

# Wygodzka Irena

Irena Wygodzka

Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Zuzanna Schnepf

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*Mrs. Eni (this is the first name she prefers to use)  
Wygodzka returned to Poland from Israel three years ago.  
She lives in a new apartment building in downtown  
Warsaw.*

*Just like the modern building, her apartment is simple and  
functional. We spent many hours there, talking, often long  
after the voice recorder had been turned off.*

*Mrs. Wygodzka treated me to Italian panettone, Israeli  
sesame paste and kosher broth with noodles – just like her  
mother used to make before the war. Going back to distant  
events from the past was not easy.*

*Mrs. Wygodzka would often say with regret: ‘I don’t know,’ ‘I don’t remember’ and explained: ‘I was  
only a child then,’ ‘so much happened later.’*

*The impressive collection of photographs – Mrs. Wygodzka’s real treasure – was very helpful. The  
photographs miraculously survived the Holocaust: saved in a camp barrack and discovered years  
later by family in Israel.*



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## My family background

My name is Eni Wygodzka, nee Beitner. Erna was the name used in documents, in the identity card, but both my friends and family always called me Eni. One of my cousins used to call me Koziula [from the Polish word ‘koza,’ meaning goat], because I was kind of wild and restless, skipping around on one leg.

Irena, that was only after I returned to Poland, in 1947. The [communist] authorities explained that first and last names should be Polish, not Jewish, so I changed my name to Irena [1](#). That’s how it has stayed – Irena. I somehow got used to this name, only my close friends and family call me Eni.

My maiden name was spelled differently, depending on who was writing it down, what official. Sometimes they'd spell it with 'ay' – Baytner – sometimes 'ei' and sometimes 'aj.' My grandparents and Father's brothers spelled their names with 'ei' [Beitner], like my father.

I don't remember anything before my grandparents [Mrs. Wygodzka doesn't know anything about her great-grandparents' generation]. Father's family came from Dabrowa Gornicza [approx. 65 km west of Cracow] and Mother's from Bedzin [approx. 70 km west of Cracow].

I only remember one grandfather from my father's side. [His name was Ajzyk Beitner, he was born on 20th April 1857 in Bedzin – information from an album prepared on the basis of documents found in the archives of Andrzej Maskalan, Mrs. Wygodzka's cousin's son.]

I don't have any memories except for one meeting with Grandfather, maybe because he was so sick then. He was in bed, in some dark room, his legs were hurting. I think he had diabetes and died shortly afterwards in Dabrowa Gornicza. I only remember that when they told me, I cried a lot.

I think he died in 1928 [probably in 1934 – according to A. Maskalan's album], because I was at school then, it could have been first grade. I don't remember his wife at all. [Her name was Zofia Beitner, nee Weksler, born on 4th September 1857, a daughter of Herszlik and Cwetla, married Ajzyk on 21st February 1877 in Przyrow, approx. 80 km southwest of Cracow – according to A. Maskalan's album].

My grandparents had a hardware store, one of their sons who was living in Dabrowa, Nachman, operated that store. It must have been a family business. My grandparents were living in some one room shack, in a non-Jewish district, a mixed one.

And that's where the hardware store was located, next to the house. I remember the kitchen – there was a table, a cupboard and a stove, for cooking, with removable eyes [cast-iron rings, closing the holes in the stove plate, where pots are placed.]

This was all small, small windows overlooking the street, yes. The store was large, with an entrance from the street. I remember the counter and drawers, all kinds of nails, screws, nuts, hammers, all kinds of equipment for building works, maybe even machine parts were sold there.

Uncle Nachman, Father's brother, lived near my grandparents' house and so did Father's sister, Aunt Rozia [Jewish name: Rajzla]. They must have been taking care of Grandpa somehow. They lived in this small single-family house, as you'd call it today.

I visited this Uncle Nachman and Aunt Rozia in Dabrowa several times. They had children and we were more or less the same age. This Nachman and his wife Rywcia [Rywa] had a daughter named Chawa, or Ewa, and a son, Jankiel. Jankiel survived the war, as the only one from the family in Dabrowa. There were three children at Rozia's: the daughters' names were Zosia and Jadzia [Jochewet] and there was also a boy.

There were seven sons in Father's family: Jakub, Szlomo [Hebrew; Yiddish name: Szlama], Tobiasz, Chaim, Herman – my father, Abram and Nachman, and two sisters: Rozia and Ida. It was a traditional family, with many children.

They were all religious. Except for my father and Uncle Nachman they all had beards and side-locks and went to the synagogue. They dressed normally; I don't think they wore those kapotes.

Nachman was living in Dabrowa Gornicza where all the people knew each other, so he was religious, too, but he didn't wear a beard, so he must have been kind of rebellious. There was also one brother in America; I only met him in Israel.

His name was Abram. He must have emigrated before I was born. He also shaved. Father and his siblings spoke Yiddish. So did my grandparents. They probably knew Polish, German, but spoke Yiddish to each other. We [Mrs. Wygodzka and her cousins] spoke Polish to each other.

I don't know what year Father was born in. [Herman Beitner was born on 30th September 1890 in Bedzin – according to A. Maskalan's album.] I'm sure Father and his brothers went to cheder. I'm also sure Father graduated from public school.

I don't think he had more schooling. I think no one in my father's family studied at university, no. Life was hard, difficult, you had to make money, you had to learn something: either to trade or do something else to earn a living. So no one had time for studying.

My mother's maiden name is Londner. Her parents died early, I didn't know them at all. Mother's father had a store in Bedzin, also a hardware store, that's all I know. Mother's mother must have died, because Grandfather remarried and had three more daughters with his second wife.

My mother – Bala was from the first marriage, there was also Mania, Regina, who was in Palestine, and I think one more daughter, who was in America. These three half-sisters of my mother's were Hela, Frania, she was a bit of a hunchback, Hela was pretty, and there was also Jadzia, she was pretty as well.

They lived in Bedzin, I think. I only remember how their mother was a stepmother to her – that she was not good to her and her full sisters. Mother never wanted to talk badly about her; she didn't want to talk about bad things.

I supposed Mother's family was religious, because Mother used to light candles, say this Friday prayer, celebrated the holidays. That's how she was taught at home and that's what she did. I remember that even during the war, when she was very depressed, she used to say you have to believe in God, that he'd get us out of it.

It's very likely that the families of my parents met through business – these hardware stores. There was a double marriage between two families [two marriages]. First Tobiasz, my father's brother, married Mania, Mother's sister.

And at this wedding my mother must have met [Tobiasz's] brother. They must have fallen in love, but somehow Mother never talked about it. Those were families who hardly made ends meet. That's what I think.

I remember how Mother told me that she waited seven years, because during World War I Father was in the German Army [2](#). He only married my mother after he was discharged from the army. So he was in the army between 1914 and 1918 [3](#), and I think they got married in 1919, because my brother, Natan, was born in 1921 and I was born in 1922.

I don't know where they got married, I don't remember any photographs from my parents' wedding. It wasn't then like it is now, you didn't invite hundreds of guests and throw huge parties. It was all more modest.

After the wedding my parents went to Magdeburg [approx. 125 km southwest of Berlin]. There was a painful [economic] crisis [in Poland] and that's why Father went to Germany looking for work. I think it must have been 1920. He worked at his sister's store. She had a shoe store.

Her name was Ida Oppenheim, her husband, Natan Oppenheim, was, I think, a German Jew. Or maybe he was from Poland? I don't know where they met, but I do know they only spoke German to each other. They were more progressive, reformed. We were both born in Magdeburg: my brother Natan and I.

Ida had two sons, Heinz and Herman, and two daughters, Cili und Mary. The Oppenheim family left Germany when Hitler came to power. They went to Palestine [4](#). I later met Mary in Israel, she told me about how she took me for walks, I was in a stroller.

One son, Heinz, lived in Germany [after WWII], but both daughters and Herman lived in Israel. Cili had a hat store in Israel and sold hats to, for example, Golda Meir [5](#) and other important people.

## Growing up

When I was two years old my parents returned to Poland. We went to Katowice [75 km west of Cracow]. That's where my two sisters were born, Zosia and Jadzia [Jadwiga]. In Katowice, Father was a real estate manager.

Private owners would ask him to manage their tenement houses. Probably at first Father was only managing one or two houses, for example the building at 10 Slowackiego Street, which belonged to my father's brothers Tobiasz and Chaim. Later the owners started trusting him more and all in all he had 14 buildings in his care.

We had an apartment in one of these buildings. Father's office was in our apartment. There were five rooms there, Father had one room for himself, but it was also the dining room. Father learned about management all on his own. He went from one house to another collecting the rent.

Some things had to be fixed. Light bulbs exchanged, they were sometimes stolen by thieves. He met with people of different heritages, because there were all kinds of people living there: Jews, Poles, Volksdeutsche [6](#). There were quite a few so-called Silesians [7](#) in Katowice.

[Editor's note: When Mrs. Wygodzka refers to Volksdeutsche she mostly means Silesians who became Volksdeutsche during WWII.]

Father didn't only work for Jews. For example, Mrs. Rabsztynowa, at whose building we had our apartment, was not Jewish, but Polish.

Father had help, this [girl called] Hadasa who worked for us for very many years. She could do bookkeeping. She was schooled in trading. Hadasa would sit at the typewriter and serve all the people who came there.

Her maiden name was Manela. She lived in Bedzin, next to the market square, with her mother. She took a tram to work every day. [A tram ride from Bedzin to Katowice took from 20 to 30 minutes]. Hadasa also had a brother.

They were both Zionists, but rather religious ones: they were probably members of Mizrachi [8](#), not of the Zionist Organization [9](#). We were great friends with Hadasa. She sometimes went on holiday with us. Abram Manela would also go with us. He was Hadasa's nephew. I later met him in Israel, he married a Hungarian and had two sons.

Father used to go to court hearings, because some people wouldn't pay [the rent] and there were evictions. Once, during such an eviction, my father didn't go there on purpose [to the apartment he was supposed to evict the family from], because he didn't want to evict that man, who was poor, had a wife and several children.

He was a Jew who lived on Mariacka Street. One of the richer Jews, Mr. Krakowski, owned that building and ordered this man to be evicted. Mr. Krakowski went there to evict him. When he knocked on the door, that man came out with a knife and stabbed him [Mr. Krakowski]. And then there was this headline in the newspaper, in block letters 'Jew killed a Jew.' This was a horrible ordeal for Father. And this was just before the war, I remember.

Father was calm, he was good, not talkative, very liberal towards his children, towards the world. He had blond hair, blue eyes. He had a very friendly face. He wore a suit. He had to dress properly, because he went to courts, for those hearings.

He really liked photography. He took pictures whenever he could. At outings, holidays, at home. He had a camera, he had a darkroom. It was some corner, maybe the servants' room. The camera – one of the more popular ones at the time, Zeiss or Leica [Zeiss – the first single-lense small-picture Exacta camera, invented in 1936 in Drezno, Leica – a 35 mm small-picture camera, invented in 1925].

There was this man, his name was Salpeter, he was going to Palestine as a tourist and he asked Father to lend him that camera. He was an acquaintance, from the same town. He had a store with ties, scarves and umbrellas.

It was 1939. Mr. Salpeter took that camera with him and stayed in Palestine. That's how my dad lost the camera. Father used to collect scissors of all types; there was this album where he, kind of, arranged these scissors.

Mother's name was Bala, but officially, in documents – Bajla, I think. But she'd also sign her name Balbina. 'Balcia,' I remember that's how my father called Mom. When they were speaking Jewish to each other Mother would call Father 'Herszel,' but when they were speaking Polish – Herman.

Mother was born in Bedzin. She was about as old as Dad, even, I think, a year older. She was pretty, a brunette, I think. She had short hair, somehow tied, but it wasn't a bun. She wasn't tall, she wasn't plump. She was calm, kind. They loved each other, Father and Mother, yes, I remember this. They were very gentle with each other. But Mother felt that Father wasn't energetic enough with us, or with the work he was doing.

Mother was always worried that she didn't have enough money. As I remember it, it wasn't so bad, because we used to go on holidays in the summer with our entire family, there was a piano in the house, I used to learn how to play it.

That didn't last long, because I was lazy and didn't have good musical hearing. But I remember that my parents always talked about being in debt. Father used to borrow money, possibly from his brothers Tobiasz and Chaim.

Mother dressed very modestly. She may have had one better dress, for outings. I remember Mom's shoes, laced up, with heels, narrow, gray. Sometimes my parents would go to Bytom [approx. 85 km west of Cracow] to buy clothing.

That's where the border was and there were Germans there. You could buy something a lot cheaper, but the Germans didn't permit for anything to be taken out [of the country]. So I would leave my worn out shoes in a trash can and put the new ones on. But I remember that once my parents bought some oranges and it was forbidden to take those oranges [to Poland] and Father was so angry that he smashed them into a wall.

I was in Bytom once with my parents and brother. And I bought this dress, a woolen one, pink, even my sister, six years younger than me, wore it later on. And even Jadzia, who is eleven years younger, wore it during the occupation.

I remember that Mom was always busy with work. And she wasn't that strong. She had some health problems, she couldn't sleep. I think she went to Naleczow once [a popular health resort in eastern Poland, approx. 20 km from Lublin].

I don't think it was a longer stay, because that would have been too expensive. Mother took care of the house, there were four children, so there was a lot of work. Once every week or two the bed linen had to be changed, the washing would be done in a tub and the servant did the washing on a washboard, the wet things would be dried up in the attic.

Everything was washed at home, we never took anything to a laundry. Everything was so primitive, simple. I didn't help with the cleaning and cooking. I was studying, taking care of my younger sisters: taking them for walks, playing, reading to them. There was no nanny or governess. There were no luxuries.

There was one servant. She was always a Pole. The servants would come and go, for different reasons. They came from the countryside. I remember one who was very pretty. She used to wear an apron, I remember, Mom came up to her and said, 'What do you have in your pocket?'

And it turned out that she had stolen eggs. I was devastated that she'd stop working for us, because I really liked her. She had a nice name, but I don't remember what it was. Of course, she stopped working for us.

Every day we'd eat potatoes, broth with noodles – that was typical, grated carrots, raw, we had that every day, compotes, we'd eat chicken, sometimes a piece of meat, noodles, rice, groats, barley groats. The servants cooked and Mom did, too.



I remember that from time to time Mother would make so-called tsimes, chulent, kugel. I really liked milk, cheese, eggs, dairy products. Mother would bake cakes with poppy seeds, with cocoa. Yeast cake. Not some fancy kind, the simplest one, delicious. I really liked sweets.

There was a bakery, a kind of confectionery called 'Martike,' on 3 Maja Street. There were beautiful cakes on display, frogs with open mouths, different cookies – these colorful mushrooms, fancy, pretty. And I really like halvah. So many kinds, this fresh, wonderful halvah!

Father was a member of the General Zionist Organization. He was the treasurer there. My parents wanted to move to Palestine, but they never had enough money for the tickets, to go with the entire family. So we never left.

Zionist views were popular among Father's brothers. Uncle Tobiasz and Uncle Chaim bought some land in Palestine, but somehow they didn't manage to leave on time, because if they had, they would have probably survived [the Holocaust].

That's how their oldest brother, Jakub, survived. He died there. One of the sisters in my mother's family also left for Palestine, but I don't think it was for ideological reasons. She simply got married to someone who took her to Palestine and that's where she lived until she died. Her name was Regina Cytrynbaum. Mother wanted us to leave, but she wasn't a member of any Zionist organization.

My brother Natan was smarter and more talented than I. I kept arguing with Natan all the time. We would fight over everything, but he was very chivalrous. I remember how once, when I was supposed to get a spanking for something, he stood in front of me and didn't let Mom or Father spank me.

We were later very close, we liked each other very much. Natan kept to himself. He was involved in his technical things. He was tinkering all the time, electrical equipment. For example he built some radios. I remember he also took pictures with Father's camera and he took this one picture of our cousin in a bottle.

