

# Anna Lanota

Anna Lanota

City: Szymanowek, Warsaw

Country: Poland

Interviewer: Aleksandra Bankowska

Date of interview: September - October 2004

*Mrs. Lanota is a charming, distinguished elderly lady.*

*Benevolent and kind, she often assists with translations from Hebrew and Yiddish – recently she was a consultant for the translations of memoirs written in Yiddish for the book by Anna Bikont entitled 'My z Jedwabnego' [We of Jedwabne].*

*She helps Centropa to find new interviewees – thanks to her we made an interview with her cousin Zuzanna Rosset.*

*Our conversations took place in her home outside Warsaw, where she lives with her daughter and son-in-law. She talks calmly, patiently and thoughtfully, choosing her words with care.*



- [My family history](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [After the war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

## My family history

My mama's family comes from Zdunska Wola [about 45km south-west of Lodz, central Poland]. My grandfather, Szmuel Pilicer, was born there in the 1850s. It was a very poor family. He married when he was 15. His wife Ryfka [Pilicer] was two years younger than him. Her wedding was a shock to her.

She told me that during her wedding she went out onto the threshold of the house and played with her doll, and when her father saw it, he hit her and said, 'You're a married woman!' But she didn't even understand what getting married was all about; the doll meant more to her.

After the wedding Grandfather bought a weaving loom, and what he wove on it, he sold. He was able to look after money. When the expansion of Lodz [in connection with the Industrialization] came in the 1880s, Grandfather and his brother set up a textiles factory on Sienkiewicza Street, became rich, and bought three or four townhouses. When I was small Grandfather no longer

worked; he had handed his factory over to his children and lived, very well at that, from renting out apartments.

Grandfather Szmuel was very learned in religious matters, and so became an arbiter in conflicts. That wasn't an office connected with the Jewish community organization; he simply had authority among the Jews of Lodz as a wise, honest man, and people would come to him to have their quarrels about unpaid bills of exchange, sureties, or marital affairs like divorces resolved.

They were ordinary commonplace matters that the Jews didn't want to go to court with, because that took a long time and was costly. He didn't take money for it. My grandparents lived in Lodz on Dzielna Street.

Grandfather had two rooms separated off from the rest of the apartment; in one was a waiting room and in the other he received callers all day long. Whenever I went there, there was always someone sitting in the waiting room and someone in Grandfather's room.

Grandma Ryfka kept a very welcoming house. She had a large family from Zdunska Wola, and her brothers and their families would come to visit her at all the holidays, because she was the only one of all the siblings who was wealthy. We always spent the holiday of Purim with her.

Moreover, almost every afternoon Grandma's daughters would go there with their children. Grandma and Grandfather Pilicer had eight daughters – Sara, Cesia, Pola, Bronia [Bronislawa], Hanka [Hanna], Mania [Maria], Hela [Helena] and Jehudit, my mama – and three sons: Mendel, Simcha and Josel.

When I was still small Mama would often take me to my grandparents'. Grandma would give me aniseed cookies or candies. Sometimes we would go out shopping, and then she would buy me makagigi at the Turk's shop [grocer's store owned by a Turk]. Makagigi looked a little like khalva, it was very sweet and oozed a thick, rich, sticky substance. I liked it a lot.

Grandfather Szmuel was miserly and couldn't bear to look at Grandma's hospitality. He didn't reproach her for it, and gave her money for it, but he couldn't stand the sight of it. We grandchildren were terribly scared of Grandfather. He was a very stern man, a dictator in the house; I never saw him express feelings, even towards his own mother. He never ate at the table with us; only on Fridays was he at the Sabbath supper, and on Saturdays at lunch, but even then he ate very little. On normal days he kept a strict diet; he ate only semolina three times a day. Sometimes he liked to drink a glass of spirit with his food. He was never ill, he simply lived very ascetically.

There were two maids working at their house, Jewish girls from a small town. Grandma didn't want to have Polish or German girls in the house because it had to be kosher. I never in my life saw a non-Jew at Grandfather's.

Grandma bought at Jewish shops; only sometimes did she buy candy for the children at the Turk's shop. At my grandparents' home the language was Yiddish, not Hebrew. They didn't approve of the Zionist movement, because they believed that only when the Messiah came would Palestine be for the Jews. Grandfather and Grandma were very religious.

My father's family owned the estate of Skryhiczyn near the little town of Dubienka in the Lublin province. There was a short time in Tsarist Russia when Jews were allowed to buy land [the decree of Alexander II of 5 June 1862], and then my grandfather's mother, Ita Rottenberg, bought Skryhiczyn from a German.

Jews rarely owned land. Skryhiczyn was later the property of my grandfather, Szmuel Rottenberg, and his brother Chaim. Grandfather had one manor and his brother another. My grandfather's manor was burned down during World War I. Grandfather died in 1915 in Odessa [today Ukraine], so I never knew him.

My grandparents had ten children: Zlata, Hena, Fajga, Chaja, Masza, Natan, Henoch, Josel, Mordechaj, and Szlomo, my father. After Grandfather's death the estate was divided up into farms for each of the children, each one with 60 hectares of land plus so many hectares of woodland and meadow.

Each of the children built themselves a separate house. The manor was rebuilt, too, and my father's sister, Aunt Hena, lived there, and my grandmother Ryfka Rottenberg. It was a fairly large, sprawling single-story manor, with a porch and with a very nice orchard and a vegetable and flower garden. Most of all I liked the iron gate at the entrance and the fence that encircled the garden.

During World War II there were Germans in the manor, after the war a co-operative, and after that both the fence and the house were taken down, what was wooden was taken and burned, and what was brick was dismantled and taken for bricks.

Now all there is there is grass, nobody builds anything there. The land belongs to farmers who were given it after the agricultural reform. [As a result of the agricultural reform of 1944 large landed estates were divided up into small farms and given to farmers.]

My second grandmother, my father's mother, Ryfka Rottenberg, I remember only vaguely; I was six when she died. She was born in the 1850s, in Warsaw, I think. Her maiden name was Kral. She lived almost all her life in Skryhiczyn.

I remember that when she stood at the well pulling up the pail of water she seemed very tall to me. But she was a tiny woman. She looked like a peasant woman; she wore a white headscarf tied under her chin. She was short-sighted.

My father was her youngest child, and she loved him very much. Even when he was already married, she would call him Szlojmele, which used to drive him crazy, because that is what only small children are called. He protested, but it was of no avail; Grandmother would forget and soon afterwards would say the same thing.

In my father's home Yiddish was spoken, but the children grew up in the country among Ukrainians and Poles, and spoke Ukrainian and Polish to them. My father spoke Polish with a Ukrainian accent. The Ukrainian peasants were Father's friends; they swam together, dived, watered their horses, raced on horseback; they were quite close.

In both Skryhiczyn and Dubienka there were few Poles but lots of Ukrainians. Skryhiczyn was basically a Ukrainian-Jewish village. The only Poles were the priest, the priest's housekeeper and her two children, the pharmacist and his family, and the teachers at the elementary school. I don't

remember any Polish peasant families. Both my uncles had separate apartments for their farm-hand and his family, in the same house. They were Ukrainians.

Not all, but the majority of the Ukrainians had a hostile attitude towards Poland. They had their own organization, 'Ridnaya Ukraina.' [Editor's note: There wasn't an organization called Ridnaya Ukraina but one called 'Ridna Skola,' which means educational organization in Ukrainian.]

I think there was a communist organization there too, but a conspiratorial one. I remember one Ukrainian, called Radiuk, who lived on my father's plot. He had the same approach to both Poles and Jews – he lived on our land because that was where he lived, he had to work somewhere, didn't have his own land, but he was against us.

At the beginning of World War II, when I was roaming the Ukrainian villages with my distant relations Ita and Olek Kowalski, far beyond Vladimir Volhynski, the Ukrainians didn't want to give us, as Poles, even a glass of water.

Olek got mad once and said to them, 'I spent four years in prison as a communist, and now I can't even get a glass of tea off you.' When they heard that he'd been in prison under Polish rule, everything came out for us at once, even ham.

My mama came to Skryhiczyn from Lodz for the first time as my father's fiancée in 1905. My parents' marriage was definitely organized by a matchmaker. Mama might not have liked Father, and then she wouldn't have married him, but she did like him.

They were both 17. After her first visit to Skryhiczyn Mama promised herself that she would never live there in her life. She was horrified. She had been brought up in a wealthy family, in the city. And in Skryhiczyn there was no electricity, just candles and kerosene lamps, there were curtains instead of blinds, there was no sink or bathroom – the water had to be brought to the bath in pails.

Relations with the servants and farm-hands were familiar, too, which annoyed my mother.

And relations within the family were entirely different, too, less traditional. In my Mama's family the man was the master of the house, and children and young people had to show him respect. But here it was a little different. My Mama saw all this and said that it was out of the question that she should live there. Father gave in; he was the only one of his siblings not to live in Skryhiczyn.

My mama was a woman of great faith. She didn't go to the mikveh and she didn't wear a wig, but she kept a kosher kitchen and observed all the holidays according to the commandments, even those that were the hardest to keep.

For instance, she always fasted on Yom Kippur, even though she had a heart complaint and she found it difficult. On the other hand, Mama had graduated from the 7th grade of gymnasium, which was a lot at that time, she spoke Polish like a Pole and was very widely read. She always used to say to me that women should work.

That was her true creed. She encouraged me to become a dressmaker or a dentist, because then the woman can work at home and can bring up the children. She also had clear-cut political views. She always spoke of the Russian progressive intelligentsia with great sympathy, but considered the Bolsheviks [1](#) to be animals through and through.

During World War I my parents lived in Odessa with Father's sister, Masza. When the revolution broke out [Russian Revolution of 1917] [2](#), Mama saw such terrible things that whatever one said afterwards she was very negative. Father agreed with her.

My father was religious too. He dressed in traditional costume: long dark coat and always a hat. Every Saturday and at the holidays he went to the shtibl, a place of prayer in a private apartment. He considered the synagogue to be for Jews who were less rigorous in observing all the bans and impositions, so he didn't go there.

He worked as a gang foreman in my uncle's factory, the spinning factory on Sienkiewicza Street in Lodz. On the whole the workers there were Polish. Father had a close colleague there who was a Pole, and he came to our house almost every day. I think he was called Podgorski. He held the same position.

I was born in Lodz in 1915. I was the eldest child and the only daughter. I had three younger brothers. The eldest was called Cwi Rottenberg, but we called him Rysiu. He was born in 1917. I remember him starting to walk. We were living in Skryhiczyn then, and he saw a goat racing along the street and wanted to catch it.

Rysiu finished elementary school in Lodz and went on to a technical high school for the textile industry. He did his school-leaving exams there and started work as a dessinateur [French for draughtsman, designer]. A dessinateur draws the designs according to which the cloth is to be woven. My brother worked in that capacity until the outbreak of the war.

At the beginning of the war Rysiu married Tusia, I can't remember her surname, and he and his wife wanted to cross to the east [to eastern Poland, which had been occupied by the Russian forces]. The Germans caught them; his wife got free somehow, but he was arrested.

They held him for a whole year in Pawiak [3](#), and there he worked in his own trade and taught others. My parents were in the Warsaw ghetto [4](#), so when he came out of prison he went, with his wife, to the ghetto. He started work in a co-operative that made brushes.

I saw him for the last time in that co-operative in August 1942 during the first deportation from the Warsaw ghetto. I got out of the ghetto then, you see, and it was only afterwards that I found out that when they rounded Tusia up for deportation, he went with her into the wagon.

My second brother was called Mietek, but his Jewish name was Mordechaj. He was born in 1920. He graduated from elementary school and vocational school, but he didn't work before the war, didn't get the chance. He was the only one of my brothers who was very religious.

He didn't wear the traditional robes, but he was a very devout Jew. He had similar friends, too. He didn't advocate the Zionist ideology or any other. He was very sensitive to music. I know nothing else about him, because I left home young to go to Warsaw to university, and I didn't live with my parents and my brothers after I was 16. I met him during the war; he was in Warsaw and worked with my elder brother for the brush-makers. He perished in the first deportation, too.

