Irena Wojdyslawska

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Lodz
Poland
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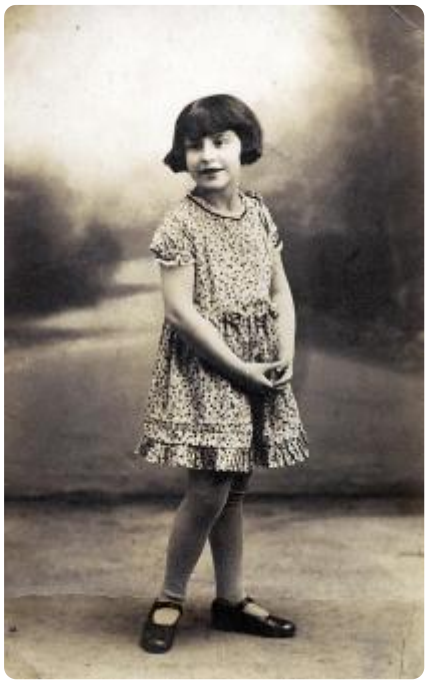

Irena Wojdyslawska is 83 years old. She is a doctor of psychiatry. She was born in Lodz, in an artisan family of assimilated Jews. She has lived in Lodz for most of her life.

She survived the Lodz ghetto and camps: Auschwitz and Birmbaumel. She saved herself by running away from a Death March. Most of her relatives did not survive the war.

Her father died in the ghetto in Lodz, her mother was gassed in Auschwitz. Ms. Wojdyslawska came back to Lodz and graduated from medical school.

For 30 years, until her retirement, Ms. Wojdyslawska worked in a psychiatric hospital; for many years she was department head of the women's ward of the psychiatric clinic.

We met 3 times in her apartment in Lodz. Together we reconstructed her history and her family's life story.

- **My family history**

I don't know anything about my grandmother and grandfather from my father's side. Grandfather was not alive ever since I remember. My father's name was Mendel. He was born in Strykow near Lodz. Before we went to school, he changed his last name to Mother's maiden name and since that time his name was Wojdyslawski.

He changed it, because his last name was funny. The mailman would laugh at him when he brought the mail, strangers used to laugh too. Father had 2 sisters and 2 brothers. They were also born in Strykow. His older sister lived in Strykow with her family. We were never close with the brothers.

I only know that they didn't survive the war. I don't remember if they died in the ghetto or were gassed in the camp. We were, however, close with Father's second sister, the youngest of the

siblings, Aunt Bela. Before she got married, she lived with us. She later opened a ladies dress shop, where I worked for some time.

Aunt Bela was gassed in the camp in Majdanek. [glossary] Father was 65 years old when he died in the ghetto, in 1944. I don't remember his funeral. I only know that it was very cold, Mother fainted and I took care of her.

Father stayed in Strykow until he was 15. He graduated from elementary school there. He later went to Berlin, where he studied in some vocational school, a tailoring one, I think. He studied to be a cutter. He came back from Berlin to Lodz and got a job in a company on Wolnosci Square.

I don't know what company it was, but it must have had something to do with tailoring, because he worked there as a cutter. He fought in World War I, but he was dismissed from the army, because he fell ill with the 'Spanish flu'. [The name of this largest flu epidemic comes from the country where it originated.

Between 1918 and 1920 the flu claimed approx. 20,000 lives.] Later, this I remember myself, there was a ladies' coats workshop at home. 3 or 4 apprentices would sit down and sew. You could say that Father was running a kind of cottage industry then. I don't think he was very successful, because there weren't too many customers.

In the 1930s, but I think closer to the year 1930, he started his own business. He had 2 partners. The company was first located on Piotrkowska 56, with an entrance from the backyard. After 3, maybe 4 years he moved it to Zawadzka Street.

Mother's parents, as I remember, lived on Wieckowskiego Street in Lodz. They were very religious. Grandmother was at home and she raised the children. Grandfather didn't work, he was supported by wealthy Jews. All his life he studied the Talmud and the Torah. As I remember him, he was a man who lay in bed, with a waist-length beard. He died when I was 14, 15 years old. His language was Yiddish. Grandmother used only Yiddish too. She could only say the basic phrases in Polish, for example 'good morning', 'how are you.'

Mother's name was Chawa. I don't know where she was born; I do know that her parents came from Zychlin. But whether she was born in Lodz or Zychlin, this I do not know. My mother never went to school. She had a teacher. She studied, what did she study?

Well, anyway she could spell correctly. She could also count, because she helped father in his business. She knew Yiddish, because although Polish was spoken at home, parents sometimes spoke Jewish to each other. Until she got married, she worked in her father's brother's factory, that is my grandfather's brother's.

I think his name was Salomon and the factory was some kind of a textile workshop. Later Mother only kept house. Just like her siblings, she was not a religious person. Mother was gassed in 1944 in Auschwitz. She was 56 years old then.

Mother had numerous siblings – 5 sisters and 4 brothers. The oldest sister's name was Lonia, but she was called Laja, I think Grandmother called her that. At first she lived with us.

Then she moved out to Gdansk and lived there with her husband and 2 sons: Bolek and Lolek. In 1938 or 1937, when they chased Jews out of Gdansk, she came back to Lodz with her younger son Bolek. [After the pogrom in 1937 half of the Jews living in the city left Gdansk, most emigrated.]

Her older son Lolek left for England at that time and that's why he survived the war. He later moved from England to Australia. He started a family, but I don't know if he is still alive. Lonia's husband died in Gdansk, before the Jews ran away. The younger son's name was Bolek. He died of pneumonia in the ghetto and Lonia was gassed in Auschwitz.

The second sister was Estera. Her husband was Josek Flambaum. He was Father's business partner. Estera died in childbirth, giving birth to her daughter Bluma. In accordance with Jewish tradition, Mother's third sister – Dora became Bluma's mother and the wife of Josek Flambaum, Estera's husband.

14 or 15 years later Dora gave birth to her own daughter – Gutka. Mother's youngest sister, Rozka, dealt with dressmaking, she sewed. She was set up by a matchmaker. She got married, but they broke up even before the war. I don't know what the reason for the divorce was – I heard something about some financial fraud her husband was involved in. And there was one more sister that I know nothing about. It was said she died, but I don't know if she died as an infant, or a small child – I don't know.

