

# Teofila Silberring

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Cracow, Poland

Interviewer: Magdalena Bizon

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I meet Mrs. Silberring in her little apartment on Karmelicka Street in Cracow. It's downtown, and the trams rattle along outside the window and ambulance and police car sirens wail - there's a hospital and a police station nearby. This short, dark-haired lady has for the last few months been dependent on crutches. Now she goes out only once a day, and is frustrated with her leg, which despite a hip replacement is refusing to co-operate. Since her problems with her leg began she has found it hard to climb the stairs to the fourth floor and has had to curtail her activities - and she is a very energetic lady with a huge appetite for life. It's hard to believe that she's almost 80. Mrs. Silberring is a great raconteur, has a wonderful sense of humor and spins a terrific yarn. Listening to her stories I discovered my own city anew.



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## My family

We were all from Cracow, all of us: my grandparents and theirs before them. We had family houses, passed down from father to son. I know that Father's parents lived at 8 Dlugosza Street in Podgorze [a district of Cracow on the right bank of the Vistula, until 1915 a separate town], and Mother's parents at 32 Kalwaryjska Street, also in Podgorze. All my family was assimilated; everyone spoke Polish. I don't think anyone in the family spoke Yiddish, anyway, certainly not to the children and not in front of them. We were spoken to in beautiful Polish. I don't even know whether Father knew Yiddish. Nobody in the family wore traditional Jewish dress. We dressed like everyone else on the street, and all the children went to Polish schools. But we kept up the traditions and celebrated the holidays.

We lived in [Kazimierz 1](#), at 21 Miodowa Street, with Grandmother, Father's mother. It was her house: a huge, three-story house on the corner of the street. Later, when Grandmother died, she left the house to Father. She was called the same as me - Tauba Nussbaum. I am Teofila after Grandmother, Tauba in Yiddish. When I was born, in 1925, Grandfather Hirsh had already died. And

Grandmother died when I was six. I don't know what her maiden name was. I don't know what was wrong with her, but in any case she was already bedridden. She spoke pure Polish, beautifully. She was interested in what went on at school, and corrected my homework.

My father, Juda Nussbaum, had a sister and a brother. The brother was called Chaim; he lived at 8 Paulinska Street. He had a daughter - Helenka was her name. My uncle had a grocery store. My aunt lived on Dietla Street. I don't remember what her first name was or what her married surname was. She had children, but somehow we didn't keep in touch with her. My aunt was more traditional than my father, but my uncle opened his shop on Saturdays. During the war [WWII] they all died.

My Mom's maiden name was Barber. Her parents had a grocery store. And I know that Mom helped there when she was single. I don't remember my grandfather, because when I was born he was already dead. Grandma - I don't even know what her name was - ran the shop herself. Grandma was a great housewife. We would always get juices made by her. The house was very nicely kept up, because Grandma had taken Mom's youngest sister in to help her. She had a maid, too, who cooked. It was a single-family house, and at the bottom was the shop. In the back there was a garden. On the second floor were the living quarters, with a large, wooden balcony: nicely decorated rooms, four or five. There were pictures hanging everywhere. There was this black dining room suite, where there were chocolates in the drawers. I would always take them; I remember that I used to open the drawers. I was the kind of child that didn't eat well, to spite Mom, and I took them when nobody was looking.

The shop was quite big. There was flour there, in these big sacks, and there was candy and Enrillo chicory coffee. The candy stood in glass jars with lids. I could take it. Hard candy, I think, because that was what I liked, colored. And as well as that, I also remember what we called 'lodes,' these bars, like chocolate, but smaller. Different colors, there were: red, blue, green, and so lovely. It was unearthly awful stuff; I don't know what it was made from. The cheapest rubbish, for poor children. But I liked it a lot, and when I went to Grandma's those 'lodes' were all I wanted. Until the war Grandma ran that shop in her house. Whether she died of old age or whether she was taken into the ghetto, I don't remember.

Mom had three sisters and a brother. The older ones were called Helena and Sala, the youngest was Hania, and her brother was called Szlomo. Aunt Helena's husband was called Srul Weintraub. They were very well off. He was a co-proprietor of the Cracow Husking Plants and Mills on Mogilska Street [a husking plant was a factory that processed seeds, mostly rice and peas]. My uncle died in 1937. During the war, when my Mom died, Aunt Helena took us in, because she was the closest to my Mom. They lived on Jasna Street. My aunt died during the war, of a tumor. She lies buried in Miechow, except there isn't a headstone. We don't know where exactly her grave is. She died in I think 1942. They had three children. One of her daughters lives in Wroclaw: my cousin, Bronislawa Goldkorn. She is 93 and doing very well. What a mind she has, and how beautifully she writes! It's incredible, really. They were in the Soviet Union, and only she survived; the other two died there of typhus.

Aunt Sala lived in Podgorze. I know that she had five children. I didn't even know all of them, because with that aunt we weren't in such close contact. They had it very hard. My parents helped her out, because my uncle wasn't very capable; he didn't work. I think they kept to tradition more

than us, because my uncle was very religious. The youngest was Hania; she lived with Grandma and helped her out. Uncle Szlomo was older; when the war broke out he could have been 40-something. He had a grocery store on Agnieszki Street. And somehow, I don't know, Mom didn't keep in touch with him. He'd become degenerate. He hadn't wanted to go to school; he would kick a ball around. That wasn't to the family's taste, as they say. He kept up tradition. Apparently there's a cousin living in Israel, the daughter of one of my mother's sisters. But I'm not in touch with her. All the others died.

My parents, Gustawa and Juda Nussbaum, were born in 1900. They were both 20 when they married. They fell in love and had a Jewish wedding under the canopy [chuppah]; there were photographs of the wedding at home. Whether or not there was a matchmaker involved somewhere along the way, that I don't know. But in any case, they said it was love. True love. And it was a very good marriage, from what I remember.

Father didn't have a degree. He only had his secondary school certificate, but he knew an awful lot of languages. He had simply taught himself. He was one of the first Esperanto speakers in Cracow. Together with his friend, the well-known Polonist Dreher, he wrote pamphlets for learning Esperanto. He also worked on dictionaries, Polish-Hebrew and Polish-French, with that same friend. He was a journalist, a critic with Nowy Dziennik [New Daily, a Zionist daily published in Cracow], which had editorial offices on Orzeszkowa Street. Basically, he worked for the upkeep, I mean to pay for the upkeep of the house. In our house there were the rents and revenues. I remember that there were a lot of shops downstairs. As well as that, Father had a small - 7 percent - stake in the Cracow Husking Plants and Mills, so he lived off that. Because as for writing, I don't know how much he got for a dictionary. Whether he got anything for those Esperanto pamphlets, or whether that was just symbolic. As for views, Father was basically a socialist. Mom didn't participate in political life at all, but Father was a socialist, which the family held against him. That's all I remember. My neighbor had this pre-war book, a review of people well known in Cracow, and Father was in it. She offered to sell it to me, but she wanted an awful lot, and I didn't have that much money. She sold it in an antique bookshop somewhere and I really regret it.

Mom had her secondary school certificate. She kept house. She was very modest, the home-bird type. She had a lot of interests. She used to go to the theater, to cafes. Mom worried because I didn't want to eat, and she was afraid, the poor thing, that I would be hungry. So at night she would put some cake on the night table that I had by my bed. I used to devour them, because I was hungry, because I didn't want to eat, out of spite. And in the morning Mom would get up and say, 'Who ate the poor child's cake?' And I would sit mum, 'I don't know, perhaps someone came and ate it. I didn't eat anything, absolutely.' 'Poor child, somebody ate it all up.' I didn't want to eat anything, because I knew that they would worry. Evidently I wanted to be important. Because otherwise I would have eaten, but something wouldn't let me, out of spite. Later, in the camp, when I remembered, if I had just a crumb of that cake ... I sinned terribly, not wanting to eat.

My brother, Henryk, was four years older. When we were children, we would be first in love, then argue. My brother was a very able student, which always made me furious. He was an excellent physicist and mathematician. I remember that in school they even used to call him 'Fosgen' [phosgene, carbon oxychloride - a highly toxic chemical substance used in World War I as a combat gas]. And I was a little in my brother's shadow, because I was gifted, but not as much. He was always more talked about than me, and that annoyed me a lot. Even though I had good results at

school and a great capacity for languages.

At home there was also a girl to look after the children, who spoke English. She spoke German too. Brandwein, Miss Brandwein. A Jewess from an intellectual but impoverished house. She had to earn a living. She was a chemist and taught in a gymnasium somewhere, and in the afternoon she was with us. She picked me up from school, because my brother was older and went on his own. She did our homework with us and taught us the language. She disappeared somewhere too, when the war broke out. She wasn't from Cracow, you see, and went to her own people, to her family. I don't know what happened. We had a maid too, and a cook. One of them lived in the servant's room and the other in the kitchen, and they stuffed themselves like I don't know what. I wrote the younger one love letters to her boyfriend, because she couldn't write; she was from the country. They were there until the war, literally. The cook was even still there when the war had already broken out.

We had a very nice apartment, eight rooms on the second floor. My brother had his own room, I had mine. The children's maid had her own room. We were well-off, though not potentates. Father loved everything modern. I didn't know that he borrowed money; it was only after the war that it transpired how many debts the house was burdened with. Father was such that whatever had just come out, he liked to buy: the first radio with a magic eye, a wind-up gramophone, with a tube, and beautiful records. There was a bathroom, a telephone, a refrigerator; there was everything there could have been. In my room I had cream and blue furniture built into the wall. Before the war! And I had this bed with a pull-out drawer. Father even had a washbasin with hot and cold water put in my room so that I wouldn't have to go to the bathroom in the morning. So I had this little washbasin with all my toiletries.

The hall was very big. I remember that Father brought me a scooter with chromium-plated mudguards, and we used to ride it up and down the hall. And when my friends came round I used to let them ride on it: for a picture, a candy wrapper, always in return for something. I had a head for business. We had these - not scrapbooks - but notebooks. And we used to make these triangles out of pieces of paper, like envelopes. We would buy pictures of angels or devils, we used to flatten out chocolates wrappers, and put them in those pieces of paper. And then we would swap them at school. I remember that you used to buy Erdal shoe polish. In the packaging there was always this tin badge. So I kept watch on the maid to make sure she only bought Erdal, because there were those decorative tin badges in them. I collected that too.