At first he took a picture of a bottle, then he placed [the image of] this cousin on the same film. He went to the Berek Joselewicz Public School in Katowice, I later graduated from the same school. I remember some names of my brother's friends, girls: Fela Frejlich, Mici Meler, Hanka Urbach.

My brother had some friends, boys, but I don't remember him having a close friend, no. I remember how he was getting ready for his bar mitzvah. There was this Hebrew teacher [in the public school]. His name was Winer and he prepared my brother.

After he graduated from seven grades of public school, when Natan was 13 or 14 years old, my parents sent him to an agricultural school in Helenówek near Łódź [approx. 30 km northeast of Łódź]. My parents were probably thinking about going to Palestine and wanted Natan to learn about farming, so he'd have a job there.

The school in Helenówek was directed by the 'king' of Łódź, Rumkowski [10](#). My brother only spent several months in that school. I remember that I went there to visit him with my parents in the fall and Natan was back in Katowice shortly afterwards. I think he didn't like it much.

In Katowice he was admitted to a technical school, which didn't accept Jews at all. It was the Silesian Technical Research Plant [The Silesian Technical Research Plant opened a school in 1931, the second largest institution of its type in Europe].

It was a very high-standard technical school, which is probably still in existence [the school is now located in a building at 26 Sokolska Street]. Natan tried to get in three times. Each time he passed the exams easily, but they didn't want to admit him. But he was stubborn and they had to finally admit him [1938].

So there were a thousand students in all and two Jews: my brother Natan Beitner and one boy from Bedzin – Dudek Naparstek, that was his name, as I recall it now. My brother didn't graduate from this school. Natan didn't want to go to Palestine, like my parents and I [wanted]. He didn't have anything to do with Zionism, he was more of a communist.

Natan had a crush on Hadasa, who was my father's employee. She was older than him, some 10 years older. She had a crush on him as well. They didn't hide their feelings from our parents much, because it was, how should I put it, a platonic story.

They weren't a couple. In his notes, before he died, Natan wrote that he loved Hadasa, but that some other girl could have replaced her for him. I would say he was very realistic about this.

I remember the birth of my sister, Zosia [in 1928], because my mother gave birth at home. She didn't go to the clinic, like she did with Jadzia. It happened then, I was in first grade, that the servant came to get me from school.

On the way, as we were walking, we saw lots of people. Everyone was saying something: 'What happened, how did it happen?' It turned out that my brother had just been run over by a car. So we came home and we told Mother that Natan had been run over by a car and that's when she went into labor.

Natan was taken to the hospital, examined. It wasn't anything serious. We later saw the man who stopped that car at the last moment, because the car would have backed up and smashed my brother's heart. It turned out it was a German, his name was Doctor Aronade. He was a physician, a pediatrician. Anyway, that's when Zosia was born, after seven months of pregnancy.

Zosia was really tiny – Mother used to say 'she's as large as a knife,' I remember they put her in cotton, because there were no incubators then. And later, several days after she was born, this same Doctor Aronade saved Zosia, because the baby started dying.

The bed was near the furnace, carbon monoxide must have been coming out of it; coal was used for fuel then. I remember that Doctor Aronade took two bowls, one with hot water, one with cold water and kept moving the baby from one bowl to the other and that's how he saved her.

Zosia went to a Jewish preschool, which was operated by my mother's friend, Mrs. Schif. It was a private preschool, but it wasn't expensive. Mrs. Schif taught the children some Hebrew, sang with them. The activities always took place at our apartment, in the nursery.

Zosia was very close to Natan. She adored him and he was nice to her, good and kind. Not like I was to her. I remember that I once took her hand and put it on a hot light bulb. Zosia annoyed me,



because I had to take her everywhere with me.

When I went to the Organization [Mrs. Wygodzka used to belong to the Zionist Youth Organization Akiba], I had to drag her with me. I think she was later a member of this organization as well, but this was already during the war, in Sosnowiec [approx. 65 km west of Cracow]. Zosia also managed to go to the Berek Joselewicz school for some time. When she was ten years old, the war broke out.

Jadzia was the youngest of all the siblings. She was born in 1933. I loved Jadzia. She was so sweet and pretty. I called her 'Jadziulka.' Before the war Jadzia didn't manage to start attending school, so she had no schooling. My little sister was six years old when the war broke out.

We lived in downtown Katowice. The city wasn't so big, that's how I remember it. It was close everywhere, you could walk on foot. Katowice was clean, there were nice stores, houses – not very tall, some three or four stories.

Maybe even taller in some new buildings which they started building right before the war. The streets were paved, there was electricity and running water in the houses. At first we lived at 10 Slowackiego Street. It was actually a side street of 3 Maja Street, which was the main street in the city.

The building on Slowackiego Street belonged to Uncle Tobiasz and Uncle Chaim and my father managed it, it was large. Then our family grew, because Zosia was born, that was still at 10 Slowackiego Street. We moved to an apartment at 21 Slowackiego Street and that's where we stayed until the war.

In addition to five rooms, there was a kitchen, a small room for the servant, a bathroom with a bathtub and running water. There was a separate toilet, even two. There was Father's office, the parents' bedroom and our, the children's, bedroom.

We always rented out one room, sometimes even two, because we had enough space, but we needed the money. One of our boarders was this pianist, a Pole. There was also a German with his wife and he yelled at her horribly, because she didn't make scrambled eggs like he liked them.

He threw those scrambled eggs at her. I also had an aunt, but not a real one, Nysele, she lived with us for a longer period of time. And she had a son who was robbed and murdered somewhere in the forest, probably for anti-Semitic reasons. Perhaps he was carrying something, trading something? It happened before the war, I heard about it as a child.

The balcony door was in the kitchen, my father made this special contraption which opened the ceiling of the balcony for Sukkot. The balcony would become a booth and that's where the holiday of booths was celebrated.

This balcony is not there anymore, I was in Katowice some two years ago and saw that it has been disassembled. After such a long absence I came back to that house, which is really run down. What I remembered were the stairs, which are still the same. Wooden stairs. I used to sit there, with my girlfriends from school, do our homework, play.

The furniture in the apartment was large and heavy. The curtains were very nice, I remember kilims [decorative rugs, usually woolen, hand-woven, often placed on walls to adorn them] ... There

were furnaces, used for heating, for example in the nursery. There was a telephone in Father's office, number 990.

There was also a Keren Kayemet [11](#) can. You'd put money in there, from time to time young people would go around collecting the money. With this money Jews used to buy land from the Arabs in Palestine. A portrait of Uryshkin, this Zionist, was on the wall. [Uryshkin, Mendel Menakhem, (1863 – 1941): a member of a Zionist Organization, one of the leaders of Russian Zionism]

There were two entrances to our apartment [at 21 Slowackiego Street]: the front entrance – from the main gate, and the back entrance. There was one hallway from the street, with entrances to all the apartments and three hallways from the back. One of them led only to our apartment. Although there were other apartments above ours, these back stairs went up only to our apartment. When you entered our apartment from the back, there was a small storage room on the left of a small hallway, there were glass jars with good stuff there.

We were living on the first floor. I think the house had three floors. Mrs. Rabsztynowa was living above us. She was very nice. There was a caretaker, who took care of the house, cleaned and so on. I think this caretaker was a Volksdeutsche [she was probably a Silesian and signed the list of loyal citizens of the Third Reich during the occupation], her name was Chudasz.

She lived on the ground floor, from the back, in the hallway opposite the gate. There were also two Jewish women living in that building. Their last name was Krysztal, they lived right next to us. Both, the mother and the daughter, died of cancer.

There was one more Volksdeutsche living there: Erika Pietruszka, I remember her name. She was a blond, living with her fat mother. Erika Pietruszka was my age, maybe a year older. The neighbors in our building were all right. [Mrs. Wygodzka means that there were no anti-Semitic conflicts with the neighbors].

Katowice was this Polish-German city [12](#). There weren't many Jews and they were mostly progressive. I don't remember any Jews with beards, side locks. Orthodox Jews, if there were any, lived in Sosnowiec, Bedzin, in that area. There was no Jewish district in Katowice. Jews were scattered throughout the city, they lived where they wanted.

There were different Jews in Katowice, rich ones and poor ones... There were days when the poor ones went around collecting money. I know that my parents always gave alms. There were Jewish stores; rather poor ones, with vegetables, fruit, somewhere downstairs, almost in the basement, but with entrances from the street.

This girl came to us, her name was Langer, she was pretty, she brought us eggs, milk. There were stores on this main street, there were elegant goods there. I remember Wasserman's textile store. There were rich Jews as well, who dealt with trade.

I knew several girls from school whose older brothers went to France to college. I suppose they must have had their houses there as well. For example Edek, Marysia Zukierman's brother, studied at Nancy [approx. 275 km southeast of Paris].

There was also this Stasiak Zimmerman, who went abroad to study. I knew him, because he was in the Hanoar Hatzioni [13](#) Zionist Organization which I was also a member of for some time. Stasiak

had a sister named Lala and a younger brother called Janek, who died in the uprising in Sosnowiec [in the summer of 1943 members of Jewish self-defense groups in the Srodula ghetto in Sosnowiec stood up to the Germans, several hundred Jews were shot then].

Sztrochliz was rich, his father had a printing house. There was Marysia Grajcer, her parents had an iron factory. There was this Marysia Szolowicz, whose father, I think, owned some real estate. These girls, egoists, used to buy ice-cream for themselves and would never let you have a lick.

In Katowice people used to drive their cars to the synagogue for the holidays. [The synagogue was located on Mickiewicza Street, it was built in 1900, later destroyed by the Germans in 1939, it was the second synagogue in Katowice, the first one was built in 1862.]

This was a western fashion, you could say German. Their religiosity was not very strong. Even those who were not religious celebrated the holidays, because that was the tradition. It was a reformed synagogue. I think there was no mikveh in the city, no talmud torah or cheders.

I remember the synagogue was very beautiful, large. I think the women had their own separate part, upstairs. There were also services on Polish national holidays, for example on the 3rd of May [14](#). In addition, when Pilsudski [15](#) died, there was a service, we all cried.

The service was in Polish and the rabbi talked about the Marshal. There was singing, 'Boze, cos Polske' [Polish, 'God, you protect Poland,' a song from 1816 considered to be one of the Polish national anthems]. The entire school gathered in mourning, everyone.

We had two rabbis [in Katowice]. One was called Doctor Vogelmann. The second one was Doctor Hajmades, who had a beautiful wife and he was, in general, very European, with a small beard, elegant. And Doctor Vogelmann was more traditional, with a longer beard.

I sometimes went there to ask him whether a specific hen was kosher, my mother would send me. He lived very close to us, on 3 Maja Street. I was really ashamed to do this, I was shy and going to the rabbi was a huge event for me.

Mother's food was kosher. Kosher meat was bought in a store, I think it was called 'Fischer.' It was on Szopena Street, nearby, two minutes from home. Near the synagogue as well. And Pola Fischer, the daughter of these owners, attended the vocational gymnasium with me [Gymnasium of the Polish Women's Association in Katowice].

She left for Australia in 1947, maybe 1948. My parents celebrated the traditional holidays: Pesach, Chanukkah, Purim. Mother lit candles on Fridays. When she lit the candles, she'd say the prayers, but she didn't pray in other situations. She didn't go to the synagogue much, she was no religious fanatic.

Father went to the synagogue, but only on holidays, not on Fridays. Not every week, like those religious Jews. He didn't wear a beard, he was more progressive. I know that when we were later in Lwow he ate ham, other things, too.

We didn't do anything on Sabbath. That's when guests would come visit. We sometimes listened to the radio. There were these programs, I remember Korczak [16](#), these talks, songs: 'O czym marzy dziewczyna gdy dorastac zaczyna? Kiedy z paczka zamienia sie w kwiat.' [Polish: 'What does a girl

dream about when she starts to grow up? When she changes from a bud to a flower.']

But I don't think we obeyed all those restrictions. We cooked, we turned the lights on, but I don't think we traveled. We weren't allowed to eat ham, but my friends and I would often buy a ham sandwich and eat it at the gate.

I was never religious. I remember I attended the synagogue only on high holidays and we played in the gardens around the synagogue. My parents were inside and we were romping, running around, talking in the gardens around the synagogue.

We only went inside for a second. I remember my brother debated religious issues with Father and tried to prove to him that God didn't exist, that it had all been made up by people. And we, girls, didn't care much about religion. Later, when I was older, I didn't go to the synagogue on my own.

I liked Pesach best of the holidays we celebrated at home, because everyone gathered and we had good things to eat. Dumplings were made from matzah flour: just matzah, eggs and water. Mother prepared all the dishes in the kitchen: there was challah, egg in salt, and, of course, matzah.

And for the Pesach holiday Mother also changed the dishes. We'd read the Haggadah and Father put on a white robe and ate in a half-reclining position. For Pesach Father would sometimes bring some Jewish soldier home for supper.

That was customary there, because Polish soldiers [17](#) were quartered somewhere nearby and, because they came from all over the country, they didn't have any relatives there, so locals would take them in.

We also celebrated Kuczki [Sukkot]. We would sit down and eat on the balcony, we opened this roof of the balcony. The balcony would be beautifully decorated with paper. It was like a booth. And we'd sit there and sing. I don't remember these songs now.

On Yom Kippur you had to fast. My parents fasted, but I didn't. Children didn't have to. We also went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur. I think candles were lit at home for Chanukkah. We played with a dreidel and received Chanukkah gelt [Chanukkah money].

We didn't dress up all that much for Purim, sometimes we painted our faces a bit, but I don't remember any parades of dressed up children on the streets. There were also these ringers, which we used to make noise in the synagogue, I think also at home. Nothing much happened on New Year's. If anything, perhaps Father went to the synagogue.

We spoke Polish at home. My parents also spoke German and Yiddish. We, the children, spoke Polish and German. German and Polish were the official languages in Katowice. Actually, I think that until I turned six, until I went to school, I only spoke German.

The only book which I remember we had at home was in Polish. It was Tolstoy [18](#), I remember, it was bound in these red covers, but not leather, it was in my father's study. My parents didn't read much. They didn't have an intellectual education, no needs.

They were simple people. Among themselves they spoke about family, business, that there wasn't enough money. I'm sure they didn't talk about politics. I remember that before the war there started to be talk about whether there'd be a war. They were afraid. Mother thought we should

have left for Palestine.

We sometimes went to the theater, mostly with Mother. It was a Polish theater on Teatralny Square [probably the S. Wyspianski Teatr Slaski, located at Rynek 2, created in 1907, still in existence], very nice. Seats in the first rows cost more, in the back rows – less. I didn't go there often, but when I did, I usually had tickets for those cheaper seats.

The Jewish theater came once, for a guest performance. I went to the play. It was 'Madame Iks' with Ida Kaminska [19](#), or maybe with her mother [20](#). I remember that Korczak came with a lecture on how to love children. I went to listen to that, my mother took me. Father used to buy the daily paper, it was called 'Haint' [21](#). I remember he would read that.

My parents' friends were Jews. We didn't have any close relations with Poles. The three nationalities in the city: Poles, Jews and Germans were not close. Jews met with Jews, and the others probably with their own. Some Jews who were friends of my parents had a printing house on the main street, I think it was Pilsudskiego Street.

They were both called Sztrochlic, because they were brothers. They had children our age. One of them was short and fat and the other one was tall and very handsome, he had a wife and a pretty daughter named Gusta and a son. The short one also had a short fat wife and a daughter – also Gusta, but she was fatter. Both Sztrochlic brothers were living on Graniczna Street. We'd go there for their birthdays.

We lived at number 10 and the ones who lived at number 21 were, I think, the Zajdlers. I don't know what they did. I think we invited them for birthdays, they invited us. We would organize birthday parties German style, with cocoa, chocolate and whipped cream, there was 'Kartoffelsalat' – potato salad. There was a movie projector at their house. They showed us films, for example 'Tiny Tim,' in German. We'd sing songs in German.

