

# Ludwik Krasucki

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Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Marta Janczewska

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*I was interviewing Mr. Ludwik Krasucki, Chairman of the Association of Jewish Combatants and Casualties in World War II, in his apartment situated in an exclusive area of Warsaw. Our discussion took place in his study filled with books, photographs and other mementoes. My host told his story with color and volubility, interspersed with many anecdotes. The story of Ludwik Krasucki's life was not just the story of an individual, but first of all a record of the fate of a large group of Warsaw's Jews – an enlightened, wealthy intelligentsia steeped at once in two traditions – the Polish and the Jewish. I met Mr. Krasucki for the last time on 10th May 2004. Although he was not feeling well, he was full of optimism and confidence in the future. As we parted he quipped: 'Wisniewski's already knocking my coffin together, but I'm not going to die for his pleasure!' Ludwik Krasucki passed away on 3rd August 2004.*



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## • My family background

I was born in Warsaw in 1925. My parents came from two different social groups, both typical of prewar Jewish Warsaw and prewar Poland.

To be precise, my mother's family, the Krasucki family, was a venerable, well-off Warsaw family, descended from and linked to a long line of prominent figures in the Jewish community.

My grandfather Naum alias Nikodem Krasucki was a descendant of the first Rabbi of Warsaw, whose beautiful tomb still stands in the Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw.

That ancestor of my grandfather – Rabbi Shlomo Szlajman (Zalman) Lipszyc, who was born in 1765 in Poznan and died in 1839 in Warsaw – served as a rabbi in Warsaw from 1819.

He was the first Rabbi of Warsaw, as it was only then that a rabbi for the entire city of Warsaw was appointed. At that time, the city became capital of the Congress Kingdom [1](#), following the demise

of the Duchy of Warsaw [2](#) and the final defeat of Napoleon.

My great-great-great-grandfather is the author of the well-known book 'Chemdat Shlomo' [Splendor of Shlomo, a book of religious writings] which has seen several re-editions, most recently in Israel in 1961.

The memory of Rabbi Lipszyc was very much alive in the family. He was a man of patriotic, pro-Polish convictions – which was a source of pride for the family.

Thus, the Krasuckis have been a family of writers for generations. It was a family of Jewish intellectuals, people who traditionally concerned themselves with religious inquiry and philosophy.

I must say, however, that they weren't Orthodox in their outlook. On my mother's side of the family there had never been a single Orthodox Jew. They were representatives of the Jewish Enlightenment.

My grandparents from Mother's side got married around 1892. My mother's mother – Cyla alias Cecylia Krasucka, nee Schoenfeld, was born about 1870 in Hamburg and died in the Warsaw Ghetto [3](#), probably in 1942.

Grandma came from a prosperous Jewish family from Lowicz or the environs of that town, which is on the Western fringes of the Mazovia region. The family business was processing industry. They owned flourmills and distilleries as early as in the 18th century.

At that time, grain was exported to America via Germany. In the 1830s my grandma's father, that is my great-grandfather, decided to move to Hamburg to sell grain and flour to America without German intermediaries. In this way the Schoenfelds acquired a vast fortune.

My grandma was also born there as 'Fraeulein' Schoenfeld. Having made their fortune, the Schoenfelds returned to Warsaw. When the family was living in Germany, my grandma resolved to get a medical degree.

And in fact, she was already well advanced in her medical studies when she had to interrupt them because of her family's return to Warsaw.

While she didn't finish university in Germany, she nevertheless came back to Poland convinced that for the Jews there was nothing better than Germany and that no good could come to Poland from the East.

My mother also adopted those views of hers. That was the cause of the incredible tragedy Grandma experienced on hearing the news about Hitler and developments in Germany, which I remember witnessing as an already reflective teenager.

She declared that such a thing was impossible; she would read the papers and burst into tears. She couldn't comprehend what was going on over there. Couldn't accept the facts. I don't know if Grandma had any siblings; anyhow, she inherited the Schoenfeld fortune.

My mother's father, Naum alias Nikodem Krasucki, was born around 1868 in Warsaw and was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. Grandpa was a rather short, very handsome man with a small beard.

He had studied law but never graduated: he probably went to university in Poznan for a while. He was fluent in Polish, Yiddish and Russian, as he was born in Russia; he had an excellent command of German and some knowledge of French, as well as Hebrew, as he had naturally received, as was traditional in that family, a sound religious education. He was able to read books in Hebrew without difficulty.

Among the newspapers that could be found in his home – and I used to browse through them, especially when there were many sporting events on – were: *Gazeta Polska* [The Polish Newspaper, a daily published in Warsaw in 1929-1939, organ of Pilsudski's party] and *Nasz Przegląd* [Our Review, a Polish-language Jewish daily published in Warsaw in 1929-1939] – an excellent, splendid newspaper, perhaps the best Polish Jewish paper of the time.

Next, he bought some newspaper written in Yiddish, which, I believe, was a Bund [4](#) paper. That reflected Grandpa's philosophy that one should listen to different opinions. Grandpa had a huge library, filled with religious and secular works.

He didn't belong to any political party, but held centrist views; he considered Pilsudski [5](#) – to be the man in Poland in whom the Jews should put their hopes.

Grandpa and Grandma Krasucki were engaged in some business, but unfortunately I don't know any details about it; in any case, theirs was a very wealthy bourgeois family.

Incidentally, their financial status had suffered somewhat due to Grandma's pro-German sympathies. Namely, towards the end of World War I Grandma talked Grandpa into believing that the Germans wouldn't lose the war.

The upshot was that they kept a part of their fortune in German marks, and that investment subsequently lost its value. They were still very wealthy, but in childhood I heard them saying that if it hadn't been for the war, they would have been really rich!

Theirs was a very wealthy home. Suffice it to say that they were close friends of the Szereszewski family, the owners of the largest banking house in Warsaw [Szereszewskis – before WWII a well known Jewish family of manufacturers and merchants in Warsaw; in 1864 Dawid Mose Szereszewski established a very popular credit bank, which was in operation until 1939].

Grandpa and Grandma Krasucki lived in the most prestigious part of Warsaw – on the corner of Nowowiejska and Sluzewska Streets. Nowowiejska was an almost fairy-tale street of the Warsaw of the time – beautiful tenement buildings.

My grandparents had a six-bedroom apartment on the third floor, which also included a maid's room, a huge kitchen, and a bathroom. Many years had to pass before I learnt to appreciate it. The apartment was fitted with beautiful furniture, there was a grand piano, and fine paintings hung on the walls.

When I would drop in to gobble down my 'befshytychek' [literally 'little steak tartare'], which Grandma used to prepare for me, I ate it with exquisite cutlery; when the family sat down around a large expandable table, the table was set with the best china.

I used to drop by my grandparents' to plunk around on their grand piano. For a time, one of the rooms was rented by Leon Kruczkowski, the writer, who liked me very much and used to lend me books [Kruczkowski, Leon (1900-1962): Polish left-wing writer].

The Krasuckis were people who had been brought up and remained immersed in the Jewish tradition, but they were open-minded in their attachment. Both dressed in the European style; Grandma didn't wear a wig. I talked with them in Polish, whereas Grandpa spoke to Grandma in Yiddish, mostly when they didn't want me to understand their conversation.

When eventually I was able to learn German, which I did with incredible speed, they continued to believe that I couldn't understand them while in fact I frequently understood what they were talking about, thanks to my knowledge of German.

Oftentimes I would be mystified as to why they didn't want me to hear them speaking, as they weren't discussing anything particularly horrifying. Grandma spoke excellent German, like a native; her Polish was also very good, but it grew richer by the year, which means that her Polish was 'in statu nascendi'[coming to being], that she was in the process of learning it. She spoke a slightly different variant of Yiddish, since I remember that during their conversations Grandpa kept uttering a kind of 'eh' sound, and Grandma had to repeat what she had just said a second time.

In terms of myself, Grandpa Krasucki had a very strong influence on the formation of my views; I loved him very much and he was very good with me. Grandma was warm-hearted and good, but she wasn't a figure of authority in my eyes, whereas Grandpa represented the genuine intellectual authority for me.

In my family, it was my grandpa who provided, in various ways, my link to the Jewish religion, and more precisely to its customs. He considered religious issues, Talmudic aspects, less important, but believed that the Jewish religion consisted of a set of customs that every Jew should respect and observe.

Grandpa used to tell me frequently that the most important thing was to believe in and act in accordance with God's commandments and to respect Jewish tradition because it represents the customs of our people that unite and distinguish it.

On the other hand, he didn't attach much significance to what I might call religious zeal or exactitude, even though on occasion I did see Grandpa praying dressed in a tallit.

I also recall that he used to go to the synagogue, though I'm not sure if he did that every Friday. And it was Grandpa who had bought that engrossing book on the history of the Jews, in which I read with bated breath about Moses, the walls of Jericho, all the kings, etc.

I remember, too, that it was Grandpa Krasucki who took me to a religious service on the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur]. The shul we went to served a section of the city, which didn't have many Jewish inhabitants.

The prayer house stood in the courtyard of one of the houses on Mokotowska Street, on the odd-number side; it seems that the tenement belonged to the Erbsztajns, a well-known Jewish family.

I felt very proud to be there with my grandpa, for he knew many of those present and many people knew him; as Grandpa was greeting everybody, I found it fascinating: here was some distinguished professor from Warsaw University, there an owner of twelve tenements, next was some guy about whom the newspapers had written that he had committed some huge fraud but he wouldn't let them lock him up.

That was the richness of prewar life. As thinking, sensitive child, I took the Day of Atonement seriously, of course; I knew that it was a day for self-reflection and examination of my relationship to God. The purpose of the Day of Atonement is to recognize one's own faults.

Regarding kosher food, two kitchens were kept simultaneously at my grandparents'. Namely, Grandpa ate kosher, and everyone in the household knew which dishes were milk-based and which contained meat; there were two types of plates – I remember all of that.

On holidays, everything was done in accordance with Jewish tradition, of course. But when I showed up there after playing basketball, or after a game of tennis as was the case just before the war, just to see Grandma and Grandpa, and, while there, to plunk around on the grand piano or sometimes to play chess with Grandpa, then Grandpa would eat his kosher food while I got my rare 'befshytychek', because Grandma believed that a rare 'befshytychek' was an absolute must for her boy, and that wasn't kosher.

In other words, in that household a kosher kitchen was kept for Grandma and Grandpa, and all the guests that came to visit them on holidays or on other such occasions participated in it, but other than that, when we called on them, we ate non-kosher.

Helenka, the maid at Grandparents' house, always made sure that Grandpa had meals prepared in accordance with the law, but when I or any of my cousins came, then her only concern was to make the food tasty and serve it fast, as we were always in a hurry.

With respect to kosher food, I recall the following incident: Mom took me to a summer vacation place in Lesna Podkowa [a small village near Warsaw, a popular vacation spot of middle class families in the prewar period]; Dad would come up to see us on Saturday afternoon, and Grandma Krasucki also came on occasion.

Grandma used to arrive laden with packages in order to bring some goodies for her poor little Ludwik. Father would get mad and try to explain that we weren't starving, after all, etc., and then he would ostentatiously invite everybody to a restaurant.

