

Sokal Jan

Interviewee: Jan Sokal

Lodz

Poland

Interviewer: Judyta Hajduk

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We met with Mr. Jan Sokal in his home on Gandiego Street in Lodz, where we talked for many hours. Mr. Sokal is 91 years old. In spite of his slight stature he is a very vivacious and active man. He does housekeeping by himself and takes care of his wife who is a blind person. Our first meetings went on in the atmosphere of limited confidence. Mr. Sokal was very particular about text authorization just after the first draft. As time went by and the succeeding biography versions were completed, our relations became more and more friendly. During one of the meetings Mr. Sokal confessed he had been dreaming about writing a 'Saga of the Sokal Family' and because of that he agreed for the interview. Mr. Sokal often digresses, develops sideplots with pleasure, frequently does not finish sentences or skips subjects, and this is a reason for so many editor's notes in the text.

Mr. Sokal didn't want to let us publish the present pictures of him and his family, but with pleasure he made his prewar pictures accessible to us. He hopes that thanks to Internet someone of his friends from the old days will contact him in Lodz.

I rather didn't know my [grandparents] from my father's, Natan Sokal [1860-1938] side. Some gentleman used to come, a short Jew, bearded, and his name was Fuks. Where he [used to come] from I don't know, probably, I suppose, from somewhere in Rawa Ruska [small town, ca. 100km north-east of Przemysl, today in Ukraine], since Father was from there. [There] was such a custom that a freeholder [of the land] would give family names. [And my father's family was given the name] Sokal. [That name] is not popular. Here in Lodz, [there is] one, some doctor. [I know that, because] I used to receive his mail for a certain period of time. [But I] have never spoken to him.

My father probably came from somewhere in [the vicinity of] Rawa Ruska. I can only suspect he was born in 1860. No one in our family was keeping such a calendar, right. He was a normally shaved, cropped man. [He did not wear a beard]. I have never seen him [having a beard]. Father was a townsman. He worked until year 1928. He was a hired employee in a certain beer wholesale firm, right. He was a collector. He would travel with a carter and a load of beer and would distribute it [the beer] to restaurants, and it was his job. During those times it was a relatively well paid [job]. I suppose [so], but having such a big family wasn't easy. And later, during that time when our family went into financial troubles, he lost his job. Father, I remember, liked to smoke a lot. [He kept smoking] until the end of his life. He apparently [started to smoke] before the war, when he was [working] in a propinacja [archaic Polish: a nobleman's monopoly, sales of alcohol beverages]

of vodkas. [Father] was not a drunkard, right. No! But he did not scorn from alcohol. When he used to work, I remember him, he would return [home] frozen in winter, in the kitchen he had such 'tens', small [liquour-glasses, 10ml], like a thimble, [and he would drink one].

[Father] was a good expert in the history of the Jewish nation and religious matters. He had [knew] a rabbi, and Father attended his services. The rabbi's name was Herszel. When I was very young I was there [with my father] several times, lead by the hand. It was just an apartment, and people used to come there. There was a man who had rabbinical, national knowledge. And Father was respected by him, too. Because my father was strong [in that knowledge]. He knew it through and through, right. That's how we used to say, in our family. And he used to live in accordance to that religious knowledge. All the holidays that existed [he would go to pray]. I remember, as long as I was at home, since later I flew away too, he was observant of that, [but] he was normal. As normal civilized people are dressed, [same about him] he did not distinguish himself. [Mr. Sokal wants to emphasize his father was 'civilized', in other words that he was not fanatical, not a Hasid; pious, but a progressive man]. He knew the Polish language very well. He died probably in 1938. I was already in Cracow back then.

[I do not remember my grandparents from my mother's side]. Simply, I have never seen them in my life. I only heard some stories about them. My mother Bronislawa Sokal [?-1933] came from the Schorrs, exactly the Przemysl Schorrs. [See: Mojzesz Schorr]². The whole family from my mother's [side] came [from Przemysl] [town ca. 400km east of Cracow]. Grandfather's name was Ben Cijon. That was his name. My grandmother's name... [I don't remember].

I knew my uncles [from my mother's side]. They were my mother's brothers. They used to come to us [to the house] until the Soviet-German war broke out [1941]. They also lived in Przemysl. Their family name was same as Mom's maiden name, Schorr. They were rather intelligent people, accountants by occupation. I knew my uncle Dawid by name. The eldest. I remember another uncle, his name was Jozef [Schorr]. [He] was a kind of a story-teller. He used to reminisce about the war time [WWI], because he did his military service in the Austrian [Austro-Hungarian] forces. He could talk about the history quite vividly. There was probably a lot of fiction in it, but [I listened to it willingly]. And he lived for a long time. I still saw him in 1943 in Lwow. I had one more uncle. His name was Oskar Schorr. When I was a little boy, he was already a lawyer, right, and he was a very respected man. His story is a bit convoluted. I know Mom was very unhappy [because] of him. That is, because of the life he led. Because he married some lady, a girl, who came somewhere from tsarist Russia. She was a refugee from the Bolsheviks. And it was something terrible for my mom [who] came from such a traditional family. [My mom's family] was very national-Jewish by ancestry. Mom was raised according to this spirit, [filled with] this faith. [To her] it was a shock. How could it be? He's from such a noble [traditional, Jewish] home, and she's from some tsarist, not-Jewish one. Terrible sin! I know, when my mother learned about that, she was trying to find him in order not to allow for that misalliance, right. This was a tragedy in her life. I also knew Fajga, my mother's youngest sister, a beautiful girl. She got married late, to Mr. Lewski. A handsome man. He was a trade agent. [They had] a little boy [son]. [He was] a beautiful boy. They all perished [in Holocaust].

[My mother's first name was] Bronislawa. Broncia, Bronia, something like that. She was slim, slender. She didn't wear a wig, [she had] long hair. [She used to dress] normally, in a middle-class manner. She did housekeeping and looked after the children. It seems Mom's cooking was kosher. I suppose so. But I can't characterize it. [She used to cook] very tasty. I fed only on that cuisine.

[Mom worked] till late, I remember. And she was doing everything herself. Such a martyr. As the girls [my sisters] were growing up, they were surely helping her, they were involved, forced to do that. I know that as a young boy I also had my duties, because I was strong enough. I used to carry water. From a well, of course. I carried water since early childhood. I carried two buckets normally in hands. And it was not that I carried it from a building to home, but it [was] a good bit of the way, half a kilometer at least. And a lot of water was used. [Especially] when washing took place. Mother was an amazing [woman]. Good. Loving. Knowing how to raise [children]. Not old-fashioned, absolutely not. If I came to blows with someone, she used to say: 'Your fault, if you take up with such bounders, it's all right. Don't go barging over there'. Something like that. She was an angel, not a human being. She died probably in 1933, I don't remember exactly. She had a lot of problems, those life experiences related to certain matters that afflicted our home.

[My parents] were not politically engaged. Absolutely not. They had no interest in that. Well, Father sometimes looked at the [socialist] literature my brothers had. But [my father] was a man who had broader horizons. Parents didn't really lead a social [life]. I don't remember them having [many friends]. Whereas, each of us [their children], had friends, boys and girls. And obviously we kept in touch within the family. I had many cousins in Przemysl, with the same last name Schorr, because all of them lived here [in Przemysl] with us.

This town of mine, [Przemysl], was not that big. In the pre-war times, it was also not that small, because it was a town with a population of 65 thousand citizens, right. Located beautifully. In Lwow province. Przemysl is about 100 km from Lwow. And even nowadays Przemysl is a border city. Over there, not too far from Przemysl, about 3-4 kilometers there is the Ukrainian border [Editor's note: the border is ca. 10km from Przemysl]. Lovely foot-hills land, with water. There is the San River. I learned to swim in that San, in early childhood.

A modern city. There were, I remember, big factories. Tools and agricultural machinery factory, for example the 'Field Factory'. It was its name. The owner was a Jew, Klagsbald. [The biggest factory in town. Established in 1925 as 'Field Machinery Factory and Iron Foundry Joachim Klagsbald & Sons'. Located on Zyblikiewicza Street, produced agricultural machinery, sewing machines, bicycles etc. In 1938 the 'Field Factory' employed 150 workers. Joachim Klagsbald was an active member of the Zionist organization.] And the second one, big for Polish conditions back then, the Rindeg's [factory]. It was a kind of a home factory. Of children's toys. [Also] Jewish. [Most probably 'Minerwa', producing mainly mechanical toys. Established by Jozef Reiner, Town Council councilor. In 1938 it employed about 100 people.] Furthermore there was a Gorlinger sawmill [Gorlinger & Gottfried Sawmill]. I remember since a brother of one of my friends used to work there.

