

# Zuzanna Mensz

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Poland

Interviewer: Aleksandra Bankowska

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*I've met Ms. Mensz thanks to her cousin, Ms. Anna Lanota, another Centropa interviewee. Ms. Mensz lives alone in downtown Warsaw. We had a couple of meetings. She's a very gentle person, always with a smile on her face. She speaks quietly due to her hearing impairment. She loved to talk about her childhood, but the conversation would turn less fluent whenever we touched the postwar times. The interview was interrupted for a few months by her serious health problems.*

My father's parents, the Rossets, came from Volodymir-Volyns'kyy [presently a city in Ukraine; a town in pre-war eastern Poland, ca. 200 km east of Lublin]. I don't remember my Grandpa's name, Grandma was called Pola. Grandpa owned a printing house in Volodymir. The family later moved to Lublin, I don't know why. Grandpa was a middleman in grain trade, and my father used to help him I believe. My sisters and I used to visit our grandparents once a week. They lived on a narrow street stemming from Lublin's main artery, Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street. About the only thing I remember from those visits was my Mom taking us to a candy store and buying us cookies. I don't remember Grandma ever talking to us. She would stroke our heads, but not talk. I generally didn't have any closer relationship with my grandparents. Grandpa died of pneumonia as a relatively young man. I'm not sure which year it was but I remember it very clearly. The family was rather sickly. Grandma died a week after my Father's death, in 1933. It was her only son; she had been very attached to him. I'm not able to tell anything more about my grandparents.

My father had two sisters, Pola and Adela. Pola never married, she lived with the grandparents. I didn't know Adela's husband, he'd left her and emigrated to America [in the 1930s]. She had two grownup children and a girl of my age, Esterka [diminutive for Estera]. She was always ill and Pola took care of her. I remember when my Father got ill Pola came from Skryhiczyn [a village ca. 90 km from Lublin, by the river Bug; the family of Ms. Mensz's mother had an estate there] to take care of him, and she taught me how to cook. I don't know much about Father's sisters, because Mom didn't keep in touch with them after Father's death. Then the war came, I know they were killed.

My maternal grandparents were called Horowicz. Mom's mother, Sara Zlata née Rottenberg, died during labor [giving birth to her next child], she was twenty-something [According to the family saga Nad Bugiem - Rottenbergowie ze Skryhiczyna (By The River Bug - The Rottenbergs From Skryhiczyn) Zlata Rottenberg died in 1917.] She managed to give birth to ten children. She was born in Skryhiczyn. Grandpa was called Hersz Horowicz. He came from Piotrkow Trybunalski. He floated timber from the Skryhiczyn woods to Gdansk by the Bug. He had some business in Gdansk. After Grandma Zlata's death he remarried a widow who already had some children, and later they had a daughter. They lived in Lodz. I remember him visiting Mom in Lublin once. I was 6 at the time I think. He brought us some toys. My elder sister also recalled visiting him in Lodz. That's all I know about him.

All the orphaned children of Zlata Horowicz grew up in Skryhiczyn at Grandpa Rottenberg's manor. My maternal grandparents had a big estate there all the family lived at. As for Mom's uncles Rottenbergs, they were very religious. They wore beards, no payes as far as I remember, but they observed all the regulations. I remember there was no cooking on Saturdays, only the meals prepared the day before were kept in the oven. The dinner was very early in the day and before it Mom's aunt Hena [wife of Mordechaj Rottenberg, Zlata's - Ms. Mensz grandmother's brother] used to call me over to have some gingerbread and milk. There was a small room in the manor, a synagogue of sorts, where [Mom's] uncles prayed together. They were very pious and used to go to a rabbi [tzaddik] to Gora Kalwaria I think [1](#). People in Skryhiczyn spoke Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish, with no Jewish accent but rather the rural one like everywhere in the Lublin region. Mom used to live there until she got married.

Of the ten children [Mom's siblings] I knew seven, not all of them survived [lived to grownup age]. Mom's eldest brother was called Motel, he had a wife and eight very nice children. He was a very religious Jew, reportedly an expert in Talmudic philosophy. He didn't talk to me I think. Perhaps he didn't speak with women at all, but I guess he didn't like it that we [Ms. Mensz often uses 'we', meaning her and her two sisters.] were raised in not a very religious way, we went to Polish schools, we spoke Polish. Motel raised his children in a religious fashion. He even sent his eldest son, whose name I don't remember, to a religious school in Lublin [2](#). He was later in Warsaw in a [religious] school, but he quit, supposedly lost his faith. He was killed in the Warsaw Uprising [3](#). Uncle Motel's second son was called Pinio [diminutive for Pinchas]. He looked after the Skryhiczyn farm, he farmed the land and he bred horses. Third son, Froim, was a very audacious boy. There was this story about him. He went, as everyone, to the elementary school in Skryhiczyn. The teacher kept saying that Jews smell of garlic and onion. When he later told them to write an essay on 'Why do I love Poland?', Froim wrote: 'I love Poland, because lots of onion and garlic is grown here.' Later he had Communist sympathies; he was arrested for hanging red flags on 1st May. Uncle Motel's youngest son was called Dawid and he was my age, we were friends. Uncle also had three daughters: Bala, Hinda, and Zlata. Aunt Hanka [diminutive for Chana], Mom's younger sister, used to grieve over Motel's not giving his gifted children the education. She took to Czestochowa with her first Bala, who later became a nurse, a very esteemed one, and then Dawid, who completed high school thanks to her.

Motel was also raising Mom's youngest brother, the one whose birth resulted in his mother death [in 1917]. His name was Henocho. He moved to Warsaw and founded a printing house. Motel's youngest daughter, Hinda, a very pretty girl, worked there as well. I don't know if there was anything between them, but I don't think so. Henocho died very young of brain tumor.

Another Mom's brother was called Jojl. He was a very good-looking man. He went to Russia, he took part in the revolution [4](#), but he got disillusioned [about Communism] and came back. He never got married; he lived with his younger brother Josel. Josel had a wife, Rachela, who came from Lodz, and five children, bright and pretty. He managed the farm, she was a seamstress and she also ran a tailoring school for country girls. They really struggled to get by, because they only had a small patch of land, same size as what my Mom inherited, seven hectare [ca. 17 acres]. I remember him bringing water in a bucket yoke, because he didn't have his own well at the time and had to use the one in the middle of the village. We liked their home very much. Aunt Rachela was very cheerful and hospitable.

The eldest son of Josel and Rachela, Kalmus, [diminutive for Kalman] was more or less my age. After finishing elementary school he completed on his own [supporting himself] the gymnasium in Hrubieszow, a small town some twenty kilometers from Skryhiczyn. He worked hard every summer at his uncles' farm during haymaking and harvest, and he also tutored, and that's how he was able to pay for his education. He passed the final exams. He married a girl from Skryhiczyn, Hadasa Kaminer, our distant relative. It had been a puppy love. When the war broke out, they went to Russia, up-country. Well, their lives there weren't all roses, naturally, but he worked in a mine, she worked in a canteen, and supposedly it was not that bad. Hadasa got pregnant, though, and wanted to go back to her mother, who was in Volodymir-Volyns'kyy at the time. When they were on their way back, the frontline moved forward and they disappeared without a trace. They were killed.

Kalmus' younger brother was called Szmulek, [diminutive for Szmul] and his youngest Chaimek [Chaim]. He also had two sisters: Sara and Rywcia [Rywka]. Szmulek was not very fond of studying, unlike Kalmus. Chaimek was very talented, he also studied in Hrubieszow and later in Volodymir-Volyns'kyy [Volodymir-Volyns'kyy and Hrubieszow were the nearest towns with gymnasias]. During the war Chaimek, Surcia [Sara], and Rywcia were hiding in the woods around Skryhiczyn, but the Germans found their hideout and murdered them. Szmulek was the family's sole survivor, he was in Russia and he emigrated to Israel right after the war, he still lives there. He got married, he has two children and many grandchildren.

My Mom had two sisters. The aunt I loved most was called Chana. There were these legends about her, that as a young girl she dared walk around Dubienka [a small town near Skryhiczyn] barefoot, it was unacceptable, how come the granddaughter of the Motel Rottenberg walked barefoot?! She took part in the demonstrations in Dubienka, and she ended up in the Bund [5](#). It was there she met her future husband, Aron Percec, who was a dentist from Zamosc. They moved to Czestochowa. They had two children, Zosia [Zofia] and Mietek [Mieczyslaw], whom we always used to spend the summer holidays in Skryhiczyn with. You might say we were raised together, we were like brothers and sisters. I remember my sister Zlatka [diminutive for Zlata] playing four hands [piano duet] with Mietek, they were both very musically gifted. In 1939 Aunt [Chana] and Uncle [Aron] left all their belongings in Czestochowa and fled to Volodymir-Volyns'kyy [After the outbreak of the war many people, especially Jews, fled the Germans eastwards, to the Soviet-occupied areas.]. When my sister and I reached Volodymir, they were already there. They later enrolled for going to up-country Russia [People from the Soviet-occupied parts of Poland could volunteer for work in the eastern federative states of the Soviet Union]. Zosia finished school there, she became an English teacher. They came back to Poland after the war.