There were also 4 brothers and I remember 2 of them best: Szyjka, he was called Szyjo, and Icek, whom we called Icio. They worked for father's company, they came for bridge, every Saturday. They also came to the countryside for Saturdays and Sundays, when Mother was renting summer cottages for the children.

Usually these were summer houses in places like: Wisniowa Gora, Kolumna, Glowno. I also remember that once or twice my parents took me to resorts like Iwonicz and Krynica. The third brother, Mojsze, was an old bachelor and lived with his father. He never visited us, because they didn't have any common interests with him.

Mother's 4th brother was a stepbrother, from Grandfather's other marriage. I don't remember him at all, I don't even know what his name was. He was in Gora Kalwaria, at that famous tzaddik's [glossary]. He worked there, but I think he mostly studied the Talmud and the Torah. He was so religious that when he once came to visit us in Lodz, and there was no mezuzah above the door, so he didn't want to enter the house. He only talked to Mother on the stairs.

Mother's other siblings were not religious. Szyjek and Icio were not religious, but I have to say that there was this tradition that on Yom Kippur, or Judgment Day or Rosh Hashanah, even non religious Jews went to the synagogue. With the sisters – I didn't notice and signs of piety. Ah, this Mojsze, who lived with Grandmother, of course he was involved in a religious house.

- **Growing up**

I was born on May 9th 1921, in a house on 1 Maja Street 9, where I lived until we moved out to the ghetto. That was my aunt's house. We had 3 rooms and a kitchen, arranged one behind the other. And when Father was starting out with his business, the tailoring workshop was located in the 3rd

room.

Later it was my sister's and my room. There were mostly middle class Jews living in that tenement house. They were assimilated people.

The tenement house was located opposite Izrael Poznanski's Palace, on Gdanska Street. [Izrael Poznanski, one of the wealthiest factory owners in Poznan (1833-1900), the founder of the Jewish cemetery, long time chairman of the Jewish Community.]

It wasn't a Jewish district where we lived. I visited the Jewish district with Father . [An area set up in 1827, outside of which Jews – with a few exceptions – could not settle. With time it came to consist of the district of Baluty, where mostly poor people lived, wealthier citizens gradually moved downtown.] He had some relatives there.

My grandfather's brother, from Father's side, lived on Podrzeczna Street, which was part of the Jewish district. I remember that there were often people in front of stores, trying to sell different things, advertising merchandise, offering large discounts. Sometimes you could buy something for half price. (But I never would buy anything). And everyone was pious, they went to the synagogue.

For me this district was associated with poverty. Two women who lived in the Jewish district worked for my aunt. I remember a story about one of them. She said that when she bought some chocolate for her child, the child showed the chocolate bar to others, so they'd see what chocolate looked like. I'm sure not everybody who lived there was that poor.

This family I visited with Father was not poor. After all, they had a house which they built before the war. And this house is still there today. I even remember the address – Podrzeczna Street 14.

Our parents were very tolerant when they were raising us. Father never hit me. He was very interested in what I was reading. He browsed and sometimes even bought books for me. Father was very warm, considerate.

He took me to tailors, so I'd know what poor people lived like. He showed me children who worked, helped their parents. Some ironed, others sewed on buttons. When I later had some leftist brochures, Father saw what I was reading, but he didn't mind, he didn't forbid it, he accepted it.

He wasn't a religious man, he had leftist views. I don't know if he was in the PPS [glossary] or only sympathized with that party. He was also connected to Bund. [glossary]

Father was a very open, intelligent, talented man. He could speak several languages. He spoke Yiddish and Polish, but he also knew German and Russian. He read a lot. He also traveled a lot, mostly on business. He used to go to Berlin and Vienna to get coat patterns.

He was so talented, that when we were walking on Piotrkowska Street and Father noticed some interesting coat pattern, he'd enter the doorway and draw a kind of… sketch. He was also a man who helped others very much.

Without Mother's knowledge he sometimes went to visit the tailors who took materials from him and sewed at home. If he saw they were very poor, he gave them money. He helped the Jewish Theater 'Ararat.' [A revue-satirical theater created in 1927 by M. Broderson, an artist from Lodz.]

This theater was located on 1 Maja Street, I think number 1 or 3. Dzigan [Szymon Dzigan 1905-1980] and Szumacher played [Izrael Szumacher 1909-1960] there. He also helped some Jewish writers. I don't know which writers and I don't know how significant this help was. I do know that he used to meet with these people in the 'Astoria' café, which was on Piotrkowska Street. Those were his interests. Parents would also often go to the theater, to the movies.

I began my education in Maria Hochsteinowa's gymnasium. There were 10 years of school – 6 grades of elementary school and 4 grades of gymnasium, and then the final exams. All the grades were located in one building – that's why the entire school was called Maria Hochsteinowa's gymnasium.

It was a Jewish gymnasium, financed from private funds. Maria Hochsteinowa lived in Paris and the school was managed by a headmaster. Parents sent me to this gymnasium, because it was close to our house – on the corner of Wolczanska and Zielona Streets. Additionally, the school had a good opinion.

Hebrew and Jewish History were taught in the first grades of elementary school. All the subjects were taught in Polish. I was an average student. I was good at Math, good at Polish. There were some subjects where I wasn't as good. I was weaker in history and the History of Jews didn't interest me very much. I passed my final exams in 1937.

I have fond memories of the gymnasium. I met some nice girls, became very good friends with some of them. A lot was going on at school. Field trips were organized. I remember a trip to Cracow. We visited Wawel [a hill and castle in Cracow, until 1609 the seat of Polish kings, today a museum] among other attractions, but we had to cut our stay short due to Pilsudski's death [glossary], because of the funeral ceremony. Music concerts also took place at our school.

We also went to the swimming pool, but not to 'Imka' [YMCA – Young Men's Christian Association, an international organization created in 1844 in England for raising religious awareness among young people], because that was a Christian swimming pool, but to Zgierz, because that was a public pool. We organized joint events, dances with the boys' Jewish gymnasium, which was on Anstadta Street. They took place several times a year; they were supervised by teachers, of course.

And finally, what interested me the most, we went together to all plays put on by Teatr Miejski, currently Teatr Nowy. The school cooperated with the theater, they arranged reduced price tickets for the students. From those times I remember 'Intrigue and Love' – a play by L. Schiller. [Leon Jerzy Schiller, correctly L. de Schildenfeld (1887-1954), producer, director, critic, theater historian, composer, translator and singer.]

