

Emilia Ratz

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Interviewer: Tanja Eckstein

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Shortly after the beginning of our interview, Mrs. Emilia Ratz, called Mila by her friends, impresses me with her exceptional life-story and her humor, which overshadows the tragic of her experiences in the first moment. She has a strong personality and I'm almost convinced that she already had a great amount of self-confidence, courage of her own convictions and purposefulness when she saw the light of day. She shows great interest in politics, art and culture. There are also a lot of younger people that are drawn to her personality; her circle of friends consists of old and young alike.



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My family background

My father's whole family lived in Warsaw, in a house that belonged to my grandfather. My grandparents lived in the house facing the street while the other two families belonging to our family each had a two-bedroom apartment without bathroom in the annex forming the rear of the house. We had a bath-tub in the kitchen. During the day we used it as a table by putting a table-top on top of it. We had running water and electricity, but there was no garden. We didn't have any pets either. We lived very modestly.

The house facing the street had three or four stories and in the rear there was a wing on both the left and the right side. The main house consisted of about 15 apartments, in which mostly Jewish families lived. The janitor, however, wasn't Jewish.

My grandfather owned a soap factory which was housed in the cellar of the rear building. It consisted of three rooms: the office, the packing-table room and the boiler-room. There was a huge boiler in which the soap was produced as well as a machine for pressing and shaping the soap. By the way, my grandfather also manufactured toothpaste. It was called Milodont, after his daughter Mila. I think there was coconut oil, perfume and soapsuds in the boiler. There were up to four workers there; they were probably Jewish. My father didn't have a shop of his own, he sold the products to shops and private people, and, before Christian holidays also to market stalls. The

factory was closed on Jewish holidays.

My grandfather's apartment was big – it consisted of three or four rooms – but I don't remember it very clearly. What I do recall is the smell of the house, which was a mixture of velvet and spices.

I did know my grandfather Endler, but I don't remember his first name. When I was a child the relations between grandparents and grandchildren were different from what they are today. I was just a small child of pre-school age and I don't recall ever really talking to my grandfather. He was a respected authority.

The family mainly gathered at his place for meals on the high holidays. Anytime I saw my grandfather, he wore a black suit. He also always wore a kippah. In my memories, he was a tall and chubby man. He said the prayers and led the dinner. I remember a large table, at which all family members had their meals, and of course, there was also a cook. I don't remember if there were any other servants. The children had to show good manners and the parents made sure that they behaved properly. After the meal, one was supposed to kiss my grandfather's hand to express one's gratitude.

On Sabbath my mother baked challot and lit the candles. My father, who was a heavy smoker, didn't smoke on Sabbath. I remember that we had potato pancake on Chanukkah and hamantashen on Purim. I didn't fast on Yom Kippur, but after people ended their fast there was always a lot of food; I don't recall what exactly. On Sukkot we built huts [sukkah] in the yard and ate in there. There was a Chassidic family living in the house and they performed dances on all the holidays.

As for my grandmother Endler, I don't remember her at all. Perhaps she just spoke Yiddish or perhaps she found it difficult to make friends, or perhaps she had already passed away – I really don't know. I just know her from a photo. Unfortunately I can't say anything about her and there's no one left whom I could possibly ask.

There were two portraits in our apartment – one of my grandmother and one of my grandfather – and those are all I remember. I can't recall anyone ever talking about them either. My grandfather died in the 1920s; I don't know when my grandmother passed away.

My father was the oldest of my grandparent's five children. His name was Israel Endler. My father's siblings were Ignatz, who lived in South America, Adolf, Helena and a sister, who lived in a mental institution, and whose name I don't remember.

The relationship between my father and his younger brother Adolf wasn't particularly exemplary. They fought sometimes, but back then children weren't involved in such kind affairs. Uncle Adolf was an office clerk in a company, or perhaps it was even a cartel. He was well off financially. I think they had fights because my father had inherited my grandfather's soap factory. Allegedly it was my father who had got Uncle Adolf his good position in that office and thanks to him he had a good life, whereas my father was struggling quite a bit with the soap factory.

Uncle Adolf's wife was named Felicia and they had a son, Mieczyslaw, born in 1921. He was the same age as I. He was a typical only child, spoiled and well off. Once he pushed me off a bicycle and caused me to hurt my knee. As a result I was sick for the whole summer and I still haven't forgiven him for doing what he did. Maybe I'm exaggerating a bit, but he just wasn't my type.

Uncle Adolf died after an appendix operation in 1938. Aunt Felicia didn't survive the Warsaw Ghetto [1](#), whereas Mieczyslaw managed to flee from the ghetto. He got hold of some 'Aryan papers', went to Southern Russia with the Todt [2](#) organization and joined the Polish army in exile [see Anders' Army] [3](#) there in 1943. He marched into Poland with the Polish army in 1945, became a journalist and worked for a newspaper. At the beginning of the 1950s he was sent to Sweden by the newspaper and never returned. Later his family followed him to Sweden. He is divorced now, and spends his time between Germany and Sweden. His two sons live in Sweden.

Uncle Ignatz was the black sheep of the family. He left his family in his young days and immigrated to South America. I only met him once, in 1939. I remember that he came by ship and had a cabin trunk. He brought my father twelve shirts, all with a soft collar. Today all men wear such shirts, but my father only wore shirts with a stiff collar throughout his life. He said thanks to his brother, but once Uncle Ignatz had left, he told me, 'Well, Mila, now you can make yourself twelve blouses out of these because I will never wear them.' I did make myself a blouse out of one of them, and it survived throughout the war.

To me Uncle Ignatz was the personification of 'being rich' - that cabin trunk for example, or those twelve shirts. My father probably had many shirts, too, but going on a journey and bringing twelve shirts as a gift is a different story altogether. And never in my life had I seen such a cabin trunk! To me that was all pretty exotic. I don't know if he really was rich. He was very likeable and I still remember the ring he gave to me as a gift. It was the first ring I ever got; I was 17 at the time. It was made of gold and my name was engraved on it. Uncle Ignatz was killed in a plane crash, but I don't remember when.

Aunt Helena was a housewife. Her husband owned a textile store in the heart of Warsaw, in the Jewish quarter, on Nalewki Street, which was a very long and famous street with many Jewish stores. This street is mentioned in all the books on Jewish life in Warsaw before the Holocaust by the way.

My aunt's family was doing quite well. They had a daughter named Friederike, who was two or three years older than I, but I didn't really get along with her. First, because she was stupid, second, because she was a very bad student; and third because we studied in the same grammar school and any time I had to leave my classroom because of disturbing the class I had to go through her classroom and she always told my mother, 'Mila has been thrown out of class again!'

I was a good student though and had excellent grades in my graduation certificate. Friederike was raised by her parents exclusively to be a good match. She spent most of her time in front of the mirror. I was in a completely different phase: I also liked to be dressed well, even though I had to do so with limited means, but I was always very annoyed if people only noticed my appearance. I always wanted people to investigate my intellectual side. All this left Friederike unmoved; she preferred to look out for a good match. And indeed, she married a lawyer, who was much older than her. A 4th-year student fancied me back then, which means he was four or five years older than I. And I thought: 'he must be out of his mind, such an old man, what does he want from me!' And I thought the same thing when Friederike married this lawyer, Mr. Stützer, in 1938. I wasn't the only one who thought that way. In my class - we were just Jewish teenagers - no more than 20 to 30 per cent of the students wanted to get married immediately after graduation. Most students wanted to continue their studies at university.

Back then it was customary in Poland, or at least I think it was, to go to some kind of school for corporals if you were a university graduate. This was also true for Jews. Friederike's husband also had to join the army in 1939 and he either died on the frontlines or in some camp in Russia. But his younger brother survived. When I visited a friend in London after the war, she told me that she was friends with a certain Stützer and that he was the brother of my cousin Friederike's husband. Friederike died in the Warsaw Ghetto.

My father's third sister, the one whose name I don't know, apparently went insane. Or so they said in the family, I don't know for sure. During World War I the Russians blew up a bridge in Warsaw and allegedly my aunt was nearby when it happened. From that moment on she stopped speaking and lived in a mental institution. She was there as long as I can remember. Back then they put all people like her behind bars. I visited this institution near Warsaw with my father numerous times: it was called Tworki and it still exists today. I never saw this aunt of mine because they didn't let children into the institution. I didn't interrogate my father about her either; I simply accepted the way things were.

This sister of my father had a single daughter, Rosa, who also lived in one of the apartments of my grandfather's house. I liked to visit her and she even taught me French for a little while. In the family's opinion a stain clung to her because she had a child, back then still a baby, from her non-Jewish boyfriend, who was quite a bit older. The family didn't really approve of me visiting her, but I found her interesting. She probably had rather unconventional views for the time when it came to children. She respected my views and we talked about things my parents would have never talked to me about. Rosa and her child were killed during the Holocaust.

After my grandfather's death, , the sense of community in the family disintegrated. Each family began to celebrate the holidays in their own apartments; I don't recall any family celebrations where we were all together.