Mom's other sister, the youngest one, was called Ita. She was the only one to live with her father, my Grandfather Hersz Horowicz. She studied and passed her final high school exams in Lodz. Inspired by a teacher she left for the already Soviet Russia and she lived there until her death. Her husband was called Rylski, he was the then First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party [6](#). They lived in Moscow, they had three children. She was shot with her husband in 1937, at the time of the Jagoda trials [7](#). They were later rehabilitated of course; their sons even received some kind of compensation. As for their children, they really had a tough life. The girl, Iwonka [diminutive for Iwona], was taken care of by her mother's friend. Later she got married and lives in Israel now. Both Ita's sons went to an orphanage. The elder one, Olgierd, was rebellious and ended up in

prison as a teenager, and later was sent to Siberia. After Stalin's death, in 1956 perhaps, we started looking for them, we established contact and both Olgiard and Michal came back to Poland, they settled in Warsaw. [Joseph Stalin died in 1953. A political loosening followed in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.]

My Mom's name was Mariem Szyfra. I found out it was 'Mariem' later, I'd always thought she was called 'Maria'. She was born in 1886, she was the eldest child. I don't know when exactly she got married; I'm assuming she wasn't very young. She met her husband through a matchmaker. I heard she also tried to liberate herself [emancipate], just like Aunt Chana. As all the girls from Skryhiczyn she completed five years of gymnasium, she used to learn French, she had some education. But eventually she let them find her a husband. My father was called Mosze Rosset. They lived in Volodymir-Volyns'kyy, but later, still before World War I, they moved to Lublin with my eldest sister.

Mom was very pretty, a bit plump. She was a very good person. After Father's death [in 1933], for example, we rented an apartment in Volodymir and we had a neighbor who was even poorer than us. She was a widow with two children, who made her living selling things at the market and fairs. She cooked a meal only once a week. Mom, although really poor herself, used to take this woman's daughter with us on summer holidays to feed her up a bit. Mom was remarkably absent-minded. There were jokes about the whole Horowicz family, they were all considered scatter-brains, they often got distracted, absent-minded, forgetful, and Mom was no different, she would always lose her keys and such. She was not a very religious person, unlike my father. Father was very religious. I remember him attaching the straps with the biblical Commandments [tefillin] to his forehead before prayers. He prayed alone, every day. I don't remember him wearing a yarmulka. He told me not all the religious regulations were reasonable but had to be kept nevertheless, as they allowed Jews to maintain their tradition and identity. There were arguments sometimes, when Mom mixed the milk knife up with the meat one or some such. Mom's relatives valued Father higher than her, because she was absent-minded and not religious, and he was religious. They also liked my Father for his sense of humor, he was witty.

Father stayed home once a week, he had his business trips; I think he traded in grain. He was a middleman. He also had a job in Rejowiec [a small town ca. 50 km south-east of Lublin], he kept the books for a flour mill. I was not really interested at the time in what he did. He always came home [to Lublin] on Fridays and we had a holiday dinner. Mom lit the candles. Father used to drink a small glass of vodka before the meal. He produced it himself from wheat. He would come home on Friday and leave again on Sunday. When we were in Skryhiczyn for the summer, he would come to us just the same, Saturday only.

My elder sister was born in 1909, I was born in 1918. The age gap was quite big. Later our youngest sister was born, a year and a half my junior. My eldest sister was called Sara Zlata, we called her Zlatka. I was nicknamed Zunia [diminutive for Zuzanna]. The younger one was called Hilka. I'm not sure what was her name in the birth certificate, Hinda I think, or perhaps Hilara? Zlatka was born still in Volodymir and us already in Lublin. Zlatka moved to Warsaw to study when she was 16. She studied Polish history at the Warsaw University. She already had Communist sympathies back then. She spent a year in prison for some political affairs. With a sentence like this she was unable to find a work as a teacher. She gave private lessons; she was a very good math tutor. She earned so well on tuition that she was even able to help Mom a little. My father's political

views differed from my sister's but I got the impression he was nevertheless proud of her in a way. It might have something to do with the fact people were not so hostile towards the communists before the war as they are now, communists and socialists were thought to be people fighting for their ideals. Father was generally on better terms with Zlatka than with me and Hilka. Maybe it was because he was younger when she was young, I don't know.

My younger sister Hilka was, as Zlatka used to say, the wisest of us all. She was truly very gifted, but she was also the so-called problem child. Mom always gave in to her. Hilka had her whims, she could say some day she didn't want to go to school and she wouldn't go. As a matter of fact, she didn't have such superb grades in her first years at school, maybe she just didn't feel like learning. But then she had a year off, because Mom could not afford to send us both to school; I went to Lublin to school and she stayed in the country with Mom. It was a very tough time for her. When she started to go to school in Volodymir again a year after Father's death in 1933, she studied really hard and was an outstanding student.

Hilka and I were born already in Lublin. We lived in a house on 1 Cicha Street. Cicha was a small cross-street of Trzeciego Maja Street, right in the center of Lublin. There were many Jews living in Lublin, in some quarters more than in the others. On Lubartowska Street, in the Old Town, beyond the Grodzka Gate around the synagogue lived almost exclusively Jews I think. But there were no formal restrictions. Neither we nor Grandpa Rosset lived in the Jewish quarter.

We had a second floor apartment, with a balcony, three rooms, and a kitchen, no bathroom. Zlatka had her own tiny room while she still lived with us in Lublin. It was a narrow room with a bed and a bookshelf. The dining room and parents' bedroom were big. We had nice, solid furniture in the 'gdanski' style [huge, dark, ornate, middle-class], Mom got them as a gift before she got married. The rooms formed a suite, the kitchen was spacious, a hall, balcony. It was very cozy in there. It was nothing luxurious; our friends said the apartment was dark. Mom sold it all when Father died and she wanted to move away.

Was my family wealthy? Middle-class, I'd say. We had that apartment, which cost much, the food was cheap, Father was paying for my sister's studies. Mom always used to argue with Father - that he wasn't bringing enough money, that he was helping his family; she wanted us to have bicycles for example and he couldn't afford that. But generally we had everything we needed.

Throughout my childhood, until my Father's death, we always had a maid. Mom would usually bring some girls from the country, from Skryhiczyn. One of them was Olga Mickiewicz, who was Christian-Orthodox. There was this story about her that she got appendicitis while she lived with us and she was treated in the Holy Ghost Hospital, managed by the Sisters of Charity [Catholic nuns, whose mission is looking after the sick]. We went to see her every day, and when she got well and came back home it turned out she had vowed to one of the sisters that she will convert to Catholicism. The sisters started to pay us visits, because they wanted her to keep her promise. The girl had to quit [her job as Rossets' maid] and go back home, because she was not willing to change her confession after all. The last of our housekeepers was called Jadzia, a very nice, gentle girl. She had a fiancé, who later left her and my sister Zlata took care of her and soon enough turned her into a leftist activist and had her come to Warsaw. Having a maid wasn't all that expensive back then. Mom used to sew for us by herself, she did the shopping, but we always had a housekeeper.



We spoke Polish at home. Mom spoke Yiddish, Polish, and Hebrew, because some families in Skryhiczyn spoke Hebrew [Knowledge of Hebrew in the Rottenberg family resulted from the religiousness of the elder generation on one hand and the popularity of Zionism among the young on the other]. Grandpa and Grandma Rosset spoke Yiddish. I don't know why, but it so happened that our parents spoke to us in Polish and used Yiddish when talking to each other. I was accustomed to Yiddish, I understood everything, I could read, I remember there were only Yiddish papers in the house. Father tried to introduce us to Jewishness, he told us about the holidays, taught us Hebrew. I've forgotten everything since.

We celebrated all the holidays, Father always made sure we did. I remember Easter [Pesach] the best, because then we'd have the seder, a festive family supper, and my sister would come from Warsaw. The house had to be cleaned, scrubbed before the Holidays, including all the drawers. I remember I once found, to my horror, a slice of dried bread in my table drawer. I didn't tell my Father and threw it out as soon as possible. We had a separate set of dishes, used exclusively on Easter. If a particular dish wasn't double [without a Pesach counterpart], it had to be put into boiling water. The cupboard was full of matzot, we were not allowed to eat a single slice of bread for the whole eight days, and indeed we didn't. We only ate matzot, which Mom would use to prepare many different dishes, for example a cake from matzah flour that you bake similarly to a sponge-cake, or an omelette, the so-called matzebray. You make it like this: first you soak the matzot in water or milk, then add some eggs, two eggs for two matzot, whip the whites, add some salt to taste. You then form a sort of pancake out the mass and fry it on a pan. I still prepare it sometimes.

The seder looked like this: Father sat on a coach in the dining room, the table was pushed closer to the coach, Mom would place pillows on it, because the tradition demanded that the head of the family was comfortable. We all sat at the table, the candles were lit. Father had some matzot of special importance. There was that custom that children could steal the matzot from their father and hide them, he would look for them and if he couldn't find them, the children could say wishes and he had to fulfill them. [Editor's note: The most popular form of the custom was different. The last piece of matzah was hidden from the children and they were given small gifts when they found it.] Naturally, Father had never found any matzot and we could say a wish. Mom prompted us to ask for bikes, but either we had different dreams or we had mercy on him, and our wishes were much more modest... I remember asking him for a drawing pad, oh, Mom was so angry with me! Father would naturally promise to buy the things we wanted, we'd show him where the matzot were and the seder would start. There is this custom that during the seder a child asks its father four questions about the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. I was always the one to ask, although it was supposed to be the youngest child. My sister Hilka was very moody and she wouldn't always do what she was asked to. So it was me who asked the questions in Hebrew and Father answered, reading them aloud. That [Exodus] Haggadah is very long but I think he only read excerpts of it because I don't remember being bored at the table, just some joking, laughing, and finally a normal supper, consisting usually of dishes like broth and chicken. In the meantime Father would drink six, I think, glasses of wine. We weren't given the wine, maybe a sip. Father would always joke a bit when drinking the wine. There was also a glass left for the prophet, but he never showed up.

