Holder Romana

Romana Holder
Warsaw
Poland
Interviwer: Maria Koral
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Mrs. Romana Holder lives in Warsaw with her son. They have a two-bedroom apartment in a block of flats. Mrs. Holder is very fragile. Recently she broke her arm, which has caused her some discomfort, but she is still entirely independent. She speaks with energy and perfect elocution. She remembers many details and has a wonderful sense of humor. She remembers many names of her teachers, friends and neighbors. She tends to reconstruct the world from before the war through tiny details, the slightest of facts, but does not create a full narrative. We spoke about difficult matters, but only once was there a tremor in her voice, when she spoke about her child who died. But there was a sense of outrage in her words when she spoke about the life of her husband after the war and about the current political situation in Poland, in which she feels anti-Semitism is very much present. It is mostly for that reason, in fear for her son's welfare, that Mrs. Holder did not agree to the publication of her story before the year 2015.

My family background

Growing up

During the war

After the war

Glossary

My family background

My family was from Warsaw, all of us. I know nothing about my great-grandparents. I never knew them and we never talked about them at home, for lack of interest in those matters, I suppose. To be honest, I don't know much about my grandfathers either. I had none; when I was born they were gone. I never knew my father's father or his mother, not even their names. I had one grandmother: my mother's mother.

My grandmother's name was Perla, nee Klajnbajcz. I'm sure she was born in Warsaw. I have no idea when she got married, I know nothing about her husband's family or about himself; I never even saw his picture. Mine was not a household where people were interested in their roots, deep down.

My grandmother had a brother, Ludwik, who must have been younger than she was. He had a hat store on Zabia, I think [a prewar street in central Warsaw near the Saski Garden, no longer in existence]. His wife, Gucia, he used to call Guciuchna. They were wealthy people, without children. They had a house–to say a 'palace' would be too much–with a garden, in Sulejowek [a town 20 km

east of Warsaw]. Aunt Gucia was very pretty. She was larger than her husband, portly, dark-blond. She ruled him and knew how to make him fear her. He loved her so much, I don't know how he survived her death. She died before him, during the Warsaw occupation, in the Ghetto, from typhus. I never knew any other of my grandmother's siblings, so she probably didn't have any.

My grandmother's married name was Kropiwko. She had four children: Felek, who ran away to France to escape the tsar's army; then there was, most likely, my mother; after her Mania; and Szymon, the youngest. My grandmother was small, like me; I am very much like her, including the early gray hair. My mother always said she turned gray at an early age. Before I was born, Grandmother sold the Warsaw house–for which my mother never forgave her–and went to France to her son, Felek, who fell ill, I don't know what with. When she came back after his death she was still young and worked taking care of elderly rich people. Then she took care of her younger daughter Mania's household.

Aunt Mania was a very pretty woman, dark. She liked entertainment and frequented 'tombola' balls [Ital.: a party with music and a lottery]. Her husband, Nathan Gleichenhaus, opened a store at Marszalkowska [Warsaw's main street, before the war and now], next to the bar 'Pod setka.' It sold stockings, socks, maybe thread and suchlike, just like haberdashery stores today. But my uncle had little to do with that store, my aunt took care of it. I know he liked to drink; he went to the next-door bar and drank with the waiters. Mostly he spent his time in the company of drunk Poles. He went to the races. Once they said in the paper: 'Mr. Gleichenhaus was shaking like a jelly.' I remember that because the family would talk about it constantly. They lived on Wspolna Street [central Warsaw, outside the old Jewish district]. They had two children: the daughter's name was, I think, Natalka, but I don't know what she had in her birth certificate; the son was Miecio. Natalka was my age, a pretty girl, black hair, gray eyes. Miecio was younger, a pretty boy, too. Uncle Nathan later left them for a woman with three kids. But I don't know whether she was Polish or Jewish. Nobody in the family did. My aunt never remarried. She ran the store until the war.

My mother's brother, Szymon, lived in the Old Town, at Piwna, I think [outside of the Jewish district], with his wife Cesia, also Jewish, and two sons. Those boys were younger than I was; one was Dudek–we called him Dudus–the other's name I can't remember. I don't know what Uncle Szymon did, we didn't see each other very often. He was still very young, 30-something, under 40, when he fell ill with consumption. He went to the Jewish hospital in Czyste [1]. I know that my mother visited him there; either the place was so horrible or his condition so bad, she cried all day. He died of tuberculosis before the war began. We had no contact with his wife and sons.

My mother had a Jewish name, Niselcyrla. I don't know how she became Natalia, they must have called her that since she was a child. She was born in 1890, in Warsaw. I don't know which school she attended and I don't remember any particularly important events from her childhood. She got married in 1911, most likely through a matchmaker. What kind of wedding they had, I have no idea; I'm sure it wasn't held in a synagogue, because a synagogue wedding is very expensive, it's not free. I never asked about that, it didn't cross my mind to ask.

My father's name was Mojzesz Bachner. He was born in 1881, also in Warsaw. He had two sisters and two brothers. Them and my mother's siblings were our closest family. I never met one of my father's brothers, Edward, because he lived in Bydgoszcz [a town approx. 260 km west of Warsaw]; I have no idea how he ended up there. He had no children, no wife, only a lady friend; I think she

was Polish, because we never spoke about her. That's why he didn't get married. I don't know what his occupation was, I was too young to be interested in things like that. He was rich, because when he died he left an inheritance for my father and the two sisters. I don't know whether the other brother, Adolf, got a share of that inheritance.

Uncle Adolf was older than my father. He was the director of some paper factory, but it got closed down and he was left without a job. He couldn't find another; maybe he didn't look for one. For a while he'd come over to our house and scrounge up cigarettes from my dad, his brother. His wife, Regina–I don't know what her maiden name was–looked like all other Aryans. They had two children, Edek and Helena.

Helena was a talented girl. She painted beautifully and her paintings decorated their apartment at Nowolipie [a street in the old Jewish district]. Helena graduated from Law School at Warsaw University. She must have been a few years older than I was, because when I graduated from high school she was already a practicing lawyer, and a good one, too. She was having an affair at the time with this famous prosecuting attorney, Lemkin. But she married below her. Her husband was not a good match at all; he was a traveling salesman of sweets and candy; she was completely out of his league. He was a Jew from Luck [now Ukraine], Lowa Lukacz. A nice, clever guy. I remember their daughter, very pretty, I think her name was Blanka. They lived all together, my cousin with her husband, daughter, mother, father and brother. Helena supported the whole household. In that big apartment she ran her own practice. Her brother Edek was a bit of a failure; he was maybe not retarded, but at least strange. He had a sweet tooth: he'd come to our house, open the cupboard and rummage around for sweets. I remember he used to carry those sweets around in a bag or brief-case and try to sell them, but he would end up eating them instead. I think he was older than I was, but he didn't act older at all. He never got married before the war. That sister of his simply supported him. And his mother adored him.

My father also had two sisters. One was an old maid–Syma or Sima–she was really horrible. She had this big goiter, I couldn't take my eyes off it; I was scared of her. The other aunt was Rozia. A big woman, quite fat, not very pretty; she married Maks Wach, a very decent man. I have no idea what his occupation was. She was very energetic and worked at home, finishing ties. They lived together with Aunt Sima, in the same building we did, at Leszno [part of the Jewish district before the war, now Solidarnosci Avenue], only you entered their staircase thorough a different courtyard. And they had a daughter, Niusia, whom I taught to read and write. That Niusia later played a bad trick on me and died in the Ghetto from diabetes.

Of our family, we were closest to Aunt Mania and Uncle [Nathan]. She was very different from my mom. She went dancing with her husband and they both danced. He even tried to teach me the Charleston, Uncle Nathan did. And Aunt Regina, my father's sister-in-law. My mother's cousin, Pola From, I think, was also in touch with us. Her daughter Emma came to my birthday parties. Later she got married to a man from Belgium. But she came back–I guess they split up and so she came back–and she must have died. Her brother Miecio, a doctor, contacted me after the war.

As I said, my parents were married in 1911. My sister Hanka was born in 1912, me in 1917 and my brother Dawid in 1918, all of us in Warsaw. Where exactly my sister and my brother were born I don't know. From my mother's stories I know she gave birth to me in a gynecological clinic, a private Polish practice, somewhere at Chmielna Street. We lived at 76 Leszno, second house from

Zelazna [in the Jewish district].

My father was basically a tradesman, but I don't think he had any education. He started off as a craftsman in a big shoe factory, 'Slon.' I don't know where it was located, because I don't remember seeing him work there (that was before I was born). I only remember a huge picture of the director–Barke was his name–hanging at our place. And then Father became a tradesman and had a store at the corner of Sienna and Wielka [Wielka, a street downtown, does not exist any more], with leather: 'giemzy' [Ger.: soft goat leather used for shoe-tops, gloves, bags, etc.] and polishes; I remember Sterling polishes were the best. It was a big store with a good selection of leathers. My father had a partner in it, Mr Zylberlast, an engineer, who knew nothing about all that, so my father went bankrupt. When that happened, he fixed up a little store for himself in the courtyard at Franciszkanska [in the Jewish district]. This time he chose leather that goes inside, not outside, the type that is used for the lining of shoes, goatskin. He had great clients there: Strus, Kielman, all of Nowy Swiat [an exclusive street in the center of Warsaw], all those well-known shoe companies.

My father was a smart man; he used to wear a bowler-hat, and later other hats. He was very handsome, mustached, they called him 'the Pilsudski of Franciszkanska' 2. He never talked about himself or his family, he was always busy. He was addicted to dominoes. He used to go to the 'Loursa' cafe [a café well-known already in the first half of the 19th century, under the arcades of the Wielki Theater] to play with other maniacs like himself. I could never understand what that game was all about if it could get grown-up people so obsessed. For me dominoes were a game for children. I'm at a loss, I still don't know what it is all about. But that game cost us! We lost everything because of it, life was miserable. My mom got mad at him when he came home at midnight. Even when he came early and bragged about winning, he said he'd go out again; and he did, I remember that, and lost everything. There was a huge row about that. Once it got so bad there was nothing to eat. I must have been a teenager by then or I wouldn't remember it so well. My mom moved out and stayed with Mania, my aunt. Terrible. There was no dinner at home. But it didn't help any. He promised her he would stop playing – and carried on playing.

My mother was quiet, unless she was ticking my father off for those domino games. She was just a housewife, taking care of us all. She was a handsome woman; my sister resembled her a little and my sister was considered pretty. I remember Mom's picture from before she got married. Each time we looked at it we laughed so hard we cried. It's the clothes she was wearing: the wasp figure, long jacket, an even longer skirt, a hat with some feather, and to top it all she had some kind of a collar, but she wasn't wearing it but holding it in her hand and it looked like a tail.

My mom called my father Moryc or Maurycy and he called her Talka. They called me 'kid', that is, my father did; I think my mother called me Romcia. I used to say 'Daddy' to him, but later I called him 'Father.' My brother was called Dada, just that, even later. At home we spoke Polish; everybody in our family spoke good Polish, without an accent. My mom definitely knew Yiddish, my father probably did too, because sometimes they jabbered to each other when they didn't want me to know what they were saying. I did understand some words, but not everything. Grandma Perla must have known Yiddish in her youth. And the rest of the family? I never heard them speak Yiddish.

