

Halina Najduchowska

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Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Joanna Fikus

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Mrs. Halina Najduchowska is 80 years old; she is a retired sociologist. She comes from a family of assimilated Jews from Lodz.

Our conversation took place in Mrs. Najduchowska's apartment, which is situated in a pre-war building in the Warsaw district of Mokotow. The place of honor among her many books is reserved for two family photographs.

Mrs. Najduchowska remembers her childhood in detail, and enjoys talking about it.

As she said herself, our interview was quite an emotional experience for her – many memories came back, both good ones and bad ones.



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• My family background

I know nothing about my grandparents and great-grandparents. Unfortunately, none of my grandparents, either from my mother's or from my father's side, were alive by the time I was born. I do know that one of my grandfathers was named Daniel, and I suspect it must have been my mother's father, because there was a tradition of naming boys Daniel in that family.

My mother's family comes from Lodz. Mother's name was Maria Biber. She was born on 25th March 1899 in Lodz. She had lots of siblings: three sisters and two brothers: Sala, Hela, Ruta, Leon and Motek. There were six children altogether. I knew all my aunts, except Ruta, and uncles. My mother's father died young and her mother died in 1919. The children were left on their own.

The oldest sister [of my mother] was already a married woman at that time. I don't know her full name, we called her Auntie Sala. She lived in Lask. Her husband's name was Lajb Borensztajn. After Grandma's death, she took the youngest sister, Hela, to live with her, and my mother was left with the two younger brothers, Leon and Motek, and with Ruta. My mother was taking care of them, but it did not last too long. She soon got married.

My mother supported herself and her brothers by giving private lessons, they were probably Polish lessons. She would go to her pupils' homes. By the standards of those days, my mother was quite an educated person – she had completed the equivalent of today's gymnasium. She had graduated from a school in Lodz. She did the 'small finals' [semi-final exams held in the middle high-school years]. She knew Polish, Russian and German – she had probably studied these languages at school.

In the United States there lived an aunt of my mother's, who had several children. She decided that since there were all these orphans left behind, she would take one of the children to live with her. And my mother was supposed to be the one to go. But she wrote to her aunt saying that she couldn't go to the States, because she had already given her word to a man [her future husband] and so she couldn't do it. As a result, it was my mother's younger sister Ruta who went to the USA in 1919.

My mother's brother Motek was crippled. As far as I know, when he was just a baby, less than a year old, he fell, during a bath I think, and so one of his legs was shorter than the other. I don't know exactly what the problem was, but in any case he was crippled and it was very visible.

Motek got married at the beginning of the 1930s. His wife's name was Helena, and their daughter was called Anulka. Helena was a seamstress, she adjusted dresses for people, and he was a caretaker. They lived in a basement room opposite the park in the area close to the university.

My father's family came from a small town whose name I don't remember, somewhere in the German sector. [Editor's note: After 1795 the Polish state ceased to exist, and was split among three neighbors: Russia, Austria and Prussia. Prussia took over the western and northern part of Poland which was henceforth known as the Prussian or German sector. Poland regained its independence in 1918.]

My father's name was Beniamin Szwarc and he was 13 years older than my mother, which means he was born in 1886. However, I don't know the day or the month. Papa was a small child when his family moved to Lodz. My grandpa died when I was just a few months old [1926] and Grandma had died before then.

My father had siblings: two sisters, who were much older than he, then a younger sister, and a brother; their names were Hasura, which might have been short for Hanna Sura, Ita and Lola. I don't remember the brother's name. I believe my father was the youngest. I don't know anything about the brother; he might have been around the same age as my father.

My father completed three or four classes of elementary school. When he was nine or ten years old his parents sent him off to learn to be a shoemaker. But after two to four days Father came home and said he would not go back there. He said one could learn to repair shoes in just a few days, and this was not for him. Then they tried to make him into a tailor but that didn't work out either.

Finally, he discovered electro-technology. He studied it as someone's apprentice. This is how people learned their trades in those days.

As far back as I can remember, my father was always working as an electrician. This was quite an exclusive profession in those days, when electric light was only being developed. When someone's lighting broke down, they would call my father and he would repair it. His entire workshop fit into a single briefcase – inside it, he had an inductor, a few screwdrivers, and some other small things. My father went to work in the same clothes he wore all day long

He didn't make much money, we were quite poor. He would be gone all day, but he always came home for lunch at 2pm. We would all sit at the table, each person at their own place [at the table] and we would all have lunch together.

Papa did not serve in the military. In order to avoid being recruited into the Russian army, he had cut off two of his toes. [Editor's note: men recruited into the tsarist army would spend 25 years in service – hence common cases of self-mutilation, a method of avoiding military service.] This was not a serious disability, he could walk normally, and you didn't see it when he was walking. Quite simply, I knew about this because I saw it many times, and generally, it was a well known fact in the family.

My father's oldest sister, Hasura, had two sons and a daughter. They were much older than me. I am not even sure if I addressed them by their first names, or more formally, as 'cousin.' Hasura lived in Lodz. I do not remember her husband's name. Their sons survived in the Soviet Union. And the daughter, along with her husband, were both in Warsaw. They paid a very high price to get into Polski Hotel [1](#) and then they were killed.

The other sister's name was Ita. My parents were good friends with her daughter, Sala, and the husband, whose name escapes me. They had two daughters and two sons: Hanka, Halinka, Romek and Izio. Halinka, was my age [she was born in 1925], while her sister Hanka was my sister's age [born in 1923]. The children were also good friends with one another. The generations had gotten mixed up a bit. They were all killed in Lodz.

My father's youngest sister was called Lola. I don't know her last name. She lived in Berlin. When Hitler came to power [2](#), she emigrated to Palestine and settled in Haifa.

In 1936 or 1937 my father's younger brother, whose name I don't remember, took his wife and his daughter Dorka to Palestine, but after two years they came back. They probably did not like it there. Dorka was the same age as me. She died in Lodz Ghetto [3](#), her parents were killed in Auschwitz.

My mother and her siblings lived in a single room at 33 Wschodnia Street in Lodz. It was the second floor. Right on the other side of one of the walls of this room there was a restaurant. And on the day of my grandma's [Mrs. Biber's] death, my future father happened to be sitting in this restaurant, having his lunch. And he heard the terrible crying of children. He went over to the apartment to see what was going on. And he fell in love with my mother.

• My siblings

My parents' wedding was on 11th November 1920 – they chose this date to celebrate the anniversary of Poland's independence [4](#). My parents were also living at 33 Wschodnia Street, in the same building where my mother lived with her siblings. Except that their place was a floor below, on the first floor.

Wschodnia Street was inhabited by Jews. Not exclusively, of course, but it was a sort of Jewish quarter. There were some orthodox Jews living there as well. And of course you would hear Jewish [Yiddish] spoken in the street.

After my parents got married, my mother's brothers moved in with them. At the age of 13 one of the brothers, Leon, took offence at my father. I will tell you how this happened. It was 1920 or 1921. My father was an electrician, and he wanted to teach Leon the trade. He took him as an apprentice, but Leon did not like the arrangement.

What he especially did not like was that my father would make him carry his briefcase when the two of them went over to people's homes to repair the lighting. He was insulted by this; he told me so himself, over 40 years later. And he ran away from home.

There was no news from him until 1938. That's when a telegram came to our house, from Spain. My mother took this telegram, read the word 'Leon' but then she couldn't read any further. She asked the postman to read it to her. It turned out the telegram was in Spanish. But the postman misunderstood one word in it.

He thought it said 'dead.' My mother fainted. And I ran downstairs to our neighbor, Rozia Bekier, a very close friend of my mother's. She saw that it was in Spanish and told me where to go, who would translate it for me. It turned out that the telegram said: 'Everything is fine. Leon.'

In any case, I can feel it even today – my heart pounding, as I ran over to Zawadzka Street, because that's where this person lived who knew Spanish. And I could find this apartment even today. This is how strongly I felt about it. Soon afterwards, a letter from Leon arrived, and it turned out that he had taken part in the war in Spain [5](#). He needed some documents, such as his birth certificate. This is why he suddenly remembered that he had a family.

