and his children] came back to Poland from the USSR, the family came together again. And then that family emigrated to Israel in the 1950s, in 1951 or 1952. No, there were no problems emigrating then. If you had the opportunity it wasn't difficult.

Then Maurycy left with his family, with his wife Lola [Liba] and little boy Henryk. And the third, Leopold, went to Sweden, also with his wife and two daughters, one of whom, Inka, emigrated from Sweden to Israel and lives there to this day. I think she's still alive. I'm not sure that they'd all have gone if it hadn't been for the Kielce pogrom.

In Israel Artur set himself up a good-sized photographic firm and worked as a photographer. He was assisted by my other brother Maurycy and his wife, because she was a photographer by trade too. Artur came here, to Poland, before his death, when he was 84 or so [in the mid-1980s].

In Wroclaw that time he got hold of a set of photographs that German soldiers often used to take [during the war]: photographs of Jews and Polish peasants. Artur collected those photographs and I think he donated them to a museum in Jerusalem.

In Sweden there was Leopold. He worked in a national photographic materials factory. Leopold had a family. Maryla, his wife, died at 90, and he had two daughters, who I mentioned. Ania and Roman [Mr. Gringras's children] went to stay with him for a month in 1963.

They had no problem getting passports – they were going on their own, without their parents. It wasn't a whole family going, just a 12-year-old and a 15-year-old. [Editor's note: In the 1960s very few people were allowed passports bearing the stamp "permission to go to a capitalist country"; a whole family would certainly not have got passports to go to Sweden.] One of my friends was going to Germany at the time, and took them up to Gdansk or somewhere – in any case they crossed to Sweden by ferry on their own and had a wonderful month.

I had very infrequent contact with the family in Israel. That was due to the political situation. There was total isolation at that time, you see. Since 1956 there had been no diplomatic relations [32](#), and contact was not permitted at all [Editor's note: contact with family in Israel was not totally banned, but was frowned upon by the authorities].

I think I had unpleasantness, problems at work as early as 1957. The problems involved my being summoned to a certain institution [the communist party Central Committee [33](#)] – I was deputy trade minister at the time – and told that I shouldn't be working in [that] ministry, that I had to transfer to another job, closer to industry, and I think I moved to some other ministry.

In 1968 [34](#) I wasn't working in the ministry any more, because I'd left it in 1967. I'd stopped being departmental director. It was a professional demotion. I wouldn't say I took it as my biggest defeat, because at that time it still seemed as though there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

In 1968 I was already 50-something. I retired at 64 [1975]. After that I carried on working part time. By that time I didn't feel any pull abroad; I realized that at that age, with my skills, I wouldn't have anything to do abroad – I wasn't a writer.

I find it comical when they talk about communism in Russia and Poland. It was [barely] an attempt to move towards a socialist system, but the aims themselves were beautiful. It's a well-known fact that this was the merriest block in the socialist camp.

And it was a block where the theaters functioned very beautifully, for instance, better than today, and where many very good plays were written, where many songs were written that are [still] played today.

And the great masters of cinema? Where did Wajda make his films, where did he make them? [Andrzej Wajda, b. 1926, film and theater director, one of the creators of the 'Polish School' (films incl. A Generation, Kanal (They love life), Ashes and Diamonds). Oscar for lifetime achievement.] In Turkey? He made them in Poland!

That now he wants to make a film about Katyn, because his father was killed at Katyn [35](#), I admire him for that. Do I think Katyn was a nice thing? It was a terrible thing. But when I listen to cassettes about the French Revolution...

In the apartment where we live now, we've been living since 1979, and before that for 30 years I lived at Mochnackiego Street. My wife didn't work after the war. She worked before, in the Soviet Union. After the war she looked after the baby, kept house, cooked and so on.

She didn't have to work, as things worked out; I never suggested that she look for a job. I didn't spend a lot of time with the children [Ania was born in 1948 and Roman in 1951]. As much as time allowed. I worked away a lot.