I still remember them: 'Hänschen klein, ging allein, in die weite Welt hinein./ Stock und Hut, stehn ihm gut, ist auch wohl gemut./ Aber Mutter weinet sehr, hat ja nun kein Hänschen mehr./ Da besinnt sich das Kind, läuft nach Haus geschwind./ Lieb Mama, ich bin da, ich dein Hänschen hoppssassa./ Glaube mir, ich bleib hier. Geh nicht fort von Dir.'

[English: 'Little Johnny/Went alone/In the wide world,/ tick and hat/Suit him well/He's cheerful!/But Mother weeps much,/Now she has her little Johnny no more,/So, the child thinks it over,/He goes back home./Dear Mother, I'm here,/Your Johnny tra la la,/I'm by you,/I stay by you.'] Polish was spoken at the Zajdlers and at the Sztrochlices.

Almost every year we'd go on vacation. We'd leave the city for at least a month, or two. We'd take all our stuff. We'd go near Katowice, to Bystra [Bystra Krakowska and Bystra Slaska – towns south of Bielsko-Biala – 86 km west of Cracow], to Cyganski Las [forest in the southern part of Bielsko-Biala], sometimes to Rabka [approx. 40 km south of Cracow], always to southern Poland, Silesia. I never went to the seaside [Baltic Sea, in the north of Poland] before the war.

Our more distant family would go with us too and we'd spend time there together. We'd rent cottages from peasants. I remember this hotel in Zakopane. We'd live there and eat there. It was a Jewish hotel. The owners were Jewish, the guests were mostly Jewish too.

We met a young married couple during one of those vacations, they were staying in that hotel with us. And then we hiked in the mountains together. We'd hike mostly in the valleys with the little sisters, we'd climb the Gubalowka [a peak on the outskirts of Zakopane, 1,120 m above seal level], never too high. We were not professional [hikers], I didn't have any special clothing, I hiked in my school coat.

Most often we'd meet with Aunt Mania, that is Mother's sister, and her husband Tobiasz, my father's brother. They had one daughter – Estusia [Ester]. We were also in touch with Chaim, that is Father's brother and his entire family.

Chaim and Aunt Cesia had several children. Four sons: Abram, Herman [Herszlik], Nachman, Aronek [Aron] and one daughter – Netka [Natalia]. We didn't have any family in Katowice. They all lived in Sosnowiec.

Tobiasz and Chaim lived in Sosnowiec, on Deblinska Street, near the train station, they had nice apartments. They were wealthier than the rest of the family. Tobiasz and Chaim operated a currency exchange office in Katowice, at 10 Slowackiego Street, in a house which was owned by them. It was a small, private corporation.

Chaim also had a clothing store in Sosnowiec, on Modrzejowska Street. Modrzejowska was a street where almost all the stores belonged to Jews. There was no Jewish district. There were streets where mostly Jews lived, but they were in no way separated. [The Jewish religious community was founded in Sosnowiec in 1899.

Jews lived mostly in the commercial district – a square delimited by present day streets: Warszawska, Malachowskiego, Sienkiewicza, Koscielna. According to the census of 1931 Jews constituted 19% of the population of Sosnowiec.]

Szlomo, another one of Father's brothers, also lived in Sosnowiec. He had a colonial goods store. He was alone, his wife was dead, that's what I remember. He had a daughter Jadzia – Jochewet, a nice, pretty, blond girl. We used to call her Jochcia.

She used to talk a lot and very loudly. I remember I was ashamed to walk on the street with her. She was a bit older than me and died in the camp in Lichtenwerden [Svetla Hora, Czechoslovakia, an 'Aussenkommando' of Auschwitz, inmates worked in the arms industry in a yarn factory (G.A. Buhl und Sohn) and clearing the rubble after bombings, liquidated in February or March 1945]. Jochcia had one brother, his name was Pesach, he was in Peru.

He had emigrated before World War II, he was an upholsterer by trade. Jochcia also had some more brothers, sisters, whom I don't remember. I met this one from Peru in Israel, when he came there in the 1970s and died shortly afterwards. He was some 10 to 15 years older than I.

We also used to meet with Rozia and Heniek Oksenhendler. They had two daughters: Fredzia and Renia. Rozia was Aunt Cesia's sister, Aunt Cesia was the wife of my father's brother, Chaim. I think that Rozia was also some relation of my father's, because Cesia and Rozia had one more sister: she lived in Czestochowa and her name was Miriam Bruk, I know that she was also a cousin of my father's. [Chaim Beitner married his cousin Cesia, the daughter of Aron Weksler, who was the brother of Zofia Weksler, Chaim Beitner's mother – according to A. Maskalan's album.] Miriam Bruk also used to go to on vacation with us.



Estusia was my favorite cousin. Her father [Tobiasz] was my father's brother and her mother [Mania] was my mother's sister. We loved each other very much. I remember how once I went with her and her mother to Krynica [Krynica Gorska, approx. 90 km southwest of Cracow].

We were there in the summer, in a hotel called Tel Awiw. Krynica Gorska was a health resort. Estusia was some ten years older than I. She graduated from a gymnasium in Sosnowiec. I don't remember if it was a Polish or Jewish one. She wasn't married.

Estusia was a charming, intelligent girl. She was self-taught and she was very radical, progressive. Progressive – I mean her father was very religious, he had this long beard, but she sympathized with the communists.

She didn't belong to the party [Communist Party of Poland] [22](#), but she had a whole group of friends with whom she met and discussed political issues. Her leftist views were well known in the family. Her parents were pious Jews, but they didn't mind [her communist views.]

Politics didn't play any role in my friendship with Estusia. She was the one with communist sympathies, I was a member of a Zionist organization. She didn't try to convert me to communism. My brother Natan, yes, she did. She had influenced him, but I was too stupid, too naïve. I was a child. Estusia died in Auschwitz. Together with her parents, she was deported from the ghetto in Sosnowiec [23](#).

My second cousin Netka was also a communist. She was Uncle Chaim's daughter. She organized a strike in her parents' store on behalf of the employees. She may not have been a member of the party, but she was definitely a communist and they always spoke quietly about her.

Netka survived the war. She was in the USSR. She married a Russian of Polish origin and they followed the line of the front together, they reached Berlin. [Most likely they were in Berling's Army, formed from Polish refugees in the USSR in 1943.

Berling's Army took part in the capturing of Berlin in April 1945.] Right after liberation they settled in Warsaw. Her name was Natalia Maskalan and she had this son, Andrzej [Andrzej Maskalan, the author of the Beitner and Weksler family album, quoted above].

Natalia's mother's sister, her name was Nadzia Lesko, was also a communist, and she was also not talked about, because she was in prison for communism. [Communist activity was illegal in Poland in the interwar period.]

In the 1930s she went with her husband to the homeland of communism [Soviet Union], because she was in trouble in Poland. And that's where Nadzia's husband was murdered and she was sent to a camp for ten years [24](#).

Netka's oldest brother was named Abram, then there was Herman, Nachman and Aronek. The oldest ones went to Palestine even before the war. I think Abram left in 1933 and Herman in 1934. Nachman, we called him Nacek, left in 1936 or 1937. He died there several years ago.

Their father, Chaim Beitner, stayed in Poland. Of course, he died [in the Shoah] and his youngest son, Aronek, died with him. They were sent from Sosnowiec to Auschwitz. [Transports of Jews from the ghetto in Sosnowiec began in May 1943, the last one departed from Sosnowiec in January

1944].

From my mother's side I met her three step-sisters: Hela, Frania and Jadzia. And this Hela had a son, I remember. Her name was Hela Frydrych, she was not quite normal. And Frania and Jadzia didn't get married before the war. We did not have a close relationship with Frania, Hela and Jadzia. They would sometimes come to Katowice. Only Frania survived the war, no one else was left. And this Frania went to America after the war, got married, had a son.

I was in Bedzin two or three times, but when I went there I would always sleep at Hadasa's house [Father's employee]. I remember there was this huge bed with a feather quilt. There was only one room there, they were not rich people.

Hadasa's mother used to bake yeast chocolate cake – it was delicious. Hadasa would sometimes bring it to us, to Katowice. I visited this Helcia [Mother's stepsister] maybe once or twice. I don't know what she or her husband did. They had something on the market square in Bedzin. I only remember Mother used to say he was primitive.

Hela lived outside of the Jewish district. There was a Jewish district in Bedzin, it was called 'Zimna Dupa' [Polish, literally: 'Cold Ass'; most Jews in Bedzin lived in the area of: Zaulek, Zawale, Rybna, Berka Jozelewicza, near the old walls of the city, near the castle.] I don't know the origin of this name. Only poor people lived there. I was there only once, it was near Gora Zamkowa [Castle Hill].

Mostly German was spoken at the preschool which I attended in Katowice. It was a private preschool, German, I think. Children of all ethnic backgrounds went there. My mother used to walk me to the preschool. I don't remember if I went there with my brother or not.

I was six years old when I started attending the Berek Joselewicz Elementary School. It was very close to our home, on Stawowa Street, I think. There was one Jewish school in Katowice. It was organized by the Jewish religious community.

The school had a lot of pupils, there were boys and girls together in the classes, the building was quite impressive too, maybe three stories high, with a large schoolyard. The principal's name was Dligacz. The classes were taught in Polish.

Winer taught Hebrew, but it was very basic. Our homeroom teacher was Miss Londner, who taught Polish. Her name was the same as my mother's, but they were not related. There was Miss Apter, I think she taught history, Mr. Szapiro, who taught Polish.

I really liked Ms. Sara Diler, who taught us drawing. Marlana, that's how we called her, she had beautiful legs, like Marlene Dietrich. Sara Diler was very shapely, nice, intelligent. We met in Israel, many, many years after the war and talked about the days in Katowice. It had turned out that before the war she was a friend of my future husband, Stanislaw Wygodzki [25](#).

There was gymnastics [at school] and in the Zionist sports organization which we belonged to. I think it was called Maccabi [26](#), or perhaps the name was different? We did exercises on all kinds of equipment. There were competitions too.

The gymnastics classes at school took place in the girls' gymnasium on 3 Maja Street [Municipal Girls' Gymnasium, located at number 42, on 3 Maja Street, created in 1922, currently M.

Sklodowska-Curie High School number VIII.]

I had the greatest problems with Mr. Neumen, who used to throw me out of physics and mathematics lessons, because I didn't know anything and disturbed the class. Well, I wasn't such a good student.

I was lazy and only once, in 5th grade, did I have all As and Bs. Once I even had to repeat a grade, 6th grade. Yes, I failed mathematics and physics. I remember that it really hit me hard. My parents didn't punish me at home.

They were sorry, just like I was. I told them I wouldn't study at all, that I'd go to work. Of course, I couldn't find a job. So I repeated 6th grade and graduated from that elementary school after eight years, because there were seven grades in all.

I had several friends at school: there was Mala Lobel, Hanka Urbach, there was Rutka Reichman, Mina Schif, Hela Hass. All of us, with the exception of Mina, were in love with this boy from our class. His name was Natan Rozenzweig.

He was charming, nice, intelligent, wise. I think I even made out with him somewhere in the park. Those were very immature feelings, but they did bind us, because we stayed in touch for a long time. Natan was in the ghetto in Warsaw [27](#), he wrote me that he was sick with typhus. I even sent him a typhus vaccine. He died in the ghetto.

Most of my friends were in Akiba [28](#) – a Zionist youth organization, so I also joined it. I was in touch with my girlfriends for many years. My best friend Hela [Hass] was in Siberia [29](#) during the war. We sent packages to her from Vilnius, from the kibbutz, pictures and greetings. She survived, got married, she was in Israel and died a few years ago.

Mina Schif also survived, she is in Israel today. She's very sick with Parkinson's disease. Mina Schif's father was a member of the Zionist Organization. I think he operated a Singer franchise [a company producing sewing machines]. He had bicycles, sewing machines there.

My other friends died during the war. Mala Lobel, Rutka Reichman. When we were in gymnasium this Rutka was really in love with Franek Goldsztain. We were very young, maybe 17 years old and it wasn't popular then for young people to carry on like that, they were like a marriage.

But nobody condemned them much. She later died, he survived. I know, because he sent me a letter in 1946 and his picture from Karlstadt [a city on the River Main, east of Frankfurt am Main]. We later lost contact, I don't know what happened to him.

When we were children, and later teenagers, we used to go to Kosciuszki Park. There was this special sledding trail there. It was quite far away from the center [of the city]. Fairs [of industrial products] took place in Kosciuszki Park from time to time.

There was also Bugla [an outdoor swimming pool, opened in 1927, still operating at 26 Zeliwna Street], where we used to go to swim. There was a skating rink, where we went skating. We also played ball. I used to go to the cinema with my brother.

It was a huge expense for us, but there was this one teller, who let us in without tickets. There were some cowboy movies, I also went to see 'Ben Hur' [American silent movie from 1926].

I was nine years old [1931] when I joined the Zionist organization and I was a member until the end. My friends encouraged me to do it. My parents didn't have anything against it. I remember that my father said, 'You can join anything, but the Betars [30](#).'

Because Betar was an organization whose members looked like fascists, almost like the 'Hitlerjugend' [31](#): they had uniforms, brown shirts and these military belts. They also had this idea to take Palestine by force, which my father didn't like.

I joined Akiba, but I wasn't always there. I was also in Hanoar, but later returned to Akiba. Which organization I was in, depended on where my friends were at the time. There were probably some ideological differences between those two organizations, I don't remember exactly. I only know that they were more pious in Akiba: they made us pray, organized religious celebrations. There was also Hashomer Hatzair [32](#) in Katowice. It was a socialist organization.

In Akiba we'd meet, learn Hebrew, sing some songs in Hebrew. It was quite fun. We wanted to leave for Palestine. Studying, discussions, camps – all of this prepared us for emigration. When I was some 15-16 years old I wanted to go to Palestine and work on a farm, like I was taught in the organization.

They told us about Palestine, what was happening there, what life was like, about how land was being conquered, about how everything was being built, how difficult it was there. They talked to us a lot about morality, pride, love of Israeli land.

There were discussions about current events, political and sexual issues. Those discussions made me conscious [of sexuality]. I was very young then, 12-13 years. What did we know then? Nothing. Our parents didn't tell us anything.

It was all organized very well in Akiba: there were these units, platoons, kind of like in the army. They all had names: 'Sharon,' 'Degania' – named after places in Israel [then Palestine]. For example I was in 'Blyskawica' [in English 'Lightning']. Later in others, because that would change.

We had this 'kfucovy,' that is a leader, male or female. There was this Zyga Halbreich and his brother Paul [Halbreich], there was Edi Goldberg, there was Rakower, Bronek, there was Mania Walner. Some of them would later go to Palestine.

For the older ones – you had to be 15-16 years old – there was the so-called haksharah [Hebrew: preparation, strengthening], this preparation for emigration to Palestine, it took place at a farm. I never went there. I was too young.

I didn't date. I didn't fall in love easily, well, even if I did, it was platonic. There was this Moniek Fajner. He was from Bedzin. His father used to come to Katowice, I knew him. Moniek Fajner had a brother, Karol, who ran away to the Soviet Union during the war and was deported to Kolyma [Kolyma Lowland, where the gulags were scattered].

He was in Magadan [a city in the Asian part of Russia, since 1939 the largest Gulag transfer point, transports of prisoners were sent off to camps from there.] And he labored there, in a mine [there were gold, zinc ore, tungsten, coal and lignite mines].

He labored there in very harsh conditions. He came to see me after he got back from Russia – without hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. And Moniek Fajner left for Palestine in, I think, 1937. He wrote letters to me, he was in love with me, but I didn't write him back.