In Lesna Podkowa, the regular restaurant was good, whereas the Jewish kosher one was, pardon the expression, a sorry excuse for a restaurant.

Therefore, Father and Grandma held the following frank discussion: 'Mom, if you insist on eating kosher, then we will go to the kosher place, but if we are to enjoy our meal, then let's go to the non-kosher restaurant.' Grandma's reply was: 'you know what, we won't tell Grandpa, let's go to the good restaurant.'

Grandpa and Grandma Krasucki had seven children. At the time when I was born and then started to become acquainted with the family, two of my grandparents' children, their eldest and middle sons, were already dead.

The eldest son, Emmanuel, was a very distinguished engineer who had had a successful career; having completed a technical degree course in Zurich, he later joined the faculty of Zurich Technical University.

He was a very eminent mechanical engineer who lectured on issues to do with various types of engines, and designed several types of engines himself. Regrettably, his designs were subsequently used by the Germans to build submarines during World War I – a fact of which I'm not proud.

My mom's second brother, Nehemiasz, was an outstanding draughtsman. He, unfortunately, led quite a colorful lifestyle and ended up with tuberculosis. For the family, that was a real tragedy, as he was very much liked and loved by everybody.

My mom always claimed that he was my grandma's favorite son. Just before the start of World War I, he was sent as a tuberculosis patient to his elder brother, who had already become a lecturer at Zurich Polytechnic.

Unfortunately, just as in Thomas Mann's 'Magic Mountain', he was treated for his lung disease in Switzerland and died from tuberculosis soon after the end of World War I.

My mom was the eldest daughter. She graduated from the music conservatory in Warsaw and ought to have become a professional pianist, but suffered from stage fright and got so nervous in front of an audience that she never managed to give a decent performance.

Thus, she ended up as a music teacher. Because she graduated from the conservatory with a good reputation, she taught at one of the music high schools in addition to giving private lessons.

As our living conditions weren't particularly representative, she gave her lessons in Grandma and Grandpa's apartment.

My mother's sister Felicja was to have been a physician. Unfortunately, her medical studies were interrupted by her marriage. However, her husband Rudolf Wielburski, a stockbroker, was very successful, so she didn't do badly by marrying him.

The Wielburskis had two sons, Julian and Edward, who were older than me. The third sister, Roza, had some pedagogical education, but she was a teacher only incidentally, and primarily a housewife.

Later on, she married Hersz Borowski. The Borowskis had a son, Aleksander, who was younger than me. The youngest sister – Brandla, or Auntie Bronia, was a lovely girl.

As a matter of fact, I was on friendly terms with her as she was the youngest of them all. Bronia was a brilliant artist. When she made a set of puppets that were exhibited at the Paris Expo world fair in 1936 or 1937, the entire family took pride in her.

Everybody was there: Chaplin and Greta Garbo, political leaders, Pilsudski, and so on – an entire row of wonderful puppets, which received very good press. Bronia belonged to the jazz generation, frequented cafés and met various people.

In the end, before the war she married a nice, wealthy young man whose last name was Wrobel.



Her husband was in the automobile accessory business. By chance, in that family everyone had Polish surnames; of the Krasucki girls, one married a Wielburski, another a Borowski, and the third a Wrobel. All of them were Jews, of course. My mom was the only one to marry a man with a Jewish last name, Jakub Kaferman.

Mom also had another brother, Izrael alias Jerzy. He was one of my childhood heroes. Uncle Jerzy worked at the Szereszewskis' bank. He was a sporty type, a very handsome man. He played tennis and took me to important matches and other sporting events.

I don't know whether my grandparents had any siblings. There must have been some other family, as there were also some other Krasuckis and other Schoenfelds.

The intellectual and literary predispositions of the family are attested by the fact that my aunt Janina Zawisza-Krasucka was a famous translator, who, before the war, translated 'Anne of Green Gables' and all the other books from that series [by Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942)]. There was also a Doctor Krasucka - a left-wing social activist. Unfortunately, I don't know how we were related.

My mother's entire family, her parents and siblings, together with their families, were killed during War World II. They were all in the Warsaw ghetto. I've never found out whether they died in the ghetto or were murdered in Treblinka [6](#) extermination camp.

My father came from a different social background than my mom. Father's family had Litvak roots [7](#); they came from the Vitebsk region. The eldest son of that family to receive an education was my grandpa, Chaim Kaferman, born between 1868 and 1870 in Homel.

He too was a very handsome man, but his beard was much longer than Grandpa Krasucki's. Unfortunately, I only heard about Grandpa Kaferman from others as he had died from a heart attack in 1924, or one year before I was born.

Grandpa Kaferman had been, first in Lublin, and subsequently in Warsaw, a representative of a large Russian company, 'Three Anchors - Gubkin & Kuznetsov,' tea merchants.

He had a secondary education, but I recall, somewhat vaguely, that it was said that the company had sent Grandpa abroad for a year, probably to Germany, to learn how to do business European style.

Grandpa was promoted steadily up through the firm, so that prior to his death he was its representative for the whole of Poland. Anyway, after the October Revolution the owner of the company, Mr. Sokolnicki, escaped from Russia and settled in Milanowek near Warsaw, and it was for him that Grandpa continued to work.

In 1893 or 1894 Grandpa married in Lublin a native of that town, Hena Roter [1870-1942]. Grandpa Chaim spoke fluent Russian and German; he spoke Yiddish with his wife, and with his children - Yiddish or Polish. Grandma Hena could speak Polish, to be sure, but with a strong Yiddish accent.

Right before World War I the family moved to Warsaw. The financial position of the Kaferman family, while by no means bad, was nevertheless quite different from that of the Krasuckis. The Kafermans belonged to the lower middle class.

Especially after the death of Grandpa, for Grandma it was a struggle to make ends meet as she found herself alone with a bunch of kids. The Kaferman family lived on Ciepla Street, close to the intersection with Twarda Street; that is, on the edge of the northern district of the city.

[The northern section of Warsaw was poor and inhabited mostly by Jews.] The family had to be concerned with keeping their heads above water; in that social environment Yiddish was heard more frequently.

Grandma Kaferman was a charming, rather short lady, who was very good and warmhearted towards me. She managed the household. Her apartment wasn't far from my school and I used to drop by frequently for Sabbath dinner.

It is with Grandma's apartment that I associate traditional Jewish holidays and traditional Sabbath dinners. Grandma was more religious, but she didn't wear a wig. She would bless the candles, the entire family would sit down around the table; Grandma's sons had their heads covered – something that wasn't required from me.

One of my father's brothers would say what was supposed to be said on the occasion. He was very religious and went to the synagogue every Friday.

If I were to describe my own point of view on this matter, I would say that I understood that I was a Jew and that the holidays and the Sabbath represented tradition, but in my mind it was all very loosely connected with the issue of religious beliefs.

### • Growing up

I was a boy and came under the authority of my parents, especially that of my father, and Grandma didn't dare to actively shape my religious views.

Grandma was a great cook. If my own mom was a dunce in culinary matters, Grandma Kaferman was a genius. The food she served was incredibly delicious. To this very day I remember her Jewish-style goose and caviar, cholent, her fantastic carp, a meat-based dish, which was called 'shalei moostet' [shelakhmones], and more.

Grandma didn't have a servant in the house, but there were her daughters, my aunts, who were very good; they had jobs and helped to keep house.

The eldest son in the family was my father, Jakub Janusz. One of the daughters, Chawa, or Ewa, who was his elder, married a Mr. Lewin and moved to Cracow. Next came a whole galaxy of sisters.

The youngest girl and another slightly older sister were the only ones who survived, stayed alive through the Holocaust, in the following way: in 1936 Wonia married a Mr. Richter, who had emigrated to Palestine previously and then come to Warsaw in the hope of getting married here; he met Wonia and together they left for Palestine.

My father's youngest sister, Lucja, married a Mr. Margulies; they both survived the war in Siberia, and immigrated to Palestine in 1948. Besides those two sisters, there was Aunt Natalia, Aunt Jozefa, and Aunt Pola, who married a Mr. Blumenkopf.



Their daughter – Dzidka or Jadwiga Blumenkopf – was in the ghetto in Korczak’s [8](#) orphanage and died with the rest of the orphanage. In addition to those sisters, my father had two younger brothers: Jozef and Tadeusz.

All of them were killed in the Warsaw ghetto, with the exception of the Richters and the Margulies.

My father, Jakub Janusz Kaferman, was born in June 1897 in Lublin, and went to a Polish gymnasium [grammar school] there. As a good student, he was given a scholarship, so that when the family moved from Lublin to Warsaw, my father stayed behind in Lublin to finish school in order not to lose his scholarship.

He came to Warsaw only after getting his high-school diploma, and then started to study chemistry at Warsaw University. Father was a mad PPS activist [9](#), had the typical political traits of a PPS activist, meaning that his views were strongly leftist in the social sense, he was very much in favor of Polish independence, and thought the Bolsheviks were madmen – at once a staunch leftist and an anti-bolshevist.

In 1918, my father and his fellow university students were disarming Germans, and as a student of Warsaw University, he took part in the 1920 war [see Polish-Soviet War] [10](#).

He was wounded in the Battle of Warsaw [11](#), as a second lieutenant in the famous, the legendary 36th infantry regiment, the Academic Legion, a regiment composed exclusively of student volunteers.

Father was wounded in his left leg, in exactly the same spot where I was wounded while serving with the partisans in World War II. When my father got wounded, which happened some 200-300 meters from the place where the legendary Father Skorupka died [Ignacy Jan Skorupka, 1893-1920, Catholic priest and chaplain of the Polish Army], they transported him to Warsaw to a military hospital in Ujazdów [a district of Warsaw], where my mother was a volunteer nurse. That’s how I became a child of the Battle of Warsaw in the 1920 war.

A very handsome man, Father captured Mom’s heart; subsequently, they had a romance. Marriage wasn’t on the cards for a long time, because Mom’s family put up desperate resistance; it was a misalliance. But in the end there was a wedding...

Since on account of his convictions, Father was a personal enemy of God, there was only a civil wedding. Father believed in general that religion is stupidity.

He used to say that everyone should be a decent person and act in accordance with some principles, that the Ten Commandments is just the code of behavior of a decent person, etc., but he refused to take part in any form of religious marriage ceremony.

A solution was found in the end – my parents got married in a civil ceremony in Katowice. As a result, I bear my mother’s last name.

Even though their union was formalized, the difference between the law in Silesia and in Warsaw was such that I was a legitimate child in Katowice but not in Warsaw.

[Editor’s note: After Poland regained its independence, different marriage codes, as inherited from the legal systems of the Partitioning Powers, remained in effect.

Thus, the Russian marriage code, under which only religious marriage was permitted, continued to be in force in Warsaw, which had been under Russian rule prior to World War I.

In Katowice, located in the former Prussian-ruled zone, a civil marriage ceremony was obligatory. That mixed legal regime remained in place throughout the interwar period.]

