Samuel König

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Lodz
Poland
Interviewer: Judyta Hajduk
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Mr. Samuel König is an elegant, dignified gentleman of 81. Our meetings took place at the Jewish community center in Lodz. Mr. König visits the city very often; he's taking a train from his hometown of Cieladz and staying for a couple of days each week. He visits the center, attends the services and meets his friends. He has his own little place there – the former cloakroom, where I could always find him. Mr. König was answering my questions very matter-of-factly. He was not inclined to multiply the threads of his tale. It was very hard to persuade him to tell stories and anecdotes. Whenever such digressions appeared he always stressed it was probably nothing that important.

I was born in a little town of Mielnica Podolska [town in Tarnopol region, ca. 220km south-east of Lwow, today Melnytsya Podilska in Ukraine]. Altogether there were 5,000 people living there. Apart from Jews they were Poles and Ukrainians. The town itself was Jewish, but the surrounding area was mostly Ukrainian, with the occasional Poles. Well, the Ukrainians were the majority, the Jews made up less then a half [of the population] and there were very few Poles. The Poles just ran the offices, right. If a Pole lived in the town, he was an administrator or a warehouse manager. The policeman was Polish, the postman was Polish, they worked in the courts, or as office clerks.

Most of the Jews lived in the town. The market square, [all of its] surroundings were populated by Jews. Those were all old streets, no new buildings there. They were putting up new buildings but that was in the other part of the town. The market square had a small paved section but the rest was a swamp. When it rained, you could neither walk nor drive through it. There was a well in the center, right, and a pump, and that was it. Everyone stocked up on water there. There were some shops, a few little cafés. The cafés were owned by Jews, and the patrons were of course Jewish as well. I mean, the places were not exclusively [for Jews], but the non-Jewish population wasn't interested in such cultured ways of spending time: [to sit] over a coffee or play some chess. Anyway, I was a very young boy back then [before the war] and that's how I recall it. The older boys hung out at the cafés to listen to the radio and drink some soda, especially on Saturdays, right. You could croon, sing a tune [there], right. You might say it was the central point of the town, a typical spot for socializing. There was no synagogue at the square. And the rabbi didn't live by the square, either. Well, the fairs took place there, right, lots of horses, cows, pigs you could buy, and crops. It was a small town [market]. There was a mikveh in the town, but I've never been there. It was somewhere near the [non-Jewish] bath house.

There were two cemeteries [in the town]: the old one, where they wouldn't later bury anyone anymore, and the new one. Both [situated] on the outskirts. At the main road I guess, leading to the Iwanie Puste train station [ca. 7km of Mielnica]. At that time [before the war] those were the

outskirts. I went to the old cemetery just to see how it looked like. You know, we've made a trip with the rest of the boys. And the new cemetery was only partially filled with mazevot, the graves. Neither one was particularly well kept. And anyway the Jewish cemeteries have one thing in common; they have no alleys, lanes, right. It's all saturated, one tomb right next to the other, dense.

I've seen some Jewish burials but I can't recall it all that precisely and exactly. I remember the procession set off from the deceased's house. Four people carried him. The coffin was a simple box made of wooden boards. There was a piece of black tapestry with the Star of David on top of the coffin. The procession would go to the synagogue the deceased had used to go to. They put the box on the ground there, and the rabbi recited Kaddish. Or maybe a different prayer? I don't remember exactly. It took a while, and then up on their shoulders again and off to the cemetery. The coffin stood in the funeral home and the dead person's friends, the elder people came in turn and whispered something in his ear. 'If I've ever wronged you, please forgive me', right. I don't remember if the coffin was open or not at that moment. I think one of the smaller boards could have been removed. So you could see the white robe, because the deceased was wrapped in a white shroud, a piece of material. After the apologies the Kaddish was recited but I don't know if that was still at the funeral home or [maybe] already over the grave. Well and there was this worker, the synagogue sweeper, and he carried a money-box, jingling with it and shouting, 'Tzedakah tatzil mimavet', 'Alms save you from death', something to that effect. Some people approached him, threw in a dime and that was it.

I remember there were three synagogues in town. Two were modest and the third one was bigger and its interior was a bit more fancy. The Bimah was high there and the aron kodesh. It was beautiful. Prettier than the other synagogues. The others were so coarse. Maybe it had something to do with the people attending the services. They [the Jews in town] varied. The poor had the simpler synagogue and the richer gathered in the more elegant one. But I'm not that sure of it. My grandpa went to the normal, simple synagogue.

I don't remember any conflicts [in the town], but I guess there could have been some. I don't recall any great friendships, either. [Townspeople of different nationalities] didn't mingle with each other, didn't go to common weddings, right, or christening parties, but as for arguments or troubles – no such things either. Jews and Ukrainians didn't celebrate the Catholic holidays but neither did they stay at home. And anyway, I was only 15 [in 1939] and had lots of other things on my mind, so [I can't tell exactly]. But I remember [the town's celebrations of] Corpus Christi [the Feast of Body and Blood of Christ, a primarily Catholic feast celebrated with processions with the Holy Eucharist]. The summers there, in the Kresy [The Eastern Borderlands, the easternmost regions of pre-war Poland], were without rain, there were droughts. And one year was so dry that the rabbi with his community, and the Orthodox priest with his community, and the Catholic priest with his processioned around the market square and beyond, praying for rain. They were all praying [together].

The oldest impressions [memories] I have is the fire at our neighbor's house. It was 1927, I wasn't even four. Grandma Steilberg, my Grandpa's [Benjamin Menczer, mother's father] sister lived there. I don't know how the fire could have started on Saturday. It had to start already on Friday, smoldered during the night and [on Saturday] the people saw [Grandma Steilberg's] ceiling [roof]

was on fire. [Apparently] a piece of wood or something fell on the stove. And that was already Saturday morning. [My father] took some water and started to put the fire out with other neighbors. And Father went to a wrong place where the floor had burned through and he crashed with it on the stove below, right. He got his leg burned all over. He stayed home for months and the doctors were treating him. I remember the screams when the doctors extracted necroses from people's bodies. There was a second fire there, I was four or five maybe [1928]. The whole town quarter was on fire, right next to Grandpa's house. It was a huge blaze. Well, I'm not able to tell exactly, but something like 20, 25 houses [burned]. But those were all old hovels. Later they [the owners] apparently got some damages, insurance money, and rebuilt the places nicely.

I only knew my maternal grandparents. Because my father was, say, acquired [had come] to the town from Kolomyja, next to Stanislawow [town ca. 130km south of Lwow, today Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine]. It's about 150-160 km [west of Mielnica Podolska]. That's already in the Carpathian Mountains, right. His whole family lived there. My [maternal] Grandma, Ester Fejga [Menczer] was of middle height and rather hefty, right. She didn't wear a wig. Her hair was red but already grizzled. We'd lived at Grandpa and Grandma's [Menczer] before I went to school. When we lived with them there were four of us [children] in the household and Grandma had to take care of us all. I think it was Grandma who spent most time with us, she was our superior. She had to urge us to eat. Besides, she was in very firm [close] relations with us, we had a strong family bond. She died in 1936 or 1937. It was extensive pneumonia. She didn't suffer too long.

I remember that day. It was fall. Grandma died on Friday afternoon. The Sabbath had already begun. She had to lay in bed all through Saturday because it was not allowed to move her! The funeral took place on Saturday evening. As soon as the Sabbath was over the procession set off. I remember the mourning at home. It lasts seven days, you sit home, on little benches, right, barefoot. Grandpa sat there, and his son Fajbisz [Menczer], who was still a bachelor at the time. I don't think my dad prayed with them. No, because he had to be at the shop at 5 a.m., do things. They didn't shave. Grandpa was carrying the water [out from the house]. They didn't smoke – Grandpa was a smoker – and [they sat] in socks, without shoes. I don't know why [it was that way]. Well, [it was] such tradition. Apart from that, my uncle [Fajbisz Menczer], Grandpa's son, used to go [to the synagogue] for the service everyday for the next year, to recite Kaddish. There were no prayers at home. I don't remember any.

