

# Izaak Wacek Kornblum

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Poland

Interviewer: Anna Szyba

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*I met Mr. Wacek Kornblum in his apartment in Saska Kępa, a district of Warsaw. We talk in his living room. There are pictures and photographs hanging on the wall - Mr. Kornblum is an amateur photographer. There are plenty of books around. Some in Hebrew, some in Yiddish, most of them in Polish - both Polish classics, as well as works of Jewish authors published in Polish. The house has a warm air to it, someone is cooking, somebody else is cleaning up, Mr. Kornblum's wife remains in her room and reads throughout our conversation. Mr. Kornblum willingly talks about the pre-war times, his stories are colorful and full of details, I often feel as if I was watching a movie about his life.*

## My family history

My name is Izaak Kornblum, I was born on 5th March 1926 in Paris. I was born to an intellectual family. Father, Szlomo Kornblum, born in 1894, was a writer, he used to write in Yiddish. Mom was born in 1901, her maiden name was Zamosc, she came from Mszczonow [49 km south-west of Warsaw], near Warsaw.

Father's family was a large family, where several generations came from Powazki near Warsaw [a village near Warsaw before the war, now a district of Warsaw]. I only vaguely remember Father's mother, her name was Miriam. I don't know what year she was born in, I don't know what year she died. Father's father's name was Icchak, I have my name after him. I don't remember him. He must have died fairly early. Father's parents must have been religious, whereas all Father's sisters and Father were not.

Somewhere on Nowolipie or Nowolipki lived Grandmother Miriam's sister, her name was Kajle Zonszajn. We didn't use to go to visit the Zonszajns often before the war. There were also kids there, there was Mosze, there was Miriam and Reginka [diminutive for Regina]. They were all much older than us, of course.

Father had a couple of sisters and a brother. The oldest sister of Father was Aunt Frania [Franciszka]. She lived on 26 Wielka Street, if I remember correctly, they were best off before the war. Aunt's husband, Motek [Mordechaj] Braunrot, had a hardware warehouse on Bagno Street. And they had a daughter Manusia [Mania, diminutive for Miriam], most emancipated, there was a son older than her who had already left home, and a younger one, Salek [Salomon], who was about two years older than me. Manusia later married some other Salek and they had a daughter Paulinka [Paulina] in 1940.

Father's older brother, Mosze, went to Paris at the beginning of the 1920s, along with his wife, who had a family there. And later they went to the United States from Paris. I don't know when he was

born, but he was about four years older than my father. Uncle married a Jewish woman from Warsaw. I don't remember her name, they had three daughters. One of them, Suzi, committed suicide in Washington after the war, as a very young woman. The other two, Lilian and Madeleine, lived until not long ago, one died maybe half a year ago when she was 90 something years old, the other, who we keep in touch with from time to time, is still alive.

Another sister of Father's, Aunt Doba [Debora], had a husband whose name was Szlomo Gilf. They had two sons, Zewek [Zejw] and Chylek [Chil] and a daughter Maniusia [Miriam], who was a bit older than me. It was a non religious family. Uncle had a grocery store in Wlochy near Warsaw for many years, but later, because of various anti-Semitic incidents [1](#), moved to Warsaw just before the war. He had a store there for some time, but it wasn't going well. In 1939, Chylek and Zewek were drafting age and they were both drafted to the army. Chylek was in cavalry and was taken to a POW camp, which he escaped from and returned to Warsaw, that was before the ghetto. Zewek was in the army and defended Warsaw until the capitulation [the Warsaw defense went on from 8th until 28th September 1939].

Father's other sister, Aunt Ryfcia, also married a Gilf, Szymon, Aunt Doba's husband's brother. Uncle was a miller. They used to live on 54 Przykopowa Street, and I remember there were huge flour sieves at the back of the house. They had a daughter, Maniusia, born in 1922. Later they were in the ghetto and we even lived together for some time [on Niska Stret].

Then there was Aunt Rozia [Roza]. To tell you the truth, she was a half-sister, because I don't remember whether there was a common Grandfather [father] or Grandmother [mother]. They lived on 35 Niska Street. The husband of that Aunt was Lejb Gefen, she was his second wife. He was a very wealthy man, he was one of the five richest bakers in the ghetto, a man with a heart of gold. They had two sons. Poldek [Leopold] and Julek [Juliusz]. Julek and his girlfriend ran away to Russia in 1939 and we never heard from him again. Poldek with his wife Anka stayed with the family all the time. They were a very handsome couple, about ten years older than me. And they remained in the ghetto until the end.

Father's half-sister, but of a different combination [than Aunt Rozia] was Aunt Zlatka [Zlata]. Her husband was Abram Zymelman and Aunt Zlatka had three daughters, Bronka [Bronislawa], more or less same age as Uncle Gefen's children, and two daughters, twins, my brother's [Borus] age: Halinka [Halina] and Dziunia [Jadwiga]. Halinka was a very pretty girl, and Dziunia was such a skinny creature, they didn't look a lot alike.

The youngest sister, Father's favorite who he used to always help, was Aunt Chawcia, that is Chawa. Her husband Benjamin was also a Kornblum, he was Father's cousin. They had two sons. One was Icchak, the other one Kuba [Akiwa]. Icchak was three-four years older than me, and Kuba was my age, my best friend who kept getting me in trouble. They lived in Warsaw, on 17 Panska Street. It wasn't a religious family, but a traditional one, they had a kosher kitchen. Aunt's husband was very active in Zionism. Kuba used to go to a Hebrew school, and probably belonged to Betar [2](#). They had a piggy-bank for Karen Kayemet [3](#) at home and his father, whenever he could, would give [money]. My father didn't like it, Mom even less. Izaak was very talented. He used to play the violin, paint. He used to go to the Pilsudski School of Lithography on Konwiktorska Street in Warsaw. He also sang in a choir, in the Large Synagogue on Tlomackie [4](#), and whenever he had shows, the entire family tried to get there. I remember that synagogue as a large palace, staircase

going up, lights. I felt strange there, a bit uneasy.

Father was born in 1894. He went to a cheder for certain, but what school he went to afterwards, I don't know. I don't think he took high school exams. I remember when Dad used to sit and write, I remember his handwriting. He wrote by hand, very specific handwriting, so that where there were long Nun, Chet [at the end of a word], there was a thick line. And he wrote on sheets of lined paper, but folded in half in such a way that there were thin stripes of paper.

I don't know much about my biological mother. In Father's first book, published in 1921, there is a dedication: "Dedicated to you Menuchele", so he knew her in 1921 already. [My parents] got married probably in 1921. Since I was born in 1926, I suspect they spent those few years in Warsaw and then went to Paris, where the family of my uncle, Father's brother, was living. They went there to work, because they had a place to stay there. I know that Mom died in Paris. I know she died of tuberculosis. I know that after Mom died Father gave me, a few-month-old baby, to the nuns, to some convent in Strasburg, apparently there was no one to take care of me, and probably after about half a year Father took me back and brought to Warsaw. All these memories are based on unfinished allusions, by Mom's sister, Aunt Mania [or Mina] Zamosc from Mszczonow, who lived in Warsaw.

Aunt Mania was an old maid, [I don't know when she was born], she probably died in the Warsaw ghetto [5](#) in 1942. My earliest Warsaw memories are such that Aunt Mania would come over to our home, where there was Father's second wife, Mom - Lonia, already, and take me for a walk. I can't tell how often those visits used to happen, but I know they were unenthusiastically accepted at home by Mom and Dad. Later it came to it that Aunt Mania somehow would sneak me out. I rather liked her, but can't say I loved her. When I was a child that could remember something, when I was about 9 - 10 years old, the family of Mom - Lonia, who lived in the same yard as we did [on 42 Sliska Street], when they knew, I don't know how, that Aunt Mania was coming over for me, they would sneak me out of the house and hide me in their apartment. I don't know what caused that.

Aunt Mania used to come several times a year and take me to her family, that is, the family of my Mother. And I remember there was an older Aunt, on Wielka Street, across from the house where Father's sister, Aunt Frania, lived. I remember, though vaguely, that that Aunt's name was Bela, and Uncle Jankiel Goldwaser, he was a religious Jew, with a beard. There were no children there. And there, on a bookshelf, were twelve crystal elephants [placed] from the smallest to the largest, and I was allowed to take them and play with them. That old Aunt would also take crystal glasses, attach strings to forks, I would hold both ends of the string near my ears, move my head, the fork would hit those glasses and the bells rang!

I remember two events at that Aunt's on Wielka Street. Once: the entire family sits at a large table, on the honorary place there is an old Jew in a capote, with a grey beard, in a cap. Dad brought me there, because it was somebody's wedding, I can't remember whose. I was told to walk up to that, as it turned out, Great-grandfather, he looked at me, they said I was Izio [diminutive for Izaak]. That was my Great-grandfather, Mother's grandfather. The second event at that Aunt's, I must have been even smaller, Aunt Mania brought me there, Dad came, I hadn't seen him in a while. The air was tense, Dad sat on a sofa, picked me up and held me between his knees, because I was struggling to get out, and Aunt Bela was arguing with that Aunt Mania, and Dad took me home. I think what happened was that Aunt Mania took me for some time and didn't want to give me back.

I suspect the basis of the entire story was such that Aunt Mania hoped to marry Father, after Mother died.

The second family [from my mother's side], that I remember, lived on Panska Street. There were two sons, one of them was my age, the other was older. [When you entered their house, there was] a hallway, a large clothes hanger on one side, colorful glass door led to the kitchen, then you'd enter the living room, and there was a desk, I think it was that older boy's desk, with some lamp, and there was a shelf above it, with volumes of Plomyczek children's magazine. And I used to sit there and look at and read those magazines. It was fairly dark in that apartment, but I liked going there.

[The last memory related to Mother] comes from the times of the ghetto. When Borus was on the [so called] Aryan side, and Dad was very emotional about it, and we knew that I would get out in a few days, Dad called me and took a folded envelope out of his wallet, and from that envelope [he took out] a folded see-through paper that held golden locks of hair. He gave it to me and asked if I knew what it was. I said I knew, because I figured that was Mom's hair. And Dad said: 'Do you want to take it?' I said: 'Yes'. He said: 'No! Give it back to me.' That was the only time when my mom's subject was touched. There was some pressure not to talk about it, so I didn't even ask.

Some time around 1929 Dad got married the second time, to Lonia [Lea], maiden name Mileband. Out of parents of Mom Lonia Mileband [in the rest of the story, whenever Mr. Kornblum talks about Mother, he means Lonia Mileband] I only remember Grandmother, her name was Bube Gele [Yiddish for Grandma Gele]. She was born in Warsaw, I don't know which year. She came from a religious family. I remember her as if through fog, only in bed, because she was sick. Not a small woman, dressed traditionally, in dark colors, she had a white collar. She treated me rather coolly. When I was a very little boy, I remember that whenever she was to visit us on Friday, Mom would quickly light candles, which I couldn't understand, because it was so unlike Mom. I think it was about 1933 when she died. Mom's father's name was Ber Wolf Mileband. I know nothing about him.

Grandma [Gele] lived at the same yard as we did [on 42 Sliska Street], at Mom's sister, Chana. Aunt Chana's husband, Jankiel Tygiel, [was] very traditional, he had a parted beard [in the middle] with two spikes and completely orthodox clothes: a black gabardine and a square hat with a tiny black peak, on holidays he would put on a black velvet capote with a string tied around his waist, not to mention a tallit whenever he went to a synagogue, he dressed himself as a Hasid. Aunt used to wear a wig and ran a religious house, but Aunt's children absolutely did not [they were not religious].

Stefa, Aunt's daughter [Aunt Chana and Uncle Jankiel's Tygiel], came from this house, a teacher, who taught Polish in a Polish school in Wolomin. She left her home very early and lived on Zelazna Street. A very well read person. I remember that before the war I used to go to her, and she taught me some French. I was her favorite, she used to take me everywhere. To Aleje Jerozolimskie, to the National Museum – I went there for the first time with her (there was an agricultural exhibition, where I drank pasteurized milk for the first time, that was a novelty back then). Stefa was the most intelligent out of that house, completely emancipated, I'd say assimilated. She wanted to have nothing to do with anything Jewish. She used to go to Paris to her aunts, and was in France when the war broke out. She survived the war in France, in Toulouse, when Germany took over a part of France, they all ran south. She was an old maid, and only in France she met Jacques, a true

Frenchman with whom she married and outlived. They had no children. They ran a so-called salon. Stefa came to Poland after the war, she had lots of friends among people close to authorities in the People's Republic of Poland and used to come to us for a month or two, she lived in Warsaw. Her [Stefa's] sister, Bela, had to escape from Poland before the war, because as a very young person she belonged to the Communist Party of Poland [6](#). She went to France. She had a husband there, last name Pachholder. A rather strange man. I think he came from Poland. She has a son, who is seriously ill now, Jean.

The third sister was Renia, a very pretty woman, who lived with her parents, married, before the war, Elek, who was mildly cross-eyed. Elek was a taxi driver, when he was to take a test to become a taxi driver, I questioned him about where what streets were, and he would tell me off hand how to get there. He used to drive a German car, a Steier.

There was a younger brother, Dawcio, Dawid, a boy older than me a good few years, and there was the oldest one, Beniek, who married Lodzia and had a child, Mareczek, born in 1940. They lived in Praga where Beniek had a wine store. He was on such bad terms with our mom, that Mom didn't go to his wedding. I don't know why, it was some family story.

