

Matylda Wyszynska

Matylda Wyszynska

Gdynia

Poland

Interviewer: Anna Szyba

Date of interview: March 2006

Ms. Wyszynska is a very elegant old lady.

We meet at her apartment in Gdynia, which she shares with her granddaughter.

The apartment is modest but nice. Books on Jewish subjects stand on the shelves.

Ms. Wyszynska prepares a breakfast for me, and when we eat, she tells me about how she misses Lwow, showing me photo albums and books about the city.

She gladly tells the story of her life.

- [My Family background](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [After the war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

- **My Family background**

I was born on 31st January 1922 in Lwow to a Jewish family. My mother, Leonia, nee Ramer, ran the house. My father, Maurycy Fuchs, was a lawyer. I knew my maternal grandparents. Only recently did I find out the name of the street they lived at, it was 18 Szpitalna Street in Lwow, the Jewish quarter.

My grandfather was called Leon Lajzer Magid, and my grandmother was Gitel Ramer. And now there's this thing that my grandfather is always called differently than my grandmother, because they never had an official marriage only a Jewish one. And my mother is called after my grandmother rather than after my grandfather.

I very seldom visited [my mother's parents] because we lived in a completely different part of town and we basically didn't go to them, and they never came to us, but when I went to school, my grandfather often came to see me there in the summer.

We went out to the yard for the break and he threw me small bundles with this kind of ice candy over the fence, because he didn't want to make himself conspicuous. It was kind of ice cream, transparent. I don't know why he didn't want to be seen, perhaps because he was a Jew. I don't



know whether my maternal grandparents [were religious], I quite simply don't remember that.

Grandmother was rather bulky, the true grandmother, but I think she had blonde hair. Grandfather was short, chubby, bald. I remember Orthodox Jews in the Jewish quarter [1](#), with the payes, in the kaftans, but my grandfather never dressed like that. And I loved [them] very, very much.

Grandmother always had some goodies in the pockets of her apron for me, which she gave me secretly, because my mother didn't allow me to eat sweets.

Grandfather died before my mother, I think [before 1936], and my grandmother I don't know at all when she died. She must have died after my mother's death and I simply wasn't informed. I had no contact with her since my mother's death.

My paternal grandfather, in turn, was orthodox, that I know for sure. He lived in [a part of town called] Zniesienie, Grandmother was already dead. I don't know how he was called, Grandmother was called Fidelia Udul Fuchs, I'm called Ada [after her]. [Zniesienie] was also a quarter populated chiefly by Jews.

[Grandfather] never visited us but I remember, when I was four or five and I went to visit him, I was always struck by the sight of the tower of the Baczynski [Editor's note: Baczewski] factory [near where he lived], the inscription 'Baczynski', it was a vodka factory, its products were known virtually all over the world. [Lwow's oldest, J.A. Baczewski's made vodkas, cordials and liqueurs.

Founded 1782, in operation until 1939, it exported its products during the interwar period to virtually all European countries, Canada, South America and Australia].

And what I remember of that grandfather, my father's father, it must have been a very religious family. I can't remember how many times we spent holidays together there. I was a small girl when we went to Grandfather for the Seder. I remember a large table and there must have been relatives at that table [possibly Grandfather's sisters].

One chair was left unoccupied, the door was left ajar, they told me prophet Elias would come to take that chair, there was a plate for him, and I trembled with fear and kept looking whether some ghost wasn't coming from that direction. I remember how they poured the wine into the cup, grape wine, and my grandfather sprinkled the wine from the chalice and told the blessing.

He was very skinny, tall, dressed all black. I never remember how the ritual ended because I'd invariably fall asleep and they'd carry me away in their arms. I don't know whether [Grandfather] had a beard. From the perspective of those childhood years, I remember him as a very old man. He died before the war, but I don't remember the funeral.

My mother had three sisters and three brothers. She was either the first or the second child because she was the eldest of the sisters. One brother, the eldest one, I think, studied in Nancy near Paris, a textile engineer. I don't know what his name was. I called him Ma, the older ones called him Manek - for Manuel or something like that.

Later he was sent to work at a wool factory in Bucharest and married the owner's daughter, a Jewess, her name was Raisa, [married name] Ramer. They had a daughter called Bianka. During the war, when the Germans came, they fled through Bessarabia and found themselves in the

Soviet Union.

After the war, he came to Poland with his family, became the head of the whole textile industry at the Textile Industry Administration in Lodz. He is buried at a cemetery in Lodz and, to my shame, I neither attended the funeral nor have ever visited his grave. And Aunt with Bianka went to Toronto [after Uncle died].

Helena Ramer was an aunt in Paris. She arrived there in 1926 to join her brother Ma who was studying there. In Paris she met her future husband and decided to stay. She married an Austrian, and when the war started, he joined the Wehrmacht, she [found herself] in a camp and there, in 1940, she gave birth to a daughter called Jeann.

When her husband returned from the war, he disowned them. If that were not enough, the daughter was called Jeann Haltmeier, and he went to the court to strip her of the name. He said she wouldn't be his daughter. Aunt Helena died in July last year [2005] at the age of ninety.

My mother's second brother I called Mis and parents called him Samek, he was Samuel Ramer. He was a dentist, married a dentist and they lived in Stary Sambor [today western Ukraine, Lwow district]. She was a prosthodontist, he specialized in restorative dentistry, they had a practice together.

She was Jewish and they had a beautiful boy named Romek, blue eyes, light blonde hair. I know I twice spent the summer holidays with them in Stary Sambor before the war. They were assimilated. Had their practice and I know they didn't even [observe] kosher because I remember Aunt always bought cold cuts from a certain butcher and we very much liked the ham from that butcher, his name was Baran ['ram' in Polish].

One day there was no ham and my Aunt said that Baran didn't have any ham today. And I asked whether it had to be ham from a ram, whether it couldn't be ham from a pig, for instance, and they had a hearty laugh at my expense. You remember such silly things and you don't remember the important ones. Uncle Mis's whole family died in the Lwow ghetto.

The second aunt [was] my dearest, Aunt Mia, I don't know what her real name was, perhaps Miriam. I attended her wedding under the chuppah. It was when my mother was still alive [before 1936]. I know that my aunt married the owner of Leopolia, a Lwow-based paper and confectionery plant, she worked there in the office, the man fell in love with her (he was a Jew) and married her.

There was this large room somewhere in town, I don't remember it to have been a synagogue, but there was a chuppah, and I remember how Aunt was dressed because I have her wedding photo to this day. Aunt Helen sent her a dress from Paris, so she had a beige-blue outfit - a dress and a hat - under that chuppah. That's all I remember. None of my father's or mother's sisters were religious. After her husband was murdered in the Janowski camp in Lwow, Mia went mad and was shot in the Lwow ghetto.

The third sister was called Mada, what her real name was, I don't know. Mada was the youngest of the sisters and was very pretty. When the war started, she was very young, not much my elder. She could have been in her twenties. She had beautiful, large, almond eyes. And when [the war started], she disappeared. Later everyone refused to know her, she was seen riding in a car with

the Germans, and [what happened to her] later, I don't know. Nobody knows.

Then there was the third brother, Bernard. He lived with his wife and two sons in Katowice [ca. 380 km west of Lwow, 70 km west of Cracow]. His son, Gieniek, was a violin virtuoso and studied at a music school. As an 18-year old boy he played concerts across Europe. I had a photo of him with the violin. Fleeing from the Germans, they left Katowice and set up in Lwow. Unfortunately, the Soviets soon sent them to a camp in Siberia, where they died.