Though nobody told me officially, I know that I had an elder brother, and the fact that Mom was pregnant with him probably had something to do with my parents' getting married.

My brother died a few days after his birth, and I, who was born two years later, was an only child. The Krasuckis resigned themselves to having such a son-in-law and eventually came to like him.

The house we lived in was No. 7 Hoza Street. Father worked as a chemist and his professional life was peppered with ups and downs. For example, he was the first person in the world to successfully candy pears.

Unfortunately, he got cheated on the patent, which he sold for 300 zloty. He thought he had got a good deal, but in fact he had sold the patent on which others made thousands.

Besides, whenever he got a job anywhere, after one, two or three years he would get into some trouble as a PPS activist, so we were constantly in a see-saw situation.

Some time later Father went to work for 'Three Anchors,' the same company which employed Grandpa. As an expert on food chemistry, he worked on the expansion of a drying plant for mushrooms intended for export, near Bialowieza Primeval Forest [immense forests near Bialystok, in Eastern Poland].

If there had been ups and downs in previous years, 1937, 1938, and 1939 were a period of relative prosperity in my family because Dad was working all the time.

When my father found himself in financial straits, then my grandparents from Nowowiejska Street helped us in a discreet way. On the other hand, Father always helped his own family one way or another, regardless of our situation.

But it was always done discreetly, in a manner that was respectful of the feelings of his relatives. Mom also was in favor of assisting Father's family. In general, theirs was a good marriage. Mom gave private music lessons, but when the Depression came, she had few lessons.

On Hoza Street we had a second-floor apartment. There were two large rooms and one small room plus a kitchen; the downside was that we had to walk downstairs to the toilet when I was a kid.

There was running water in the apartment, but to go to the toilet we had to walk down to the first floor. Later on, when Dad earned some money, my parents had a toilet put in inside the apartment.

There was a balcony on three sides. It was a decent place to live, if perhaps not as comfortable as the apartment of Grandpa and Grandma Krasucki.

We moved in PPS circles. I grew up in an environment that was politically charged in the positive sense. In the building where I lived, one of the front apartments was occupied by Kazimierz Czapinski, president of the Society of Worker Universities, a leading PPS activist.

[Kazimierz, Czapinski (1882-1941): Socialist activist, killed in Auschwitz concentration camp; Society of Worker Universities (Towarzystwo Uniwersytetow Robotniczych – TUR): a cultural and educational organization founded by the PPS in 1923.]

Dad's party colleagues frequently met in our flat. Stanislaw Dubois [12](#) came to our apartment four or five times. It was a tremendous experience for me when Niedzialkowski came once [Niedzialkowski, Mieczyslaw (1893-1940): PPS activist and member of Parliament, murdered by the Germans].

From time to time my father would send me to Warecka Street, to the editorial offices of Robotnik [The Worker – a Socialist daily published in Warsaw] when an article had been confiscated, to try to get a copy.

My parents' friends were from both the Polish and Jewish communities. For Dad, the most important were his comrades in arms; that is, the circle of war veterans. His front-line comrades and their wives visited us.

If I were asked what each of them thought about the Jews, which party they voted for, I wouldn't have the faintest idea.

My parents spoke both Polish and Yiddish, save that between themselves they spoke only Polish.

I was a witness to a number of incidents when my father, as a PPS supporter, would get hot under the collar when among my mom's family, which included very rich people and the dominant point of view might be described as politically centrist. In that family circle, my father represented the left.

I remember that when he once got into an argument with Rudolf, the husband of my mom's younger sister Felicja, at first they spoke in Yiddish for a short while.

Then, when he was completely enraged, Dad said: 'This I can explain to you only in Polish,' and he switched into Polish. That is, for my dad Yiddish was no good for such refined problems.

Dad spoke Yiddish with his mother, but if I was present, they would exchange a few words of greeting in Yiddish, and then would turn to Polish lest I thought that they were talking about me behind my back.

I was born in 1925 in Warsaw, two years after my parents got married. Since I learned to read and write quite early, they sent me to a kindergarten for Jewish children, which had Bundist leanings. It was located on Twarda Street.

I felt comfortable there. In that kindergarten I spent only a couple of weeks and I don't remember unfortunately what language we spoke there, but it was Polish, probably.

I was a gifted child. When I went to elementary school – I was sent to a normal public school on Hoza Street – Mom arranged for me to be placed in the second grade from the start. I could read, write, and count.

At seven I finished the second grade, terribly bored and with all A's. By then I had read all the books written by [James Oliver] Curwood and [Karl] May, as well as [Jack] London's 'Martin Eden'.

On the initiative of the headmistress, I was assigned right away to the fourth grade. In that way I completed elementary school at the age of ten.

At the age of eleven, I was admitted to the first gymnasium grade at the Warsaw Merchant Congregation Gymnasium on Walicow Street in Warsaw [founded in 1906, in the prewar period it was a very popular gymnasium].

It wasn't a Jewish gymnasium, but the kind of progressive school to which Jewish parents readily sent their children. That school was the first so-called experimental semi-boarding school in Poland.

We were taught by the best teachers. The headmaster was the famous Taubenszlacht, the director was Ordynski, and our history teacher was Lukaszewicz – who was to become president of Torun University after the war.

My Polish teacher and our class teacher was Stefan Zolkiewski [1911-1991, literary historian and critic]. His wife Wanda Zolkiewska, a writer, whom we dubbed Izyda, also taught Polish, and most of the boys were in love with her.

Lubelski, who looked like a caricature from Der Stuermer, taught German. Biology was taught by Michajlow, who was to become a distinguished biologist and deputy minister of higher education [Włodzimierz Michajlow (1905-1994): Professor of Zoology].

That was a dream-come-true school. To this day I remember the attendance register from the third and final grade which I completed in 1939: Abramski, who was a Pole, next Antkowski, then came Altman, Birek, and Borensztain.

That meant that 60 percent of the students were Poles and 40 percent were Jews. Among the faculty there were both Poles and Jews.

I was an all-As student but was constantly in trouble on account of my behavior, which didn't involve any acts of thuggery on my part, but rather distribution of cribs, boredom, etc.

At the same time, in the company of boys two years older than me, I developed a kind of resourcefulness, stamina, an ability to adapt to difficult circumstances, and that skill later on had a number of consequences that were reflected in my experiences under the occupation [see German occupation of Poland] [13](#).

Since I was a tall, overgrown boy, I made the school basketball team early in my school career. Ten players are needed for a basketball game – five players on the court and five on the reserve bench – and that 'ten' included six Poles and four Jews.

With childhood I associate the memories of summer vacations, which we used to spend near Warsaw: in Lesna Podkowa, Urle, Radosc, or Zielonka. Mom sent me to Radosc as a reward for graduating from elementary school.

There was a boarding house there for Jewish children from good homes, whereas I was quite a rascal who enjoyed a good fight and liked to climb trees – I was cut from a different cloth.

I felt awfully miserable in that boarding house because I had to wear this yellow sleeper suit and play cerceau [hoop]. On top of that, they kept telling me that the model I should live up to was a

lovely boy wearing a check outfit, whose name was Zabotynski.

After three days of that talk, I couldn't stand it anymore and threw a plate full of buttered cauliflower at Zabotynski.

The kid, who was quite a mamma's boy, naturally burst into tears, the girls started to squeal, and the owner of the boarding house phoned Mom and told her:

'I will give you back your money, but your son is sure to grow into a thug; I would appreciate it very much if you came and took him back.' Mom fired back: 'I have confidence in my son; please give him the money and he is old enough to return home by himself.' In the morning, I ate my breakfast and left that wonderful vacation place by myself.

I began to earn money while a gymnasium student: I shared the same desk with this noodle whose name was Rysio Meisner and who had very rich parents. They figured that I could be a mentor to Rysio and help him in his studies.

I was exempted from school tuition thanks to my good grades, plus I made 30 zloty a month from the Meisners. That was a huge amount of money! Of that sum, I gave 15 zloty back to my parents, which made me terribly proud of myself.

During my school years, my hobbies were sports, books, and music. My parents were both music lovers and I was brought up in a cult of music; Mom used to take me to matinee performances at the Philharmonic Hall and organized morning music concerts at my elementary school.

When a gramophone appeared in our apartment at one point, my friends were at a loss why we didn't have any records with popular hits, just Chopin, Beethoven, and Mozart.

I recall that when I was twelve my parents took me along to the Grand Theatre to see 'A Night in Venice' [an operetta by Austrian composer Johann Strauss (1825-1899)]. I remember how proud and happy I felt when I heard the first bars of the overture.

What I say about my artistic and cultural experiences, about my exposure to art, also relates to my sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Dad used to buy *The Worker* and *Our Review*.

He read *Our Review* as a Jew, and *The Worker* as a PPS member. I read both those newspapers. *Our Review* was a newspaper that carried excellent theater reviews and published wonderful serialized novels; for example, Vicki Baum [1888-1960, a popular Austrian writer] or 'Colas Breugnon' [a novel by French writer Romain Rolland (1866-1944)] in installments.

In that paper one could read a great deal about culture and the Jews. It was from that source that I learned who Tuwim [14](#) and Slonimski [15](#) were. Mom also paid attention to that issue when she gave me books to read. Reading *The Jewess from Toledo* [by Lion Feuchtwanger] [16](#), I was aware that it was written by a Jew.

I knew that regardless of the language in which a particular book had been written, be it German, English, French, or Polish, it was written by a Jew and it was about my people. When listening to Mendelssohn-Bartholdy [Felix, (1809-1847), German composer, conductor and pianist], I learned from Mom who the Mendelssohn family was.

My parents weren't nationalists of any sort, but they did teach me to be proud of my Jewishness. I believe that my sense of belonging to the Jewish people, an unquestionable fact from a genetic or genealogical point of view, consists simply in my attachment to this people, the sense of my being part of it, the respect I have for its customs, the pride I feel for its achievements and the distress I suffer because of its negative characteristics, of which it has quite a few, to be sure.

My attitude toward religion developed under the influence of the social circle in which I grew up. My father was a smart man who never talked down to me.

What he told me went more or less like this:

'If in order not to become a scoundrel, a thief, a thug or a bum, you need to fear God and His punishment, then you must be religious. If you can be a good man without that fear, then remember that I am a decent man without religion.' Having to deal with opposite poles – an atheistic father and his religious mother, that is, Grandma Kaferman, and Grandpa Krasucki – I had to find a way out of that dilemma.

The path I adopted was that of cautious conformism. It meant that when I found myself at a Friday religious dinner at Grandma's, then I participated in it with gusto. When I happened to be at my other Grandma's and got my 'befshtycheke' as usual, then my own conscience remained untroubled, even though I was aware that Grandpa ate kosher.

Of course, I wasn't boycotting the Jewish religion, as I absolutely felt no need or desire for that, but I understood its interpretation, which was very wisely imparted to me by Grandpa Krasucki, according to which that religion was the customs of my people.

So if I'm supposed to eat matzah on a certain holiday, I will eat it not on account of God, but because of my identification with that tradition.

My mom was irreligious, but at home my parents took care to preserve the outward forms of Jewish holidays, which meant that we had matzah, for example. Father wasn't opposed to them, for he made a distinction between religion and customs.