I saw 'Twelfth Night' [play by W. Shakespeare (1564-1616), English poet and playwright], a play where an exceptional Polish actor – Wegierko was cast in one of the main roles. I saw 'Pygmalion' [play by G.B. Shaw (1856-1959), English playwright, critic and writer.]

I didn't go to the Jewish theater (I didn't speak Jewish), but with my parents I went to a play with Michal Znicz [correctly. M. Feiertag, an outstanding film and theater actor, born in 1892, died in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943.] I used to go to the cinema every week. I remember seeing the movie 'One woman, three men' when I was little. And later I remember seeing films with Clark Gable, Greta

Garbo, Merlena Dietrich [movie stars from the 1930s.]

At school there was a chapter of the Union of Communist School Youth, a kind of division of KZMP [Union of Communist Youth of Poland, an illegal youth organization, operating between 1922-1938, led by the Communist Party of Poland], but with no formal, organizational structures.

I had leftist views, so I took part in the activity of this chapter. Girls from other schools were also members. A speaker – also a student from some school – would come to each of the meetings. There were all kinds of propaganda materials, brochures, we'd collect money for political prisoners.

I know that there could have been repressions, but I wasn't scared. The brochures were hidden in a place which we thought was safe. I had a friend, she was not at school with me, who spent 2 years in jail. She was a bit older and belonged to KZMP.

My sister was born in 1916. The name on her birth certificate was Frajda, but later on, perhaps this started at school or in college, she was only called Franka. My sister attended a Jewish gymnasium, which was located on Piramowicza Street. Because classes were taught in 2 languages at that school: in Hebrew and in Polish, she transferred to Hochsteinowa's before the final exams.

She passed her finals at Hochsteinowa's – where I did. She later left for Nancy in France, for university. She studied dentistry there. At that time Jews could not enter university in Poland [glossary]. They weren't accepted for medicine, or dentistry, or for many other faculties.

So everyone, my sister's age and my age, studied abroad. I only know one doctor Winer, who was accepted at university in Warsaw or Poznan. Going abroad was not a problem for my sister, because she knew foreign languages well. She knew Hebrew, Polish, German and French. Later she also learned English and Russian.

I also wanted to continue studying. I thought about a two-year lyceum first, to get the secondary school certificate. Later, I wanted to study pedagogy. But due to the bankruptcy of Father's company and lack of money, I had no choice.

I went to work at Aunt Bela's, Father's younger sister, in the ladies' dresses workshop. I sewed, I ironed: well, I did these basic things. I worked there for 2 years. I was later able to make myself a dress or a muff. Some of these skills stayed with me. I was later able to use them in the ghetto.

In this situation [Father's bankruptcy], Franka also had to stop her studies, she came back to Lodz. She didn't come to live at home, but rented a room on Gdanska Street. I don't know how she got money for that. Perhaps someone from the family helped. She started working for a milliner. She made hats, in 1939 she ran away to the east, to Bialystok.

So Father's financial problems changed my sister's plans, and mine too. Everything started when one of the merchants cooperating with Father, received merchandise worth a large sum of money and went bankrupt. He didn't pay Father back. I don't remember which one it was, there were two merchants who had stores, one in Torun and one in Sosnowiec. They both cooperated with Father. After this incident, it turned out Father didn't have money to run the company.

Soon after, maybe 2 weeks or a month later, he suffered heart failure. This was in 1936. He had to be constantly watched for the next year, because he was depressed. We were afraid he'd commit

suicide. He carried some string with him, and some razors.

Someone always accompanied him everywhere, Mother checked his pockets. Later, in his own house, he sewed some muffs, some accessories. He earned some money. Finally, he got back on his feet, so there was enough money for everyday expenses and paying the bills.

I was also earning some money by then, and so was my sister. We were able to survive, but it was a completely different standard at home. You'd count money, what to buy for dinner, what to buy for breakfast. A different standard of life.

From the mid 1930s we lived in an atmosphere of constant anxiety and increasing fear, fear of what would happen next. I knew about the misfortunes of some friends, those who went to gymnasium with me. Once, when there were 2 Jewesses in a class, someone wrote the words 'Jewess' on their desk.

All kinds of unpleasant things. They were really hurt. I was truly moved by Aunt Lonia's arrival, with her son, from Gdansk – they were chased away from there. You'd talk about it a lot and think about it as well. I was afraid that something similar could happen at home. After all, I was aware of fascist ideology.

And during May 3rd parades [on May 3rd 1791 the Four-Year Parliament adopted a statute which initiated many reforms. The day of adopting the constitution is a national holiday in Poland] you'd often hear shouts: 'Down with Jews!' etc. You'd listen to the radio.

We had a radio at home, we bought a local daily 'Glos poranny' [a newspaper published in Polish (1929-1939), moderately leftist, published by a group of Jewish journalists; editor-in-chief – J. Urbach] every morning. We'd talk, discuss Zbaszyn [glossary]. These were very worrying events.

But we did not consider leaving Poland. There was no wish to emigrate at our house. Only 3 of Father's cousins left. But they were living in Germany. They left Germany for Palestine, after Hitler came to power [glossary]. They all left their businesses behind and ran away.

- **During the war**

When the war broke out, there was huge fear, terror of what would happen. At first I, because I was leftist minded, thought of running away to the east. Meanwhile, my sister came home and said she was leaving, running away. In that case I decided to stay with my family.

My sister first went to Bialystok. She got married there to an engineer named Torunczyk. He came from a family of assimilated Jews from Lodz. He was a graduate of the Lvov University of Technology. Franka went with him first to Lvov and then, when the Germans were capturing the city, they ran away to Kielce.

In Kielce the Germans were looking for her, because she was helping her family in the ghetto, so she moved to Warsaw. Then she had to leave Warsaw as well. It was very difficult for her there, she didn't have anyone close there. She went to some country estate, where she stayed until the end of the war.

For some time we knew what was going on with her, because she sent us letters. Actually, those were letters from Bialystok, so that's how we knew she had gotten married. Later we were not in touch with her. I learned about what happened to Franka from what she told us after the war.

In the spring of 1940 we found ourselves in the ghetto. [glossary] There was some ordinance of the Germans, that you could only take the most necessary items, which would fit in one cart. So we packed our bags on that cart, the rest of our things remained at our house on 1 Maja Street.

