

Leon Solowiejczyk

Leon Solowiejczyk

Lodz

Poland

Interviewer: Marek Czekalski, Judyta Hajduk

Date of interview: September 2005

Mr. Leon Solowiejczyk is 82 years old. He comes from the eastern part of prewar Poland, the area of the city of Vilnius (today Lithuania), from a relatively well-to-do small town family of orthodox Jews. We talked in his apartment, which he hardly ever leaves. He suffers from serious asthma, which made our conversation difficult. He tires easily and uses an oxygen tank. Mr. Solowiejczyk is a warm and cordial man. He told his story willingly, without reservations and our meetings seemed to please him considerably.

I was born on 25th March 1923 in a small town called Dzisna [the town of Dzisna is located on the river Dzisna, a tributary of Dzwina], in the Vilnius district. I knew my grandparents from my father's side better, because we lived together. They were born in the times of Tsar Nicolaus I [Nicolaus I Romanov (1796-1855)]. The grandparents spoke Yiddish at home and Russian when there was company.

My grandfather from Father's side - Mojzesz Solowiejczyk - came from a town called Glebokie [near Vilnius, today Lithuania, a city located on the junction of the route from Polock to Vilnius, on the Wielkie Lake]. He had five brothers. They were: Izaak, Bauman, Abram... I don't remember the names of the other two. Those three were fishermen; they had their own lakes, equipment. They were quite well off.

Just before the war [World War I] Grandpa married, he was an older man by then. The family was large, so he separated from his brothers. He got some money from them and he dealt with fishing as well, he leased some lakes, fished, sold the fish and that's how my grandparents made money. When World War I broke out my grandfather was in the Russian army. During the war of 1920 [1](#) the Polish-Russian border was set on the Dzwina [River]. Grandpa remained on the Polish side, with his children, Father, Mother. The remaining ones [Abraham, Izaak, Bauman, Jankiel] were on the Russian side. Grandpa's brothers owned two lakes and were well-to-do. They had no problems making ends meet; they traded horses on the Polish side from time to time too.

Grandpa Mojzesz was a religious man. He dressed like a Hasid [2](#); he wore a cloak, a beard. In 1924 he gave Torah scrolls to the synagogue together with a few other people. Such a scroll cost a lot. It was a big thing. It was as if there was a wedding - people danced, congratulated one another. Grandpa went to the synagogue to pray as long as he lived. He also took us, the grandchildren, to all the ceremonies. I remember I was four years old then. My younger brother, Misza, when they were reciting the Kaddish for the dead - he had this sweet voice like a bell - when they reached 'Amen,' he'd pronounce it 'Aaaaaamen.' And later, on a Friday, after Grandpa sold all the fish at the market, he would give us 20 groszy each, but he gave him 50, because he could say 'Amen' the loudest.

Grandma [Father's mother] was called Miriam, nee Dworman. She came from Dżisna. They met through a matchmaker. Grandpa was a tall, handsome man, while Grandma was short, a bit of a hunchback. They said if she's a hunchback, she must be rich. Grandma was very wise; she could read and write, she could pray too. She was very pious. She knew all the commandments. When she saw a young couple walking too closely to each other, she'd tap them on the shoulder and tell it to them, so they wouldn't forget themselves. She also made sure that no woman went to the mikveh before her period. It was a public bathhouse. Before the wedding the bride had to go to the mikveh and get a certificate that she had been there.

Grandma made sure that all rituals were observed. I remember that there was a 'kruzhka' [Russian: a vase or small pot] with water in the house and you had to wash your hands early in the morning. The 'kruzhka' could be made of clay or iron. There were different ones. It was this ritual pot, with two handles. I mean when a woman got up and she hadn't washed her hands yet, she'd take hold of one handle of the pot and pour water on the dirty hand. That washing was called 'negl waser.' 'Negl' means nail, that is, the idea was that you had to wash off all the dirt. And later, because one hand was still dirty, you'd hold the clean handle with the clean hand and pour water over the dirty hand. Yes, those were rituals. You also had to wash your eyes. When I was a child I had to recite these prayers. In the morning. When you're still in bed, you say this prayer called 'Ani' and you have to wash your hands in order to say it. So Grandma made sure we did all this, because she was pious.

She was also a good housewife. Preserves were fried in the yard from spring to fall - there was this custom. All the housewives would gather in the evening. There was this large table, a samovar, a tray. All of them would bring their preserves, they tried each one. They chose who made the best one. Grandma also dried all kinds of herbs on the stove, for medicines. Also blackberries, raspberries, so it would be available if a child fell ill. She died in 1938.

Grandma had one brother. His name was Dawid. He was older than she was, he was a musician, a choirmaster, I mean a conductor. In Jewish that's 'klezmer.' There were more of them in our town, they were his students. He was self-taught, very talented. He even made his own violin. He had his own band. It was called 'Chaim Dowid der Klezmer.' He played in the town, at weddings, wherever they invited him and also when there was some national holiday, some celebration in the park [outdoor], he was always invited there. They treated him with respect. He was good at it.

My grandparents had two sons and one daughter. The older one was Abraham, the younger one - some 20 years younger - that was my father, Szlome, he was born in 1890, in Dżisna and the daughter, Chaja, was born between the sons. Abram was a horse trader. He had a family - a wife, son and daughter. They died in the ghetto in Dżisna [3](#), only the son saved himself, because he had run away to Russia. He died in 1990 in Oszmiana [in the Vilnius district]. Father's sister, Chaja, was older than him. Her husband, Mordechaj Szuszkowicz, was a merchant. They had five children, four daughters: Ester, Chana, Cypa, Margola and one son - Sioma. Only Ester survived the war, because she had left for Palestine before the war broke out. The rest were murdered in the ghetto in Dżisna.

Grandpa died before World War II when I was four years old. He died of a hernia, there was no surgeon, he couldn't be saved. I remember how, after his death, everything, stools, were turned upside down, water was poured out of buckets. All pictures, all mirrors were taken down or turned to face the wall. And they all sat there. The closest family members were there: the children, wife,

brothers. There had to be someone there to help. They couldn't greet anyone; they couldn't go out on the street for a week, so they wouldn't meet anyone. It was a ritual. All these were signs of mourning. For a year they would all say prayers at home, three times a day. We would gather for prayers. There had to be ten people, to form a minyan. There's even a saying among Jews: ten rabbis don't make a minyan, but ten scoundrels do. So there had to be ten people, so we'd always be looking for the 10th one. When I came and said that we needed a 10th one, no one would ever refuse.

My grandparents from Mother's side were from the country. They lived somewhere in the countryside when they were young, but I don't know exactly where. Later, when Grandma got married, they were in the city. They had some land, they had some mills. Grandpa's name was Mendel Szenkman, he bought and sold cattle and was in agriculture too. That's how it was that every squire had his Jew, whom he used. Grandpa Mendel was younger than the other one, Mojzesz. He had two brothers - Jankiel and Gotlieb. They died even before the war. Grandpa died in 1942, in the ghetto, in Dżisna. He died alone.

Grandma, his wife, her name was Sara, nee Judin; she was really from the country [that is, born in the countryside]. She was the same age as Grandpa; she mostly took care of the house. She also died in the ghetto. The grandparents from Mother's side were also a Hasidic family, but not as pious as Father's parents. Because, for example, when Father was coming back home on Friday evening and he was late, he wouldn't drive into town in a horse-drawn wagon, because it would have been shameful. He'd leave the horse in the nearest village. It was the same on Friday evening, a Jew wouldn't go to bathe in the mikveh, because the rabbi could come and check on him. My mother's parents also spoke Jewish [Yiddish] at home.

My mother, Chaja Pesia, nee Szenkman, was born in 1900 in Dżisna. She had two brothers: Icchak and Abraham and two sisters: they were Choda and Roza. Mother was the oldest one; Icchak was some two or three years younger. He was a cattle trader; he had a wife, children. He also died in the ghetto with his family. Then there was Choda, she was married to Matys Rusin, they had two children. They also died in the ghetto. Just like Mother's second sister, Roza, with the husband and child. The youngest one was Abraham; he had a wife and three children. He survived, because he had escaped to Russia. After the war he was in Łódź for a while and then went to Israel.

They all went to school, they could read and write. So could my parents. My father, this was still in tsarist times, he had what they called 'gorodkoye uchylyshche' [Russian: municipal school], I think it was an elementary education. I'm sure Mother must have had at least four grades of school too.

My parents met on their own, without a matchmaker, in Dżisna, it was a local love affair, they were neighbors. They got married in 1922. They had three sons. I was the oldest one. Then there was Izrael. He died in 1945 near Kielce, on the front, in the Russian army. The youngest one was Mojzesz - named after Grandpa. He's now living in Vilnius.

My parents were more or less religious. They celebrated all the holidays, all the rituals, Sabbath. Lard and other things like that - that was out of the question. The house was kept kosher - there was a spoon for meat, a spoon for milk, a milk pan, a meat pan, all that was observed.

Mother was always at home, she was very resourceful; she had to take care of things on her own, because Father was never there, always on the road. The entire family was very close. I was the

oldest one, I sometimes scolded my brothers. The middle brother, he was often naughty, so I'd hit him. For example when he once took another boy's bike. The boy was the landowner's son, who came to visit us.

When Father came back home, he had to tell Mother about everything, he had to report it all. When Father was about to come home from work - and Mother didn't know exactly when he'd be back, in the morning or in the evening - she'd get everything ready, keep the stove hot, so there'd be hot food for Father when he arrived. Father was a very calm man. I take after him in being calm and responsible. He was very traditional, he didn't drink, didn't play cards. But when there was some celebration, they'd all gather around him, because he could sing, he knew Yiddish and Russian songs. He slapped me once on the face and I remember this until today. And he was right. Well, how old could I have been? Five years, I don't think I was even six yet.

This was at my Aunt Choda's wedding, she was Mother's sister. Father was at this wedding. Father knew all the Jewish rituals, all those songs; he was also very funny and entertained all those wedding guests. I always liked sitting next to Daddy and he'd take me with him, as the oldest son. And according to the Jewish ritual, the guests from the groom's side feel more like guests and need to be tended to. Father felt he was from the bride's side, so he had a task there at that wedding. He sang to those guests, entertained them. And I don't know why this happened, maybe he had a lot to do, but he didn't take me with him to the table. I felt so sorry for myself I didn't want to sit at the table at all. I was waiting for Daddy to come and get me. Well, those aunts, it was a large family, started telling me: 'Come here, here...' If they hadn't said anything, then I would have just sat down in some corner, but they must have known that I was feeling sorry for myself. And because of that, I was fed up with them taking care of me like that, so I went away.

This wedding was at my grandmother Sara's house, where the bride was living, so I went home. There was no one there. It was locked up, everyone was at the wedding. And Mommy must have asked Father to go and get me: 'Go and bring him. He went home. Everything's locked up there, nobody's home.' I heard Daddy calling, I thought: 'Well, if Daddy's calling for me, I have to go.' And when I approached him, he didn't say a word, but slapped me on the face and turned back. He didn't hit me at any other time, he'd always hug me. He turned back and went to that wedding. And it was horrible for me. No one had ever hit me before, why now? And I cried and didn't go back to my house. I understood I had to go with him. And I went to that wedding crying. I sat where they told me to sit. That was only once. I still remember this, because it's such a special memory.

We were living in Dzisna with the grandparents from my father's side and when Grandpa died, then with Grandma Meri [Miriam]. Grandpa died earlier and, according to Jewish tradition, parents stay with the youngest son or daughter. And because Father was the youngest, Grandma lived with us. I guess you can look at it differently; it was, after all, her house and she was the host. It was a wooden house, there was a garden and vegetables, fruit in that garden. There were three rooms. And there were also these rooms in the back. The kitchen, the pantry, a hallway. It was a farm, there was a stable, a cow, there was everything, hens, some sheep. The house was near the river.