My wife was a real thesp, and when I still had my eyesight we used to go to the theater at least once a month. I went to the Jewish Theater once or twice, but seldom. I usually went to the Polski [Polish] Theater, and to the Wspolczesny [Contemporary] Theater. I used to like swimming – I can't swim well but I used to swim as well as anyone, breaststroke; I like taking a run-up and diving into the water best. I usually used to go swimming with my wife.

I didn't have any contact with the Jewish world, other than personal contacts, of course, and buying matzah, but that was a much later period, I was 60 or 70 then. I never went to synagogue. After the war I read Mendeleyev's [36](#) and a few other things, but Jewish poetry much later.

Artur made a visit to Poland when he was 82, 83; he spent a month with me. Artur's only son, Ryszard – his girl [daughter], who was a biologist, died at the age of 50. She didn't marry. She died of cancer in Israel, Lilka, she was called.

That son of Artur's is about 70, and keeps in touch with Jakub [Mr. Gringras's grandson] to some extent. They write each other sometimes – email each other, as they say nowadays. That son of Artur's has three sons now, handsome lads, going on 40, probably.

The only one left in Israel is Maurycy's grandson – his son, Heniek, died young for some reason – he was no more than 50, perhaps 45, when he died. Maurycy died in the 1980s, I think; he died before the eldest [Mr. Gringras's eldest brother]. Zdzisław died in Israel about five years ago, and Artur eight, maybe ten months later died of his heart. I don't know anything about his wife.

The only person from my mother's side who I met up with [after the war] was the one who lived with my grandfather on my father's side in that room where my grandfather asphyxiated and died. Czarny [surname], Kazimierz, or maybe Heniek. He spent quite a long time in various concentration camps, but he turned up after the war, visited me from time to time. Czarny had a shop in Swidnica with technical goods. He had three sons. He died. His wife, too. With them, the sons, I didn't keep in touch.

The question about my present life is one my grandchildren often ask me. It's a metaphysical question. My fortunes are related to my body. And that is constantly degenerating. I don't know whether it's the nature of every old person, that you become excessively sensitive to your ailments.

Sometimes I don't pay attention to it at all. But usually a lot of my thoughts are connected to my body, my health: did I take the right medicine, have to drink it down, should I call the doctor? 9.00 – time to take..., etc. You're wrapped up in yourself, but it's not a pleasant pastime.

For two years I've had such trouble seeing that I can't read any more. I use cassettes from the library for the blind. And those cassettes help me take my mind off my body and get back into the

world where I used to live.

I've got Norman Davies' 'God's Playground' [a book about Polish history] on the go at the moment, which I don't like, and 'The Confessions of St. Augustine,' who talks interestingly about time. There's a beautiful little poem by e. e. cummings about time [Mr. Gringras recites the poem 'in time of daffodils':]

in time of daffodils (who know  
the goal of living is to grow)  
forgetting why, remember how

in time of lilacs who proclaim  
the aim of waking is to dream,  
remember so (forgetting seem)

in time of roses (who amaze  
our now and here with paradise)  
forgetting if, remember yes

in time of all sweet things beyond  
whatever mind may comprehend,  
remember seek (forgetting find)

and in a mystery to be  
(when time from time shall set us free)  
forgetting me, remember me

#### • Glossary:

**1** Mussolini, Benito (1883-1945): Italian political and state activist, leader (duce) of the Italian fascist party and of the Italian government from October 1922 until June 1943. After 1943 he was the head of a puppet government in the part of Italy that was occupied by the Germans. He was captured and executed by Italian partisans.

**2** Jews in Kielce between the wars: According to census data, there were 15,500 Jews living in Kielce in 1921 and 18,000, or around 30% of the population, in 1931. They were mainly active in trade (61% of all the shops in the town were Jewish-owned) and crafts (56% of all workshops).

