

# Maria Krych

Maria Krych

Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Agata Gajewska

Date of interview: October-December 2004

*I meet with Maria Krych in her apartment at 26 Pulawska Street. In the war-damaged Warsaw of the 1940s and 1950s this modernist, comfortably furnished building was a real luxury. For this reason it was used for housing higher officials of the communist party. Mrs. Krych moved in there in 1947. Today, the house has lost signs of its past greatness. There's a multitude of books in Mrs. Krych's apartment, they're everywhere. The impressive collection includes a vast number of books in Yiddish – Mrs. Krych has translated several of them into Polish. Literature, translations – that was her way of keeping in touch with Jewish culture, which she wanted to pass on to her daughter.*

My mama came from a Hasidic family [1](#). Her maiden name was Meisels and, as it turns out, this was the family of the famous Rabbi Meisels [2](#). At first, I didn't want to believe it, but it has been confirmed to be true. He was some direct relation, probably a great-grandfather. But I don't know more details about my great-grandparents. None of them were alive during my lifetime. They all came from Lublin and dealt, in one way or another, with trade. I don't know much about my mother's parents. Mama's dad was a very strict Hasid. Mama's mother kept house.

There were four sisters in the family. The oldest one was called Rywka, then there was Chaja and later Estera. Mama was the youngest. She was born in 1883. Her name was Ajdla – Adela. Rywka and Estera moved to Zamosc [85 km from Lublin], where their husbands were doing business. Chaja stayed in Lublin [Chaja Meisels lived in Lublin, but later she moved to Warsaw with her husband]. They all died during World War II, nobody was left.

Dad's family were also merchants. Their name was Goldwag. Grandma's name was Chaja, and Grandpa's – Dawid. After Grandpa's death, that is, in the early 1920s, Grandma Chaja moved to our home and was the only one of my grandparents' generation whom I knew closely.

There were five siblings in that family: four brothers and a sister. My father's name was Josef and his brothers were Mendel and Jakub. I don't remember the name of the third one. Dad was born in 1883. They all lived in Lublin. That's where they died during the liquidation of the ghetto [3](#).

Mother and Father met in Lublin. I'm sure a matchmaker made the match. It couldn't have been otherwise at that time. My parents were the same age. When they got married, they were 20-something, maybe 24. They were both religious. They had Jewish education. Dad, of course, went to cheder, but he didn't go to yeshivah.

They both knew Russian. They attended a Russian school, not a public one, but a Jewish school where they learned Russian. [Editor's note: There were no schools for girls at the turn of the 19th and 20th century in Lublin, therefore it was not possible for Adela Meisels to have attended one. She probably received an informal education at home]. They didn't speak Polish at all, although

they understood a lot.

When my parents got married, they went to Zamosc. Father got a job there and an apartment, because one of Mama's sisters, Rywka, married rich. Her husband's name was Awigdor Inlender. Inlender was one of the richest people in Zamosc. He was a merchant and he had his own trade company. He mostly sold textiles, but not only that. Father worked there for a long period of time in a textile store, but he became independent [that is, opened his own business] shortly before the war.

Father was a talented merchant, very talented. When he started his own business he worked in the wood industry in Zamosc. He was doing quite well for himself. He made good money, but I don't know exactly how much.

Mother kept house, she didn't work. She was an excellent housekeeper. At some point she taught herself how to sew and bought a sewing machine. She sewed for the entire closer and more distant family. But she didn't get any money for that.

Four children were born shortly afterwards, so she had her hands full. The oldest son was born in 1909. His name was Bernard. It was a Polonized name. Of course, he had a Jewish name on his birth certificate, it was Dow, Dow-Ber [cf. Polonization of Jewish first and last names] [4](#). The second son was called Izrael. After the war he changed it to Jerzy. He was born in 1910. The youngest one, Michal, was born in 1914. I was born in 1913. They named me Perla.

My parents' apartment was on 3-go Maja Street. It was one of the main streets of Zamosc and it had cobblestones. That was my childhood home. I was born there and I lived there until the war broke out. As I mentioned, the building belonged to my Mama's sister Rywka. My aunt rented out the apartments there – there were about 50 of them. Aunt Rywka lived there as well. They had a beautiful apartment. When Mama's second sister, Estera, got married she also started living in the same tenement house.

We lived on the second floor. There were three rooms in the apartment. My parents, of course, had a room, the boys had a room and I had a room. For those times, those were rather good conditions. The house was pretty well furnished. There was no heating, but there was running water. When I went to Zamosc after the war with my brother and sister-in-law the house was still there.

We were very close with the family, especially Mama. She mostly kept in touch with that rich sister, Rywka, and with Estera. We often met up in each other's apartments. The contacts were very frequent. Most often we'd meet at Aunt Rywka's, because she had a large apartment and she loved inviting friends and family over. The entire close family gathered at Aunt Rywka's for the holidays.

On holidays, on Saturdays and Sundays, my parents often went to the park for walks. They rarely went to the theater. They wouldn't go to restaurants either. They sometimes left town. There was a so-called 'bypass' in Zamosc... It was a road going around the city, where the entire town went for walks on Saturdays and Sundays. You'd walk on foot along the road. It was a very pleasant walk. And the park was beautiful. We had a biology teacher at our gymnasium whose name was Miller. He was the one who organized that park. He set up a small zoo there and took care of the animals.

Dad used to read books, although it's hard for me to say which books. He used to read Moment [5](#) and Haint [6](#), those were liberal Jewish newspapers. I can't recall which political party he

sympathized with. He was quite distant from Agudat [7](#), but he was also not close to Bund [8](#). He was a liberal man. Mother didn't use to read newspapers.

There were quite a few wealthy Jews in Zamosc. Jews who could afford living in nice buildings, downtown. But there were also districts of poor Jews. One was called Nowe Miasto [New Town]. But there were contacts between these groups. You'd often go to these poor districts. Anyway, friends from school lived there. Each Thursday the wealthier Jews would give out alms in front of the synagogue. All the poor Jews came there for help. It was horrible!

A very poor shoemaker lived in the same house we were living in. His wife had died. He only had a daughter, who was in a teachers' training college, she was studying. Everyone hoped she would support the family. And that's what happened indeed.

But the poorest Jews were living in nearby towns. For example in Izbica – a town full of mud. As if it had been forgotten by God and by people! During World War II all Jews from Zamosc were taken to Izbica and later deported to Treblinka. [Editor's note: Mrs. Krych is confusing two towns. She is referring to Izbica Lubelska, where a transitory ghetto was organized in 1942 for Jews from the Lublin ghetto]

There was one synagogue in Zamosc. There were also meetings for prayers [minyan] at houses and people often met in rooms; when ten men met, they could recite prayers. But Father went to this city prayer house. It was a very beautiful building [a brick structure, erected in 1610-1618, operating until WWII. During the war the Germans opened a carpentry plant inside, therefore destroying the interior; renovated in the 1960s, currently serves as a library]. I think a library was organized there during the war.

The main goal for one of my cousins who lives in Israel [Yoram Golan, previously Goldwag, grandson of Chawa Meisels – Mrs. Krych's aunt – and Mosze Dawid Goldwag, Mrs. Krych's father's brother] is to have the prayer house returned to the Jewish community. They promised him they'd do it. But I don't know if he will be successful... I don't know.

We celebrated all the Jewish holidays at our home, Sabbath and Havdalah, candles were lit. Mother went to the synagogue only on high holidays. Sometimes she'd take me with her. I especially liked Yom Kippur and New Year's. They're completely different holidays than Pesach or Channukah. They were very solemn. Those were true Jewish holidays. Jews celebrated them in a very warm-hearted manner...