My sister Zlatka usually came home for the holiday. They lasted eight days and supposedly she couldn't stay that long, so she would leave after four days. Father once asked her not to eat bread

during the remaining days of the holiday. She was already a grownup and an atheist at the time, and she told him she didn't want to make him such promise since she wouldn't keep it. And he blurted out: 'In that case I won't send you the tuition money anymore.' In a fit of pique, she said: 'Alright then.' And from then on she wouldn't accept any money from him.

Easter was a holiday one remembers well, just before the spring would come, it was very nice. And there were also Kuczki [Sukkot] in the Fall. A shack would be made in Grandpa Rosset's backyard and the meals would be eaten in it. There was also Purim, Mom baked special poppy seed cookies for the occasion, they were called hamantashen; it had something to do with a story of some sorts [the story of the evil Haman]. Purim wasn't celebrated the way it is done nowadays in Israel, no one wore costumes. We had the Rosh Hashanah holiday, when Father used to say people should enjoy themselves and gave us apples spread with honey. Then Yom Kippur would come, the fast, you weren't allowed to eat from one evening till the next. My Mother, the kind person she was, always used to bake lots of cakes for that holiday and leave them in an open cupboard so that the children wouldn't starve to death. And so I just decided to fast once, when I was older; I tried not to eat anything and somehow I made it. Mom, however, always fasted and went to the synagogue with my Father. That was the only occasion she would pray. I guess that's the most important holiday of all, Yom Kippur.

Before we started to go to school [until 1930], Mom had always taken us to Skryhiczyn right after Easter. She used to say the urban air was not healthy for the children. So we would pack a horse cab full of baskets with cooking pots, bedclothes, and everything, and leave. We used to go to the country in early spring and leave at the end of summer.

The whole big family Rottenberg lived in Skryhiczyn. There was Skryhiczyn-Dwor [Manor] and Skryhiczyn-Folwark [Farm], 3 kilometers apart. All that owned one family [the Rottenbergs]. During our first visits we probably all stayed in the manor. Later the land was divided between the heirs [According to the book Rottenbergowie znad Buga it happened in 1926.] and Mom got her 17 acres at Skryhiczyn-Folwark. Mom's cousin, who worked in a sawmill, rented her a large shed. I remember the building clearly, we stayed there with my sister and a friend of her; it was a room with a cooking stove. And later Mom decided to build a house. There was a brick wall on the land she inherited, the remaining three had been pulled down, I don't know why. A house was built. It had three rooms and an annex with a traditional country kitchen, with a large stove which you could sleep on, and which you baked bread in. The kitchen was built before the house was finished, we spent our first holidays there. Aunt Hanka [Chana Percec, mother's sister] came to visit us and she liked the place, and added one more room with a balcony and a large kitchen. And so the house had two porches, a balcony, and a great attic. We had our tenant farmers, the Blanders, living in the house whole year round. It was a couple with three children, very religious Jews. He'd earlier worked for some Germans; he was a very good farmer. He built a barn next to the house, had his own horses, a cattle. When the house was finished, one room was occupied by the Blanders and we would take the other two. When we were gone, they used the whole house, and when we came, their two sons slept in the attic.

There were five more houses in Skryhiczyn-Farm apart from ours, among them Aunt Masza Halperin's [sister of Zlata Horowicz, Ms. Mensz's grandmother; the age gap between the sisters was so great that Masza had Ms. Mensz's mother's age despite being her aunt], and in Skryhiczyn there was the manor and the houses of our Uncles Motel and Josel, and of the Kaminers, who were

from our family as well. There was a sawmill between the Manor and the Farm, where the Szydłowski family lived, also our relatives. A bit farther stood the house of a Ukrainian, Demczuk (his wife still lives there). Farther still was the village, where the peasants lived. I've retained in my memory the Techewiczers, a Jewish family. They had a big house; a boy who was friends with my one of my cousins, Guta, lived there. Apparently her parents did not approve of that, as she always used to take me along as a chaperone. The boy made beautiful figures out of wood; he carved a whole chess set for example. He was later a well-known painter in Israel, had his exhibition. There was also the Bocian family, who we bought meat from, they had a little store where we used to go and have ice-cream. A Bocians' boy later married a Ukrainian, they lived in Russia; their daughter was a doctor. There were not too many Poles. The Ukrainians prevailed, as everywhere in the Lublin region.

Aunt Chana didn't come too often but she always sent her children, Zoska and Mietek. A whole bunch of kids used to come to Skryhiczyn every summer, an awful lot of people, and all of them family. Skryhiczyn is our legend, our happy childhood. We had this game, it went on and on. It was called The Kingdom of Fun. The idea was of course Ida Merzan's [née Halperin, daughter of Masza, 1907-1987, educationist and writer, associate of Janusz Korczak]. We had a Queen, it was always Sara, Ida's sister, the most beautiful of the girls; we made a bulletin, flags. It went on for years. We used to go swimming in the Bug river, three kilometers from the Farm, and visit the uncles at the Manor on our way back, they would give us treats and we would go back to the Farm. We often worked in the fields, helping harvesting or threshing. The harvest was still done with scythes. We tied the sheaves and carried them over to the barn. There was a treadmill in the barn and we tossed the sheaves into the threshing machine. We helped our tenant farmers that way, although it was not our duty. When there was some work to do, we did it with pleasure.

Many of the younger members of our Skryhiczyn family left for Israel [Editor's note: Palestine] before the war. During my first visit to Israel [in 1959] I met people from Skryhiczyn I didn't know, but I'd known their parents. Why would they emigrate? I suppose their primary motive was the idea. They were Zionists; they wanted the state Israel to come into being. But apart from that, those young people had no perspectives in Poland. The seemingly huge estates did not allow paying for the children's education. Well, at least not many of them did study. Ida Merzan, who came from Chisinau already after completing high school, literally forced her mother to send her younger sisters to school. She arranged for them to have a teacher, a friend of Zlatka, and she coached them a bit. She then sent them to the elementary school in Dubienka. Ida's sister Hanka, who rode on horseback, used to say: 'I don't need to learn geography - I know how to get to Dubienka anyhow.' They did go to school eventually, however, and they all worked for Korczak at the Orphans' House [8](#). Ida's two sisters later emigrated to Israel and set up their families there.

I started my studying late, either; I went straight to gymnasium. I'd studied at home before because as soon as I'd gone to the kindergarten or school I'd caught a cold. I would always get tonsillitis. They would put compresses on my neck and ears, because I'd get ear inflammation in no time, and so I lay all wrapped up. First a surgeon-barber would come to see me, then, if the illness lasted long, a doctor, his name was Wajnberg. During the summer stays in the country I was sickly just the same. I even remember lying on a sun lounger covered to the chin despite the heat. When I was ten some famous doctor came to Lublin and told my parents I ought to have my tonsils removed. And so I had a surgery and got my tonsils removed. But I haven't grown too tall and it's



said that the lack of tonsils affects your height.

Mom thought I inherited sickness from my father. As a child he'd fallen ill with tuberculosis that hadn't been treated completely and he used to have relapses. He was treated in Krynica and later he went to Otwock [well-known health resorts in Poland]. He also had a heart condition. He never was a completely healthy person. I was ten when he fell ill. I remember we came back home from the summer holidays and Mom told us to be quiet because Father had got ill. It was his first heart attack. He hardly worked anymore from that time on. He lay at home, he was on diet. I lasted three years that way. He did some business sometimes; some clients came to see him. I'm not sure how Mom managed it financially through that couple of years until we finished our schools. They had some savings, I suppose. We had a small profit off the land. My elder sister had already completed her studies by then, she lived in Warsaw; she was a private tutor and helped Mom, she sent her money. Mom also did some tailoring, embroidering, she had a special embroidering machine; she learned how to use it and sold her products.

It all happened at the same time - Father's illness and my going to gymnasium. Mom convinced Father to send us to a public school, where you had to attend on Saturdays, instead of a private, expensive Jewish gymnasium. Father wouldn't allow it at first but we had no money. A public gymnasium was much cheaper - the monthly tuition fee was 20 zlotys, while the private ones cost 60 zlotys [a craftsman earned on average approx. 60 zlotys per month]. The problem was, they allowed only ten percent of the students to be Jewish [9](#); out of 30 students [in the class] there was the three of us Jewish girls. There was an entry exam. I passed it and was admitted. The school was called the Union of Lublin Public [Girls'] Gymnasium.

I was an average student. I was taught geography by Ms. Chalubinska, the daughter of the geographer Chalubinski [Tytus Chalubinski (1820-1889) - doctor, botanist, explorer of the, founder of the Tatra Mountains Museum]. I wasn't that good at geography but I liked the teacher. I also liked the nature teacher. I read a lot. I used to go to the Macierz Szkolna library [Polish Education Community, a national education organization founded in 1905] ever since my first year, the librarians offered me books, gave advice. When I was a bit older I started to use the LSS [Lublin Food Producers' Cooperative] library as well. They had translations of many Soviet books, the revolutionary literature. I'm sure they had Gorky [Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) - Russian and Soviet writer, creator of the Socialist realism literary style], but also How the Steel Was Tempered [a socialist realism novel by N. Ostrovsky]. I read Dostoyevsky at the time as well [Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) - Russian writer].