I also had a third brother, called Zalman; he was born in 1924. We used to call him Baby, because he was the youngest of us. He was very intelligent. He was born sick; he needed something sewn into his spine, and the doctor, who knew how to do it and usually did it well, damaged a nerve

when he was operating on him.

After that my brother's legs were paralyzed; he did walk, but in special 'machines' [devices stiffening the legs]. But the worst thing was that he had a weak heart. The doctor told my parents that he would live to be nine. He lived 14 years, caught influenza, and died in 1939, before the war.

## Growing up

Our family lived on Pusta Street in Lodz, opposite the Ettigon's factory. We were the only Jewish family in the building. There were just Germans living there. We played with the Germans in the courtyard, on the rug-beating stand.

The German women didn't have anything against our playing with their children. But my mama never invited those children to our apartment, and those children never invited me in. We talked to them in Polish. The Germans had a German gymnasium just like we had a Hebrew one.

As the gymnasium had state entitlements to issue the school-leaving certificate, it also had a state curriculum, and all subjects had to be in Polish. That's how they knew Polish. Except as well as that, they had German language, German literature and German history. It was similar at the Hebrew school.

Some time afterwards we moved, because my parents couldn't keep up the high rent payments any longer. We moved into a house that was owned by my grandfather. We didn't have to pay him. That house is still standing on Sienkiewicza Street. The apartment had four rooms and a kitchen.

On the left there was the fairly big kitchen and bathroom. We had a coal-burning stove, but there was also gas. You entered the rooms from the corridor. The furthest along was my parents' bedroom. We also had a dining room. That was where my youngest brother slept.

Next to the kitchen there was a small room where my middle brother lived. As I was rarely at home, because I left home early [to study in Warsaw], my bed stood in my eldest brother's room. We had a maid when I was small, but later someone just came round to clean. Mama cooked herself.

We spoke Polish in our house. I know Yiddish from my grandmother, but not only, because we read both the Polish and the Yiddish press at home. There were two big Yiddish newspapers in Poland then: [Der] Moment [5](#) was one, and Haynt [6](#) was the other.

There was also Nasz Przegląd [Our Review] [7](#), a Jewish newspaper in Polish. And the Polish newspaper was Głos Poranny [The Morning Voice] [8](#). But books we read mostly in Polish. We had an awful lot of them, because my mother read a lot. When I was a schoolgirl Mama enrolled me at the library. They were private lending rooms at that time, where you had to pay. We used Mrs. Birencwajg's library, which was on Piotrkowska Street [the main thoroughfare in Lodz].

I remember the first edition of Sienkiewicz's Trilogy [popular, 3-part historical adventure novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916)], which was published as a supplement to one of the illustrated weeklies.



They were little green hardback volumes, fabric bound, I think. I couldn't put it down. I remember that we also had a German encyclopedia, Brockhaus, at home [one of the first big general encyclopedias, published 1796-1805 in Amsterdam and Leipzig].

Mama often took me and my brother to the Philharmonic. When the 'Habima' Hebrew theater from Vilnius [9](#) came to Lodz, I went to their performances. It was very high standard. To this day I remember the extraordinary performance of An-ski's [10](#) The Dybbuk [11](#), as if I had those scenes before my eyes. But in our family we didn't tend to go to the theater much.

That was a big outlay. My family's financial standing was average to low. We were never short of food, but it was very hard to buy clothes. Later on, they couldn't keep me in Warsaw, and I had to pay my own way when I was studying.

We celebrated the holidays and Saturdays very ceremoniously. Every Friday evening Mama lit two candles and said the blessing. After that there would be the Sabbath supper. My parents, brothers and I sat at the table together.

We would eat fish Jewish style [gefilte fish, minced fish] with challah, then clear chicken soup with pasta or beans, broiled chicken, compote, and cake. I didn't go to school on Saturdays because Saturdays were free at my Jewish school.

In the morning my father and brothers would go to the prayer house. I was incredibly privileged, because I got breakfast in bed from Mama. My father used to gripe at me about that: 'What's wrong, can't you get up?'

They would come back from the prayer house at 12 and then there was the Sabbath lunch. My father smoked cigarettes, and because it wasn't permitted to smoke from Friday until Saturday evening, he didn't smoke, but it used to make him terribly mad.

After dinner we always sat by the window all together and waited for the first star, so that Dad could light up. That was very nice; we felt that we were a family, that we were together, that that was something very good.

The most solemn festival for the Jews was Yom Kippur. It was believed that on that day the Lord God allotted people for life or death for the next year. So devout Jews asked for mercy.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, Father sat me and my brothers down on little stools, took a live hen, swung it above our heads, and spoke a formula in Hebrew that means: 'This is my sacrifice.' It was meant so that the hen took all the sins on itself. That's an old custom.

On Yom Kippur we didn't eat anything the whole day for 24 hours from one evening until the next evening. That was always very difficult for us, because my mother had a weak heart, and she desperately wanted to fast. And then in the evening she would go to the prayer house for the service as well.

The atmosphere there was so heavy that Mama when she came home was exhausted. She went straight to bed; she was very weak. But she always fasted. One time I went to the shtibl with Mama at Yom Kippur. There was a separate room for women and a separate one for men. The cantor sang the song Kol Nidre very beautifully.

I also remember Pesach. Dad made a search in advance, so that there was not a single breadcrumb, or humetz [chametz], in the house. Once it was all cleaned very carefully, Father took a cockerel feather and checked in every nook and cranny on the floor.

In the evening there was the extremely pleasant Pesach supper. We would put a large cup on the table for the angel [prophet] Elijah. Dad sat in his death shirt. Jews were buried in such shirts. They are sewn from white fabric, they have a collar like on Russian shirts, and they have gold embroidery at the neck.

Father would hide a piece of matzah from us [the so-called afikoman], under the cushion he was resting on. We knew where the matzah was, but we pretended we didn't know. When one of us found it, Father would give each one of us a piece, before we started eating.

Then the youngest child asked four questions [the mah nishtanah], why we celebrate Pesach. Father answered the questions reading from the Haggadah, the story of the exodus from Egypt. At the end of the Haggadah was a song about the kid, which we liked the best.

Only after reading the Haggadah did we start to eat. There had to be a few important dishes, for instance charoset. Charoset is this thick, dark-colored substance, not very nice; it tastes like earth. Then we would eat sliced apple with honey [Editor's note: this was a dish usually served at Rosh Hashanah, New Year].

Then we had gefilte fish, clear chicken soup, broiled or fried chicken, and compote. For seven days we ate matzah instead of bread. All that time we didn't go to school.

Most of all I liked the holiday of Purim. Then we would send Grandma Pilicer and all the aunts living in Lodz gateaux [layer cakes] and bottles of wine. They would send them to us too, so we had a lot of sweet things.

In the evening Grandma Ryfka Pilicer would hold a festive supper for the whole family. She served a lot of good things to eat, things that we never had: grapes, pineapples, special triangular nuts, and a lot of different kinds of sweets. At Purim humentashe [hamantashen] are made, triangular cookies with poppy seeds and raisins.

The children played with a greger [or grager, Yiddish for 'rattle']. On that day Grandfather would give all the children 2 zloty each. He would do it grudgingly, but very solemnly. Each one would go into his room alone, and Grandfather would ask, 'Whose are you?', because he remembered his own children, but not his grandchildren very well, because he had an awful lot. When you answered he would kiss you, give you 2 zloty, and wish you good health.

Another very solemn holiday in our house was Chanukkah, because my mother's birthday was at that time. At Chanukkah, candles were lit in a special, beautiful candleholder for seven days. [Editor's note: this holiday lasts 8 days in the Diaspora, and 7 in Israel.] And at Sukkot my father and my brothers ate their meals in a shelter [sukkah] that they built on the balcony. The German children in the house were very bemused that we did something like that.

We would go to Skryhiczyn on vacation, sometimes the whole family and sometimes just me. The trip was difficult because [railroad] tickets were expensive, but most of all it was hard to transport my youngest brother, who walked so poorly, so Mama would often stay in Lodz with him and we



would go to the country alone.

I was very attached to the family of Aunt Masza, my father's sister, and I spent every vacation with her, sometimes even a few months. In the country I always helped with the harvest, tying the stooks and threshing. Father would come quite often.

When we were small there weren't any nursery schools, just what they called 'sets.' A few families would get together and hire a 'bonne' [nurse], who looked after the children, played with them, showed them their letters, and took them out for a walk for an hour or an hour and a half.

Our set was made up solely of children from my mother's family. My cousins, I and my brother Rysiu went. We were five to six years old. We spent a few hours a day there, from 10 in the morning until dinner.

I was seven when I went to the elementary school at the Hebrew gymnasium on Piramowicza Street. It was a girls' school, but there was a Hebrew boys' gymnasium just the same. You started gymnasium at the age of twelve and it went on for four years.

All the subjects at my school were taught in Polish, apart from Hebrew language, the history of the Jews, and religious studies, which were in Hebrew. In religious studies we read the Torah and the Prophets.

The teachers and the pupils were all Jews. On the whole the teachers came from Cracow, probably because in Lodz pure Polish was not spoken in all families, but in Cracow the Jews spoke beautiful Polish.

There were no teachers at our school without a university education. The headmaster, Brandstaetter, was a German teacher. I also remember our class teacher, Mr. Ellenberg, and our math teacher, Mr. Szarybroder.

I hated school. The drill annoyed me, the fact that you had to go, this had to be done, that had to be written down. I did it all, but it was unbearable. I was a good student. Most of all I liked learning Polish literature, German, and German literature.

Languages were taught over a very long period then, six years, so to this day I know German and Hebrew well. I liked nature too, because we were taught that on excursions outside the city. I liked Latin as well, perhaps because the teacher was nice.

There were a lot of lessons. They started at 8 and I would go home at 4. Mama would give me mid-morning snacks to take to school, and there was a buffet at school, too, where you could buy something to drink and to eat.

At home I had to eat dinner alone because everybody had eaten earlier. After that I read books, went to friends' houses, or they came round to me. After supper I quickly did my homework. On Saturdays I would arrange to meet my friends and we would go to the park.

My maternal grandfather, Meir Pilicer, had a very big, very pretty garden next to his house. In the spring we would play there on the swings, and play cricket and sero [a game involving throwing rings and catching them on sticks].

Gymnasiums such as the German or Jewish ones had restricted state approval, which meant that they could award the school-leaving certificate but the examination had to be invigilated by someone from the education office.

The questions for the school-leaving exam were the same as in Polish schools. You took Polish, mathematics, Latin and I think physics, a written and an oral exam in every subject. I took my school-leaving exam in 1932.

They sent us an invigilator from the education office who was a German and a Nazi. I think they must have sent him to the Jewish gymnasium on purpose. He flunked 14 out of 30 girls, often for silly things, for instance for turning their heads and looking behind them.

Several of them he refused to admit to the oral exam. The girls who didn't get their school-leaving certificate that time got together and straight afterwards went to Palestine together. The same man from the education office had been at the school-leaving exams in the boys' Jewish gymnasium, and the lads had warned us what kind of a person he was.

My father believed that a woman didn't even need to graduate from gymnasium, because in any case she would soon be getting married and having children. But for my mother it was obvious that I had to have a profession and my own income.

As usual she convinced my father. I was interested in psychology, because at that time it was something entirely new. My mama didn't like that choice; she said, 'What will happen – well, you can't make a living from that.' And my grandfather didn't understand what psychology is at all.

Once he met me and asked, 'What are you studying?' I said, 'Psychology.' 'And what are you going to do?' I told him that I was going to be a teacher, and he said, 'A teacher? The worst profession in the world! You have to work so hard and study at the university to go on and teach other people's children afterwards?' He thought it incredibly stupid.

I left home to go to university in Warsaw when I was 16. My mother's sister, Pola Wegmajster, lived in Warsaw. At the very beginning I lived with her in a house on Walicow Street. Within two weeks I had rented a room with an unrelated family, together with a girl I had met at university.

I couldn't rent a separate room because that cost 30-40 zloty and was too dear. [These days a craftsman earned around 60 zlotys monthly. Mrs. Lanota couldn't earn much more as a student.] I earned money teaching private lessons.