Mom had a brother, Mosze Mileband, who died during my early childhood. For many years his daughter Estusia lived with us. They were very poor, so Mom took her in. Estusia was both a family member and also helped around the household. She and Mom were both caught on Umschlagplatz [7](#). [Estusia] had a brother Dawid, but he didn't live with us. Dawcio had [in about 1937] a shoe stall in Hala Mirowska [a Warsaw market hall built in 1899]. We used to go visit him there from time to time, later he drove a rickshaw at the very beginning of the existence of the ghetto.

Mom also had two sisters in Paris. Aunt Mania and Aunt Emilia. Emilia lives until this day, she's very old. Aunt Mania died of Parkinson's disease, many years ago. And there was a brother, religious, in a cap, in a capote, who had something to do with selling and buying currency. I don't remember him or his wife. I know they lived on 10 Twarda Street. They weren't well off, they had lots of children. There was Fredzia born in 1931, another girl older than her, there was a son with a hump, Elimelech and maybe some other children. Fredzia was a beautiful girl who lived with us for a while in the ghetto, and to whom my brother [Borus] used to give his lessons that he took secretly during the war.

There was one more sister of Mother, from Zdunska Wola [a small town 190 km west of Warsaw], Aunt Mala and Uncle Mendel Staszewski, a very religious family, they had a daughter Irka and a son Beniek, who emigrated to Belgium when he was young. Irka studied in Warsaw and I remember that one summer she lived with us on Sliska Street. We never went to Zdunska Wola.

My mom [stepmother], Lonia [Lea] Mileband, was born in 1900, I don't have information what school she went to, but she was a teacher before she got married, a home room teacher, and she may have also taught Polish at Korczak's [8](#), on Krochmalna Street [until November 1940 the Korczak Orphanage was located on 92 Krochmalna Street, later it was moved to the ghetto to 33 Chlodna Street]. When I was little she didn't work, but later, when we weren't doing too well, she learnt how to make corsets, there were two additional sewing machines at home [for Mother]. I learnt how to sew and used to help Mom to sew bras, so-called full ones, you had to put the cups in first. Later Mom realized it would be better for her to open her own store instead of providing bras to other stores. And she opened a store on Rymarska Street, in the other part of the store there

was a dressmaker or a haberdasher. It could have been in 1936, didn't last long. We used to go there some time to visit Mom, Wladek [Borus] was nuts about those visits.

I knew Lonia wasn't my mom, but I didn't feel it. Mom was a very smart woman. But from the time perspective, I realize I didn't experience true motherly love. I was a bit browbeaten, always very shy. I know that Mother's niece, Estusia, who stayed with us, used to pick on me a bit. And Dad would always get very upset about it, I remember. Once in a summer resort she made me a hardboiled or soft-boiled egg – not what I liked, another time in a row. When I protested, Dad got upset, he was drinking a glass of tea with milk. He didn't finish, threw the glass over the porch. Mom didn't say anything.

[My brother] Borus was born in 1932. Borus derives from Ber - Dov in Hebrew, which means a bear. [Mr. Kornblum calls his brother also Wladek, or Wladzio – diminutives from Wladyslaw, his Polish name]. I remember when he was born Grandmother [Gela] was lying in bed [she was sick]. In Yiddish 'brist' means 'brisket' that's how we call meat: brist. And brit mila means circumcision, but here [in Warsaw] people used to call it brist mila. And Grandma asked me when I came to visit her: 'Vus makht di mame?' [Yiddish: 'what is mom doing?'], 'Zi makht a brist', [she's doing 'brist'] I answered, thinking about meat and everyone laughed in the whole family. I remember very well when Borus lay in the other room in a bed with a lifted front, with bars, so that he wouldn't fall out.

Dad was a writer and he wrote a few books. It's not big literature, but it's prose with a large poetic load, so descriptions, accounts of events. He also used to write to Jewish magazines, to Folkshtime [9](#), to the newspaper Haynt [10](#), to the newspaper Radio [11](#), that was an afternoon newspaper, and to the newspaper Moment [12](#). He belonged to a Union of Jewish Writers in Warsaw, on 13 Tlomackie Street [13](#), where he used to take me to as a child, where Itzik Manger [14](#) also used to come. Some of Itzik Manger's poems I remember today, and when Father took me there, I used to sit in his lap and recite. I met Itzik Manger later in Israel on 'Di Megle' show, but he was quite old then already and didn't remember anything.

13 Tlomackie Street I remember as a row of rooms, lots of people, noise, cigarette smoke. I remember the name Horonczyk [Szymon Horonczyk, (1889 – 1939), a Jewish writer who committed suicide in the first days of September 1939], that was one of the writers who used to come there. A strange man, with big hair, who was extremely afraid of the war and the Germans. And he was one of the first to run east [15](#), but he didn't get far, he cut his wrists in some barn. It was a well-known story in that world then.

Various writers, painters, and also Mom's friends, teachers, used to come over to our house. They drank a bit, but I remember them [the artists] to be in rather bad material conditions. And Father, whenever he was able to, used to help them, but where did he get the money from? When he was in Paris, he learnt how to make women's handbags. He was very good at it, he used to come up with styles himself. He had a shop that throughout various periods of life was located either in our house or in some rented apartment. For some time even in the house of Aunt Chawcia – [Father] helped them this way by paying rent, because they were not too well off. Mom used to help at the shop, and I, when I grew up, and I know how to use a sewing machine until today. [Father] used to sell [finished] purses to various stores, on Aleje Jerozolimskie, on Marszalkowska Street, where I used to go with him often. But there were various periods, too, sometimes it was better, sometimes it was worse. [When it was] better, [Father] had three, four apprentices.

## My neighborhood

We lived on 42 Sliska Street, in the spot where Jana Pawla II Avenue runs now. A long yard, a gate, which used to be locked at night. The gatekeeper lived there, he had a son whom I was very afraid of for no reason. A tall boy, a lot older than me. We lived in the back premises, on the second floor in a four-story building, in an apartment with two bedrooms, a kitchen and toilet, there was no bathroom.

When you entered, there was a gas meter, on which I broke my arm chasing after my little brother [Borus]. There was a mirror over the gas meter. The first door on the left led to the toilet. There was a small window high up in the toilet, which looked onto the kitchen. In the kitchen there was a bed behind a curtain, for a servant. There was a living room, there was a large table, folding iron bed, when it was folded it became a type of a table. And there was a couch. I used to sleep on that folding bed, I think Estusia slept in the kitchen, and the third, much smaller room, was my parents' bedroom. There, in the alcove, there was the [parents'] bed, and a crib where Borus slept. Out in the yard, under the bedroom window stood a garbage can. For Friday my parents used to buy hot challot, which they put on the window to cool them off. And Brother, since he was a huge rascal, would sometimes sneak in and push [those challot] straight onto the garbage. And I had to run downstairs and rescue them.

In the living room, on the right, there was a large, very old cupboard. It had glass doors, some pottery inside, lower down there was also door and a table top on which various things stood. And it fell on me, like a house made of cards. A horrible experience. I must have been very little then, [it was] probably before Wladek [Borus] was born, nothing happened [to me], but there was a huge row.

The kitchen was narrow and on the left there was a sink, in the shape of a half-circle at the bottom, and next to the sink there was a huge box, opened at the top, and we kept coal for the tile stove in there. Kuba put me into that box once and closed the lid, and I had to sit in there, I can't remember why, but it was a game. When I got out of that box and Mom saw me... Well, Kuba didn't come over for two or three weeks! We had to bring the coal from the warehouse, at the end of Sliska Street near Twarda Street, so it was always a problem who was going to bring it, we used to hire porters, they had such huge baskets they put on their backs. I remember there was Mom's cousin, who was in very bad financial conditions, a religious Jew with huge beard, and he was a porter. There was time that he used to bring us that coal. Of course Mom didn't pay him the regular fee [she paid him more].

In that kitchen they used to do laundry in a wash-tub. A washerwoman used to come to do the laundry, later it was just Mom and Estusia who did the laundry. And there was a hand wringer, I liked working it a lot, but it was quite hard, especially when a sheet got in there and then we had to hang it. There was an attic over the 4th floor, but they used to steal there. And in the kitchen, under the ceiling, over the window, there was such a frame and ropes, and on the opposite wall there were hooks, and a part of that frame was pulled over to the other side, and then we had ropes like [guitar] strings along the entire kitchen, and we had to climb a ladder to hang [the laundry]. Once I climbed that ladder and fell straight onto some box with nails and until this day I had this triangle here on my hand, you could identify me by this.

[I often played in front of the house]. Once they bought me a scooter, a good one, massive, wooden, it had rubber wheels. And I used to let myself ride it on the road. There was never heavy traffic on Sliska Street and once a navy-blue policeman came by and took that scooter from me. I, of course, ran home and Dad went with me to the police station, at the police station they said: 'Yes, we have it, but you have to go to the constable on Grzybowski Square, he directs traffic there.' So Dad and I went there from Sliska Street to Grzybowski Square, he stood on a platform in the middle of the road, we went up to him, Dad told him what we came for: 'That's 10 zloty'. So Dad took out 10 zloty, that was a huge amount of money, gave it to him, we went back to the police station and I got my scooter back.

Across from our house there was a grocery store, 'at Rudele's'. Rudele was a red-head. It was a Jewish store, you could cut big pats of butter with a wire, like a bow. And we kept going to Rudele's, there were no fridges, you had to buy everything fresh. I liked going there a lot. The smells! Incredible. Next to it there was a soap store [a soap store - store with cleaning articles], there was everything, soap, kerosene. A dark store, an older woman stood behind the counter, she must have been very religious. Her sons with sidelocks were there, in caps, that store was connected to their house.

At the corner of Sliska and Komitetowa Streets they used to sell 'baygels', that is bagels, if I remember correctly, 3 for 10 groszy [Polish change]. Today's bagels are not the same thing. Baygels were braided, and the whole thing was to sell them while they were still warm. I know how they made baygels, because later we lived on Niska Street, where Uncle [Gefen] had a bakery: they made dough, quickly rolled out, the baker braided - two braids, then they threw it on the boiling water, fished it out with a long rod and put into the oven, it sat in the oven briefly and was taken out with a shovel. It was crunchy, brown. I never experienced that taste again.

Every once in a while peddlers would come to the yard. Among others a juggler. I was happy when they gave me some pennies, I stood and watched next to that blanket where he was showing tricks. Sometimes an old Jewish woman came, pulling a barrel on a small platform with wooden wheels and shouting: 'Uliki, uliki'. A type of a herring, uliki.

In our part of Warsaw everything was around Twarda, Sosnowa, Zlota, Wielka, Sliska, Komitetowa Streets [before the war these streets were located in the Jewish district]. On Komitetowa Street there was an extraordinary Jewish cold cuts shop. On the way to school I often dropped by in there, bought a Kaiser bun and so called 'varieties', that is, scraps of various cold cuts. There are no 'varieties' today any more, like many other things.

I remember the Saski Garden, near the Unknown Soldier's grave, there were eleven arches, it was called 'eleven gates', and it took the entire stretch between the Saski Palace, which isn't there any more, and the buildings of the general headquarters. There are only three [arches] left out of that (I think). It was a well known architectural accent and we used to go there to [watch] changing of the guard. We used to go to the Saski Garden often. It was nice in there, there was a Japanese house, which doesn't exist today, there was a garden, a railing around. And whenever we went to the Saski Garden, we had to jump on the wall where the railing was, hold Mom or Dad with one hand in order not to fall down, and walk like that the entire way. At the entrance, at the Pilsudski Square, right to the left, there was a huge café Sigalina where we used to go for kefir, and at the entrance they used to sell ice-cream Eskimos, on a stick. And there was a sundial, which is still

there today, a temple of love, and a famous fountain, a pond that turned into a skating rink in the wintertime and we used to go there to skate. I wasn't good at skating.

In our house we spoke Polish with Mom, Yiddish with dad. Parents spoke usually Yiddish to each other. Mom was from Bundist [16](#) circles, but I can't say she was an activist. It was rather a group of friends, well-wishers of Bund. Among others she kept in very close touch with the family Lifszyc. There was Estusia Lifszyc and her husband Joske Lifszyc [Josef Lifszyc – a dentist, Bund activist, a co-founder and chairman of Jewish Socialist Youth Club Tsukunft], who was a famous Bund activist, very close friend of Erlich [17](#). He was a dentist, on 1 Pawia Street he had a very well equipped dental office, I think they lived on the third floor, and the office was on the fourth floor. I used to go there, because their daughter was my friend. Her name was Mirka. There was also an older brother.

Joske Lifszyc escaped to Lithuania at the very beginning of the war, as a Bund activist. Estusia was left with the children. She stayed and didn't want to leave because she was taking care of the dental office. She was in the small ghetto [a part of the ghetto covering streets south of Chlodna Street. The little ghetto was liquidated in August 1942], I even visited her. And I remember how they used to say that she stayed because of the office. Miraculously she sent away the older son, before the ghetto was created, and later at the very beginning of the ghetto she got in touch with some Pole, who, in the wintertime, put Mirka into the train, dressed in some fur, and drove her to Eastern Prussia. Then he led her by foot through the border to Lithuania. In Wilno [presently Vilnius, capital of Lithuania] she met her father and his brother. Then she went from Lithuania to Japan through the Soviet Union. She survived the war and found her brother in London again.