I sure had school friends, we went to see each other. I remember Zosia Grudzinska, I met her in Lublin after the war. Many of them were killed. I had a friend in a higher grade, she was called Halinka Zandberg. We met in Lwow during the war, she already had a child, her husband was in the army. I know she was killed in the Lublin ghetto.

I had two major influences around me: my sister agitated for Communism and my cousin Sara Leja from Skryhiczyn for Zionism. And I was unfortunately very easily influenced... I remember Sara always took walks with me one summer and agitated. I guess it would be probably better for me if I opted for Zionism. Eventually, however, I followed my sister's steps. There was this youth organization in Lublin, active in many schools which were under Communist influence. When I was in fifth or sixth grade my sister asked a friend to coach me, and I started to attend a self-study

club. We read pamphlets by Radek [Karol Radek, real name Sobelson (1885-1939) – born in Poland, Communist activist in the Soviet Union, he took part in the October Revolution, sentenced for 10 years in 1937, he died in prison], we learned from them.

My Father died in Skryhiczyn in July 1933. He was buried in Dubienka. Mom set up a gravestone there. The tomb made it through the war but under the Communist rule the area was turned into a machine depot. That's how it was – the Jewish cemeteries were being erased. The Turkish ones have not been destroyed, nor the Armenian, nor the Russian, only the Jewish ones.

Lots of things changed after Father's death. Mom sold our Lublin apartment and moved to Skryhiczyn with Hilka. Hilka had a year off from school, as Mom couldn't afford to send us both to school. I was left in Lublin by myself, Mom arranged for me to stay with some friends of her and to have dinners at some others' house, and that's how I spent the year. A year later we moved to Volodymir-Volyns'kyy. My parents had already planned to move to the city, 30 kilometers from Skryhiczyn. It was cheaper there than in Lublin, and Mom had some friends there.

In Volodymir we lived in a different place every year. We would go to school on 1st September and Mom would place us for a month or so at her friends' or some Father's relatives'. She would then come to the town, rent an apartment for nine or ten months and afterwards we would go back to the country again, to Skryhiczyn. Volodymir was a cheap place; you could find an apartment easily. I completed gymnasium there, I went to the public Copernicus Gymnasium. I came from a girls' school in Lublin to a coeducational one in Volodymir and found it hard to settle in, so many boys. Besides, I only spent two years there, until my final exams.

After my exams I went to Warsaw, to my sister Zlatka. Mom stayed in Volodymir with Hilka. We lived in a rented room on Ogródowa Street. My sister made her living with private tutoring, I also got a few people to coach and that's how I earned some money. But Zlatka wanted me badly to have a profession. I said I wanted to become a nurse and she found me a nursing school. It was located on Dworska Street, at the Czyste quarter hospital [10](#). Ms. Szindler, Ms. Lubowska, and Ms. Bielicka taught at the school. (Luba Bielicka is a well-known person; she even has a memorial plate in Warsaw, because she ran the school during the German occupation.) They were very strict teachers. Only Ms. Bielicka was a bit more approachable, maybe because she was also a bit happier. Ms. Szindler completed Florence Nightingale's nursing school in England [Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) – English nurse, founder of the very first nursing school] and she based her school on the principles applied there. The education at the school lasted two and a half years. We only had the theory during the first six months and afterwards we practiced in various wards at the [Czyste] hospital. At first our duty was simply to clean the tables and provide such help, and only in the following years we were allowed to carry out medical procedures. It was a Jewish hospital, meaning it was financed by the Jewish community of Warsaw. The patients varied, however most of them were Jews. Same with the doctors. Naturally, there were often patients who didn't speak Polish, but I understood everything and was able to communicate with them. It was a big hospital, lots of buildings, all kinds of wards. Nowadays there's a children's hospital there.

During my first year in Warsaw I stayed with my sister. Later she moved to Vienna to the man she loved, Srul Bursztyn, who worked there. I think it was in 1937 or 1938. It was an affection dating back to their school years. And anyway, we were friends with his whole family; they lived in Lublin, used to come to Skryhiczyn for the summer. He was a Communist, just like her. Right after she'd

arrived there was the Anschluss [11](#) and Hitler took over Vienna. At that time many communists, with the help from various people, were somehow being transported to England. They were given money for the flight which they returned once they'd reached England. Anyhow, she went to England and someone helped her find a job as a maid. Some time later came her fiancé, who already held an engineering degree, and got a job at a factory. They got married just before the war, in 1939. I remember Mother getting the letter with the news of their wedding. She was happy her daughter got married.

When I was in the nursing school I lived in a dormitory on Dworska Street. There were like four of us in each room. They stressed keeping things in order very much. You had to air your room in the morning, keep your closet perfectly organized. There were many different girls, coming from various families, and I was not the only one who had to learn how to maintain such perfect order as was required. We had a day off once a month.

I used to go to the movies a lot before the war. First with Mom, in Lublin, to children's movies, later with my school and on my own. I still remember seeing Ben Hur in Lublin. In Warsaw I used to go to the Uciecha Movie Theater, on Leszno Street or maybe Wolska Street. It would usually be Polish comedies, starring Dymcza, Bodo [Adolf Dymcza, Eugeniusz Bodo - Polish film actors, entertainers, and pre-war movie stars]. I also saw Soviet movies, which made a huge impression on me, for example Counterplan [aka Turbine Number 50.000, with score by the famous composer Dmitriy Shostakovich], about the making of Socialism, The Road To Life, Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin [Sergey Eisenstein (1898-1948) - innovative Soviet film director and theorist, author of propagandist historical film epics]. Sometimes the nursing school took us to the movies; I remember seeing The Lady Of The Camellias. I didn't go to the theater that much. I sometimes used to get free tickets to the satirical theater Qui Pro Quo a relative of mine worked at. Krukowski was among the performers [Kazimierz Krukowski (1902-1984) - an actor and entertainer].

After my younger sister Hilka had passed her final gymnasium exams Mom sold her land in Skryhiczyn and bought a house in Falenica, just outside Warsaw. It might have been 1938. I was already a student of the nursing school. Mom wanted to live closer to us. We had a deal my sister would start her studies when I completed the school. During the remaining year she gave private lessons, lived with Mom. I used to visit them on my days off. There were two houses next to each other in Falenica. One was relatively small, consisting of four rooms and a kitchen. The former janitor lived in one of the rooms. The owner who sold the house to Mom asked her to let her stay. And Mom said yes. The second house had not been finished off yet. In 1939 Mom found a tenant for the house for the summer. She lived there the entire war. Some more people moved in, finished the house off and boarded it up, so it started to be inhabited. The house still stands there, I'd like to get it back but I didn't know how to deal with that. You'd need a lot of money.

When the war broke out I was in Warsaw, at the Czyste hospital. Most of the personnel moved eastwards after the order from the government [12](#). Maybe five students stayed, the rest went back to their homes. The school was closed. Only the housekeeper stayed and she cooked us meals. We worked at the hospital. The patients able to go home left. When the battles outside the city started the hospital quickly filled up with the wounded, they simply lay all over the floor. Since there were no personnel and no supplies only few of the wards were open, surgery the longest.

In Wola [the quarter of Warsaw where the Czyste hospital was located] the water works and the power plant were destroyed early on by an air strike [Editor's note: the Wola power plant was destroyed on 23rd September, just before the end of the siege]. We had to go fetch the water in buckets. It was really tough. The air strikes never ceased. The sky was clear throughout that September and all the targets were clearly visible, and the Germans loved to bomb hospitals. Many buildings were destroyed. If the bombing got real bad, we moved all [the patients] to the basement. Once, when everyone was already downstairs, I realized there was a feverish wounded man left upstairs. We went to get him with a young doctor, who was lame and therefore hadn't escaped to the east. We put the wounded on stretchers and brought him to the basement. A moment later a bomb hit the room he'd lain in. At some point they bombed our kitchen and stores and it hurts me to say this, but there were many people [who lived nearby] who simply stole our flour, sugar, everything, all the hospital's supplies. We were then included in the army hospitals' supply. After Warsaw's surrender we had to wait three days for a soup delivery [28th September, 1939] [13](#). The wounded were given soup served by the German soldiers. The Germans were acting in a very arrogant way, they jeered at us. That's when I learned to hate them so much I wanted to be as far from them as possible.

During the siege of Warsaw my sister Hilka was in Falenica with Mother. They heard about the bombing and were sure I'd been killed. Hilka came to look for me. We went to Falenica together on foot. Various friends began to show up in Falenica, staying at my Mom's on their way east [to the Soviet-occupied, eastern parts of Poland]. My sister and I decided to go east as well. Unfortunately, we left Mother in Falenica. We thought we'd have her come as soon as we settled. We had a weak imagination. It later turned out the janitor living with us was German. When the Germans marched in she told my mother to get out because from then on the whole house belonged to her. We didn't know about it all. Mom went to Skryhiczyn and stayed there. I later found out she went to Lublin on her way from Warsaw and she spoke to a friend she had much respect for and he advised her against going to Russia. He knew it from his own experience: his son had gone to Lwow and later come back because otherwise he would be arrested. Later we tried to bring Mom to us. You could get a special permission from Stalin to cross the border. I got it for Mom and sent it to her in a letter to Falenica. It probably got there too late for her to receive it. And Mom did not come. We exchanged letters later on, I sent her parcels.