Professor Baley from child psychology found me very good lessons at 2 zloty a lesson, teaching mentally handicapped children. Sometimes I would get lunch in return for a lesson, for instance from my aunt, for teaching my cousin math. I had to earn my meals, my rent and my fees. Sometimes my mama would send me a food parcel.

For a long time while I was at university I had internships at the Centos [12](#) house in Otwock. My immediate superior was my cousin Ida Merzan [her father's sister's daughter]. I worked with mentally disabled children, young ones, five to seven-year-olds.

Most of them had Down's Syndrome or schizophrenia. There were other mental illnesses too, but there weren't any seriously handicapped children there. Healthy children lived there too, from high-

risk families.

We had outstanding professors: Witwicki, Kotarbinski, Baley, Krauze, Tomaszewski, Nawroczynski. [Eminent Polish theoretical psychologists; Tadeusz Kotarbinski (1886-1981): philosopher, professor at Warsaw University and rector of Lodz University] Kotarbinski was one of my examiners for my Master's exam.

I wrote my Master's thesis on memory in children. I was studying at a time when the Endek [13](#) and ONR [14](#) hit squads were harassing Jewish students and enforcing the so-called 'bench ghetto' [15](#) at the university.

But in our department, in Prof. Baley's seminar class, when a classmate stood up once and said that Jews should sit separately because they were a worse race, Baley said this, 'Sir, please leave the room, and I am warning you that you will not pass my class, please enroll somewhere else, because you are not doing your Master's with me.' And indeed, in spite of interventions, he was not accepted after that into the seminar class. That was the only such incident in our department.

I personally didn't come into contact with any anti-Jewish harassment such as there was in medicine or law, or at the entrance to the university on Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street [Jewish students entering the university's gate were beaten by students from ONR or Endek groups].

I knew of it, of course. It didn't go on in our department simply because there were no positions to be had after psychology, no great openings, so people didn't flock to do it in such great numbers. The numerus clausus [see Anti-Jewish Legislation in Poland] [16](#) was not in force in psychology.

I had an awful lot of friends at university. They were mostly young left-wingers. Leftism was a world view; I define it very broadly [i.e. not only in terms of party membership]. For instance there was a girl among us who came from a very Catholic home, but not an Endek one.

In any case they weren't such crass young people as in medicine or law. We were involved with the Communist youth organization Zycie, which operated at the university. [Editor's note: Zycie, literally 'Life,' was an Independent Socialist Youth Union, a students' organization, existing in the years 1923-1938 in several Polish universities, and connected to the Polish Communist Party.]

We knew there was great poverty in Poland. We believed the Soviet Union to be just, that they governed well there, that Marx and Lenin were right. We read Marxist books, such as Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?' [A book by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, written in 1902, in which he formulated his concept of the revolutionary socialist party.], but also ones by the anarchist Kropotkin. [Kropotkin, Pyotr (1842-1921): Russian political activist, theoretician and organizer of the anarchist movement.] We carried out enlightening work. I used to meet workers from the communist group that met on Wisniowa Street.

Once I lived with two friends on Marszalkowska Street with a Mrs. Front. One of those girls worked with MOPR [17](#), the International Workers' Aid Organization, which was run by Ms. Stefania Sempolowska [(1870-1944), social activist, writer and benefactor of political prisoners]. That was an aid organization for political prisoners. Stefania Sempolowska used to send us people who had been let out of prison, mostly Ukrainians.

The idea was for them to spend the night with us, receive money and clothes, because they used to come in terrible rags, and only then would they go on to their families. My friend also used to send parcels of food and cigarettes to the prisoners. We all used to help her.

Once we organized a Christmas party for the children of political prisoners. We were given a large room in the Zelazna and Panska Street area by some trade union for the occasion. We cooked everything at home. I made a huge pot of cocoa milk. There was a Christmas tree, and the children got sweets and small practical presents, not just toys. The children were happy.

I lived with various friends, usually ones that I met at university. Most of the students in the psychology department were women. Once I lived on Marszalkowska Street with a painter, Natalia, and students from the Academy of Fine Arts used to come to see her.

At that time the boys and girls that studied there were the most sociable, fun, intelligent that you can imagine. Once or twice a large group of us went to Kazimierz [a little town and famous health resort near Lublin, about 180km from Warsaw] on the Vistula with Prof. Pruszkowski. [Pruszkowski, Tadeusz (1888-1942): portrait painter, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, pedagogue.] We used to organize get-togethers, talks, sometimes we would dance, but they weren't noisy parties, definitely without any alcoholic drinks.

We used to go to the theater, to the opera and to the philharmonic a lot – the very cheap tickets; we had to stand. In Lodz there wasn't an opera house, and it was in Warsaw that I went to the opera for the first time in my life. I went with friends to see 'Faust.'

It amused me greatly that Mephisto lay there and sang: 'I die, I die.' I started laughing, and the usher came up to me and said, 'Please do not laugh, it's too loud.' I couldn't stop, and he took me out. I also went to the philharmonic frequently, because I simply can't live without music.

The tickets to 'Qui pro quo' [well-known Warsaw cabaret, 1919-1931] were very expensive, but even so we got in often. That was a first-class cabaret. Jarosy [Jarosy, Fryderyk (1890-1960): director and master of ceremony in cabarets in inter-war Warsaw] was the master of ceremony, very witty; Ordonka sang [Ordonowna, Hanka (1904-1950): popular singer of the inter-war period]; sketches were put on.

They were often by Tuwim [18](#). I remember his 'Queen of Madagascar.' We also used to go to avant-garde plays that Jaracz put on at the Ateneum. [Stefan Jaracz, Stefan (1883-1945): actor and theater director, founder of the Ateneum Theater in Warsaw.]

Perzanowska acted in them [Perzanowska, Stanislaw (1898-1982): actress and director]. We went to every new play; it was a social duty. I used to go to the cinema, but to my taste today the films then were terrible, like Harlequins [cheap romantic novels, similar to Mills & Boon]. I don't remember any films that I was especially taken with.

I finished university in 1936. I carried on working at Centos in Otwock. Just before the war my friends from university Erna Justman and Jurek Bauritter and I had plans to open a home for retarded children in Srodborow. Erna's parents had given her a bit of money; my family lent me some, too.

We took a house, paid the rent, but we didn't have either a table or any beds. We even had bookings; one child even arrived, but the war broke out and its parents took it away. Fortunately there weren't any more. [The interviewee is referring to the fact that it would have been a problem to send away more children or to stay with a large group of children during the war.] In short, working in such a place was our idea of earning a living.

The Jewish community in Poland knew about the persecution of the Jews in Germany. When Hitler came to power [on 30th January 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany], the Germans began to resettle all the Jews that had Polish citizenship.

The Poles made a camp for them in Zbaszyn [19](#) and later those Jews were helped by the Jewish community organizations. The Poles didn't take Hitler seriously. I read 'Mein Kampf' [the book by Adolf Hitler, in which he laid out the principles of Nazism]; I couldn't comprehend it. We thought he was a bit crazy, abnormal. We didn't know that he had such an army of Germans behind him.

Neither then nor later did I want to immigrate to Palestine. I wanted a Jewish state; I believed it was necessary. But that didn't move me like the misery that I saw with my own eyes. But a lot of my family from Skryhiczyn went there even before there was terrible anti-Semitism and Hitler.

My cousins didn't really have any other alternative, in fact, because they didn't have any money to go to school or university. But they knew all about farming and could work hard. They were attracted to Palestine.

Several kibbutzim, among them Kineret, were established by members of my family: the Rottenbergs, the Szydlofskis, the Pryweses. My mama, later, during the greatest persecutions, in the war, said that when the war was over she was going straight to Palestine, that she wasn't going to stay in Poland.

We young people didn't really believe that there would be a war. Only one friend was adamant that war was certain to break out, and offered us, his friends, the chance to go to Canada. He didn't have a grosz [one zloty, the Polish currency is divided up to 100 groszy.] – neither did we – but he thought up a way to organize a trip to Canada for those who wanted to go and come back, and they would pay our fare, too.

And he managed to organize it; he stayed in Canada and saw the war out very peacefully. But none of our gang went; we thought it was simply madness, because we thought there wouldn't be a war.

## During the war

When the war broke out [see Invasion of Poland] [20](#), I was in Otwock. On 5th or 6th September, with my cousin Ida Merzan and her husband, I set off for Skryhiczyn. We went on foot. The road was full of evacuees, the fires could be seen from far off, every five minutes there were bombardments, the Germans were shooting at people from airplanes, people were trying to escape... We lost each other right away. That was a problem, because we had given Ida all our money.

I went on alone. I had left in high-heeled shoes, very uncomfortable ones, so I threw them away and went barefoot; my feet bled. Some soldiers took me a little way in a truck. I reached Chelm. I walked along the road; I must have looked terrible, because a Jewish woman came out and invited me in.

She asked me about everything, and it turned out that she knew the name of my relatives, the Rottenbergs. She bandaged my feet and even though it was Saturday and she was a very devout person, she ordered her son to harness a horse to the cart and take me to my aunt's. It took me ten days to make the journey to Skryhiczyn from Otwock.

Shortly after me, Ida reached Skryhiczyn, slightly wounded. I didn't stay with my aunt for long. The Germans were advancing very fast. A few people decided to go further east, as far as possible from the Germans. I set off with my distant cousin Ita, her husband Olek Kowalski, and two other guys.

We knew the area well, we knew where there were fords on the Bug [river, after September 1939 forming the eastern border of Poland], so we crossed the river without coming up against any Germans, Russians or our border guards. We went straight to Vladimir Volhynski, through Vladimir, and we passed Kovel.

A little way beyond Kovel we were sitting at the side of a dirt track, we had lit a fire and were roasting a goose that we had bought from a peasant farmer. Suddenly a cart went past, driven by a woman, who shouted: 'Bolsheviks, Bolsheviks!'

An hour later leaflets bearing Molotov's [21](#) speech were dropped. We didn't believe it. We were disoriented [see Annexation of Eastern Poland] [22](#). We returned to Kovel. On the way we joined up with a detachment of the Polish army; the men wanted to fight.

In Kovel the detachment set up their guns as if they wanted to defend the town. They didn't want the assistance of me and my cousin Ita at all; and anyway, Ita was pregnant, so the guys stayed with them and we went into the town. In the morning the Polish army had vanished, the guns that they had set up were gone. The guys came back to us.

That day or the next a Soviet tank rolled into Kovel. It was driven by a young boy. People surrounded him and asked him how things were in their country. He answered that they had everything, that things were very good, and altogether excellent.

This old Jew asked him about trading, and he answered that everything was state-controlled, so trade was too, and that they had everything in great quantities. And the Jew asked, 'Listen, but who trades in parsley?' The boy answered, 'What do you mean, who? The state, everything is state-controlled.' The Jew turned away and said in Yiddish, 'What kind of a state is it that trades in parsley!' People fell about laughing.

It's true that in September the Jews welcomed the Red Army. [The Soviet occupation was a total catastrophe for the Poles, because Poland had lost its independence. For Jews it was better than German occupation and, for a few people, something even better than Polish rule before war.] I saw it myself.

Jewish towns in eastern Poland were terribly poor. And because there was poverty and the young people knew that there was no way out, it was very easy to believe in the Soviet Union. It was said,



which wasn't true, but I believed it, that there were no differences between nations or between religions. There was no truthful news. As for welcoming the Soviet Army when they were chasing the Germans out, I would have gone myself; after all, the Germans were the ones who wanted to kill me.

We stayed in Kovel. On the way my skirt had got ripped and I wanted to buy some material to sew myself a new one. I went into a Jewish shop and asked for 70 centimeters, and the shop assistant said, 'Why 70? Take as much as you can.'

You'll see what's about to happen here, I strongly advise you to take as much as possible.' I thought to myself that he had gone mad; I bought the 70 centimeters and left. The next day the Soviet forces came and raided the shops like locusts, buying whole bales of materials, stockings, everything. Once Ida asked one of them, 'Why are you buying so many stockings?' He answered, 'What do you mean, why? As presents.'

We had to live off something, so I reported to the education office for work. The officer, his name was Bohonko, told me to fill out a form and write on it my background. First name and surname, and education. In the 'background' rubric I didn't know what to write.