My maternal grandparents' surname was Katz. I don't remember this grandmother either. As a child I never visited Narewka, the village where my grandparents lived and where my mother and her siblings were born. I did know my grandfather because every year up until his death, he visited us for a few days in Warsaw. I didn't have any close contact with him either though. He died when I was in elementary school. My father was most likely informed about my grandfather's death by telephone and in the beginning he kept it secret from my mother; he had a very hard time to tell her that her father had died. When I came home from school that day I knocked on the door of our apartment as I always did, and I could hear my mother crying bitterly. On the stairs leading to our apartment there was always a box with charcoal and I sat down on it and was afraid to enter the apartment because never before had I heard my mother cry so bitterly. I must have been seven back then because I remember that my sister was still very small.

I visited Narewka for the first time in 1969. My husband had already received permission by the Polish authorities to immigrate to Austria with our children by then. I asked him to travel to this village with me because I knew I would never see the place if he didn't come with me.

In 1888 Narewka had approximately 860 residents, 780 of which were Jews. In 1908 they built the Hajnowka-Wolkowysk railway line running through Narewka. This little village wasn't destroyed in World War II. In the interwar period the village had industrial companies, a turpentine factory, Hackiel's glassworks and a windmill.

Of course the Jewish life was wiped out in Narewka after World War II, I'm sure that not a single Jew remained in town. There was no synagogue and no Jewish cemetery giving evidence that Jews had lived there before the Holocaust.

My mother's name was Marija, nee Katz. She was born in Narewka in 1896. She attended a grammar school and spoke German, Russian and Polish. Before World War I my mother worked for the Post Office. After she got married and had children she became a housewife. She occasionally helped out in the soap factory, but mostly she stayed at home.

My mother had two older sisters and many brothers of whom I only knew one. One of her sisters was Bertha, who was married to a man who owned a wine-merchant's in Grodno [today Belarus]. They didn't have children. The other sister was Sonja; she wasn't married. The only brother I knew was Joel Katz. He was a businessman and owned a timber trade in Bialystok [today Poland]; he was married and had a son, Josef. They were all killed in the Holocaust. Sometimes my mother's brothers and sisters came to visit us but I don't recall that my parents ever visited them. My mother was certainly happy to live in such a big city as Warsaw. They were all killed during the Holocaust.

My father, Israel Endler, was born in Warsaw in 1890. His mother tongue was Polish. He had a commercial education and was a soap manufacturer. He was a businessman. He was away a lot; his company was small and he tried to sell his goods by traveling from village to village.

Growing up

I know that my father met my mother on a business trip. I assume that my mother was at her brother Joel's in Bialystok when they met because I cannot image that my father would have even tried to sell his goods in such a small place as Narewka, but rather in bigger places such as Bialystok. I don't know for sure though. They got acquainted before World War I and probably got married in 1919 or 1920 because I was born on 9th December 1921 in Warsaw.

My sister Halina was born in Warsaw in 1926.

When I was a child I had a nanny who even spoke German. Later we usually had peasant girls that helped my mother around the house. They had to put up with very modest conditions: they slept on a folding bed in the kitchen because our apartment only consisted of a living room, a bedroom, a kitchen and a small anteroom. Besides, the apartment was very dark because it was on the first floor.

I would assume that I slept in my parents' bedroom when I was a child, but later I slept on a sofa in the living room and my sister stayed in my parents' room. I did my homework at the dining table. There was a pretty wide windowsill in the living room and when it was warm I did my homework there. A very religious family lived opposite us. On weekdays there was no problem, but when I did my homework on the windowsill on Saturdays, my father used to say, 'Why do you have to upset the people living opposite us?'

We spent our vacations with our mother somewhere near Vilnius, what is today Lithuania. She took us to the countryside where she was born. Sometimes we just went to small villages close to Warsaw or we hired a farmer and a cart and went on a summer holiday. It took about an hour to get there and the road was named 'the line'. Along this 'line' there were a number of small villages,

the last of which were a bit more. We rented an apartment and our father came by train to join us on either Friday morning or before Sabbath and returned Saturday evening or Sunday morning. If we went away for longer, we took our own bed sheets and dishes with us. My mother cooked for us; sometimes a peasant girl helped her. We, children, usually spent our holiday playing. There were also lakes in the area, so we could also play in the water. My mother often joined us playing, otherwise she read the papers or books.

I attended a private elementary school for two years. I wasn't extremely industrious but I had to do my homework; that was my duty. My parents must have been doing quite well at that time because otherwise they wouldn't have been able to afford to send me to a private school. Afterwards they took me out of that school and I had to study in a public school, which was free, for four years. It was only when I entered grammar school that I went to a private school again. I could have attended a public grammar school, but due to anti-Semitism it wasn't so easy for Jewish children to enter grammar school.

We had religious instruction at school and it was absolutely necessary to have a good mark because a bad mark in religious instruction – no matter if Jewish religion or any other – was regarded by the authorities as a sign for the person to belong to a communist organization. In addition it was difficult to enter university with a bad mark in religion.

At the grammar school I went to there were mainly Jewish teachers who would have had a hard time finding a job at a public school and who were very committed. I assume my parents sent me to this school on purpose because there was a strong anti-Semitism in Poland at the time, whereas I didn't have to face anything of the like in this school. It wasn't a Jewish school; all the students there were assimilated Jewish children who stood by their Jewishness and the fact that they were Polish citizens and regarded Poland as their homeland. There were even Jewish members in the Polish parliament back then. Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s brought an end to that.

I had a cousin – I don't remember from which side of the family – who went to school in Breslau. He was expelled from Germany in 1938 because he was a Polish Jew. Once he came to our place for lunch. He had very right-wing political views, but he told us in detail about the 'Jewish Laws' in Germany. I was hardly 16 at the time and loathed this cousin of mine. I said to my mother, 'If you ever invite Henry – that's what my cousin was called – for lunch again, let me know so that I can make sure I won't be home then.' Jozef Pilsudski [4](#) was a dictator, but he was well disposed towards Jews.

I did look Jewish enough, but it never happened that anyone abused me on the street; I never ever experienced anything the like. A gym teacher – she wasn't Jewish – was said to be anti-Semitic. I met her again by accident after the war and she almost squashed me when she hugged me, out of joy that I had stayed alive. It has to be said though, that many Christians who were anti-Semitic before the Holocaust changed their minds after they realized what that meant. There was this familiar quote in Poland at the time: Away with Jewish men, Jewish women stay with us! Of course that was only because Jewish girls were very pretty. I took an interest in politics as early as 1935, at the age of 14. It was at the time when Polish fascism started to rise. I met leftwing students and developed a leftist attitude.

There was a drama theater at our school. I was a member and worked on plays under the direction of the teachers. We also created the sets ourselves. Each year a subject that we wanted to adapt

for the stage was discussed and agreed on. I remember one of them, which was 'My favorite book'. This way the reading matter for children was supposed to be influenced. We performed a fragment of a historical novel and a fragment of a thriller, and of course children were advised against the thriller. I was also part of a literary circle and very good at writing.

As a child I was interested in many different things. During my school years I also attended courses in biology and astronomy. I don't mean to say that I was born an intellectual, but I was always a little bit more mature than many other children and I was interested in social issues from an early age on.

Theoretically, studying at the grammar school was very expensive. In practice it was different though because the teachers were very committed. So the families of the richer girls paid almost everything and most of the other children got a fairly good discount. However, after I finished the 10th grade and got my 'small' final exam [studies for the 'small' final exam lasted 10 instead of 12 years and it didn't qualify students to enter university] my father said, 'You have your small final exam. That will do. You aren't crooked, you are quite pretty, you're ready to get married.' Well, I created an enormous scandal, and with success. I told my father, 'I want to study and if you can't afford to pay for it then I'll give private classes and pay for it myself. If I can continue to live at home, I'll make it.' Had it been up to my father, things would have remained the way they were in the old times: my sister and I would have married a good match.

My mother silently rebelled against my father: she was a very smart woman and didn't approve of what he had said, but she didn't dare brew up a storm. However, she always succeeded in having it her way, also thinking of her other daughter, my younger sister, who was pretty lazy back then, but then again she was still a child. I had the feeling that my sister was the spoiled one. If I wanted to ask my father for money for something 'unimportant' - children didn't get pocket money back then - I always sent my sister ahead because chances were higher that she would get some before I would.

Later my father allowed me to spend my summer vacations in a school camp that was neither kosher - the teachers weren't religious - nor Zionist. On one of these occasions I met a student there, who had pitched his tent nearby, fell in love with me and wrote letters to me afterwards. I didn't have the slightest idea that he was interested in me. I was hardly 17 years old, hadn't finished school yet and a 20 or 22-year-old seemed an old man to me. My father learned through these letters that a Jewish man from a rich family was interested in his daughter. However, I told my mother, 'If he phones, tell him I'm not at home.' My father was outraged that I'd let the chance of such a good match slip through my fingers. That should give you somewhat of an idea what he thought of female emancipation.