In fact, he enjoyed the customs and found the cooking tasty and splendid; he would even demand traditional Jewish dishes from Mom, such as Jewish caviar. He believed that those customs should be respected because they were the customs of our people, but eating matzah doesn't need to have much in common with religion.

My father fought a desperate battle to have me exempted from the obligation to receive a final grade in religion. For him, it was a matter that had to do with the Free Poland for which he had fought.

Father said: 'my son is a Jew, no question about that. However, I don't want him to study religion if he doesn't have to.'

As it was impossible not to have a grade in religion in elementary school, the headmistress, Mrs. Wyszacka, also a PPS member, suggested to me the following solution: 'If you wish, you can come and sit in on the Roman Catholic class. If you are curious, you can go to the Protestant classes.'

Besides, it would be a good thing if you could drop in on the teacher of Jewish religion on Hoza Street.' So I went to see that teacher; he gave me a textbook and discussed issues of Judaism with



me.

I took very seriously the view that I should be a decent person without fearing God. I finished elementary school with an A in religion, even though I didn't fully deserve it since I hadn't studied any particular religion systematically.

In any case, when our entire school went to the Savior church for the opening of each school year, then I would go along on occasion but not always.

In general, I went motivated by curiosity or in the expectation that once the service was over, we would go to play soccer, for whenever we went to church, we didn't have to go back to school afterwards.

On Yom Kippur I didn't have to attend school, I was entitled not to go to school, and in fact, I didn't. I was just a regular school kid, so when given a chance to have a day off school, why the hell should I go to school?

When I was 13, Grandpa and Grandma Krasucki arranged a bar mitzvah for me on Nowowiejska Street. Personally, I wasn't too keen about it, but my father and I decided that I had to go through that ceremony since it was required by Jewish custom. However, I didn't attach any great significance to it. A teacher was hired to prepare me.

I remember that during the ceremony I managed to mutter some words on my own, for more I had to look at my crib notes. Still, to this day I know the Hebrew characters.

On the whole, I didn't encounter any manifestations of anti-Semitism in my social circle, because of the neighborhood we lived in, the PPS community, and the type of school I attended.

On the other hand, my dad hit me only once in my life and that was related to an encounter with anti-Semitism. It happened like this: When I was about ten, there were twin brothers, Kazik and Maniek, whose last name I don't recall, who also lived at 7 Hoza Street.

Those two boys were the terror of the courtyard. The two of them beat me up, probably because I was a Jew. I went home crying and told my father what had happened.

Father slapped me in the face and said: 'Go back to the courtyard and take care of this business!'

My father was keen on bringing me up as a man, and he simply got mad that I was sniveling instead of trying to handle the problem. I waited for a moment when the brothers got separated, and then thrashed each of them separately.

I came home covered in scratches but happy. Then Dad was terribly nice to me and he took me later to a fine movie house, 'PAN', on Nowy Swiat, where we saw Charlie Chaplin in his film Modern Times. That was Father's reward to me for not giving in to those kids.

In our gymnasium it was accepted that boys made friends with each other in school, shared a desk, played sport together, and everybody got the same treatment. I remember an incident that happened in our school: in my class there was one Altman, he was an excellent student; he has remained in my memory because I used to compete with him constantly.

A boy whose name was Gobanowicz beat up Altman at school. The next day I went up to Gobanowicz and said to him, 'You shit, you won't hit smaller kids.' I punched him on his snout and we started to fight.

I beat him up horribly, and that affair had a very unusual ending. The parents of that Gobanowicz, who were Endeks [17](#), came to school protesting that Jews were bullying their son.

So Zolkiewski, our class supervisor, called up my mom from the school – the telephone number in our apartment was 83559; I remember that number to this day – and told her laughing: 'Mrs. Krasucki, there has been a complaint against your boy.

He is bullying Poles.' Zolkiewski was a wonderful man. Mom went to the school, and later on that story was recounted as a funny anecdote. But terrible things happened, too. Once I was given a soccer ball and went out along with other boys from my school to play soccer.

A bunch of hoodlums came along and when they found out that the ball was mine, they took it away from me. If that hadn't been a Jewish ball, then perhaps they would have given it back.

In terms of my friends, I had three groups of buddies. The first group comprised the boys with whom I had been friends since elementary school and who went on to attend the same gymnasium.

Among them was a Polish kid, Zdzisiek Goscinski, a friend with whom I shared a desk both in elementary school and in gymnasium. The Goscinskis lived on Hoza Street right across from us. His father worked for the ZUS [Social Insurance Administration], and was a member of the PPS.

That was another bond that existed between us. In the future they were to provide assistance to my mother. When my mother escaped from the ghetto, they arranged a 'Kennkarte' [German identification document] for her and gave her all the appropriate advice.

That group also included Julek Konopka, the son of Jerzy Roland, a well-known actor; Roland – was his stage name.

Julek was a child of a mixed marriage – his dad was a Pole and his mother was a beautiful Jewish woman, who was a dancer at the Grand Theater.

The other members of that group were two brothers, sons of a Warsaw streetcar driver. The five of us used to play tennis and bridge together, and go to matinee showings of westerns.

My second group of buddies were the kids with whom I played basketball. And the third group were friends with whom I shared intellectual interests. That group included Adamski, a Polish kid.

I was the editor of a classroom newsletter, which was called The Creaky Desks, while Abramski wrote a serialized novel for consecutive issues of that newsletter.

In addition, I penned satirical poems. The third buddy was one Marek Hausman. He was a Jew, the son of a physician; he had a twin sister.

They lived somewhere on Szpitalna Street in the downtown district. That Marek Hausman was a fantastic kid, an awfully voracious reader. Abramski was interested in literature, too; by then he

must have already read every book: Lechon [18](#), Lesmian [19](#); my knowledge of half of world literature came from him.

Marek Hausman – he was the stuff of a great university professor; he was a walking encyclopedia. We discussed books, debated politics, and went to see ambitious films that addressed serious issues.

I remember how profoundly affected we were by the famous pacifist feature called *Comrades in Arms*. An excellent movie – I remember it to this day.

I and my buddies from that third group had a dream that when we all went to university, albeit to different departments, we would be like a Masonic lodge of sorts, an inseparable trio of buddies.

My first girlfriend was Halinka, a Pole and daughter of a Polish police inspector. Even before I started to make money on my own, I saved the 30 groszy of the streetcar fare by running to school on foot, so as to be able to invite Halinka for ice cream at 'The Italian's' on Aleje Ujazdowskie [very popular cafe in prewar Warsaw].

It was thanks to those friends that no Polish family, no Polish boy or girl was exotic for me. I was free from any feeling of strangeness. Without that 'training' of being among Poles, to put it in cynical terms, familiarity with the Polish mentality, with the Polish boy, the Polish girl, with the contradictions inherent in the Polish character, I probably wouldn't have survived the war.

### • During the war

Then came September 1939 [also see Annexation of Eastern Poland] [20](#). I remember when airplanes appeared in the sky and the war started.

On 3rd September Britain and France declared war on Germany, so I along with thousands of other Warsaw kids congregated in front of the British embassy.

There we sang 'It's a long way [to Tipperary]' [British soldiers' song from WWI]; next we went to the French embassy, where we sang 'Madelon'; the impulse drove us on to the Czechoslovak embassy on Koszykowa Street, which had already been closed, where General Svoboda [Svoboda, Ludvik (1895-1979): Czechoslovak Communist activist; in 1939, commander of the Czech and Slovak Legion brigade in Poland] appeared before us, so we yelled there: 'Long live our Czech brothers!', and we had an awfully good time altogether, until we realized what war was really like.

People knew who Hitler was and nobody had any doubts about that; on the other hand, we didn't foresee then that it would take such a shape or form. Mother tended towards extreme pessimism.

The rest of the family, however, retained these positive notions about the Germans. Dad evacuated eastwards, obeying the famous order of Colonel Umiastowski [21](#), and got as far as Lutsk.

My father reasoned that this was a mortal enemy, and decided to escape from Warsaw as both a Jew and a Socialist. The rest of the family stayed put. I stood on Hoza Street when the German troops paraded in front of Adolf Hitler on Aleje Ujazdowskie. After all, I lived about 200-300 yards from the route of that parade.

A few days later, a regular occupation was already in place. Several times, when I went to Walicow Street to find out what would happen to our school, on Zelazna and adjacent streets I witnessed the cutting off of beards and side locks of Jewish men.

One day they were looking for people to fill in trenches. As I was a tall kid, they took me along with some other Jews to do that work.

Mom found my documents and came to take me back, for the announcement was that only those over 16 were to report for labor; she was able to prove that I wasn't yet 16 and took me home in triumph.

Mom had a very good appearance [i.e. she didn't look Jewish], so that even after the introduction of the armband regulation [22](#), we didn't put them on.

I was such a proud kid that I felt hurt and humiliated by notices that said 'No entry for Jews.' My own helplessness and the constant threat of humiliation irritated me.

Moreover, my own assessment of what could befall us from the Germans was very pessimistic; my attitude was so naively patriotic – by what right have they trampled on my Poland!

I told my family that I couldn't stand it any more, that it would all end very badly, and that I didn't want to live under such conditions.

I realized that it was an entire system, that it was growing and there would be more of it. After all, in Wawer they had already killed a mass of people [a community close to Warsaw; in December 1939 the Germans executed 107 people there], so I reasoned: if they had knocked off a crowd of Poles, would they spare Jews?

I made up my mind to run away to my father. Mom was the only one in the family to approve of my departure, if after a long hesitation.

My family was focused on survival and clung to the belief that it would be possible to adjust and survive somehow. I said that 'somehow' wasn't good enough for me, and while there was still the slightest chance, I was going to cross the border illegally to get to Dad in Lutsk.

My family had to accept my decision. Later on, they all moved to the ghetto and all of them, with the exception of my mom, died there.

I left Warsaw in January 1940. At the time I was 14 years and a few months old. I found myself in the position of a grown-up man. After several adventures, I reached Dad. The first thing he told me was: 'Son, remember that if you tell anyone that I was in the PPS, you won't see me again.'

In Lutsk, Dad faced various complications both as an escapee and as a PPS member. I was also aware that I could get into trouble, but not for being a Jew. Our first problem was that we were to be deported as refugees.

[The reference is to mass deportations into the interior of the Soviet Union carried out by the Soviet authorities on the Polish territory occupied by the Red Army in September 1939.]

Their first victims were members of the Polish intelligentsia, civic activists, etc. Those deportations took place in the context of terror.] Father, who wasn't lacking in imagination, had the idea that we would board a passenger boat that cruised the river Styr and wait out the transports on that boat.

Thus, we traveled up and down the Styr for two days. We returned to Lutsk after the deportations had ended. Dad obtained a passport, but had to report to the police periodically. At that time Dad's youngest sister, Aunt Lucja, was deported to Siberia with her husband.

As a chemist, Father became 'glavtech inspektor,' which means chief technical inspector, in a cooperative of photographers. [Following the Soviet model, in the occupied areas] private photography shops were closed down and a cooperative of photographers was established in their place.

