

# Hanna We

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Warsaw

Poland

Interviewer: Joanna Fikus

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(\*The full name of the interviewee is being withheld upon her request.)

*Mrs. Hanna We is a biochemist. She's a medicine graduate and works part-time in the genetics department of the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology in Warsaw. She lives alone in a small apartment in the Warsaw district of Ochota, where she moved recently after the death of her husband. She is intelligent, cool and even-tempered, and offers succinct answers to my questions. She's from a wealthy and intellectual family of secular Jews. The Jewish holidays weren't observed in her family home, and Jewish traditions weren't kept. Her parents moved around in circles of people like themselves – secular Jews. During our conversations, Hanna repeatedly emphasized that her family was thoroughly assimilated. From our talks, an interesting description of the life of secular Jews in prewar Poland emerged. The size of this section of the population is estimated at around 50,000. It was this group that had the best chance of surviving the Holocaust – they spoke excellent Polish, were familiar with Polish culture and had at least some connections among the Polish community. It's precisely her wartime experiences and the resultant fear of revealing her true identity that prompted Hanna to ask us not to give her full name during this conversation. In spite of her age she's very physically active – she continues to play tennis, ski, and canoe, and has a varied social life.*



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## **My family background**

I know very little about my ancestors. My father's family was more assimilated than my mother's, and they had lived in Warsaw for several generations. My mother's family were Litvaks [1](#). There were two portraits of my great-grandfathers in my grandparents' house, and those great-

grandfathers had beards and wore caps. I find it a little strange that I slightly remember those portraits, because that was an environment that was unfamiliar to me.

My maternal grandfather was a Litvak. His name was Marcelli Lewin. He was born in 1859 in Belarus, in a place called Wysokie Litewskie [before World War II Wysokie Litewskie was in Poland, in the Brest district of the Poleskie province. Today it is in Belarus, also in the district of Brest, and is called Vysokoye] – I found it on the map when my cousin in America was doing our family tree. Wysokie Litewskie is on the other side of the [Polish–Belarusian] border now. I don't think my grandfather had an education. Neither did my grandmother. I think my grandfather was the first of his brothers and sisters to come to Warsaw, and he and his wife opened a Laundromat. Initially they ran the Laundromat themselves. Because my grandfather did well – he was evidently a confident and capable man – he had his brothers come to Warsaw from Lithuania.

My maternal grandmother's name was Sara. At first I think she worked in the Laundromat. Later, she just kept the house. Their children were born in Warsaw. I know that my mother certainly was. The eldest was Elias, followed by my mother – Balbina – and then finally her younger sister Elzbieta. My grandparents had lots of children, but many of them died because of misfortunes, or something bad. My grandmother had miscarriages; she had problems.

My mother's eldest brother, Elias, you can see [in the photograph] that he was much older than his sisters. I think he was born in Warsaw. I don't know whether he went to a secular school, as he was too old to know. He wasn't young when I met him. On the family photograph you can see the difference [between the siblings]; it must be well over ten years. I don't know exactly what year he was born in. He worked in his own family firm: it was a laundry and underwear factory.

Before the war Uncle Elias had had two wives and a daughter from one wife. The first wife, Helena, died, and the other wife was called Felicja. Felicja survived the war and died in Poland. My uncle had a daughter, Irena, with his first wife, and she was from Polonized circles, too. [The interviewee is referring to the acquisition or imposition of elements of [Polish culture](#), especially [Polish language](#), as experienced in some historic periods by non-Polish populations of territories controlled or substantially influenced by Poland.] But later, after the war, Irena went to Israel, probably in the 1950s or 1960s. She decided that that was what she wanted.

Next was my mother, Balbina. My mother was born in 1898, and she died in 1977. Her unique name was the product of somebody's imagination. My mother was always a little ashamed of her name. She blamed her father for that. She asked why he'd given her such a silly name. He joked: 'Well, I asked you but you didn't say it was a bad name.'

My mother's younger sister was called Elzbieta. She died in Canada after the Holocaust. She was born in 1900 or 1901. She got married before the war; her [married] name was Ramet. I don't know whether it was a secular or a religious wedding. Her husband, whose name was Henryk, had Zionist [leanings](#) at one time. He was in some organization. They sent their daughter to a Hebrew school, for instance. My parents had no such intentions at all. And I even think they looked critically at Elzbieta's husband for being silly.

My grandparents were traditional. My mother said that even though her parents were traditional, her father ate ham, but never at home. At home I don't think they kept kosher, but nevertheless it wouldn't have been acceptable to eat ham. On the photograph you can see that my grandparents

aren't wearing traditional costume, but entirely secular clothes. My grandfather didn't belong to any organization. I don't think he had any political sympathies. In any case nothing has stuck in my mind, or survived in the family history.

I think my grandparents spoke Yiddish between themselves; they didn't speak it with the children. I remember my grandmother; she spoke Polish with mistakes, not pure Polish. My mother spoke fluent Polish. Even if somebody thought she was Jewish, and then she said something, they thought they were mistaken. All my grandparents' children spoke Polish fluently. In our home we spoke nothing else besides Polish. I don't even think my mother could speak Yiddish, but she understood it, and my father didn't speak or understand Yiddish.

As far back as I remember my grandparents in Warsaw lived on Pawia [a street in the northern part of Warsaw inhabited mainly by Jews]. I don't know where they lived before that. I remember that apartment on Pawia: it was attractive and big. I think there were four rooms in the apartment. My grandparents were wealthy and lived in good conditions. They even had help in the house. The house-help was Polish. I remember her a little; my grandmother used to call her 'Anielcia.' They could afford help, because my grandfather was the co-proprietor of the Laundromat.

The business grew in time into a large company. My grandfather accepted partners because he didn't have any capital. They transformed into a joint-stock company. His partners were Jewish. I don't know how many people worked in the Laundromat. I was a child, and the Laundromat seemed big to me. My mother used to say that initially they did the washing by hand, but then later they had machines. A fully-fledged firm! The Laundromat and the apartment were in the same building.