I had friends from different classes of society and therefore I clearly saw the difference between my typical petit bourgeois home and other milieus. My father was conservative in every respect and therefore we almost always had different opinions. He was a typical small-scale businessman who wanted to support his family and make sure that his daughters behaved properly.

I met most of my friends at school, through drama classes and courses. We didn't go to the cinema or coffee houses because we didn't have enough money for that. Sometimes we met at the home of a more progressive friend, if his or her parents allowed it.

My father only owned the Talmud in Hebrew and some other religious books. I never saw him lying on the sofa and reading, like I do, but my mother did read novels and was more open-minded. I have an idea about how this came to happen: Sometime during World War I, before she got married, my mother probably worked somewhere. Back then women were also subject to work. I'm certain that she had a German friend back then because how else could she have known German if she didn't? In that part of Poland it was rare to speak German. In Galicia [5](#) they only spoke Yiddish and German, but in the part where my mother lived, they spoke Russian and Polish. My mother owned and read many books in German, and I have been reading many books since my childhood, too.

If I look back at my parents' cultural life and compare it to mine, I have to say that they had a very poor one. They rarely went to the theater and when they did they watched operettas or revues. They took me along to a revue twice.

All the Jews in our surrounding were kosher; there were many kosher stores. We lived on a very long street, one side of which was Jewish – apart from one non-Jew, Mr. Stanislaw, the janitor of our house – and the other was Christian. There was a Catholic church opposite our house; it was the only building in what later became the Warsaw Ghetto that survived the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising [6](#). The Great Synagogue was quite a bit away from our house, so my father and mother went to a prayer house close to our home, on the high holidays.

My father prayed daily, and on Friday afternoon, at the beginning of Sabbath, he stopped smoking. No lights were lit up any longer. He was deeply religious and followed all rules. There was no cooking on Saturday; the food was completely prepared beforehand. I remember the single time my father entered the kitchen. He had found a knife for meat among the cutlery for dairy products. My mother, in her despair, said that the nanny had probably mixed them up. My father immediately put the knife into a pot of earth. I had the impression that my mother was way less religious than my father. I can't describe it exactly, it's just that she was always very tolerant towards me. She never punished me either.

My father once overheard me talking on the phone about a sum of money, which I had collected for the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War [7](#). He was in the room next door and all of a sudden he asked, 'What kind of money are you talking about? Where did you get that much money? I confessed upon which he said, 'Why do you get involved there? It's none of your business!' He was definitely conservative, loyal to the regime and seriously believed that if you did what the government said, nothing bad could ever happen to you.

None of us was a Zionist. I never heard any conversations about emigrating to Palestine or anything the like. Maybe there were such talks among other adults, I don't know. It was probably also a question of money because we were people who couldn't afford to go abroad.

During the War

The war broke out on 1st September 1939 [see Invasion of Poland] [8](#). My friend and I went to the Technical University by tram to hand in our documents. I wanted to study chemistry; it was my dream to become a chemist. When we reached the center of town I noticed young boys crying out loud and distributing a special edition of a newspaper. I said to my friend that I would get off the tram to see what was printed in the paper. War was already in the air! When I read about the

mobilization of men in the newspaper, I told my friend, 'I'm not going to leave my documents with the university. It's almost certain that there's going to be a war.' Six days later the Germans had advanced as far as Warsaw. Men and young people tried to flee. I wanted to leave too, because I had an idea that things could turn ugly. I was a hundred percent convinced that we had to flee. The Polish government said: 'We are strong, we will fight and we will win!' And in my 'small brain' - although back then I thought I was incredibly mature and knew everything - I secretly knew by then already that the war against the Germans would be lost. Three weeks later Warsaw fell into the hands of the Germans.

My father wouldn't let me leave. It was a catastrophe. 'You want to leave the family?' he uttered indignantly. So I stayed. I was the only person to stand in line for water, because there was none left, and organize food because my sister was only twelve, my mother was chubby and not used to strenuous work and my father probably suffered from either heart or kidney disease because he was always sweating.

When the Germans marched into Warsaw I stood on the street with my fists clenched. They marched into town like heroes, dressed in black, with an arrogant expression on their faces, and with tanks. I ran home and had an argument with my parents. I wanted us to flee together. My father said, 'What do you think you know? You're just a child. That's all exaggerated.' And my mother said, 'You know, the Germans are a civilized people, just think of Schiller and Goethe!' I realized that my attempts were hopeless. Two years before the war the economical situation had improved, people bought furniture and things like that and they clung to that. So I began to fight for my sister. And at that point my father burst out in a fit of rage: 'What do you think you're doing! You're not even grown up yet!'

As a result of this I moved in with my friend Halina Altmann. Her parents were progressive. Her mother was in prison for her political convictions, or perhaps she had already been released at the time, I don't remember exactly. They were all left wing and decided to flee. Halina escaped to Lwow [today Ukraine], where she studied at university. Her parents and her younger brother fled to Lutzk, a small village, which was under Russian rule back then, and which today belongs to Ukraine. Halina's father happened to be on a business trip in Kiev when the Germans marched into Lutzk and killed her mother and brother. Halina and her father survived the Holocaust. I 'terrorized' my parents and said I'd only come back home if they would at least let me go. I hadn't attained my majority yet but was only missing a few months.

Shortly after the Germans invaded Warsaw, I saw how they cut off a Jew's beard at the market place. I said to my parents, 'I know I don't have a chance here. You don't either but I can't force you to come along.' My father remained stubborn; for him it was out of the question to let me go. At that moment my mother said to my father, and it probably took her a lot of courage to do so, 'You know, I can't take responsibility for Mila [Emilia]'. Upon that my father agreed with her. He allowed me to go on the condition that I wouldn't leave with all the 'insane' people, so he went to get a taxi for me. In that taxi he wanted me to go to my mother's brother, Uncle Joel, in Bialystok, who would take care of me. My father put 100 zloty into my shoes, which made no sense at all because I couldn't have done anything with that money.

I don't have a single photograph of my parents or my sister because my father checked my backpack before I left and found an envelope with photos that I had put there. He took all photos

out of the envelope, except the ones of me, and said, 'If you want to put yourself in jeopardy, all right. But you won't put the whole family in danger!' That's why I don't have a single family photograph.

A woman and her baby were traveling with me; her husband was already on the Russian side. But we didn't know then that a partition of Poland into German and Russian territory had taken place on 17th October 1939 as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [9](#). The taxi had barely made it 20 kilometers when the Germans confiscated it. In this chaos, the woman with the baby said she would return home. I asked her to tell my parents that she had lost sight of me. Thereupon I joined some strangers and we continued on our way on foot. I think it was about 300 kilometers to Bialystok [today Belarus]. It felt like being in a flock of sheep a bit: everyone's going so I'm going, too. Sometimes farmers gave us a lift in their carts; there were hardly cars around then and the Germans had requisitioned the ones that existed.

I don't know how many days we were on the road. Half starved and thirsty, we sometimes got milk from farmers. Money wasn't an issue any more. If you had a bar of soap - and I had a few bars because my father had foreseen that correctly - you could exchange it for food. Soap became kind of a 'currency'. We arrived at the demarcation line, and I, in my low cast of mind back then, thought the Soviets would be standing at the border waiting for me. By chance there was no German guard there and we made a beeline for the Soviet side. The Russian border guard took his carbine, pointed it at us and said, 'Stoi! Get back!'

We tried to cross over three times and fortunately the Russians didn't hand us over to the Germans; it was a neutral piece of land. Afterwards we decided - I being the youngest - to go into the village and try finding a farmer who would bring us across the green line. We found a farmer who belonged to a minority of very poor German people and took us along in his boot for a short distance. 'Just for security reason', as he assured us, he took all our jewelry, including my watch and my ring, the one that Uncle Ignatz from South America had given to me. This attempt to escape failed but we finally did manage to cross the border illegally. It was October, the nights were cold and I caught a cold. I had a coat that I forgot to put on - at the age of 17 you just don't think about sickness very much.

When I arrived at my relative's place in Bialystok, my uncle Joel's wife opened the door, looked at me and was reluctant to let me. I was in a horrible state and she didn't recognize me. She thought I was a beggar. I had a fever the next day but once I had recovered a bit, my uncle Joel took over my father's role. He said that his dear sister Marija had always been incredibly tolerant, that it wouldn't be good for the children and now he would show me what discipline was. 'You stay here. Work is out of the question for you. We will find you a good match', he said. When I had recovered I told him, 'You know what? I'm a human being and you are not my father and besides I've almost reached my maturity age.' He just replied, 'You're a kid.' I didn't want to start an argument with him so I just went to the center of town a few days later, where I found a refugee organization. They gave me a free ticket to Lwow, so I went to my uncle and announced, 'I'm going to Lwow tomorrow!' Of course this caused a similar scandal as the one I had had at home. But I didn't let them stop me. I wanted to study and there was no possibility to do so in Bialystok. My uncle said, 'But you don't even know anyone there'. Upon which I just murmured, 'For goodness sake, I'm not going into the desert!'