There were two synagogues [in Przemysl] [Editor's note: There were four big synagogues in Przemysl before WWII]. I knew them. [Located] fairly close to my place of living. One of them about ten houses ahead. The one [on Slowackiego Street] is still there to this day. And that was the Szynbach's [Editor's note: Scheinbach's or New Synagogue, at 15 Slowackiego Street, erected in the years 1910-1918. In 1960-1961 turned into a library.] Beautiful, modern. A big building. It wasn't really radical. There were children choirs and cantors. Young boys, 14 [years old], [who] had beautiful voices, used to sing there. Young folks used to go there regularly. Beside that there was the so called 'Templum'. [Located] next to San. That 'Templum' [was] beautiful. [It looked like] a big hall. Very progressive people [used to go] there. ['Tempel', on Jagiellonska Street, erected in the years 1886-1890 as an initiative of the group of so called progressive Jews, demolished by the

Germans during WWII.] However, there were [also] a couple of prayer houses, [that] my father loved. I knew the one [Father used to go to].

[From Przemysl I remember] a Jewish cemetery that exists to this day, but it's a ruin now. [Mr. Sokal most likely refers to the cemetery on Slowackiego Street. Established in 19th century, with a cemetery gate and about 200 tombstones preserved.] I have been there several times, just after the war. [Last time] I was there probably ten years ago. A part of the cemetery with an iron gate was used after the war. It was brought into use. The mazelot were grown over. It would be necessary to dig everything up. My deceased parents lie there, [but] nobody can [tell me where].

On Basztowa Street, somewhat far from the centre of town, at the border of some district, [there was] a Jewish hospital. [Editor's note: Mr. Sokal most likely means Staszkievicza Street with a hospital that had been there since 1900. The hospital was supported by the Jewish religious community and the Society of Friends of the Jewish Hospital.] I have a kind of a memento [related to it]. It was an accident. I broke my leg once, when I was a child. [I broke it] when doing sports. I was 10, 12 years old. Obviously, my parents took me to the hospital. They [the doctors] set the bones on that leg back, but not properly. It was in a cast only up to the knee. I didn't pay any attention to it; I lay in the hospital until it healed up. Friends used to come, look at my leg and laugh: 'What a crescent roll you've got here!' Because that leg was kind of like that. I brought it to my parents attention and I lodged a complaint. Indeed, they repeated everything, broke the leg with no anesthesia and put it together again. I was a strong boy, so I could [endure] it all.

Somewhere on Tarnawskiego Street or Dworskiego Street there was a Hebrew gymnasium. [The Hebrew gymnasium organized by the Hebrew Educational Institute in 1927. The school's first location was in a rented house at 4 Gorna Street (today Grottgera Street). The opening ceremony of the new school building at 15 Tarnawskiego Street took place on 14th October 1928.] I don't know who supported it. For sure it wasn't a public gymnasium. Young people used to attend it normally and [it was] a school of high standards. My girlfriend used to go to that gymnasium. She was a nice girl. A beautiful blonde, hundred percent. Petka Pater. Yes, it was such a youthful love. Those were early times, even very early. [We were both] in our teens. Maybe 17. For a certain period of time we were very close to each other, right. She completed that gymnasium. And later her history was such that during the war the fate sent her probably somewhere to Asia. After the war I got [information] from my friend that in Trybuna Ludu ['The People's Tribune', daily 1948-1990, an official newspaper of the Polish United Worker's Party] there was a list of people who were looking for their families. Press advertisement. And she [was] among those people. She was searching for [her relatives], she gave her parents' last name, address. I got interested [in it], took advantage of that opportunity, and sent a letter to her. She came back to Poland after the war. She was with her husband. He was a printer.

Various types of celebrations were organized in town. Each Sunday an orchestra used to play on the market square. Usually military orchestras. There was a lot of greenery there, right, trees [grew] around, nice atmosphere. [I know that since] as a young boy I used to go there with pleasure. Mostly young residents liked [to go there]. I don't recall those to be any rallies [in a patriotic sense].

I think it's worth to mention some persons [from Przemysl]. Those were important people who counted [in the town] and in the country. They were Jews by origin. The ones I am mentioning here

I knew personally when I was a child. They were [all] excellent professionals, prominent physicians. For example there was Dr. Lieberman [Herman Lieberman (1870-1941), socialist, member of Polish parliament]. He was a noble man. He represented left-wing political opinions. Great, famous activist. A politician on a national scale, parliamentarian from PPS [See Polish Socialist Party]³. Yes, he was very respected by people. Workers were very fond of him, they adored him. Dr. Zustwain was a pediatrician [Editor's note: most likely Dr. Julius Susswein, one of the most meritorious activists of the Health Preservation Society - TOZ] The Society came into existence in 1927. There were always [a lot of] people ready to join it. He was popular in the Przemysl community, regardless of his nationality. There was also doctor Sohn [one of most meritorious activists of TOZ]. [He] was a physician, an activist. I used to be treated by him. There is even a monument of him in Przemysl, [in] that undestroyed part of the [Jewish] cemetery. Uberal was an excellent dentist. In general he was a nice person and he was popular because of that. All ladies, regardless their date of birth [age], used to go [to him]. Doctor Tirkel was a director of a Jewish hospital in Przemysl, an excellent surgeon. Then, a major socialist activist, also from PPS, was Dr. Ludwik Grosfeld. A lawyer, a counsel for the defense in all those left-wingers' cases. Moreover, during the war, he was a member of the Polish government in exile. I think he was the Minister of Trade in the Polish government in London. [Editor's note: 1943-1944 Ludwik Grosfeld was the Minister of Finances in the Polish Government in Exile] And he was also a true-born Przemysl citizen. Sztrudler: a young industrialist in his prime. He was probably about 50 years old. He had a quilt factory. And he was a member of Bund, too. [Editor's note: most likely Jozef Strudler, an active member of the Jewish Musical-Dramatic Society Juwal, the organization promoting Jewish culture, music, arts, theater. Almost all Jewish intelligence of town was centered around that organization.] There were also several others from Bund.

The Jewish community [in town] was diverse. It consisted of a several shades. A lot of intelligence. Generally, quite a large Jewish intelligence. For example Herszdorfer, a wealthy man, he had a large insurance company. Both his sons were sympathizers of left-wing, of communism, right. [They were men] of Zionist political opinions. I belonged to Zionist youth, Hashomer Hatzair ⁴. I remember that organization very fondly, because it was my school of maturation. There were a lot of shoemakers, tailors. A lot of noble men, whom I remembered, whom I knew, right.

When it comes to Hasidim, there was the Tajcher family in our house. He [was] a rather venerable gentleman. He had one daughter, if I remember correctly. Later, after she got married, she used to live in Drohobycz [town ca. 200km south-east of Przemysl, today Ukraine]. Beside that the Hirszows were also orthodox Jews. The parents observed tradition; wives wore wigs on their heads. There were also the Frenkls, the Kielcs families. The Kielcs family was poor. There were, at the same time, children, two daughters and a wife. I knew the daughters. One of them was Rozia and the other one was named something else. Lajka, something like that [probably diminutive for Lea]. And he [Mr. Kielc] was a furrier, a craftsman on his own. So there [in an apartment] he had a workshop and he tightened and cut those leathers.

There were rabbis in Przemysl. But I wasn't familiar with those matters. Over there, where my father used to go [to the prayer house] I knew [the rabbi] by name. [His name was] Hersztl. There were such men who used to kill poultry. They were butchers, specialists. They had kosher meat shops. Opposite of our house the Frost [family] [lived]. They were bakers. We often used to buy [from them]. I used to do errands at that shop. During a certain period of time we used to buy

bread on credit. I used to go to the shop, he wrote down how much we were due, and so on.

During my life there were no pogroms, no disturbances. Yes, there were some town sections, [like] Pralkowce [Editor's note: actually a village near Przemysl], where there were hooligans, but one rather did not go there. So personally [I did not experience] any harm.

Some Ukrainians also used to live [near us]. They had their beautiful, representative house. It means a national house. It was a well known house. And their various events [used to take place] over there. And probably meetings [too]. It was located in the right side of the town. I've never gone there, but I know something like that existed, and Ukrainian intelligentsia used to center around that. Similarly [there was] a Polish [house]. Located at the other side of San. This was the Workers' House. [It was] owned by the Polish Socialist Party. Mr. Zigman was an administrator there.

[We lived] at 3 Slowackiego Street. And this house still exists. This is a two-storey building, in the centre of Przemysl. [There] was electricity, a sewage system [too], only toilets [were] out on the porch. Each family had access to their own toilet. They took care of it. How many tenants were there [in the building], I'm not certain. Four families on each floor. With us [on the first floor], the landlord lived, the Frenkl family - they had an ironmongery hardware store, wealthy people, the Kielcs - a poorer [family], and we used to live on the first floor, too. And [everyone had] more or less two rooms. So it was a pretty big house. Obviously, on the ground floor, there were shops. Various ones. I remember, the owners of this house were the Schechter family. Their sons-in-law lived on the first floor, next to us, right. [Their last name was] Trajbec, and they had a big store downstairs with newspapers [press], stationery, etc.

My family [occupied] two big rooms and a kitchen. In the kitchen, first of all, there was a big stove. A cupboard was there for sure, a table, but we didn't use to eat there. And a small room [a pantry] where the housewife used to store all the things necessary for housekeeping. The wash-tub was huge. When laundry was being done, all that took place in the kitchen. Some fat lady [used to come]. [But I] didn't know the details. Beside that we had no house-maid. During my life, everyone had some kind of chores. No one had an entire single room [for themselves]. I never had a bed of my own. There was no such convenience. During that period of time, I remember, I usually [slept] together with my brother Bernard.