My mother was my father's second wife. The first wife had died. I don't know anything about her. My father had three children from that first marriage: Sala, Fela and Hersz. These children were all placed in an orphanage in Lodz – apparently, my father just couldn't manage on his own with three children.

It wasn't until after my parents got married that these kids returned home. And I was raised together with them. All three completed elementary school. These were schools for Jewish children, and the only difference from Polish schools was that Saturdays were free, and that Judaism was the religion taught at school.

My older stepsister was named Sala, and the younger one was Fela, and the step-brother's name was Hersz. We were step-siblings, but this did not make any difference, we didn't feel it that way. They addressed my mother as 'auntie.'

The oldest sister was 14 or 15 years older than me, it must have been 1931 or 1932 when she got married. But we stayed in close touch with one another after that. She lived in Baluty [poor, working-class section of Lodz, in the northern part of the city, inhabited mostly by Jews], at 48 Limanowskiego Street, in a single room with her husband, Pinkus Wyszegrod, their son Bronek, and her husband's mother.

I remember this room in Baluty quite well, because later [during the war] I lived there myself, with my parents. During the war, as you know, the Baluty area was the ghetto. I remember what this room looked like before the war: the door was in the middle of the wall, and on the left there was a tile stove.

Behind the stove there were two beds, where Sala and Pinkus and their small son all slept. To the right of the door there was a curtain which separated off the space used by my sister's mother-in-law. And in the middle there was a table and some chairs. It was a sunny room. The water and the toilet were both outside, in the yard, but they did have electric light.

When I was seven years old, I was already an aunt [Bronek was born in 1932]. Sala and Pinkus had a small ice-cream shop. It was almost exactly opposite their apartment – on the other side of the road. Sala used to help her husband run this shop. An ice-cream cost 5 groszy [unit of currency, 1/100 of 1 zloty]. It was scooped up with a spoon into a wafer.

In the summer they were quite busy, but in the wintertime it all came to a standstill, maybe they managed to sell some wafers and some chocolate, but it was not a good business then. Pinkus had more free time then so he studied various languages, for instance English and Esperanto. He was very intelligent, and he just taught himself – out of books.

My other step-sister, Fela, was twelve years older than me. She was a seamstress. Before the war she fell in love with Henryk Szmulewicz, but she left him and married a Jew from an aristocratic family [meaning that they were educated and wealthy]. His name was Pawel Merenlender. People called him 'Polek.' I suspect that she did it partly out of snobbery. Pawel's brother was a lawyer, and there were a few doctors in the family, too. Pawel worked in an office.

Fela gave birth to a child, but from the very beginning it suffered from epilepsy. This child died in the ghetto in 1940, when it was less than two years old. Fela stayed with her husband for another year or two after that, but she'd had enough. She left him, and went back to her first love, to Heniek. And she was with him until his death [Henryk Szmulewicz died in 2001 or 2002].

I don't recall the date of Hersz's birth – he is the last of my step-siblings. I know very little about him. For three years he was in the military – until 1938 or 1939. Before the war he was engaged to Guta Samsonowicz. Hersz died in Auschwitz. Guta survived, and after the war she went to Israel.

I also have a biological sister – Renata. She is two years older than me [born in 1923]. Before the war we both went to the same elementary school. She completed this school and went on to a Polish public vocational school on Narutowicza Street. She was studying book-binding. In 1939 she finished this three-year vocational school.

On Wschodnia Street we lived in a one-room apartment with a kitchen. My parents gave up renting the apartment that was left when Grandma died, because that was just one room without a

kitchen.

Today I can hardly understand how we could live there. One large room and a large kitchen! I guess the size of this room must have been about 20 square meters. The view was onto the street. I think there was some wallpaper on the walls. When you entered the room, you had a stove on your left, two beds, and a laundry basket to the side of my father's bed. Between the stove and the wall was where my father kept his tools, he had some shelves built in there.

There was a table – seven persons could sit there comfortably, so it must have been big. Around the table there were seven chairs and an arm-chair for Papa. And behind his arm-chair there was a large mirror. Opposite the door – two wardrobes. And two beautiful, huge portraits of my father and my mother were hung on the opposite wall.

In the kitchen my father made this partition – he made the kitchen smaller so that my sister Fela could have her sewing workshop. It was called 'the little room.' My sisters slept there, and there was a folding bed for my brother as well. The little room had a window.

So altogether we were eight persons living in this one-room apartment: five kids, mother, father and a woman who helped run the household, before the war you would call her 'servant girl.' Her name was Frania, she was Polish, she stayed with us for many years, until 1935 or 1936. After that she got married.

Then there were also customers coming to see Fela. They would come into the room, of course, there was a screen, and they would get behind it to try on their dresses. I can hardly reconstruct it all today – how it was all possible.

We had to light up the tile stove and then the kitchen stove, too. It was in my lifetime, in my living memory, that a sink was installed in the kitchen. I must have been about five years old at the time. And a year or two later we had a tap. So that means that until then we didn't even have running water in the kitchen. It's hard to imagine today, a life like this.

Once a month my mother and Frania would spend three days washing the dirty laundry. Nobody had a separate bed just to themselves, except for my brother, and he slept in a small folding bed. I slept with Papa, my sister Renata slept with our mother, and the two older sisters shared a bed with each other. The servant girl slept on a folding bed. The kids would go to sleep before the parents. Frania used to put me to sleep by telling me stories and singing lullabies.

• Growing up

My mother took care of the household. She also read a lot – mostly literature, she read the same novels as the whole family. My father also did some reading, but he was more interested in the press. He read some Jewish paper, I think it was in Yiddish. I know for sure that my parents both knew Yiddish, but they spoke Polish with each other. I remember also that they spoke Polish with their siblings.

As for me, I don't know Yiddish. I didn't even understand it. I would always play with other kids in Polish. My step-sisters and step-brother did know Yiddish, I remember hearing them speak it.

In my family home we didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays. And we never went to the temple. My mother did not have any political views. And Papa had leftist sympathies, but he didn't have any strong political commitments either. I know that he was a sort of militant atheist, and my mother didn't like this at all. What she resented was the militant part, the fact he would demonstrate his views openly. She thought you should not be too provocative, she wanted to avoid irritating the relatives, the aunts and uncles who would come visit us.

It was also a matter of food: my mother did not want guests to refuse to eat at our house. And my father used to say: if they don't want to eat, they don't need to eat. So there would not be a problem whether one can eat at our house or not because we did not keep kosher.

Thanks to Frania my mother cooked Jewish dishes. Because, to tell you the truth, it was Frania, a Polish woman, who taught my mother to cook such typical Jewish specialties as, for instance, chulent. On Fridays either my mother or Frania would take it to the bakery, where bread was baked, and on Saturday you would pick it up. Except that it wasn't kosher. Before the war my mother did not buy kosher meat, because it was expensive, and the non-kosher type was cheaper, so she would buy that. And after the war she would even make chulent based on lard.

How do you make chulent? You take some fat, then the potatoes, barley and the meat. You bring it all to a boil, and cook it. The pot needs to be covered with paper, so the steam does not escape. Chulent has to sit in the stove for at least twelve hours.

On Friday night we often had fish, cooked the Jewish way. Carp. I can make Jewish carp, too. You slice the fish, and sprinkle salt on it. The fish has to remain in the salt for a while. Then you put it in sweetened water with sliced carrot in it, and you cook it for two hours.

Another dish was chopped liver. You slice some onions, and fry it. Then you add the liver and you grind it all. You add garlic, salt and pepper to taste. I did not know this was called Jewish caviar. At home we did not call it that. I don't think we even knew that such a thing as caviar exists. We just said: liver paté. I don't know any other Jewish specialties.

We had a Christmas tree every year, because Papa liked them so much. I am like that till this very day -- I can't get rid of a Christmas tree, not until my son Piotr throws it out almost by force, after two months. Papa always bought and decorated the tree. There was no special meal on Christmas Eve. We just had the tree standing there, because it was so pretty. Before the war almost all the Christmas tree decorations were edible – little wafer houses, pieces of candy, toys, you'd eat it all afterwards. The tree was all the way to the ceiling.

I also remember goose-Monday [Christian custom which consists in pouring water on each other on Easter Monday]. But there was nothing Christian about this – it was just great fun for both kids and adults, this splashing of water in the street. So this is the sort of household we had.