The leaders of the Jewish community organization were, in order, Herszel Zagajski, Dawid Rottenberg and Abram Piotrowski. In the 1920s the dominant fraction within the community was the orthodox party Agudat Israel, and in the 1930s the Zionists. The chief rabbi in Kielce was Abele Rapoport.

Kielce was also a center of Hasidism; it was home to the courts of Chaim Szmuel Horowitz of Checiny, and Mordecai Twerski of the Chernobyl dynasty. Almost all the Jewish parties of the interwar period were represented in Kielce:

Agudat, the General Zionists, revisionists, Mizrachi, Hitahadut, the Bund, Po'alei Zion, the Folkspartei, and the communists. In total some 40 Jewish associations were registered. In Kielce

there was one synagogue, the Great Synagogue, built in 1902, and around 30 prayer houses.

There were well-developed religious and secular school systems and cultural societies. The Jewish Synagogue Choir was known throughout Poland, and there was also a theater company, the Jewish Art Stage. Newspapers published in Yiddish were Kielcer Tsaitung, Kielcer Radomer Wokhenblat, Kielcer Unser Expres, and Kielcer Wokhenblat.

**3** Jasna Gora: Marian sanctuary and Pauline monastery in Czestochowa. In 1382 the church was given by Prince Wladyslaw Opolczyk to the Pauline monks he had had come from Hungary. A few years later the monks were entrusted with the keeping of the painting of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the object of a cult, believed to be the work of St. Luke the Evangelist.

Soon afterwards the monastery became one of the most-visited centers of pilgrimage in Europe. The wars waged in the Polish-Czech borderland regions, in the proximity of the monastery, prompted King Sigismund II Vasa to fund the fortification of the Jasna Gora hill.

The monastery became a fortified stronghold, which enabled it to repel the attack of the Swedes in 1655. The defense of Jasna Gora from the Swedes under the leadership of Abbot August Kordecki became the legend of the monastery. Today Jasna Gora is the leading Marian center in Poland and receives more than 3 million pilgrims a year.

**4** Hitler's rise to power: In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one-third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor. On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down. The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates. The new Reichstag passed an extraordinary resolution granting the government special legislative powers and waiving the constitution for 4 years. This enabled the implementation of a series of moves that laid the foundations of the totalitarian state: all parties other than the NSDAP were dissolved, key state offices were filled by party luminaries, and the political police and the apparatus of terror swiftly developed.

**5** Numerus clausus in Poland: After World War I nationalist groupings in Poland lobbied for the introduction of the numerus clausus (Latin: closed number - a limit on the number of people admitted to the practice of a given profession or to an institution - a school, a university, government office or association) in relation to Jews and other ethnic minorities.

The most radical groupings demanded the introduction of the numerus nullus principle, i.e. a total ban on admittance to universities and certain professions. The numerus nullus principle was violated by the Polish constitution. The battle for its introduction continued throughout the interwar period. In practice the numerus clausus was applied informally.

It depended on decision of deans or university presidents. In 1938 it was indirectly introduced at the Bar.

**6** The Zycie Independent Socialist Youth Union: A university communist youth organization founded in 1923, active mainly in Warsaw, Cracow, Lwow and Vilnius. It was strongly influenced by the



Communist Party of Poland (KPP) and the Communist Union of Polish Youth.

It acted in defense of students' economic rights and equal opportunities for ethnic minorities, and to combat anti-Semitism in higher education. It was dissolved in May 1938 along with the KPP.

**7** Communist Union of Polish Youth (KZMP): Until 1930 the Union of Communist Youth in Poland. Founded in March 1922 as a branch of the Communist Youth International. From the end of 1923 its structure included also the Communist Youth Union of Western Belarus and the Communist Youth Union of Western Ukraine (as autonomous regional organizations).

Its activities included politics, culture and education, and sport. In 1936 it initiated the publication of a declaration of the rights of the young generation in Poland (whose postulates included an equal start in life for all, democratic rights, and the guarantee of work, peace and universal education).