Growing up

We lived at 76 Leszno, on the third floor, two rooms with a kitchen, a toilet in the hall, no bathroom–there were no bathrooms then. I took my bath in a large basin, then in a tub. I remember the tub hanging in the hallway with writing on it which said ‘Down with Mrs. Bachner’s laundry!’ We wrote that, me and my brother, because we didn’t want my mom to do the washing and be tired. My mom used to go to the bathhouse–state, municipal, I don’t know who owned them. She took me once, maybe, but I didn’t want to go again. There was a stove in the room which heated in two directions. I remember a ticking clock, a cupboard, a couch, a table. We had electric light and small oil lamps. We had a wood stove and a small gas one, similar to those we use today. The kitchen was very small and not very interesting for me. There was a table, a shelf, a sink and a bed for the maid. We also had a cellar in which the food was kept. I never went there because I was damn scared of the cellar, I still never go. My mom did all the cooking by herself and she was a good cook. The maid helped her with the peeling, plucking, keeping the stove hot. The maids were mostly Polish. The last one’s name was Marysia; she lasted till the end of freedom [until the Ghetto was created in 1940]. She was a very decent girl, and handsome. But earlier there was one called Elsa, a young one, who was a Volksdeutsche 3. She was once visited by a cousin or an uncle who asked what she was doing in a Jewish house.

My parents obviously felt Jewish, I’m sure of that. In those times it used to be called ‘of Moses’ creed.’ I think they had Jewish names in their papers. My mother was a little religious; she didn’t wear a wig. She lit the candles on Friday, but then, when it got closer to the tragedy, she stopped; there was no point in keeping that up. I don’t know if the kitchen was kosher or not, but I don’t think so. But before the war we never ate pork. Only later did I start buying ham for myself. I remember that during the war, in the Ghetto, my father would get mad that my mother bought meat from peasants: Polish meat, which meant pork. He didn’t want to eat it, but then he had to. My father was a man with no teeth, ever since I can remember. And he never agreed to have teeth made for him, he had to eat everything ground or chopped, even then. [My mother did not celebrate the Sabbath] because father had a bad stomach; he was on a diet and couldn’t eat certain things. He had doctor’s orders to eat fresh food, it had to be made fresh every day. He ate on the Day of Atonement. He was a superstitious man, but he never went to synagogue, never observed any of the laws. [Did your father go to the mikveh?] I don’t know, he never told me. He prayed in the morning, before going out, because he was superstitious. It’s only because he was afraid that he’d put on that thing, I don’t know what it was called, he put something on his head, a black square thing, and another on his arm; I think it was made of leather [tefillin]. He also had a white cloth with black stripes [tallit]. There was a mezuzah by the door to the apartment. My father used to touch it whenever he came or went; my mother never did.

My mother’s home was very different from that, because my grandmother was not observant. After all, she’d lived for quite a long time at that other daughter’s house. And Mania’s house was totally ‘anti’: my mother’s sister was very assimilated. She didn’t celebrate anything. She passed for a shikse and felt like one. Why my mother was different, I don’t know. She was the only one to be so [i.e. to live according to Jewish tradition]. As I said, she lit the candles on Friday and she did something over them [blessed them], then she covered her face and whispered something, I don’t know what. I remember there was always fish for Friday dinner, boiled carp. Later, after the war, I did that, too; I learned it from my mom. I can give you the carp recipe. Carp in jelly: Ingredients: carrots, celery root (or celery stalks), parsley root (or fresh parsley), 1 onion; cleaned fish cut into pieces; salt and pepper; butter. Make vegetable stock, take out the vegetables. Place the fish in a

small amount of the stock, add butter, pepper and salt and cook for about 30 mins. Place the cooked fish on a platter, garnish with the vegetables, cover with stock, and chill until the stock thickens into jelly. You can add raisins for a sweet version of the dish.

At home we celebrated the Easter holidays [Pesach]. My mom did all this cleaning, I remember that. She had some pots and pans, separate tableware which she kept in a cupboard behind glass doors, wine glasses, all those treasures. For those holidays my mother baked special cookies, macaroons, made with almonds only. I remember when she made them she hid them from us, otherwise we would eat them all. On the holiday evening the table was set and everything was there. We sat around it: mother, father and us, the three kids. For a while we thought it was all very pretty. And the food was delicious, we always looked forward to those holidays, especially I looked forward to the matzah balls. Matzah balls: Pour water over 1 cup of matzah flour with salt; add 2 eggs, 1 tablespoon of butter and fresh parsley leaves. Form balls and place them in the refrigerator for 15 minutes so they thicken; Cook them in boiling salted water untill they swell (about 15 mins); serve with boulion.

I remember a little plate was placed on the table with something that tasted bad, bitter… maybe it was horseradish [maror]. There were eggs and matzah. Matzah was bought at the bakers, I think, because it was round and very tasty. Later Mom also bought commercial matzah [baked in large bakeries, mass-produced]. I remember a pillow was placed next to my father and under the pillow something was hidden, matzah or something else, and we had to find it [afikoman]. We didn't play at that for long, but you remember things like that. Father would trick us, push the table, pretend the wine got spilled from the glass. I think Father prayed during those holidays, but I honestly have to say I'm not very well informed. There were these little dark red or reddish-purple books in our house written in Hebrew. I don't know what those prayers said. When we got older, we made fun of our father, because all that seemed funny to us then. We were terrible. One time, already as a grown man, my brother went out to have a drink of cider or beer on the Day of Atonement, when my mother was fasting. We were bad too, me and my sister. So our home was neither this nor that. In December we always had a Christmas tree. No presents, but dressing up the tree was a lot of fun. I liked that very much, and my sister took part in it too: we made the baubles, paper link chains… But that was entirely our–the kids'–affair. We copied it from our friend in the same house, Marysia Feldman. She had a tree, which made me jealous, so I wanted one too. I remember Purim and [the Feast of] Tabernacles, but we didn't celebrate those holidays. I remember them from the homes of our neighbors.

Our house was a large, four-story building. It had a booth built in, very pretty, made of glass and bricks. The owners of the house–Mr. Rowinski and his family, who went to Israel even before the war started–celebrated their dinner [Sukkot] there. Others camped out in the courtyard–that's how I knew about the holiday. It was a very pretty courtyard, with a long, egg-shaped garden and trees. The staircase was rather shoddy, wooden, with two apartments on each floor; yes, there were us and the neighbors. Now the front was much more elegant. Some relatives of my father's used to live there, some cousin or other. As I said earlier, my father's sisters also lived in that house, only their entrance was off a different courtyard. There was a janitor at the main gate, a Pole, I think his name was Walenty. I remember how the children teased him and he'd chase them around the courtyard with a broom. He locked the gate for the night and you had to ring to have it opened. Some people gave him a tip, others didn't. When my father went playing dominoes and came back

at night the janitor had to go up the stairs with him and turn on the light. Many people lived in that house, a thousand souls. You could say it was like a little town. Both Poles and Jews lived there. I suppose people who were neighbors had some contact with each other. My mother claimed they were all gossips, but she had her buddies too. They spoke Polish to each other.

Across from us lived the Aleksandrowicz family. They were real Jews. Something was always cooking there, because they had all these children. Later they moved to a different place because they only had two rooms, like us. Then Mrs. Gelbfisch moved in. Their daughter said her name was Irka Goldfish [Ger.: gelb-yellow, fisch-fish]. A pretty girl, later she grew up to be quite a lady and got married. Then the Janowers came, who had two daughters. One of them got married, but the other didn't, I don't think. There were no Polish families in our part of the building, everybody was Jewish… No, there was Mrs. Jakubowska at the ground floor with a son of a different sexual orientation. He would approach boys on the street and there were rows about that. Poor woman–his mother–she was very nice. What happened to them? They must have moved out, it was the Ghetto after all 4, so they had to leave. That was the only Polish family in our stairwell.

On the fourth floor lived the Edelsztajns, with three children. There was a girl, older than me, maybe even older than my sister. She graduated from the department of Polish literature and language and got married, to a Jew, naturally. After the war she was a professor of grammar. Her name was Salomea Szlifersztejn [1912-1994, a professor of linguistics at Warsaw University]. Her daughter emigrated to Sweden after 1968.5 Her sister Lotka–what kind of a name is that?–was a Halutz scout before the war. She belonged to this organization 6 that trained young people to go to Israel, and she did go. There was a son, too, but I think he was killed. Opposite us, on the fourth floor, there lived Janka, a terrible woman, an anti-Semite. In the corner, there was Dziunia Fajertag, a communist, very ugly; that's probably why she was a communist. She later went to the Soviet Union with her beau, a Pole. And why the hell did they come back? They didn't do well over there, so they came back here and got killed. Marysia Feldman, that friend of mine, lived with her parents a floor below. Her mother was a music teacher and her father a traveling salesman of a very well known company selling clothes fabrics, called AGB, at Marszalkowska. Across the courtyard from us, on the first floor there lived a mother with two daughters. Her name was Berta, as far as I can remember. When I was small I used to go there, because she used to baby-sit kids, two or three at a time. She was cross-eyed and I learned from her to cross my eyes, so my mother took me away. Then a young Jewish girl came to our house, Pola. I can't remember her last name. She had three sisters. She taught me to read, taught me my first letters, she even taught me about nature, for example where ice comes from.

When I was 6, I went to kindergarten, even though I could read and write. That was because of that friend from downstairs, Marysia Feldman. She was disabled. She was born with a hip they had to operate on seven times and still it didn't help, because she couldn't walk right to the end of her life. So I had to go to school with her. We walked from Leszno to Przejazd Street, [a street in the old Jewish district no longer in existence; near the intersection of today's Andersa and Solidarnosci] . We went to Goldman-Landauowa's private school for girls. 5 Przejazd Street was the address; it's where the movie theater is today [Muranow, near Bankowy Square]. The school had a very nice building; there were eight grades with a pre-kindergarten and kindergarten class; we went from Monday till Friday, Saturdays and Sundays were free–the only school which worked like that. We went for six hours, from 8am to 2pm. Our headmistress was baptized for sure, her sister Julia, the

secretary, looked like a hundred shikses. The headmistress's husband was a gym teacher in the lower grades. I remember they had her portrait done and hung it on the wall in the main gym hall. She was a crazy woman. Once she caught my friend with dyed hair and stuck her head in the sink.

For a short while, in kindergarten, I was the top student. Later I also had good grades, I did study. I had a breakdown in the 4th grade, because our teacher committed suicide out of love. She poisoned herself. Her name was Wanda Konowna, she was a teacher of Polish. She fell in love with a well-known chess-player, Frydman, I think. Her parents came for her body from Lodz in this special car and I remember we followed it [the hearse, which later went to Lodz]. We all had fits of crying, we couldn't deal with regular classes, it was awful. She was a lovely woman. Another teacher, Pola Borensztajn or Berensztajn, taught German. I had only occasional contact with her because I took French. She called me by my full name, very official. A petite woman, we called her 'the flea.' She was funny; she seemed to be afraid of us. I did like some of the school subjects. I liked math, but only algebra, geometry was beyond me. The math teacher's name was Glas. We really made her miserable, we were so bad. Today, when I think about it, I don't know why girls go like that. One of my friends, called Bander, pretended she went mad and wanted to throw herself out the window. Poor Glas ran around the classroom begging us to stop her. Good God!