A family lived next to us, on the same story; I don't remember what they were called. They had three sons, who played the mandolin. I was always sitting round at their apartment, because they played so beautifully. Sang and played. And on the third floor were the Klugers, two little girls, so we played with dolls, doctors. Upstairs there were these small balconies, and we used to play there too. We played ball, I remember skipping ropes, counting games, hide-and-seek, tag, games like that: but never on the street, we weren't allowed to go out onto the street at all, everything happened in the house and the courtyard.

Before the war, Miodowa Street was largely a street of intellectuals, better secular Jews. And on the side streets lived Jews in cloaks. Not that the ones with sidelocks, in white socks [Hasidim], didn't walk along Miodowa Street. They walked along it because it was a main street, but they didn't live there. Opposite our house was Tempel Synagogue [the most recent of the synagogues in Kazimierz (1860), a reform synagogue. The rabbi there was Ozjasz Thon (1870-1936), an eminent Zionist and

deputy to the Polish Sejm]. Before the war it was a reform synagogue, for wealthier people, who would come in cars and carriages. An orthodox Jew wouldn't have gone in there. My parents went to Tempel at every holiday, definitely. And sometimes, when Father went with Mother on a Saturday, they would take me. Tempel was beautiful. The men were downstairs and the women upstairs, and I used to go up to Mom up these stairs. There was a barrier there, and you looked down, what the men were doing, how they prayed. That all delighted me. I liked going, I remember that too.

On Sabbath Mom always lit candles and made those movements, I remember, over the candles. There was definitely fish on Friday evenings. And there were these special challot too. There was always almost the same food to eat, and most importantly, they made what the children liked. On Saturday there was definitely chicken soup with noodles, gefilte fish and aspic jelly. Delicious! Father always had a glass of plum brandy. I didn't get any, of course. But there was beer, which Father really liked. Beer I did sip, because I liked it too, even though it was bitter. As well as that, on Friday evening we would go and take what we called chulent to the bakery on Nowy Square, and give it to the baker. Our maid carried it. This big pot, it was a stoneware one, I think. On Saturday morning she would bring it back warm. I liked it a lot. It was peas, round ones, which the Jews called 'arbese' [der arbes (Yid.) - peas], groats, some kind of fat ... And that, baked like that, was very nice. There was always cake, but especially on Saturdays there was an awful lot of cake. On Monday mornings this lady would come round and we would give her cake all packed up. She was Jewish too, very elegant, who had evidently fallen on hard times somehow. And our maid always gave her a whole package of that cake.

Downstairs in our house there was a bar [restaurant]. It was run by this Orthodox Jew, with a beard. He was very nice. He made the aspic that I liked so much, and to go with it he baked this special, round, sugar-coated... I don't know what it was, not cake, not bread. He had crowds on Saturdays. People used to go in for fish and for aspic. I remember that. On Saturdays the maid did everything; Jews weren't even allowed to turn the light on, apparently. She could, because she wasn't Jewish. I knew that on Saturday driving wasn't allowed, that we weren't allowed to do certain things, but the children did everything, because the children were more assimilated. And anyway, Father sometimes even went to work on Saturdays. So Father wasn't traditionally religious. But he kept up the holidays; all the holidays were celebrated.

My favorite was Kuczki [literally shelter, in this case it refers to Sukkot], the Feast of Shelters. Because then there were these shelters in our courtyard, and we children, not just me, but from the whole house, made colored paper chains and competed to see whose would be the prettiest. Father ate there on the first day or the second. And after that it was a so-called 'free' holiday, so he didn't eat in there. But the shelter stayed up until the end of the festival, so eight days or seven, I don't remember that. [Editor's note: Sukkot lasts eight days]. In any case I liked that holiday a lot, because I prepared things, did things, was very important. When my chain came out better than my friends' from next door I was very proud. And Father was proud of me too, and showed everyone what I'd done. That was my most favorite holiday.

I liked Purim too, because you got presents. You got money. We used to dress up, I remember. So Purim was a fun holiday too. Then I remember the holiday of Pesach. We packed up what was called 'chummes' [chametz], that means crumbs of bread. Because at Pesach you're not allowed to eat bread, only matzah. And in Kazimierz there was this bakery. We used to go, there was this big



wooden paddle, and you threw the 'chummes' on it to burn it. I used to go with it, because I liked going there. What tradition that was, what it was based on, that I don't know. And there was Seder, this dinner, I remember; there were definitely matzot. That was celebrated in traditional fashion, and afterwards Father went to a coffeehouse. There was this coffeehouse where painters and erudites just like Father used to meet. Mr. Koziol, a Cracow journalist, told me that that coffeehouse was on Dietla Street and was called 'Pod szmatka' [Under the Rag].

My brother, when he was 13, had his bar mitzvah. There was a huge celebration, as there is among Jews, even assimilated ones. That was a duty. He got what was called tefillin. You wound it around your arm, only I don't know how many times - I don't know that tradition - and tied it to your forehead. These squares, little boxes; I don't know what they meant. There were a lot of guests and a great celebration. And I was furious, because my brother got a load of presents and they didn't give me anything. And I started crying that I hadn't got anything. So Father went out the next day and bought me a scooter, because I was howling and stamping my feet all the time that my brother had got so much. A whole roomful of presents and nothing for me, and he didn't want to give me anything. I even got mad at him and didn't give him my best wishes, because I was so mad. For three days there was a huge celebration, we ate and drank. And I was furious the whole time and was pleased when it was all over.

Children's birthdays were always family affairs. Aunts and uncles, uncles' children and aunts' children would come, from Father's family and from Mother's family. And Grandma would come too. And when she couldn't come any more, we used to go to see her. The children's, Father's and Mother's birthdays were celebrated with great gusto. Very much so. In fact at that time we already had - we were some of the first - a gramophone and beautiful records. There were records by Ordonka by then. [Hanna Ordonowna (1902-1950): born Maria Anna Pietruszywska, known as 'Ordonka'; singer, dancer and actress. At 16 she started performing in the Warsaw cabaret 'Sfinks'.] Father would put the records on and I would turn the handle.

Father had some personal charisma and an awful lot of friends. There were always heaps of guests at our house, those friends of Father's, who weren't married and didn't have children. Jews, but very assimilated. Well, and I had the luck to be treated as their plaything. They would always bring me something. One was always painting me: Weber, who was a well known Jewish painter. [Weber, Henryk (Hersz) (1904-1942): painter and art critic, wrote reviews for Nowy Dziennik] Unfortunately not a single painting has survived. No-one gave them back.

## **At school**

I went to a state elementary school; that school is still there - on Starowislna Street, on the corner of Miodowa Street, this big, red school. Not to the end; somewhere around the 5th grade Father transferred me. Because at that school we had to go to religious studies classes and Father was afraid that I would have complexes. [The religious studies classes in Polish schools were Catholic, and Jewish children used to go out of the classroom while these lessons were in progress.] There were maybe four Jewish girls in my class. There were no barriers between us and the rest of the children. I must admit that I didn't feel any. I had friends. I suspect it depends on the home and on the parents. If the parents at home, in front of the children, don't say, 'He's a Jew' or 'Don't play with her because she's a Jew,' then there isn't any difference. That was how it was with me and

Esia - that was her name - Teresia, or something. She had a little dog and I was very friendly there. Her parents liked me a lot and there was absolutely no talk of my being a Jew and her not. And for instance our maid, she went to church on Bozego Ciala Street - there's a beautiful church there - and she always took me. 'Toska [an affectionate diminutive of Teofila], come on, we're going to church.' So I would go. And whenever the priest was sprinkling the congregation with holy water, she would say 'Get down under the pew, or he'll sprinkle you!' I would get down. But I used to tell my parents, and somehow Mom never minded, because my parents had the healthy view that whatever I learned wouldn't harm me.

After that I became a pupil at the Dr. Hilfstein Hebrew Gymnasium; Dr. Hilfstein was its founder. That was a beautiful school, on Podbrzezie Street, apparently a very high standard, with state entitlements. All the subjects were in Polish, and there was also Hebrew. There were only Jewish children, but well-off ones, because the fees were about 50 zloty; that was an awful lot [by way of comparison, prices of newspapers at the time were for a daily 10 groszy, a weekly 20 groszy, and a monthly 30 groszy, 1 zloty equals 100 groszy]. There were very good relations, very good conditions at the school. The school had a huge courtyard and a wonderful gymnastics hall.

There was this local scout troop at school, a rather childish one. It was called Hacofer [Hatzofeh, literally 'the one that watches' - a Zionist scouting group set up at the Hebrew Gymnasium by a pupil, Michal Feldblum]. I don't know what that means. There was a very nice leader; I was a member of that scout group of course. We had meetings once a week, in our courtyard. There were trips, and talks. And there was also a music room in the school, a very beautiful one, in fact, where we had music sessions once a week. The teacher in charge of that was Mr. Feldhorn. [Feldhorn, Juliusz (1901-1943): eminent pedagogue, poet, essayist and translator. He used the pseudonym Jan Las. Shot to death in Wieliczka in 1943.] A very well known Polonist, he wrote some book. He was a friend of Father's. He was killed unfortunately. Best of all I remember Mr. Hamer, who had the little shop at the bottom. Because I didn't eat at home, out of spite, I was hungry. I took breakfast but didn't eat it. But I used to buy myself a roll and herring for 10 groszy and it tasted very good. He was very important, that Mr. Hamer, he was always saying, 'The headmaster and I have decided that it will be like this...' And that has stuck in my mind: The headmaster and I.

We lived very comfortably and at our school there weren't any poor children. Anyway, as I've already said, the Hebrew gymnasium was more for the well-off. It was like an automobile show outside our school. There was this one boy, Rath; apparently they're in Vienna, they survived. They had a company, 'Iskra', pencils and crayons. A very rich company. He used to come in a beautiful Chevrolet, I think it was, with a servant in 'glace' [patent, literally ice in French], white gloves, who used to carry his briefcase. He would carry it into his young master's classroom, put it under his desk, take his coat off, and after lessons come for him. The Libans, two sisters, used to come in a carriage with a maidservant in a veil. There were nannies like that, in navy blue veils; you addressed nannies like that using the term 'Schwester' [German for sister]. The Libans had quarries in Plaszow; it used to be known as 'Liban's Hill' - that was where the camp was later [Kamieniolomy i Wapienniki Krakowskie Liban S.A. The labor camp in Plaszow had a lot of satellite camps scattered throughout the area. One of them was 'Liban,' the penal camp for the Baudienst, the construction service.]. And there was this one other boy, called Fangielbaum, his parents had a shop, 'Muza Harmonia' [the muse harmony] on Grodzka Street on the 2nd floor; there were the latest records and radios. They were very wealthy too. Lusja, a friend, who came to Cracow recently, told me

when she came that he's alive and is in Israel. She brought me here some photographs of friends from before the war. Lusia [Lea Shinar], came to promote her sixth book, 'Losy krzyzuja sie w Warszawie' ['Paths cross in Warsaw']. Apparently, it's about the ghetto; I haven't had time to read it. Here, in this book, are our school friends, now living in Israel. Poldek Wasserman and Fredek Thieberger, we used to call him Frycek. During the occupation they took part in the attack on the cafe 'Cyganeria' [Campaign] [2](#).