Grandpa Benjamin [Menczer, mother's father] was a tall, handsome man. And healthy, too. He had a beard. Well, every elderly man there [in the town] had a beard anyway. He was not a stern man. He was very kind-hearted towards Mom, his daughter [Gitla Menczer] and his son [Fajbisz Menczer], too, and his grandchildren. I remember going with Grandpa to swim in the river Dniester. Just the two of us. It was in the summer, we would head out at daybreak. We would make the trip two, three times during the summer. It was rather far off. The gorge was very deep, you had to have some [strength] to climb down and up again. Well, I had already had my bar mitzvah at the time. I was 13. Jews have their mikves and maybe he thought the swimming passed for bathing in a mikveh, it was running water, right. Well, but I'm not that sure.

Right after getting married my parents moved into Grandpa's [Benjamin Menczer] house. Because they didn't have their own house yet. There was a large front hall there, then a room, or two, then the kitchen and some more rooms upstairs. You could enter the house from two streets. There was

no backyard. We had no livestock. We didn't have electric light at home, but there was a power plant in the town. It gave some light [power], but not too much. Only briefly, two or three hours every afternoon. We, our parents and the five of us: Sara, Dwora, Fryda, Josef [and me], lived at the back [of the house], in one room. [We were] really cramped. It was a dark room with two beds, like a ship cabin without a window.

[Until 1936] we usually [sic!] lived at Grandpa Benjamin's [Menczer], Mom's father's, next to the market square. In 1935 and 1936 – I was 11 – Father built a new house and we moved in there. The house was a couple of blocks away from the market square. The constructing works didn't last long, it took one year, or one season maybe, I don't remember [exactly]. Father amassed enough money; he'd been saving, right. I guess [we were doing] rather well. It was a beautiful, large house and it cost a lot of money. Modern, wonderfully arranged. You could tell it just from looking at the triple windows. At first it was all, the whole house was ours. There were two rooms upstairs, so my sisters got one and I got the other little one, and there were spacious rooms downstairs. There were five rooms and a kitchen. Beautifully furnished. Floor parqueted with one-meter-long boards, in squares. Coal stoves, electric light. I remember a rabbi once paid us a visit. It was a rabbi from Father's homeland, from Kolomyja, and apparently Father invited him over to bless the house. I remember the prayers at home. And lots of guests came. Father [apparently] invited them.

Grandpa ran a pub at home, and Grandma [Ester Fejga] ran the kitchen, for the guests, right. That was how they made their living. The pub occupied part of the house, in a big hall. You could eat [there], drink and sleep over. Grandma took care of it all. [The pub] was a rather crude place, I'm not sure how to put it, but a rather simple one. There was one long table and three or four smaller ones on the other side. No big parties there, they were rather focusing on the market days, the fairs. [The Ukrainian peasants] would come to have a cup of tea, or some beer, or a shot of vodka, to eat something, to snack. The pub was in a very good spot, right next to the market square. I'm sure it wasn't kosher so Jews didn't have any use of it. A Jew might have come by once in a while to have a beer but the place was generally for the non-Jewish.

Grandma had four, maybe six beds [at her disposal]. Meaning there was a separate room for the guests. You had to cross the pub to get there. More or less twice a week people would come to the town from wholesalers, from [various] cities, middlemen between the wholesalers and the stores. Traveling salesmen. They usually stayed in town for a day or two. They collected their orders from the stores, and they needed a place to sleep. Grandma would make them dinner and offer them a bed. I don't know if it was official, legal, or just like that, but I'm sure the pub itself was legal. There weren't too many pubs like that [in the town], only some little cafés, but those were rather for the Jews, right. The cafés were rather [fancy] social places. Only the socialites sat there. The well-read, the cultured ones. Well, and not everyone in the town was so exclusive [socially prominent], so to speak. For most of the Jews religion was the center of their lives, they wore payes. The Jewish schoolboys also had payes, right. I remember Grandpa's pub was doing pretty well. Well, you could see a decent crowd sipping their beers. There even was a beer pourer. The keg was in the basement. Those were wooden kegs. And they were connected, right, with a rubber pipe to the tap in the pub. Upstairs [at the bar] there was this hand pump that filled the keg with air and the compressed air pushed the beer up. When you opened the tap the bubbly beer would flow, already with a head. A very common device those days.

There was also a store in Grandpa's [Benjamin Menczer] house. My father ran it. Grandpa asigned a nook of his house as the store, right. It was a long store. The width was maybe 4 meter and the length could be 7 meter, more or less. Well, you could find there groceries, exotic spices, some industrial goods, and what not. You know, you could buy a penknife by my father's, or a pair of stockings. Well, all the everyday, little town stuff, right. As for the groceries, father was supplied by a wholesaler, there was a local one. And it was a Jewish wholesaler. As for other things, the salesmen came [to town] every other week. I don't know if all the stock was kosher. I think the groats are all kosher, as well as sugar, and also flour. And anyway, Jews were not the only customers, there were Poles, too. Father's store was more elite compared to the rest of them, he had good clientele. Many Poles did their shopping there and they were [usually] town's teachers but also landowners from the surrounding area. Their administrators used to come once a week to cater. Well, and there were the market days apart from that, and everybody would [come]. Everybody liked my father, he had a lot of customers. Every one of them had his own book, right, with his name on it, and at the end of each month the clients came with the money and settled their bills. I helped my father at the store sometimes. When I was 14 I carried the sacks from the wholesaler's on my back. Flour, sugar, salt.

Apart from that Grandpa Benjamin and my father also had some fields. They didn't farm them by themselves, the land was located 6 or 7 kilometers from the town, in Kudrynce near the Russian border [Editor's note: USSR]. It couldn't have been large. I don't know how did they end up owning it. I just remember the balk of, I think, Father's field was lined with walnut trees. They bore beautiful walnuts.

I think my parents [Abram and Gitel König] met thanks to matchmaking. They had to be introduced to each other by matchmakers, I don't see it any other way. Father was from Stanislawow, near Kolomyja. Mom was born in Mielnica. So where's one and where's the other? Where would they be supposed to meet?

Oh, I still remember how it was done. Roza Szternberg, my aunt, was to get married. This matchmaking could be in 1935, or 1934, and she was zero, I guess [born in 1900] so she was already a spinster. I was maybe 10 [at the time], and the matchmaker came with her would-be fiancé, right. I don't know where they'd come from but they weren't locals. They discussed all the issues: what and when, and what were each one's properties, right. The marriage did not take place [eventually] but I don't know why not. Her brother's name was Dawid. They were the only ones in the town who survived the war. They wandered through the forests, right. Without any help they wouldn't have survived, somebody did help them. Roza left the country right after the war. In 1946 she was already gone. First she went to Berlin. There was a whole Jewish colony there; afterwards she went to the USA. She lived in New York. The Szternbergs had a brother and a sister in the States. We were exchanging letters. She helped us after the war, she used to send us parcels. She died a year ago [in 2005], she was 103. Yes, a healthy vintage.

My father, Abram, was even-tempered and energetic, he took good care of us – and he had a bunch to take care of! He was thin, of my height. He didn't wear a beard. He dressed the European style. He wore a derby, right, a round hat. It was a hat for special occasions. He was incredibly hard-working. He smoked, but not much. I remember he would cut a cigarette in two and wrap the other half in tissue paper. A good man, not strict but sober could have been some old affair. He was

pious. He went to the synagogue every Saturday, on every Sabbath.