I knew my father's two sisters. One was called Regina Fuchs and was married to a dental surgeon whose last name was Frid, and it seems to me that, with a name like that, he should have been a Jew but he was a legionnaire [2](#). He joined Pilsudski's [3](#) legions, was wounded in the thorax, had this kind of pipe here [in the thorax], and always wore tall, rigid collars.

They had a daughter named Ada, like me, after Grandmother. And I visited her and she visited me, when my mother was already dead. [Uncle] whistled at us because he couldn't talk. I was very afraid of him. My aunt divorced him and went to Tlumacz [today in Ukraine], a town near Lwow, to work, and she was never heard of after that.

The other aunt was called Klara. I remember her from my childhood, when she came to visit us in Brzuchowice [village near Lwow] where I [was] on vacation with my mother. She came with Uncle and made wonderful raspberry juice, and she knew I loved that juice so she gave it to me to drink. That's how I remember her. Before the war, thought I don't know precisely which year, she emigrated to Mexico. I wanted to find them after the war, but I don't know their name. I don't know to this day. She got married and had a different name than my father.

• Growing up

When still lived with my parents, we lived in those large apartment blocks on the third floor, the street was called Na Bajkach. I don't remember how many rooms we had, I always had my own. I was the only child. We had a bathroom. There was a coal stove and by that stove a large plastered box.

It had a metal door on top and a small door at the side. Once a week the coal supplier came and poured in the coal and the maid took that coal portion by portion through the small side door. As a child, I loved to lay on that box because it was so warm there.

When my mother went out somewhere, I went to the kitchen to the servants and had my shakedown on that box. And the servants gave me scale weights to play. There was a weight called 'mother' and another called 'father' and the small ones, the children, and I played with them on those scales.

My father worked in the office of the French oil company, it was called Koncerny Francuskie Malopolska. The branch office was in Cracow, the head office in Paris. It was an oil company, the wells were in the nearby, foothill villages. My father was the head of the supplies department.

The office was in Lwow's largest house, owned by Jews in fact; it was called the Szprecher house. I remember it was the only house in Lwow that had an elevator, an old one with metal railing, and there was that usher called Bruniany and when I came to visit my father, I always asked that

Bruniany, who had a long moustache reaching up to his ears, to give me a ride and he took take me on that elevator to the sixth floor and back.

The house, slightly converted, exists [to this day], near the [city's] largest street, Akademicka, the so called Corso, vis-à-vis the Mickiewicz monument.

My dad was a big-time sportsman and played soccer on the Polish team called Pogon, because there was also some Jewish team. When I was born, he took me to every game and I shouted together with my father, 'Down with the referee!' We had that huge lobby in the house on Na Bajkach. We'd stand at its opposite ends and play soccer and my mother would shout at us because we broke windows.

Besides that, I remember that my father had very many Jewish friends, I remember a man called Rapaport, for instance, he was certainly Jewish, with whom my father played tennis and who also taught me to play it.

I don't know what schools my parents attended. My mother, when she was very young, worked in Przemysl [city 100 km west of Lwow], I don't know why in Przemysl. She worked at a post office, as an assistant. My mother always believed in fortune-telling and I remember as a child that she [told] her sisters and me that when she was a very young girl, there was some old Jew who foretold the future.

My mother went to him with some friends and he told her she'd marry a man who would come from the military and would be in uniform. He told her his name in Yiddish. And when my mother wanted to know more, he studied her palm, closed it, and said, 'Don't ask for I'll tell you no more.' As if he saw something bad. He refused to say anything more. And it all proved true. Even Father's name.

My mother didn't have a good life with my father, at the beginning perhaps it was good, I don't know, but when I was a bit older, my father had an affair with his secretary. They [Ms. Wyszynska's parents] separated for some time, he moved out, and it was a great time for me.

I was young and stupid, my mother cried all night, wept, and I felt great because my father asked me out, came to pick me up, took me to various places, I ate cakes, whatever I wanted, he bought it, and then he saw me off home. And I have a bad conscience to this day because I was against my mother, I offended her, I told her she was wrong, told her that my father was good and she was not.

And it was the other way round. I actually read a letter from that secretary that my mother had obtained or found somewhere, a love letter. There were scenes [the parents argued], not in front of me, of course, but a child always senses such things, and my mother, still a young person, had a stroke one night. She was a hypertensive, I'm not sure whether it wasn't caused by one of those arguments, because my father would come home at strange times, and afterwards I always had a grudge against him.

Even though my parents were assimilated, on the high holidays they went to synagogue. I was too little; I don't know where the synagogue was. They went to the prayer house, fasted on Yom Kippur, and I know I said the Kaddish for my mother on the high holidays.

I know we also [observed] other holidays because I remember the festival of the booths, when you built the wooden shelters and we played in those shelters with other kids. And our parents prayed during that time, I don't know, in the prayer house or in the synagogue. I went to synagogue with my parents.

On Purim, I remember, I ran around with the rattle when they told the story of Haman. But my mother never wore a wig! She didn't observe kosher, we had a maid, a Baptist. I know it was her who saw me off to school even though the school was close to home.

The language spoken at our home was Polish. My parents, when they didn't want me to understand them, they spoke German. Everyone around knew German because it was the former Austrian partition [4](#) and my grandparents always spoke with great respect of Emperor Franz Josef [5](#) and about living under his rule, that everyone had a good life then, Jews included.

Grandparents spoke Polish, but what language they used between themselves, I don't know. I never spoke Jewish. Still, I don't know from where, I know some letters. Two or three. It seems to me I learned the Kaddish in Yiddish. I guess my father didn't go to the cheder because he was an educated man, a lawyer, though I don't know where he studied. There were no Jewish newspapers at home. There were Polish books and newspapers.

My mother had two cerebral strokes and was hospitalized for some time. She died in March 1936. Even though our family was assimilated, she had a Jewish funeral and I remember the ceremony as if it were today. Mama was wrapped in a white cloth, I saw only her legs, I was afraid to raise my eyes, and there was the coffin, a wooden one, I think.

I was dressed in a sweater and a coat at the cemetery, and someone cut that sweater and the coat with scissors. It's a Jewish custom. It made me very sad because it was my beloved mohair sweater. After returning from the cemetery we sat for like a week, me, my aunts, I don't remember whether my father sat with us all the time, I don't remember precisely how many days, on those small stools, with our shoes off, and the mirrors were covered. It was called sitting 'na pokuciu' [shivah], if I remember well.

I saw it as a traditional thing, there was nothing strange in it for me. My father got married again shortly after my mother's death, not with the secretary but with another woman, she was Jewish, less than a year had passed, it came as a shock to me and I felt a deep resentment towards him.

I lived on Na Bajkach Street with my mother, then we moved to another part of town, on Zielona Street, together with my mother, and there my mother died. [And there the maid robbed us]. One day [the maid] took everything from the house, the rest of the furniture my father gave away to some warehouse for storage because it was before he remarried, and me he gave away to the judge's wife, because he was always on the move.

[It was] a judge's widow who had a huge apartment near Leona Sapiehy Street, by Gleboka Street. She wasn't Jewish, rented rooms to students, I had a room for myself. She was supposed to have custody of me, and the custody was limited to me having to be back home at eight, and I remember I wore my school badge covered with black crepe paper [as a token of mourning].