'Nachalstvo' [management] was brought from Kiev, but they didn't have the faintest idea about photography. Later, Father became chief accountant in a restaurant that had just been nationalized.

After all, he had attended school under the tsarist regime, knew Russian, and was thus an ideal candidate for chief accountant. In this way Dad came to hold two jobs. All that time I attended a Polish school, and I also worked on the railroads for a period of time.

In June 1941 the Germans came [see Great Patriotic War] [23](#). They behaved atrociously from day one. They really took their gloves off over there.

Besides the Germans, there were a great many Ukrainian fascists who informed, exposed, tormented, and generally geared up for the bloodbath, which in any case they carried out a year later.

Father was taken five days after the entry of the Germans. I don't know who fingered my father, or whether he was denounced as a Jew or an educated Pole. One day I said good-bye to Dad and told him I was going to meet some friends, and when I came back, he was gone.

At first, they held them in the municipal park. I went towards the park; from a distance I could see a crowd of men, but I couldn't get any closer, since anybody who got close was shot at.

The following morning they took them away somewhere; it turned out that they finished off all those men. I didn't get to see Dad's body. Only many years after the downfall of the Soviet Union was there an exhumation and a ceremony.

My friends told me that I could count on them. Risking their own lives, they went with me to the Ukrainian police where they testified that I was a Pole, and that was how I got my identity papers. Nobody fingered me as a Jew. That was in Volhynia, where the Poles behaved very decently.

In mid-September 1941, the Lutsk ghetto [24](#) was established. I saw my worst conjectures confirmed, which once again determined my subsequent fate. I said that I wouldn't surrender to the Germans voluntarily and that I wouldn't go into any ghetto.

All the adults around me were convinced that my attitude was foolish, but I dug my heels in.

One of the people who went into the ghetto left me his watch with the request that I sell it and send him food. Several days later I managed to sell the watch and buy some pork fat and a small bag of flour and groats; next, I found a man who agreed to take it into the ghetto.

He told me that he had done it successfully, but ever since I have been tormented by doubt as to whether he told me the truth and if that other man, as he was dying in the Lutsk ghetto, didn't think that I had swindled him.

I stayed in Lutsk as long I could, but when I started getting warnings from all sides that my position was becoming increasingly precarious, I decided to escape from the town. My teacher gave me directions to a Polish self-defense group that was being organized in the area.

The commander of that group – Master Sergeant Franciszek Adamowicz – took me in, and ten days before Christmas Day 1941 I became an underground fighter. The group comprised some Polish reserve officers, a few Russians – soldiers who had managed to escape from German captivity – and some Jewish boys from the areas of Klevan, Olyka, etc.

In that partisan unit I went through the entire training and took part in skirmishes with the enemy. We had to deal with the Ukrainian police all the time. The one guy about whom I know for sure that I shot at him and he took a tumble was a Ukrainian policeman.

In spring 1942 I reported to Adamowicz that I wanted to go to Warsaw because my mother was there, and perhaps I could save her. I went to see a friend of my parents – Puhaczewski.

He was, of course, in the Home Army [25](#) or AK; that was soon after the AK was created. Puhaczewski knew that Mom was in the ghetto because she had called him up once.

Puhaczewski fed me and said: 'we advise you against going to the ghetto. We will try and see if we can locate your mom, but I'm going to send you to Lublin region, where a partisan unit is being formed to receive airdrops.'

I spent several days in Warsaw; it so happened that the gentleman at whose place I was staying had a daughter of my age. So that girl and I went together, pretending to be some happy couple, to see the ghetto [they probably rode the 'Aryan' streetcar that transited the ghetto]. And in fact, I saw what it was like inside.

I must say that at that moment I felt something like fear at the thought that if I went in there, I would be done for, for sure. I saw those faces, saw everything, and it was terrifying.

I didn't stand a chance. The upshot was that Puhaczewski told me that if he found my mom, he would take care of her in some way, and I was sent off to the partisan detachment.

That is how I found myself in the detachment of Jaskolka in the Western Lublin region. That was the Pulawy-Deblin district. I arrived at the unit with a strong recommendation; a highly placed official in the Home Army had sent me to it, after all.

The mission of that detachment was to receive airdrops. In the partisan unit I passed for a Pole, but the commander obviously surmised that I was a Jew. He ordered me to report to him if anyone asked me unnecessary questions. He told me to keep in the rear during combat missions.



Contrary to common belief, the most important and the most exposed soldier in a unit is not the one who goes first, but the one who comes last.

Jaskolka knew that although the rear of the detachment was the most dangerous position, I could handle it; and while I was at the back no comrade from the unit would shoot me in my back: 'You will hold your own against the Germans, and no one else will knock you off, either.' Of course, nobody ever tried to knock me off; in fact, I felt rather comfortable with the other guys. Nobody in the unit said that they loved Jews, but there was general condemnation of the Holocaust.

I remember that once we entered some little town the day after its Jews had been taken away. We found a situation where local inhabitants were fighting, with knives drawn, over pots and eiderdowns that the Jews had left behind.

I remember that Jaskolka spat and said: 'It boggles your mind; worse than animals, worse than pigs.'

In April 1943, I reported to Jaskolka that I wanted to go to Warsaw. He gave his consent several weeks later. I had great identity papers, a well-planned route, and I knew whom I could turn to for help.

I reached Warsaw without any problems; the rising in the Warsaw ghetto was in its third day [see Warsaw Ghetto Uprising] [26](#). There was no news of my family. It was known that horrific things were going on, but exactly what and how – that we didn't know. Under the circumstances, there was no use in trying, and a few days later I was, consistent with the orders I had received, on my way back to the unit.

I wasn't aware that Mom had come out of the ghetto in February 1942, two months before I arrived in Warsaw with the intention of getting her out.

Our neighbors, the Goscinskis, had arranged for a 'Kennkarte' for her, Mom had left the ghetto, and gone to the Lublin region.

There she became involved in underground education activities. My mother was the only one to leave the ghetto, while the rest of the family remained there.

Meanwhile, the train on which I was returning to my partisan unit in the Lublin region was stopped several miles before Radom, and all the young men were arrested, including me.

The Germans were looking for someone from the underground; they weren't at all curious who I was. They were after someone else. That was how, in a matter that had nothing to do with me, without my being in any way connected with the person who had been reported to be traveling on that train, I ended up at the Gestapo in Radom.

The interrogation was horrible; I had matches put under my nails. I found myself in a totally absurd position. Had they asked me any questions that I could have answered, possible that they might have forced some information out of me, but they didn't.

They simply wanted to identify the guy they had zeroed in on among the group of young men they had detained.

From Radom they transported our group to the central Gestapo prison in Cottbus. There I was kept in several locations, and finally, in the first days of July 1943, I arrived in Stutthof [27](#).

I was held there as a Polish political prisoner; my files said I was a suspected partisan. I remained in Stutthof until 1945, then I went on a death march [28](#) as they drove us first toward Lebork [100 km west of the Stutthof concentration camp] and then back, because our troops were already near Kolobrzeg [on the west coast of the Baltic, site of a very fierce battle between Germans and the Polish Army in March 1945].

It was a death march as described in the literature; they shot anyone who couldn't keep up; we didn't get any food. Being a young man, I managed to hold out somehow.

### • After the war

On 12th March 1945 we were liberated by the Red Army in Puck [50 km east of Lembork]. Naturally, my initial feeling after the liberation was joy, a sense of relief, but right after that came a desire to get on with my life, obtain food and a roof over my head. I was much older and my way of thinking was also very different.

When I had come to Warsaw in April 1943, I had seen a terrifying picture of a city in ruins. On Hoza Street where we used to live there was nothing, just a heap of rubble. Subsequently, someone told me that Mom had stayed alive until the Warsaw Uprising [29](#) and was killed during it.

Thus, I thought that there was no use in trying to find my mother, and that the rest of the family was dead. I decided to go to Lodz to the Goscinskis.

In Lodz I signed up for Lower Silesia and was one of the first settlers to arrive in Lubin county [see Settlers in Lower Silesia] [30](#).

In Lubin, where I arrived as the tenth or perhaps eleventh Polish settler, there were several Jews. Among them was the first physician who had miraculously survived the war in the Radom region; he was the only person capable of providing medical assistance there.

He and I talked about what to do next, but I didn't have any intention of emigrating at all; I simply didn't take that option into consideration. For me, emigration would be tantamount to putting up a white flag, to capitulation.

I reasoned that I wouldn't allow anybody to squeeze me out of here, nobody could throw me out of here; I wouldn't give anyone the satisfaction of saying that I had got out of Poland.

I understood those who were leaving; later on, I was happy for the establishment of Israel and I welcomed the good news that came from there.

It was members of my own nation that had chosen that path, and they are close to my heart, but myself, I have never wanted to depart from Poland.

In 1946 my aunt Lucja and her husband returned from Siberia. We had long talks. They said they were emigrating not because they didn't want to be in Poland, but because they had become acquainted with the pleasures of Siberia [Poles deported to the interior of the Soviet Union were

kept in inhuman conditions and forced to do hard labor].

The new Poland wouldn't be truly independent and they wished to get farther away from the Soviet Union that they had learned to hate heartily. I told them that I understood their point of view perfectly well, but I wouldn't join them because Poland was my home.

In this country I am not a tolerated guest, a guest performer, nor had I found myself here by chance. Here I am simply at home, and that's my view on that matter, while I have nothing against any other different viewpoint.

The revival of Jewish life filled me with great joy. After all, Lower Silesia had a huge Jewish community; besides my own organization, the OMTUR [31](#), there was also Zukunft [32](#), a Bundist youth organization.

Bundist labor cooperatives were being established. Members of the OMTUR and the Zukunft paraded together dressed in blue shirts and red ties. That was a large and fine community.

I took sympathetic notice of the revival of religious life, even though, as I have already stated many times, that wasn't an area in which I was interested. I didn't hide my background or pretend to be someone other than I was in any way. I mean that I didn't pretend to be either a Catholic or a pious Jew.

After the war, a change came over me that forced me to exist without certainty as to where I would sleep the next night. I simply turned into a brute. Twice I made a desperate attempt to build something like a home. On both occasions I had to accept with regret that I was simply not made for it.

In 1947 I moved to Wroclaw, and it was also during that period that I found my mom. The circumstances under which I found her were really incredible. Namely, my love from the Lutsk period, Alla, came to see me in Wroclaw.

When I was with the partisans, I thought that after the war I would go back Lutsk, find Alla somewhere, and perhaps together we could build something solid. She was the girl of my dreams. Alla gave me a powerful motivation to survive.

After the war, Alla and her mother repatriated from Volhynia to Czechoslovakia, and from that country Alla came to visit me in Wroclaw. I took her to Warsaw to show her the place where I had grown up.

In the courtyard of our house on Hoza Street, I was unexpectedly embraced and kissed by our prewar janitor. Alla and I spent several hours at his place; together we downed a bottle and told each other our wartime stories.

On the following day, my mom, who was already working on Wiejska Street [the location of the Parliament building], decided, for no clear reason, to have another look at the rubble of our former house.