Did I like going to the synagogue? No. I went, because my mother made me do it, but I wasn't keen on it. I stopped going to the synagogue when I was in the higher grades of gymnasium [at the age of 16-17]. Even my parents didn't insist on it, didn't remind me... We didn't discuss this at home, why I didn't go. By that time the boys also stopped going to the synagogue with Father. Those were different times...

There was a Jewish elementary school in Zamosc. I attended that school from age seven to age ten. The principal was a very progressive man. His name was Weiner. He wasn't closely connected with Jewish life and that's how he raised children. And that was the school they sent me to.

The language the classes were taught in was Hebrew [it was probably a Tarbut school, with lectures in Hebrew]. All subjects were taught there, even science and geography. Polish was also

taught there; that's why I say he [Weiner] was a very progressive man. [Editor's note: Polish was a compulsory subject in all ethnic minority school in interwar Poland]. I also learned it by myself. That's why when I started attending a Polish gymnasium I could speak, read and write in Polish. I had to know Polish, because everything took place in Polish in secondary school.

I also spoke Polish with my brothers at home. Children, friends, all spoke Polish among themselves. I liked the Polish language. It's a very beautiful language. I like Polish literature, I like it a lot. I used to read Mickiewicz [9](#) and Sienkiewicz [Henryk (1846-1916): Polish journalist, novelist and short story writer from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Nobel Prize laureate in 1905]. But I especially liked Mickiewicz.

When I was ten years old I went to a Polish gymnasium. It was a public gymnasium, there were no others then. A Jewish gymnasium was set up later, but I was already used to the Polish one. All my brothers also graduated from that Polish school.

I remember our headmistress, a very, very nice and valuable woman. Her name was Madler and she taught biology - the school was very strong in this subject. She was single; her husband had died during World War I. They later moved her from Zamosc to Bialystok and that's where Germans arrested her and sent her to Auschwitz. Perhaps because she was a teacher and a headmistress, perhaps she did something else, I don't know. [Editor's note: During the occupation the Germans murdered many Polish state officials and members of the intelligentsia according to previously created proscription lists.]

Anyway, her sister-in-law, also a Mrs. Madler, was my homeroom teacher, but she was a very unpleasant woman - an anti-Semite. She treated Jewish children in a different way than Polish children. She always addressed Polish children with their first names and Jewish children with their last names. She was not pleasant. You could see that she was not a good person. This homeroom teacher was definitely an anti-Semite. I couldn't say that about any other teachers.

Jewish children were mostly friends among themselves and Polish children were friends among themselves. There were four Jewish girls in the class and they sat together, separately from the rest. But I didn't have real problems with manifestations of anti-Semitism at school.

Although there usually were no close contacts between Poles and Jews in Zamosc, I had Polish friends. They knew very well that I was Jewish. After all, I had a Jewish first and last name. They had different attitudes towards me.

I had this one friend, her last name was Banachiewicz and her first name was Mira. Mira is an old Slavic name. She told me how her father searched the calendar for a Slavic sounding name and he finally found one. At first they lived in Warsaw, but when her father died, the mother took the children to Zamosc, because she had wealthy parents there. They were very well off.

There was no anti-Semitism in that house, absolutely none. She was friends with me and with other Jewish girls. We often visited each other at our houses. It often happened that Mira stayed with us for Sabbath or one of the other holidays. I usually didn't visit them for Christian holidays. They used to invite their entire families then, not us.

Mira also told me about her grandmother, how she told Polish children, when they were unfriendly towards Jewish children on the street, not to do it, because there is one God and he is the same for

everyone. It was a very decent family. I was friends with Mira for a long time even after the war. We used to visit each other. She died a few years ago.

During our gymnasium years, we went for a vacation each year. We'd go for the entire summer holidays, that is, for three months. We would go to Krasnobrod, Jozefow and other towns nearby Zamosc. Father would always rent a summer house for us there. Those were holidays in the countryside. We would go for walks, in the forest... like children on vacation. But we only went with Mom. Dad stayed in Zamosc and worked. He only came to join us on Sundays.

We had a very good childhood. My oldest brother was accepted at the Medical Academy in Warsaw. Jerzy – also in Warsaw – studied law. The family gave them money for as long as they could. But still, accommodation in Warsaw was very expensive, so they weren't doing too well for themselves. But Bernard managed to graduate. The material conditions at our house were not bad until the boys got arrested.

My brother Jerzy was a communist. Michal was one, too. Only the oldest one, Bernard, was not. He didn't belong to any other party either. When Michal and Jerzy started going to some meetings, rallies, my parents were not very pleased. My parents suffered a lot because of my brothers' involvement in the communist movement.

Jerzy was studying at the Faculty of Law at Warsaw University, but when he was in his 4th year, two months before graduation, he was arrested for communist activities. [Editor's note: Due to its anti-state character, communist activity was considered illegal in interwar Poland and active members of the communist movement were thrown into prison.] He spent four years in jail [probably between 1931 and 1934].

My parents hired a lawyer for him and very intense efforts were made to shorten his sentence. He didn't stay in the Zamosc jail for long; they took him to a prison in Drohobycz. It wasn't a very bad prison [that is, it was a low-security prison].

Later, in 1932, they arrested my younger brother, Michal. He was 18 years old then. He was a very talented boy. Michal didn't manage to study anything, because he had just graduated from gymnasium and then he disappeared. [Editor's note: Immediately after graduation from secondary school Michal Goldwag was accused of communist activity and convicted with a court sentence]. At first, in the first level court, he got five years.

Father didn't have money to save him, because it had all gone to save Jerzy, so there was no help for Michal. But an appeal was submitted and, because he was young, he was 18, the appeal court shortened his sentence to two years. He spent the two years in Wronki. It was a very hard prison. When all those jail stories started, the material situation of the family really got worse.

At that time [1931] I passed the public secondary school final exam. I was 19 years old. I had various interests then. I used to read Russian literature. Because although Russian was not taught at school, I learned it from books and handbooks. I also took French at school – my parents made sure I did. I also had Latin at school. And it was my favorite language. I was really interested in history and ancient culture. I wanted to be a teacher.

I tried applying to the Faculty of Classical Philology in Warsaw. This was in 1931. I prepared, but I didn't do well at the [entrance] exam and I didn't get in. So I went back to Zamosc.

Sometime later Mother got me a job. I worked as a book-keeper at my Uncle Inlender's, Aunt Rywka's husband. He had a textile warehouse then. I didn't like that job. They really took advantage of me. I was overwhelmed with the atmosphere there, it was so bourgeois! You could see they only cared about the company's profit.

Of course, communism was very important for me. Some time in the 1930s I went to a meeting of the KPP [10](#) in Zamosc. Some friends of mine took me there. That's what the environment was like – my brothers were in the Party, so were girl-friends, and other friends. There were Jews and Poles there. You'd somehow let them influence you and start participating in what your acquaintances were doing.

I received my membership card even before the war broke out. I was a regular member of the KPP. I didn't hold any positions of very important functions. I had two brothers in jail, and so I was more or less aware of what kind of danger was associated with belonging to the communist party, but I didn't get into the kind of trouble my brothers did. I was still young and everything was just starting out. I didn't spend much time on party activities in Zamosc. Later, in Warsaw, it was a lot more.