When I got off the train in Lwow in the evening I stood at the railway station like a poor orphan. I had never been to this city before. I knew that Lwow was a cultural center, but that was about it. A woman approached me, saying, 'Girl, you must be a refugee!' 'Yes', I replied. 'Do you have a place to stay?' 'No.' 'You can stay at my place. I only have a small apartment but I'll put a mattress into the bathtub and you can sleep there.' My benefactress turned out to be a teacher. I told her, 'You know, I want to study at the university here. I have no money but I'll probably meet many friends at university.' I knew many people from Warsaw, also older students. The next day I wrote to my uncle: 'I have arrived.'

And, indeed, I met a lot of old acquaintances at the university. I was the youngest and everyone felt obliged to help me. It was the beginning of November and exams were over already. However, there was a student committee because this was an unusual year: there were a lot of people who wouldn't have been allowed to enter university, both Jews and communists. And this committee had fought for us to be allowed to take special entrance exams.

What turned out to be a little bit more complicated was the matter of accommodation. There was a so-called 'commander', an older student, in the student hostel. Much to my disadvantage I had this coat with a Persian lamb collar that my mother had made for me for my final exams. Now this 'commander' concluded that someone who owns a coat with a Persian lamb collar simply must be rich. I had no money whatsoever though and couldn't possibly afford an apartment. And so I lived illegally for two months, spending the night here and there. Some of the people, who accommodated me, gave me some food. I had to study a lot and finish my exams quickly. I had done my finals in June and now I had to sit exams in maths, chemistry and physics.

All my friends helped me with my studies so that I would pass the exams with good results, and indeed, I succeeded. My dream had come true: I could start my chemistry studies. With a trick I also got a space in the student hostel after two months. When I had finished my exams I was granted a scholarship but it was hardly enough to keep body and soul together. I worked besides my studies: I cleaned floors and knitted pullovers for a shop. The owner of the store had hidden some wool, and I knitted the pullovers from that wool, which was forbidden. The third job I had was also the most daring: I drew boards to illustrate the vocabulary for the language classes of the English Faculty, and it was daring because I had no talent when it came to drawing. Drawing bodies I could cope with somewhat but when it came to heads a friend of mine, who studied architecture, came to my place in the evenings to help me out.

Anti-Semitism was particularly horrible at universities. Polish nationalists achieved that Jews and non-Jews had to be in separate classrooms - we called that 'bench ghetto' - and they constantly instigated fights.

I experienced the reality of this 'socialism' for two years. I had already read The Communist Manifesto back in Warsaw and I believed that Soviet Russia was paradise. The materialistic side of things was left out of account - no one thought about things like that. Once I watched a historical Soviet film on the tsarist era, against imperialism, in which they also trampled on Polish flags. I was upset: after all I was a Polish patriot. Sometimes I approached the older ones students to draw their attention to certain things, which, in my opinion, weren't politically correct. They always had some kind of excuse: 'Yes, there are mistakes, but it's the right principle', they would say.

I met my future husband, Martin Ratz, while at university in Lwow. He also had to sit the entrance exams for university because he had been put into prison as a 'hostile alien' - the Austrians regarded him as a Pole and the Poles regarded him as an Austrian - by the Polish in Lwow following the invasion of the Germans in 1939. He was released by the Russians when they occupied Lwow.

There was a shop on the university grounds where you could buy drawing paper, ink and things like that and I continually met this handsome young guy in the dean's office, where you got vouchers for the learning material. Well, that handsome young guy was Martin and he became my boyfriend.

Martin was born on 14th April 1921 in Vienna. He had a sister called Hedwig Charlotte, born in Vienna in 1924. His father's name was Alexander and his mother was called Sophie. They came to Vienna from Brody, Galicia, but I don't remember when. I assume his father was a businessman. He worked in a company in Vienna that sold pencils and the like Two years later the family moved to Cracow. I suppose my husband's father had relatives and better job opportunities there. Unfortunately he died of a heart attack in 1931 or 32.

Sophie Ratz stayed in Cracow and devoted herself to the children. I don't know how they made a living, perhaps they had some income from some property or perhaps their relatives supported them. When my husband was in grammar school, his mother decided to send him to her sister in Vienna, probably because - but this is only my supposition - he had the chance of getting better final exams there than in Cracow. Martin moved to his aunt's in Vienna - she lived on Rechte Wienzeile - in 1937. In 1938, a year before his final exams, he was expelled from Austria for being a Polish Jew.

On 23rd June 1941 I was supposed to sit an extremely difficult exam in mechanics. I was in the fourth term. At 6am on Sunday, 22nd June [the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War] [10](#), a colleague of mine, who I knew from school, came to my place and said, 'War has begun!' We all thought she was out of her mind, but the very moment she said it, firing started. A few minutes later we understood that this was no mere training.

We were supposed to flee the next day, but then they said that the Germans had been repressed. The university director gathered everyone, told us not to panic and to go in for our exams. Martin was a 'Jecke' [term for a very responsible and law-abiding German Jew], followed the instructions and, the good boy he was, went in for his exam; I think that was on 28th June.

I volunteered for the army along with two other girls; we wanted to fight against Hitler. They didn't want to accept us though because we didn't have the proper training. So we just told them that we had had a class on the subject in school, where they had trained us to be nurses in the war. Thereupon we were accepted as assistant nurses. A military hospital had been set up in the building of the university, but there were no wounded people at that stage yet.

Martin had an uncle and aunt, who had a daughter living in Lwow. He went there after his exams to have some good food. So while the Germans were invading Lwow, he was sitting in his aunt's house and eating; she had made scrambled egg for him. All of a sudden his uncle walked in and said, 'What are you doing here?' And Martin proudly announced, 'I've passed my exam!' His uncle murmured, 'You're crazy. The whole town is on the run. Go to the student hostel right now, get your things and leave!' His family in Lwow didn't survive the Holocaust.

I felt very mobilized and my two friends and I were very industrious: We dragged beds and mattresses and they sent me to the hospital to collect medicine. I went through a city that was being evacuated and saw nothing. I was so engrossed in my mission that I didn't notice what was happening around me. Proudly I brought back the medicine, and in the evening – the city was quiet and you could only hear artillery far away – I said to my two friends, 'You know, I feel the same way I did when they gave up Warsaw.' There was a girl among us, later a war heroine, who died during the battle for Warsaw, at the end of the war. She was two years my senior and more pontifical than the pope. She swore at me for being a defeatist: how could I possibly say a thing like that. I told her, 'You know what. We are all grown-up but we are not related. As to me, I'll flee!'

We went up to the first floor, where the university administration was located, and no one was there – not the director, nor anyone else. They had simply forgotten about us. I hadn't come all the way from Warsaw on foot, leaving my family behind, just to fall into the hands of the Germans here.

We went to the student hostel and it was almost empty. Bombs were being dropped already and they were firing from the roof of a barracks opposite the university building. Those were probably Ukrainian nationalists, but we didn't know that back then. In the short time before the Germans seized Lwow, the power had been in the hands of Ukrainian nationalists, and I'll never forget how afraid I was of my fellow Ukrainian students. Maybe it's a sin to say so, but this Ukrainian nationalism was terrible. However, many were enthusiastic about it because this nationalism had freed Ukraine. There was a rather large number of Ukrainians in Lwow. They collaborated with the Germans from the very beginning and were very strong anti-Semites.

One person from that group came up to me once, patted me on the shoulder and said, 'Well Mila, now that we have the Germans here everything will be good and we'll at last get some order.' I was very upset and replied, 'We'll see about that.' And I said to the others, 'I'm leaving right now! And I'll use the window, not the door because our Ukrainian colleagues could be waiting there to kill us.' The window led onto a meadow, but hardly anyone from our small group of girls knew her way around in Lwow. Two girls were from Warsaw and one was from a little town, close to what was then the border with Ukraine, but none of us was from Lwow. We went on foot along with Russian troops that were already fleeing. It was nighttime and I had no idea what had happened to Martin. The very next day the Germans already occupied Lwow.

We walked throughout the night. In the morning we arrived in a little town by the name of Pszemyslany [today Ukraine]. We wanted to rest a little there. I knocked on the door of the first little house. The owner was a shoemaker and his family was incredibly poor. It was a kind of poverty I hadn't known before. We almost behaved like occupiers; we needed a place to sleep. A few hours later we walked into town and saw a bus around where an enormous number of Soviet Party officials with bag and baggage had gathered. Each of us had a backpack with almost nothing in it. You were only allowed to board the bus, if your name was on a list. The bus was supposed to go to Kiev and under normal circumstances we would have had no chance to get onto that bus. But we were young and strong and violence saved us. We pushed our way forward to the bus. In the course of the journey we didn't hear any explosions; all was quiet. But when we reached a town near Tarnopol [today Ukraine] a horrible bomb attack took place. The Ukrainians were firing at the Russian troops from the shelter of the woods.

