Mieczyslaw Weinryb

Mieczyslaw Weinryb is 89 years old. He is a construction engineer. He was born in Zamosc, a town in southeastern Poland, but moved to Warsaw before the war.

He spent the war in the Soviet Union. He has always been a Zionist but never had the opportunity to emigrate to Israel. In the course of our conversations he often quoted long excerpts from the Bible, which he sometimes interspersed with criticism of over-orthodox religiosity. We met four times in the apartment belonging to his son, who works at Yale University.

Together we reconstructed Mr. Weinryb's life and the history of his family, and looked at photographs, many of which survived because his sister, who emigrated to Palestine before the war, took them with her.

Family background

I don't remember my grandparents – they died before I was born. The oldest people I remember in the family were my two uncles. My mother's brother had two daughters and a son. I don't remember the names of my uncle or his daughters. His son was called Awigdor. He lived in Lublin. My father's brother, Szalom Weinryb, had a son, Chaim Mojzesz, and a daughter, Ita. He was the owner of a mill in Grabowiec, which was 20 kilometers from Zamosc. The area was fertile and the grain good, so they lived a fairly plentiful life. At that time tarpaulin-covered wagons like gypsy carts ran between Zamosc and Grabowiec. They were used to transport people and goods. We traveled in such wagons to visit them.

My father also had a sister. Her name was Lea. She lived in Kovel, and her name in marriage was Rejder. Her husband was an administrator in a large mill.

My father was called Eliasz Weinryb. He was born around 1880. His family came from Zamosc. Our ancestors, who had come to Poland several centuries earlier, were Sephardi Jews. [Sephardim settled in the town in the late 16th century, since it was situated on the major trading route between Warsaw, Lublin and Lvov.] My father had a fancy goods store – sweaters, wool, muffs, gloves. Many different people came to him. I remember that in winter my father would open his

shop after dusk on Saturdays. Everybody did that because the Sabbath ended early in winter. Somebody would always drop in, there was always someone who needed something, for instance leather workers, and would come in for thread. Then there were the regular customers – the wives of the officers from the local garrison.

My father was a Zionist. He even bought a little land in Israel from Keren Hayesod 1, albeit not in the best location. He dressed according to the European fashion. He didn't wear sidelocks or a yarmulka. He always had a bristly beard. He was very good to us, very gentle. He would get irritated at times, of course. He had ample reason: there was the economic crisis – 1929 in particular was a hard year.

My father prayed at a shtibl [Yiddish for a small Hasidic prayer house] for Reformists like himself. [Editor's note: In Zamosc there was one Jewish community organization officially recognized by the state authorities. However, Jewish religious life was divided into a number of smaller communities. In addition to Orthodox Jews there were also Hasidim 2 and Reformists. The Orthodox used the town's only synagogue, while the Reformists and Hasidim usually prayed in separate prayer houses, shtibls.]. One day a whole group of them went to the big synagogue and the Orthodox Jews chased them away.

My father and his friends were active in the education cause. In 1921 they founded a Tarbut 3 school in Zamosc, called 'Kadima', which means 'forward' in Hebrew. [This was a private Jewish school with state recognition.] It comprised four classes. The resources for its construction came partly from their own contributions and partly from money that they collected from the residents of Zamosc. The school itself was a single-story building. Later on a Jewish grammar school was also established in Zamosc, but my father wasn't involved in the construction of that one.

My mother's name was Chana; she was born around 1880. She came from Lublin. Her family had lived there on a famous Jewish street – Lubartowska [a street in the heart of the pre-war Jewish quarter. It is mentioned in the reminiscences of many Lublin Jews]. Her family name was Sztern. My parents probably met through a matchmaker because my grandparents' families were Orthodox. In fact it was very interesting to observe how everything was changing. Our household was already different, for instance in terms of marriage. Of course my parents advised my sisters what kind of husband to choose, but there was no longer any question of a shadkhan. Around the time I came of age my mother stopped wearing a wig. That doesn't mean that she didn't light the candles on Fridays – that would have been inadmissible. Mama helped in the shop but her main occupation was housekeeping. Like my father, my mother was a Zionist. However, she was afraid of the journey across the sea. And at that time the journey to Palestine was usually illegal, on Italian ships or via Romania. It probably would have been possible to convince her eventually, but then the war broke out and they never managed to leave.

I had three sisters, Margolia, Sara and Rywa, and one brother, Mojzesz. Margolia was the eldest. She was born in 1902. She went to the state grammar school in Zamosc, and towards the end of the 1920s she left home to study in Warsaw. There she graduated from the Free University of Poland [a private university], the faculty of natural sciences and mathematics. After that she taught in the Tarbut school on 2 Nalewki Street in Warsaw. She didn't manage to emigrate to Palestine because the school administration was always asking her to stay on just a little longer. Margolia had the most gentle character of all my sisters. She always looked after me. The family even used

to say that she never got married because she devoted too much time and attention to me. She was like a second mother to me.

My two younger sisters, Sara and Rywa, had similar lives. They both emigrated to Palestine in the 1920s. They were members of Hashomer Hatzair 4. They did hakhsharah in Zamosc. There was an agronomist there who had both a vegetable garden and large orchards, and was educated in hakhsharah, and he taught the Hashomer how to work the land.

Rywa was born in 1906. She completed six classes of the grammar school in Zamosc and was the first member of our family to emigrate to Palestine. That was about 1925. At first she worked on a private farm that belonged to some Arabs. They lived in spartan conditions there. Malaria was rife. They didn't have houses, just shacks. Only later did they manage to form kibbutzim. Rywa went to live in the kibbutz Ein Harod.

My sister had a fiancé, as I suppose you could call him, back in Zamosc. His name was Szalom Luksemburg. He was preparing to emigrate, too, but kept putting it off, and in the end she left without him. She met her future husband in Palestine. His name was Josif Yavnai and he came from Lithuania. He had been called Slept, but when he arrived in Palestine he changed his name to a Hebrew one. He was very well read and at the same time hardworking. I remember that I used to send him books from Poland. In fact, I have to say that both my brothers-in-law were very decent people. In time Rywa and Josif became independent. They started off by breeding chickens, then they went into orchard cultivation, and eventually they bred cows. That improved their material situation immensely. They left the kibbutz and went to live in a place called Kfar Vitkin.

Sara was two years older than Rywa; she was born in 1904. She studied pedagogy and worked in orphanages in Kobryn, later near Bydgoszcz, and after that somewhere near Lodz. She left for Palestine a little later, towards the end of the 1920s. Like Rywa, Sara didn't get married until she moved to Palestine. Her husband was called Josif as well, Josif Schifeldrin – he came from Germany. They lived in a kibbutz, Kvuzat Shiller, near Rehovot. Sara was there for 70 years. In the kibbutz she worked taking care of children. They were quite successful, they had their own house with flowers all around it. At first everyone in the kibbutz worked in agriculture. Later they opened a rubber factory, which prospered fairly well. They manufactured goods for export and even sold some of their products to Arab countries, but without any indication of the country of origin, of course.