Well, my mommy [Gitel König] was year zero [1900] or one [1901] maybe. She was pretty straightforward, you could say. She was shorter than Father. She helped him at the store so Grandma took care of us. Mom didn't wear a wig, she had beautiful hair. A long, black braid. She wore that braid all her life. She [tied it] in a bun. She dressed the European style. She was an energetic woman. She raised us, but she didn't have any trouble with us. Every one of us saw the track to follow. She had to be great if she managed to keep the five brats in good health, right, and hygiene. So everything was swell [at home]. Mom had a brother, Fajbisz. He was born in 1917.

Parents were an accordant couple. There were no rows, I don't remember anything [bad] happening. I don't think they had any political views. Father served in the army, the Austrian [Austro-Hungarian] army, during World War I, so maybe it left him with some ideas. But I don't know anything of that matter. Besides, Father was a serious man, with a house, children, wife, he had to provide his family with daily bread instead of playing politics. I know there was [was active in the town] the Bund 1. I also know the craftsmen had their organization. The workers were rather leftist. But I can't say the political issues were ever discussed at home. I don't remember parents ever talking about leaving for Palestine, but they supported the emigrants 2. Some people from the area left. It was the poorest who emigrated, they didn't have any perspectives. They took part in a Shara. An Ahshara [Hahshara, Hebr. preparing, tempering – training camps intended to prepare for life and work in Israel] was to prepare the youth for Israel, teach them how to farm, right. Many organizations were running those Ahshars. And the whole town gave money to that purpose.

My parents didn't have too many friends. There were no meetings among neighbors like it is a custom nowadays, with neighbors coming [to visit]. We didn't have any of that. And the holidays were also celebrated at home, every family by itself. Well, there were gatherings when somebody from the family arrived from afar, yes, people came together on such occasions. They did so when Father's sister came with her husband, long way from around Kolomyja where they lived. [They came] on horseback. They were called Bregman. I don't remember their first names. They stayed a few days with us and all of the family came to see them, right. There were other occasions – when Mom invited Grandpa on Saturdays, [especially] later, when he became a widower. Well, but that was because of the [family] situation.

There were five of us at home: me, my three sisters Sara, Dwora and Fryda, and my brother Josel [from Josef]. We were all born at Granpa's [Benjamin Menczer's]. I don't remember us hanging out together. There were no conflicts, no, but my sisters were younger, they had their own friends. My parents only took us to the synagogue; usually it was Dad [who did it]. Mommy didn't go to the synagogue too often. They didn't use to take us out for a walk or to go see someone, I don't remember any of that. No such visits. We didn't go on holidays, either. I don't think anyone did those days. There was no such fashion, it was rather people came to visit our region. The town and its surroundings were a healthy and interesting area, so scouts from central Poland, from Silesia, maybe from Warsaw used to come there. They had their camps on the banks of the river Dniester, of Zbruch, right, somewhere around there.

My earliest memories are from school. I went to a cheder first. But the memory is rather hazy. It's hard to recount anything. I was maybe 3, maybe 4 years old. And besides, I didn't stay there too long, maybe I didn't even completed it. The cheder was located in a small, unkempt house. There

was this old man, Jankel, right. He was alone, a widower. And so he taught us the letters. [He pointed] with a little stick, 'That's aleph, that's…' It was very monotonous. I don't think I stayed there long. The old man [Jankel], the rebe who taught there died soon. Afterwards they sent me to another cheder. There were more cheders in the town, right. It was, I guess, that depending on family's [financial] situation [the children] were send to a better cheder, a wealthier one. Anyway, my family was not poor.

I can still read in Hebrew but I learned it at a Hebrew school, not at the cheder. The school was called Tarbut. It was a communal school. I think the Jewish community council had some supervision over it. But studying was not free, you had to pay. My sister and I went to that school, to different classes, naturally. I remember I used to go there for four, maybe five years. Well, I guess I started studying there when I was in second or third grade of elementary school. Parents wanted me to learn Hebrew. I guess there were Zionist sympathies in the family. But it didn't necessarily have anything to do with Zionism, right, or religion. The school [building] was earlier the Jewish Communal Hall, right. The school was in the back, at the backyard. The yard was big, neighbored by two farms. There was a huge hall on the ground floor of the building where all the meetings took place, and the classrooms were upstairs. There were four, maybe five classes, lots of students anyway. [I know] there was also an affiliated kindergarten. I used to go to that school till I was 12, or 13.

All the students were Jewish. The teachers were also Jewish. The lecturing language was Hebrew. They didn't teach us the Torah or basic religious knowledge, we were learning to read, write, sing. First of all we studied Hebrew language and grammar, Jewish history. It was all on adolescent level, right. We also had singing classes. We sang popular Hebrew songs. I can't recall exactly if they also taught us geography, maths, and other subjects. I don't remember. Personally, I liked singing, I was interested in reading and writing as well. I managed to grasp it during those four years. And not just me, maybe me the least, but after the four years we all could beautifully speak, write, and sing [in Hebrew]. I was surely doing better at the Hebrew school than at the Polish one.

I used to go to the Polish elementary school parallel to studying at the Hebrew one. I started it at the age of 7 years old. It was a Polish public school. It was all set up so that the schools did not collide. I think I used to go to the Polish school in the morning and to the Hebrew in the afternoon. The Polish school was located near the market square, on the main street leading to the railway station, right, at the very beginning of it. The school was obligatory. You had to attend; the paupers sometimes did not, though, because they didn't have any proper clothes. There were lots of those have-nots. The Ukrainians didn't [usually] go to school in the winter because they didn't have boots. That's true. Father brought me to school my first day. He gave me a piggyback ride. On the second or third day, it was fall, harvest time, I left home for school and saw a farmer driving a wagon. It had the perch sticking at the back, a sort of a shaft. You could make it shorter or longer. I sat on it, held on to the wagon's rail, and we drove on. The horses were walking slowly when I got on the wagon, right, so no problem. When we almost reached the school the farmer suddenly whipped the horses and it was a bit too fast for me, so I was scared to jump off and decided not to. He didn't look back, hadn't noticed me so we drove on far, far away, to the Russian border where he collected sheaves from his field. I didn't come back home until evening that day, with the farmer and his sheaves. I got spanked for that, I remember.

We only learned Polish at school, plus Ukrainian twice a week. There was no Ukrainian school as such, even though the Ukrainians were the majority [in the town], right. They all went to the Polish school. Girls and boys together. There were no rules as for seating at desks. Jews sat with Ukrainians, or Ukrainians with Poles. There wasn't even other possibility. The class was small and there were 30 or 35 of us. I don't remember any [ethnic] conflicts, or negative attitude [of the teachers] towards the Jews or the Ukrainians. On the contrary. They didn't make any distinction between Poles and Ukrainians. If you were good, you were good, and if you were a troublemaker, Dziubinski, our maths teacher, would throw a piece of chalk right at your forehead, no matter if you sat at the far end of the classroom. Well, it happened sometimes in the school yard that one student punched another but that was just children playing. Nobody beat me and I never beat anybody. I don't remember experiencing anti-Semitism in my childhood. Well, some people frowned at you, right. But I don't know if that was already anti-Semitism.

Apart from Dziubinski I remember one more teacher from that school. She was a very nice lady. She was one of seven or eight teachers. They were all Poles, right. Her name was Danuta Lange. God, what did she teach us? The drill was one thing. She led us in fours, left, right, yes, and turn, and form a double line. I have to admit I was a mediocre student.

The Jewish tradition was thoroughly observed at Grandma and Grandpa Menczer's home. I need to stress it. Traditional in 200 per cent, you could say. Grandpa used to go to the synagogue three times a week. When he wasn't praying at the synagogue he sometimes prayed at home with his son Fajbisz. As for Daddy, I don't think he prayed everyday. He had to be in the store at 5 a.m. sharp, prepare things. Grandma cooked kosher. Her meals were nothing special. And our meals at home neither. You know, ordinary Jewish food, like in every Jewish home. We always had a chicken on Saturday. Besides, those were the Borderlands, there were lots of corn, lots of mamalyga. Corn flour mamaliga and malayes, right. Those were the staples. Mamaliga is a boiled corn flour [polenta], and malayes are the same only baked in the oven. They were sometimes spread with cherries. That was one of the simpler, primitive [dishes]. We also had some more interesting ones on festivals. Well, I can't tell exactly right now but there were those apple pies, and we had them quite often. And the fludn [Yid. dessert, cake]. Der fludn in Jewish [Yiddish], a very heavy cake, with nuts, very thick. Well, it was all very tasty. We could afford it and we indulged in it. Oh, and we drank whale oil everyday. It was a must. Mommy watched that we drank it.