On vacation we used to go to Zakopane, and later to Rabka [a spa town at the foot of the Gorce hills, some 80 km south of Cracow]. I remember that Father wrote, perhaps in 1937, in Esperanto about Kaden. He was the owner of Rabka [a spa in Rabka]. Father was friendly with that guy Kaden from the time that he wrote 'Rabka jako uzdrowisko' [Rabka as a spa]. Mr. Kaden invited Father to stay, and from that time on we had a beautiful apartment in Rabka for the vacations for free. Pogon Villa, the place was called. Kaden used to let us have a whole floor, and we went with the cook, the maid, the children's maid and all our belongings. And there, every year, we had a beautiful place. I think there were five rooms up there. This verandah; there was space to run around.

Kaden always used to invite Father in February, and we took advantage of it. Aunt Hela's children and their cook used to go with us, because there were an awful lot of rooms there. I used to go for inhalation and brine treatments, because apparently I used to talk through my nose. Maybe I still speak like that, only Father isn't around any more and there's no-one to despair of me... I had a scooter, I had a bicycle, first a three-wheeler, then a two-wheeler, and lots of friends. Father used to come for Saturdays and Sundays and play tennis with Kaden, because Kaden had his own beautiful villa in the park, a swimming pool and a tennis court. And he always used to invite us for ice-cream. I remember there was this hut where they used to sell this sour milk drink, laktol, it was called. I used to get 10 groszy to drink a glass of that laktol. I liked it very much, but I had to make a face out of spite. That's the little devil I was, you see!

Many of my school-friends live in Israel. Stenia Hollender, now she has a different name; I don't remember what. Her parents had a notebook factory in Podgorze and they supplied the whole school. A few years ago we went to Ravensbruck [3](#), invited by the mayor. They received us with great pomp there, in a beautiful hotel. There were these tents, and in the tents tables, marvelous food, and cooks served us. There was a group from Israel. And this lady had a lecture in Hebrew, translated into Polish. She introduced herself, and my husband said: 'Ask, perhaps she knows that friend of yours, that Stenia Hollender, because she's got the same surname.' When she finished, I go up to her and say, 'Excuse me, I used to have a friend by the same name; are you a relative perhaps?' And she looks at me like this, because we all had these name badges. She looked at me, 'Toska, dammit, you don't recognize me?!' How we started kissing! Unfortunately, they were already leaving, the Israeli group. There were little pennants on each table. There were red and white ones on ours, and Israeli ones on theirs. And so she gave me this pennant when we parted. But she comes to Cracow with groups of young people, because she is a pedagogue by profession. She comes almost every year, and then we see each other.

Lusia Helzel - that's her maiden name, of course - is in Israel too. Her father was a friend of my father's. They had a large shop with radios on the Main Square, near St. Mary's Church. I remember that just before the war he brought Father a radio with a magic eye. That was still a novelty. He always brought us the gramophones and records. Lusie was in the camps. Which ones, I don't



know. But straight after the war I met her. We lived together for two years or so, and she left.

I had a very good friend from gymnasium, Hela Erlich. Our parents were friendly and we often used to go to Wolski Wood [a favorite leisure spot on the outskirts of Cracow] with our parents by carriage. Unfortunately she died in Kazimierza Wielka. I met her once more during the war. They left. Because the Jews had to leave Cracow [on 18th May 1940 the Jews were ordered to leave Cracow by 15th August. Only employees of economically important businesses and their families were allowed to stay.]. You were allowed to move to somewhere no closer than 20 kilometers from the city. They went to Kazimierza Wielka and perished there, in 1940. The 'Judenfrei' [4](#) the purge of Jews, came quickly there. The Germans entered and they shot all the Jews there. The whole family was killed.

I was a good student; I wrote poetry too. Once I won some Cmielow porcelain, a little plate and a cup. I don't remember the poem any more, but I know that there was great rejoicing at home. I wrote something about Cmielow and I won. I liked writing in general. At school, in Polish class, everybody had to write a little book. I wrote 'Sister Maria.' About this nurse, I don't know where I got it from, because I'd never seen a nurse and didn't know anything about hospitals. I wrote about how she devoted herself to sick children. Everybody liked the book a lot and Father had it bound. It was at home until the war, but unfortunately it didn't survive.

Father was crazy about learning languages. I learned them with great ease, whereas my brother was a math specialist; he had a brain for the exact sciences. We all spoke excellent Esperanto. Except that I don't remember Esperanto any more. We didn't speak Yiddish at all. I don't even know whether Father knew Yiddish. We had a house full of books. The library was vast, but those books didn't really interest me at the time. I didn't look at them much. There were encyclopedias in various languages. The only thing that absorbed me was an atlas, where there were all the capitals of countries; I often used to look at that.

Miss Brandwein had her own room and she had a boyfriend. He taught at a school as well. I don't know whether they cuddled or kissed, but half the class used to come round to my house and we would look through the key hole at what they were doing in there. It was an eye-opener for us.

My first love was a boy in my class. It wasn't only me, but the whole class was in love with him. A gorgeous boy; he was Viennese, and came to us fairly late on, because he'd moved to Cracow.

When the war broke out they left; his father had an Austrian passport. And I didn't know what had happened to him until ten years ago there was a reunion for our school in Israel. He went there from the States. And my friends told him that I was alive, and he wrote to me. He wrote that he was going to be in Cracow and asked if I wanted to meet him. So of course; we met two years ago. We reminisced about old times, and I remembered better where he used to live: on Sarego Street, in this beautiful house that was called Dom Wola.

Even before the war there were entry-phones and an elevator. I used to go round there a lot, because I liked riding in that elevator, and anyway his parents liked me very much. And he asked me to take him to where he'd lived before the war. We went over to the house, and it turned out that this man was still alive who remembered him. We parted warmly, but not as warmly as before the war. I had a carefree, wonderful childhood. It lasted 14 years. If I'd been at home that childhood

would have lasted a little longer. I remember everything most marvelously. I had everything that a child could possibly dream of.

## **Second World War**

My brother Henryk passed his secondary school exam in 1939, at the Hebrew Gymnasium on Podbrzezie Street. He was supposed to go to England to study shipbuilding, I remember that. He was very gifted and Father managed to get him a place there. But because there was talk of war, my parents didn't let him go, because we had to stay together. and in September the war broke out. Mom was shot in 1939, at home, by Germans who were taking away the furniture. She tried to stop them and they shot her. I don't know where she's buried. We weren't allowed to have funerals. They took her to somewhere in Podgorze and there, I don't know, whether in a mass grave... I don't know anything. I was at school then, because the schools hadn't been closed. And all I remember is that I came back, our janitor was standing in the gateway and said, 'Toska, you don't have a mommy any more!' That's all I know; there was nobody there when it happened. And they took the furniture anyway. And on top of that Father said, 'Take your armband off and go and see where they're taking that furniture, maybe I'll get it back.' I, stupidly, flew off. They were taking it all to Wawel [the castle hill, then the seat of the governor general]. I ran after the cart. I had my armband in my pocket. When anyone was coming, Germans, I would put it on, because that was punishable by death. [Editor's note: On 1st December 1939 an order came into force binding the Jewish population to wear armbands. At first there was only a fine for not wearing an armband. On 11th December Jewish schools were closed down.]

On 5th and 6th December Kazimierz was surrounded by a police cordon, and apartments were searched and money and jewelry requisitioned (and in practice other valuables also). The people killed during that campaign were buried in a common grave in the Jewish cemetery in Podgorze. The cemetery was flattened during the construction of the concentration camp in Plaszow. It was probably then that Mrs. Gustawa Nussbaum, was killed.]

I remember how Father, with that friend of his, that Dreher, who he had written the dictionary and published various papers with, chopped up the built-in furniture, so that the Germans wouldn't take it. They chopped up those cupboards of mine, everything, I remember, they chopped it up with an ax. Furs were burned, so as not to hand them over to the Germans: my Mom's furs.

I was the main supplier during the war. Father was afraid, because he had to wear the armband, he was afraid to send my brother out, because he was a boy, so I was sent. Father was friendly with the owner of a shop on Florianska Street, Baczynski's - vodkas. It was a well-known firm. And Father would send me there for 'alasz' [a caraway liqueur flavored with bitter almonds, aniseed and orange peel]. I would hide the bottle under my dress and take it home, because Father liked to drink a glass with his supper. That man would always give it to us, even though Jews weren't allowed to go to the shops; they weren't allowed to sell anything to Jews. In Kazimierz there were two or three shops and one cafe for Jews. But other than that it was 'No admittance for Jews' everywhere. But I somehow always managed to bring something home under my dress. Somehow I managed it, even though I'd never done the shopping before. Nobody had taught me at home, of course, what I should buy. Before the war it was unthinkable to send a child out to town to buy something. But somehow I managed.

When my Mom died, Aunt Hela took us in. She'd been closest to my Mom, you see, they'd loved each other the most, and her husband had died in 1937. It was dangerous to walk around near Tempel [Synagogue], because you got stopped. While we were still living on Miodowa Street I saw how they would cut Jews' sidelocks off, torture them... Right opposite us, near Tempel, they would kill people up against the wall... They killed children - I saw that. And after that it really was very dangerous, but my aunt lived on Jasna Street; that wasn't Kazimierz proper. It was dangerous there too, but not as dangerous as on Miodowa Street, because that was typical Kazimierz and only Jews, but on Jasna Street it varied. In the house next door there weren't any Jews. My aunt had a very beautiful large apartment. We were there right until we went to the ghetto.

We still had our things when we went into the [Podgorze] ghetto [5](#), and there they allocated one room to three to four families, divided by wardrobes. I slept behind one wardrobe, along with Father and my brother, another family slept behind another wardrobe, and well, that's how we lived. In the ghetto Father worked in the hospital. I don't know what he did there - he had had nothing to do with medicine, of course, but they took him, because he was wise. He went to work in the mornings. I stayed at home; my brother worked too. He used to go somewhere with Father; I don't even remember where.