The apartment was on the third floor, there was a window in my room, and I was alone all day, I mean, I was permitted to go to a friend [but] I had to be back home at eight, meals were delivered to my room, she had a maid, a cook. And I remember that the afternoon snack was always strawberry preserve which I put into the oven [to heat] because the widow only told my father whether I was back home at eight and whether I ate my meals.

And so, on that third floor, I did nothing but sit in the window. On the first floor across the street lived my schoolmate, and in her apartment there rented a room a technical university student named Staszek [diminutive for Stanislaw].

He lived in lodgings because his parents lived near Kalusz [town, today in Ukraine, 100 km south-east of Lwow] where they taught at school. Staszek studied at the technical university and rented a room nearby. I was sending various messages to my friend through the window. He also had a window in his room and that's how we got to know each other.

I learned to write in reverse and read various messages. He started writing to me, her too, and it was her who persuaded me to go on the first date with him. We went to cycle or for a walk. Then it turned out I wasn't doing well with math at school, I had to tell my father, and Staszek started giving me lessons.

We started dating each other, and he [Staszek] was an endek [6](#) at the university. He wore the Chrobry's Swords [an emblem in the form of two crossed swords worn in the lapel], wore the special cap, had an endek friend. He dated me and [my friends] Tamara and Irka were angry at me because they knew I was very close with him.

We went to a park, and when we passed some endek activists on our way, I trembled with fear. I used to say, 'Your nose is my insurance policy,' because he had this [non-Jewish] snub nose. I don't think he ever took part [in attacking Jews]. Those were not the German times yet.

Those were the Polish times. He took me to the polytechnic club for parties, but that was at my father's knowledge. As my tutor. My father had to know where I went, with whom, he saw me off, and my father permitted that. I went to those student parties, it was great fun. There was no question whether someone was Jewish or Polish, well, there were the thug activists in the park, but that didn't concern us.

[One day] my father spotted me biking with him, because [Staszek] always brought his friend's bike for me, a men's one, with a frame. My widow didn't know either I was going biking, she thought I was studying with my classmate. On the stairs I took off my skirt and put on sweatpants.

And once my father caught me riding a men's bike. He came to me looking very stern and said I was to report in his office the next day at hour so and so. And he had always threatened to give me away somewhere, to some orphanage or boarding house. So I went, with my heart in my mouth, and my father took me to a large bike store and told me to choose a women's bike for myself.

I trembled he'd give me away. And that was my first bike. I have photo with this bike, it had that blue mesh cover on the back wheel. And, imagine this, he told me, 'Who's this? Your boyfriend?' 'A friend.' I said. 'I don't want to see you with him on the stairs, if you want to be meeting him, let him come in.'

[Then we settled with my stepmother] on Leona Sapiehy Street, an apartment I remember very vividly. It was a very large apartment, on the main street, opposite the technical university. And there occurred a clash because they assigned one large room for me and Anka [stepmother's daughter] together, the furniture was all new, everything painted blue, and there was a wardrobe where she had the lower part and I the upper one.

Besides that there were beds with those white-and-blue kind of curtains, there were writing desks, a table, and those blue armchairs. And I rebelled, because I was already at the age when my friends from school visited me, I was in gymnasium and high school, and the chit told her mother what we talked about, and we had all kinds of secrets.

Always when I told her to leave us alone, there was an argument, because she'd open the wardrobe and sit there, in her [part], on the pretence that she needed some stuff from there. Because she had their crayons there, and her toys. With my stepmother I lived like a cat with a dog, but my father arranged it somehow and she started sleeping elsewhere, not in my room, but her wardrobe was still there and she always came, especially when Staszek visited me.

Because there was a large bathroom, my father, to spare me the effort of going through their rooms, knocked out a new door and now I had direct access from my room to the bathroom, even though that door wasn't standard size but lower and narrower. There was a huge kitchen, and the servant's room by it, a servant always lived there, and I remember the stove, in an alcove, fired with coal and wood.

In 1929 I went to a Polish school by the St. Mary Magdalene church. It was Catholic, but it also admitted Jewish girls. There was a priest and an altar in the corridor, but Jewish students didn't have to pray. Nor did they have to attend religion classes, and they didn't.

The priest played with us, I have very nice memories of him, he was such a kind-hearted man, he played ring a ring o'roses with us and sleeping bear and all. The discipline was harsh, we weren't allowed to have curly hair, and my mother was often called to the headmistress for curling my hair, and she had to swear they were curling by themselves. In winter time you had to wear the beret [straight], never at an angle.

We had to wear those sailor-collar uniforms and ankle-length pleated skirts, which we pulled up after school. Brown stockings only. Brown leather shoes.

A white hat with navy-blue ribbons, which had to be starched so hard to hold firmly. In fact, they were very nice, those hats. That's how we had to dress in elementary school. You weren't supposed to run, you were supposed to stroll.

Each class had its stretch of the corridor and there you were supposed to stroll. In the summer, each class had its tree to stroll around, you weren't allowed to run around the whole field. When my grandfather came to throw me candy over the fence, he had to aim well so that I didn't have to run for [it].

Then I went to Zofia Strzalkowska's gymnasium. There was this saying in Lwow, 'a mother had two daughters - one of them was decent, and the other one went to Zofia Strzalkowska's.' It was a wonderful private gymnasium for girls (there were also Jewish students). A beautiful building.

It was a very good school, and a genuinely secular one. The Polish literature teacher was wonderful. I have no accent because the eastern accent wasn't tolerated. I know Latin to this day. Each one of us had a [nickname]. [My friend] Mela was called 'Mentecaptus' [dimwit] by the Latin teacher because she didn't know the answer to some question.

I was 'Morbus' [disease] because I didn't know how to decline the names of diseases. I still remember the Iliad, I still remember some things I had to learn. The teacher was very demanding. Thin, tall.

But there were parties where you were allowed to bring your boyfriend, naturally in front of the teachers and the headmistress you danced like this [decently], and afterwards like this [closer to each other]. We staged cabaret shows, I still remember some songs, poems, we had funny songs about each teacher, each subject. I don't think there were any Jewish teachers there, but I didn't give it any thought then.

I had four friends since elementary school; we were the five of us, as close as sisters. We were all Jewish. We also had [Polish] friends but not that close. One of us was called Mela Miezes. She had those thick braids, and one night one of her [brothers] cut off one of those. [During the war] she changed her name to Melania Mirska and retained the name afterwards.

Her husband never learned who she was, and her children aren't aware who she was either. She argued that if she didn't tell him about her ethnic origin before the war or when she was marrying him, i.e. under the occupation in Cracow, then she was afraid to tell him afterwards. One could think she married for protection and security. They are both dead now.

Another one was Alina Kupfer, she died. She was my closest [friend]. She lived next door. I lived on Leona Sapiehy Street, corner of Gleboka, and she lived on Gleboka Street. Her parents were Jewish pharmacists, ran their own pharmacy, and had two children, Alina, whom we called Lina, and a son, I don't remember his name, who was a great musical talent.

When my mother died and my father married again, I spent the summer vacations with them and their mother in the Eastern Beskidy mountains south-west of Lwow. [Lina's parents] died before the war, first her father, of a heart attack, and then her mother, of cancer.

The children were left alone, they were 15 or 16 years old. Their mother died, they were left alone, in a large apartment, and we all met there, some boys [came], a bit older than us. As soon as the Germans entered, they took [Lina's] brother right from the street, to the prison on Lackiego Street [former police buildings turned into a prison].