We settled on Wawelska Street 16. The house isn't there anymore. Why there? I don't know, Father arranged it somehow. It was a bungalow. There were 2 rooms, a hallway and a kitchen, without any windows. We called it a kitchen, but it was a small, separate room.

I slept in one room with Mother, Father, Mother's sisters Rozka, Lonia and Lonia's son, Bolek. The second room, an even smaller one, was taken up by Dora with her 2 children – Bluma and Gutka, her husband and her husband's father.

Grandma slept in the kitchen, because there was no other place where you could fit a bed. The conditions were very difficult. We used a koza [a kind of small iron stove] for cooking. It was also the only source of heat.

We all worked in the ghetto. Mother and Rozka worked in Schnaiderresort [a tailoring workshop on Dworska Street 10, currently Organizacji 'WiN' Street], a tailoring resort [workshops producing mostly for the needs of the army were called resorts].

Father also worked in a tailoring resort – as a cutter. At first he didn't want to. But he learned that he had to, because that's where they distributed soup. No one would have survived without this soup.

Bluma was employed in the kitchen. Families would help one another. Provisions were distributed on the Baluty Market [the Department of Provisions, created in May 1940, was located there]. A quarter of coal would be distributed, or a quarter of potatoes, I don't remember for how many months, I don't remember today. And I had to carry it – for my family and Mother's sisters. But I was strong and I took it all well.

I worked in three resorts myself, one after another. In Strohschuch, making shoes for the army, straw shoes, for standing. You couldn't have any fire in there, because these shoes were made of straw. So even in the winter we worked in unheated halls. It was very cold.

I later worked in Sattlerwarenresort [a leather products and saddlery workshop on Lagiewnicka Street 70]. I sheathed backpacks with leather, using a machine. And then, the last 2 or 3 years [1942, 1943], I worked in the resort of 'weak power'.

We used to receive broken telephones from Germany and we had to do the electrical assembly. We had diagrams of these electrical connections and we had to assemble the phones according to this diagram. I also worked in a varnishing shop and in the mechanical assembly department.

I remember the day when children were taken out of the ghetto [glossary]. Gutka, Dora's youngest daughter, was taken from us. This was during the szpera [round-the-clock curfew] in 1942. The Jewish police came to our house first, at night [glossary].

They searched the house, but we managed to hide Gutka then. We hated the Jewish police. We thought that in exchange for better conditions they behaved in a shameful way. Aunt Dora said if they took the child, it would be over her dead body.

They didn't take her. But several days later, I don't remember exactly, there was an assembly, roll call. Everyone had to be there, everyone, because they were searching the apartments. I don't know if it was the Jewish police, or if the Germans were there on that square as well. Gutka was taken from that assembly and her mother, Dora, Mother's sister, went with her.

She somehow made it to the other side, to the group of people who were supposed to be deported. Children, sick and old people were taken then. Bluma, Dora's older daughter, was not there at the assembly, because she was working in the kitchen. But she must have found out somehow, because she ran to the station in Radogoszcz. [People from the Lodz ghetto were taken from the station in Radogoszcz to death camps in Chelmno and Auschwitz.]

I ran after her. I tried speaking to her, but she wouldn't listen. Bluma survived the war, she survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. [located in northern Germany, a concentration camp was located there since 1940] She went to Paris, she was a physician there. She died a year ago.

From this szpera I remember our neighbor's horrible tragedy. She had 2 children. When they took the younger one, she followed him. Her older daughter was left standing on that square. She was maybe 12 years old.

This older daughter shouted: 'How can you leave me, how can you, mother, after all I am your daughter as well!' It was a horrible experience. This child's scream. Mother's sister, Dora, also left her older daughter Bluma, when she went to die with Gutka. But Bluma was an adult, she was 20 years old. I didn't hear Bluma scream, she simply followed Dora to the station. And I followed her.

Did I know they were going to die? I wasn't sure, but everyone felt that yes, they'd die. After all, there had already been a deportation to Chelmno, where people were gassed [glossary]. My friend whom I met in the ghetto was deported to Chelmno.

His name was Arnold Szmant. And he sent me a letter from Chelmno. I don't know how this letter made it from Chelmno. Some people gave it to me. Anyway, he managed to write it before he died. We knew about all the deportations, that people never came back. They disappeared without a trace.

Grandmother never complained of anything in the ghetto She was always very pious. Before the war, every Friday, she gave away some of her things to the poor. And because she had many children, someone would always buy her something to wear on Mondays. We didn't keep kosher in the ghetto.

She didn't eat anything that wasn't kosher, so she didn't eat much. She used to drink some tea, make herself some bread with something, I don't remember with what, because she did her own cooking. This malnourishment really exhausted her. One day, in the hallway, we found her dead. This was, I think, in 1942, in the winter, her frozen hand was on the doorknob.

I never saw Rumkowski [glossary] and if I did, it must have been in the beginning of the ghetto. But he was talked about. He was accused of different things. I personally don't know what was true and what was a lie. Usually people would say negative things about him, because he was the one who was responsible for making the deportation lists.

My friend, Gienek Boczkowski, whom I knew from before the war, was summoned by Rumkowski to write these lists. Two days later I found out that he had been deported. That is, he wrote his own name on the list.

Karol Weksler, whom I knew from before the war, helped me in the ghetto. He helped me after the war and before the war. He survived, he was in Israel. I don't know if he's alive today. I had news from the radio from him. Having a radio in the ghetto could end with a tragedy. He risked it, but he had a radio. When Father was summoned to Kripo [glossary] and kept there, we were very afraid. I brought him some food. Karol Weksler helped me, because I was afraid to go there. Father came back after several days. He told us that they didn't beat him, just interrogated him. He was asked about some contacts, but I don't remember today exactly what it was.

I remember the Arian side, because you had to walk very carefully and far away from the wires [the ghetto in Lodz was enclosed with barriers and barb wire]. They used to shoot there and from time to time they killed someone next to the wires. You had to stay away from the wires.

There was a time when I picked strawberries in a garden we had in Lagiewniki [a village and a forest complex on the outskirts of the city]. This garden was located near the border of the ghetto. I don't know how we got it. Several of our acquaintances also had these gardens.

We grew strawberries there. We picked them for marmalade and jam. We later sold the jam to make some money. One day, when we were coming back from the garden, we went to the presbytery. It was fenced off from the ghetto and not operating. It was on the corner of Jagiellonska Street.