As far as my sisters go, I have to say that they were all different types, had different characters. As I said, Margolia had the best nature. She was very dedicated. Rywa, the youngest, went through a lot before she made it to anything. When she emigrated to Palestine she had to learn to live in extremely harsh conditions. That took its toll on her character. She was hardened. She was of the opinion that you shouldn't ask too much of life. Sara, who emigrated a few years later, didn't experience the problems that Rywa had. She went to live in a kibbutz at once, and had a house of her own. And that in turn influenced her temperament, she had none of Rywa's rawness.

My brother Mojzesz was born in 1909. He went to the Jewish grammar school. One day, one spring, when he was playing football with his friends, he trod on a nail. They took him to hospital to Lublin, but he died of gangrene. He was 15. Today all he would have needed is an injection, but they didn't have penicillin back then. The anniversary of Mojzesz' death is around Passover. I remember that every year when my father read out the story of how God punished Pharaoh with the deaths of all

the firstborn sons in Egypt [Haggadah], he cried terribly. That story reminded him of the death of his firstborn son that he had taken so hard.

Growing up

I was born on 8th February 1915 during the feast of Purim. I was named after my grandfather, who, like the hero of the Purim story [Megillat Ester], was called Mordechaj. I was the youngest in the family. In fact, you could say that I'm a child of war [World War I]. I remember how during the bombardments my mother would pick me up and we would all go down into the cellar. When I was a little older and had started playing in the street, I saw General Haller's troops 5 enter the town and abuse the Jews. They would stop them and cut their beards off, singing, 'Yid, give us your beardy!' and so on. Later on Russian prisoners of war passed through Zamosc. As they were led through the town we children would run after them. They made all kinds of toys, wooden birds and things like that, and they would give them to us in return for a bread roll.

I never went to cheder to chant my Hebrew alphabet. Sometimes, out of curiosity, I would peer in through the window. The teacher there had an assistant. The children that went to cheder were three and four-year-olds, so they had to be taken to school and back. They just learnt their prayers by heart but didn't understand a word of them. [Editor's note: Mr. Weinryb's parents were probably not satisfied with the traditional recitative teaching in cheders, and so they sent him to the modern Zionist school.] When I was six I started to go to the Jewish elementary school, 'Kadima', the one that my father had helped to establish. We learnt Hebrew there, and Polish, of course, and other subjects. I was in the first group that went all the way through that school. After that I went to the state grammar school.

I also had a tutor for religion, who came to our home to prepare me for my bar mitzvah. That is a tradition, of course. When a boy is 13 years old, he becomes a man. He is taken to the synagogue. Beforehand he learns the relevant prayers and so on. He has to be able to read a passage aloud and understand it. The same applied to me. I had a tutor who came to our home and taught me all this. My bar mitzvah was in the spring. I remember that day; the celebration took place in the big synagogue. My name was read out and I had to go up and read out a passage from the Torah. My heart beat a little louder, I was nervous whether everything would go alright, but I managed somehow. Then, during the prayers, the tefillin were put on – one case on the arm and the other on the forehead, with the Ten Commandments written inside. Well, this lasted maybe a year or two, I put them on less and less frequently, and eventually I stopped altogether. My friends stopped doing it as well.

As a present for my bar mitzvah I was given some money to buy myself something. But I couldn't decide: a bicycle or a radio? I thought and thought, and the money was gradually frittered away on trifles and in the end I bought neither a radio nor a bicycle. And since I'm on the subject of bicycles, I should say that in Zamosc we had two Jewish cycle hire shops. Zamczer had these old clapped out things; he was a lot cheaper and that was where everybody who was just learning to ride hired bicycles. The other one, Pekler, was more expensive, but he had good bicycles.

In 1930 I went to Lublin to see the opening of the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshivah. [Editor's note: The yeshivah was founded on the initiative of Agudat Israel; its rector and founder was M. Szapiro. It was one of the largest Talmudic academies of its time. The opening, on 24th June 1925, was a very

solemn affair. In many towns special transport was put on to take people to Lublin.] I was 15 years old. My parents couldn't take me, so they put me on the bus that went the Zamosc–Lublin route and my uncle met me at the other end. That was the first time I had ever been in a motor vehicle, I remember. It was a lorry adapted to carry people – there were benches along the sides in the trailer. The opening of the yeshivah was a very grand affair. There were large crowds of people, so actually I saw very little. Anyway, it was so long ago that I don't remember any details.

Whenever we went away on holiday, one of my parents always stayed at home. They had to take care of the shop – the fight for customers was fierce. We usually went to Krasnobrod. That's about 20 kilometers from Zamosc. There were wonderful woods there – not woods like there are today – it was a thick forest. The trees were so old and standing so close together that they blocked out the light. We would rent one room and a kitchen from some peasants. There were guesthouses in Krasnobrod as well, but they were for people who went there just for one or two days. My father would wake me in the morning and take me for long walks in the woods. We would pick mushrooms, wild strawberries and blackberries. I also remember that I watched the peasants making clay pots. They were painted nicely and kept things cool well. What interested me most of all, though, was the clay whistles. And the peasants sold all these things for a few pence at the market.

There were about 25,000 people in Zamosc before the war, about 15,000 of them were Jews. Like my family, most of Zamosc's Jews descended from the Sephardim. Neither their customs nor their language have survived to our times, however. People celebrated the same festivals and dressed the same way as the Ashkenazim. Everyone spoke Yiddish. Of course, the Yiddish spoken in Zamosc differed slightly from that spoken in Lublin or Vilnius. It had its own nuances, but they were differences arising from the use of different dialects of the language. [The Yiddish spoken in the Polish lands used to have three major dialects: Galician (southern), Central (often called Polish) and Lithuanian (north-eastern).] You could say, then, that nothing of the Sephardi culture had survived in Zamosc; all that remained was the memory of the origins of our ancestors.

There was one big synagogue in town, and besides that several shtibls. The interior of the synagogue was traditional, with the bimah in the center and a decorated ark [aron kodesh, in Polish often called ark]. It had ornaments carved around the doors – two lions and two deer, and around them the inscription 'Gibor ka-ari, ratz ka-zevi' [Heb.: Strong as a lion, swift as a gazelle]. My father went to a shtibl, but rarely to the synagogue. I used to go with him when I was small and for a while after my bar mitzvah. Mama didn't go to the shtibl – women didn't go to pray at the shtibls at all; they were meeting places for men. At the more important holidays and sometimes on Fridays she would go to the synagogue, where there was a special area set aside for women. We used to go to the synagogue with school as well, for instance when services were held for the president of the Polish Republic.