The Sabbath looked quite ordinarily at our home. Well, the stores in the town were closed during Sabbath. Father would go to the synagogue, right. Mom would lit a candle in the evening, there would be prayers before the supper, blessing the bread, right. It looked like that when we lived at Grandpa's, but when we moved to our own house we still went to the synagogue, without question. But as long as we lived with Grandpa the Sabbath evening was more ceremonial. And the candles were lit for a longer time, right. All the recommended prayers, everything was done in a more solemn way. When we lived by ourselves Mom lit the candles, we came back home from the synagogue, but it was not as ceremonial as at Grandpa's. It wasn't stressed that much. But we always kept kosher. I went to a Hebrew school, to the synagogue, so I knew about those things. I spoke Hebrew, I've had a bar mitzvah. It was very ceremonial but not at home. In the year following my bar mitzvah I had to regularly pray at the synagogue. Later it was not so regularly. Checkered, I'd say.

We spoke Yiddish at home so I'm not really sure how and when I've learned Polish. Well, it was broken Polish at first, [a mixture of] Polish and Jewish [Yiddish] with the Ukrainian lilt. [My command of the language] has developed gradually but I can't precisely describe [how and when]. Besides, we had various [of various ethnicities] neighbors. For example our closest neighbor was the school's principal. A Pole. He often invited us [the children] over. We helped him out, raked over his garden a little, right. Well, I have somehow learned Polish. I do speak it.

I used to get up at 5 or 6 a.m. everyday and leave for school. After the schoolday I went to the store with Father. I was a 13-year-old, well-built, strong boy. Everyday I carried a sack or two of flour, sugar, whatever had come from the wholesaler. Afterwards I usually spent my time playing outside. The whole market square was our backyard. Running was the most common game. The whole gang ran barefoot. Well, we did sometimes play soccer, but it wasn't that often. We rode bikes a bit. Uncle Fajbisz used to lend me his bike to take a ride. What's more, the Dniester was less than a mile away from the town. It was a hilly area. You could play hide-and-seek. But there was no such tradition that [children] get together and play soccer like today, there was no such fashion I'd say. Well, later there were those organizations – Zionist, non-Zionist. But I'm not really familiar with them. There were evenings for the youngest children, and for those a bit older as well. Singing, dancing, right. By dancing I don't mean, you know, a dance band. Horas. It was called a Hora. [People] formed a circle and danced to the rhythm of their own singing. Oh, and there was also something like scouting, right. Jewish scouts. They were all very young kids. They marched, marked trails, right. That's what they did mostly. As for Zionist organizations I remember Kordonia [Gordonia] 3. The boys from Gordonia were older, at draft age – 18-year-olds, 17-year-olds, right. Later there was Trumpeldor [Brit Trumpledor] 4. Zionist as well. And Ashomer Hatzair [Hashomer Hatzair] 5. And Hanoar Hatzioni 6, also a Zionist one. But the division has never been clear to me. I don't know what made the young people opt for any particular group.

I usually played with Jewish boys. Because as far as friendships go, they were rather uniform [homogenous], right. The ethnic groups kept to themselves on the schoolyard. It wouldn't be welcome by the Polish parents and the whole society to have a close Jewish friend, right. Or worse still, a girl to have a Jewish boy for a friend. Not really. Well, there were no such cases. The groups did meet, yes – on civil defence lessons, on marches. Why was it that way? Firstly, there was no need [to change anything]. Secondly, I had so little free time my Jewish friends were enough for me. And the Jewish organizations existed. The meetings in those Jewish organizations were held quite often. I was a member of Jabotynski's 7 Trumpeldor. [I was around] 10 at the time. I think Trumpeldor is a name. It had something to do with organization's origins. But I'm not able to give any details. Jabotynski was a Zionist, his views were rather radical. As members of the organization, we walked through the forest, right. We took different trails, left marks, and the others were to follow us. But there was also Sokol Polski [Polish Gymnastic Society Polish Falcon, association established in 1893] and Polish scouts. Jews had their own organizations and the Ukrainians as well. They marched with those wooden rifles. Besides, the two or three Poles in our class were from a different sphere. They had their money, their activities. And the Ukrainians were unkempt, always barefoot, dirty. Poverty, poverty. So everyone stuck to their group.

In the 1930s you could sense an air of menace in the town. A sort of unease. There was radio, a couple of sets in the town – powered by batteries, not from a socket. The cafés usually had them, but only with the Jewish patrons in mind. I've seen those radios. I don't remember the stations. I

know they spoke Polish on the radio and that it was really something if you had a set. People listened to the news together. I remember [a debate] in the Parliament, they wanted to ban ritual slaughter 8. I know it caused protests, people discussed it. In 1933, [and] in 1935, when the Germans passed those anti-Semitic laws [the Nuremberg Laws], everyone listened to the radio to check what was happening in Germany. Everyone heard about the Crystal Night 9, and you could also get news about the situation in Poland.

We leased [a part of the house] sometime before the war, well, the situation forced us to. Apparently we needed some money. There were two or three tenants [altogether], each spent about six months with us. Well, we only had moved there in 1936, maybe 1935, four years before the war at most, so the tenants also lived there shortly. I don't remember the order [exactly], but the first tenant was a Jew. I don't know how long he stayed [with us]. Next was a bankrupt landowner, a Ukrainian woman with a young man. She was in her fifties and her boyfriend was 25. At least that's what I think now. And also this detail: later she became really poor, didn't have money to pay the rent and so she left us a piano instead. But nobody of us could play so it just stood there. Well, the girls, my sisters, would casually thumb it once in a while, right. [The tenants] catered by themselves of course, we only provided them the room. They usually didn't stay too long.

I was 15 when the war broke out. The outbreak itself didn't make any special impression on me. So a war broke out, [that's it]. I saw my first plane on the first Tuesday of the war. 1st September was on Friday and on Tuesday the low-flying plane appeared, [the townspeople] said it was a German one.

The atmosphere in the town changed when the war broke out. The Germans didn't reach us, they only got to Lwow, and our town was about 200 km farther or maybe more. Well, the mayor ordered not to raise the prices, by no means, or to hide food. When the Russians entered [the town] 10 nothing actually happened. They probably used different routes and the town was a bit out of the way. So I don't remember the soldiers marching into Mielnica. They came on Sunday, 17th September. The Jews already in the early morning knew the Russians crossed the border. I think they'd learned it from the radio. Early that day, at 7 a.m. three vees of heavy planes flew by, heading for the Polish-Romanian border. You could see the red stars, they had to be flying low.

At about 9 a.m. [a group of Polish soldiers], our boys from the town and Poles from the neighboring villages as well, ran across the fields with their rifles and rushed into the baker's. They took some bread and set off again, heading for Romania. I think they didn't even show up at their homes. I'm sure two of them came from our town.

Dziubinski, the math teacher, had a sidecar motorbike and he rode up to us. I think he wanted some gas. I don't remember it exactly. He said, 'Get on, Samuel, we'll go to the border, you'll help me out there.' I rode with him down to the river, to Dniester. Nothing was happening there yet, it was still quiet, there were no Russians. He rented two boats, right, [loaded] his heavy bike in them and we crossed [the river]. Afterwards he asked me to go on with him. I was [only] 15, I didn't want to go and eventually came back home. He drove on. I don't know what happened to him later.