At home we used to read Folkshtime, Radio and Haynt, and also a magazine for children Grininke Baymelekh, there were columns for children, various stories, books printed in series. We subscribed to books, there was a large library, also for children. There was a Jewish publisher in Warsaw called Kinder Fraynd and they published known youth fiction in Yiddish. I probably read the entire children's fiction in Yiddish. For example The Pickwick Club, Emil and The Detectives, although whatever I read and recited later on various celebrations and shows in an amateur theatre, all that was in Polish. From our library, right when the war broke out and the Germans were coming closer, Dad took out all works by Lenin and Marx and threw them out to the garbage.

My parents were anti-religious. Never in my life did I go to a service in a synagogue, not even on Yom Kippur. There were holidays [present in our life], because there were generally holidays in the Jewish world: Rudele closed her store, Dad didn't work, the shop was closed. And we went to visit the family.

I remember that on Purim we used to visit the Aunts. Wladek [Borus] was quite small then, but I already had a deal in it. There is a custom that on Purim children used to get purimgelt [Yiddish: money for Purim]. And I remember Uncle Braunrot prepared for that holiday a roll of grosze [small Polish change] and we got that. We had little flags, greger [Yiddish: grayger – a rattler], it's a little mechanism on a stick, like a flag, which, when spun, it rattled. The more you spin it, the more it upsets Haman. There was also a spot for a candle at the very top.

During Chanukkah we used to play dreydel [a cube spinning top] for money, and for many years we had a very nice dreydel. Whenever Grandmother Gela came, Mom would take out a little lotto. Those were cards with numbers on them, you threw dice and depending on what you got on the

dice, you'd put on those numbers same numbers that you had in a sack. In the sack you had small dice with numbers on them and you had to put those numbers on the appropriate square on the card. Whoever filled his card first, won.

[I also remember] we used to buy matzah and for that matzah we had to go to Uncle Gefan on Niska Street. It was a special matzah, round, very thin, in packages made of brown paper. To get the matzah we took a horse carriage there and back, which was an event, because we didn't used to use horse carriages since they were too expensive, but we couldn't take matzah on a tramway, because those were big parcels.

I had a non-religious bar mitzvah. Every boy who celebrates bar mitzvah first has to learn some part of the Torah at some rabbi's. And then he puts on a tallit, tefillin, but I had nothing to do with that, I didn't know Hebrew, I didn't know any service prayers. The family came to our house and we ate something. Some sisters of Father surely celebrated [religious holidays]. Interesting, there were some boys, but I never went to any Bar Mitzvah. We never criticized orthodox Jews, but we spoke of Zionists [18](#) with some contempt or disapproval.

My best friend was Kuba [Kornblum, the son of Aunt Chawcia and Uncle Benjamin]. He used to come over to our place, I used to go there, we played together, together we constructed the first radio detector with headphones, which was a big achievement. We used to tease Kuba's older brother, Izaak - we often broke his violin. We used to play with photographic film. We played it as follows. On Sliska Street there were cobblestones, we had pieces of a photographic film with five frames on each, and two coins. We'd throw the coin on the ground, between the cobblestones, and we had to toss the second coin as close as possible to the first one. We measured the distance with our fingers. The thumb and the little finger, that was the largest distance, but if you could touch both coins with the thumb, then you'd win most. The smallest bid was five frames.

I didn't have Polish friends, everything revolved in the Jewish world. But I remember once I was going home from school and on Komitetowa Street I got beaten up by a bunch of some Jewish boys, they thought I was a goy. I came back home all in tears.

I remember a student anti-Jewish rally. Before the war on Swietokrzyska Street there were many bookstores with school textbooks and always at the beginning of a school year young people with their parents would go there to buy books. And I remember some students on Swietokrzyska with long bats with razor blades, scaring people off: 'Don't buy from a Jew', they stood in front of Jewish stores and wouldn't let people enter. But it didn't concern me personally.

When I was 6 years old I went to school on Krochmalna Street [Chmurner school number 36] because of Bundist sympathies at home. I started going to Freblowka [a pre-school ran according to the pedagogic system of F. Froebel] in the same building where the school was. I have very funny memories from Freblowka - I fell in love with a girl, Nomcia, I think Apfelbaum, who I [later] met in the ghetto, after such a long time, and it turned out Father knew her father, who was also a writer. I remember a boy, I can't remember what his name was, but he had a runny nose all the time and he never wiped it, even when he would eat a bun. I remember a girl, I think Hanusia, who left Poland with her parents and went to southern America, which was a big deal. The entire pre-school walked her to a bus, which was strange, and that bus was to take them somewhere. Maybe to some port somewhere?

I went to Freblowka on Krochmalna until the 6th grade. I didn't do the 7th, because I went to the Laor [Hebrew: light] high school [2A Nalewki Street]. On Krochmalna the teaching language was Yiddish, except history and Polish which were in Polish of course. There were crafts, once I hurt my finger with an iron file. In the gym there were ladders on walls. We had to climb them. I wasn't good at gym, I couldn't jump over any vaulting horse.

I remember that the school corresponded with another school in Vienna, possibly also a Bundist school, we wrote letters, to various kids, in Yiddish. I remember a gentleman used to come over, I think his name was Melech Rawicz [originally Zacharia Chone Bergner (1893-1976), a poet writing in Yiddish, a traveler], who used to show us slides from Africa. I always liked geography, biology, animals.

I don't remember the school on Krochmalna well. I think it was in the back premises, because we used to exit onto a yard. I remember a big room, where they used to show us the slides, a classroom, double door, a blackboard on the right, desks on the left, I always wanted to sit with Pola Boznicka. She was my sweetheart. They caught me once when I cut out the name Izio and Pola from a newspaper, from an obituary I think, and I glued it in my notebook, everyone laughed at me. It must have been in the 1st or 2nd grade.

There was a hole for an inkstand in the desk, we used to write with a pen called 'mendelowka' or 'krzyzowka,' those were nib pens. 'Mendelowka' was long, ended with a kind of a flat circle, it wrote completely differently than 'krzyzowka' which had a cut in shape of a cross. I didn't have good handwriting, the teacher didn't like it. We were 30 in the class. There were lunches at school, but I never ate them. I used to go home for lunch, and bring breakfast from home.

I remember the action of drinking cod liver oil. We had to go [to school] and it annoyed me that I had to do the trip again from Sliska to Krochmalna in order to drink that horrible cod liver oil, and there wasn't always a lemon to kill that taste in your mouth.

I remember the Nowosci Theater [19](#). I used to perform there with a group of kids from Freblowka, we walked in a circle there, and my hat fell off, I didn't pick it up, it was a horrible experience. I remember hallways at the back of that theatre, where artists got dressed. It was terribly cold there, dimly lit, they were dressing us up in something. We used to go there to various shows, I remember some show with Ida Kaminska [20](#). I remember a verse of a song: 'Khotsmekh iz a blinder, hot er nikht kayn kinder' - 'Khotsmekh is blind, he doesn't have children'.

The teaching method in Folksszule was different [than in other Jewish schools]. I can't describe precisely today how it differed. It was a secular school, they for example taught stories from the Old Testament, with no religious overtones. I remember that when I went to high school, it turned out there were gaps in my knowledge of religion. I was very young when I started going to Skif [21](#). I might have been 8. I used to go somewhere on Karmelicka Street, I didn't really like it. There were readings, some singing at the meetings. Parents must have been happy I went there, but I think it was obligatory at school.

I walked to Krochmalna on foot, it was a long way. On the way, on Prosta Street, there was a navy-blue mounted police station, and I had to stop there, when the gate was open, I could see horses and barns, it was very exciting, but it didn't always work. Sometimes I would meet friends on the way and walk the last parts with them. Always, when we got to Krochmalna, we waited to see cars:

Haverbusch and Schiele. On higher numbers of Krochmalna [the school was located on 36 Krochmalna, so Mr. Kornblum is referring to buildings located further] there were breweries. Haberbusch and Schiele [Haberbusch and Schiele United Warsaw Brewery, founded in 1869, was located on the corner of Krochmalna and Wronia Streets]. And that beer in barrels was transported by special cars built in such a way that the barrels stood tilted on those cars, but that wasn't the attraction yet, but the horses that pulled those cars. Those were Percherons, huge, slow, fat, massive horses. And always two or four horses pulled such a car, slowly, and I still remember the clatter of their hooves. We used to run there, stay as long as we could, and then back the other way, to school, with our backpacks on. Past Krochmalna, there was a parish on Chlodna Street and there was a theatre next to the parish. And sometimes we'd skip school and go to that theatre for such films: Tom Mix, cowboys, with Indians. On the way back I used to see many porters, and carts on two wheels that they pushed. I think they were [entirely] Jews, because it was a completely Jewish street, with a bad reputation, because the poorest people lived there, so porters and prostitutes, and thieves.

I remember gymnasium well. I remember the principal who used to go to Majorca, and would tell us stories, his name was Tenenbaum. There was also a high school and once a geography professor came to our 1st class during the Latin lesson, taught by Bella the ugly Latin teacher, he interrupted her, whispered something in her ear and called me out of the classroom. He took me to a class in high school which he was teaching, and showed me to everybody: 'See, this is a Nordic type'. In Laor I started studying Hebrew. I didn't like this language.

I shared a desk with Adas Minc. Adas Minc, a fat boy, his parents were communists. They lived in Praga. They weren't well off. He liked me a lot, I often shared my breakfast with him, I think they lived on Zamenhofa Street. It was far from Sliska, but he used to walk me home and then go back to his home. I had another friend in high school, Izio Brustin - a brilliant mathematician students from higher classes used to come and talk to him [about school matters]. He used to solve various problems for them. Teachers, professors knew that whenever there was something to solve, they would send from the 1st grade of high school to the 1st grade of gymnasium, to Izio. Izio looked particularly Semitic - he had a hook nose. He lived on Majzelsa Street.

Almost every year we used to go for holidays with the family, usually to the so called Linia [a row of tourist-health resort towns located on the line Warsaw-Otwock]. We went to Otwock, Falenica, once to Swider, many times to Miedzeszyn, once to Jablonna [summer resort towns near Warsaw] and once to Kazimierz. We usually took a train to the Linia, but we took a ship to Kazimierz [on the Vistula River, from Warsaw]. And our things, because we used to bring everything, [we used to send] by a horse carriage. I remember we would load things up at 6am and the horse carriage would get to the destination by night.

We used to go for a month, sometimes two. Estusia would come with us, of course. Once she stayed behind on the train station, she didn't manage to get on [the train], and it was a big fuss, was she going to come on the next train or not. She did. Some summers Kuba came with us, too. Once Dad did it so that Aunt Chawcia and Izaak came as well.

Kazimierz was really a lot of fun. A lot of people, we used to walk up the Mountain of Three Crosses, go to a castle, we went to Naleczow [40 km from Kazimierz], to Pulawy [about 20 km from Kazimierz]. I think Jewish writers used to go there, because Dad went to some meetings there.

In 1939 we went to a summer resource in Falenica, and Father even had a shop there, but without apprentices, I helped him there a little, but not much, I didn't really feel like working. I was 13, there were girls, Kuba was with us. Kuba was very popular with girls, he was outgoing, dark [was handsome, had dark hair], I was jealous. There was the hosts' daughter, a pretty girl, Ziutka. When we knew that the war was coming, boys and girls [used to say]: 'Well, Ziutka, be careful, when the Germans come, you'll be doomed. But before that, you're for Kuba.' In Falenica Parents decided to move [after we returned to Warsaw]. We had been promised an apartment in the same house as Uncle Gefen, on 35 Niska Street. A huge building, two back yards, one after another, typical Jewish neighborhood. We could see Umschlagplatz from our balcony.

[In the new apartment] there were more rooms, one large room, second one even larger, a balcony at the front, two windows, a small room across, then a walk-through living room, and from there you could go to a small hallway, a bathroom and a toilet separately, and a kitchen and from the kitchen there were another exit onto a stairway. One room was always cluttered and we used to put stuff in there that we didn't have anywhere else to put. We lived in a dining room, there was our Parents' bed. On the opposite wall there was a crib for Borus and a large wardrobe. Father used to work in the kitchen. The large room at the front was rented out. A mother with a daughter lived there, Jews, completely assimilated. Mrs. Henel or Hellen, refined, white-haired, [spoke] beautiful Polish, they had nothing to do with anything Jewish. The daughter, too, very pretty. Wladek liked them, that daughter used to teach him something.

Across from the building on the even side of Niska there were lumberyards all the way to Parysow [a district of Warsaw], and opposite our house there were some small stores. In the back yard, in the back premises, there was Uncle Gefen's bakery store, and in the corner of the back premises there was the entrance to the bakery. There was a counter behind which they used to sell bread, and further there was an entrance to the huge bakery which fairly modern stoves, machinery, there was also a shower, and on the left there was a bread storage, where bread was cooling down on shelves. It was a basement which windows went out to the back yard, and when the Germans entered [Warsaw], those windows were covered up with wooden planks. Later we used it as a temporary bunker.

Immediately after bombings began in 1939, one of the first igniting bombs fell on the lumberyards on Niska. The fire was horrible. Everybody was scared, didn't know where to run. And Parents decided we would escape from there to some place on Sliska, and we left with bags. It was before the ceasefire. We finally got to Sliska, but not to [our old] apartment, but to the soap store. It was full of people, because it was downstairs, and people would always come down from higher floors, being afraid it would be worse upstairs.