Later on Father managed to have some papers done that made me two years older. He bought these high-heeled clogs to make me taller, and I worked. It was a carbide factory, a Jewish factory, in fact, that had been taken over by the Germans, opposite the ghetto, on 2 Lwowska Street; we used to go past the wire and it was out on the Aryan side. And there I worked with the father of Polanski Romek, that's how I know him. [Polanski, Roman (1933): Polish-born American film director. He escaped from the Cracow ghetto on the day it was liquidated, 13th March 1943, and survived, in hiding with a peasant family.] We worked on three shifts. So sometimes I would come home and Father wasn't there; we would miss each other. And when I had a night-shift I would sleep during the day.

There, in the ghetto, I was hungry all the time. Then I would have eaten anything, but there was nothing. They didn't pay us, of course. We worked for nothing, you see [but nevertheless everyone wanted to be employed, because that was protection from being deported from the ghetto]. Father used to procure the food from somewhere. I don't know whether he still had money or sold things; he didn't let me in on the secret. In any case he would bring soup from the hospital. Well, sometimes he would bring it, and sometimes evidently they wouldn't give him any. We all had jaundice there. I think it was mechanical, without a fever, and apparently you had to eat something sweet. Father procured some beet jam, I don't know where from. But at the time you couldn't bear the sight of sweet things. Although I was hungry I felt sick. Even in the ghetto Father was still learning Spanish. I remember the lady who came to Father and taught him was called Gusta Borghen. I listened in a little, but nothing came of it.

Later, when the ghetto was liquidated [13th March 1943], they ordered us to gather on the square, where the pharmacy was, now a museum [Apteka pod Orlem, the Museum of National Remembrance, at 18 Bohaterow Getta Square, formerly Zgody Square. This pharmacy, the only one in the ghetto, was run by a Pole, Tadeusz Pankiewicz, honored with distinctions including the 'Righteous among the Nations' medal]. You were allowed to take with you as much as you could carry. So poor Father, he dressed me up like an onion, literally [in layers], because how much could I carry?! And I had a rucksack with books, this satchel, and the rest in a little case. Father had a

case as well. There were trucks standing on Zgody Square and the Germans very politely told us to write our names on our suitcases and load them onto the trucks. They said that we would get everything in Plaszow [6](#). That was perfidious; it was meant so that we wouldn't shout, so that we would be good. Rubbish, they never brought any of it. Later it turned out that we were naked and barefoot there in Plaszow. We went on foot from Zgody Square; they took us along Wielicka Street to the camp, to Plaszow. Children went separately, men separately, women separately. They put me with the children...

In Plaszow I was in a barrack, and Father and my brother were in a different one, and I lost touch with them and didn't know where they were. You weren't allowed to walk between the huts. I didn't know anything: when they had taken them, where they had taken them. Nothing, nothing at all. I wasn't in Plaszow for long, because I was taken to Schindler's [7](#), to the Emailwarenfabrik in Zablocie [the Oskar Schindler Enamelware Factory (Deutsche Emailwarenfabrik) in the Cracow district of Zablocie, at 4 Lipowa Street, a branch of the Plaszow camp]. I stayed there until the end, until they liquidated Plaszow [October 1944], and I went to Auschwitz from Schindler's factory.

I had it very good at Schindler's, because he made the effort that we should have food. Apart from that, we were working with Poles, and if you knew anybody, they would pass on letters. And they brought us bread rolls. If anybody had anything to sell they would sell it and bring something else for the money. They helped a lot. There's a Polish woman still alive, Zofia Godlewska, she lives on Smolensk Street, who worked at Schindler's with her mother. And they were really poor, but they helped us the most. Zofia brought us letters - that was risking your life. She was my age. After the war I even met her, on Szewska Street. I say, 'So you're alive, so you're alive!' And she says, 'Yes. And the Lord God has rewarded me, because I've married a Jew and have a wonderful husband.' He was a doctor, Goldstein, he was a neurologist, but unfortunately he died. And she was a nurse at the Narutowicz hospital. When her husband died she didn't want to meet up, so I didn't want to force myself on her, and we just lost touch.

Well, and from Plaszow they took us, as per that list of Schindler's, to Auschwitz. [Editor's note: In August 1944 the Zablocie satellite camp was liquidated and Schindler's Jews were moved to Plaszow. Schindler organized the relocation of the factory to Brunnlitz (today Czech Republic). On 15th October 1944, 2,000 men, 700 of them from Schindler, were sent in a transport to concentration camp Gross Rosen and, after two days' uncertainty, to Brunnlitz. On 21st October 1944, 2,000 women, 300 of them from Schindler, were sent to Auschwitz. They were put in separate huts and three weeks later moved to Brunnlitz.] At Auschwitz we stood on the railway ramp because Schindler wouldn't let us be put in... to those blocks, because he wanted to have all of us. He was waiting for a transport that was supposed to be coming from Austria. At the time I wasn't aware whether he'd paid for it or hadn't paid for it, whether he'd pulled any strings. And indeed, our group squatted by the railway tracks and waited for wagons. And so finally, I don't know after how many days - whether it was three days or five days I can't say because I can't remember - these wagons came in, these goods wagons. And it started. 'Everybody from Schindler get up,' and there were about 2,000 people. All that camp of his. He said: 'Don't worry, you're all going with me.'

Well, and there were these OD-men. That was the so-called Jewish police. An OD-man, that was the Ordnungsdienst, the law and order. They were Jews, prisoners too. Schindler picked three of those OD-men and they were to take us into the wagons, according to the list. And it so happened that

one of the OD-men, whom I in fact met after the war, had evidently taken some money for me, because he didn't read me out, but took someone else instead of me. Ten of us he didn't read out. We were standing here, and Schindler was by the wagons. I run to him, look, and the wagons are starting to move off, they're locking the wagons. And I tell him that he didn't read me out. And he says, 'What do you mean?!' - because he even knew me personally, I mean he knew that I'd worked for him, because he'd known me from the camp. He calls the OD-man, and he says 'Hang on, hang on, hang on.' How he [the OD-man] pushed me, how he flayed me with that whip! The wagons moved off, and the ten of us stayed behind; that was in Birkenau [Auschwitz was a concentration camp; Auschwitz II - Birkenau was a death camp]. I met him after the war. 'You're alive?!' - Because we were destined for death. You see, we knew that because we'd come with that transport they would send us to the gas. But they put us in Birkenau into the blocks. There were selections, but somehow I was lucky; I was sent to the gas, and then sent back. And from there I moved to Auschwitz, because they were taking people there.

Amazingly, I still looked great. Very good. I was never a musliman [in the concentration camp slang a prisoner who had lost the will to live]; they took them straight off to the gas. And at that time they were selecting for Auschwitz. And there, beyond that 'Arbeit macht frei' [Above the main gate into Auschwitz was the infamous inscription 'Arbeit macht frei', meaning 'Work Makes You Free' in German.], there were six show blocks, which were the so-called Musterlager [Musterlager means model camp in German]. That was where the Red Cross came to see how wonderful we looked, what conditions we had. And because I looked so good, this German Obserwierka [Polonization of the German 'Aufseherin', meaning female guard, warder] selected us, and they took me there. There the blocks were brick, there was water; we pinched ourselves, wondering if we were in the next world or this. We couldn't believe it was true. The food there wasn't better: once a day that slice of bread. But there was water and toilets; there weren't the latrines. In Birkenau they let us out to the latrines three times a day, and if you couldn't wait you did it where you stood. And then they shot those who did it where they stood.

And then from there, only when the liquidation came [the liquidation of the Musterlager], they took me to the experimental block, also because I looked good. And I was very happy, because in that block they gave you not one slice of bread but two. And all my friends were so jealous that I had got into that block... Unaware of what could be there. And all because they gave me that slice of bread more. And there they injected us with typhus bacteria and made an antidote. They were using us to make vaccines for the Germans for the front. [Editor's note: In 1941, following the German invasion of the USSR, typhus began to spread through the German army. In Buchenwald research was carried out into the efficacy of vaccines and various chemical substances designed to provide protection against infection with typhus. 75% of the prisoners were given vaccines or drugs and 25% were given nothing, and after three weeks they were all injected with the typhus bacteria. The death rate among these prisoners was 90%. Studies have not documented what research into typhus was conducted in Auschwitz; they only report that Dr Mengele also experimented with infectious diseases, including typhus, in an investigation into how infectious diseases affect people of 'different races.'] Because those bacteria of mine were useful, I didn't go to the gas, but stayed there all the time. They sent it to the front, you see, to treat soldiers. I don't know exactly what they were doing, because I had a fever of 40 degrees. They were injecting typhus, and I don't know whether I was suffering from it or not... And I was there until the liquidation of Auschwitz.



When the liquidation began, everyone who could possibly get up went. But there were some who couldn't get up, the so-called muslimans, these skeletons. They couldn't move, so the Germans shot them, but they didn't have time to shoot them all, and some were liberated. It turned out that the Russians were already in Cracow [18th January 1945]. None of us knew that. The older prisoners heard some rumors, and they stayed behind, pretending to be muslimans. But I didn't know anything, even what time of day it was. And when they ordered us to go, I went, because they threatened that if we didn't go it would be the gas for us. But they weren't sending people to the gas any more, because they were fleeing themselves.

And that was the worst, that journey; it was called the death march [8](#), because we walked... I walked to Leipzig. Walked! In snow like this. It was winter at the time, it was in January, 23rd January, as far as I remember [the Auschwitz death marches set off on 17th-21st January 1945; in all 56,000 prisoners]. Snow up to here [shoulders], 20 degrees below zero, and me in one shoe. A Dutch shoe, it was called. These clogs that were typical in Auschwitz. As we walked, that sound that nobody could bear, of those clogs. It was so characteristic... And the snow, red, literally. Because if you stopped, stood for a moment...

I'd never have thought that you could sleep while you walk. We learned to, took it in turns with our friends. We walked four in a row, took it in turns, and the people on the outside supported the one who was asleep. I could sleep as I walked. Whoever stopped for a moment... The road was littered with corpses, these red bloodstains on the white snow. Awful. They shot if you just... it was enough to stand for a moment. And we helped each other to survive - in fact, all four of us survived. I had one friend, Helenka Groner. We were very close. She died two years ago. She was a lot older than me; she was already married then. She had a son my age; he died in Plaszow. Her husband had died in Plaszow too, Groner. She was with me from Auschwitz. We lived somewhere near each other, then in that death march we walked together, and we stayed together until the end.

