

# Gizela Fudem

Gizela Fudem

Wroclaw

Poland

Interviewer: Jakub Rajchman

Date of interview: December 2004



Mrs. Gizela Fudem has been blessed with incredible memory. During our three meetings in her house in Wroclaw she not only described her closer and more distant family with great details, but she was also able to convey the atmosphere of pre-war Jewish Tarnow with its colorfulness and variety. Mrs. Fudem remembers in details holiday customs of her childhood home. Since 1947 she's been a wife to Mr. Leon Fudem, who is five years older than she is. Mr. Fudem is Jewish as well. That's a fairly uncommon social situation in Poland in 2005. Today, both of them old and ill, they often talk about their only daughter who lives in the USA. Mrs. Fudem has told her Holocaust story several times to newspapers and to Polish and international organizations. In our conversation she goes back to her childhood which is deeply emotional to her. A few weeks after the interview Mrs. Fudem's husband, Mr. Leon Fudem, passed away.

[My family background](#)

[My parents](#)

[Growing up](#)

[My school years](#)

[The Jewish history in Tarnow](#)

[During the war](#)

[My escape from the ghetto](#)

[From Plaszow to Auschwitz](#)

[Bergen-Belsen](#)

[After the liberation](#)

[Married life](#)

[My daughter Barbara](#)

[Post-war events](#)

[Glossary](#)

## **My family background**

My name is Gizela Fudem, my maiden name is Grunberg. I was born on 24th November 1924 in Tarnow. I lived in Tarnow before the war and for the first two years of the war. When it comes to my siblings, I had a brother - Mojzesz - four years younger than me, and a sister - Tauba - older than me, also by four years. I come from a religious family, even very religious, my father was a pious Jew with a beard, and never tolerated anything that wasn't kosher.

My father's family came from the Kielce region, from the town of Stopnica [50 km from Tarnow]. I remember both Grandpa and Grandma. Grandma's name was Bajla or Bela Rywka, and Grandpa was Szmul. And my father was Josef, Josef Nechemiasz. Grandpa was killed during World War II, and Grandma died during that war, because she was sick. My grandparents were religious, Grandma used to wear a wig, and Grandpa - a hat that Jews used to wear in the Russian partition [1](#), in the shape of a little black saucepan with a visor.

Stopnica was a small town, and I used to go there with Dad to visit the grandparents. Grandpa was well off. He had a store with some iron articles, like nails, scythes, some tools, chains, whatever you'd buy in a small town, which farmers from the area would come to. My grandparents had their own small house, they lived right behind that store, there was even an entrance from the house to the store, and there was a big yard neighboring with some concrete plant. I used to play there as a child, used to go inside concrete tunnels. I remember that.

My grandparents lived near the marketplace. And I even remember - once we went there during a Polish folk holiday, and there was the atmosphere of a bit of a peril, because farmers didn't like Jews, they would buy from them whatever they needed, but you never knew, we were afraid of some incidents. [Editor's note: anti-Semitic incidents often took place during national holidays.] So the shutters were closed in that store, and I remember we were listening to whether it was peaceful outside or not.

One of my cousins, Sala [nickname for Sara Lea], often came to the grandparents. She also lived near the marketplace, but on the opposite side. And she used to come there to help out, clean up at her grandma's, since she lived nearby, she used to help them. Her father, Uncle Lajbisz, older brother of my father's, was a small merchant, and there were also a few small children. Uncle had six children altogether, but because Aunt Chaja died early, some of those kids were of the second mother - Perel. And they were so-so off, not too rich, but they weren't that badly off either.

When it comes to my mother's family, I don't remember Grandma very well, but I remember Grandpa better. Grandma Debora came from Debice area near Tarnow. She died when I was four years old. She was about 46 then. Grandpa came from Dabrowa near Tarnow. His name was Chaim. Grandpa was two years older than Grandma. It was an arranged marriage, of course, they were both from traditional families. After the death of Grandma, who died at a young age, Grandpa Chaim remained in Tarnow. I remember, he had a long white beard and I think he used to wear a kapote. But you could talk to Grandpa in Polish, he was a bit more secular than that other Grandfather in Stopnica.

During the times of my early childhood, I remember, he had a wine bottling plant. He owned a house on one of the more beautiful streets in Tarnow, on the corner of Folwarczna and Goldhammera Streets. It was a big house, two- storey, I think. It was quite elegant, with additions, there was a fish market, and in the yard there was a carpenter's workshop, and near that a little house for the caretaker, and there was the wine bottling plant.

There's a story in our family that when I was young, when I was going to school, I used to drop by at Grandpa's and the workers there would let me drink some wine from a barrel with a rubber hose. Later I couldn't eat my dinner.

But later, I remember it well, I guess Grandpa wasn't doing so well, because he gave up on the bottle plant, and he had a kind of an inn or a tavern with a store. That store had an exit onto the street and an entrance to the apartment, because he lived on the first floor and took half of that floor. There were a few rooms there.

Grandpa had all sorts of ideas, he kept remodeling his house. To the left from the entrance there was Grandpa's apartment. And to the right there was a room rented out to the Jewish community. There was another room with a ping-pong table - I don't know who that belonged to. And on the second floor there were apartments. Grandpa was alone for many years, but he got married again just before the war. I don't remember that woman's name, I remember only she was from a small town, and she was about 50 years old, but she was still unmarried. I know that Mother didn't like her, and thought Grandpa should not be getting married again.

## My parents

My Mother, Sara Lea Grunberg [nee Muschel], was the eldest of six children. She had two sisters and three brothers. These are their names in order: Bronia, Bala, Berisch [German spelling kept due to Austrian influences], Rafael, Mozes. The middle sister - Aunt Bronia - married a very religious Jew and she lived in Cracow.

The youngest sister, however, was a sort of a black sheep in the family. Her name was Bala. They used to call her Bajla in Jewish. She was a bit of a communist and Grandpa had all sorts of problems with her, because before each 1st May the police would come to arrest her. [Editor's note: 1st May - workers' holiday, illegal in interwar Poland, was a chance for socialist and communist demonstrations unaccepted by the government.] At least for that one day, so that she wouldn't demonstrate or whatever, and Grandpa had bring out the wine for all of them and ask them not to take her. And she, knowing about it, would go into hiding, so he had problems with her. But I don't know if Grandpa was as determined as my father, who didn't let us talk about Bala in his presence because of what she did later.

She was to get married, in an arranged marriage to a man whose last name was, as I remember, Hermeles, and she ran away on their wedding day, right after the ceremony. And she broke off this marriage, even though he was a very decent man, that one she married, but he completely didn't suit her. Because he was very religious and quiet, and she was a crazy girl, always on the move. And that communism of hers, that didn't suit him either. Grandpa forced her to get married, he thought she'd settle down, but on the day of her wedding she sent the gifts back and ran away.

Then she moved out and lived somewhere in Warsaw, then somewhere in Sosnowiec, she became a nurse. All in all she was a bit of a wayward daughter, different from the rest of the family. They practically disowned her. And when she came by to our apartment in the first year of the war, she was careful to come when Dad wasn't there. I was always very impressed by her, because she had such an exciting life.

And later she married again, this time out of her own will and volition. And it so happened that I met her second husband during the war, in Auschwitz, through the fence in the adjoining camp. She was dead by then. That's how it was with them. When they were on the way to Auschwitz, and they knew they were going to Auschwitz, they decided to poison themselves on the train.

They had a son, Jurek, a few years old, six, maybe seven years old. And they couldn't decide whether to give him the poison or not, and when they finally gave it to him, it was already too late. And she, carrying him in her arms, most likely dead already, was sent to a gas chamber. And her husband was spared, but he was sick a lot, and died exactly one day before Auschwitz was liberated, he didn't survive the war.

But back then, in the camp, he found us - I was there with my sister Tauba - through the fence and helped us a lot. I most likely owe him my life. Because my sister and I, we were to be transported to a different camp - to Stutthof [2](#) - and none of those people survived. He got us out of that transport; I'll tell about that later. That uncle, by marriage, my aunt's husband.

And, as I mentioned before, there were three brothers of my mom's: Berisch, Rafael and Mozes. The oldest one - Berisch - also lived in the same area, near Grandpa's, but in his own separate house and he was very religious. He was selling fish, and he had that fish market in Grandpa's house. I remember, it so happened that when the war broke out [3](#) and he escaped to Russia, his wife, my Aunt Roza, stayed behind with six little children, and during the first few months of the war, she was trying to find some fish to sell, to make a living. And I was sent to help her, which I didn't like at all, because I was afraid to hold a live fish in my hands.

The other two sons used to help Grandpa with his business, and later they became independent and had their own plant, also a wine and vodka plant. They had clients all over Poland and they were traveling with samples as canvassers. They stayed near Grandpa until the end, until they escaped to Russia, when the war broke out. And Grandpa stayed here, in Tarnow.

My father's name was Josef Nechemiasz, he was born in Stopnica. He was very religious. He used to go and pray with other Hasidim [4](#) to one of the shtiblach. That tzaddik, he came from Kolaczyce [40 km from Tarnow]. They used to call him Koleszycter. Mom was even upset at those friends of Dad's, that when she met him he wasn't that superstitious, yes, he was very religious, traditional, and that was always most important, but there was nothing bordering on the absurd, that he didn't do. And later Dad, according to my Mom, started spending time with such a crowd that was just too holy, and they had this influence on him.

Mom was upset, because they indeed kept coming up with ridiculous things, and Dad would follow them. For example, on Saturdays, you were not supposed to comb your hair! I also didn't like them. One of them - I remember - used to come to our home. He had a long beard. He was such a horrible Hasid. He used to pinch my arm whenever he came over. And I really didn't like him because of that. Whenever he came by, I would run away.

Dad did various things in life. He didn't have a lot of spare time, he was always busy, because we weren't all that well off. When it didn't work out with the winery, then he had a kosher dairy with a partner. He had it in a basement of some house a couple blocks away. It was a dairy with a bit of wholesale and a bit of retail. He would deliver milk and butter to stores, but also sold them in retail. I was sent there from time to time, I remember. So that, whenever my dad went out to have lunch or had to go somewhere, somebody stayed at the store to sell that milk.

During summer he also sold skim milk, used to make paint and then paint apartments. I remember something like round barrels to make butter and cheese. I remember, there was a year when there was lots of that cheese. Because Dad had an agreement with manors in the area, in the radius of

from approximately a dozen to several dozens of kilometers. And they brought milk from them, and the agreements usually said that they had to take all the milk whenever cows were on the fresh feed, even if there was too much milk. Because the agreement was for everything, everything that was delivered throughout the year. And I remember the time when there was too much cheese and there was no market for it. And they had to take that cheese out of the city and bury it in holes in the ground, since you couldn't just throw it out, it would go bad, so you couldn't really do anything with it.