Our home was very progressive, with a fully formed outlook upon life, of left-wing opinions, right, and this often caused trouble for the whole family. Only the Polish language was used at home. Except my father, who knew Hebrew and Yiddish perfectly, I have no doubts, none of my brothers [spoke these languages]. Maybe the older brothers [knew some] because they went through all the periods necessary for that [cheder, grammar school, gymnasium]. Probably, I don't know that for certain, my parents also spoke Yiddish. Somewhere, it came to my ears. I really doubt other homes knew Polish and used it to such an extent as it was at the home in which I was born.

[At home we would read] lay books, belles-lettres, all contemporary [writers]. And everyone knew [them]. Boys and girls lived to read. It was normal. Nowadays [it is] a special virtue, [but back then] nobody could imagine [otherwise]. My brother Bernard used to eat his dinner with a spoon and read.

There was [also] foreign and Polish [press], that was a rarity not everyone could put their hands on it. It was delivered [by order]. [For example] 'Imprekor' [Inprekor, a trockist, Polish-language paper of 4th International, issued in the 1880s], about the world upper class, criticizing mutual relations between people, right, in different countries. Kind of left-wing. Uncles used to come [to us] and often read it.

Tradition was [present] all the time regardless of [the home being] progressive. During those early years, holidays were legalized [observed]. Obviously, all holidays, Easter time, when you don't eat bread, only those matzot, right, and so on. Mostly on Saturdays [Father used to go for prayers]. He really abode by it during holidays, but he never forced us to celebrate it. Such a custom it was and that's it. I don't know, but it was applied probably because of religious reasons. I don't remember if anyone deviated in these matters. When my parents could afford it, there was that traditional fish [gefilte fish], too. There was [also] a crisis time, [when] [there were no] such fancy dishes. We just couldn't afford it. Mostly because of those reasons I don't have such [recollections].

We were four brothers and four sisters [Editor's note: five sisters; Mr. Sokal doesn't count the sister who died in her youth]. A typical [Jewish], large, numerous family. Exactly as God told: 'Procreate and give birth.' We kept very close together. These memories of those young family years are still alive in me. Maybe it's my weakness.

The oldest one at home was probably [my sister]. Her name was Andzia [from Anda]. But she died when she was 21 years old. I don't even remember her, very foggy. She died of meningitis. The oldest brother's name was Abraham. He was born in 1905. He was a wise man. He was in Poland until 1930. [Abraham] practically directed upbringing at home. He infected us with opinions that the whole family well accepted. Leftist opinions. Where did such opinions come from? I don't know. He probably died tragically. I don't know the details of his death. I don't have specific information and I will never have it in my life. [The next one] was another [sister], who also died in her youth. I cannot even recall her name. Then there was another brother, Bernard [1909-1939]. He was a gymnasium student. I don't know if he completed [the gymnasium], but he was an educated druggist. Not a pharmacist but a druggist. He [used to sell] hygienic articles [in] a drugstore. The story of his life was also very complicated, right. He got into a lot of trouble. He was sent to prison because of his opinions, because of his activity. It was such radically leftist [activity]. He was severely punished, right, eight years in prison. He didn't survive the war. He didn't even return home. He died in 1939 on the way. This I know specifically. Next the twins. My sister Fryda and my brother Emanuel. Both were born in 1910 [or 1911]. Bernard was probably two or three years older than them. [Emanuel] started to attend the gymnasium. Fryda was the same age as him, so she probably [also] began going to school. Emanuel served five years [in prison because of his opinions]. Fryda probably died when the Germans entered Przemysl. In 1941, 1942 I suppose, something like that. Emanuel died after the war in 1951 in the Dzierzynski Antituberculous Sanitarium in Otwock. I already lived in Glucholazy then. His grave is at the Jewish cemetery in Cracow. [Emanuel used to live in Cracow]. There is a tablet with his [particulars].

Next there was Eugenia. A very nice, beautiful girl. She was always regarded as very [attractive]. Tadzio [Bilan's] wife, right. His family used to live on Zasanie [the part of Przemysl on the left bank of the River San]. [They were] non-Jews. But it was a healthy, beautiful family. Athletic, all [boys] were football players. And my brother-in-law was a good football player too, he used to play for good clubs. And what is characteristic, they had very Aryan opinions. National ones.

And it's her [my sister Eugenia's] correspondence with her husband from the pre-war times that I've got. It used to arrive to our home address until 1939. At 3 Slowackiego Street. My entire knowledge, wisdom, traces from the back-then world, [all that] [came to me] [thanks to] my brother-in-law's brother. One day [after the war], when I was already working on the western territories [in Glucholazy], Leszek [brother of my brother-in-law Tadeusz Bilan] probably brought this treasure of mine to me. Their family also tragically died. [Genia] spent the entire occupation in Poland. She went through [survived] both [occupations]. She probably wasn't in the ghetto. Genia [from Eugenia] died in Cracow in 1945. In June or July, something like that. There was one more sister, Minka, Mina. Born in 1913 or 1914. Minka was a nurse. She died probably in 1940, something like that. I was born in 1915.

My siblings at home were educated differently. My eldest brother went up to a [Polish] gymnasium. I've got a photo of him dressed in that gymnasium uniform. He normally passed the high-school final exams, and I think he started to study law. At some state university, Polish, but I don't remember where exactly. Maybe in Lwow, because it's close to Przemysl. Minka [for example] completed a co-educational school in Przemysl. Apparently, I suppose, Father could still afford it then. [Later] It was recession, family status did not allow to achieve that luxury.

I never belonged to a political party before the war. I didn't want to, because I knew [what could come out of it]. My two brothers served in prison [because of their opinions]. Bernard and Emanuel. [Yes], I was fascinated by that. I made some attempts, but I was never a member [of any party]. I believed it had [already] ruined our home terribly.

I was sent to a [cheder] to learn Jewish. [The cheder was] not far from my place. Only 10 minutes to the left [from my house]. Several steps [further] to the right Mickiewicz Street [began], Franciszkanska Street to the left. And that cheder was on Slowackiego Street, on that even [side of] the street. The cheder was in an apartment. Those were private issues. I [even] remember the rebbe's surname: Rispler. He was not a rabbi, but a rebbe and he used to teach that [Hebrew] alphabet. A, b, c. He taught in that way. He always showed majesty. And if something was wrong, he'd pinch one's ear. He was a rather venerable man, bearded, and you had to pay him some, because it wasn't free back then [he accepted children for lessons]. The hours were fixed. I remember, I don't know how old I was [when I attended his lessons], 3, 4 years old. But I didn't stay there long.

And later [at 6 years old] I went to a grammar school. [It was] a normal grammar school. There was no typical Jewish grammar school over there [in Przemysl]. I used to go [to a school] on Wodna Street. Again, it was a good bit of a way [from home]. It was a 7-grades school. And what is characteristic, I already learned a foreign language - Ukrainian in that school. [If] the town had, assuming 100 [as the whole population], then the Przemysl community consisted of approximately 30 percent [of each] nationality: Jews, Poles, Ukrainians [Editor's note: according to the 1931 census there were 63% of Polish, 30% of Jewish and 7% of Ukrainian population in Przemysl]. And it was because of that, I understand, such a requirement. That language [Ukrainian] was common in Przemysl. Religion was [also] at school. I remember, in the grammar school, the religion teacher's name was Weksler. Later, in higher grades, it was professor Gotesman. There was Polish [language], there was mathematics. I completed [the grammar school] and it was my entire education before the war. To my mind, I was not a good student. Kind of average. My school report card [was rather poor].

[I have] very pleasant memories of the school. I had a lot of friends, but I was close [mainly] with Jewish children. I had nothing against [was not biased against] Ukrainians, Poles. Absolutely not. Kids always jerk and hit one another [but] nobody ever told me: 'You Jew'.

As a child I used to go to summer camp. Those were [summer camps] for poorer Jewish children, so called 'two-pennies'. Jewish social organizations took care of it. [Most likely the Health Preservation Society, or Society 'Two Pence']. In the town we'd get onto the rack carts, padded with straw, and they took us 40, 50km away to particular villages. Those were not summer camps with some propaganda. We just simply knew we were a group of Jewish children that went to recover their health. There was healthy food and games of various kinds there. Such children's [games].

I had many weaknesses in my life. Since early childhood I wanted to ride [a bicycle]. But it was a pipe dream. I was not in such an environment where a kid would have a bike. But I liked to ride. [Rebbe's] son, Mr. Rispler, had a bicycle workshop vis-à-vis our apartment. At the same time [there] was a bike rental place and people used to come, pay per hour [and rent]. So [I] used to go there, to that shop, I would clean up those bicycles, and later Mr. Rispler in return would loan me a bike, and I would ride it. It was my whim.

I also liked to ride round on a carousel. The carousel was located somewhere near San. It was always crowded over there. A barrel organ used to play polkas, mazurkas. At the bottom of the carousel there was a mechanism. Boys my age pushed it at the bottom and it would spin around. Children sat down in the saddles on the carousel, the boys would push it and earn some. Actually they did not earn [money], instead they could later ride for free. [It was] dangerously over there. There were scamps, thieves, such an 'aristocracy'. Parents didn't know [I used to go there]. I was 8, 12, then. But a young person was curious about it then.