My father was a worker, but my family, both the family from Lodz and the family from the country, were rich folk, so I had a most unfortunate background. But I wrote the truth, that one of my grandfathers was a 'pamieshchik,' that means someone who has a lot of land, and my other grandfather was a factory owner.

Bohonko read it and said, 'Did I ask you to write about your grandfathers? I am going to rip this up and you are to write only about your father.' He did so, I obeyed him, and only afterwards did I understand that he had saved me from exile. [In 1940-41 the Soviet occupying authorities organized 4 large-scale deportation campaigns of Polish citizens into the heart of the USSR, including those who had inappropriate social background, e.g. landowners].

I was sent as a carer to an orphanage. As soon as they came, the Soviets had merged the Jewish orphanage with a Polish one that had been run by nuns. The nuns were fired, but the other employees of both homes stayed.

Someone sent from Ukraine was made director, and the previous director of the Jewish home became a carer. I had small children aged five to seven in my care. The Polish orphans were pleased, because under the nuns as well as going to school they had had to work in the garden.

They had been fed worse than the nuns too, but we lived and ate together, children and carers. There was very little food, in fact really only millet for every meal. We couldn't bear it, but the children were hungry.

Once we ran out of spoons for the small children. I didn't suspect that buying spoons would be such a difficult thing. The boss sat down at the telephone and called first Kharkov, then Kiev; in the end somewhere they said that they had spoons.

They sent a large box, and I, delighted, opened it, but there were those painted wooden Russian spoons, huge ones - they wouldn't even have fitted into the children's small mouths. The boss said that the bigger children could eat with those spoons.

He knew that that was impossible, he was angry, but that was what he said. But I went round houses where Jews lived and asked them to donate me spoons for 20 small children. They gave very willingly.

I took them back to the home. I thought the boss would throw me out of my job, he shouted at me so much, he was so angry that I had begged for a state orphanage from private homes. But he didn't throw the spoons away – that was all I had feared.

I spent less than a year in Kovel. My relations, the Kowalskis, who I had traveled with in September, had settled in Lwow. I went to them. It's not far from Kovel to Lwow, it takes three to four hours by train. But then it was really difficult.

You had to have a 'komandirovka,' a permit to get on the train, a ticket, and in addition to that there was a woman standing by every carriage guarding it, and if she didn't like the look of someone she didn't let them on at all. I couldn't speak Ukrainian, so I couldn't communicate with her, but I mingled with the crowd and somehow got on the train.

I spent the first few days in Lwow with the Kowalskis. Olek worked in a factory and had got a room there. I was assigned to work in a home for handicapped children on Sykstuska Street. I moved in with a friend from university, Danka Barzach, with a Mr. and Mrs. Adler on Bonifratrow Street, a side street off Lyczakowska Street. (I remained friendly with Danka until the end of her life. She died a few weeks ago.)

We slept together in one bed. Our hosts were extremely nice and helped us enormously. Mr. Adler, as a surveyor, would go into the country to survey land and would always bring back some victuals, and Mrs. Adler would sew clothes for us, and give us thick soup after which we could go for a long time without food.

After that, while I was working on Sykstuska Street, I got a meal once a day. The children in that home were very severely mentally and physically handicapped. You couldn't communicate with them; most of them couldn't speak; some couldn't walk, couldn't eat.

There were about 20 of them in my group, and I the only carer. And in addition to that, the older, teenage children were sexually aroused; we had to watch them, because what would have happened if a girl like that had got pregnant? We had to be careful altogether, that they didn't fall, didn't get out, didn't get lost.

When the war broke out in June 1941 [the so-called Great Patriotic War] [23](#), the parents of those children took them home. All of a sudden that job came to an end. Right after that the Germans came. I very much wanted to go east.

Olek Kowalski called me that they were going, and were waiting for me at the station. But when I arrived at the station the train had already left. So I went back again and was there when the Nazi army entered Lwow [30th June 1941]. The Ukrainians were shooting at Poles from the windows.

German tanks were rolling down Lyczakowska Street. They were covered in flowers. Ukrainians came with bouquets of flowers, women dressed in very pretty Ukrainian skirts and blouses threw themselves at the Germans. They received them like liberators.

Detachments of the Wehrmacht holed up throughout the town and soldiers rounded people up to work. They caught me twice, but not as a Jew, as a Pole. The first time it was uniformed German women who caught me, and wanted me to wash the floor in their room.

Although I spoke German and they could communicate with me, they treated me like a subhuman. They let me go home as soon as I had washed the floor. The second time I was caught and taken to a Wehrmacht camp. An officer wanted me to wash his gloves. The gloves were smart, light colored, from pigskin. I knew I couldn't wash them in water, only in gasoline.

He wanted to give me gasoline from the automobile, but that is contaminated, so I told him that the right gasoline could only be bought from the pharmacy. He gave me a few groszy to go to the pharmacy, buy the gasoline and come back. I took the money and went home – I wouldn't have gone back to him of my own free will.

Some time later a friend of mine, Cynka Fiszman, told me that there was a job as a governess at the home of Mrs. Schorr, the wife of the doctor Mojzesz Schorr [24](#). Mrs. Schorr was very nice. Her daughter Fela, whose husband had died, lived with her, with two children, as well as the son of her other daughter, who had gone to New York before the war for the World Exhibition and couldn't get back.

She had left her child with her sister. That boy was the eldest, red-haired, pleasant, the nicest of all of them. Mr. Schorr had been arrested before that; by then I think he was dead, but they didn't know it. And the writer Adolf Rudnicki lived there too [Rudnicki, Adolf (1912-1990), born Aron Hirschhorn, popular Jewish-Polish writer]. I used to go there for a few hours a day, take the children for a walk and teach them. I had a very pleasant life there.

In Lwow I met Edward Lanota, my future husband. He was born in 1905 in Stryj in Eastern Galicia [25](#). He came from a family of Jews who converted to Catholicism a long time ago. He himself was a non-believer.

He had graduated in agricultural studies in Cracow, but had always worked as a chemist. When he finished his studies, he moved to Lwow. After the outbreak of war in 1941 he went to Warsaw.

Right from the outset the Germans issued a decree that all Jews had to wear white armbands [26](#) with the blue Star of David. I didn't wear the armband, because it annoyed me, and in any case I had always believed, right from the Polish times, that the authorities are not to be obeyed – authority is all very well, but I had my own common sense. I would take the boys' armbands off whenever I went out for a walk with them in the park.

It was not only the Germans, you see, but the Lwow hooligans also tormented the Jews, even children. When Mrs. Schorr found out that I took their armbands off, she was terrified that something awfully bad might happen because of it, and said that she couldn't agree to it. We came to the conclusion that I would simply leave.

So then Rudnicki said that you could get to Warsaw via Przemyśl and Cracow. Before that, all that time I had been sending letters and parcels with flour, sugar and butter to my family. I don't know when and why, but all my Lodz family had moved to Warsaw.

Now they were all in the ghetto in Warsaw. I had no intention of going into the ghetto, of course, but I did want to see my parents. Mrs. Schorr gave me a little money, and as well as that Rudnicki gave me a typhus vaccine [The typhus vaccine developed by Rudolf Weigl (1883-1957), a professor at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwow].

He told me that I would be able to sell it in the ghetto and then I would have money to live on for the first few days. Some Romanian in a Wehrmacht greatcoat took me to Przemyśl by car for 20 rubles or marks. I went to Warsaw on the night train, incredibly crowded, sitting on the floor.

In Warsaw I went to see my friend Szczesny Zamienski, on Szopena Street. Later on he was a journalist, with the pseudonym Dobrowolski. We had met in Lwow, and when he was leaving he said to me, 'In case you need it, here's my address, you can come and stay with me.'

A boy on a rickshaw took me there; that was the first time I'd seen a rickshaw. The Zamienskis weren't very happy, because Szczesny's wife was Jewish, and half her family was living with them, and they had terrible trouble, because they wanted to rescue them. And I wanted to see my mother, father and brothers.

In the evening Szczesny went with me up to the fence surrounding the ghetto. It was a high, wooden fence guarded by a Polish policeman. Szczesny went up to him and said, 'Please let this lady in, because her mother's in there.' The policeman didn't want any money – he slipped a plank aside and I went into the ghetto.

I remember that terrible impression; that was how you might have imagined hell, pitch black on the streets, you couldn't see anything, the streets full of people, some of them were sitting on the sidewalks and stretching out their hands. I had my parents' address; Leszno [Street] was very close by, but I completely lost my sense of direction.

All the time I was in the ghetto I was dazed – I think it was necessary to defend myself from it. In the end I made it to my parents. They lived with several other families in one apartment.

Mama opened the door to me. I didn't recognize her. She had had typhus and become a tiny, very thin old woman; she had never looked like that. It was only when she said 'Hania' and I heard her voice that I realized it was Mama. My parents and my middle brother Mietek were there; the elder Rysiek lived with his wife separately.

My parents had a tiny room; in the corner there was a stove that they cooked on. There was nothing to eat in the house. I took out my money and the Weigl vaccine to sell. Mietek went down and bought some food.

My family was living off the parcels that they got every week from Mama's sister Pola, who had been very rich and had managed to salvage the remnants of her fortune. That was all they had. Rysiek had sold lilac on the street in the spring. After that he worked at the brushmakers'.

The very next day somebody got me a job in the ghetto. A rich man with a kind heart had set up a small orphanage in an apartment on Leszno Street, close to Bankowy Square, and took children off the streets there.

He had equipped it with beds and bed-linen, and had food, clothes and simple drugs such as aspirin and ointments brought in. I don't remember his name. He took me and another woman on [as carers]; we lived there, and got food.

We didn't earn anything. There were no more than 20 children. The man collected children that he found on the streets and brought them to us. Many of them died at once; it was already too late to save them.

That was the worst for me, when they died. They thought they were in heaven – washed, bathed, in bed, in the warm – but it lasted a day or a few hours. There were a few orphans that weren't so emaciated yet, and they stayed with us.

Towards the end of 1941 Cousin Motl from Skryhiczyn came to see my parents. He told us that the Germans had taken all the Jews away to some place, where they had had Poles come with wagons too.

A 'dushegubka' was standing there, that is a kind of vehicle where they poisoned people on the spot. [Editor's note: 'dushegubka' Russian for 'mobile gas chamber.' Motl came from Lublin region, which was an area where many Ukrainians lived, so the inhabitants used many Ukrainian and Russian words.]

Beforehand they undressed the people and gave the clothes to the people who had come in their wagons. Among them was a peasant from Skryhiczyn who knew Motl, pulled him out of the line to the 'dushegubka' and hid him under the clothes on his wagon. Motl came to us and told us everything. People didn't believe him, because they thought it was impossible, but my Mama and all of us believed him because someone had come who was an eye witness.

So when on 22nd July 1942 the Germans and Latvians surrounded the ghetto and the deportations began [see Great Action] [27](#), I knew for certain that it was to death. The next evening, when things had calmed down a little, I ran to my parents.

They had already gone; but some soup, still warm, was standing on the stove, and photographs lay scattered on the floor. I wanted to get my parents out, and I flew off to the 'Umschlagplatz' [literally 'transshipment square' in German. It was located near Stawki Street where Jews were gathered by force before deportation].

I had no money, but I thought that somehow I might succeed. As I was running towards the 'Umschlagplatz' I came to a small square on Gesia Street, and there Germans were rounding people up into a truck. There were taking them straight to Treblinka [28](#) in it.

When I saw that, I ran up to the fifth story of a house that stood to one side, but a Jewish policeman [see Jewish police] [29](#) ran in after me, forced me to go down, and put me in the line to the truck. I saw that some people were giving the Germans pieces of paper, and then they ordered them to leave the cordoned off area.

They were evidently some kind of passes. I had nothing of the sort. But I showed the German a folded piece of blank paper. He didn't take it, but let me go at once, but not on the side towards the 'Umschlagplatz,' but the opposite side. I didn't get to my parents.

I went back to the orphanage. There came a day when they took children from orphanages. Our house was almost butted up against the [ghetto] wall, so we told the children to escape. All the children that could walk, even the five-year-olds, left the apartment.

I don't know what happened to them later, whether they made it to the Aryan side or perished in the ghetto. The ones that were lying in bed dying stayed. The Germans came; I don't remember whether they shot the children lying there – I was totally in shock.