My grandfather died in 1926, when he was quite young. After my grandfather's death the Lewins' financial situation still blossomed. They were still heirs or shareholders in the company. My grandmother didn't get involved in it, as she wasn't the businesswoman type. When I went to my grandmother's house she used to talk to me a lot. My grandmother wasn't beautiful, but she was slender and magnificent [according to Mrs. We, 'magnificent' means an elegant woman]. I remember her as someone already fairly elderly. I remember her as a mild person. When I was younger and we lived close [in the same building as her grandparents], I used to go around often, and later, after we moved, we only visited once a week or so, usually for Sunday lunch. I used to like going there. I remember those meals! To this day I remember one dish – chopped liver with egg and onion [Polish Jews call this dish Jewish caviar], and clear chicken soup, I think.

My grandparents didn't observe the Jewish holidays. I have never been to a seder supper in my life. It was only after the war, abroad, that I experienced a Jewish holiday. Evidently my grandmother didn't celebrate that. Her daughters didn't celebrate the holidays either. In terms of customs I can't tell you anything.

My grandmother died the day before the outbreak of war. Perhaps she had a stroke or she probably died of old age. I think she was about 80. She was still lucky enough to die in her own home and she had a normal funeral. My grandparents are buried in the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa [in Warsaw]. I can't find their graves. I've been going there recently because it's important to my son, but I haven't managed to find my grandparents' grave, although I did go there. And there's nobody to ask at the cemetery.

My paternal grandfather was called Pinkus Cohn. When we had the documents made out again later on, they said: Cohn alias Kon. I don't know what surname appeared in my father's papers. I think it was Kon. But in mine, and in Uncle Stanislaw's papers, too, that dual spelling is recorded. Although it's possible that his surname was written with a 'C.'

I think my grandmother's name was Fania. I didn't know her. She died before I was born. I don't know my grandparents' dates of birth. I think Grandmother was slightly religious. I remember my grandfather a little. They lived in Warsaw for a long time. I don't remember their apartment, although I did go there, but I was still small. I know it was on Zlota Street [a street in the center of Warsaw, considered fairly high-class, inhabited by Poles and assimilated Jews]. My grandfather died when I was a few years old. I think he was a merchant. I don't think he had any political leanings. My mother's family was wealthy, my father's family was more modest. I wrote about that in my book [Hanna had a book published in 2001 entitled: Ze wspomnien (From My Memories), about her experiences before the war and during the occupation] - in my paternal grandparents' house there was a portrait of my great-grandfather, who was a gentleman in a suit, he had a fob in his pocket, and a watch, and looked secular. I remember that portrait.

My father had a lot of brothers and sisters, but none of them survived the war. The situation was very complicated there. My grandparents had been married previously and both their spouses had died. They got married around 1895. My father had three brothers and sisters just from his father's side and three from his mother's. Then they also had my father and his brother. There was a big age difference between the stepbrothers and sisters. I don't think they all lived together.

My father's full brother was called Maksymilian. He wasn't much older than my father, maybe one or two or three years older. I think their older brothers had two versions of their names [Polish and Jewish]. The eldest brother, Stanislaw, was 23 years older than my father. I remember him the most, because I was still quite close to him during the war. His birth certificate said 'Salomon vel Stanislaw.' To us he was Stach; we used to call him Stacho. He didn't use his Jewish name, but he had one. In the Lewin family there was no such thing. Sara was Sara, and Elias was Elias.

In my father's family the situation was quite convoluted. Grandfather Pinkus's children from his first marriage were Stanislaw, Helena and one more daughter, whose name I don't know. From her first marriage Grandmother Fania had Sala, Stefa and Henryk, who committed suicide as a student. There were a lot of suicides in that family. Sala married Stanislaw. My grandparents married, and their children married, too. So that was amusing. My father always used to say that he'd have to say that his brother and sister were married. Because that's how it was, except that it was his stepbrother. My father kept in touch with them, and with his other brothers and sisters. I don't think he favored any one of his brothers or sisters in particular. He also kept in touch with one of his sisters, Helena; she was from the same father; Helena was a Catholic. Somebody else in the family went over to Catholicism, too; there was even talk of some archbishop - I don't know whether that was claptrap, but there was someone like that.

I don't know any stories about my parents' childhoods. My mother went to a Russian gymnasium, I think. That's why she spoke Russian very well. She studied chemistry at Warsaw University, but she didn't finish, but my father, who studied at the [Warsaw] Polytechnic, did finish. I think my mother attended all her classes but she didn't get her certificate. I think she and my father met during their studies.

My parents got married in a synagogue. That was an exception, in a sense. They weren't religious at all; they weren't even believers. Perhaps someone wanted it, it was somebody's wish – I can't say why it happened. But that has stuck in my mind. I remember that it was something of a curiosity in my parents' circles. Once, a friend of my father's came to Warsaw, and I remember that when he met my mother, he said, 'This is the beautiful Bela who got married in a synagogue!'

After their wedding and before I was born, at the beginning of the 1920s, my parents went to France for six months and then came back. My father even wanted to get a foothold somehow, because there was some distant family there and quite a few people had stayed in France. The family had moved to France gradually, over two to three generations. But my father either couldn't find a good job, or didn't have one at all, and my parents came back to Warsaw. My mother didn't work. My father worked for his stepbrother, Stanislaw, who owned a private firm. His line of work was galvanizing technology, which is electrical metal coating. My father was a specialist at that.

My parents weren't poor. They weren't as rich as Croesus, but they lived plentifully. I'm not from rich circles, but people were wealthy, as you could see from their apartments, from everything. My father worked, and my mother probably inherited something from her father, who was the co-proprietor of a firm. All in all it was a relatively good life.

## **Growing up**

When I was a small child my parents lived on Pawia in a different apartment from Grandfather and Grandmother Lewin, but in the same building. I remember it a little: It had two or perhaps three rooms. I was about six years old when we moved from there to Krolewska Street [a well-to-do street in the center of Warsaw].

On Pawia we had a house-help, like my grandparents. Our house-help was Polish. In our house the housekeepers were always Poles. They were girls from the country who were looking for work. In Jewish houses, where a kosher kitchen was kept, I suppose it had to be a Jewish girl, because other girls wouldn't have managed [with the requirements of kosher cuisine]. My mother never kept the house herself. She only did it when they lived somewhere outside Warsaw, just after she got married. But once I was around there was a servant. I didn't have a nanny; she did everything.

Later I lived on Krolewska. The apartment on Krolewska was nice: four-roomed, though not front-facing but back-facing. There were two courtyards there; I think we lived in the second. The windows of our apartment looked out over the roof of the Cyrulik theater [a small satirical and revue theater in Warsaw, popular before the war].