And only in the last year before the war Dad signed an agreement with someone who made components for the production of calolite near Cracow. That was something like plastic nowadays. And it was made out of that milk, first processed in a special way. That milk after processing looked like cooked rice and that was delivered in barrels to Cracow. They wouldn't make any money on this, but it was still better than losing everything. And they used that calolite to make belt buckles, cabinet hardware, it was a bit transparent. So I remember that it was a rather poor business.

However, a year or two before the war Dad gave up on the dairy, as I mentioned earlier. He took a course in making dairy and cheese, it had a weird name, he had to pass a test. And he opened a big dairy on Folwarczna Street, with a few other milkmen, such that used to deliver milk to homes, in cans, with a horse and a horse carriage and they delivered that milk to homes. And somehow Dad contacted them. And since he was the only one who was literate [that is, he could write and keep books] among them, they made him their manager. They were simple people, but they had their clientele that they delivered milk to, and their manors that they bought milk from.

They rented a big place on Folwarczna Street, and made it into a dairy, and that was the only big kosher dairy in Tarnow, where they converted probably more than 1,000 liters of milk into cheese, butter and other products. There were four big rooms with modern machinery. They were selling it to stores and restaurants and some smaller grocery stores that had milk and cheese. And they also delivered to some small cake shops. And you could buy directly from them as well. It wasn't a great business, but it wasn't too bad either, you could make a living.

Dad kept the books. He was the one who had a permit, and it was very difficult in that time to get a permit for this type of a shop [5](#). And I remember, there was a competitive company, but not kosher, in Tarnow, and it was called I think 'U Zoski' ['At Zoska's']. Only these two dairies had a permit issued by the local government, and the owner or the manager had to have taken that course that my Father took. I think there were five of them, those partners that had their clientele. They kept on delivering milk to private homes and in shifts helped out at work, or their wives helped, because you had to spin milk, make cheese, butter, and also buttermilk was for sale there.

Father had made a name for himself, he was very much respected and liked, and even sometimes, when there was an argument between Jews, and they didn't want to take it to court, but solve it between themselves, then Dad was the arbiter. And also they knew he knew how to do book-keeping, so he was well trusted. He had no money, but he was respected.

However, he had no time, and I remember that we, the children were always waiting for Purim, which was a holiday, because on Purim Dad was at home, at least in the afternoon we could play checkers with him, or talk to him, he had time for us. Any other time he was always very busy, and used to go to all those prayers, he had to make it to the morning and the evening one - that took time and split the day, so that he was home only late in the evening. He was tired by then and

didn't spend time with us. So the kids were always waiting for some holiday, one which wasn't that rigorous, so we could get a hold of Dad.

During Sabbath Dad didn't work, but he prayed a lot instead. And he always went to the shtibl late in the afternoon on Friday, depending on when the stars began to shine. Very often after that prayer he would bring a guest along for a supper. Usually without consulting anyone, but it was a kind of 'anojrech' [an ojrech, Hebrew oreach, orchim using the Ashkenazi pronunciation, for guest] or guest. It was usually a young man who had no family or he studied somewhere, went to some yeshivah or somewhere, and he was invited over on Saturday. I remember once Mom was very upset because Dad hadn't warned her he would bring such a guest over on a certain day. But, in fact - there were five of us - so five or six didn't make a big difference, but she always liked to have been warned ahead.

My mom was a tall blonde. She was really the same height as Dad. And she didn't use to wear a wig, but right after the wedding she wore a kind of a braid fastened to short hair so that everyone would be happy. So that you could say she had a wig, but so that it wasn't a wig. She had pretty blond hair, Dad was dark-haired, Mom was a blonde, so she wore that wig for two, three years, but I don't remember that, I just heard stories. From the time I remember Mom, she had her own hair, which was a big concession in those circles, but she always wore something on her head, or whenever she was outside, she wore a hat or a scarf. I don't think she wore it at home, because I remember her hair, always cut short and somehow tucked, so that there was no suspicion whether it was her own hair or not, and so that nobody made a fuss about it.

Mom was extremely clean and she took great care of the house, and all the time we had to sweep and polish those floors, and when it comes to things like that, she could do it on Saturdays, but of course in such a way that Dad wouldn't find out. Because when it comes to this, Sabbath was more important. So she was a bit more lay.

Mom spoke Polish every day and was more fluent in it than Dad. Dad would make some grammatical mistakes sometimes, but Mom never. She was from slightly different circles and she read, maybe not very serious literature, but she read from time to time, she had some books in Polish. She borrowed them from someone; there was an aunt who used to read, so they exchanged books or something.

We would bring Polish books from a library. Both my sister and I belonged to a library. I belonged to a library called TSL, I think that stood for Towarzystwo Szkol Ludowych [Rural Schools Association]. I used to borrow books there, I know I had to fight for it, because I had to pay a fee there - I think 1 zloty a month - and we didn't really have money. So Mom sometimes read those books, and if Dad knew we had something new, some book, he always had a look at it, because he was curious what we were reading. But he didn't read much himself. And Mom could read Jewish [Yiddish], and sometimes she also read a book in Yiddish.

Mom didn't work, but helped Dad. Mainly at the store, especially at the beginning, that is in that dairy in the basement where there was only one partner. Mom spent a lot of time there, and other than that she did the shopping, cooked at home, took care of us. So she was busy, she didn't have time to chit-chat. On Saturdays sometimes she would go to her aunt Fryma, the wife of Majer Muschel [German spelling kept due to Austrian influences], who was the younger brother of Grandfather. That aunt was more or less her age, not much older. They lived on the Plac Rybny

[literally: Fish Square]. She used to go visit there, sometimes she brought us along.

What else did she do? I know that, for example, she used to help my sister to go on ice, that is, skating, which was just unthinkable. Mom didn't skate herself, just helped my sister hide from Dad. Dad would have never agreed to it, because it was completely not kosher - some strange people, and they danced, music was playing and they were dressed in such a way - it was out of the question. Everything was kept a secret from Dad. The skates my sister hid at some friend's, and whenever she was to go skating, she went there first to pick them up, and Mom was making sure it all went well.

When it comes to education, Mom went to some school, I think to a business school. But I don't know what it was called. I know that inside the wardrobe's door there was a photograph of Mom in such tall laced shoes up to her knee, they must have been in style back then, and in a pleated skirt and a very pretty pleated blouse. Mom said that it was taken when she was taking some course.

Mom married very young, when she was 19. Shortly after that my sister Tosia was born [Polish diminutive of Tauba]. After my sister was born, my Mom was very sick. They sent her to Karlovy Vary, it was called Karlsbad in German [6](#), she was there twice. My sister was also sick a lot as a small child, so Mom didn't really have time to finish her education.

Mom spoke German. During World War I her family escaped from Tarnow to Vienna and most likely Mom brushed up her German there. She was self-taught, but she spoke nicely and with a Viennese accent, which we found out during the war. When there were Germans there, then Mom, whenever a German would come to the apartment, then Mom spoke with them. She was the eldest of her siblings - she was born in 1901, so she took care of her younger sister Brajndla [Bronia] there in Vienna.

My sister and I liked it when Mom told us stories about Vienna, since they spent about two years there before they came back. She told us about the 'Riesenrad.' [Riesenrad, a tourist attraction in Vienna, a giant Ferris Wheel, giving tourists an opportunity to admire the city from the height of 65 meters]. It was a huge hoop, a vertical carousel, and she used to go on that carousel and took her sister along.

The fact that my parents knew German came up at some other time as well. I remember I found in the lower drawer of the wardrobe a pack of letters tied with a ribbon, and I saw they were in Hebrew and some in German. Those were the letters my parents wrote to each other back when they were engaged.

## Growing up

At home, I remember, before the war we had a servant, a maid, Polish. There was one for many years, my Mom took her in as a young girl; she was maybe a teenager. First she worked for a Polish neighbor that lived above us, and she kept pestering her, didn't treat her well at all. Mom found her in the basement once, where the caretaker lived. She hid there, because that neighbor from above had thrown her out. So Mom took her in and taught her, so that she never mixed up treyf with kosher.

She came from somewhere near Zakliczyn, from Wesolowo [23 kilometers from Tarnow]. And she was with us for many years. She learned everything and became so enlightened and elegantly

dressed, that, for example, when my friends came over, those who didn't visit often, they thought from far away that it was my Mom. Maryna - that was her name - came to us when she was about 14, and left when she was, I think, 27.

She left finally, because she had a brother who was a priest, who kept telling her to leave and he took her in. First she had to learn how to cook normally, because for us she made Jewish dishes, and she had to learn how to make pork chops. So she had to take a course, and then she was his housekeeper, he got a parish somewhere there, and she went there.

As children we were so attached to Marynia [Polish diminutive for Maryna], that when we woke up we weren't calling for Mom, but for Marynia. She was from a very poor family, she had a lot of siblings, sometimes her father would come from the village to pick something up in Tarnow, and so we even met him. And when she was to go home for Christmas, we baked her special cookies with a hole in them, so that she could hang them on a Christmas tree. And after her we had another girl, Wisia, also Polish. She stayed until the war, but we didn't get as attached to her.

I think I remember all holidays at home. Especially Pesach. We used to call it Easter. I remember my daughter was very surprised when I called Pesach that, because she always thought that Easter means a real Polish Easter. But she didn't know that this is what we called it in our area. We did general cleaning then, where we had to turn everything inside out, wash and scrub everything. There was a full set of pots and plates and cups, all dishes and utensils, which all year long stood packed partially in the room behind the mirror and partially on the attic. And we couldn't use it all year long, except on this Easter Holiday.

The cups were very pretty, I remember, completely different than the ones we used every day. And before we took and placed all that, we had to scrub all the cupboards. We lined the cupboards with clean paper so that it didn't touch anything and there was paper even on the windowsill, so that there wouldn't be any crumbs. And the rest of the food which was at home, you couldn't use it; it was called 'humyc' [chametz]. There was a ceremony to sell the chametz to someone [non-Jewish] and then buy it back from him after the holidays. And there was a caretaker who would buy all this chametz, because he wasn't a Jew. He bought everything from the entire building, and didn't even see it, because the chametz stayed at our homes, but he would get 50 groszy for that later. Of course he bought it and then sold it back so that during the holidays we had nothing that wasn't just for the holidays.

I also remember that as a child I couldn't understand why after that general cleaning Dad was walking around with a little brush that some housewives use to smear egg yolks on a cake [a goose feather], and was looking for bun or bread crumbs. Mom used to wink at him and show him where [to look] and Dad would find some. He would find something in a few places, and I couldn't understand how, after all this cleaning, he could still find something. But it was Mother who left it, because that was the custom, that she'd put it somewhere and immediately tell him where, under this closet or in that corner, or somewhere else, that this chametz is there, and Dad had a special paper dustpan, and used this brush to sweep everything onto the dustpan, and later we would burn all of it.