Mr. Walenty came out to her and said: 'Good morning to you, Mrs. Krasucki, but I must tell you that your son, that terrible rascal, has turned into a hunk of a man.' At that moment Mom fainted.

Only after he brought her around did my mom start to interrogate him as to where I was, how to find me, what I was up to. Since our conversation had been accompanied by copious drinking, the janitor didn't remember much; in the end it was established that I was somewhere in the west, probably in Lower Silesia, perhaps in Wroclaw. In the meantime I said good-bye to Alla and went back to Wroclaw.

On Monday an excited colleague of mine brings me a newspaper where I read the following: Stefania alias Stella Krasucka, domiciled before the war in Warsaw, 7 Hoza Street, is looking for her son, Ludwik, who is most likely living in Lower Silesia, and then it said in brackets – probably in Wroclaw.

Please call such and such a phone number with any information.

There was a post office nearby; I ordered a long-distance call and had to wait four or five hours for the connection – that was how the phones worked then – at last they tell me to go the telephone booth and I can hear Mom's voice... The year was 1947, the first days of April. At that time Mom was working in Warsaw in the Parliament library, which she had created after the war.

I joined the PPS and OMTUR after the war. Those were the early days, the first weeks after the liberation, and I had a rather blurred picture of what was going on in Poland, so I decided to follow my father's example.

I went to Lubin as a PPS and OMTUR member. There I established local PPS and OMTUR organizations; founded the sports club 'Zawisza Lubin', and in general busied myself with dozens of tasks to become, in the end, the [county] secretary of the PPS. It seems that I distinguished myself, as they transferred me to Wroclaw, where I was named city secretary.

Wroclaw was one of the cities where the local PPS organizations were strongest. In Wroclaw I had three times as many PPS members as there were members of the PPR [33](#).

As a result, it was in Wroclaw that the historical 27th and last congress of the PPS party was held. And I, a 22-year-old brat, was the host of that congress. In that way I became a PPS activist.

At the Wroclaw PPS congress, I gave a very good speech; Cyrankiewicz remembered me from that speech [Cyrankiewicz, Jozef (1911-1989): from 1945 secretary general of the PPS, implemented the Communist-imposed plan for the merger of the PPS and the PPR], and in spring 1948 I was promoted to the post of PPS provincial secretary in Gdansk.

Naive as I was, I realized that the PPR would obviously have an advantage, but I didn't expect that it would eventually take the shape of a headlong rush into Stalinism.

I tried not to allow any wrongs to be done to people under the guise of purging the party; especially that numerous experts had joined the PPS on the Baltic Coast.

Those were Kwiatkowski's people [Kwiatkowski, Eugeniusz (1888-1974): prewar Polish Minister of Industry and Trade], who had built up Poland's maritime economy before the war.

I opposed their expulsion from the party. The upshot of all that, combined with my past affiliation with the Home Army, was that while I was supposedly the local leader of the PPS, two days prior to the unification congress [at the Unification Congress held on 15th December 1948 the PPR and the

PPS were merged, resulting in the founding of the Communist party, Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR, Polish United Workers Party).

The PZPR was established on terms imposed by the PPR, following the expulsion of independent-minded leaders of the PPS], I learned that I was no longer to come to work, that from now on I wouldn't be given any assignment. My party membership was suspended for almost a year after the unification.

Under the circumstances, I decided not to waste my time and I enrolled on a German Studies course at Torun University. It was only in November 1949 that I was given another job.

I became head of the Department of Science, Education and Culture in Gdansk. I founded two theatres and brought about the establishment of the Baltic Opera; I still have friends from that time.

In 1952 I was transferred to Poznan to a post that was similar to the one I had held in Gdansk [i.e., head of the Department of Science, Education and Culture].

On my departure, they had given me very good references, with the reservation, however, that I wasn't ideologically sound, and lacked a sufficiently solid grounding in theory.

The head of the personnel department in the Central Committee then summoned me. One of the questions he put to me was: 'Comrade, you were with the Home Army, and the Home Army was in general anti-Semitic, dominated by the Endeks.'

That wasn't exactly the case, but rather a notion he had. 'I would like you to tell me in your own words how you managed to stay alive?' That made my blood boil, and I replied: 'Comrade Tokarski, why should the two of us waste our time, as you have enough power to eliminate that mistake.'

[The question put by the personnel head was in fact anti-Semitic, as it implied that any Jew who survived the war must have committed contemptible acts. Krasucki's response includes an allusion to the mass detentions carried out by the state security forces during the Stalinist period.]

In Poznan I finished my university studies in 1954. From 1954 I lived in Szczecin. The ferment that was to lead to the October crisis began in 1956 [see Polish October 1956] [34](#), and in early April 1956 I called for deep changes in the leadership of the Communist party, the rehabilitation of the PPS, and the return of Gomulka [Gomulka, Wladyslaw (1905-1982), a Communist activist who was removed from his post for a rightist-nationalist deviation in 1948, and was rehabilitated in 1956].

That caused a big commotion. Following the Poznan events [In June 1956 workers in Poznan staged strikes, which ended up in street fighting suppressed by military units], I was instrumental in organizing a big meeting of party activists in Szczecin, during which I presented a diametrically opposite assessment of the Poznan events, arguing that it was the last call for the reform of the system.

My PZPR membership rights were suspended and I was deprived the right to publish. On an earlier occasion, while I was already living in Szczecin, I did my first translations of Heine, and had a small volume of his poetry and a study about that German poet published.

In late summer 1956 I was transferred to Warsaw. I worked in Trybuna Ludu [a daily published in Warsaw in 1948-1990, organ of the Central Committee of the PZPR] and in Zycie Warszawy [a popular Warsaw daily], and published articles in Polityka [a socio-political weekly, which expressed the views of moderately reformist groups within the PZPR].

In Warsaw I put into practice my idea that as a student of German culture I should specialize in the 'Storm and Stress' period, the era of the German Enlightenment and German Romanticism, and over several years, that is between 1958 and 1961, I lectured in the German Studies department. In February 1960, I successfully defended my Ph.D. thesis.

I am the author of four film scripts, including three written jointly with my friend Ryszard Pietruski [a popular Polish actor]. One of those screenplays served as the basis for a movie entitled Wilczy bilet [Outcast], which was shown for the first time in 1964. In the years 1965-1970 I taught German drama at the Drama School in Warsaw.

During the March events of 1968 [see Gomulka Campaign] [35](#), a sort of proscription list was in circulation, which included the names of all the Jews. My name was added at the bottom.

That fact shows that they had a problem with my case because of my service with the Home Army and because I wasn't an old-guard communist, but in the end they added my name as well.

Later I was barred from the meetings of the editorial team and subjected to all possible harassments. My salary was also cut. I was very good friends with Michal Lucki, a very talented reporter, who couldn't bear the situation any more and decided to emigrate.

The editor-in-chief of Trybuna Ludu called me in and asked whether or not I intended to go. I said: 'No, I can tell you right away that the only crime I will commit in Poland is that if you throw me out, I will slip back over the border illegally.'

Some of my colleagues at Trybuna Ludu behaved very decently towards me, but others didn't. I must say that the openness, intensity, and sheer boorishness of the anti-Semitic campaign surpassed my wildest expectations.

As far as the official anti-Semitism cultivated by the PRL [the Polish Communist state] and the PZPR is concerned, I think that the main danger it represents has to do with the fact that the generation of protagonists of that campaign is still around in public life.

Much scum came to the surface at that time and has remained in public life ever since. For several years, I was to serve as a revisionist bogeyman within the PZPR.

There were attacks against me, as a hidden enemy of Socialism, in roughly every other newspaper. At the time I found them irritating; I never thought that one day those attacks would be a source of glory for me.

Throughout my life I've had both Jewish and Polish friends – that distinction didn't mean anything to me. I've always had good friends who were Jews. I was friends with Arnold Mostowicz [36](#), Marian Turski [journalist and Jewish activist], my colleagues from Polityka, etc.

Those were normal relationships, just as I maintained friendly relations with many Poles all the time.



In 1970 my mother died. She was buried in the Powazki cemetery. Mom was a typical representative of the Polish intelligentsia of Jewish descent, and the Powazki is the cemetery of the Polish intelligentsia.

Mom was also entitled to a grave there on account of her work for the Parliament. Anyhow, that institution took care of her burial.

Mom had always kept in touch with our family in Israel, and I kept up those contacts after her death. I went to Israel for the first time in spring 1988.

My father's two sisters lived there with their families: Aunt Lucja Margulies has two daughters, Batja (Bronia) and Vita, and Aunt Wonia Richter also has two children – Ryfka and Zeev.

Bronia is a physician; she and I have kept in touch; she used to call me up. As a matter of fact, they came to visit me before I went to Israel. Lucja, my Dad's youngest sister, had an apartment in Israel that was crammed with Polish books.

They knew what plays were on in Warsaw, in which theater. They used to stand in long lines in order to buy a single new book that had just arrived in the famous Polish bookstore.

While in Israel, I was instrumental in making possible the visit by Peres, as minister of foreign affairs of the incumbent government. That visit contributed to the 'unblocking' of relations between Poland and Israel.

As a well-known journalist, I had a conversation with one of Peres' advisors, went to see various people, and the upshot was that Peres came to Poland after years of complete freeze in mutual relations.

I've been married three times. From my first marriage I have a daughter, Monika, born in 1946, who has a degree in Polish studies, works as a radio journalist, and lives in Wroclaw. Regrettably, I have no grandchildren.

In the case of my daughter, who is a child of a mixed marriage, she is a Jewess to a greater degree than I am a Jew.

I tend to react to all issues that concern me as a Jew or those related with various aspects of a broadly understood Jewish concern in a common-sense sort of way, with due consideration, dispassionately, whereas my daughter's response is similar in general orientation, but much more emotional.

Because of that, we tell each other in jest that while I am a 100 percent Jew, she is a 200 percent Jewess. She is simply allergic to any type of anti-Semitism, chauvinism, and xenophobia.

She is very much interested in the folklore and history of the Jews, reads a lot about these subjects, but is not religious. Like myself, she doesn't have any emotional need to emphasize her identity, which used to be somewhat blurred; she simply considers that everything in her life is the way it should be.

My first two marriages were short affairs. My third wife is Alina Elzbieta nee Kaniewska, born in 1931 in Warsaw. This is my true marriage; it is now just 43 years since that wonderful day in 1961

when we met for the first time.

I'm very close to my spouse; she is an ethnic Pole, very strongly attached to me, a woman who shared with me my fate and vicissitudes with stamina and fortitude and with the maximum of goodwill.

We are a tried-and-true marriage. My wife is from the intelligentsia; her father was a lawyer and was killed during the Occupation. Herself, she has a degree in music and has had a forty-year career as actress, singer, and concert soloist.

It is very important that my wife, who is stepmother to my daughter, has an excellent relationship with her; they understand each other perfectly, and importantly, they find it very easy to form a common front against me.