Later we went to Aunt Dobcia, on Panska, she had a large apartment. There were lots of foreign people who didn't live in those buildings, but who, like us, were running away from other parts of the city, but nobody asked any questions. We all went to the basement, because they announced a bombing, and a bomb fell on that house. I know I lost consciousness. Everything went dark, it must have taken a while, when I woke up the basement was full of black dust, and people were pushing their way towards the exit to the stairway, I instinctively got out, and then heard some woman scream: 'Vu iz mayn man un mayne kinder?' [Yiddish: Where is my husband and my children?]. And it was my mom. Then Dad showed up and Borus and Estusia, and it also turned out that in the same house there was Aunt Chawcia with her husband, Kuba and Izaak. And when we met at the

gate, it turned out Izaak wasn't able to walk. Aunt Chawcia said there was a wooden exit door, and it hit him in the head. And when we all got outside to the street, Aunt Chawcia decided to go to Aunt Frania's on Wielka Street, and Dad and Mom decided to go back to Niska. We parted and from later stories we know that Izaak died two days later.

Financial hardships began for us then. After Warsaw surrendered we decided to somehow sell the stock of handbags that Dad still had. And I remember Mom and Dad packed those handbags into some special white boxes, and Mom and I went to Swietokrzyska Street to stand in a row [to sell the handbags], there were lots of people [selling various things]. Uncle Lejbisz Gefen, who was quite well off at the time, ended up with no flour and couldn't do anything either. After some time a [Polish] man came to Daddy, and it turned out that through some common acquaintance who used to have a handbag store, he found out that Dad used to deliver handbags to that store. The man said he's willing to buy handbags from Father. And he took a couple boxes with handbags, and said that if he sells them, he'll be back with the money. And, surprisingly, he came back a few weeks later and that's how the cooperation began. He used to come once every two months.

Then they started building the wall [April-May 1940]. At the beginning we didn't know what it was, because they didn't build it continually, but pieces on various streets, so that nobody realized they would be connected. Then they created the ghetto and there were passages in the walls, and as long as there were passages, that man kept on coming. They used to search people on those passages, but he was a huge man and he used to hang those handbags, without boxes, on himself, under his coat, and he just seemed much heavier then, he also bribed those guards. He came a few times when it became more difficult to get inside and outside of the ghetto [in January 1941 the penalty for leaving the ghetto without a pass became stricter], he kept coming to bring money, but once he came, took the handbags and never returned. He most likely couldn't get in any more.

At first, before the ghetto was created, I used to go to secret classes in the Krynski gymnasium [the pre-war, Jewish, mathematics-biology oriented Magnus Krynski gymnasium was located on 1 Miodowa Street [22](#)]. Wladek [Borus] also took those secret classes, at the beginning I used to walk him to Pawia Street. [Mr. Kornblum's brother writes in his memoirs the secret classes on 1 Pawia Street were taught by Miss Greta and Miss Cylia. Wladyslaw Dov Kornblum, *The Last Descendant: Memoirs of a Boy from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 2002]. Later, after some time, to Smocza Street. [In the ghetto] he often used to go to Gesia Street, to a so called garden, those were classes for little children, children would get together there in the summer and there were caregivers. They even taught them something there.

In the ghetto, when my parents realized we would most likely be separated [Mr. Kornblum most likely refers to summer 1942], Dad wrote down the address of his brother in America and I put the piece of paper with this address on it into my wallet that Dad made for me. [My parents] also sewed canvas backpacks for us, and we put in there a change of underwear, extra shoes, things like that, so that in case they'd catch us and take us away, we'd have it with us.

Before the war Daddy used to obtain leather always from some place in Nalewki, where there were warehouses, we had to bring it and I used to go with Dad, the leather was rolled up in rolls in a brown paper wrap. At home Dad would cut the leather, according to design, and then this leather had to be taken to a special shop where they had special machines that scraped the endings of those pieces so that it was easier to fold and glue them. In the ghetto the leather was cut by a

craftsman's widow, who lived on 33 Niska Street, with two children, in very bad conditions, and Dad used to send me there. Whenever I went there, Dad, despite the fact that we didn't have much either in that period, always gave me something to bring them.

I need to say that Dad was by nature a very good person. Very sincere, warm-hearted, very sensitive, and – it stuck with me since I was very young – he always helped people. He used to help other artists, kept giving to Aunt Chawcia, organized bread delivery for Jewish writers in the ghetto. In the later period in the ghetto, when there was horrible poverty, and children wandered about on streets and died on sidewalks, they used to also beg. A young boy used to come to Niska where we lived and shout: 'A stikele broyt' [Yiddish: 'a piece of bread']. And Father once brought him upstairs, fed him, found a flat box with a string that he could hang on his neck, and I don't know how, but bought him a box of candy to sell. And he came by a couple times, and finally he came once and said he'd eaten all the candy.

At the beginning, when there were the first blockades, Dad was involved in some backyard self-defense. Every house had a self-government. People helped one another, it was done both for social reasons and for the sake of maintaining order. And I remember that people came and demanded money, supposedly for the underground, but we all knew it was a plain robbery and theft, and Dad, somehow, for his money, bought knives, and gave it to some of the young people in the backyard, and the self-defense was created. People imagined some things could be arranged for this way.

Then the typhus epidemics broke out [the peak of the typhus epidemics in the Warsaw ghetto was between July and September 1941]. In the ghetto we had a Judenrat [23](#) decree and a so called '13' [24](#) kept a close eye that anyone who came down with typhus was taken to a hospital, it was banned to be sick at home. They were afraid the epidemics would spread. Those taken to the hospital usually never came back. And Uncle Lajbisz Gefen's brother, Szmelke, who lived in the same back premises got sick with typhus first. Lajbisz lived on the second floor, and his brother on the first. He didn't have children, had a significant hump, lived with his wife. And as Uncle Lajbisz was a good man, his brother and brother's wife were considered to be bad people. They never helped anyone, they were withdrawn, sullen, he was a co-owner of the bakery. He was always sickly, pale, because of that hump probably too, and they knew that if they took him to the hospital that would be the end of him, but they had to call a doctor when he got sick. They brought a doctor in, and I remember they tried to bribe him with golden dollars, or so called 'piglets', that's what we used to call Russian rubles, but the doctor refused and reported and they took [Uncle Gefen's brother] to the hospital where he died.

Mother had a very good friend, a teacher, Bela Szapiro, her husband came from Pinsk, was color-blind, and as a color-blind person he worked [in Warsaw] in a factory of colorful bands and strings, like for a bathrobe. Everyone was surprised how he could discriminate those colors. It turned out he had some numbers on those strings. They had a son Michas, three years older than me, who used to teach me German before the ghetto, I used to go to them on Walicow Street. He taught me enough that I could write using Gothic letters and could read, of course. I read, when we still could, Volkischer Beobachter. Bela, his mother, came down with typhus. The hospital was located on Stawki [the internal and infectious diseases units of the Starozakonnych Hospital on Czystem, was located on 6/8 Stawki between May 1941 and July 1942] and they took her there, and there was nothing to eat there. Michas used to come to our place every day and Mom would give him food in

flasks and he took them to the hospital. And one day Michas came, took the flasks, and came back half an hour later with all that, stood in the doorway and said: 'Mom died'. Later we had no contact with typhus.

It was getting worse and worse, raids began. They were making so called blockades [25](#). They would come to the building, to the backyard, gathered people and took them to Umschlagplatz. They did the blockade on 35 Niska, we were at home, everything went quiet as if there was not a soul anywhere. They [the Jewish police] [26](#) started going from apartment to apartment, banging at the doors, pulling people out, unbelievable screams. And they started pounding on our front door. I know that Dad opened the door just a little and said something, and they shut the door and it lasted for a long while, but nobody banged on the door any more, and then everything went quiet and we understood they all left. Then a policeman came and Parents gave him money. It turned out that Mom, without Dad's knowledge, kept putting some money aside in the wardrobe, under the linens, and she managed to collect some. And when that moment came, she took it out and we bought ourselves out this way.

Later, when shops began [from the mid 1941 a dominating form of production in the ghetto were German manufacturing enterprises, so called shops], they announced that whoever had a sewing machine could sign up. Since we had three sewing machines, one for leather, two of Mom for sewing corsets, we went with Szmil to the Oszman shop on Ogrodowa Street. Szmil was a bakery worker, who had a yellow horse wagon with a sign 'bakery' on it to deliver bread to various stores or selling points. At the beginning, for as long as he could keep the horse, that wagon was the transportation means for the entire family in every situation, because the police usually didn't stop it.

The shop on Ogrodowa Street was located in a small building, where they had already taken everybody out of [after the Great Action only the Jews capable of working remained in the ghetto]. I remember we didn't do anything there, just sat at the machines. That shop existed for a very short time, it's possible that they didn't manage to organize anything to work on then yet. The management of the shop were Jews who had dealings with the Germans. And they had a registered sort of a factory. They did it for money and to save themselves. There were also shops where they did work, but you had to pay to get in.

Once we came back home [from the shop on Ogrodowa] and we found out that Dad got into a leather shop on Nalewki Street, I think Brauer's [the Herman Brauer leather and tailor shop at 28-38 Nalewki Street]. And then the leather sewing machine got transported, but me, Mom, Borus and Estusia remained on Ogrodowa. We also wanted to move to Dad's because Nalewki was near Niska and we wanted to be together, near Uncle.

One time [before Dad went to work on Nalewki] we were on our way to that shop [on Ogrodowa] and the Jewish police caught us on the street [according to Wladek it was on 24th July 1942], Mom, Estusia, Wladek and I, and a few more people who they caught on the street there, and they took us all to Umschlagplatz. On the way, as they were taking us, I noticed Edek Buch on a street. We started to shout: 'Buch, Edek, go to Uncle, tell him they're taking us to Umschlagplatz!'. And he ran and alarmed Uncle. In the meantime they took us through the gate [to Umschlagplatz].

Then they started to push people through a passageway, behind the building, to train cars. People went there rather eagerly, hoping it may be good to be there first. And then a policeman appeared

and started shouting: 'Kornblum, Kornblum!'. He came to us, said: 'Sit here, don't move'. It took a couple of hours and then everything went quiet, they must have taken those people away, that policeman showed up again and took us through the gate where the Germans stood. We went back to Niska. It turned out that one of Uncle Gefen's cousins had a son who was in the [Jewish] police. I suppose we got out somehow through him. After some time that cousin policeman was at Uncle's, and it was already the curfew. And he left to go back home. The Germans killed him on the street.

People 'belonged' to bunkers [the ghetto inhabitants built bunkers after the January action]. There were huge bunkers in the ghetto, hooked up to sewers even on the Aryan side, electricity, there were bunkers with a telephone. We belonged to Uncle Lajbisz's bunker. In the bakery, where the shelves with bread were, they built a temporary bunker. One of the walls with shelves could be moved to the side and you could go behind that shelf and there was a small room.

Once a German came [to the bakery] and asked for a loaf of bread and we all froze, because that shelf was moved to the side, you could see the passageway. And he looked - he was somehow dumb or from the Wermacht - and took that loaf and left. Whenever there was a raid in the ghetto we sat there behind that wall with bread: Parents, Wladek and I, cousin Bronka, Polek with Anka, Aunt Rozia and Tusia [Estera] Gersztensang's parents. Tusia's mom, Nacia Gersztensang was Uncle Lajbisz Gefen's cousin. Tusia's father was tall, there was something wrong with one of his eyes, I don't know what he used to do. They came to our house probably from the little ghetto and lived on the highest, 6th floor. Tusia was my age, but she slept in a baby crib. They were very poor. The bakery workers had another bunker. Under the stoves, there was a deeply dug huge bunker for 40 people, that you entered from the room with a shower. A part of the wall moved to the side there.

One day an order came to our shop, that whoever has a pass must go to Majzelsa Street [according to Wladek it was on 27th August 1942]. It turned out there would be a selection there.

They set us all up in a square. Mom was a terrible coward, was always afraid of something. Dad wasn't with us there, he was in his shop [on Nalewki]. And Mom with Estusia stood at the back. And I stood in the first row. Two Germans stood before us. Two people from the shop management stood beside them with pieces of paper in their hands - they had lists. And they would call out a name and that person would run across to the other side of the street and a new block of people would form there [who were staying in the ghetto to keep working in the shop]. At some point I realized they read the same names twice, because they called and nobody would come up, I realized they wanted to save some people this way. And after some name there was such a moment of silence, and I jumped ahead to that other group. When they finished the selection, all those 'chosen ones' were pushed to a backyard of some building, they opened the gate, the police surrounded us, people ran up to those policemen, because they knew that among the detained were their relatives who didn't make the selection. I had some money on me, because we all had some money then just in case, I got a hold of one and said: 'Listen, there is my mom and a cousin, take this money and give it to them'. And I gave him all I had, I'm certain he didn't pass it to them. I didn't know where to go, I went to Nalewki [to the apartment near Dad's shop].

Now I think my parents knew something was about to happen with that selection, because Borus didn't go to Ogródowa then [he usually went with Mom to the shop]. He slept in the apartment on Nalewki. In 'our' apartment there were still beds and bed linens, before we went to Ogródowa with Mom and Estusia on that unfortunate day, they decided that he [Borus] would stay and we covered

him with the bed linens in the bed. I remember Dad was worried he wouldn't be able to breathe.