Beside that I had another fondness. I wanted to learn to swim, [so] I would go several kilometers out of town, and over there, on the San River, I would pick up some reed, tie it with a belt to fasten it firmly. I would put it on the water, [there was] a strong current, and I'd let myself downstream. Later I swam up to the town, to Przemyśl. That's how I learned to swim. It doesn't mean I was a master swimmer. But, at any rate, I was not chicken-hearted, and so I learned. Over there [on San] my friends had boats and a canoe rental place, and I was also eager for that. Whenever I had some time, I would learn to paddle a canoe on San. I was probably 14 years old then.

San was my favorite place, where I would find an outlet for my energy. [Near San] there was Gora Parkowa. There was a castle [Kazimierzowski Castle] over there, [in which] an amateur theater [functioned]. In that castle there was a Fredreum auditorium. Polish theater. [Dramatic Society Fredreum came to existence in Przemyśl in 1869. It is the oldest amateur theater in Poland and most likely also in Europe. During the first several years plays were produced in actors-amateurs' private houses. In 1865-1867 an antique Kazimierzowski Castle of Przemyśl was renovated, and in 1884 a big part of it was assigned to the theater.] [I also] used to go there to see those performances. There was some payment for that but [I don't remember] the details any more.

[Beside that] I used to play soccer. I was probably 15 years old then. I used to go to a club. Hagibor [Hagibor Przemyśl] was its name. It was a 2nd class Jewish

[sports] club. Not the 1st class - record-seeking, but a 2nd class. They assigned [players] to groups according to strength, [play] level. I [was] in the 5-th [or] 6-th group. Over there I got shoes, [special] ones, and we would kick.

We had leather balls. [We'd play] with rag balls somewhere out at courtyards. The older boys, who played there, taught us. They taught us to kick and say: penalties, fouls. I ran well, was able to kick, but it doesn't mean I was a soccer player according to present-day understanding. It's a fantasy. And I, even when I was already working, I had to be at work at 8:30am, I would leave home at 5am and literally run, not walk, I'd run beyond the town to the soccer field. Later [after the training] [I'd] run back to work. It was a great satisfaction for me, because I was quite involved in that.

[Beside that] I was brought up in a Hashomer Hatzair environment. It was a Jewish youth organization. They taught us orienteering. A type of scouting. Beautiful young people [belonged to it], very progressive, very noble people, the most gifted, the most honest people. I grew up in there.

After the 7th grade there were no funds [at home] for further education. They came to the conclusion that I should get a profession fast. Very good, that's fine with me. All the same. I had judicious parents. They were not formally educated, but they wanted to do something for these children. And when I was 13, they sent me for training, to learn to be a dental technician. This was a private apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship, what does that mean? During a day I had to work normally. In the morning I would come in and clean up the dental office. I tempered cement, I tempered plaster, right, for those secondary tasks for the doctor. And later [if] I had spare time, I would go to the room at the back and there was technology. [The office] looked very well, as it looks nowadays. There was nothing different, except, auxiliary technology is probably different today. And in that room there was a cabinet with tools and dental accessories, those phials, those tools for tooth extraction, for drilling. Big leather dental chair, or leather-like, it doesn't matter. And over there on the dental chair, there was a container for water for patients to rinse their mouths. There was a machine there, with a foot pedal. I stepped on it, while the doctor was repairing teeth. I worked [in that office] for one full year. It was a very good occupation. Splendidly [paid]. [But] Father was dismissed in 1928. [World economic recession; In Poland, year 1935 can be recognized as the end of the recession]. We were badly off at home and we couldn't afford [to pay for the apprenticeship] any longer. Father used to pay \$5 per month for the apprenticeship. It was such an agreement with the owner of the office. Besides, that was hard currency. It was a lot for our conditions. And then I had to do something.

I ended up in a [clothes] store, a very elegant men's clothing salon, not far from my home. Firm Lette [was its name]. Mr. Jozef Lette was the owner. Mainly aristocracy and [especially] Polish [aristocracy] used to dress over there. [Mr. Lette] was a very noble man, very refined. He had a rich past. During the war [WWI] he was in a Russian servitude. I know that since he used to tell [about that] sometimes. He was a lover of cars, but he couldn't afford to buy a car. On free Sundays he used to hire taxi-drivers [who] parked not far from his store. He would make an appointment on a free Sunday afternoon and would drive [by himself] with them. He was married, his wife was an excellent dressmaker. They used to live on Slowackiego Street, only a couple houses away [from

us], right.

First [I] was his trainee. Next, I [worked] in that field. So there was continuity. I got the experience in the clothing trade. Besides, I've made use of it in my life. I think he [Mr. Lette] [finally] went bankrupt. [The firm] disappeared, [but] since we were in touch with a firm from Rzeszow, they produced clothes [over there], at the same time they had a big salon, [so] I got a job in Rzeszow in 1936.

Mr. Samuel Tanz was the owner [of the salon]. After one year Mr. Tanz sent me

[back] to Przemyśl for some time. He opened a store in Przemyśl, I returned there and managed it for him. I lived [in Przemyśl] until a certain year and later went to Cracow. Yes, it was a kind of promotion for me. I was in a big city and Cracow was an interesting town. [Besides,] I wanted to be close to somebody from my family, since my sister lived in Cracow, that Bielan [Tadeusz Bielan's wife, Genia]. [At the very beginning] I stayed with Sister for some time. She helped me find the firm Sztrasberg in Cracow. Over there I also [worked] as a salesman in an elegant [clothes] store.

I remember exactly the moment, when Hitler came to power. I was [already] an adult man. And just [then] the Family's tragedy began. My brothers were a political threat for the then-authorities, so as a result they served in prison. Moreover, even before then something began to happen. They alluded that the situation was tense a little. My cousin, related to the Przemyśl Schorrs [family], used to live in Germany and they evicted her to Poland in 1933 [or] 1934. And she returned [5](#).

[I] was in Cracow. The war found me over there [6](#). [Father] lived in Przemyśl. In 1939 Przemyśl was divided. The left side of Przemyśl, the Germans quartered there, but the right [side of the town] was occupied by the Soviets. At that time the Soviets were on relatively good terms with Poland. They occupied whatever they wanted and they [didn't go] any further. Father lived on that Soviet side. After some time he had to leave [our] apartment because it was too expensive. There was an owner, [so] we had to give it back. [Since that time] he stayed somewhere at private people's accommodations. What happened over there [with that apartment and its tenants] later, I don't know. All the owners probably died.

In 1939 there was a disaster. Besides the general disaster, that there was the war, the additional hardship was that the Jewish people were [persecuted]. Fortunately, the fate somehow spared me. I had another history. I joined the army early, set off into the world and survived the war.

On 1st [September 1939] I was going to work and two airplanes flew by over [my] head. [People were saying:] 'Ours are flying, ours are flying'. I was on Zwierzyniecka Street, and not far from there, there is a bridge, the Debicki Bridge. And they started bombing that bridge. [I] worked close to there, I was outside and I [saw] that. It was 8 [in the morning]. And this is how the war started for me. I realized it [was] already bad, right. I even didn't go to my sister then. I went to the house of my friends' from Rzeszow [Roza Horn and Fawek Auerchan] and said: 'Listen we have to escape'. I let my sister know I was leaving home [getting out of town]. Because there was nothing there to wait for. It was already a mess.

Along with Roza and her boyfriend we decided to get on our way [to Rzeszow]. Roza's family lived over there. At one time I lived [with her]. When I worked in Rzeszow I found accommodation with them. She was an excellent expert, an accountant. A very serious [girl]. He [Fawek] didn't have any specific profession. They were not married then. In one little town on the way, Fawek came to conclusion [that] he they will for certain draft him to the army. He was a young, healthy fellow, right. 'I will [marry Roza], so that she's [married], just in case'. And they came to an agreement. In one of Jewish apartments, they just used to marry couples. They had a chuppah on a rod and so on. But he [Fawek] was a smoker. And he went out for a cigarette. I stayed with Roza. Such a bad luck, a trifle, they call her, him, but he's out smoking somewhere. So I went instead of him and that's how I happened to replace him]. Well, does it really matter? All of this [was done] in a rush. The family name was right. He got a certificate immediately, that [on that day he married Roza].

It was a long, long way from Cracow to Rzeszow. The road was difficult and it wasn't so that we [would move] as punctually as a train would. It was war time. There were no such directors that one would plan and get a first class voyage. [We moved] on foot, by cart, by train. Whichever way was possible. In the end, together, we reached Roza's home in Rzeszow. All [family members] were still alive then.

At their home there were: Roza, Chana, Mania, son Donek, brother Janek – an engineer with leftist opinions. It so happened, that he, all exhausted, [came back] from jail [on that day]. He managed to come out of the prison safely. He sat, I remember as if it was today, keeping his legs soaking in some container. Later his story went on beautifully. For a certain period of time he was an important person in Poland. He was an educated man, a Voivodship Committee Secretary. However, his name [back then] was not Horn but Rogowski. [Roza's] Father was a Jew, bearded, but a wonderfully fine Polish scholar. He had beautiful handwriting. He earned his living by writing court applications for people. He was a 'vinkel shrayber' [Yiddish, literary 'corner writer'], as we used to say.