I think there were 5 of us, I don't remember exactly. The Germans barged into the presbytery and made us stand in a row. The hit us with the barrels of their guns, they threatened us with death. This lasted for several hours, but they didn't kill anyone.

They allowed us to go back into the ghetto. We also used to go to this garden for walks, to get away from the nightmare we were living. We later lost the garden, I don't remember the circumstances. But anyway, I used to go to this garden for at least the first 2 years of the ghetto.

Before the war a girl friend of mine had a friend who was a German [before 1939 60,000 Germans lived in Lodz, constituting 9% of the city's population]. He stayed on the Arian side. He used to walk up to the wires and beg her to talk to him. But she never agreed to do it.

She couldn't talk to him after everything that had happened. So, some individual people, made some contacts, some distance from the wires. But this did not happen often, because the risk of death was very high.

For the last 2 years in the ghetto I had a friend. He wasn't a lover, just a friend. He worked with me in the resort, that's how we met. He took care of me. He made sure I had something to drink, or

gave me some of his food, although I didn't want to agree to that, because there was such hunger.

His name was Abram Habanski. He was younger than me. His parents were also in the ghetto. We used to meet after work. We would go for walks, talk. We enjoyed reading, so we exchanged impressions, we told each other about what was on the radio. I didn't go to concerts.

There was a group which played, there were concerts, well… people would sometimes go to concerts. Abram went to Auschwitz in the same cattle wagon I did. I even felt bad that he wouldn't make any contact with me then. I think he really broke down. No wonder, it was true hell.

I don't remember anything concerning the departure for Auschwitz, just that I found myself in a cattle wagon [It was mid August 1944, the action took 20 days. The last transport of Jews left for Auschwitz on August 29th.] I'm sure I wasn't working that day.

I must have been walking from home, because I was with Mother. Rozka, Mother's sister, was also in that transport. I remember that we entered a wagon packed with people. There were no windows, just two air grates at the top. People relieved themselves in this wagon.

We knew where we were going, because the railway workers told us. But when I saw the sign Katowice and that we were going in the direction of Auschwitz, I was 100 percent sure of what was waiting for me. I didn't have much hope of surviving.

I do remember how the train was unloaded. These dogs which jumped on us and these Germans, shouting, hurrying us. I remember I entered a bathhouse, this common washroom. I was sure they'd release gas. I didn't want to bathe myself, turn the faucet on. But I remember there was some shouting, I was made to do it.

I was in the same ward as Mother, bed to bed. I never met any other relatives who were brought there. I was in Auschwitz for 3 or 4 months [since late August 1944 until November 1944].

I did, however, meet Abram Habanski, my friend from the ghetto. He was in a group which worked in the women's ward. They cleaned, or something similar. We greeted each other warmly, but what else could we say?!

After all, the situation was hopeless. I stood naked during roll call every day. Every day they chose more people from the wards to be gassed, so what was there to be planned. I think he died, but I don't know that for sure. I know if he hadn't died, he would have searched for me.

One night or evening, anyway it was dark, our entire ward was summoned for roll call. And that's when Mother was taken to be gassed. I stayed on the other side, among women who were not designated to be gassed that day. I was stunned, confused. I can say this honestly – I didn't have enough courage to walk over to her side and be gassed with Mother. I was only conscious of the fact that I didn't want to live at all anymore.

I had a high fever, I don't remember until this day, how the other women and I were transported to the reloading station. I know that I was lying in the corner somewhere in that station. Only the next day did the Germans take me from that corner and load me into a car.

Those were Pullman cars, because they were passing through Germany. They were completely different from those [cattle wagons] in which people were transported to Auschwitz. They had windows and normal seats.

We were taken to a new camp in Birmbaumel. [A branch of the Gross Rosen camp near Swidnica, currently: Rogoznica.] It was a women's camp. I remember my arrival at that camp. There was a forest there, fields, no village. Only a few wooden buildings.

There were about 10 beds in each of them. They gave us sacks and hay to fill them up, and some blankets. The conditions were completely different than in Auschwitz. Less horrific. The camp was less horrible as well. But we had to work. We were forced to dig ditches.

Only, how much could we dig when the ground there was frozen? Just like in Auschwitz, I had no hope of surviving. I spent 2, maybe 3 months in Birmbaumel [from November 1944 until January 1945].

One day, as always, we showed up for roll call. And then we were told to walk. We didn't know where they were taking us, although we had the worst feelings about it. [Death March] [glossary].

At some point this German who was guarding us came up to me and told me in German to run away. He said that when we got to the Odra [River], we would all die. He wanted to help, because he was aware that I would repeat his words to the other women who were marching.

I don't know how long we marched. We marched through empty fields and through populated areas. And you could only try to escape in a populated area. I remember there was some turn there. I started running away, but I must have been visible, because this German led me back to the column.

He looked like he was shoving me, beating me, but he told me to keep running. I made it when I tried for the second time. There was a village there. I don't remember where I hid at first. I was in hiding until it got dark. I don't remember if I managed to wait until it got dark, because I was very hungry; they didn't give us any food on the way.

I got out of that hiding place and crept towards some cottage, still in that striped uniform from Auschwitz, and told them I was hungry. They carried out a pan of apples. I took those apples with me to the barn, where I hid for several days. There were 4 sisters in that barn with me; they ran away as well.

At night the girls would leave the barn and go to the fields, bring back raw potatoes, which we ate. We had horrible diarrhea from those raw potatoes. Later, when I was walking to Poland on foot, I met a few more people from that march. I met Wanda Wajn. I know she survived. She's a physician in Israel. Several people survived. I only remember Wanda today, but I know there were more.

One day the Russians came [early February 1945]. They swore in Russian. This curse that everyone in our country knows, 'job wasza niemiecka mac' etc. [fuck your German mother]. They spoke Russian, so I peeped out from that barn.

Earlier I heard a shot fired near the barn. I was upstairs, and I went down in that striped uniform. The Russians then led us to the house of the farmer, where I had been before. But the house was

empty.

I don’t know if they chased those villagers out, anyway no one was there. But they left some food and the oldest one of those sisters made sure we wouldn’t eat everything at once. After all, we had bad diarrhea, so at first she gave us only rice and porridge.

We quickly came to understand that we had to be careful. There were rapes of older women, everyone knows how it is when the first line of the front passes. We hid at night, we walked on roads in the daytime.