Around noon two trucks full of soldiers, Russian infantrymen, drove past our house. At the same a Polish biplane landed. I saw it all, I was nearby. The Russians were driving along the street when

the plane crossed it and landed moments later, 400, maybe 500 meters away from them. All the kids, the youngsters ran over there. It turned out the plane was Polish. There was no gas anymore [The pilots ran out of gas]. The plane taxied away a little and that was it. They arranged to get some horses and rode to a [nearby] estate; there were probably some combustion-engined machines there so 20 minutes later they had their gas. They turned over [the propeller] and took off. Why the Russians didn't notice the plane? I don't know. At that time I didn't think [about what was happening]. It didn't concern me yet.

The Russians evicted us from our house. They came and nationalized [requisitioned] it. That was late 1940, I was 16. It was already cold when they threw us out. Out into the street, in the open air – there was already snow and frost. We could only take a couple of things with us. Some [of us] went to Uncle [Fajbisz], some to Grandpa [Benjamin]. We ate at Grandpa's, there was no access to our house. A guard stood in front of it, right. A Ukrainian guard with a rifle. First thing we lost was the store. They sealed it right away and that was it. It happened one Saturday. And not just us, they nationalized [the property of] some 15, maybe 17 families that one day. Including 15 Jewish and two Polish ones. It didn't last long. Maybe two months. After that they gave us our house back and let us move in again. But we couldn't use the whole of it anymore because they installed some Soviet farming office there. Land Office, that's how it was called. The Farming Department of the Distict National Council, right. They took the ground floor and left us the rest. There were three little rooms upstairs, in the attic, and that was enough for us.

Well, you had to find some job. Father went to work in a sovkhoz [Soviet state-owned farm]. Before the war the farm belonged to a landowner, then the Russians came and turned it into a sovkhoz. Father worked there some time, and later they gave him a new job, made him a warehouse attendant, right.

A few days later I also went to work, we were short of money. I'd completed my school anyway. As the Russians came, they set up [their own] evening schools. Very quickly. I used to go to one. I don't remember what grade I was, I only recall I attended. Well, the lectures were already given in Ukrainian. They taught us maths, and ancient history. There were no pre-war teachers. They brought their own. I know there were two Jews among them. One taught us maths and the other Ukrainian language I think. Both came from the nearby district capital. The town's name was Borszczow. There were no such educated people in our town.

I worked with horses. I plowed, harrowed, you know. Farming, simply. And later one of the tractor drivers took me as his helper – someone had probably told him about me. And that's how it was till the end. I went to a vocational school in the spring of 1941. There were lots of us at home so it was Dad who suggested I go to that school. It was for railroad workers, they taught about tracks, junctions, bridges. It was located in Tarnopol [ca.130km east of Lwow], on the way to Lwow. And so I went there.

In June 1941 I was home, on a leave. They let us go home, the three of us – two Ukrainians and me. Maybe for some school achievements, I don't know, there got to be something anyway. I came home for four days and those were exactly the days just before the outbreak of the war. 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th June - and the war broke out on 22nd June. We set off back to school at dawn and we saw German planes flying from Lwow and heading for Przemysl, to bomb Tarnopol.

The school was evacuated to inland Russia. But only a few of us stayed. The local Ukrainians fled, the Poles also left. And anyway there was no supervision [anymore], there was nobody to watch over us. It was a mess everywhere, right. They moved us near the old, pre-war Polish-Soviet border. The place was called Woloczysko [Podwoloczyska, ca. 45km east of Tarnopol]. They turned us over to some other school. The Germans were getting closer so they evacuated [us farther] to Kiev. It wasn't far away. We didn't stay long in Kiev, maybe two, maybe three weeks, and we marched on, right. The marches were pretty tough. You had to move quickly. [We stayed] in one place for short time only, two weeks [at most]. We had to run again before we even had a chance to settle, the Germans were moving really fast, right.

In Kiev they passed us on to yet another school. We were given food, and school uniforms. Eventually they evacuated us from Kiev. At night. In the afternoon earlier that day lots of soldiers passed through the city, right, to the Dnepr River and across. The bridge was bombed that evening. There were two bridges, a wooden one and the other, more solid. We sheltered all night in the famous Pecherska Lavra [monastery complex in Kiev, nowadays the residence of the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church], the gold-roofed monastery. When the bombing ended at dawn, all the men marched out. Others joined along the way and [eventually] we reached Poltava [ca. 300 km from Kiev]. Oh, [there was] a Pole with me who came from our town, Franek Gawryluk. I told him, 'You're going home, so tell them I'm not coming back, I'm staying with the Russians.' I've never had any contact with my family since.

And so I went to Poltava with the rest of the school. And to Donbas [Donetsk Basin, region in eastern Ukraine] before that. I was with a lot of people. This students' group was separate, but the whole crowd marched together, I mean fled together. Eventually they consolidated us with a mining school in Donbas. It was a little town called Socgorodok, Socialist Town. It was very pretty, affiliated to a mining combine, right. There were three mines, each had its number: no. 38, 39, and 42. There were beautiful things in the town. Modern buildings, boarding schools, apartment houses for workers. I'd never seen anything alike. We spent a week working underground. Under teachers' supervision at first, right. One boy, a Jew – I don't remember his name – told me to join up, volunteer for the Red Army. He was a year older than me. I was 17 then. Four more boys were with him and he added me to the group.

I don't know if we actually got to the draft board ourselves or were taken from the mine. I think we went there on our own. Everything was so mixed up those days. We had to get to the 'rayoncentr' [Rus.: district capital], Solidowka, 20 kilometers away, and go to the 'Voyenkomat' [Soviet draft board]. They didn't draft us to the army, they only told us, 'Go to Bergaysk [Berdyansk, ca. 400 km from Poltava], a town by the Sea of Azov, there are rally points and they'll tell you what to do next.'

So we went to that Bergaysk and I was not accepted [to the army]. There were problems with those evacuated. Some said they're untrustworthy, those from the area [western Ukraine], right. All the men from there were first to be evacuated away from the frontline and only then drafted. Some of those men were taken to the army and those untrustworthy – to labor battalions. I was one of them. Mainly because I was too young to be a soldier. And maybe also untrustworthy, but that didn't matter in my case as everyone from western Ukraine, from former Poland was looked upon with suspicion. Well, such was the social policy there.

I was evacuated with them [members of the labor battalion] to Rostov [city on the river Don, ca. 250 km from Berdyansk]. It wasn't far away. It was in the fall of 1941. The front stopped on the river Mius. It flows between Staganrog [Taganrog] and Rostov. A group of men too old or too young to serve stationed there. So I worked there for some time. The rest of 1941 and in 1942, in the rear services. I was sent to a 'Stroybat' [Construction Battalion], or Labor Battalion. We did everything. We did what they ordered us to do. Usually digging, making trenches, right. Later in 1942 the Germans broke through Russian defences and headed for northern Kavkaz [Rus.: the Caucasus]. We were evacuated. I became a soldier of the Red Army in 1943.

In 1942 I also worked in a kolkhoz [Soviet co-operative farm]. I was transferred there from the labor battalion to recuperate after illness. Something was wrong with my lungs. They sent me there for six months to get better, right. I didn't have to do anything. The kolkhoz had to feed me but I only worked when I was feeling better. I did anything. I worked in a barn, drove a tractor, right.

Drafting into the army was nothing special. I had to stand before the commission. I passed the tests, they drafted me, and that was it. I didn't have anything – no ID, [no other documents]. I could say anything – true or not true. But I told them where I was from and they accepted me. They didn't have any problem with that anymore. They saw I was a Jew but I quickly learned to speak Russian. After a year you couldn't tell me from Russians. During the war I didn't have any trouble from my being a Jew. The years we spent fighting together bonded us. I worked in the battalion, right, for year and a half, and then [fought] in the army, so I earned the trust. First they sent me to a reserve regiment. It was called the Tashkent Infantry Regiment.