I went to Warsaw in 1935. I had an aunt there and I stayed with her. Her husband was my father's brother. Their name was Goldwag as well. Uncle's name was Mendel and Aunt's name was Chajka. They lived on Gesia Street. It was in a Jewish district. There were two rooms there and this one tiny little room. I paid them some money, not much, from what I had saved in Zamosc. I lived there, in that tiny room. Their children – two girls and a boy – lived with their parents in the second room. They were very poor. They didn't have jobs and had a hard time supporting those children.

When the war broke out, Aunt didn't know what to do with the kids. Uncle Mendel was in America at that time, visiting a brother who was doing well and had sent for Uncle to get him educated there. So Aunt wrote to my brother Bernard in Lublin - he was a doctor there - asking if he could do something for the girls. He sent for them and employed them in his hospital. But what kind of a job was that? Not much.

It all ended when the war broke out [the Great Patriotic War] [11](#). The girls died immediately, in the summer of 1941. Bernard's entire family, who were in the ghetto, died, too. [Editor's note: Mrs. Krych's brother, Bernard Goldwag, died with his family during the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto; only the son, Chil Goldwag, survived from Chawa and Mendel Goldwag's family.]

I didn't work for the first two years of my stay in Warsaw. I occasionally swept up the snow in the winter. I looked for work and couldn't find anything. I lived from my savings in Zamosc. My family helped me a bit. I suffered like this for two years and then, in the third year, I got a good job. A friend of mine, also from Zamosc, worked in a printing house and arranged with her boss a job for me.

At first I was supposed to help his two sons with schoolwork – they were such rascals, it was horrible, they were spoiled rotten! But after some time this boss started liking me, he felt he could trust me. He offered me a job in his office, he employed me in the printing house for 80 zloty per month plus lunches [by way of comparison: an average teacher's salary in the 1930s was approx. 120 zloty, an office worker's salary – 200 zloty, a tram driver's – 600 zloty]. I was also supposed to keep taking care of those boys. And that's when I started doing well. That was a good wage. I could support myself, and support myself well.



I worked there, starting in 1937, for two years, until the war broke out [12](#). The war caught me and my younger brother in Warsaw [Michal, after serving his term in jail, moved to Warsaw and was involved in KPP activity while doing odd jobs for a living]. Michal volunteered for defending Warsaw and died immediately, in unclear circumstances. He was 25 years old.

I only got home after Warsaw surrendered, several weeks later. I went on foot to Zamosc, to my parents [approx. 230 km]. I left Warsaw with a group of friends. But we later split up, because they wanted to go east. [Editor's note: When the Soviet army entered the eastern part of Poland on 17th September 1939, some residents moved into Soviet occupied territory in an attempt to escape German persecution.] I kept saying that I have to go home and I walked alone. It took me several days.

When I reached Zamosc, I didn't find any family members there. They had all run away from the Germans and had gone to Lwow. So I followed them to Lwow. That's where I stayed with my parents, my brother Jerzy and my sister-in-law, whom he had recently married. Bernard was a physician in Lublin at that time.

My sister-in-law's name was Eleonora. That was the name on her birth certificate. Her family also came from Zamosc. Eleonora was a communist activist. This sister-in-law was raised by the sister of Isaac Leib Peretz [13](#), who was like a grandmother to her [Eleonora Epstein's real grandmother died young. A friend of the family – I.L. Peretz's sister – Mrs. Goldsztajn took over that role.]

I can't say much about that family, but this grandmother was an exceptional woman. When the Jewish militiamen [policemen, forces created by the German authorities, consisting of Jewish residents] came to get her to deport her to a death camp [probably the camp in Belzec], she didn't go with them. She simply told them she wouldn't go. So they shot her right away.

She had two sons. One was in the Soviet Union, and that's where he died, and the second one was here, in Poland. He was an engineer. He had two daughters. Their mother was a doctor. Two charming girls. They were living next to us in Zamosc. Both were captured by those Jewish traitors, when their mother and father were not at home. And they both died.

My sister-in-law's brother was a real hero. His first name was Jozef, last name Epstein [14](#). He wrote a book [Les Fils de la Nuit, Paris, Grasset, 1982]. He was a wonderful man. He was very smart and very brave. He belonged to the communist movement before the war. His father somehow managed that he got away with it, didn't go to jail, but he sent him to Czech lands. Jozef went through Bohemia to Spain, where he fought in the civil war [15](#).

Later he moved to Paris and was in the French opposition. He became the vice-commander of Paris. That was a rather high position. But they arrested him. He had a trial, along with twenty-something other communists from various countries, mostly Jews. They were all sentenced to death.

In Lwow, there was, of course, a Jewish district. [In fact, since 1867 there was no formal Jewish district in Lwow. Most Jews, however, lived within the same area, not far from the city hall.] But when we came from Zamosc [in 1939] there was no ghetto yet [16](#). We couldn't rent an apartment, but the Jewish community organized some kind of accommodation for us. We lived at somebody's place, many families together. The conditions were horrible.

My brother Jerzy and I, we worked. My parents didn't work, naturally. First I worked as a cashier in some institution; I can't remember what institution it was. Later I took a teacher's course and started working. I went to a village and worked in a Ukrainian school until the Germans attacked Lwow [17](#). Then I returned to my parents, to Lwow.

When the Germans marched in, men, especially those in danger of being arrested for communist activity, escaped to the Soviet Union. Jerzy also left Lwow on foot and was soon in the Soviet Union.

I lived with my parents at first. Later, when it was dangerous and they were looking for me because of my communist activities, I moved to my aunt Ester's, my mom's sister, who escaped with us from Zamosc to Lwow. Ester's family consisted of four people, I was the fifth one, and there were also two men, who paid rent. The apartment was small. Everything looked very, very poor.

One day some people came over. It turned out it was the commanding officer of the Jewish militia [police]. They had an arrest warrant for me for communist activity. But they couldn't find me. It happened during the time [Fall 1941] when a German order came out that Jews have to give away all furs - fur collars, mittens, coats... and my parents, like all Jews, had to give them up.

So, when the police came for me, my sister-in-law came forward instead of me. She said she'd manage better than me. She told the police that the warrant was because of a fur. They kept my sister-in-law in jail for several hours, and we didn't know what was going on with her. Finally I told my father I didn't like it, and that I had to go to the militia [police] to find her. But in the meantime they realized they mistook my sister-in-law for me. They said that if I don't come forward, they'll keep my sister-in-law and my parents. My father tried to stop me, but he couldn't, and I went there immediately.

They let my sister-in-law go, and arrested me. They arrested me, because they found documents saying I was a member of the communist party when I worked as a teacher in some village near Lwow. When I was arrested, it was the second half of 1941. It was the early period of the German occupation, and it was still possible to arrange things in exchange for money. So my family bought me out. I remained under Gestapo supervision and had to go there every week.

Not much later, however, an order of a higher instance came out, sending people like me [accused of communist activity and under Gestapo supervision] to Auschwitz. And that Jewish militiaman [policeman], who had arrested me earlier, told my parents about it. Jewish militiamen usually didn't help people who were in danger. It's not true that they helped! But it somehow happened that this militiaman had a friend from the same city, who was my sister-in-law's aunt, and she put in a good word for me.

He spoke to the militia [police] commanding officer, and he agreed to let me go for a golden watch. He got the golden watch, but because they ordered to have me deported to Auschwitz, I disappeared from home. But I assured them, that if they arrested my family, as they said, I would come forward - like I did when they took my sister-in-law. Tension lasted three days, but they left my family alone.

In Lwow I stayed with comrades, Polish, and later they helped me go to Warsaw, to the ghetto [18](#). Where else could I go but to the Warsaw ghetto? I had no one anywhere else. Those who helped me had contacts in Warsaw. I had contacts thanks to them and they somehow fixed me up.