The salient activists in the organization included B. Berman, A. Kowalski, A. Lampe, A. Lipski. In 1933 the organization had some 15,000 members, many of whom were Jews and peasants. The KZMP was disbanded in 1938.

**8** 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 organizations 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.

**9** Yesenin, Sergei Aleksandrovich (1895-1925): Russian poet, born and raised in a peasant family. In 1916 he published his first collection of verse, Radunitsa, which is distinguished by its imagery of peasant Russia, its religiosity, descriptions of nature, folkloric motifs and language.

He believed that the Revolution of 1917 would provide for a peasant revival. However, his belief that events in post-revolutionary Russia were leading to the destruction of the country led him to drink and he committed suicide at the age of 30. Yesenin remains one of the most popular Russian poets, celebrated for his descriptions of the Russian countryside and peasant life.

**10** Birkenau (Pol.: Brzezinka): Also known as Auschwitz II. Set up in October 1941 following a decision by Heinrich Himmler in the village of Brzezinka (Ger.: Birkenau) close to Auschwitz, as a

prisoner-of-war camp.

It retained this title until March 1944, although it was never used as a POW camp. It comprised sectors of wooden sheds for different types of prisoners (women, men, Jewish families from Terezin, Roma, etc.), and continued to be expanded until the end of 1943. From the beginning of 1942 it was an extermination camp. The Birkenau camp covered a total area of 140 ha and comprised some 300 sheds variously used as living quarters, ancillary quarters and crematoria.

Birkenau, Auschwitz I and scores of satellite camps made up the largest center for extermination of the Jews. The majority of the Jews deported here were sent straight to the gas chambers to be put to death immediately, without registration.

There were 400,000 prisoners registered there for longer periods, half of whom were Jews. The second-largest group of prisoners were Poles (140,000). Prisoners died en masse as a result of slave labor, starvation, the inhuman living conditions, beatings, torture and executions.

The bodies of those murdered were initially buried and later burned in the crematoria and on pyres in specially dug pits. Due to the efforts made by the SS to erase the evidence of their crimes and their destruction of the majority of the documentation on the prisoners, and also to the fact that the Soviet forces seized the remaining documentation, it is impossible to establish the exact number of victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

On the basis of the fragmentary documentation available, it can be assumed that in total approx. 1.5 million prisoners were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, some 90% of who were Jews.

**11** Pilsudski, Jozef (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 of the Royal Castle in Cracow.

**12** Bolsheviks: Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party.

It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the

1905-07 Revolution.

During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils).

When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevikize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution.

Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry.

In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

**13** Młodzież Wszechpolska: A student organization, nationalist and anti-Semitic in character, created in 1918, ideologically linked with Narodowa Demokracja, most influential in academic circles. Reactivated underground during the war, in 1943.

After 1945 failed attempts at legalization as a party. In 1989 the organization was reactivated at a convention of nationalist Catholic youth in Poznań (current president of the board: Roman Giertych).

**14** Corporations: Elite student organizations stemming from Germany [similar to fraternities]. The first Polish corporation was founded in 1828. They became popular in the 1920s and 1930s, when over 100 were set up.

In the 1930s over 2,000 students were members, or 7% of ethnic Polish male students. Jews and women were not admitted. The aim of the corporations was to play an educational, self-developmental role, to foster patriotism, and to teach the principles of honor and friendship. Meetings included readings and lectures, and the corporations played sport.

The professed apoliticism of the corporations was a fiction. Several players fought for influence in the Polish Union of Academic Corporations – the Union of Pan-Polish Youth (Związek Młodzieży Wszechpolskiej), the Nationalist-Radical Camp (Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny), and the Camp for a Great Poland (Oboz Wielkiej Polski).

Before the war most corporations were of an extreme right-wing ilk. This also included anti-Semitic attitudes. Students in corporate colors participated in anti-government campaigns and hit squads, resorted to physical violence against Jews, and supported the “lecture-theater ghettos” at universities and the idea of the numerus nullus, a ban on Jews studying.