But over there, in Rzeszow, [the war] just began. The Germans already administered everywhere. They raided [people] on streets. Once, I was in a group that was taken away into barracks to tidy them up. To clean up, to sweep. They led [the group] and called up such people as me on the way. I was well dressed. I [wore] such a new, nice jacket. I was experienced enough to wear all of that. When they caught me and I joined the group, they striped of my jacket, gave me something of their own, and took me into those barracks out of town. I already knew that something bad [was going to happen] here, and I shouldn't expect anything good. [Finally] they released us with no consequences. I saw things were heating up in Rzeszow. There was nothing more to seek over there. We [Mr. Sokal, Roza and Fawek], without saying much, set off from there. We managed to bid [Roza's] parents goodbye and we were refugees again. We left Rzeszow.

We were on the way for several days. In the meantime, some time in September, the Soviets and the Germans signed an agreement that the Soviets would liberate the Ukrainians. For us, it was a surprise from that side. They had attacked [our country]. This is a simple name for it [7](#). Then, since Przemysl was free, I decided to take the opportunity to return home. The right side of Przemysl, where I used to live, was ruled by the Soviets. Then we parted. [Roza and Fawek] could not return to Rzeszow, [because the town] was occupied by the Germans.

In Przemyśl, the Soviets used to say to young people: 'We can take you to Donbas. Over there, young folks who want to learn more [will have the conditions]'. Yes, it impressed me and in December of that year, 1939, I agreed and went to that Donbas in Ukraine. But it was a big mistake in my life. I let them deceive me. That was no chance to learn. I lived in such a collective barrack. There were tens of men over there. And I worked normally. They initiated me into a storehouse of cement, building material, I remember. I used to unload bricks, cement from carts. I was young, I could stand it pretty [well]. We were there for quite long. I don't remember exactly how long, a year or two. But I was not satisfied with that. I knew I went there to make self-improvement, to make up for my lost time, but there were no prospects over there, so I broke away from there. Me, a restless, uneasy soul. I couldn't agree with all that. [I was] to learn, to go to college, I always used to dream about that. But it was only a dream.

Where to go to? [I decided] do go to Lwow, because I had an Uncle [Jozef Schorr] in Lwow, right, and, as it turned out, my sister [Minka], that nurse, worked at a hospital in Lwow. And again, my trip to Lwow, that was an experience.

Before I got on the train to Lwow, I was in Kiev. I camped on a street. I just wandered around. I rested to get on the train. I slept near the station, somewhere out on a street. Empty wagons stood on train tracks, so I would get into the wagons at night and would sleep there, right. I didn't have anything, just a coat; I sold it at the station. Some thieves would come there. Those little boys, homeless, would wander about, sneak something away from you. And I had such an incident there. I bumped into a friend from Rzeszow. Hirszt. That was his name. I don't know if he's still alive, I don't think so. I said: 'Listen. I haven't got a single grosz [Polish equivalent of a cent] to go any further.' And I borrowed some money. And I somehow managed to get on the train to Lwow.

I arrived at Uncle's, because I knew his address. [Then] I called my sister [Minka]. My sister was surprised: 'You got all the way here. What happened? What all of the sudden?' I was still in shock: 'Don't ask me about the details, there's no point. We won't talk about that.' I stayed there, in Lwow, for a short time, I knew they couldn't support me, right. And I went back to Przemyśl.

Przemyśl was in the same Soviet district as Lwow. I stayed at my sister Fryda's. I took on various jobs, to have something to live off, right. I remember, I went to some grocery store and worked there for some time. I'll keep it short, there's no point to talk more about that.

All those games ended [quickly]. The Germans attacked the Soviets [9](#) whom they had formally been friends with since they had signed a pact with them. And the war began again. I was always unlucky. There was a new escape from Przemyśl. I couldn't be there any more. We talked, we had a family meeting. My sister Fryda, and my brother Emanuel were there. And she says: 'Where am I to go to? Uncles [Dawid, Chaskiel] are here in Przemyśl. It won't be that bad, the Soviets will get [Przemyśl] back. It'll all be good.' They were convinced everything would be so. [The Soviets] convinced everyone their army was unbeatable. They were as good strategists as me. They knew nothing about that. I convinced my brother [Emanuel]: 'Listen, we have to leave. We have to!' We weren't ready [for the trip]. [The only thing we had] was a small sack of sugar. Maybe 5kg, maybe 3kg. So we brought it along and left on foot. We knew the area. We went through a forest, through fields.

We walked and walked, but that was just the beginning of the Gehenna. All the way to the Soviet border? To that old border, in Rowne [a city in the western part of Ukraine, the capital city of the

district. It's located on the main road between Warsaw and Kiev, about 200km from today's Polish border.] Somewhere on the way to Dobromil [a town in Ukraine located in the Lwow county], fortunately, we met a group of ladies from our town. Glansberzanka, Wilner's wife, with a small child in her arms, and some other [woman was with them]. Three of them. And my brother says: 'Listen, you sit down here, I'll walk them off the main road for a bit and then come back.' I said: 'Good'. I sat down. What difference does it make? Sitting or walking. I sat there until late at night. [Finally] I said: 'There's no point for me to stay here. He must have stayed with them.' And I decided to go on. Without him. I can see a 'tachanka' coming, Russian vehicles. Those were some kolkhoz 8 men, I ran after them and wanted to get on. I ran up, jumped on at the back [of the 'tachanka'], and they lashed me with a whip: 'Hola, kuda, kuda [Russian: where]?', but I gave them such a speech, such an interpretation, that they understood.

And we drove and drove, I don't know how many days, nights. I was hungry, simply hungry. Why not? I always had a good appetite. And I had nothing there. That sugar [only], [but] I don't know what happened to it, did I leave it out [on the road] there, did my brother take it? Well? I ride with them and see that they're eating. They had provisions, butter in a barrel, food. And they were bored and didn't like they had a freeloader on board. 'Listen, you can't be like that. You'll be driving the horse.' 'Not a problem.' At first those horses did whatever they wanted with me. I had never driven a horse carriage [before], and they kept scorning me for it. And finally we got somewhere to Rowne. I remember it more or less. And they went to a military point there.

I can see they're murmuring there on me, I think, that I'm a who-knows-what. And they took me for questioning, for a conversation. Fortunately I had a passport on me. But, if I had known what I know today, that I had a wrong passport, because I had a note in it that I have a sister abroad. [My] sister, Minka, when she wanted to go home [to Przemysl] from Cracow, she had to cross the border. And they must have noted that somewhere there. And later, when I got a Soviet passport, I also had a note [in it] that I have a sister abroad. [So they asked me] if I had anyone abroad. They always asked whether you had anyone on the other side of the 'kordon' [Russian: border]. So I say: 'Yes, my sister is abroad, in Cracow.' 'All right.' And they started talking to me [in Russian]. Fortunately I was able to talk to them. They spoke [Russian], I spoke some similar language and we managed to communicate. 'OK, you can go' and they left me alone. All right. Off I went.

Where to? To a train. Besides, it wasn't far from a train station. What kind? A cargo train. Cars were divided with wooden planks, upstairs and downstairs, so that more [people] could fit in. [And] there [on the train station] entire Soviet families, with children, were running away home. Excellent, whichever way was good for me. On larger stations, since it was still the Soviet side at the time, the trains would stop. They [the Soviet families] we unhappy because they had money, but nothing to eat. They would ask to get them some groceries. [So] they'd give me those rubles, I'd jump out of the train whenever it stopped to buy food. And so I rode with them, buying them food, eating at the same time, right. We went together, but I don't know how long because it was still on the cargo train. First we got to Turkmenistan, later all the way do Ashkhabad. That's the capital city of Turkmenistan, on the Caspian Sea. It wasn't far to Iran from there.

It was 1941. Over there, on the road, of course a new 'proverka' [Russian: control], that is a check-up, control. They talk to everyone, [ask] where they're from, their family, brothers. So I say I have an older brother, right. He's somewhere in the Soviet Union, I don't know where, I can't say, but he's a soldier in the army. I lied, I knew there was something wrong going on with him. I told them

what my education was, 7 [grades]. And they accepted me, somehow trustfully, because I could communicate in their language. I wasn't any big expert in Russian, but I spoke ok. Actually, Ukrainian as well. That helped me everywhere.

In Ashkhabad I lived with my friend Kestenbaum, from Przemysl. Siunek Kestenbaum, that was his name. We met on the train to Ashkhabad [and since then] we were practically [together]. We always slept somewhere near town. Because it's Asia, plains. There were no brick houses. We didn't have an address. We borrowed a rack [bed] somewhere, and we slept like that. They [the Soviets] offered me, to my surprise, without knowing me, [a job in trade]. Can you imagine, such a surprise? They must have liked me, because they offered me a managerial position in a grocery store. I was well off. I had everything [during that time]. All the good food: butter, honey. And the working conditions were good, very good. And I worked well, nobody had any complaints.