When the situation had calmed down we set out on our way to Tarnopol, where the bus stopped for a break. In the spur of the moment I decided to stay in Tarnopol and wait for Martin. My heart told me, it was only here where I could possibly meet him because Tarnopol was the last Polish city before the former Polish border.

They were bombing quite a bit at nighttime. We spent the night on the floor in the city hall and in the morning we discussed what we should do. We were fairly weak already. And then I met my husband, who arrived a few hours later. Martin was wearing his winter coat from Vienna and had blue underpants wrapped around his neck, which were tied into a knot at the end of the trouser legs. In these trouser legs was sugar, which Martin had found next to bombed military vehicles. My husband and I stayed together from that moment on.

We escaped eastwards on board a freight train. We had no idea where we were, where the train stopped; we didn't know anything. It was total chaos. We just wanted to get away from the Germans. We decided to head for Kiev when we learned that both Kiev and Odessa had already been encircled. Nonetheless we wanted to go to a big city with a university to continue our studies. I think we boarded ten different trains. We arrived in Dnepropetrowsk, a fairly big city, and planned to stay there. That very night the city was being bombed for the first time. We had no money and decided to work in a kolkhoz [11](#). The name of the village was Kotelnikowo [today Russia], later a location where pretty fierce fighting took place.

I gave myself an upset stomach by eating a fatty lamb soup; I had never eaten lamb before. Everyone thought I had typhoid. Martin decided to save me and drove me to a hospital because there was no doctor in the village. We went by cart to see a doctor and by the time we arrived there I was back to normal, a bit starved but healthy.

Since my husband had a good upbringing everything had to be done the proper way and so he sold his watch, the only valuable thing he had left. He probably would have got more for it on the black-market, but because he was such a civilized person, he sold it to a state-owned shop. He bought train tickets to Stalingrad with the money he got for it. We were the only people in the whole Soviet Union who boarded that train with tickets. Whenever I told my friends this little anecdote later, I always brought the house down.

My husband had a wound on his leg inflicted earlier by a scythe during work on a field. It got worse and he had to go to hospital in Stalingrad. Due to a false diagnosis he was put into quarantine. I stayed in a refugee camp in the meantime; theoretically you were only allowed to stay there for 24 hours.

Stalingrad was an industrial city. I came across ads by a university and made inquiries if there was a faculty of chemistry. We only had two choices: study or work. There were no people our age that didn't work; they would have been sent to forced labor. Therefore we had to change faculties. I arranged for us - once Martin was released from hospital - to sit exams, get a place in the student hostel and study mechanical engineering, and that would be it.

We neither had money, nor a scholarship. In the beginning I studied and he worked. He had always been fond of cars and worked in a metalworking shop. During that time I sat two exams in Russian, which was one long torment.

My mother spoke Russian very well. She corresponded with her brother in Russian all the time and only spoke Russian with her friend. I remember this one incident very clearly – and this is a characteristic example for the pre-war period in Poland – when she came home with a tear-stained face after a meeting with her friend. Anti-Semitism was just one thing in Poland; the other was deep hatred of Russians and Bolsheviks. My mother and her friend had been to a coffeehouse and then on a tram, chatting away in Russian, whereupon one of the other passengers abused them of being Bolsheviks. My father said to her, ‘How many times do I have to tell you that they don’t love their neighbors in this country and that you shouldn’t speak Russian in public places.’

I couldn’t read these letters back then [Editor’s note: the interviewee is referring to the Cyrillic letters used in the Russian and Ukrainian language], and when I saw the Ukrainian language, which also consisted of such strange letters, I decided one can’t possibly study two such weird languages at the same time, so I decided to focus on Russian. In Lwow, lectures had still been held in Polish but when we came to Russia, the only language spoken was Russian. There were no textbooks so I put everything down in handwriting and also lent my notebooks to other students. In these notebooks you could have seen how my knowledge of the language improved. Unfortunately I have thrown away the one notebook that I took back to Poland with me after the war. My initial notes in there were still in Polish and then I changed to Russian. You could see how my Russian developed and that I gradually wrote more and more in Russian.

Mathematics wasn’t a problem for me, but when I went in for my exams I had to describe a high blast furnace. I did so by describing it partly with words, partly with gestures. To get a scholarship depended on how you did at the exam. If you had three ‘Excellent’ marks and ‘Good’ in all the other subjects, you got a scholarship. My professor, an elderly man, said to me, ‘I see that you know your subject very well but at some points I didn’t quite get what you meant.’

The scholarship wasn’t enough for both of us to survive on, so Martin went to look for a job and found one with a construction company. In October 1941 the Germans got awfully close and the company was about to be evacuated. Martin said that he had a wife, whereupon they demanded the marriage certificate, so we quickly got married on 21st October 1941, during our lunch-break. Our wedding clothes were patched up old clothes – I didn’t have proper shoes either – but that didn’t matter. The only bad thing was that I signed the part, which said that I agreed to take my husband’s name. I would have been allowed to keep my name because the documents I fought for in Lwow were in my maiden name. But to go to the military as a foreigner and have my passport changed to my husband’s name could have become dangerous. Fortunately things changed for the better, the evacuation didn’t take place and I just put my marriage certificate in a drawer.

In Stalingrad we suffered under the hardest winter and the most severe time of starving of the whole war. I remember that my colleagues gave me ten potatoes for my birthday on 9th December.

The biggest problem was shoes. I practically wore overshoes throughout the war, and made myself socks and a cap from remnants.

We were fairly blind to politics, but then again we were cut off from the outside world – there was no radio, only a public loudspeaker that broadcast the official news. We didn’t know anything about Europe, absolutely nothing! We were fighting to get a hold of newspapers only to use them to roll cigarettes and smoke Machorka [very strong tobacco] – both my husband and I were smokers then.

We were always busy making money somehow so that we wouldn't starve and be able to study. It was easier for men to get a job because of their physical advantage. If two wagonloads of salt arrived, I couldn't possibly have gone to help out carry the sacks- I was too weak to carry a sack of salt.

There were two professors and the dean who looked after us. Everything was chaotic but at the same time there was a great solidarity among people. We received 300 grams of bread daily, but no fat, the oil you got back then was similar to lubricating oil. Two girls, who took evening classes at the university, worked in a bakery producing baked goods on a large scale, and they sometimes brought us a bit of extra bread. And the dean, who had noticed that my husband's shoes were completely worn-out, discreetly got him another pair of shoes; they were also old but not that worn-out.

The pressure from above to finish our studies quickly was high because at the beginning of the war a lot of young people - intellectuals - had lost their lives. They had no idea about fighting in a war and fell in their first battle. And later it turned out that there weren't any people to work in companies and therefore we had to hurry with our studies to fill these positions.

All student hostels were full of evacuated people. The Germans had advanced very close to the borders of Stalingrad, but they probably wanted to take the city at once and started to bomb. There was no bridge and the Volga is fairly wide at this point. There was only a single tram that went southwards towards the Caspian Sea. It was difficult to get supplies to the city.

After the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the Volga-German Republic [see German ASSR] [12](#) was dissolved by a decree and the whole Volga-German population, out of fear it could collaborate with the Germans, was deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. They had also sent 'dangerous elements' to Siberia back in Lwow in the winter of 1940. These 'dangerous elements' also included people like me, refugees. All that happened very quickly: soldiers came, arrested people and transported them to Siberia in cattle-trucks. Most of them died in the harsh conditions there.

We were sent to attend crash-courses, for example one for tractor-drivers, to bring in the harvest in the Volga-German Republic. We arrived in a country with painted houses; everything was completely different than in the rest of Russia. It was a piece of Germany in the Soviet Union. A whole country without a single soul; it was very spooky. In the empty houses there were German sayings affixed to the walls, such as 'Morgenstund' hat Gold im Mund' ['The early bird catches the worm'].

We were fairly poor craftsmen. Martin was good because he was a car fanatic and learned how to drive as early as in his childhood. The tractors were in miserable condition because the army had taken the good ones. The steering wheels were so wretched that you could hardly drive the tractors. We worked there for a few weeks but weren't very successful. We were paid in crops for our work, but both Martin and my business skills were rather bad. Instead of selling the crops we tried to grind them with a chair-leg. Our hunger was so enormous; we simply ate anything.

In June 1942 all students in Stalingrad were mobilized and we had to build a defense line against the German troops. The supplies were pretty good at that stage. One day, early in the morning, bombing started. It wasn't the Battle for Stalingrad, but they were the first fights. Two girls from my group that were very young started to cry because they hadn't experienced war before.

The only railroad line leading southwards had been bombed terribly, but there was the harbor in the center of town. The only possibility to flee from Stalingrad was to cross the Volga in small boats. We, however, in our naivety - we were only 21 years old - thought we could build ourselves a raft.