I went back, the door was locked, the key was taken away so I couldn't get open and inside, I sat on the stairs and waited, maybe they'll open. Dad learnt earlier Mom and Estusia were taken away. Uncle tried to get something in motion, some policeman apparently went to Umschlagplatz. Too late. Dad came back, I told him how it was, we opened the door, uncovered my brother and he started to scream: 'where's Mom', but he understood. He was in despair. We went back to Niska, to the bunker. There were only: Dad, Wladek, and me. And I remember how Dad just sat alone and cried.

From the Aryan side Jehuda Feld used to come visit Dad. He had something to do with the Bund underground, [he used to] talk to Anka and Poldek [Uncle Gefen's son]. They were involved, because I also remember how armed Jews came to Uncle's bakery and took money for the underground. I witnessed such a robbery once, Uncle wasn't there then, Aunt was sitting there, she opened the drawer and gave them all the money. I think she even took her necklace off and gave it to them, too.

Since I had [so called] Aryan looks, people kept asking Dad why he's keeping me in the ghetto. But we didn't know anyone. And there was a problem with Borus who had a very dark complexion, I don't know if he looked like a Jew as a child, but he surely stood out. And Dad also knew he had to save both his children, he knew he didn't have a lot of time. He was afraid that if I left first, he'd lose touch with Feld, Borus wouldn't leave. It was easier to send me away at the last moment because of my looks. That's why Borus was to go first. Dad talked to Feld and Feld found on Gilarska Street, in Praga, a railway man, Polish, his name was Duriasz, who agreed to take in a Jewish boy from the ghetto, for money. It was the beginning of December 1942. We said our goodbyes and Dad took him to the gate and Feld moved him. On the Aryan side a woman was waiting for him, probably that Duriasz's wife. Duriasz, of course, was getting money only for some time, later he wasn't, but he was a very decent man, as opposed to his second wife. And Wladek sat there in a shed and lived out his own, huge, story.

I remained in the ghetto with Dad. And talks with Feld began to take me out as well, but Feld disappeared. In the meantime I fell in love with Tusia [Gersztensang]. She was very pretty. She looked totally Polish, she spoke perfect Polish, was a well read, intelligent girl. Once, in March, Feld let me know he'd come for me. The day before I said goodbye to everyone and Tusia said: 'Will you come back for me?' I said I would. Feld came and took me to the gate on Chlodna Street. There was a column that was on the way to work, to placowka [27](#), I joined that column and knew that on Zelazna Street there would be a guy waiting for me. I wore everything I owned, including rain boots and my gymnasium coat. And there was a guy waiting for me, and he took me to Marki near Warsaw to his family. There was a sister and two brothers, he was the third one, lived separately. As it turned out after the war, they all belonged to PPS [28](#), active in the underground. Once [after I already left] the Germans came there, surrounded the villa, shootings began, they had a machine gun, the Germans were throwing grenades, an armored car came and they even entered the house, killed everybody, including that girl.

I slept there and the next day the eldest brother, who picked me up, was to take me to some village. And I told them I have a girlfriend in the ghetto, I wanted to go back. 'But will there be money?' I said: 'Yes, there will', but blindly, with nothing. And I went back [to the ghetto]. I found

Dad, he didn't ask why I was back, I told him myself, he didn't say anything, I ran upstairs to Tusia. I said I needed money. [Tusia] went to her mother and later Dad went to Lajbisz and came back with the money. Next morning we got ready and went through the gate the same way. There was no problem, we again left with 'placowka'. The guards weren't bribed [not now and not before], we just sneaked in with Tusia to that column and they didn't control everybody. And we got to Marki. They gave us identity cards. Tusia's name was Jasia, and I got a birth certificate for the name of Waclaw Bartkiewicz, born in 1925, in Marki. And next morning we went [east], on foot, with that eldest brother who we called uncle. It turned out there was nothing arranged with any farmer. And he led us on foot, usually in evenings. It took two, three days.

We got to the Bialostockie voivodship, to the area of the town of Sokoly [ca. 220 km north-east of Warsaw], it was a rather Jewish town before the war. Somehow, he wasn't successful in finding a place for us. In the end he told me to wait, and took Tusia somewhere. Some three days later he came back, told me where he'd left her, and he had to go back home. [He told me to keep asking farmers, tell them I was from Warsaw and I wanted to get hired as a shepherd.] I tried to take side roads, finally at some spot, on some field, I met a plowing farmer, [I told him] my story, that my parents died during bombing. He agreed to take me in and sent me to his home, and told me to wait until he gets back. It was a farmstead, a shabby house, a huge barn, a cowshed, another house, somehow neater, it turned out that his sister lived in that second house, married, with two children.

Stasiek [Stanislaw] Sliowski, 25 years old, an old bachelor. He lived in a village Kowalewszczyzna [10 km east of Sokoly], with an elderly mother and a sister [her married name was Janeczko]. I worked for them as a shepherd. Mrs. Janeczko washed my clothes. Stasiek, you could tell right away, was a good man. They used to give me some food for the road, and I would spend almost all day with the cows in a forest.

[At the beginning of my stay at Stasiek's] I went to that address where Tusia was and we met a few times. One day I didn't find her, and I had no idea what happened. A year after the war I received a letter, Tusia found me. She was in France. It turned out that [in the village she had been] people started suspecting something and she, along with some young Polish girls, signed up for work in Germany [where] she worked for some farmers, and next to it there was a camp for French soldiers held captive by the Germans. Tusia met her future husband there and didn't return to Poland. She immediately had a baby, and then two more girls. We kept in touch, I even went there. Tusia died of Parkinson's disease [in 1996].

I still kept going to the forest with the cows. One day, as I was getting ready to go back, the cows stopped all of the sudden in the forest and didn't want to go further. I walked over, looked, there were people in their underwear. I immediately understood, my throat went dry, I said: 'Are you Jewish?' 'Yes.' A married couple with a little girl, two more men and a woman. All together. I said: 'Ikh bin oykh a yid' [Yiddish: 'I am also a Jew']. Which I wasn't supposed to do. They started asking questions, I started telling them a little, they asked me where I was staying. I told them that, too.

Stasiek didn't know I was a Jew, but I wasn't behaving right. I never went to any parties, games, I had no contact with boys or girls. I was shy, hidden, isolated. I also didn't go to church and that wasn't good either. I was dazed, depressed, I knew there had been the uprising in the ghetto [29](#). People would say: 'Jews are fighting, they're being liquidated...' [Editor's note: The information

about the uprising wasn't parallel to the events].

Some other time, walking with the cows again, I met a woman with a scarf on her head on the road. She was dressed like local peasant women, but I immediately sensed it, and so did she. She was Jewish, Marysia Olsza, we chatted a little, she told me where she was staying. She worked as a maid. She had to escape from that place after a few days. Later she was hidden at Stasiek's sister's, in the forest. Some other time I was sitting in the pasture with the cows, some guy walked up to me, in a 'maciejowka' [flat hat with a peak], in tall farmer's boots, he looked like a rich farmer. He talked to me, it turned out he was Marysia Olsza's brother. Perfect Polish. The Olszas were from Sokoly, they knew people in those villages. I think they were very rich before the war.

Stasiek realized I was Jewish by my behavior, and because something was going on with Marysia Olsza [Because I kept in touch with her]. And he came to me once to the field, brought me something to eat, and on the way back he said: 'Wacek, don't worry, I know who you are. You're at my place, everything will be all right.' Later I learned Stasiek had a Jewish fiancé during the war, a girl from Sokoly, he was in love with her, she used to come to him. Stasiek wanted, when there was a ghetto in Sokoly [30](#), for her and her parents to live with him, he wanted to build a bunker under the house, and they almost did that, but eventually those people decided to go back to the ghetto.

While herding the cows every once in a while I could see a fire, a glow, I could hear some shots. I knew [it meant] the Germans found Jews at some farmer's and were burning down the house, the farm, killing the people [31](#). [From time to time] the Germans would come to the village, there was a big post in Sokoly and a big post in Waniewo [10 km east of Sokoly], they would ride bicycles across the village, and if I wasn't out in a pasture with the cows, Stasiek would say: 'Wacek, get inside'. And I would run to the barn, hide, in case one of them came by. Besides, Stasiek wasn't certain of the people in the village.

One day Stasiek called me and said: 'Listen, I can't keep you any more, [people] in the village are talking, I'm afraid'. But he found me another place. It was early winter 1944. In the evening somebody knocked, a tall man came in, dark hair, dark Jewish complexion, introduced himself as Abram, and took me to the forest. It was quite far, on the way he told me that himself and a few more people sit in a dugout dug in the ground. And we went to that forest, at some point he walked up to a large juniper, picked it up along with its roots, underneath there was a hole of a girth just like a man's, and I went in there. In the dugout there was Abram, his sister Rachela, three-four years older than me, and their mother, Mrs. Kaplanska. The Kaplanskis were from Sokoly, [before the war] they had a textile store. Their father was killed. It was a very Zionist house, they spoke Yiddish and Hebrew [at home before the war]. There were also three more people, there was Szmil, his sister and sister's husband, a tailor. Szmil - a carpenter, was a man from an underworld, his sister and that tailor weren't much better. He didn't look Jewish, he was fat and blond.

It turned out that among those people who I had met by accident in the forest with the cows, there was also Szmil with his sister and her husband. They remembered me.

That dugout was built by Szmil and that other man, the tailor, and the Kaplanskis gave them money. The entire dugout had two rooms connected with a narrow passageway. Everything was deep just enough, so that if you ducked you had a ceiling right above your head. The first room was about 3 meters by 3 meters, the passageway you had to crawl through, the second room was maybe 2 meters by 3 meters, and there was also a toilet in the second room. The walls of the

dugout were timbered with young trees, light flexible branches were entwined, and the trunks touched each other. The roof was also made like this. The toilet had a door made of that timber and whoever went inside had to hold that door. In the first room there was Rachela, Abram, their mother and Szmil. They lied beside each other and Szmil across on their legs. In the second room there was Szmil's sister and her husband. And I got the passageway. When somebody from the first room wanted to go to the bathroom, they had to crawl over me. We had to sit in underwear, because even in the winter it was very hot in there.

Rachela and Abram decided to teach me Hebrew. And I started to tell them about books I had read in Polish. At night we used to go outside, a few steps further there was a ditch in the ground, we made fire there, and if we had something to put into a pot, we cooked. Whatever we managed to get from farmers. When I was there, at first it was pea-soup. The Kaplanskis had money and Abram used to go to trusted farmers at night to get some food. In the morning, before we went to sleep [we slept during the day], we finished the leftovers for breakfast.

It was winter, some snow fell, and that was a problem, because when we came out, there were traces left. And therefore a great danger. Szmil and his brother-in-law came up with an idea to make wooden shoes with 4 pegs at the bottom. When you put your foot on the snow, only 4 holes were made in the snow. Often, when sitting in the dugout, we would hear some patter: of hares or some other animals. Every time we thought somebody found us.

We didn't have anything more to eat. The Kaplanskis knew that in Waniewo there was a priest, his name was Ostalczyk, and Szmil or the Kaplanskis had a fox fur collar and they decided that I would take that collar and go to Waniewo during the day and try to sell that fox to the priest for food. I went there during a day, I arrived in Waniewo. The priest, a young, handsome man, brought me inside, to his office. I took out the fox: 'And what's that?' - he asked. And I told him my story. [I didn't told him I was Jewish] I told him I was from Warsaw, that my parents died. He was very moved. And I asked for food, which I could take back, in exchange for that fox. We started talking, he brought me to the kitchen, ordered to make me scrambled eggs with four eggs. I remember until today: on bacon. It went dark, he came to the kitchen with me again, said to cut two sides of pork fat. He walked me out not to the road, but through the vegetable garden, blessed me and off I went. It was a good few kilometers, they were already waiting at the edge of the forest, [that lard] was a treasure!

The second time they also decided that I would go and try to get some food in exchange for dollars. The priest told me: 'If you'd like to come one more time, see, I sleep here in this room, you can come on the porch and knock at the window'. This time it was at night, I went on the porch and knocked at the window, [after some time] he opened the door and let me in, asked what I came for. I told him I had dollars and if he was so kind, maybe some food again. He sat me down on a stool and said: 'It turned out that the fox you sold me, some Jew had already tried to sell it in the village earlier. Your entire story isn't true. But I'll help you.' I gave him those dollars, he gave me the food.

When it got warmer, we came out of the dugout to the forest. The Kaplanskis and I went to the area of the village of Druzgolachy and we sat there in the bush, rye wasn't tall enough then. And Abram brought food every once in a while from some farmers he knew, the Druzgolaskis. Once I went with him. It was night. Abram told me to wait outside. I saw a couple of men walk by, talking loudly, towards Lachy [Druzgolachy], I heard some noises in the village. It started to dawn. I

decided to go back to the rye, I thought Abram had already gone back, but he wasn't there. It turned out that the Druzgolaskis tied him up, threw him on a horse cart and took him to a military police post in Sokoly. I knew he was beaten up, they wanted him to tell them who else he was hiding with and where. At the same time they sent carts to the forest to find other Jews, and we saw those carts. They killed Abram. And we don't know until this day where he is buried. After they killed Abram we went back to the area of Kowalewszczyzna and sat there in the rye which was tall enough to hide us.