Hilka and I left Falenica and went to Skryhiczyn. The border had already been closed, but there were people in Skryhiczyn who could smuggle you by night across the Bug river in a boat [the river Bug defined the demarcation between the German and Soviet occupation zones]. When we got to Skryhiczyn we met my cousin Kalmus with some young people from Lodz and we crossed the Bug together and went to Volodymir-Volyns'kyy.

In Volodymir I started to work in an infectious diseases hospital [as a nurse]. It was my first real job and I was very glad to be working at last. Hilka learned later you could enroll for studying in Lwow and so she went there with some friends. She started to study agriculture. We made a deal I would earn the money for the time being and she would study. She was a very good student, she was very happy. In 1940 I joined her in Lwow. I wanted to study medicine but I failed the entry exams. I started to work at the Na Gorce hospital, in the children's ward. I shared a room with three other girls. Hilka's department was later moved to Dublany, a town outside of Lwow [10 km from the city]. I used to come to see her on Sundays. It was always a great joy.

And the war broke out again [German – Soviet war, in June 1941] [14](#), and the Germans bombed Lwow. I remember the day the air strikes began [23rd June] Hilka and our cousin Guta Rotenberg from Volodymir stayed over at my place, we slept on the floor. Guta decided: ‘I have to be with my Mom’ and soon left for Volodymir. We tried to talk her out of it, to persuade her to go east. Our cousin Ita Kowalska was just about to leave Lwow with her family at the time. But Guta came back to her mother and they were both killed.

[Right after the first bombing] my sister went to Dublany, to the university. And I left for work. I don’t remember exactly how it happened, I think someone came over to the hospital and told us a car was waiting outside and we should leave. In all that rush I just got in the car and left with them. But on the way I came upon a student, a friend of my sister’s, who told me Hilka was in Lwow and he gave me the address. I came back to Lwow and found my sister. A draft notice was waiting for me at home – I was to report to the Soviet army as a nurse. I didn’t even think about disobeying. We decided Hilka would come to me to the barracks everyday and when it was time for me to leave Lwow, she would leave with me. And come she did. There was a terrible air strike one day and they put all of us drafted to the Red Army in a double line and we marched out heading for Kiev. Our commander lead the column for some time and then told us to use whatever means of transport available, because there were lots of cars with people and their belongings and you could get a lift. He said our rallying point was the school in Zhytomir. And somehow I managed to get to that school. In Zhytomir they put us in a freight train to Kiev, and in Kiev we were told there were no uniforms for us, they gave us some pay and disbanded the unit.

Once I got to Kiev I started to visit the places the evacuees from Lwow stayed at looking for my sister but I didn’t find her. Eventually I met a large group of her fellow students and was told she hadn’t left Lwow. She said: ‘Whatever happens to all of us, I’ll stay, too.’ She managed to make it through to our Mother. She stayed with Mom in Skryhiczyn where they were both killed along with everyone else. Those friends of hers also told me some military group is being formed, that they’d applied but hadn’t been accepted because they came from Poland. I went there and they enlisted me, but only me. Apparently they needed a nurse. Kiev was almost encircled already so we left the city on foot and headed to Poltava.

It was all really well-organized, as the towns and villages along our way had been informed a military unit was to arrive and they’d prepared food and boarding for us. We usually covered between twenty and thirty kilometers a day. That way we got on foot to Poltava, where a so-called war town had been created. There were tents made of wood [sheds]. There were some women among us and we were put in a newsstand. There was a floor there and glass walls, so it was weatherproof. The commander said it was a palace, that the girls went to sleep in a palace. And so we slept there on the floor. We stayed very shortly in Poltava and we were soon transferred to Charkiv.

I met two students from Kiev in Poltava, Jewish girls from Ukraine, who have become my lifetime best friends. Roza was a bit older; she’d already finished her studies. She vouched for me, because I doubt they would accept a Polish girl into a military unit. She introduced me to the second one, Ania, who was also in the group marching from Kiev to Poltava. That’s how we’ve become friends. The three of us worked in a military hospital in Charkiv. We were like sisters, we shared everything. We lived together. Whenever one of us found out there was some extra food somewhere, she either let the others know or brought it home. We were young so we were always hungry.



We stayed in Charkiv for a month. Later the hospital was evacuated. They ordered that no women were to be sent to frontline units and so we were all transferred to Kemerovo in the Siberia. I spent the following two years there.

Kemerovo is a town in the western Siberia [200 km east of Novosibirsk]. It is situated on both banks of the river Om [Editor's note: Tom]. On one side of the river the town was built of wood but densely populated, and on the other it looked as if it was still under construction. There was a single street with some brick houses, three- and four-story high. The town grew during the war, because they evacuated the factories from Charkiv and Kiev, mostly arms factories. I remember a giant Charkiv tractors factory, which made tanks instead of tractors after the evacuation. When we arrived we found two empty school buildings with beds and tables with tablecloths on them put by the children. We were supposed to set up a hospital there. The personnel were boarded with the locals. They didn't have any decent houses, just that sort of large barracks. They had a corridor in the middle you entered the rooms from. Everyone had a room with a kitchen. We - me and another nurse - were hosted by a woman who worked in a factory all day long; her husband was in the army. She had an eight-year-old boy so she was glad there was always someone home when he got back from school. She had a bed and we were given a second one, and since we had night duties interchangeably we didn't need separate beds.

The hospital in Kemerovo was located in school buildings. It was large, consisted of two buildings. We only had one real surgeon, the rest were general practitioners. Everybody was retraining back then. I was told to put plaster casts. In Poland casts were applied by doctors and in Russia it was done by technicians. There was this girl in Kemerov, a very good plaster technician. Because there were two buildings they decided to create a second casting room and to put me in charge of it. I didn't have a clue about it but the girl taught me everything. To help me I was assigned a cleaning girl, Marusia, and a medical orderly who knew as much as I did. But I did learn and [the quality of] my casts was never questioned. It was a very tough work. Whole transports of wounded soldiers kept coming from the frontline; we had to remove all those pus-covered casts. They came all dirty, infested with lice. Whenever a train with the wounded came the personnel didn't sleep for a few days straight, until we brought them back to normal.

I was the only Pole among the personnel. There were some Ukrainian girls and the whole staff of a Kiev hospital. I didn't have anyone to speak Polish to, I didn't speak Russian. But I learned fast and later I used only Russian. Once a fire broke out in a local factory, lots of people got burned. We went to the civilian hospital to give them a hand. I stood there helping with something when I heard a female doctor speak to a girl: 'Zosia give me this, Zosia give me that.' I later came up to that Zosia and it turned out she was Polish. So I started to use Polish again.

During my stay in Kemerov I contacted Aunt Chana and Uncle Aron Perec. In 1939 they were in Volodymir as well and they volunteered there to go to up-country Russia. They went to Orel [a city ca. 360 km south of Moscow]. When it was time for evacuation, they moved to Kuybyshev [presently Samara, a city 800 km east of Moscow]. I found out about them somehow and we wrote letters to each other. Uncle Aron wrote me once there was a Polish paper being published in the USSR. It was published by the ZPP, Union of Polish Patriots [15](#). I subscribed to it. And from the paper I learned a Polish army is being formed and people were invited to enlist. The air was such that I wanted badly to fight; it seemed to me I wasn't doing enough. So I wrote a couple of letters to Berling [16](#), to the ZPP, and got a draft notice some time later.

I went to Sielce near Ryazan [a city ca. 180 km southeast of Moscow] where the camp of the Second Dabrowski Division was located [17](#). It was in August 1943. I was assigned straight to the medical battalion – the sanbat. I wanted to be on the frontline as soon as possible so I volunteered for the assault battalion.

I met a friend of mine in the army, Helka Seid. She came from Hrubieszow [a town ca. 100 km east of Lublin], she was in the nursing school with me. She crossed the border in 1939 and the Russians arrested her. Her father was a Bund member and knew Molotov [18](#) from before the war. He used his influence and she was released from prison and sent to Kazakhstan instead [19](#). She lived in a kolkhoz [a collective farm] in the backwoods. Because she completed a year or two of a nursing school she passed as a doctor there, she treated everyone. She told me she was on good terms with the people. She later met Mietek Starkiewicz, who'd been in the Anders' Army [20](#). He fell ill with typhoid fever and was not able to leave with the army. He stayed in that place [in Kazakhstan]. That's how they met and they later got married. They were in the First Army. He came from Lwow, from the cadets' school, a background completely different to hers. They had two children, they emigrated to Australia.

I met my future husband in the assault battalion. I felt very lonely there and suddenly someone took interest in me. My husband came from Lwow, his name was Wilhelm Mensz. He was born in 1920. His father was a representative for a Swiss company, he sold watches. When the war broke out, they were left with a certain amount of those watches and that was how they made their living. It was a Jewish family, although entirely assimilated [Polonized], they didn't speak Yiddish at all. My husband had two brothers. The elder was called Aleksander, he was a Zionist. The younger, Poldek, was ten when the war broke out and he supported the whole family throughout the occupation. They were all killed in Lwow. My husband had started to study at the Lwow Technical University before the war. Early on he was drafted into the army [the Red Army]. Some time later they transferred all Poles out of the army [frontline units] and he ended up in a so-called stroy-battalion [Russian: stroitelnyy batalyon, construction battalion; people who were too politically suspicious to be sent to the frontline were assigned to such units] in the Kolyma. He nearly starved there, loss much weight, became weak. When he learned the Polish Army was being formed he escaped and made it to Sielce. And that was where we first met.