That journey was terrible. Terrible. And so we reached the camp in Leipzig. There they gave us some parsnip, and although we were dying of hunger, we couldn't eat it, it was so awful. And so we were there, that was a transit camp, and then they put us in Buchenwald. In Buchenwald it wasn't so terribly bad, perhaps a little better. But good, there was no question of that. And then there was an ammunition factory there. We worked, making these - I don't know, lids. There weren't only Jews there. There were also Hungarians, gypsies. And then after that we went to Ravensbruck.

In Ravensbruck we all prayed that they would send us back to Auschwitz, because that was just indescribable. I think it was the worst camp there was. Above all, we weren't in blocks, there were just these tents. These sloping things, like tents, they were called 'zelta' [from the German 'Zelt' - tent]. And they packed us in there, I don't know how many into one tent. It was like putting 200 people in a tent for four or five. All you could do was sit, one on top of another. You went [relieved yourself] where you sat; they didn't let us out at all. At each other, on each other, it was pouring over my head; I don't even know who it was doing it on me... And so there we sat like that. That was the worst camp, Ravensbruck. The worst.

One day this supposedly Red Cross came along. It was the Bernadotte [9](#) campaign, that doctor Bernadotte. They were taking people from Ravensbruck to Sweden. But to us, when we saw the truck with the tarpaulin, it was obvious that it would be to our deaths. And we all fled. No-one was giving in... They had difficulty catching maybe 100 people out of those thousands. After the war I

found out that they were in Sweden. And how many fell dead, because we wouldn't let ourselves be caught. You just fled, so they shot. Later it turned out it was some agreement between Germany and Sweden. If I'd known, I would have got in. But who could have known?

Well, and after that typhus raged. Terrible. That was truly the worst camp of all the ones I was in. There was typhus, and the Germans were a little afraid of an epidemic, and we, the healthy, were sent to Malchov. That's a small place outside Ravensbruck, that camp belonged to Ravensbruck. And there first the Allies liberated me, and then the Russians came in [the Russians liberated Ravensbruck on 29th/30th April 1945].

The Allies were astonished at how we looked, but they didn't take any closer interest. We were black, terribly. Full of dirt too, because towards the end we didn't live in huts but outside, under some trees. 'Good Lord, how black you are! What have you been doing?' And we asked for food; they had some tinned food, so they gave it to us, but no-one could eat it. An awful lot of my friends died when they ate it: because we threw ourselves on it, but we weren't in any fit state. I thought I could eat half the world, but one bite and you couldn't eat any more.

The Russians there in Malchov behaved terribly. They killed two of my friends. Raped and killed them. And I was stupid enough to go and look for my friends. I didn't realize. I was an idiot. And I went, I asked these Russkies [pejorative term for Russians] where they'd gone to. And they just waved their hands. They could have raped and shot me just the same.

We didn't even know that the war had ended. We just stood there, there was no camp any more, nothing, but we were afraid to go out. The Germans had ordered us to stand, so we stood. The Allies came through, the Russians came through, and still we didn't believe. Well, there wasn't any radio, there wasn't anything. It was only when some Greeks came along, these ragamuffins: 'Hitler kaput! Hitler kaput!' they said. They gestured something to us, that the war had ended, that we could go home.

I still looked good. As soon as they told us that we were free, I went into action at once. I flew to the local chief councilor, saying that we wanted to go back to Poland. He came to see us and said that he asked us most earnestly not to get friendly with anyone there, not to approach any houses. He asked in earnest. That he would give us bread, take us, to the road. That we should go away, because he couldn't guarantee what might happen there. After all, it was Germany. He asked us in earnest to leave, as fast as possible. And that's what happened. He did give us bread and took us to the tracks, so that we could get on when something came. We waited there somewhere, there in Malchov, on the ground, on the tracks, until a train came along. We got on, not knowing where we were going. Anywhere, just forward. Later they put us off, put us on, put us off...

In one train there were already looters from Poland, and it was only then that we knew for certain that the war had ended, that Cracow was free. Poles were already going to Germany to loot. But they wouldn't give us a thing. I was excellent at stealing. I was so good at stealing sugar! Sugar was lying there in cubes. I hid it in my knickers, tied it up in the leg. And I remember - now I laugh - that all the girls asked just to let them lick it... I shared it, I didn't just take it for myself. I took it out of my knickers and everyone licked that sugar. It was so good! And then we would go out into the fields when the train stopped in the middle of nowhere. We ate nettles; they're apparently very healthy, lots of vitamins. And I had some little bag, I don't remember where I got it from. I would put those things in it. I stole some grain. I stole whatever I could. Not from among our people, only

if one of the looters put their rucksack down for a minute. I could see that there in that rucksack he had rolls; when he fell asleep I would think: 'Why does he need them when he's got so many and we're hungry?'

It didn't even occur to you that somebody might help. The Allies had passed through and hadn't even asked if we were hungry. Only said that we were black. The Russians came in, raped and murdered and left. We just carried on fleeing. Two of my friends died after that, while we were still on the way. What I stole I stole... I couldn't count on anyone, anything.

### **Return to Krakow after the War**

I got back in July. I flew to Cracow like a madwoman. We had arranged to meet at our house, at the janitor's, whoever came back first. Father, my brother and I, that whoever came back, it was to there, and all news to the janitor. So I flew; I thought Father would be waiting for me, the apartment waiting, and I could go back to school, I wouldn't have to worry about anything any more. When I arrived, the confrontation with reality, that was the worst shock, worse than in the camp. What I felt when I found out that there was nobody there, that no-one from the family had survived, only me! I had nowhere to go; I stood on the street and cried. And I wanted to go back to the camp. Because at least there, there had been that bunk and I had been someone's business...

When I rang the bell, the one person who let me in was our janitor, 'Toska, are you hungry?' She was still there from before the war, so she knew me. 'Come on, come home!' - and she rang the bell, 'The owner has come back, the owner!' But this man said, 'Well let her go to the devil, there are no owners, get out!' I say, 'Sir, but from the street I can see that our lamps are hanging there. Please give me back those lamps, because I haven't got anything to live on. I'll sell them, please buy them.' Those lamps were nice, these chandeliers. He didn't even open up to me; he snapped through the door. I stood there; the poor janitor cooked me two potatoes. She didn't have a lot herself, but at least she cooked me those potatoes. I ate because I was hungry all the time. No-one here, what was I to do? No money, no-one wanted to let me into my apartment, no-one wanted to give me back my things. What was I to do? Without an education. It was well that I could read and write. At least there was that. No-one would even have taken me on to work, because I couldn't do anything.

At 38 Długa Street the Jewish Committee had set up; I was directed there. And there you posted slips of paper saying who'd come back. And there were thousands of those slips on the walls. There was a large courtyard, and there they put straw down and you could sleep. At midday you got soup. And if you were absolutely in rags, like me, in my one shoe and without any dessous [French for underwear], without panties, you could get some there. Not to fit, but something.

I came back to Cracow with Helenka Groner. Except that she had a sister and somewhere to go. That sister of hers married a Mr. Lubelski and her parents sat shivah because Lubelski wasn't a Jew. She fell in love and married him. He had saved her, that Lubelski, but nobody knew - that's what she thought - that she was a Jew. She was mad when Helenka came back; she didn't want to take her in, so that it wouldn't come out. She was terribly afraid of that. Helenka's parents, before the war, had had the Polonia hotel in Cracow, and her husband a large store selling lace on Szpitalna Street. She even showed me where. Later Helenka met some Czech guy, a Jew too, and married him. She did really well for herself, she lived in Ostrava, had a restaurant there. I don't remember

what her married name after that second husband was. In any case for me she was Groner. She died two years ago.

I put up a slip of paper that I was there, that I was alive, and if any of the family had survived, they should sign. After a month the Korczaks, these friends of my parents, found my note. They wrote that they lived on Karmelicka [Street], and that I should go to them. I went there, and they took me in. They had a very big apartment, they were doing very well, because he was a dentist. They enrolled me in school, because I had to have a sponsor. And I was there right until they left. They went to Israel in 1948. Mrs. Korczak, Gina Korczak, died not long ago. Her husband has been dead a long time, but she died only about a month ago; I just got news from Israel.

Where my father and brother perished there's no knowing. In the camps. But I was told, I mean from what I found out through the Red Cross and people who had come back, that they both died almost at the end of the war, in 1945. Whether that's true, is hard to say, because there are no witnesses. In any case they didn't come back.

Father had told me where he was leaving what - I even had it written down on a piece of paper - but no-one would give me anything back. They said they didn't have it, that the Germans had taken it off them, or that they'd grown attached to it. The photographs survived because Father had given them to a lady called Wladzia. I don't know how Father knew her, but she used to come to our house, and I looked her up after the war. And she alone gave me everything back. I mean the photographs, Mom's silver powder box, which I have to this day, and a ring. Nothing particularly valuable, but nostalgic. So she alone, the poorest of all of them, gave me everything back.

Once I started doing a little better, I wanted to repay people's kindness, to help. That Wladzia, for instance, she was so poor. And my aunt Hela's maid, who used to bring me blueberry pierogis to the ghetto, because I liked them. [Editor's note: pierogis are dumplings made of flour with water and some egg yolk, rolled flat very thinly. You cut circles with a glass, put the filling in the center and stick the edges together. The shape is a crescent. You boil them in water. Pierogis can be filled with cheese, meat, cabbage, mushrooms or fruits. The ones with fruits are served with cream and sugar, the other ones with melted butter.] She used to cry so much outside the ghetto, 'Toska, you're hungry!' And she was poor. What she could, she used to bring me. So after the war, I and my cousin from Wroclaw sent her money every month. Not a lot, because I didn't have it myself, but that maid was always grateful to us. And when Wladzia was ill I procured medicines for her, because she really deserved it. There was this foreman at Schindler's; I looked for him after the war, because he'd really helped me. I advertised in the newspapers, because I remembered his full name; now it's gone from my memory. Like I say, Poles helped. There were decent people and they helped me a lot. Even just with pierogis or a piece of cake.

But they gave me the house back at once, through the courts, because there was no-one, I was the only heiress. They just ordered me to pay the charges for six years. A German had taken the money and run, not given it up to the local authority or wherever the service charges went during the war. And I got bills for the whole occupation. I had a hearing and I thought I would go through the roof. I didn't have enough for an attorney, and apparently I defended myself marvelously in that courtroom. I said, 'What for? Isn't it enough that I lost everything, I'm barefoot, naked, and now I have to pay for my stay in the camps?!' It was dismissed, but I had to pay something in

installments.