On Krolewska we had Lucyna Milecka, a Pole, to help in the house. Auntie Lucyna was a great friend of my family. Our lives were intertwined. Even after the war she raised my son. We lived in great friendship. She went straight to heaven, as she was good, calm, and loving. I knew her whole family. During the war, before the ghetto, she stayed with us.

We had a large library at home, with international [foreign] literature. My parents could read in foreign languages. My father knew French, English and German, well, I think. My mother knew Russian from the gymnasium, and French, too. I remember that they read *Nasz Przegląd* [3](#), and *Wiadomosci Literackie* [one of the leading literary periodicals of the interwar period]. I don't know whether they read any other papers. My father had a wide range of interests, and read books on

philosophy. My mother a little less, perhaps, but she read international literature.

In our home nothing kosher was eaten any longer. Nothing at all – I didn't even really know what was kosher and what wasn't. My parents didn't celebrate any holidays, either Jewish or Christian. To this day I still can't really get those holidays into my head. No Judgment Day, nothing! I even remember my mother saying, 'We don't celebrate any holidays, so we shall celebrate birthdays, because we might miss out on celebrations.'

Guests would come round to my parents' and my parents went out a lot. But they kept to their own circle. They were all people of the same caliber: the working intelligentsia: lawyers, and the free professions. Very Polonized. In Warsaw – my parents had an extensive circle – you could immerse yourself in it up to your ears. It's just like the Jews in New York live today. My mother kept in close touch with her brother and sister, and they often visited each other. Her sister lived with her mother, so it was natural that my mother used to go there, to Grandmother Sara's and to her sister Elzbieta, on Pawia.

I went to an elementary school that was a private Jewish school, fairly well known in Warsaw. It was called 'Our School' and was on Rysia. It was thoroughly laicized. In general the children that went there were like me [secularized]. I don't know of any that observed the Jewish holidays.

There were religious studies [Jewish], because there had to be. You couldn't get a grade in your school-leaving exam without religious studies. Actually, it wasn't called religious studies but 'The History of the Jews.' History like in the Bible but a non-religious approach.

Children were brought up very much to be Poles there. I remember that when Pilsudski [4](#) died [in 1935], children cried. There was a mood that a misfortune had befallen Poland. I don't think I cried, but I was probably on the verge of crying.

It was a co-educational school. There were very few of us in the class - 13. We all knew each other very well. I had one friend, Joasia, who immigrated to the West at the start of the war, and then to America. There was another boy, the son of a communist. He was a communist, too, although he was a small boy. He disseminated his father's convictions. Joasia was always sparring with him on theoretical topics. I remember that they used to argue and make noise, and to tell you the truth, I didn't understand what it was all about.

I can't honestly say which subjects I particularly liked. I think I liked all of them. I was quite a good student and I don't think I was scared of anything. The only thing I didn't like was drawing; I couldn't do it right. There was a very ambitious headmistress at that school. It was very important to her that lots of children from her school go on to state grammar schools and gymnasiums. I was persuaded to take the exam for the Zmichowska gymnasium, too [a well known Warsaw girls' gymnasium on Klonowa Street].

Not only did I pass that exam, but also to my dissatisfaction – because I was the only Jew – I was accepted. Right away when I got there, in the morning, there was a prayer. I think I started crying and said that I didn't want to go to a school like that. If I'd had just one other friend, I'd have stuck with her. My parents gave in to me and took me away from that state school, although it was an honor that I'd got in there.

They moved me, for one year, because after that was the war, to a Jewish gymnasium. It was called Swiatecka's – perhaps its founder was a Mrs. Swiatecka. It was in the vicinity of Miodowa and Senatorska Streets. It was a private gymnasium, with the school-leaving certificate [not all Jewish gymnasiums had the authority to matriculate students]. The young people there were of more nationalist tendencies, from more traditional circles. But again, not very much so. There was no question of any holidays [being celebrated] at school.

At first there were classes on Sundays at the gymnasium. That was received very badly by my parents, for instance. There were three lessons, I think, which they abolished later on. Saturdays were free. At the elementary school, which I had been more involved in, it wasn't like that.

I remember that once I went on holiday with my mother to Hel [a Baltic Sea peninsula in Poland], and I also went to Druskienniki [a small town on the River Niemen, now in Lithuania]. Right before the war I also went with my mother to Zakopane [a Polish mountain resort in the Tatra Mountains, Poland's highest mountain range, at the southern tip of the country]. We climbed mountains like fearless hikers; we even climbed Koscielc [a peak in the Polish Tatras at 2155 m a.s.l.] – my mother was a little scared. My parents were members of the Polish Hiking Society and they used to go hiking in the Tatras. I remember pictures that showed them climbing using pitons. Unfortunately, all the pictures disappeared during the war. The few that I have, my mother got from her relatives abroad.

My parents liked to send me to private holiday camps with groups of children. One lady would take the children; that was how she earned money. The children were Jewish and they were all from Polonized intellectual circles. That was a large group of people, so there was a wide variety of guests, acquaintances, and friends. I have quite a lot of memories from those trips. We went to Ustron, Szczyrk [holiday resorts in the Beskid Slaski Hills], Karwia [a village on the Baltic], and various places in Poland – I didn't go abroad at that time.

I was friendly with the children from those camps and with my parents' friends' children. It was all the same company; we only mixed with each other. I think my nicest childhood memories are from those trips. I always liked sports; I liked being active. I liked trips when we played sports. We did a lot of hiking in the mountains. I was an only child, so I always liked having company.

Some [assimilated Jews] were baptized, but no-one close to me. Some converted to Protestantism. The Protestant faith was considered less demanding and easier to adapt to, and Catholicism required more – confession, Communion – and was harder. I know for certain that my parents had no trace of [Jewish] religiosity. My father didn't concern himself with matters like his background. He had very secular interests. You see, people were searching [for their identity], because it was hard to become Polonized by force, the atmosphere was wrong for that [due to anti-Semitism]. Some people became communists, others Zionists. The Bundists [5](#) were different again; they wanted independence within the situation as it was [i.e. within the existing Polish state, without immigrating to Palestine]. They were seeking some kind of solution for themselves and for the whole nation. I can't recount it to you accurately because I was a child at the time.