[The Soviets] necessarily wanted to recruit me, they had a hook on me. But not rudely or something. The head manager of the wholesale firm, [who dealt with] assigning [food to stores] was a Russian man, I don't know his last name. After some time it turns out I'm supposed to go to a school. There was going to be a man in a classroom, on the first floor, and he [will] talk to me. He wants to meet me. All right. Siunek knew I was going there, but he accompanied me, so that I wouldn't get lost, and so that he didn't lose me. We were always afraid for one another. Nobody knew what was going to happen. And that man talks to me. Again, he's asking about my life history, how I'm doing, whether I'm happy with my job. I say that yes, indeed, I know [how to do] it, and I think others are happy with me as well. 'Well, you know, but...' he begins: 'Because we can see you're our patriot, we can count on you. You, an intelligent, wise man, shouldn't be wasting yourself in a store, should you? We have another suggestion for you.' He doesn't want me to go to some other business or something, but he's got a better, respected job. I say: 'Unfortunately I can't do it, I don't have life experience in those matters. You'd have big problems with me, and I'd have worries. If you want to, take me to the army. I feel healthy, I can join the army. Give me a placement. I'll do it happily.' 'No, you can still stay with us, the time for that will come later. We will find you, we'll take you to the army [later].'

And how did I know [what it was all about]? [That man when] he was talking to me, wore civilian clothes. A coat. But you could see [decoration on a uniform] underneath. A uniform top gave him away. Besides, I could tell what he represented by the character of the conversation. We parted in peace, all was good, I went back to my job. It didn't last long, soon after that they fired me, because I'm not suitable. Too bad. [It was] a good job, an excellent job for conditions back then, [but, well, too bad]. [I went] to the head manager, [and] he says: 'We have to make some cuts'. I understood what that 'cutting' was.

I was looking for a job. I learned there was an Ashkhabad Kinostudio. A movie factory, a film company in Ashkhabad. There were artists, among them a Pole, Krasnowiecki [Wladyslaw Krasnowiecki (1900-1983), Polish actor, director, theatre manager. Since 1918 he acted mainly in theaters in Lwow and Cracow. During WWII he was associated with the Polish Army Theatre. After 1945 he was a manager of theatres in Lodz, Katowice and Warsaw.] And Wohl, that famous, huge movie expert in Poland after the war. He played a huge role in the making of a Polish movie [industry]. [Stanislaw Wohl (1921-1985) a film operator and a director. In 1930 he co-founded an Artistic Movie Enthusiast Association 'Start'. During WWII he worked for the Russian cinematography in Lwow, Kiev and Ashkhabad. In 1945 he organized technical bases for the Polish

cinematography in Cracow and Lodz.] And two more operators. I don't remember their names right now, [but] they were Jews. And I went there for a year, as a physical worker. 'All right. What am I supposed to do?' 'Whatever there is to do. You'll drive trucks, load bricks, sand, whatever is needed.' I was strong enough to be able to do that. And I worked there. During that time, I remember perfectly, they were filming a movie. The director of that movie was a Russian Jew, Mark Donskoy, that was his name. [Mark Semyonovich Donskoy (1901-1981), director.] I don't know how long it took. Did they leave me alone for even a year? And they came up with another idea. They invited me again for a talk, but not there [to the school] any more, but they gave me some address. It turned out it was the security [The Security Agency]. [People, when] they walked by, they tried to go around [avoid] that building. There was no sign to inform what was in there. They only let specific people in.

[Again] that friend [Siunek Kestenbaum] went with me. And indeed, they were already waiting for me. I gave them my name. They let me inside. All those additional impressions. That silence in the building made a horrible impression, like in a sanatorium. [They led me] over such plush carpets, you walk quietly, there's nobody in sight. They tell me to go up on the first or second floor, I don't remember. I sat there and waited. I waited and waited, until I fell asleep. After some time somebody came and [led me] into a large room, beautiful, with luxurious armchairs. And they talk to me again. He's suggesting again, but this time seriously, and he's pushing me. He tells me what kind of a job it is. I said I had already had a similar conversation. I had one and I rejected it, because I really don't think I can do it, I don't know how to do 'such a job'. 'Please send me to the army', I keep saying the same thing. But they had a different idea. But it was a polite conversation, very reasonable. They didn't threaten me. Finally I got out of there.

[I] didn't like [what was going on] [anymore]. We knew we were losing ground and we decided to leave there [with Siunek]. We went to Uzbekistan. It's a pretty country. We tried to find a job somewhere there. On a station there, a regular train station, they were looking for kolkhoz workers. Oh well. All right, let's go to a kolkhoz. We were young and determined, we didn't want to just travel around. I thought that kolkhoz, that there will be a normal possibility for work and some life. But there were no buildings there. Some shacks, you can't see any movement. So we left. How? On foot, we jumped on trucks, however we could

We arrived at another station. Ziyadin, near Bucharra. A busy, junction station. And we lived there for some time. I lived at some people's. A very religious Jewish marriage, older people. They were poor, [but] whenever they cooked for themselves, they always gave me something, right. We worked, each one of us in whatever we could. You could only trade there. Fabrics, they [Uzbekistan inhabitants] were impressed. They looked for fabrics, because there was nothing else there. And that lasted for a while. I don't remember how long I spent there. About a year, until they wanted to make me happy again and recruit to a 'stroy-batalion' [short for 'stroityelnyy batalion'; Russian: construction battalion]. It was a work battalion. They were building something, somewhere, they needed young people. They didn't [ask] whether I wanted to go or not, they just drafted me in.

I don't remember what was the town's name. It was also out in some field. A house was in such a deep hole, in a dugout. People there weren't too attractive, only Uzbekistani. After a few days I said: 'We've got nothing to look for here. It's not a job with some perspective.' And we knew that there was an army recruitment point near by. An army office, where they drafted people [to the army]. I said: 'I want to go to the army.' 'Oh yes? Very good. The 1st army [Editor's note: actually

the 1st Kosciuszko Infantry Division] is already formed [10](#), but now they have another drafting. I'm sure they'll accept you. You're young, agile.' A few of us went. They gave us a formal document for the train. And they also gave us some little money to do some shopping. All in all, they helped us leave.

It was already 1943. Probably 13th October. They drafted me into the 4th Regiment. It was the 2nd Division [2nd Henryk Dabrowski Infantry Division]. It was a regular army. Military exercises, everything. When I was an older soldier, I was moved to the 3th Regiment. When 4th Division, 10th Infantry Regiment was created, they directed me there. And that was my career. I already had my provision and all. At first they placed me in a unit of Regiment Armature, as an office chief.

They knew I could write some. My responsibility was to equip my unit with ammunition and weapons in suitable amounts, right, and then write reports on that. A normal, plain job. I didn't have problems doing that. And I had that function almost until the end of the war.

I kept moving with this regiment, this unit. They kept moving us into various disasters. There were air raids on trains. I didn't really have any difficult experiences. I was lucky not to ever get wounded. And we kept going towards our country, right. [In the end] we arrived in Lublin.

It was 1944 already when they pushed us [out of Lublin] further, towards Warsaw. It was peaceful for us there, because the Germans didn't attack there. We were here [there] during the Warsaw Uprising [11](#). One of our units, some battalion of our regiment, was sent to help. Unfortunately nothing could be done. The uprising authorities back then were certain they could deal with liberating Warsaw by themselves. [Besides], political matters probably decided that they didn't want the Soviets to free them. They were being slaughtered there, [and] we heard all that. [But] we kept sitting on this bank until the offence moved on 17th January 1945. Thankfully, there was beautiful weather when we marched through Warsaw. [In the city] there was still war equipment laying around, corpses; [we saw on the way] lots of destruction. Wherever we went, it was unimaginable what we saw. Warsaw was destroyed.

[Later] through the Polish territory, through Grudziadz, we went that way to Germany, until we got close to Berlin. We ourselves, our unit didn't fight for Berlin, but the war goes on. And my commander tells me: 'Listen, we're all good here, we'll go to the country soon, home, to Poland. [But first] we'll go to Berlin, to Reichstag. We'll look around there.' [And Reichstag] was all destroyed. Each [soldier], it was such a soldier manner, would go there and write his name, with a piece of coal or chalk on a wall there. First name, last name, the regiment. Just for personal satisfaction. A few days later we arrived in Poland.

And in Poland, it was fall 1945, in October, I think, demobilization. They were laying off those older people. To tell you the truth, they were trying to convince me not to go, because it was going to be good. The chief of the general headquarters tells me: 'Janek, kuda? Ostay sye. Poyezhday ku nas.' [Incorrect Russian: 'Janek, where are

you going? Stay. Come with us.’] ‘We respect you. You’re our man.’ I really felt good in that unit. I was much respected. Not for any special accomplishments. I had more luck than brains. [But] I said: ‘But I really want to go to Przemyśl. I hope to find my family.’ Indeed, I still had hope. I knew what went on there, but somehow everybody had hope.