Our destination was Dschimbek in Northern Kazakhstan, in the steppe, 200 kilometers from Stalingrad, and we reached it. In Northern Kazakhstan there are settlements every 50 kilometers. We mostly lived on fruit we stole. Our feet were sore because our shoes were completely worn-out. Allegedly Stalin had ordered the trucks that returned empty from the front to pick up refugees, but they ignored that. I sat down on the side of the road with a bottle of vodka and that had a better effect than Stalin's order.

Dschimbek was an oriental city, a junction between North and South, and there - sometimes real life is more interesting than a film - I met a friend. I wanted to head further north because I thought the heat in the South would cause us difficulties. That's why we came to Sverdlovsk [today Ekaterinburg], made enquiries about the university and learned that a professor was teaching there, who had been in Stalingrad with us. He was very concerned about us and even put us up in his place in the beginning.

There was a faculty of chemistry in Sverdlovsk, but we had already taken so many exams in mechanical engineering that we decided to stick with it. That was in fall 1942. We completed our period of practical training in a motorcycle factory in the small town of Irbit. We worked twelve hours a day, just like the laborers there. There were no real roads in this little town, just tracks like those we had in the poorest parts of Eastern Poland. We were accommodated by different families. We had hardly any food, or, to be more precise, we were starving.

Afterwards we returned to Sverdlovsk, took our exams and the next summer we were already given the subjects of our dissertations. We were supposed to finish our studies quickly in order to fill job positions. I completed my practical diploma training in a factory for aircraft equipment. I was satisfied with my work. Of course we were used, but at the same time we also learned a lot.

My husband always tried to make some extra money. I had an injury on my leg, which didn't heal because we couldn't get vitamins. We had practically finished our studies and were just missing our diploma examinations. But the prospect of going to work soon wasn't exactly enticing. Students didn't have much money and had little food but at least we had time and didn't have to work twelve hours a day. I dawdled over my exams a bit. Most likely someone told on me because I was summoned to the administration of the university. Since female emancipation wasn't exactly high on the list of priorities back then, I came up with the following argument: 'It would make kind of a bad impression if I was an engineer already whereas my husband was still a student, wouldn't it?' I negotiated six more weeks for myself and we finished our studies on the same day.

I had decided that I wanted to wear 'real' shoes to my diploma examination and therefore Martin and I ate even less bread and sold the rest on the market so that I could get a new pair of shoes. Neither he nor I were good salesman. He left the job to me though, so I went to the market with two loaves of bread. I assume that some speculators had bribed the militia; in any case I was caught immediately. Luckily they also caught the wife of a 'big wheel', who was released again immediately and was kind enough to inform my husband on what had happened. Somehow he succeeded to rescue me from the clutches of the law, but the bread was gone of course, and so

was the dream of my new shoes. In the end a Polish shoemaker made a pair of shoes for me, which I paid for in installments, but they were useless and I could only wear them once.

After I had passed my diploma examination, I was abused for being a Jew for the first time by a young man on the street in Sverdlovsk. I gave him a box on the ears. I was 23 years old and the crowd of people on the street, although not knowing what had happened, was on my side.

If you had a diploma, you were given a mandatory job assignment [13](#). That was in 1944, at the beginning of the offensive, and Moscow or Leningrad was out of the question as they were still evacuated. In Dschelabis, an industrial city in the Southern Urals, there was a pipe rolling mill and much to our horror we were assigned there. But we took advantage of the chaos everywhere and simply went to the factory in Sverdlovsk where we had done or diploma practice training. Again we worked twelve hours a day, and, I think, also every second Sunday. The food was poor: bread, bad oil and tea made of dried carrots. There was a variety of food available at the market, but we didn't make enough money for that. The factory in which we worked had been evacuated as well and we lived in horrible barracks. Winters can get as cold as 30 degrees minus in Sverdlovsk and we didn't have running water and only a Russian stove [14](#) to cook on and heat the place. Never before in my life had I seen such a thing! Once I bought some warm panties in a village store. They were red! They made it all the way back to Poland [after the war]; I didn't own anything more exclusive. My sister-in-law, who had survived several camps in Poland, rolled up laughing when she saw my red panties.

I was a technician in a department that manufactured machinery equipment; my husband worked in a different department. And then - Russia already received help from the Americans at the time - the director of the factory learned that there were two casting machines sitting at the railway station and that nobody knew who they belonged to. I assume he pulled some strings; in any case he got those machines. There was a foundry in the factory but no one who spoke English. So my husband volunteered to translate the instructions that came with those two machines. From then on he was deputy head of his department.

In 1943, I think, a Polish organization and army was being formed. I wanted to volunteer for this army, but they didn't take senior students. I asked the professor, who had already been my teacher at school in Warsaw and who liked me, for help, but the opposite happened! Although he was left wing he got very angry with me and said that they didn't need soldiers like me. I'm sure all he wanted was save my life. Apart from the Polish army, the Polish-Soviet Society, which had its headquarters in Moscow, was founded. I worked as a social worker for this society in Russia.

Post-war

When the war was over we were working in Sverdlovsk. In 1946 we heard about an agreement according to which former Polish citizens were allowed to return to Poland.

Since I was sixth month pregnant and had worked for the Polish-Soviet Society, we, along with some Polish farmers who had been deported to Siberia, were among the first to return to Poland. They wanted us to be there in time for the harvest. We were transported to Poland in cattle-trucks, some of which had buckets that served as toilets. That was in April 1946; our destination was Warsaw.

After the end of the war in May 1945 we began to look for our relatives. We had no idea about what had happened in Europe. My letters remained unanswered. The last letters I received were from my father, written in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941. Of course they had been censored. I couldn't write about anything in particular either. I wrote about exams that I had passed and things like that. I couldn't possibly have told him that I ate badly, and, besides, the situation really wasn't that bad in Lwow.

An older student colleague of mine had arranged herself 'Aryan papers', was in the resistance and lived in Warsaw. She came across an ad in a newspaper in 1941 saying that my father was looking for me. She was very courageous and went to see him in the ghetto. She told him that he needn't worry because she knew for sure that I had left Lwow before the Germans invaded it. My father was upset and said, 'Yes, that's the influence of the Bolsheviks.' He still didn't grasp what was happening.

My father probably lived in fairly good circumstances because he had his stock of soap, which was worth its weight in gold back then. Our apartment was situated in the ghetto, so he lived in his own place and was better off than people who had to move from their apartments to new apartments in the ghetto. Later other people moved in with my family. My mother, who wasn't a very emancipated woman, wouldn't have said, 'Okay, I'll go'. My father had already been in poor health when I still lived with them. But if the doctors ask me today, which illnesses there were in my family, I couldn't possibly tell them; my parents were only 45 years old when I last saw them.

My husband received a letter from the city hall of Cracow stating that Mrs. Hedwig Charlotte Ratz lived in Cracow. First we thought it was a mistake because the address given in this letter wasn't the same as the one where the family had lived before the war. The letter my husband wrote to his sister in Cracow remained unanswered. He wrote another one, and again there was no answer.

On the Russian-Polish border the Russian customs confiscated the only belongings we had: our books. They were mainly specialist books, which we had bought when we worked as engineers. 'Books? Do you have any permission to bring them?' the Russian customs officer asked. My husband had to carry two crates of books out of the train on his back. They were requisitioned.

Since the train had a rather long stop at the border - the Russians and the Poles had different railway lines and something had to be adjusted - my husband asked if he could phone Cracow. He found the following name registered in the directory: Ratz, Hedwig Charlotte. I couldn't possibly say: No, we'll go to Warsaw instead of Cracow. I probably didn't have any family left in Warsaw anyway.

My husband's sister had been to several concentration camps. I think she was in Plaszow, near Cracow, first. She was deported along with her mother who was killed in Plaszow. That was the camp where Amon Goeth [15](#) was commander and saved Oskar Schindler's [16](#) Jews. One of my husband's cousins was saved by Oskar Schindler and she can be seen in one of the last sequences of the film 'Schindler's List' [17](#). This cousin and a friend of my husband's, who were saved thanks to Schindler, helped him a lot after the war.

Hedy, as my husband's sister was called, lived with her future husband, Heinrich Reissler, a Holocaust survivor, who came from a very Orthodox family. They shared a two-bedroom apartment with friends who had also survived.

Hedy and Heinrich immigrated to Palestine in 1946. We would have liked to put up Hedy because she was a typical war child, hadn't been able to finish school and we believed that she still needed support in many respects. She grew up in Cracow, but she was only a child when she lived there and couldn't really enjoy her teenage years. She never experienced this kind of world that was so important for my personal development. She is a typical example of how the war ruined the life of Jewish children. The aunt, with whom my husband had stayed when he was in grammar school, could flee from Vienna to Palestine in time, and that way Hedy at least had a relative in Palestine.