My closest family was not religious. In fact, I don't remember anyone who would really be religious. But I remember this cousin of my mother's, Mala Bajgielman – her mother, who was very much a believer, used to come visit her from another city, and when she came, Mala would come over to borrow some plates, with a pattern different from her plates. Then she would tell her mother that one set was for meat, and the other for dairy products. As soon as her mother left, she would return the dishes to us.

I remember she did this two or three times. The point was to reassure her mother. Mala lived on Piotrkowska Street, near Zawadzka Street. She took care of the house, and her husband ran an applications-writing service.

I remember my father and my mother's younger brother talking politics. But at the time I was too young to understand. They were basically indifferent to Zionism. The idea of leaving was simply not there. I don't remember my parents mentioning anti-Semitism. Anyway, before the war I never experienced any of that [anti-Semitism].

My parents' social life was with their relatives. There were almost no friends from outside of the family. Perhaps this one neighbor, Rozia Bekier, the one I told you about – my mother sent me over to her to have that telegram translated. This was a very close friend of my mother's. And I was close with her daughter.

I think my mother and Rozia got to know each other when Rozia was living on Wschodnia Street, in her husband's apartment. Her husband's sister also lived there, along with her family. They took up the whole ground floor, on the right.

I was born on 30th October 1925. I can't say what my nicest childhood memory is. It was a childhood lived in poverty. I remember that when they were collecting contributions to LOP [Air Defense League – pre-war organization which collected funds for the development of Poland's air force], or some other cause – 5 or 10 groszy per month – then I would apologize and say I had forgotten to tell my mommy to give me the 5 or 10 groszy. This was not true, but I did not want to tell them my mother had no money.

I remember that in those days a 2 kg loaf of bread cost 50 groszy. A kilogram of sugar cost 1 zloty. It was very rarely that my mother sent me shopping, but I do remember those prices.

I don't think it was an extraordinary childhood, but I guess it was a good one. I lived in a loving family. My father really adored my mother. I remember, one day in the ghetto, my sister and I were reading books, and Mother took a brush and started sweeping the floor. Papa got very angry with us: how can you sit around reading and let your mother do the cleaning! My mother was treated like a saint in the house. There were no riches, no special attractions, but it was a good childhood.

I remember my favorite toy – when you have just one doll then you remember it well. I think that today's kids will not remember anything. In the USA, in the house of my cousin's children, you could hardly enter the room of their kids, the whole place was so cluttered with toys. If I could draw, I could draw my doll perfectly even today.

My father's sister, Lola, she lived in Berlin. Once she came to Poland, she took me to this store on Pomorska Street, and there she bought me this doll. I don't remember how I named it. All the dolls had crooked legs, but mine had straight ones and she could stand up. She had a dress and hair made out of plastic. Sometimes, too, I would get a balloon. The balloons were filled with gas, and you had to hold on, or they would fly away.

I attended a school which seemed quite ordinary to me at the time, but now it seems strange. In Lodz, at 11 Sienkiewicza Street. I remember it very well, it was school number 131. A school for Jewish children, but it did not have only Jewish teachers. You could say that the Jewishness of this

school was limited to two things:

no classes on Saturdays, and Jewish religion lessons, but nobody studied for those, because we all knew that you had a guaranteed 5 [highest grade] for behavior and for religion. I don't remember anything from religion lessons I attended in this period.

We were being educated in the spirit of patriotism, and this really spoke to me. You had to stand up at attention in front of the eagle [White Eagle – Poland's national symbol], and of course I remember till this day all the legion songs [6](#) and the Polish national anthem. We were taught all the patriotic, military and folk songs.

Pilsudski's [7](#) funeral – this must have been the one pre-war event that made the strongest impression on me! The mourning was just terrible! I have no doubts that my parents felt very deeply about it as well. At school we all wore 4 stars on our berets, it was the school's symbol. So you had to sew black crepe around the stars, and all year long we wore mourning ribbons.

They showed the film from Pilsudski's funeral, and we would go to see it, the whole class would go to the theater to see it. I also remember the little poems I recited on Pilsudski's name-day:

We are both called Jozio - you and I.

All of Poland knows you well,

But nobody knows me yet,

'Cause I am just a little kid.

But when I grow up big and strong,

In the army with you I'll go

We always celebrated Pilsudski's name-day [19th March], and all these anniversaries, the Polish uprisings [In the 123 year period of Poland's occupation there were three uprisings for independence, all failed: the Kosciuszko Uprising in 1794, the November Uprising in 1830 and the January Uprising in 1863].

My year was not yet co-educational. I believe co-education was introduced about two or three years before the war. By 1939, when I had completed seven years of elementary school, the first three classes were, I think, mixed. It sometimes happened at school that the boys would talk in Yiddish during the break – it never happened before that, with only girls around. And they would be punished for it. They would sit in 'jail' – it meant they were made to stay after school for an extra hour or more. This was a rule made by the school principal, a Jewish woman.

I don't know how it worked in other schools. [Editor's note: We have not been able to establish whether a similar ban, and punishments for its breaking, existed in other Jewish schools. In general, Jewish teachers did attach enormous importance to their students' ability to speak proper Polish. Nonetheless, it appears that the strict ban on Yiddish was an individual idea of the principal of the school attended by Mrs. Najduchowska]. On Saturdays we had no school, instead we went on Sundays.

I can't say which subjects I liked. I could tell you which teachers I liked. I did not enjoy school. I mean, I did not like studying, but I did like my school friends a lot. I was close with many girls. In my class there were 50 girls; four of them survived. Ewa Parzeczevska lives in Canada; Jadzia Rubinstein and Hanka Fiszman live in Israel, and I am the fourth.

My sister and I – neither of us was a good student. I always judged myself like this: that I was dull, stupid... But now I sometimes think it was not so much a question of my stupidity, but rather of those conditions.

There was no place to do homework. I asked my sister: how did we do our homework? At this time the older sister [Fela] was still living with us, running that dress-making business. Renata told me that we often did our homework on the window sill. The clients would come, and they would sit at the table. If I sat at the table with strangers, who were all talking, there was simply no way to do homework properly, [though] mother did make sure we finished all our lessons.

The worst nightmare of my childhood were the dictations, that my mother did for us. I made terrible spelling errors. Perhaps today this would be accepted as dyslexia. For three months, from October till December, I studied German at Jaszynska's Gymnasium. They taught us to write in gothic script, but I would go to my mother, asking her to read what I myself had written, because I couldn't make it out.

So after school we had to do our homework, and later I would see my girl-friends. These were very close friendships, we were always visiting each other, and there was no need to call beforehand, because there were no phones. I would walk over to their homes on my own; we lived very close to each other. I did not play outside the building with kids from my block. I don't know why. Maybe because for such a long time there had been a sewer there?

I was good friends with my cousin Halinka. And with Dorka, the daughter of my father's younger brother, who had been to Palestine and then came back. And in our house there was this girl named Felunia, she was my age, a class above me. And our neighbor from the same floor, Stas Fajflowicz. His father was a doctor.

Stas and I used to draw and paint together, and we tried to write. His family later moved to a better house in a better part of the city. I was invited to his birthday and this was the first time I'd ever seen a radio, which talked real loud all by itself. I was very impressed

Then, on the second floor there lived this boy; I was friendly with. His father was a traveling salesman. They lived in a single room, like us, and later they moved to Koscielny Square. These were all kids from assimilated families. [According to Mrs. Najduchowska, assimilation meant departing from visible attributes of Jewishness, such as traditional clothing, kosher cooking, celebrating Jewish holidays.

In fact, assimilation is the emancipation of Jews, their opening up to external influence and their participation in non-Jewish social life. It appears that the difference between the two definitions pertains to the level of integration into Polish society. The fact of abandoning the Jewish way of life did not, in many cases, lead to a tighter bond with the Polish world].

I did not play with Polish children. I had Jewish friends, we visited each other in our homes. With the girls we mostly played with our dolls. We would also play ball, and if someone had a bicycle, they would lend it to the others. A bicycle was the great dream of my childhood.