I was given six houses back; I sold five. My uncle's house on Paulinska Street. In Podgorze, Grandma's. On Nowy Square, too, my uncle's. There was the one of ours, on Miodowa Street. After the war my husband took care of that house, and he just wrote off the debts that Father had run up. In crowns, in zloty. There were heaps of those debts, because Father had lived beyond his means. Evidently before the war that was what people did, take out mortgages for things. Luckily we managed to pay it all off at the prices that Father had taken it in, because they didn't revalue it. If they'd revalued it I wouldn't have recovered from that debt.

I ate lunch in the Ermitaz [restaurant] with my girlfriends for Grandma's house. And I thought what my father would have said to my selling it just like that. But if he'd come and we hadn't had anything to eat, he'd have sold it too. In any case, after the camps nothing was important apart from life. I did well to sell it; I haven't got anything to regret today. I lost everything, so at least I ate a dinner. Year after year I'd dreamed, as you did dream in the camps, of a loaf of bread. A whole one! When I get out of the camp, that's how much I'll buy myself! A whole one! I'll eat a whole one at once! But that wasn't true, because you couldn't after the camp, unfortunately, because your stomach had shrunk. It was impossible. But I thank God anyway, because I came out healthy. My friends had problems with their lungs, and other complaints. There was nothing wrong with me. And I was in six camps, and never once even had a cold. That was the luck I had. I wasn't ill; well, I was in that experimental block, but that was the only thing.

After the war I was a witness at the trial of one OD-man [the interviewee does not want to reveal his last name for personal reasons.]. There was this roll-call in Plaszow and they ordered people to give up their children. But when the roll-call ended, they didn't care which child had been hidden by its mother... A woman had hidden a child, a baby - I don't know how old it was - in this fire bucket. And at the last moment she had covered the child in sand. The roll-call had ended, so he didn't care any more, that Amon Goeth [10](#). Those children... he didn't even shoot, but smashed them against the wall, because he didn't want to waste the ammunition. The mother would have to watch it. Afterwards he would shoot her anyway, but first she'd had to see that. And the roll-call was already over, they'd ordered us to disperse, and he came over, that Adam, took the child out of the bucket and gave it to Goeth. He took the child and smashed it against the wall. And the mother, we were standing near each other, says, 'I have to survive! I have to. To kill that bastard, if I survive.' She survived and turned him over. They called me as a witness; I told them everything I knew. They put him inside, but his parents had a lot of cash. He and his parents survived, because his father was an OD-man too. The whole family survived. She went away, the mother of that child. And he was expelled from the Jewish community. But later on he had a shop on Bracka Street and he did well for himself.

Once a day, a cart and horses went to Plaszow taking bread to the camp. At 5am it was still dark and the cart had sides with bars on, and as it went bread crumbs would fall off. We would collect the crumbs. I was walking along with my friend, and I said, 'Oh that's good, it's him on guard, he knows me; he'll look the other way.' Because the OD-men used to pretend they hadn't seen. How he flayed me with that whip! 'How can you - Adam, you - you know me, we know each other!' How he laid into me - I had lumps on my head as if I was growing horns. The bandit.



We threw him down the stairs at Feniks [a popular tea dance venue on Cracow's Main Square, still in existence]; my girlfriends and I used to go there for tea dances. And he came. We were in the company of some men friends; I was in university by then. And I say, 'Listen up, it's the murderer!' How they took him and threw him down the stairs at that Feniks... He brushed himself off and left, didn't even say a word. Then again in the Planty [a ring of parkland surrounding the Old Town, established along the route of the former city walls]. I was sitting with my husband on a bench and he was walking along. My husband's friends from university were with us. And I say, 'Listen up, give him a squeeze!' How they leapt on him, how they beat him up... I say, 'Well, you don't have to pick up crumbs!' In Plaszow I practically used to lick those crumbs up off the ground with my tongue. He didn't say a word. Apparently he wanted to commit suicide, but he didn't. After that they forgot him. Perhaps five years ago, I don't know, I got a telephone call that he'd died. He was still young - a year younger than me. My father, as we were walking through the ghetto and an OD-man came past, told me to spit. 'Spit on him. And don't you ever talk to him.'

Right after the war they arrested all those OD-men. I don't know whether at the request of the Jewish Community organization or whether as a result of information from people who were in the camp... Some people say that there were decent OD-men too. I say: 'Decent?! Yes, decent like Ubeks! [11](#) A Jew who was an OD-man is a foul Jew. He had to sign saying that he would beat people, inform, and that he would be at the service of the Germans. That's decent?! How decent? It's suspect enough that the whole family survived. I went through six camps and I know what it means for a whole family to have survived. It was out of the question. Well, they took me separately, my brother separately, my father separately, they shot Mom... There was no way we could have been together. But they survived, and quite nicely too. They did great for themselves in Plaszow. They had a hut to themselves, food up to here... I agree that OD-men's children aren't the guilty ones, that their parents did it so that they would survive, but they should keep quiet. Not write idiocies about how they were starving or how they didn't see anything. Rubbish. They saw all too well that Daddy walked around with a whip.

There are all sorts of people in every nation. I say: 'Just don't tell me that there was a decent OD-man; I would sentence them all at once.' In Plaszow there was this Chilowicz, who was Amon Goeth's footstool. They used to kiss each other; Goeth adored him. And one fine day, we were ordered to go to the 'Appellplatz' [the roll call square], and there Chilowicz, his wife and his child were lying. Goeth had shot all of them. [Goeth rid himself of Chilowicz because he had been a witness to his financial misdealings.] I say, and well he did; it didn't fall to us, because he sorted them out. Chilowicz's son, eight years old, this little upstart, dressed in high boots and running around with that whip.

Hardly had I got back than I wanted to enroll in school, so much had Father instilled in me that 'you must learn.' I enrolled in school on Oleandry Street, but because I was too old to start from the beginning, I did two years in one year. You see when I got back I was 20, and it was a bit too late to start from the first grade of gymnasium. I caught up somehow. After that I sold another house and then another, got myself a few clothes. I already had some friends at school. When I finished school I started studying chemistry at the Jagiellonian University [12](#). We used to go out having fun, as young people do, to Feniks for tea dances. In Bratniak [a student self-help organization] at the Jagiellonian University there was this Mr. Chlebowski. He was some chairman, some party guy out of this world. He helped me a lot, because he got me an apartment on Czapskich Street. A little

attic room, but I was over the moon. He got me into the university student canteen. And his colleagues taught me and tried to make sure I passed everything, because in chemistry I had problems with math. My studying chemistry was stupid; I was more of a humanities person. What made me decide to do chemistry, I don't remember. But I think it was a girlfriend who went to do it. So we went together. I was hopeless at math, because I've never had a head for the exact sciences. But I made it through somehow, only I didn't write my dissertation. My son was born and I didn't manage it. I didn't have any help, because we had nothing. We were poor. My husband was a student, then he worked at Polfa [a pharmaceutical company]; he earned 700 zloty and we never had enough; my father-in-law helped us out a bit.

### **Teofila Nussbaum meets Adam Silberring**

My husband, Adam Silberring, is a chemical engineer. He was born in Bochnia in 1921, the last year to graduate from high school before the war. His was a very assimilated family. His father, Samuel, owned a large printing press and a house. He even used to drive around on business on Saturdays, he said, and the orthodox Jews used to throw stones at him. He didn't give his sons a Hebrew education. He was a believer, because even after the war he used to go to the synagogue at New Year, but he didn't celebrate all the holidays. He died in 1973. His [Adam's] mother's name was Rozalia; she perished during the war. My husband has a brother, Ludwik, born in 1925. Both he and his brother studied at the Silesia Polytechnic in Wroclaw. Ludwik lives in Switzerland, he's a professor and has two children. We're not in touch with him.

During the war, first the Germans threw them out of their house, because it's a very beautiful house. They took their car, a Steyr. So they, with some cases, as my father-in-law told me, set off towards Lwow [today Ukraine]. In the meantime the Germans forced them into some labor on the way somewhere, but later they made it to Lwow. His mother and the younger brother went back to Bochnia for some winter clothes. They didn't have any warm things, because there had been a heat wave in September. She was crossing the river San in a boat and the boat capsized and she drowned, but Ludwik was rescued and went back to Lwow. After that the Russians deported them out to the Ural Mountains. I can't remember what the place was called.

His father was some protégé of the Polish diplomatic service. And my husband reported as a driver. He had a driving license, from back before the war; I can't remember which year. His father said that Adam drove and he paid his fines. [Editor's note: The interviewee is referring to the fact that when the war started, Adam was just 18. Because his father wanted him to become a good driver, he kept paying Adam's tickets for driving.] I even have this photograph where his father's putting a cushion under him, because he couldn't reach the steering wheel. He did very well, because he used to drive some commander, and he was given food. There was a round stamp in the driving license, and my husband said that round stamps were sacred to them [the Russians]. And what amused me the most was when he told me how, when he got milk, he would take it home in his pocket. First he would throw it somewhere so it froze - it was about 40 degrees below zero there. Then he would put it in his pocket and take it home, and thaw it out at home. And I remember that once they were allocated some coffee. It was white, it hadn't been roasted. They sold it to some Russian woman. Then that Russian woman came back sounding off. She wanted to beat them up for deceiving her. So they asked why. She says: 'Bloody hell, I've been boiling it for three days and it won't go soft!' She'd bought it thinking it was grits or something, I don't know.

When they returned from the Soviet Union they went to Bochnia, a small town where their house, with a dozen or so rooms, was. But after the war it had been nationalized, because there had been the printing press downstairs.

First the Germans had taken it, and then our own people, the Poles, took it. And my father-in-law tried to get at least one room, because they didn't have anywhere to live. But they didn't want to let him in; they threw him out. Before the war my father-in-law had been very rich and had donated a lot to Bochnia, even for the building of the church. So they were known in Bochnia, and the mayor remembered them. His father had worked in my father-in-law's printing press.

And the mayor pulled some strings and got them one room, 15 square meters, without the use of the kitchen, bathroom or toilet. So my father-in-law asked, as he told me, 'So where are we supposed to go?' 'In the garden.'

They lived there for some time, and then moved to Cracow. My father-in-law was very capable, and opened a small printing press here, with a former employee. He started earning and they rented themselves an apartment here.

We didn't know each other, because my husband studied at the Polytechnic and I was at the university.

We met because of a book. Because I, I don't know where from, but I had textbooks that were hard to come by. And a girlfriend knew that I had them, and sent Adam to me for them, while I was still on Karmelicka Street, where I lived with the Korczaks.

And so my future husband came for a book, and that's how it started. That must have been in 1946. We got married in 1947, and we spent our honeymoon in the Polish resort town of Zakopane.

On 2nd October 2004, we had our 57th anniversary.