We came to Lublin in 1944 with the army. On our way there, while stationed somewhere near Chelm [a town ca. 60 km east of Lublin] I asked for a few days furlough and went to Volodymir. I wanted to find out about my family. During the war there was a German administrator at the Skryhiczyn manor. Everyone [from the family] had been reportedly evicted from the manor. I don't know where they lived. And later all the Jews from that area were transported to Sobibor [21](#). I came upon a friend of my sister Hilka and she said she'd seen her on a horse wagon with the group which was to be transported [to Sobibor]. She urged her to escape but she didn't. Apparently, she didn't want to leave Mother alone. It was also then my husband learned about the death of his parents and brothers. And so we decided to be together.

In Lublin I found the sister of my brother-in-law, Bursztyn [husband of Ms. Mensz's elder sister, Zlatka] and the first close relative from my family. It was my cousin Hania Lanota [Anna née Rottenberg, daughter of Szlomo, brother of Ms. Mensz's grandmother, Zlata Rottenberg. Ms. Anna Lanota is also a Centropa interviewee.] I don't recall it all that exactly but I think I'd had some business with the military commandant, he'd put down my name and when Lanota arrived in Lublin

he told her I was around and gave her my telephone number. I recognized her voice right away. She escaped from outside Warsaw with Jadzia Koszutska. They were two heroes in Lublin, veterans of the Warsaw Uprising. They were both terribly gaunt, unbelievably, and Hania was pregnant. So that was my first meeting with someone from my family.

I soon found my other cousin, Esterka Rottenberg. Her father was Nusyn Rottenberg [brother of Zlata Rottenberg, Ms. Mensz's grandmother]. He'd lived with his family in Skryhiczyn-Manor, right next to our house. Esterka survived the war in Volodymir-Volyns'kyy. She was 16 in 1939, she came to Volodymir on her own, she was given some training, taught how to make injections and she worked in a hospital. I met her then, we lived together. I later moved to Lwow while she stayed in Volodymir. She worked, went from village to village giving vaccinations. She was later in the ghetto. A group of nurses from the hospital she'd worked in hid all the doctors - Jews from Volodymir. When the [deporting] action was just about to start in the ghetto Esterka was taken by one of the nurses, her name was Stasia, and hid in a wardrobe in her apartment. Esterka had pneumonia then, she was ill overall. She was the sole survivor from her family.

After the war Esterka found two children, Hanka and Szmulek, from our relatives the Szydowski family [Grandmother Zlata Rottenberg's sister Fejga married Mosze Szydowski; they were the children's grandparents]. Their mother, Fryda, was a teacher. She left her two youngest children with a friend of her, also a teacher, in a village near Volodymir. They both survived. The boy didn't want to leave Volodymir, he already went to school there, wanted to learn there, and he stayed in the teacher's care. Esterka arranged for him, so that his uncle's house was signed over to him. He later became an engineer and moved to Moldova. Hanka returned to Poland with Esterka. They went to Lodz, because Esterka had used to live there, she had some relatives. Ida Merzan put Hanka in a children's home and Esterka moved in with Hania Lanota, who had already left Lublin. Esterka took care of Hania's child, Malgosia. One day a relative of ours, who'd served in the British army [22](#), came to us from Israel and decided to take our whole family from Poland to Israel. He spent a whole night persuading us to go with him. Only Esterka and Hanka Szydowska joined him.

I worked in Lublin as a nurse in the hospital of my military unit. It was a very small hospital. At first it was located in Majdanek [23](#) in one of the barracks and then we were given some different place. Generally we treated only sick soldiers, there were no wounded. My husband and I were quartered with some strangers. We were not exactly married yet, I didn't care for all the weddings and formalities. You had to go the commander and announce you were a couple, and you'd be quartered together. We were later transferred to Katowice, to a unit stationed there. I was pregnant at the time and my husband said I ought to at least be able to get a benefit in case he was killed, and so we had a civil marriage. Our eldest son, Julek [diminutive for Julian], was born in February 1946. I quit the military right after my maternity leave, I didn't like the institution.

When we were still in Katowice the Percec family came to see us, Aunt Chana [mother's sister], Uncle Aron [her husband], and Mietek with his wife. Zosia stayed in Russia, because she got married there. Their whole family spent the war in Russia. They returned as repatriates [24](#). The repatriates from Russia were brought to the western parts of the country, where there were houses. They let us know in Katowice they were coming soon. It was a great joy. They later settled in Gliwice. Uncle was a dentist, he was given an apartment and he ran a dentist's practice. Mietek, who was an engineer, got a job in a foundry. We kept in touch.

I went to see Skryhiczyn once after the war. The manor was ruined. The roof had got leaky, no one had fixed it and it had just gone from there. Few of the former inhabitants were alive; there was nobody to take care of it. The whole estate had had more than 250 acres so it was parceled out between the peasants [As a result of the 1944 land reform the big estates were divided into smaller farms and given to peasants]. There was one place in Skryhiczyn we visited regularly. It was the grave of our cousin Niuniek [Arie] Prywes. He was an engineer, he was drafted into the [Polish] army in 1939, his wife and child came to Skryhiczyn and he later joined them, but they didn't manage to escape on time. He was a teacher there, he gave private lessons. In 1941, I think, a German was killed in the area, so they took three hostages, including Niuniek, and shot them just behind the manor. Their grave was located on the meadow behind the manor, and schoolchildren took care of it. A dozen or so years after the war the grave had to be exhumed, because some melioration works were to be conducted.

My husband was an officer. After spending some time in Katowice, in 1948 I think, he was transferred to Warsaw and we had to leave. We moved into the military quarters on Pulawska Street. Our son fell gravely ill at that time. We were told he got tuberculosis when he was 6 months old. We had a very good pediatrician, his name was Bialecki, and he told us to leave the city with the child. So we rented an apartment in Jozefow [near Warsaw] and I lived there with our son for a year. We couldn't afford renting an apartment and me being a housewife, even though my husband had his salary and also received some food rations. But my sister Zlatka, who lived in London, helped us then. Some time later, in 1951 I guess, we were given an apartment here [downtown Warsaw]. In 1949 I started to work in the War Veterans Union. I had a decent salary. I worked as a clerk in the social services department. I thought it quite suited my profession. We set up children's homes, arranged care for the disabled.

My sister Zlatka stayed in England for a couple more years after the war. We wrote letters to each other. She even came to see us. Her husband, Sruł Bursztyn, didn't want to come back to Poland but she had him come. They returned for good in 1949 I think. They lived in Warsaw. They came with their son, Jerzyk, who was born in England. Later they had two more sons: Wlodek and Andrzej. Zlatka was an editor in a popular science publishing house. Her husband worked in the PKPG [Polish Committee on Economic Planning] as the head of the technology department.

In 1948 my second son, Pawel, was born and in 1954 - my third, Piotrek [diminutive for Piotr]. The Veterans Union was closed down and I started to work in the radio, in the editorial staff of the Radio University. I took care of all the self-education clubs organized by the University. When my third son was born, I moved to Przyjaciolka [a weekly, still existing]. It was easier that way. I stayed home with my child and answered the readers' letters. Later I worked normally again, in Przyjaciolka editorial office. The editor-in-chief was Hania Lanota at the time, she left and I stayed. I used to work there until I retired, that is till I was 60.

The Kielce pogrom [25](#) was a painful experience; it made us realize there is anti-Semitism in Poland. You could sense it in post-war Poland, even though it was not supported [present] in the press, or the radio, or anywhere at all. Nevertheless, I had a job which involved trips in-country and meeting people, and many times I heard: 'The Germans did one good thing, they cleansed Poland from Jews.' I heard that a couple times, but I thought the government combated anti-Semitism and would eventually fight it off.

I was an enthusiast of the new order – I thought we were making a brave new Poland. I was in the party [PZPR] [26](#) until the Wujek coal mine shooting during the martial law [27](#). When I heard about it I gave back my membership card. But even before that I knew that's not the way. My husband got disillusioned early on and turned to revisionism. He did not question the ideology as such but there were things he didn't like and he would be vocal about it. He stayed in the army after the war. He completed extension degree in Polish history. He was a teacher in a military academy and he spoke or perhaps wrote about his doubts a bit too early. When Stalin died in 1953, critical voices rose in Russia about the cult of personality. My husband said something to that effect; a tad too early for Poland, it turned out. So they demobilized him in 1955 I think. He gave back his party membership card soon after the Khrushchev's letter [28](#). He then worked in the Ksiazka i Wiedza publishing house as an editor. His health deteriorated early and he retired at the age of 55 – he was entitled to a military retirement plan. He died in 1991.

Some time around 1956 my brother-in-law [Srul Bursztyn] went to see his parents, who were already in Israel. When he got back, his desk was taken. He was an ambitious man and he said 'no'. That's when the first official anti-Semitic actions took place, firing people. My brother-in-law was pushed aside. And later their son Jerzyk was riding on a bus and heard some remarks: 'What is this little Jew doing here?' or something to that effect, and no one at all stood up to take his side. He was 15 or 16, he jumped out of the moving bus and told his mother: 'I don't know about you, but I'm leaving.' And their youngest son came back home and said: 'I don't want to be a pretty little Jew', because someone in the street said to him: 'What a pretty little Jew.' He sensed the offense in that. And so my sister's husband and children made the decision. They left for Israel in 1956.