I remember that in the springtime, there'd be some ice brought in and put in this hole, which would then be covered with straw and that's where meat was stored in the summer. There were these holes in the garden, where potatoes were stored; they were deep, round, some two meters deep. I never saw any potatoes rot there. Other vegetables were stored like that too, turnips, carrots. My

parents also had cows. But the main income was from trade. Father had horses; he distributed goods, to restaurants, wine, vodka. Mother helped Father collect the orders; she had contacts with Poles often. She knew how to live well with them. She would always take some tasty food to them on Jewish holidays.

Grandma didn't work, but she had her hands full at home. She had to burn wood in the stove in the mornings. She baked bread each week. Grandma used to say that there were four bakeries on our street, where there were 20 houses in all, and each one baked bread better than the others to sell it. There was this 'dzieza' [Polish: a special bowl for making bread], it was passed from neighbor to neighbor; several neighbors would use the same one to bake bread. Ours was used by four families. It was dark rye bread. Sometimes there'd already be new bread before the old one was eaten. Grandma used to say that if we had to buy bread, we'd go bankrupt. The bread was good and it was cheap, because a pound [pound = 16.5 kg] of rye cost 1.5 zloty. Some 25 kg of bread could be made from this, so a kilo of bread cost 0.25 grosz [1 grosz = 1/100 of 1 zloty].

Dzisna itself was a town close to the border, there were two rivers. In the fall there was always mud. We, the kids, used to walk on these stilts. There were floods in the spring; the largest one was in 1931. On the street you could smell horse manure and so on, because there were horses and cows in every house. There were hills, rivers, lakes, valleys and forests in the area. But mostly it was flat. The area was quite swampy. There was moss, there were swamps, mud. Yes, like it is in Polesie. When someone 'went to the mosses,' there was no point in looking for him. [Editor's note: Mr. Solowiejczyk uses the phrase 'go to the mosses' in the sense of 'take one's life']. Only locals knew how to pass between those mosses, no one else would come back.

Supposedly, during the war partisans would hide in the swamps and when the Germans went looking for them the partisans were sitting in these holes which they had dug for themselves. When they had dug those holes there was water in them, but they took some pine branches and covered the holes with them. They could see those Germans looking for them, but the Germans couldn't see them.

There was no industry in Dzisna, no factories. There was a city hall, a church, eight synagogues, schools, a post office. There was a hospital, stores and restaurants. There was electricity in the town, from this turbine; lights would be turned on after it turned dark. The central area in the town was the market square. There, next to the market square, there was the 'birzha' [Russian: bazaar]. It was something like a bazaar. It was this place higher up, at the intersection of the streets and you could get everything done there. If you didn't have work, you'd go there in the morning, because everything was private, so all those without work went looking there. They'd find out where they could get a job and when there was nothing, if you came before 10am you could get a piece of bread and some cold water: you'd dip it in salt and eat it.

You could also marry your son or daughter off there, buy a horse, a cow, everything... There were these people there, they were called 'maklery' [incorrect Polish: stockbroker] and they could do anything. This 'makler' could marry a daughter off, he'd say: 'Well, this is such a nice girl, rich, she's got this and that...' that's how he'd describe her. He had these glasses, monocles. He'd drive around all the neighboring towns in a horse-drawn cart, he could do anything. You could borrow money from him, buy or lease an orchard, or land from the squire - 20, 30 hectares of land for 10, 15 years.

There were restaurants at the market. Father would often supply wine and vodka to them. They mostly had wine and vodka in those restaurants. You'd often see drunk people. Mostly Belarusians. There were some fights there from time to time, but they were mostly... friendly. And there were some stores. With fish and meat. Usually people would buy on credit in those stores, they'd put your name down in the book. Sometimes for a month. When the first day of the month came, they'd pay back. But I heard that sometimes they wouldn't return the money. But the merchants somehow prospered. There had to be a trusted butcher from whom you'd take meat.

There was this one Sara there, in Russian they called her Sarochka. Her last name was Sorocka. She was the owner of a private butchery. She had this butchery and she sold meat. She was very honest, a very honest woman. And there were all kinds of people in the town. There was this stupid loony man [mentally ill]. He had fits [epilepsy] and came to her store [to ask] for money. And the best customers bought meat from her. Each store owner wanted to make as much as possible, so she'd give this man 20 or 50 groszy, so he'd leave her alone and not scare off the customers. So it was quite a lot just for him going away and not falling down [that is, having an epilepsy fit] in the store.

There were 6 thousand people in Dżisna. Some 60 percent were Jews. Or 50-60 percent. The remaining ones were Poles and Belarusians. The community was strong. There were merchants, tailors, local officials, doctors. The Poles had the better jobs, in the magistrate, in the offices, there weren't many Poles, less than Jews. We always lived in harmony. But we lived separately.

There were only Hasidim in our town. [Mr. Solowiejczyk is simply referring to religious Jews]. They were carpenters and tailors, shoemakers, merchants, those who made the pavement and built houses, normal people. Yes, they were pious, when the time came they went to the synagogue to pray or prayed at home. But they were not loonies, those who walk around in the summer wearing fur caps, with sidelocks, or who only wear socks, they weren't excessively pious. They were normal pious Jews, moderate, reformed. There were eight synagogues. They were normal synagogues, orthodox, Hasidic. Hasidim prayed there. There was no reformed synagogue.

There was this one where, how to put it, the rich ones went and another one where the poorer people went. There were all classes of people in the town. One synagogue on the market square, that's where the butchers went. No one financed these synagogues, only the community, the people would chip in. There were also those immigrant elements, Misnagdim [Hebrew: Misnagdim - opponents of Hasidim], but they got kind of watered down, assimilated to the environment. There are quarrels among them even to this day [4](#). So much that when you were walking in Głębokie [approx. 70km from Dżisna] and you met some Russian [a person of the Eastern Orthodox faith] and he asked you: 'Is this the moon or is this the sun?', you'd have to answer 'I'm not from around here' if you didn't want to get beaten up.

The Hasidim always had their tzaddik. He was a Lubavitch [a tzaddik of the Lubavitch dynasty, Joseph Isaac Schneerson from Lubavitch (1880-1950), since 1920 the rebbe of the dynasty]. Lubavitch the Hasidic rebbe, that's how it was called then. Lubavitch Hasidim [5](#). He used to live in Lubavitch [near Smolensk], that's in Belarus.

There was also a Jewish religious community in Dżisna, there was a rabbi. The rabbi had huge rights. The rabbi wrote out birth certificates, baptism and marriage certificates and they were accepted everywhere, in all kinds of offices. There were also rabbinical courts. In our Jewish

community such a court is the most important one. The Gypsies [Roma] have that as well, that they acknowledge the civic court, but it's not sufficient for them, they have to have their own courts.

So there was this rabbinical court, they used to call for people to testify, one spoke for the one side, the second one for the other side, the third one was neutral. It was a court of one's peers, I guess you can say that. The Jews would usually not want any case to go outside [of the community]. If someone was stubborn and wanted to go to a regular civic court, so it would be. But this rabbinical court was respected the most.

Let's assume that you and I have some misunderstanding, so I take my so-called juror and you take yours, someone you trust. Like a member of the jury. You could also call the rabbi, but usually it wasn't necessary. Usually they'd settle for some compromise, because there were all kinds of cases there, disputed wills or commercial issues. And everything had to be done, whatever they would say. There was no appeal.

It was called 'dintojra' [Hebrew: Din Torah - religious court]. But those 'dintojras' were different than in the city. What was dintojra there, was the rule of the Torah here. If one side didn't agree [to carrying out the verdict], they were doomed in that community. If he didn't do what the court told him to do, if he didn't submit to the verdict, no one would trade with him, no one would shake his hand, no one would want to talk to him. It was different in a [civic] court, but in the community it was sacred.

In a Jewish community, the rich members were also important, not just the rabbi. There was this Bimbat, a wealthy man. He came from a poor family, but became rich selling forests. There were also some doctors, members of the intelligentsia in the community, they had their own banks and trade unions, all of them Jewish. The chairman of the bank was the community leader. There were some butchers, three rabbis, there was one appointed by the government and there were schoolteachers. Candidates would take part in the local magistrate elections. There were parties - the Bundists [6](#), the Zionists [7](#), the Hashomer Hatzair [8](#), leftist, rightist... There were Chalucinim [HaHalutz] [9](#), they were mostly young people who wanted to go to Israel. The strongest party was the Bytarym [Betar] [10](#). That was a rightist party. There [in Dżisna] there were no workers, they all lived from commerce or agriculture. Well, there were lots of poor people, lots of them.

Sometimes those poor people would walk across the [frozen] water in the wintertime and run away to the other side, to Russia. They ran away, because there was such unemployment, no industry, nothing. They didn't know that it was even worse on their side. The Russians treated those who crossed the border like spies, many of them died in prisons there, others were sent back. Because when someone got there and they asked him why he came, he'd say: 'Because I'm a communist.' 'A communist? Why would we need you? We have many communists. If you're really a communist go back and show them that you're a communist.' No, they didn't need people like them there, they had lots of their own poor people. So they'd put them on trial and they had to stay in jail until the trial. And the punishment was later that he couldn't live closer than 120 km from the border [on the Polish side]. He also had to go to the police station once a month or once a week and show up there.

There were Polish, municipal and Jewish schools. There was a Jewish religious school - Talmud Torah, then there was 'Jidysze Folks Szul' [Yiddish: Jewish Folk School], that is a public Jewish

municipal elementary school, then there were cheders, where we studied for five years. Talmud Torah was a private school, supported by donations. It existed until 1931.

I began my education in cheder, later in a public school. I started going to cheder when I was five years old. And later to 'Jidysze Folks Szul.' I was there for two or three years, because the school was later closed down, there was no money to keep it up. There was one Polish lesson in that 'Jidysze Folks Szul.' When that school was closed down, I went to a public, municipal school. And there everything was in Polish. I'm glad they taught us at cheder like they did. Because now in this community [the Jewish Religious Community in Lodz] I am an expert. I know all those holidays, the celebrations, everything. And I've known the Jewish [Yiddish] language since childhood.

At the public school there was religious education, Jewish and other. And we would all stand up to pray in the morning, the entire class would sing 'Boze cos Polske' [Polish, 'God, You Protect Poland'] or 'Kiedy ranne wstaja zorze' [Polish: 'When the sun rises in the morning,' both songs are Polish religious songs]. I liked Mathematics and History the best. There were many Polish teachers in the school, I had different relationships with them, because I had problems with the Polish language.

It's difficult to learn a language well if you don't use it. I only learned it later, mostly in the army. But there were also other situations. My name is Leon - Leon is Lejba. So, when she said Leon, I rebelled, because why did she call me that if my name was Lejba?! And I told her that her name was Rachela or something like that. [Editor's note: The teacher was Polonizing Jewish names. This was an expression of assimilation tendencies, which Mr. Solowiejczyk opposed.]

When I was 13 years old I had my bar mitzvah. I remember they summoned me to the synagogue, asked me to read a verse from the Torah. It was called aliyah [Hebrew: ascension]. And since that time I was counted as a man. Well, it was pleasant that you counted for a minyan.

I had lots of friends. We played normally, like boys do, we didn't look who was who. There were two rivers in Dzisna [Dzisna and Dzwina]. In the summer and in the winter we played interesting games. We played by the river. We would tie up the cane that was growing there. We'd tie it up into bunches, make a raft, put it on the water and float like that for some 8 or 10 kilometers. We passed some neighbors' farms, orchards. The river turned a lot. When we'd stop we'd pick some apples in one place, some pears in another. We'd bake potatoes. Or go get some milk. One river joined the other and it was the most fun when the two rivers joined, because there were rocks there. In the winter we'd also play by the river. The land was hilly, when we went sledding on the hills, we'd slide over onto the other side of the river. We'd play both with Jewish and Polish boys. We were close, we wouldn't tell on one another.