In addition to merchants, the Jews of Zamosc were craftsmen of various trades. There were carpenters, metalworkers, blacksmiths, joiners, painters, leather specialists and cobblers. There were poor water carriers too. Yes, because at that time the houses didn't have running water. So these people would bring water from the well on the market square, and they were happiest when someone was doing the washing because then more water was needed and they earned more. I also remember that there were servants – also Jewesses – in the wealthier households. These were young girls from nearby towns. They saved up their wages for their dowry. There were those who

didn’t find a husband, and they would pay for a Torah for the synagogue out of the money they had saved up.

In Zamosc there were people of all different convictions, both Zionists and Bundists 6. There were communists, too. Wealthy people and the intelligentsia were usually Zionists. The communists had a lot of supporters among the poor. That was because they had effective propaganda. [The egalitarian ideal of communism naturally attracted the poor everywhere. It was not merely because of the successful propaganda.] They said that everyone would have work and be equal, and they didn’t offend the Jews.

There were Hasidim as well, of course. I remember that they invited a tzaddik to come and live among them. It started with a long exchange of letters. I think he came from Gora Kalwaria 7. He came to Zamosc by train. There were crowds waiting at the station, not just Hasidim but other Jews, too, and even Poles. I ran down there with a group of my friends. That was a big event in Zamosc. Many people went out of curiosity, to see what would happen.

The Hasidim had hired all the carriages in the town. They put the tzaddik in the first, best-looking one, drawn by white horses, and drove him to the house they had prepared for him on Lubelskie Przedmiescie Street. Colorful lamps were strung out all along the route. About 100 meters before they reached the house the Hasidim unharnessed the horses and pulled the carriage themselves. After that they would all go to the tzaddik on Fridays and Saturdays to be blessed. I remember that because we often used to go down there and peer in through the window. I saw the tzaddik take the challah, bless it and then crumble it into small pieces, which his followers took because it was blessed [shirayem]. I saw them dancing and rejoicing – that was how they prayed to the Lord.

Rare events like the arrival of the tzaddik were attractions for people who lived in a town like ours. People liked to go and see unusual things. Once, word got around that in a neighboring village there was a sleepwalker. I didn’t go, I was too small, but lots of people gathered to see him. It was a moonlit summer night, and everyone stood around in the street and hushed each other so as not to wake him as he walked along the roofs of the houses with his arms outstretched.

We lived right by the square. Our family was relatively well off; you couldn’t say that we were rich, but we didn’t go hungry. We lived in a town house and our apartment overlooked the town square. And all around the square in Zamosc are arcades, so when it was raining you could walk all the way round without an umbrella. On the ground floor of the house was a Jewish bakery. In the kitchen there was a bread oven which we used to bake challah and all kinds of cakes: cheesecake, poppy-seed cake, honey-cake, gingerbread, and regular bread, of course. I remember there was a period when flour was hard to come by, but we were sent flour by my uncle, who had mills in Grabowiec.

We had a servant too, a young girl, a Jewess. She came from a poor family in a small town. She did the cooking and the cleaning; apart from working she also learned housekeeping because back in her home town she wouldn’t even have had anything to cook. She also used to go to the rabbi to ask if a chicken was kosher, for example – Mama didn’t have time for that.

In the living room there was a tiled stove. On winter evenings we would sit and play lottery. That was a game where you threw dice and depending on the result we would put numbers on special cards. We played dominoes and chess as well. My father used to play cards at his friends’. The apartment was lit with kerosene lamps. Later on, in the 1920s, electricity was introduced. That was

in 1926 or 1927. I remember the day when electric lights first appeared in our house – how everything was suddenly brighter; what a different light it was!

When Friday evening drew closer the shammash would come out into the streets with his rattle, shouting, ‘Shut up the shop! Shut up those shops, Sabbath is coming!’. The men would clean their shoes and the girls would wash their hair. They didn’t have shampoo then, so they used kerosene, and often they would wash their hair in something that looked like borscht. It was some kind of beetroot stock, but I don’t know exactly what it was made of. In any case it was known as ‘borscht’.

On Sabbath everything had to look nice. In the evening men went to pray, and at home the woman would pray and light the candles. And then the food came. There had to be cakes, challah and stuffed fish [gefilte fish]. Those cakes were made of yeast dough. They were plaited from twelve strands, which symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel. Challah was this kind of tall white bread. Then they stood side by side, the cake and the challah. [Editor’s note: In fact the ‘cakes’ that Mr. Weinryb describes were probably challah, a sweet white bread traditionally woven from twelve strands of dough to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and the ‘tall white bread’ that he calls ‘challah’ was probably the ‘cake’ (a round yeast cake called ‘kolacz’ in Polish).] And that taste of stuffed fish you don’t find today any more. Even in Israel they make some sort of balls, but it’s not the same. In our house it was usually carp. Those who couldn’t afford it made gefilte fish with small fish. So the carp was sliced into steaks, the flesh cut out of the middle and minced with breadcrumbs, egg, pepper, and salt to taste, and then this mixture was stuffed back into the fish. How exactly it was done I can’t tell you because I didn’t make it, I only ate it.

Before Passover help was organized for the poor. Volunteers reported, and they got flour and water and kneaded this matzah. The matzot that were baked then were round – not rectangular like they are today. Then the matzot was distributed to the poor.

Passover was one of the most solemn festivals. The whole family gathered round the table; there was beautiful crockery and compartments for matzah with colored threads sewn in – each compartment stood for someone different: one for the Israelites, one for the Levites and one for the Priests. [Editor’s note: On the seder plate there were three pieces of matzah, which were sometimes placed in a bag sewn specially for the occasion, which had three compartments.] I was the youngest in the family, so I asked the four questions, and my father, the head of the family, answered. There were various cakes and wine. We also said, ‘Whoever desires to come in and be our guest, let him enter, let him come in.’ Guests were brought round. Later, when I was in the army, I was myself invited to various homes for Passover. There was a glass for the prophet Elijah. The door was opened and we waited for him to come. We would ask our parents why we couldn’t see the wine going down in the glass for the prophet. ‘Because he just sipped a little bit,’ they would answer.

And then there were the other festivals, of course – Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and others. At Purim, the Megillat [Megillat Ester] was read out in the synagogue. We, children, had special twirlers and at the word ‘Haman’ we would shout and make a huge noise. In the end they would shout at us to stop, but we didn’t want to, and that was a kind of game. There were Purim plays, too. King Ahasuerus sat on a throne with a paper crown on his head, and a minister came to him and reported something or other. Then the beautiful Esther came and said, ‘Why do you want to exterminate my people?’ The king changed his mind, and at the end there was a scene where

Haman is already in the ground and in his place comes Mordechai riding on a horse. At Purim it was the custom to eat these triangular little cakes with poppy-seeds – they were triangular because they were supposed to resemble the hat that Haman wore. Those cakes were called ‘humentashn’[Galician Yiddish for hamantashen].