I went there by train. It was at the turn of 1941 and 1942. I had no documents, but no one asked who I was and where I was going. I went to the ghetto, to Aunt Chajka. I stayed there, in the same apartment I had lived in during my first stay in Warsaw, on Gesia Street. I stayed in the ghetto until July 1942. Then the huge liquidation action of hundreds of Jews started in Warsaw [19](#).

Then my eldest brother, who was a doctor in Lublin, said, that, allegedly, I got a job at an estate in some village. He wrote to me and asked me to come. I didn't sneak out of the ghetto – I just left. It somehow happened that they didn't stop me. I was stopped later by 'szmalcowniks' [20](#) and they took everything I had. I had 1,000 zloty, which was enough to support me for a few months, and which my brother somehow managed to get. Someone owed him this money and he asked them to give it to me. They left me only with a little money, 20 zloty, to cover the trip... I bought a ticket and went to that village.

But nothing came out of that. My brother Bernard, he tried his best. He wrote to me that he had spoken to some manager of an estate close to Lublin, and that he'd hire me. So I went there, and when I arrived, that manager proposed that I live with him, and he'd take care of me. When I told him that was out of the question, he threw me out immediately. And that was it.

But there were some Jewish boys at that estate, who had escaped from nearby towns and villages. They worked at this estate, picking hop. And I joined them. They were mainly Jewish boys, and I was the only woman. Those boys were very, very well-mannered. I got no such propositions from them like I did from that manager.

We worked there for a couple of months. They didn't pay us, of course, only gave us food...And then, in the fall, when there was nothing more to do there, the boys went back to the nearby villages. They came from there and had friends there. They were hiding in forests, because we kept hearing news about planned liquidation actions of Jews in the region. So I stayed in that estate by myself.

Only one of those boys stayed. He told me that there was a very nice navy-blue policeman [21](#) there in the area, who was looking for a maid - of course the best one would be Jewish, since he wouldn't have to pay her - and that I should go to that policeman's house. I did that. They accepted me and I stayed there for a few months, till next fall.

That Polish policeman's last name was Kaminski. They were decent people, helped others. They took care of the needy. If someone came by, they always gave them food or some old clothing. They never gave money, of course, but they gave food. They shared whatever they were eating.

That lasted until the great frosts in 1942. I think it was in the fall, in November, when my boss, the policeman, went to work and immediately came back. He said there is an order that all Jews have to go to the square in that city at 11 o'clock and that means the liquidation of all the Jews. So it meant I had to disappear... and I disappeared.

Later, after the war, when I felt sure and safe, I went back to that village. I found the wife of that policeman and told her that I owe my life to her husband. And so, if he ever were in some trouble, he could always contact me. I left my address and name. But nobody ever contacted me. He had his own life. He was a policeman and that was the essence of his life – to track down thieves and that's it. He never came back to me on my offer. And I never saw them again.

I picked my things and went to Lublin on foot, which was some 18 kilometers. I had my eldest brother there, Bernard. I stayed with him for a few weeks, until the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto, when the deportations started. [Editor's note: The interviewee most likely means the liquidation of the so-called ghetto B after the main ghetto in Lublin was liquidated. Ghetto B was occupied mainly by Jews working for Germans, and by Jewish doctors. The Jews who lived there were not taken during the liquidation action in 1942 to the extermination camp in Belzec, but moved to the forced labor camp in so-called Majdan Tatarski.].

My brother had some sort of a way to hide there, but only for himself and his wife. I had to take care of myself. I contacted a communist party cell in Lublin. Those were the contacts already made during the war. The party helped me obtain false documents. They were changing names of their people then. My first and last name, Perla Goldwag, was changed to Maria Kowalewska. And it stayed this way. After the war people usually kept the names from the occupation. It changed a bit later, but until today there are people who have those names. I changed my last name one more time, when I got married.

I had to go my own way. I went to Warsaw, where I had comrades from before the war. And they somehow helped. They directed me to one lady who hired me as a maid. I got this address from my friend, Janina Psiserowa, who I worked with in the printing house before the war, taking care of the manager's children. She was Polish, a very decent person. Once I sent two Jewish women who looked Semitic to her, and she helped them. And later I went to her myself. But she couldn't help me herself then. She had a mother-in-law who knew everything about it and who said there is no way she should still be helping Jews.

So Janina wrote a letter to one family. She lied that I lost my documents, was waiting for the new ones and needed a job. I did laundry, washed floors, I did everything there, but without any pay. I never got any money. But I didn't work there for long.

It was a very anti-Semitic family. They were a married couple with two young children and an old mother who used to visit them. Every evening they used to start conversations about the liquidation of Jews and making soap out of Jewish fat [reference to rumors concerning the production of different chemicals from human fat obtained from the bodies of the victims of death camps]. They liked it a lot. They didn't know I was Jewish. They were surprised that 'You're not laughing? You don't find it funny?' and so on. I couldn't take it any more. One Saturday I left the house with no documents, no money, nothing. That was late fall [1943].

I left. I had friends, printers, from the time I worked at the printing house before the war. One of them, a Pole, used to take care of me and was helping me until I worked in Warsaw before the war, and even later, during the war, he kept helping me kindly. During my previous stay in Warsaw I even slept at his place once. So I went to him, I knew his address, but this time he didn't welcome me. He just didn't. He said he's going to another room and sent his wife to talk to me and this wife kicked me out.

Then another printer helped me a lot. His name was Smolenski. We had a very close relationship even before the war. When I left Lwow and went to work as a teacher in a village, the money I was getting I used to divide into three parts – one for my parents, one for me and one for him. He had been seriously wounded during the September Campaign [22](#) and he needed help. Now he could repay his debt.

So after some time of wandering about Warsaw, I went to the partisan forces and that was it. I joined a unit in the forests near Deblin. I remember that we slept in holes dug in the ground. When it comes to food, some of it was bought, because the partisans had some money. Most of the partisans came from that area, so it was easy for them to get and buy something.

Every once in a while we organized various combat actions. I never took a direct part in them, but helped the partisans any way I could. They were a mix: there were Jews, Russians, and Poles.

After a while the Russians went to a different forest, and they wrote to me that they wished I had come with them, because they could use me. But I wasn't able to go with them because I had horrible ulcers all over my body. My daughter still has that letter from those Russians.

I worked like that until 1944. In 1944 the war ended in those areas. [Editor's note: On 3rd January 1944 the Red Army crossed the pre-war boundaries of the Republic of Poland and placed pro-Moscow local government in Lublin]. We returned to Lublin, where life was going back to normal. There was one partisan there, a Pole. His name was Miroslaw Krajewski. He was a communist. We had known each other for over a year then. He helped me a lot then.

This comrade Krajewski, when our group came to Lublin, took care of me and took me to Gomulka [23](#). And Gomulka hired me. Miroslaw was shortly after that killed by Russians, maybe out of jealousy or something... he died horribly, I don't want to talk about it.

I worked as Gomulka's assistant. I was his secretary. I did everything that needed to be done at the moment – wrote down meetings' proceedings, that kind of thing. Initially I was the only person in the secretariat. Then it changed.

They also gave me housing. There was a house where our people lived – I got a room there. Those were hot times. The workday wasn't regulated. It used to happen that I worked nights.

The cooperation with Gomulka was working out very well. Gomulka was a very kind man. He was, however, edgy at times and acted on it. I used to meet the entire Political Office, the entire Central Committee in Lublin. [Editor's note: Mrs. Krych means departments of the temporary communist government - Polish Committee of National Liberation]. Everyone was there, of course. But there was no time for social life. Those were different times.