I remember that one German came up to me, took the pendant that I was wearing round my neck in his hand, and said, 'You have only six weeks to live with that pendant,' and went. I don't know whether he wanted to frighten me or warn me. They only took the children. They left me and the other carer.

Then I went to my friend from university, Hania Rabinowicz. Her mother was very ill and could no longer walk. Hania had packed a rucksack and said that she was going to the 'Umschlagplatz' on her own, because they were giving out bread there, her mother couldn't go, so her mother would stay and she would go, because it was resettlement, so what was all the fuss about.

I told her what I knew, that it was not resettlement at all. She didn't believe me: 'What are you talking about, going round spreading doom!' She kissed her mother and went. Of course they [the Germans] shot her mother after that, and Hania went to Treblinka.

I thought they had taken my brother Mietek with my parents, but it turned out that they hadn't. I found out by chance that both my brothers were at the brushmakers'. I went to them. The co-operative was a room on the first floor, on Leszno Street, there were tables there and lots of people working, making brushes. Aunt Sara, my mother's sister, and her daughter, found us there. Both of them were killed almost straight afterwards.

Once I saw through the window that a large group of Jews with rucksacks was collecting in the courtyard. I realized that they wanted to go just like that friend of mine. I told my brother I would go down and tell them what was going on. But my brother said, 'Don't do that, because they'll just rip you to shreds.' But I went down and told them all I knew.

They answered that I was saying that on purpose to create a revolt; the Germans had said they were going to be resettled, they were giving everyone a loaf of bread, so they were going, and people like me would cause a massacre. They got so angry and shouted at me, so I didn't hear them out, I went back upstairs.

I spent two or three days at the brushmakers'. A friend from university, Rozenfeld, came to me and said, 'Here you are, 200 zloty, tomorrow morning at 5am a commando of Jews is leaving the ghetto to go to work, tag along with them and give the German who lets them past this 200 zloty; either he'll let you go or he'll shoot you.' [Rozenfeld, Michal (1916-1943): communist, member of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) [30](#) and Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) [31](#), in the Warsaw ghetto, fought in the rising in April 1943, killed in the partisan army in the Wyzkow forest in the summer of 1943.]

Before that, Poles and Jews in hiding outside the ghetto had called me and said, 'Get out, Hania, get out, tell everyone it's to the death.' They had been told by railroad workers that the trains from the ghetto went to Mlawa, and not somewhere way east, that they were overcrowded and came



back entirely empty.

They knew how it really was. I took the 200 zloty and said that I would go. My brothers said to me, 'When you get out, if you survive and have the chance, remember to get us out too.' I got out then; it was perhaps 14th August, at 5 in the morning with the group, who were all men, in fact.

I gave the German the money and walked very slowly, because I thought that if he wanted to shoot me, let him shoot. But he didn't even look round. I got in a rickshaw and went to the Zamienskis'. They had called me in the ghetto beforehand, and knew that I was coming out.

There were lots of Jews at the Zamienskis', the family of Szczesny's wife. He had got me a place to stay with a Mrs. Niwinska, but I was only with her for a very short time. I don't remember how I got my false papers – I had them, of course, in the name of Krawczyk, I think, and the profession written in them was seamstress.

Before the end of 1942 I married Edward Lanota. The way we did it was that somebody in the Warsaw office who forged documents wrote us out a certificate that we were married. My husband's data were true. We simply registered as a married couple. We lived on Kopinska Street at first. But after that we had to keep on the move, split up, because he was wanted by the police after escaping from jail.

When my husband had come to Warsaw from Lwow he had joined the PPR [the Polish Workers' Party]. Together with this Janka Bir he had made bombs, taken part in campaigns to blow up trains going to the front. They made the bombs in an apartment on Mazowiecka Street [in Warsaw].

They arranged that if there was a flowerpot standing in the window it meant that they could go in, and if there wasn't, they couldn't. My husband was on his way to the apartment and the flowerpot wasn't there, but he had gone up too close and turned back suddenly, and then they arrested him.

He was in Pawiak, they tortured him terribly. He asked for cyanide to be sent in for him. They sent him some, he swallowed the poison, and came to in the mortuary. He asked the guard to let him out, but he was afraid they would count the bodies, so he reported him to the Germans.

They sent my husband to Majdanek [32](#). He managed to hide a sledgehammer, and when the train moved off, he opened the door of the wagon and jumped out. He got to some farmer, and he put him in touch with a friend from Warsaw, Zbyszek Paszkowski, to come and get him with some clothes, because Edward only had his prison stripes.

Paszkowski came, and that was how my husband got free. After that the Germans put up wanted letters with his name on them in the streets. He always carried a gun after that; he said that he wouldn't be taken, that he would shoot at them and at the end at himself.

I don't remember how I met Krysia Stalinska. She was a very important person to me, and helped me a lot throughout the occupation. She wasn't Jewish. She was blonde, very tall, plump. We liked each other tremendously. I often lived with her. Once we lived in the German quarter [a representative part of Warsaw where apartments were assigned mainly to Germans], with a Mrs. Hammer.

She was a German from a well-known Warsaw family of slaughterers. She didn't want to accept the 'Volksliste' and her family disowned her. [Editor's note: a Volksdeutscher [33](#) was a person, who accepted the Volksliste.

From this time he was treated by German authorities like a German citizen, and had various privileges. Volksdeutsche were considered by Poles as traitors.] She lived on Belwederska Street; she rented out two rooms there. There, together with Krysia, we printed the clandestine newspaper Glos Warszawy [the Voice of Warsaw, a political and social paper published in Warsaw in 1942-1944].

Glos Warszawy was published by the PPR. I became a member of the Party then. Bienkowski and Sawicka contributed to that paper. [Bienkowski, Wladyslaw (1906-1991): communist activist, journalist and politician; Sawicka, Hanka, real name Anna Szapiro (1919-1943): activist in the communist youth movement, organizer of the Fighting Youth Union during the occupation.]

They would bring us their articles. Then our friend, a typesetter, would come round; he would come in through the window so that the janitor didn't see him, and he set every letter by hand, laying out the text in the type cases.

When he left, Krysia and I would print; we put the paper in the cases, rolled the roller across, and so on many times. We printed everything by hand. It took us all day. And because we made a lot of noise doing it, we told Mrs. Hammer that we were ironing stockings and that that was how we made our living. Once the whole edition was ready, Janek Tarlowski would come round, take it and distribute it.

We didn't live from ironing stockings at all, but from selling cheesecakes. I baked the cheesecakes, terrible ones; most of the filling was potato, not cheese. Early in the morning Krysia would go round the shops and sell them. You had to eat them the same day that they were baked, or the potatoes went black. If she didn't manage to sell them we ate them ourselves, together with Mrs. Hammer.

Once we did an awfully stupid thing. On 1st May a whole group of boys and girls gathered in Skaryszewski Park to celebrate the holiday. Each of us pinned a red flower on. Suddenly Polish policemen surrounded us and said, 'These are Jews.' But out of all of us I was the only Jew - all the others were Polish.

Halina Kaczmarek, a dark-haired girl, was there, so was Janek Tarlowski, and a few others. I was standing next to Krysia, and the policemen said to us, 'You ladies may go, but we are taking them in to the lock-up.' And they took them. Luckily they let them out straight away.

The PPR had contacts with the ghetto, but I personally had none. While the uprising in the ghetto [see Warsaw Ghetto Uprising] [34](#) was in progress I had to be very careful; I was afraid to leave the house.

I saw the ghetto burning, I saw the merry-go-round outside the ghetto, and people behaved appallingly. I'm sure there were some who found it horrendous, but the Warsaw street, the great unwashed, joked about it.

They thought that Jews were escaping from that hell, so if someone looked slightly different, or they thought so, they would either demand a ransom or denounce them to the police. It didn't

happen to me once.

Only once, when I was standing on the street waiting for a tramcar, Rolf, a German, a friend of mine from the neighborhood in Lodz, walked past. He was in a black German police uniform. He recognized me, I recognized him at once too. He looked at me, then turned his gaze upward and pretended he hadn't seen me. He would have had to take me in to the Gestapo.

Some time later the PPR's main printing press was denounced and Mankiewicz, who ran it, was arrested. Mankiewicz knew our address and that of Janek Tarlowski. We were told to move out. We rented a room with this woman.

Once I broke a glass and said to her, 'Madam, I've smashed a glass.' The woman answered, 'You've smashed a glass? O my lady, you ladies aren't going to be living with me any more, because you are Jews.' I asked, 'How did that come into your head?', 'Only Jewesses say "I smashed" a glass; Polish girls say "I broke."' Perhaps that's true, I don't know. We had to move out.

At that time, after the ghetto uprising, there were mass arrests in Warsaw, so we were sent to the AL [Armia Ludowa, People's Army] [35](#) partisans near Wyszki. We spent several months there in the summer of 1943. The detachment was 15-16 strong, of which three were girls.

The leader was Janek Bialy ['White Janek' Szwarcfus (1914-1943): communist, member of the PPR, fought in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, killed in the partisan army in the Wyszki forest in the summer of 1943].

I met that guy Rozenfeld there, the one who had given me the money to get out of the ghetto a few months earlier. Within the detachment I was responsible for intelligence, which means I had to find out when and where trains with Germans going to the front would be traveling, and also when they would be requisitioning food from the farmers – butter and pigs. The boys would then take the things back off the Germans and give them back to the farmers.

They would also attack gendarmerie stations. I also used to go to the village for bread. We took food off the Germans. Once we got a huge amount of eggs. There was nothing else, so we ate scrambled eggs, and hard-boiled eggs in place of bread.

The farmers were not well-disposed towards us, because they were very frightened of the Germans, but although they knew that there were partisans in the woods, nobody ever denounced us.

During a break once Janek was cleaning his gun, I was sitting next to him, and his gun went off. He didn't know that there was a bullet in it, he was careless, and he shot me in the foot. It was a big wound. They bound it up for me in a towel, because we didn't have any dressings.

They decided to send me back to Warsaw. Krycia Stalinska went with me. In the night they stopped a train and ordered the driver to take me into the cab, because the Germans didn't go in there. The driver let me in at once and off we went.

We got off in Warsaw in the middle of the night. There was a curfew. Krycia went for a pass. I couldn't walk, my foot hurt terribly. A German came up to me and asked what I was doing there. I pretended I didn't understand. Just then Krycia came up with the pass and told him that I was from

the country, I had been chopping wood and had cut myself. He didn't ask anything else. We got in a carriage and went to our friend Kalinowski's house. He lived in Ochota [a district of Warsaw], and was a cobbler.

I couldn't stay there because it was one room, he had customers coming in, there was too much traffic. Opposite lived his friend Wawrzyniak, albeit with his wife and children, but in two rooms. I moved in there. Krysia went back to the woods. They sent a doctor, Ludka Tarlowska, to me.

When she saw my wound she said, 'I don't know what will happen, you've got a break and a wound, you may get gangrene, because it's so dirty.' I answered, 'There won't be any gangrene, because there can't be, it's out of the question.'

She cleaned me the wound, put my leg in wooden splints and bound it up. And nothing happened; it just took a very long time to heal. After that she sent me high lace-up boots to keep my leg stiff once I started walking. I limped a bit, but later not even that.

Some time later Krysia came from the woods with a whole bag of guns to be repaired. While she had been in Warsaw our whole detachment had been killed. A forester had let them stay the night in the attic of his hut, and then went and told the Germans that he had a partisan detachment in his hut.

The Germans surrounded the hut, a shootout ensued; they defended themselves but were all killed, none of them survived. I can't remember how we found out about that. But we decided to have the guns repaired anyway. We put them in bags. We got to Narutowicza Square.

Somebody pointed to us, perhaps because I was limping and she'd come from the woods and you could see it. They flew at us, out of the house where the SS lived, to the right of St. James's Church. They went up to Krysia, she ran to a tram and asked the driver to move off, but he didn't make it in time, the SS were already there.

She pulled a gun out and shot. They took her away. I never heard of her again. An SS man ran to me too and wanted to see what was in my bag, but when he heard the shot he turned round, and then I escaped. After the shot people started to run away, and I mingled with the crowd.