They reached Cyprus and Heinrich volunteered for and fought with the Haganah [18](#), while Hedy was interned on Cyprus. After they had arrived in Palestine, Heinrich became an engineer in Haifa, on the only railroad that exists in Israel. Hedy worked somewhere, but I forget what she did. Their daughter, Zofie, was born in 1957. It was a complicated pregnancy - Hedy had to lie down throughout the pregnancy - probably due to the many years that she had been locked up in concentration camps. Zofie has two wonderful children; her son is called Lior and her daughter Shiri. Lior and I communicate via email sometimes - he in his good English, I in my miserable English. Zofie is divorced. She works as a nurse. Hedy died in the year 2000. Heinrich is still alive and lives in Haifa, but he is very sick.

We first lived with Hedy in her apartment. I think the house belonged to her mother but Hedy sold it after the war for next to nothing. However, she succeeded in keeping a two-bedroom apartment for herself. And around ten people lived in this apartment then because my husband had many friends in Cracow. The first to leave were Hedy and Heinrich when they moved to Palestine in 1946.

My husband started to work in an enamel factory. Our son, Alexander, was born in Cracow on 11th June 1946. After giving birth, I had health problems, and so did my son. The food supplies were still very bad shortly after the war.

In 1947 I went to Warsaw. Everyone tried to talk me out of it, but I went nonetheless. The street where I used to live had been situated in the center of the Warsaw Ghetto, but all that was left was a wasteland. I had lived on that street for 17 years, but I almost got lost. The only thing that saved me was a church, which had stood opposite our house. That church had survived and I could use it as an aid to orientation. There was debris everywhere because during the Ghetto Uprising in 1943 all houses had been destroyed by flame-throwers. The houses that they later built there were built on a fundament of debris. And of course, there were no documents left.

When my son turned one, I started to work as chief engineer in a cannery. I was a young, 25-year-old woman and the rest of the employees were men. It was hard in the beginning. All the masters were older than me and not particularly happy that I, a young woman, should be their boss. When I started work there, the director of the factory said to me politely, 'You're a smart young woman. Why do you want to wrestle with all these ...' He used a pretty dirty word! About six weeks later I invited all my colleagues to a pub - I would never set foot into a pub like this today - for beer and vodka. After that they respected me. Not even three diplomas would have been able to do what that beer and vodka did.

This factory had been in Jewish ownership before the war. The family survived in Brazil. I didn't walk around with a sign saying 'I'm Jewish', but my name is Jewish and Poles simply know when they are dealing with a Jew; they are very strong anti-Semites. They told me non-stop about how they had helped the Jewish owners of the factory with wrapping gold to send it to Brazil. They really

got on my nerves! I would have preferred if they had told me that they had beaten them. This currying of favor really annoyed me. However, I wasn't harassed for being a Jew. I think at that time they trusted Jews in Poland because they hadn't collaborated with the Germans.

We considered the Kielce Pogrom [19](#) a 'slip'. We thought it was 'yesterday's people' who had done that. Cracow was a cultural center, a former capital of Poland. Many intellectuals lived there. In any case I wouldn't say that there was a particular atmosphere for pogroms there. However, there was pressure from above, to assimilate, to adopt Polish surnames, but they only issued the documents in 1947 or 48. They summoned us to the militia and said we should change our name, Ratz, to something like Raczynski or Rakowski. Upon that my husband said, 'The only thing left of my family is my name, and I won't change it!' Most Jews in Poland did change their Jewish surnames though.

Once a man called me on a business matter in Poland. First we talked business on the phone but then he started to tell me Jewish jokes. They weren't bad and I did chuckle a bit, but I also told him, 'You know, I'm not sure if you should tell someone whose father's name was Israel, such an awful lot of such jokes in such a short time.' He was completely shocked and uttered, 'I'm really sorry. If your surname had been Rakoschka or Ratschenski or something like that, I would have guessed that you might be Jewish. But with a name like Ratz...!'

When I worked in Warsaw, I met an older former student colleague of mine and I knew that he had changed his surname. We were on the opposite sides of the negotiating table and he knew that I knew him, but still he shook my hand and introduced himself with his new Polish surname. It was doing my head in, so I also shook his hand and introduced myself by saying, 'The name's still Ratz.'

My husband was transferred to Warsaw in 1949 to work in a car factory. He was the head of a Polish group of engineers and they sent him to Italy for a half-year training at FIAT. Later my son Alexander and I also moved to Warsaw. My daughter, Margarete, was born in Warsaw on 19th May 1952. I got a position as an expert with the State Planning Commission. I would have preferred to work in a factory but they said they also needed good people with the Planning Commission, so I stayed there until they fired me in 1968.

After the Six-Day-War [20](#) in Israel, an anti-Semitic mood began to spread in Poland. It wasn't public yet, but it was noticeable. A few people even dared to shout at meetings. But no one dared to say that the Jews should get out of Poland.

One day my boss summoned me to his office. He had always valued me highly but nonetheless he said that I couldn't keep my position because my husband had a sister in Israel and they therefore couldn't trust me any more. I would get an equivalent position though, he said. I didn't, so I went to see the head boss because I thought he was an intelligent and politically correct person. In reality, he was a hopeless scaredy-cat though.

I finally got a job as technical advisor in a bank. There was probably some kind of instruction that wanted to make Jews feel that they weren't welcome in Poland by paying those who had been fired from their previous jobs lower salaries. I can't prove that though because at the place I worked, I still made good money in comparison to others. My husband had kept his position but as early as 1956, during the first anti-Semitic wave in Poland, he wanted to leave the country. Many people left back then. But then the situation became more relaxed and, at age 50, we had to admit, that we were wrong.

The authorities only issued Polish Jews documents for Israel. We didn't want to go to Israel, and at the same we knew, from reading foreign newspapers, that no one in Vienna was exactly waiting for a 50-year-old engineer. But my husband chose Vienna nonetheless because German was his mother tongue and he said the most complicated thing that came with a move was the language barrier. He was certainly right there.

My husband was allowed to emigrate from Poland in 1969 but he could only take our children along; I, as 'a person cleared for access to secret information', wasn't allowed to leave Poland. My son, who was 23 at the time, only had one more exam to pass for his diploma at the technical university, and my daughter, 17 at the time, was only missing one year for her final exams. She didn't want to leave Warsaw at all. She wanted to stay with me. Besides she was in love for the first time. I had to sign a paper saying that I agreed that my husband left Poland for good.

We made enquiries at the Austrian Embassy in Warsaw about my husband's Austrian citizenship. They told him that he would automatically get the Austrian citizenship once he was in Austria. When he arrived in Vienna though, it turned out that there had been a set date at which he would have needed to register. At that time, however, he was still in Poland. Then they told him in the city hall that he would get back his Austrian citizenship within three years. And so it was. Exactly three years later our family got the Austrian citizenship. I was in Vienna already at the time and this was very important to us.

Two weeks after he had settled in Vienna, my husband found a job as an engineer with a company that went bankrupt a year later. He was unemployed for half a year until he found a job with the German Festo company. Originally, that company manufactured equipment for timber processing and pneumatic systems; later it was pneumatic systems and steering for machines. My husband was responsible for the market in the GDR. He traveled to fairs, made good money and was valued by his company. When he got seriously ill they treated him very nicely.

After a great many rejections of my applications for the reuniting of my family, I finally got the permission to move to Vienna. That was in 1972. I was sick and exhausted after those two and a half years of waiting. I didn't know anymore if I would make it out of Poland alive. My husband had told me beforehand that I should brush up my knowledge of German as well as my typing skills. I still knew Russian. I became a translator and worked freelance from home.

At the age of 50 it was difficult to make new friends. We didn't have much time because we had to build a new life for ourselves. In Poland we had a large circle of friends and we could knock on their door anytime and would be welcome. I have friends like that in Paris, London, New York and God knows where, even in Israel. But they have become fewer and fewer for many of them have already died.

The first apartment we lived in had a stove that I couldn't handle. I almost set the apartment on fire once. Then we found a co-operative apartment. I immediately fell in love with it. To me it is very important to live in a place I feel comfortable in.

My daughter didn't have it easy in Vienna. She had reached puberty, missed her mother, had difficulties with the German language and therefore problems in school. Now she is an interpreter in the Polish and Russian language. Sometimes I help her out with technical translations for she is totally lost when it comes to technical things. She is divorced and has two daughters, Barbara and

Julia, and a son, Nikolaus. My daughter isn't religious and neither are her children.

My son didn't stay in Vienna. Two weeks after his arrival he moved to Sweden. He's an academically qualified engineer and holds the degree of a 'Bachelor of Business Administration'. He lives in Goteborg, and is married to Tola, whose father was Jewish and died when she was a small girl. My son and his wife have three sons, Martin, Jakob and Benjamin. My son took a year off work and went to work for a Swedish firm in Danzig. He's back in Goteborg by now though.

My oldest grandson, Martin, decided to have his circumcision at the age of 17 and became a Jew. His mother fulfilled his wishes and they also celebrated all the religious holidays at home. He was studying at Business University in Vienna for half a year, and Pesach was around that time. He wanted us to celebrate seder eve together. It was a catastrophe because none of us had any idea about it. He said he would take care of everything but then, at the last moment, he had to do something at university and was late. I had a Haggadah for children, and I was the 'chief rabbi'. I don't know if Martin still celebrates religious holidays; he's very busy with the development of his company.