When we were children and then teenagers, we used to go around Jewish homes and collect money for Keren Kayemet, in those blue cans with a star of David, for the purchase of land in Israel. There was a youth Zionist organization in Chorzow [a city approx. 3 km northwest of Katowice] and we went to meetings with youth from that organization. It was a five to six kilometer walk: from Katowice to Chorzow or Krolewska Huta, as it was called then [in 1934 the name of the city was changed from Krolewska Huta to Chorzow]. And from there [from Chorzow] they would walk to Katowice to visit us.

When I was 12, 13 years old I went to camp for the first time. I went to camps with Akiba, perhaps once with Hanoar. With Akiba I used to go to Banska Wyzyna, near Zakopane [approx. 9 km north of Zakopane]. My parents didn't like this very much.

They had to pay, it was expensive. But I always somehow managed to convince them. Once, I don't think they let me go, so I ran away. We went hiking in the Tatras [the highest mountain range in Poland, in the southern part of the country.]

I remember we would always go to Zakopane at night and then hiking in the mountains. We practically slept while walking, we were so tired. Each hike would always last several days. We ate whatever was available, mamalyga [a dish prepared from corn flour or cooked groats], we slept wherever we could, on some straw.

I once climbed Kasprowy Wierch [one of the highest peaks in the Tatra Mountains, 1,985 meters above sea level.] I climbed using these buckles and chains. Well, there were also these raids of the Polish scouts. And we would raid their camp as well.

We kept watch, guarded our camp in Zywiec [approx. 100 km southwest of Cracow.] We were afraid that these scouts would take our flag [capturing another troop's flag was a custom based on the capturing of the enemy's banner in the military.]

I started attending gymnasium when I was 14 years old [1936]. It was a vocational gymnasium of the Polish Women's Association in Katowice. An all girls' school. We learned sewing, corsetry. I didn't want to work in that profession, but my parents sent me there.

Because I wasn't such a great student they sent me to a vocational school, so I'd learn a trade. There was also a public girls' gymnasium [in Katowice.] But I wasn't a good student, so perhaps those general subjects would have been too difficult for me? I didn't like studying.

My friends from elementary school and from Akiba went to the gymnasium with me, for example Mala Lobel. There were some who attended the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bedzin. It was called the Firstenberg Gymnasium [opened in 1930, currently High School #2.] Classes were taught in Polish there. There was also a Jewish trade school in Bedzin.

My gymnasium was very decent: there were quite a few students, the building was very nice. It was in the Silesian Technical Research Plant, where there was a technical school for boys. We were in a separate part of that building.

There were practical classes and general subjects. We learned German and French. But the study of foreign languages was not very serious. I remember one professor – Mrs. Fik. A great teacher of Polish. I think she must have been a communist. There were also [Christian] religion classes at the gymnasium. I left the classroom for religion classes. Jewish teachers didn't work there.

There weren't many Jewish students. There were few of us in the class: this friend of mine [Mala Lobel], me, Pola Fiszler and one more – she commuted from Dabrowa Gornicza. We didn't feel anti-Semitism at the gymnasium.

There was also this Aniela Gora, a Pole. I was friends with her. She lived on 3 Maja Street. I used to go to this Aniela's house and she'd come and visit me. But usually there weren't that many close relationships between Polish and Jewish girls.

I attended the gymnasium for three years, until the war broke out. I graduated from the gymnasium. It was called the semi-final exam [an exam after four years of gymnasium; secondary school consisted of a four-year gymnasium and a two-year lyceum.]

## During the war

After Hitler came to power [33](#), it was in the 1930s, there were lots of anti-Semites [34](#). This happened when I started to be able to understand certain things, I could have been 10 or 12 years old. I don't know how it was before.

Usually, there weren't many serious anti-Semitic incidents. I remember that yes, they used to shave off the beards of Orthodox Jews, who came to Katowice from Sosnowiec or Bedzin. This uncle of mine, Tobiasz, when he came to Katowice from Sosnowiec, he was attacked and his beard was cut off.

I remember that my uncle and my parents were all shocked. But when there were such attacks, they wouldn't rob you, they wouldn't take your money. It was the Hitlerjugend that did this [Mrs. Wygodzka is probably referring to the Jungdeutsche Partei für Polen (JDP), 1930-1939, a national Nazi party of the German minority in Poland.]

Those young people [from JDP] dressed just like the Hitlerjugend: in those gray shoes, white knee-high socks, shirts. They were behind all those anti-Semitic incidents. But I don't know exactly whom they represented, I didn't know them. Those were German influences. I don't remember if there was Endecja [35](#) in Katowice.

In nineteen thirty-something my father had some problems. Some Volksdeutscher must have ratted on him – but I don't know what exactly, because my father wasn't doing anything illegal. I remember how they came to our house, the Polish police.

Mother told me and my brother to go out to the park. And she dressed us nicely. That is she had me wear a two-part dress, red, polka-dot. And she told us not to come back until she came to get us. And we walked and walked around this park, until finally Mother came to get us, it turned out they had searched the house. They took Father's scissors, those he had been collecting for the album.



And I remember this story when I was playing hopscotch at 21 Slowackiego Street, the house on the other side of the street was number 10 or number 12 Slowackiego Street. It was a corner house. Suddenly a boy came out of that house and slapped my face, then went away.

I cried horribly and went to my mother and told her everything. Mother went to talk to that boy's mother, but she didn't care – nothing. That was an anti-Semitic incident. It was in the 1930s, that's what the atmosphere was like. After the Germans came [in 1939], all the Silesians immediately became Volksdeutsche. One of them was shot on the very first day when the Germans entered. On the street, because he was out there, overjoyed that they had come, so they shot him. He was a barber on 3 Maja Street. I don't remember what his name was.

The last camp was organized [by Akiba] in 1939. Several hundred people went hiking in the Tatras, because young people from all over Poland gathered there. I didn't take part in that hike, I must have been feeling ill. It was a tragic hike, because lightning struck a rock and seven people, including the guide, who was a very handsome boy, fell off the cliff, into the precipice.

He lived in Nowy Targ [approx. 20 km north of Zakopane]. His name was Heniek Jaffe, he was slim, tall, blond, he had blue eyes. I remember the despair of those parents who were waiting at the train station in Cracow. It was August, we had just gotten home when the war broke out on 1st September and the tragic camp was forgotten.

I wasn't there when the Germans entered Katowice, I didn't see how happy they [the Silesians] were to greet them. Perhaps a day before the war broke out we ran away from Katowice, because we were afraid of the Germans. We knew Katowice would surrender immediately. We took some wagon and ran away [to the east]. Everyone was running away, not just Jews [36](#). But no one was counting on how soon they'd catch up with us.

We were somewhere near Olkusz [approx. 40 km east of Katowice], Wolbrom [approx. 55 km northeast of Katowice]. The Germans starting bombing the fields, people were hiding in the grain fields.

The Germans told everyone to get off the wagon, only I was left there, because they asked 'You're the servant, aren't you?' I was blond, blue-eyed, they didn't think a Jew could look like that. Even that servant [a Pole] had to walk.

And I sat on the wagon and the driver took me home, to Sosnowiec, to my mother's sister [Mania] and my father's brother [Tobiasz], that is to my closest relatives. Only later did my family get there, to Sosnowiec, on foot. And that's where we stayed, with Mania and Tobiasz.

And then this horrible occupation [37](#) started. It drove me crazy, because Uncle Tobiasz controlled my every move and didn't allow me to do anything. I was a rebellious girl, so I decided to run away. I didn't tell my parents anything. And my brother and I, we decided to go to Lwow, to the Russians [38](#). This was still in September 1939.

So we left home, we walked and walked, sometimes we'd get a ride on some horse-drawn wagon. We reached Cracow. It turned out we didn't have any money. So my brother bought himself a kilogram of salt and went back to Sosnowiec to sell the salt and earn some money. He returned with Father [from Sosnowiec to Cracow].

Father had decided that he had to run away too, because he was the manager of those tenement houses where so many Volksdeutsche lived and, although he was a very decent man, he still had enemies among those Germans. And from then on we traveled together.

My mother and sisters stayed in Sosnowiec, with that Uncle and Aunt. The children were small: six and ten years old. It seemed at the time that the war would end soon and that we'd all be back. I don't remember the Germans stopping us on our way to Lwow. It was still quite easy, it was just the beginning.

I think they must have approved of this running away, yes. [In September 1939 the Germans deported several hundred Jews from Sosnowiec and forced them to cross the German-Soviet border. Polish lands incorporated into the Third Reich were supposed to be 'Judenrein'] [39](#). We passed Przemyśl [243 km southeast of Cracow], we swam across the River San [a tributary of the Vistula] at night, crossed over onto the Soviet side and went to Lwow.

So I spent the first few months of World War II in Lwow. At first I'd call the situation dramatic. There were lots of refugees from Poland. People were unhappy, wandered around Lwow not knowing what to do with themselves. There were no means for living. Mina Schiff with her family was also in Lwow.

Mina's mother knitted some scarves and my brother took them to an arcade to sell them. I was living in a school dorm, because I was supposed to start going to school in Lwow. I don't remember what kind of a school it was, perhaps I wanted to graduate from a regular high school? Father finally rented a room from the Seweryns.

It was a mother with a son and a daughter. They were Poles. Very nice and decent people. Father lived there with Natan, but he couldn't get a job either. He later started working in some wood and coal storehouse.

Natan wanted to enroll in a technical secondary school, but they didn't want to admit him, because he was a 'bieżeniec,' [from Russian, refugee] that is a refugee from the German zone. He couldn't come to terms with the fact that he couldn't study.

He saw what real communism was like in Lwow and he came to understand that it had all been falsified, not true. He kept to himself, he didn't have any friends. When I left [Lwow for Vilnius] he was practically all alone. He didn't have a good relationship with Father. Natan committed suicide in 1940.

I went to a kibbutz in Vilnius [40](#) in December 1939. My brother walked me to the train station. I didn't tell Father that I was leaving, because I was afraid he wouldn't let me go. It was horrible! I crossed the border to Vilnius when the temperature was 40 degrees below zero [Celsius], so I remember this.

When I was in Vilnius one of my friends from the organization said: 'What?! You didn't say goodbye to your father, you didn't tell him? Write him, he must be worried!' So I wrote him and Father somehow forgave me.

I went to the kibbutz, because I wanted to leave for Palestine, but I was one of the youngest in the kibbutz. Well, it was the older ones who got to go first. It was all quite illegal, papers were arranged

in Russia. There were all kinds of organizations in the kibbutzim in Vilnius: leftist, rightist, all Zionist.

We were in these former army barracks on Subocze [a street in Vilnius, leading from the center of the city to the suburb of Poplawy]. It was horribly cold [in the winter of 1939/40]! There were no toilets in the building. You had to go out into the yard.

And to get there you'd slip on [frozen] pee. There were hundreds of people there and lice. We used to go to the so-called 'banya,' the baths, and those lice were crawling on the walls, on the tiles. It was a horror, this first period. But then we broke up into groups and each organization tried to somehow function independently.

There were more or less 90 of us in our organization, Akiba. I knew some of the people from before the war. For example there was this Fryda whom I knew from a camp organized by Akiba before the war. We settled in a very nice house with a porch from the yard.

It was somewhere near Ostra Brama [a city gate in the southern district of Vilnius, erected before 1514]. The street was called Beliny. We'd be assigned jobs and then paid for doing them. The money was collected in one cash box and then used to buy what was needed to survive.

I was the nanny of three children, I think it was a Jewish family. Later I worked in a printing house, I chopped wood, I cleaned apartments; there were always lots of windows to be washed.

In the spring of 1941 I received a letter from Mom, sent from Sosnowiec to Vilnius. The letter arrived in the mail, normally. Mom wasn't clear about it, but she wrote that she was sorry she would never see Natan again. How did she know what happened? I think Father must have written her something. And Father hid Natan's death from me, because he wrote that he had been sent to Siberia.

So I thought: 'If Natan is in Siberia, then Mom shouldn't think that she'll never see him again. After all, the war will finally be over, he'll come back from Siberia.' When I got this letter I asked my friend Dudek Goldberg, who was going to Lwow, to find out exactly [what happened]. Then he brought me the news that Natan had committed suicide.

That's when I went back to Father, to Lwow, it was May 1941. The war between Germany and Russia [41](#) broke out a month later. Dudek Goldberg also went to Lwow. He was my first love: Dudek Goldberg from Radom [approx. 100 km south of Warsaw.] I met him in Vilnius, in the kibbutz.

We were together in Lwow for a short time. Later the war broke out and he was conscripted into the Soviet army. C'est tout – that's all. He died in the army. Everyone knew: they sent them all to the front without any kind of training, as cannon fodder.

After I returned from Vilnius I settled with my father in that room at the Seweryns'. A month after the Germans came in [the Germans captured Lwow on 30th June 1941], a pogrom of Jews took place, to honor Petliura [42](#). The Ukrainians organized a pogrom of Jews [43](#).

That's when my father died. First they took everyone to nearby forests, outside of Lwow. They forced them to dig their graves and shot them. I was also in that pogrom [Mrs. Wygodzka was arrested during the pogrom].

I managed to get out of the prison on Lackiego Street because I showed them the document I had. The German looked at me, I was young, blond, blue-eyed, maybe I didn't look like a Jew to him. Anyway, he read 'place of birth: Magdeburg' and said, 'you shouldn't waste your life,' and asked them to lead me out of the prison, along with two other girls.

I was all by myself, after Father died in that pogrom. I was living in Lwow, at the Seweryns'. I had to go to the Germans, because I was looking for a job, I didn't have anything to live off. They gave me a job cleaning windows, later in a laundry. It was an army unit.

The airmen who went off to bomb the Russian part of Poland [the Soviet occupation zone], or even further, came back dirty, they had lice. We'd get food from them, lunch, bread. I used to divide this bread among my friends, because there was such horrible hunger in Lwow.

Linka, my friend from the organization was in Lwow, as was Joziek, another friend from the organization. I don't remember if I paid Mrs. Seweryn for the room with bread, too. It's possible, I don't remember.

When they started setting up the ghetto [44](#), I ran away from Lwow. I was afraid of the ghetto, because I knew if they built a wall around us, or surrounded us with wire, then they'd have control over us. I decided to go to my mother, to Sosnowiec.

The only document I had was my gymnasium school-leaving certificate. I had this special ink which I used to erase all the data from the document and filled in a new name: 'Emilia Dutkowska, Religion: Roman Catholic.' I only left 'born in Magdeburg.' And with that document I set on my way from Lwow to Sosnowiec [in December 1941].

I stopped horse-drawn wagons, today this is called 'hitchhiking,' they offered me rides. I remember that I made the sign of the cross each time we passed a cross, so the drivers wouldn't think I was Jewish. I was extremely careful...

I stopped in Sanok [approx. 220 km southeast of Cracow] along the way, where I had some friends with whom I was exchanging letters. Awrumek Gurfein and Marta, I don't remember her last name, they were in the same organization as I was, in Akiba.

Before the war we used to meet at summer camps. I wanted to see them, because nobody knew what the following day would bring. I was depressed after my father's and brother's deaths, I wanted to cry on a friend's shoulder. I was in Sanok for one day. Marta gave me her picture as a keepsake, in the picture she's holding her little sister. Both Marta and Awrumek didn't survive the Holocaust.

I reached a settlement, I think it was called Zloty Potok [approx. 20 km southeast of Czestochowa]. It was Christmas by then, it was December 1941. I could see the lights of a local recreation hall from far away. I entered that hall and there was some boy sitting there and decorating it.

I told him I was Jewish and didn't have any money. I asked him if he could lead me to the Reich [Polish lands incorporated into the Third Reich - for example Sosnowiec and Katowice], because I knew that the border was nearby [border between the General Governorship and the Third Reich], but I didn't know exactly where I could cross it.

And he agreed, no money, nothing, he didn't want to rape me, he was decent and very kind. He guided me across the border. We were walking at night, it was very cold. At some point he said: 'Here, on the other side, it's the Reich.' I said goodbye to him and kept on walking.