But matzah was baked at some trusted baker's, so that it was 100 percent safe [kosher]. And despite that, Dad never ate matzah. Dad had some other matzot, made of rye flour. They were called something like 'shmile matzah.' [Editor's note: Shemurah Matzah, usually a handmade



matzah, baked under special supervision of a rabbi throughout the entire process. Among other things all dishes used to make it must be washed and dried exactly every 18 minutes, the time after which, according to the Halakhah law, fermentation begins.] They were baked in a special way. A few Hasidim would get together and bake them. I thought those matzot weren't tasty. So Dad ate those matzot of his, but ours weren't non-kosher, we could put them on the table next to the other ones. He also never ate crumbled matzah and put it into the chicken soup or something. You couldn't soak it [the matzah].

At Pesach children had to take a nap during the day, which, I remember, I hated, because I never liked sleeping during the day. But we had to, so that we wouldn't doze off later, because we had to stay up till late at night and sit at the table. So I used to cheat, pretending that I was taking a nap, because I didn't like it very much. Later, during the seder supper, the table was moved next to the bed, since we had to eat that supper resting on an elbow, as if lying down.

Later there were those questions - 'kashes' [a type of a Talmud question asked to a rabbi; questions asked during Pesach were very rarely called kashes, they were rather called: The Four Questions or mah nishtanah]. First I would answer, but later just my brother. [Editor's note: The Four Questions are traditionally being asked, and not answered by the youngest child at the Pesach table.]

All dishes had to be as God ordered. There was egg smoked on fire, there was a bit of horseradish, and various other dishes. There were also special plates with dents, and in each dent there was an appropriate dish. Dad used to hide the matzah, and we would search for that matzah, and whoever found it would get something. That matzah was called afikoman. So Dad would hide it under a pillow or something. He'd hide it, so that we, the kids could find it. When I was a bit older I would let my brother find it. Besides, whatever we would get as a reward, we'd get anyway, because for the Easter holiday, for Pesach, we usually got either new shoes, or new stockings which we needed anyway. We had to have something new for that holiday. That was the rule.

Father made sure the seder night was the way it was supposed to be. He wore a white gown, over his clothes, tied in the waist, and when he was saying the Eliash prayer, we would open the door so that Eliash could come in, because he was to come in and drink from the chalice. And there was a special chalice for Eliash.

At Purim we used to dress up, and in the last years that I remember, we kept dressing my brother Mojzesz [Polish form of Mozes] up as a girl. I don't know where, but we would find at home long strips of fabric, and we'd make something like braids out of them. We'd put those braids on him, tie a scarf on his head, his face was indeed like a girl's, so round. But all in all, the entire thing was not just about those games, but about bringing sweet gifts, on a plate covered with a napkin to people. We had a whole list of people to take it to, and we usually used to get some from them, too. The entire deal with the gifts was that on two beds - Mom and Dad's - put together and covered with a clean tablecloth or a sheet, we would put all those sweets and various cookies, fruits, chocolates, that were a set. And later we would take it and portion it.

We also had gifts for non-Jews, but it would be a bottle of wine, some more elegant chocolate or something. Because they knew we had such holidays, so we used to bring them gifts. It was always to remind them about us, or sometimes you just wanted to please someone. We would make these portions for all friends and family. There was lots of it, we would put all the sweets on a deeper

plate, cover it nicely with a clean napkin and tie this napkin underneath, under the plate somehow, and we would go around with it. And my brother Moniu [Polish diminutive of Mozes] or myself would take it.

Aside from that we used to read Megillat Ester, and my brother had a rattler which, when you were spinning it, it rattled. And whenever Dad said the word Haman, he would rattle it. Brother also had a dreidel, that's how we called it, it was a lead cube with a leg, and it had something like handles on both sides. You'd hold the upper part, and if you knew how to handle it, and turned it, it would spin for a while, a little spinning top.

I also remember it was the only day in the year that Dad would play domino or some checkers or lottery with us. [Editor's note: such plays were being played traditionally for Chanukkah, not for Purim.] And we were on cloud nine, because we really loved it when Dad played with us, because otherwise he never had time. Aside from all that there were also meat dumplings for dinner, and sweet triangular buns with blueberry jam. There was a custom called hamantashen. We didn't even use to call it hamantashen, but I knew that name.

For all these holidays we didn't use to go to a synagogue, but to that unfortunate shtibl where Dad always used to go. It was very ugly. There was a balcony upstairs where women went. And men were downstairs. I remember that Dad used to take us there for Yom Kippur, and maybe for Rosh Hashanah.

For all other holidays and on Saturdays we had our prayer books and we had to pray at home. And with time, I simply started to cheat. I could read it, because I learned to, but I didn't understand it, and I can't say that I was passionate about it, I didn't really care. But for some period of time, before I started to rebel, I used to say a few prayers that I had marked in my prayer book. And we had to say it every Saturday morning, when Dad was in the prayer house, and when he came back he always asked, and that was the worst, because I didn't want to lie. So, to somehow get out of it, I kind of said a part of it, and when he asked whether I had already said my prayer, I would answer: yes. And it wasn't a lie entirely, because I had taken a look at it somewhat.

At Yom Kippur you had to fast, and of course my parents fasted and we fasted; my brother until the war was too young to fast and only during the war he managed to fast one time. Because when he died he wasn't 14 years old yet, and he started when he was 13, so he fasted only once. But we fasted, and of course Dad and Mom fasted. Children, when they were younger, fasted for only half a day, and then ate normally, but kids had this ambition to fast all day, and then they bragged about it. Later, in the evening, we had a very ceremonious and filling supper. We had neighbors so fanatically religious that, this neighbor and maybe his wife too, not only fasted, but they wouldn't even swallow saliva, when they had some, they would spit it out. So that it wasn't that they were drinking something.

For Chanukkah there was this oil candlestick. It was a menorah and it had little cups into which oil was poured, a wick was made out of cotton and put in there. There were more wicks every day. And the candlestick stood in the window. And I remember I knocked it over once and I spilled oil on my dress and the stain never went away. It wouldn't wash away. Mom was upset. But Chanukkah was a lighter holiday; I remember we used to always get something, but not money, rather some things, maybe some clothing or something.

For summer holidays we used to go to Ciezkowice or to Muszyna [Ciezkowice - 26km from Tarnow, health resort Muszyna - 75km from Tarnow], all in the Malopolska region. We used to go with our parents and Aunt Bronia who was Mother's younger sister, younger by two years. That's the aunt who lived in Cracow. She went to America, too, before the war, but came back. She had a son more or less my age, maybe half a year younger. I remember that in one of those towns I went into deep water and was drowning. And they had to rescue me, so they pulled me by the hair. It was such a summer resort. We used to bring feather quilts, pots, and some huge luggage.

Dad usually didn't go with us; if it was some place closer he would drop by on Saturday and Sunday. Because on Sundays the store had to be closed as well. Other than that he didn't use to go with us. I don't even know where he ate then, maybe somewhere at Mom's family, in Tarnow. And we used to rent an entire house from some farmers, and they lived in some shack or moved out somewhere. And once, if I'm not mistaken, Marynia came with us, to help, because we had to cook there. All that was a few good years before the war.

And later our parents didn't go anywhere, but we went to camps. It was a camp from the school, Beit Yaakov [7](#), which I attended with my sister. They were very cheap because they rented some cottages from farmers and we slept on the floor on hay mattresses. And there was a kitchen, kosher, of course. We brought a cook with us, used to go on trips, I even remember there was one trip to Poronin [104km from Tarnow]. I went to such a camp twice, that is the first time they took me out of pity, because I had an older sister, but I was too young for it. I don't remember any special program on Jewish traditions on those camps.

I know that we had a really nice supervisor and all girls were in love with her. They were happy when she even looked at them. She came from Cracow. I almost loved her; her name was Rajza Klingier. The classes in Beit Yaakov cost money, but not a lot. There were only girls there. We were learning how to read and write in Yiddish, there were also classes on Jewish history and something on religion. We used to go there three times a week with Tosia [Polish diminutive of Tauba].

## My school years

I went to a normal school - public, Polish. And there were Polish and Jewish kids there. It so happened that we lived almost opposite of the school building, but there were two schools there. And there was the Slowacki School and the Krolowa Jadwiga School. I went to Krolowa Jadwiga, and that wasn't quite in front, but you had to go around the building.

I started attending school when I wasn't quite six years old yet, because my sister was already going there and a few years earlier my cousin, who had the same last name as I, graduated from that school. Later she lived in Lodz, but at that time she still lived in Stopnica, and there was a six-grade school there and in order to do the 7th grade she came to Tarnow. And since the cousin had a good reputation, and so did my sister, I asked them to let me in earlier. I was first going there when kids were playing in the school yard, and I was waving my arms too, when they were doing some exercises. So I wasn't even 13 when I graduated, and later I went to a one- year business school.

Most of the teachers in the public school were Polish. Only religion was taught by a Jew, Mrs. Taubeles. Because we went to religion separately - all Jews from both schools. And religion for non-Jews was taught by a priest. I didn't really experience anti-Semitism, there; maybe sometimes

there'd be something slightly unpleasant. There were teachers who would nag at some of us sometimes, but it usually went together with the fact that a girl was a worse student, or came from some neglected home, and then she was also teased about being Jewish. There weren't any antagonisms between girls. Usually no big friendships either. It's just that we were about 30 Jews there, so naturally all my friends were Jewish.

On the other hand, however, in the class that I went to starting in the 5th grade, there was a girl - Polish, who saved my life during the war. We weren't really friends, but it so happened that I bumped into her and told her I wanted to get out of the ghetto. And she helped me out; I spent a few weeks at her place on the Aryan side. Her name was Gabriela, but everyone called her Ela. But I'll get to that later. I didn't go to that school on Saturdays, but they just had gym, music then, on purpose, because we were more or less half and half of Jews and non-Jews. It didn't matter much, and I was always a very good student, so nobody demanded that I went to school on Saturdays. After I graduated from this school, as I said earlier, I went to a business school.

That business school, it was, I think, called merchant training or something like that. It was founded a year or two earlier, some time in 1935. Jewish teachers founded this organization and this school was private and not in my neighborhood. It was one-year at the time [when Mrs. Fudem studied there], and later it was supposed to become a two-year school. And I started going there, because I couldn't go to the business school my sister went to.

My sister graduated with a three-year degree after seven years of studying, so it was almost like high school. But they weren't accepting students who couldn't come on Saturdays. You had to go [to school] on Saturdays. My sister managed to finish it, because she had a friend, non-Jewish, who used to come to her after school on Saturdays. She'd drop by at our place on the way home. This friend used to leave her notebooks, some notes. Sometimes she would come on Sunday and would show my sister what she needed to do to catch up. And it was so that on Saturdays they had important classes in that school. And later they turned it into a four-year school with the high school final examinations, and there was no mercy, you had to attend on Saturdays, so it wasn't for me, since Father would never agree to it.

Out of all classes, in both schools I always liked mathematics best; it was called arithmetic at that time. And I also liked Polish, but I didn't like history much. I don't remember why I didn't like history, probably because of the teacher. But I don't remember who taught it, they were usually women.