The army was marching in one direction and we walked on the side. We knew no one would leave the column to harass some girls. Those Germans who did not run away, were raped. I was afraid, because there was this one time when we were hiding and some Russian officer came there.

He put one of those sisters on the ground and he wanted to rape her. He was already lying on her, when she shouted: ‘ja jewrejka’ [I’m Jewish]. He let her go then. He said that ‘jewreje’ killed his parents during the revolution [October Revolution 1917], or something similar, and he didn’t do anything to her. Life can sometimes be so tragicomical.

I walked back to Lodz on foot. I spent the first night in Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski, at the Red Cross. [International Organization, founded in the XIX century, which deals with helping soldiers wounded in battle.] I kept walking, I think through Kalisz, because I remembered there was a drawbridge there, which was broken.

I arrived here [in Lodz] at 6 in the morning, in February 1945. I searched for acquaintances until late at night. I went to a friend of Aunt Bela’s [Father’s sister] on 1 Maja Street. I checked all the houses – no one was alive. I sat down in the doorway of Gdanska Street 42 and I started crying. Some strangers took me in that night.

I had a nightmare at first where I kept entering that building where they gassed people and Mother was still there. This nightmare kept repeating itself. And then I stopped thinking about it.

The following day I went to 1 Maja Street, where I used to live before the war. The door was opened by complete strangers. They didn’t want to let me in. I only saw a part of the hallway of our old apartment. I only asked if my sister was alive, if she had showed up. And they said no. Later, when I met my sister, I found out from her that she had gone there. They lied.

- **After the war**

I soon found my sister Franka. This happened in quite unexpected circumstances. I went downtown with a physician friend of mine. At some point she recognized some passerby as a friend of hers from the university in Lvov.

He introduced himself as Torunczyk. I knew this name. I knew from my sister’s letter that she had married engineer Torunczyk. He told me his wife’s name was Franciszka. I asked him about further details. I found out that got married in Bialystok and so on.

This confirmed my suspicion that he was my sister's husband. He told me what her current workplace was – Office for Information and Propaganda, on Traugutta Street. I went there the next day, in the morning. I sat in front of her door, with the other customers.

At some point my sister opened the door. She saw me and she fainted next to that door. She regained consciousness shortly and she took me to her house.

Sister helped me. I could stay with her, I had food to eat. But soon it got very crowded in their apartment – two rooms. Torunczyk's family came: his sister with her husband and son. My cousin Bluma was also staying there. Bluma was Estera's [Mother's sister's] daughter; my mother's other sister, Dora, was taking care of her after Estera's death. Dora was gassed in Auschwitz.

Bluma was in Auschwitz and then, I think, in Bergen-Belsen. Mother's other sister, Rozka, was also in that camp. Bluma and Rozka came back to Lodz together. Bluma soon married the chief cook, for whom she had worked in the ghetto. In 1945 she started studying medicine in Poland.

Her husband, who was a very religious person, wanted to leave the country. And in 1947 they went to France. Bluma got her medical degree from the Sorbonne. She became a doctor. She gave birth to a son. They kept kosher all those years. She died 2 years ago, but she was over 80 then, so quite an advanced age.

I don't remember how I met Aunt Rozka after the war. But we used to see each other quite often for 3 years. She later got married and went to Australia.

Sometime in 1949 she left with her husband, she was invited by some distant relative of my mother. This relative promised to help them after they arrived. Aunt lived there until her death. She died in 1980 or 1990.

And then, right after the war, when it got crowded in my sister's apartment, I moved in with those 4 sisters who ran away with me from the Death March. They were also from Lodz. They had some room on Gdanska Street.

I don't know exactly when it was, but they left for Israel shortly. I don't know what their later fate was, I don't know if they're still alive. Today, I also don't remember what their names were.

One day I decided to visit the area of the former ghetto. There were no wires then and, I think, there was no bridge [three wooden pedestrian bridges were built over Nowomiejska, Zgierska and B.Limanowskiego in the summer of 1940].

Everything was a mess. I entered the house on Wawelska Street 16, where we lived in the ghetto. Nobody was living there yet. I went into the basement. I found our family photographs. I also found some photos of our friends, I gave them to their surviving relatives, for example Zosia Radzinowicz. She was my sister's friend.

I only went to see the grave of my father, who died in the ghetto [winter 1944] once. My husband found the number in the file of the Jewish community. But I saw this field [over 40,000 people who died in the ghetto were buried along Bracka Street; this place was called 'the Ghetto Field'], so this place didn't tell me anything.

I didn’t visit the ghetto later. I went there for some ceremony which took place on the 50th anniversary of the liquidation of the ghetto. I was there so many times during the war, I buried so many people I loved there, I didn’t want to go back and remember it all

I knew about murders of Jews after the war. I heard about the pogrom in Kielce [glossary]. When I came back to Poland and I was walking with my friend I overheard these words: ‘So many of them were murdered and so many are still left.’ Some Pole said this. Many Jews lived in fear and anxiety. Some left the country or were thinking about leaving. I wasn’t thinking about this, I didn’t consider it [my feelings] as fear.

I had to think about the future. I studied in a Public Teacher’s Training School on Lipowa. I wanted to get my secondary school certificate. This school also had a dorm. That’s why I decided to go there. I lived in this dorm and then in a dorm for Jewish students on Franciszkanska Street. I graduated and I applied to be admitted to the faculty of medicine.

I wanted to be a doctor. I passed the exam, I think I did quite well. But I can’t rule out the possibility that I had some additional support. I was a member of a youth organization, which was a division of the governing party [PPR] [glossary]. It’s possible that members of the organization were given priority among those who were taking the exam.

I joined the party [PPR] in 1946 or 1947. It was an independent decision. It is true that when I was still in the Teachers’ Training School, Witek Woroszylski [Wiktor Woroszylski (1927-1996) fiction writer, poet, translator of Russian literature] told us about the party and encouraged us to join. But he must have known I had leftist views. I was friends at that time with his girlfriend Janka. [Janka Witczak, later Wiktor Woroszylski’s wife]

Just before I entered university I met Karol Weksler, a friend from before the war and from the ghetto. Karol allowed me to use a room, which he was renting in a Jewish family’s apartment on Zeromskiego Street 18. So I moved in there.

I lived off my scholarship. It was a very modest life. How should I put it – I wore the same coat in the summer, in the winter and in the spring. I usually borrowed handbooks. Sometimes I’d buy lecture notes. There usually were no handbooks, anyway, we used lecture notes.