I also really liked Latin, because I was in love with the teacher. His name was Halpern and he was very handsome. He addressed us by our first names (not everybody did). I ran into him later, at the Jewish community office, in the Ghetto by then, I think; anyway, the Germans were already here. He pretended he didn't know me. I did too. So. He was married to our [nature] teacher, a big blond called Bronislawa. He was a Jew and she was not. She died of typhus in the Ghetto. I don't think he survived either. I also liked ancient history, I really did. It was taught by the director, the history teacher's husband. First he was our history teacher, then her. His name was Dinces. Later I didn't like history so much. Somehow it wouldn't stick in my head, I couldn't remember the dates. We had no Yiddish at school but we did have history of the Jews, up to 4th grade. Our teacher's name was Inwentarz. I read very well, articulating everything clearly, so I was always called on to read everything. He gave me these thick volumes to read; it was something religious, but I don't know what. I read in Polish, but I didn't understand a word of it. Poor Mr. Inwentarz, we didn't take his class very seriously and we made fun of him. He once wrote: 'The whole class wanders around the class and nobody takes any notice when I call them to attention.' Oh, there are things one never forgets... Marysia, from the floor below, didn't like that teacher and once she spoke back to him rudely. Her mother had to take her out of the school. She went to the Polish school run by Mrs. Warecka at Nowy Swiat. 10% of their intake were Jews. But my school was basically Jewish. Even though the headmistress was probably baptized, only Jewish girls went to that school. A Polish girl came once, stayed a few days and left. I guess she didn't like it. She was probably from a mixed marriage, otherwise she wouldn't have come to that school in the first place; that's what I think.

A dancer, Pola Nirenska, the wife of Jan Karski [7] graduated from that school. She danced at all our events, back at school. Then she went to the Ballet School, not Wysocka's but a different one. Then she went abroad and made a career there.

There were around twenty of us in my class. I used to remember all the names. At the front desk there sat a very good student, Gehen; she was good at math and physics, but she wouldn't help anyone cheat. Next to her, there was this girl from some provincial place, very miserable-looking. There was Rega Segal, the daughter of the director of the Jewish Theater. I used to go there a lot,

to that theater–at Dzika? Gesia?–[Ed. note: probably the Jewish Theater at Dzika; in 1930-33 a theater hall there was used by Jewish theater companies] because she'd drag me there with her. I think at school she sat with this Russian girl, Zenia Weksler. At the next desk sat Polcia Klaps, who looked like a shikse. Then Zosia Kestenbaum and Celinka Finkelkraut, who lived closest to me, on Chlodna, at the corner of Zelazna. Then Runia Bander, who was friends with Halinka Zlotogora. I saw Halinka later in the Ghetto; she already had a child and a musician husband. Then Zosia Klajnbart, Franka Jarlicht, and next to her this girl who was emotionally unstable, as we later decided, who committed suicide, even before the war. I also remember this wild Bronka, who pretended to faint in class and we had to carry her out. Good grief! There was also Zula Wermus, she went to dancing school. Our headmistress said it was either dancing or school so she quit dancing. She wrote very beautiful compositions. Another one was Anka Bortner who, I think, never graduated.

I sat in the last row, with Lola Henigman. But I hung around with Halinka Zlotogora, Anka Bortner and Rozka Madrzak. Rozka was the youngest of three daughters of the owner of 'Plutos,' a large chocolate factory. Very wealthy people; they lived at 31 Krolewska [a smart street downtown, near the Saski Garden]. That was a huge, beautiful house, with 11 rooms or so. And I'll never forget one special room with a couch on which only pillows were arranged. I also remember the food was strange at their house; there was no bread for dinner, only chocolate. Rozka sometimes invited friends over but not everybody. All three daughters of the Madrzak family died during the war, only the son survived. After the war I had this very short meeting with my friends, including Franka Jarlicht, who didn't spend the occupation here but went to Israel [Palestine] with her husband. Anka Bortner also visited me. After the war I got a call from the headmistress's son, a car mechanic. He wanted to find those of us who had survived the war. But there was only one other one–Zosia Klajnbart. He wanted to put together a commemorative album. His mother, our headmistress, died before the war, I think.

Our school was politically undefined. On September 1st [the beginning of the school year in Poland] they took us to the Tlomackie Synagogue [a large synagogue in the center of Warsaw, built in the Renaissance style in 1872-78] for a service. Professor Schorr 8 read to us, I don't know what, I only remember it was in Polish. One time we simply walked out of the service, because someone let out a pigeon with a red ribbon tied to its leg–a very communist gesture. Our class teacher quickly took us out of there. At school there were some leftist girls, I'm sure, but I don't know if they belonged to any organization. We didn't care for politics much. I also wasn't interested in finding out if my friends were religious, but I think they came from homes like mine.

I never studied anything outside of school. I remember once, when my brother had his confirmation [Ed. note: bar mitzvah], someone came to teach him. So I took the opportunity to learn some Hebrew from him. But when he mispronounced some word, said 'eart' instead of 'earth,' I couldn't stop laughing and I quit studying, just like that. I do remember a few words: 'tsipor ofo, tsipor ofo' [Hebr. Tsipor afa–the bird flew away], which means something like the bird went away? I also don't remember anything from the celebration or whether it was held in the synagogue or not. There may have been a lunch or a dinner.

My brother was a good boy, really. When he was younger, he was stupid and beat us up. My mother would chase him around the table with a carpet-beater. You never forget things like that. When he was young, he played with the neighbors' children out in the yard. Then he had some

friends at school. He went to a secondary school where most of the students were Jewish, too. The school was called ‘Spojnia’ and was a teachers’ cooperative, somewhere at Dluga [a street downtown, on the border of the Jewish district]. It was a school for boys, rather leftist. We had the same geography teacher, Stefcia Halbersztat. She had a crush on my brother and they went to Zakopane together later. She married an eye-doctor, Arkin. My brother didn’t want to go to college, because he didn’t like studying, but he did graduate from high school. I remember I went to stand at the door of his school when he was taking his matriculation exam, because I was very worried about him. Until the war he worked in our father’s leather store at Franciszkanska.

My sister did not finish school; she was the lazier one, that is. She went to a Polish school, to Matyskowa. Natalka, Aunt Mania’s daughter, also went there and also never finished, because she wouldn’t study. The school was near Koszykowa Street [in the center of Warsaw, outside the old Jewish district], but I don’t know what the name of the street was, because it was quite far away from us. In the 5th grade something came over my sister and she said she wouldn’t go to school any more and nothing could make her. I remember how my mother screamed at her for not wanting to study or read.

I don’t know what I read at school. I was very taken by this book called Zycie dziewczat [‘Girls’ Lives’], I can still remember the opening of that book. It was about these two sisters, one of which is very sick; it was all very sad. I can’t remember if there was a library at school. I never borrowed books from there. I went to the ‘Humanite’ library at 14 or 16 Leszno. Even during the war, not the owner, but the woman she employed, came to Leszno where I lived and brought me a book which was a hit at the time, I can’t remember anymore what the title was. She came and brought me fresh books for a while, but then she stopped coming. Before the war, there were basically no books at my house except for the ones I bought at the Wirgin bookstore at Elektoralna Street [downtown] and the dark red [religious] ones; I can’t remember any others. Anyway, there was no space with three kids in two rooms. My mother probably read what I did and I never saw my father reading. He was busy doing something else: playing dominoes. As far as papers went, we read Nasz Przeglad 9. I remember my brother entered a quiz there, because there was also Maly Przeglad [Mini Review, one of a number of supplements, established by J. Korczak 10, published in 1926-39, addressed to children and co-edited by them]. My brother won a tennis racket in that competition.

Politics wasn’t much of a subject in our house. My father was not interested in it at all. I know he liked Pilsudski very much and my mother thought that as long as Pilsudski was in power things would be all right. So they voted for him. I remember once Dziunia Fajertag, the communist from our courtyard, came over asking us to keep some papers [leaflets, illegal materials] for her. When my father found out about it he almost kicked me out of the house. My parents didn’t belong to any party, nothing like that. My sister and brother never belonged to any organizations either, never went on youth camps, they were an asocial bunch. And neither did I; I never went on summer camp.

In the summer we went to a place near Warsaw, in the direction of Otwock [a pre-war resort around 30 km south-east from Warsaw]. When we were small we went to Michalin, Jozefow and Swider, later to Srodborow. We took the train and our stuff went on a horse-drawn cart. We used to go for two whole months. What did we do there? I don’t know. We lived in a guesthouse, my mother did all the cooking. My father didn’t come with us. He went to the ‘Srodborowianka’ house [in

Srodborow]. That was a private guesthouse which belonged to a doctor, whose name was Gorewicz, I think. Father spent his holidays there and got his meals there. Unfortunately, I spent one summer with his sister Rozia–the two sisters always went together–but I can't remember where that was. I only remember this one incident when my aunt bought a pastry for her daughter, who wouldn't share it with me. So my memories are not very happy. For a while I was in Sulejowek [a small town 20 km east of Warsaw] at my grandmother's brother's, Ludwik's. That was when my brother got sick with scarlet fever. I remember an aunt there who was unbelievably stingy–when she bought sour cream, she waited until it went really thick before she let us eat it. There was another niece of hers there with me; we were both very young girls then, just kids really. Another time I went with Marysia Feldman to a guesthouse in Srodborow, run by a Mrs. Markuszewicz. On Sundays in Warsaw we went to Skaryszewski Park [a park on the east bank of the Vistula river, created at the beginning of the 20th century] with my mom, and Marysia and her mom. I don't know why we didn't go to Saski Park [a park in downtown Warsaw, created in the first half of the 18th century, often visited by Jews between the wars], which was closer. I guess it was fashionable to go to Skaryszewski. I remember once when we were getting off a tram at the corner of Chlodna and Zelazna [downtown] my brother was hit by a bike. But he was all right as far as I can remember.

As for our medical care, before the war we did not belong to the Insurance [an institution in Poland between 1920 and 1934 which provided free medical care to the insured]. We had a doctor come over to our house. Doctor Zacharewicz came to our father, and Doctor Roszkowski to us, the kids. They were both Polish, I can't remember a Jewish doctor. No, sorry, there was one, Zylberlast, the brother of my father's partner from that store on Sienna. He would always say, 'Well, as far as I'm concerned…' which meant he was taking no responsibility for his words, so we didn't particularly trust him. I remember having blood drawn when I was sick once. I was about 14. A guy came from a clinic–a doctor or no doctor–and said: 'Lie still or the needle may pop out.' So I said I wouldn't let him do it. So he left and my mother had to chase him down the staircase to bring him back. Finally he did draw my blood. My mom also took us to the dentist.

I took my matriculation exam in 1935, I think. I remember I studied for it together with Celinka Finkelkraut and she failed. She had to take it again the following year and I felt very sorry for her. I didn't study history with Celinka, but with Bander, Runia Bander. First I had an exam in Polish. Then, even though I liked math and couldn't do physics, I had an exam in physics. Since Rega Segal was sitting right in front of me, I said to her: 'If you don't help me, I'll kill you!' and the poor thing did; I would have never been able to do it without her help. And Latin. I had a very good grade in Latin, because I liked the teacher, unlike the other subjects where I had threes and fours [B's and C's]. The Latin teacher must have been scared we wouldn't pass, so before the exam he dictated lists of words to us. And I got lucky. My mother's cousin was a Latin teacher (she graduated from the Latin Philology department at the University) and she came to us from Konskie [around 160 km south from Warsaw]. Basing on those lists of words she figured out what I would have to translate in the exam. Can you believe that?! And indeed, when I went to the exam, he gave me that text. So I passed it with flying colors.