In June 1941, before their evacuation from Lwow, the Soviets murdered the majority of the Polish and Ukrainian prisoners held there]. They were alone, loved each other very much, she went to look for him and never returned. They killed her too. Their aunt later moved in the apartment.

There were also Tamara and Irka [Irena Weizberg, married name Herz]. They lived next door and I was virtually raised in their home. I called their mother 'mama' when my mother died. They were three sisters and a mother.

The mother was called Klara Weizberg, Tamara was called Zwerling, after her mother's first husband. The mother attended the parents' evenings in school on their account but also on mine because Tamara was in the same class with me. Irka was younger.

I didn't know much about Jewish political life, and what I knew came from my friend Lusia Lewental. She came from the most orthodox home [of the five of us], we never visited here at home because it was far away. She was highly aware politically. She was a Zionist.

I think her whole home was like that. She told us about Palestine, about the political parties. But we listened with only half an ear. We somehow weren't interested in all that. Lusia was killed immediately, didn't even go to the ghetto [7](#), such were her looks.

So it was four years of gymnasium, then two years of high school, and I passed my maturity exams in 1940. In 1941 I was admitted to the Lwow technical university but when the Germans entered [June 1941] I could no longer study.

• During the war

Between 1939 and 1940 we were under the Soviets. And that wasn't normal. My father lost his job, my uncle, [Aunt] Mia's husband, was arrested. My second uncle, Ada's father [Aunt Regina's husband] also died in the Brygidy [Brygidy or Brygidki, called so because it was located in a former Brigittine nunnery: a major prison at Kazimierzowska Street in Lwow where, in June 1941, the Soviets murdered several thousand Poles before evacuating from the city].

When the Germans came, my mother's brother, Uncle Bernard, fled from Katowice to Lwow and lived somewhere in Lwow. They were taken to the forest [and murdered]. My stepmother's brother, a doctor, was also taken away, never heard of again.

My father spent a number of nights in the coal box, hiding from deportation, because during the Soviet era lights were put out in the whole city and they went from house to house, taking men, deporting them to Siberia or taking to the forest.

When my father lost his job [there was no money], I lived for some time with Aunt Mia, in a terribly cramped apartment, it was after the Soviets had taken their husband, it may have been 1940 or 1941. He [Aunt Mia's husband] was incarcerated in Lwow's harshest prison, the Brygidki, spent six months with his legs in water all the time. I don't know whether such were the conditions or it was a punishment.

They were quite rich because they had a factory, and Aunt Mia had that beautiful black pearl, she sold it and ransomed my uncle from the NKVD [8](#). Uncle could no longer walk, his legs were very thick, and they lived in terrible conditions because she had sold everything to buy him out.

Uncle lay on the bed all the time and he sewed some cyanide into his clothes because he thought the Soviets could come for him again. He was a bourgeois, after all. My Aunt took that cyanide away from him, and when the Germans came, he was taken to the Janowski camp [9](#) and shot at the very first roll call because he couldn't stand.

My Aunt went to the ghetto, lived in the same house as Samek with Romek and his wife, [because they] had come to Lwow when the Germans came. Romek may have been 5 or 6 when he was in the ghetto.

At first we terribly feared the Soviets because when the Soviets marched into Lwow, in 1939, I lived opposite the technical university. There's a large garden in front of it, a board fence, and that's where the Polish military surrendered their arms. The Soviets arrived riding bareback. Savages! Without uniforms, with just some red rags stuck here and there.

Their hair uncut, in those felt [hats] that are a hotbed for lice. The female soldiers were also terribly louse-infested. And they bought nightgowns as ball gowns. They commandeered our apartment and a postmaster from Odessa, now appointed the postmaster of Lwow, [moved in with us] with his wife.

The first day he stood by the bathroom light switch and toggled it on and off, because he didn't know how it works, back in their place they had those turning knobs. Later, when he got to know us, he pushed us to attend the 1st May parade [1st May, International Labor Day, established by the International, celebrated since 1890 in the form of public rallies, demonstrations and marches] and we had to go.

I always said, 'And why don't you go?' 'I went for forty years, now it's your turn.' I went for the parade with the rest of my school because they wrote down who went and who didn't and we were all afraid, they'd arrest you and deport you, so you went.

My father certainly felt Jewish. When the Germans entered [10](#), but before the ghetto was set up, various people were evacuating themselves from the city, among them a doctor who lived next door. I remember how they were packing their things, how they had to [get aboard] some ship somewhere to go. My father not at all, there was never any talk of us going anywhere.

I remember, in 1941, we didn't know anything about the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact [11](#) we [only] knew the Germans were approaching Lwow, and my father went with other men from the neighborhood to raise barricades near our home, on Listopada Street. We realized what was happening to Jews [in German-occupied Poland] but not fully. Because we believed the [Germans] were, after all, a civilized, intelligent, music-loving nation. We didn't know.

In the first days [of German occupation] my father was terribly beaten up, he was unconscious. There was a prison on Lackiego Street, near where we lived, and when the Soviets were leaving [June 1941], they murdered the prisoners there. When the Germans came, they caught people in the street, not only Jews, and made them remove those corpses. And when they saw a Jew (and they told men to strip so they knew who was a Jew), they beat him terribly. And my father was utterly unconscious.

Some strangers, Poles, brought him home. He stank so hard of dead bodies it took several days [to get rid of the smell]. We burned his clothes. He lay completely out of his senses, for a very long time, he was so horribly beaten. And as soon as he came to, they [Ms. Wyszynska's father, the stepmother and her daughter] moved to the ghetto. Me, I stayed on Sapielny with Staszek until the last moment, because I was afraid. He protected me a bit.

The Germans started setting up the ghetto as early as in July [Editor's note: the Lwow ghetto was officially set up in November 1941]. I remember such episodes like when the Germans, helped by the Ukrainians, ordered all people from our house to gather in the courtyard.

Lined us up against the walls. Men separately, women separately. We didn't know whether they'd shoot us or... They took the men [for labor] then. Notices were posted, all on pain of death, that by day so and so all Jews had to move to the ghetto. The armbands were introduced, Jews were like hunted animals. The szmalcowniks [12](#) operated in large numbers, and there were also people who denounced Jews just for the sake of it.

Under our apartment, on 29 Sapielny Street, there was a large nightclub, with dances and all. It was called Wesolowski's, obviously the owner's name. When the Germans came, they requisitioned [the place] and some uniformed German ran it. One day there's banging on the door.

Staszek went to open. A uniformed German enters. 'Any Jews living here?' Staszek couldn't speak German, unfortunately, he said 'no' in Polish. 'Do you have a piano?' Indeed, there was one. I used to play it, but no longer. Never had a knack for that, and I didn't like to practice either.

He saw me, realized immediately I was a Jew and started talking to us. I told him I was afraid, he started inquiring with Staszek, I had to act as an interpreter. Why he was there with me and so on, and [Staszek] said he loved me. And, imagine this, the German took the piano, apologizing to us for taking it, and said, 'It'll be of no use to you anyway because you have to leave here.'

But for as long as we stayed there, before we moved to the ghetto, he sent us food upstairs everyday. Some soups, some chickens from that restaurant. And he said, 'If you love her, flee together, go anywhere, just don't stay here.' See, there were good Germans too.