I ran to some friends' house, who lived on Narutowicza Square. I spent a few hours there. My husband sent our friend Jadzia Koszutska to take me to Kolo [a district of Warsaw], where he was living at the time. We had to go after dark, because I was still wearing lace-up boots, and it was summer and nobody was dressed like that. In Kolo there were blocks of one-room apartments with kitchen annexes. We lived there until the uprising.

Just before the Warsaw Uprising [1944] [36](#) my husband went to see Zbyszek Paszkowski, who lived in the Old Town. I was alone when I heard shooting. Jadzia Koszutska came to see me and told me that the uprising had broken out and that we were going to the Old Town to meet them.

We went on foot, and all the way we didn't meet a single German or a single insurrectionist. Only when we burst onto the Market Square did we see a procession of people with red and white flags. They were singing 'Rota' [a very popular patriotic and anti-German song written by Polish poet Maria Konopnicka in 1896] or some other patriotic song.

We stood bewitched. Suddenly freedom had come to the whole of the Old Town, it was incredible – rarely in one’s life does one have a feeling of such happiness. I experienced it then. We joined the demonstration. My husband dashed out of a café, because they had gathered there, and from then on we were together all the time.

Right at the start of the uprising my husband said to me, ‘There won’t be victory here, only defeat,’ but it didn’t occur to us not to fight. To fight the Germans was happiness; it was suddenly freedom after so many years. We knew we would lose, but what did that have to do with our will to fight? Nothing.

Though I don’t know why ‘Bor’ [General Tadeusz Komorowski, pseudonym ‘Bor’ (1895-1966), a commandant of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) from July 1943 to October 1944] had to stage the uprising then – 200,000 people died – Polish intelligentsia and youth. It is portrayed as heroism. I think that the heroes were the people who fought, but it was the heroism of people betrayed by their leaders.

In the Old Town I divided up the food among the boys on the barricades. Later I printed our newssheet. It came out every day, it was four pages long. The printing shop was on Freta Street. I certainly built barricades, and had a gun, but I don’t remember standing on the barricades.

Later on we went round making holes in cellar walls to be able to move from house to house without going up onto the street. People were angry with us. The Old Town was simply massacred, they bombarded it terribly; houses collapsed, people were killed under them, there was no escape. The Germans sat on the roofs and shot at passers-by, and there was nothing to eat. So the people blamed us, the insurrectionists.

On 26th August [1944] my husband was killed. We were in the same house; he was standing nearer the street and I was standing nearer the courtyard. I was printing the newspaper, and suddenly a bomb with a time delay fell on the house.

The last thing I heard was my husband calling: ‘Hania!’ I said, ‘I’m here,’ and some guy standing next to me threw me out onto the street through a hole in the wall. The bomb exploded, that guy was killed instantly, and I lost consciousness.

I was wounded in the head and the leg. I was taken to a hospital in a cellar. I regained consciousness there and they bandaged me up. I found it hard to walk on that leg, and I think I had a slight concussion, because I was constantly dazed.

Only later did they tell me that my husband had died. He was buried in a mass grave for the insurrectionists on Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street, next to the statue of Mickiewicz.

Then Gustaw Rozlubirski [Lt. Edwin Rozlubirski, pseudonym ‘Gustaw,’ one of the AL Commanders in the Old Town] decided that our entire group was going to Zoliborz [a district of Warsaw]. Zoliborz was holding out and hadn’t yet been badly hit.

Our path through the sewers had been mapped out by Inka Solska a long time before. We went down into the manhole. I strapped myself to Jadzia Koszutska so as not to get lost, and we set off. Walking through the sewers was terrible, you got hallucinations, you thought you were about to get out.

In some places the sewer was high and you could walk upright, and in some you had to crouch down low. There were stormwater sewers, sewers where there was a lot of water, which you couldn't turn into because the water would drown you.

Huge rats flew past us. We didn't get lost because Inka had marked the route well. The Germans knew that we were down there so they stood at the manholes and threw grenades in. But the grenades exploded in the water and didn't do much damage.

The actor Wesolowski, a friend of Jadzia's, was walking in front of us; he got hit by a grenade but walked on. [In May 1943 the Warsaw ghetto insurrectionists had used the sewers as an escape route.]

A few hours later we emerged onto Inwalidow Square [in Żoliborz, which was the district of Warsaw that the insurrectionists held the longest]. We went to friends', washed – we were terribly dirty – and had to throw away the clothes we had worn in the sewers, and we got new ones.

There was a fairly large AL organization there, under Zenon Kliszko [(1908-1989): politician, PPR activist, one of the founders of the AL, after the war a deputy to the Sejm, secretary of the PZPR's Central Committee]. Some time later, when the defense of Żoliborz was coming to an end, a 20-man detachment was formed and ordered to go to Kampinos [a forest near Warsaw]. Jadzia and I were the only women in it.

We had to be very careful because the Germans had strung wires between Żoliborz and Bielany [a district of Warsaw]. We walked by night, and in the morning we reached Wawrzyszewo; at the time it was a little village on the edge of Warsaw. A woman gave me a basket of tomatoes.

The whole of the boundary of Warsaw was manned by Kalmyks [37](#), the Germans' auxiliary army. Jadzia and I went up to one of them and I said in Russian, 'My children are beyond there, I'm taking them tomatoes, you have to let me through.' And I had this pretty watch, which had always been broken; I had been given it by my employer in the ghetto.

The Kalmyk wanted me to give him the watch, so I gave it to him and he showed us how to pass so that the Germans didn't see us. It turned out that we needn't have asked him at all because the path was through a large field of rye. We showed the boys to follow us. And that's how we got out.

We reached Laski [a village just outside Warsaw], arrived at a home for the blind run by nuns. The nuns made us extraordinarily welcome, gave us food and drink, and put us in touch with a ferryman, because we wanted to cross the Vistula.

On the way to him, going through the wood, we met a detachment of the ONR. [The ONR didn't have detachments during the war; the armed organization ideologically close to the ONR was the National Armed Forces (NSZ) [38](#).]

They were all on horseback, and during the day they stood on the road and weren't afraid of the Germans at all – I don't know if they had an agreement with them, but there was something fishy about it.

An older man was walking with us, who had fought in the uprising, a worker, unshaven, neglected and tired. They pulled him out and said that he was a Jew, and if he was a Jew they would smash



him up. But he wasn't a Jew and they let him go. They didn't take any notice of anybody else.

The ferryman told us that the Germans patrolled the river every minute and that we would have to cross between the patrols. He gave us a very big boat, we all fitted in it, more than ten of us. His son took us across, a boy of perhaps 15.

As we were approaching the other bank, the boy noticed that there was somebody on the beach. From the boat we saw a machine gun planted in the sand and a uniform on the machine gun. It was beautiful weather, and a German had undressed and was sunbathing totally naked.

There was nothing for it; we had to land. Jadzia and I got out first, and the German closed his eyes in shame and started trying to cover himself with sand. We disappeared quickly into the undergrowth.

We hid in a barn. Some Germans came and took all the men off to work. They left Jadzia and me. We went to Legionowo. The Germans had evacuated all the residents from the area because the front was about to be there.

Legionowo was completely deserted, the houses were open, there was furniture and bed-linen in them, so we could sleep in clean beds, but there was nothing at all to eat. We were terribly hungry; sometimes we were eating raw beets from the fields.

We were indifferent about what we ate, and I was pregnant and constantly hungry. We went into a hut and opened up the cellars looking for potatoes, and we found a large demijohn of cherries in spirit. We started to gobble up the cherries.

Suddenly a Kalmyk came in and demanded our papers. He said that we were bound to be Bolsheviks, because there wasn't anyone here; the Bolsheviks had sent us, and he was going to take us to the Gestapo.

He didn't take us to the Gestapo, but to the borough authorities. There was a German sitting there, the Kalmyk led us in and started reporting to him in broken German. I couldn't bear to hear him speaking German, and at one point I said to the German,

'You can hear how he speaks – he's an idiot, I'll tell you how it was: we were staying with our aunt and we took some cherries, I live here; they left me because I'm wounded, and this is my cousin, who's helping me. And he's talking rubbish about Bolsheviks.'

I think I was so brave because I was drunk from the cherries in spirit. The German told the Kalmyk to leave, and asked us if we knew what the Bolsheviks did to women. We said we didn't know. So he said, 'Women under the Bolsheviks work hard laying railroad tracks.'

We could hardly keep from laughing, because I thought he would say that they rape them, but no, oh no, they lay rails, such heavy work for women. The German gave us a pass for the train to go west to Kalisz, because this was the front and no-one was allowed to be there.

We told each other that if we succeeded we wouldn't get on the train, but if not, tough. The Kalmyk, when he saw us going to the station, sitting down on the bench and waiting for the train, stopped following us. Then we stood up and went back to Legionowo.

We went into a hut. It was evening, the shooting was awful, but we were used to it since the uprising, so we lay down under feather eiderdowns and fell asleep. But suddenly it went quiet. Jadzia went to the window, lifted the curtain and said, 'There are gendarmes coming towards us.'

We decided that we'd had enough; if they ordered us to go we would go to Kalisz. But I wanted to see the gendarmes too, and I lifted the curtain a little too far, the man we thought was a gendarme saw me and said, 'Zdrastvuytie.' [Russian greeting] They were Russians, and just after that the Polish army arrived.

Because Jadzia's sister Wanda lived in Wawer [a place near Warsaw], which was also already occupied by the Russians, we went to her. We knocked, her neighbor came out and said that Wanda had gone to Lublin.

At that we both started crying terribly, as if the greatest misfortune had befallen us, because Wanda wasn't there. Everyone in Wawer wanted to feed us because we had come from the uprising. We overate terribly at that time. Soon we decided that we would go to Wanda in Lublin.

In Lublin I lived on Szopena Street, in a house left by some Germans. I worked in the daily newspaper Głos Ludu [The People's Voice, the PPR daily newspaper, founded in Lublin in 1944, then moved to Warsaw, in existence until 1948]. In May [1945] I had my baby, Malgosia.

Three months later I went to Łódź. My cousin Ida Merzan was living there then with her husband and daughter. They had just come back from Russia. I went to see them. I reported for work at the publishing house 'Książka i Wiedza.' Zbyszek Paszkowski was mayor of Łódź at the time, and he allocated me an apartment on Gdanska Street, two rooms and a kitchen.

It was an apartment that a Gestapo officer had been living in, but before that it must have been Jewish because the furniture all had labels in Yiddish underneath. I received my apartment furnished and fully fitted. I have to admit that before the war I'd never seen a refrigerator.

In that apartment there was a large steel cupboard with a cable to plug it in to the electricity. I thought it an oddity, something abnormal, and my cousin and I threw it out into the courtyard.

That cousin was called Estera Rottenberg, and she was a nurse. She had survived the war in Vladimir Volhynski. My cousin Ewa Prywes had also survived the war in Warsaw; she was totally unlike a Jew, so she didn't go into hiding.

We often met up during the occupation. Hanka Szydłowska survived; she and her brother Szmulek [the children of Mrs. Lanota's father's nephew Mordechaj Szydłowski] had been in hiding in the partisan army deep in Russia. She was a child at the time.

The ones who survived in Russia were Ida Merzan, Zuzanna Mensz [Złata Horowicz's granddaughter], Ita and Olek Kowalski and their child and Ita's mother, Mietek and [his mother] Hanka Perc and their family, and apparently the son of my cousin Minberg. No-one else, I don't think.

## After the war

All those who had been in Russia came back to Poland after the war. Before the end of 1945 my cousin Chadasz from Israel [Palestine at the time], from the Kineret kibbutz, came to visit me. He had been fighting in the British army, and I think he was returning from Germany then.

He had come to take us back with him to Israel. One had to cross two borders illegally, so I told him at once that that would be impossible, because I had a small baby. But Estera and Hanka went with him. I didn't think about emigrating there, not even when the state of Israel was established.

I had started working, and I found my job extremely interesting. Besides, I had never been a Zionist. I think that if Israel had come into being earlier, maybe the Holocaust wouldn't have happened, or at least not on such a scale. There should be a Jewish state.

Later on I remained in touch with my family in Israel by letter all the time. I went there to visit several times; I had to go via Paris, get a visa from the embassy there, and go on to Israel from there. But I never wanted to stay there permanently.