**15** Pogrom in Kielce in 1918: The end of World War I and the revival of the Polish state provoked a wave of debate on the situation of the Jews. On 11th November 1918 a pamphlet was published in Kielce that, while welcoming with joy the creation of the Polish state, also called for cultural autonomy for the Jews.

On the evening of the same day, the Jews gathered in the Municipal Theater for a rally. The speaker, Herman Frejzyngier, was called upon to make a speech in Yiddish. Some Polish youths who were also present spread the rumor that a Jewish gathering hostile to Poland was underway in the theater. This was compounded by news that a Jew had wounded an unidentified member of Pilsudski's Legions.

A tumultuous crowd gathered outside the theater and provoked a skirmish with the security services guarding the rally. The rioting spread throughout the town: Jewish shops and businesses were smashed up (including Kaner's jewelry store and Ellencweig's cinema), and people were beaten up.

The situation was so serious that Gen. Wacław Iwaszkiewicz, the commander of the Kielce garrison, ordered his troops to be brought out of their barracks to return order in the town. More than a dozen people were arrested, and a trial in 1922 sentenced 5 people to several months' imprisonment. In all, 4 people were killed and 250 wounded in the pogrom.

**16** Kristallnacht: Nazi anti-Jewish violence on the night of 10th November 1938. The official pretext was the assassination two days earlier in Paris of Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German embassy, by a Polish Jew named Herschel Grynszpan.

In an increasing atmosphere of tension engineered by the Germans, widespread attacks took place on Jews, Jewish property and synagogues throughout Germany and Austria. Shops were destroyed; warehouses, homes and synagogues were set on fire or otherwise destroyed.

Many windows were broken and the night of violence thus became known as Kristallnacht (Crystal Night, or the Night of Broken Glass). At least 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Dachau.

[Though the German government attempted to present it as a spontaneous protest and punishment on the part of the Aryan, i.e., non-Jewish population, it was, in fact, carried out by order of the Nazi leaders.

**17** Flight eastwards, 1939: From the moment of the German attack on Poland on 1st September 1939, Poles began to flee from areas in immediate danger of invasion to the eastern territories, which gave the impression of being safer.

When in the wake of the Soviet aggression (17th September) Poland was divided into Soviet and German-occupied zones, hundreds of thousands of refugees from central and western Poland found themselves in the Soviet zone, and more continued to arrive, often waiting weeks for permits to cross the border. The majority of those fleeing the German occupation were Jews. The status of the refugees was different to that of locals: they were treated as dubious elements.

During the passport campaign (the issue of passports, i.e. ID, to the new USSR - formerly Polish - citizens) of spring 1940, refugees were issued with documents bearing the proviso that they were prohibited from settling within 100 km of the border.

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet authorities launched a vast deportation campaign, during which 82,000 refugees were transported deep into the Soviet Union, mainly to the Novosibirsk and Archangelsk districts. 84% of those deported in that campaign were Jews, and 11% Poles.

The deportees were subjected to harsh physical labor. Paradoxically, for the Jews, exile proved their salvation: a year later, when the Soviet Union's western border areas were occupied by the Germans, those Jews who had managed to stay put, perished in the Holocaust.

**18** Flight of the Polish government in 1939: On 17th September 1939, when fighting was still going on against the Germans, Soviet forces invaded Polish territory, which spelled the ultimate failure of the defensive war.

The Polish government, president, and commander-in-chief of the army took the decision to evacuate the Polish authorities to Romania, with the intention of subsequently getting to France. The Romanian ambassador assured the government right of transit.

On 18th September the supreme Polish authorities crossed the border in Zaleszczyki to Czerniowice. From there, President Ignacy Moscicki delivered an address to the Polish nation in which he announced that the state authorities had been transferred to an allied country.

The dispatch of the address constituted a violation of the Hague Convention and provided the Romanian authorities with a pretext to intern the Polish authorities, which the Germans were pressing them to do.