Out of the teachers I remember one lady - a Christian - Miss Witekowna. She later got married and her name was Mrs. Prazuchowa. I was in the first grade, and I remember, I could read and write a bit, so in the first and second grade Miss Witekowna, who liked or favored me, let me come to her home and she used to lend me books to read. I used to go with her to her home after school, she lived quite far, in another neighborhood, and she used to lend me books. And later, after I read it, she would ask me what it was about; she was checking whether I had really read it. And she was very kind. She lived somewhere close to Ogród Strzelecki. Later I belonged to a library, but those first books, I remember, I had from her.

That business school I went to was such a school that was really preparing for an accountant's assistant. So my sister, when I finished that school, she was already working and I did something like my apprenticeship in that company, when I wasn't quite 14 yet. That was my first job. It was a

textile company. The owners were two partners, my sister was an accountant there. It wasn't any serious bookkeeping, since it wasn't a big company. But they let me come there for a while, I was at the cash desk, I would write some receipts - the cashier will pay, and so on... I even remember that they, those owners, started during that time, I think in Bielsko [140km from Tarnow] a small workshop with looms, where they started manufacturing some fabrics on a small scale, and I did some calculations of those fabrics for them, and they were very happy with me.

Later I started working as an accountant in some other company, and, I think, one of these partners, because there were also two partners there, was related to one of those for whom my sister worked. The new company's name was Guter and Melinger, and they manufactured and sold ready-to-wear clothes, both wholesale and retail. There were a lot of stores and workshops with ready-to-wear clothes in Tarnow. Where I worked, one of the owners was a cutter and he would cut fabric that was later given some home-workers to sew. They would sew at home and bring those suits, and every week I had to clear accounts with them. Later they were sending those suits [to clients]. I remember there were clients even close to the eastern border.

Regardless of that, you could also buy something right there, except the entrance wasn't at the front, but from the back yard, so not too many clients from the street were getting there. But there was a boy, I don't know on what conditions he worked, probably on commission - a kind of a tout. Whenever he saw someone walking by a ready-to-wear clothes store, he would tell them there was another store, somewhat cheaper, because it was actually cheaper at our store.

At this Guter and Melinger I did real bookkeeping, checks and balances, that's what it was called. I had to clear accounts with those home-workers, who used to come on Fridays, and had their payday, and I paid them, and filled out some forms. I also took care of the correspondence.

I worked there until the beginning of the war. And even a few days after it broke out, because I remember one incident, it was already war and there was an alarm, the siren was announcing that everyone should seek shelter, because there were some airplanes somewhere. And I was running, I remember, home from that store. It wasn't far, but I was so scared and agitated by it, because I thought that for as long as the siren was on nothing would happen to me, but when it stopped, they could start bombing.

## **The Jewish history in Tarnow**

When it comes to Tarnow, before the war there were probably about 50 percent of Jews among the inhabitants, so about 30 thousand, because it was a city with a population of 50 and later 60 thousand. Where we lived, on Szpitalna Street, it wasn't a strictly Jewish neighborhood, but most houses were occupied by Jews. We lived in a two-storey house, and a few years earlier occupants of those houses were mixed. But just before the war only Jews lived there. And there were mostly Jews in that neighborhood.

Another, even more strictly Jewish neighborhood was near the market. There was a fish market, where my relatives lived, and there were only Jews there. But there weren't very many Jews in the area where my business school was - on Matejki Street, and where that friend of mine, who let me stay with her later, lived - on Parkowa Street. It was the area of Ogród Strzelecki, and there was a seminary there. That was the neighborhood where fewer Jews lived. But on the main street that went through that area - Krakowska Street, there were some Jewish stores there.

We didn't know any rabbi personally, but I had a friend who was a rabbi's daughter. Her name was Horowitz. And she had two younger brothers; I remember they used to wear velvet hats, even as kids they were dressed like that. And I remember that during the war someone took a picture of them, when the final persecutions started. The photograph was shown in a Nazi newspaper - 'Völkischer Beobachter' [a daily newspaper bought by Adolf Hitler and the NDASP in 1932, published till the collapse of the Third Reich, used as a tool of Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda]. On the first page there was the picture of those two boys - with blue eyes, they were very pretty kids - with a caption, reading 'growing generation of villains.' It matched them perfectly, such pretty kids...

I remember there was a mikveh in Tarnow. Dad always used to go there on Fridays. I know also, that women had to take a ritual bath there before the wedding. It was a big bathhouse on the Plac Boznic [literally: Synagogue Square]. Later it was used as a point of getting to the ghetto [8](#) or from the ghetto, because its one side was out of the ghetto, but the other side had an entrance inside the ghetto. The mikveh was on the Plac Boznic. And I had a relative, who lived on the Aryan side, and whose parents lived in the ghetto. He worked on the railway. And he was getting to the ghetto in such a way that he would enter from the Aryan side in that uniform, a coat with railway buttons, and once inside he would put the coat inside out, put some hat on, hide the other one, and would exit on the Jewish side.

We used to buy meat at the kosher butcher, of course, in the Jewish store - there was no doubt about that. But it happened sometimes that we'd buy something live, like for Rosh Hashanah. We had to have a sacrificial hen. We would say a prayer and spin the hen above the head. And then we'd take the hen to the butcher, and there was this shochet that would kill it. And I really hated it when they were spinning that hen over the head. Because it was flailing her wings and I was afraid it would do something to me.

When it comes to Tarnow, I don't remember any anti-Semitic incidents. Both groups - Jewish and Christian - lived separately, and aside from trade or meetings of the intelligentsia, there were no other contacts. We kept in touch with some non-Jewish neighbors. We had one neighbor above us, who every Sunday morning, before she went to church, came by, kneeled in the middle of the kitchen, and asked whether she looked good, whether her stockings fit her well, if she had put her skirt on correctly. That was Mrs. Dankowa. We had a good relationship with her. On the ground floor there were neighbors who had boys my age, and they always invited us over for Christmas and for Easter, that real Easter. And we used to get a chocolate egg or something like that.

### **During the war**

I remember news about the changing situation in Germany, when Hitler was coming to power [9](#). They used to even say that a year before the war they started throwing Jews of Polish descent out of Germany [10](#). Those who had once emigrated from Poland, either themselves or their ancestors. And it was this big operation, they were evicted, and sent away, and it happened at times that on the border entire transports were stopped. They had to be received and placed.

Out of such a transport I had a friend for some time. She didn't speak Polish and she was so unhappy. I don't remember who recommended her to me, but I decided to teach her Polish. I remember she couldn't understand why we need seven cases if she's got four and she can say everything. Her name was Hania Sznur. I remember that others from those transports were going

from one house to another and kids were making fun of them, because they spoke in broken Polish. One would say: 'Jestem biedna emigranta' [broken Polish for: 'I'm a poor emigrant']. Of other international affairs I remember there were talks about Anschluss [11](#) and about the dangers of fascism.

In our family we never talked about emigration. In my childhood there were some discussions about something else, when we weren't too well off, Father's brother, the one from Lodz, Uncle Baruch wanted to help us and there was a suggestion that we move to Grandpa's to Stopnica. My mom wouldn't hear about that and we were crying, my sister and I, that they talk about moving. But later everybody forgot about it.

We had the first bomb in Tarnow even before the war broke out. It was placed, or thrown, at the train station. There were horse carriages in front of the station, and I remember perfectly well that after the explosion the horses, scared, ran trotting across the town, white, covered with dust, because the building collapsed there. On the same day we saw our teacher to the station, because she decided to go home to Cracow. And that bomb exploded when the train from Krynica [Krynica, a mountain health resort, 70km from Tarnow] arrived, about an hour later. Tarnow was a fairly large railroad junction, since all trains to Krynica, Nowy Sacz, Cracow, Lwow, were going through Tarnow. And then [when the bomb exploded] we all knew that it's a sign of the war. Later, I remember, there was also an air raid.

I remember, I was woken up by horrible thunder, I looked up, and the lamp was rocking above my head, swinging really, it was such a tremor. We lived on Szpitalna Street [literally: Hospital Street], there were two hospitals on that street, one public, and a few hundred meters further a Jewish hospital. The bomb landed there, it didn't hit the hospital, but exploded right in front of it. Later there was a huge hole in the street, and then we knew the war was here for serious.

I remember when the German army was marching in and tanks were entering the city. There was a smell of some weird gasoline, I remember. Everyone was scared, of course nobody knew how it would turn out; they were saying it wouldn't last long, that it would change, that England and France would help us.

So I still worked during that time for two, three weeks. But they [the employers] started liquidating the store and later I just stayed at home. It became so 'war-like' that my sister wasn't working anywhere either. It looked like we wouldn't have money to survive because that dairy that I mentioned earlier, which existed for only two years, was damaged when the central prayer house in Tarnow was blown up. [Editor's note: The New Synagogue on the corner of Nowa and Folwarczna Streets was opened on the birthday of Franz Joseph, that is on 18th August 1908. This explains its other names - Jubilee or even Franz Joseph' Synagogue. It was set on fire in November 1939 and was blown up the same month. In September 1993 the former location of the synagogue was commemorated with a plaque.] I remember that Germans kept trying to blow it up, they were struggling for two days or so before they finally blew it up. Because it was a huge synagogue, with a large dome.

I remember that when a train I was on was getting closer to Tarnow, when I was coming back from somewhere, I could see it shining from a distance of many, many kilometers. It was covered with some copper or something, it was shining like gold. And they were putting explosives under it with no success at first, but when they managed to blow it up in the end, whole big blocks were flying

around. And it was a narrow street [Folwarczna], and the dairy was just across, and got damaged and we were practically left with no means for survival.

So Dad organized himself some job, as an accountant, I don't remember what company it was. And my sister and I began working in a fruit preserve plant, which the Germans opened in the basement of the house taken away from my Grandfather. His wine bottling plant stopped operating before the war, he only had his store upstairs, but those basements in this nice big house downtown [corner of Folwarczna and Goldhammera Streets] were adapted mainly for the production of wine and that's where that plant was.

They were producing some marmalades and juices, and my sister and I worked the night shift there for two, three months, we peeled apples and pumpkins with a special tool, a spoon with sharp edges, we were cutting out scoops, these little round balls. And they made compote, stewed fruit, that instead of little cubes had these balls [of fruit]. My sister and I would come home early in the morning, and I know that the parents were still asleep at home. That was in fall and winter [1939], so it was still dark and we didn't want to wake them up. At the end of the porch in front of our house there was a box for coal and we used to sit on this box and wait until the light was switched on, which meant that Father had gotten up. When the light was on, we knocked quietly, so that we wouldn't wake up Mother and our brother, and Dad would let us in. That went on for maybe two, three months, at the turn of 1939/1940, and then that ended too.

In 1940 we all sat at home, we had no work, neither us nor Dad. Then Mom agreed that we should take a cutting and sewing course. This course was taught by the wife of a doctor, an assimilated Jew. I think she was an amateur, but she had her clientele, and became a dressmaker, because her husband was somewhere in the army, I think, and with that army was running away across the border to Hungary. And she stayed alone and she opened a dressmaking shop. And she accepted apprentices, there were six of us, and taught us cutting and sewing, and also was taking advantage of the fact that we would finish by hand things she made for her customers. She had her clientele, German women used to come there, too.