I remembered I had some distant relatives in Olkusz and I went there. They gave me money, so I could have it for the bus and train fares. I bought a ticket and went to Sosnowiec. I didn't know it was after curfew [at the beginning of the occupation the curfew, the ban on walking out on the street, was enforced between 7pm and 5am].

I reached Deblinska Street number 13, where Estusia was living with her parents. Out on the stairs someone said to me, 'The lights are not working.' I looked and it was Estusia. We hugged each other and cried very much. She opened the door and I saw that my mother was there and both my little sisters. I was very, very sad, because I had left with my father and brother and came back alone.

The Germans had a detailed list of everyone who crossed from the General Governorship to the Reich, because all those people had to apply for a 'Kennkarte' [45](#). The Germans summoned them to a meeting point. I received an order to show up there.

We, the young ones, were sent to a labor camp. There were women, some very young ones, some with children, who were immediately sent to Auschwitz. But we didn't know about it then. So in February 1942 I was already at the Oberaltstadt camp [46](#).

Today it is called Horejsi Stare Mesto, near Trutnov [a city approx. 100 km northeast of Prague, near the Polish-Czech border] in the Sudeten Mountains. At first it was a labor camp. We were taken to a flax factory, it was called Kluge.

The factory produced thread. The work hours were, for example, from 2.30am to 2.30pm. And then you had to clean the camp, scrub the floors, do all kinds of things, peel the turnips. Turnips – the kind you give to cows, that's what we ate. We lived in horrible barracks, full of bugs. There were some 16 girls to a room. The rooms were small, double beds.

There were only girls at the camp. I became good friends with some of them. For example there was this Lunia Kronental, I think. She was from Bedzin. She gave me her picture as a keepsake with the inscription: 'Eni, I want us to be able to recollect these times soon, or maybe forget – which would you prefer?

To my friend from factory times. Lunia.' Lunia survived the war. After the war she lived on those conquered lands [so-called regained territories, which used to belong to Germany before WWII, incorporated into Poland after the war]. She got married to a simple tailor, she later went to Canada with him. That's where she died.

It was a camp only for Jews, but around us [probably in surrounding camps] there were Russians and Frenchmen and English soldiers from Africa [most probably POWs from the African front]. There were Belgians, who, I think, volunteered for that labor. They were not Jews, they were normal people. I don't know where they [other, non-Jewish workers in the factory] were living, because we only saw them at the factory.

English soldiers would, from time to time, throw cigarettes to us and out of gratitude I'd throw them pictures of myself and my family, so they wouldn't think we were some criminals, but that normal people had been rounded up at that camp.

Those English and French soldiers showed great solidarity with us. Once this Zosia's head was shaved, because they found out that she had been writing a letter to some Frenchman or Englishman. And as a sign of solidarity they all shaved their heads.

We were allowed to write letters once a month at the camp, we could also receive letters. Estusia used to write to me, all the letters were in German. We had arranged a kind of code, so we could tell each other things.

I found out that a ghetto had been created in Sosnowiec in the following months, after I had been sent to camp. The ghetto was in Srodula, between Sosnowiec and Bedzin. [Editor's note: Srodula was incorporated into Sosnowiec in 1914.] My family was moved into the ghetto.

I remember that I kept writing about how horrible the camp was and my Estusia would write me back saying that I should be glad and should not complain, but she didn't tell me about Auschwitz. Fewer and fewer letters came to the girls at camp. Only when a transport from Auschwitz arrived, did we find out what was happening. That was in late 1943.

I was thinking that as long as the Germans needed our work they would keep us there. So I started thinking about getting my mother and sisters to the camp. There were a thousand of us at the camp and all of the others looked at me like at some idiot.

I went to the 'spienmajster' [German: Spinnmeister], the technical manager at the factory, and I asked him for a requisition [allotment of work] for my mother and sisters. I said that I would put my hands into the machine if he didn't give it to me, because I couldn't live there without my mother and sisters. And he wrote such a requisition for me, I sent it to Mother.

This 'Lagerführer' [camp commander] of ours once went to bring some more girls to the camp. I asked her then to bring my mother and both my sisters. I gave her a tablecloth which I had from home. She accepted the tablecloth, went there and brought Zosia.

She told me she couldn't run a kindergarten or a retirement home at the camp. Zosia was 13 then. That was the best age. Of course, Zosia for many years felt offended that I greeted her: 'What, only you?!' – that I wasn't happy enough. But she later forgave me.

Meanwhile Mother kept walking around Sosnowiec begging to be taken to the camp. Finally, someone got bored with her and put her on some transport. They managed to reach me before the final deportations from the ghetto in Srodula. All the other family members: Uncle Tobiasz and Aunt Mania, Estusia, Uncle Chaim and his wife, Aunt Cesia, they were all taken to Auschwitz and they all died.

I was at the camp with my mother and sisters until the end of the war. And we all survived. My sisters worked very hard at that camp. Even the little one, Jadzia, she had to push these heavy carts with the cotton spools, she cleaned the toilets.



Mother worked on the machine for some time and later this 'Lagerführer' allowed her to work in the kitchen. It was easier, because she didn't have to go to the factory and there was one more plate of soup.

Doctor Mengele [Mengele, Josef (1911 - ? in hiding), a member of the SS, a doctor, performed criminal medical experiments in the Auschwitz extermination camp] came once and there was a selection then. I hid Jadzia on the top bunk.

Even this 'Lagerführer' didn't turn her in. We had to march naked in front of them, several people from the SS. Mother somehow passed. They didn't bother her [because of her age]. Several girls were sent to Auschwitz then, the sick ones.

We were lucky that our camp was not evacuated, because during evacuations many people died of exhaustion, diseases [47](#). Almost all the surrounding camps were evacuated. At the end we had to dig trenches before the Russians came.

We were there until 8th May [on 8th May 1945 Germany signed the act of unconditional surrender], even a little bit longer, because we didn't know where to go. The Czech locked up this 'Lagerführer' and those SS-women. There were all put on trial later in Czechoslovakia. I even testified in the trial of our 'Lagerführer,' her name was Hoffman.

## After the war

After we left camp I went to Salzburg [Austrian city, near the border with Germany, some 250 km from Vienna] for some time. Together with my mother and sisters, because we didn't know where to go, we wanted to go to Israel.

In Salzburg we lived in stables which were adapted for sleeping. [Mrs. Wygodzka was in a 'DP' - 'displaced persons' camp, for persons taken to the Third Reich for forced labor and liberated from concentration camps, who did not return to their countries after the end of WWII.]

From Salzburg we went to Germany. We were in the French zone [the area of defeated Germany was divided into 4 occupation zones: British, American, Soviet and French], in Jordanbad [approx. 100 km south of Stuttgart].

The nuns were running a house for DPs there. It was a very old place, very beautiful. It was called Knajp Kur. Hadasa contacted us and invited us there. She got married to Motek Krzesiwo.

He had survived together with her using false South American documents [48](#). Hadasa and Motek were interned as foreigners in a special camp. They survived the camp, they survived the occupation. In Jordanbad Hadasa gave birth to her first son. I was there when he was born.

I met my husband in Germany, still in 1945. I was at the camp in Oberaltstadt with his wife, Rena Domb. We were friends with Rena. She told me about him, about her family. And right after the war ended, Rena went to Poland and I stayed.

In Jordanbad I found out about Wygodzki, that he was in hospital. I went there to pass on Rena's greetings. He was in hospital in Gauting [approx. 5km southwest of Munich], sick with tuberculosis. That's how we met. Well, and we fell in love.

My husband was from Bedzin. His name was Szyja. Stanislaw was his pen name before the war. His parents were Icchak and Rywa-Brajndla, nee Werdiger. I know that Rywa-Brajndla's brother, Samuel Werdiger, was living in Paris with his wife Anii and daughter Luci.

My husband also had other relatives in France: some male cousin. My husband had three younger brothers, their names were: Lejb, Leon and Aronek. When someone asked Rywa-Brajndla how she was doing, she'd answer: 'My husband is a Zionist, my four sons are communists, how can I be doing?'

Stanislaw was a leftist. He was expelled from school two months before his high-school final exams. It was the Firstenberg gymnasium. He was sent to prison for promoting communist literature. So he had no education.

He was self-taught. But he was a man of great knowledge. He translated from German, from Yiddish. Until the outbreak of the war he was working as a bookkeeper at a zinc white factory in Bedzin. He started writing in the 1920s.

His first book was published in 1935 in Moscow, it was poetry [the 'Apel' ('Assembly') volume of poetry was published in Moscow in 1933]. Later more volumes of poetry were published in Poland ['Chleb powszedni' ('Daily Bread'), Cracow 1934]. He cooperated with leftist literary journals [publications in 'Miesiecznik Literacki' edited by Aleksander Wat, numbers 11, 9, September 1930].

The name of my husband's first wife was Anka. They had a small, beautiful daughter, Inka. They lived in Bedzin. During the war they were deported from the ghetto in Srodula: his father, mother, wife, daughter, two of his brothers.

My husband had earlier arranged some luminal [luminal – an anti-seizure medication, causes drowsiness, here: luminal as poison]. And he gave it to his wife and child and took some himself. They arrived at Auschwitz.

The wife and child were dead, but the dose must have been too low for him and so my husband survived, they tattooed him while he was still sleeping. Everyone else from his family was murdered in Auschwitz. He was in the sick ward first.

They later gave him a job, carrying out dead bodies. He was evacuated to other camps. He was in Auschwitz, Oranienburg [49](#), Sachsenhausen [50](#), Dachau [51](#), Freiman [Editor's note: a camp with this name has not been identified] – he was liberated there in 1945, he was sick with tuberculosis, taken to hospital.

## Marriage and later life

We got married on 11th March 1945, when he was dismissed from hospital. In Germany, in Feldafing near Munich [approx. 35 km southwest of Munich]. It was a civil marriage. My husband's acquaintances, who were with him at the camp, organized a party at their house, in Feldafing.

We stayed at Knajp Kur until 1947 when my husband was well enough to return to Poland. Both my sisters and my mother went to Palestine straight from Germany. Zosia left with a youth group in 1945 or 1946. It was called Aliyah Noar [52](#).

It was the last transport for Palestine, the next one went to Cyprus. The British were not admitting anyone any longer [53](#). Mom went with Jadzia. They left in 1947 legally, with papers, and they got there without problems.

I wanted to go to Palestine, too, but my husband, because he was a Polish writer and a communist, believed his place was in Poland. He had fought for this socialism all his conscious life and when it came in Poland, he wanted to keep on building it.

When we were getting married my husband put forward this condition – that we would go back to Poland. And I agreed, because I loved him. People were leaving for Palestine, for America, going to all kinds of places.

Nobody was going back to Poland, because they knew there was anti-Semitism there. I found out about the Kielce pogrom [54](#) in Jordanbad. They talked about it, but not that much. And in spite of the Kielce pogrom, my husband decided to return to Poland. So we arrived in Warsaw.

When we arrived in Poland in 1947 we were forced to change our personal data. The authorities explained that first and last names should be Polish and not other. Other meant Jewish. There was even an ordinance about this.

My husband changed his name to Stanislaw and I – to Irena. As the names of my parents I put: Barbara and Henryk Lewicki, instead of Beitner, and of my husband's: Barbara, nee Balicka, and Ignacy. My place of birth was changed from 'in Magdeburg' to 'in Sosnowiec.' It was all falsified like this in all documents. Only now did I manage to change the data through the court, it took me two years.

In Warsaw at first we lived with my cousin, Natalia Maskalan. When we arrived, she helped us. She was living with her husband in some house in Mokotow [a southern district of Warsaw]. By the end of 1947 we received a room in a building belonging to the Ministry of Culture.

My husband started working for the Ministry of Culture then. When Ewa was about to be born, that was in 1955, we got an apartment in a building belonging to LOT [Polish Airlines] at number 9 Warynskiego Street. We were there until the end of our stay in Poland.

My husband was working at the Ministry of Culture for some time, later only at home. All he'd do was write. I don't remember when he stopped working at the Ministry. He wrote by hand, later typed it on a typewriter. He asked me to proofread his writing, I did the editing, later typed it on the typewriter.

And after he submitted it at the publishing house, I'd do the subsequent revisions, which he checked. He usually agreed with me. I often threw out lots of things, because he sometimes repeated some things.

At first I worked at 'Przegląd samochodowy' ['Automobile Review' – a supplement of 'Przegląd Techniczny,' a technical-scientific journal, published since 1866, since 1945 as a weekly]. I collected materials about automobiles in the office.

I later worked at 'Książka i Wiedza' ['Book and Knowledge' publishing cooperative, established in 1948], doing technical revisions, after all I didn't have a proper education [to write texts by

myself].

I worked until the birth of my son. In 1952 I gave birth to Adam. Later to my daughter, Ewa. She is three years younger than Adam. Almost to a day. They're all born on the 13th of January. My husband on the 13th, Ewa on the 13th, Adam on the 14th.

I wasn't involved politically. I wasn't in the Party [55](#), but I didn't rebel against the authorities either. I didn't go to all those discussions at the writers' club. That was my husband's domain. My husband was in the Party.

After Khrushchev's [56](#) declaration at the Twentieth Party Congress [57](#) his eyes were opened. He didn't return his party membership card, but he openly spoke his mind during meetings. He wrote the book 'Zatrzymanie do wyjaśnienia' ['Detained until explanation,' novel published by 'Kultura' in Paris in 1968 and in London in 1979]. It was also translated into Hebrew [Israel, 1968, Maariv publishing house] and into German [Germany, 1969, Piper Verlag].

After the events in Hungary [58](#), after Nagy [59](#) was murdered, we submitted the paperwork necessary to get permission to go to Israel for good, but they refused.

But I always received a passport [in communist Poland one had to receive permission for each trip abroad – one would then receive a passport which had to be turned in to the authorities after returning to Poland] when I used to go to Israel as a tourist, to visit my mother and sisters. Before emigrating there, I went there some five or six times. I never had any problems, I would go alone or with my children.

Mother died in 1966. All those years I was in touch with my mother and sisters. Both sisters got married. Their husbands were born in Israel, but their parents were from Poland. My sisters didn't visit me often in Poland. Jadzia came once in 1958.

She only visited me again recently, a month ago. Zosia came here several months ago for some celebrations. She was also in Katowice for the opening of the monument of the Katowice synagogue [a monument with the inscription: 'to honor the memory of Jews, the residents of Katowice – murdered by the German occupant in 1939-1945' was opened between Mickiewicz and Skargi Streets in Katowice in July 1988].

In 1963 my cousin from Israel, Fredka [Rozia Oksenhendler's daughter] visited us. She had run away from Poland during the war, to Hungary [60](#) and later went from Hungary to Palestine. She came for the 20th anniversary celebrations [20th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising] [61](#).

At that time you could already sense anti-Semitic feelings [62](#), the number of people who were allowed to come for the celebrations from Israel was limited. But there was a delegation from Israel. It included Gideon Hausner [Hausner, Gideon (1915-1990): main prosecutor in A. Eichmann's trial in 1961], Eichmann's [63](#) prosecutor, Rabbi Goren, people from the Israeli Embassy. I went to Auschwitz with them. It was the first time I was in Auschwitz.

My husband and I never concealed our identity. My husband wrote about Jewish issues, about the Holocaust. Everyone knew he was a Jew. Our friends were also Jewish, but we were in touch with some Poles as well. My husband was in the [Polish] Writers' Association, so he knew lots of writers. We talked about the Holocaust with our friends. Whatever we talked about, we'd always go back to

the war.

I wasn't a traditional Jewish housekeeper. I brought my children up in a secular manner. I told them about their heritage. I even remember this conversation with my son, who was five or six years old at that time, when one of his friends told him he was a Jew.

He came home and asked what a Jew was. So we explained to him that he was a Jew and that we were Jews. And because he had listened to our conversations, which he was not supposed to hear, he asked whether he and his sister would have been gassed, too, if they had lived during Nazi times. That was his question.