On Sunday afternoons I went to church with [our housekeeper] Frania. I did everything that the others did. I don't know whether I liked going there. I think it was all the same to me. I went because Frania wanted to take part in mass. After church Frania used to take me over to my friend's house, on Koscielny Square.

From time to time school outings were organized to the cinema. And sometimes I would get 25 groszy for a movie. I don't know how many times I went on my own. I did go a few times with school. I even remember some of the movies. But I also went with my girl-friends a few times, to different cinemas. I did not have any favorite film stars. You would have to go to the movies more often than I did, to have your own favorites.

Once I went to a play, to a children's theater. My sister, the seamstress, must have gotten tickets from one of her clients. I don't remember where the theater was located. I remember that all the children were supposed to point at something with their fingers and repeat some words.

My two aunts lived in Lask [town located 35 km south-west of Lodz]. I spent many Spring breaks, I mean Easter breaks, at my older aunt's place there. I would stay for two weeks each time. I think once I went with Renata, but a few times I went on my own. My parents would put me on the train, and then my aunt, Sala, would pick me up in Lask. They lived right opposite her husband's mother, at Tylina Street 9.

The seder table was always set and Uncle Leib's mother came over and then supper would begin. My uncle read some things, or said some things. After half an hour they would tell his mother she was old now and had better go lie down. As soon as she was gone, the seder was over. They only did it [the seder] for her sake.

I don't know whether they celebrated any other holidays. It was a small town and you could not really make it known to outsiders that you were not a believer. I know that my uncle used to go to the synagogue on Fridays, I remember this, but I don't know if they were religious.

Sala had a bedroom, a dining-room and a kitchen. There were two beds in the bedroom, on the left there was their son's bed.

The other aunt's name was Hela. They married her off using some matchmakers. Her husband made men's shirts, or maybe it was long underwear. On Fridays he would go to the market and sell what he had made during the week. They had a daughter named Anulka, born two or three years before the war. I used to go to their apartment in Lask, they lived in the main square. You walked through a small kitchen into the room. There were two beds to the sides, and as you entered the room you faced the table.

Beside these periods spent in Lask, at Aunt Sala's, we also went for vacation to Teodory, 7 kilometers from Lask [village located 40 km from Lodz]. The last year there was no money at all for vacation. Three years in a row we went to Wisniowa Gora [summer resort, 10 km east of Lodz, popular with Jews in the inter-war period], because they built a swimming pool there and a dance

hall, and they organized parties and dances there.

Today you would call it a club. My father worked at setting up electricity there. And we received – I think it was free of charge – an apartment to stay in, from the owners who were building it. And we lived there [through the vacations] in two or three consecutive years. My mother, my sister and myself – whereas my father only came for the weekends.

The next two or three summers we also spent in Wisniowa Gora but in a different house, these were summer rentals. My mother cooked and we ate at home. We played with other girls, the daughters of people who came there for vacations. We played ball, volleyball. These girls had a bicycle, so I rode a bicycle, too. I was never bored.

There is no river in Wisniowa Gora. It was a typical Jewish summer resort. I suspect that it was only Jews that went there, to spend two or three months each summer. There were no real peasants there, working in the fields, the sort you might see in Teodory. That was a real village.

The [financial] situation [of our family] deteriorated during the last two years before the war. My father's relatives talked him into setting up a shop with electro-technical goods. A lot of money was spent on this – money we did not have. It was borrowed money, and it had to be paid back. The shop was on 11 Listopada Street. My mother helped Papa in the shop. Papa prepared the goods, such as lamps, and my mother sold them. By then, of course, we no longer had any domestic help.

I completed elementary school in 1939. After the summer vacation I was supposed to go over to that sister who was a seamstress [to learn the trade]. I was supposed to learn dressmaking. But war was coming. My parents didn't believe it would break out; they did not want to leave. I think in Lodz there was really no chance to hide. Besides, nobody knew that the ghetto would be as closed as it later was.

I remember these conversations from the beginning of the war. People would suggest that we all go to the Soviet Union. My father would always say to this: here are my beds, here is my house, I'm not going anywhere. The idea of leaving was just never considered.

• In the ghetto

In February 1940 we moved to the ghetto with my parents and my sister. We took what we were able to pack. There was no way to take the shop with us. You moved things on sleighs, in suitcases, in bags. Over and over again we walked to my older step-sister Sala's place [to Baluty]. Her mother-in-law was no longer alive by then. My sister Fela and her husband Pawel and their son took over the other room.

Also, by that time Sala and Pinkus did not have the ice-cream shop any more. Nobody made ice-cream, there was nothing to make it from. Later they moved away from Limanowskiego Street, because Pinkus got the position of a caretaker in another building.

My father didn't have his shop any more. It functioned for another two or three months after the Germans came, but it had to be closed down before we moved to the ghetto. Papa worked in a 'resort' [German workshop with forced labor in Lodz ghetto] as an electrician. Mother didn't work as long as she could avoid it, but later she too worked in one of the resorts. You had to work –

maybe it was because this is how you got the food stamps?

The ghetto streets did not look the way they did in the Warsaw ghetto⁸ – you can see in the films that they had dead bodies lying in the streets. I think that [in the Lodz ghetto] the organization was better. Everyone had to work, and everyone got stamps for food rations. A lot of people did die of hunger, but you could also survive. I suppose it depends on one's condition.

I did not feel fear. Only once, during the 'great szpera' ⁹. I was in the hospital then, I had jaundice. Suddenly, one morning, we heard they were removing people from two hospitals on Lagiewnicka Street. It was clear they were taking people away. A panic broke out. I was a person who calmed others down. It wasn't clear where they were taking people, but in any case it meant parting with your family.

My mother, my father and my sister were standing in the street, like many other families of people who were in the hospital. I managed to jump out of a window on the ground floor. I wasn't the only one, many others did the same thing. We knew by then that one hospital was already being emptied out, and that they would do the same with ours, so all those who could were running away. My parents caught me and we were walking home.

I remember precisely that before the bridge on Limanowskiego Street, we were stopped by the doctor, the one who was treating me, Doctor Nekricz. He took my mother aside and said something to her. It turned out that the Germans were doing a head-count at the hospital. Whenever they found a patient was missing, they went to their home and dragged this person out. So the doctor told my mother not to take me home, but to leave me with some friends or relatives.

We went to the family of the sister of our uncle from Lask. She also had a daughter my age, I played with her whenever we were in Lask. So my mother asked them to please keep me at their place for just a few days. She hoped that in a few days it would blow over. But they refused. Quite simply, they were afraid. I always remember this when people speak critically about those Polish families that refused to give shelter to Jews. Here we had a Jewish family, close relatives, and they didn't want to give me shelter.

Then my sister took me over to her friend and I spent a week there. It turned out that nobody [no Germans] had come to get me [at our place]. Later the whole thing became clear. What happened was that at the same hospital, in the very next room, there was another Halina Szwarc, the daughter of one of the nurses. The nurse signed her out of the hospital with the false date before the 'szpera.' But by mistake, she signed me out instead of her daughter.

The Germans came to get her [this other Halina Szwarc] in her home, and they took her away. People told us later that she was screaming – instead of the right Halina, they are taking the wrong one! But she managed to get the daughter out of the bus they had put her on. I remember that the buses were used to take sick people to the train station.

When the war ended, I was in Mauthausen ¹⁰ and I heard there the name Halina Szwarc. I hope she survived. I don't know how I could manage in life, knowing that someone else was killed in my place.

The 'szpera' went on for at least two weeks. People were taken into the yard, and they checked if all the rooms are empty. Germans stood there together with Jewish policemen, saying, 'rechts' and 'links.' I had jaundice, which I had caught in the hospital. I remember my father painting me. He would paint my cheeks red, so they would not see how yellow I was. But it didn't help.

They made me go to the bad side [of people who were designated for the transport]. At some point my mother caught on to what was going on and she signaled to me that there was a way at the back, behind the Germans, where you could slip over to the good side. So it was the second time I had saved my life.

A great number of people were taken out of the ghetto that day. Mostly [they were taking] children, almost all of them. After such an intense experience, people would react by eating up all they had stored up at home. My mother watched carefully that we didn't eat on one day what we had put away for the next. I remember our neighbors, who somehow managed to save their child that day, because they hid it somewhere. A few hours later they told us they had eaten all the food they had stored for the following week.