Back then, in 1940, we could still get around somehow. But it was getting very unpleasant, every couple of days a new announcement appeared saying what [Jews] cannot do and what they have to give up. We weren't allowed to have furs, tea, etc., and everything was punishable by death. The posts were in Polish and German. And men were also not allowed to wear beards, we had a horrible and painful moment when the barber came to our home to shave my Dad's beard off so that he could go outside, because if not, then the Germans would catch him and tear the beard off. Whoever was at home, we all cried, together with Dad.

Grandpa, of course, also shaved his beard off; I don't know what it was like at his place then. But I remember that my grandpa was without a beard, we joked at home then that he looked like an old highlander. Because he was very tall, huge. Dad's beard wasn't very long, but still had to be shaved. And they didn't use a razor, but something nasty, it was called 'razol,' some chemical agent. First it was cut with scissors, and then treated with that 'razol,' it was a lesser sin if treated with 'razol,' I don't know why...

I remember as if it was today that situation in the room, I know where each one of us stood, when they were cutting that beard off. Dad in general limited our outings, because we kept hearing that they caught somebody, tore out the beard of someone else, took that person away and nobody



knows what happened to him. During that time my sister and I were learning German, and Dad used to send either me or my sister to go on that corner where the announcement post was with the newest announcement on what was forbidden. And I had to read it very carefully and repeat, and later Dad would ask questions, and if I didn't know how to answer one, he would get very upset, so I was almost learning by heart what was forbidden.

Back then we were still alone in our apartment, but at the end of 1940 or at the beginning of 1941, they started evicting Jews from certain areas, and also an entire transport of Jews came, I think from Plock. And the Jewish community had to place them somewhere. And because we had two rooms, they took one room away from us and put a family of five there. And the five of us were to stay in the one room, but Mom didn't want to leave the furniture there, so there was no space in our room, because all the furniture from the other room was put into ours.

It was really crowded, and those people were completely different. The girls were going out with boys and they were not the kind of people we would associate with. We did all we could to get rid of that family. It took a couple of months, but we managed to do it, and we had our other room back again.

That was already 1942 and then the first big action [liquidation of Jews] took place during which a lot of people died. We managed to survive because Germans would search by last name, and if they found someone, they would take everyone that lived there. And we weren't on that list. During that first action a lot of people were taken away, many shot on the spot, in apartments or in the yards. And many were taken to the Polish cemetery and shot there. The rest was taken somewhere not too far, to some river, it was the Biala River, I think, and shot there. It was the first mass execution.

Before the first action [June 1942] the ghetto wasn't closed yet, and our house remained in the ghetto. But after that action the ghetto got smaller and was surrounded by a partition and the house we lived in was outside the ghetto. So then we had to move. First to Grandpa's, for a week, maybe two. Later even Grandpa's house was outside the ghetto, and we moved into the area of that destroyed synagogue. There we lived above a bakery, also in a two-storey house and we were two big families there in a two-bedroom apartment. The other family, the Franks, we hadn't known earlier, only met them then, in the ghetto. It was a couple with two sons.

Our grandpa lived separately, he was with his second wife then. They had to move out of their house, and moved into a small room not far from us. Everything was not far once they closed everything. Two of Grandpa's sisters moved in with him, the twins: Brajndla and Sara Lea. They were displaced from Dabrowa.

When we were living in the ghetto, despite all the hardships, there were no excuses when it came to keeping everything kosher. Of course, as much as we could. Food still had to be kosher, Mom never broke those rules. We weren't hungry, at least at the beginning. In order to get food, we had to sell things, whatever was left. We didn't have those more expensive things, because furs, etc. were taken away immediately, but we could still find something from some reserves, some jewelry maybe, I don't remember.

The food was quite basic and there was no fish or anything like that. We used to make fish out of eggs then. We would soak a bun in water, hard-boil an egg, mix everything with onion, make balls,

and then cook them in a vegetable sauce, just like you make for fish dishes. And it was supposed to taste like fish balls. Sometimes we could smuggle something from outside the ghetto, we used to bring flour, sugar from work, and Grandpa's sisters who lived with him traded it somewhere.

We survived the second action [in September 1942], because we all went into hiding. My sister and I hid in one of the basements in our house. I remember that after the last people entered that hiding place, someone on the outside bricked up the entrance. And we managed to save ourselves, and it so happened that Mom and my brother were somewhere else, in some hiding place on Starodabrowska Street, and Dad was somewhere else yet. Dad used to work somewhere, but I don't remember now where it was.

But I remember the Yom Kippur holiday in the ghetto, in 1942. I rebelled then completely and I decided not to fast, which wasn't easy, because we had very modest reserves and hardly anything to eat. Mom did whatever she could to produce something. So she made a kind of potato cake, out of potato flour. It was a big piece, uncut and untouched, so it wasn't easy, but I decided to break the fast and took a bite, and I was as hungry as I would have been if I hadn't eaten anything, or maybe even more. But I proved to myself I didn't die on the spot, because I used to think that if I ate something on Yom Kippur, that meant I would die immediately. Logically I knew it wouldn't happen, but I wanted to prove it to myself. And I did it in great secrecy, no one of my family ever found out that I let myself do it, that on that last Yom Kippur with my parents I didn't fast.

During the third action [in November 1942] I lost my family, only my sister survived. It was in the fall of 1942. On the day of the action my sister went to work, I had escaped from the ghetto a week earlier and stayed at that school friend's of mine I mentioned earlier, Gabriela, her maiden name was Niedojadlo. My sister told me later how it happened. It turned out that our parents were hiding in the same basement as I had with my sister during the previous action, but someone informed on them. It was someone who was taken away. He was at the train station and said he would tell where the Jews were. He was a Jew as well. He thought he would save himself.

There was even this one incident where a son, who was in the Jewish police [12](#), informed on his own mother, he said where she was hiding. He went to that shelter where his mother was hiding and said, 'Don't be afraid, come out, don't be afraid. Come out, don't be afraid, you'll be fine.' And that mother came out. And later they were teasing him when he was leading people to work [13](#), someone from the first row would call this text: 'Come out, don't be afraid', and someone else called: 'You'll be fine' and they'd repeat it, and he would turn back, but could never catch the one who was teasing him.

## **My escape from the ghetto**

I knew that there would be another action, I don't know from where, but most of us knew, they were talking about it, predicting, sometimes not exactly, sometimes it was earlier than they were saying it would be, and sometimes a few days later, but we knew it would happen. When they started talking that an action is about to happen, I left the ghetto on Sunday and on the next day they took my parents and my brother. I remember I said good bye to the parents, and my brother was crying very bitterly, asking me to take him with me, but it was out of the question for several reasons. Besides, Dad didn't approve of me leaving, but he said that since I decided to do so, when it's a matter of life and death, he cannot say no. But he thought I should share everyone's destiny, I shouldn't be looking for another fate.

After all the good bye's I got in touch with that friend of mine, Gabriela. I saw her a couple of times when they took us to work outside the ghetto. Because my sister and I worked at a German company, Madritsch, where we sewed. And that friend lived on Lwowska Street, which was the ghetto's border, and where that shop I worked in was. And that girl came by to see me at work a few times, and even offered to hide me in case I needed it, but first she had to make sure her mother agreed. They were very nice people, her mother agreed.

That Saturday I got in touch with that friend on the other side of the fence. I called some kid and told him he'd get money from me if he went to the store where my friend worked. She came and we decided she would come the next day, on Sunday - we worked half a day on Sundays as well - that she would come there, to Lwowska Street, to my work and she would get me out. I didn't have any right to be there that Sunday, because during the second action I didn't get a stamp, my sister did and I didn't, so I lost the right to leaving. But since those people who let us work knew me by sight, and they didn't know yet who was allowed to leave and who wasn't, I came out and stayed there. I stayed in the washroom upstairs and stood there for a few hours until it turned dark outside.

And that friend picked me up from there. With great trouble, because the gate was locked, she lied to the gatekeeper, told him some story so that he'd let her in, and she was very afraid later how we were going to leave. She came and said [to the gatekeeper] that she needed to use the bathroom, all of a sudden, in a house where the gate was locked. And the gatekeeper didn't know what she wanted, let her in, but told her to go downstairs, quickly.

However, she knew I was upstairs and ran upstairs. She found me and said 'Jesus, Maria, what am I going to do now? He saw me, he opened the gate.' I prepared some money. She went first, and he wanted to lock the gate behind her, but then he saw that one had come in, but two were leaving! He didn't know what was going on. And I pushed the money into his hand and ran off immediately, she held my arm and we left - in the evening, without an armband [14](#) on. And that's how I got to her place.

This is how I managed to escape. But I didn't have the proper papers and I couldn't go anywhere and leave there. I got myself some sort of an ID, but it wasn't a 'Kennkarte' [15](#) which was needed in order to move around freely. I needed money for that, but I couldn't afford it at the time. So I obtained a false 'Ausweis' using her first and last name, and with these papers I couldn't stay at her place officially, so I had to hide.

A week after my escape the third action took place in the ghetto. My sister was at work and when she came back, our parents and our brother were gone; they had taken them in the meantime. I stayed at that friend's for the next few weeks. But my sister was in despair and wanted me to come back, because she couldn't live alone in the empty apartment. And when it turned out that I couldn't go anywhere, I decided to go back to the ghetto. I kept telling myself that if I go back and manage to get myself a false 'Kennkarte,' I'll still leave the ghetto. And so I just went back to the ghetto, a brother of my friend took me back in; I went into the ghetto along with the people coming back from work.

My parents and my brother died in Belzec [16](#). I know it because Gabriela's brothers worked at the train station, and I heard while I was at her place, that they had to take cars with Jews to Belzec and the Germans ordered them to wait there and after some time gave them empty cars back.

When I went back to the ghetto I didn't have permission to work, and with the greatest effort I managed to go back to the same company. I worked there with my sister for one more year, until the end of the summer of 1943. We lived in a house near the ghetto's border, on Lwowska Street, we got the entire house, we were six to eight girls living in one room. The ghetto was divided into two parts - for those who worked and those who didn't, and we lived in that first part, until the ghetto liquidation at the turn of summer and fall 1943. [Editor's note: the complete liquidation of the ghetto took place in November 1943.]

### **From Plaszow to Auschwitz**

Later it turned out it wasn't a total liquidation, but they moved most of the people. First they kept us at a bus station for two days in a row. We had to kneel. On the first day they took people to the camp in Plaszow [17](#) and on the second day the rest of the people went straight to Auschwitz and nobody survived there. My grandfather and those aunts were taken on the second day. My sister and I ended up in Plaszow. I think we were moved on Thursday and the others on Friday. But they all died. My sister and I got to Plaszow and stayed there for a year.