I remember once when I picked some pears [without permission] from a neighbor's orchard, he went to my father and told on me. So my father punished me, I couldn't leave the house. So my friends, because we were such good buddies, played a trick on that neighbor. That neighbor had a large family. There were outhouses in the garden, wooden ones. So, as punishment, the guys went there at night, pushed the outhouse over on its side and all that [the liquid waste] spilled out into the yard. And the next morning, the neighbor wakes up and sees that the outhouse is gone. So he had to make a new one quickly. These guys were great. We could steal horses together. Speaking of horses, at night the guys would ride on horseback to the meadow. So the horses could eat some grass. It was so much fun there at night. Sometimes someone would get tied to a horse's tail and dragged through the mud. We played like that all night long on that meadow.

Political events... I remember these elections and voting for [list] number 1: 'Vote for number one. You will eat sausage and ham.' There were other [such election rhymes] as well: 'Sugar, vodka are good, but chocolate is better' or something like that. I don't remember exactly when those elections were and what they were about just this list number 1. And also Pilsudski's death [11](#). Everyone cried. There was this kind of 'trauer' [from Yiddish: sadness] at schools. I remember this song: '(...) you wear a dark robe, you are so dear to us, like a king in his majesty. On your name day, your holiday, you are so dear to us, Mr. President.' [Editor's note: a song for Jozef Pilsudski's name day, 19th March].

My parents didn't have any political preference. They were loyal to the authorities. We didn't talk about going to Palestine at our house. But there were Jewish organizations in the town, they gave out loans for moving to Palestine [12](#). You can say that everyone supported moving there wholeheartedly. But most were too poor. Although there were people, wealthy townspeople, who left.

Even one person from our family left. It was Ester, the daughter of Father's sister Chaja. She wasn't very wealthy, but she didn't have to go to a kibbutz. She left her family and worked as a servant [physical laborer] in the kibbutz. Because she wanted to obtain permission to go to Israel [then Palestine], she had to work here first. There were such kibbutzim [13](#) in Poland where young people had to stay for several years to get used to this kind of work. It was somewhere near Vilnius, or maybe in Lomza, I don't remember exactly. She scrubbed floors, did whatever she had to. She had to show them that she would be able to live in a collective. She took care of the children and the elders. If a lady needed to have her windows cleaned, she'd go to a kibbutz and they'd send a girl to help her. She simply had to work hard, so she would get used to hard work. There was some patriotism in this. And there, in those kibbutzim, they'd live on their own. They were like those Russian kolkhozes [14](#).

There were no anti-Semitic incidents in Dzisna really. It was like this. There was the gymnasium, so usually all kinds of anti-Semitic moods would come from there, they had these organizations. But the community was strong, there were self-defense groups. There were firefighters and there were also some, so-called strong boys. And when they knew something was going on, they'd try to calm everyone down. So there were no real pogroms.

There were incidents, for example when they were conscripting boys into the army, the village boys [Poles and Belarusians] would get drunk and get into trouble. And they were dangerous. But those who did not want to go to the army and who were starving, they were peaceful. And nobody wanted to go to the army. Jews didn't want to either. Before the war, it was like this, they'd choose whom they wanted in the army. You had to be tall enough, weigh enough, you had to be healthy. The boys had to be healthy and fit. And those who didn't want to go, would starve themselves on purpose, so they would weigh less.

We also mostly had a good relationship with the parish priest. Well, when we were passing the church, we'd have to take off our hats, because [otherwise] you could encounter some... [problems]. But that was obvious, whenever you were in some office or at school, you'd have to take off your hat. I remember that when the bishop came, each community would welcome him in their own way. The Poles would put up altars, the Jews put up this gate, where the rabbi greeted the guests, the Byelorussians did something as well, but I don't remember what.

Later, in the late 1930s there was some fear, maybe not as visible. There were anti-Semitic articles in newspapers, there were these anti-Semitic leaflets, all kinds of various calendars, there was this witch hunt for the Jews, this 'Bij Zydow' [Polish: 'Get the Jews!'], but nobody paid much attention. Somehow you'd survive. And there was news from Germany. There they knew what Nazi ideology [15](#) was.

With regards to the Soviet Union, it was like this. That world was closed. No one knew what it was like there. Since 1920 there was the new border [the new border, set on the basis of the Peace of Riga, which ended the Polish-Bolshevik War 1919-1920] and a part of the city was on the other side of the Dzwina and we didn't know what was happening there. We only heard some songs, once a day some guard on horseback would come by. We heard all kinds of songs, on their national holidays they'd walk by with their flags, but we didn't know anything about that world. The river was peaceful, when rafts were passing by, they'd sometimes moor on the other shore. Sometimes a cow or some geese, or a horse would swim across the river to the other side, but they would always give it back. They'd go to the Batory Island and give it back. Well, because there were many islands on the River Dzwina. When Batory was marching on Pskow [Battle of Pskow 1582; approx. 550 km from Riga], he rested on that island. There were fortifications there. You couldn't live there, nothing. From the Polish side, you could go there on a boat and go fishing, but it was all under Russian control. And there was another island, named after Bronislaw Piracki [correctly: Bronislaw Pieracki (1895 Gorlice - 1934 Warsaw), a colonel of the Polish Army, politician]. The border patrol guarded those islands. There was a watch-tower there every few kilometers, a regular border.

I turned 16 before the war broke out. My aunt, my family, they all gathered and discussed what they should do with me. And they decided I would distribute salt, in a wagon. The shopkeepers were to come and buy their salt from me. But this didn't work out, because the war broke out. Earlier Uncle Mordche Zelig, gave me a job watching his orchard, because that's what he did. He leased orchards from local squires and he picked the apples. Well, people did whatever they could. It was Poles who owned those orchards, but they leased them, mostly to Jews and they knew how to go about it - sorting those apples, packing them and shipping them to Warsaw, Vilnius and Katowice.

Uncle's orchard had to be minded in the fall. We minded that orchard at night, so that no one would make any trouble, steal the apples. In the daytime we made boxes. Later the apples had to be picked and packed into those boxes and they were sent to Lodz, to Warsaw. I remember that I was supposed to get 20 zloty for two months of work. That was quite a lot of money. I would have become independent. It would have been my first real cash. But the war broke out...

I remember the beginning of the war like this: 1st September [1939] I was out of town, some 5 kilometers away, at that uncle's. We were in the orchard. There was a medic there and a female doctor - they had a radio. And I found out that the war had broken out, that there was this attack on Poland [16](#). At first nothing much was happening in the town. We were picking fruit. But the Russians marched in later. There was a shooting in the town. My younger brother went to let the horses out and he said that he was on the border and that there must be some military maneuvers or something. Later, around 10am some Russians arrived. They had crossed the border and reached us, they came into our yard. I don't know if they were the new authorities or what. They started chasing [catching] horses. The horses were good [strong], they wanted to catch them and they chased them into our yard. But one Russian saved them, didn't let them take the horses.

And it all began. I mean, there used to be private stores in the town, but all of them closed down immediately, you couldn't buy anything in the stores. [Especially] after the Russians marched in, the Russians were crossing rivers, all the private stores were closed, there was nothing. Well, those first days were good for us, we made money selling things. We took those apples to the station, we had lots of them.

However, I didn't make any money then, they'd pay me in apples. When the war broke out money lost its value, so Uncle paid me in apples for my work. I took those apples home. Daddy came with a cart and loaded up an entire cart, even two carts full of apples. We were up to our ears in apples. We didn't know what to do with them, so my brother would stand by the river and sell those apples. Well, he didn't really sell them, he would give them to the soldiers. He didn't take any money for them, because money wasn't worth anything, but he asked for some tobacco, a piece of soap, after all there was nothing available.

When the Russians came there was no joyful atmosphere. There were some greetings. It was mostly those leftist organizations greeting them: 'Long live the Soviet Union!' For the young people it was a novelty. Something new. An interesting thing, but usually it was horrible. We felt it was war, because by then we knew what war was. When the Russians came, on the first day we hid in the basement all day long.

Later, after Father went to the other side of the river, he saw all that chaos. Until that time people didn't know what was happening there. On the first day Father said that this song which they were singing, this 'Katyusha' was very nice, used to be very nice when we heard it from the other side of the river [Mr. Solowiejczyk means that when the Russians were singing the popular Russian folk song 'Katyusha' before the war it was a simple and nice song. After they invaded Poland, the song became a symbol of the presence of the occupant.] And he found out then, he found out about the hunger, the terror, everything.

Then the deportations began. First they started deporting all the members of the intelligentsia, teachers. Arrests began. The first from among our friends to be arrested were Pawel Skolysz and others, who had restaurants. We were nervous, perhaps not as much as the Poles, but still, you couldn't be sure of anything. They could come and get you, point their fingers at you. There were no differences, Pole, or Russian, or Jew. They deported lots of our friends. There was general chaos, general 'trauer.' A general insecurity about tomorrow. So it was a tragedy.

I wasn't working then, because there was no work. I was helping my father. We had horses, so we transported goods. We needed to have special permits to go to the other side of the river. At first, when those deportations started, Father would help people get their things. He was friends with a lot of people in the town and they were grateful, because he had good horses and they could pack a lot of things.

Then June 1941 came. There was chaos in the city. People started running away from the city [17](#). And we needed to run away from the town, because the town was wooden and there was only one bridge. When they started bombing, the city caught fire and we had to run away, because there was no place to stay. Father had left earlier, he was a horse-driver, he was mobilized to take some doctor closer to the front. And we stayed. They took Father early in the morning. Some activity began in the city around 10am. People started running away. We were left alone, so our neighbor, Mrs. Gram [Chawa Ester], a close friend of the family, said she'd take us, that she was going in the

same direction as our father. Her mother had a tavern along the way, if Father was coming back, he'd surely stop there. We were hopeful.

But they started bombing out in the fields. They killed a boy who was minding the cows, our cow came running from the field. So we - me, my two younger brothers [Izrael and Mojzesz] and our mother, together with our neighbor, went across the bridge, because it was the only way out of the town. As soon as we crossed the bridge, we hadn't even gotten off the bridge completely, a plane came along and bombed the other end of the bridge. And we had to run away. Our neighbor said we'd go to Polock [at the mouth of the Polota River, on the bank of the Dzwina], because her sister Basia was in Polock. So we turned left with her towards Polock, but we only went for one or two kilometers when we started wondering what it would be like if Father came back and didn't find us.

We had some packages with us, pillows, all the valuables we could carry. It wasn't much, but it was something. And there was one cow walking with us. Mother decided to stay with the middle brother [Izrael] and wait for Father and we went to Polock. It is 35 kilometers from Dżisna [correctly: approx. 60 km from Dżisna], but it is closer if you walk along the Dzwina River. We didn't have to take a ferry, because we had managed to cross that bridge which was later bombed, so we were in Polock by nighttime. We found the house of the neighbor's sister and found a place to stay there.

Meanwhile, Daddy came back. He had taken that medic to the front. The Germans were probably already in Dżisna. The bridge was damaged, no one knew how to cross it and take the rest of our things from the house. Uncle Mates gave Father a bag of flour and some bread. And my parents set out with my brother to join us in Polock. There is a large forest between Dżisna and Polock. It was a wild forest, it wasn't used in Polish times, no trees were chopped down, it was more than 20 kilometers in length. And they somehow turned into that forest, there were Germans on one side and Russians on the other side. And they were in the middle. Some shooting broke out, trees were falling down, they couldn't get out. But my mother was a resourceful woman, she went to those Russians, they drove a tank, cleared the way and in the morning Father managed to pass with the family.

I should mention that those Jews who stayed in Dżisna were all killed by the Germans. 3,800 Jews, buried in two long graves, somewhere on the border of the town. Germans later planted trees there. They thought it would mask it, there's still a forest growing there. The first victims were two rivals, photographers. One was called Epsztejn, the other one Kandakiewicz. Kandakiewicz, as it later turned out, was some kind of a Soviet spy. And Epsztejn had a dog that he called Hitler. And this Kandakiewicz, as soon as the Germans entered, went there and told them this and this Epsztejn was killed first with his family. Some 20 people from our family died in the ghetto. Mostly the uncles and their families, later some more distant relatives, some cousins. We survived only because we ran away with that neighbor.