A lot happened in the army. It's hard to tell about it all. We were all equal. When things got bad, they got bad for everybody, right. I don't regret joining the Russians. I didn't have any choice. I decided not to go back home because I saw what was happening, right. I knew the Germans were coming and that they would reach my town. The Germans moved very quickly. On June 22nd 1941 they were in Przemysl and on July 1st already in Tarnopol [ca. 250 km farther]. They covered a lot, a lot of kilometers.

I fought in many battles, near Taganrog, Don, Rostov. It was 1943. Taganrog had already been liberated. And later near Perekop, [the isthmus] between Ukraine and Crimea. Pretty rich area, right. I also got to know the Dnepr region. I fought in Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporizhia districts. There were lots of battles, in many different parts of the country. I remember this story from 1941. We stood near Taganrog. Some horses were killed there. And soldiers, too. There was shelling, or an air raid, I don't remember exactly. It was late fall, frost. And in the spring of 1942 we returned to that area. It was early spring, we were already short on food. The commanders remembered the horses lying there, buried somewhere in a gorge, covered with snow. And so they sent some people to dig them out, and the horses were used as food. In 1943 our route led through the Kherson region [ca. 470 km from Taganrog]. It's near Odessa, right [ca. 150 km away]. And in 1944 we entered the Polish territories. It was the Polesia region, [we stationed in] a town called Sarny [ca. 400km east of Warsaw, today Belarus]. The frontline stopped there for some time.

From August 1944 we stayed near Serock [ca. 40km north of Warsaw], by the conflux of the rivers Bug and Narew. The town had been evacuated by the Russians. By late fall we didn't have any fodder for the horses anymore. The soldiers would go to Serock, to the suburbs. They dismantled thatched roofs, right, to feed the horses with them. Afterwards [we moved] through Poland,

heading for Bydgoszcz [ca. 230 km north-west of Warsaw]. I remember we stayed a bit longer in Torun [ca. 50 km from Bydgoszcz], or rather just outside Torun. Because the Germans stopped there. We spent two nights in a church somewhere. I know we crossed the Vistula river twice. The supply officers learned there was an artificial honey factory nearby. There was no-one to watch over it, right. They sent us – me and two other soldiers – to the factory. We took a car and brought the honey to the unit.

My unit was not heading for Berlin. We were not part of the Berlin drive. We belonged to the Second Ukrainian Front. We got to Bydgoszcz and then turned towards Gdansk [ca. 150 km from Bydgoszcz]. But first we reached a small German town called Rummelsburg, nowadays Miastko [ca. 130 km from Gdansk]. We spent the night 3-4 kilometers outside the town. We were no longer in the assaulting batch. The fighting hadn't been too heavy because the town was intact, only the church was burned. I guess the Germans had set fire to it. In any case, there were churches burning all along the way. The Germans were setting them on fire because they used it as reference points, right. We slept in a manor. Beautiful palace. And they showed us movies one night. We stayed longer in one place so the cinema came and [they showed us a movie] in the barn. The cinema was a car with a generator, right, and it projected the movie on a wall. The screen was quite big, I remember. The army had a lot of those. Every division, or maybe even regiment, so we got to use it sometimes. When a unit was sent to the rear to rest, right, there were baths and disinfection, and sometimes someone would come and show [a movie]. Well, you had to entertain the lice-infested people somehow, you know? There were also vocal groups. Whenever there was a longer stay; the Russians had dozens of those things.

We set off for Gdansk from there. Outside Gdansk I saw my first Polish soldiers. The Kosciuszko Division 11. Yes. I was no longer fighting. I assisted the regiment's commander, I was a sort of an interpreter. I spoke a little German, right. In 1942, while recuperating, I met some Germans from the colony near the kolkhoz, right. We had contacts with them and so I started to learn German a bit. And Jewish [Yiddish] is pretty close to German anyway. From Gdansk they transferred us to the Oder River. To the town Gryfino [ca. 570 km from Gdansk]. But there was no fighting along the way. These lands were liberated.

The end of the war found me in a small town by the sea. Or rather a big resort village, on the GDR side [the German side; the German Democratic Republic was created in 1949 on the territory of the former Soviet occupied zone]. It was called Heiligendamm. There was a German naval base. We got there on the night of 2nd May, or maybe 1st May, and we slept there. A plane came out of the blue and dropped a bomb on the barracks' yard, but no-one was hurt. The end of the war. Well, the fighting went on but we didn't take part in it anymore, it was all quiet there. The official end of the war found me on a meadow, a pasture. It was my turn to watch over the horses and I saw the soldier who usually brought us lunch, screaming from a distance that the war had ended, right. It was on 8th May, or maybe 9th. [I remember] Stalin giving a speech about the end of the war, might have been two weeks later. On one hand I was happy I was alive, [but on the other] I didn't have any news of my family. And they were gone.

I was demobilized in 1946. I came back to my town, to Mielnica Podolska. And I was ill before that. I would perhaps serve longer but because of my health, my lungs, I was released. And everybody headed for their hometown. So did I. But I already knew nobody was there. In the summer of 1945 I

wrote to my town, to the town council, or sovyet [Rus.: council]. It turned out they gave my letter to Dawid Szternberg who had stayed [in Mielnica]. He and his sister survived. Had anyone else survived? No. Just the two of them. And so I got a letter from him saying my family was all gone. There was nothing in it about the circumstances of their deaths. They had all been killed, that was all.

I didn't have any place to go anyway so I returned to Mielnica. When I got there [the townspeople] told me all the Jews had been deported to Borszczow [by the Germans] on one summer day in 1942. They made them walk the 20 kilometers to Borszczow. A ghetto was created there for [the Jews from] all the surrounding towns. They kept them for a week or two, hungry and cold, and later herded them into railcars and sent to a death camp somewhere [The Jews were probably deported to Terezin, as Borszczow was located 1.5 km away from a railway station on the Terezin-Iwanie Puste line]. I've never been to Borszczow. I don't know the town. [Besides], Dawid knew everyone was dead. They were gone from Mielnica without a trace.

I stayed in Mielnica for two, maybe three months. I stayed with the Szternbergs. I wasn't doing anything. I had been demobilized, they granted me the disabled soldier status; I waited for the repatriation transport to take me to Poland. My house still stood there but I didn't even try to get in. Nobody lived there, those gentlemen occupied it, the NKGB. Narodniy Komisaryat Gospodarstvinay [Gosudarstvenoy] Bezapasnosti, National Commissariat for State Security [People's Commissariat for State Security, Soviet secret police, intelligence, and counter-intelligence service, functioning between 1941 and 1946].

Mielnica had changed during the war. It was damaged. All the little houses, the poor Jewish houses surrounding the market square, right, had been burned by the Germans. You could see the absence. Normally [before the war] you wouldn't have seen the Dniester River [because of the buildings]. In 1946 I could see the bank of Dniester, so something had vanished. The better houses, those worth something were surely left. [Other thing was], there were more poor people I think. They lived in shanties, in adobe shingle-roofed huts. I left with the first repatriation transport.

I arrived in Poland in early November 1946. Or so I think. I didn't know [where I was going]. And nobody asked anyway. You didn't have to know where the repatriation train was heading. [First] I got to Przemysl [ca. 220 km from Tarnopol] via Lwow. There was this guy at the Przemysl railway station, a beer-bellied fifty-year-old with a red, a white-and-red armband. 'Any Jews with you?' [he asked]. I don't know if [the people] from my car knew I was a Jew. Well, I didn't say anything and they didn't say anything, and we set off again. If nobody reported, apparently there were no Jews.