When I was still at university, in 1949, my sister informed me that an apartment was free in the building where she was living, on Narutowicza Street. So I moved. My sister was on the 3rd floor and I, at first, was on the 2nd. There were 2 other families living in that house.

When my sister moved out from her apartment, I moved in there. And this is where I live until today. I think in 1953 my brother-in-law got a job with RWPG [Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, an economic organization of socialist states, founded in 1949] and he moved to Warsaw. My sister and her daughter followed him after a few weeks. I visited them often in Warsaw.

In 1951 I gave birth to a daughter, Janka. I was very happy, because I wanted to have a daughter. She was an illegitimate child. I don’t admit who the father is, because his children have no idea that he has a child with me.

I was at fault very much, because I got involved with Ryszard. [Ryszard Krasilewicz – psychiatrist] I even arranged his admission to the clinic. We saw each other every day at work and after work. Ryszard was Janka's Godfather.

My housekeeper influenced me to baptize the child. The housekeeper, who cared for Janka ever since she was born, took her final exams at the Nazareth Nuns' school [a Polish order of nuns, founded in the XIVth century, deals with the education of girls, work in hospitals and orphanages].

She was a deeply religious and practicing person. She raised Janka religiously, she often took her to church. Janka was a strong believer and wanted to be baptized. She was several years old by then – 7, maybe 8. Ryszard also persuaded me to this baptism. The ceremony took place in a church, in Aleksandrow, because the Godmother was from Aleksandrow. All the formalities connected with baptism were taken care of by the Godparents.

My daughter's name was Wojdyslawska-Wald, because I got married in 1954. Ryszard didn't propose to me, I quarreled with him. I got married because of my daughter. I thought that there would be all kinds of social problems once she went to school.

At that time people looked a bit differently at illegitimate children. My husband's name was Mieczyslaw Wald. He was a Jew. At the Marriage Office he said that Janka was his daughter. Our marriage didn't last long.

He moved to the theater to Bielsko. He was an actor. We didn't meet often. We got divorced in 1956. Mieczyslaw went to France and later to Israel. We exchanged letters until last year. Then I learned that he died in Hebron in 2003.

In 1951 I completed my coursework, in 1952 I received my diploma. Ever since I started my studies I knew I would choose psychiatry as my specialization. I worked on my 1st specialization for 3 years, then another 3 years for the 2nd specialization.

In 1961 I submitted my doctoral dissertation. I defended it in 1962. The title of the dissertation was 'Criminal Issues in Schizophrenia.' I started working immediately completed coursework, in 1951, in the J. Babicki Psychiatric Hospital.

For 2 or 3 years the conditions were very bad, because the women's ward of the clinic was located in the hospital. I remember huge rooms, very crowded, poor sanitary conditions. But after 2 or 3 years we moved into a new building, which housed only the women's ward. The work conditions and the conditions of treatment improved significantly.

I don't remember patients whose psychiatric illnesses were the result of wartime experiences. Psychiatric illness is not the result of a traumatic experience, it has different roots. The results of these horrific experiences were acute neuroses. But I did hear that in the 1950s and 1960s there were cases of placing politically inconvenient persons in psychiatric hospitals. But I never encountered a case like that. We had a very nice, very decent team.

In the 1970s I became the director of the clinic. I could consider myself a good physician, although, of course, you always ask yourself for more. I was well liked and respected. I retired in 1981. I worked for 17 more years, but only in a psychiatric outpatient clinic on Bardowskiego Street. It was

part-time work.

My daughter attended the gymnasium on Narutowicza Street. She later graduated from the Technical University of Lodz, Faculty of Chemistry. She's a chemist, an engineer. She's currently working as an insurance agent. She and her husband lived in Poddebice near Lodz. My daughter is catholic, but she doesn't go to church.

Marek Edelman [glossary] is one of the important people in my life. I knew him from university, but it wasn't a close relationship then. He was a year higher than I was, with Hela Bergson and Witek Woroszylski.

In 1959 I broke out with a terrible fever, almost 40 degrees [Centigrade]. I called doctor Feningsen for help. Unfortunately, he was sick as well. He said he'd send his friend. That's when Marek Edelman came to me. He told me to go to the hospital immediately and have surgery – it turned out I had cholelithiasis.

Of course, I knew who Marek was. I knew he had been in the ghetto in Warsaw and had fought in the uprising [glossary]. Our closer friendship began then. Later I also became good friends with his wife, Alina Margolis. [Pediatrician, lives in Paris and Warsaw, an activist of many social organizations.] I was admitted to Marek's hospital 3 or 4 times more. I trusted him with my health, and these were mostly issues requiring surgery, I always went to him. I had surgery in 1982, 1986. And later also in 1992 I was in his hospital with liver abscess.

The first time I went abroad was in 1960, to Paris. I was invited by my sister Franka. When she was still in Warsaw she became involved with Filip Ben. Filip was a Jew, he worked for the French journal 'Le Monde.'

Before she left Poland, my sister worked in the radio, then for 'Czytelnik' [a publishing house]. Filip's professional issues were the reason for them leaving the country. My sister's daughter, Ewa, went with her.

My sister's husband, engineer Torunczyk, didn't object to Ewa's departure. At that time he was very sick, after his 5th heart attack. He thought it would be better for Ewa to go with her mother. But my sister never took the name Ben.

During the war Filip found himself in Palestine with Anders's army [glossary]. He was exhausted, dying. An older woman took care of him there. And he, out of gratitude for her care, married her. He never divorced her. I even suspect that he helped her all that time. When me sister was in Paris she cooperated with 'Kultura' [glossary]. She wrote reviews, I think she used the name Torunczyk.

I can say that during this stay in Paris I got to know the 'Kultura' circle. There was an exhibition of Jan Lebenstein's works there at that time. At the opening of the exhibition I met Jerzy Giedroyc and Kot Jelenski. [émigré writers and activists supporting the democratic opposition during PRL].

I even met with Jelenski in a café, to discuss some private issue of Witek Woroszylski. He seemed to be an elegant, intelligent, handsome man. When I came back to Poland, they summoned me to the UB [glossary] for an interrogation, but there were no consequences.

In the 1970s my sister went to the USA, because Filip took a job there as the ‘Le Monde’ correspondent at the UN. They lived in New York. They traveled a lot all over the world. They went to Israel, their daughter Ewa studied there for some time.