We kept on going northeast of Polock, towards Nowe. That neighbor's brother-in-law showed us that direction. It turned out that wherever we arrived, the Germans had already arrived there before us. As we were walking, the Russians forced us to move a herd of cattle to a train station. Some planes came by in the morning and bombed the station. Some of the animals were killed, others ran away into the forest. That's how we got rid of the cattle and we were free. But we had to keep on moving. If we stayed put, the Germans would be there. Finally those Germans were in front of us. We managed to get all the way to Starobielsk, Ostaszkowo and Staropiesk [approx. 600

km from Moscow] where the camps [18](#) were. The Russian army was there and they didn't let you go into the forest. That's when we heard about those Polish camps. It was a secret. Nobody said this out loud.

Later on, slowly, we finally made it to Rzew [approx. 450 km from Moscow]. It was a train junction. We didn't have the strength to go any further. We were exhausted. The horse was heavy, it had to be fed. We didn't have any grain. But the horse went through a lot. Lice were eating us alive. We didn't have any food. There was a train station in Rzew, trains full of soldiers would arrive there. They were taking them to the front. Wherever we arrived, the Germans were already there, but not there. We found out that those cattle wagons they were bringing the soldiers in would be empty after they got off and we could get in and go deeper into Russia. It was organized like that, they gave you some bread, some food. So we decided to go.

We also sold the cow in one of the villages we were passing through. The woman gave us a few rubles, a basket of eggs, she wanted to give us a hen, but we didn't take it, because we wouldn't have been able to cook it. We left the horse at the train station in Rzew. Father went to this office and was issued a receipt for the horse. We boarded the train together with others. We didn't go straight, but kept turning. Northwest to Balagoje [approx. 500 km from Vilnius]. The tracks must have been busy. Balagoje was a train junction, but we didn't reach it, because there was an air raid. They bombed the station, lots of damaged trains and tracks. They would only let us pass in the evening, after they had cleaned it up. They wanted us to pretend that the wagons were empty. We opened the doors, the windows, the wagons looked empty and we hid in the forest. German planes were flying back and forth.

We kept going, via Kalinin [approx. 300 km from Moscow], Rybinsk [approx. 550 km from Moscow], Jaroslaw [approx. 500 km from Moscow]. We passed Moscow and stopped somewhere at some small station. They asked us to unload the wagons. And some farmers from the kolkhoz showed up there and took us to a kolkhoz. Not by force, if you didn't want to, you didn't have to go with them. We looked. We were not alone, there was also one more man from our town with us with his family. Szuchman. We saw that there was great poverty there, the horses were weak, we decided not to go [to the kolkhoz], because we were afraid we'd die of hunger in the winter. We decided to wait. We had some flour, so Mother went to the bakery, asked for some yeast, they gave it to her and we baked bread. We were hoping the train would go to Niznij Nowgorod [a city in the European part of Russia, near the junction of the Oka and Volga Rivers, approx. 800 km from Moscow].

And we reached Niznij Nowgorod. It's a large city on the Volga River, a harbor. There were repatriation points there at every station. So we showed up there. They said that on some day a ship would start along the Volga River towards the cities: Kazan [approx. 1350 km from Moscow], Samara [approx. 1650 km from Moscow], Saratow [approx. 1400 km from Moscow]. There was hope we'd stop there in one of those larger cities, port cities, where we could make a living. They loaded us on that ship, on the lower deck. Our clothes were dirty, there were rats everywhere, mice. The parents cooked some meals. We had boiled water, they gave us some groats. They'd also sometimes give us some bread.

We were approaching Saratow, we wanted to get off. Oh no! No way. We needed to have special permits. You could get them from the Soviet authorities. Because they wouldn't let you off wherever you wanted to. Some people had those permits, but we didn't have anything. No money,

no resources. We didn't know those Soviet rules well. And they didn't trust us. We had only been under Soviet rule for two years. We were second-class citizens. And they didn't let us go deeper into Russia. So we had problems because of those passports.

We lived from what we got helping those who were getting off the ship. We would carry packages ashore. They'd always give us a little bit of money. It was warm and there we'd buy some pumpkins, these sweet pears, we'd stuff ourselves. And what else did we - kids - need? So we stayed on that ship, because they didn't want to let us off until we reached Stalingrad [approx. 1,800 km from Moscow].

They unloaded us in Stalingrad. In the harbor. This entire journey took about one month. We wanted to stay there, because one of those who arrived with us said it would be good there. He was there before 1920, he knew there was fish and groats. But they wouldn't let us. They said they'd get us on another boat and take us to Astrachan. So we waited. There were children with us - my two younger brothers [Izrael and Mojzesz] and our acquaintances [the Szuchmans] had children too. They told us there was a zoo there. So Daddy went to the zoo with all the children. We got there and there was a bombing. The Germans bombed the zoo. All the animals, the lions, were dead. But the children were pleased anyway, because they got to see lions. But Mommy didn't let Daddy go anywhere with the children after that.

The boat finally arrived and they loaded us on the lower deck again. They gave us boiled groats, but the lice were eating us, it was horrible. So they took us to Astrachan [approx. 75 km from Moscow], but they didn't want to let us off in Astrachan either. And from Astrachan they took us to the village Siedlistoje. The kolkhoz Siedlistoje. It was 1941. It was the end of our journey. We settled there. They unloaded us, gave us some flats.

It turned out that there were mostly people like us there, who had been deported. From Upper Volga. They used to be farmers, wealthy people. They welcomed us. It was summer, we had a place to sleep. The next day they told us to go to the kolkhoz square. There they gave us jobs. Daddy and my brothers were collecting hay and I had to go to the army.

They told me to go to the voyenkomat, because Siedlistoje was a larger village and there was a voyenkomat there. It was a kind of army office, where they conscripted men into the army. And since that time I was a recruit. There were a few others like me and they sent us to take a course. It was supposed to be a minesweeping course, but it was more of a firefighting course. They taught us how to maintain fire hydrants. We completed that course, there were a few of us. They divided us up. The Volga River split up into little deltas and there were islands there and 'Lager' [forced labor camps] on these islands. There were lots of prisoners there. They could send you to a camp for everything. There were people there, sentenced to 20, 15 years. There were these fire-safety boards there, hydrants, buckets, brooms, these metal hooks. There were also water reservoirs there. And we had to make sure all this was functioning. I was assigned to one camp.

There were these booths along the Volga, these wooden houses, with cane growing all around them. These booths were set up every 500 meters or so. That's where we slept. I was in one booth and then there'd be another guy in the next booth. This camp of mine was an entire city. There was a bakery there, a school. There were lots of prisoners there, they had to be guarded. They mostly dealt with fishing. And they supplied to these 'shalandas.' A 'shalanda' is a factory, a fish processing plant. Several thousand prisoners processed fish in these factories. From time to time

they'd go out to sea. The family stayed, some of them had families there, they had children.

I was living there in that little house and my parents were in Siedlistoje. They later moved them to another kolkhoz. It was called Mielstroy. A village, with a lake nearby. Father worked there in a fish processing plant. Mielstroy means breeding fish. Miel is these tiny fish. There was a water reservoir there and that's where they kept the fish. And they had to dig ditches, so there'd be water [flowing from the lake to the reservoir].

I had everything there in that 'Lager:' they gave me bread, they had their own vegetables, watermelons, tomatoes, so I lived normally. They even gave us underclothes. I was there as a soldier, I wore a uniform. I had interesting acquaintances. There were these prisoners who were better [educated]. One was really intelligent, he was the director of some large plant. He had a 15-year sentence, for overlooking something. Then there was the director of a bakery, he also had a 15-year sentence. I didn't look for them, they contacted me. What kind of contact? They met twice a week in that cane. The director of the bakery would bring some bread, the gardener would bring some tomatoes, another one some fish. And this director, he had a permit, so he could go to Astrachan when he needed to. And he would bring things from Astrachan.

Then this baker, when he was baking bread, when he closed the oven hermetically, he had these pipes from the back of the oven where the steam went out and for one load of bread he'd get half a liter of spirit. I don't know how he did it, but that's what I heard. And they all brought it to me. They played cards at night.

I was pleased, because I had something to eat. I always did what my father told me to do: 'Always mind your elders and do whatever they're doing.' I was really comfortable there. They would come in the evening, I'd go somewhere, usually in that cane, cover myself with something, because the mosquitoes were biting. And I was pleased, because when that engineer came from Astrachan, he'd always bring a present for me. And that's how it went for several months.

I was re-stationed in Ikranoje [approx. 20 km from Astrachan]. It was in the fall [1941]. I was there at the voyenkomat, serving there. But they [Russians] didn't trust us. It was a kind of second rate army. We didn't know what was going on around us. We were in Ikranoje for some time. Well, maybe a month. We later went to Astrachan, to the army unit. I felt better there, because there were more boys like me there, from the other side of the River Bug, from Ukraine, from Lwow. I felt fine there. They trained us in building bridges, fortifications. We built bunkers there.

Then they sent us to the Kalmen Steppes. It was the end of 1941, early 1942. The Kalmen Steppe is a desert, near Stalingrad. And there we dug those ditches, bunkers, anti-tank fortifications, all kinds of holes in the earth for the command. But there were some problems with water. There was sand there, so when water appeared, it would all collapse. You'd dig a half-meter hole there and there'd already be water there.

We stayed there until the Germans arrived. When the Germans got there, our unit was moved to the Volga River. There were temporary bridges there. We were helping to build a river crossing. I couldn't find a dry place all winter long, so I fell ill. I got sick, because of that cold water and had to spend some time in the sick ward.

Since 1942 I was in the Soviet army. But it wasn't a regular army. They didn't trust us. Well, they didn't trust us, because we were Polish citizens. We were always supervised, because they didn't trust us. There were NKVD [19](#) officers all around us and we were simply discriminated by them. We would set up mine fields, that's what we specialized in. We served the bridge over the Volga. Some also worked in factories. I didn't feel like it.

A bomb fell on one of the temporary bridges in Dubowka [approx. 8 km from Stalingrad]. I was injured, I had to spend some two months in hospital, in Krasnoarmiejsk [Krasnoarmiejskij, approx. 55 km from Stalingrad]. My teeth were knocked out, I could later take them from my mouth like sunflower seeds. But I somehow pulled through. I still have these scars, but the accident mostly damaged my airways. When I got out of hospital, I went back to the unit, to the minesweepers.

We mostly worked the mines. We had to set up and clear mine fields. Because at first you had to set the mine field up and, after they had surrounded the Germans, then you had to clear it. We reached the Volga River. The town of Kolacz [Kalacz, approx. 15 km from Stalingrad]. When we were walking from Kolacz, I think it was on New Year's Eve, we encountered the French squad Volga-Niemen [Normandie-Niemen]. The French were hospitable - they gave us tea. We got there after they had already liquidated the Germans, this Paulus's army, the Russians surrounded them from both sides. And the second German unit, they were chased all the way to Ukraine, to Rostow. Our task was to clear the mine fields and pick up the dead bodies. There were lots of corpses there. German, Russian and Romanian. There was great hunger. We ate horses, as long as they weren't stinking yet, we didn't care if they had been killed or died on their own. And that's how we made it until, I think, March [1942].

There were these valleys near Stalingrad. The Germans were roaming in the valleys. At first, when the Russians caught them, they'd kill them. And then there was an order that you couldn't. That you had to take them to the headquarters. Once they caught three Germans and three of us had to take them to the headquarters. We took them there and, when we were coming back, we went into one of those valleys. We saw that there was some smoke coming from a hut. Six guys, German. They were armed. They were cooking something. They had something from those packages and some warm coffee. Because the Germans would drop packages there, these canvas bags with food. They had better food than we did. Sometimes we also found these packages.

Once we were sitting in a hut, there was snow, a plane came by, we thought: bomb! We got down on the ground. We waited for the explosion, but there was none, just this canvas bag dropped down. One of those Germans could speak Russian and he told us not to be afraid, that they wouldn't hurt us, that they wanted us to take them to the headquarters. They surrendered. They were armed, but they were afraid!