Even before 1967 [64](#) they [communist authorities] spied on us. We'd be invited to the Israeli Embassy, for example for Chanukkah or something. They'd always follow us. Once they even came to our apartment.

They asked my husband about his relationship with, I think, the secretary of the Israeli Embassy. And my husband said that all he was interested in was literature. And indeed that's how it was.

My husband never wanted to go to Israel, but in 1967, he decided to go. Anti-Semitism knew no limits then. We left in 1968, in January. The entire period preceding our departure was horrible. We were followed, our phone was being tapped.

Even our son wanted to leave, because he had experienced anti-Semitism at school, for example children would write in his notebooks: 'Go away to Israel.' My daughter experienced anti-Semitism, too.

There was fear [in 1967] like during the occupation. I was afraid to go to the Dutch Embassy, because I thought they'd arrest me. There was no Israeli Embassy by then, because they had been chased away [in June 1967 Polish authorities broke off diplomatic relations with Israel, following the example set by the USSR].

I decided to go to Vienna to learn at the Israeli Embassy whether they were admitting Jews from Poland and, if they were, whether my husband would be able to get a job there. They only told me they couldn't promise anything. We went to Vienna by train.

At the airport they [representatives of the Polish opposition] wanted my husband to talk about what was happening in Poland for Radio Free Europe [65](#), but he didn't want to. The same evening we were on a plane to Israel.

In Israel, Jadzia, who was living near the airport, took us in. We stayed with her for some two months. And then we went to Ulpan [school of Hebrew, founded in 1951, still operating] near Netanya. It was a Hebrew school together with accommodation, food, everything.

So we didn't have to worry about cooking, shopping, especially since we didn't have any money. We didn't have to pay for accommodation, for food. We spent some five months there. I was in the same class with my son, so I had to try hard not to embarrass myself.

My husband's car accident, which happened while we were still at Ulpan, was a huge problem for us. My husband went to a meeting to Kfar Saba [city in Central Israel, north of Tel Aviv]. My husband was the most seriously injured of those who were in the car.

There was also this doctor, Dawid Lazar, a journalist from 'Maariv' [evening paper, published since 1948], Efraim Sten, a radio journalist, who was driving and my son, Adam, who luckily wasn't injured. My husband was in hospital for a long time afterwards, he kept shouting 'moja noga, moja noga' [Polish, 'my leg, my leg'] and in Hebrew 'noga' means 'planet,' so the doctors didn't understand what was going on.

We were also allotted an apartment then. And immediately after our arrival, we didn't yet have time to settle down, we received notification that we have to pay back the credit. It was very difficult for us financially. We borrowed money from one sister, then from the other one and then we paid it back.

Our apartment was in Givataim [a city east of Tel Aviv, a part of the Gush Dan metropolis]. We liked it best, because it was closest to my sister, Jadzia. There were six buildings there, built for new immigrants, who came from everywhere: Africa, England, France, Morocco, Poland, Russia, Lithuania.

It was the only apartment we had in Israel. We were very pleased with it. When we started living there, there was no road, just sand. But a beautiful city was built later on. We later bought this apartment, because it was possible to pay some small sum and the ownership of the apartment was transferred to us.

In Poland my husband used to earn money in one specific way – he published books. But in Israel you wouldn't receive much even for writing that was published. We had to get by somehow, so I studied for nine months at a school for beauticians in Tel Aviv.

It was very difficult for me, because all those terms were in Hebrew, I didn't understand them, so I had to learn them by heart. But I somehow passed the exam and received my certificate. I took out a loan and purchased all the equipment necessary to open a beauty salon at home.

At first I waited for a long time, almost for a year, for my first customers. I worked very hard, I had learned how to work hard in Poland. I had lots of customers later. They were government employees, some executives' wives, storekeepers. They were very nice and it was thanks to them that I learned how to speak Hebrew, because the language had still been foreign to me before.

We spoke Polish at home, until the end, always. And with my sisters, after some time, I started speaking Hebrew. Not always though. When Jadzia visited me recently we spoke Polish, so she would remember it, because she was only a child during the occupation. But when Zosia calls me from Israel we speak Hebrew, because it's easier for her.

My husband used to write a bit. Mostly for 'Maariv.' His book 'Zatrzymane do wyjaśnienia' was also published. And he started working for Yad Vashem [66](#). He prepared definitions for Encyclopedia Judaica for them, he also edited memoirs.

My husband was displeased with many things in Israel: their attitude to Arabs and those Orthodox people, their power in the country. When there were elections we always used to vote for the Labor Party [Israeli Labor Party, created in 1968, social-democratic, leaders: I. Rabin, Sh. Peres, E. Barak].

My husband missed Poland very much, he missed his friends and his past. He never really belonged anywhere, he didn't go out. He rarely went to those meetings of the Writers' Association,



because he decided that all those people keep talking about themselves and not about some topics which could interest him. He got kind of sidetracked in life.

We were friends with people from Poland. They were from the previous waves of emigration. There was a Polish bookstore in Tel Aviv. So Mr. Neustein with his wife, Ada [the owners of the bookstore], organized some parties at their house for interesting people, for writers who came from around the world.

My husband had one cousin in Israel, who emigrated in the late 1920s. His name was Wygodzki too and he lived in Petach Tikvah [a city in central Israel, north of Tel Aviv-Yaffa], nearby. We met from time to time, not too often. He was religious. When he visited us he'd never eat anything, just drink water. He had a wife, two daughters. He was a calm, very nice man. He worked in a health insurance company, I think. And then they all died.

And from my side, I have a large family in Israel. In addition to my sisters, there are lots of male and female cousins, their children, the second, third generations born there. Bar and bat mitzvahs were always an experience for me there, because I would meet my family.

I was in close touch with some of my cousins. They were: Abram, Cwi – Herman, Nachman or Nacek [Chaim Beitner's sons], Fredka [Rozia Oksenhendler's daughter], Fredzia and her brother Kuba [Miriam Bruk's children].

Fredia Rappaport, nee Bruk. Her husband, Frycek, was a charming boy. He came from Bielsko [today: Bielsko-Biala, 86 km southwest of Cracow] from a family which made wool. The name Rappaport has something to do with wool. My cousins didn't change their names to Hebrew ones. They're still called Beitner. And the women took their husband's names.

My daughter was 12 when we got there from Poland. She went to elementary school in Israel, it was near our house. And my son was at boarding school. It was called Hadsim, near Natanji. He was 16 when he came to Israel.

He graduated from high school and had to go to the army. There were two types of army duty: regular and kibbutz. So he chose the other kind and he was in a kibbutz. It was in Golan [Golan Hills – a mountainous area between Syria and Israel] and they guarded Israel's borders there.

It wasn't tough duty. My son would come home from time to time, I'd go and visit him. Adam took part in the Yom Kippur War [67](#). He was seriously wounded. He was almost dying. After he was wounded he stayed in the kibbutz for some time.

Then problems with the children began. They were in a different world, climate, mentality, everything was foreign to them. Although they tried to plant their roots there, it wasn't working out. My daughter graduated from gymnasium and attended the Michlal LeMorim LeOmanut higher school of painting in Tel Aviv for three years, because she was quite talented. It was a painting school for teachers. But she didn't graduate from that school.

Meanwhile my son had decided to leave Israel for good [in 1975 or 1976]. He married a Swiss girl [in 1985]. They traveled all over the world. They were in India, New Zealand, Jamaica, South America. Their daughter, her name is Sunshine, was born in New Zealand.

My husband followed everything that was happening in Poland closely [the 1980s, the period of democratic opposition in Poland, the creation of Solidarity] [68](#). He was a communist. That's how his life was. He only realized that he was on the wrong side when it was too late.

We were very happy when communism fell in Poland [69](#). My husband additionally disliked communists, because his brother, Leon, who was a communist, had been murdered by Stalin. Leon and his wife, Genia, also Jewish, left Poland for the Soviet Union before the war. That's where their two sons were born: Seriorza and Roman. Leon was murdered in 1936 or 1937 when there were so-called cleansings in Russia [70](#).

After some time in Spain, my daughter met a Frenchman whom she married. They've been living in the south of France for ten years now. They have two daughters. Satia is now 13 and Lotus is two years younger, so she's eleven.

Both are beautiful, talented, they paint, they're excellent students. They're very cheerful, charming. My daughter's husband is very kind, everything is going well for them. They have an ecological farm: goats, chickens, vegetables. They have a greenhouse. My daughter also paints when she finds the time.

My son has remained a traveler. During one of his stays in India he decided to teach himself magnetic biotherapy. My son and his family have been traveling all their lives. Sunshine, who is today 20 years old, is in Martinique. And my son with my daughter-in-law are in France. They spent half a year in Poland. They'll probably come again this winter.

My husband died in 1992, on 8th May, on liberation day [anniversary of the end of WWII]. He died at night, in hospital. I stayed in Israel for many years afterward. Finally, I decided that if I wanted to keep in touch with my children, I should go to Europe. I decided I'd never return to Israel.

In 2000 I decided to go to my daughter. But it turned out I wasn't feeling well there. They live in the countryside, I had no acquaintances. I didn't know the language. I could speak Hebrew to the children, because Ewa had taught them Hebrew.

But the four of them were a kind of closed unit and I didn't want to interfere. So I decided to go to Warsaw, see how it would be here, whether life would be possible, because I had never imagined I'd return to Poland after I left [in 1968].

So I got here, here I am and I'm not doing too badly. Not good, because I don't feel ties to Israel, Poland or France. I'm somewhat suspended, neither here nor there. I am an Israeli citizen, I don't have a Polish passport.

Polish citizenship was taken away from me [in 1968 Jews emigrating from Poland were deprived of Polish citizenship, they only received so-called travel documents, without the right of returning to Poland]. I could try to regain it [71](#), but I'm not sure if it's worth it. I'm also put off by the same things I was put off by in Israel. For example fanatics, who are the same everywhere.

So this is all difficult, especially since I'm alone. I know I don't have much time until the end, so I'm happy every time my son or daughter come and visit me. My daughter will visit me soon, in the fall, with her family. Adam has been here twice since I came to Poland.

I also have relatives here. There is the son of my cousin, the closest one, Natalia [Maskalan]. I don't impose myself on them, because they are young people, the same age as my children, they have their own joys and sorrows, their own families.

There are quite a few people I can talk to from time to time. For example from literary circles. I don't participate in the life of the Jewish religious community in Warsaw. I never have. I don't see why I should begin now.

I've been to the Jewish theater, Grynberg [Grynberg, Henryk (born 1936), writer and poet, the theme of the Holocaust dominates his writing] came, so I went to a meeting with him. I read a lot. Mostly about the Holocaust. I somehow can't leave the past behind.

## Glossary

### **1 Polonization of Jewish first and last names**

The Polonization of first and last names in the 19th century was mostly an effect and a symptom of assimilation. Representatives of the so-called assimilatory trend changed their names or added a Polish element to the name.

Later, this tendency was not restricted to the assimilatory circle. In the interwar period Jews often had two names: the Jewish name (in the Hebrew or Yiddish version), the official name, written down on the birth certificate and the Polish name, used in everyday contacts with Poles, but also among family.

The story of the Polish-Jewish historian Schiper is an interesting case of the variety of names used by Polish Jews. Schiper published his works under three different names: Izaak, Icchak and Ignacy. After WWII many Jews who survived the Holocaust in hiding under false names never returned to their pre-war names.

Legal regulations after the war enabled this procedure. Such a situation was caused by the lack of a feeling of security and post-war trauma, which showed itself in breaking off ties with one's group. Another reason for the Polonization of names after WWII was the pressure exerted by the communist authorities on Jews – members of the communist party and employed in the party apparatus.

### **2 Polish Jews in occupant countries after World War I**

During WWI (male) Jews, like all citizens, were forced to perform army duty and were conscripted into the army. There were approx. 100,000 Jews (approx. 1.1% of the total army) in the German army, approx. 500,000 Jews in the tsarist army and approx. 300,000 in the Austro-Hungarian army.

### **3 Poland's independence, 1918**

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

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

In the face of the defeat of the Central Powers, on 7 October 1918 the Regency Council issued a statement to the Polish nation proclaiming its independence and the reunion of Poland. Institutions representing the Polish nation on the international arena began to spring up, as did units disarming the partitioning powers' armed forces and others organizing a system of authority for the needs of the future state.

In the night of 6-7 November 1918, in Lublin, a Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland was formed under Ignacy Daszynski. Its core comprised supporters of Pilsudski. On 11 November 1918 the armistice was signed on the western front, and the Regency Council entrusted Pilsudski with the supreme command of the nascent army.

On 14 November the Regency Council dissolved, handing all civilian power to Pilsudski; the Lublin government also submitted to his rule. On 17 November Pilsudski appointed a government, which on 21 November issued a manifesto promising agricultural reforms and the nationalization of certain branches of industry. It also introduced labor legislation that strongly favored the workers, and announced parliamentary elections.

On 22 November Pilsudski announced himself Head of State and signed a decree on the provisional authorities in the Republic of Poland. The revolutionary left, from December 1918 united in the Communist Workers' Party of Poland, came out against the government and independence, but the program of Pilsudski's government satisfied the expectations of the majority of society and emboldened it to fight for its goals within the parliamentary democracy of the independent Polish state.

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

#### **4 Emigration of German Jews**

According to rough estimates, some 278,000 Jews emigrated from Nazi Germany in the period 1933-1944. Most of them left Germany after the pogrom in 1938, the so-called Crystal Night. Nazi authorities supported and facilitated emigration. Moreover, they forced those leaving the country to sign declarations that they would not return to Germany, threatening to send them to concentration camps.

Emigration was organized by Jewish organizations, for example 'Reichsvertretung' and 'Hauptstelle für jüdische Auswanderung.' In January 1939 the Reich Headquarters for Jewish Emigration was created in the ministry of internal affairs and directed by Reinhardt Heydrich.

Legal emigration was curtailed with an ordinance issued on 23rd October 1941. Jewish refugees from Germany were admitted by: France, Belgium, Holland, Great Britain, Poland, Switzerland, Italy, Luxemburg.

In the fall of 1933, the office of the High Commissioner for refugees from Germany, which was to coordinate the admission of exiles to various countries, was created at the League of Nations. In the first period, Palestine admitted relatively few refugees.

After the Anschluss of Austria, a project of systematic large-scale emigration of Jews to Palestine via Greece was created by Wilhelm Perl. The project was realized by Adolf Eichmann. 50,000 people left Germany that way. Waves of Jewish exiles reached South American countries as well as Africa, Australia and even Shanghai.

## **5 Golda Meir (1898-1978)**

Born in Kiev, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union.

From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

## **6 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.

## **7 Silesians**

Inhabitants of Silesia, a land located at the crossroads of German, Polish and Czech cultural influences. In ethnographic data Silesians were the native peoples of Slavic origin, who spoke mostly using dialects of Polish, with numerous Czech and German influences.

This group created a specific folk culture (dialect, folklore, architecture, art and literature, customs). Most Silesians are Catholic, although there are also quite a few Protestants. Since the mid 19th-century there have been in existence movements for the autonomy of Silesia, which claimed to represent a separate Silesian nation, for example the Silesian Folk Party at the end of the 19th century.

In the interwar period Silesians had their own Parliament in Poland with significant autonomy in local matters. In 1997 activists of the Movement for Silesian Autonomy and the Silesian Academic Movement tried to register the Association of Ethnic Silesians, but Polish courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg denied registration.

According to the most recent census, 44,000 people in the Czech Republic and 173,000 people in Poland declared their nationality as Silesian (which makes Silesian the largest ethnic minority in

Poland). Some 60-80,000 people are active in German organizations in Silesia.

## **8 Mizrachi (full name**

The 'Mizrachi' Zionist-Orthodox Organization): A political party of religious Zionists, which was created in order to build a Jewish nation in Palestine, based on the rules of the Torah. The name comes from the words 'Ha-merkaz ha-ruchani', that is 'spiritual center.'