Filip was also a correspondent in Eastern Europe, so they visited Russia, Romania and other countries of the region many times. And each time they were coming back from Moscow, they would stop in Poland for 2 or 3 days, in a hotel. I visited them in the States, once.

But I never went to Israel. I was supposed to go there for a distant cousin’s wedding, but I poured some boiling water on my leg and couldn’t go. My sister Franka died in the USA, in 1996.

My sister’s daughter, Ewa, lives in Princeton. She is an architect. She visited me recently, actually she visited my daughter, 2 years ago. She used to live in Sweden. She got married there, but after the divorce she moved to the States. She graduated from university in the States and that’s where she works as an architect.

1968 was for me like the beginning of occupation once again [glossary]. I was really stunned with everything, confused. Some unpleasant things happened to me as well. I had started working on my habilitation, but I stopped that in 1968, influenced by everything that was happening in the country.

It was such a difficult experience that I sent my daughter to France. I didn’t want to her go through all this. Janka was 17 years old then. An aunt from Australia offered to finance her university studies there. But Janka didn’t want to stay there. She missed Poland and so these plans collapsed.

I knew that someone who was jealous of me could try to trip me. I didn’t want to have anything to do with that. I didn’t want to have to fight it. I was also more interested in medical practice than in research. Most of my research papers were about pharmacotherapy in psychiatry.

One of the assistants wrote to the dean and the party secretary. He said that a Jewess was working at the clinic and that they should get rid of her. But the [hospital] team opposed him and I didn’t suffer any consequences.

But I did tell myself that if I was thrown out of the clinic, I would leave the country. My job at the clinic was very important for me. Nevertheless, it was still difficult to run away, to free yourself psychologically from all these articles in the press. And from this atmosphere of a witch-hunt.

I always considered myself to be Jewish, but closely connected to Polish culture. It was in my birth certificate, I never changed that. Mendel and Chawa [parents’ names]. Everywhere, where I introduced myself or where I had to show my identity card, my ethnicity was clear. I never hid it.

It was said that Moczar [glossary] was responsible for this entire anti-semitic hunt for Jews. My attitude towards him was extremely negative then. I never trusted the UB. I knew Moczar’s wife, we studied together in the Teachers’ Training School.

She later worked in Warsaw. My close friends: Krystyna Lesniewska and Janka Woroszylska were friends of hers. Irena [Moczar] visited me at that time. Her attitude towards what was happening in the country was very negative. She divorced Moczar then.

The departure of many close friends was a painful consequence of March 1968. Krystyna and Adam Lesniewski left. He was Jewish, but Krystyna wasn't. And she went to Sweden, together with her husband, son and mother.

She was the second of my closest friends. I later visited her in Sweden. I think I was there at least 6 times. And now she comes to Poland, usually twice a year. We meet again in Poland.

Everything that was happening in Marek Edelman's family was very hard on me. Marek stayed, but his wife and children went to France. My daughter was friends with his son Olek. She really suffered, because she had to be away from him. Doctor Kolczycka, whom I knew very well too, left as well. Those were horrible experiences.

I wasn't thinking about leaving. If they had fired me from my job, then I would have probably left. And I wasn't that young then, either. I would have had to know the language, especially the vocabulary necessary for a psychiatrist, to be able to work in my profession.

Anyway, I felt good in Poland. I was leading a very active life, I often went abroad. I went to Italy, many times to Sweden, France, the United States. I went to Denmark, Germany, Yugoslavia. At first I was usually invited by friends, but when it became possible I would also go on my own.

I would have probably also missed the theater. I have always been interested in theater. I was friends with many people of the theater. I went to all the opening nights in Teatr Nowy. And apart from that, after the performances, I used to go with the actors to the actors' association restaurant.

I went to inside events which only people very closely connected with the team were invited to. I led my social life mostly with artists. I didn't have close contacts with physicians, with the exception of Ryszard [Krasilewicz].

For many years I had someone who was very close to me – an actor. This friendship lasts until this day. We met very often for 11 years, as long as he worked in Lodz. He later moved to Warsaw, so our relationship naturally wasn't as close.

I returned my party membership card even before 1980, while I was still working at the clinic, but I don't remember the exact date. But I had stopped going to meetings even earlier. I didn't want to be a member of the party any longer.

But I was also very anxious about the collapse of that system [the collapse of communism in Poland]. I wondered what would happen next. For me Walesa [glossary] was not fit to be president.

A man without an education, who couldn't speak Polish correctly, I had no hope for a sensible government. Secondly, I've been following this privatization and this free market, I am really opposed to so many people losing their jobs.

The culture of Jews in Eastern-Central Europe after the Holocaust was completely destroyed. I don't have any special ties to Jewish culture, although of course, it does interest me very much. I have read books by Asz [glossary], Perec [glossary]. I have read Singer [glossary]. But other cultures are important for me as well, for example Russian literature: Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy [I.Turgenev (1818-1883), Russian writer, leading representative of critical realism, L. Tolstoy (1828-1910), Russian writer and thinker, F. Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), Russian novelist, the most

important person in XIXth century literature.] This is still a fascinating thing for me. I also really love French literature.

Jewish issues are still present in Poland. Although I knew about old pogroms, the case of Jedwabne [glossary] made a huge impression on me. On the other hand, I had 5 friends whose parents hid Jews during the war and they never even told me about it.

I think that, like most others, they were afraid to talk about it. Only assistant professor Pogorzelski told me that he hid a Jewess in Vilnius. Actually, he informed me about it when a tree was planted in Israel [glossary], and he was asked to come. In 1968 he told me he was ashamed of being Polish.

Nevertheless, when I wonder about whether Jewish culture can develop in Poland today, I have to say, I think, no. Only an assimilated Jew can feel good in Poland. One who wanted to follow Jewish traditions, rather not. [In recent years there are increasingly more people who are returning to their Jewish roots.]

How do I view my life today? I didn’t have influence over many things, so I couldn’t have changed them. But, all in all, I think I had great luck that I was able to go to university, because I wouldn’t have been able to do that before the war.

I had an interesting, satisfying job, I had an interesting circle of friends, acquaintances. And now… The end of life is near. I only wish for this end not to be painful. I wish I never become an invalid who needs to be taken care of by her daughter. I want it to come suddenly and, until it comes, I want to do whatever needs to be done and to be independent.