There was this one corporal in my unit, his name was Strug. He was just like me, they didn't trust him too. He took the locks out of their automatic guns, ordered them to get up. We searched them. We took their grenades, everything. We left the automatic guns, but took the locks with us. We took them to the Russian headquarters. There were officers there, or whoever, they admitted us and confirmed receiving those Germans. We left the headquarters as heroes. We got three days off for that deed, so that we could go somewhere, get ourselves cleaned up.

There was this town called Bikietowka near Stalingrad. It was a larger settlement, really. There weren't many civilians there, everything was military. But there were some civilians. We found out

that there was a small market there. Well, if there's a market, we've got to see it. We had to dress up a bit. There was everything in those valleys, whatever you wanted. We took the best things off those corpses, leather bags. Leather shoulder bags. Soldiers usually carry maps in these. We cut out pieces of leather from them. We needed that for [shoe] soles, because it was war. Money didn't mean anything and leather would be used for shoe soles or something. We took blankets, sheets and went to this Bikietowka. We wanted to exchange it for something to eat. We were hungry like dogs.

We reached Bikietowka and we saw some woman standing on the street selling pierogis. Pierogis are these large pancakes. Where she got them from, I don't know, but we gave her a blanket or something and she gave us five pierogi each. They were so bitter we couldn't stand it, but we ate them. It turned out that a barge with barley had sunk there, on the Volga. They dried the barley, ground it and that's why it was so bitter. We ate it. We kept going.

We reached the house of an elderly couple, this grandma and grandpa. They told us that we could find a place to sleep there and they gave us shelter. We spent two days there. There was dry wood out there in the backyard, so we chopped it up, heated the oven. The grandpa had some barley, so we found a hand-mill, ground the barley and we had some barley groats. That was our feast. We didn't pay anything for sleeping there. Well, what could we have paid, what could a soldier have given them? Some long johns, a piece of soap, some underclothes, German pants, we gave that to the grandpa. After three days we returned to the unit.

In early May we went to the front, on the Orlov-Kursk Axis [Orlov, approx. 65 km from Moscow, Kursk, approx. 85 km from Moscow]. It was 1943, after Stalingrad. They loaded us on trains and let us out in a village called Kapuscino. It was still a second-class unit. It was a minesweeping division. We built bridges, trenches, fortifications, these ditches that are used on the front. We set up mine fields, masked roads, we would move an entire forest. The road to Rostov and Kursk was constantly under fire. From their side of the Oka [River], where the Germans were sitting, they could see open space. And they'd shoot. So there were several kilometers of a road they could shoot at and we had to mask that road, so they wouldn't see it. We had to move an entire forest in one night. We chopped up these trees, branches and set up these green fences, along the road. From a distance it would look like a forest. NKVD soldiers guarded us and shook their guns at us.

I was wounded by the time the Kursk battle [20](#) began. And here's how it happened. There was a river there on the Orlov-Kursk Axis, a tributary of the Oka. I knew we would finish setting this fence up at night and we were supposed to start preparing the river crossing. The river wasn't deep, I was curious, I wanted to check out what the shore looked like in the morning. So I left the forest. It was a sandy shore. I looked around a bit, I figured out what the crossing should look like. I also wanted to get cleaned up, so I approached the water. It was still dark. And then, suddenly, a plane appeared out of nowhere. But those scout planes never had bombs. Everyone knew that. So I was sure this plane wouldn't have any bombs. I got out and the plane dropped a bomb. I fell down. I was hit in the leg.

I didn't lose consciousness, I somehow managed to get ashore, out into the open. I crawled to the bomb hole, there was a rule that if a bomb hole was fresh, you could find shelter there, because they would never hit the same place twice. So I crawled in there. And by the time I managed to get in there, the bone was sticking out of my wounded leg. My leg was like a bow. I had a belt with me,

a canvas belt, so I tied it around the leg, above the knee. My leg was getting numb. Only in the afternoon did some soldiers who were distributing food and water find me there.

They took me to this village, Kapuscino. There was this village chamber there [a field hospital], there was a nurse and she tended wounds there. She put in some splints. This kind of wire bed and she put some bandage around my leg, so it wouldn't bend. And I stayed there until evening. I had to be taken to the 'sanbat' [sanitary battalion]. It was a serious wound. I had to lie down for seven months because of that leg!

There were cars there [on the Orlowsk-Kursk Axis], which were used for taking ammunition to the front. They were preparing for that battle. The famous Orlowsk-Kursk battle, an armored battle. Those cars would come back empty. So they took me in one of those cars to a sanitary point. The Sanitary Battalion. There was no special transport. There was no bed in that car, it wasn't comfortable, because they used it for ammunition. And the road was very bumpy. It was very uncomfortable. I couldn't stand the pain and I cried horribly. So the driver stopped and left me in the ditch by the road.

A nurse was taking me there and she stayed with me. I couldn't stand it. I was in the ditch, there were planes flying overhead. She went to get some grass, because there was some freshly cut grass nearby. She wanted to put it under my head. So she took a handful of this grass and put her hand on a mine. The blast took her hand off. So we were both wounded. We were there in that ditch until nighttime. A driver was driving by at night and took mercy on us. He took us in his car. Over those bumps. He let some air out of his tires and he took us. He didn't take us to the 'sanbat,' but to some village in the forest, I don't remember the name. But there were civilians there, kolkhoz workers.

They took us on a wagon then. There was hay in those wagons and they took us to some forest. There was the so-called Medsanbat there. A medical battalion. And here's what it looked like: there used to be stables there, cattle, cows, horses. Those stables had been bleached a bit, there were makeshift beds there. There were lots of us there. They collected wounded soldiers from all over until there were enough to fill a train. Then they'd be loaded up on a train and taken somewhere.

That's when I had surgery done on my leg. They took off those splints, stretched the leg out and put a cast on it. I asked them to shave the hair off my leg, because I knew it would hurt when they were taking the cast off. But they told me they wouldn't, because they were getting me ready for transport and the cast would stay on better with the hair. The cast started drying at night. Those hairs were getting pulled, it hurt like hell. It was such horrible pain, I was crying out from pain, yelling. I couldn't stand it and nobody would help me. I hadn't eaten for two days, my body was getting healthy, regenerating, I had to eat something. There were lots of patients there and all of them were complaining. I called the nurse, but she wouldn't come.

And that's where I met a kindred spirit. I didn't know him well, I only found out here in Lodz, in the 1970s, who he was, but it was too late, because I couldn't meet him there. His name was Kielerman. He was also wounded. This man with a cast on his arm showed up unexpectedly and asked, 'What's wrong with you?' So I told him. He knew who I was, because it takes one to know one.

He was also a Jew, from Poland, central Poland. I was from the Vilnius area and Jews used a different dialect there, a different accent. They used this jargon in my home town. He spoke differently, he had an accent resembling Russian. He went to get the nurse, brought her there. Then he'd keep coming to see me and asking, 'How are you doing? Better?' He also brought me water and something to eat, because I hadn't eaten for two days. He went and brought back this large biscuit. A black one. I can still see that biscuit. I dipped it in water as if he'd brought me the best meal ever. He was my guardian angel, as it turned out. I don't know how he knew it, but whenever I needed help, he'd show up. He saved me so many times, did so much for me. Even after the war, here in Lodz, he also took my side more than once. It was always something nice, unexpected.

After some two, three days there were enough of us and they brought in the train cars. Those were those Russian sanitary cars, with these stretchers attached to the sides. Those stretchers I was on got dislodged and fell down. I fell down on the wounded leg and those who were above me, fell down on me. But the cast was strong and nothing happened. They brought us to the station at night, loaded us up into the train cars. It was all very fast and we were off. We went east, towards Moscow. To Mozajsk [approx. 20 km from Moscow]. There was a hospital there. And some planes came flying by when we were on our way there. Those who wouldn't be able to get out by themselves in an emergency were up on the top bunk. Those who had good arms and legs were down on the bottom bunks.

So when the planes appeared, they stopped the train in the forest and those who could got out of the train and hid in the forest. I stayed up there on the top bunk. We could see, from the window, those planes dropping bombs. There were a few more men there and we decided to get down from the top bunk. But my cast got caught up in something, there were these chains there, and I found myself upside down on that bunk. And who came to my rescue? Kielerman. He was in that transport, found me, helped get me free from those chains and went to the forest himself. They unloaded us in Mozajsk, took us to the hospital, started shaving us. These young women came. And there was Kielerman again.

The way this hospital was organized was like this. If they hoped to cure someone within a month, they'd keep him in Mozajsk. And those who had to be treated for longer than a month were transported. They took us all the way to the Ural. The town was called Gorod Otmulinsk. In the direction of Komsomolsk. There was a hospital there, which had been evacuated from Charkow. There was a Jewess there, Pertka Aronowna, this 'gyeroy' [Russian: hero] woman. Everyone was afraid of her.

There were different people there. One man had been wounded near Charkow, in his heel. He stepped on a mine and his entire heel was blown off and the nails from his shoe got imbedded in his foot. He spent the entire war in that hospital and didn't let them amputate that leg. They wanted to amputate my leg too, but finally those bones mended, they were set well, so they mended. They wanted to cut it off, because it was the easiest for them. They cut off your leg and sent you home after two weeks. But they didn't amputate the leg after all. I had no home to go back to.

I was there in Otmulinsk for four months. It was the end of 1943. November, December. When I got out of hospital, they sent me to Kiev [approx. 800 km from Moscow] and from there to Gorki

[approx. 400 km from Moscow]. It was winter 1943 [actually 1944]. I was not on the front line in Gorki. I was dismissed from military service for six months, I could go wherever I wanted to, but I didn't have a place to go to. My family was in Astrachan Oblast [District]. The Majaczno village, on the Caspian Sea, some 120 kilometers from Astrachan, on the seacoast. So finally I stayed in Gorki. They assigned me to a noodle factory. This factory was supposed to give us accommodation, food and we were supposed to help them the best we could.

I was young, I didn't want to stay in one place, so I volunteered for work. I wanted to carry bags, but I couldn't, because of my leg. The leg kept snapping back and forth, so they assigned me to the reception desk. There was hunger, so people from that factory, mostly women, would carry out bags of noodles, flour, we had to search them. I was young, I didn't feel comfortable searching women. The director of the factory said that there were complaints about me and suggested that I apply for a transfer. So I did and they transferred me to an oil factory.

It was possible to survive there. There were potatoes, there was oil. They later moved me to the 'Krasny Jakier' factory. It was a metallurgic factory, they made bombs there. My leg got stronger. I worked the loading ramp. We loaded up metal scraps into wagons.

It was already 1944. They sent us to Kamieniec Podolski [approx. 90 km from Lwow], to a factory. It was a metallurgical, chemical factory, a large one. But we were young, we wanted to have some fun, be free for a while. So we took some buckets and said we were going to get some water and got lost along the way. We were late for the train. We missed it. Luckily, our friends covered for us, because they could divide our food rations among themselves. That's when we found out the Polish Army [21](#) was getting organized in Sumy. We ran off to Poltawa [approx. 700 km from Lwow].

In Poltawa we showed up at the command post, with those buckets. We didn't let the buckets out of our hands. They assigned us to Sumy, to the Polish Army. And that's how my stint in the Russian army ended. There were ten of us there signing up for the Polish Army. But the Russians didn't want to let us go easily. At first they turned us back to Poltawa. There were more guys like me there [volunteers for the Polish Army], they were from Ukraine and there was the recruiting committee there. They told us we were in Unit 4, in the Polish Army, they took us to Sumy [approx. 150 km from Poltawa]. It was later on, when this Polish Army had been organized.

In Sumy I found out they were organizing a cavalry unit. And I had been a horseman ever since I was a kid. I went there, there was this guy in a uniform. I don't remember, I think he was a corporal, he was signing us up. And there were lots of people there. From Podole, from Wolyn, they were all cavalymen. My turn came. He took my papers. He asked, 'Have you had lunch?'. I said, 'No.' 'Are you sure you want to be in the cavalry?' 'Yes.' I could see my friends waiting outside. He put the papers away and told me, 'Go to the kitchen, I'll let them know and they'll feed you.' I went there. And there was a sergeant there, a great guy, he was asking everyone, 'Where are you from? And you? You? Are you from those Solowiejczyks? Come here, brother!' And I recognized that he was from Dzisna.