My brother-in-law got a job at Weizman's Institute, a large research center in Rehovot, outside Tel Aviv. They were given an apartment there. Very nice place: woods, flowers, laboratories right next to the housing. After my brother-in-law's death Zlata moved to Tel Aviv as her children wanted to have her closer. The boys changed their names in Israel to Hebrew ones, just like many people did. They're now called Igal, Michael, and Arie. Igal is a filmmaker, Michael – medicine professor, and Arie is a choreographer and dancer.

I went to Israel for the first time in 1959 to see them. You were already allowed to visit your closest relatives abroad. My brother-in-law sent me the money for the ticket, the invitation form, and all the other formalities. I remember the long flight to Athens and a ship from there. You could only exchange five dollars worth in Poland – that was the limit. But it was enough; Israel was a relatively poor country back then. I liked the people there very much, they were so full of enthusiasm. Lot of work had been done, you could see the large amounts of labor invested – the watering systems for example – anywhere something was farmed. Most importantly, I was happy to see all my relatives who had emigrated to Israel back before the war as well as those who ended up there after the war. I felt like being in a sort of a branch of Skryhiczyn.

Some of them were pioneers in a large kibbutz in Kineret, some lived in Hedera, some in Tel Aviv. I met all my cousins there, Hanka Szydłowska, Esterka Rottenberg, Ida Merzan's two sisters. Esterka got married, her name is now Szlomowicz, she's got two daughters and plenty grandchildren. Hanka also established a very nice family in Israel, she has two gifted sons, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, she still looks young herself and she even drives a car. I also met the children of our tenant farmers the Blanders, Nuchym and Masza. First thing Nuchym did there it was he bought some land and a horse. He was great friends with my sister, she used to visit him often with her



children, they loved it. I liked it very much in Israel and I've been there a couple times since.

We've never decided to leave for good. During the 1968 campaign of hate [29](#) lots of people left, many of my close friends, first of all Mietek Percec and his wife. We stayed. Maybe I still had faith in socialism, maybe I was attached to Poland, no use debating it. Our son Julek moved [to Denmark] later, in 1969 I think. When the opportunities arose, the young people started to go abroad; they saw opportunities for themselves there. He said before leaving: 'Oh Mom, I'll be able to work and study there.' He emigrated and got a degree from a technical university there and worked as an engineer in the local company F.L. Smidt. He's dead now. He died in 2002 of a heart attack. My younger son, Pawel, got a degree from the Warsaw Technical University, and Piotrek holds a degree in physics. Pawel later worked in an Institute of the PAN [Polish Academy of Science]. He went on a yacht cruise to America and was supposed to come back but the martial law was imposed and he stayed. He works in a university. My third son, Piotrek, lives in Canada. I have five grandchildren. My granddaughter Asia lives in Warsaw, Susanna in Denmark, and Janek, Olenka, and Izabella in the United States.

My opinion on the Solidarity [30](#)? My elder son [Pawel] signed the students' protests. My husband supported the movement. For me there were too many nationalist slogans, besides, I told my husband I didn't want to be a member of any organization anymore. And I'm not. I'm a member of TSKZ [31](#), the veterans' organizations, but I'm no activist. They send me invitations to lectures, and if it's something interesting I go to listen to them. I had an accident there by the way, I fell, broke my leg, I suffered through a lot. I don't go out anywhere now, I've been home for only a month and I'm still very weak.

## GLOSSARIES

### [1](#) **Gora Kalwaria**

Located near Warsaw, and known in Yiddish as Ger, Gora Kalwaria was the seat of the well-known dynasty of the tzaddiks. The adherents of the tzaddik of Ger were one of the most numerous and influential Hasidic groups in the Polish lands. The dynasty was founded by Meir Rotemberg Alter (1789-1866). The tzaddiks of Ger on the one hand stressed the importance of religious studies and promoted orthodox religiosity. On the other hand they were active in the political sphere. Today tzaddiks from Ger live in Israel and the US.

### [2](#) **The Wise Men of Lublin Yeshivah (Yid**

: Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin): world-famous Talmudic school founded in 1930 in Lublin by Yehuda Meir Shapiro, chairman of the Polish branch of Agudas Yisroel and member of the Polish parliament. It was located in a large, six-story building on 85 Lubartowska Street. The parcel was donated by industrialist Samuel Eichenbaum. Specially created associations collected money throughout Poland; funds were also raised in other European countries and the United States. The opening of the school on June 24th, 1930 was a great event. The yeshivah was to become the world center of Talmudic science. Its educational system combined the rationalism of the Lithuanian schools with the mysticism of the Hasidim. The study lasted four years. The yeshivah amassed a huge book collection of more than 10,000 volumes. The 1933 death of Meir Shapiro, the founder and first President of the yeshivah, set off a crisis resulting from the debates over succession. Eventually,

Shlomo Aiger became the President in 1935. In November 1939 the Germans took over the building and turned it into a hospital. After the war the building became a part of the Lublin Medical Academy campus. Since 2001 the former yeshivah belongs to the Warsaw Jewish community.

### **3 Warsaw Uprising 1944**

The term refers to the Polish uprising between 1st August and 2nd October 1944, an armed uprising orchestrated by the underground Home Army and supported by the civilian population of Warsaw. It was justified by political motives: the calculation that if the domestic arm of the Polish government in exile took possession of the city, the USSR would be forced to recognize Polish sovereignty. The Allies rebuffed requests for support for the campaign. The Polish underground state failed to achieve its aim. Losses were vast: around 20,000 insurrectionists and 200,000 civilians were killed and 70% of the city destroyed.

### **4 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution, in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

### **5 Bund in Poland**

Largest and most influential Jewish workers' party in pre-war Poland. Founded 1897 in Vilnius. From 1915, the Polish branch operated independently. Ran in parliamentary and local elections. Bund identified itself as a socialist Jewish party, criticized the Soviet Union and communism, rejected Zionism as a utopia, and Orthodoxy as a barrier on the road towards progress, demanded the abolition of all discrimination against Jews, fully equal rights for them, and the right for the free development of Yiddish-language secular Jewish culture. Bund enjoyed particularly strong support in central and south-eastern Poland, especially in large cities. Controlled numerous organizations: women's, youth, sport, educational (TsISHO), as well as trade unions. Affiliated with the party were a youth organization Tsukunft, and children's organization Skif. During the war, the Bund operated underground, and participated in armed resistance, including in the Warsaw ghetto uprising as part of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) led by Marek Edelman. After the war, the Bund leaders joined the Central Committee of Polish Jews, where they postulated, in opposition to the Zionists, a reconstruction of the Jewish community in Poland. In January 1949, the Bund leaders dissolved the organization, urging its members to join the communist Polish United Workers' Party.

### **6 Communist Party of Poland (KPP)**

created in December 1918 in Warsaw, its aim was to create a global or pan-European federal socialist state, and it fought against the rebirth of the Polish state. Between 1921 and 1923 it propagated slogans advocating a two-stage revolution (the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution), the reinforcement of Poland's sovereignty, the right to self-determination of the ethnic minorities living within the II Republic of Poland, and worker and peasant government

of the country. After 1924, as in the rest of the international communist movement, ultra-revolutionary tendencies developed. From 1929 the KPP held the stance that the conditions were right for the creation by revolution of a Polish Republic of Soviets with a system based on the Soviet model, and advocated 'social fascism' and 'peasant fascism'. In 1935 on the initiative of Stalin, the KPP wrought further changes in its program (recognizing the existence of the II Polish Republic and its political system). In 1919 the KPP numbered some 7,000-8,000 members, and in 1934 around 10,000 (37 percent peasants), with a majority of Jews, Belarus and Ukrainians. In 1937 Stalin took the decision to liquidate the KPP; the majority of its leaders were arrested and executed in the USSR, and in 1939 the party was finally liquidated on the charge that it had been taken over by provocateurs and spies.

## **7 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

## **8 Korczak, Janusz (1878/79-1942)**

Polish Jewish doctor, pedagogue, writer of children's literature. He was the co-founder and director (from 1911) of the Jewish orphanage in Warsaw. He also ran a similar orphanage for Polish children. Korczak was in charge of the Jewish orphanage when it was moved to the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940. He was one of the best-known figures behind the ghetto wall, refusing to leave the ghetto and his charges. He was deported to the Treblinka extermination camp with his charges in August 1942. The whole transport was murdered by the Nazis shortly after its arrival in the camp.

## **9 Numerus clausus in Poland**

After World War I nationalist groupings in Poland lobbied for the introduction of the numerus clausus (Lat. closed number - a limit on the number of people admitted to the practice of a given profession or to an institution - a school, a university, government office or association) in relation to Jews and other ethnic minorities. The most radical groupings demanded the introduction of the numerus nullus principle, i.e. a total ban on admittance to universities and certain professions. The numerus nullus principle was violated by the Polish constitution. The battle for its introduction continued throughout the interwar period. In practice the numerus clausus was applied informally. It depended on decision of deans or University's presidents. In 1938 it was indirectly introduced at the Bar.