But my father wasn't searching [for a party that corresponded with his convictions]. My father was only moderately interested in politics. He knew what was going on. If he did have any political leanings, I think they could only have been towards the PPS [6](#). He had an affinity with the state of Israel [then Palestine]. My father was a Polish patriot. He was an officer, a lieutenant, I think, and

he was very proud of that. He served in the Polish army, although not in the Legions [7](#), I don't think. He was drafted during the 1920 war [8](#), but fell ill straight away and in the end didn't take part in it. So he must have gone to an officer training school. I remember that he had a uniform and a saber at home. He wasn't a strapping man, more a sickly one. The army was very important to him. He often used to sing soldiers' songs. He definitely wanted to be Polish. You could say that my mother was a patriot. Not just a Polish one, a Jewish one, too. In her student days my mother had had Zionist leanings.

Before the war I never had anything to do with a home where Jewish traditions were cultivated. But there were groups of people who wore long kaftans [cotton or silk cloak buttoned down the front, with full sleeves, reaching down to the ankles] living on Pawia, so I came into contact with the street [where Jews in traditional dress walked, and where there were shops with Jewish signs]. They were different to me, from a different society. It didn't enter my head to approach them. We were divided by too great a difference in lifestyle and by the language barrier. Apart from that, perhaps they had a hostile attitude towards the assimilated [Jews]! In the Jewish religion, people who depart from it are considered traitors.

My parents came into contact with anti-Semitism. Oh, but that was natural. Well, there were the occurrences at the university [9](#), for instance. It had been decided in our house that I wouldn't be sent to the university in Warsaw, because my parents didn't want to expose me to the 'bench ghetto' [10](#). And that was certainly what would have happened, had it not been for the war. They tried to send me to France to university, because some of the family was there. But I wasn't yet of age.

I came into contact with anti-Semitism, too, on occasions, and sometimes on trips. I was terribly, overly sensitive. All it took was for somebody to say one word, and I would be in tears and didn't want to get involved in anything any more. I remember one vacation in Druskienniki – I learned to swim there, I played ball, and rounders. A very pleasant, sporting vacation. My mother and I used to go to a place where you sunbathed. We used to call it the solarium. And there were mixed people [i.e. both Jews and Poles]. We stayed in a guesthouse where the daughters of Colonel Chmura from near Warsaw were. I remember those little girls, because they fascinated me, they were from outside my circle. I was attracted to them. I didn't experience anything unpleasant from them because we became friends. Bad things happened elsewhere – on the street, on the train, etc. I was always alert, terribly over-sensitive. I was kind of a skinny child.

Jews with connections to Polish culture and the Polish language kept to themselves. I didn't see a lot of non-Jewish intellectuals in our house. I thought about that for a long time. My husband and I talked about it many times: true integration is only possible with a mixed marriage. We could see it among our friends. In my family there weren't any mixed marriages. Among the creative intelligentsia, professions such as artists and writers, there were lots. But far fewer among representatives of professions such as that of my father, his family, or his friends.

There was no integration. My parents' circle was very large; there was a lot of internal support, a lot of people, company. And there was anti-Semitism, undeniably. That meant that a child stayed within the circle, too. Although I don't know, perhaps my family was like that; maybe other families wanted their children to integrate more. I'm convinced that if we'd had more contact with Zoliborz [a Warsaw residential district, widely associated with Polish-Jewish coexistence and tolerance



among Poles, a myth that is rooted in the interwar period, when intellectuals, progressive people, Poles often with links to the PPS, lived in the newly-built houses there. During the occupation many Jews found shelter with those progressive Polish families], with the co-operatives, the 'new Jerusalem,' with PPS circles – it definitely would have been different. It was only during the occupation, on Aryan papers, that I came into contact with the Zoliborz intelligentsia. There was a school run by the RTPD there, the Workers' Society of Friends of Children [an association founded in 1919 within the PPS that ran clubs, kindergartens and schools for children]. I had a childhood friend, Alinka, who was Jewish. She later became a close friend of mine. We went to the same school. I met her by chance on the street during the occupation and she drew me into her circle.

It's just a little strange that people didn't emigrate then, because they should have realized what was going on and what threatened [them]. I even remember conversations on the matter at home. I remember this one conversation between my father and his brother, which totally bewildered me, because I was still a child then. The conversation stated, '...there were ties, the child, it would be difficult...' They thought all that tied them down awfully, and nobody expected very bad things. They felt strong because it was a very big group. There was talk [of emigrating], but nothing came of it. Although there were those who, in that period, did leave Poland. My parents' friends also stayed put for the most part, only later [did they try to leave], at the beginning of the war. I don't remember any of my parents' friends going away before the war. Perhaps the Zionists were immigrating to Palestine! At the beginning of the war my close friend Joasia immigrated, to America, via France. But that was an exception.

### **During the war**

My mother's eldest brother, Elias, died at the beginning of the war. That was a tragic death. The Germans came for him at his apartment, to arrest him and two others – including Grandfather Lewin's brother Zelig, and Elias's cousin. Zelig went with the Germans, but Elias shouted, 'I'm not going with them!' and jumped out of the window. He died a few hours later. The others didn't come back; they were taken for good [and murdered somewhere]. That was very early on, very little was happening then. Elias was one of the first of that type of victim of war.

My father left Warsaw in response to Colonel Umiastowski's appeal [11](#) for men capable of bearing arms to go east. And my father went. I never saw him again. He really was a Polish patriot. First there was chaos on the roads, and then he turned up in Lvov [today Ukraine] and was there for quite a long time. The intention was that he would return to us. He couldn't bring himself to cross the border illegally, and the thing dragged on. And as it was dragging on he was nabbed and deported to Siberia [12](#). After that there was no question of return. It wasn't a camp – they were building, chopping trees down. He was way out beyond Yakutsk [a port on the River Lena, in Siberia]. He managed to free himself from there when Anders' Army [13](#) was forming. He reported to the army and left with them via Iran to Palestine. When Anders' Army was dissolved [1946], he was in Israel [then Palestine] and there he took his own life. But I don't want to talk about that.