In Plaszow we worked for the same company, which moved there. Because the entire management of that company was from Cracow. We worked shifts there and the day shift was almost entirely from Cracow, those who had been in Plaszow earlier. We were on the night shift almost all the time for quite some time. And during the day they would catch us and take blood. They would catch and take blood for soldiers. And it didn't bother them that it was Jewish blood.

We lived in barracks, 100, maybe 200 people in each, I don't remember exactly. The food at Madritsch's wasn't too bad because he organized some extra bread. And it wasn't that clay that we used to get, but for his employees they were bringing food somewhere from the outside and we used to get a quarter of a loaf of bread for exceeding the norm. So all of us together, these ones that sewed better, sewed as much as we could, taking work from the ones that sewed slower. For example I sewed more and if I got half a loaf, twice the quarter for being over that norm, then we all shared among everyone.

That's how I managed until August 1944 when they moved us to Auschwitz. A few months earlier came a transport of Hungarian women who had already been to Auschwitz, and from Auschwitz they brought them to Plaszow, I don't know on what conditions. They were shaved and wore some gray dresses and looked out of this world. Later along with that transport they took some people from Plaszow to Auschwitz and they called us 'a Hungarian transport' because there were a lot of them there. There were more of them than us.

In Auschwitz they shaved our heads, took away our clothing and put us in such barracks where there were maybe 100 people. Precisely, it was in Birkenau [18](#). For some time I got lucky and worked as a cleaner for the camp officers, I would take things to wash, clean up, sweep floors, things like that. But later we worked physically, and then I was barely alive. They made us dig a new river bed for the Vistula River, and that was the worst time.

In Birkenau we stuck together, my sister and I with three more friends we knew from Plaszow. Up until the moment of one transport from Auschwitz, out of which nobody survived, because everyone died in Stutthof. We were all sent to this transport, but my sister and I were saved by our uncle. But those friends went. I remember we were standing on the square, ready to leave. But we

managed to get in touch with that uncle on the other side of the fence; he was our neighbor through the fence. He was the second husband of my aunt Bela, Mom's sister, he had recognized us earlier, as soon as we arrived at Auschwitz. We managed to let him know we are in that transport, and he quickly took our tattoo numbers. And almost at the last moment one of those camp officers came, she walked along the row and called out those numbers. We came forward, she checked whether the numbers were right and then said, 'Disappear.' And she told us which way we should go and we went back to the camp, which was almost empty and stayed there for a few more months, until the end of December 1944.

## Bergen-Belsen

On 30th December 1944 my sister and I were taken to Bergen-Belsen [19](#) in one of the last mass transports. It was such a transport that the one after us went on foot. It was winter and they gave us paper bags we were to put on. We tied them around the neck so that we didn't get cold and also, if someone had something, they would put it in [the bags, to provide insulation from the cold], hay or something, and we went like that for maybe three days.

The cars were locked and there were small iron furnaces in them, and Germans who guarded us used to heat some food up on them, and sometimes even, if it was a good German, he would let us use one. It was New Year's Eve while we were on the train, and we could hear some sounds of celebration when we were going through Germany. And they unloaded us at Bergen-Belsen and later led us quite a long distance on foot.

They put us in barracks where the conditions were very primitive and there were way too many of us in each one. And there, after a fairly short time, starvation began. There was no work, unless someone got lucky and got something to do in the kitchen or the peeling room. I got lucky. I worked in the peeling room for some time. On top of that I had a friend whom I knew from Auschwitz, who worked in the kitchen, and she used to steal some salt from there. You could get anything for salt, salt was at the price of gold. So sometimes I would look after that salt of hers, because otherwise it would have gotten stolen [by prisoners]. They used to steal from one another.

When I worked in the peeling room, once I smuggled out one sliced potato, it was very dangerous. Or a piece of turnip, I would slice it and put in the sleeves because they used to check under the armpits. They never checked in elbows, so I could fasten a small slice there somehow, to bring it to my sister, since there was already great hunger everywhere. When you went through the search and you were caught, it was enough for them to beat you up badly, and you wouldn't be able to get up.

There were some prisoners that used to steal soup, and later you could trade that soup. Sometimes I got a pot of soup to trade, and if there were 30 portions out of it, I made, lets say, 32, thanks to which my sister and I had soup. You could exchange such a portion for a piece of margarine or a so-called 'Blutwurst' [blood sausage].

There was also a transport from some work camp, not from a death camp, and they still had some aspirations that they needed thread. So we made thread, pulled it out of a blanket and wound it onto a piece of paper and sold it. I learned to wind it so well that it looked as if made in a factory. And I would trade this thread for a piece of turnip for example, that's how we did business.

My sister during that time was literally fading away before my eyes. She was three and a half years older than me, but everyone said about her: 'your younger sister.' They thought she's much younger than me, while I was 20 and she was almost 24. But she looked 15, she was looking really bad. I came down with typhus at the camp, but managed to get better, but when she got sick, she was getting worse and worse every day.

During that time there was absolutely no more bread. However, after we got liberated we found entire barracks filled from top to bottom with moldy bread, because they weren't giving us bread and it went bad. Anyway, they hadn't given us bread for entire weeks, since January, February. For the last two, three months we were only getting brewed turnip, with nothing else, not even salt, just like that, half raw.

It was in these conditions that my sister came down with typhus. I remember, she was placed in a so-called 'rewir' [Polish, literally: territory - here hospital ward]. It was like a hospital, so a place where theoretically you could die in peace, but it wasn't quite like that. Two, three women were put in one bed, and full of lice. The lice were so huge that, literally, in my blanket there was a louse on every thread, on every spot. Those blankets literally walked by themselves.

It was in the last period of the war, I would go to see my sister, try to organize something, bring her something, save her. And then the English came, and liberated us. They were a bit late, say, if they had come a week earlier, there would have been a chance. I had a friend whose sister was also in the same state and she rescued her, but really at the last moment. But my sister was like a skeleton then and it was too late for everything. They freed us on 15th April and she died on 23rd April.

We knew what was about to happen a few days before the liberation. People were talking, and Germans were taking off, there were fewer of them, every once in a while some were leaving. We knew the front was getting closer. And when the English came, they said through the speakers not to worry, that we're free. I remember I wasn't even joyful, I had no idea how to be happy. I couldn't believe it was really the end, I wasn't really conscious of anything.

### **After the liberation**

After the liberation they deloused and fed us, and after a while they began moving us to a different place. It was about two, three kilometers from the camp. There were barracks in which Hungarians working for the Germans used to live. They had been sent away and we got an entire town of barracks. Tens of two-storey houses forming these squares. There were also one-storey houses for diners, theaters and administration. Initially they turned most buildings into hospitals. And then more or less it turned into a DP camp, a camp for displaced persons [Editor's note: Prisoners of Nazi concentration camps and other people moved against their will by the German administration during and after the war, were called Displaced Persons and placed in special camps from which they were moving to target places (country of origin, emigration)].

There were also transports of Poles from forced labor camps. At first there was some plan to move us, and they packed some people onto trucks and sent us to the Belgian border; I was among them. First they took us to Diepholz [today Germany, 120km from Hamburg], then from Diepholz to Linge [today Germany, 60km from Cologne], and they kept moving us every few weeks, and then finally they decided to take us back to Bergen-Belsen.

In the meantime they created a camp high school, and I went to such a high school. The teachers taught whatever they knew, so not all subjects were offered. I remember there was no biology. But there was chemistry, because there was a chemist, there was something like physics, there wasn't much of it. During that time refugees from Poland started coming. There were those who survived the war in Russia, or somewhere with Aryan papers, in any case entire transports were coming, and, among others, my future husband, Leon, got there from Russia. He was in Poland and when it turned out he couldn't find anybody, because everyone was killed, he got on a transport to Bergen-Belsen and we met then.

For some time I worked for the English administration of the camp, they created a search office there. They created files and people from all over the world were searching for each other. They were looking for us and we were looking all over the world, so there were many of the staff there, and I typed, because I knew German and English. I remember also I used to type names of the sought-after on cinematic film that was shown in movie theatres before a movie, to help with the search. A few people got found thanks to this.

We didn't have to work and go to school in the camp. It was voluntary. They just fed us, we had these coupons, and there were diners, where we were getting food rations. And when I started working they paid us with cigarettes and chocolate. And you could exchange it somewhere. But at the end, right before we left, there was the first big exchange of that German money which was worth nothing, they would cut off some zeroes and print new money. Then I received my last pay in the search office in marks [German currency], not some cigarettes or something.

The camp was closed and there were gates through which we could normally go out to freedom, but once or twice there were some incidents and they locked those gates as punishment. Once somewhere in the area a cow or a calf got stolen, and they suspected, probably rightly so, that it was stolen by someone from the camp. There were also some demonstrations, when there was that episode with the ship 'Exodus.' We went then to demonstrate to Hamburg, which is where the ship was. [Editor's note: In July 1947 British war ships intercepted on the Palestinian coast the 'Exodus 1947' ship with 4,500 Jewish refugees on board. They were forced to turn back and go to the Marseille harbor in France. Then they had to go to Hamburg in Germany where the police forced them to leave the ship.]

## **Married life**

I married my husband in Bergen. It was on 11th September 1947. We got married in the office, and I remember that my husband didn't understand German and didn't say anything. At some point I had to give him a sign so that he'd said 'Ja' [German for 'yes']. Some family members can't forgive us until this day that it wasn't a real Jewish wedding. But nobody was thinking about that back then.

Bergen was a town a few kilometers away from the camp. And that was the only contact with Germans we had then. We had everything else in the camp. There were also some trading contacts. We used to get coffee, which was unattainable to Germans. Germans drink a lot of coffee, and they were selling up, some of them completely, for coffee. I remember I bought an old sewing machine in Hamburg that I still have even today.

We stayed at the camp until 1948, and then decided to go back to Poland. Everyone was advising us against it. But I wanted to study more, and I thought it would only be possible in Poland. Besides, I was very much attached to the language and couldn't really imagine living anywhere else.

In Poland first we went to Wroclaw, because I already knew then that two younger brothers of my mother, Rafael and Mozes, had survived. They stayed in Russia during the war, and later came to Wroclaw. And we came with a box in which I had all my belongings, and that old Singer sewing machine, and I had an ax which I brought as well. I remember Mom's Brothers laughed at me when they saw the box, because they thought I brought some treasures from Germany, but in reality there were just my shabby things in there.

Later I went to Lodz to look for the rest of the family. And I got there exactly when my cousin Sara Lea [daughter of Baruch, Gizela Fudem's father's brother] and her husband were ready to leave for Israel. I managed to see her then. I decided to stay in Wroclaw then. It was still 1948, and after some two months of being in Poland I took university entry exams, humanities then, because I thought I'd study English, and I thought I'd like that. But later it turned out I preferred science and moved to the polytechnic where I got a degree in civic engineering, a bachelor's and a master's degree. In the meantime I began working at the construction mechanics faculty, I worked there as an assistant for nine years. And later I moved to a design office, where I worked until my retirement.