My own attitude to the events of 1989 [37](#) was and remains a positive one; however, even then I perceived the potential threat of populism, was afraid that democracy would fall into the typical rut of Polish anarchy, the 'liberum veto' [the right to block any legislation by a single individual in the diet of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th and 18th centuries].

I feared a bit that a dangerous gap would open up in Poland between a small group of very wealthy individuals and the large mass of people whose very foundations of existence have been painfully shaken by the transformations. And these three fears of mine have been realized.

For the last four years I've been working for the Association of Jewish Combatants and Casualties in World War II. Prior to this, I handled compensations paid to Polish Jews from a Swiss fund.

Arnold Mostowicz invited me to participate in this work. While he was president of the Association, I was elected, on his initiative, its secretary general. Due to the poor state of his health I carried on the work, and subsequently I was elected president of the Association.

This is an important task in my life for two reasons. First, you age more slowly when you have plenty of work. Second, in my life I have done many things, which were – in my opinion at a given time – useful; I think now that some of them were positive, about a few others I think with a measure of irony or even embarrassment, but during all that time I never occupied myself with community work, in the narrow sense of the term, among Jews and for Jews.

The last six years are the completion and conclusion of my biography, and as such they are of great significance for me.

Currently, several hundred young people in Poland have decided to return to their Jewish roots and are doing so with huge enthusiasm. I consider this development positive, but I don't overrate its importance.

No multitudes of young enthusiastic Jews and Jewesses will appear in this country; this affair concerns several hundred individuals.

It is good that they are here, since their presence ensures a measure of continuity and some kind of survival, but it isn't possible to change the facts of history. I've never shared the naive belief that there will be some great renaissance here.

Of course, it is with tremendous satisfaction that I greet any manifestations of this process, but I wouldn't call it a renaissance, since renaissance is altogether a very big word.

- **Glossaries:**

The Kingdom of Poland (other names: the Congress Kingdom, Congress Kingdom of Poland): founded in 1815 by a decision of the Congress of Vienna.

It extended throughout the lands of the Kingdom of Warsaw with the exception of the Poznan and Bydgoszcz provinces and the city of Cracow. It had an area (until 1912) of 128,500 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 3.3m in 1816 and 10m in 1910.

The Kingdom of Poland was a monarchy linked by a personal union with Russia, with the tsar as king. It had a Polish Sejm (diet), government and army, but was not permitted to conduct its own foreign policy.

The constitution, though formally liberal, was systematically violated. The Kingdom of Poland was a center of the Polish liberation movement. In 1830 the November Uprising broke out; following its failure the Kingdom of Poland ceased to be a separate state and was henceforth to be an integral part of the Russian Empire.

After the January Uprising in 1863 the Kingdom was stripped of its separate identity altogether. In official documents the name 'the Kingdom of Poland' was replaced with the expression 'the Country along the Vistula'.

In the second half of the 19th century the country was subjected to intensive Russification. In 1915 it was occupied by German and Austrian forces; the occupation lasted until November 1918. After 1918 the lands of the Kingdom of Poland became part of the independent Poland.

**2** Duchy of Warsaw: state founded in 1807 by Napoleon. Formally a sovereign entity, it was in fact dependent on its alliance with France. The Kingdom of Warsaw comprised mostly Polish lands that had been annexed to Prussia (the 2nd and 3rd Partitions of Poland).

It covered an area of 155,000 km<sup>2</sup> and had a population of 4.3m. It was a constitutional monarchy linked by a personal union with Saxony.

In January 1813 the Kingdom of Warsaw was occupied by Russian forces; in March Tsar Alexander I convened a Provisional Supreme Council of the Kingdom of Warsaw, and in 1815 the kingdom was abolished by a decision taken at the Congress of Vienna.

**3** 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.

#### **4 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.

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

When Poland regained its independence in January 1919, he was elected Head of State by the Legislative Sejm. In March 1920 he was nominated marshal, and until December 1922 he held the positions of Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army.

After the murder of the president, Gabriel Narutowicz, he resigned from all his posts and withdrew from politics. He returned in 1926 in a political coup. He refused the presidency offered to him, and in the new government held the posts of war minister and general inspector of the armed forces. He was prime minister twice, from 1926-1928 and in 1930.

He worked to create a system of national security by concluding bilateral non-aggression pacts with the USSR (1932) and Germany (1934). He sought opportunities to conclude firm alliances with France and Britain.

In 1932 owing to his deteriorating health, Pilsudski resigned from his functions. He was buried in the Crypt of Honor in Wawel Cathedral in the Royal Castle in Cracow.

**6** 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 Grossaktion [great liquidation campaign] in the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942.

As well as 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 2 August 1943 an uprising broke out there with the aim of enabling some 200 people to escape. The majority died.

## **7 Litvak/Litvak roots (Yid**

: Litvakes): name for Jews from Lithuania. When used by Polish Jews it takes on a pejorative tone. The stereotypical Litvak was arrogant, unapproachable, a wiseacre who spoke an unintelligible form of Yiddish.

In Polish the term 'Litvak' was used to describe Jewish refugees who arrived on Polish territory (in the area known as the Lands along the Vistula) in the 1880s.

Their arrival, provoked by a series of pogroms and the passing of the May Laws, which discriminated against Jews (1882; these laws did not extend to the lands along the Vistula), was received with hostility by Polish Jews and Christians alike.

The Christians accused them of conscious collaboration in the Russification of the Polish state, while the Jews feared that the Litvaks, who were familiar with the Russian market, would constitute competition for local merchants.

The Litvaks had separate synagogues, schools and press. The negative stereotypes perpetuated the mutual isolation, and the sustained sense of uprootedness fuelled a rise in nationalist tendencies and pro-Zionist currents among the Litvaks, one manifestation of which was the Hibbat Zion ('Love of Zion' movement).

**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** 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.

**10** Polish-Soviet War (1919-21): between Poland and Soviet Russia. It began with the Red Army marching on Belarus and Lithuania; in December 1918 it took Minsk, and on 5th January 1919 it drove divisions of the Lithuanian and Belarusian defense armies out of Vilnius.

The Soviets' aim was to install revolutionary governments in these lands, while the Polish side had two territorial programs for them: incorporative (the annexation of Belarus and part of Ukraine to Poland) and federating (the creation of a system of nation states sympathetic to Poland).

The war was waged on the territory of what is today Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland (west to the Vistula). Armed combat ceased on 18th October 1920 and the peace treaty was signed on 18th March 1921 in Riga.

The outcome of the 1919-1920 war was the incorporation into Poland of Lithuania's Vilnius region, Belarus' Grodno region, and Western Ukraine.

**11** Battle of Warsaw (13-25th August 1920): a battle in the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1920. In early August 1920 Poland was in a critical situation; the entente powers offered aid only in the form of military advice and supply of arms, but not in the form of soldiers.



In Poland a coalition government was appointed in order to mobilize more workers and peasants to fight the Soviet invasion. From 13-25th August the decisive Battle of Warsaw was played out.

In the bloody battles for Radzymin the Polish Army defended the capital, and the counterattack from the Wieprz that began on 16th August forced the Bolshevik divisions to retreat.

At the beginning of September the Poles were pushing up along the whole length of the front, and on 12th October the Polish and Soviet delegations signed a cease-fire and peace talks began. The repulse of the Soviet attack on the outskirts of Warsaw defended Poland's independence and probably prevented the Bolshevization of Europe.

**12** Dubois, Stanislaw (1901-42): socialist activist and publicist. From 1931-33 and 1934-37 he was a member of the Supreme Council of the Polish Socialist Party, and from 1928-30 a deputy to the Sejm.

From 1934 he advocated agreement between the socialists and communists. He was arrested during the war and died in Auschwitz.

**13** German occupation of Poland (1939-45): World War II began with the German attack on Poland on 1st September 1939. On 17th September 1939 Russia occupied the eastern part of Poland (on the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact).

The east of Poland up to the Bug river was incorporated into the USSR, while the north and west were annexed to the Third Reich. The remaining lands comprised what was called the General Governorship - a separate state administered by the German authorities.

After the outbreak of war with the USSR in June 1941 Germany occupied the whole of Poland's pre-war territory. The German occupation was a system of administration by the police and military of the Third Reich on Polish soil.

Poland's own administration was dismantled, along with its political parties and the majority of its social organizations and cultural and educational institutions. In the lands incorporated into the Third Reich the authorities pursued a policy of total Germanization.

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

The Germans assumed ownership of Polish state property and public institutions, confiscated or brought in administrators for large private estates, and looted the economy in industry and agriculture.

The inhabitants of the Polish territories were forced into slave labor for the German war economy. Altogether, over the period 1939-45 almost three million people were taken to the Third Reich from the whole of Poland.

**14** Tuwim, Julian (1894-1953): Poet and translator; wrote in Polish. He was born in Lodz into an assimilated family from Lithuania. He studied law and philosophy at Warsaw University.

He was a leading representative of the Skamander group of poets. His early work combined elements of Futurism and Expressionism (e.g. *Czychanie na Boga* [Lying in wait for God], 1918). In the 1920s his poetry took a turn towards lyricism (e.g. *Slowa we krwi* [Words in blood], 1926).

In the 1930s under the influence of the rise in nationalistic tendencies in Poland his work took on the form of satire and political grotesque (*Bal w operze* [A ball at the opera], 1936).

He also published works for children. A separate area of his writings are cabarets, libretti, sketches and monologues. He spent WWII in emigration and made public appearances in which he relayed information on the fate of the Polish population of Poland and the rest of Europe.

In 1944 he published an extended poem, 'My Żydzi polscy' [We Polish Jews], which was a manifesto of his complicated Polish-Jewish identity. After the war he returned to Poland but wrote little. He was the chairman of the Society of Friends of the Hebrew University and the Committee for Polish-Israeli Friendship.

**15** Slonimski, Antoni (1895-1976): poet, literary critic, publicist and author of comedies; he wrote in Polish. Born in Warsaw into an assimilated family, the grandson of the astronomer and Haskalah activist Chaim Zelig, Slonimski was a co-founder of the Skamander poetry group (1920); his best known volumes include 'Droga na Wschod' [The Road East] (1924) and 'Okno bez krat' [Window without Bars] (1935).

In 1939 he left for France, and from there went to England. During the war he wrote two famous poems, 'Alarm', and 'Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej' [This one is from my fatherland], hailed as a tribute to the victims of Nazism.

He returned to Poland in 1951 and until 1959 was the president of the Union of Polish Writers. In 1968 during the anti-Semitic campaign waged by the Polish authorities he was removed from his posts and his works were banned. In the 1970s he cooperated with the anti-communist opposition.

**16** Feuchtwanger, Lion (1884-1958): German-Jewish novelist, noted for his choice of historical and political themes and the use of psychoanalytic ideas in the development of his characters.

He was a friend of Bertolt Brecht and collaborated with him on several plays. Feuchtwanger was an active pacifist and socialist and the rise of Nazism forced him to leave his native Germany for first France and then the USA in 1940.

He wrote extensively on ancient Jewish history, also as a metaphor to criticize the European political situation of the time. Among his main work are the trilogy 'The Waiting Room' and 'Josephus' (1932).