I don’t share a common opinion here that in Poland everybody was waiting to give the Jews up to the Gestapo. Not everyone was like that. And for example I can say that I have a few letters, correspondence between my brother-in-law in Auschwitz and my sister who lived in Cracow during that time. [That correspondence] was [sent to] a Cracow address where she used to live before the war broke out. I used to go there, slept there several times, [even my] brother [when] he came out of jail also slept there. Those tenants who had [their apartments] there knew they were a mixed family and nobody told on them. And the correspondence went back and forth between them for several years. I’m looking at it objectively. That’s the way it was. Well, not everyone was that brave to want to help, take a risk. [But] I can’t generally be upset at everyone because of that.

After the war I got a job in the western region, in Glucholazy [town ca. 360 km south-west of Warsaw, near today’s Polish-Czech border], in the position of a general manager of a company. I was supposed to organize it from the basics. Glucholazy is a beautiful town, near Nysa, between Nysa and Prodnik. There was almost no war there. The place was intact. They introduced me to the party [12](#) there. I was involved in my professional career, but not only, I also did some communal work. I was active in the community. They would send me here and there. Those were units of the the official government that did some community service. But I wasn’t really involved. I paid my member fees. Everyone knew about it. I’m not hiding it. It was a legal party. In the end it turned out the party accomplished nothing. I don’t regret it. I won’t change my beliefs. I had such views and I don’t feel guilty, as nobody suffered because of me.

I worked in Glucholazy for 6 years. We had a very good life there. The conditions were better than I would have dreamt up. First I had an elegant 2-storey house. With a bathroom like this room, with tiles. There were 3 rooms, I think, or 4, and a kitchen on each floor. Then they moved us, [because I] was the only one in Glucholazy that didn’t live in a villa. That was their ambition. They did me a favor. I was on a business trip somewhere, I came back, [and] my wife tells me they had come with a car and moved her to a villa. A beautiful villa, with a garden, fish.

I met my wife in Glucholazy in 1947. And we became friends there. Her first name is Malgorzata, maiden name Rademacher. She was born on 11th December [1911]. She comes from a coal-miner’s family, she was born in Katowice-Szopienice. She came to Glucholazy looking for a job. She met with a mayor who she had known before the war. [And] because he knew I was working on something, he sent her to me: ‘Go there, he’s a decent man.’ And that’s how we met. We got close, we liked it, and we’ve been together ever since. The wedding was very modest. We got married in 1949, but I don’t remember it exactly. Malgorzata isn’t of the Jewish origin. [She is a Catholic], but

she's never been practicing, thankfully. I [also] never had a need [to practice my religion].

Nowadays my wife is unhappy. It's been 10 or 15 years since she lost her eyesight and she can see almost nothing. She's losing the iris. We went with my wife to [many] doctors and they [all] told her the same thing. Unfortunately... She can find her way around the house perfectly, she remembers where everything is, but that's all. And my wife practically raised both Grandsons. Daughter didn't have time, and [because of that] they adore their Grandmother, they really do.

My daughter was born in 1950, in January, [in Glucholazy]. She wasn't raised in the Jewish tradition. She always knew everything [about my past]. We didn't have any problems [with her]. She had good grades. [When] she was at a university, they pressured her a lot. Some major [wanted] her necessarily to join ZMS [Socialist Youth Union, a youth organization founded on 3rd January 1957 in Warsaw by joining Revolutionary Youth Union and Peasant Youth Union]. Since December 1957 ZMS was idealistically, politically and organizationally subordinate to PZPR. The main goal of ZMS was getting its members ready to join PZPR] and to the party [PZPR]. But she kept saying she didn't feel like it, she wasn't interested in it. And it didn't interfere with anything, entry exams to the university, and she never had problems at the university. She's a good specialist in her field. She is a doctor, a psychiatrist. She has worked for many years. She has decided to retire.

I, by the way, decided to leave [Glucholazy and go to Lodz] because of my daughter's birth. Because, I said, what am I going to do here? [Lodz] is a big city. [I] had never been in Lodz, but I knew it, I had contacts there. So, everything has its own reason. In 1951 they called me up to the ministry. I was taking oral high school final exams then. [I remember] I asked them to let me take the exams earlier, because I had to go to Warsaw to a personal meeting with a minister. I had a letter, showed it to them, and I went. Over there, during the meeting, they suggested I move from Glucholazy to Lodz, because I did all there was to do: 'We don't want to waste your time. You'll have a unit with 35 people. You'll do fine. We know you will...' 'But, Minister, here, in Glucholazy, I didn't learn much', I said. 'That's all right' 'But I have one condition. I have a beautiful apartment in Glucholazy, a perfect one. I don't want anything better, as long as the conditions [are] good.' 'There's a key to your apartment.' That's it. That's good. It impressed me.

Starting in July [1951] I was employed in Lodz. I was moved to the Central Office of the Textile Industry Union. [Central Office of the Textile Industry Union in Lodz (CZPO) was founded in 1948.] I became the general manager of the Dr Prochnik Textile Industry Institute [Dr Prochnik Textile Industry Institute was created in 1948, by nationalization of the Martin Norenberg Krauze Partnership textile factory existing in Lodz since 1939.] Prochnik was a multi-factory corporation. The headquarters were in Lodz, a plant in Poddebice, new plants in Rawa and Uniejow. All those factories exported [clothes] to most developed western countries: America, England, Holland, Switzerland. I introduced those plants onto western markets.

Probably in 1957 [I started] a few years of studies here [in Lodz]. At first it was the Evening University of Marxism and Leninism at the Lodz Committee. It was political-economical education. Very valuable for managers and other head positions. But I had ambitions to finish formal studies. [Later] I took 3 year long vocational studies in the department of Economics at the Lodz University. Those were extramural studies. Saturday afternoons, because we used to work Saturdays, and Sundays from morning until 4pm [I had my classes during that time]. All that while working, having so many responsibilities, I don't know [how I did that], [but] all went well. I graduated with very

good results. The defense was in 1967. In the same year when I finished my studies, my daughter began medical studies.

[I] never had [any problems with anti-Semitism], [but] it turns out that in 1968, during my absence, somebody from the Committee came, some activist. He gathered a few [employees] and appointed one for a position of a general manager, because that was my position from the beginning. I came back and found out about it. I called that candidate for a general manager and [asked] how things were in the company. He was an educated man, with higher education, right, an excellent employee, a great specialist. He was a bookkeeper. I talk to him, ask him what the results for the last months are. [He says] the results are good, there are no problems. I say: 'Good. So, how was it during that meeting?' I ask. 'I don't know anything.' 'So, I'll remind you. But you know what, let's do it this way, why talk about it just the two of us, why don't you call the crew up, on my behalf, to the common room and we'll all talk. I understand you, maybe it won't be nice, but we'll talk to each other with the others present.' 'But, director, Sir, I've got nothing...' he talks like that. 'So, let's turn things around. I will call up the crew to the common room.' There were always about 500 people on a shift. Because there were always 1,000 people in one unit of the factory. Altogether I had a staff of 4,500 people in Prochnik. Regardless of that I was the boss of some additional people. I had over 11 thousand of them in the field, since they added that co-operation. Co-operative Institute of Men's Clothing, to that. I said: 'So, I will call that meeting, but I would like you to be there, because I want to talk to people. What am I supposed to talk to them about without you.' He says: 'I don't know anything, I don't want to.' Not even three days passed, the guy is called off by the Union. They needed a vice director at Wolczanka [a clothing factory, well known manufacturer of men's shirts] and they moved him, so that he disappears. [There was] a secretary of the basic organization in the company and she went [together] with the [entire] board of directors [to the Committee and said]: 'Comrade, don't do anything. If you remove Mr. Sokal from the position, the entire staff will stand up. They'll go on streets.' That's what they said. I don't know if it would ever come to that, maybe so, since I had no troubles with [people] in those factories. There were some arguments about finances, they happened, but [all problems could be resolved] reasonably.

My [employment] with Prochnik was dissolved in 1977, and I finished working in 1998. Even when I was retired, I still worked in the same Union, part-time. I used to be involved in exporting to capitalist nations. I used to go to America, to England and other western countries. And without knowing English. Because they would always give me a translator. One from the embassy. Also because I don't believe there is something you can't accomplish in life. It depends on people. I needed [work] for a living, life on retirement isn't pleasant.

I have two grandsons. Adas [from Adam] is 30 [years old]. He lives in Warsaw. He does well. He works in the movie-business. He's not an actor, he is a technician. The second one, younger - Mateusz. He's 24. He graduated from the Musical Academy in Lodz. He is a musician, he plays double-bass. He works for the Lodz orchestra. He lives in Lodz. [Both of them], whenever they have a spare day, they still drop by, come to visit.

[My grandsons] know everything [about me, about my family]. They don't brag about it, I suppose. [They don't flaunt it.] It's their business. [My daughter] is of mixed origin, she's not Jewish. Her husband is 100 percent Polish. It doesn't matter. It never mattered in my family. Never! Because it's not something to show off, brag, or worry about. In my opinion, it isn't. Yes, during the occupation there were some worries, but thankfully, I somehow never had deal with those.