I can understand why Jews who had never had any contact with Poles before the war left Poland afterwards. It was an unbearable ordeal, because they didn't know anyone during the war to help them, or who wouldn't denounce them; they lost their whole family. It was awful to be a hunted animal.

I can understand that it was hard to stay here afterwards. I didn't feel like that, because I was able to do something with my head, that as if when I sensed that there was grave danger leading to madness or suicide, I didn't see everything in all the horror.

It's as if my brain divided, and you experience life a little like unreality, because you can't accept it. But it was people who helped me most of all during the war, especially Krysia Stalinska.

The Kielce pogrom [39](#) was a terrible shock. I always knew that I lived in a society that on the whole believes in all kind of anti-Jewish rubbish, but to do something like what was done in Kielce... I found it terrible. And all those lies that surrounded it...

Poles don't understand the Holocaust. People who witnessed it can't understand their attitude. Poles are brought up in traditions of national uprisings [Uprisings in 1830-31 and 1863-64, armed Polish insurrections against the Russian authorities in the battle for independence], resistance, but half of what people are brainwashed into believing is a lie.

The fact that masses of people collaborated with the Gestapo is concealed. [The scale of collaboration with the German authorities in Polish society is to this day the subject of research and conflict among historians.]

The nation is made out to be a nation of heroes. And suddenly all the Jews from everywhere are transported here and murdered. In the Polish subconscious there is the feeling that they should have saved the Jews.

They can't come to terms with the fact that they were ordinary, that they weren't heroes, that it was beyond their mental and physical capabilities and they couldn't help. They have to explain to themselves why they behaved as they did and not differently, so some people invent theories that Jews are like that, that Jews are different, Jews dominate us, Jews calumniate us.

After the war there were Jews in the authorities: Berman, Minc, Zambrowski [see Jews in the PZPR] [40](#). But in the Party itself there were an awful lot of anti-Semites. My friend, a Jew, told me that just after the war, in 1945, he was at a reception in the Soviet embassy in Warsaw, and some big guy had come from Ukraine.

At the reception he proposed the toast, 'I hope that in a year's time you will have no Jews left in Poland.' That was a communist, a member of the very top level of authority in Ukraine. My friend told me about that in complete shock; he couldn't explain it, and I can't either.

I had a positive attitude to the communist authorities in Poland. I was in the PZPR [the Polish United Workers' Party] [41](#). You had to go to party meetings, on courses in Marxism and Leninism. I didn't, because I didn't have time, I was editing a weekly publication and I had a small child, but I didn't object to it.

Although all the time I had the impression that something was wrong, that Bierut [42](#) and Gomulka [43](#) were the wrong people. I never blamed the idea itself, only always the people. I had a group of friends who thought the same, from the beginning, from 1945. But I was distant from AK circles [see Home Army] [44](#), where people were being arrested en masse.

A lot of communists were arrested, too, Mankiewicz, for instance, who I had worked with during the war. He was sentenced to four years in prison, or even more. The same thing happened to several of my acquaintances.

When 'Książka i Wiedza' moved to Warsaw, I went with my baby. That was in 1946, I think. Warsaw was totally razed, it was absolutely unrecognizable. My baby and I lived in the room where I worked. Malgosia lay on the desk I worked at, and at night we slept on a mattress. I don't know how my friend Marecki managed to get me an apartment in Bielany, on Zjednoczenia Avenue. I earned very little at 'Książka i Wiedza.'

In 1948 the magazine 'Przyjaciółka' was launched [a women's weekly, still on the press market] and I was given the position of editor-in-chief. Then I earned good money. As the editorial office was a long way from my apartment, on Wiejska Street, I approached the publisher and asked them to exchange my apartment in Bielany for one closer to the office.

I was given one, a little smaller, and in fact I still have it today. In 1949 'Przyjaciółka' had a circulation of 2 million, and I got a medal for that then. My photograph was printed in some newspaper among others with the caption 'The foremost women in our country.'

Three or four years after the war I took in an orphan, Ela Dzikon, the daughter of my friend from Skryhiczyn, Stasia. Stasia died of cancer just after the war, when her daughter was four. The little girl was taken in by her aunt, Stasia's sister, who worked in Muszyna as the director of a holiday center.

I went there and saw that the girl was being treated very badly. She was dirty, lice-ridden and altogether in a terrible state. On the spur of the moment I said I would take her to live with me. Her aunt at first thought that I wanted to take her because of the cow that Stasia had left her daughter.

When I told her that I didn't need a cow in Warsaw and that she could take it, she was pleased. Ela was pleased to be coming with me too. She and Malgosia grew up together.

In 1959 I was thrown out of 'Przyjaciółka.' They sent a woman from the Central Committee [of the PZPR] to carry out an inspection, and I threw her out. I was summoned to the Committee and they told me that it was unheard of for their people to be thrown out.

Starewicz, the Committee's main man for the press, said that it was him or me, because he couldn't tolerate his employees being treated like that. My superiors were a little worried that circulation would drop, and that was money, so they didn't all vote against me. But they threw me out.

After 'Przyjaciółka' I was out of work for a whole year. I was offered the paper of the ZBOWiD [Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, an organization of veterans that existed in the period 1949-1990], but I didn't want to work there.

I went to Professor Zebrowska and she gave me a job at Warsaw University. I taught a child psychology class and helped her to gather materials for her work, and conducted research in kindergartens.

At the same time I worked in a psychology clinic. After a year's break I once again started work for a magazine, this time for 'Wiedza i Życie' [Knowledge and Life, a popular science monthly] as the assistant editor-in-chief. The chief was a good friend of mine from back before the war. I worked there until I retired, i.e. until 1975. I carried on working in the clinic even longer, until I was 80.

In 1968 an awful lot of my Jewish friends emigrated [as a result of the Gomulka Campaign] [45](#). I was working at 'Wiedza i Życie' then and didn't have any problems, because it was a backwater. I once went to a meeting of journalists from several Warsaw newspapers, where a Moczar man gave a paper [supporter of Mieczysław Moczar, Minister of the Interior, initiator of the anti-Semitic campaign of 1967-68]. But the journalists resisted him.

After 1968 I stopped going to party meetings altogether. I formally surrendered my ID a year or two later.

My daughter was arrested for participation in riots at [Warsaw] University, but they let her out quickly. After that she worked at KOR [46](#), and she was in 'Solidarity' [47](#), she was very involved in that. A lot of my friends worked for 'Solidarity,' but I didn't. Work for the Party was not at all important for me either. I'm not cut out for social work, and even less so for party work. I had nothing against the changes in Poland, but I didn't get involved in it.

Polish anti-Semitism today is a comedy – why, there aren't any Jews in Poland. But there are so many anti-Semitic publications that you'd think there were mad armies of Jews here. Not long ago my friend told a funny story.

Her daughter, a quarter Jewish, lives in Wilanów. She was having a house built. This workman came and started sounding off about Jews, saying, 'I hate Jews.' She asked him, 'But have you ever seen a Jew?' 'No, I've never seen one.' 'So why do you hate them?' 'Because my father told me to.'

A simple man, never known a Jew and never will now, but hates them. I know Jews who are afraid to tell their neighbors in Warsaw that they are Jewish because they know that they are anti-Semitic. I don't know what they're scared of, because they don't have any social relations with them anyway.

I didn't bring my daughter up religiously, because I am a non-believer, but I brought her up to be aware that she is Jewish, and that that is something good, something to be proud of. My grandsons, Piotr and Jan, whose father is a Pole, consider themselves Jews.

We always celebrate Pesach, and Christmas in the winter, not as religious festivals, but because we like them. The happiest festival is Pesach. My grandsons and their friends come round. We sit down and read the Haggadah, in Polish, because no-one understands it in any other language any more; we put the cup on the table and open the door for the prophet to come in.

When the boys were small they believed that the prophet had come, because the wine in the cup went down. I used to hide matzah from them and they used to pretend that they didn't know where.

After reading the Haggadah we eat supper. There is matzah instead of bread, and a host of festive dishes: fish, chicken soup, charoset. We have a special cookbook and cook using it. It's a very happy day, like it was at my parents'.

## Glossary

### **1 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party.

It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution.

During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16 April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets'

began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard.

Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

### **2 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution, in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were:



February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

### **3 Pawiak**

prison in Warsaw, opened in 1829, between Dzielna and Pawia Streets (hence the name Pawiak). During the German occupation it was one of the main custodial prisons used by the German security forces in the General Governorship.

Of the approximately 100,000 prisoners (80% men, 20% women), some 37,000 were murdered (at sites including the forests near Palmiry, and over 60,000 were sent to concentration camps and for forced labor to the Reich. Pawiak was demolished in August 1944 by the Germans. At present there is the Pawiak Prison Museum on the site.

### **4 Warsaw Ghetto**

A separate residential district for Jews in Warsaw created over several months in 1940. On 16th November 1940 138,000 people were enclosed behind its walls. Over the following months the population of the ghetto increased as more people were relocated from the small towns surrounding the city.

By March 1941 445,000 people were living in the ghetto. Subsequently, the number of the ghetto's inhabitants began to fall sharply as a result of disease, hunger, deportation, persecution and liquidation. The ghetto was also systematically reduced in size.

The internal administrative body was the Jewish Council (Judenrat). The Warsaw ghetto ceased to exist on 15th May 1943, when the Germans pronounced the failure of the uprising, staged by the Jewish soldiers, and razed the area to the ground.

### **5 Der Moment**

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

### **6 Haynt**

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

### **7 Nasz Przegląd**

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

## **8 Glos Poranny**

Jewish daily published in Polish in Lodz from 1928.

## **9 Habima**

Hebrew theater founded in 1914, initially a touring troupe. From 1917 it was based in Moscow; later it made grand tours of Europe, and from 1926 it was based in Palestine.

## **10 An-ski, Szymon (pen name of Szlojme Zajnwel Rapaport) (1863-1920)**

Writer, ethnographer, socialist activist. Born in a village near Vitebsk. In his youth he was an advocate of haskalah, but later joined the radical movement Narodnaya Vola. Under threat of arrest he left Russia in 1892 but returned there in 1905. From 1911-14 he led an ethnographic expedition researching the folklore of the Jews of Podolye and Volhynia.

During the war he organized committees bringing aid to Jewish victims of the conflict and pogroms. In 1918 he became involved in organizing cultural life in Vilnius, as a co-founder of the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists and the Jewish Ethnographic Society.

Two years before his death he moved to Warsaw. He is the author of the Bund party's anthem, 'Di shvue' (Yid. oath). The participation of the Bund in the Revolution of 1905 influenced An-ski's decision to write in Yiddish.

In his later work he used elements of Jewish legends collected during his ethnographic expedition and his experiences from WWI. His most famous work is *The Dybbuk* (which to this day remains one of the most popular Yiddish works for the stage). An-ski's entire literary and scientific oeuvre was published in Warsaw in 1920-25 as a 15-volume edition.

## **11 Der Dibuk (The Dybbuk, 1937)**

The play was written during the turbulent years of 1912-1917; Polish director Waszynski's 1937 film was made during another period of pre-war unease. It was shot on location in rural Poland, and captures a rich folk heritage.

Considered by some to be the greatest of Yiddish films, it was certainly the boldest undertaking, requiring special sets and unusual lighting. In *Der Dibuk*, the past has a magnetic pull on the present, and the dead are as alluring as the living. Jewish mysticism links with expressionism, and as in *Nosferatu*, man is an insubstantial presence in the cinematic ether.

## **12 Centos**

Central Society for Care of Orphans and Abandoned Children in Poland, a Jewish care organization founded in 1924. It founded orphanages, mediated adoption and covered the costs of care of adopted children, provided medical care in the form of specialist clinics etc., and organized summer camps.

It operated through donations, and also received financing from Joint. In 1931 there were some 10,000 children in the care of Centos. After the outbreak of war Centos continued its activities in the ghettos.

### **13 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.

### **14 ONR – Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny (Radical Nationalist Camp)**

a Polish nationalist organization with extreme anti-Semitic views. Founded in April 1934, its members were drawn from the Nationalist Democratic Party.