Martin lives in Stockholm. He started to work right after his diploma, with a Swedish company that sells know-how to language schools. Jakob studied medicine and did his doctorate in May. Benjamin, the youngest, did his final exams this spring and wants to study law.

My husband died of cancer in 1989 in Vienna. He was buried in the Israelite section of Vienna's Zentralfriedhof.

People are surprised to hear that I don't know a single word of Yiddish. I do understand a few words, but I've never used the language. There are no more Jews in Poland, but there's a wonderful Yiddish theatre in Warsaw that has fantastic actors; they aren't Jewish though. Because I know German, I understand almost everything in Yiddish.

Since there are no Jews anymore, Jewish culture has become somewhat of a new fashion. Take Cracow for instance: My daughter paid for my trip to Cracow because I very much wanted to go there. I didn't go to the house where I used to live until 1949, but I knew from my son, who had been there before, that the janitor was still the same. They have restored the Jewish quarter and the synagogue there very nicely. Every year a festival of klezmer music takes place in Cracow. Unfortunately that's in July and I always go to Sweden to visit my son's family in July because there's already a fall chill there in August.

I've never been religious; even back in Poland our friends were rather assimilated Jews. We never denied that we were Jews but we never practiced religion either. Sometimes I went to the temple in Vienna, when I was invited to a bar mitzvah or a concert, but I never prayed there.

When I went to Israel for the first time, I admired simply everything I saw there. I wasn't superficially interested in the political side of things. Hedy and her family were there and my husband had a great many acquaintances in Israel. We saw a lot of places, including Eilat, which back then was still being constructed. I had a student colleague who was a building contractor and had an airplane and he flew us to Eilat. The country fascinated me and of course there were many discussions and some people tried to convince us to move to Israel. But I don't know the language and since I'm a culturally orientated person, language is very important to me, and I would be

somewhat of an illiterate person in Israel. There were quite a few interesting people, such as friends from my childhood, a director and a musician, with whom I was in touch.

I went to Israel for the third time in 1998. My friends, though they become less and less, decided to stay there; actually they don't have a choice anymore. They are disappointed with the politics of the government. Some have children in America. A former student colleague of mine has a son in Israel who is a chemist and another one in America, who is a professor of economics. The son in Israel says, 'I was born here, my daughter was born here, this is my country.' Many say that but still they aren't happy with the whole politics and history of the country.

Today I live in Vienna and have lady-friends here: most of them are Jewish but there are also a few atheists. I go to the theater, exhibitions, concerts a lot and I also like hiking. My daughter lives in Vienna and so do my two granddaughters. I visit my son in Sweden every summer and usually stay for a month.

Glossary

1 Warsaw Ghetto

A separate residential district for Jews in Warsaw created over several months in 1940. On 16th November 1940 138,000 people were enclosed behind its walls. Over the following months the population of the ghetto increased as more people were relocated from the small towns surrounding the city. By March 1941 445,000 people were living in the ghetto. Subsequently, the number of the ghetto's inhabitants began to fall sharply as a result of disease, hunger, deportation, persecution and liquidation. The ghetto was also systematically reduced in size. The internal administrative body was the Jewish Council (Judenrat). The Warsaw ghetto ceased to exist on 15th May 1943, when the Germans pronounced the failure of the uprising, staged by the Jewish soldiers, and razed the area to the ground.

2 Todt Organization

Named after its founder, Nazi minister for road construction Dr. Fritz Todt, this was an organization in Nazi Germany for large-scale construction work, especially the construction of strategic roads and defenses for the military. By 1944, it employed almost 1.4 million workers including thousands of concentration camp inmates and criminals.

3 Anders' Army

The Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, subsequently the Polish Army in the East, known as Anders' Army: an operations unit of the Polish Armed Forces formed pursuant to the Polish-Soviet Pact of 30 July 1941 and the military agreement of 14 July 1941. It comprised Polish citizens who had been deported into the heart of the USSR: soldiers imprisoned in 1939-41 and civilians amnestied in 1941 (some 1.25-1.6m people, including a recruitment base of 100,000-150,000). The commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR was General Wladyslaw Anders. The army never reached its full quota (in February 1942 it numbered 48,000, and in March 1942 around 66,000). In terms of operations it was answerable to the Supreme Command of the Red Army, and in terms of organization and personnel to the Supreme Commander, General Wladyslaw Sikorski and the Polish

government in exile. In March-April 1942 part of the Army (with Stalin's consent) was sent to Iran (33,000 soldiers and approx. 10,000 civilians). The final evacuation took place in August-September 1942 pursuant to Soviet-British agreements concluded in July 1942 (it was the aim of General Anders and the British powers to withdraw Polish forces from the USSR); some 114,000 people, including 25,000 civilians (over 13,000 children) left the Soviet Union. The units that had been evacuated were merged with the Polish Army in the Middle East to form the Polish Army in the East, commanded by Anders.

4 Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935)

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

5 Galicia

Informal name for the lands of the former Polish Republic under Habsburg rule (1772-1918), derived from the official name bestowed on these lands by Austria: the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria. From 1815 the lands west of the river San (including Cracow) began by common consent to be called Western Galicia, and the remaining part (including Lwow), with its dominant Ukrainian population Eastern Galicia. Galicia was agricultural territory, an economically backward region. Its villages were poor and overcrowded (hence the term 'Galician misery'), which, given the low level of industrial development (on the whole processing of agricultural and crude-oil based products) prompted mass economic emigration from the 1890s; mainly to the Americas. After 1918 the name Eastern Malopolska for Eastern Galicia was popularized in Poland, but Ukrainians called it Western Ukraine.

6 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (or April Uprising)

On 19th April 1943 the Germans undertook their third deportation campaign to transport the last inhabitants of the ghetto, approximately 60,000 people, to labor camps. An armed resistance broke out in the ghetto, led by the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) and the Jewish Military Union (ZZW) – all in all several hundred armed fighters. The Germans attacked with 2,000 men, tanks and artillery. The insurrectionists were on the attack for the first few days, and subsequently carried out their defense from bunkers and ruins, supported by the civilian population of the ghetto, who contributed with passive resistance. The Germans razed the Warsaw ghetto to the ground on 15th

May 1943. Around 13,000 Jews perished in the Uprising, and around 50,000 were deported to Treblinka extermination camp. About 100 of the resistance fighters managed to escape from the ghetto via the sewers.

7 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

8 Invasion of Poland

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

9 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

10 Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and

threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

11 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.

12 German ASSR

established as Labour Commune of Volga Germans or Volga German AO within the Russian SFSR on 19th October 1918. Transformed into Volga German ASSR on 19th December 1924, abolished on 28th August 1941. The official state name was Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of the Volga-Germans. The city of Engels is the former capital of the Volga-German Republic.

13 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

14 Russian stove

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

15 Goeth, Amon (1908-1946)

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

16 Schindler, Oskar (1908-1974)

one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' who during the Nazi persecutions saved the lives of more than 1,200 Polish Jews. Schindler was born in Zwittau, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, and after the annexation of the Sudetenland by the Germans served as a member of Admiral Canaris' anti-espionage service. He left the service after Germany's conquest of Poland and established a factory in Cracow which was later converted into a munitions plant. Schindler took advantage of this plant to save Jews from the extermination camps. He arranged for his workers and those of three neighboring factories whose Jewish workers were about to be deported to be classified as prisoners doing essential work. He often had to bribe the SS and other functionaries to turn a blind eye. After the war, Schindler emigrated to Argentina where he bought a farm, but in 1956 returned to Frankfurt. In 1962 Schindler was honored by Israel as one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations'

and in 1967 was awarded the peace prize of the International Buber Society in London. The following year the West German Government awarded him its highest civilian order, the 'Verdienstkreuz Ersten Ranges' and a small pension. Schindler, a Roman Catholic, died in Hildesheim and in accordance with his last wish, was buried in Jerusalem in the Latin cemetery on Mt. Zion.

17 Schindler's List

Steven Spielberg's 1992 film featuring the deeds of Oskar Schindler, who saved the lives of more than 1,200 Polish Jews during World War II. The film received awards for best film, best director and best script at the Golden Globes.

18 Haganah

(Hebrew: 'Defense'), Zionist military organization representing the majority of the Jews in Palestine from 1920 to 1948. Although it was outlawed by the British Mandatory authorities and was poorly armed, it managed effectively to defend Jewish settlements. After the United Nations' decision to partition Palestine (1947), the Haganah came into the open as the defense force of the Jewish state; it clashed openly with the British forces and successfully overcame the military forces of the Palestinian Arabs and their allies. By order of the provisional government of Israel (May 31, 1948) the Haganah as a private organization was dissolved and became the national army of the state.

19 Kielce Pogrom

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

20 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.