A lot of people left [Poland at the start of the war]. But at the time my mother had absolutely no thought that that was what we should do. She thought: well, we can stay here! When the order came for the ghetto to be established, my mother had no doubt. She thought that that was what we had to do [go to the ghetto]. She had no doubt. It's silly, but she had none. We moved [from Krolewska] to the house we had lived in before, on Pawia [the house was within the enclosed

district]. And later on there was a German 'shop' there, Schulz's ['shop' was the term for the German factories in the ghettos, which exploited Jewish labor. Schulz's 'shop', after Toebebens' 'shop,' was one of the largest in the Warsaw ghetto]. As unskilled laborers we unpicked furs from donations in Germany. After that furriers would make them into gloves and hats for the soldiers [German soldiers on the eastern front]. Those furs definitely weren't from requisitions in the ghetto, because by then no one had furs any longer. And so it was partly thanks to that that we survived, because we managed to get ourselves work in the 'shop.' And that's how we survived the period of the biggest transports [14](#).

In the ghetto I studied in the 'sets' of the Spojnia gymnasium [Elementary schools in the Warsaw ghetto functioned officially only in the 1941/42 school year. In spring 1942 there were 19 official schools teaching 6,700 pupils. Secondary school children (some 1,000) studied in secret 'sets.' The Spojnia gymnasium and high school functioned on those lines; its headmaster was Arnold Kirszbraun. Lessons were taught in Polish and held in the afternoons. The curriculum was the same as that in prewar schools, with the exception of gymnastics, drawing and military training]. It wasn't particularly secret, because nobody was persecuting us, but it was a certain closed circle. A lot managed to escape from that circle, or at least attempted to. Some were killed later on, but they escaped [from the ghetto] however they could. The Jewish masses [religious Jews] had no chance. If you spoke only Yiddish or went around in a kaftan, you had no chance. There was no point in even trying in Warsaw.

There's a book by Henryk Grynberg [b. 1935, Jewish prose writer and poet living in the US]: The Jewish War. It's a marvelous book. He shows through the eyes of a child what was going on in the countryside at that time. And I happen to know what was going on in the city, and I was fairly privileged, which I have even been reproached for. When a friend in Canada published my book, somebody said to her, 'Yes, but that lady was in an exceptional position.' I was! My parents' prewar circle at least tried to save itself. They didn't all succeed. But they had a chance [because they were Polonized to a large extent].

After the second big campaign [15](#) in February 1943, we escaped to the Aryan side, over a ladder, over the [ghetto] wall. You bought a crossing from smugglers. Unlike what some people think, it wasn't terribly expensive. You had to pay a group of smugglers, a Polish policeman, and a German. You got over to the other side and waited in a sentry box until dawn. Once you got out onto the Aryan side you had to sew a scrap of fur on quickly, so that it wouldn't be obvious that you were from the ghetto [the prevailing fashion outside the ghetto was fur collars; in the ghetto there was no way of obtaining such luxuries because of the Germans]. From there we went straight to Zoliborz, to the wife and daughters of a friend of my father's from university, who was murdered at Katyn [16](#). I applied to Yad Vashem [17](#) to have that family awarded a medal [Wladyslawa Sienenska and her daughters, Zosia and Janina]. They helped us the most. The most important was the first person you went to from the ghetto. After that our friends and family who had also gotten out of the ghetto helped us. We passed on from one family to another. Lucyna was with us in spirit; we couldn't live with her because she didn't have her own apartment.

When we were in hiding on Aryan papers we had real, authentic birth certificates from a [Catholic] parish [authentic ones were ones made out in the name of people who had died]. Those were the better birth certificates. You could buy better or worse birth certificates. Ones you could tell had been forged, and ones that had belonged to children who had died. That meant that my mother

and I had different names, so we pretended to be aunt and niece. We lived in Warsaw and in the country, near Grojec. We didn't always live together, although most of the time we did. In fact I wasn't really in hiding; I was under someone else's identity.

I found a job in a firm of tailors. I sewed dresses and coats, as unskilled labor. As well as that I started going to private lessons with a Polish friend who I'd met through Alinka. I was working through the curriculum for some grade; we were given homework. The people who were the teachers came from the WSM circle in Zoliborz; I was living there at the time. [Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa (WSM) – a Warsaw residential district, widely associated with Polish-Jewish coexistence and tolerance among Poles, a myth that's rooted in the interwar period, when intellectuals, progressive people, Poles often with links to the PPS, lived in the newly-built houses there. During the occupation many Jews found shelter with those progressive Polish families.]

I was Polonized; I had no problem with the language, with the customs, and I could pass myself off as a Pole quite well. And then my appearance – that's a subjective thing, but nobody ever took me, and still never does for a Jew. So I lived at liberty. My mother was afraid, but that was groundless really, too. I learned the prayers fast. When I was in the country, in Grojec, staying with the family of our housekeeper, Lucyna, I had to go to church. There was no option. Quite simply, if I hadn't gone, I would have been suspected at once. When I was in Warsaw I didn't go. Lucyna wasn't with me at that time; she used to come from Warsaw sometimes. My mother was in hiding in Warsaw at the time.

We were in touch with my father's eldest brother, Uncle Stanislaw. He was in the ghetto, his wife had been killed; then he escaped from the ghetto; he had friends. He looked totally unlike a Jew. He could pass off as a Pole just the same. The rest [of the family] all died. They were all deported from Warsaw to Treblinka [18](#); Stanislaw's wife Sala, the Catholic aunt and Helena. Aunt Stefa was taken from Otwock. My grandparents were already dead; they died before the war.

The fates of my parents' friends were very varied. A fair percentage survived, because they were the sort that had a chance; they knew people, they spoke the language purely, knew the customs, and could pass themselves off as Poles quite well. Such kind of people survived. Though from my school very few pupils managed to survive.

Then there was the Warsaw Rising [19](#); we were taken away from the Warsaw Rising, out of Zoliborz to the trains, and then to Pruszkow [20](#). There we were scattered around in different villages. We spent a little time in the country. We moved to Kielce, because there were terrible lice in that village, and that didn't suit us. We decided to delouse ourselves first, and then we lived in someone's house. People were quite keen to take in Varsovians [people from Warsaw] at that time. Of course there was no question of revealing that we were Jewish!

## **After the war**

The end of the war found us in Kielce. Almost at once we went to Warsaw, only by a roundabout route, via Lublin. We didn't really know what the point of waiting there was. We felt drawn to Warsaw. On our return we stayed with Lucyna at first. In the beginning I think we were living four to a room at her brother or sister's house. After that we lived a little better, because there were two to a room. Living conditions after the war were hard. Our apartment had been demolished.