But I didn't have anywhere to go. I was afraid of the Soviet Union. Under the Soviets, we always feared we'd be deported [The Soviets carried out mass deportations of Polish citizens to the Siberia and Kazakhstan in 1940-1941]. Whom did I have there, where was I supposed to go? Men were [right to flee] perhaps, because they joined the army there, but where would I go? To work in the forest? You didn't know things would take such a turn here.

Then I had to [move to the ghetto] because they went from apartment to apartment and checked. I don't remember the address in the ghetto. An old brick house, wooden stairs. The third floor, I guess, I don't even remember how many rooms, but there were so many people there!

My father, me, my stepmother, her daughter, her mother, her sister, the sister's husband, and some children. It was horrible, the apartment. Water froze in the glass, there was no way to wash yourself.

Filthy, no water in the toilets. Horrible. I slept on the floor, next to my stepmother and my father. I know there was no food, but when I woke up in the night, she [the stepmother] was feeding Janka [her daughter]. I don't know where she had the [food] from. I was very cold that winter. Since then I've had deformed joints in my fingers.

I was at home [didn't work] and was terribly afraid. I was afraid to go out on the street, everyone begged there, the sick and the dead lay on the sidewalks, and I couldn't bear it. I don't know where

you took food from in the ghetto.

My father went to work somewhere, but where he worked, what he did... I don't know. And my stepmother stayed at home. Before the ghetto was sealed, Staszek sometimes came to pick me up.

I remember one of my trips out of the ghetto: I put on a hat and high-heeled shoes, a streetcar passed through the ghetto heading to the Aryan side, and we decided he'd take me out aboard that streetcar.

There were prostitutes [in the ghetto], so I wore full makeup and I went with him to the streetcar without the badge, laughing out loud, he pretended to be whispering something to my ear, groping me, and kissing. I stood in the back. I crossed over to the Aryan side, I had my heart in my throat, but I kept laughing hard.

Once, I remember, I left the ghetto and Staszek went ahead of me to warn me in case of any danger. And he signaled me and immediately I saw uniformed Germans. I don't know whether it was the Gestapo or the SS or whatever. I leaped into the nearest gate, there were stairs up and stairs down, and I didn't know what to do.

I heard them coming after me so I hid behind the gate, and when they came, they went up the stairs and down the stairs, and during that time, I heard their footsteps, I left the gate and Staszek stood there, waiting for me at a distance.

There were such situations because I left the ghetto several times, I went to Staszek's place to wash myself or to eat something, for a day or two. There was no bread [in the ghetto], there was nothing, and he always had some bread and mustard, and we'd spread the mustard on the bread and eat it. How wonderful food it was! And I felt my heart in my throat. Chaos and confusion. And the damn fear.

It was 1942, August, the liquidation of the ghetto and the full extermination of Jews were under way, people were being shot. [Staszek] offered to take me out of the ghetto. He forced his mother [to help him] by telling her that if she didn't help hide me, he'd go to the ghetto himself to be with me, he was her only child so she agreed to everything. He secured some documents from a friend of his.

Whether he told her it was for a Jewish girl, I don't know. He may have told her it was for a Polish girl in hiding, because Poles faced repressions too, they were being sent for forced labor to Germany, for instance. He gave me a genuine birth certificate for one Matylda Bednarska, a smallpox vaccination certificate, a school ID, and a form for reporting one's relocation out of Lwow.

My father saw me off to the ghetto perimeter, the wall. We dropped in on Aunt Mia to say goodbye. Aunt talked to me like [I was her husband]. His photograph lay next to her, she lay on the bed and talked nonsense, gone mad. She never had any children. My future husband, Staszek, told me later Aunt was shot in the ghetto for assaulting the Germans. She'd mouth off when on the street, and must have obviously molested some German.

I didn't know then I'd never see my father again. He gave me very little money [on saying goodbye] because the [stepmother] had taken everything from him and he didn't work. When

giving me the few zlotys, he apologized to me for all he did, for remarrying so soon and that I had such a miserable life. I lost touch with him but I was in touch with Staszek who found out how they were doing and related the news to me. Some time later he told me my stepmother had jumped out of the window and killed herself in the ghetto.

I suppose her daughter must have been killed because she would have never left her daughter alone by killing herself. My father died in the Janowski camp in 1942 or 1943. My mother's brother, the one from Sambor, with his wife and small boy, was also killed in the ghetto. Samek, and his family too.

As for my paternal relatives, I don't really know because [I didn't even know them all]. Uncle Ma was in the Soviet Union, he didn't die, returned after the war. Aunt Hela was in a camp in France and Jean was born there. [Today] all the relatives that I knew are dead, except my cousins Jeanie and Bianca.

Staszek's parents were teachers and ran a rural school in Kalusz. Staszek forced his mother to come near the ghetto, he took me out, by a miracle in fact, I took off the badge in the nearest gate and I went following her, not with her, because she was afraid to go with me. We also had to swear we wouldn't be seeing each other. That was the condition on which she agreed to hide me, because she was anxious about him.

We got off at the station where the rural school was, waited until it got dark, and [walked] some 25 kilometers in the night to get there unnoticed. It was August, the summer break, no classes. The school stood away from the center of the village, I didn't go out, I was locked away in a classroom and I didn't even go to the lavatory, there was a free-standing one outside, but Staszek's mother instead brought out the potties.

I can't remember how long I was there. After a couple of days she said people in the village were talking there was a Jewess hiding in the school and that I had to leave. She was good enough, though, not to throw me out completely but again walked the 25 kilometers in the night with me to the nearest train station and took me to Staszek's uncle, the brother of Staszek's father, whose name was also Podchaniuk.

He was an old bachelor, the headmaster of a school in Stryj [city 70 km south of Lwow, today in Ukraine]. She brought me there in the morning, four or five o'clock, and told me I'd stay there until she found some hiding place for me. We arrive there, and we saw a drinking party, an orgy, it turned out the guy Podchaniuk had signed the Volksdeutsch list [13](#), the place was full of uniformed Germans, drinking.

When we went in and saw all that, she told him we'd just have a tea in the kitchen, and we fled from that kitchen so that they didn't see me. She took me to Stanislawow [today Ivano-Frankivsk in Ukraine, city 70 km south-east of Lwow] where, in the suburbs, there lived Staszek's grandfather, who was in his eighties but had a nasty daughter.

[My mother-in-law] told him I was Staszek's friend and I was to be sent to Germany for forced labor and I was hiding. They hid me in the barn so that the daughter didn't find me. They were liquidating the Jews in Stanislawow, it was August 1942, they were liquidating Jews everywhere.

I hear shots all the time and I heard the daughter telling her father how they were hanging Jews on trees. I overheard that because it was a plank barn, and when the daughter wasn't home, he slid the bowl with food under those planks for me. Once, when she wasn't home, because she worked somewhere, I begged him successfully to give me a pen and a piece of paper and then to send my letter to Staszek. And Staszek came and took me away from there.

There was a rural school in Wygoda [today in Ukraine] where his parents' friend, not much older than me, was the headmistress and a teacher. [Staszek] took me to her and she took me in as Staszek's fiancée who is hiding away from being sent to forced labor to Germany, while Staszek went to Dolina [today in Ukraine] to [fix me up] with a job at a sawmill.

He came back with the right paper and with it I reported to the manager. The German asked me who I was, what I could do. I said I had completed high school before the war but had no profession. I stammered a bit, I learned German at school but I hardly remembered anything. And he said okay, you'll work at the sawmill. And so in 1943 I started working at the sawmill, Holzwerke, later renamed to Delta Flugzenhalen und Barackenbau.