After matriculation I decided to study at the University. A friend, Irka, and I, we applied. But I didn't go to a single class. I decided it was too much for me and said 'No way, I'm not going.' The first exam came along–with Witwicki [Wladyslaw Witwicki, 1878-1948, philosopher, psychologist,

professor at Warsaw University]– which I didn't study for, I didn't even open a book. So I never went, and my friend did the same. But I couldn't just sit around and do nothing. So I started attending sewing classes at ORT 11. I was very good at drawing and I planned to become a fashion designer. My mother even wanted me to go to Vienna, to learn cutting, because Vienna was known for fashion design. But it all came to nothing. I didn't do well at ORT, because I didn't like sewing. I went to that school, but it didn't make sense really. I went for almost a year, but didn't even take the exam at the end.

At ORT, I met Blima Ramler from Kolomyia [now Ukraine]. I renamed her Lidka. She was a very good student of sewing, unlike me. She did all the machine-sewing for me. She was a lovely girl: small, dark. Once I invited her home for chulent. I got my mom to make chulent. I liked it very much, I don't know where from, because we very rarely had it at home. My father wouldn't eat it. So she came to dinner, but she didn't like the chulent. We remained friends even after ORT. She graduated and went back to Kolomyia. Once she came to Warsaw with her fiance, Henryk, to see an exhibition. They knew each other from a school in Kolomyia. She was five years older than him. He studied law in Lwow [now Ukraine]. In Warsaw, they stopped at my and my parents' house and stayed for two days. Then she invited me to Kolomyia and I spent ten days there. They behaved as if they were married, which they weren't. I don't remember the town at all. I only remember that I was very popular as the girl from Warsaw and that we went dancing in 'Cafe Roma.' I met Henryk's friend there, Emanuel, Menio. He enlarged my high school graduation picture and touched it up so that my headmistress at school said I wore makeup for it. Ridiculous! I had that portrait up on the wall above my bed. That friend went to the Soviet Union after the war broke out, and after the war went to Cuba, where his uncle had a hotel. There it turned out that the hotel was a brothel, and Menio went to Israel.

Around 1938, Lidka wrote to me because she was getting married to Henryk. I even got her a special hat at my milliner's and sent it to her by mail. I know that until the war she was a very popular seamstress in Kolomyia and her husband worked at a friends' law firm as an apprentice. They didn't have children.

My other friend was Marysia Feldman, the one from the floor below. She graduated from the Warecka Gymnasium. She never went to college either. I think she was out of school already when she got married, after the death of her mother. I remember I went to that funeral with my mother. It was held at the cemetery at Gesia [Jewish cemetery at Okopowa]. But I ran away; I must have heard the weepers and I ran away. After her mother's death, Marysia got married to Elek Kahan. She was very young, maybe 18? I don't think I went to their wedding, I don't know what it was like. Her husband Elek–what kind of a name is that?–had a brother Mulek; they were the sons of the editor of a Jewish newspaper, a very quiet man. I can't say what kind of a paper it was. Their mother, Szoszana, was an actress, and behaved like one. There was a daughter there, too, Lilka, who became a dancer and then also gave recitations. I remember her reciting at IPS, the Art Institute [Institute for Art Propagation, a cultural and artistic institution active in 1930-1939, which organized shows, exhibitions, etc.], at Prosta. They lived at Nowolipki.

Those two brothers belonged to a group called 'Balagania,' a dozen or so men, all from the Polytechnic. I met them through Marysia. It all started when she got married to Elek and they would come to play bridge at her place. I didn't play, though they tried to teach me. I think they were all Jewish. One of them, from Lodz, didn't look like a Jew, but was Jewish for sure. His name was

Knaperbaum. Another's name was Kacap, but that wasn't a real name. He lived at 13 Leszno. There was Stasiek Lipecki, who survived in the Soviet Union. Then there was Szmulenty Baran: 'Baran' [the ram] because his hair was kinky, but his real name was Eilenberg [Samuel Eilenberg, 1913-1998, professor of mathematics, one of the creators of homological algebra]. He was a mathematician, very talented; at 21 he already had a PhD in mathematics. He went to America and stayed there because the war broke out. My beau, Beniek Trokan, already had his degree in surveying. We were dating for something like seven years. Then he said his mother thought that since we had been together so long we should get married. I had no such intention, I had other things to think about, so we split up. There was also Ignas Tyrmand, not a member of the 'Balagania' group, but he would come to play bridge. I think he worked for his father's wire business. I don't exactly understand how he was related to Leopold [Leopold Tyrmand, 1920-1985, prose-writer and journalist, connoisseur and propagator of jazz; from 1966 lived abroad], anyway, it was a very close relation. They used to come to play bridge and we went to the movies together. We always went at the last minute, by taxi, to the late, 10 o'clock show. When I was a girl, they didn't always want to let me into the movie, because I looked very young. My mother suggested that I show them my high heels. I bought my clothes at Vilars's, at Marszalkowska, I remember that as if it was today. He was the owner of a women's clothing firm. A friend of my sister's, Irka Fenigsztajn, was his girlfriend, but then she married someone else.

As I said earlier, my sister never finished school. She took some accounting courses and found a job. She worked for a few years. Then she got sick, mentally sick, I should say. She was afraid to go out on the street. She once fainted on the street, so she later had these fears. But finally she got married in 1937. I don't know how they met, they dated for a short time. His name was Abram Feldman and my sister renamed him Adam, though at the beginning she did call him Abram. I know very little about him, because he was from Radom. I know he was a tradesman dealing in metal products, ovens for farmers or something like that. I have to say that at their wedding I was only a spectator, I didn't take part in all that commotion. The wedding took place in a room rented from a rabbi from Norway or somewhere. That rabbi, if he was a rabbi at all, was wearing plain clothes, no robes or anything, only, I have to say, he did wear a hat. I don't know, I guess he prayed in Hebrew. It was a very secular wedding because my brother-in-law was a leftist and he didn't go in for that stuff. (He didn't say the Kaddish for his mother when she died, for which his sisters never forgave him.) I know he did break the glass at the wedding. My sister was wearing a beautiful white striped suit. It's difficult for me to say what kind of people came, because I hardly knew anyone. I only remember that my mother forgot to serve the salad with the dinner (back at home). The next day she found the salad on the windowsill. Those are the things you remember.

After the wedding, my sister and her husband went to Lublin. He once came to visit me with his sister, Salomea I think, from Radom. She was very ill, and it turned out she had cancer; I think it was bone cancer. She stayed in bed in our house for three days and some professor came to see her. Then her husband–for her husband came with her too–took her back to Radom in an ambulance. The other sister's name was Kala. Salomea was not entirely assimilated, the way my brother-in-law was. My sister's husband also had a brother, but I can't remember his name. He was an important army official in the communist army; I saw his name in a Russian encyclopedia. In 1937 or 1938, more likely 1938, my nephew Gucio was born. He was born in Warsaw, because it was a complicated delivery. Then they went to Lublin, but not right away. They stayed in Lublin until the war.

In 1937, the year my sister got married, I started working in the ‘Linia i Litera’ print shop. It started out at Krochmalna [in the Jewish district] in a rundown building. I worked in the basement, in this horrible office, somewhere under the stairs. Then a new building was put up, on Grzybowska, I think [in the Jewish district], where the print shop was located on the first floor. I ran the office there: I paid the workers their salaries, typed various things and did some accounting. A real accountant came occasionally to check if everything was in order. I even went to the tax office occasionally; they sent me there to make sure they weren’t getting in trouble. It was a big company, with over a dozen workers and draftsmen employed. I remember I had four bosses: Michal Walersztajn, Jerzy Bursztyn–a bon vivant and a very handsome man–and two others: a type-setter and a machinist who made prints on those printing machines. They printed posters, booklets. I remember how we botched a job once with one of them. We were supposed to print a Philips radio manual. We had plates with the drawings. But even though he checked them and I checked them, we didn’t notice that the drawings were upside down. Nothing happened, because it was on the day before the war broke out. When the Germans came in, the print shop lasted a month or two and was closed down.

There was a boy in that print shop who went around on a bike with boxes of printed material. Very well-behaved, pleasant and nice. And then, when the Germans were here, someone saw him in an SS uniform.

During the war

There were both Jews and Poles at Leszno, where we lived, but really there were no anti-Semitic clashes. Maybe once only. I remember there was a family, quite religious. I can’t remember how many sons there were. One of those sons was beaten to death by Polish boys. He was 12 or 13. I will never forget that funeral in the courtyard. Terrible. And once when I was walking down Marszalkowska with that beau of mine, Beniek, suddenly these heavies started breaking windows in the stores, including Hirszfelds, this big delicatessen.12 So we grabbed a carriage and I went home. Really annoying. Once I had to pay for my own lack of common sense. I was given a costume, Tyrolean-style, gray with green stripes, with red and white lining, Tyrolean lapels and buttons (later, in the Ghetto, an acquaintance took it away in a suitcase, because I was afraid to keep it). So I went out on the street in this costume, got on a tram and this woman said: ‘Well, well, a Jewish broad wearing this?!’ What do these people have against Jews? In August 1939 I was in Muszyna [a resort in the south of Poland, in the Beskid hills] with this friend of mine from the print shop. We were coming back from Zegiestow [a resort near Muszyna] on a train. We were the last ones to get on the train and this man looked at us and said: ‘Those Jews, they’re everywhere.’ Well, that’s enough for me.

I retuned to Warsaw from Muszyna on 23rd August. My brother was in Zakopane. On 1st September 1939 I went back to work at ‘Linia i Litera’ [on 1st September 1939 the German army crossed the Polish border and World War II began]. One of my bosses said they were putting up posters about the draft, so I started crying. So this son-of-a-bitch, one of the owners, says, ‘What are you crying for?’ So I said ‘What do you mean, what for? I have a brother who is 18.’ My brother responded to the Umiastowski order 13 in September, I think. A whole group of my friends went as well. My sister’s little son moved in with us, because at the time [when the war broke out] he was spending his holidays in Srodborow with my mother. So my mom walked back to Warsaw with this child in her arms under the falling bombs. I remember she told me how she walked across the

bridge with him, scared to death.

Then I went looking for my sister and my brother-in-law. I went to Bialystok [a town in north-east Poland, approx. 200 km from Warsaw], because everybody who was leaving went through Bialystok. The cafes in Bialystok were all covered with slips with names written on them. One of those slips told me my brother-in-law and my sister were in Luck. From there they were planning to go to Lwow, because my brother-in-law wanted to look up his brother, who was somebody important in the Soviet army. I stayed with them for a month and then signed up to go back to Warsaw–with my sister, because, after all, her child was there without his mother.