Next stop was Bytom [ca. 280 km west of Przemysl]. The train was surely going farther west, right, but in Bytom a group of Jews stood by the railtracks and asked if there were any Jews in the train. They asked in Jewish [Yiddish] and Polish. I saw them and said, 'I am.' 'So get off, why go any farther.' So I did, and I followed them. They lived in Bytom, on 6 Grunwaldzka Street. They set up a kibbutz in the town. The kibbutz's goal was to gather people and send them farther, abroad, to the West and to Israel. That's what I think. It was an assembly of Jewish survivors, right, coming from different places, with their lives broken. Their past had been erased, they didn't have anyone or anything; they'd lost everything. The war left them with nothing but the disaster, the calamity. The kibbutz was organized by the Jewish Committee, right. There were similar [establishments] throughout Poland I guess; in the Silesia region, and later lots of them in Warsaw. The Jewish

Commitees headquarters was located in Warsaw I think 12. I stayed with them there but I don't know what I was hoping for.

They had this tailoring co-operative. Some 30 people worked there already. I also started to work in a co-operative. It was called Metaloplastyka. The community [kibbutz] arranged it. We made all kinds of things from sheet metal: vacuum bottles, milkcans, anything you can make out of sheet metal. It was in 1947, in January I think.

They fed me, for about two months. Gave me vaccinations, did some tests, right. Everyone was tested. [And if you needed, they sent you] to Otwock [health resort ca. 280 km from Bytom, near Warsaw]. I spent six months in Otwock as well, on treatment. On 49 Reymont Street. I didn't go back [to Bytom]. There was no reason to come back. All my belongings fit into a small sack, right. A change of clothes and that was it. In Otwock some people I knew told me, 'Go to Cracow, there's a lot of Jews there, you'll find a job.' And so I went. They gave me a jacket in Cracow, army surplus. A green American jacket and a pair of trousers, yes. And so I started to work in Cracow.

I think it was in mid 1947. I worked there for three months, until the Disabled Soldiers Union sent me to Slupsk [city by the Baltic Sea, ca. 200 km east of Szczecin], to study in a two-year gardening school. I didn't choose the school by myself, the Union's board wanted its members to get some profession. And I was a disabled soldier. I became a student in November or December. The schoolyear was delayed that year.

[The school was located] on 82 Szczecinska Street. There were two tailoring classes and and two gardening ones. I was in the latter. I really liked the school. But already in 1949, during my second year in the gardening school, [I decided] to enroll in an evening high school, a merchant and bookkeeping one. Well, I had to learn something, I didn't know a thing. You didn't have to pay. And so I went to the gardening school in the morning and [to the merchant and bookkeeping school] in the evening. We studied six days a week, right. [The courses] were [rather] general. Polish, maths, various bookkeping systems, right. I was surprised to see so many schools, and teachers, and workplaces in the western regions [former German territories] as early as 1948. It was all amazingly well arranged. I completed the merchant school in 1952. I passed the final exams.

I met my future wife, Stanislawa, in Cracow. Her parents lived in a village near Cracow. I worked for the Metaloplastyka co-op then. She had contacts with Jews. She worked at a Jewish family after the war. She was a housekeeper. And she had some business in the Jewish Committee one day, we talked, went for a walk together, and that's how it began. I left for Slupsk later but we wrote letters. Plus I came to see her, and once she went to visit me in Slupsk. When I completed my school we decided to get married. Since it was nice together, why not? We never discussed the fact I was a Jew and she was a Catholic. I needed a woman and she also wasn't made to be single. I knew her parents. I met them twice. We also went there before the wedding for two or three days and they saw how things were. We got married in the summer of 1952. It was in Cracow, in the registry office. Just us and the two witnesses. A boy and a girl my wife knew. There was no wedding party.

[After the wedding] we settled in Slupsk. I worked in a dairy. They assigned me a room in a house occupied by some family. It was a big German house. We didn't stay there too long. Two, three weeks. I was later sent [to the country]. The Slupsk dairy lacked a local representative. There was a couple of former German dairies [in the surrounding area], right. I was made accountant in the

dairy in Dobieszew [ca. 200 km from Szczecin]. I was assigned a little apartment. Two rooms and a kitchen. I don't know how the dairy got to administer the building. Four families lived there. I worked there till April or May 1952, or 1953. They transferred me to a state farm in Labiszewo [village in the Slupsk district]. The farm had 1,500 acres of land. An old friend of mine told me they needed an accountant. They hired me right away. I was well educated, I finished a bookkeeping school. Later I was transferred again. They lacked an accountant in Malczkow [village in the Slupsk district]. The farm there had 4,500 acres. And so the head accountant assigned me there. Malczkow was about 12 or 13 kilometers from Labiszewo. Later we moved from Malczkow to Jasionna [village in the Wielkopolska region, western part of Poland]. It's a place near Lowicz. I also worked in a state farm there. I stayed there till 1966. Then I got a job here, in Cieladz [village in the Lodz region, central part of Poland.

I worked as an accountant in all those places, I mean as a head accountant, bookkeeper, and cashier. Three posts, one person. Head accountant was an important person, financial vice-director. We did fine. I earned well. Even though the state farms in the country did not compare to the co-ops in the cities. You didn't earn as much as in a city. Well, but you had your own garden, and free boarding, and free milk if you had a wife and child. So we didn't have to worry and were able to save some money.

Two of my children were born in Labiszew. Ala in 1954, and Ludwik in 1956. My youngest, Andrzej, was born in 1960 in Malczkow. My children know I'm Jewish but they were not raised in the Jewish tradition. They were christened. They went to a normal school, just like everybody else. Ala went to the school in Jasionna at first, and later all three went to the school in Cieladz. Ala completed a merchant high school, just like me. Ludwik finished a mechanical high school. The third one [Andrzej] dropped out just before the final exams. The elder two [Ala and Ludwik] live in our village [Cieladz]. They have their own houses. Andrzej has lived in Germany for 19 years now. [The city he lives in] is called Regensburg [ca. 400 km south of Berlin]. He left with his girlfriend; it was still PRL back then, right [People's Republic of Poland, the official name of Poland from 1952 to 1989]. They went as tourists but fled and didn't come back. They settled there. Ala has two children, a boy and a girl. His name is Daniel and hers – Dagmara. He's 30 and she's 27. Ludwik has a son, Konrad, he's now 26, and a daughter, Kinga, she's 23. There are no children in Germany. We were a good family. We kept our limbs intact, nobody ever hurt anybody. We're still closely bonded.

[It's hard to tell if my children were interested in my past or the Jewish history.] My grandson Konrad, Ludwik's son, is in Israel now. [He left] six months ago. Kinga has been to Israel, too. They flew there together thanks to a Polish-Israeli rapprochement program, right. And he decided to stay there. He has Israeli citizenship, a job. My children would have probably done the same, but there were no such opportunities back then. We were isolated as a state when they grew up [Poland did not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel from 1967 to 1990]. There was no way they would go anywhere. Israel was hostile towards the Socialist countries because it fought the Arabs, and we were friends with the Arabs. So it [the emigration] couldn't work out. [Besides], it wasn't that bad for them here. [My sons] went to a synagogue once. But not during the service. They sat for a while, took a look, and left.

I don't know if I ever had any political sympathies. While in the army I wasn't yet smart enough to realize what I wanted. Everyone wanted the same thing as long as politics were concerned. You

were a member of the komsomol [Communist Youth Union, Soviet organization founded in 1918] and then – of the [Soviet Communist] party. I became a member of the [Polish] party 13 after the war, in 1963. But that was not because of my political sympathies. Nor views. A guy I was dependent on, damn, influenced me, I don't know [how to describe it], he kept saying, 'Join the party, join…' and so I did. But I haven't regretted it, no.