I liked it after the war; it was good. I had been liberated, there was justice, you could study, culture was coming back; I liked everything! It was only later that you saw all the negative things. I started having doubts when they merged the parties [the PPR and the PPS - 1948] [21](#). Perhaps I was also under the influence of people. I was never particularly strong in politics. I had to listen to others' opinions. Well, no, I've got my own mind, but even so, I always listened to what other people said, people who I trust.

My mother's sister, Elzbieta, experienced the war in Russia. After the war she came through Poland on her way to a camp in Germany. That was a transit camp; she was set on emigrating at once. She and her daughter stayed there for three years. I don't know whether they spent three years in the camp, but I know that Elzbieta's daughter went to a Polish school in Germany at that time. Later she went to Canada. They were finishing hats there; you had to have a paying job. Her daughter got married, they had a store, but there was no question of studies, of an education for her daughter! My cousin lives in Canada now, and has quite a large family in Toronto. It's quite a large Jewish family now; the children have returned to the traditions and customs. They've married locals [Jews] there. Aunt Elzbieta's husband, Henryk Ramet, survived, but they got divorced after that and when they came back [to Poland] they weren't together anymore. They weren't a family.

Perhaps there were even thoughts of leaving Poland after the war. My mother had once been a Zionist, so she did think that she might want to go to Israel. But I didn't want to leave, I wanted to study, and my mother was already a widow by then, with no profession, so I had no chance of studying anywhere abroad. Anyway, I had nothing against being here. Later on, in 1950, I got married; perhaps even my husband would have emigrated sooner than me, although he was a Pole. But we didn't go. And that's how it turned out.

The year 1968 [22](#) affected me badly. Psychologically above all. I saw [anti-Semitism] then; it all re-emerged. Professionally a little, too, perhaps, in a camouflaged way. I couldn't have left then, even if I'd wanted to, because my mother was incapacitated very early on, and she needed looking after. To leave and start a new life with somebody frail, I would have found that a hard decision to make. If I'd gone, I don't think it would have been to Israel, but maybe to the States. I went to the States during that period, because my husband had a grant. I went to visit him. But our child stayed here, so we didn't think of not coming back.

I wouldn't have chosen Israel because I wanted to go somewhere more neutral. I didn't want to immerse myself totally in all that Judaism again. It's hard to say. Perhaps if I'd gone away straight after the war I'd have wanted to go to Israel. But later it certainly wouldn't have ended like that; we'd definitely have been in the States or somewhere. Israel is a challenging country to live in; I've been there twice. The first time I didn't like it very much. I was there in the early 1960s, before all those wars [the Six Day War [23](#) in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War [24](#) in 1973]. The jingoism annoyed me, and the fact that Israelis are terribly harsh. I didn't understand that it's a country threatened by its neighbors. I didn't see that then. Later on I understood that it had to be like that for political reasons. The first time I had gone to visit my family. There was still some distant family there then, a second cousin, Krysia. Krysia was the daughter of my mother's cousin Estera. Later on, her husband died and she immigrated to Australia.

The second time I went, not so long ago, about ten years ago [1995], it was with great fondness [that I looked at Israel]. Although there were already political conflicts, it was possible to get

disillusioned. On my second visit I was wiser. What I liked most of all that time was Old Jerusalem, which I hadn't seen on my first visit, because it was abroad. That's an exceptional place on earth. It really does make an impression. I joined an excursion to visit it.

[After the war] my mother tended not to admit [to being Jewish]. In the early 1960s she went to Israel. I remember that she brought for a neighbor these commemorative coins from Bethlehem or Nazareth. So she didn't make a big thing of hiding it, but she didn't admit to it widely. My mother was in poor condition fairly early. She became incapacitated; mentally she was in a bad state, too. She died in 1977. She's buried in the Jewish cemetery because that's what she wanted. It didn't have to be like that, but because she wished it, I thought that it was my duty to fulfill it. She didn't explain why. Perhaps she wasn't even very conscious of what she wanted and what she didn't want by then. Perhaps she wanted to be buried on Okopowa [in Warsaw's Jewish cemetery] because that's where her parents lie. Tradition always held my mother. It was really quite deeply rooted in her that she was Jewish.

After the war I wouldn't have married a Jew. I certainly wouldn't have stayed in Poland, if I was to have a Jewish child. That was out of the question. Enough of that! I didn't want it. Just like the hero of Grynberg's book told his mother that he had decided not to be a Jew any more. I had decided the same. In any case I didn't want to have a Jewish child. I said that my life had been through too much in that respect. I've had enough; I don't want to give it to a child as well, so that she would have it, too.

After the war I didn't return to my [maiden] name at all. Never. I'm still in hiding. That's how you could say it in short. Then I got married [so I took my husband's name]. It's a very serious scar. On the whole I didn't say I was Jewish; it depends who I'm talking to. I'm certainly not going to tell the neighbors; where would that get me?

Once I even read the words of an American Jew, who'd been in America for years, who said that in fact he was still in hiding. I could understand that, and I thought to myself, oh yes! That really is a good way of putting it, that you're in hiding. But it depends on character. There are strong characters who [don't think like that] – absolutely not! Perhaps it's more cowardly people [who do] – I don't know how to put it. I just didn't want to, and I had no intention of going back to a tradition that I hadn't been attached to before – well, what for? What would be the point?

My husband was – he's been dead quite some time now – Polish. He was born in 1923. His name was Jerzy. We met as students. He was an engineer; he worked at the Institute of Fundamental Technical Matters. I entered a Polish family. That suited me perfectly. Indeed, my husband shared my opinion that the best thing to do was to assimilate and immerse oneself in [Polish] society.

After the war, with a husband who wasn't Jewish, we celebrated the Christian holidays in a traditional fashion, with his parents and with his sister. To this day I celebrate them that way. But it's not deep observance. We didn't go to Midnight Mass. My husband was a militant atheist, so there was no question. He was against all religion far more so than I was. But for Christmas Eve dinner [the highlight of the Christmas celebrations for Polish Catholics, comprising traditional meatless dishes, chiefly fish-based] he liked to have fish. His atheism was the result of his having been brought up to be a Catholic. Later on he rebelled awfully. But the customs – breaking the wafer [a Polish Catholic Christmas Eve tradition involving sharing a Communion-type wafer with close family members while giving them wishes for the next year], for instance – he accepted. He

hadn't rebelled to the extent that he wanted to upset his mother or his sister.