At the Russian-German crossing–there was no special border there, only a table where Germans sat on the one side and Poles on the other–my sister tried to cross with me. Everything was going well, only when you took a step forward you heard 'Jude raus!' [Ger.: 'Jew – out'] and then shots in the air. She couldn't take it; she pulled her hand out of mine and ran back. She hid somewhere in a kennel or sty and landed up back in Lublin. She went back to Lublin, because that's where they used to live. And me, I was left standing there on that crossing between two Polish men, very nice. One of them took me by the hand, held tight and said 'stand still.' So I did. And I crossed with the two of them. I crossed and went back home to Warsaw. My mother was very surprised, because I should have stayed on the other side. Then my sister reappeared, a few months later, infested with lice. It was terrible. That was a very difficult time. She escaped from Lublin because it was even more dangerous there. So she stayed with us for a while with the child; then she left again and the child stayed behind. He was 2 years old then, maybe 2 and a half. He couldn't say 'ciocia' [Pol.: auntie], he said 'Tuta,' so I was 'Tuta.' Then a Polish woman was supposed to come and pick him up. Marysia [Feldman] told me that apparently on the tram he asked her: 'When is that shikse coming?' There was always a bit of laughter in everything. 'That shikse' did come, and took him to Lublin. My brother also came back to Warsaw. I wrote to Lidka, because she lived in the East, and Kolomyia was not yet taken by the Germans, asking if my brother couldn't hide with them. But her husband wrote back that the entire family came to stay with them. That was the beginning of a miserable life.

Until the war, my father had his store at Franciszkanska. He had only one employee there, Albert, I think, Szapiro or Szpiro. He had the keys to the store, because he lived in the same building. When he learned the Germans were coming he took everything to his house, all that leather. We were left without money, without anything, it was a nightmare. I don't know how, but a few packages of that leather found their way to our house. So I took a carriage to the Kielman firm [a shoe company], on Chmielna [a street downtown, outside the Jewish district] and I sold them, because we had no money to live on. (That shop assistant met a terrible end, because later I saw him and his wife and child being led in a column to the Umschlagplatz 14.)

My father was so terrified that he didn't go out on the street, never laid his eyes on a German. He stopped shaving, he deteriorated fast. He only went to visit his sisters, who lived in the other courtyard. Once we went with him to cousin From. And From threw us out of his house for bringing father in such shape. God! My father cut it short and committed suicide, through the window in his sisters' apartment… It might have been in 1940, before the Ghetto [before October 1940], for it couldn't have been in 1939… I don't remember much from his funeral at the Jewish Cemetery at Okopowa. The funeral procession was allowed to walk without German police supervision, and a group of us followed the hearse. I went to another funeral at the Jewish Cemetery later, when the

father of that boyfriend of mine, Beniek, died of typhus. I wanted to go to my father's grave. But I was told that this was not done, that one doesn't visit [graves]. So I didn't go. I still haven't been. I have no idea where the grave is; I haven't been to that registry office to check. I haven't looked for it, I have to admit.

We lived at Leszno: my mom, my brother and I. We had the last maid with us, Marysia, until they created the Ghetto. She was a very decent girl. She went out to the fields and pulled up tomatoes or something, so that we wouldn't die of hunger. It was very hard. I remember how, in the Ghetto by then, I made the Jewish dish chulent, because it would keep for two or three days. You used barley, potatoes and some kind of meat. It cooked all night on a low flame, the top wrapped in paper.

When there was the Ghetto, my grandmother lived with us. First she was with my mother's sister, Mania, but then that aunt's kids did something inexcusable. When things got tough–not as bad as with us, because we had no means of supporting ourselves–they told her to leave. So later we didn't have anything at all to do with them. There was no fight, no reproaches, nothing. Only we never went to my aunt's house and she never came to ours, as if she didn't exist. I don't know when she left that apartment at Wspolna–she certainly had to, because that wasn't the district for the Jews. I only know the return address on my brother's letters said '53 Wspolna,' where she used to live. I think I once saw Natalka on my street, Leszno. Before the war her hair was black as a raven's, almost bluish. I saw someone like her on the street, only her hair was dyed red, to make it less dark. But we pretended we didn't know each other. And that's how it was. When Grandma was with us, her brother Ludwik came to visit her and sometimes he'd bring a little money. And then I read an announcement on a post or some fence that his wife died. He posted that obituary himself. He probably died too. My grandmother was 84 when she got ill because the food was unsuitable. A doctor came and said that it was an intestinal torsion, and that she was too old to have an operation and anyway, in those conditions, in the Ghetto…. If not for the war maybe they would have saved her. She died shortly after. I wasn't at home at the time. I don't even know where she's buried.

Our family relations deteriorated greatly: we didn't visit each other, didn't know what was happening to any of the others. I only remember that once my cousin Helena put me in touch with this Volksdeutscher who went with me to pick up some stuff of my sister's. Because my sister, when she was coming to Warsaw from the other side [from Poland's eastern territories, not yet occupied by the Germans], had had two or more suitcases with her with good quality clothing. Those things were very attractive, among others there was a beautiful fur of Persian lamb paws, braytshvantse [Yid.: astrakhan] or something like that, and a whole set of linens…. She left them with some peasant on the way. So I went to pick up those suitcases with the Volksdeutscher, my lawyer cousin's friend. Maybe he'd been her client and that's why she trusted him. Anyway, I paid him and he took me. My mother cried that it was too dangerous. I got to the town, Siemiatycze [130 km east of Warsaw]. He introduced me as his wife, because his German friends were there with him. It was terrible. Luckily it lasted only one night and one day. In that town we looked up the man, who said he knew nothing about a suitcase or suitcases. So the whole trip was in vain and my mother worried in vain. That cousin of mine thought the Volksdeutsche would save her. She bequeathed him her fully furnished four-room apartment. But nothing came of it. She met a terrible end. Her little daughter, Blanka, who was 8 at the time, died too. How? When? Where? These are

terrible questions for which there is no answer.

We lived at Leszno. Close to our house there was a ‘shop’ [German compulsory workshop in the Ghetto] where Jews worked who were conscripted by the Germans. It was called the Toebbens shop [on the corner of Leszno and Zelazna, a factory producing for the German military industry]. Before the war, Rowinski’s cotton products workshop was located there; I have no idea if it was the same Rowinski who owned the building where we lived. We remained at Leszno until the deportations began.15 Two Germans entered the house and yelled: ‘Alles raus!’ [Ger.: everybody out!]. We were all scared, so we all went out. Only we took bedclothes with us, to have something to sleep on. We got an apartment at 16 or 18 Mila. That’s a building well-known in the history of the Ghetto; the headquarters were located there. [In the bunker at 18 Mila were the headquarters of the Jewish Fighting Organization 16. On 8th May 1943 the leaders of the Ghetto uprising, surrounded by the Germans, collectively committed suicide in that bunker.] I wasn’t there long, only a few weeks; then I got out of the Ghetto.

But before I got out, I worked. First, for a short time, I worked for Ringelblum’s archive 17 in the basement of the synagogue at Tlomackie. I got that job through an acquaintance of my brother’s who was madly in love with him. Her name was Felka, I don’t remember her last name, and I think she was active in some organization. A few other girls worked there, too; we were making lists of donations for Jewish children.

And then I worked in an ink factory. A private company, not far from where I lived, called ‘Leszczynski and Company.’ A big firm. They employed Jews for the dirty jobs in which you had to deal with ink. Poles did all the other kinds of jobs, because there were also paints, carbons and other papers. Some of the Poles were very decent people, very nice. But there were a few really unpleasant ones, especially the Polish woman who supervised us, and this foreman, Stokowski, an older, gray, small guy, terribly vicious. So there were various people there. There were these two who would come to us, to the ink department, and insult people using bad words. For some reason I was spared: either they had some respect for me or they found me attractive, who knows. They had strange names, like the two painters; one called himself Michal Aniol [Michelangelo] and the other’s name was Walicki [Michal Walicki, 1904-1966, professor of history of art, specialist in painting–a coincidental similarity of names]. When things got really bad and Jews were being rounded up, one of them offered to get me out of the Ghetto. I asked how much for. And it turned out that for nothing.

It was September 1942, a few days before the big deportation [Grossaktion]. So I got up and left. I hid a few pictures in my purse: my mom’s, my brother’s and sister’s, her son’s and my own. And five dollars which my last friend made me take. I remember that somewhere on the way from Leszno to Gesia [a street which exists only partly today, as Anielewicza], I had to go through a Jewish kitchen where they gave out soup. And there was my friend’s mother. It was the first time I saw her. She gave me a rose from my friend and with that rose I went out of the Ghetto. Opposite the Jewish Cemetery I had to cross the Ghetto demarcation line. A German stopped me at the exit and said ‘Ausweis!’ [Ger.: identification card]. Damn it, nobody told me you had to have an ausweis. I just went like an idiot with nothing, not a slip of paper for that German. I hadn’t thought they should have written something for me in German. I had toilet paper with me, so I took out a piece and showed it to the German. He said ‘Los’ [Ger. colloquial: go], so I walked on. Was the German bribed already? Maybe my brother arranged that for me? And there, on the other side of

the street one of those workers was waiting for me [Walicki or Michal Aniol]. I accidentally dropped the rose, so I bent to pick it up and he told me off me for being silly, wasting time for a rose. We got on a tram and went to his house on the corner of Marszalkowska. The pregnant wife of one of the men was there; she worked for the Pakulski brothers [a company selling wine and imported foods]. I spent two days there.

As was decided earlier, I called the husband of my friend Marysia. Before the war, she was the wife of Elek Kahan, but then she got baptized and married Wojtek Matuszczyk. And during the war, that Wojtek of hers would look for apartments for people, mostly people he knew. He also helped get papers; I know it cost 1500 zloty and that was a lot. He didn't take any money from me, because I came out without any money. When I called him, he came to pick me up and we went to their house at Czackiego [in the city center]. I stayed there only for 2-3 days, because other people were hiding there too.

Wojtek found a very pleasant apartment for me, at 62 Hoza [in the city center], at a Mrs. Barbanel's. Her husband was a lawyer. He wasn't there, I guessed he was in hiding too. She was French-born, so her Polish was terrible. She had a beautiful, large apartment. Apart from me, a Dr. Rajchert was staying at her apartment. He survived the war and went to America. In the third room a woman lived whose name was Hanka. She would go out and not return before curfew. Mrs. Barbanel and I were both always very worried about her, worried that something happened to her. But then she would appear, all of a sudden. Once she said in French to Mrs. Barbanel that she suspected I was Jewish; so Mrs. Barbanel said that was impossible. Wojtek paid the rent for me. He also managed to get me these little toy cars to paint. He brought them, I painted them and then he picked them up.

Naturally I had to leave the house, I had to go out for dinner. I went alone to 'Nadswitezianska,' a restaurant at Aleje Jerozolimskie [one of the major streets in Warsaw]. There I would sit over dinner and think that everyone, the entire restaurant, was watching me, and I was scared to death. Whatever I did, I did it in fear. How else? Once, when I left Wojtek's office and went out on the street, a guy approached me. He must have been no more than 16 or 18, my age. He says to me: 'You're Jewish. I'm taking you to the police.' I knew right away that I had to act tough, so I said: 'You punk! Just wait and I'll take you!' I turned around and marched off, weak at the knees. I walked on foot to Hoza and the first thing I did was to call Wojtek and tell him to come over. I was lucky I acted like that. What gave me the idea? I don't know if I could be so clever today.

I lived for a month or two at Barbanel's, but then Marysia got mad and refused to help me any more. She probably thought I was flirting with Wojtek. Anyway, it was horrible. I asked her 'So what am I supposed to do?' 'As far as I'm concerned you can walk out of a fourth story window,' was all she said. So I wrote a letter to my brother saying that I wanted to go back to the Ghetto. So Wojtek took offense and that was it.

My brother had been in hiding, but the Germans caught him and sent him to work. He worked outside the Ghetto, they took him to work in Skaryszewski Park.[18] Marysia went to visit him twice, but later she said to me, 'You know, I won't go there anymore, because this woman stopped me after one visit and asked, 'Why do you come visiting those Jews, are you Jewish too?'' So she must have been scared to go there. When I wrote to my brother that I wanted to get out [get back to the Ghetto], he wrote back that a woman would come and take care of me.