There was Chanukkah as well, in remembrance of the time that Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies, and afterwards the eternal flame had to be lit in the temple. Well, and the oil for the menorah was going to run out, but somehow there was enough. We had a menorah that burned oil at home as well. [Editor’s note: The interviewee probably means the chanukkiyah.]

On the subject of Polish-Jewish relations it has to be said that things varied. It’s a very complex issue. For instance, Jan Zamojski invited Armenians and Jews to the town of Zamosc himself [this was back in the 16th century]. It wasn’t a disinterested move, of course – it was thanks to them that industry and trade developed. The Jews lent the kings money. There were famous families, too, such as the Kronenbergs 8, for example, who created the Warsaw-Moscow railway. In the late 19th century there were various insinuations in Russia that the Jews took blood to make matzah [the blood libel accusation] and so on. [see Partitions of Poland] 9 In the interwar years on the one hand there were the Endeks 10, but on the other hand you have to remember that Poland had economic difficulties. There were hardships for the Jews, too, especially for religious Jews, in connection with ritual slaughter, for example. On the face of it the issue was the protection of animals [see campaign against ritual slaughter] 11.

It also has to be said that the Catholic Church is to blame for a lot of it [the bad relations between Poles and Jews]. We know the history: the inquisition – the burning of Jews, of witches... The Church made no attempt at reconciliation. Perhaps it actually needed this, to sustain the faith. They said that the Jews had murdered Jesus and that they had to be punished. It’s only now that the pope has changed the approach to Jews and is seeking appeasement, but even so, it’s only on the surface. On the other hand, you have to add that the Jews always kept themselves apart, and created ghettos. [Editor’s note: In fact Jews were forced into ghettos (separate Jewish quarters, often confined by walls) by the non-Jews in medieval cities. On the other hand, in many respects such communal settlements served Jewish interests, too.] That only started to change just before the war. We had famous Jewish writers who wrote in Polish – Tuwim 12, Brzechwa 13, Lesmian 14. Young people felt that things couldn’t stand still, that it was important to seek reconciliation.

As for me, I had two Polish friends. They were very nice; we spent time together. We would go down to the river and go cycling. But I also remember that the children of local landowners went to school with us. They considered themselves above everybody else. One of them would drive up to school in a carriage, and the driver, although he was older than him, would climb down from the coachbox, take his hat off and bow to him. I remember once in a drawing class, one of them complained, ‘Sir, he stinks of garlic!’ and the teacher didn’t tell him off, but turned to the Jewish boy he had pointed at and said, ‘Listen, try not to eat garlic before you come to school.’ And it did no good him saying that he hadn’t eaten garlic.

So you could say that it varied [the relations between Poles and Jews in interwar Poland]. I had a group of friends, both Jews and Poles. We were good students and stuck together. On the other hand there was a definite anti-Semitic atmosphere at school.

My parents also had contacts with Poles. Most of the customers in our shop were Poles; the regular customers often used to come in and talk about their affairs, and the owner of our house, Mrs. Namyslowska, would come in, too. She used to come to talk about how she had to marry her daughter off, and what an expense it was and so on.

When I finished grammar school my sister Margolia persuaded me to move to Warsaw to go to school there. She had been there for a few years and was earning a living as a teacher, so she could support me. I came to Warsaw in 1933 and moved in with Margolia. I started studying at the State School of Construction. After graduation from that school you could go straight into the second year at Warsaw Polytechnic.

In 1937 I was called up. Many Jews dodged service at that time, but I went. It was what my father wanted, too. He said that I would learn to fight, and that that could prove useful later on in Palestine. I served at Wlodzimierz Wolynski, in the 23rd infantry regiment. Later I was transferred to Pogorsk near Baranowicze. They were building a range there and I had an education in construction. We put up wooden barracks for the soldiers and ancillary quarters. There were lots of wolves in that area. I remember how one time our cook went to town to buy some meat. The terrain was marshy, you had to walk on special wooden planking. When he was on his way back he heard the wolves coming. The cook survived, but our meat didn't.

When I left the army in 1938 I went back to Warsaw. I lived in a rented room then. I wanted to start working, so as not to depend on my sister or my parents any more. I also had plans to continue my studies at the Polytechnic. I started work for two construction firms, one was run by Halber and the other by Krajterkraft. Both firms were Jewish. We were commissioned to design tenement houses. I worked up the plans and corrected them. From time to time I also took commissions from the architect Goldszmit. That was all the work I managed to do before the war.

At that time I kept fairly extreme left-wing company. We were disillusioned with the situation in Poland. For instance, I could only work in Jewish firms. There were restrictions at university [see Anti-Jewish Legislation in Poland] 15. And we were naive. We thought that by changing the political system we could also change the situation. All this was also bound up with a rebellion against religion. I didn't belong to any party. Many of my friends belonged to the Socialist Youth Organization 'Life' or to the Communist Youth Association.

During the war

When the war broke out, my call-up papers were for the seventh day of war. Before I had a chance to report for service, though, the army had already been smashed. There was no unit for us to go to. We were directed east. I walked with a group of friends from the army in a crowd of people who were escaping from the Germans. In their haste people took with them whatever they had been able to lay their hands on. Then they realized that they didn't have the strength to carry it, so they abandoned various things including clothes and shoes – heaps of them lay in ditches.

When we crossed the Bug river, we started to meet Ukrainians – armed and on horseback [see annexation of Eastern Poland] 16. They stopped us, even though we wore civilian clothes. Finally we made it to Kamien Koszurski, and from there I set out for Kovel a few days later. I hoped I would find my parents and my sister there because my Aunt Lea – my father's sister – lived there. The

whole journey took me over a week – it was several hundred kilometers. [Kamien Koszurski is actually no more than 100 km from Kovel]. There were a few of us, and we slept where we could. There were lots of abandoned houses in the villages. People were escaping; they were afraid. Sometimes we caught a stray chicken, found a pot and lit a fire. We wanted to cook the chicken, but we were so hungry that the chicken was eaten before it had a chance to go tender.

My predictions came true and to my delight I found my family in Kovel. It turned out that when the war broke out my parents had bought a fairly big cart, loaded up some of the goods from the shop and their own luggage, of course, and gone east, to Aunt Lea. Margolia had gone with them because on the day the war broke out she was still in Zamosc, where she had been spending the summer holidays. In Kovel they lived from selling the goods from the shop. They were even able to rent an apartment.

As for me, soon after I arrived in Kovel I saw a notice that they were looking for people to do construction work in a garrison left by the Poles that the Russians had taken over. I volunteered and was given the job. I was in charge of renovation work there. As a person employed in the Soviet garrison I was allocated a bachelor apartment by the municipal authorities. They billeted me in a private house. I remember that I paid the owner some rent. Thanks to the job in the garrison I was even able to help my parents a little because there was always the chance to take a bit of coal or firewood home.