My step-brother Hersz was on the battlefield in 1939, and he ended up in a prisoner-of-war camp. I don't know where this camp was. I believe he came to the ghetto in 1940, but I don't know how he managed to get in. In 1941 he married this girl, Guta Samsonowicz, they were in love before the war. I remember that the wedding took place in the rabbi's home. There were chairs, but no chuppah. [Mrs. Najduchowska cannot not remember any more details].

Frania was not able to stay in touch with us. The ghetto was very tightly closed. You couldn't enter and you couldn't leave. Till this day I sometimes wonder how my brother managed to get into the ghetto [after he escaped from the camp, when the ghetto was already closed]. But it must have been 1940 and maybe in this period it was still possible to get through.

During the war both my sister and I belonged to the Young Leftist Organization [11](#) in the Lodz ghetto. Even today I can't tell exactly how I got involved in it. The organization reached me somehow, through friends. They had so called 'loose fives,' for candidates who wanted to join, and after that you were a full member. I belonged to the youth section.

Our meetings were held in private apartments. We studied Marxism-Leninism, and besides we had a very well-stocked library. We copied the books in longhand. Many large volumes were copied in this way, so there would be enough for everyone. Thanks to this there were many books. So I did not waste my time.

What did I learn from Marxism-Leninism? – I might have different views about it today, but it was certainly a very meaningful and important thing – the very fact that we studied, that we did all this reading and thinking. There were debates on various scientific topics. The [Marxist] interpretation was always provided – I suspect that I would disagree with many things today, nonetheless I still value that whole experience very highly.

We talked exclusively in Polish. The young people met in their fives, but there were also broader meetings. There was one more beautiful thing about this organization: we all had those tiny food rations, but each of us gave a spoon of sugar and a teaspoon of flour for those in greater need, and for the ill. It was literally taking food away from your mouth.

[In the organization] we all followed the slogan 'WS - work slowly' [Polish: 'PP - Pracuj powoli']. You were working for the Germans, so it made sense to work slowly. I worked at a sewing resort – my sister also worked there – and I was miserable. I know it's a sin to talk like that – but if it were not for the war, I would be a seamstress today. I feel sick at the very sight of a needle, even today.

Later I worked in a metals factory, it was named the 'metal resort.' My first job was at a milling machine, then I operated a turning machine. This was quite unusual in those days, for a girl to be working in such a place, so I could afford to play games – I would show the men who were working there what I have made, I would boast to them what good job it was.

And then I'd put it under the cutter again, take off another millimeter, and it was ruined. Of course, they forgave me as a girl, how could a girl know how to do such things? I also tried to communicate with my co-workers in Yiddish, but that didn't work. They began to laugh at me and I had to back out of it.

The population of the part of the ghetto where we lived was being displaced [the ghettos were being made smaller]. We moved into the factory – my father, my mother, Felka, Renata, and myself. We stayed in the ghetto until the very end, the last day. Until 1944 [the last transports from the Lodz ghetto took place in late August 1944].

I remember that people had these little plots of land where they grew something [vegetables] to eat. Papa and I crossed over to the other side illegally. If we had been caught at that point, immediately [we would have been sent] to hell [to the camp]. We picked some beets.

• In concentration and work camps

Then there was the transport to Auschwitz. We were all taken with the last transport [August 1944]. We were all taken to Auschwitz: Mother, Papa, Renata, Felka along with her husband and her son, Sala and her family. Once we got there, we were all separated. All the men go to one side, then go the children. My sister went with Bronek; she didn't want to leave the child. Papa, as far as I know, went straight to the gas.

I was left with Mother, Renia and Felka. We survived the war together – it was a completely exceptional situation that we were not separated and that we survived. We only spent one day in Auschwitz. They took us off to Freiberg [the Freiberg camp was located in Chemnitz Kreis in Saxony, Germany]. There was a metals factory there and this is where we worked.

They had an exceptionally decent 'Unterscharführer,' that is camp commander. Unfortunately, the Americans killed him. On 14th April 1945 they evacuated us from Freiberg to Mauthausen and unfortunately the camp commander was killed. During the wartime I thought of him as a terrible bastard. But after the war, when I found out how things were in other camps, I thought that he was an exceptionally decent man. This was in 1944-45, I don't know how he behaved in 1941 or 1942 or 1943.

In any case, he saved three pregnant women. He was supposed to send pregnant women to Auschwitz, but he hid them when there was some sort of inspection. These three children were born, and they all survived the war. I knew about it all the time, but we were living in dreadful

conditions, eating in dreadful conditions. I didn't know at the time that this [his hiding these women and thus saving their lives] was something extraordinary.

The Americans came to Mauthausen on 5th May, but we were not released until July. People did not return home from Mauthausen right away, because the Americans wouldn't allow it. My mother, Felka and I returned in the first Polish transport, early in July [1945]. My sister [Renata] returned earlier, she was smuggled out of the camp by some Czechs. The Czechs stole away over a dozen people, because they were allowed to go home.

• After the war

We were kept locked up in there for another month. I was in a hospital then. I was very weak, there were problems with my heart. I was not allowed to leave the camp site. I would like to know myself why they forbade us to go outside the camp.

The Americans were spreading propaganda through the radio, claiming that they had sent messengers to Poland, to find out what was going on there. And that nobody is coming back. So they suppose that war is still going on over there, and that is why they won't let us go.

Of course all of this was pure lies, they knew very well what was going on in Poland. They were creating a Polish Army somewhere in the west of Germany. They were encouraging men to go there. We were there as Jews, but they wouldn't let anybody out – neither Jews, nor Poles.

It never occurred to us that we might not return to Poland. This was my homeland! I had been brought up to think in this way. I never heard at home that I was Jewish. Even today I find it hard to say that about myself. I always knew that I was a Polish-woman whose creed happens to be Judaism, except that my family were not believers.

My sister – the one who returned home a month before we did – went to the Lodz party committee. They had lots of empty apartments and she got one. Apparently, she had several to choose from, but all of the apartments were empty, without furniture. But on Strzelcow Kaniowskich Street, near the Kaliski train station, there was this one room. It wasn't large, but there was furniture, sheets, towels, dishes, everything you need.

Olga Baden had lived there during the war. She left behind an album with photos of various SS-men. So my sister chose this one room and this is where we lived for a while.

The keys were always left with the caretaker, so when someone returned from camp and asked about us, the caretaker knew he should give them the keys. We would come home and find people there, waiting. This was my 'largest' apartment ever – in the sense that there was room for everyone there.

The whole floor was covered with bedding, anyone who needed to stay, was welcome. Friends from the wartime, and from before the war, they would return, ask around, find out we were living there and come over. They could stay until they got something of their own.

After the war we found out that my mother's two sisters, and their entire families, were killed in Lask. Apparently, they took all the Jews to the cemetery, and shot them. [In 1942 4,000 Jews were

taken out of the Lask ghetto: 3,500 were taken to the camp in Chelm on the Ner River, and 760 persons were taken to the Lodz ghetto]. Their children were also killed: nephew Daniel, Sala's son and Anka, Hela's daughter.

My mother's brother, Motek, was killed during the war, along with his wife Hela, and their daughter, Anulka. They were taken out of the Lodz ghetto. My step-sister, Sala, died in Auschwitz with her child. They separated the children. The mothers went with their children. Her husband Pinkus survived Auschwitz, I saw him in 1964 in the United States.

My step-brother Hersz was taken to Auschwitz and died in one of the camps after Auschwitz was evacuated. His wife Guta survived, and after the war she emigrated to Israel. She completely cut her ties with our family. Evidently, she wanted to free herself of the past.

The other step-sister, Fela, survived the war. After the war, she married Henryk, when she was already pregnant. She gave birth to two children and in 1957 she left for Israel. Her son Teodor is in Australia, and her daughter lives in Israel. In Poland her name was Ryszarda, but in Israel she is called Ruth. Both the son and the daughter have their own families. Fela is no longer alive.

My mother's brother, Leon, went to England, leaving Spain after the civil war, and he was in the Polish army [12](#). He married an Irishwoman, Minnie, and they had a son, another Daniel. After the war they settled in the USA, in California, in Los Angeles. He worked as a salesman in a shoe-store. He was 55 when he quit that job due to the conflict with the shop owner.