My son, Jan, was born in 1958. He went to elementary school in Ochota [a district of Warsaw], and then to the Gottwald High School, because early on he had an interest in mathematics [the Klemens Gottwald High School is one of the best high schools for mathematics and physics in Warsaw]. He studied mathematics and now he is a mathematician at the University of Arizona [USA]. He left Poland with his wife and child in 1985, at the time of the political upheavals here. He went there to do his doctorate. Once he'd done it he stayed there. His wife, Beata, is a painter. Their son, Mateusz, is 22 [b. 1983] and he's studying psychology. My son is half-Jewish; he's not Jewish, so there's a difference. Fortunately he doesn't have any complexes, because he didn't experience all that horror. He doesn't have the baggage that I have. Unlike me he wasn't an over-sensitive child. But he understands Jewish issues one hundred percent.

After 1989 [25](#) I didn't try to contact any Jewish organizations. I don't belong to the 'Children of the Holocaust' [26](#). Although through someone I do have some contact with them. I even thought about going on the trips they organize once, but I decided not to. I'm not attracted to that circle. And certainly not to religion. But with age, in one's old age, that contact is perhaps a little closer than when one is young. That's a general thing, that's just how it is.

I suspect that the prospects for Jewish life in Poland are remote, because there are very few people. There's the 'Children of the Holocaust' association, they stick together, and there are individual activists – Warszawski, Krajewski. It even surprises me somewhat that they are so religious. It's an old religion; it's all so old-fashioned to me. If one wants to emphasize one's Judaism one can go to Israel and you don't have to be religious at all. Just the opposite – you can be a rebel. But if you are in that country [Israel], it makes some sense. But here [in Poland] – no [there's no point being Jewish]. It repels me; I have no affinity [with the religion, the traditions].

In spite of my age I still work part-time at the Institute of Psychology and Neurology [in Warsaw]. I meet friends, and do sports. Yesterday I played tennis, though I didn't learn as a child, so I don't play very well. I ski. This winter I went to the Alps. I also canoe. I see my son once a year. He said recently that I should go visit them twice a year, because I'm too old now for us only to see each other once a year.

## Glossary

### **1 Litvak**

Name for Jews from Lithuania. When used by Polish Jews the word takes a pejorative tone. The stereotypical Litvak was arrogant, unapproachable, a wiseacre who spoke an unintelligible form of Yiddish. In Polish the term 'Litvak' was used to describe Jewish refugees who arrived on Polish territory (in the area known as the Lands along the Vistula) in the 1880s. Their arrival, provoked by a series of pogroms and the passing of the May Laws, which discriminated Jews (1882; these laws did not extend to the lands along the Vistula), was received with hostility by Polish Jews and Christians alike. The Christians accused them of conscious collaboration in the Russification of the Polish state, while the Jews feared that the Litvaks, who were familiar with the Russian market, would constitute competition for local merchants. The Litvaks had separate synagogues, schools and press. The negative stereotypes perpetuated the mutual isolation, and the sustained sense of

uprootedness fuelled a rise in nationalist tendencies and pro-Zionist currents among the Litvaks, one manifestation of which was the Hibbat Zion ('Love of Zion' movement).

## **2 Zionist parties in Poland**

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

## **3 Nasz Przegląd**

Jewish daily published in Polish in Warsaw during the period 1923-39, with a print run of 45,000 copies. Addressed to the intelligentsia, it had an important opinion-forming role.

## **4 Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935)**

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

## **5 Bund in Poland**

Largest and most influential Jewish workers' party in pre-war Poland. Founded 1897 in Vilnius. From 1915, the Polish branch operated independently. Ran in parliamentary and local elections. Bund

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

## **6 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 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.

## **7 Polish Legions**

A military formation operating in the period 1914-17, formally subordinate to the Austro-Hungarian army but fighting for Polish independence. Commanded by Jozef Pilsudski. From 1915 the Legions came under German command, but some of the Legionnaires refused, which led to the collapse of the organization.

## **8 Polish-Soviet War (1919-21)**



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

## **9 Events at Warsaw University in 1930s**

In protest at the introduction of the 'bench ghetto' at Warsaw University in the 1930s, some students and lecturers, among them Prof. Tadeusz Kotarbinski, demonstrated their solidarity with the Jewish students in various ways, e.g. by standing during lectures. In response to this protest, anti-Semitic hit squads brutally attacked Jewish students as they left lectures.

## **10 Bench ghetto**

A form of discrimination applied against Jewish students at higher educational institutions in interwar Poland. In lecture halls separate seats were allocated to Jewish students and they were not allowed to sit elsewhere. The bench ghetto was introduced in 1935 at the Lwow Polytechnic, and in 1937 the majority of the rectors of Polish higher educational institutions brought it in with the approval of the Ministry of Religious Confessions and Public Education. Jewish students, along with Polish students who supported them, protested by standing during lectures and not occupying any seats. Their protest was also supported by a few professors, including Tadeusz Kotarbinski.

## **11 Umiastowski Order**

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

## **12 Forced deportation to Siberia**

Stalin introduced the deportation of certain people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

## **13 Anders' Army**

The Polish Armed Forces in the USSR, subsequently the Polish Army in the East, known as Anders' Army: an operations unit of the Polish Armed Forces formed pursuant to the Polish-Soviet Pact of 30th July 1941 and the military agreement of 14th July 1941. It comprised Polish citizens who had been deported into the heart of the USSR: soldiers imprisoned in 1939-41 and civilians amnestied

in 1941 (some 1.25-1.6m people, including a recruitment base of 100,000-150,000). The commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR was General Wladyslaw Anders. The army never reached its full quota (in February 1942 it numbered 48,000, and in March 1942 around 66,000). In terms of operations it was answerable to the Supreme Command of the Red Army, and in terms of organization and personnel to the Supreme Commander, General Wladyslaw Sikorski and the Polish government in exile. In March-April 1942 part of the Army (with Stalin's consent) was sent to Iran (33,000 soldiers and approx. 10,000 civilians). The final evacuation took place in August-September 1942 pursuant to Soviet-British agreements concluded in July 1942 (it was the aim of General Anders and the British powers to withdraw Polish forces from the USSR); some 114,000 people, including 25,000 civilians (over 13,000 children) left the Soviet Union. The units that had been evacuated were merged with the Polish Army in the Middle East to form the Polish Army in the East, commanded by Anders.