My son, Jerzy, was born on 30th May 1949 in Cracow. Well, I really had nothing, but he had everything. My father had instilled in me that I would never be someone without an education.

Even as I was going to the ghetto Father gave me a rucksack full of books 'because you are going to study,' he said. Even at Schindler's I had books, because Father said that I had to study. So that was something I learnt at home and carried on with my son and granddaughter. At the Sobieski high school, mothers at parents' evening protested that they didn't want Russian taught. I said, 'Son, whatever you learn will be yours.' He speaks beautiful Russian and it's come in very useful to him. But those mothers: 'You should be ashamed to have your child learn Russian!' How can you tell a child not to learn?! I'm not red, and I've never been a communist in my life, but I have absolutely nothing against the Russian language. [Editor's note: Russian was a compulsory foreign language. The antipathy towards it was due to the fact that it was the language of the occupant.] It's a very beautiful language. The language is guilty of nothing. And they have such beautiful music. When my husband was working in Russia, and he was in Moscow, I used to go and we used to go to the theater or the opera. Swan Lake is truly an experience out of this world - it's the best ballet in the world.

When the baby was small my husband was against my going to work because he wouldn't entrust anyone with the child, wouldn't have anyone take it. When my son was bigger I put my foot down and got a terribly bad job, because it was a part-time post, so I could still manage the house. Once my son was at school, I used to get up at 5am to clean, send him off to school at 8, and then I went out to work for those four hours. I picked him up from school on my way back. I had to cook, wash, do everything, so that job suited me. It was in an office. And the relations there were good. A lot of perks came with it then, because there was nothing in the shops, and we had a buffet downstairs and there was ham. Not every day. Everyone got an allocated ration, but I had ham and there was something to give the child. And I had a buffet ticket later on, when my husband went away on a long business trip and my son was at college. So it was very convenient. I used to go to concerts, to the movies. Apart from that I had an awful lot of friends. We would play bridge all night, straight from bridge to work - I was hardly ever at home. I was never sad. Never. I didn't allow it, because I'd had enough sad years. So I made the most of it wherever I could.

The greatest woe was when I told Jerzy that he wasn't going to school. And he cried. I hid his uniform - at Sobieski they had to wear a uniform. The poor thing borrowed one from a friend. But I knew that that was the only way I could threaten him. He so badly wanted to go to school. At high school he had extra-curricular Latin, English at the cultural center, and he also went to music school and played the violin - very nicely too. Even when he was small, he used to say: 'I want to have two jobs. One I don't know what, and one in music, because it could come in useful.' He always said that. But I put that out of his head, because I considered that music is no profession for a boy.

Jerzy was very friendly with Zosia Zeleska. He was still at elementary school and she was in high school. They were madly in love for many years. Her father was a professor at the Polytechnic in Wroclaw. And he always used to say, 'I don't know whether it's Zosia who's so stupid or Jerzy so clever.' He couldn't understand that they had so much in common. She graduated in architecture. She lives in New York and is in artistic photography, she's an assistant to Horowitz [Ryszard Horowitz, born in 1939 in Cracow, well-known New York photographer]. When Jerzy was dating my daughter-in-law, I said, 'Jerzy, don't you bring home anyone who hasn't got a degree. Ever. There's no question of my daughter-in-law not having higher education.' Well, and at last he came to me and said, 'Mom, she's a graduate.' My daughter-in-law graduated in history from the Jagiellonian University and is now headmistress of High School No. 6.

Jerzy studied chemistry and also physics at the Jagiellonian University.

He did his Ph.D. very quickly and went away to Sweden; ten years he lectured at the university in Uppsala.

He did his assistant professorship there. When he came back he had to have it accepted. This photo shows my son Jerzy getting his professor's title from Aleksander Kwasniewski, the President of Poland. The photo was taken in 2000 in Belweder, Warsaw [seat of Polish Presidents]. In fact, he still lectures there now, goes to Uppsala once a month. He's lectured in Japan too.

He speaks five languages. In 2000 he became a professor at the Jagiellonian University. I let him go, gave him everything I could have given. It all cost. But becoming a professor is his own achievement, because I didn't demand that of him.

One fine day, when he was in second grade, he came running home and says: 'Mom! Is it true that you're a 'Zydka'?! [Jewess, the word used in Polish is derogatory] I say: 'Not a Zydka, but a Zydowka' [the neutral word for describing a Jewess] 'Because my friends told me.' Some friend's mother, who knew us - anyway, I never hid it. Except that after the war there were none of the traditions, unfortunately. So he knows he's Jewish, but nothing else. He didn't change his name, either, and as he's always saying, being Jewish has never harmed him.

My husband was working at Polfa as head of production when in 1968 [see Gomulka campaign] [13](#) they forced him to leave when all that with the Jews started. He went to Chemadex, that was a design office. And well he did, because at least he was abroad all the time. They built sulfuric acid factories. In Russia, then in Czechoslovakia.

He carried on working into his retirement, about eight years ago, I think, because he was a great expert; he spoke languages and they built their factories. But Chemadex fell apart, my husband came back to Poland, and because he was already of retirement age, they let him go. And I was terribly afraid, because I couldn't imagine my husband at home. I knew it would be a huge tragedy for him; he was so active, such a workaholic. Even now someone's always calling. Adam, tell me how you do this, how you do that; I'll come round with the wood, you draw it all out for me.

Last year he worked, had a few lectures at AGH [AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow]. At the moment, thank God, he's got work building an extra story for our granddaughter in our house on Miodowa Street. He reads, he's interested in everything. You can talk to him on any subject. Having said that, I don't agree with him in many cases, but I've lowered my tone now. It's a waste of time arguing.

For years I refused interviews. Whoever called me, I refused. But then they started persuading me that it's for history, so that the memory doesn't die. Because when we're no longer here there won't be anyone to tell it, because there won't be anyone from our generation left. Only the second and third, who have heard about it. That's not the same. But I catch myself at what I'm saying is no longer a faithful account of what happened. So I wonder if it's true. What I'm saying, if it's really true. If it is true, it seems impossible to have survived it. Hard to believe that you could have survived something like that. Some of my friends, they died at once... I, who was straight from a home where there really was everything ... Perhaps that's why I survived, that I was resilient, somehow. I only became hardened afterwards. Later I was, because I had to be hard. When I came back and found out that none of the family had survived.

I talked about Schindler somewhere, and it was recorded. I didn't even know, I only found out afterwards. I spoke very positively about him, because I consider him worth it, although he has a lot of opponents, who think that I shouldn't talk like that, as a Jewess. But I think he did so much good. Really, he loved us, so to speak, and did everything to sweeten those times. Most importantly he didn't shoot anybody, didn't beat anybody, didn't kick anybody, and didn't call anybody 'Verfluchte Jude.' And I got a message from a Mrs. Erb, chair of the Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk, saying that she would like to make an interview, because she was very interested in Schindler. She came here with a Mr. Sowa, who was her right-hand man for Poland. They're both dead now. I told Mrs. Erb that Schindler used to stroke my head, send us bread rolls, let us out, if you had money, to the food shop next door. And there was nobody on guard; we weren't under



guard at all. No-one escaped.

A newspaper came out, the daily 'Kurze Zeitung', in Germany, in Freiburg, with that interview and my photographs. And from that time on a friendship developed. When Mrs. Erb was in Cracow, she always dropped in to see me. She invited me to see her. There was another man from that Kolbe-Werk, called Konradi, who came to Cracow once fine day and called me. He said he had read the interview with me and asked if he could meet me. He asked if I could even meet a German, if I didn't have a mental scar. We arranged to meet in Jama Michalika [a cafe]. I asked how I would recognize him. And he says, 'I have a photograph of you and I'll find you. Please sit in the front room.' He came, a very handsome, elegant man, in fact, and brought heaps of roses, a huge bouquet, about 20 or 30 roses. He came up to me. At once, without hesitating, evidently he recognized me from the photograph. He knelt down, literally with tears in his eyes gave me the roses. And asked if I could give him my hand. If he could greet me. So I say, 'Well, I've never done it before; I'm a Jew and you're a German, but this once...' and I greeted him. I had tears in my eyes too.

That was seven or eight years ago. And after that he always came, every year, like the best of friends. Later he invited me to Germany. He paid for a holiday in Fulda for me and asked if I could bear the German language, if I would be able to listen to the language. But somehow that barrier of hate has broken down in me, as far as he goes. I considered him my friend. He came, every year to Cracow, with his job. Kolbe-Werk is a foundation that helps the sick and the old. All those who were in the camps. He checked up on how the money is used. Whenever he came, he would bring me something, and if he didn't come he would send something. I told him I didn't need it. But he said that he wasn't in a position to make amends for even a thousandth of what I'd been through. He was a little younger than me, but he remembered the war. His father hadn't been in the army either.

Later I wrote to the Kolbe-Werk, that he was the first German with whom I'd been able to break down that barrier and give my hand. I wrote that he was a wonderful man, and that had there been people like that during the war, there wouldn't have been a war. His wife had it translated, and my letter is hung up in the Kolbe-Werk. His sons are proud of their father and it's hung up where they work, and at her home too. She wrote that she thanked me for what I'd written about her husband. He died two or three years ago, of cancer. His wife wrote and told me when the funeral was to be, that I should go. I paid in some money here to the hospice and sent that instead of flowers. I really took his death hard. Those meetings were wonderful. He was a man of silk.

I've always felt strong. There's never been anything wrong with me. I never thought that anything could be wrong with me. And then some time ago my leg started to hurt. We have this surgery for prisoners at 64 Dietla Street, maintained by the Kolbe-Werk, by the Germans.

I went to Dr Slizacka, a lovely, good lady doctor. She treated it very seriously at once, sent me for tests, for physiotherapy, even had some apparatus sent from Germany. And she persuaded me to walk with a stick. It didn't help. She started talking about an operation. I didn't want to hear of my being operated on. One day she called me to say that the surgery had had a letter saying that Germany had set up a doctors' foundation and that they operated on former prisoners free of charge. There was an address, I filled it in and sent it off. They sent me a date for the operation, but in Blakenburg.

I wrote to Germany asking them very nicely to operate on me in Berlin, because I could get there. And they agreed, but it took nearly six months. They put me in this accommodation, a beautiful apartment, and the operation was literally three days later. The care! Here I would still have a long wait for conditions like those. From the start they gave me a physiotherapist, a Pole, in fact, and three days later, when I got up, he was there with me, teaching me to walk. And there, seven months ago, I was walking better. Now unfortunately I walk with a crutch.