It was hot, we had to go and fetch water, somewhere to abandoned wells, and one day Rachela with Mrs. Kaplanska went. I stayed alone and a German found me, a military man, who was taking letters from the general staff to units. He took me to the company. It was the Wermacht. It turned out there were a lot of people from Silesia, they spoke Polish. They knew I was a Jew, they gave me a haircut, kept me with them until their commander ordered them to take me to the military police. At the same time they got an order to withdraw and they took me with them, at night they were going through Sokoly, but couldn't find a military police post, and they didn't give me away, they took me far, towards Eastern Prussia. In the end they had to take me to the military police, but they didn't tell them I was a Jew, they brought me as a boy who wandered around the village. It was in the fall of 1944.

[In Eastern Prussia] they assigned me to a German company which dug ditches. Finally I escaped from there and began to wander in forests, I slept in the forest, ate berries, sometimes knocked [at some door] and got bread with butter. Finally I arrived in some village where a farmer took me in not knowing who I was, and then I knew there had been the uprising [32](#) and I told him I was an uprising fighter from Warsaw. Later a family of runaways came [to that farmer's] and they took me with them, and we got to the village of Zbojnia, near the former border with Eastern Prussia.

In January the attack began and in the morning there were Russians, lots of snow, so they followed one another, because they were afraid of land mines. And we knew then the Germans were gone. I stayed there for two more weeks, until traffic towards towns started. Russian trucks would come by, always stop in the middle of a village or town, and people would get on. And so, on a horse wagon, in horrible cold, I got to some town where those trucks used to come. I wanted to get to Bialystok, since it was the closest city, I thought maybe some Jews were there.

I arrived in Bialystok in February and immediately heard somebody speak Yiddish on a street. I was one of first ones to arrive. And there was a Jewish committee [33](#) and in the first words of my story I mentioned the name Kaplanski, they said: Rachele and her mother are alive. And they gave me their address. And I immediately went there and stayed with them for a while, until I discovered I was sick with tuberculosis. They examined me, sent me to a military clinic. The first one who x-rayed me, said: 'Well, boy, you've come too late'. I had such changes in my lungs, but after some time the committee, most likely, organized for me to go to a health resort in Otwock [a tuberculosis health resort founded in 1893 by doctor Jozef Geisler].

In Bialystok I found Irka, Aunt Mala's daughter, who in 1945 took my brother Wladek from Warsaw and placed him in an orphanage in Lodz. I wanted to move him from there to Otwock. I arrived in Warsaw. One night I slept somewhere, [then] right in front of the Jewish committee I met Antek Cukierman [34](#), who I knew from Bialystok, he used to come to Rachela [Kaplanska] and sleep at the Kaplanskis'. The Dror Organization organized a transfer of Jews to Palestine [35](#). He gave me some

money so that I could get Wladek out of Lodz.

Wladek wanted to hear nothing of Judaism. He was shouting he wasn't a Jew. I wanted to bring him to an orphanage [in Otwock]. The orphanage was right next to a health resort. The manager of the orphanage was a wife of a deceased Bund activist, Bielicka [Luba Bielicka-Blum, (1905-1973), a principal of a nursing school, wife of Abrasz Blum]. Emissaries of Dror and some other Zionist organization would come to the orphanage, and children would agree to go to Israel [36](#). I didn't want to let Wladek go, but he told me he was going. Stefa was in France then and I hoped that she'd keep him, but he didn't want to. He met his [future] wife, Linka, in the orphanage. In Israel Wladek was in a kibbutz, he worked very hard with bananas.

I spent a long time in the health resort [in Otwock], I was very sick with tuberculosis, in both lungs. There was no streptomycin back then. And I had a friend in that health resort, Michal Janik, a boy my age, who unfortunately died of tuberculosis. I want to say that in the health resort everyone knew I was a Jew and there were four of us in the room, then six, and I absolutely cannot say anything bad [about other patients].

They sent us to a dentist. And there was Mrs. Filipowicz, a dentist, also a Jew, who survived. And [my future] wife used to come to that dentist as well, a young woman, who also had sick lungs. Mrs Filipowicz set up our visits in such a way, that I used to meet my future wife there.

My wife, Jasia [Janina], maiden name Aneksztejn, was born in Warsaw in 1923. She was the only child in an assimilated family, her father worked in the American Embassy and was far from Judaism, like her mother, Helena Aneksztejn, nee Finkelblech. She went to a Polish gymnasium on Miodowa Street, but had Jewish friends. She had aunts, one in Holland, and another one, who survived the war in Russia, then went to London with her husband, we used to go there. We got married in 1950.

I spent a few years in the health resort, then I took extramural correspondence courses in economy and bookkeeping and I started working in the Department of Internal Trade. And we stayed in Otwock. I used to commute to Warsaw by train, it was a hassle. And my wife didn't work.

In 1957 the harassment began [37](#), it was first period of Gomulka's ruling [38](#). Psychological pressure started. Jews worked on various positions in that department. It became very unpleasant. I belonged to the party [39](#), my wife didn't. I went to the secretary Rysiek Wiazek, said: 'Rysiek, see what's going on, I'm returning my party membership card.' There was no surprise.

The decision about leaving was easier because of emigration psychosis and the anti-Semitic witch hunt. The atmosphere was awful, suffocating. People would leave with a travel document [a travel document took away Polish citizenship of the person leaving], you had to wait for a long time to get it. This document said that the person who had it had undeclared citizenship. We had a friend in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and she helped us obtain this document sooner. People used to take all their belongings and custom officers would steal them. We heard of a customs officer, Mr Piechotka, who, in exchange for money, would come to your home and do the customs clearance. He came to us, to Otwock, he even helped us pack, and we sent off those sealed boxes, they made it to Israel 4 months after we got there. We left from Dworzec Gdanski [the Gdanski Train Station], through Vienna to Genova. The Czechs didn't want to let the train through, there were some problems, we waited for 24 hours with no food or drinks. In Genova we waited for a ship to Israel.

And we arrived in Israel. At first we lived with Wladek, who was already married, in a basement apartment, in Ramat Gan. Wladek's wife's name is Lina. She's also from Warsaw, went through the occupation and the ghetto. They have two daughters: Dafna and Anat. Anat is in London, Dafna lives in Tel Aviv.

My wife's father sent us money and we bought a small apartment, I got a job in the Ministry of Labor, then in the Ministry of Treasury. I took Hebrew, not for too long. My wife learnt it for longer and so she knows it better than me. We spoke Hebrew at work, but everybody working there was from somewhere [from Europe] and that Hebrew was never perfect. I worked with a [post-war] president of Warsaw, Fedorowicz. My wife usually didn't work, only in Israel when we were very badly off, I had extra work I used to bring home and my wife usually did that.

I got the position in the Ministry thanks to Mosze Zonszajn [Aunt Kale Zonszajn's son]. Mosze Zonszajn had a wife, Fajgusia [Fajga], they were in Russia during the war, and he was quite active, I think in Poalei Zion [40](#), after the war they went back to Israel, lived in Jerusalem and they both died there. He [Mosze] was very active there, he was a vice minister at the Ministry of Labor, he was quite well known in the first years in Israel since he had a visible position and was socially active. A very good man. She [Fajgusia] was a painter, they had a son, Tuli, a handsome boy, when we first got to Israel after a year there was Tuli's wedding. Tuli married a girl named Warda, she was born in Israel, but she spoke Polish. And we were very surprised by that. It turned out that her parents and a grandmother came from Poland. She was raised by her grandmother who spoke only Polish to her. Warda is still alive today.

Mosze's sisters, Miriam and Reginka, were also in Israel. Miriam had a husband, he was a carpenter, from the real Jewish proletariat in Poland, heavy communist, his name was Chaim Goldberg. A golden hand, was able to do everything around the house, he worked in Israel as a teacher - carpenter, and at home all furniture was handmade by him. Miriam in Israel, in Ramat Aviv, she reads a lot of Polish literature. [She has] a large collection. A small apartment, but filled with Polish culture.

In Israel everybody celebrated Jewish holidays, but not in a religious sense of course, but in a sense of a day free of work, trips, and so on. Mother of Lina, my sister-in-law, was a very good cook, so always for Pesach the entire family would get together, there was very good food, we chatted, played games. We never went to the synagogue.

Our connection to Poland was based on buying Polish books, subscribing to Przekroj [a weekly illustrated magazine which has been published from 1945 in Cracow]. In Tel Aviv there was the famous Neustein bookstore [41](#), on Allenby Street, which used to get books and magazines for as long as Poland didn't break off relations with Israel [from 1967 until 1989 there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and the satellite countries of the Soviet Union]. We subscribed to Przekroj, my brother has [all of them] from the first issue. And we spoke Polish at home. With Brother as well. He almost forgot his Yiddish. We kept in touch by writing letters, we had friends in Poland, who left later, in 1968 [42](#).

We knew there was anti-Semitism in Poland, that whenever there was something wrong, Jews were blamed, but 1968 hit us very hard when it comes to our feelings. I can't say it brought about hatred, because I kept dreaming of going back to Poland. There was no way. And we came for the first time in 1989 [43](#) on an individual trip, for a month. We lived on Bagno Street [in Warsaw] in a

rented apartment, we walked about, did sightseeing.

I worked in the ministry [in Israel] until 1989. [Later] I got a job offer from an American company in Warsaw. And we left everything, apartment, everything, and went to Wroclaw, because that company was located in Wroclaw at first, and moved to Warsaw after half a year. I worked as a vice director of financial and administrative affairs. And they kept extending my contract for yet another year, until we stayed. I went to America a few times, because the headquarters were in Chicago. And I worked until the end, until that company went under in 2000. The economic situation changed, because the company dealt with building large industrial outlets in the food industry. The company built twenty-something large plants in Poland.

In 2002 Wladek turned 70. The initiative to organize his birthday in Poland was an idea of his wife Lina, they gathered together the entire family, Anat with husband and three daughters from London, and from Israel Dafna with husband, a daughter and a son. They came for a short time, but Wladek and wife stayed. And I decided to have a birthday party for him in Warsaw. I found a former singer from Mazowsze [a well-known Polish folk music and dance ensemble existing since 1948], with her own band, and I got in touch with her. We made a list of songs from my and my brother's childhood. When we all sat down at the tables, along with that family who didn't speak Polish, a curtain was drawn aside, and a band walked in, there was a violin and an accordion. My brother knew all those songs, started to sing, his wife too, and me and my wife, we all sang, and Brother's both daughters helped with the chorus at some songs, and that was the celebration. Then we ate, drank, of course.

I keep in close touch with Wladek. I call him every Sunday. They come to Poland every year. Wladek is one of the leaders of a Polish-Jewish Society in Israel. They used to come more often when he worked in PKO in Tel Aviv [a Polish bank]. He was in the supervisory body - they organized trips for them once a year, supposedly for reports. Last two-three years they've been coming for a month, three weeks, somewhere in Mazury, then they spend a week in Warsaw.

We never thought of going back to Israel. Wife is very interested in politics, she reads, comments, watches television. We are not engaged in activities of the local Jewish commune, but we are affected by all mentions of anti-Semitic writings that show up on walls somewhere, by politicians' remarks with some anti-Semitic accents. But we know it has to be like that, that we need some two generations, and then maybe anti-Semitism stops being a topic altogether.

## GLOSSARY

### **1 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.

## **2 Betar**

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

## **3 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'. In Poland the JNF was active in two periods, 1919-1939 and 1945-1950. In preparing its colonization campaign, Keren Kayemet le-Israel collaborated with the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod.

## **4 Synagogue in Tlomackie Street in Warsaw**

the largest synagogue built in pre-war Warsaw, built in 1875-1878 on the basis of a project by Leander Marconi. It was founded by reformed Jews, previously grouped around the synagogue on Danilowiczowska Street. The synagogue on Tlomackie could fit close to 2.5 thousand people. It was famous for superb preachers (Izaak Cylkow, Samuel Abraham Poznanski, Mojzesz Schorr), cantors (Mosze Kusewicki) and a choir under the direction of Dawid Ajzensztadt. The synagogue also had a Judaist Library, one of the largest Jewish book collections in Poland. Throughout the existence of the synagogue there were strong assimilationist tendencies among reformed Jews: sermons were in Polish, and Polish national holidays were celebrated. The synagogue was active until spring 1942, when the Germans excluded it out of the ghetto and turned it into a furniture warehouse. It was blown up on 16th May 1943 by general Jurgen Stroop after the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was put down.

## **5 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.

## **6 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, Belarus 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.

## **7 Umschlagplatz**

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

## **8 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.

## **9 Folkshtime /Dos Yidishe Wort**

Bilingual Jewish magazine published every other week since 1992 in Warsaw in place of 'Folkshtimme', which was closed down then. Articles are devoted to the activities of the JSCS in Poland and current affairs, and there are reprints of articles from the Jewish press abroad. The magazine 'Folkshtimme' was published three times a week. In 1945 it was published in Lodz, and from 1946-1992 in Warsaw. It was the paper of the Jewish Communists. After Jewish organizations and their press organs were closed down in 1950, it became the only Jewish paper in Poland. 'Folkshtimme' was the paper of the JSCS. It published Yiddish translations of articles from the party press. In 1956, a Polish-language supplement for young people, 'Nasz Glos' [Our Voice] was

launched. It was apolitical, a literary and current affairs paper. In 1968 the paper was suspended for several months, and was subsequently reinstated as a Polish-Jewish weekly, subject to rigorous censorship. The supplement 'Nasz Glos' was discontinued. Most of the contributors and editorial staff were forced to emigrate.

## **10 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.

## **11 Warszawer Radio**

a daily newspaper in Yiddish published in Warsaw in the years 1924-1939. It was an afternoon supplement of one of the largest Jewish magazines of the interwar period Der Moment. The editor was Salomon Janowski. Warszawer Radio was a scoop newspaper, containing short, concise, written in a light language, articles. Its circulation was 150 thousand issues and was very popular, thanks to which it became the financial pillar of the Moment concern.