I remember that Aunt Ruth thought he had gone mad, because at his age he would never find another job. I remember that Mother told this story when she returned to Poland, and nobody could understand. He never came back to Poland again. They were not doing very well. And besides, Los Angeles is a bit further [from Poland] than New Jersey, [which is where Ruta lived]. After his wife's death he moved to Israel and he died over there in the 1980s.

My mother's third sister, Ruta, also survived the war, because in 1919 she had gone off to the United States. There she married Aba Fejtlowitz. They had two sons, Daniel and Harvey. My mother went to the States in 1959 – she saw her sister Ruta for the first time in 40 years then.

After that Aunt Ruta came to visit us a few times. She liked it in Poland very much. She especially enjoyed taking trams – she was very pleased that when she got on a tram, people would give up their seats for her. She did not know this custom from the States. She used to bring toilet paper with her [she probably thought Poland was terribly backwards and there isn't enough toilet paper]. Aunt Ruta died in 1981, during martial law [13](#).

In 1959 my mother also met with her brother, Leon. In 1964 I had a scholarship to the States and I got to know them then. Our relations were very warm. I stayed with Aunt Ruta's son [in New Jersey] for four and a half months. I didn't notice them celebrating any Jewish holidays. Uncle Leon also did not know Jewish religion or Jewish customs.

When I was in the States, his son, Daniel, was 18 years old and graduating from high school. He became very religious. I was in their home for Passover and Daniel was making sure that everything was kosher, he did the whole seder celebration, because his father wouldn't know how. His mother was getting very upset that he kept controlling her.

Later Daniel married a minister's daughter. They brought their children up in such a way, that they could all decide on their own what they want to be: Jewish or Protestant. They celebrate the holidays of both traditions.

The first thing I did after the war was to join ZWM [Fighting Youth Union] [14](#) and to sign up for school. I went to school half-legally. I wanted to join straight away the fourth year of gymnasium, although I had only completed elementary school. I thought there was no point for me, at my age, to start with first year students.

One of my friends told me about this teacher who had taught in a gymnasium before the war, and whose ambition it was to be able to recognize all her former students. I went to see her. She pretended to recognize me immediately, claimed to remember me, she said I sat at the third table by the window. Of course, I confirmed that indeed this is where I used to sit and I got the permit.

I went to school, the fourth year, and for half a year I couldn't work because I was catching up all those missing years. I did complete that fourth year of gymnasium then, and without any 3s [C's]. For that matter, I didn't have that many 5s [A's] either. But I decided that this school does not satisfy my ambitions, and I went to one that did. Before the war this was a boy's school named after Pilsudski, and after the war they turned it into the 3rd City Gymnasium on Sienkiewicza Street. This is where I completed two years of high school, while working full time at the ZWM.

I passed my final exams and enrolled in the university, the physics faculty. I wanted to study electricity, but it turned out to be too difficult, after all, to both work and study electrical engineering, so I finally opted for physics, because I thought it would be easier. But after the first semester, I found I couldn't manage that either, even though my friends were helping me.

In Lodz there was a faculty of social pedagogy, and I began to study there. I kept at it for a year and a half, and then I moved to Warsaw, to take a position in the main headquarters of ZMP [Union of Polish Youth] [15](#). I moved to Warsaw on 1st March 1949. I lived at Unii Lubelskiej Square.

It took me until 1953 to bring my mother from Lodz, I only did that when I got a decent apartment, in Muranow district, on Nowolipie Street. That was also when I took [from Lodz] the remaining books and a few pieces of furniture. In Warsaw there was no pedagogy faculty, so I switched to sociology. For one month, this was in October 1955, I worked in the Department of Party History, but I quickly quit this job.

[After our return from the camp] my mother did not work. She had a job from 1954 to 1957 at 'Ksiazka i Wiedza' ['Book and Knowledge' publishing house] as a proofreader. After the political changes of 1956 [16](#) they reduced the staff. My mother could have tried to struggle against this, she was close to retirement age, but we didn't want it to seem like we cared so much about her getting her pension. She just stopped working and began taking care of the house.

In 1955 sociology was reactivated. I got a job at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, at the Polish Academy of Science. The head of my section was Julian Hochfeld [1911 – 1966, sociologist, socialist activist]. I did research on the process of disintegration of the ZMP structure. Later I did studies in the sociology of industry.

In 1956 we were doing our research in Zeran. I was a participant of all the changes taking place in Zeran at the time. Leszek Gozdzik [b. 1931, political activist at the Zeran car factory in Warsaw; leader of Zeran's workers during the anticommunist protests of 1956], the leader of the workers, was in constant touch with us.

I was supposed to go to Zeran in the evening on the day of the famous Plenum of the Central Committee. [In October 1956 the Plenum session of the Central Committee (KC) of the communist party (PZPR) was held under pressure of workers' protests, and with the threat of Soviet military intervention looming in the background. Wladyslaw Gomulka was elected for the position of the First Secretary of the Central Committee]. I stood in the hallway of our apartment, all dressed and ready to go, when my husband got a call – they said, if you want your wife to stay alive, you'd better keep her safe at home. I did not take this to heart and I went to Zeran anyway.

Later I went to work at SGPiS [Main School of Planning and Statistics – school of economics in Warsaw]. I really enjoyed teaching students. I gave lectures in sociology. In 1968 they decided I was unfit for academic work. The secret services sent in this list of people who were to be kicked out from work at SGPiS. But they had to motivate it somehow.

So they wrote that I do not seem promising in terms of my scientific research. Despite the fact that two or three months earlier I had received a post-doc scholarship, because I was finishing up my post-doctoral project. Over 60 persons were fired from SGPiS then.

It was a great tragedy for me, but my students behaved beautifully. I had a group in my MA seminar, twelve students, who sometimes visited me at home. When I told them I had been let go, one of them called to ask if he can come over. I said yes. That afternoon the bell rings, I open the door and there is line of twelve students, each of them holding flowers. This spontaneous gesture of solidarity coming from them really helped me live through the tragedy [of being fired due to Jewish roots].

Fortunately, I had good friends, who found me a job at the Institute of Politics and Scientific Research and Higher Education. But I kept up my fight to return to SGPiS, [despite the fact that] the Party organization accused me of organizing an illegal student demonstration, which was not true. A colleague warned me, however, that they might hire me again at SGPiS, and then throw me out [due to changing political atmosphere]. So I arranged to be [officially] hired again, [but did not return to work] and then resigned of my own free will.

I worked at the Institute until it was dissolved, which was in 1991 I believe. I mean it wasn't totally dissolved, because it still exists, but there used to be 100 persons employed there, and now there are only ten left. Since I was past retirement age at the time, the new director said I might take some contracts from them, but I should not hold up a full time position. So I retired.

For a short period of time after the war, my sister worked at a post-office in Lodz. She cheated about her school years the way I did, except that in her case it was a lie of greater scope. She had finished only a vocational school. And she enrolled at the university without ever admitting that she was not a high school graduate. She told them her school documents were lost. They said she must take the finals. She would have passed them in the humanities, no problem. I don't know, however, how it would have been with math and science.

When she was in her second year of studies she became an assistant of Ossowski, who valued her very highly, and she confessed to him that she did not have the finals. [Stanislaw Ossowski (1897–1963): great Polish sociologist and activist of the democratic opposition; enjoyed great respect and authority among the intelligentsia] When she went to take the exams it turned out there was a document from Ossowski, which said that there is no need for her to take the exam, because she is an excellent student. This way she avoided taking the finals!

Later she worked at Lodz University, then at the INS [Institute of Social Science] in Warsaw, and finally, until her retirement, she worked at the Institute of Sociology and Philosophy, Polish Academy of Science.

She married an Italian. She had studied Italian before the war. Someone had talked her into joining a course. After the war there was a trip to Italy, she was sent as translator, and this is how she met Vico. He fell in love with her and wanted her to move to Italy. She said this was out of the question, so he came here and they got married. And he stayed. They have a daughter who is a writer, her name is Magdalena Tulli.