It was created in Vilnius in 1902 as a branch of the World Zionist Organization. In 1917 Mizrach broke off from the Organization as a separate party. Headed by Jozsua Heszal Farbstein, other activists included Izaak Nissenbaum and Icchak Rubinstein.

The Mizrachi party cooperated with the Zionist Organization in Poland, supported the program of national-cultural autonomy, took part in parliamentary and local self-government elections. Mizrachi also created its own school organization Jawne and youth organization Ceirej Mizrachi (Mizrachi Youth) and He-Chaluc ha-Mizrachi (Mizrachi Pioneers), later Ha-Poel ha-Mizrachi (Mizrachi Worker). Mizrachi's influence was strongest in southwestern Poland. After WWII it was the only religious party which was allowed to operate. Dissolved in 1949.

## **9 Zionist Organization in Poland (also General Zionists, General Zionist Organization)**

The strongest Zionist federation in prewar Poland, connected with the World Zionist Organization. Its primary goal was the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, by means of waking and strengthening the national identity of the Jews, promoting the emigration to Palestine, and colonizing it.

The organization also fought for national and cultural autonomy of the Polish Jews, i.e. the creation of a Jewish self-government and introducing Hebrew education. The Kingdom of Poland Autonomous Bureau of the General Zionists existed since 1906. At first it was headed by Jozsua Heszal, followed by Meir Klumel and, since 1920, Icchak Grünbaum.

The General Zionists took part in all the local and national elections. In 1928 the party split into factions: Et Liwnot, Al ha-Miszmar, and the Revisionists. The groups grew more and more hostile towards each other. The General Zionists influenced most of the Jewish mass organizations, particularly the economic and the social and cultural ones.

After World War II the General Zionists tradition was referred to by the Polish Jewish party Ichud. It was dissolved in January 1950.

## **10 Rumkowski, Chaim Mordechaj (1897-1944)**

Spent most of his life in Lodz. Merchant, later co-owner of a small textile factory and an insurance agent. In the interwar period Rumkowski worked in Centos, was the director of an orphanage in Helenówek near Lodz. He was also the leader of the Zionist fraction of the Jewish Community in Lodz. From October 1939 until August 1944 he was the head of the "Judenrat" (Jewish council) of the Lodz Ghetto.



He held dictator power in the ghetto over all kinds of organization (for example self-help, house committees etc.). He was called “the king of the ghetto.” He implemented the idea of survival through labor, seeing a possibility of saving the ghetto in the employment of Jews in industrial plants producing for the German army. During the period of deportations to death camps he cooperated with the German authorities, creating lists of people designated for deportation.

He claimed that designating those who could not work for death would save those who would work. The so-called szpera (curfew) of September 1942, when Rumkowski appealed to the residents of the ghetto to release their children, elderly and sick, generated the most hatred towards him.

When the ghetto was liquidated in August 1944, Rumkowski was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and died in a gas chamber. His behavior during the Holocaust has been the topic of many discussions and controversy.

## **11 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K**

K.L.): Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people.

After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the 'blue box.' Now these boxes are known worldwide as a symbol of Zionism. In Poland the JNF was active in two periods, 1919-1939 and 1945-1950. In preparing its colonization campaign, Keren Kayemet Leisrael collaborated with the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod.

## **12 Jews in Katowice in the interwar period**

The Jewish religious community was created in Katowice in 1866. It was inhabited mostly by Jews assimilating into the German culture. When in 1922 Katowice was incorporated into Poland, many Poles and Jews from central Poland settled in the city.

Those newly arrived Jews formed 60% of the Jewish population in Katowice. In 1931 there were 9,000 Jews in Katowice, out of a total of 140,000 inhabitants. The community was led by Bruno Altman. A new building of the community was opened, the Berek Joselewicz Polish-language school was operating as was a Hebrew school.

There was also the Maccabi sports club, the Zionist Organization, the WIZO organization (Women's International Zionist Organization). There was also well-organized social care. In the late 1930s Polish artisans and shopkeepers organized a successful boycott of Jewish stores and services. There were anti-Semitic events in 1937.

## **13 Hanoar Hatzioni**

(Heb.: Zionist Youth), a youth scouting organization founded in 1931 by a break-away from the Hanoar Haivri organization Akiba. It aligned itself with the centre-right current of Zionism, and its program placed great importance on educating young people in accordance with the principles and values of the Judaic tradition.

## **14 May 3rd Constitution**

Constitutional treaty from 1791, adopted during the four-year Sejm by the patriotic party as a result of a compromise with the royalist party. The constitution was an attempt to redress the internal relations in Poland after the first partition (1772).

It created the basis of the structure of modern Poland as a constitutional monarchy. In the first article the constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion, although Catholicism remained the ruling religion. Members of other religions were assured 'governmental care.'

The constitution instituted the division of powers, restricted the privileges of the nobility, granted far-ranging rights to townspeople and assured governmental protection to peasants. Four years later, in 1795, Poland finally lost its independence and was fully divided up between its three powerful neighbors: Russia, Prussia and Austria.

## **15 Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935)**

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

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

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

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

## **16 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.

## **17 Jews in the prewar Polish Army**

Some 10% of the volunteers who joined Pilsudski's Polish Legions fighting for independence were

Jews. Between the wars Jews were called up for military service just like all other citizens. Like other ethnic minorities, Jews were hampered in their rise to officer ranks (other than doctors called up into the army) for political reasons. In September 1939 almost 150,000 Jews were mobilized within the Polish Army (19% of the fully mobilized forces).

It is expected that losses among Jewish soldiers in the September Campaign were approaching 30,000, and the number of prisoners of war is estimated at around 60,000.

Like Poles, Jews were also isolated in POW camps in the Reich. They were separated from the Poles and imprisoned in far worse conditions.

At the turn of 1939 and 1940 Jewish privates and subalterns started being released from the camps and sent to larger towns in the General Governorship (probably as part of the 'Judenrein' campaign in the Reich). Jewish officers of the Polish Army, protected by international conventions, remained in the Oflags [Rus.: officer POW camps] until the end of the war.

This was not the case for Jewish soldiers who were captured by the Russians. More than 10% of the victims of the Katyn massacre were Jews, mostly doctors.

## **18 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910)**

Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer. Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama.

He is best known for his novels, including *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, but also wrote short stories and essays and plays. Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as *Sevastopol Sketches*, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him.

His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas. He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901.

His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

## **19 Kaminska, Ida (1899-1980)**

Jewish actress and theater director. She made her debut in 1916 on the stage of the Warsaw theater founded by her parents. From 1921-28 she and her husband, Martin Sigmund Turkow, were the directors of the Varshaver Yidisher Kunsteater. From 1933 to 1939 she ran her own theater group in Warsaw. During World War II she was in Lvov, and was evacuated to Kyrgyzia (Frunze). On her return to Poland in 1947 she became director of the Jewish theaters in Lodz, Wroclaw and Warsaw (1955-68 the E.R. Kaminska Theater). In 1967 she traveled to the US with her theater and was very successful there. Following the events of March 1968 she resigned from her post as

theater director and immigrated to the US, where she lived until her death. Her best known roles include the leading roles in *Mirele Efros* (Gordin), *Hedda Gabler* (Ibsen) and *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Brecht), and her role in the film *The Shop on Main Street* (Kadár and Klos, 1965). Ida Kaminska also wrote her memoirs, entitled *My Life, My Theatre* (1973).

## **20 Kaminska Ester Rachel (1870-1925)**

(nee Halperin), a legendary actress of the Yiddish theater, called the “mother of the Jewish theater.” She made her debut in 1888 in Warsaw. Since 1893 she performed with the troop of her future husband, Abraham Izaak Kaminski. At first she played in operettas and tabloid performances.

She became famous for playing more serious pieces during the troop's tour in Russia and in the United States. Plays in which she had significant roles include Jacob Gordon's “*Mirele Efros*,” Ibsen's “*Nora*,” Dumas's “*La Dame aux Camelias*.”

She popularized classic European drama on Jewish scenes: Shakespeare, Chekhov, Shaw. She also starred in movies: “*Mirele Efros*,” “*Der Unbekanter*,” “*Di Shtifmuter*,” “*Tkie kaf*.” The National Jewish Theater in Warsaw, the only Yiddish theater in Poland, is named after Kaminska.

## **21 Haint**

Literally 'Today,' it was one of the most popular Yiddish dailies published in Poland. It came out in Warsaw from 1908-1939, and had a Zionist orientation addressing a mass of readers. In the 1930s it attained a print run of 45,000 copies.

## **22 Communist Party of Poland (KPP)**

Created in December 1918 in Warsaw, its aim was to create a global or pan-European federal socialist state, and it fought against the rebirth of the Polish state. Between 1921 and 1923 it propagated slogans advocating a two-stage revolution (the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution), the reinforcement of Poland's sovereignty, the right to self-determination of the ethnic minorities living within the II Republic of Poland, and worker and peasant government of the country.

After 1924, as in the rest of the international communist movement, ultra-revolutionary tendencies developed. From 1929 the KPP held the stance that the conditions were right for the creation by revolution of a Polish Republic of Soviets with a system based on the Soviet model, and advocated 'social fascism' and 'peasant fascism.'

In 1935 on the initiative of Stalin, the KPP wrought further changes in its program (recognizing the existence of the II Polish Republic and its political system). In 1919 the KPP numbered some 7,000-8,000 members, and in 1934 around 10,000 (37 percent peasants), with a majority of Jews, Belarusians and Ukrainians.

In 1937 Stalin took the decision to liquidate the KPP; the majority of its leaders were arrested and executed in the USSR, and in 1939 the party was finally liquidated on the charge that it had been taken over by provocateurs and spies.

## **23 Ghetto in Srodula**

From November until March 1943 the Germans resettled Jews from the entire region of Zagłębie into the central ghetto in Srodula (a northern district of Sosnowiec, on the border of Bedzin and Zagorze).

Approx. 15,000 Poles were resettled from Srodula and Jews from all districts of Sosnowiec and surrounding cities (for example from Bedzin, Dabrowa Gornicza) were moved there. Smaller ghettos were also created in Stary Sosnowiec (so-called small ghetto in the area of Ciasna Street) and in Modrzejow, which was liquidated in May 1943.

In the summer of 1943 the liquidation of the ghetto began: after a short fight with groups of Jewish self-defense (several hundred people were shot then) approx. 10,000 Jews were deported from Srodula from 1st to 6th August. The last transport of Jews left for Auschwitz in January 1944; a few Jews remained in hiding in Sosnowiec.

## **24 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison.

The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'.

By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

## **25 Wygodzki, Stanislaw (Jehoszua) (1907-1992)**

Writer, poet, translator. Son of Zionist activist from Vilnius, Jakub Wygodzki, he himself was a communist. He made his debut as a poet in 1928 in "Wiadomosci Literackie." He worked for the Revolutionary Literature Office in Moscow.

During the war he was in the ghetto in Bedzin and in concentration camps. After his return to Poland in 1947 he worked at the Ministry of Culture and Art and later was the literary director of the Polish Radio. Since 1953 he dealt exclusively with writing.

His works are part of Holocaust literature, for example "Pamiętnik miłości" [Diary of Love], "W kotlinie" [In the Valley], "Widzenie" [The Visit], "Pusty plac" [Empty Square], "Koncert życzeń" [Wish Concert]. He was also a translator of Yiddish and Hebrew. He left Poland in 1967 as a result of an anti-Semitic campaign and settled in Israel. There he published a satirical-political novel, "Pieskim został pisarzem" [He Became a Mediocre Writer].

## **26 Maccabi in Poland**

Clubs of the Worldwide 'Maccabi' Jewish-Sports Association were created on Polish lands since the beginning of the 20th century, for example the club in Lwow was created in 1901, the club in Cracow in 1907, the club in Warsaw in 1915. In 1930, during a general assembly of the 'Maccabi' clubs, it was decided that 'Maccabi' would merge with the Jewish Physical Education Council and create one Polish Branch of 'Maccabi' with a strong Zionist character.

241 clubs were part of 'Maccabi' in 1931, with 45,000 participants. All Zionist youth organizations were part of 'Maccabi.' 'Maccabi' organized numerous sports events, including the 'Maccabi Games,' parades, instructors' workshops, camps for children. The club has its own libraries, choirs, bands and the Kfar ha-Maccabi fund for settling in Palestine.

## **27 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.

## **28 Akiba - Hanoar Haivri**

Zionist youth scouting organization founded in Cracow in the early 1920s, subordinate to the Zionist Organization. Its program was moderately right-wing; it advocated the dissemination of the Hebrew language and Jewish religious tradition, which it considered a key element of the national identity. The first Akiba groups left for Palestine in 1930. In 1939 the organization numbered 30,000 adherents in Europe and Palestine.

During WWII it was active in the resistance movement. Armed Akiba units took part in campaigns in Cracow (1942) and in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943). After the war it did not resume its activities in Poland, but continued to operate in Palestine until the foundation of the State of Israel (1948).

## **29 Deportations of Poles from the Eastern Territories during WWII**

From the beginning of Soviet occupation of eastern Poland on 17th September 1939, until the Soviet-German war, which broke out on 21st June 1941, the Soviet authorities were deporting people associated with the former Polish authorities, culture, church and army. Around 400,000 people were exiled from the Lwow, Tarnopol and Stanislawow districts, mostly to northern Russia, Siberia and Kazakhstan. Between 12th and 15th April as many as 25,000 were deported from Lwow



only.

### **30 Betar**

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine.

It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

### **31 Hitlerjugend**

The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend was the only legal state youth organization. At the end of 1938 the SS took charge of the organization.

From 1939 all young Germans between 10 and 18 were obliged to join the Hitlerjugend, which organized after-school activities and political education. Boys over 14 were also given pre-military training and girls over 14 were trained for motherhood and domestic duties.

In 1939 it had 7 million members. During World War II members of the Hitlerjugend served in auxiliary forces. At the end of 1944 17-year-olds from the Hitlerjugend were drafted to form the 12th Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend' and sent to the western front.

### **32 Hashomer Hatzair in Poland**

From 1918 Hashomer Hatzair operated throughout Poland, with its headquarters in Warsaw. It emphasized the ideological and vocational training of future settlers in Palestine and personal development in groups.

Its main aim was the creation of a socialist Jewish state in Palestine. Initially it was under the influence of the Zionist Organization in Poland, of which it was an autonomous part. In the mid-1920s it broke away and joined the newly established World Scouting Union, Hashomer Hatzair.

In 1931 it had 22,000 members in Poland organized in 262 'nests' (Heb. 'ken'). During the occupation it conducted clandestine operations in most ghettos. One of its members was Mordechaj Anielewicz, who led the rising in the Warsaw ghetto. After the war it operated legally in Poland as a party, part of the He Halutz. It was disbanded by the communist authorities in 1949.

### **33 Hitler's rise to power**

In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one-third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in

Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor.

On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down. The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates.

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

### **34 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.

### **35 Endeks**

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

### **36 Flight eastwards, 1939**

From the moment of the German attack on Poland on 1st September 1939, Poles began to flee from areas in immediate danger of invasion to the eastern territories, which gave the impression of being safer.

When in the wake of the Soviet aggression (17th September) Poland was divided into Soviet and German-occupied zones, hundreds of thousands of refugees from central and western Poland found themselves in the Soviet zone, and more continued to arrive, often waiting weeks for permits to cross the border.

The majority of those fleeing the German occupation were Jews. The status of the refugees was different to that of locals: they were treated as dubious elements. During the passport campaign (the issue of passports, i.e. ID, to the new USSR - formerly Polish - citizens) of spring 1940, refugees

were issued with documents bearing the proviso that they were prohibited from settling within 100 km of the border.

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet authorities launched a vast deportation campaign, during which 82,000 refugees were transported deep into the Soviet Union, mainly to the Novosibirsk and Archangelsk districts. 84% of those deported in that campaign were Jews, and 11% Poles.