### **My daughter Barbara**

Our only daughter was born in 1955. Her name is Barbara and she currently lives in the USA. She graduated from a university here, she took biochemistry, and she emigrated in 1981. She couldn't find herself a place for herself here. Besides, all her friends scattered around the world and she couldn't really find herself here. Since I had relatives in America, she decided to go there.

I remember, when she was little, she was a strong Polish patriot; when we started talking about maybe moving to Israel, she was close to committing suicide. It was absolutely unacceptable for her. She went to America with me when she was eleven, and for the first time she heard people talk badly about Poland. Because those were emigrants who escaped after the Kielce Pogrom [20](#). And she was very upset about it. Once, it so happened, that when they started talking, she ran away from someone's apartment, at night, and I was looking for her all over New York, a strange city. And she opened up a bit after that.

She always knew she was a Jew, we never hid anything from her, but she had little contact with Judaist practices, because we observed no traditions. But all her friends were non-Jewish, so she had a Christmas tree at home, which she never mentioned in the USA in order not to upset her cousin who was very conservative, and practically it was no problem for her. But when she went to the USA for the second time as a 17-year-old girl, she saw what it looked like and later, when she came back, she decided that if she has a family, her children would know something about Judaism. So she really missed it that she had gotten nothing [that is, that as a child she was not taught Jewish traditions].

Now, having two children, whenever she doesn't forget, she burns candles Friday nights, just for the kids. She celebrates some of the holidays, for example Purim. For Pesach she was a couple of



times invited over by my pious family, so she knows what it's supposed to look like, and her children know they are Jewish. Her husband is Jewish, but from Belarus. He emigrated a year or two before she did. With his entire family, he has his parents, sister and aunt there. They aren't pious, he didn't really know anything about those things, and she kept teaching him, but until this day he mixes everything up.

### Post-war events

Here in Wroclaw since the beginning we've had contact with Jewish circles connected with TSKZ [21](#). We also used to go to the Jewish theater on Swidnicka Street [22](#), back when Ida Kaminska [23](#) used to perform there. The only contact I have with the Jewish community is when I pick up matzah for Pesach. I also have an ID from the Association of the Repressed. And sometimes we went to celebrate the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising [24](#), because my husband comes from Warsaw. The group of those who go there keeps getting smaller and smaller.

I never tried to hide the fact that I'm Jewish. All my Polish co-workers always knew. I even taught them the Hebrew alphabet, I don't know if they still remember, but I taught them to sign their names. I couldn't stand to hide it. When during the war I spent a few weeks on the Aryan side, this false situation, when I couldn't say what I wanted, was very hard for me to stand. That's why later I never hid it again.

After the war I encountered anti-Semitism for the first time in 1956 [25](#). I was working at Gazoprojekt, that was a design office, for a few months during that time. Then that thaw began. I overheard accidentally - because I don't think they did it on purpose to upset me - an extremely anti-Semitic conversation about Jews, that the persecutions are good, that maybe they'll finally go to work now, they should do some work, and so on... I was really shocked because I saw nothing of the sort during my studies.

I remember also in 1968 I didn't feel great, and it must have been obvious, because one of the co-workers came up to me, he bumped into me somewhere on the stairwell, patted my shoulder - 'Don't worry about it' - he said - 'First it was the AK [26](#), now it's the Jews, people have to have something to complain about.' And in 1968 [27](#), because I was never in any party and never had any position, I didn't suffer either. Those who had something to lose, suffered. And I didn't. But I remember that witch-hunt on television and in the newspapers, and the fact that more and more of those few friends that I had suffered in some ways and decided to leave. And the disappointment when we understood that we don't really have much to look for here. Then this other side takes over, because when I'm among Jews from out of Poland, I feel very Polish, but when I'm among Polish non-Jews, I feel very Jewish. And there's nothing I can do about it, and I felt it very strongly during that time. It was a sea of hurt.

We considered emigration to Israel twice. First time in 1956, I was in Israel then, my daughter was still tiny. There was already this wave then and people began to talk about it. It was then when all my friends were leaving, so I went there to look around. And actually, if I had decided to do so then, I still had relatives there who would have helped, but my husband had no relatives and had a job here. He was independent and didn't want to go, start everything from scratch, and depend on someone else. And in 1968, when we considered it for the second time, my daughter didn't want to hear of it.

Martial Law [28](#), I was very upset about it. Because there was so much hope and openness, that when everything all of a sudden changed for the worse, I thought that it's something that could never go back to normal, that it would never come back. I remember how disappointed I was about 'Polityka' [a weekly magazine on social and political issues], because we used to read 'Polityka' earlier. And then it wasn't published for some time, and later there was some purge and a few authors that I used to enjoy reading disappeared from 'Polityka.' And then I realized what it means, such a purge.

I remember that 'Polityka' was saving me during that worst witch-hunt, since it was fairly decent. And now, after the change of the system we live, if I were younger, I'd say, better. If I were getting younger, not older. And I think that a lot of those people who complain and say that it's worse now, it's just because they have gotten old.

Today I live from day to day, and we go out less and less with my husband. We keep in touch with our daughter and grandchildren in the USA, and with some of friends from our youth, like for example that friend, Polish - Gabriela, who lives in Zakopane nowadays and she calls sometimes. My granddaughter's middle name is Gabriela in her honor.

A few years ago a publisher associated with the former camp in Bergen- Belsen was interested in my story from the time of the Holocaust, they even interviewed me. But now I could tell my whole life story for the first time, and I'm very happy about it.

## Glossary

### **1 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, Drua and Dnieper, a total of 92,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> and over a million inhabitants. Russia took the Ukrainian and Belarus lands east of the Druja-Pinsk-Zbrucz line, altogether 280,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> and 1.2 million inhabitants. The Prussians took the remainder of Podlasie and Mazovia, Warsaw, and parts of Samogitia and Malopolska, 55,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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 Masovia, a total surface area of 47,000 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 1.2 million.

### **2 Stutthof (Pol**

Sztutowo): German concentration camp 36 km east of Gdansk. The Germans also created a series of satellite camps in the vicinity: Stolp, Heiligenbeil, Gerdauen, Jesau, Schippenbeil, Seerappen, Praust, Burggraben, Thorn and Elbing. The Stutthof camp operated from 2nd September 1939 until 9th May 1945. The first group of prisoners (several hundred people) were Jews from Gdansk. Until 1943 small groups of Jews from Warsaw, Bialystok and other places were sent there. In early 1944 some 20,000 Auschwitz survivors were relocated to Stutthof. In spring 1944 the camp was extended significantly and was made into a death camp; subsequent transports comprised groups of Jews from Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Lodz in Poland. Towards the end of 1944 around 12,000 prisoners were taken from Stutthof to camps in Germany - Dachau, Buchenwald, Neuengamme and Flossenburg. In January 1945 the evacuation of Stutthof and its satellite camps began. In that period some 29,000 prisoners passed through the camp (including 26,000 women), 26,000 of whom died during the evacuation. Of the 52,000 or so people who were taken to Stutthof and its satellites, around 3,000 survived.

### **3 German Invasion of Poland**

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

### **4 Hasid**

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

### **5 Anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s**

From 1935-39 the activities of Polish anti-Semitic propaganda intensified. The Sejm introduced barriers to ritual slaughter, restrictions of Jews' access to education and certain professions. Nationalistic factions postulated the removal of Jews from political, social and cultural life, and agitated for economic boycotts to persuade all the country's Jews to emigrate. Nationalist activists took up posts outside Jewish shops and stalls, attempting to prevent Poles from patronizing them. Such campaigns were often combined with damage and looting of shops and beatings, sometimes

with fatal consequences. From June 1935 until 1937 there were over a dozen pogroms, the most publicized of which was the pogrom in Przytyk in 1936. The Catholic Church also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism.

## **6 Karlsbad (Czech name)**

Karlovy Vary): The most famous Bohemian spa, named after Bohemian King Charles (Karel) IV, who allegedly found the springs during a hunting expedition in 1358. It was one of the most popular resorts among the royalty and aristocracy in Europe for centuries.

## **7 Beit Yaakov (Hebrew)**

House of Jacob, Yiddish: Bajs Jakow): a school organization for religious education of Jewish girls. The first school of this type was founded in 1917 in Cracow by Sara Szenirer. The idea of creating female religious schools was supported by orthodox activists of the Agudat Israel party; a network of schools was started. In the 1930s over 110 Beit Yaakov institutions with almost 31,000 students were operating in Poland. A seminar for teachers started operating in Cracow in 1927, and a business high school in Warsaw in 1935. The institution also used to publish its own magazine, 'Bajs Jakov.' The program of Baj Yakov schools included learning the basics of the Hebrew language, general information on the Pentateuch, the learning of psalms and prayers meant for women, lectures on liturgy, holidays, rules of Jewish ethics. With time lay subjects (Polish language, Polish literature and history, geography) were also added to the schools' program, thanks to which they attained the status of public schools.

## **8 Tarnow Ghetto**

The population of Tarnow was 52,000 in 1939, out of which 48 percent were Jews. In March 1941 they were forced to move into a designated area, which was turned into a ghetto in February 1942. Later Jews were also brought in from the surrounding towns and villages, as well as from the Czech lands and Germany; altogether some 40,000 people were deported there. From the summer of 1942 until September 1943 there were continuous deportations to the death camp in Belzec. In September 1943 the ghetto was liquidated; 2,000 people were sent to the camp in Plaszow, and 8,000 to Auschwitz. A few hundred workers employed in the town managed to survive there until 1944.

## **9 Hitler's rise to power**

In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one-third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor. On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down. The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates. The new Reichstag passed an extraordinary resolution granting the government special legislative powers and waiving the constitution for 4 years. This enabled the implementation of a series of moves that laid the foundations of the totalitarian state: all parties other than the NSDAP were

dissolved, key state offices were filled by party luminaries, and the political police and the apparatus of terror swiftly developed.

## **10 Eviction of Polish Jews from Germany**

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

## **11 Anschluss**

The German term "Anschluss" (literally: connection) refers to the inclusion of Austria in a "Greater Germany" in 1938. In February 1938, Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg had been invited to visit Hitler at his mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden. A two-hour tirade against Schuschnigg and his government followed, ending with an ultimatum, which Schuschnigg signed. On his return to Vienna, Schuschnigg proved both courageous and foolhardy. He decided to reaffirm Austria's independence, and scheduled a plebiscite for Sunday, 13th March, to determine whether Austrians wanted a "free, independent, social, Christian and united Austria." Hitler's protégé, Seyss-Inquart, presented Schuschnigg with another ultimatum: Postpone the plebiscite or face a German invasion. On 11th March Schuschnigg gave in and canceled the plebiscite. On 12th March 1938 Hitler announced the annexation of Austria. When German troops crossed into Austria, they were welcomed with flowers and Nazi flags. Hitler arrived later that day to a rapturous reception in his hometown of Linz. Less well disposed Austrians soon learned what the "Anschluss" held in store for them. Known Socialists and Communists were stripped to the waist and flogged. Jews were forced to scrub streets and public latrines. Schuschnigg ended up in a concentration camp and was only freed in 1945 by American troops.