When the Germans were approaching Kovel evacuation trains began to be put on at the station. People were going east in droves. I went to my parents and Margolia and tried to persuade them that we should all go together, but they didn't want to just drop everything immediately. They had no idea what might happen. My parents were older by then, and Margolia wanted to stay with them. They talked me into believing that nothing would be lost if they spent a few days packing and so on. I was younger. I sensed that something was going to happen. I decided to leave first, but I thought they would manage to leave in time and that we would meet up. Unfortunately they didn't make it.

I never found out what exactly happened to them. I never found anybody who could tell me what fate befell them. They were probably in Kovel ghetto, and were most likely shot and buried in the mass graves in the woods outside Kovel. After the war I tried to get news of them. I hoped that they might contact me. But nothing like that happened. I went back to Kovel two years ago thinking that I might find some clues. I went to the site of the Jewish mass graves – all that stands there today is a small monument. But I was unable to find out any details. In the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw there's a whole wall commemorating people who were killed during the war. I put up a plaque there bearing the names of my family.

Anyway, I made it onto an evacuation train. We traveled southeast, and before long the German air attacks started. I was wounded when they bombarded the train. I was put on an army vehicle and taken to a hospital. No one had time to look after me, and I got gangrene and in the end they amputated a part of my arm. After that I set off into the unknown once more, and the trains started running again. That way I reached Vladikavkaz, a beautiful place at the foot of the mountains [the Caucasus]. It was reached by a straight road, and on the horizon there were huge mountains, with their peaks shrouded in mist.

In Vladikavkaz I reported to the town authorities for work. I had arrived there with nothing, I had nothing to eat and nowhere to live. A job gave me the chance to be allocated an apartment, food rations, and some money. I was given a job in the Directorate of Railways. I could speak Russian quite well. I had learnt it before the war, and before I went to Vladikavkaz I had lived more than a year in Kovel, which was under Soviet rule. Once again I was overseeing construction work. I was often sent on business trips; I went to Grozny, in Chechnya, for example, and to Baku in Azerbaijan. I saw a lot then. I remember various anecdotes from those places – a Muslim who made a huge fuss at a market because the trader put the mutton that he wanted to buy on the same scales that he had just used to weigh some pork. I also remember that they used to sell bears' paws at the market because there were lots of bears in those mountains. Or the time I brought back a watermelon from a business trip. It was so huge that I could hardly carry it, and of course, at the very last minute, just as I was opening the door to my house, I dropped it and it burst.

I had two friends there, one of them, Latyshev, was a Russian, and the other, Zinenko, a Ukrainian. Once they realized that I didn't inform on them, they started to tell me about what was happening in the Soviet Union, about what Stalin was doing to people [during the so-called Great Terror] 17. I earned a pittance – 350 rubles a month – the price of a kilo of meat. There was also a canteen, where they served something like grits with synthetic oil poured over it. It was the same thing every day. During that period I lost a lot of weight, I often went hungry.

The front was moving, the Germans had got as far as Rostov-on-Don. Then the Directorate decided to evacuate. They took all the employees and their families. We got on a train and began a journey to nowhere, which lasted for the next eight months. We were headed south. Sometimes the train would stop for several hours, and then set off again. Then I would get off and buy something to eat or look at the Caspian Sea. I could still afford to buy something nutritious from the locals. I also bought bread, which wasn't bread at all – it was a kind of pap made of potatoes. I even tried to bake it some more, but still, like bread it didn't taste. One night I went to bed on the top bunk [in the sleeping compartment] because the air up there was better. In the night a bombardment started, I woke up, and thinking that I was below, slid out of bed. That was quite a bad accident.

The Directorate of Railways tried to stay in control of its territory all the time. From that train we maintained communication with the whole region – we directed goods trains to the front and so on. In the end the Germans retreated and we went back to Vladikavkaz.

In 1943 my friends from Warsaw found out where I was and sent me a letter inviting me to Bashkiria, where they lived at the time. There were more Poles there [in fact Jews from Poland], there was even a Society of Polish Patriots, which said there was a chance to go back, so I got myself permission to move there. To do that I had to lie a little in the papers. I wrote that my friends were actually my family. They promised that they would support me in Bashkiria and that I would have work there. I was on good terms with the director of my company, so he issued me a permit to leave as well. It was all a bit risky because the NKVD 18 monitored the whole procedure, but it worked. Once again I traveled on goods trains, this time to the Urals.

The Society of Polish Patriots was for the most part made up of Jews from Poland. In Bashkiria I met engineer Slobodkin – an architect from Warsaw – and other people I knew. I was made director of production in the manufacturing shops owned by the Society of Polish Patriots. We sewed clothes and made shoes. For a while I lived with a family, and after that I had my own room. The climate

there was very harsh. We wore felt boots. Sometimes the buran, a blizzard, would pass over, during which you couldn't leave the house because you could freeze to death – something like a wall of ice and snow flew at you.

Ever since I had left Kovel I hadn't had any news of what had happened to my family. I didn't know anything of what was going on in the West, either. Correspondence from abroad didn't get there, and I didn't meet anyone who could give me any news. It wasn't until the end of 1944 that we could send letters. So I wrote to Israel to my sisters – where I was and what I was doing. I was hoping that my parents had written to them, too. But all I got from my sisters was a parcel full of soap. That was a good idea, though, because I sold the soap and that got me some money to live on for a while. But I still had no news.

Towards the end of the war news started to reach us from Poland. Some people left. When they came back we asked them, 'Well, and how is it with bread, what kind of rations?' They said that there were no rations, that goods were in the shops on the shelves and you could take as much as you wanted, that there were even cakes there. But we had become so used to the reality of life out there by that time that we didn't believe them, we simply couldn't imagine it. We left in fall 1945. After a few weeks traveling in goods trains I arrived in Lublin.

Post war

I didn't meet anyone of my family in Lublin. Later I found out that Awigdor, my uncle's son, and his two sisters had survived. They left for Israel straight after the war. Later they moved to Canada, and then the girls went to the US, to Boston. Some time ago we lost contact with them.

After I returned from the Soviet Union I started work in the Jewish school of the Central Committee of Polish Jews 19. I taught Polish. It was a small school; there were about 30 pupils. I remember that we had a Jewish boy whose mother had taken him back from a convent [see Jewish children rescued by convents] 20. The problem was that the boy was very small, only a few years old, so he had become very attached to the nuns in the convent and had forgotten his mother. We all tried to comfort the woman somehow, but she was always crying and cuddling her son.