#### **14 Great Action (Grossaktion)**

July-September 1942, mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka extermination camp. This was the first liquidation campaign, during which around 265,000 of 355,000 Jews living in the ghetto were deported, and a further 10,000 were murdered on the spot. About 70,000 people remained inside the ghetto walls (the majority of them, as unemployed, were there illegally).

#### **15 January Campaign**

After the deportation of 300,000 people from the Warsaw Ghetto in the Grossaktion of July 1942, some 60,000 people remained within its walls. Half of this number were in hiding, and hence pursuant to the regulations in force during the occupation, were there illegally. The only people who had the right to be in the ghetto were employees of the so-called 'shops.' The ghetto was drastically reduced in size and divided into independent sectors. The Jews already realized that in reality the Germans were planning to murder them all. A defense was prepared; bunkers were built, and people were armed and trained. On 18-22 January 1943 the Germans attempted another liquidation campaign. However, for the first time, they met with armed resistance from the decimated ghetto population. After killing around 1,000 people and deporting 6,000, the Germans were forced to abandon their plan. The January Campaign was the first armed act of resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto. It gave the ghetto residents heart and enabled them to believe in the possibility of armed resistance against the Germans.

#### **16 Katyn**

Site in Western Russia where in April and May 1940, on the orders of Stalin and the Politburo the NKVD murdered some 4,400 Polish officers, prisoners of war from the camps in nearby Kozielsk. Similar crimes were committed in the neighboring Starobielsk and Ostashkovo. In all, the Russians murdered well over 10,000 officers of the Polish Army and the Polish State Police, and civil servants. When in 1943 the German army discovered the mass graves, they released news of them to public opinion. The Soviet propaganda machine, however, continued to claim for almost the next 60 years, that the murders had been committed by the Nazis, not by Russians. The Katyn crimes came to represent the falsity in Polish-USSR relations, and the word 'Katyn' was censored until 1989.

## **17 Yad Vashem**

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

## **18 Treblinka**

Village in Poland's Mazovia region, site of two camps. The first was a penal labor camp, established in 1941 and operating until 1944. The second, known as Treblinka II, functioned in the period 1942-43 and was a death camp. Prisoners in the former worked in Treblinka II. In the second camp a ramp and a mock-up of a railway station were built, which prevented the victims from realizing what awaited them until just in front of the entrance to the gas chamber. The camp covered an area of 13.5 hectares. It was bounded by a 3-m high barbed wire fence interwoven densely with pine branches to screen what was going on inside. The whole process of exterminating a transport from arrival in the camp to removal of the corpses from the gas chamber took around 2 hours. Several transports arrived daily. In the 13 months of the extermination camp's existence the Germans gassed some 750,000-800,000 Jews. Those taken to Treblinka included Warsaw Jews during the so-called 'Grossaktion' [great liquidation campaign] in the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942. In addition to Polish Jews, Jews from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia and the USSR were also killed in Treblinka. In the spring of 1943 the Germans gradually began to liquidate the camp. On 2nd August 1943 an uprising broke out there with the aim of enabling some 200 people to escape. The majority died.

## **19 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.

## **20 Pruszkow transit camp**

From the start of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944 the civilian population of Warsaw was evacuated to a camp in Pruszkow, a small town in the vicinity of Warsaw. From there they were deported to various labor or concentration camps in Germany. The Pruszkow camp remained in existence until January 1945. Over this period around 650,000 people were imprisoned there.

## **21 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.

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

From 1962-1967 a campaign got underway to sack Jews employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army and the central administration. The background to this anti-Semitic campaign was the involvement of the Socialist Bloc countries on the Arab side in the Middle East conflict, in connection with which Moscow ordered purges in state institutions. On 19th June 1967 at a trade union congress the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR], Wladyslaw Gomulka, accused the Jews of a lack of loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day-War. This address marked the start of purges among journalists and creative professions. Poland also severed diplomatic relations with Israel. On 8th March 1968 there was a protest at Warsaw University. The Ministry of Internal Affairs responded by launching a press campaign and organizing mass demonstrations in factories and workplaces during which 'Zionists' and 'trouble-makers' were indicted and anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia slogans shouted. After the events of March, purges were also staged in all state institutions, from factories to universities, on criteria of nationality and race. 'Family liability' was also introduced (e.g. with respect to people whose spouses were Jewish). Jews were forced to emigrate. From 1968-1971 15,000-30,000 people left Poland. They were stripped of their citizenship and right of return.

## **23 Six-Day-War**

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

## **24 Yom Kippur War**

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

## **25 Events of 1989**

In 1989 the communist regime in Poland finally collapsed and the process of forming a multiparty, pluralistic, democratic political system and introducing a capitalist economy began. Communist

policy and the deepening economic crisis since the early 1980s had caused increasing social discontent and weariness and the radicalization of moods among Solidarity activists (Solidarity: a trade union that developed into a political party and played a key role in overthrowing communism). On 13th December 1981 the PZPR had introduced martial law (lifted on 22nd June 1983). Growing economic difficulties, social moods and the strength of the opposition persuaded the national authorities to begin gradually liberalizing the political system. Changes in the USSR also influenced the policy of the PZPR. A series of strikes in April-May and August 1988, and demonstrations in many towns and cities forced the authorities to seek a compromise with the opposition. After a few months of meetings and consultations the Round Table negotiations took place (6th Feb.-5th April 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronislaw Geremek, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki). The resolutions it passed signaled the end of the PZPR's monopoly on power and cleared the way for the overthrow of the system. In parliamentary elections (4th June 1989) the PZPR and its subordinate political groups suffered defeat. In fall 1989 a program of fundamental economic, social and ownership transformations was drawn up and in January 1990 the PZPR dissolved.

## **26 Children of the Holocaust**

A social organization whose members were persecuted during the Nazi occupation due to their Jewish identity, and who were no more than 13 years old in 1939, or were born during the war. The Association was founded in 1991. Its purpose is to provide mutual support (psychological assistance; help in searching for family members), and to educate the public. The group organizes seminars, publishes a bulletin as well as books (several volumes of memoirs: "Children of the Holocaust Speak..."). The Association has now almost 800 members; there are sections in Warsaw, Wroclaw, Cracow and Gdansk.