I am very happy. Whatever happened there and however the society thinks, I personally think that the last governing party [was very good]. [Mr Sokal refers to Ariel Sharon and the Likud Party.] I consider him a wise, reasonable man. [But] it's just my personal opinion about this man. Let everyone have [their own beliefs], but [one person must] govern a country. [On the other hand], those in charge must have the wellbeing [of the country and its citizens at heart]. This is how I worked. They didn't teach me that at a university. [Simply] life taught me that. I never went [to Israel] but I would like to [go]. I would have no problems with going to Israel.

I keep in touch with the Jewish Community in Lodz. I used to even go there during the cadence of previous group, Mr. Minc and his helper. I used to go [only] on some Saturdays, listen to [the prayers]. I worked in Prochink then. They knew what my beliefs were. [But] they tolerated me the way I was. And nowadays I'm [also] never questioned. Symcha Keller [the president of the Jewish Community in Lodz], he does a lot for religious matters. During his term, they treat [people of non-Jewish origin] very liberally. I can often see people [there] who I never knew and still don't know, who come, listen. Some got quite comfortable there and they always come. Most likely they have some connection to Judaism. But it doesn't really matter.

It's unfortunate that here, in Lodz, there aren't many Jews. That's a problem. They are [people] from mixed marriages, [but] they come to services. Once I read in Midrasz [Jewish monthly social-cultural magazine in Polish, treating about life of Jews in Poland and abroad], there was a discussion: Ronald Lauder, some rabbis [took part in the discussion] and they talked about that work, so unfortunate, because there are no prospects, there are no live people, right. [Symcha Keller] really did something very valuable for the commune. [He caused] some institution to exist, but there are few people, it has few members.

Now I don't go anywhere, I spare myself. I go [to the commune]. I go there, but it doesn't mean I'm practicing. I was never a practicing Jew. Before the war I had no opportunity or need. After the war I [also] never [practiced]. Those are such individual matters. I'm not a specialist in these matters, but I willingly, with pleasure, whenever I can, I go [to the commune] on holidays. I usually [go] to those services and I listen. I even have a Polish-Hebrew prayer book. I never learned Jewish [Hebrew] and now I have no patience, but if you know Polish, you can easily navigate [the text]. I actively pray in the sense that I read [what's written in the prayer book].

And, whenever I can, I mainly do my own groceries. To get imperishable goods, larger groceries, I even go once a week to a supermarket. And for everyday stuff - here, [not far from home]. Somebody has to do it, right. I do try, within possibility, move about by myself. It's for my health. I don't want to brag, not at all, [but] I've never been idle in my life and I'm happy with it.

Why did I agree for this interview? Simple. Because it's not just my personal matter. I want something to be left of me. And because my hope to have a real saga of the Sokal family didn't work out, I thought to at least tell a short story.

GLOSSARY:

1 Jews in Przemysl

a Jewish commune formed in Przemysl already in the 1550s. The Jewish district was located in the north-eastern part of the city. Jews dealt with craftsmanship, trade and usury. In the 17th century

26 smaller local communes, called 'przykahalki', were subordinate to the Przemysl Jewish commune. In 1785 the Jewish commune signed an agreement with Przemysl citizens, based on which Jews were allowed to live anywhere in the city and carry out any sort of economic activity. According to a census from 1775 there were 1558 Jews in Przemysl, in 1870 - 5692. In XIX century Przemysl was an important Haskalah center, even though Podkarpacie region was strongly influenced by Hasidism fighting enlightenment. In 20th century Bund, Agudat Israel and folkists parties had the biggest support. In 1921 18360 Jews lived here, just before the war - about 20000. In 1939 Przemysl was divided: one part of the town was under the Soviet, and another under the German occupation. In June 1940 Soviet authorities deported about 7000 Jewish refugees from the central Poland deep into the Soviet Union. Germany took over the city a year later. On 15th July 1942 they created the ghetto occupied by about 22000 Jews from Przemysl and the surrounding areas. Between July 1942 and October 1943 there were several so called deporting actions to death camps. The majority of Przemysl Jews died in the camp in Belzec.

2 Schorr, Mojzesz (1874-1941)

rabbi and scholar. Born in Przemysl (now Poland), he studied at the Juedisch-theologische Lehranstalt and Vienna University. In 1899 he became a lecturer in Judaism at the Jewish Teacher Training Institute in Lvov, and from 1904 he also lectured at Lvov University, specializing in Semitic languages and the history of the ancient Orient. In 1923 he moved to Warsaw to lead the Reform Synagogue at Tlomackie Street. Schorr was one of the founders of the Institute of Judaistica founded in 1928, and for a few years its rector. He also lectured in the Bible and Hebrew there. He was a member of the State Academy of Sciences, and from 1935-1938 he was a deputy to the Senate. After the outbreak of war he went east. He was arrested by the Russians and during a transfer from one camp to another he died in Uzbekistan.

3 Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in 1892, its reach extended throughout the Kingdom of Poland and abroad, and it proclaimed slogans advocating the reclamation by Poland of its sovereignty

It was a party that comprised many currents and had room for activists of varied views and from a range of social backgrounds. During the revolutionary period in 1905-07 it was one of the key political forces; it directed strikes, organized labor unions, and conducted armed campaigns. It was also during this period that it developed into a party of mass reach (towards the end of 1906 it had some 55,000 members). After 1918 the PPS came out in support of the parliamentary system, and advocated the need to ensure that Poland guaranteed of freedom and civil rights, division of the churches (religious communities) and the state, and territorial and cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities; and it defended the rights of hired laborers. The PPS supported the policy of the head of state, Jozef Pilsudski. It had seats in the first government of the Republic, but from 1921 was in opposition. In 1918-30 the main opponents of the PPS were the National Democrats [ND] and the communist movement. In the 1930s the state authorities' repression of PPS activists and the reduced activity of working-class and intellectual political circles eroded the power of the PPS (in 1933 it numbered barely 15,000 members) and caused the radicalization of some of its leaders and party members. During World War II the PPS was formally dissolved, and some of its leaders created the Polish Socialist Party - Liberty, Equality, Independence (PPS-WRN), which was a member of the coalition supporting the Polish government in exile and the institutions of the Polish Underground State. In 1946-48 many members of PPS-WRN left the country or were arrested and

sentenced in political trials. In December 1948 PPS activists collaborating with the PPR consented to the two parties merging on the PPR's terms. In 1987 the PPS resumed its activities. The party currently numbers a few thousand members.

4 Hashomer Hatzair in Poland

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

5 Anti-Jewish legislation in Nazi Germany

in Germany in April 1933 a bill on state officials was passed and ordered the discharge of Jews working for government offices (civil servants, army, and free professions: lawyers, doctors and students). According to the new legislation a person was considered a Jew, if he was a member of a Jewish religious community or a child of a member of a Jewish community. On 15th September 1935, during a session in Nuremberg, the Reichstag passed a legislation concerning Reich Citizenship and on Protection and Honor of German Blood. The first one deprived German Jews of German citizenship, giving them the status of 'possessions of the state.' According to the new law anyone who had at least three grandparents belonging to the Jewish religious community was considered a Jew. The second bill annulled all mixed marriages, banned sexual relationships between Jews and non-Jews, and the employment of Germans in Jewish homes. After the great pogrom known as 'Crystal Night' in November 1938, an entire series of anti-Jewish bills was passed. They were, among others, so-called Aryanizing bills, which gave all Jewish property to the disposal of the ministry of treasure, to be used for the realization of the 4-year economic plan, excluded Jews from material goods production, craftsmanship and small trading, banned Jews from purchasing real estate, trading jewelry, ordered them to deposit securities. Moreover, Jews were banned from entering theatres, cinemas, concert halls, obtaining education, owning vehicles, practicing medicine and pharmacology, owning radios. Special stores were set up, and after the war broke out, separate air-raid shelters. At the beginning of 1939 a curfew at 8pm was started for Jews, Jews were banned from traveling by sleeper trains, staying at certain hotels, being at certain public places.

6 German occupation of Poland (1939-45)

World War II began with the German attack on Poland on 1st September 1939. On 17th September 1939 Russia occupied the eastern part of Poland (on the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). The east of Poland up to the Bug river was incorporated into the USSR, while the north and west were annexed to the Third Reich. The remaining lands comprised what was called the General

Governorship - a separate state administered by the German authorities. After the outbreak of war with the USSR

in June 1941 Germany occupied the whole of Poland's pre-war territory. The German occupation was a system of administration by the police and military of the Third Reich on Polish soil. Poland's own administration was dismantled, along with its political parties and the majority of its social organizations and cultural and educational institutions. In the lands incorporated into the Third Reich the authorities pursued a policy of total Germanization. As regards the General Governorship the intention of the Germans was to transform it into a colony supplying Polish unskilled slave labor. The occupying powers implemented a policy of terror on the basis of collective liability. The Germans assumed ownership of Polish state property and public institutions, confiscated or brought in administrators for large private estates, and looted the economy in industry and agriculture. The inhabitants of the Polish territories were forced into slave labor for the German war economy. Altogether, over the period 1939-45 almost three million people were taken to the Third Reich from the whole of Poland.

7 September Campaign 1939

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

8 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.

9 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.

10 The Berling Army

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

11 Warsaw Uprising 1944

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

12 Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)

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