I've never personally experienced anti-Semitism. Well, no such thing ever happened around me. I remember that story from our town [Mielnica Podolska], I was 10, 11 maybe. A whole Jewish family and their Ukrainian housekeeper were murdered. The [head of the family] was a landowner. The two Ukrainians who committed the crime were workers on his farm. They were caught. They were hiding in a potato pile for three days but the police eventually found them. I know they were tried and sentenced, but I don't remember the ruling. I saw the funeral of the Jewish family and the Ukrainian woman. The procession was huge, the whole town came, right. But was it anti-Semitic? Maybe simply a robbery. Damn if I know. I also remember the Kielce case 14. In 1946. I was not yet in Poland at that time, I learned about it here but years later. [They say] there were lot of incidents like that but I just heard about them. My wife also told me a story. She knew a Jewish family, she worked for them. They went to Zakopane [Polish mountain resort] and were all killed, only the little boy survived somehow. Their son. He was two, maybe three years old, not more. I only know it happened in Zakopane.

I don't have any special memories of 1968 15. Well, I lived in the country, married to a Polish woman, a member of the party… It's all relative. How could it affect a single person, keeping aside, right? And who was I supposed to share it with. After the children went to school I don't remember any unpleasant incident, either. I'm even a bit surprised at that. [Polish] boys and girls were playing with them all days long. In any case, all the people from the neighboring villages I worked in knew I was a Jew. I've never kept it a secret. If your name is Samuel König, if your father's first name is Abraham – there's no way to hide it.

I became a member of the Jewish community only recently. It's been three, maybe four years since I started getting to know the people and socializing here [in the Lodz Community Center]. I have a nice garden there [in Cieladz] by my house. I was once here [in Lodz] and [people] told me there's a canteen here [at the Center]. I had lots of string bean. I filled two sacks with it, 20 damn kilograms altogether, and dragged them to the canteen. And I left it for them to eat. Then I did it again. Later I had some black radish in the garden, it's a Jewish specialty, you can prepare different dishes from it. You can grate it, salt it, add some oil or fat, right. Personally I like it. I think it was very popular in my town [Mielnica Podolska]. I grew that radish expressly to bring it over here. And that's how I've met here two or three people of my age.

I was never a religious person. And I still can't say that of myself today. I haven't been [to a synagogue] for years. I didn't have any contact with that. I don't know, somehow I managed without it. I've been living in Sieradz for 42 years and I've never been to the synagogue in Lodz. And there was a synagogue in the city. [Nowadays] I come and pray. [But] not everyone in a church is totally devoted to religious issues, right. [I'm] close to neutral in that aspect. After so many bad experiences it's hard to imagine there's someone up there leading us, and leading us wisely at that. He's supposed to be there to help people, right, and to lead them in the correct direction. There were so many religions throughout the centuries and people were always fighting,

killing, murdering each other in [cruel] ways. Sometimes a beast dies in a more humane way than a human being.

My life today is absolutely normal. I'm not alone. I have neighbors. I have good relations with all my close and more distant friends. Lately I'm spending more time here [in the Community Center]. I come to Lodz on various days. I always try to attend the Friday and Saturday services. My wife is in Cieladz now. She's been here with me twice, I think. Whenever it was possible to spend the night in the Center, I had a decent place to sleep. Nowadays I have my own tiny room here [in the former cloakroom]. It's rather shabby in here, but when I stayed in the house [Center's Day Care House] the conditions were great. So I sleep here and go to the service in the morning.

When I look back on the past, on the Israeli wars, I think it [the creation of the state Israel] had to be that way. Well, those people deserve to have their own place on Earth, at the very least because of its tragic past. And what's more, it's a land historically connected with them.

It's hard to tell if I regret anything in my life. Maybe if I'd stayed in the kibbutz [in Bytom] and hadn't gone to the gardening school [in Slupsk], I would have also lived in Israel now? I would have had to go there if I'd stayed with that group. [Today] I'd even like to go to Israel but I don't think they need old people like me.

GLOSSARY:

1 Bund

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

2 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.

3 Gordonia

Zionist youth organization affiliated with the Hitachdut party. It was founded in the Galicia region of Poland in 1923 but it soon reached international scope. Gordonia's ideology was founded on the writings of Aron Dawid Gordon (1856-1922), who glorified farming work and collective labor. Hence the basic task of the members was to found kibbutzim in Palestine (the first was founded in 1929), while in the Diaspora to provide farming training during hahshara summer camps. Gordonia belonged to the He-Khalutz movement. It published its own press, ran scouting-like groups and sports clubs. Shortly before the war Gordonia had 40,000 members around the world. The

organization was headed by a Polish Jew, Pinkhas Lawon (Lubianikier). During the war it functioned underground. After the war Gordonia ran kibbutzim in Poland and prepared young people for emigration. It was dissolved in December 1949 along with all Jewish organizations save few.

4 Betar

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning the Trumpledor Society. Right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. In Poland the name 'The J. Trumpledor Jewish Youth Association' was also used. Betar was a worldwide organization, but in 1936, of its 52,000 members, 75 % lived in Poland. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists in Poland and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration, through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During the war many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

5 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.

6 Ha-Noar ha-Tzioni (Hebr

: Zionist Youth): Zionist youth organization present in various European countries under the auspices of the World Zionist Organization. It was founded in 1932 in Poland. Its aim was to prepare young people for building the Jewish state in Palestine – through training in physical labor, especially in farming, as well as introducing them to Hebrew language and culture. Ha-Noar ha-Tzioni organized summer training camps (hahsharas), courses for kibbutz managers, Hebrew lessons, published its own press, collected money for the Jewish National Fund. In early 1934 Ha-Noar ha-Tzioni had 22,000 members in 320 branches throughout Poland. Its activities were not stopped by the war. The organization remained active especially in the Warsaw and Vilnius ghettos. Ha-Noar ha-Tzioni continued to function after the war until January 1950, when it was dissolved.

7 Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940)

Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish

rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

8 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.

9 Kristallnacht

Nazi anti-Jewish outrage on the night of 10th November 1938. It was officially provoked by the assassination of Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German embassy in Paris two days earlier by a Polish Jew named Herschel Grynszpan. Following the Germans' engineered atmosphere of tension, widespread attacks on Jews, Jewish property and synagogues took place throughout Germany and Austria. Shops were destroyed, warehouses, dwellings and synagogues were set on fire or otherwise destroyed. Many windows were broken and the action therefore became known as Kristallnacht (crystal night). 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.

10 September Campaign 1939

armed struggle in defense of Poland's independence from 1st September to 6th October 1939 against German and, from 17 September, also Soviet aggression; the start of World War II. The German plan of aggression ('Fall Weiss') assumed all-out, lightning warfare (Blitzkrieg). The Polish plan of defense planned engagement of battle in the border region (a length of some 1,600 km), and then organization of resistance further inside the country along subsequent lines of defense (chiefly along the Narwa, Vistula and San) until an allied (French and British) offensive on the western front. Poland's armed forces, commanded by the Supreme Commander, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, numbered some 1 m soldiers. Poland defended itself in isolation; on 3rd September Britain and France declared war on Germany, yet did not undertake offensive action on a larger scale. Following a battle on the border the main Polish line of defense was broken, and the Polish forces retreated in battles on the Vistula and the San. On 8th September, the German army reached Warsaw, and on 12th September Lvov. From 14-16 September the Germans closed their ring on the Bug. On 9th September Polish divisions commanded by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba went into battle with the Germans on the Bzura, but after initial successes were surrounded and largely smashed (by 22 September), although some of the troops managed to get to Warsaw. Defense was continued by isolated centers of resistance, where the civilian population cooperated with the army in defense. On 17th September Soviet forces numbering more than 800,000 men crossed Poland's eastern border, broke through the defense of the Polish forces and advanced nearly as far as the Narwa-Bug-Vistula-San line. In the night of 17-18 September the president of Poland, the

government and the Supreme Commander crossed the Polish-Romanian border and were interned. Lvov capitulated on 22nd September (surrendered to Soviet units), Warsaw on 28th September, Modlin on 29th September, and Hel on 2nd October.

11 The 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division

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

12 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.

13 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.

14 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.

15 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.