On the same day the members of the Polish authorities were placed in isolation in several different locations throughout Romania. The Polish constitution of 1935 gave the president the right to nominate his successor in a situation of war.

Ignacy Moscicki nominated as president Wladyslaw Raczewicz, who succeeded in getting to France. The new president appointed Gen. Wladyslaw Sikorski prime minister of the emigre Polish government in Paris.

**19** Annexation of Eastern Poland: According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact defining Soviet and German territorial spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in September 1939. In early November the newly annexed lands were divided up between the Ukrainian and the Belarusian Soviet Republics.

**20** Great Patriotic War: On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed.

Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

**21** Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP): Political organization founded in March 1943 by Polish communists in the USSR. It served Stalin's policy with regard to the Polish question. The ZPP drew up the terms on which the communists took power in post-war Poland. It developed its range of activities more fully after the Soviet authorities broke off diplomatic contact with the government of the Republic of Poland in exile (Apr. 1943). The upper ranks of the ZPP were dominated by communists (from Jan. 1944 concentrated in the Central Bureau of Polish Communists), who did not

reveal the organization's long-term aims. The ZPP propagated slogans such as armed combat against the Germans, alliance with the USSR, parliamentary democracy and moderate social and economic reforms in post-war Poland, and redefinition of Poland's eastern border. It considered the ruling bodies of the Republic of Poland in exile to be illegal. It conducted propaganda campaigns (its press organ was called 'Wolna Polska' - Free Poland), and organized community care and education and cultural activities. From May 1943 it co-operated in the organization of the First Kosciuszko Infantry Division, and later the Polish Army in the USSR (1944). In July 1944, the ZPP was formally subordinated to the National Council and participated in the formation of the Polish Committee for National Liberation. From 1944-46, the ZPP resettled Poles and Jews from the USSR to Poland. It was dissolved in August 1946.

**22** Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (or April Uprising): On 19th April 1943 the Germans undertook their third deportation campaign to transport the last inhabitants of the ghetto, approximately 60,000 people, to labor camps. An armed resistance broke out in the ghetto, led by the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) and the Jewish Military Union (ZZW) - all in all several hundred armed fighters.

The Germans attacked with 2,000 men, tanks and artillery. The insurrectionists were on the attack for the first few days, and subsequently carried out their defense from bunkers and ruins, supported by the civilian population of the ghetto, who contributed with passive resistance.

The Germans razed the Warsaw ghetto to the ground on 15th May 1943. Around 13,000 Jews perished in the Uprising, and around 50,000 were deported to Treblinka extermination camp. About 100 of the resistance fighters managed to escape from the ghetto via the sewers.

**23** Babi Yar: Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men.

During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

**24** Ghetto in Kielce: Created on 5 April 1941. It fell into 2 parts, the small ghetto and the large ghetto. The boundaries of the large ghetto were formed by the streets: Orla, Piotrkowska, Starozagnanska, Poczieszka and Radomska, and those of the small ghetto by Sw. Wojciecha Place and Bodzentynska and Radomska streets.

27,000 were enclosed in the ghetto - in addition to Jews from Kielce and nearby towns and villages also people resettled from Lodz, Kalisz, Cracow and some 1,000 Jews from Vienna. The head of the Judenrat from December 1940 was the merchant and industrialist Herman Lewi.

Organizations functioning in the ghetto were the Jewish Law and Order Service (120 members), the Jewish Social Self-Help Welfare Committee, a social insurance organization, a hospital, an old people's home, an orphanage, and a post office.

Groups of Jewish laborers worked outside the ghetto in quarries, metal foundries and wood processing plants, and on the railways. The ghetto liquidation campaign began on 20 August 1942. Within 4 days almost the entire ghetto population was deported to the death camp in Treblinka.