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

**18** Lech Jan (real name Leszek Serafinowicz, 1899-1956): poet, co-founder of the Skamander poetry group. From 1940 he lived in the US; he committed suicide. His work touched on both issues of the heritage of romantic culture - the legacies of great nationalist examples - and personal themes - loneliness, the tragedy of life and death.

His 'Collected Poetries' were published in 1954; he also had satirical works published, among them 'The Babina Republic' (1920). More of his works came out posthumously, including his literary and theatrical sketches, his 'Journal' (Vol. 1-3, 1967-73), and a selection of prose writings, 'The Senator's Ball' (1981).

**19** Lesmian, Boleslaw (1877-1937): Poet, writer and translator. He came from a family of assimilated Jewish intelligentsia. He was born in Warsaw and studied law in Kiev.

He wrote in Polish and Russian. He was one of the founders of the Warsaw-based experimental Artistic Theater (1911). His works are in the fairytale convention and are inspired by oriental and Slavonic folklore.

In 1912 he released his first volume of poetry (Sad rozstajny [The widespread orchard]). Only his admittance to the Polish Academy of Literature in 1933 enabled him to publish his work.

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

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

**22** Armbands: From the beginning of the occupation, the German authorities issued all kinds of decrees discriminating against the civilian population, in particular the Jews.

On 1st December 1939 the Germans ordered all Jews over the age of 12 to wear a distinguishing emblem. In Warsaw it was a white armband with a blue star of David, to be worn on the right sleeve of the outer garment.

In some towns Jews were forced to sew yellow stars onto their clothes. Not wearing the armband was punishable – initially with a beating, later with a fine or imprisonment, and from 15th October 1941 with the death penalty (decree issued by Governor Hans Frank).

**23** 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.

**24** Lutsk ghetto: Lutsk is a town in Volhynia (now Ukraine); in 1939 it was home to 20,000 Jews. After the outbreak of the German-Soviet War on 22nd June 1941, many Jews left their town with the withdrawing Soviet forces.

The town was occupied by the Germans on 26th June. A few days later some 2,000 Jews were murdered, and on 4th July 3,000 Jews were killed in a nearby castle. The ghetto was created in December 1941.

In the spring of 1942 a group of young people managed to escape from the ghetto, but most of them were murdered by Ukrainians, although some joined the partisans.

From 19th-23rd August 1942 the Germans held an 'Aktion', during which they murdered the majority of the Jews in the ghetto – 17,000 people were taken up a hill called Polanka and shot; the remaining 5,000 people who worked in the labor camp were murdered on 12th December 1942.

When the Soviets returned to the town on 2nd February 1944, they found 150 Jews, who had survived the German occupation in hiding.

**25** Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK): conspiratorial military organization, part of the Polish armed forces operating within Polish territory (within pre-1 September 1939 borders) during World War II.

Created on 14 February 1942, subordinate to the Supreme Commander and the Polish Government in Exile. Its mission was to regain Poland's sovereignty through armed combat and inciting to a national uprising.

In 1943 the AK had over 300,000 members. AK units organized diversion, sabotage, revenge and partisan campaigns. Its military intelligence was highly successful.

On 19th January 1945 the AK was disbanded on the order of its commander, but some of its members continued their independence activities throughout 1945-47.

In 1944-45 tens of thousands of AK soldiers were exiled and interned in the USSR, in places such as Ryazan, Borovichi and Ostashkov. Soldiers of the AK continued to suffer repression in Poland until 1956; many were sentenced to death or long-term imprisonment on trumped-up charges.

## **26 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.

**27** Stutthof (Pol. Sztutowo): German concentration camp 36 km east of Gdansk. The Germans also created a series of satellite camps in the vicinity: Stolp, Heiligenbeil, Gerdauen, Jesau, Schippenbeil, Seerappen, Praust, Burggraben, Thorn and Elbing.

The Stutthof camp operated from 2nd September 1939 until 9th May 1945. The first group of prisoners (several hundred people) were Jews from Gdansk. Until 1943 small groups of Jews from Warsaw, Bialystok and other places were sent there.

In early 1944 some 20,000 Auschwitz survivors were relocated to Stutthof. In spring 1944 the camp was extended significantly and was made into a death camp; subsequent transports comprised groups of Jews from Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Lodz in Poland.

Towards the end of 1944 around 12,000 prisoners were taken from Stutthof to camps in Germany – Dachau, Buchenwald, Neuengamme and Flossenburg. In January 1945 the evacuation of Stutthof and its satellite camps began.

In that period some 29,000 prisoners passed through the camp (including 26,000 women), 26,000 of whom died during the evacuation. Of the 52,000 or so people who were taken to Stutthof and its satellites, around 3,000 survived.

**28** Death marches: forced evacuation of prisoners of concentration camps in Eastern Europe on Hitler's orders from January 1945, ahead of the Soviet invasion. The prisoners were formed into marching columns or transported in cattle wagons in the direction of Germany.

The sick and the weak were shot on the spot; the winter, starvation and harsh conditions decimated the transports, and many prisoners were shot along the way. In all, of the approximately 700,000 who were sent on such marches, a third died.

The Germans evacuated part of Auschwitz, Stutthof, and the Hasag forced labor camp in Czestochowa in this way.

**29** 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.

**30** Settlers in Lower Silesia: Evacuation of Poles from the USSR: In 1939-41 there were some 2 million citizens of the Second Polish Republic from lands annexed to the Soviet Union in the heart of the USSR (Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians).

The resettlement of Poles and Jews to Poland (within its new borders) began in 1944. The process was coordinated by a political organization subordinate to the Soviet authorities, the Union of

Polish Patriots (functioned until July 1946).

The main purpose of the resettlement was to purge Polish lands annexed into the Soviet Union during World War II of their ethnic Polish population. The campaign was accompanied by the removal of Ukrainian and Belarusian populations to the USSR.

Between 1944 and 1948 some 1.5 million Poles and Jews returned to Poland with military units or under the repatriation program. Between the wars Lower Silesia was part of Germany.

Jews emigrated from the region during the fascist period to escape persecution. In 1939 there were 15,480 Jews living in the region, most of whom perished during the war.

A new influx of Jews began in 1945 after the region was incorporated into Poland. Of the 52,000 or so Jews that arrived there, 10,000 settled in Wrocław (formerly Breslau). Jews also moved to Legnica (formerly Liegnitz), Dzierżonów (Reichenbach) and Wałbrzych (Waldenburg).

**31** Workers' University Society Youth Movement (OMTUR): socialist youth organization linked to the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Established in 1926, it organized cultural and sporting events, and acted against clericalism and anti-Semitism.

It brought together young people from all walks of life. In 1932 it had some 6,500 members in 85 towns and cities. In the 1930s OMTUR activists underwent political radicalization and began cooperating with a radical peasant communist movement.

Reactivated in 1944, in 1948 it numbered around 100,000 members. After the war it ran clubs, libraries and sports clubs. In July 1948 OMTUR was incorporated into the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP).

**32** Zukunft (Yid.: Future): Jewish youth organization that operated in Poland from 1910-1948. It was formed from the merger of several social democratic oriented youth groups.

It had links to the Bund and initially also to Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy [Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania] (SDKPiL), and was involved in printing and disseminating illegal press and conspiratorial political activities in the lands of the Russian partitions.

From 1916 it functioned officially as the Bund's youth organization, and from 1918 (when Poland regained its independence) it was a national organization with some 7,000 members (85 sections).

Zukunft organized educational and self-teaching activities in young working-class Jewish circles, opened sports clubs, and defended the economic rights of young workers. It published a magazine, *Jugnt-Veker* (Yid.: Reveille for the Young).

During the war Zukunft took an active part in organizing resistance in the Warsaw ghetto. Reactivated in 1944, it continued its cultural and educational activities, running vocational schools and night classes. It was disbanded by the communist authorities in 1948.

**33** 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.

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

From 1954 the political system in Poland gradually thawed (censorship was scaled down, for instance, and political prisoners were slowly released – in April and May 1956 some 35,000 people were let out of prison).

But the economic situation was deteriorating and the social and political crisis mounting. On 28th June a strike and demonstration on the streets of Poznan escalated into an armed revolt, which was suppressed by police and army units.

From 19th-21st October 1956 a political breakthrough occurred, the 8th Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee met under social pressure (rallies in factories and universities), and there was the threat of intervention by Soviet troops.

Gomulka was appointed First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, and won the support of many groups, including a rally numbering hundreds of thousands of people in Warsaw on 24th October.

From 15th-18th November the terms on which Soviet troops were stationed in Poland were agreed, a proportion of Poland's debt was annulled, the resettlement of Poles back from the USSR was resumed, and by the end of 1956 a large number of people found guilty in political trials were rehabilitated.



There were changes at the top in the Polish Army: Marshal Rokossowski and the Soviet generals went back to the USSR, and changes also to the civilian authorities and the programs of political factions.

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

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

On 19th June 1967, at a trade union congress, the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR], Wladyslaw Gomulka, accused the Jews of lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War.

This marked the start of purges among journalists and people of other creative professions. Poland also severed diplomatic relations with Israel. On 8th March 1968 there was a protest at Warsaw University.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs responded by launching a press campaign and organizing mass demonstrations in factories and workplaces during which 'Zionists' and 'trouble-makers' were indicted and anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia slogans shouted.

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

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

**36** Mostowicz, Arnold (1914-2002): writer and cultural activist. Born in Lodz into a Jewish family; his father was an industrialist but also a cultural activist and theater director. Mostowicz studied medicine in Toulouse, and returned to Poland shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

He worked in the Lodz ghetto as a doctor. He was imprisoned in Auschwitz. He did not return to medicine after the war, turning instead to writing. He wrote science fiction novels and popular science books.

He was also a journalist and publicist. He is the author of the novel 'The Ballad of Blind Max', and the volume 'Lodz My Forbidden Love', in which he revealed his ties with his native city. He was the president of the Monumentum Iudaicum Lodzense Foundation.

**37** Events of 1989: In 1989 the communist regime in Poland finally collapsed and the process of forming a multiparty, pluralistic, democratic political system and introducing a capitalist economy began.

Communist policy and the deepening economic crisis since the early 1980s had caused increasing social discontent and weariness and the radicalization of moods among Solidarity activists (Solidarity: a trade union that developed into a political party and played a key role in overthrowing communism).

On 13th December 1981 the PZPR had introduced martial law (lifted on 22nd June 1983). Growing economic difficulties, social moods and the strength of the opposition persuaded the national authorities to begin gradually liberalizing the political system. Changes in the USSR also influenced the policy of the PZPR.

A series of strikes in April-May and August 1988, and demonstrations in many towns and cities forced the authorities to seek a compromise with the opposition.

After a few months of meetings and consultations the Round Table negotiations took place (6th Feb.-5th April 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronisław Geremek, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki).

The resolutions it passed signaled the end of the PZPR's monopoly on power and cleared the way for the overthrow of the system. In parliamentary elections (4th June 1989) the PZPR and its subordinate political groups suffered defeat.

In fall 1989 a program of fundamental economic, social and ownership transformations was drawn up and in January 1990 the PZPR dissolved.