Towards the end of the school year, in 1947, I left for Warsaw. Here I met my friend Weiner, who had come from Paris, engineer Slobodkin, with whom I had been in Bashkiria, and others. I worked in the Central Jewish Committee [CJC] as a construction technician. The first house that I rebuilt was in Praga [a district of Warsaw]. It had been a Jewish house, and after we had finished work on it some Jewish families moved into it. Later on some of the tenants left the country and some moved out. I also worked on the rebuilding of the house on 28 Jagiellonska Street. That was another commission from the CJC. On the ground floor of that house was a shop that sold kosher meat. I can't remember when it closed down.

At the beginning of the 1950s I became a member of the Budometal co-operative. In 1955 I went on an engineering course and received a diploma from Warsaw Polytechnic. At work everyone knew that I was Jewish, and suggestions started to be made that I change my name. Many people even changed their surnames, but I didn't want to, so I just changed my first name. Even before the war people used to hail me Mieczyslaw, Mietek [a diminutive of Mieczyslaw], so it stuck, and I struck the name Mordechaj out of my papers.

I was still doing jobs commissioned by Jewish institutions, except that they were organized by the co-operative. It was easiest that way. I renovated the facade of the Nozyk Synagogue 21 several times. They were commissions from the community authorities, and the funds for this work came out of foreign aid, if I remember correctly, from Joint 22. Just after the war we also built a matzah production line in that synagogue. We set it up in the women's gallery, put in machines to mix the dough and electric ovens, and that was where matzah was baked for Passover. The matzah production line in there operated for a few years. Then they started sending us matzah from abroad. I also renovated the Jewish community building on 6 Twarda Street. In the 1950s we were also commissioned by the community authorities to tidy up the Jewish cemetery. During the war the cemetery had been badly damaged. The avenues were buried in earth and the monuments overturned. So we cleaned up the main avenue. We put broken fragments of mazzevoth [tombstones] into a special wall. A few years later we also built some ancillary premises by the entrance.

In the 1950s and 1960s there were still a lot of religious people. In fact, it was a little bit like the Bundists and Zionists were before the war. There was also a fair group of communist activists. Quite a lot of American aid came in through Joint. There were the Jewish 'Solidarnosc' 23 works, where they taught different trades, and Slobodkin – the one I was in Bashkiria with – was the head of ORT 24. If it hadn't been for 1946, if it hadn't been for the Kielce Pogrom 25, and then Gomulka [see Anti-Zionist campaign in Poland] 26, who said that one person cannot have two homelands, then probably not so many people would have emigrated.

At the beginning of the 1950s I met Izabela, my wife. She worked with the trade union, she was a bookkeeper. Her father, Waclaw Tluchowski, left home to fight in the Warsaw Uprising 27 and never returned. He even has a monument in Powazkowski Cemetery [the most famous Catholic cemetery in Warsaw; many famous people are buried there]. Izabela is Polish and went to a Catholic school. We got married and in 1955 our son was born. We called him Eligiusz because it's similar to my father's name – Eliasz – and the times when he was born weren't auspicious for giving Jewish names.

Eligiusz graduated from Warsaw University with a distinction in physics. He also did a doctorate and an assistant professorship. Now he works at various universities. At the moment he is at Yale University. He is a member of a research group there that works on problems of theoretical physics. What does the Jewish tradition mean to him? Eligiusz keeps in touch with his family in Israel. In the States he goes to Jewish meetings. He is interested in the Jewish tradition. He is an agnostic, though.

Izabela comes from a Catholic family but she doesn't go to church and I have the impression that she has a negative attitude to all that. In any case, she isn't practicing. I have never forbidden her religion, of course. I have always gone to the synagogue on Yom Kippur, when they say the prayers for the dead. But other than that I don't go. At home we don't really celebrate any holidays. On Jewish holidays I go to the receptions that the committees put on, mostly the Social and Cultural Society of Jews 28.

Israel? For centuries it has been the Jews' dream to return to Israel. Every year at Passover they wished each other: 'ba-shanah ha-baa be-Yerushalayim' [Hebrew: next year in Jerusalem]. For hundreds of years it wasn't possible – Turkey, the Arabs, the British protectorate [British Mandate].

I grew up in a Zionist family, and my parents also strove for the establishment of a Jewish state.

I thought about moving to Israel many times. There were always various obstacles, though, that prevented me from doing so. Before the war I wanted to finish school first and then I was called up into the army. Later on, when I was in Israel for the first time – in 1956 – I even had a job lined up. But here in Poland my wife had responsibilities – she had to care for her mother.

I remember that first trip. I had a lot of trouble getting permission to go, but in the end I succeeded. When our ship sailed into the port of Haifa, the whole family was already on the quayside. I went to Rywa and Josif's house; they bred chickens at the time. They didn't even have a gas cooker then. My brother-in-law had a donkey, which he harnessed up to a cart and drove me around so that I could look at the sea. Now when we go over there with the family, everything is totally different. The last time I was in Israel was in 1999. We had separate rooms to ourselves. During the day we went swimming and sunbathed. In the morning there was coffee, tea, milk and cocoa. And lots of vegetables because there are vegetables all year round there – not like here – they have everything there.

Did anything change in Poland after 1989? Well, of course things changed. Now there is more democracy, then the strict discipline ground us down. When I worked in those institutions back then, I remember how they used to keep us for hours on 1st May, you stood and stood, so that a few people at the top could look at us. And altogether there was this attitude – Stalin this, Stalin that. I always had a critical attitude to what went on because I listened to the BBC and I knew what was going on. But I have friends, even in Israel, who back then somehow got drawn into those communist wheels and they truly believed in Stalin. I don't know, I was even puzzled because they were decent people, they had a grammar-school education. For me it was inexplicable that they could believe in something like that.

As for the Warsaw community and Jewish circles today, I get the feeling that they overdo it in a lot of cases. The Yiddish school, for example – I don't believe that the Yiddish language has a future. Yiddish is still around among older people. They were born in Europe and so on, but to revive it? I don't even see the need. Perhaps just one thing, that wonderful literature written in Yiddish by Sholem Aleichem 29 and Peretz, An-ski 30.

It's the same in the Jewish community. There's a few young people, but it all comes down, I suspect, to the fact that they get financial assistance from abroad. In any case, it's hard to say anything on that subject. I'm not prejudiced. Perhaps in the Jewish religion people do find a way to live their life. Not long ago I read an article in the newspaper about a young girl who was complaining that in Poland it's hard to buy kosher food. Suddenly problems like that appear, and that, when there were years and years when nobody went to the synagogue here. People moved to Israel and they made the right choice.

I don't take advantage of any re-compensation funds because I was never in any of the ghettos. I'm a member of the Association of Jewish Combatants, too. Three years ago I and some other combatants went to Germany. We were invited there by the Kolbe Foundation [Maxmilian Kolbe Werk: operates in Germany; its mission is offering aid to victims of concentration camps]. I feel a bit awkward about it. Kolbe was in a camp and he gave his life for another – that's true, but before the war he was an anti-Semite. He even published these Jew-baiting newssheets. And they don't know about Kolbe at all – about his pre-war activities. Life brings all sorts of surprises and people

change their views, too, but to name a foundation after them just like that? Anyway, so they sent us an invitation in German and we went to meet them. We visited schools there. There were about 1,000 pupils and teachers there. One time they asked me to read something in Yiddish to them, so that they could compare if the language really is similar to German. So I read something by Sutzkever 31 .