At first I was employed as a simple worker: hammering in nails, cleaning, doing everything. One of the girls [working] in the office was a Jewess from my street who appeared as a Volksdeutsch, had the right papers, her hair dyed light blonde, blue eyes, and she was from the same house as Tamara. Then I worked in accounting but we were stationed together.

There were those wooden houses on the premises, because those were all formerly Jewish-owned sawmills that the Germans had requisitioned.

And I lived in one such pseudo-villa, in the loft, and she lived right next to me. She had a son who was four years old then. Her husband was killed by the Germans shortly after they marched into Lwow.

She fled and she couldn't [stay] with that son because he looked like ten Jews together: dark, big dark eyes, curly hair, and was circumcised, so she found some woman she knew in the countryside whom she paid [for hiding the son]. [Then] she ran out of money and could not longer pay and one day the woman came with the son and left him there, said could no longer keep him.

She took the boy to where we lived. She locked him away in one of the rooms, didn't allow [him] to go out because there were various kids wandering around the sawmill and someone could notice he was circumcised. He sat by the window all day and one time he stuffed something into his nose, a tragedy, she had to call someone to take it out. And a rumor quickly spread she was hiding a Jewish child. She ran away in the night, they caught her on the road and shot them - her and the boy.

Later, because the front was approaching, many of the Germans working at the office, especially the young ones, were taken to the front, the older ones were left in place, and I was moved to the front office, where I learned to type with two fingers on a typewriter, in German.

I didn't know German too well at the time, and those wood industry-related terms were complete black magic to me. They put me in charge of the files. I had those 'geheim' [confidential] stamps, for instance, because that was classified stuff.

I met a girl there who worked at another department, her name was Olga Mieroszewska, she came from an aristocratic family, lived in a poor cottage without a chimney. Her sister, Janka Mieroszewska, worked at the Arbeitsamt [employment office] in Dolina. I became friends with Olga.

It was a family of princes, Poles. There were three daughters and four brothers, all died on the front. [Olga lived with her mother] and had a cow off which they lived. In her white gloves, in her delicate cotton hat, she led that cow to the pasture. We worked two shifts at the sawmill, until noon and from two to six.

During the break, Olga ran for the cow, [brought her] on a piece of rope, and the cow grazed on the sawmill grounds. At six, after work, she took the cow back.

Because I worked in the front office and it turned out Olga was collaborating with the partisans, the Poles from the AK [14](#), [she] asked me to show her the 'geheim' correspondence if there arrives any.

[Near the office] there was a free-standing wooden latrine and I agreed to take those documents out of the office and hide there. I was an idiot because I was [risking] my life. She passed those papers on to someone. I don't know who, my role was to [deliver] the stuff.

There was a lot of wood cuttings all over the sawmill, and I had that room [in the loft] and I liked it to be warm, so I collected those cuttings into an apron or a blouse and placed behind the stove, and between noon and two I stoked in that stove as hard as I could so that it was always nice and warm in my room.

One day I stoked it up hard, there were those cuttings layered between the stove and the wall, I went back to work and when I returned at six [it turned out there had been a fire], I couldn't get to my room because the stairs weren't there anymore, everything burned down. I had that cupboard where I kept my things, all I had, [it burned down]. Naturally, there was an investigation whether it wasn't an act of sabotage, but as the directors liked me, [I somehow got off scot-free].

The directors had been told I came from Lwow and had a family from Lwow, knew my fiancée from Lwow visited me, so they kindly gave me a few days' leave so that I could go to my family while they renovated the place because they didn't have anywhere to put me. What to do? Where to go? Where to hide? In the forest?

And [because] I was friends with Olga [Mieroszewska], I told [her] I was Jewish and had nowhere to go and was terribly afraid, and what should I do? We arranged I'd pack my bags, go to the station for the evening train, enter the train, and then go out the other side before it departs.

There were those buildings [by the station] where I was to hide, then [Olga] came for me and took me to her place, in the night. I spent [the several days] there, didn't go out anywhere. She had plates with her family's coat of arms, there were seven clubs there.

And flatware, whatever they managed to salvage from that mansion or palace of theirs, some of that was also in that cottage. And I didn't know a Jew was hiding in the attic above me. That she didn't tell me until the very end. I found out after the war.

We did a terrible thing with Olga, for which we were all detained by the Gestapo for three days. We gave notice to that Volksdeutsch, Dziewonski. [He was] a Pole who collaborated with the Germans and Olga received word, from the partisans, I think, to do something with him, and that was something like half a year before the Soviets came.

I worked at the front office and I had the rook [official stamp]. It was me who typed the notices for employees. It was April Fools' Day and we typed the notice for him, and it worked, because he was in forced labor there and used the opportunity to flee because the Soviets were approaching and he was afraid. He was given the notice on the first and he disappeared. On the third day they started looking for him, he didn't come to work, what's happened? Nobody knows.

An investigation was started. All of us, the office workers, were detained. They kept us for three days. [And it turned out he had been given notice]. Olga held out tough and didn't tell them a word. I cried like an idiot and told Hermel that I did [it] because it was 1st of April. I didn't tell about Olga.

The boss said, 'Well, young and stupid.' He ordered me to swear I'd never forge anyone's signature again. I swore, of course, and the whole thing blew over. But what we went through, all the employees!

In March 1944, when the Soviets were already very close, at 2 AM [the sawmill was evacuated]. It was a harsh winter, we roamed for eight days and eight nights and finally they took us across the San to Jaroslaw [town ca. 100 km west of Lwow].

• After the war

On the San I saw Polish navy-blue police [15](#) for the first time in years, the Ukrainians had different uniforms. When I saw the navy-blue policeman, I felt like giving him a kiss. Those were the same kind of thugs as the Ukrainians though perhaps they didn't participate on this scale in the murders.

When we reached Jaroslaw, they sent us to various sawmills owned by the Delta company, the branch office was in Cracow, the main office in Breslau [German for Wroclaw, city ca. 270 km north-west of Cracow, today in western Poland].

I was sent to Grybow, a small town near Nowy Sacz [town, 160 km south-west of Jaroslaw]. When I was there, Staszek suddenly turned up, who didn't know what was going on with me but who learned the sawmill had been evacuated. They also fled the Soviets.

He went to Chabowka [village 90 km west of Grybow] together with his mother, because his father went to Czestochowa [city 170 km north-west of Grybow] where he was put in charge of a school near the city. Staszek, in turn, got a job on the railways.

Chabowka was an important interchange between Zakopane [Poland's major winter resort, 90 km south-west of Grybow], Cracow and Nowy Sacz, it was called the eastern railway. And he started looking for me. Later, when he came for me, I fled from Grybow. It must have been the summer or autumn of 1944.

They [Staszek and his mother] had rented a room with some farmers in Chabowka. When I fled from Grybow, I went there. [At first] his mother didn't want me to be there, so we rented a room for me across the bridge. I was jobless. The Germans were still there. I had a Kennkarte [16](#).

Staszek started telling me he knew that manager, a German, who was a fantastic man, collaborating with the underground. There were Polish partisans there, very active in the area. Their job was to blow up bridges, crossings, rail tracks, viaducts, so that the transports of weapons, munitions, the deployments, didn't go east, because it was a major interchange. And, as if knowing what would happen when, the manager always disappeared when something was to be blown up.

That manager supervised the technical staff and he was often out on the platform, and one day I accosted him and I asked him whether he could give me any job. He knew [Staszek] well so he told me to come. Because there were no vacancies, he fired a Volksdeutsch girl who brought him all kinds of cold cuts because her father was a butcher!