His name was Arcimionek. He changed it to Artymowicz there. Because that's how it was with those Belarusians. If he wanted to be Polish, he'd call himself Artymowicz, if he didn't, he'd call himself Arcimionek. But I didn't mind. He was a fun guy, he used to make rafts and float down the Dzwina. He liked to drink. The Russians deported him too. He took me to the kitchen, fed me. I also told him that there was a friend with me, this Sipser from Tarnopol, a young guy too. A Jew. Arcimionek took

my things and my friend's things, his documents. He said that the guy who took my documents was one of Pilsudski's settlers. He had been deported too. He knew my uncle [Abram]. Uncle used to sell horses, he'd give horses to those settlers. Because at first they didn't have anything, so he'd give them horses and they would remember it.

So he told him to take me somewhere, so I could rest, before the second recruiting committee. Arcimionek took us somewhere to the countryside. He had a fiancée there. We bathed, got some sleep. We spent some two, three weeks there. He gave me some tips: 'Don't try to act up with that accent of yours. You don't need this. Don't try to get assigned to the front, try to get accepted for courses. Petty officers, officers...' And that's what I did. I didn't need to pretend, because with that leg of mine, I wouldn't have been accepted for the front anyway.

First I went to a petty officers' course in Zytomierz [approx. 850 km from Moscow]. It was still 1944. It was like an officers' school, but you didn't get an officer's rank. It was a six-week course. There they'd say, 'Although I can't write, I can't read, I can speak.' I later learned these courses were modeled after Pilsudski's 1st Division. I graduated from the course, but didn't receive an officer's rank.

There was a political officer there, Michalak, he was from Cracow. I went to see him and told him I wasn't fit to be an officer, because of that leg and that accent. I never hid the fact that I was Jewish. Anyway, not with my accent. My name, Solowiejczyk, was well known there. Because of that uncle Abram, who used to sell horses. So I knew my place, I knew I'd finally get a disability pension anyway. Although I could have done whatever I wanted. I was held in high esteem. I was known for being able to arrange things that others weren't able to do.

They later moved us to Lublin [approx. 242 km from Lodz], to officers' training school. We were quartered in Majdanek [22](#). There we found corpses which were still warm. It was dangerous there. If a soldier didn't come back in the evening, we'd go looking for him. We'd find him in a ditch, undressed. The Ukrainians didn't care if you were Jewish or not, if they needed a uniform they'd undress you and kill you.

I arrived in Lodz in 1945, in February. The Russians were still quartered in the barracks on Obroncow Stalingradu Street. We later cleaned those barracks up. If we needed coal, then we'd go out onto Obroncow Stalingradu under the bridge. There were peasants passing by in wagons, we would stop them, have them unload the wagon, go to the station to get some coal, load it up and bring to the barracks.

When we needed workers for the kitchen, we'd go out on the corner of Cmentarna and Obroncow Stalingradu Streets, to the bus stop. The Germans had to wear armbands. We took those with armbands for tidying up the barracks and to the kitchen. They worked until the evening. They'd get coffee, soup, we'd feed them and give them something to drink. They'd later wait in front of our gate, volunteer, because there was nothing to eat. And the Germans felt safer with us.

I was never in the ghetto in Lodz [23](#). I was a soldier, so I couldn't do that. But I was in touch with the Jewish community. The head of the garrison here in Lodz was Colonel Friedman [Centropa interviewee Michal Friedman]. He is in Warsaw now. He is some 90-something years old. He was one of the first lecturers in that officers' training school in Zytomierz. He was promoted to the rank of major very quickly. He was a professor from before the war. He never hid that he was a Jew. For

Easter 1945, while we were still there on Zachodnia Street, he organized a Pesach celebration. Later there was this colonel, Subicz. He almost killed me when I was working in the warehouse. He was an anti-Semite. A Jew, but an anti-Semite. He was later in Warsaw, he was said to have signed jail sentences for pre-war officers. He shot himself after Stalin's death.

I got married in 1956. My wife, Janina, nee Lesiak, was born in 1922. She was from the Kielce area [south-central Poland]. We met here in Lodz. She was also working for the army. We got married in the civil office on Kosciuszki Street. Later my friends came to my apartment, we had something to eat, to drink. There was food, there was drinking, there was a wedding. I remember I received a radio from the trade unions. We were living on the corner of Zakatna and Wieckowskiego Streets, in an old building. The room was some 40-something square meters.

My wife was a kind person. A kindred spirit, very positive. And sensitive. She was very devoted to my family. We were in love. We shared the ups and downs of life. She was the director of an officers' lounge on Tuwima Street. She was both the director and the cook, everything. We were doing well. But my wife couldn't have children. Doctors told her this and that, but nothing was working. She really took it hard, I'd tell her 'Give it a break.' She died in 1994. Of cancer.

I remarried five years later. My second wife, Danuta Truszkowska, was born in Petrykozy, in 1945. She was also a widow. She was also working in the officers' club. We met through a common acquaintance. Her husband had just died. We talked, well, we were a match and that's how we've been living until today.

I immediately found out about my parents. There was a hunchback in Lodz, he had run away from the ghetto in Glebokie, together with my cousin, Lazarz. He told us that this Lazarz was living in Oszmiana [approx. 50 km from Vilnius]. I wrote him a letter and found out that this Lazarz had a high position there, he was the director of a tannery. He was living there and that's where he got married. There was a small house near the tannery. They gave this house to him. And that's where my parents went, to Oszmiana, with my brother. They were working there, trading.

My brother was with them, but he was still a student. They later sent him [to work] to the printing house. He learned about printing, but he didn't work as a printer yet. He started dealing in trade, he was supplying goods to a restaurant. And that's how they lived. He later got married and they were quite well off. He married in Oszmiana, a woman who was born in Russia. She would tell him that the first time she had eaten so much that she felt full was after she got married. They met, because the mother-in-law was a seamstress, she would sew for women there. When she'd come, they'd give her something to eat and to drink and she'd be amazed and would say: 'You eat meat like wolves.' She wasn't used to this.

We were in touch with my parents. And after 1956 Mother came to Lodz for the first time, she brought things to sell. Later I would go there. My parents would have stayed there, in Oszmiana, but the situation at home was difficult. My brother's father-in-law moved in with them, a former 'chekista' [an activist of the internal security organization in Soviet Russia, operating in 1917-1922, responsible for repressions], mentally ill. It was impossible to live with him. We decided my parents would move in with us.

Such things could be arranged quickly then. Just one month. I wrote to Moscow, to the Polish Embassy. I attached a certificate that my room had an area of over 40 square meters, plus a 12-

meter kitchen. I didn't tell them how many rooms, just the area. I signed a declaration that I would not apply for a new apartment. They sent an answer immediately, sent the papers. This was in 1967. When they were allowed to come here, we went to bring them over here. They settled here. In Lodz. My parents lived with us in this apartment on Wieckowskiego Street. Father lived there until he died [in 1970], Mother also lived with us in the new apartment on Rojna Street.

My parents, when they arrived in Lodz, had some money with them. It was some 80 million, in that currency. It wasn't much, but it was enough. I had enough money for accommodation. My wife was working too, she was resourceful, she wasn't lazy. If there were two days off from work, she could pack her bags up and go to Moscow or Vilnius, to trade.

My parents felt well here. My mother found some friends quickly. My father started going to the synagogue. I took them to the Synagogue on Rewolucji 1905 Roku Street. The synagogue is still there. And he liked going to the Jewish community. All in all, Father didn't live long here, some two years. He was 80 when he died. It was a blood clot. He never checked his blood pressure, never went to the doctor, never took any pills. He was always in good shape, healthy. When he died in hospital on the second day after he was admitted, Mother said: 'Son, you have to deserve such a death.' And she had to suffer, poor woman. She had surgery, after that she lived for a year longer. She suffered for seven months. She died in 1972.

Uncle Abram, Mother's brother, came to Lodz earlier, with his family. I helped him get set up, my wife also helped them. He was a tailor, but he didn't work as a tailor. He quickly decided to move to Israel. When Mother visited us for the first time he was already in Israel. He asked for someone to come visit him, because he wanted to pass on a present to Mother. Well, I couldn't even mention this, I was in the army after all. Abram sent a check for 200 dollars, so it would be official. My wife could go. It was in the early 1960s. She was there for two months, she later recollected that time fondly. She was well liked there. She liked the kibbutzim best. She used to say, 'What a life!' So I asked, 'So, should we go?'. She answered, 'You can't, it's not for you. I could go there.' I wouldn't have been able to switch to a new environment.

Of my two brothers only Mojzesz is alive. He lives with his family in Vilnius. I am in touch with him. We write letters, phone each other. When I fell ill, my nephew was here immediately. My brother came to Lodz for Father's funeral, for my wife's funeral. And the second brother, Izrael, died in 1945. When my parents found out about his death, they let me know. I was still in Lublin then. I couldn't go there immediately, but I finally visited his grave.

It was in the village of Celiny, in the Kielce region, near Busko, somewhere not far away from Chmielnik. I had a good description, the number of the grave, but I didn't find anything there. I found out from the local residents that the bodies buried in those graves had been exhumed and taken to Sandomierz. I went to Sandomierz where there were mass graves, each one 15 meters long, with 10 posts. Supposedly even 1,000 people could have been buried under one such post. So there could be even 10,000 in one grave. And there were three such graves, so maybe even 30,000 bodies. I went to a gardener, bought all the flowers he had and put them on all three graves. I never went there again.

This Kielerman, my guardian angel from the war, also found his way to Lodz. I met him accidentally on the street, at a cab stop, when I was coming back from drinking at the garrison canteen. It was freezing, I was walking with a female friend from the canteen. You had to wait in a long line to get a

cab, but this friend of mine noticed her neighbor and he took us into his taxi. And this was Kielerman, but I didn't recognize him, I didn't know that this was his name. He didn't recognize me either, only later, by accident, he met my father at the Jewish community and he walked him home. Mother made some tea, they talked, she showed him a photo album and he recognized me. He told them what his name was and left his address.

I only found out about this after some time passed and I couldn't find him. I found out he had married some German woman and left for Germany. And disappeared without a trace. I needed him then, because I had lost some documents about how I was wounded, I could have used him as a witness. I later wrote to Bogoruslan, where there was an archive, the necessary documents were sent to Leningrad and then to me. They found them, they even gave me a Medal for the Defense of Stalingrad [24](#). They decorated us at the Grand Theater in Warsaw. I also have other decorations: 'Za pobiedu' [Russian: 'for victory'] and other Russian medals for my accomplishments, also a Cavalry Cross 'for outstanding service.' I was and still am a member of ZBOWiD [25](#). I retired in 1980.

With regards to my views, I think the best period during the PRL [26](#) was the time of Gierek [Edward Gierek, (1913-2001), Polish politician, socialist activist, 1970-1980 1st Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party and the leader of the state in the 1970s]. Although later, during Gierek's later period you could see that everything was falling apart, but I didn't think that it would all end.

I was afraid of the Russians. The entire border was guarded. And I can't say anything good about Gomulka's [27](#) period. There was Moczar [28](#) there and all those anti-Semitic incidents. It was really hard on me. When the war in Israel started, Yom Kippur [29](#), I didn't think they could win. On the one hand, I was happy that something was happening there, but, on the other hand, I didn't like this situation with the Arabs. Because there had always been conflicts there. One day, when I met an old Jew out on Wschodnia Street, I asked him what he thought about it. And he said, 'What, you don't think that Jews can attack? After all, they've shown what they can do.' I had my doubts, I knew there were few of them and lots of Arabs.

In the unit I talked with a colonel whom I knew well and he asked me what I thought about it. I told him that I didn't know and he said, 'I'm afraid this is the beginning of something bad.' I really took it hard. I was afraid what would come out of it. And also what started going on here. At a meeting, a kind of general rally at the unit, they formed a committee, this was already in 1968 [30](#), and you had to speak in front of the committee. They summoned me and asked me what I thought about what was happening in Israel. So I said, 'I agree with the resolution of the United Nations.' [Editor's note: The decision about the forming of the state of Israel was made by the General Assembly of the United Nations, in November 1947. The decision was made to create two states: a 'completely Jewish one' and a 'completely Arab one,' as the option which would have the highest chances of success.] I didn't say anything more. But it was hard for me. I would have liked to say that there were my relatives there and that I supported them and didn't care about you, but I wouldn't have dared.