The deportees were subjected to harsh physical labor. Paradoxically, for the Jews, exile proved their salvation: a year later, when the Soviet Union's western border areas were occupied by the Germans, those Jews who had managed to stay put, perished in the Holocaust.

### **37 German occupation of Poland (1939-45)**

World War II began with the German attack on Poland on 1st September 1939. On 17th September 1939 Russia occupied the eastern part of Poland (on the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). The east of Poland up to the Bug River was incorporated into the USSR, while the north and west were annexed to the Third Reich. The remaining lands comprised what was called the General Governorship - a separate state administered by the German authorities.

After the outbreak of war with the USSR in June 1941 Germany occupied the whole of Poland's pre-war territory. The German occupation was a system of administration by the police and military of the Third Reich on Polish soil. Poland's own administration was dismantled, along with its political parties and the majority of its social organizations and cultural and educational institutions. In the lands incorporated into the Third Reich the authorities pursued a policy of total Germanization.

As regards the General Governorship the intention of the Germans was to transform it into a colony supplying Polish unskilled slave labor. The occupying powers implemented a policy of terror on the basis of collective liability.

The Germans assumed ownership of Polish state property and public institutions, confiscated or brought in administrators for large private estates, and looted the economy in industry and agriculture. The inhabitants of the Polish territories were forced into slave labor for the German war economy. Altogether, over the period 1939-45 almost three million people were taken to the Third Reich from the whole of Poland.

### **38 Annexation of Eastern Poland**

According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact defining Soviet and German territorial spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in September 1939. In early November the newly annexed lands were divided up between the Ukrainian and the Belarusian Soviet Republics.

### **39 Judenfrei (Judenrein)**

German for 'free (purified) of Jews'. A term created by the Nazis in Germany in connection with the plan entitled 'The Final Solution to the Jewish Question', the aim of which was defined as 'the creation of a Europe free of Jews'. The term 'Judenrein'/'Judenfrei' in Nazi terminology referred to

the extermination of the Jews and described an area (a town or a region), from which the entire Jewish population had been deported to extermination camps or forced labor camps. The term was, particularly in occupied Poland, an established part of the official and unofficial Nazi language.

#### **40 Annexation of Vilnius to Lithuania**

During the interwar period the previously Russian-held multi-ethnic city of Wilno (Vilnius) was a part of Poland and the capital of Lithuania was Kaunas.

According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Soviet-German agreement on the division of Eastern Europe, August 1939) the Soviet Army occupied both Eastern Poland (September 1939) and the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, June 1940).

While most of the occupied Eastern Polish territories were divided up between Soviet Ukraine and Belarus, Vilnius was attached to Lithuania and was to be its capital. The loss of the independent Lithuanian statehood, therefore, was accompanied with the return of Vilnius, regarded as an integral part of the country by most Lithuanians.

#### **41 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed.

Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

#### **42 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)**

Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine.

In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

#### **43 Pogrom in Lwow in June 1941**

Before leaving Lwow the NKVD murdered hundreds of political prisoners. On 30th June 1941 the German army entered the city. The crimes committed in the prisons were revealed. A rumor spread in the city that the Jews were guilty of the murders. A pogrom started which lasted 4 days. Jews were killed on the streets, some were gathered in the courtyard of the Brygidki prison and forced to bury the dead bodies of the murdered prisoners. 4,000 Jews were killed during the first pogrom. Rabbi Jecheskiel Lewin and Henryk Hescheles, the editor of the journal 'Chwila,' were among them.

#### **44 Lwow Ghetto**

Created following an order of the German administrative authorities issued on 8th November 1941. All Jews living in Lwow, that is approx. 120,000 people, were resettled to the ghetto. During a selection which was conducted by the German authorities most elderly and sick persons were shot to death before the ghetto was formally created.

Many Jews were employed in workshops producing equipment for the Wehrmacht or the Luftwaffe. Some of them were also employed in the German administration outside of the ghetto. Since March 1941 the Germans imprisoned Jews in the Janowska forced labor camp and also deported them to the extermination camp in Belzec.

Some residents died during mass street executions in the area of the ghetto called Piaski. The Great Liquidation Action in the Lwow ghetto lasted from 10th to 23rd August 1942. It is estimated that some 40,000 Jews were deported to the Belzec extermination camp. Some young men were sent to the Janowska forced labor camp. Approx. 800 people were taken to the Auschwitz extermination camp.

#### **45 Kenkarta**

(Ger. Kennkarte - 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.

#### **46 Oberaltstadt (Horejsi Stare Mesto)**

A labor camp for Jewish women located in the Sudeten Mountains. Approx. 500 women were imprisoned there. They worked in a metallurgical plant. In January 1944 the camp became a branch of KL Gross Rosen and increased in size, reaching 1,400 prisoners.

A total of 3,500 women passed through the camp. The women worked in the J. A. Klube and Siemens Motoren Werke companies. The commander was Anton Harlik. The camp was liberated in early May 1945 by the Soviet army. The Germans did not manage to evacuate the camp; 1,500 women were there when the camp was liberated.

#### **47 Death marches**

In fear of the approaching Allied armies, the Germans tried to erase all evidence of the concentration camps. They often destroyed all the facilities and forced all Jews regardless of their age or sex to go on a death march.

This march often led nowhere and there was no specific destination. The marchers received neither food nor water and were forbidden to stop and rest at night. It was solely up to the guards how they treated the prisoners, if and what they gave them to eat and they even had in their hands the power on the prisoners' life or death. The conditions during the march were so cruel that this journey became a journey that ended in the death of most marchers.

## **48 Passports of neutral countries as a possibility of saving oneself**

Until 1939 it was possible for Jews who had passports of neutral countries to leave the lands occupied by Germany. The well known Zionist politician Apolinary Hartglas left Poland using that opportunity. Jews, citizens of neutral countries, did not suffer from all forms of repression targeted at Jews, for example they did not have to wear Star-of-David armbands.

During the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, approx. 200 foreign Jews were interned and, after several months, taken to a camp in Vittel, and then exchanged to Germans staying abroad. Some 2,500 certifications of citizenship of South-American countries were filled out in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943.

They were later sold to random people in the so-called Hotel Polski affair. American countries refused to confirm the citizenship of the passport holders. Most of them died in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. 260 people survived.

## **49 Oranienburg**

A city in Brandenburgia. From February 1933 to July 1934 one of the first concentration camps, created and managed by the SA, operated there. The commander was W. Schlaefer. 2,900 political prisoners were kept there. In June 1943 the camp in Oranienburg was reactivated as a sub-camp of KZ Sachsenhausen. Mostly women prisoners brought from Ravensbrück were imprisoned there. They worked in airplane factories. Not much is known about the male sub-camp. The camp was liberated in April 1945 by the Soviet army.

## **50 Sachsenhausen**

Concentration camp in Germany, operating between 1936 and April 1945. It was named after the Sachsenhausen quarter, part of the town of Oranienburg. It is estimated that some 200,000 prisoners passed through Sachsenhausen and that 30,000 perished there.

That number does not include the Soviet prisoners of war who were exterminated immediately upon arrival at the camp, as they were never even registered on the camp's lists. The number also does not account for those prisoners who died on the way to the camp, while being transferred elsewhere, or during the camp's evacuation.

Sachsenhausen was liberated by Soviet troops on 27th April, 1945. They found only 3,000 prisoners who had been too ill to leave on the death march. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 396 - 398)

## **51 Dachau**

The first Nazi concentration camp, created in March 1933 in Dachau near Munich. Until the outbreak of the war prisoners were mostly social democrats and German communists, as well as clergy and Jews, a total of approx. 5,000 people.



The guidelines of the camp, which was prepared by T. Eicke and assumed cruel treatment of the prisoners: hunger, beatings, exhausting labor, was treated as a model for other concentration camps. There was also a concentration camp staff training center located in Dachau.

Since 1939 Dachau became a place of terror and extermination mostly for the social elites of the defeated countries. Approx. 250,000 inmates from 27 countries passed through Dachau, 148,000 died. Their labor was used in the arms industry and in quarries.

The commanders of the camp during the war were: A. Piotrowsky, M. Weiss and E. Weiter. The camp was liberated on 29th April 1945 by the American army.

## **52 Aliyah Noar (Youth Aliyah)**

Organization founded in 1933 in Berlin by Recha Freier, whose original aim was to help Jewish children and youth to emigrate from Nazi Germany to Palestine. The immigrants were settled in the Ben Shemen kibbutz, where over a period of 2 years they were taught to work on the land and Hebrew.

In the period 1934-1945 the organization was run by Henrietta Szold, the founder of the USA women's Zionist organization Hadassa. From that time, Aliyyat Noar was incorporated into the Jewish Agency.

After WWII it took 20,000 orphans who had survived the Holocaust in Europe to Israel. Nowadays Aliyyat Noar is an educational organization that runs 7 schools and cares for child immigrants from all over the world as well as young Israelis from families in distress. It has cared for a total of more than 300,000 children.

## **53 Restrictions of immigration to British Palestine after 1939**

After the so-called White Book from 1939 became valid, the immigration policy of mandate authorities changed drastically. The principle of the balance of the number Arabic and Jewish inhabitants of Palestine was introduced: Jews were not to exceed 1/3 of the inhabitants.

This meant that only 75,000 were to be legally admitted into the country in the next 5 years. The number of illegal immigrants increased rapidly. In November 1945 the Jewish Agency demanded the admission of 100,000 Jews saved from the Holocaust, who were then staying in camps organized for displaced persons from Germany.

The British refused. Illegal emigrants were sent to camps in Cyprus, but most often entire ships were sent back to where they came from. In 1947 the case of the ship 'Exodus 1947' became infamous. 4,500 refugees arrived on the ship in Palestine.

The ship was sent back to Marseille and, after the passengers refused to disembark, to Hamburg, where they were forced to leave the ship. In the period 1946-1948 17,249 Jews arrived in Palestine legally and 39,227 illegally.

## **54 Kielce Pogrom**

On 4th July 1946 the alleged kidnapping of a Polish boy led to a pogrom in which 42 people were

killed and over 40 wounded. The pogrom also prompted other anti-Jewish incidents in Kielce region. These events caused mass emigrations of Jews to Israel and other countries.

## **55 Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)**

Communist party formed in Poland in December 1948 by the fusion of the PPR (Polish Workers' Party) and the PPS (Polish Socialist Party). Until 1989 it was the only party in the country; it held power, but was subordinate to the Soviet Union. After losing the elections in June 1989 it lost its monopoly. On 29th January 1990 the party was dissolved.

## **56 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

## **57 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

## **58 1956 Revolution**

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed.

Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality.

The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

## **59 Nagy, Imre (1896-1958)**

As member of the communist party from 1920, he lived in exile in Vienna between 1928 and 1930, then in Moscow until 1944.

He was a Member of Parliament from 1944 to 1955, and the Minister of Agriculture in 1944-1945, at which time he carried out land reforms. He became Minister of the Interior in 1945-1946. He filled several high positions in the party between 1944 and 1953.

After Stalin's death, during the period of thaw, he was elected PM (1953-1955). As prime minister he began to promote the so-called July program of the party from the year 1953. Accordingly he stopped jailings, police kangaroo courts and population displacements, initiated the investigation of trial proceedings.

He also promoted changes in agriculture. He was forced to resign, and later expelled from the HCP by party hardliners, in 1955. On 24th October 1956 he was once again elected to the position of prime minister.

On 22nd November 1956 he was arrested by Russian soldiers and subsequently jailed in the Snagov prison in Romania. In April 1957 he was taken to Budapest, where he was given the death sentence in a secret trial. The sentence was carried out on 16th June 1958.

## **60 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 exiled.

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 émigré community.

## **61 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.

## **62 Anti-Zionist campaign in Poland**

From 1962-1967 a campaign got underway to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The background to this anti-Semitic campaign was the involvement of the Socialist Bloc countries on the Arab side in the Middle East conflict, in connection with which Moscow ordered purges in state institutions.

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

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

After the events of March, purges were also staged in all state institutions, from factories to universities, on criteria of nationality and race. 'Family liability' was also introduced (e.g. with respect to people whose spouses were Jewish). Jews were forced to emigrate.

From 1968-1971 15,000-30,000 people left Poland. They were stripped of their citizenship and right of return.

## **63 Eichmann, Adolf (1906-1962)**

Nazi war criminal, one of the organizers of mass genocide of Jews.

Since 1932 member of the Nazi party and SS, since 1934 an employee of the race and resettlement departments of the RSHA (Main Security Office of the Reich), after the "Anschluss" of Austria headed the Headquarters for the Emigration of Jews in Vienna, later organized the emigration of Jews in Czechoslovakia and, since 1939, in Berlin.

Since December 1939 he was the head of the Departments for the Resettlement of Poles and Jews from lands incorporated into the Reich.

Since mid-1941, as the Head of the Branch IV B 4 Gestapo RSHA, he coordinated the plan of the extermination of Jews, organized and carried out the deportations of millions of Jews to death camps. After the war he was imprisoned in an American camp, he managed to escape and hid in

Germany, Italy and Argentina.

In 1960 he was captured by the Israeli secret service in Buenos Aires. After a process which took several months, he was sentenced to death and executed. Eichmann's trial initiated a great discussion about the causes and the carrying out of the Shoah.

## **64 Gomulka Campaign**

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## **65 Radio Free Europe Poland**

Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block.

The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB.

Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block.

The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994. Radio Free Europe Poland was created on 3rd May 1952 and became the most popular foreign radio station in Poland.

It was also systematically jammed by Polish authorities. The radio station revealed the injustice of the communist system and played an important role in the democratic changes in the country.

## **66 Yad Vashem**

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

## **67 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)**

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria.

The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier.

The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war.

The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

## **68 Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc)**

A social and political movement in Poland that opposed the authority of the PZPR. In its institutional form - the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc) - it emerged in August and September 1980 as a product of the turbulent national strikes.

In that period trade union organizations were being formed in all national enterprises and institutions; in all some 9-10 million people joined NSZZ Solidarnosc.

Solidarity formulated a program of introducing fundamental changes to the system in Poland, and sought the fulfillment of its postulates by exerting various forms of pressure on the authorities: pickets in industrial enterprises and public buildings, street demonstrations, negotiations and propaganda.

It was outlawed in 1982 following the introduction of Martial Law (on 13th December 1981), and until 1989 remained an underground organization, adopting the strategy of gradually building an alternative society and over time creating social institutions that would be independent of the PZPR (the long march). Solidarity was the most important opposition group that influenced the changes in the Polish political system in 1989.

## **69 Events of 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 had introduced martial law (lifted on 22nd 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 the Round Table negotiations took place (6th Feb.-5th April 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronisław 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 January 1990 the PZPR dissolved.

## **70 Purges among KPP activists**

In June 1937 purges began among members of the Communist Party in Poland in the USSR. They were summoned to Moscow and accused of cooperation with the Polish secret service.

In 1937 the general secretary, Julian Lenski-Leszczynski, was summoned from France and arrested, he was shot to death in 1939. Twelve central committees of the party were liquidated, several hundred members of the party were killed. Purges also took place among Polish communists fighting in the International Brigades in Spain.

In February 1938 an article was published in the Comintern newspaper presenting the thesis that the Polish Communist Party (KPP) had been taken over by Pilsudski's agents. Comintern officially dissolved KPP in August 1938. During that time most activists were already in Soviet prisons, camps or were dead by that time.

## **71 Restoration of Polish citizenship**

According to § 2, Article 8 of the Polish Citizenship Act (5 February 1962) foreigners may be granted Polish citizenship at their own request in justified cases, even in case they have not been resident in Poland for longer than five years.

In 2000 the Polish Sejm (Parliament) issued an act specifying that this article is applicable to former Polish citizens forcibly resettled abroad or who emigrated during the Communist period (including, for instance, Jews forced to emigrate to Israel in 1968). Interest in restoration of Polish citizenship among Israelis increased most recently, following Poland's accession to the European Union.