• Later life

My husband's name was Roman Franciszek Najduchowski. He was born on 21st January 1926, near Cracow. There was terrible poverty in that home. He lived in very bad conditions. This is probably why he got this bone disease, osteonecrosis. He had bone surgery 21 times. They amputated one of his legs. The disease attacked his kidneys.

We met during those two years when I was working at a ZMP school in Otwock, teaching history. My future husband was working at the economics department. Whether or not he knew much about economics then, I do not know. He had graduated from high school.

We got married in 1954 and we moved to Warsaw. My husband decided to continue studying – he graduated in economics at SGPiS. When we were about to get married I asked my mother if she would mind if my husband was not a Jew. She was surprised I would ask – of course she did not mind! She loved my husband.

In 1959 we had our son, Piotr Tomasz. When the child was born, my mother started taking care of him. She did absolutely everything about the house. She wouldn't let me touch the kitchen: she thought that since I am working and my husband is working, it is her duty to do all the domestic chores. I appreciated this very much.

My son sometimes gets up at two in the morning every Friday, and puts the chulent in the oven, so that it's ready for 2pm on Saturday. Then the guests can come. One does not eat chulent alone – so much work, all this getting up in the middle of the night – just to eat alone? But I don't think he is especially attracted to Jewishness. At one point we used to make chulent for Sundays, because we worked on Saturdays. We treat it simply as a dish we make for our friends.

My mother died in 1978. Till the very end she was incredibly fit and active. She is buried in Warsaw in the Northern Cemetery. This is also where my husband's grave is, and those of my mother's cousins.

I was in Israel with my husband, for treatment for his disease, at the turn of 1977 and 1978. I managed to arrange for a certain sum of money from the bank. My sister Felka had left for Israel and was living there at the time, so we had a place to stay. For four months we lived in Bat Yam near Tel Aviv. We experienced great warmth from the people there.

We did lots of sight-seeing. Whenever my husband was not in the hospital, he would join me in my excursions. We were trying to see as much as possible. This was the best thing that could have happened to him before he died. He loved Israel. Unfortunately, there was nothing one could do for him, and my husband died in 1979.

I was in Israel once more, this time with my sister, at the beginning of the 1990s. We stayed with the husband of my sister Felka, but she was no longer alive by that time. Felka had died in the mid-1980s. We did a lot of sight-seeing, going from north to south. I have friends there, people I know from the organization in the Lodz ghetto. They often visit Poland. I also have a good friend from elementary school, Jadzia Rubinstein; we are in touch with each other on a regular basis.

Today I don't work anymore, I live with my son. I miss work a lot. Life without it seems empty. Just three or four years ago I was still working. Now I read a lot. Sometimes I go to the cinema, to the theater or to a museum. Fortunately, I have many good, loving friends. I am happy as long as I have them.

• Glossary:

1 Hotel Polski: A well known German provocation. In 1943 the Germans announced that they would enable all Jews – citizens of neutral countries and territories incorporated into the Reich – to legally emigrate from Poland. They were supposed to be exchanged for German citizens who were being detained by the Allies.

Volunteers were supposed to come to Hotel Polski, which was located at Długa Street 29, and to Hotel Royal on Chmielna Street in Warsaw. Many Jews considered this to be a possibility for saving their lives. They purchased documents of deceased persons or fake documents for huge sums of money.

In 1943 the first transport of Jews left Hotel Polski for a camp in Vittel in France. 4-5,000 people passed through Hotel Polski. Some were shot to death in the Pawiak prison in Warsaw. Most were taken to France and then to death camps in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Approx. 10% survived.

2 Hitler's rise to power: In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one-third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor. On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down.

The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates.

The new Reichstag passed an extraordinary resolution granting the government special legislative powers and waiving the constitution for 4 years. This enabled the implementation of a series of moves that laid the foundations of the totalitarian state: all parties other than the NSDAP were dissolved, key state offices were filled by party luminaries, and the political police and the apparatus of terror swiftly developed.

3 Lodz Ghetto: It was set up in February 1940 in the former Jewish quarter on the northern outskirts of the city. 164,000 Jews from Lodz were packed together in a 4 sq. km. area. In 1941 and 1942, 38,500 more Jews were deported to the ghetto. In November 1941, 5,000 Roma were also deported to the ghetto from Burgenland province, Austria.

The Jewish self-government, led by Mordechai Rumkowski, sought to make the ghetto as productive as possible and to put as many inmates to work as he could. But not even this could prevent overcrowding and hunger or improve the inhuman living conditions.

As a result of epidemics, shortages of fuel and food and insufficient sanitary conditions, about 43,500 people (21% of all the residents of the ghetto) died of undernourishment, cold and illness. The others were transported to death camps; only a very small number of them survived.

4 Poland's independence, 1918: In 1918 Poland regained its independence after over 100 years under the partitions, when it was divided up between Russia, Austria and Prussia. World War I ended with the defeat of all three partitioning powers, which made the liberation of Poland possible.

On 8 January 1918 the president of the USA, Woodrow Wilson, declaimed his 14 points, the 13th of which dealt with Poland's independence. In the spring of the same year, the Triple Entente was in secret negotiations with Austria-Hungary, offering them integrity and some of Poland in exchange for parting company with their German ally, but the talks were a fiasco and in June the Entente reverted to its original demands of full independence for Poland.

In the face of the defeat of the Central Powers, on 7 October 1918 the Regency Council issued a statement to the Polish nation proclaiming its independence and the reunion of Poland. Institutions representing the Polish nation on the international arena began to spring up, as did units disarming the partitioning powers' armed forces and others organizing a system of authority for the needs of the future state. In the night of 6-7 November 1918, in Lublin, a Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland was formed under Ignacy Daszynski.

Its core comprised supporters of Pilsudski. On 11 November 1918 the armistice was signed on the western front, and the Regency Council entrusted Pilsudski with the supreme command of the nascent army. On 14 November the Regency Council dissolved, handing all civilian power to Pilsudski; the Lublin government also submitted to his rule.

On 17 November Pilsudski appointed a government, which on 21 November issued a manifesto promising agricultural reforms and the nationalization of certain branches of industry. It also introduced labor legislation that strongly favored the workers, and announced parliamentary elections.

On 22 November Pilsudski announced himself Head of State and signed a decree on the provisional authorities in the Republic of Poland.

The revolutionary left, from December 1918 united in the Communist Workers' Party of Poland, came out against the government and independence, but the program of Pilsudski's government satisfied the expectations of the majority of society and emboldened it to fight for its goals within the parliamentary democracy of the independent Polish state. In January and June 1919 the first elections to the Legislative Sejm were held.

On 20 February 1919 the Legislative Sejm passed the 'small constitution'; Pilsudski remained Head of State. The first stage of establishing statehood was completed, despite the fact that the issue of Poland's borders had not yet been resolved.

5 Spanish Civil War (1936-39): A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

6 Polish Legions: A military formation operating in the period 1914-17, formally subordinate to the Austro-Hungarian army but fighting for Polish independence. Commanded by Jozef Pilsudski. From 1915 the Legions came under German command, but some of the Legionnaires refused, which led to the collapse of the organization.

7 Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935): Polish activist in the independence cause, politician, statesman, marshal. With regard to the cause of Polish independence he represented the pro-Austrian current, which believed that the Polish state would be reconstructed with the assistance of Austria-Hungary.

When Poland regained its independence in January 1919, he was elected Head of State by the Legislative Sejm. In March 1920 he was nominated marshal, and until December 1922 he held the positions of Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. After the murder of the president, Gabriel Narutowicz, he resigned from all his posts and withdrew from politics.

He returned in 1926 in a political coup. He refused the presidency offered to him, and in the new government held the posts of war minister and general inspector of the armed forces. He was prime minister twice, from 1926-1928 and in 1930.

He worked to create a system of national security by concluding bilateral non-aggression pacts with the USSR (1932) and Germany (1934). He sought opportunities to conclude firm alliances with France and Britain. In 1932, owing to his deteriorating health, Pilsudski resigned from his functions. He was buried in the Crypt of Honor in the Wawel Cathedral of the Royal Castle in Cracow.