News about the family was coming in slowly. I knew Mother died in 1941. [Mrs. Krych doesn't remember how she learned about that]. They were taking all Jews out of their houses. They were announcing that all Jews must come forward, and if not... you know what. No one knows where they took Mother. We could speculate, because they used to take people from Lwow to Belzec. But it's just speculations, no one knows for sure.

They didn't catch Dad because he went to work and he wasn't home. I don't remember who told me about Mom's deportation. My sister-in-law was living then, Father was alive. I used to get some news from them. For some time I would get letters from the family in Lwow when I was in Warsaw.

Later there was the final liquidation action. [The Great Action in Lwow ghetto took place from 10th September to 23rd September 1942.] They took everyone. My sister-in-law went to the meeting place. She had a three-year-old boy then, his name was Lucjan. When she was on a train, she wrapped him in a pillow, threw him out of the window and jumped out herself. Many women did

that. But, after she had jumped and was looking for her little boy, he wasn't there. She never found him. It so unfortunately happened to her! She herself survived. I think the communist partisans helped her.

We never heard of how and when our father died, and until this day we don't know what happened to him. Bernard, who was a doctor, was killed. He died in Majdanek [24](#) during that great massacre in February 1943. [Editor's note: The interviewee is actually referring to the so-called "Aktion Erntefest." On 3rd November 1943 about 18,000 Jews from various concentration camps around Lublin were moved and killed in the concentration camp in Majdanek. This was the largest mass execution of all of the extermination camps.]

I was hearing news about the Holocaust rather slowly. When in July 1942 they started taking Jews to Treblinka [25](#), initially nobody in Lwow knew about it. [Editor's note: Jews from Warsaw were taken to Treblinka, Jews from Lwow, like from Lublin, were taken to the camp in Belzec]. The Germans said those who came forward voluntarily would get 1 kilogram of bread and jam, but obviously that turned out to be a lie. Finally, when one boy escaped from there, he told us what was going on there. Everyone found out from him. I didn't believe him at first, but in the end everyone knew what was going on.

There was also news about various pogroms in Poland, during the war and after the war. Now there is a lot of talk about Jedwabne [26](#), but there were more stories like that. During the war, I remember, naturally, the Kielce Pogrom [27](#). Kielce – that was a provocation, horrible provocation. First they accused Jews that they had murdered some Christian child to make matzah. [That was referring to a Christian superstition about Jews murdering Christian children for ritual or medical reasons.] And then it turned out that child went back to his parents and had been at his uncle's. [According to Mrs. Krych the provocation against Jews living in Kielce was an accusation made by Poles living in Kielce that Jews kidnapped the boy. When she talks about the provocation, she does not mean what many Polish historians believe to be true that the provocation was made by the communist government]. Of course, people heard of those things and couldn't be unaffected by them.

Out of my family only my brother Izrael survived the war. After the Germans entered Lwow, many young communists escaped to the Soviet Union. Along with his comrades, my brother went somewhere far, far north. He tried to join Polish units following the Red Army [Kosciuszko Infantry Division] [28](#) and in this way return to Poland. But it wasn't easy for Jews and they didn't accept him. [Editor's note: The number of Jews in the 1st Division was limited in order to maintain the 'Polish character' of the division. In order to join the army Jews had to change their last names to Polish ones.] So he stayed in the Soviet Union and worked somewhere far north.

I helped him come back. I think it was in the year 1945. Since I worked directly for Gomulka, I asked whether I could add my request to find my brother to correspondence of the Union of Polish Patriots, in short ZPP [29](#). I immediately received an answer saying he was alive. Through the ZPP I found out his address and that's how I got him to come back to Warsaw.

After the war Izrael changed his name to Jerzy and took the same last name as mine – Kowalewski. He started to work. He was a reporter. He was a political commentator. At the end he worked for a longer time for Trybuna Ludu [official media publication of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, newspaper with the highest circulation in the Polish People's Republic]. He

died a few months ago [2004].

I stayed in Lublin until the liberation of Warsaw. [Editor's note: On 17th January 1945 the Red Army along with the 1st Division entered Warsaw, which had been destroyed by the Germans and abandoned by both Germans and civilians] Later the entire government went to the capital city. I continued to work for Gomulka for some time.

At the end of 1945 I was moved to a different job. It was also a job for the KC [Central Committee] office. It was the so-called General Department of the Central Committee – administration and so forth. It lasted for quite a long time. I worked there until the 1960s.

After some time I met my husband. His name was Henryk Krych, he was Polish. He also worked for the KC. He worked in the personnel department. He was born in 1914. He was sent to work in Germany during the war. He worked for a 'Bauer' [German: farmer] near Gorzow. [Editor's note: During the war Poles were sent to Germany for forced labor in German plants and on farms.]

I don't remember the date when we got married. We formalized our relationship in 1947, but we had been living together earlier. After a short time, in 1947, we moved to the apartment at 26 Pulawska Street, because that was the house for party officials. It's a beautiful building built before the war.

Our son was born in 1948. He was called Michal, like my younger brother who died in the Warsaw Uprising [30](#). Our daughter was born in 1951. Her name is Malgorzata. But it wasn't a good marriage. We lived together for over ten years, but things weren't working out. This marriage was one big mistake. My husband didn't get along with my son at all. We had to split up. We got a formal divorce [in 1964].

I raised the kids by myself. Later we kept in touch, yes, he used to come... but we weren't close any more. He belonged to the Party almost until he died. A few years before PZPR [31](#) was dissolved, he got sick and retired. He's dead now. When did he die? I don't remember [1990].

When the state of Israel was founded [32](#) we were all very happy. We thought a new chapter in history was opening. A lot of people chose to emigrate. I was tied to Poland, to all things Polish, and wasn't thinking about emigrating. Later my daughter wanted all of us to leave. But my son didn't want to. I couldn't leave him alone. He hadn't begun college yet and he wasn't working.

That 'Jewish note' remained in my daughter. Not in my son. He was a boy scout [during the communist period, the ideology of the scouting movement did not emphasize ethnic identity]. We used to talk about Jews, what it means to be Jewish, Judaism, but he had a different approach. He has got a university degree in mathematics and is working at the Faculty of Mathematics at Warsaw University down to the present day.

Malgorzata has always felt Jewish. Everything Jewish she considered nice and valuable. But back then there weren't very many opportunities to take part in Jewish life. Her friends were mostly Polish. She liked to read and used to read anything she could find about Jews. Even here, before she left the country, she started taking Hebrew at the university. I was teaching her Jewish [Yiddish] a bit then. Until today she buys and reads a lot of Jewish books.

My daughter has always been offended by anti-Semitism although she never experienced it herself. She went to school where there was no anti-Semitism. After she graduated from university – she was 33 years old then – one of her friends from the United States let her know that her boss was looking for someone from Poland to work for him. And she went there. She's been working there since [Dr. Malgorzata Krych is a researcher at the Washington University School of Medicine]. She left in 1984. She met her husband in America. She's very close with him. Her husband is a practicing Jew and they celebrate some of the Jewish holidays.

In the 1960s I began translating Yiddish literature. It was like this: a friend, a Jew [Rozka Lampe, the wife of the well-known communist activist Alfred Lampe] lived next door, and she was assigned to translate 'Historia Bundu' – 'The History of Bund' [Editor's note: a book published by the internal KC PZPR publisher, it wasn't possible to establish the bibliographic details]. Together we translated three volumes. It was a collective work written by members of Bund. I did this still during my work for the KC. I was earning extra money this way, because I wanted to buy a second apartment.