And I worked there until the end. The liberation came around May [Editor's note: Nowy Sacz was liberated on 19th January 1945, and Chabowka probably around the same date].

All war I kept promising [myself] I'd [shoot] some German, which I never did because the Soviets came again. Savages, simply. They raped, plundered and drank. My neighbor in Chabowka was raped, we sat in the cellar, terrible things were happening.

Then, when the Germans had gone, Tamara [schoolmate] turned up, and persuaded us to go to Walbrzych [city 500 km north-west of Nowy Sacz].

We set up in Walbrzych, Tamara lived there too. She worked at the registry office and she married me and Staszek on 6th January, 1946. I got a job at the Polish State Railways' road department while Staszek quit his job and went to Wroclaw to finish the studies he had begun in Lwow.

I couldn't complete my studies because I didn't have the documents. Then I was transferred to Wroclaw because I wanted to be with my husband. [Staszek] became a civil engineer and in 1950 he was sent to Czestochowa because that's where he wanted to be, with his parents.

In Czestochowa my husband worked and I sat at home. He was assigned an apartment on the premises of a wool plant he was appointed the technical director of. My relations with his parents were strained because they didn't approve of our marriage.

I didn't even notify the Yad Vashem about Staszek as a righteous among the nations [17](#) because his mother didn't want me to. They forbade me to reveal I was Jewish. They didn't want us to have children. Staszek loved his mother very much.

I became independent, shook off the shackles. Because I couldn't admit who I was. I didn't know about the Jewish organizations that were being founded. We got a divorce. I went into retraining and got a new, interesting job. It was a public institution and I worked there for 40 years until my retirement.

I'm an employee of merit, have been awarded the knight's cross, various medals... In 1959 I was transferred to Gdansk. I married again and gave birth to a daughter, Kasia. My second husband didn't know who I was, knew nothing about my origin. I told my daughter, but fear and anxiety are

in me to this day. I'll never get rid of this. My children aren't afraid.

My grandson, when in the third year of his exclusive high school here, came once to me and said, 'Grandma, I have this assignment, I'm to draw my genealogical tree and list relatives who suffered during the war and where.' And he knew I was Jewish. I told him, 'Don't put it there, I'm asking you. What for? You'll have problems, perhaps there are anti-Semites at your school.' 'I'm not ashamed of it and I'll put it there', he said.

I've never been to Israel. I was afraid it would be too much for me. I'm 85 now, but my granddaughter's been there many times, also as part of Jewish summer camps organized by Rabbi Schudrich [Chief Rabbi of Poland] here. So my children aren't afraid and I'm still afraid. All the time.

I'm a member of the Jewish community. I'm the secretary, now also the chairperson, of the Gdansk branch of the Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of WWII [18](#). I'm not a full member of the Children of the Holocaust [19](#) but I have honorary membership, I'm very active, I've done lectures for high school students.

I needed it very much then and I need it now. I attend every Shabbat and that's very important for me, that I go there like to my family, that I'm on friendly terms with everybody there, sometimes we argue, sometimes someone is cross with someone else, sometimes I don't agree with something they do, but the bottom line is that I can say everything there, I don't have to hide.

They feel the same, the old veterans, they are afraid, have the same fear deep down their souls. I know many people who do their best for no one to find out they are Jewish.

It's hard to say what my attitude towards religion is. Sometimes it seems to me I'm an atheist, sometimes I believe... I know for sure that my mama protects me. I've been in extreme situations, it was a miracle I survived them, and I believe it's my mother who led me and protected me somehow.

If I lose something and am looking for it, I pray to St. Anthony, because I believe in St. Anthony. I go [to the community], I say the prayers, because I'm the eldest member now, we bless the candles, I put on my tichel and recite the prayers in Hebrew. I'm very moved then. Feeling unity with my ancestors.

- **Glossary:**

[1](#) The Lwow Jewish district: Jewish settlements in Lwow date back to the 14th century. At first the Jews lived on the streets later called Zolkiewska and Krakowskie Przedmiescie. In 1350 there was a huge fire, which destroyed the city. It was rebuilt outside its previous boundaries.

Thereafter, the Jews settled in the southeastern part of the new city, where a Zydowska [Jewish] Street came into being (from 1871 Blacharska Street). However, some of the Jews remained in the original district, hence the genesis of two separate Jewish religious communities in Lwow: the downtown one and that on Krakowskie Przedmiescie. In 1582 the first synagogue in the downtown community was built, the Golden Rose Synagogue, at 27 Blacharska Street.

The oldest of the suburban synagogues dates from ca. 1624. The downtown Jewish district grew in time to extend beyond Blacharska into Wekslarska (later Boimow), Serbska and Ruska. In 1795 the Austrian authorities imposed a ban on Jews living on other streets. This ban was officially lifted in 1868.

2 Polish Legions: a military formation operating in the period 1914-17, formally subordinate to the Austro-Hungarian army but fighting for Polish independence. Commanded by Józef Pilsudski. From 1915 the Legions came under German command, but some of the Legionnaires refused, which led to the collapse of the organization.

3 Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935): Polish activist in the independence cause, politician, statesman, marshal. With regard to the cause of Polish independence he represented the pro-Austrian current, which believed that the Polish state would be reconstructed with the assistance of Austria-Hungary. When Poland regained its independence in January 1919, he was elected Head of State by the Legislative Sejm.

In March 1920 he was nominated marshal, and until December 1922 he held the positions of Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army.

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

He worked to create a system of national security by concluding bilateral non-aggression pacts with the USSR (1932) and Germany (1934). He sought opportunities to conclude firm alliances with France and Britain. In 1932 owing to his deteriorating health, Pilsudski resigned from his functions. He was buried in the Crypt of Honor in Wawel Cathedral in the Royal Castle in Cracow.

4 Partitions of Poland (1772-1795): Three divisions of the Polish lands, in 1772, 1793 and 1795 by the neighboring powers: Russia, Austria and Prussia. Under the first partition Russia occupied the lands east of the Dzwina, Druja and Dnieper, a total of 92,000 km² and a population of 1.3 million.

Austria took the southern part of the Cracow and Sandomierz provinces, the Oswiecim and Zator principalities, the Ruthenian province (except for the Chelm lands) and part of the Belz province, a total of 83,000 km² and a population of 2.6 million. Prussia annexed Warmia, the Pomerania, Malbork and Chelmno provinces (except for Gdansk and Torun) and the lands along the Notec river and Goplo lake, altogether 36,000 km² and 580,000 souls.

The second partition was carried out by Prussia and Russia. Prussia occupied the Poznan, Kalisz, Gniezno, Sieradz, Leczyca, Inowroclaw, Brzesc Kujawski and Plock provinces, the Dobrzyn lands, parts of the Rawa and Masovia provinces, and Torun and Gdansk, a total of 58,000 km² and over a million inhabitants.

Russia took the Ukrainian and Belarus lands east of the Druja-Pinsk-Zbrucz line, altogether 280,000 km² and 3 million inhabitants. Under the third partition Russia obtained the rest of the Lithuanian, Belarus and Ukrainian lands east of the Bug and the Nemirov-Grodno line, a total area of 120,000 km² and 1.2 million inhabitants.