Many of my acquaintances left then, in 1968. This friend of mine, from school, he was an officer and he lived in Warsaw. He didn't have to leave, he had a good military pension, but his two daughters, students, signed up to leave. And his wife too. So he left with them. Many people from Lodz left too. When it comes to me, everyone, all my Polish friends, knew I was a Jew, but nobody

spoke out against me. If someone was such a huge enemy, I wouldn't want to have anything to do with him. And there were many who tried to help me. There was no inappropriate behavior.

I've visited Israel three times. I mean, after this thaw, after Walesa [31](#). Because it was impossible earlier. I was working for the army until 1980. And so I went. I met many of my friends from school there, some family members. To be honest, perhaps if I hadn't been working for the army I would have left for good. There were even some people, a family, here in Lodz who wanted to take me along with them. A friend of my father's. And he had daughters and wanted me to marry one of them. At first I thought I'd go with them, but I wanted to keep in touch with my parents. I was always very devoted to my family and I don't regret it, because they needed my help. So finally I got them to move here to Poland and be with me. And this is where they died; they are buried at the Jewish cemetery.

As soon as it became possible, I started visiting Dżisna. Dżisna today is a place like no other. The entire city hasn't changed much. There are still World War I ruins there. Our house isn't there any longer, because it was wooden, there were fires, others were pulled down for firewood. There are no synagogues either. There are two buildings left, one used to be a bakery, there are some warehouses in the second one. The rest has burned down.

I was there some two or three years ago last time. Because I made a promise to myself, there, next to those graves [of those who were murdered] that I'd go there for as long as I could. So we went there many times. The Belarusians treated us well, they walked with us. I was very touched. They take care of the graves. The schools do it, the city council too. Especially now. Earlier this help wasn't needed as much, because several Jewish families were living there. But there haven't been any Jewish families around lately, so the authorities make sure this is done. People from Israel go there as well. The mayor of Dżisna was even invited to Israel. The Belarusians know about the Jewish residents of Dżisna mostly from stories, because there aren't many left of those who remember themselves. When I go there, they always wait for me. They've never treated me badly. So I'm moved by this.

I am in touch with the [Jewish] community [in Lodz] nowadays. I go for prayers, if my health allows me to, of course. I started going there after I retired. There used to be communities before that, I used to go there for holidays, but I didn't like the atmosphere that was there. But after my wife died, the situation changed. I didn't know what to do with myself. I was all alone. At first I would go to visit my brother, then come back. My brother lives in Vilnius. And so, slowly, I got used to it. And everything started reminding me of my childhood home. It was a traditional, Jewish family. And I like this Symcha [Symcha Keller, the leader of the Jewish Religious Community in Lodz], because he's such a kind person and always tries to hold everything together. I've gotten used to it and I feel well there. It's my life now.

I can tell you one thing [about my attitude to religion]. I never used to be particularly pious, but I believe in tradition. Not just in Jewish tradition. I respect all kinds of traditions in the world. When I was in the Russian Army I used to meet the Tatars, the Kalmyks and the Kazakhs, these different nationalities. And the Polish religion, or the Eastern Orthodox one, I accepted all these traditions and I was interested in them. I always respected them. And I always lived well with people.

So I was never really religious, but if my grandparents did it and my parents did it, then why should I keep on doing it. Well, I know about it more or less. I sometimes used to call it 'stories, fairy tales.'

I was interested in that. And people don't know anything about it, about the Bible and there are such wise things there.

Well, I don't really celebrate the holidays nowadays. If someone comes over to visit, then yes. I go there for Easter, bring some matzah, but we don't go through all the rituals, because it's a tough religion. For someone who had never come in contact with it, it would be something unthinkable to have three sets of pots in the kitchen. Knives, forks. And you can't eat butter in the same dish you use for meat. And then there are these 'parewe' [parve] dishes, these neutral ones.

My wife is a Catholic, but she's not too religious. I don't mind it. Well, she sets up Christmas trees for Christmas. She has granddaughters, they invited us for Christmas Eve. Why should I not go? I've come in contact with many religions, not just Catholics. So I feel well here, I can say. And, well, if you've managed to live such a long life, then you should really thank God.

Glossary:

1 Polish-Soviet War (1919-21)

Between Poland and Soviet Russia. It began with the Red Army marching on Belarus and Lithuania; in December 1918 it took Minsk, and on 5th January 1919 it drove divisions of the Lithuanian and Belarusian defense armies out of Vilnius. The Soviets' aim was to install revolutionary governments in these lands, while the Polish side had two territorial programs for them: incorporative (the annexation of Belarus and part of Ukraine to Poland) and federating (the creation of a system of nation states sympathetic to Poland). The war was waged on the territory of what is today Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland (west to the Vistula). Armed combat ceased on 18th October 1920 and the peace treaty was signed on 18th March 1921 in Riga. The outcome of the 1919-1920 war was the incorporation into Poland of Lithuania's Vilnius region, Belarus' Grodno region, and Western Ukraine.

2 Hasid

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

3 Ghetto in Dzisna

When the Germans entered Dzisna on 30th July 1941, there were 6,000 Jews living in the town. A ghetto was created in 1941. On 14th and 15th June 1942 the residents of the city were shot to death in a location called Piaskowe Gorki. A large part, some 2,000 people, ran away to the forest. Most of the runaways died when the Germans raided the area. Some formed a partisan unit, which joined the 4th Byelorussian Brigade, part of the Soviet partisan units.

4 Conflict between Hasidim and Misnagdim

Since the beginning of its existence, that is since the mid-18th century, Hasidism was opposed by Jews upholding traditional rabbinical Judaism. They were called Misnagdim, or opponents. Misnagdim criticized Hasidim for emphasizing the role of singing and dancing, while lessening the importance of studying the Torah and the Talmud, not upholding the proper times of the day for prayer and, most importantly, treating tzaddiks as intermediaries between God and man, which led to their cult. Some historians also notice the historical aspect of this conflict: supporters of Hasidism left their religious communities and stopped using their services, for example by employing their own ritual butchers, which undermined the material conditions of existence of the communities. Misnagdim used to curse Hasidim and considered them to be heretics. In Lithuania the spiritual leader of Misnagdim was Elijah ben Szlomo Zalman, called the Great Gaon of Vilnius - stopping the spread of Hasidism in that area is considered to be one of his achievements. The conflict between Hasidim and Misnagdim, very intense in the 18th century, gradually lessen in the second half of the 19th century, partly because of the great popularity of Hasidism, partly because of the need for solidarity when faced with the phenomenon of Haskala and the secularization of Jews.

5 The Lubavitch or Schneersohn Dynasty

the descendants of the tzaddik Zalman ben Barukh Shneur from the Liadi family, the leaders of the Chabad Hasidic movement. Zalman Shneur's eldest son, Dovber, settled in the town of Lubavitch in Belarus, the town became the center of the Chabad movement. After Dovber's death in 1827, his son-in-law Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch became the leader of the Lubavitch Hasidim, then his son Shmuel, his grandson Sholom Dovber and his great-grandson Joseph Isaac. The last one left the Soviet Union in the interwar period and moved to Poland and, after WWII broke out, moved to New York, where he created a large network of Chabad Hasidim organizations (schools, preschools, charities, magazines, publishing houses). Chabad Hasidim also live in Israel, Ukraine and in many other countries. Chabad's doctrine, formed by Zalman Shneur in the work 'Likutei Amarim,' emphasizes the role of the intellect in becoming closer to God and gives the tzaddiks a special role of God's chosen one, capable of direct contact with God.

6 Bund

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish. The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

7 Zionist parties in Poland

All the programs of the Zionist parties active in Poland in the interwar period were characterized by their common aims of striving to establish a permanent home for the Jews in Palestine, to revive

the Hebrew language, and to further political activity among the Jews (general Zionist program). They also worked to improve the lot of the Jews in Poland, and therefore ran at the Polish elections. In the Sejm (Polish Parliament) Zionist parties gained 32 of the total 47 seats won by the Jewish parties in 1922. Poalei Zion, founded in 1906, and divided in 1920 into Left Poalei Zion and Right Poalei Zion, represented left-wing views. Mizrachi, founded in 1902, united religious Zionists with a conservative social program. The Zionist Organization in Poland advocated a liberal program. Hitakhdut (Zionist Labor Party), established in 1920, combined a nationalist ideology with a socialist one. The Union of Zionist Revisionists, set up in 1925 by Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, sought the expansion of its own military structures and the achievement of the Zionist movement's aims by force. The majority of these parties were members of the World Zionist Organization, an institution co-ordinating the Zionist movement founded in 1897 in Basel. The most important Zionist newspapers in Poland included: Hatsefira, Haint, Der Moment and Nasz Preglad (Our Review).

8 Hashomer Hatzair in Poland

From 1918 Hashomer Hatzair operated throughout Poland, with its headquarters in Warsaw. It emphasized the ideological and vocational training of future settlers in Palestine and personal development in groups. Its main aim was the creation of a socialist Jewish state in Palestine. Initially it was under the influence of the Zionist Organization in Poland, of which it was an autonomous part. In the mid-1920s it broke away and joined the newly established World Scouting Union, Hashomer Hatzair. In 1931 it had 22,000 members in Poland organized in 262 'nests' (Heb. 'ken'). During the occupation it conducted clandestine operations in most ghettos. One of its members was Mordechai Anielewicz, who led the rising in the Warsaw ghetto. After the war it operated legally in Poland as a party, part of the He Halutz. It was disbanded by the communist authorities in 1949.

9 Hahalutz

Hebrew for pioneer, it stands for a Zionist organization that prepared young people for emigration to Palestine. It was founded at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia and began operating in Poland in 1905, later also spread to the USA and other countries. Between the two wars its aim was to unite all the Zionist youth organizations. Members of Hahalutz were sent on hakhshara, where they received vocational training. Emphasis was placed chiefly on volunteer work, the ability to live and work in harsh conditions, and military training. The organization had its own agricultural farms in Poland. On completing hakhshara young people received British certificates entitling them to immigrate to Palestine. Around 26,000 young people left Poland under this scheme in 1925-26. In 1939 Hahalutz had some 100,000 members throughout Europe. In World War II it operated as a conspiratorial organization. It was very active in culture and education after the war. The Polish arm was disbanded in 1949.

10 Betar

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the

revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

11 Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935)

Polish activist in the independence cause, politician, statesman, marshal. With regard to the cause of Polish independence he represented the pro-Austrian current, which believed that the Polish state would be reconstructed with the assistance of Austria- Hungary. When Poland regained its independence in January 1919, he was elected Head of State by the Legislative Sejm. In March 1920 he was nominated marshal, and until December 1922 he held the positions of Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. After the murder of the president, Gabriel Narutowicz, he resigned from all his posts and withdrew from politics. He returned in 1926 in a political coup. He refused the presidency offered to him, and in the new government held the posts of war minister and general inspector of the armed forces. He was prime minister twice, from 1926-1928 and in 1930. He worked to create a system of national security by concluding bilateral non-aggression pacts with the USSR (1932) and Germany (1934). He sought opportunities to conclude firm alliances with France and Britain. In 1932, owing to his deteriorating health, Pilsudski resigned from his functions. He was buried in the Crypt of Honor in the Wawel Cathedral of the Royal Castle in Cracow.