8 Warsaw Ghetto: A separate residential district for Jews in Warsaw created over several months in 1940. On 16th November 1940 138,000 people were enclosed behind its walls. Over the following

months the population of the ghetto increased as more people were relocated from the small towns surrounding the city. By March 1941 445,000 people were living in the ghetto.

Subsequently, the number of the ghetto's inhabitants began to fall sharply as a result of disease, hunger, deportation, persecution and liquidation. The ghetto was also systematically reduced in size. The internal administrative body was the Jewish Council (Judenrat). The Warsaw ghetto ceased to exist on 15th May 1943, when the Germans pronounced the failure of the uprising, staged by the Jewish soldiers, and razed the area to the ground.

9 Wielka szpera ('Great Curfew'): On 4th September 1942 the residents of the Lodz ghetto learned that according to an ordinance of the German authorities, all elders above 65 years of age and children below ten years of age would be deported from the ghetto.

Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski, head of the Council of Elders of the Lodz Ghetto, made his most famous speech then: '(...) In my old age I have to hold out my hands and beg: Brothers and Sisters, give them away! Fathers and Mothers, give me your children!' On 5th September 1942 Rumkowski implemented a curfew (German Sperre - closing, blockade, curfew).

The resettling committee began its work of preparing elders and children for deportation. The Jewish police, whose members were assured their children would not be deported, also participated in the action. Policemen with lists of names dragged children and old people out of their homes.

Sick people were also searched for by teams of Jewish physicians and nurses. Small children were torn from the hands of desperate mothers, sick people were dragged out of their beds. At the time everyone was conscious that the fate of the deported would find its end in the death camp in Chelmno upon Ner.

10 Mauthausen: Concentration camp located in Upper Austria. Mauthausen was opened in August 1938. The first prisoners to arrive were forced to build the camp and work in the quarry. On 5th May 5, 1945 American troops arrived and liberated the camp. Altogether, 199,404 prisoners passed through Mauthausen.

Approximately 119,000 of them, including 38,120 Jews, were killed or died from the harsh conditions, exhaustion, malnourishment, and overwork. (Source: Rozett R. – Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 314 – 315)

11 Leftist Organization in the Lodz Ghetto: Anti-Fascist Organization - Lewica Zwiaskowa (Union Left). - The name 'Iewica' (left) began to be used in the 1930s, because the communist party was illegal. Lewica consisted mostly of young people, organized in so-called fives (five-person groups). Zula Pacanowska directed Lewica until 1942, later Hinda Barbara Beatus took over. Other well known members include Samuel Erlich (Stefan Krakowski), Natan Radzyner, Arnold Mostowicz. Their actions consisted mostly of sabotaging labor for the occupant.

12 Polish Armed Forces in the West (PSZ): Military formations of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, organized outside of the country's borders after the defeat in September 1939. At first PSZ forces were stationed in France, but due to the German attack on France, they were evacuated to Great Britain. The soldiers took part in the Battle for England (August 8October 31, 1940).

In 1944 PSZ, alongside the Allied forces, participated in the Normandy landing, where the Poles fought until the surrender of Germany. In 1945 the Polish Armed Forces in the West consisted of approx. 200,000 soldiers. They were dissolved in 1946-1947. Some soldiers returned to Poland, some remained abroad, disagreeing with the new pro-soviet Poland.

13 Martial law in Poland in 1981: Extraordinary legal measures introduced by a State Council decree on 13th December 1981 in an attempt to defend the communist system and destroy the democratic opposition. The martial law decree suspended the activity of associations and trades unions, including Solidarity, introduced a curfew, imposed travel restrictions, gave the authorities the right to arrest opposition activists, search private premises, and conduct body searches, ban public gatherings.

A special, non-constitutional state authority body was established, the Military Board of National Salvation (WRON), which oversaw the implementation of the martial law regulations, headed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the armed forces supreme commander. Over 5,900 persons were arrested during the martial law, chiefly Solidarity activists. Local Solidarity branches organized protest strikes.

The Wujek coal mine, occupied by striking miners, was stormed by police assault squads, leading to the death of nine miners. The martial law regulations were gradually being eased, by December 1982, for instance, all interned opposition activists were released. On 31st December 1982, the martial law was suspended, and on 21st July 1983, it was revoked.

14 Fighting Youth Union (ZWM): Communist youth organization founded in 1943. The ZWM was subordinate to the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). In 1943-44 it participated in battles against the Germans, and hit squads carried out diversion and retaliation campaigns, mainly in Warsaw, one of which was the attack on the Café Club in October 1943. In 1944 the ZWM was involved in the creation and defense of a system of authority organized by the PPR; the battle against the underground independence movement; the rebuilding of the economy from the ravages of war; and social and economic transformations. The ZWM also organized sports, cultural and educational clubs. The main ZWM paper was 'Walka Młodych.' In July 1944 ZWM had a few hundred members, but by 1948 it counted some 250,000. Leading activists: H. Szapiro ('Hanka Sawicka'), J. Krasicki, Z. Jaworska and A. Kowalski. In July 1948 it merged with three other youth organizations to become the Polish Youth Union.

15 Union of Polish Youth (ZMP): Polish youth organization founded in July 1948 as a result of the fusion of the Youth Organization, the Society of the Workers' University, the Union of Democratic Youth, the Union of Fighting Youth, and the Union of Rural Youth ("Call to Arms"). The ZMP was politically and organizationally subordinate to the PPR and subsequently to the PZPR.

It was responsible for putting into practice the communist party's youth policy, and for ideological indoctrination designed to mould the consciousness of young people and set them against older generations. It mobilized young people to work on vast industrial construction sites, organized rivalry at work, controlled discipline at work among young people, participated in the collectivization of the countryside, monitored school curricula from the ideological standpoint, and kept strict control of the work of teachers in secondary schools and at universities.

In 1948 it had some 0.5 million members, in 1951 over a million, and in 1955 around 2 million. During the October political power struggle in 1956 the ZMP collapsed, and it was disbanded in January 1957.

16 Polish October 1956: The culmination of the political, social and economic transformations that brought about the collapse of the dictatorial regime after the death of Stalin (1953).

From 1954 the political system in Poland gradually thawed (censorship was scaled down, for instance, and political prisoners were slowly released - in April and May 1956 some 35,000 people were let out of prison). But the economic situation was deteriorating and the social and political crisis mounting.

On 28th June a strike and demonstration on the streets of Poznan escalated into an armed revolt, which was suppressed by police and army units.

From 19th to 21st October 1956 a political breakthrough occurred, the 8th Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee met under social pressure (rallies in factories and universities), and there was the threat of intervention by Soviet troops. Gomulka was appointed First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, and won the support of many groups, including a rally numbering hundreds of thousands of people in Warsaw on 24th October.

From 15th to 18th November the terms on which Soviet troops were stationed in Poland were agreed, a proportion of Poland's debt was annulled, the resettlement of Poles back from the USSR was resumed, and by the end of 1956 a large number of people found guilty in political trials were rehabilitated. There were changes at the top in the Polish Army: Marshal Rokossowski and the Soviet generals went back to the USSR, and changes also to the civilian authorities and the programs of political factions.

In November 1956 permission was granted for the creation of workers' councils in state enterprises, and the management of the economy was improved somewhat. In subsequent months, however, the process of partial democratization was halted, and supporters of continuing change ('revisionists') were censured.

17 Gomulka Campaign: A campaign to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The trigger of this anti-Semitic campaign was the involvement of the Socialist Bloc countries on the Arab side in the Middle East conflict, in connection with which Moscow ordered purges in state institutions.

On 19th June 1967, at a trade union congress, the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR], Wladyslaw Gomulka, accused the Jews of lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War. This marked the start of purges among journalists and people of other creative professions. Poland also severed diplomatic relations with Israel.

On 8th March 1968 there was a protest at Warsaw University. The Ministry of Internal Affairs responded by launching a press campaign and organizing mass demonstrations in factories and workplaces during which 'Zionists' and 'trouble-makers' were indicted and anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia slogans shouted.

Following the events of March, purges were also staged in all state institutions, from factories to universities, on criteria of nationality and race. 'Family liability' was also introduced (e.g. with respect to people whose spouses were Jewish). Jews were forced to emigrate. From 1968-1971 15,000-30,000 people left Poland. They were stripped of their citizenship and right of return.