At present I also belong to the Social and Cultural Society of Jews and to the Jewish Community organization. I also belong to a social committee whose aim is to renovate the annex in Wolski Hospital [Before the war this was a Jewish hospital, called Orthodox Hospital]. We want to make it into a home for older people. I'm at the community building almost every day. I use the canteen there. My wife is very poorly now and hasn't got the strength to cook me dinner. I'm a member of the Jewish Community Seniors' Club. We meet a few times a week. Sometimes we have talks on Jewish topics but often we just tell each other about our lives.

Glossary:

1 Keren Hayesod
Set up in London in 1920 by the World Zionist Organization to collect financial aid for the emigration of Jews to Palestine. The money came from contributions by Jewish communities from all over the world. The funds collected were transferred to support immigrants and the Jewish colonization of Palestine. Keren Hayesod operated in Poland from 1922-1939 and 1947-1950.

2 Hasid
The follower of the Hasidic movement, a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

3 Tarbut
Zionist educational organization. Founded in the Soviet Union in 1917, it was soon dissolved by the Soviet authorities. It continued its activity in Central and Eastern European countries; in Poland from 1922. The language of instruction in Tarbut schools was Hebrew; the curriculum included biblical and contemporary Hebrew literature, sciences, Polish, and technical and vocational subjects.

4 Hashomer Hatzair in Poland
From 1918 Hashomer Hatzair operated throughout Poland, with its headquarters in Warsaw. It emphasized the ideological and vocational training of future settlers in Palestine and personal development in groups. Its main aim was the creation of a socialist Jewish state in Palestine. Initially it was under the influence of the Zionist Organization in Poland, of which it was an

autonomous part. In the mid-1920s it broke away and joined the newly established World Scouting Union, Hashomer Hatzair. In 1931 it had 22,000 members in Poland organized in 262 ‘nests’ (Heb. ‘ken’). During the occupation it conducted clandestine operations in most ghettos. One of its members was Mordechaj Anielewicz, who led the rising in the Warsaw ghetto. After the war it operated legally in Poland as a party, part of the He Halutz. It was disbanded by the communist authorities in 1949.

5 Jozef Haller’s troops

During World War I Jozef Haller fought in Pilsudski’s legions. In 1916 he was appointed commander-in-chief of the 2nd Brigade of Polish Legions, which in February 1918 broke through the Austro-Russian front and joined up with the II Polish Corpus in Ukraine. In August 1918 Haller went to Paris. The Polish National Committee operating in France appointed him commander-in-chief of the Polish Army in France (the ‘Blue Army’). In April 1919 Gen. Haller led his troops back to Poland to take part in the fight for Poland’s sovereignty and independence. He commanded first the Galician front, then the south-western front and finally the Pomeranian front. During the Polish-Bolshevik War, in 1920, he became a member of the National Defense Council and Inspector General of the Volunteer Army and commander-in-chief of the North-Eastern front. After the war he was nominated General Inspector of Artillery. During the chaos that ensued after Poland regained its independence and in the battles over the borders in 1918-1921, the soldiers of Haller’s army were responsible for many campaigns directed against the Jews. They incited pogroms and persecution in the towns and villages they entered.

6 Bund

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks’ Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

7 Gora Kalwaria

Located near Warsaw, and known in Yiddish as Ger, Gora Kalwaria was the seat of the well-known dynasty of the tzaddiks. The adherents of the tzaddik of Ger were one of the most numerous and influential Hasidic groups in the Polish lands. The dynasty was founded by Meir Rotemberg Alter (1789-1866). The tzaddiks of Ger on the one hand stressed the importance of religious studies and promoted orthodox religiosity. On the other hand they were active in the political sphere. Today tzaddiks from Ger live in Israel and the US.

8 Kronenberg, Leopold (1812-1878)

Financier and industrialist. He came from a Jewish family and in 1846 was baptized a Calvinist. He was one of the richest people in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, and occupied important governmental and economic positions (he was, inter alia, a member of the Board of the Warsaw-

Terespol Railway Society). He owned a bank and opened a sugar factory. He was an active philanthropist and supporter of the Jewish assimilation movement.

9 Partitions of Poland (1772-1795)

Three divisions of the Polish lands, in 1772, 1793 and 1795 by the neighboring powers: Russia, Austria and Prussia. Under the first partition Russia occupied the lands east of the Dzwina, Drua and Dnieper, a total of 92,000 km2 and a population of 1.3 million. Austria took the southern part of the Cracow and Sandomierz provinces, the Oswiecim and Zator principalities, the Ruthenian province (except for the Chelm lands) and part of the Belz province, a total of 83,000 km2 and a population of 2.6 million. Prussia annexed Warmia, the Pomerania, Malbork and Chelmno provinces (except for Gdansk and Torun) and the lands along the Notec river and Goplo lake, altogether 36,000 km2 and 580,000 souls. The second partition was carried out by Prussia and Russia. Prussia occupied the Poznan, Kalisz, Gniezno, Sieradz, Leczyca, Inowroclaw, Brzesc Kujawski and Plock provinces, the Dobrzyn lands, parts of the Rawa and Masovia provinces, and Torun and Gdansk, a total of 58,000 km2 and over a million inhabitants. Russia took the Ukrainian and Belarus lands east of the Druja-Pinsk-Zbrucz line, altogether 280,000 km2 and 3 million inhabitants. Under the third partition Russia obtained the rest of the Lithuanian, Belarus and Ukrainian lands east of the Bug and the Nemirov-Grodno line, a total area of 120,000 km2 and 1.2 million inhabitants. The Prussians took the remainder of Podlasie and Mazovia, Warsaw, and parts of Samogitia and Malopolska, 55,000 km2 and a population of 1 million. Austria annexed Cracow and the part of Malopolska between the Pilica, Vistula and Bug, and part of Podlasie and Masovia, a total surface area of 47,000 km2 and a population of 1.2 million.

10 Endeks

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

11 Campaign against ritual slaughter

In pre-war Poland the issue of ritual slaughter was at the heart of a deep conflict between the Jewish community and Polish nationalist groups, which in 1936-1938 attempted to outlaw or restrict the practice of ritual slaughtering in the Sejm, the Polish parliament, citing humanitarian grounds and competition for Catholic butchers.