Somehow we finished that translating job. Later, in the 1960s, I left the KC. And when we finished 'The History of Bund' I wrote to an editor of Dolnoslaskie Publishing House, asking if I could do some translating for them. I had to send him a sample of my work. He agreed and I started working for them.

I translated 'Di mishpoche Karnovski' ['The Karnowski Family'] by Israel Singer [33](#) and later a few books written during the uprising in the ghetto, including works by Cywia Lubetkin [1914-1978, an activist of the youth organization 'Dror' in the Warsaw ghetto, a soldier during the ghetto uprising in 1943 and during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, after the war the founder of the 'Fighters of the Ghetto' kibbutz in Israel], 'Zaglada i Powstanie' ('Extermination and Uprising'), and Elie Wiesel [34](#).

After some time the JHI [Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw] [35](#) asked me to translate 'Di Brider Ashkenazi' ['The Brothers Ashkenazi,' a novel by I. J. Singer, considered to be his greatest work]. That was a rather big book. I translated it and they published it. Israel Joshua Singer – that's definitely my favorite author. Not Isaac Singer [36](#), but his brother. He is closer to me, since he deals with social issues.

For example, his book 'Towarzysz Nachman' ['Towarzysz Nachman' is the title of the Polish translation, the book is known to the English reader as 'East of Eden,' original Yiddish title: 'Khaver Nakhman']. That's a novel, a large novel. He, sometime in the 1930s, predicted what would happen – what would happen to communism, he predicted it all. [The book describes the life of a communist activist, Nakhman, prosecuted by the Polish government, who escapes to the Soviet Union believing that the vision of a communist country came true there].

I belonged to the Party until the PZPR was dissolved. Today I don't consider myself a communist. The ideology was good at the beginning, moved a lot of people, young and old. At first I believed everything was heading in the right direction. I wasn't the only one to believe that. I thought there would be no more anti-Semitism, that equal rights, brotherhood would prevail. A lot of young people thought that...

I had this belief for quite some time, until they started turning away from the ideology [their deeds did not correspond with the ideology they proclaimed]. First of all, there were those events where workers were going out on streets and dying. [Mrs. Krych most likely means events in December



1970 when by the order of the communist government workers who went on strike were shot at]. A lot of them died. Then I started thinking how it was. After all that I couldn't believe in communism any more.

What affected me the most? Mainly getting rid of the communists – those best, most devoted. That affected me a lot. The entire leadership of the early 1940s and 1950s, those were very devoted communists, ideologists. It's a great pity they were removed [from the government].

Turning away from the ideology happened progressively. It's hard to tell, but it was happening somehow slowly, naturally. The process began already during the war. People somehow stopped believing, were losing their faith. The March events [37](#) were a surprise, naturally. Gomulka was a huge authority to me, no doubt. I didn't use to think he could take part in such events. We all suffered a lot, of course, and we all condemned it.

There is no communism today. I'm wondering, will it stay this way? One communist reporter wrote after all those events, that it won't stay this way, that communism won't go away without any trace... But is it possible that what used to be could come back? No, I don't think so.

I feel a very strong connection with Judaism. My parents were Jews through and through. I never denied I was Jewish. Never. I learned something because I am Jewish. I know the history of Jews, I know all those horrible events, and I'm not indifferent to it. I was never indifferent.

I didn't cut off contacts with the culture after the war. But everything was happening in Polish then. At home, or among friends, we never talked in any other language but Polish. I had Jewish friends, but they weren't the majority. There were some [Jewish friends] and some [Polish friends].

I kept in touch with Jewish culture through literature. I also belonged to a veterans' organization [Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Persecutions during WWII] [38](#), but now there's nothing in me left to give, and I don't belong to any organization. Same with Jewish magazines. I used to subscribe to Midrasz [Jewish social-cultural magazine published since 1977] and Slowo Żydowskie [Polish for 'Jewish Word,' Jewish bi-weekly magazine published in Polish and Yiddish, first published in 1947 as Folkssztyrne] since they started coming out.

I used to read and keep reading, but it's not the same reading any more... I used to go to various meetings and shows in the Jewish theater. Now I don't attend any of those anymore, because I'm not able to... There's no way, I'm not strong enough.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Hasidism (Hasidic)**

Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

## **2 Meisels Dow Ber (1798-1870)**

An orthodox rabbi from Cracow, later Warsaw, supporter of close Polish-Jewish relations, Polish patriot. He took part in and financed the delivery of weapons for the Polish insurgents during the November Uprising (1830). In 1832 he was given a rabbinical function in Cracow where he remained for 20 years. In 1846 he supported the Cracow Uprising. After Cracow was incorporated into Austria he became a city senator and a delegate to the Austrian Parliament. He supported Jewish claims for equal rights. In 1856 appointed the head rabbi of Warsaw, encouraged residents of Warsaw to participate in patriotic demonstrations. In 1861 he decided to close all synagogues as a gesture of solidarity with Catholic clergy, who closed all Catholic churches after they were desacralized by tsarist Cossacks, dispersing patriotic demonstrations. He was arrested for this and imprisoned by the tsarist authorities. Until the end of his life he remained under police supervision. He was forced to give up public activity, participated in charity work and professional research. Meisels's funeral turned into a mass Polish-Jewish demonstration.

## **3 Liquidation of the ghetto in Lublin**

The process of deporting Jews from the Lublin ghetto began as early as 1941. In early 1942 the ghetto was divided into 2 parts: part A - with a lower standard of living and B - with a higher standard of living. People from the A part of the ghetto were gradually deported. Several days before the great liquidation action of the Lublin ghetto, in March 1942, all Jews employed in the German production plants were registered and resettled to the B part of the ghetto. On 16th March 1942 German and Ukrainian forces set fire to the main streets of ghetto A, forcing the remaining Jews to get out. On 17th March 1942 Jews assembled on the Umschlagplatz in Lublin were deported to the camp in Belzec. Residents of Ghetto B were soon resettled in the small ghetto in so-called Majdan Tatarski. Within 6 months most of them were deported to the extermination camp in Majdanek and the ghetto in Piaski.

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

The Polonization of first and last names in the 19th century was mostly an effect and a symptom of assimilation. Representatives of the so-called assimilatory trend changed their names or added a Polish element to the name. Later, this tendency was not restricted to the assimilatory circle. In the interwar period Jews often had two names: the Jewish name (in the Hebrew or Yiddish version), the official name, written down on the birth certificate and the Polish name, used in everyday contacts with Poles, but also among family. The story of the Polish-Jewish historian Schiper is an interesting case of the variety of names used by Polish Jews. Schiper published his works under three different names: Izaak, Icchak and Ignacy. After WWII many Jews who survived the Holocaust in hiding under false names never returned to their pre-war names. Legal regulations after the war enabled this procedure. Such a situation was caused by the lack of a feeling of security and post-war trauma, which showed itself in breaking off ties with one's group. Another reason for the Polonization of names after WWII was the pressure exerted by the communist authorities on Jews - members of the communist party and employed in the party apparatus.

## **5 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.

## **6 Haint (Yid**

: Today): 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.