And indeed, a woman came. She was in mourning. It turned out her father committed suicide by hanging himself. She was a friend of my brother's, Zaba, from Konskowola [around 100 km south-east from Warsaw]. I have no idea where he met her. The year was 1942. I went with her, scared stiff, because I had no papers. Wojtek only managed to get me a fake birth certificate. He told me to walk on it, so that it wouldn't look too new. Wojtek was a good guy. I think he was killed.

So I went to Zaba's, to Konskowola and I actually was very comfortable there. She was a nurse, 6 years older than I was; before the war she took nursing courses in Warsaw. Her mother was Czech, a lovely woman. Zaba's husband was a railway man. They had a daughter Ewa who was 2 or 2-and-a-half when I came. Zaba was a brave woman, and her husband was a sissy. She took care of me, she hugged me, she ruled that house so that he didn't have much say, lucky for me... We lived in a brick house next to the railway tracks, by the crossing. When they started deporting the Jews, I could see the boxcars with people in the windows. Once I thought I saw my brother, but I don't know if it was him... And when those trains were going to Majdanek 19, then Zaba's husband–a kind, polite man–said that one good thing Hitler was doing was what was happening to the Jews. I told Zaba about that, and she said 'Come on, he doesn't know what he is saying.' That was the end of it, but it stayed with me. Anyway, it wasn't good company for me. Zaba's sister-in-law, Hela, a bad one, took an astrakhan fur coat from her Jewish friend and denounced her to the gendarmes. Why didn't she denounce me? When one of Zaba's friends came over I had to spend the whole time under the bed. So it was pretty interesting over there...

I was pestering Wojtek for a kennkarte 20. He had good relations with the priests. His wife, Marysia, wrote me back that a human being doesn't deserve anything from another human being. Everybody around must have known I was Jewish, but nobody said anything. I was there as a cousin; the little girl called me 'auntie.' But the news spread among the railway men who I was. One young one, very handsome, said to me 'I'd find you attractive even if you were Jewish.' And another time, when Zaba wasn't home and I couldn't start the stove–it was a coal stove–I went to the office where that guy worked and asked him for help. Apparently he knew right away that I was Jewish [according to a pre-war stereotype held by some Poles, Jewish women didn't know how to start a fire in a stove]. It was only after the war that I found out why.

When I stayed with Zaba, her brother Czesio came to visit once. But because I was there, he went back to his house for the night. And that night the Germans pulled out all the young people, including him. I had a bad conscience because if he'd stayed the night, instead of me, maybe he would have survived. And he was shot.

My brother sent me letters by mail addressed to Zaba [toward the end of 1942]. My mom no longer added anything. He lied to me that she had bad legs, but what could legs have had to do with writing? Probably she was already gone. They took her out of the house and just took her away. I don't even know where and when she died. To this day I can't forgive myself that I wasn't there. I got the last message from my brother on 14th April 1943. He wrote: 'I am well, don't worry about me, think about yourself.' Zaba went to Warsaw to get him out, even though we didn't have a hiding place for him. But when she got there she saw that all of the Ghetto was burned down 21. He was a wonderful brother and a wonderful son...he loved our mother very much.

When I was in Konskowola, I still got messages from my sister. She was taken from Lublin to Majdanek. From Majdanek she apparently sent me a diamond, through a man who undertook to

give me some of the money for that diamond. For a while that was the only money Zaba and I had to support ourselves. In the meantime, my sister's husband–who they didn't take to Majdanek and he was still in Lublin–wrote to me asking if Zaba could organize a hiding place for him. It was hard to read what he said, he'd gone completely crazy. He was wealthy. If he'd given her some money, maybe Zaba would have managed to help. But he only liked making money and didn't know how to use it. Sometime earlier my sister wrote us that we should remember about this man – she gave his name - who could save her husband. So Zaba and I went to Lublin, which was rather dangerous as we later found out. The man said he didn't know my brother-in-law, though he was wearing my brother-in-law's jacket… It's all so strange. My brother-in-law really had a chance of surviving: he didn't have black hair, he had brown hair and blue eyes, he spoke Polish well. I'm not even talking about the rest of his family but himself. Because he was basically alone by then. His little son Gucio and my sister died in Majdanek, the child before her. I figured that out from the letters I got from my brother-in-law: there was no mention of the child.

Everybody died. Nobody was left from this family, nobody. I got out of the Ghetto then because I wanted to live. I was the only one to cut myself off, and that's why I'm left all alone. Closer family, distant family, they're all gone…

I spent two years with Zaba, from 1942 till the end of the war, when Lublin was freed [July 1944], possibly before Warsaw was. When the Russkies came, they wanted to arrest Zaba's other brother, Edward, who was the mayor. People were denouncing him, because apparently he was stealing their cows and produce. To put it short, he was a son-of-a-bitch. When they came to get him he hid somewhere. But the people who he'd rubbed up the wrong way came after him and there was a court case in Lublin after the war. And I was the main witness for the defense. I said in court: 'I can't say anything against Edward, because I am Jewish and this family saved my life.' I did it only for Zaba and her mother, not anybody else from that family. Because of what I said he was released, after having been held for a year and a half.

In 1944, when I was still in Konskowola, the Russian Army and Polish officers arrived.22 One time, one of them, Lajchman, slapped me on my behind in this little bar. So I told him I'm Jewish. So he asked what I was still doing there. He told me to go to Lublin to the army and say he sent me. I went to Lublin to look for someone from my family. I went to the Jewish Committee, but I didn't find out anything. I registered in case someone was looking for me. Nobody was. So I went to the army and registered under the name Szymanska. Two women took care of me. It must have been luck among all the misfortunes that I came across that woman who signed me up. I got clothing, I got food, I got an apartment.

In Lublin I worked in the office of General Grosz. Mrs. Zabludowska was the head of that office and I was her helper. I wrote up orders on the typewriter. And once the order was to transfer somewhere a Col. Henryk Holder, son of Michal. Could it be the husband of Lidka from Kolomyia? Could there be another person of the same name? I wrote to him without thinking much of the future, only because he was someone who knew me, remembered me… He came to visit, which was very kind of him. I told him all about myself and asked about his wife. Both she and his entire family died. So later I thought, 'What do I care which one it is?' Since I knew him from Lidka's stories and believed he was a decent man, we got together.

Then he went to the front and I stayed in Lublin. He was in Warsaw the day after it was liberated [17th January 1945]. I still have a letter from him in which he says that Warsaw was all gone and that the Germans should be shot, beaten, murdered. And I went through that miserable city later, too. I went from Lublin to Berlin with the army as an ensign. I was demobilized in Katowice.

After the war

In Katowice, in December 1945, we got married. I remember I had nothing to serve our two witnesses. I borrowed potatoes from the neighbors, we bought some frankfurters and that was our wedding feast.

My husband was born in 1914 in Szczerc near Kolomyia. His father worked in an office in the court in Kolomyia. His mother died before the war from diabetes, on the train to Truskawiec [a resort around 140 km north-west from Kolomyia, now Ukraine]. He had an older brother, also a lawyer, Izio, Izaak or Izydor. Henryk graduated from a secondary school in Kolomyia and then studied law in Lwow. He only took his exams there, but he studied at home. He graduated before the war. He worked in Kolomyia in the law firm of his friend, Wilf, who I later met, in Katowice, after the war. Well, and he married a friend from school, Blima–Lidka. After the Germans entered Kolomyia, his brother committed suicide in the Ghetto. He left behind a wife, Marysia, also a lawyer, and their daughter. Some acquaintances told me that Marysia left her child in front of a store and did a runner. She told me she gave the little one to the nuns and never saw her again. So I don't know how it really was. Anyway, she is gone. Marysia remarried after the war; her new husband was an army lawyer, and they lived in the same house we did and had two children. My husband's father must have been killed during the war. Lidka was also killed. She wanted to get through to Hungary. [23] She was caught near the Romanian border. They took off her shoes and she walked barefoot to Kolomyia. There she was shot. My husband went there in 1976, to the monument to the victims.

When the Germans came, my husband fled further east. That's how he ended up in the army, in a school for officers in Ryazan [in the Soviet Union then, now in Russia, around 200 km south-east from Moscow]. They did pre-military training. Then, I guess, he must have joined the Berling army [24]. When we met he was in the First Army, in the prosecutor's office. I didn't even know what a prosecutor is. Had I known, maybe I wouldn't have decided to be with him… [Communist prosecutors were infamous for their role in the post-war history of Poland: through false accusations they contributed to numerous death sentences for those belonging to the political opposition.] And he was the prosecutor for a long time. Luckily, in 1950 they fired him, most likely because of his Jewish background, and hired a Pole in his place. He was let go before all those trials, but in his time there must have been trials, too. I don't know; he never told me and I never asked.

After the wedding we lived in Katowice. We occupied a room in an apartment at Francuska which used to belong to some Germans. But that didn't last long, we soon got an apartment at Zamkowa. There were five rooms in the apartment, I don't know what we needed such a big place for, plus a huge kitchen and a maid's room. A luxury apartment – I never saw one like it since. We had a male servant, but he didn't have much work, because we always ate at the canteen. All he did was sew on my collars. Actually I don't know what he did in that apartment, nothing went on there. We had an army car, a beautiful green Audi. My husband had friends from Kolomyia living in Katowice. Those were Wilf, whose law firm he had worked in before the war, and the three Gotfryd brothers

who survived the Kolomyia Ghetto.

My husband was then transferred to Warsaw. I followed him in a short time, for I wasn't my own from then until the end of his life. We got an apartment which belonged to the Army at Belwederska [a representative street in Warsaw]: three beautiful rooms, a bathroom with a window, a maid's room. I had my first child Piotr in 1948, but he died within 12 hours. In the army hospital, in Warsaw, he was taken to the other world. In 1949 my second son, Jerzy, was born, so we hovered over him. I even went to Wroclaw [to Prof. Ludwik Hirszfeld (1884-1954), immunologist, serologist, the first person to do research into high-risk pregnancy in Poland] to give birth to him. Then we came back to Warsaw. There was a very good nanny and a maid. So I finally went out to work, because we had to pay for all of it somehow. In 1954 I went on a year-long drafting course. I completed it, I even have the certificate, but I can draft just about as well as I can sew. So obviously I didn't work in that line, but as a secretary in an office of this state enterprise, Construction of Housing for Workers, BOR. First I was in the department of planning, but I just couldn't get it. Even today if they ask me to plan something, you can guess what it's going to look like. We had a manager who couldn't even sign his name, illiterate. So I said, 'I don't want anything to do with that kind of education.' Later I was the secretary of the main Director. I was bored witless, I read books, because he went to conferences every day and there was nothing for me to do. I didn't work there long, a year maybe. After that, I don't think I worked anywhere else.

During the summer we went to those government resorts, in Bulgaria, Hungary and the GDR 25. But I wasn't proud of that or happy about it. I knew people held it against us, particularly that we were Jews.

When my husband was fired in 1950, he was a colonel. He moved to Mr. Bierut's 26 legal office. I can't remember if he worked there until Bierut's death [1956], but afterwards he became the manager of the Office of the State Council. First his boss was Zawadzki, I think [Aleksander Zawadzki, 1899-1964, secretary of the Party's Central Committee, from 1952 head of the State Council] and then Ochab [Edward Ochab, 1906-1989, secretary of the Party [PZPR] Central Committee, 1964-68 head of the State Council]. My husband was fired from there as well, in 1968. They kicked him out for giving preference to Jews. That was all a bunch of lies, of course–no one talks about that today.