When my granddaughter, Magda, was three, I was off with her to Basztowa Street, because there was a kindergarten with music there. Then I would dash off to English with her, and then skiing, because she had these tiny skis. Now Magda plays Jerzy's violin. I wanted her to study pharmacy, medicine or law, but she was adamant. 'Grandma, it's your fault, because you sent me to that school. You made a rod for your own back.' She's in her fifth year at the Music Academy, specializing in Conducting and Composition, and in her third year of sociology at the Jagiellonian University. She has a certificate for best student in Malopolska region and a grant from the minister. She has a superb command of English and German, because she went to High School No. 6 [a school for languages in Cracow], to a class where the language of instruction was English. Since her marriage [2003] she is called Strzelecka-Silberring. Her husband is a composer, an academic employee at the Academy of Music.

I always wanted Magda to move into the apartment on Miodowa Street. At first, when I got the house back, they didn't want to. My daughter-in-law didn't want to. But now that our Kazimierz is becoming fashionable and the most expensive apartments are in Kazimierz... Now we're building a floor for our granddaughter. Magda says that she wants to have lots of room, in case my husband and I should need care...

I must admit that I don't go to Miodowa Street. If I have to go that way, I'll go round. I can't. I still have Mom before my eyes, trying to protect the furniture... I didn't see it, but it's stayed in my head, and I constantly imagine it. And those stairs; I remember sliding down the banisters. Father made these knobs on the banisters - they're there to this day - I used to slide down them...

## GLOSSARY

1 Kazimierz: Now a district of Cracow lying south of the Main Market Square, it was initially a town in its own right, which received its charter in 1335. Kazimierz was named in honor of its founder, King Casimir the Great. In 1495 King Jan Olbracht issued the decision to transfer the Jews of Cracow to Kazimierz. From that time on a major part of Kazimierz became a center of Jewish life. Before 1939 more than 64,000 Jews lived in Cracow, which was some 25% of the city's total population. Only the culturally assimilated Jewish intelligentsia lived outside Kazimierz. Until the outbreak of World War II this quarter remained primarily a Jewish district, and was the base for the majority of the Jewish institutions, organizations and parties. The religious life of Cracow's Jews was also concentrated here; they prayed in large synagogues and a multitude of small private prayer houses. In 1941 the Jews of Cracow were removed from Kazimierz to the ghetto, created in the district of Podgorze, where some died and the remainder were transferred to the camps in Plaszow and Auschwitz. The majority of the pre-war monuments, synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in Kazimierz have been preserved to the present day, and a few Jewish institutions continue to operate.

## **2 Cyganeria Campaign (22nd December 1942)**

one of the key campaigns of the Cracow branch of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB): a bomb was lobbed into the German coffee house 'Cyganeria' in Cracow. Among those who took part in the campaign were Dolek Liebeskind, Jicchak Zuckermann, Jehuda Liber and Chawka Foldmann. No one died in the attack, but a few days later the German police picked up the location of one of the ZOB bunkers. During the shoot-out Dolek Liebeskind and Jehuda Tennenbaum were killed.

## **3 Ravensbruck**

Concentration camp for women near Furstenberg, Germany. Five hundred prisoners transported there from Sachsenhausen began construction at the end of 1938. They built 14 barracks and service buildings, as well as a small camp for men, which was completed separated from the women's camp. The buildings were surrounded by tall walls and electrified barbed wire. The first deportees, some 900 German and Austrian women were transported there on May 18, 1939, soon followed by 400 Austrian Gypsy women. At the end of 1939, due to the new groups constantly arriving, the camp held nearly 3000 persons. With the expansion of the war, people from twenty countries were taken here. Persons incapable of working were transported on to Uckermark or Auschwitz, and sent to the gas chambers, others were murdered during 'medical' experiments. By the end of 1942, the camp reached 15,000 prisoners, by 1943, with the arrival of groups from the Soviet Union, it reached 42,000. During the working existence of the camp, altogether nearly 132,000 women and children were transported here, of these, 92,000 were murdered. In March of 1945, the SS decided to move the camp, so in April those capable of walking were deported on a death march. On April 30, 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

## **4 Judenfrei (Judenrein)**

German for 'free (purified) of Jews'. The term created by the Nazis in Germany in connection with the plan entitled 'the Final Solution to the Jewish Question', the aim of which was defined as 'the creation of a Europe free of Jews'. The term 'Judenrein'/'Judenfrei' in Nazi terminology referred to the extermination of the Jews and described an area (a town or a region), from which the entire Jewish population had been deported to extermination camps or forced labor camps. The term was, particularly in occupied Poland, an established part of the official and unofficial Nazi language.

## **5 Podgorze Ghetto**

There were approximately 60,000 Jews living in Cracow in 1939; after the city was seized by the Germans, mass persecutions began. The Jews were ordered to leave the city in April; approx. 15,000 received permission to stay in the city. A ghetto was created in the Podgorze district on 21st March 1941. Approx. 8,000 people from suburban regions were resettled there in the fall. There were three hospitals, orphanages, old people's homes, several synagogues and one pharmacy directed by a Pole operating in the ghetto. Illegal Jewish organizations began operating in 1940. An attack on German officers in the Cyganeria club took place on 22nd December 1942. Mass extermination began in 1942 - 14,000 inhabitants were deported to Belzec, many were murdered on the spot. The ghetto, diminished in size, was divided into two parts: A, for those who

worked, and B, for those who did not work. The ghetto was liquidated in March 1943. The inhabitants of part A were deported to the camp in Plaszow and those of part B to Auschwitz. Approximately 3,000 Jews returned to Cracow after the war.

## **6 Plaszow Camp**

Located near Cracow, it was originally a forced labor camp and subsequently became a concentration camp. The construction of the camp began in summer 1940. In 1941 the camp was extended and the first Jews were deported there. The site chosen comprised two Jewish cemeteries. There were about 2,000 prisoners there before the liquidation of the Podgorze (Cracow) ghetto on 13th and 14th March 1943 and the transportation of the remaining Jews to Plaszow camp. Afterwards, the camp population rose to 8,000. By the second half of 1943 its population had risen to 12,000, and by May-June 1944 the number of permanent prisoners had increased to 24,000 (with an unknown number of temporary prisoners), including 6,000-8,000 Jews from Hungary. Until the middle of 1943 all the prisoners in the Plaszow forced labor camp were Jews. In July 1943, a separate section was fenced off for Polish prisoners who were sent to the camp for breaking the laws of the German occupational government. The conditions of life in the camp were made unbearable by the SS commander Amon Goeth, who became the commandant of Plaszow in February 1943. He held the position until September 1944 when he was arrested by the SS for stealing from the camp warehouses. As the Russian forces advanced further and further westward, the Germans began the systematic evacuation of the slave labor camps in their path. From the camp in Plaszow, many hundreds were sent to Auschwitz, others westward to Mauthausen and Flossenburg. On 18th January 1945 the camp was evacuated in the form of death marches, during which thousands of prisoners died from starvation or disease, or were shot if they were too weak to walk. The last prisoners were transferred to Germany on 16th January 1945. More than 150,000 civilians were held prisoner in Plaszow.

## **7 Schindler, Oskar (1908-1974)**

one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' who during the Nazi persecutions saved the lives of more than 1,200 Polish Jews. Schindler was born in Zwittau, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, and after the annexation of the Sudetenland by the Germans served as a member of Admiral Canaris' anti-espionage service. He left the service after Germany's conquest of Poland and established a factory in Cracow which was later converted into a munitions plant. Schindler took advantage of this plant to save Jews from the extermination camps. He arranged for his workers and those of three neighboring factories whose Jewish workers were about to be deported to be classified as prisoners doing essential work. He often had to bribe the SS and other functionaries to turn a blind eye. After the war, Schindler emigrated to Argentina where he bought a farm, but in 1956 returned to Frankfurt. In 1962 Schindler was honored by Israel as one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' and in 1967 was awarded the peace prize of the International Buber Society in London. The following year the West German Government awarded him its highest civilian order, the 'Verdienstkreuz Ersten Ranges' and a small pension. Schindler, a Roman Catholic, died in Hildesheim and in accordance with his last wish, was buried in Jerusalem in the Latin cemetery on Mt. Zion.

## **8 Death marches**

forced evacuation of prisoners of concentration camps in Eastern Europe on Hitler's orders from January 1945, ahead of the Soviet invasion. The prisoners were formed into marching columns or transported in cattle wagons in the direction of Germany. The sick and the weak were shot on the spot; the winter, starvation and harsh conditions decimated the transports, and many prisoners were shot along the way. In all, of the approximately 700,000 who were sent on such marches, a third died. The Germans evacuated part of Auschwitz, Stutthof, and the Hasag forced labor camp in Czestochowa in this way.

### **9 Count Folke Bernadotte (1895-1948)**

Vice-President of the Swedish Red Cross in 1945; attempted an armistice between Germany and the Allies. Just before the end of WWII he led a rescue operation transporting, first of all, but not exclusively, Danish and Norwegian inmates from Nazi concentration camps to Swedish hospitals. 27,000 people were liberated this way, many of them Jewish.

### **10 Goeth, Amon (1908-1946)**

Born in Vienna, Austria, Amon Goeth joined the Austrian Nazi Party in 1930. In the same year he joined the SS. Goeth was a model officer, and his reward was a posting, in August 1942, with 'Aktion Reinhard', the SS operation to liquidate more than two million Polish Jews. At the trial at the Supreme National Tribunal of Poland, Cracow, in 1946, Goeth was found guilty, convicted of the murders of tens of thousands of people and hanged in the same year.

### **11 Office for Public Security, UBP**

popularly known as the UB and its agents known as Ubeks, officially established to protect the interests of national security, but in fact served as a body whose function was to stamp out all forms of resistance during the establishment and entrenchment of communist power in Poland. The UB was founded in 1944. Branches of the UBP were set up immediately after the occupation by the Red Army of the Polish lands west of the Bug. The first UBP functionaries were communist activists trained by the NKVD, and former soldiers of the People's Army and members of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). In many cases they were also collaborationists from the period of German occupation and criminals. The senior officials were NKVD officers. The primary tasks of the UBP were to crush all underground organizations with a western orientation. In 1956 the Security Service was formed and many former officers of the UBP were transferred.

### **12 Jagiellonian University**

In Polish 'Uniwersytet Jagiellonski', it is the university of Cracow, founded in 1364 by Casimir III of Poland and which has maintained high level learning ever since. In the 19th century the university was named Jagiellonian to commemorate the dynasty of Polish kings. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagellonian\\_University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagellonian_University))

### **13 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.