## **7 Agudat Israel in Poland, [Hebrew, Israelite Union]**

A worldwide organization of orthodox Jews, founded in 1912 in Katowice. The goal of Agudat Israel was the preservation of the separateness of Jews and fighting assimilation. The organization existed until 1939 (informally also in the period 1945-1949). It was one of the strongest Jewish parties in the 2nd Republic of Poland, with the largest representation in the Polish Parliament. One of the founders and the main activist was tzaddik Abraham Alter from Gora Kalwaria, which assured Agudat Israel the support of Polish Hasidim. The goals were the protection of Judaism, the founding of religious schools, the protection of the civil rights of Jews and broadly understood social-charity work.

## **8 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.

## **9 Mickiewicz, Adam (1798-1855)**

Often regarded as the greatest Polish poet. As a student he was arrested for nationalist activities by the tsarist police in 1823. In 1829 he managed to emigrate to France and worked as professor of literature at different universities. During the 1848 revolution in France and the Crimean War he attempted to organize legions for the Polish cause. Mickiewicz's poetry gave international stature to Polish literature. His powerful verse expressed a romantic view of the soul and the mysteries of life, often employing Polish folk themes.

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

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

of the country. After 1924, as in the rest of the international communist movement, ultra-revolutionary tendencies developed. From 1929 the KPP held the stance that the conditions were right for the creation by revolution of a Polish Republic of Soviets with a system based on the Soviet model, and advocated 'social fascism' and 'peasant fascism.' In 1935 on the initiative of Stalin, the KPP wrought further changes in its program (recognizing the existence of the II Polish Republic and its political system). In 1919 the KPP numbered some 7,000-8,000 members, and in 1934 around 10,000 (37 percent peasants), with a majority of Jews, Belarusians and Ukrainians. In 1937 Stalin took the decision to liquidate the KPP; the majority of its leaders were arrested and executed in the USSR, and in 1939 the party was finally liquidated on the charge that it had been taken over by provocateurs and spies.

## **11 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **12 German Invasion of Poland**

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

## **13 Peretz, Isaac Leib (1852-1915)**

Author and poet writing in Yiddish, one of the fathers and central figures of modern Yiddish literature, researcher of Jewish folklore. Born in Zamosc, he had both a religious and a secular education (he took courses in bookkeeping and studied law in Warsaw). Initially he wrote in Polish and Hebrew. His debut [in Yiddish] is considered to be the poem Monish, (1888, Di yidishe Folksbibliotek). From 1890 he lived in Warsaw. Peretz was an advocate of Yiddishism, and attended a conference on the subject of the Yiddish language in Jewish culture held in Czernowitz (1908). His most widely read works are his novellas, which he wrote at first in the positivist style and later in the modernist vein. In his work he often used folk motifs from the culture of Eastern European Jews (Khasidish, 1908). His best known works include Hurban beit tzaddik (The Ruin of the Tzaddik's

House, 1903), Di Goldene Keyt (The Golden Chain, 1906). During World War I he was involved in bringing help to the victims of war. He died of a heart attack.

#### **14 Epstein, Jozef (1916-1944)**

Also known as Colonel Gilles, originally from Zamosc, one of the leaders of the French resistance movement during WWII. Before the war a member of the Communist Party of Poland. In 1931 deported from Poland for communist activity. In 1936 he participated in the civil war in Spain. Since 1941 involved in the activity of the communist resistance group Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP). Most probably as a result of betrayal, arrested on 11th April 1944 and shot to death by the Germans in Paris.

#### **15 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)**

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

#### **16 Lwow Ghetto**

Created following an order of the German administrative authorities issued on 8th November 1941. All Jews living in Lwow, that is approx. 120,000 people, were resettled to the ghetto. During a selection which was conducted by the German authorities most elderly and sick persons were shot to death before the ghetto was formally created. Many Jews were employed in workshops producing equipment for the Wehrmacht or the Luftwaffe. Some of them were also employed in the German administration outside of the ghetto. Since March 1941 the Germans imprisoned Jews in the Janowska forced labor camp and also deported them to the extermination camp in Belzec. Some residents died during mass street executions in the area of the ghetto called Piaski. The Great Liquidation Action in the Lwow ghetto lasted from 10th to 23rd August 1942. It is estimated that some 40,000 Jews were deported to the Belzec extermination camp. Some young men were sent to the Janowska forced labor camp. Approx. 800 people were taken to the Auschwitz extermination camp.

#### **17 Capturing of Lwow**

On 30th June 1941 the German forces captured Lwow, which had been under Soviet occupation. This was part of the 'Barbarossa' operation, initiated on 22nd June 1941, leading to the overtaking by the 2nd Reich of the area of the Soviet Union and allied republics. The quick capturing of the Ukrainian Soviet People's Republic was facilitated by the collaboration of Ukrainians, who treated the Germans as liberators from the soviet terror and forced collectivization.

#### **18 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.

### **19 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).

### **20 Szmalcownik**

Polish slang word from the period of the German occupation (derived from the German word 'Schmalz', meaning lard), referring to a person blackmailing and denouncing Jews in hiding. Szmalcowniks operated in all larger cities, in particular following the liquidation of the ghettos, when Jews who had evaded deportation attempted to survive in hiding. In Warsaw they often formed organized groups that prowled around the ghetto exists. They picked out their victims by subtle signs (e.g. lowered, frightened eyes, timid behavior), eccentric clothing (e.g. the lack of the fur collar so widespread at the time, or wearing winter clothes in summer), way of speaking, etc. Victims so selected were threatened with denunciation to the Germans; blackmail could be an isolated event or be repeated until the victim's financial resources ran out. The Polish underground attempted to combat the szmalcowniks but in vain. To this day the crimes of the szmalcowniks are not entirely investigated and accounted for.

### **21 Navy-Blue Police, or Polish Police of the General Governorship**

The name of the communal police which operated between 1939 and 1945 in the districts of the General Governorship. Navy-Blue police was subordinate to the order police (so-called Orpo, Ordnungspolizei). Members were forcibly employed officers of the pre-war Polish state police. Navy-Blue Policemen participated, for example, in deportations of residents, in suppressing the 'black market,' in isolating Jews in ghettos. Some members participated in cells of the underground state and passed on information about the functioning of the German forces.

### **22 September Campaign 1939**

Armed struggle in defense of Poland's independence from 1st September to 6th October 1939 against German and, from 17th September, also Soviet aggression; the start of World War II. The German plan of aggression ('Fall Weiss') assumed all-out, lightning warfare (Blitzkrieg). The Polish plan of defense planned engagement of battle in the border region (a length of some 1,600 km), and then organization of resistance further inside the country along subsequent lines of defense



(chiefly along the Narew, Vistula and San) until an allied (French and British) offensive on the western front. Poland's armed forces, commanded by the Supreme Commander, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, numbered some 1 m soldiers. Poland defended itself in isolation; on 3rd September Britain and France declared war on Germany, yet did not undertake offensive action on a larger scale. Following a battle on the border the main Polish line of defense was broken, and the Polish forces retreated in battles on the Vistula and the San. On 8th September, the German army reached Warsaw, and on 12th September Lvov. From 14th-16th September the Germans closed their ring on the Bug. On 9th September Polish divisions commanded by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba went into battle with the Germans on the Bzura, but after initial successes were surrounded and largely smashed (by 22nd September), although some of the troops managed to get to Warsaw. Defense was continued by isolated centers of resistance, where the civilian population cooperated with the army in defense. On 17th September Soviet forces numbering more than 800,000 men crossed Poland's eastern border, broke through the defense of the Polish forces and advanced nearly as far as the Narew-Bug-Vistula-San line. In the night of 17th-18th September the president of Poland, the government and the Supreme Commander crossed the Polish-Romanian border and were interned. Lvov capitulated on 22nd September (surrendered to Soviet units), Warsaw on 28th September, Modlin on 29th September, and Hel on 2nd October.