## **10 Hospital in Czyste**

A Jewish hospital in Warsaw. The initiative to build it came in the 1880's from the doctors of the Orthodox Hospital (established at the turn of the 19th century). In 1893 the construction of the hospital buildings began on the western outskirts of Warsaw, in the borough of Czyste. Eight buildings were erected, with modern technological equipment. A synagogue was built next to the hospital. The hospital was opened in 1902 at what was then Dworska Street. In the 1920's the Jewish hospital was transformed into a local hospital. Before 1939, around 1,200 beds were available, which made the hospital the second largest in Warsaw. After 1939 it was turned over to the management of the Jewish authorities and became a hospital exclusively for Jews. After the creation of the Ghetto, it was moved to the Jewish district, that is, the staff of the hospital was confined to the Ghetto and employed in the Ghetto's various medical establishments. Dworska was taken over by, among others, a German military hospital. In the Ghetto, when typhus broke out, a Jewish Contagious Hospital was opened at Stawki Street. Apart from treating patients, the hospital also conducted research (Prof. Hirszfeld) and held classes for nurses. The Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital moved into the Stawki hospital building. In time, the Stawki hospital became the only hospital in the Ghetto. After the war, Warsaw's oldest hospital, Sw. Ducha Hospital [Holy Ghost Hospital], was moved to Czyste, into the buildings at Dworska Street. These buildings are currently occupied by the Wolski Hospital at Kasprzaka Street.

## **11 Anschluss**

The annexation of Austria to Germany. The 1919 peace treaty of St. Germain prohibited the Anschluss, to prevent a resurgence of a strong Germany. On 12th March 1938 Hitler occupied Austria, and, to popular approval, annexed it as the province of Ostmark. In April 1945 Austria regained independence legalizing it with the Austrian State Treaty in 1955.

## **12 Umiastowski Order**

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

## **13 The fall of Warsaw**

on 28th September 1939, after a three-week siege by the German forces, the deputy commander of the defense General Tadeusz Kutrzeba (authorized by the commander, General Walerian Czuma) signed an unconditional surrender agreement. It required the Polish soldiers to ground arms (many disobeyed, hiding the weapons; some of them were later used during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising) and march out of the city. The civilian authorities were to put down the barricades, extinguish the fires, disarm the civilians, restore the administration and re-open commercial establishments, introduce a ban on political parties and organizations, and provide 12 hostages. The German authorities obliged to serve 160,000 rations of soup a day to the civilians and to help with restoring the public utilities. The German army entered the city on 1st October 1939; the resulting German occupation of Warsaw lasted until 17th January 1945.

## **17 The Berling Army**

in May 1943 the Tadeusz Kosciuszko 1st Infantry Division began to be formed in Sielce near Ryazan. It was a Polish unit in the USSR, completely dependant on the Red Army. It was commanded by Colonel Zygmunt Berling. By July 1943 16,000 Poles had enlisted to the 1st Division, most of them deportees expelled from eastern Poland in 1940. Lacking qualified Polish officers, most of whom had left USSR with the Anders' Army, the commanding positions were often given to Soviet officers. In the fall of 1943 the 1st Division was sent to the front and fought in the battle of Lenino. In September 1943 the 1st Corps of Polish Armed Forces in the USSR was formed, consisting of 3 divisions. Zygmunt Berling commanded the Corps. In March 1944 the 1st Corps was transformed into the 1st Polish Army. It numbered 78,000 soldiers. The Army fought in Ukraine and took part in liberating the Polish territory from the German occupation. On 21st July 1944 in Lublin the 1st Army was combined with the Communist conspirational People's Army to form the Polish People's Army.

## **18 Molotov, V**

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

## **19 Deportations of Poles from the Eastern Territories during WWII**

from the beginning of Soviet occupation of eastern Poland on 17th September 1939, until the Soviet - German war which broke out on 21st June 1941, the Soviet authorities were deporting people associated with the former Polish authorities, culture, church and army. Around 400 000 people were exiled from the Lwow, Tarnopol and Stanislawow districts, mostly to northern Russia, Siberia and Kazakhstan. Between 12th and 15th of April as many as 25 000 were deported from Lwow only.

## **20 Anders' Army**

The Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, subsequently the Polish Army in the East, known as Anders' Army: an operations unit of the Polish Armed Forces formed pursuant to the Polish-Soviet Pact of 30th July 1941 and the military agreement of 14th July 1941. It comprised Polish citizens who had been deported into the heart of the USSR: soldiers imprisoned in 1939-41 and civilians amnestied in 1941 (some 1.25-1.6m people, including a recruitment base of 100,000-150,000). The commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR was General Wladyslaw Anders. The army never reached its full quota (in February 1942 it numbered 48,000, and in March 1942 around 66,000). In terms of operations it was answerable to the Supreme Command of the Red Army, and in terms of organization and personnel to the Supreme Commander, General Wladyslaw Sikorski and the Polish government in exile. In March-April 1942 part of the Army (with Stalin's consent) was sent to Iran (33,000 soldiers and approx. 10,000 civilians). The final evacuation took place in August-September 1942 pursuant to Soviet-British agreements concluded in July 1942 (it was the aim of General Anders and the British powers to withdraw Polish forces from the USSR); some



114,000 people, including 25,000 civilians (over 13,000 children) left the Soviet Union. The units that had been evacuated were merged with the Polish Army in the Middle East to form the Polish Army in the East, commanded by Anders.

### **21 Sobibor**

a Nazi death camp located in the Lublin district of the General Government. It operated since May 1942. Jews from the Lublin region and eastern Galicia were transported here, as well as from Lithuania, Belorussia, Czechoslovakia, and Western Europe. The victims were killed in gas chambers with carbon monoxide from exhaust fumes and later buried in mass graves; at the end of 1942 the bodies were exhumed and incinerated. The commandant of the camp was Franz Stangl. The permanent crew consisted of 30 SS-men and 120 guards, members of the German and Ukrainian auxiliary forces. Approximately 1,000 Jewish inmates were kept for maintenance works in the camp: operating the gas chambers and crematoria, sorting the property of the victims. An estimated 250,000 Jews have been murdered in Sobibor. In the summer of 1943 an underground organization was founded among the functional inmates, led by Leon Feldhandler and Aleksander Peczerski. They organized a rebellion which broke out on 14th October 1943. Killing a number of guards enabled 300 (out of the total 600) prisoners to escape. About 50 of them survived the war. Soon after the rebellion the Germans liquidated the camp.

### **23 Jews in the British army**

the Palestinian Jews began to volunteer to the British army in 1939. The British accepted 85,000 men and 54,000 women into military service. Chaim Weizman, chairman of the World Zionist Organization, lobbied for the formation of an entirely Jewish brigade within the British army since the outbreak of the war. The Jewish Brigade, with its own uniforms and standard, wasn't created before September 1944. It was commanded by Ernest Benjamin. In February 1945 the Brigade was sent to Europe, to the Italian front on the river Senio. It was incorporated into the 8th British Army. After the end of the war the Jewish Brigade was sent to service on the Italian-Austrian-Yugoslavian border. It played an important part in smuggling the Jewish Holocaust survivors to Palestine. The Brigade was disbanded in February 1946.

### **23 Majdanek concentration camp**

situated five kilometers from the city center of Lublin, Poland, originally established as a labor camp in October 1941. It was officially called Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin until 16th February 1943, when the name was changed to Concentration Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin. Unlike most other Nazi death camps, Majdanek, located in a completely open field, was not hidden from view. About 130,000 Jews were deported there during 1942-43 as part of the 'Final Solution'. Initially there were two gas chambers housed in a wooden building, which were later replaced by gas chambers in a brick building. The estimated number of deaths is 360,000, including Jews, Soviets POWs and Poles. The camp was liquidated in July 1944, but by the time the Red Army arrived the camp was only partially destroyed. Although approximately 1,000 inmates were executed on a death march, the Red Army found thousand of prisoners still in the camp, an evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

## **24 Repatriations**

post-war repatriations from the USSR included displaced persons deported to the Soviet Union during the war, but also native inhabitants of what had been eastern Poland before the war and what was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1945. In the years 1945-1950 266 000 people were repatriated, among them around 150 000 Jews. The name 'repatriation' is commonly used, despite the fact that those were often not voluntary.

## **25 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.

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

communist party formed in Poland in December 1948 by the fusion of the PPR (Polish Workers' Party) and the PPS (Polish Socialist Party). Until 1989 it was the only party in the country; it held power, but was subordinate to the Soviet Union. After losing the elections in June 1989 it lost its monopoly. On 29th January 1990 the party was dissolved.

## **27 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, banned 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.

## **28 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

## **29 Anti-Zionist campaign in Poland**

From 1962-1967 a campaign got underway to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The background to 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 a lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War. This address marked the start of purges among journalists and 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. After 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.

### **30 Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc)**

a social and political movement in Poland that opposed the authority of the PZPR. In its institutional form - the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc) - it emerged in August and September 1980 as a product of the turbulent national strikes. In that period trade union organization were being formed in all national enterprises and institutions; in all some 9-10 million people joined NSZZ Solidarnosc. Solidarity formulated a program of introducing fundamental changes to the system in Poland, and sought the fulfillment of its postulates by exerting various forms of pressure on the authorities: pickets in industrial enterprises and public buildings, street demonstrations, negotiations and propaganda. It was outlawed in 1982 following the introduction of Martial Law (on 13th December 1981), and until 1989 remained an underground organization, adopting the strategy of gradually building an alternative society and over time creating social institutions that would be independent of the PZPR (the long march). Solidarity was the most important opposition group that influenced the changes in the Polish political system in 1989.

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

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. However, it is primarily an organization of older people, who have been involved with it for years.