12 Tuwim, Julian (1894-1953)

Poet and translator; wrote in Polish. He was born in Lodz into an assimilated family from Lithuania. He studied law and philosophy at Warsaw University. He was a leading representative of the Skamander group of poets. His early work combined elements of Futurism and Expressionism (e.g. Czychanie na Boga [Lying in wait for God], 1918). In the 1920s his poetry took a turn towards lyrism (e.g. Slowa we krwi [Words in blood], 1926). In the 1930s under the influence of the rise in nationalistic tendencies in Poland his work took on the form of satire and political grotesque (Bal w operze [A ball at the opera], 1936). He also published works for children. A separate area of his writings are cabarets, libretti, sketches and monologues. He spent WWII in emigration and made

public appearances in which he relayed information on the fate of the Polish population of Poland and the rest of Europe. In 1944 he published an extended poem, ‘My Zydzi polscy’ [We Polish Jews], which was a manifesto of his complicated Polish-Jewish identity. After the war he returned to Poland but wrote little. He was the chairman of the Society of Friends of the Hebrew University and the Committee for Polish-Israeli Friendship.

13 Brzechwa, Jan (pen name of Wiktor Lesman) (1900-1966)

Lawyer, poet, satirist and translator. He came from Podolye [now Ukraine]. He studied medicine in Kazan and law at Warsaw University. Best known as the author of a large number of works for children. He also translated children’s literature and drama from Russian. As a lawyer his main area of interest was copyright (his work in this area was published under his real name). He wrote in Polish. Jewish issues are addressed only in a few satirical works.

14 Lesmian, Boleslaw (1877-1937)

Poet, writer and translator. He came from a family of assimilated Jewish intelligentsia. He was born in Warsaw and studied law in Kiev. He wrote in Polish and Russian. He was one of the founders of the Warsaw-based experimental Artistic Theater (1911). His works are in the fairytale convention and are inspired by oriental and Slavonic folklore. In 1912 he released his first volume of poetry (Sad rozstajny [The widespread orchard]). Only his admittance to the Polish Academy of Literature in 1933 enabled him to publish his work.

15 Anti-Jewish Legislation in Poland

After World War I nationalist groupings in Poland lobbied for the introduction of the numerus clausus (Lat. closed number – a limit on the number of people admitted to the practice of a given profession or to an institution – 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. In 1938 it was indirectly introduced at the Bar.

16 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.

17 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at

the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

18 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

19 Central Committee of Polish Jews

It was founded in 1944, with the aim of representing Jews in dealings with the state authorities and organizing and co-coordinating aid and community care for Holocaust survivors. Initially it operated from Lublin as part of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. The CCPJ's activities were subsidized by the Joint, and in time began to cover all areas of the reviving Jewish life. In 1950 the CCPJ merged with the Jewish Cultural Society to form the Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews.

20 Jewish children rescued by convents

During World War II some convent orphanages hid Jewish children; priests issued false certificates of baptism for them. The way such children were brought up varied. Usually they were taught the Catholic faith, which on the one hand was dictated by security (the children had to be able to act like Catholics), on the other hand the motive was often conviction of the need to bring them up in the Christian faith. The post-war fortunes of Jewish children saved in this way varied vastly. Some returned to Jewish families, others, consciously or not, remained in the Catholic environment.

21 Nozyk Synagogue

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

22 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish

Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

23 'Solidarnosc' Production Co-operatives

an association established in 1946 to co-ordinate the work of production plants run by legally functioning Jewish parties. It also provided re-qualification and training for employees, including repatriates. In 1949 there were 200 Jewish co-operatives operating within the 'Solidarnosc' organization in Poland. They operated until 1968 (with a break from 1950-1956).

24 ORT

(Russ. – Obshchestvo Razpostranienia Truda sredi Yevreyev) Society for the Propagation of Labor among Jews. Founded in 1880 in Russia, following the Revolution of 1917 it moved to Berlin. In Poland it operated from 1921 as the Organization for the Development of Industrial, Craft and Agricultural Creativity among the Jewish Population. It provided training in non-commercial trades, chiefly crafts. ORT had a network of schools, provided advanced educational courses for adults and trained teachers. In 1950 it was accused of espionage, its board was expelled from the country and its premises were taken over by the Treasury. After 1956 its activities in Poland were resumed, but following the anti-Semitic campaign in 1968 the communist authorities once again dissolved all the Polish branches of this organization.

25 Kielce Pogrom

On 4th July 1946 the alleged kidnapping of a Polish boy led to a pogrom in which 42 people were killed and over 40 wounded. The pogrom also prompted other anti-Jewish incidents in Kielce region. These events caused mass emigrations of Jews to Israel and other countries.

26 Anti-Zionist campaign in Poland

From 1962-1967 a campaign got underway to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The background to 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 a lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War. This address marked the start of purges among journalists and 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. After 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.

27 Warsaw Uprising 1944

The term refers to the Polish uprising between 1st August and 2nd October 1944, an armed uprising orchestrated by the underground Home Army and supported by the civilian population of Warsaw. It was justified by political motives: the calculation that if the domestic arm of the Polish government in exile took possession of the city, the USSR would be forced to recognize Polish sovereignty. The Allies rebuffed requests for support for the campaign. The Polish underground state failed to achieve its aim. Losses were vast: around 20,000 insurrectionists and 200,000 civilians were killed and 70% of the city destroyed.

28 Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews

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

29 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916)

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

30 An-ski, Szymon (pen name of Szlojme Zajnwel Rapaport) (1863-1920)

Writer, ethnographer, socialist activist. Born in a village near Vitebsk. In his youth he was an advocate of haskalah, but later joined the radical movement Narodnaya Vola. Under threat of arrest he left Russia in 1892 but returned there in 1905. From 1911-14 he led an ethnographic expedition researching the folklore of the Jews of Podolye and Volhynia. During the war he organized committees bringing aid to Jewish victims of the conflict and pogroms. In 1918 he became involved in organizing cultural life in Vilnius, as a co-founder of the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists and the Jewish Ethnographic Society. Two years before his death he moved to Warsaw. He is the author of the Bund party's anthem, 'Di shvue' (Yid. oath). The participation of

the Bund in the Revolution of 1905 influenced An-ski's decision to write in Yiddish. In his later work he used elements of Jewish legends collected during his ethnographic expedition and his experiences from WWI. His most famous work is The Dybbuk (which to this day remains one of the most popular Yiddish works for the stage). An-ski's entire literary and scientific oeuvre was published in Warsaw in 1920-25 as a 15-volume edition.

31 Sutzkever, Abraham (b
1913): Poet writing in Yiddish. Born in Vilnius region, he belonged to the artistic Jung Wilne circle and was its most illustrious member. He made his literary debut in 1933. During WWII he was in the Warsaw ghetto, but escaped and joined the underground army. Subsequently moved to the USSR, but in 1946 returned to Poland. Since 1947 he has lived in Israel. He published several volumes of verse, including Di Festung (The Fortress), Yidishe Gas (Jewish Street) and In Fayer Vogn (In the Fiery Wagon).