### **23 Wladyslaw Gomulka (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 he was accused of so-called rightist-nationalist tendencies. As a consequence, he was imprisoned in 1951 and removed from the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). He was released in 1954 as a national hero, patriot and 'Polish' communist. From 21st 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. He was responsible for anti-Semitic repressions in March 1968 (as a result of which over 20,000 were forced to leave Poland) and the use of force against participants in the workers' revolt of December 1970. On 20th 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.

### **24 Majdanek concentration camp**

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

evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

## **25 Treblinka**

Village in Poland's Mazovia region, site of two camps. The first was a penal labor camp, established in 1941 and operating until 1944. The second, known as Treblinka II, functioned in the period 1942-43 and was a death camp. Prisoners in the former worked in Treblinka II. In the second camp a ramp and a mock-up of a railway station were built, which prevented the victims from realizing what awaited them until just in front of the entrance to the gas chamber. The camp covered an area of 13.5 hectares. It was bounded by a 3-m high barbed wire fence interwoven densely with pine branches to screen what was going on inside. The whole process of exterminating a transport from arrival in the camp to removal of the corpses from the gas chamber took around 2 hours. Several transports arrived daily. In the 13 months of the extermination camp's existence the Germans gassed some 750,000-800,000 Jews. Those taken to Treblinka included Warsaw Jews during the so-called 'Grossaktion' [great liquidation campaign] in the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942. In addition to Polish Jews, Jews from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia and the USSR were also killed in Treblinka. In the spring of 1943 the Germans gradually began to liquidate the camp. On 2nd August 1943 an uprising broke out there with the aim of enabling some 200 people to escape. The majority died.

## **26 Jedwabne**

Town in north-eastern Poland. On 10th July 1941 900 Jews were burned alive there. Until recently the official historiography maintained that the Germans were the perpetrators of this act. In 2000, however, Tomasz Gross published a book called 'Neighbors,' in which he indicted Poles as the perpetrators of the Jedwabne massacre. This book sparked off a discussion that embroiled academics, politicians and the media alike. The case was also investigated by the Institute for National Remembrance. This was the second such serious debate on Polish involvement in the extermination of the Jews. The Jedwabne debate attempted to establish the number of Jews murdered, to define the nature of the incident (pogrom or Holocaust), and to point out the direct perpetrators and initiators of the crime.

## **27 Kielce Pogrom**

On 4th July 1946 the alleged kidnapping of a Polish boy led to a pogrom in which 42 people were killed and over 40 wounded. The pogrom also prompted other anti-Jewish incidents in Kielce region. These events caused mass emigrations of Jews to Israel and other countries.

## **28 The 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division**

Tactical grouping formed in the USSR from May 1943. The victory at Stalingrad and the gradual assumption of the strategic initiative by the Red Army strengthened Stalin's position in the anti-fascist coalition and enabled him to exert increasing influence on the issue of Poland. In April 1943, following the public announcement by the Germans of their discovery of mass graves at Katyn, Stalin broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile and using the Poles in the USSR, began openly to build up a political base (the Union of Polish Patriots) and an army: the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division numbered some 11,000 soldiers and was commanded first by General

Zygmunt Berling (1943-44), and subsequently by the Soviet General Bewziuk (1944-45). In August 1943 the division was incorporated into the 1st Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, and from March 1944 was part of the Polish Army in the USSR. The 1st Division fought at Lenino on 12-13 October 1943, and in Praga in September 1944. In January 1945 it marched into Warsaw, and in April-May 1945 it took part in the capture of Berlin. After the war it became part of the Polish Army.

### **29 Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP)**

Political organization founded in March 1943 by Polish communists in the USSR. It served Stalin's policy with regard to the Polish question. The ZPP drew up the terms on which the communists took power in post-war Poland. It developed its range of activities more fully after the Soviet authorities broke off diplomatic contact with the government of the Republic of Poland in exile (Apr. 1943). The upper ranks of the ZPP were dominated by communists (from Jan. 1944 concentrated in the Central Bureau of Polish Communists), who did not reveal the organization's long-term aims. The ZPP propagated slogans such as armed combat against the Germans, alliance with the USSR, parliamentary democracy and moderate social and economic reforms in post-war Poland, and redefinition of Poland's eastern border. It considered the ruling bodies of the Republic of Poland in exile to be illegal. It conducted propaganda campaigns (its press organ was called 'Wolna Polska' - Free Poland), and organized community care and education and cultural activities. From May 1943 it co-operated in the organization of the First Kosciuszko Infantry Division, and later the Polish Army in the USSR (1944). In July 1944, the ZPP was formally subordinated to the National Council and participated in the formation of the Polish Committee for National Liberation. From 1944-46, the ZPP resettled Poles and Jews from the USSR to Poland. It was dissolved in August 1946.

### **30 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.

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

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

### **32 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to

the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

### **33 Singer, Israel Joshua (1893-1944)**

Yiddish novelist, dramatist and journalist. Elder brother of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Born in Bilgoraj, Poland, he lived in Warsaw and Kiev before emigrating to America in 1933. Well known as a writer of 'family sagas,' foremost among them 'Di Brider Ashkenazi' (The Brothers Ashkenazi, 1936), a novel set in Jewish Lodz at the time of the expansion of the textile industry. Other works include 'Nay-Rusland' (1928), 'Yoshe Kalb' (1932), and 'Khaver Nakhman' (1938). He wrote for the New York daily 'Forward' under the pseudonym G. Kuper.

### **34 Wiesel, Eliezer (commonly known as Elie) (born 1928)**

World-renowned novelist, philosopher, humanitarian and political activist. He is the author of over forty books. In 1986, Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Wiesel teaches at Boston University and serves as the Chairman of The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity.

### **35 The Jewish Historical Institute [Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (ZIH)]**

Warsaw-based academic institution devoted to researching the history and culture of Polish Jews. Founded in 1947 from the Central Jewish Historical Committee, an arm of the Central Committee for Polish Jews. ZIH houses an archive center and library whose stocks include the books salvaged from the libraries of the Templum Synagogue and the Institute of Judaistica, and the documents comprising the Ringelblum Archive. ZIH also has exhibition rooms where its collection of liturgical items and Jewish painting are on display, and an exhibition dedicated to the Warsaw ghetto. Initially the institute devoted its research activities solely to the Holocaust, but over the last dozen or so years it has broadened the scope of its historical and cultural work. In 1993 ZIH was brought under the auspices of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. It publishes the Jewish Historical Institute Quarterly.

### **36 Singer, Isaac Bashevis (1904-1991)**

Yiddish novelist, short-story writer and journalist. Born in Poland, Singer received a traditional rabbinical education but opted for the life of a writer instead. He emigrated to the US in 1935, where he wrote for the New York-based The Jewish Daily Forward. Many of his novellas, such as Satan in Goray (1935) and The Slave (1962), are set in the Poland of the past. One of his best-known works, The Family Moskat (1950), he deals with the decline of Jewish values in Warsaw before World War II. Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978.

### **37 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.

### **38 The Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Prosecutions during World War II (Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II wojnie)**

An organization of Jewish war veterans, who had taken part in armed struggle against Nazi Germany, and were victims of Holocaust persecution. The organization was founded in 1991. It has 13 sections throughout Poland, and 150 members. Its aims include providing help to Jews who were victimized during the war and spreading knowledge about the struggle and victimization of Jews during WWII. The Association established the Medal of the 50th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is granted to persons who have made important contributions to Polish-Jewish life and dialogue.