12 HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society)

Founded in New York City by a group of Jewish immigrants in 1881, HIAS has offered food, shelter and other aid to emigrants. HIAS has assisted more than 4.5 million people in their quest for freedom. This includes the million Jewish refugees it helped to immigrate to Israel (in cooperation with the Jewish Agency for Israel), and the thousands it helped resettle in Canada, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. As the oldest international migration and refugee resettlement agency in the US, HIAS also played a major role in the rescue and relocation of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and of Jews from Morocco, Ethiopia, Egypt and the communist countries of Eastern Europe. More recently, since the mid-1970s, HIAS has helped Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union. In Poland the society has been active since before 1939. After the war HIAS received permission to recommence its activities in March 1946, and opened offices in Warsaw, Bialystok, Katowice, Cracow, Lublin and Lodz. It provided information on emigration procedures and the policies of foreign countries regarding émigrés, helped deal with formalities involved in emigration, and provided material assistance and care for émigrés.

13 Kibbutzim in prewar Poland (correctly haksharas)

agricultural or production cooperatives training youth and preparing them for life in Palestine, through, e.g. teaching Hebrew and Zionist ideological education. Haksharas were usually summer camps, the participants of the camps were members of the Halutz movement. The camps were organized in private estates of individuals who supported Zionism and at farms purchased by the Zionist Organization in Poland (for example in Jaslo, Czechowice, Klesow in Volhynia) or by youth movements, mostly HaHalutz. In the 1930s the 'Ezra - Opieka' Central Committee for Halutz and Palestine Émigrés operated in Lwow and financed the maintenance of the kibbutzim and the

training of youth. Some 556 haksharas took place in Poland until the end of 1938 with some 19,000 participants.

14 Kolkhoz

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

15 Anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s

From 1935-39 the activities of Polish anti-Semitic propaganda intensified. The Sejm introduced barriers to ritual slaughter, restrictions of Jews' access to education and certain professions. Nationalistic factions postulated the removal of Jews from political, social and cultural life, and agitated for economic boycotts to persuade all the country's Jews to emigrate. Nationalist activists took up posts outside Jewish shops and stalls, attempting to prevent Poles from patronizing them. Such campaigns were often combined with damage and looting of shops and beatings, sometimes with fatal consequences. From June 1935 until 1937 there were over a dozen pogroms, the most publicized of which was the pogrom in Przytyk in 1936. The Catholic Church also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism.

16 September Campaign 1939

Armed struggle in defense of Poland's independence from 1st September to 6th October 1939 against German and, from 17th September, also Soviet aggression; the start of World War II. The German plan of aggression ('Fall Weiss') assumed all-out, lightning warfare (Blitzkrieg). The Polish plan of defense planned engagement of battle in the border region (a length of some 1,600 km), and then organization of resistance further inside the country along subsequent lines of defense (chiefly along the Narew, Vistula and San) until an allied (French and British) offensive on the western front. Poland's armed forces, commanded by the Supreme Commander, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, numbered some 1 m soldiers. Poland defended itself in isolation; on 3rd September Britain and France declared war on Germany, yet did not undertake offensive action on a larger scale. Following a battle on the border the main Polish line of defense was broken, and the Polish forces retreated in battles on the Vistula and the San. On 8th September, the German army reached Warsaw, and on 12th September Lvov. From 14th-16th September the Germans closed their ring on the Bug. On 9th September Polish divisions commanded by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba went into battle with the Germans on the Bzura, but after initial successes were surrounded and largely smashed (by 22nd September), although some of the troops managed to get to Warsaw. Defense was continued by isolated centers of resistance, where the civilian population cooperated with the army in defense. On 17th September Soviet forces numbering more than 800,000 men crossed Poland's eastern border, broke through the defense of the Polish forces and advanced nearly as far as the Narew-Bug-Vistula- San line. In the night of 17th-18th September the president of Poland, the government and the Supreme Commander crossed the Polish-Romanian border and were interned. Lvov capitulated on 22nd September (surrendered to Soviet units), Warsaw on 28th September, Modlin on 29th September, and Hel on 2nd October.

17 Evacuation of Poles from the USSR

From 1939-41 there were some 2 million citizens of the Second Polish Republic from lands annexed to the Soviet Union in the heart of the USSR (Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians). The resettlement of Poles and Jews to Poland (within its new borders) began in 1944. The process was coordinated by a political organization subordinate to the Soviet authorities, the Union of Polish Patriots (operated until July 1946). The main purpose of the resettlement was to purge Polish lands annexed to the Soviet Union during WWII of their ethnic Polish population. The campaign was accompanied by the removal of Ukrainian and Belarusian populations to the USSR. Between 1944 and 1948 some 1.5 million Poles and Jews returned to Poland with military units or under the repatriation program.

18 POW camps for Polish officers in the USSR

Polish officers taken hostage in the USSR after 17th September 1939 were detained in two camps: in Kozielsk and in Starobielsk. An additional camp was opened in Ostaszkow for Polish officers of the police, prison system and border patrol. At the end of February 1940 over 8,376 officers and 6,192 policemen and other functionaries. On 5th March 1940 the decision to murder all the prisoners was made at the meeting of the Political Office of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). In April and May 1940 POWs from Kozielsk were shot to death in Katyn, POWs from Starobielsk in Kharkov and POWs from Ostaszkow in Tver.

19 NKVD

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

20 Kursk battle

The greatest tank battle in the history of World War II, which began on 5th July 1943 and ended eight days later. The biggest tank fight, involving almost 1,200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides, took place in Prokhorovka on 12th July and ended with the defeat of the German tank unit.

21 The 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division

Tactical grouping formed in the USSR from May 1943. The victory at Stalingrad and the gradual assumption of the strategic initiative by the Red Army strengthened Stalin's position in the anti-fascist coalition and enabled him to exert increasing influence on the issue of Poland. In April 1943, following the public announcement by the Germans of their discovery of mass graves at Katyn, Stalin broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile and using the Poles in the USSR, began openly to build up a political base (the Union of Polish Patriots) and an army: the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division numbered some 11,000 soldiers and was commanded first by General Zygmunt Berling (1943-44), and subsequently by the Soviet General Bewziuk (1944-45). In August 1943 the division was incorporated into the 1st Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, and from March 1944 was part of the Polish Army in the USSR. The 1st Division fought at Lenino on 12-13 October 1943, and in Praga in September 1944. In January 1945 it marched into Warsaw, and in April-May 1945 it took part in the capture of Berlin. After the war it became part of the Polish Army.

22 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.

23 Lodz Ghetto

It was set up in February 1940 in the former Jewish quarter on the northern outskirts of the city. 164,000 Jews from Lodz were packed together in a 4 sq. km. area. In 1941 and 1942, 38,500 more Jews were deported to the ghetto. In November 1941, 5,000 Roma were also deported to the ghetto from Burgenland province, Austria. The Jewish self- government, led by Mordechai Rumkowski, sought to make the ghetto as productive as possible and to put as many inmates to work as he could. But not even this could prevent overcrowding and hunger or improve the inhuman living conditions. As a result of epidemics, shortages of fuel and food and insufficient sanitary conditions, about 43,500 people (21% of all the residents of the ghetto) died of undernourishment, cold and illness. The others were transported to death camps; only a very small number of them survived.

24 Medal for the Defense of Stalingrad

Established by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as of 22nd December 1942. 750,000 people were conferred with that medal.

25 Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBWD, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację)

Combatant organization founded in 1949 as the result of the forced union of 11 combatant organizations functioning since 1945. Until 1989 it remained politically and organizationally subordinate to the PZPR. In 1990 ZBoWiD was reborn as the Union of Combatants of the Polish Republic and Former Political Prisoners (Związek Kombatantów RP i Byłych Więźniów Politycznych). ZBoWiD brought together some Polish World War II veterans, prisoners from Nazi camps, soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces (WP, Wojsko Polskie), and officers of the Security Office (UB, Urząd Bezpieczeństwa) and Civil Militia (MO, Milicja Obywatelska), as well as widows and orphans of others killed in action or murdered. For political reasons, many combatants were not accepted into ZBoWiD, including some AK (Home Army) soldiers (especially before 1956). It had several hundred thousand members (1970 approx. 330,000; 1986 almost 800,000).

26 Polish People's Republic (PRL)

The official name of the Polish state introduced in the constitution of 1952 and abolished in 1989. It is also the colloquial term for the entire postwar period of Polish history to 1989, when Poland was part of the USSR's bloc of satellite states and the dominant role within the country was played by the communist party, the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). The PRL formally had all the trappings of a democratic state - parliament (the Sejm), a government, and general elections, but in practice only 3 parties participated in the elections - the PZPR and two dependent parties: the United Peasant Alliance (ZSL) and the Democratic Alliance (SD). Poland was a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (RWPG) and the Warsaw Pact. The main periods in the history of the PRL are as follows: the transition period 1944-1948, the Stalinist period 1948-1956, the period of government by Władysław Gomułka 1956-1970, the period of government by Edward Gierek 1970-1981, martial law 1981-1983, and the twilight period 1983-1989. The PRL ended with the 'round table' talks, during which the PZPR ceded some authority to the opposition in the form of the Solidarity trade union movement.

27 Gomułka, Władysław (1905-1982)

Communist activist and politician, one of the leading figures of the political scene of the Polish People's Republic, secretary general of the Central Committee (KC). In 1948 he was accused of so-called rightist-nationalist tendencies. As a consequence, he was imprisoned in 1951 and removed from the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). He was released in 1954 as a national hero, patriot and 'Polish' communist. From 21st October 1956 First Secretary of the Central Committee and member of the PZPR Central Committee's Political Office, from 1957 member of the State Council and deputy to the Polish Sejm. Initially enjoyed the support of public opinion (resisted Soviet pressure) and pursued a policy of moderate reforms of the political and economic system. In 1968 he came out in favor of intervention by the states of the Warsaw Bloc in Czechoslovakia. He was responsible for anti-Semitic repressions in March 1968 (as a result of which over 20,000 were forced to leave Poland) and the use of force against participants in the workers' revolt of December 1970. On 20th December 1970 he was forced to resign his post as First Secretary of the Central Committee and member of the PZPR Central Committee's Political Office, in 1970 he was dismissed from his other posts, and in 1971 he was forced into retirement.

28 Moczar Mieczyslaw (1913-1986)

Real name Mikolaj Demko, pseud. Mietek, Polish communist activist, general. Member of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). In 1942-48 he belonged to the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and then to the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). In 1968-71 he was the secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, and in 1970-71 and 1980-81 a member of the Central Committee's Political Bureau. During the war he commanded the Lublin and Kielce divisions of the People's Army. In 1945-48 he was the head of the Office for Public Security at the local government in Lodz. In 1964-68 he was minister of internal affairs. In the 1960s he was considered the leader of one of the factions spurring for influence within the PZPR (known as the 'partisans').

29 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria. The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier. The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

30 Gomulka Campaign

A campaign to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The trigger of this anti-Semitic campaign was the involvement of the Socialist Bloc countries on the Arab side in the Middle East conflict, in connection with which Moscow ordered purges in state institutions. On 19th June 1967, at a trade union congress, the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR], Wladyslaw Gomulka, accused the Jews of lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War. This marked the start of purges among journalists and people of other creative professions. Poland also severed diplomatic relations with Israel. On 8th March 1968 there was a protest at Warsaw University. The Ministry of Internal Affairs responded by launching a press campaign and organizing mass demonstrations in factories and workplaces during which 'Zionists' and 'trouble-makers' were indicted and anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia slogans shouted. Following the events of March, purges were also staged in all state institutions, from factories to universities, on criteria of nationality and race. 'Family liability' was also introduced (e.g. with respect to people whose spouses were Jewish). Jews were forced to emigrate. From 1968-1971 15,000-30,000 people left Poland. They were stripped of their citizenship and right of return.

31 Walesa, Lech (b

1943): Leader of the Solidarity movement, politician, Nobel-prize winner. Originally he was an electrician in the Gdansk shipyard and became a main organizer of strikes there that gradually grew to be nation-wide and greatly influenced Polish politics in the 1980s. Co-founder of the Solidarity (Solidarnost) trade union in 1980, representing the workers (and later much of the Polish society) against the communist nomenclature. He was one of the promoters of the thorough reconstruction of the Polish political and economic system, the creation of a sovereign democratic state with a market economy. In 1983 he received the Nobel Peace Prize. From 1990-1995 he was president of the Republic of Poland.