1,600 people remained. They were employed in a camp on Jasna and Stolarska streets, sorting the property of those who had been murdered. At various points in time there were 3 labor camps within the Kielce ghetto: one belonging to the munitions firm Hasag-Granat, on Karczowkowska Street (from September 1942), one in the Henrykow factory on Mlynarska Street (from June 1943), and one in the Ludwikow foundry (from June 1943). All these camps were liquidated on 1 August 1944, and the prisoners sent to the Buchenwald and Auschwitz death camps.

**25** Dzigan and Szumacher (Szymon Dzigan, 1905-1980; Izrael Szumacher, 1908-1961): Famous Jewish comic double act in the interwar period. Both came from Lodz and performed together from 1927 in the Ararat theater group, first in Lodz and then in Warsaw.

Their trademark sketches were dialogues between the wiseacre Szumacher and the simpleton Dzigan. They also appeared in films (Al Kheyty, Freylekhe kaptsonim, On a heym). After the outbreak of World War II they found themselves in Bialystok, and in 1941 they were evacuated to Tashkent, where they performed in the Red Army's "artistic brigades."

They attempted to reach Anders' Army, but were arrested for desertion from the Soviet army and exiled to Kazakhstan. They returned to Poland in 1947. They performed in the revue theater in Lodz and in 1949 emigrated to Israel. They split up as an act in 1952.

## **26 Anders' Army**

The Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, subsequently the Polish Army in the East, known as Anders' Army: an operations unit of the Polish Armed Forces formed pursuant to the Polish-Soviet Pact of 30th July 1941 and the military agreement of 14th July 1941.

It comprised Polish citizens who had been deported into the heart of the USSR: soldiers imprisoned in 1939-41 and civilians amnestied in 1941 (some 1.25-1.6m people, including a recruitment base of 100,000-150,000).

The commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR was General Wladyslaw Anders. The army never reached its full quota (in February 1942 it numbered 48,000, and in March 1942 around 66,000). In terms of operations it was answerable to the Supreme Command of the Red Army, and in terms of organization and personnel to the Supreme Commander, General Wladyslaw Sikorski and the Polish government in exile.

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

**27** Postwar pogroms: There are various explanations for the hostile attitude of the Poles towards the Jews who survived WWII. Factors include propaganda before the war and during the occupation, wartime moral decay and crime, fear of punishment for crimes committed against Jews during the war, conviction that the imposed communist authorities were dominated by Jews, and the issue of

ownership of property left by murdered Jews (appropriated by Poles, and returning owners or their heirs wanted to reclaim it).

These were often the reasons behind expulsions of Jews returning to their hometowns, attacks, and even localized pogroms. In scores of places there were anti-Jewish demonstrations. The biggest were the pogrom in Cracow in August 1945 and the pogrom in Kielce in July 1946.

Some instances of violence against Jews were part of the strategies of armed underground anti-communist groups. The 'train campaign,' which involved pulling Jews returning from the USSR off trains and shooting them, claimed 200 victims.

Detachments of the National Armed Forces, an extreme right-wing underground organization, are believed to have been behind this. Antipathy towards repatriates was rooted in the conviction that Jews returning from Russia were being brought back to reinforce the party apparatus. Over 1,000 Jews are estimated to have been killed in postwar Poland.

**28** Polish People's Republic (PRL): The official name of the Polish state introduced in the constitution of 1952 and abolished in 1989. It is also the colloquial term for the entire postwar period of Polish history to 1989, when Poland was part of the USSR's bloc of satellite states and the dominant role within the country was played by the communist party, the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).

The PRL formally had all the trappings of a democratic state - parliament (the Sejm), a government, and general elections, but in practice only 3 parties participated in the elections - the PZPR and two dependent parties: the United Peasant Alliance (ZSL) and the Democratic Alliance (SD).

Poland was a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (RWPG) and the Warsaw Pact. The main periods in the history of the PRL are as follows: the transition period 1944-1948, the Stalinist period 1948-1956, the period of government by Wladyslaw Gomulka 1956-1970, the period of government by Edward Gierek 1970-1981, martial law 1981-1983, and the twilight period 1983-1989.