## **12 Jewish police**

Carrying out their will the German authorities appointed a Jewish police in the ghettos. Besides maintaining order in general in the territory of the ghetto the Jewish police was also responsible for guarding the ghetto gates. During liquidation campaigns most of them collaborated with the Nazis; in the Warsaw ghetto each policeman had to supply at least five people to the Umschlagplatz every day. The reason for joining the Jewish police, first of all, was based on the false promises of the Germans that policemen and their families would be saved. In the Warsaw ghetto the Jewish police was headed by Jakub Szerynski; during the 'Grossaktion' (the main liquidation campaign in the summer of 1942), the Jewish Fighting Organization issued a death warrant on him, and he was to be executed on 20th August 1942 by Izrael Kanal. The attack failed, Szerynski was only wounded, and in January 1943 he committed suicide.

## **13 Placowka**

Lit. 'station' (Polish), the place of work of Jews employed outside the ghetto. Jewish workers used to work for example on the railroad, in private German companies, in businesses and institutions, SS, police and Wehrmacht, and also in city administration. Jewish workers lived in the ghetto and every day were leaving for many hours to work outside the ghetto. They were paid for their work with a modest meal, sometimes a small amount of money. 'Placowki' existed since the beginning of the occupation; their number grew in the spring of 1942. During liquidation actions in the ghettos their employees were often protected, at least for some time, from deportation to a death camp.

#### **14 Armbands**

From the beginning of the occupation, the German authorities issued all kinds of decrees discriminating against the civilian population, in particular the Jews. On 1st December 1939 the Germans ordered all Jews over the age of 12 to wear a distinguishing emblem. In Warsaw it was a white armband with a blue star of David, to be worn on the right sleeve of the outer garment. In some towns Jews were forced to sew yellow stars onto their clothes. Not wearing the armband was punishable - initially with a beating, later with a fine or imprisonment, and from 15th October 1941 with the death penalty (decree issued by Governor Hans Frank).

#### **15 Kenkarta**

(German: 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.

#### **16 Belzec**

Village in Lublin region of Poland (Tomaszow district). In 1940 the Germans created a forced labor camp there for 2,500 Jews and Roma. In November 1941 it was transformed into an extermination camp (SS Sonderkommando Belzec or Dienststelle Belzec der Waffen SS) under the 'Reinhard-Aktion,' in which the Germans murdered around 600,000 people (chiefly in gas chambers), including approximately 550,000 Polish Jews (approx. 300,000 from the province of Galicia) and Jews from the USSR, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Norway and Hungary; many Poles from surrounding towns and villages and from Lwow also died here, mostly for helping Jews. In November 1942 the Nazis began liquidating the camp. In the spring of 1943 the camp was demolished and the corpses of the gassed victims exhumed from their mass graves and burned. The last 600 Jews employed in this work were then sent to the Sobibor camp, where they died in the gas chambers.

#### **17 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.

### **18 Birkenau (Pol**

: Brzezinka): Also known as Auschwitz II. Set up in October 1941 following a decision by Heinrich Himmler in the village of Brzezinka (Ger.: Birkenau) close to Auschwitz, as a prisoner-of-war camp. It retained this title until March 1944, although it was never used as a POW camp. It comprised sectors of wooden sheds for different types of prisoners (women, men, Jewish families from Terezin, Roma, etc.), and continued to be expanded until the end of 1943. From the beginning of 1942 it was an extermination camp. The Birkenau camp covered a total area of 140 ha and comprised some 300 sheds variously used as living quarters, ancillary quarters and crematoria. Birkenau, Auschwitz I and scores of satellite camps made up the largest center for extermination of the Jews. The majority of the Jews deported here were sent straight to the gas chambers to be put to death immediately, without registration. There were 400,000 prisoners registered there for longer periods, half of whom were Jews. The second-largest group of prisoners were Poles (140,000). Prisoners died en masse as a result of slave labor, starvation, the inhuman living conditions, beatings, torture and executions. The bodies of those murdered were initially buried and later burned in the crematoria and on pyres in specially dug pits. Due to the efforts made by the SS to erase the evidence of their crimes and their destruction of the majority of the documentation on the prisoners, and also to the fact that the Soviet forces seized the remaining documentation, it is impossible to establish the exact number of victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the basis of the fragmentary documentation available, it can be assumed that in total approx. 1.5 million prisoners were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, some 90% of who were Jews.

### **19 Bergen-Belsen**

Concentration camp located in northern Germany. Bergen- Belsen was established in April 1943 as a detention camp for prisoners who were to be exchanged with Germans imprisoned in Allied countries. Bergen- Belsen was liberated by the British army on 15th April, 1945. The soldiers were shocked at what they found, including 60,000 prisoners in the camp, many on the brink of death, and thousands of unburied bodies lying about. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 139 -141)

### **20 Kielce Pogrom**

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

### **21 Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews (TSKZ)**

Founded in 1950 when the Central Committee of Polish Jews merged with the Jewish Society of Culture. From 1950-1991 it was the sole body representing Jews in Poland. Its statutory aim was to develop, preserve and propagate Jewish culture. During the socialist period this aim was subordinated to communist ideology. Post-1989 most young activists gravitated towards other Jewish organizations. However, the SCSPJ continues to organize a range of cultural events and has its own magazine - The Jewish Word. It is primarily an organization of older people, who, however, have been involved with it for years.

### **22 Ester Rachel Kaminska Public Jewish Theater**

Created in 1950 through the merging of the Jewish Theater from Lodz and the Lower Silesian Jewish Theater from Wroclaw. The seat of the management of the theater was first located in Wroclaw and then moved to Lodz. Ida Kaminska, Ester Rachel Kaminska's daughter, exceptional actress and the only female director in Jewish interwar theater, was the artistic director from 1955. The literary director of the theater was Dawid Sfar. In 1955 the seat of the theater was moved to Warsaw. Ida Kaminski was the director of the theater until 1968 when, due to increasing anti-Semitic policies of the government, she left for Vienna (from Vienna she went to Tel Aviv and later to New York). Most of the best actors left with her. After Kaminska's departure, the theater was directed by Juliusz Berger and, since 1969, by Szymon Szurmiej. The theater performed its plays all over the country and, since 1956, also abroad. The theater still stages plays by Jewish writers (for example Sholem Aleichem, An-ski). It is the only public theater, which puts on performances in Yiddish.

### **23 Kaminska, Ida (1899-1980)**

Jewish actress and theater director. She made her debut in 1916 on the stage of the Warsaw theater founded by her parents. From 1921-28 she and her husband, Martin Sigmund Turkow, were the directors of the Varshaver Yidisher Kunsteater. From 1933 to 1939 she ran her own theater group in Warsaw. During World War II she was in Lvov, and was evacuated to Kyrgyzia (Frunze). On her return to Poland in 1947 she became director of the Jewish theaters in Lodz, Wroclaw and Warsaw (1955-68 the E.R. Kaminska Theater). In 1967 she traveled to the US with her theater and was very successful there. Following the events of March 1968 she resigned from her post as theater director and immigrated to the US, where she lived until her death. Her best known roles include the leading roles in Mirele Efros (Gordin), Hedda Gabler (Ibsen) and Mother Courage and Her Children (Brecht), and her role in the film The Shop on Main Street (Kadár and Klos, 1965). Ida Kaminska also wrote her memoirs, entitled My Life, My Theatre (1973).

### **24 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (or April Uprising)**

On 19th April 1943 the Germans undertook their third deportation campaign to transport the last inhabitants of the ghetto, approximately 60,000 people, to labor camps. An armed resistance broke out in the ghetto, led by the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) and the Jewish Military Union



(ZZW) - all in all several hundred armed fighters. The Germans attacked with 2,000 men, tanks and artillery. The insurrectionists were on the attack for the first few days, and subsequently carried out their defense from bunkers and ruins, supported by the civilian population of the ghetto, who contributed with passive resistance. The Germans razed the Warsaw ghetto to the ground on 15th May 1943. Around 13,000 Jews perished in the Uprising, and around 50,000 were deported to Treblinka extermination camp. About 100 of the resistance fighters managed to escape from the ghetto via the sewers.

## **25 Polish October 1956**

The culmination of the political, social and economic transformations that brought about the collapse of the dictatorial regime after the death of Stalin (1953). From 1954 the political system in Poland gradually thawed (censorship was scaled down, for instance, and political prisoners were slowly released - in April and May 1956 some 35,000 people were let out of prison). But the economic situation was deteriorating and the social and political crisis mounting. On 28th June a strike and demonstration on the streets of Poznan escalated into an armed revolt, which was suppressed by police and army units. From 19th to 21st October 1956 a political breakthrough occurred, the 8th Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee met under social pressure (rallies in factories and universities), and there was the threat of intervention by Soviet troops. Gomulka was appointed First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, and won the support of many groups, including a rally numbering hundreds of thousands of people in Warsaw on 24th October. From 15th to 18th November the terms on which Soviet troops were stationed in Poland were agreed, a proportion of Poland's debt was annulled, the resettlement of Poles back from the USSR was resumed, and by the end of 1956 a large number of people found guilty in political trials were rehabilitated. There were changes at the top in the Polish Army: Marshal Rokossowski and the Soviet generals went back to the USSR, and changes also to the civilian authorities and the programs of political factions. In November 1956 permission was granted for the creation of workers' councils in state enterprises, and the management of the economy was improved somewhat. In subsequent months, however, the process of partial democratization was halted, and supporters of continuing change ('revisionists') were censured.

## **26 Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK)**

Conspiratorial military organization, part of the Polish armed forces operating within Polish territory (within pre-1st September 1939 borders) during World War II. Created on 14th 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. Right after the war, official propaganda accused the Home Army of murdering Jews who were hiding in the forests. There is no doubt that certain AK units as well as some individuals tied to AK were in fact guilty of such acts. The scale of this phenomenon is very difficult to determine, and has been the object of debates among historians.

## **27 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.

## **28 Martial law in Poland in 1981**

Extraordinary legal measures introduced by a State Council decree on 13th December 1981 in an attempt to defend the communist system and destroy the democratic opposition. The martial law decree suspended the activity of associations and trades unions, including Solidarity, introduced a curfew, imposed travel restrictions, gave the authorities the right to arrest opposition activists, search private premises, and conduct body searches, ban public gatherings. A special, non-constitutional state authority body was established, the Military Board of National Salvation (WRON), which oversaw the implementation of the martial law regulations, headed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the armed forces supreme commander. Over 5,900 persons were arrested during the martial law, chiefly Solidarity activists. Local Solidarity branches organized protest strikes. The Wujek coal mine, occupied by striking miners, was stormed by police assault squads, leading to the death of nine miners. The martial law regulations were gradually being eased, by December 1982, for instance, all interned opposition activists were released. On 31st December 1982, the martial law was suspended, and on 21st July 1983, it was revoked.