My son studied foreign trade. I wanted him very much to leave [Poland]. He gave up his studies to go abroad, but they wouldn't let him go. He had to do something, so he went to work for this company producing glass containers. But as soon as he started working, he got his draft card from the army. Our home was in a state of panic, almost like during the occupation. An acquaintance interceded on our behalf to get him enrolled as a student again, even though a year had already passed since he left. He did manage to become a student again and did very well. After he graduated he went abroad, first to Sweden–after all, so many different people went there at the time–and then to France, then London and finally West Germany 27, to the Gotfryds. Finally he called me from Germany to say that he was coming back. I can't believe he got out only to come back...

We had many acquaintances abroad. Before 1956 28, my friend from school, Zula Wermus, who survived the war in the Soviet Union, decided to go to Israel. She came to our house asking my husband what she should do. And she went, with her husband. Then, after 1956, my husband's

secretary left, a colleague he really trusted, Fels. He went to Israel with his Polish wife, who wanted to go, too; she was a smart girl. The sister of my husband's first wife, Andzia, was also in Israel. She even wanted to come back, but her son, Icchak, didn't. He was 13 then, in a kibbutz he liked a lot, so they didn't come back. The Gotfryds went to West Germany. A friend of my husband's from Kolomyia went to London and worked in a bank. I didn't have anyone that close who went abroad. Ignas Tyrmand went to Australia, and the mathematician Eilenberg–from the 'Balagania' crowd–lived in America; I saw him twice after the war.

I keep on wondering why I didn't think of going abroad right after the war. In 1956 when everybody was leaving I asked my husband 'Maybe we should go, too?' But he said 'Go if you want, I'm staying.' So what was I to do? Take my son and leave? I was uneducated, untrained, I didn't have anywhere to work, I didn't know what to do. So I stayed, like an idiot. I should have gone. A wasted life…

When my husband got fired in 1968, Cyrankiewicz 29 was still Prime Minister. So he gave my husband a retirement pension which could support us: 5000 zloty for the three of us. But they took away our apartment, of course. It was 1972; they persisted so we moved out. The apartment we're in now was waiting for us, so to speak, because the building was newly finished when we moved in.

After that ordeal, our doctor friend Askanas sent my husband to recover in this health resort near Warsaw, owned by the government, for we were still allowed to use it. Then Marysia, my husband's sister-in-law, called that she had a translation lined up for him. She worked for 'Ksiazka i Wiedza' [a publishing house established in 1948 in Warsaw] and she'd recommended him there. So my husband started translating from Russian; all those beautiful volumes: Lenin and such… Then he did German as well: Marx's correspondence and legal texts. From then on he was a translator. He died of a heart attack in July 1980, when he was vacationing in Jadwisin [a government holiday complex near Warsaw]. He was buried in the military cemetery in Warsaw. And that's how a life ends. He lost his mother, father, wife, then he lived through that terrible war in the Soviet Union where he suffered a lot, not being very enterprising and unable to find a job… And then they ended his life with that worthless accusation, a foul and evil thing to do [the accusation of mismanagement of human resources and his consequent firing, in 1968, led to her husband's health deteriorating].

My son then started working for PAP [the Polish Press Agency]. The third husband of my friend the hag, Marysia, called him because he speaks very fluent English, and asked him if he wouldn't like the job. He's been working there for 20-25 years now. He is a translator in what may still be called 'the English office.'

We don't observe any Jewish traditions in our home, except my son buys matzah in this store at Twarda [the Synagogue and Jewish Theater are also on that street]. I don't eat it, because it's not what matzah used to be. But my son eats it for dessert after supper.

For me, it never mattered one bit what my friends' background was. I had friends among both Jews and Poles. After the war I helped Zaba–my husband had connections, so he arranged for an apartment in Warsaw and a job at the hospital for Zaba's daughter. After Zaba died, in 1973, her husband wanted me to help him get into the veterans' union. How could I? I didn't have any connections there. So I told him there was this tree campaign going on.30 And he got the title of 'Righteous Among the Nations.' He accepted it in his and Zaba's name. He died last year.

Several years ago my husband's sister-in-law Marysia died. Her son stayed in Poland, but her daughter went to Sweden with her husband in 1968. And so there are no Jews left around me except for Alina Winawer. I have known her for over 50 years. My husband got her husband a job in the army: bought him for two barrels of gasoline. Years later we found out that her mother got married in Israel to Mr. Rowinski, who owned the Leszno house before the war. His [first] wife and his daughter committed suicide in Israel, I don't know why. In the house where I live now I don't know any other Jewish families, it's all Catholics around me. Who knows what they think about me. I don't go to all those events at TSKZ 31. It used to be that I was able to go, but I only went twice. They meet at a bad time, when I'm having dinner at home. Now there is no way I could go [because of having a broken arm]. Too bad.

Everything bad that I could have experienced I already did. I don't know if anything changed for the better in my life after 1989 32. When I hear which parties are winning [currently the left is in power, but in the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in fall 2005, both right-wing parties and right-wing individual politicians are likely to win]–what is left to believe in? I know we shouldn't have stayed here. I've known that for a long time. Every little anti-Semitic gesture or remark drives me up the wall. At moments like that I can't forgive myself for having stayed here. It's no good to live a lie. But what else can I do?...

Glossary

1 Hospital in Czyste

A Jewish hospital in Warsaw. The initiative to build it came in the 1880's from the doctors of the Orthodox Hospital (established at the turn of the 19th century). In 1893 the construction of the hospital buildings began on the western outskirts of Warsaw, in the borough of Czyste. Eight buildings were erected, with modern technological equipment. A synagogue was built next to the hospital. The hospital was opened in 1902 at what was then Dworska Street. In the 1920's the Jewish hospital was transformed into a local hospital. Before 1939, around 1,200 beds were available, which made the hospital the second largest in Warsaw. After 1939 it was turned over to the management of the Jewish authorities and became a hospital exclusively for Jews. After the creation of the Ghetto, it was moved to the Jewish district, that is, the staff of the hospital was confined to the Ghetto and employed in the Ghetto's various medical establishments. Dworska was taken over by, among others, a German military hospital. In the Ghetto, when typhus broke out, a Jewish Contagious Hospital was opened at Stawki Street. Apart from treating patients, the hospital also conducted research (Prof. Hirszfeld) and held classes for nurses. The Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital moved into the Stawki hospital building. In time, the Stawki hospital became the only hospital in the Ghetto. After the war, Warsaw's oldest hospital, Sw. Ducha Hospital [Holy Ghost Hospital], was moved to Czyste, into the buildings at Dworska Street. These buildings are currently occupied by the Wolski Hospital at Kasprzaka Street.

2 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 Wawel Cathedral in the Royal Castle in Cracow.

3 Volksdeutscher

In Poland a person who was entered (usually voluntarily, more rarely compulsorily) on a list of people of ethnic German origin during the German occupation was called Volksdeutscher and had various privileges in the occupied territories.

4 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.

5 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.

6 Hahalutz

Hebrew for pioneer, it stands for a Zionist organization that prepared young people for emigration to Palestine. It was founded at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia and began operating in Poland in 1905, later also spread to the USA and other countries. Between the two wars its aim was to unite all the Zionist youth organizations. Members of Hahalutz were sent on hakhshara, where they received vocational training. Emphasis was placed chiefly on volunteer work, the ability to live and work in harsh conditions, and military training. The organization had its own agricultural farms in Poland. On completing hakhshara young people received British certificates entitling them to emigrate to Palestine. Around 26,000 young people left Poland under this scheme in 1925-26. In 1939 Hahalutz had some 100,000 members throughout Europe. In World War II it operated as a conspiratorial organization. It was very active in culture and education after the war. The Polish arm was disbanded in 1949.

7 Jan Karski (1914-2000, real name Jan Kozielewski)

historian, courier, political emissary. Before 1939, he worked in the diplomatic corps. After the war broke out he joined the opposition as a reconnoissance and liaison officer. From May 1941, on the order of bodies including the High/Supreme Command of the Union for Armed Combat, he investigated the situation of the Jews in Poland under the occupation. He carried out two important missions in 1942: after establishing contact with the Bund (Leon Feiner, among others), he got into the Warsaw Ghetto to gain first-hand knowledge of the conditions there; he also secretly went into the camp in Belzec to investigate the method of murdering camp prisoners with gas. On a mission in London and the United States, he conveyed his reports and the appeal of the Polish Jews to the world (to make prevention of the extermination of the Jews one of the war aims in the fight with Nazism) to the Polish Government in Exile, the British authorities, the President of the United States and Jewish organizations. His efforts were in vain. The only result was a statement signed by 12 countries condemning the extermination of the Jews and postulating passing judgment on the guilty after the fall of Hitler. After the war, Jan Karski remained in the USA as a researcher. In 1982 he received the title of “Righteous Among the Nations” from the Yad Vashem Institute, and honorary citizenship from the State of Israel.

8 Schorr, Mojzesz (1874–1941)

rabbi and scholar. Born in Przemysl (now Poland), he studied at the Juedisch-theologische Lehranstalt and Vienna University. In 1899 he became a lecturer in Judaism at the Jewish Teacher Training Institute in Lvov, and from 1904 he also lectured at Lvov University, specializing in Semitic languages and the history of the ancient Orient. In 1923 he moved to Warsaw to lead the Reform Synagogue at Tlomackie Street. Schorr was one of the founders of the Institute of Judaistica founded in 1928, and for a few years its rector. He also lectured in the Bible and Hebrew there. He was a member of the State Academy of Sciences, and from 1935-1938 he was a deputy to the Senate. After the outbreak of war he went east. He was arrested by the Russians and during a transfer from one camp to another he died in Uzbekistan.

9 Nasz Przeglad

Jewish daily published in Polish in Warsaw during the period 1923-39, with a print run of 45,000 copies. Addressed to the intelligentsia, it had an important opinion-forming role.

10 Korczak, Janusz (1878/79-1942)
Polish Jewish doctor, pedagogue, writer of children's literature. He was the co-founder and director (from 1911) of the Jewish orphanage in Warsaw. He also ran a similar orphanage for Polish children. Korczak was in charge of the Jewish orphanage when it was moved to the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940. He was one of the best-known figures behind the ghetto wall, refusing to leave the ghetto and his charges. He was deported to the Treblinka extermination camp with his charges in August 1942. The whole transport was murdered by the Nazis shortly after its arrival in the camp.

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

12 Anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s
From 1935-39 the activities of Polish anti-Semitic propaganda intensified. The Sejm introduced barriers to ritual slaughter, restrictions of Jews' access to education and certain professions. Nationalistic factions postulated the removal of Jews from political, social and cultural life, and agitated for economic boycotts to persuade all the country's Jews to emigrate. Nationalist activists took up posts outside Jewish shops and stalls, attempting to prevent Poles from patronizing them. Such campaigns were often combined with damage and looting of shops and beatings, sometimes with fatal consequences. From June 1935 until 1937 there were over a dozen pogroms, the most publicized of which was the pogrom in Przytyk in 1936. The Catholic Church also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism.