The PRL ended with the 'round table' talks, during which the PZPR ceded some authority to the opposition in the form of the Solidarity trade union movement.

**29** Elections in Poland in 1947: The first parliamentary elections in Poland, intended to legitimize communist power in the hands of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). Held on 19th January 1947 amid an atmosphere of aggressive propaganda and violence against the opposition, i.e. the Polish Peasant Alliance (PSL), whose leader was Stanislaw Mikolajczyk.

Manipulation was employed involving shifting of the electoral district boundaries: where PSL had strong support smaller electoral districts were created. Groups of agitators were sent into the villages with military backup to organize rallies in support of the PPR.

Almost half of the electoral committees were recruited by the security apparatus (political police). Some 80,000 people, members and supporters of PSL, were arrested for the duration of the elections. Polling stations were guarded by the military police and the army. In spite of this terrorization of society, the authorities still had to fix the election results.

Officially, PSL won 10.3% of the votes, while the PPR and the smaller parties forming the Bloc of Democratic Alliances garnered 80.1%. The real results on the national scale are impossible to ascertain.

According to PSL's own calculations, in 100 districts (out of 6,000) it received 63% of the vote. The new prime minister was Jozef Cyrankiewicz, while PSL was given insignificant departments. Shortly afterwards, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk left Poland in secret, in fear of his life.

**30** 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.

**31** Office for Public Security, UBP: Popularly known as the UB, officially established to protect the interests of national security, but in fact served as a body whose function was to stamp out all forms of resistance during the establishment and entrenchment of communist power in Poland.

The UB was founded in 1944. Branches of the UBP were set up immediately after the occupation by the Red Army of the Polish lands west of the Bug. The first UBP functionaries were communist activists trained by the NKVD, and former soldiers of the People's Army and members of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR).

In many cases they were also collaborationists from the period of German occupation and criminals. The senior officials were NKVD officers. The primary tasks of the UBP were to crush all underground organizations with a western orientation.

In 1956 the Security Service was formed and many former officers of the UBP were transferred.

**32** Severing the diplomatic ties between the Eastern Block and Israel: After the 1967 Six-Day-War, the Soviet Union cut all diplomatic ties with Israel, under the pretext of Israel being the aggressor and the neighboring Arab states the victims of Israeli imperialism.

The Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries (Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria) conformed to the verdict of the Kremlin and followed the Soviet example. Diplomatic relations between Israel and the ex-Communist countries resumed after the fall of communism.

**33** 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.

### **34 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.

### **35 Katyn**

Site in Western Russia where in April and May 1940, on the orders of Stalin and the Politburo the NKVD murdered some 4,400 Polish officers, prisoners of war from the camps in nearby Kozielsk. Similar crimes were committed in the neighboring Starobielsk and Ostashkovo.

In all, the Russians murdered well over 10,000 officers of the Polish Army and the Polish State Police, and civil servants. When in 1943 the German army discovered the mass graves, they released news of them to public opinion.

The Soviet propaganda machine, however, continued to claim for almost the next 60 years, that the murders had been committed by the Nazis, not by Russians. The Katyn crimes came to represent the falsity in Polish-USSR relations, and the word 'Katyn' was censored until 1989.

### **36 Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835-1917)**

Hebrew and Yiddish writer. He was born in Belarus and studied at various yeshivot in Lithuania. Mendele wrote literary and social criticism, works of popular science in Hebrew, and Hebrew and Yiddish fiction. In his writings on social and literary problems Mendele showed lively interest in the education and public life of Jews in Russia.

He was preoccupied by the question of the role of Hebrew literature in molding the Jewish community. This explains why he tried to teach the sciences to the mass of Jews and to aid the people in obtaining secular education in the spirit of the Haskalah (Hebrew enlightenment).

He was instrumental in the founding of modern literary Yiddish and the new realism in Hebrew style, and left his mark on the two literatures thematically as well as stylistically.