## **12 Der Moment**

daily newspaper published in Warsaw from 1910-39 by Yidishe Folkspartei in Poyln. It was one of the most widely read Jewish daily papers in Poland, published in Yiddish with a circulation of 100,000 copies.

## **13 13 Tlomackie Street**

between the wars, 13 Tlomackie Street was home to the Union of Jewish Writers and Translators, which brought together those writing in both Yiddish and Polish. It also housed the Library of Judaistica and the Tempel progressive synagogue.

## **14 Manger, Itzik (1901-1969)**

Yiddish poet, writer and dramatist. Born in Chernovits (now Ukraine). His first volume of poetry, 'Shtern Oyfn Dakh' (Stars on the Roof, 1929) included Yiddish folk motifs expressed in classic poetic form. His volume 'Khumesh Lider' (Pentateuch Songs, 1935) portrays patriarchal figures in the setting of the Jewish shtetl. His 'Megile-Lider' (Scroll Songs, 1936) were inspired by the tradition of the Purim plays. This book of poems was hugely acclaimed, and in 1967 was adapted as a musical (music: Dov Seltzer). Among Manger's best known works is 'The Book of Paradise' (1965). After the outbreak of war he emigrated to England, where he stayed until 1951. Manger moved to Israel in 1967. His works have been translated into Hebrew and many European languages.

## **15 Flight eastwards, 1939**

From the moment of the German attack on Poland on 1 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 (17 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 western border areas were occupied by the Germans, those Jews who had managed to stay put perished in the Holocaust.

## **16 Bund**

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

## **17 Bund leaders in prewar times**

the most eminent Bund activists of that period were Wiktor Alter, Henryk Erlich, Jakub Pat, Szmul Zygielbojm, and Maurycy Orzech. They led the Bund's social organizations, published the party press, were members of the local self-government bodies. Wiktor Alter (1890-1943), member of the Socialist International executive committee, Warsaw councilor, trade unions and cooperative movement activist, journalist, editor of the magazine 'Mysl Socjalistyczna' ('Socialist Thought'). He was shot in a Soviet prison. Henryk Erlich (1882-1943), lawyer, Warsaw councilor, member of the Jewish Community Council, editor of the magazines 'Glos Bundu' ('The Bund Voice') and 'Folks Tzaytung' ('People's Journal'), member of the Socialist International executive committee. Arrested by the Soviet authorities, he committed suicide in prison. Jakub Pat (1890-1966), contributor to 'Folks Cajtung', TsYShO (Central Jewish School Organization) activist, author of language and literature handbooks for the Jewish schools, he also wrote reportages and short stories. From 1939 he was still an active Bund member while on emigration in the USA. Maurycy Orzech (1891-1943), publisher and co-founder of many newspapers and magazines ('Folks Cajtung', 'Arbeter Sztyme' ['The Workers' Voice'], 'Glos Bundu' among others), Warsaw councilor, member of the Jewish Community Council and the National Trade Unions Council. At the outbreak of the war he was in Lithuania, after being expelled on the Germans' demand he lived in Warsaw. He was active in the Jewish Social Self-Help and the Anti-Fascist Bloc. He died in 1943, probably during a failed attempt to escape to Romania. Szmul Zygielbojm (1895-1943), secretary-general of the Jewish Section of the Central Trade Unions Board, Warsaw and Lodz councilor, publisher of the 'Arbeter Fragen' ['Workers Affairs'] magazine. A member of the National Council of the Polish government-in-exile in London. He committed suicide on May 13, 1943 at the news of the fall of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, protesting against the Allied passiveness towards the Holocaust.

## **18 Zionist parties in Poland**

All the programs of the Zionist parties active in Poland in the interwar period were characterized by their common aims of striving to establish a permanent home for the Jews in Palestine, to revive the Hebrew language, and to further political activity among the Jews (general Zionist program). They also worked to improve the lot of the Jews in Poland, and therefore ran at the Polish elections. In the Sejm (Polish Parliament) Zionist parties gained 32 of the total 47 seats won by the Jewish parties in 1922. Poalei Zion, founded in 1906, and divided in 1920 into Left Poalei Zion and Right Poalei Zion, represented left-wing views. Mizrachi, founded in 1902, united religious Zionists with a conservative social program. The Zionist Organization in Poland advocated a liberal program. Hitakhdut (Zionist Labor Party), established in 1920, combined a nationalist ideology with a socialist one. The Union of Zionist Revisionists, set up in 1925 by Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, sought the expansion of its own military structures and the achievement of the Zionist movement's aims by force. The majority of these parties were members of the World Zionist Organization, an institution co-ordinating the Zionist movement founded in 1897 in Basel. The most important Zionist newspapers in Poland included: Hatsefira, Haint, Der Moment and Nasz Preglad (Our Review).

## **19 Nowosci Theater**

one of the five permanent Jewish theaters in pre-war Warsaw, staging shows in Yiddish and Hebrew. Founded in October 1921, located at 5 Bielanska Street, it had 1,500 seats. One of the co-owners was Samuel Kroszczor. The longest-acting manager was Dawid Celemejer. The performing troupes often changed, among them were groups such as Habima (Hebrew), Warszawer Najer Jidyszer Teater (WNIT), Di yidishe bande, or Ararat. Basically, the Nowosci was an operetta and revue theater, but it also staged plays by Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Babel. From 1938, the Nowosci was run by Ida Kaminska.

## **20 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. In 1921-28 she and her husband, Martin Sigmund Turkow, were the directors of the Warszawer Yidisher Kunstteater. From 1933 to 1939 she ran her own theater group in Warsaw. During World War II she was in Lvov, and was evacuated to Kyrgyzstan (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 emigrated to the US, where she spent the rest of her life. 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).

## **21 Skif (Socjalistischer Kinder Farband, Yiddish Organization for Socialist Children)**

a children's organization under the umbrella of the Bund party. It was created in the 1920s as an initiative of the Bund youth section, Cukunft. The purpose of the organization was bringing up

future party members. A parent-teacher association looked after the children. In the 1930s Skif had several thousand members in over 100 towns in Poland. It organized dayrooms, trips, camps for the children. Skif also existed during the war in the Warsaw ghetto. It was reactivated after the war, but was of a marginal importance. It was dissolved in 1949, along with the majority of political and social Jewish organizations.

## **22 Teaching in the Warsaw ghetto**

on 15th November 1939 the German occupation authorities closed down all schools in the area of the occupied Poland. On 7th December Polish elementary and vocational schools reopened, but that didn't include Jewish schools. Warsaw Judenrat attempted to obtain permission from the Germans to reopen schools several times; the schools were reopened only on 5th September 1941. Before that Jewish children and youth took classes illegally. About 10 thousand children took secret classes. Classes at the elementary level were taught not only in private houses, but also in kitchens for children and in house committees. The first gymnasium was created in the fall of 1940 under the management of Chaim Zelmanowski, as an initiative of a youth Dror organization. It had 72 pupils in the 1940-1941 school year, 120 in the next. Among its teachers were Ischak Kacnelson and Elijahu Gutkowski. The 2nd gymnasium was opened by the organization Tarbut, the principal was Natan Eck, the school had 60 pupils. There were also secret classes at the gymnasium level, led by Warsaw school teachers who were in the ghetto. They cooperated with the Polish Underground Teachers Organization. In the years 1940-1942 172 high school exams were taken in 16 secret gymnasium classes. In August 1940 Germany allowed to open vocational schools; they were organized by Judenrat. Farming courses were given by the Toporol organization. There was the legal Nursing School of Luba Blum-Bielicka and courses for dealing with epidemics and medical courses taught by Dr Juliusz Zweibaum, Dr Jan Zaorski, Prof Ludwik Hirszfeld. Those were, in fact, courses of the underground Warsaw University. After receiving permission from Germany, on 1st October 1941 Judenrat opened first 6 elementary schools. In June 1942 the number of legal schools rose to 19, with 6700 pupils. Schools in the ghetto ceased to exist in July 1942.

## **23 Judenrat**

German for 'Jewish council'. Administrative bodies the Germans ordered Jews to form in each ghetto in General Government (Nazi-occupied colony in the central part of Poland). These bodies were responsible for local government in the ghetto, and stood between the Nazis and the ghetto population. They were generally composed of leaders of the Jewish community. They were forced by the Nazis to provide Jews for use as slave laborers, and to assist in the deportation of Jews to extermination camps during the Holocaust.

## **24 The 13**

Jewish group of around 300-400 collaborationists operating in the Warsaw ghetto, led by Abraham Gancwajch. Its name came from its address - 13 Leszno Street, where it was based. Founded in December 1940, it was supported by the Germans, in particular by the circle based around the German SD (Sicherheitsdienst/Security Service). It remained in operation until July 1941. The fate of Gancwajch is unknown.

## **25 Great Action (Grossaktion)**

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

## **26 Jewish police**

Carrying out their will the German authorities appointed a Jewish police in the ghettos. Besides maintaining order in general in the territory of the ghetto the Jewish police was also responsible for guarding the ghetto gates. During liquidation campaigns most of them collaborated with the Nazis; in the Warsaw ghetto each policeman had to supply at least five people to the Umschlagplatz every day. The reason for joining the Jewish police, first of all, was based on the false promises of the Germans that policemen and their families would be saved. In the Warsaw ghetto the Jewish police was headed by Jakub Szerynski; during the 'Grossaktion' (the main liquidation campaign in the summer of 1942), the Jewish Fighting Organization issued a death warrant on him, and he was to be executed on 20th August 1942 by Izrael Kanal. The attack failed, Szerynski was only wounded, and in January 1943 he committed suicide.

## **27 Placowka**

literally 'station' (Polish), the place of work of Jews employed outside the ghetto. Jewish workers used to work for example on the railroad, in private German companies, in businesses and institutions SS, police and Wehrmacht, and also in city administration. Jewish workers lived in the ghetto and every day were leaving for many hours to work outside the ghetto. They were paid for their work with a modest meal, sometimes small amount of money. 'Placowki' existed since the beginning of occupation, their number grew in the spring of 1942. During liquidation actions in the ghettos their employees were often protected, at least for some time, from deportation to a death camp.

## **28 Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in 1892, its reach extended throughout the Kingdom of Poland and abroad, and it proclaimed slogans advocating the reclamation by Poland of its sovereignty**

It was a party that comprised many currents and had room for activists of varied views and from a range of social backgrounds. During the revolutionary period in 1905-07 it was one of the key political forces; it directed strikes, organized labor unions, and conducted armed campaigns. It was also during this period that it developed into a party of mass reach (towards the end of 1906 it had some 55,000 members). After 1918 the PPS came out in support of the parliamentary system, and advocated the need to ensure that Poland guaranteed freedom and civil rights, division of the churches (religious communities) and the state, and territorial and cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities; and it defended the rights of hired laborers. The PPS supported the policy of the head of state, Jozef Pilsudski. It had seats in the first government of the Republic, but from 1921 was in opposition. In 1918-30 the main opponents of the PPS were the National Democrats [ND] and the communist movement. In the 1930s the state authorities' repression of PPS activists and the

reduced activity of working-class and intellectual political circles eroded the power of the PPS (in 1933 it numbered barely 15,000 members) and caused the radicalization of some of its leaders and party members. During World War II the PPS was formally dissolved, and some of its leaders created the Polish Socialist Party – Liberty, Equality, Independence (PPS-WRN), which was a member of the coalition supporting the Polish government in exile and the institutions of the Polish Underground State. In 1946-48 many members of PPS-WRN left the country or were arrested and sentenced in political trials. In December 1948 PPS activists collaborating with the PPR consented to the two parties merging on the PPR's terms. In 1987 the PPS resumed its activities. The party currently numbers a few thousand members.

### **29 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.

### **30 Jews in Sokoly during the war**

Sokoly is a small town near Bialystok. The German army marched into to the town on 24th June 1941. About 1.5 thousand Jews lived there at that time. Probably in August 1941 the authorities created a so called opened ghetto, that is, they marked an area for Jews to live in, but didn't limit their freedom of movement about the town. On 2nd November 1942 the Germans displaced Jews from Sokoly and a few other towns to a camp in the former barracks in Bialystok. They were imprisoned there for several weeks in horrible conditions. Between 10th November and 15th December 1942 the prisoners were sent to the death camp in Treblinka

### **31 Penalty for helping Jews**

on 15th October 1941 the governor general Hans Frank issued a decree on the death penalty for Jews leaving the designated living areas, and for people who knowingly aid them. The decree was reissued and amended by governors of each district of the General Government, who specified what aid for Jews meant: it included not only feeding and providing accommodation, but also transporting, trading with them, etc. The death penalty was widely executed only a year after issuing the decree. The responsibility for hiding Jews was placed not only on the owners of a property, but also on all persons present during the search, which was usually the family of the person who was hiding Jews. Especially in villages, the Germans used the rule of an even broader collective responsibility, punishing also neighbors of people hiding Jews. After the war 900 people were recognized to have died for having helped Jews.

### **32 Warsaw Uprising 1944**

The term refers to the Polish uprising between 1st August and 2nd October 1944, an armed uprising orchestrated by the underground Home Army and supported by the civilian population of Warsaw. It was justified by political motives: the calculation that if the domestic arm of the Polish government in exile took possession of the city, the USSR would be forced to recognize Polish sovereignty. The Allies rebuffed requests for support for the campaign. The Polish underground state failed to achieve its aim. Losses were vast: around 20,000 insurrectionists and 200,000 civilians were killed and 70% of the city destroyed.