The Prussians took the remainder of Podlasie and Mazovia, Warsaw, and parts of Samogitia and Malopolska, 55,000 km² and a population of 1 million. Austria annexed Cracow and the part of Malopolska between the Pilica, Vistula and Bug, and part of Podlasie and Mazovia, a total surface area of 47,000 km² and a population of 1.2 million.

5 Franz Joseph I Habsburg (1830-1916): emperor of Austria from 1848, king of Hungary from 1867. In 1848 he suppressed a revolution in Austria (the 'Springtime of the Peoples'), whereupon he abolished the constitution and political concessions.

His foreign policy defeats – the loss of Italy in 1859, loss of influences in the German lands, separatism in Hungary, defeat in war against the Prussians in 1866 – and the dire condition of the state finances convinced him that reforms were vital.

In 1867 the country was reformed as a federation of two states: the Austrian empire and the Hungarian kingdom, united by a personal union in the person of Franz Joseph. A constitutional parliamentary system was also adopted, which guaranteed the various countries within the state (including Galicia, an area now largely in southern Poland) a considerable measure of internal autonomy.

In the area of foreign policy, Franz Joseph united Austria-Hungary with Germany by a treaty signed in 1892, which became the basis for the Triple Alliance.

The conflict in Bosnia Hertsegovina was the spark that ignited World War I. Subsequent generations remembered the second part of Franz Joseph's rule as a period of stabilization and prosperity.

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

7 Lwow Ghetto: created following an order of the German administrative authorities issued on 8th November 1941. All Jews living in Lwow, that is approx. 120,000 people, were resettled to the ghetto. During a selection which was conducted by the German authorities most elderly and sick persons were shot to death before the ghetto was formally created.

Many Jews were employed in workshops producing equipment for the Wehrmacht or the Luftwaffe. Some of them were also employed in the German administration outside of the ghetto. Since March 1941 the Germans imprisoned Jews in the Janowska forced labor camp and also deported them to the extermination camp in Belzec. Some residents died during mass street executions in the area of the ghetto called Piaski.

The Great Liquidation Action in the Lwow ghetto lasted from the 10th until the 23rd of August 1942. It is estimated that some 40,000 Jews were deported to the Belzec extermination camp. Some young men were sent to the Janowska forced labor camp. Approx. 800 people were taken to the Auschwitz extermination camp.

8 NKVD: (Russian: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR – the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political

Administration), the political police.

The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag.

The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (until 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (until 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

9 Janowski camp: a Nazi concentration camp in Lwow, one of the biggest in Western Ukraine. In November 1941 Jews from Lwow and the neighboring towns and villages were taken to the camp: about 70,000 people in total. During the occupation, thousands of Jewish inmates, Soviet prisoners-of-war and Ukrainian nationalists were exterminated in this camp.

In November 1943 the Nazis resolved to exterminate the inmates as well as all the traces of the camp before the Soviet Army's arrival.

A group of inmates attempted to escape, but most were killed. The few survivors told the world about the camp. In total some 200,000 people, including over 130,000 Jews, were exterminated in this camp from November 1941 until November 1943.

10 Capturing of Lwow: on 30th June 1941 the German forces captured Lwow, which had been under Soviet occupation. This was part of Operation Barbarossa, initiated on 22nd June 1941, leading to the overtaking by the Third Reich of the pre-1939 Polish territories now occupied by the Soviets and a sizeable part of the Soviet Union itself..

The quick capturing of Ukraine was facilitated by the collaboration of Ukrainians themselves, who treated the Germans as liberators from Soviet terror and forced collectivization.

11 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939.

In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

12 Szmalcownik [pron. shmaltsovnick] - in Polish slang of the period of the occupation, a person who blackmailed and denounced Jews in hiding (from the Polish word for 'lard'). There were szmalcowniks operating in all larger cities, in particular following the liquidation of the ghettos, when Jews who had evaded deportation attempted to survive in hiding 'on the Aryan side'. In Warsaw they often formed organized groups that prowled the ghetto exists.

They picked out their victims by subtle signs (e.g. lowered, frightened eyes, timid behavior), eccentric clothing (e.g. the lack of the fur collar so widespread at the time, or wearing winter clothes in summer), way of speaking, etc. Victims so selected were threatened with denunciation to the Germans; blackmail could be an isolated event or be repeated until the victim's financial resources ran out. The Polish Underground State attempted to combat the szmalcowniks but in vain. To this day the crimes of the szmalcowniks are still not entirely accounted for.

13 Volksdeutsch: In Poland a person who was entered (usually voluntarily, more rarely compulsorily) on a list of people of ethnic German origin during the German occupation was called a Volksdeutsch and had various privileges in the occupied territories.

14 Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK): underground military organization, part of the Polish armed forces operating within Polish territory (within pre-1 September 1939 borders) during World War II. Created on 14 February 1942, subordinate to the Supreme Commander and the Polish Government in Exile.

Its mission was to regain Poland's sovereignty through armed combat and inciting to a national uprising. In 1943 the AK had over 300,000 members. AK units organized diversion, sabotage, revenge and partisan campaigns. Its military intelligence was highly successful. On 19th January 1945 the AK was disbanded on the order of its commander, but some of its members continued their independence activities throughout 1945-47.

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

15 Navy-Blue Police, or Polish Police of the General Governorship: the name of the communal police which operated between 1939 and 1945 in the districts of the General Governorship. Navy-Blue police was subordinate to the order police (so-called Orpo, Ordnungspolizei).

Members were forcibly employed officers of the pre-war Polish state police. Navy-Blue Policemen participated, for example, in deportations of residents, in suppressing the 'black market', in isolating Jews in ghettos. Some members participated in cells of the underground state and passed on information about the functioning of the German forces.

16 Kenkarta: (Ger. *Kennkarte* – ID card) confirmed the identity and place of residence of its holder. It bore a photograph, a thumbprint, and the address and signature of its holder. It was the only document of its type issued to Poles during the Nazi occupation

17 Righteous Among the Nations: a medal and honorary title awarded to people who during the Holocaust selflessly and for humanitarian reasons helped Jews. It was instituted in 1953. Awarded by a special commission headed by a justice of the Israeli Supreme Court, which works in the Yad Vashem National Remembrance Institute in Jerusalem.

During the ceremony the persons recognized receive a diploma and a medal with the inscription "Whoever saves one life, saves the entire world" and plant a tree in the Avenue of the Righteous on the Remembrance Hill in Jerusalem, which is marked with plaques bearing their names.

Since 1985 the Righteous receive honorary citizenship of Israel. So far over 20,000 people have been distinguished with the title, including almost 6,000 Poles.

18 The Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Persecutions during World War II (Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II Wojnie): an organization of Jewish war veterans, who had taken part in armed struggle against the Nazi Germany, and were victims of Holocaust persecution.

The organization was founded in 1991. It has 13 sections throughout Poland, and 1050 members. Its aims include providing help to Jews who were victimized during the war and spreading knowledge about the struggle and victimization of Jews during WWII. The Association established the Medal of the 50th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is granted to persons who have made important contributions to Polish-Jewish life and dialogue.

19 Children of the Holocaust Association: non-governmental organization associating persons who were persecuted as Jews during the German occupation of Poland and who in September 1939 were not older than 13, or were born during the war. Founded in 1991.

It is a self-help organization, providing psychological support or family search services, as well as an educational one, organizing seminars, publishing a bulletin, conducting other publishing activities (e.g. the Children of Holocaust Speak... memoir series).

The Association currently numbers close to 800 members, and has branches in Warsaw, Wrocław, Cracow, and Gdansk.