13 SS
Schutzstaffel, Protective Squadrons of the NSDAP, created in 1923; they had the function of an internal police and political intelligence; after 1939 they cooperated in the extermination of the conquered nations .

13 Umiastowski Order
Col. Roman Umiastowski was head of propaganda in the Corps of the Supreme Commander of the Polish Republic. Following the German aggression on Poland, and faced with the siege of Warsaw, on 6 September 1939 he appealed to all men able to wield a weapon to leave the capital and head

east.

14 Umschlagplatz
Literally Reloading Point (German), it designates the area of the Warsaw ghetto on Stawki and Dzika Streets, where trade with the world outside the ghetto took place and where people were gathered before deportation to the Treblinka death camp. About 300.000 people were taken by train from the Umschlagplatz to Treblinka.

15 Great Action (Grossaktion)
July–September 1942, mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka extermination camp. This was the first liquidation campaign, during which around 265,000 of 355,000 Jews living in the ghetto were deported, and a further 10,000 were murdered on the spot. About 70,000 people remained inside the ghetto walls (the majority of them, as unemployed, were there illegally).

16 ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organization)
An armed organization formed in the Warsaw ghetto; it took on its final form (uniting Zionist, He-Halutz and Bund youth organizations) in October 1942. ZOB also functioned in other towns and cities in occupied Poland. It offered military training, issued appeals, procured arms for its soldiers, planned the defense of the Warsaw ghetto, and ultimately led the fighting in the ghetto on two occasions, the uprisings in January and April 1943.

17 Ringelblum Archive
archives documenting the life, struggle and death of the Jews in WWII, created by Emanuel Ringelblum (1900-44), a historian, pedagogue and social activist. The archives were compiled by underground activists in the Warsaw ghetto. In his work preparing reports for the clandestine Polish authorities on the situation of the Jewish population, Ringelblum and his many assistants gathered all types of documents (both private and official: notices, letters, reports, etc.) illustrating the reality in the ghettos and the camps. These documents were hidden in metal milk churns, unearthed after the war and deposited with the Jewish Historical Institute. The Ringelblum Archive is now the broadest source of information on the fate of the Jews in the ghettos and the camps.

18 ‘Placówka’ / ‘Establishment’
a place outside the Ghetto which employed Jews. Jewish workers were employed in ‘establishments’ including the railroads, private German firms, the Wehrmacht, and SS offices and companies, and in the municipal administrative structures. Jewish workers lived in the Ghetto and went out for several hours a day to go to work. For their work they got a meal and sometimes a small amount of money. These ‘establishments’ existed from the beginning of the war, but their number grew in the spring of 1942. During the liquidation of the Ghetto, employment in an ‘establishment’ often meant exemption, at least temporarily, from deportation to an extermination camp.

19 Majdanek concentration camp

situated five kilometers from the city center of Lublin, Poland, originally established as a labor camp in October 1941. It was officially called Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin until 16th February 1943, when the name was changed to Concentration Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin. Unlike most other Nazi death camps, Majdanek, located in a completely open field, was not hidden from view. About 130,000 Jews were deported there during 1942-43 as part of the 'Final Solution'. Initially there were two gas chambers housed in a wooden building, which were later replaced by gas chambers in a brick building. The estimated number of deaths is 360,000, including Jews, Soviets POWs and Poles. The camp was liquidated in July 1944, but by the time the Red Army arrived the camp was only partially destroyed. Although approximately 1,000 inmates were executed on a death march, the Red Army found thousand of prisoners still in the camp, an evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

20 Kennkarte, (Ger

2 ID card) confirmed the identity and place of residence of its holder. It bore a photograph, a thumbprint, and the address and signature of its holder. It was the only document of its type issued to Poles during the Nazi occupation.

21 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (or April Uprising)

On 19th April 1943 the Germans undertook their third deportation campaign to transport the last inhabitants of the ghetto, approximately 60,000 people, to labor camps. An armed resistance broke out in the ghetto, led by the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) and the Jewish Military Union (ZZW) – all in all several hundred armed fighters. The Germans attacked with 2,000 men, tanks and artillery. The insurrectionists were on the attack for the first few days, and subsequently carried out their defense from bunkers and ruins, supported by the civilian population of the ghetto, who contributed with passive resistance. The Germans razed the Warsaw ghetto to the ground on 15th May 1943. Around 13,000 Jews perished in the Uprising, and around 50,000 were deported to Treblinka extermination camp. About 100 of the resistance fighters managed to escape from the ghetto via the sewers.

22 The 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division

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

23 Poles fleeing to Hungary in 1939

In September 1939, especially after the Russian attack on Poland on 17th September, Polish refugees started arriving in Hungary: both organized military units and civilians. The Hungarian authorities, even though bound to Germany by a treaty, accepted the exiles. The military were interned in camps and then aided in a transfer to France, where a Polish army was being formed by the emigrant government (Polish Armed forces in the West). Because it was a secret operation, the exact number of Poles who escaped to the West through Hungary is not known. It is estimated that in the years 1939-1944 around 100,000 to 150,000 Poles temporarily lived in Hungary. Some of the civilians, around 15,000 – 20,000, remained there until the end of the war. They lived in towns allocated by the government, among which the largest Polish community lived in Balatonboglar. The refugees also received government relief. Already in 1939 a Civil Committee for the Protection of Polish Émigrés in Hungary was created, which was a type of Polish self-government. Polish schools, press, youth and cultural organizations were created. The Minister for Internal Affairs, Jozsef Antall, was particularly helpful to the Polish refugees. The subject of Polish Jews escaping to Hungary in the later years of the occupation is not well researched. It is estimated that around 3,000 Jews found their way to Slovakia and some of them were accepted by Hungary. When in March 1944 the German army entered Hungary, they dissolved the Civil Committee and shot the leaders of the Polish emigre community.

24 Berling, Zygmunt (1896-1980)

Polish general. From 1914-17 he fought in the Polish Legions, and from 1918 in the Polish Army. In 1939 he was captured by the Soviets. In 1940 he and a group of other Polish officers began to collaborate with the Soviet authorities on projects including the organization of a Polish division within the armed forces of the USSR. In 1941-42 he was chief of staff of the Fifth Infantry Division of the Polish Army in the USSR. After the army was evacuated, he stayed in the USSR. In 1943 he co-founded the Union of Polish Patriots. He was the commander of the following units: First Kosciuszko Infantry Division (1943); First Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR (1943-44); the Polish Army in the USSR (1944); and First Army of the Polish Forces (Jul.-Sep. 1944); he was simultaneously Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Forces, and dismissed in 1944. From 1948-53 he was commander of the General Staff Academy in Warsaw, and was subsequently retired. He wrote his memoirs.

25 GDR

German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR): the state of East Germany, created on 7th October 1949 on the territory of the Russian-occupied zone set up in 1945 when the war ended. It consisted of 5 “Laender” or provinces: Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. Berlin was the capital. GDR was a people’s democracy, dependent on the USSR, which in its occupational zone introduced all the reforms typical for its satellite states: agricultural reform, nationalization of industry and trade, and a one-party political system. Power was in the hands of the SED (the Socialist Party for German Unity) created out of the merger of the KPD (the German Communist Party) and the SDP (the German Socialist Party). As a result of the so-called second Berlin crisis, the Berlin wall was erected, separating East and West Berlin (the latter belonging to West Germany). In the 1980’s a wave of dissent spread through the country, a strong

opposition movement was created, and people emigrated en masse to West Germany, which was a democratic state. On 18th October 1989, as a result of riots in Dresden, Erich Honecker stepped down from the position of SED First Secretary. On 9th November, participants in a huge demonstration in Berlin started tearing down the Berlin wall. The communist government stepped down. On 3rd October 1990, a document was signed in the Bundestag paving the way for the unification of East and West Germany.

26 Bierut Boleslaw, pseud

Janowski, Tomasz (1892-1956): communist activist and politician. In the interwar period he was a member of the Polish Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Poland; in 1930-32 he was an officer in the Communist Internationale in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Starting in 1943 Bierut was a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party and later PZPR (the Polish United Workers' Party), where he held the highest offices. From 1944-47 he was the president of the National Council, from 1947-52 president of Poland, from 1952-54 prime minister, and in 1954-56 first secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR. Bierut followed a policy of Polish dependency on the USSR and the Sovietization of Poland. He was responsible for the employment of organized violence to terrorize society into submission. He died in Moscow.

27 Federal Republic of Germany, FRG (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, BRD)

state of West Germany, created on 7th September 1949 out of the merger of three of the occupational zones, American, British and French, which had existed since 1945, the end of World War II. The formation of the FRG was preceded by the creation of the democratic structures common to the three zones (the Parliament, the Supreme Court, the National Bank, the Constitution and the currency). After the dramatic Berlin crisis of 1948-9, the total blockade of West Berlin by the Soviet army, the decision to finalize the separation of East and West Germany was made. The FRG comprised 11 "Laender" (federal provinces), and the provisional capital was established in Bonn, in the Rhineland. The first president was Theodor Heuss, and the first chancellor was Konrad Adenauer. The FRG was a democratic country, in which the most important parties were the CDU (the Christian Democratic Union), the SPD (the German Socialist Party), the CSU (the Christian-Social Union), and the FDP (the Free Democratic Party). The FDR participated in the Marshall Plan–the US program of aid to European countries–thanks to which it experienced a great economic revival. According to the so-called Holstein doctrine, the countries of Western Europe and the USA recognized FRG as the only representative of the German nation. The division of Germany was considered temporary, and the post-war borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia were not recognized. Only in 1970 did Chancellor Willi Brandt initiate diplomatic relations with the USSR and its satellite countries, among them Poland, recognizing their borders. On 12th September 1990 a unification document was signed whereby the GDR Laender were incorporated into the FRG, and on 3rd October the act was signed by the Bundestag.

28 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-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-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 guilt 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.

29 Cyrankiewicz, Jozef

(1911-1989): communist and socialist activist, politician. In the interwar period he was a PPS (Polish Socialist Party) activist. From 1941-45 he was interned by the Germans to Auschwitz. A member of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) since 1948 and prime minister of the PRL (Polish People's Republic) from 1954-70, he remained in positions of public authority until 1986.

30 Yad Vashem

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and "Righteous Among Nations," non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

31 TSKZ (Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews)

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

32 Poland 1989

In 1989 the communist regime in Poland finally collapsed and the process of forming a multiparty, pluralistic, democratic political system and introducing a capitalist economy began. Communist policy and the deepening economic crisis since the early 1980s had caused increasing social discontent and weariness and the radicalization of moods among Solidarity activists (Solidarity: a trade union that developed into a political party and played a key role in overthrowing

communism). On 13th December 1981 the PZPR (Polish United Worker's Party) had introduced martial law (lifted on 22 June 1983). Growing economic difficulties, social moods and the strength of the opposition persuaded the national authorities to begin gradually liberalizing the political system. Changes in the USSR also influenced the policy of the PZPR. A series of strikes in April-May and August 1988, and demonstrations in many towns and cities forced the authorities to seek a compromise with the opposition. After a few months of meetings and consultations Round Table negotiations took place (6 Feb.-5 Apr. 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronislaw Geremek, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki). The resolutions it passed signaled the end of the PZPR's monopoly on power and cleared the way for the overthrow of the system. In parliamentary elections (4th June 1989) the PZPR and its subordinate political groups suffered defeat. In fall 1989 a program of fundamental economic, social and ownership transformations was drawn up and in Jan. 1990 the PZPR dissolved.