It supported fascism, its program advocated the full assimilation of Slavic minorities in Poland, and forced Jews to leave the country by curbing their civic rights and implementing an economic boycott that would prevent them from making a living.

The ONR exploited calls for an economic boycott during the severe economic crisis of the 1930s to drum up support among the masses and develop opposition to Pilsudski’s government. The ONR drew most of its support from young urban people and students. Following a series of anti-Semitic attacks, the ONR was dissolved by the government (July 1940), but the group continued its activities illegally with the support of extremist nationalist groups.

### **15 Bench ghetto**

A form of discrimination applied against Jewish students at higher educational institutions in interwar Poland. In lecture halls separate seats were allocated to Jewish students and they were not allowed to sit elsewhere.

The bench ghetto was introduced in 1935 at the Lwow Polytechnic, and in 1937 the majority of the rectors of Polish higher educational institutions brought it in with the approval of the Ministry of Religious Confessions and Public Education.

Jewish students, along with Polish students who supported them, protested by standing during lectures and not occupying any seats. Their protest was also supported by a few professors, including Tadeusz Kotarbinski.

### **16 Anti-Jewish Legislation in Poland**

After World War I nationalist groupings in Poland lobbied for the introduction of the numerus clausus (Lat. closed number – a limit on the number of people admitted to the practice of a given profession or to an institution – a university, government office or association) in relation to Jews and other ethnic minorities.

The most radical groupings demanded the introduction of the numerus nullus principle, i.e. a total ban on admittance to universities and certain professions.

The numerus nullus principle was violated by the Polish constitution. The battle for its introduction continued throughout the interwar period. In practice the numerus clausus was applied informally. In 1938 it was indirectly introduced at the Bar.

### **17 MOPR (International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters)**

Founded in 1922, and based on the decision of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, the organization aimed to protect workers from the terrorist attacks of the Whites [the tsar's followers who fought against the Red Army] and help the victims of terror. It offered material, legal and intellectual support to political convicts, political emigrants and their families. By 1932 it had a membership of about 14 million people.

### **18 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.

### **19 Zbaszyn Camp**

from October 1938 until the spring of 1939 there was a camp in Zbaszyn for Polish Jews resettled from the Third Reich. The German government, anticipating the act passed by the Polish Sejm (Parliament) depriving people who had been out of the country for more than 5 years of their citizenship, deported over 20,000 Polish Jews, some 6,000 of whom were sent to Zbaszyn. As the Polish border police did not want to let them into Poland, these people were trapped in the strip of no-man's land, without shelter, water or food. After a few days they were resettled to a temporary camp on the Polish side, where they spent several months. Jewish communities in Poland organized aid for the victims; families took in relatives, and Joint also provided assistance.

### **20 Invasion of Poland**

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

## **21 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **22 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.

## **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 Schorr, Mojzesz (1874-1941)**

rabbi and scholar. Born in Przemyśl (now Poland), he studied at the Jüdisch-theologische Lehranstalt [Jewish Theological Institute] and Vienna University. In 1899 he became a lecturer in Judaism at the Jewish Teacher Training Institute in Lwow, and from 1904 he also lectured at Lwow University, specializing in Semitic languages and the history of the ancient Orient.

In 1923 he moved to Warsaw to lead the Reform Synagogue at Tlomackie Street. Schorr was one of the founders of the Institute of Judaistica founded in 1928, and for a few years its rector. He also lectured in the Bible and Hebrew there.

He was a member of the State Academy of Sciences, and from 1935-1938 he was a deputy to the Senate. After the outbreak of war he went east. He was arrested by the Russians and during a transfer from one camp to another he died in Uzbekistan.

## **25 Galicia**

Informal name for the lands of the former Polish Republic under Habsburg rule (1772-1918), derived from the official name bestowed on these lands by Austria: the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria.

From 1815 the lands west of the river San (including Krakow) began by common consent to be called Western Galicia, and the remaining part (including Lemberg), with its dominant Ukrainian population Eastern Galicia.

Galicia was agricultural territory, an economically backward region. Its villages were poor and overcrowded (hence the term 'Galician misery'), which, given the low level of industrial development (on the whole processing of agricultural and crude-oil based products) prompted mass economic emigration from the 1890s; mainly to the Americas.

After 1918 the name Eastern Malopolska for Eastern Galicia was popularized in Poland, but Ukrainians called it Western Ukraine.

## **26 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).

## **27 Great Action (Grossaktion)**

July-September 1942, mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka extermination camp. This was the first liquidation campaign, during which around 265,000 of 355,000 Jews living in the ghetto were deported, and a further 10,000 were murdered on the spot.

About 70,000 people remained inside the ghetto walls (the majority of them, as unemployed, were there illegally).

## **28 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.

## **29 Jewish police**

Carrying out their will the German authorities appointed a Jewish police in the ghettos. Besides maintaining order in general in the territory of the ghetto the Jewish police was also responsible for guarding the ghetto gates.

During liquidation campaigns most of them collaborated with the Nazis; in the Warsaw ghetto each policeman had to supply at least five people to the Umschlagplatz every day. The reason for joining the Jewish police, first of all, was based on the false promises of the Germans that policemen and their families would be saved.

In the Warsaw ghetto the Jewish police was headed by Jakub Szerynski; during the 'Grossaktion' (the main liquidation campaign in the summer of 1942), the Jewish Fighting Organization issued a death warrant on him, and he was to be executed on 20th August 1942 by Izrael Kanak. The attack failed, Szerynski was only wounded, and in January 1943 he committed suicide.

## **30 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.

### **31 ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organization)**

An armed organization formed in the Warsaw ghetto; it took on its final form (uniting Zionist, He-Halutz and Bund youth organizations) in October 1942. ZOB also functioned in other towns and cities in occupied Poland.

It offered military training, issued appeals, procured arms for its soldiers, planned the defense of the Warsaw ghetto, and ultimately led the fighting in the ghetto on two occasions, the uprisings in January and April 1943.

### **32 Majdanek concentration camp**

situated five kilometers from the city center of Lublin, Poland, originally established as a labor camp in October 1941. It was officially called Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin until 16th February 1943, when the name was changed to Concentration Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin. Unlike most other Nazi death camps, Majdanek, located in a completely open field, was not hidden from view. About 130,000 Jews were deported there during 1942-43 as part of the 'Final Solution'. Initially there were two gas chambers housed in a wooden building, which were later replaced by gas chambers in a brick building.

The estimated number of deaths is 360,000, including Jews, Soviets POWs and Poles. The camp was liquidated in July 1944, but by the time the Red Army arrived the camp was only partially destroyed. Although approximately 1,000 inmates were executed on a death march, the Red Army found thousand of prisoners still in the camp, an evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

### **33 Volksdeutscher**

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

various privileges in the occupied territories.

### **34 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.

### **35 People's Army**

Polish military organization with a left-wing political bent, founded on 1 January 1944 by renaming the People's Guard (set up in 1942). It was the armed wing of the PPR (Polish Workers' Party), and acted against the German forces and was pro-Soviet.

At the beginning of 1944 it numbered 6,000-8,000 people and by July 1944 some 30,000. By comparison the partisan forces numbered 6,000 in July 1944. The People's Army directed the brunt of its efforts towards destroying German lines of communication, in particular behind the German-Soviet front. Divisions of the People's Army also participated in the Warsaw Uprising.

In July 1944 the Polish Armed Forces (WP, Wojsko Polskie) were created from the People's Army and the Polish Army in the USSR.

### **36 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.

### **37 Kalmyk**

A nationality living on the Lower Volga in Russia. During World War II military formations set up by Kalmyk prisoners of war fought on the side of the Germans.

### **38 National Armed Forces (NSZ)**

a conspiratorial military organization founded in Poland in 1942. The main goal of the NSZ was to fight for the independence of Poland and new western borders along the Oder-Neisse line. The NSZ's program stressed nationalism, rejected fascism and communism, and propounded the creation of a Catholic Polish State. The NSZ program was strongly anti-Semitic. In October 1943 the NSZ had some 72,500 members.

The NSZ was preparing for an armed uprising, assuming that the Red Army would occupy all the Polish lands. It provided support for military intelligence, conducted supply campaigns, freed prisoners, and engaged in armed combat with divisions of the People's Army and Soviet partisans. NSZ divisions (approx. 2,000 soldiers) took part in the Warsaw Uprising.

In November 1944 a part of the NSZ was transformed into the National Military Union (NZW), which was active underground in late 1945/early 1946 (scores of divisions numbering 2,000-4,000 soldiers), fighting the NKVD, UB (Security Bureau) task forces, and divisions of the UPA. In 1947 most of its cells were smashed, although some groups remained underground until the mid-1950s.

### **39 Kielce Pogrom**

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

**40** Jews in the PZPR: It is a widespread belief in Poland that in the postwar period Jews played a significant role in the formation of the new political system. In fact, Jews constituted a small group within the party.

There are no precise statistics on the percentage of Jews in the PZPR, the party apparatus and the security forces. Within the party apparatus and the security forces a dozen or so percent were undoubtedly Jewish, and in some senior positions slightly more than that.

After the war Jews joined the party because they saw it as their only guarantee of a free life with equal rights. Others joined out of opportunism. Many left the country in 1956-57. There were very few Jews in the government of the Polish People's Republic.

Hilary Minc (1905–74), Roman Zambrowski (1909–77) and Jakub Berman (1901–1984) were among the highest ranking figures in the party and state leadership; they were members of the Political Office of the Central Committee of the PPR and the PZPR (Minc and Berman were removed from political activity in 1956, and Zambrowski in 1968).

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

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

monopoly. On 29th January 1990 the party was dissolved.

#### **42 Bierut Boleslaw, pseud**

Janowski, Tomasz (1892-1956): communist activist and politician. In the interwar period he was a member of the Polish Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Poland; in 1930-32 he was an officer in the Communist Internationale in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

Starting in 1943 Bierut was a member of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party and later PZPR (the Polish United Workers' Party), where he held the highest offices. From 1944-47 he was the president of the National Council, from 1947-52 president of Poland, from 1952-54 prime minister, and in 1954-56 first secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR.

Bierut followed a policy of Polish dependency on the USSR and the Sovietization of Poland. He was responsible for the employment of organized violence to terrorize society into submission. He died in Moscow.

#### **43 Gomulka, Wladyslaw (1905-1982)**

communist activist and politician. From 21st October 1956 First Secretary of the Central Committee and member of the PZPR Central Committee's Political Office, from 1957 member of the State Council and deputy to the Polish Sejm.

Initially enjoyed the support of public opinion (resisted Soviet pressure) and pursued a policy of moderate reforms of the political and economic system. In 1968 he came out in favor of intervention by the states of the Warsaw Bloc in Czechoslovakia.

Responsible for anti-Semitic repressions in March 1968 (as a result of which over 20,000 were forced to leave Poland) and the use of force against participants in the workers' revolt of December 1970.

On 20th December 1970 he was forced to resign his post as First Secretary of the Central Committee and member of the PZPR Central Committee's Political Office, in 1970 he was dismissed from his other posts, and in 1971 he was forced into retirement.

#### **44 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.

#### **45 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.

#### **46 Workers' Defense Committee (KOR)**

an openly oppositionist social group founded by a handful of democratic activists and intellectuals in September 1976.

The main aim of KOR's activities was to provide financial and legal assistance to repressed workers who had participated in the June workers' protest of 1976. In 1977, after the internees and convicts were released, KOR became the KOR Committee for Social Self-Defense (KSS KOR). KSS KOR had several hundred members and co-operators, and fought for civil rights and liberties, organized social initiatives independent of state institutions and PZPR influences, and gathered and published information on violations of civil rights, repressions, and persecution of participants in social protests.

It also organized a publishing and self-education movement, protest campaigns (hunger strikes, petitions and appeals). Its members were subjected to repeated repression, and in 1980 supported the strikes and were among the founder members of Solidarity. In September 1981, KSS KOR disbanded.

#### **47 Solidarnosc (Solidarity)**

a social and political movement in Poland that opposed the authority of the PZPR. In its institutional form – the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc) – it emerged in



August and September 1980 as a product of the turbulent national strikes. In that period trade union organization were being formed in all national enterprises and institutions; in all some 9–10 million people joined NSZZ Solidarnosc.

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

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