### **33 Central Committee of Polish Jews**

It was founded in 1944, with the aim of representing Jews in dealings with the state authorities and organizing and co-coordinating aid and community care for Holocaust survivors. Initially it operated from Lublin as part of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. The CCPJ's activities were subsidized by the Joint, and in time began to cover all areas of the reviving Jewish life. In 1950 the CCPJ merged with the Jewish Cultural Society to form the Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews.

### **34 Cukierman Icchak (Antek, 1914 - 1980)**

born in Vilnius, was active in the Zionist youth organization He-Chaluc. Since 1938 he was a general secretary of Dror He-Chaluc and lived in Warsaw. After the war broke out he moved to the area of the Russian occupation, but in April 1940 he returned to Warsaw. He organized the activity of underground Dror in the Warsaw ghetto, published underground press, initiated opening of a Dror gymnasium. He was one of the founders of the Jewish Combat Organization (ZOB); he represented Dror in the Jewish National Committee. As a member of the ZOB (Jewish Combat Organization) headquarters he took part in a so called action 'Cyganeria' in Cracow in December 1942. During the January action in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 he fought in the Jewish self-defense: he commanded a ZOB group on Zamenhofa, Mila and Stawki Streets. In April 1943 he was sent to the so called Aryan side as a link between ZOB and the National Army. He organized help for ZOB soldiers who got out of the ghetto during the uprising (May 1943). He was a commander of a Jewish unit fighting by the side of the People's Army during the Warsaw uprising in 1944. After the war he was a member of the Cabinet of the Central Jewish Committee [BLA] in Poland. Moreover, he organized Brich, illegal emigration of Jews from Poland. He went to Palestine in 1946. He was one of the founders of a kibbutz of Ghetto's Heroes in Galilea. He is the author of memoirs A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Those Seven Years). Memoirs 1939-1946.

### **35 Hahalutz**

Hebrew for pioneer, it stands for a Zionist organization that prepared young people for emigration to Palestine. It was founded at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia and began operating in Poland in 1905, later also spread to the USA and other countries. Between the two wars its aim was to unite all the Zionist youth organizations. Members of Hahalutz were sent on hakhshara, where they received vocational training. Emphasis was placed chiefly on volunteer work, the ability to live and work in harsh conditions, and military training. The organization had its own agricultural farms in Poland. On completing hakhshara young people received British certificates entitling them to

emigrate to Palestine. Around 26,000 young people left Poland under this scheme in 1925-26. In 1939 Hahalutz had some 100,000 members throughout Europe. In World War II it operated as a conspiratorial organization. It was very active in culture and education after the war. The Polish arm was disbanded in 1949.

### **36 Bricha children (action of illegal deportation of Jewish children from Poland to Palestine)**

right after the war ended, creators of Bricha centers (illegal emigration) in Poland, Eliezer, Lidowski and Aba Kowner, decided to move orphaned Jewish children to Palestine. Children were taken from Polish orphanages and families who hid them during the occupation, and moved to Jewish orphanages and children's kibbutzim, ran by Zionist parties and organizations (like Ichud, He-Chaluc, Hashomer Hatzair) which prepared the children for life in Palestine (by teaching them Hebrew and bringing them up in a national spirit). Such centers were located in Lodz, Warsaw, Szczecin, Sosnowiec, Zabrze, Wroclaw, Walbrzych and other cities. The majority of them were in Lower Silesia. Zionist activists who were members of the Central Jewish Committee in Poland also attempted to introduce elements of Zionist ideology into teaching in the centers ran by the committee; it led to conflicts with Bund activists and communists who were also active in the Committee. In September 1946, under the Zionists' care, there were 13 thousand children in 173 centers. They were systematically smuggled to the Czech Republic as a part of Bricha. After the Kielce Pogrom (4th July 1946) the action of evacuating of the children from Poland was sped up. The actual data is missing, but it is estimated that in summer and fall of 1946 about 400 children left Poland every month; those were children mainly from the Zionist centers in Lower Slask.

### **37 Jews in 1956**

"the Jewish problem" came up in 1956 during conflicts within the Polish United Worker's Party. The so-called Natolin fraction used anti-Semitic slogans in its discourse, attempting to blame party members of Jewish descent for the crimes committed during the Stalinist era. At the 7th Plenary Session of the Party's Central Committee, in July 1956, this fraction postulated "nationality regulation" in the Party. This resolution was not officially passed, but in the course of inter-party dissension, members of Jewish descent were fired from higher positions in state institutions, security offices, and the army. The number of the people fired is not known. Anti-Semitic slogans were echoed by the society: Jews were likely to be accused of carrying the responsibility for repressions, murders, economic ruin and conflicts with the Church. In the fall 1956 there were even anti-Semitic disturbances in Walbrzych, quickly put down by the police. In the years 1955-1957 around 27 thousand Jews left Poland, mainly for Israel.

### **38 Gomulka Wladyslaw (1905-1982)**

communist activist and politician, one of the leading figures of the political scene of the Polish People's Republic, secretary general of the Central Committee (KC). In 1948 accused with so-called rightist-nationalist tendencies. As a consequence, he was imprisoned in 1951 and removed from the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). Released in 1954 as a national hero, patriot and 'Polish' communist. From 21 October 1956 First Secretary of the Central Committee and member of the PZPR Central Committee's Political Office, from 1957 member of the State Council and deputy to the Polish Sejm. Initially enjoyed the support of public opinion (resisted Soviet pressure) and

pursued a policy of moderate reforms of the political and economic system. In 1968 he came out in favor of intervention by the states of the Warsaw Bloc in Czechoslovakia. Responsible for anti-Semitic repressions in March 1968 (as a result of which over 20,000 were forced to leave Poland) and the used of force against participants in the workers' revolt of December 1970. On 20 December 1970 he was forced to resign his post as First Secretary of the Central Committee and member of the PZPR Central Committee's Political Office, in 1970 he was dismissed from his other posts, and in 1971 he was forced into retirement.

### **39 Polish Workers' Party (PPR)**

a communist party formed in January 1942 by a merger of Polish communist groups and organizations following the infiltration of an initiative cell from the USSR. The PPR was not formally part of the Communist Internationale, although in fact was subordinate to it. In its program declarations the PPR's slogans included full armed combat to liberate the country from the German occupation, the restoration of an independent, democratic Polish state with new eastern borders, alliance with the USSR, and moderate socio-economic reform. In 1942 the PPR had a few thousand members, but by 1944 its ranks had swelled to some 20,000. In 1942 it spawned an armed organization, the People's Guard (renamed the People's Army in 1944). After the Red Army invaded Poland the PPR took power and set about creating a political system in which it had the dominant position. The PPR pacified society, terrorized the political opposition and suppressed underground organizations fighting for independence using instruments of organized violence. It was supported by USSR state security organizations operating in Poland (including the NKVD). After its consolidation of power in 1947-48 the leadership of the PPR set about radical political and socio-economic transformations based on Soviet models, including the liquidation of private ownership, the nationalization of the economy (the collectivization of agriculture), and the subordination of all institutions and community organizations to the communist party. In December 1948 the party numbered over a million members. After merging with the Polish Socialist Party it changed its name to the Polish United Workers' Party.

### **40 Poalei Zion (the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party Workers of Zion)**

in Yiddish 'Yidishe Socialistish-Demokratishe Arbeiter Partei Poale Syon'. A political party formed in 1905 in the Kingdom of Poland, and operating throughout the Polish state from 1918. The party's main aim was to create an independent socialist Jewish state in Palestine. In the short term, Poalei Zion postulated cultural and national autonomy for the Jews in Poland, and improved labor and living conditions of Jewish hired laborers. In 1920, during a conference in Vienna, the party split, forming the Right Poalei Zion (the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party Workers of Zion), which became part of the Socialist Workers' International and the World Zionist Organization, and the Left Po'alei Zion (the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party Workers of Zion), the radical minority, which sympathized with the Bolsheviks. The Left Poalei Zion placed more emphasis on socialist postulates. Key activists: I. Schiper (Right PZ), L. Holenderski, I. Lew (Left PZ); paper: Arbeiter Welt. Both fractions had their own youth organizations: Right PZ: Dror and Freiheit; Left PZ - Jugnt. Left PZ was weaker than Right PZ; only towards the end of the 1930s did it start to form coalitions with other socialist and Zionist parties. In 1937 Left PZ joined the World Zionist Organization. During World War II both fractions were active in underground politics and the resistance movement in the ghettos, in particular the youth organizations. After 1945 both parties joined the Central Jewish Committee in Poland. In 1947 they reunited to form the strongest legally active Jewish party in

Poland (with 20,000 members). In 1950 Poalei Zion was dissolved by the communist authorities.

#### **41 Polish Neustein's bookstore in Tel Aviv**

Edmund Neustein (1917-2001) was a bookstore owner, a secondhand bookseller and a publisher. After the war he had a bookstore in Katowice, then in Warsaw. In 1957 he emigrated to Israel. In January 1958 he opened a Polish bookstore and a library in Tel Aviv on 94 Alenby Street. Neustein brought books and magazines from Poland, as well as publications of Polish emigration. He organized literary and discussion meetings. The bookstore had a large second-hand section. Neustein's bookstore quickly became a meeting place of Polish intellectuals, and one of the most important centers of Polish culture outside the country. Neustein was a laureate of many Polish prizes for promoting Polish culture in Israel: in 1989 a prize from Polish Culture Foundation, in 1993 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1994 - a Minister of Culture. In 1994 Neustein's bookstore was voted one of the best ran bookstores in the world. Edmund Neustein died in 2001. The bookstore was closed down after the death of his wife in 2004.

#### **42 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.

#### **43 Poland 1989**

In 1989 the communist regime in Poland finally collapsed and the process of forming a multiparty, pluralistic, democratic political system and introducing a capitalist economy began. Communist policy and the deepening economic crisis since the early 1980s had caused increasing social discontent and weariness and the radicalization of moods among Solidarity activists (Solidarity: a trade union that developed into a political party and played a key role in overthrowing communism). On 13th December 1981 the PZPR (Polish United Worker's Party) had introduced martial law (lifted on 22 June 1983). Growing economic difficulties, social moods and the strength of the opposition persuaded the national authorities to begin gradually liberalizing the political system. Changes in the USSR also influenced the policy of the PZPR. A series of strikes in April-May and August 1988, and demonstrations in many towns and cities forced the authorities to seek a

compromise with the opposition. After a few months of meetings and consultations Round Table negotiations took place (6 Feb.-5 Apr. 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronislaw Geremek, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki). The resolutions it passed signaled the end of the PZPR's monopoly on power and cleared the way for the overthrow of the system. In parliamentary elections (4th June 1989) the PZPR and its subordinate political groups suffered defeat. In fall 1989 a program of fundamental economic, social and ownership transformations was drawn up and in Jan. 1990 the PZPR dissolved.

## RECIPES

Cymes (9 people, small portions)

Meatballs (make 3 hours earlier)

¼ cup of flour

2 tablespoons of melted butter

¾ egg (no more)

A bit of salt, pepper and sugar

Mix all the ingredients in a small bowl to a uniform mass, add spices. They do not have to be very sweet or salty.

3 tablespoons of oil

3.5 tablespoons of brown sugar (if carrots are well ripe and sweet, less)

1 kg of carrots, sliced into thick slices

1.5 cup of water

4 tablespoons of raisins, rinsed

Salt and pepper to taste

Heat up oil well, in a large flat pan, fry carrots until they change color (about 5 minutes). Make sure the carrots, especially if old, do not stick to the pan (you may add water). Add sugar mixed with water, raisins and spices, mix, boil on a fast flame, then move to a slow one, stew under a lid for 40 minutes. Taste, add spices, you may add a few drops of lemon juice. You can do it a day before serving, put it into the fridge. Boil the carrots, add small meatballs (they grow larger!), they do not have to be perfectly round (you may scoop with a spoon, form them with your hands). Stew on a slow flame until carrots are soft and almost all water has evaporated (over an hour). It's better not to put it into the fridge, the meatballs harden up.

Chulent (6 people)

7 average potatoes

1 cup of beans

½ cup of hulled barley

2 onions

3 tablespoons of oil

½-1kg of meat (with bone), you may add some margarine or chicken fat

About 2 teaspoons of salt, depending on the saltiness of the meat

1 teaspoon of pepper

1 ½ teaspoon of sweet pepper

Water to cover the ingredients

Pick the beans and soak in water overnight, or in the last moment pour boiling water over them and leave it for a half hour. Peel potatoes and cut them in half. Clean and rinse barley. Slice onions, fry them on 3 tablespoons of oil until they turn golden (do not let them turn brown). Prepare a large, heavy pot (or earthen, heat resistant), put the fried onions in, put the meat in the center, surround it with potatoes, put beans and barley on top, add spices and enough water to cover the potatoes. Boil chulent on the stove (you can cook it for half hour), close the pot well with a lid, put it in the stove and bake in about 100C. It should be cooking very slowly (you should be able to hear a bubbling sound every once in a while), leave it in at night, until lunch next day. Every once in a while check if it is cooking too slow or too fast, if there is enough water (usually you do not need to add any if the pot is well closed). You may want to taste it to make sure you do not need to add salt.