INTRODUCTION TO THE TESTIMONY OF

Helena Balicka-Zwolińska

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Introduction

Helena Balicka Zwolińska was nineteen years old when WWII broke out. In her testimony we encounter the story of a young Polish woman who was deeply involved in helping Jews during the Nazi occupation. This engagement was the result of her own convictions but also of her family background. Her story is to some extent typical of the Polish leftist intelligentsia of that time.

She was born in Warsaw in 1920 into a Polish family with a long tradition of civic engagement. Her mother, Jadwiga, was a pediatrician and her father, Zygmunt, an engineer. Both parents had been involved in the socialist movement long before WWI. After the war Zygmunt Balicki became even more radical, sympathizing with the illegal Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP).

As the Great Depression of the 1930s descended on Poland and the rest of Europe, mass unemployment and destitution spread. Not only the Communists and Socialists but also members of the People's Party, Christian Democrats, and Nationalists predicted that the crisis meant the beginning of the end of capitalism. Both the left and the right proposed radical programs of social and economic reform.

The Polish parliament, elected according to the new 1935 electoral law, no longer reflected real political or social divisions, as all political groups critical of the government found themselves outside the Parliament (Sejm). The newly founded Camp of National Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego, OZN) adopted some of the National Democrats' nationalistic and antisemitic catchphrases. The state ideology was morphing into an authoritarianism that advocated waging an economic war against the Jews and their exclusion from public and economic life. Polish national radicals further demanded segregation of Jewish students, first demanding "voluntary" separation and, when this was refused, violently attacking Jewish students. In 1937-8 most Polish universities introduced segregation (so-called "ghetto

benches"). By 1939 many Polish institutes of higher learning had implemented a *numerus clausus* system that reduced the number of Jewish students.[1]

Balicka's family belonged to a circle of the Polish intelligentsia that openly opposed nationalism and antisemitism and was in favor of radical social reform. Zygmunt Balicki was involved with the Housing Estate of Workers Society in Warsaw's Grochów neighborhood in the second half of the 1930s. He supervised the construction works. The Society was part of a broader movement for functional low-cost housing, mainly for poor blue-collar families. The movement was born in the Bauhaus School in Germany in the 1920s.[2] In Poland, many architects, engineers, social and union activists were engaged in it. Most of them were members of the various leftist Polish parties. In 1928 they established the Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa (WSM; Warsaw Housing Cooperative) and founded the Społeczne Przedsiębiorstwo Budowlane (SBP; Social Construction Enterprise). These institutions had as their aim the development of construction cooperatives and the construction of cheap workers' apartments.

In the circles in which Balicka's parents moved there were many Jews. All of them were well educated: architects, engineers, doctors, scientists. They spoke excellent Polish and were completely assimilated. Balicka admits that before the war she practically did not know anyone from the traditional Jewish community in Warsaw. Some Jewish girls attended the high school she graduated from were Polonized, too.

As a teenager, Balicka was a member of Red Scouting (Czerwone Harcerstwo), organized by the Workers' University Association (Towarzystwo Uniwersytetu Robotniczego, TUR). This leftist organization fostered a spirit of social equality among its young members; it was secular, even anticlerical and fought nationalism and antisemitism.

In these circles in which Helena Balicka – Zwolińska grew up the political situation in Europe and Germany was observed very carefully and with enormous anxiety. As she recalls in her testimony:

"…for us, what was happening in the first years of the war was not a surprise, because we knew what fascism was. So only after a certain threshold was crossed, well, before the war there was no mass extermination, but all the harassment against the Poles, and much more against the Jews, we had been expecting it. We knew about the Kristallnacht, and so on, and so on."

Poland was invaded by Germany on 1 September 1939 and Warsaw defended herself until September 28. The Balickas, like many other citizens, aided in the defense of Warsaw. Nineteen-year-old Helena worked with the Capital Committee of Mutual Assistance (Stołeczny Komitet Samopomocy Społecznej). When the German occupation began, her friend Krystyna Szapiro, despite her Jewish origin, did not

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[1]Joanna Michlic, Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 112.

[2] Karolina Matysik, "Zespół mieszkaniowy TOR na warszawskim Grochowie," Budownictwo i Architektura 14, no. 1 (2015): 73-91.

move to the ghetto and lived under the false identity of Hanka Sawicka. She was a communist activist and organized an underground leftist journal. Helena joined this enterprise and became a member of the staff. [3]

In 1943, a few radical leftist and communist organizations merged in the Young People's Fighting Union (ZWM, Związek Walki Młodych) and began to release the journal *Walka Młodych* (The Struggle of the Youth). The Union was a small circle, composed of several dozen people ideologically tied to the communist Polish Workers Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza; PPR) and its military branch – the People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL).[4] Balicka became a member of the Union. She also studied at the underground department of architecture at Warsaw University.

Under Nazi occupation Zygmunt Balicki became a member of an underground communist organization named "Proletariusz." In 1943 he was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo in the "Pawiak" prison and finally sent to the concentration camps Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen and Launingen. In April 1945 he was liberated by American troops and then returned to Poland.[5]

During the occupation and the Warsaw Uprising (August 1 – October 1, 1944) Jadwiga Balicka worked continuously as a doctor. She became a member of the Secret Settlement Committee of Democratic and Socialist Doctors (Tajny Komitet Porozumiewawczy Lekarzy Demokratów i Socjalistów). Associated doctors worked as a support network, secretly took care of the wounded soldiers of the underground movement, provided false medical certifications, and medical assistance for the ghetto. They also financially supported their Jewish colleagues deprived of jobs. The Committee also published in its own conspiratorial journal, a wartime medical code of ethics, and expressed solidarity with the Jews.[6]

The Warsaw ghetto was established by the German authorities on 16 November 1940. In an area of 3.4 km^2 (1.3 sq. mile), at its height as many as 460,000 Jews were imprisoned there. The ghetto was surrounded by walls. It was a closed ghetto and leaving was forbidden for Jews under the death penalty. As Balicka observes in her testimony, the Nazi policy against Jews in Poland came as no surprise for her family and Jewish friends. After the ghetto was established in Warsaw the majority of her family's Jewish friends did not move there and tried to live on the "Aryan" side. They needed help from their Polish friends – be it apartments, medical care or false documents. In the underground this support network was established step by step.

The Balickas were engaged in many dimensions of this network. They organized shelters and false identity for Jews who decided not to move to the ghetto. They helped others to leave it secretly. More

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[3] Stanisława Lewandowska, "Kobiety i dziewczęta w konspiracyjnym ruchu wydawniczym (1939-1945)," Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej 25, no. 4 (1986): 117-28.

[4] Krystyn Dądrowa, ed., Konspiracyjny ZWM w Warszawie, Warsaw: Pokolenia 2008, 164.

[5] Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego, t. 1, Warsaw, Książka i Wiedza, 1978.

[6] Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna, eds., Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939-1945 (Cracow: Znak, 1969), 241-44.

than 10 people lived with them in their own apartment for shorter or longer periods. As a doctor, Helena's mother organized illegal medical care for Jews in hiding.

Balicka in her testimony recalls that the Jews who lived on the "Aryan" side usually limited their activity and lived under false names. Both the Jews in hiding and the Poles helping them were in danger – not only because of Nazi law, but also by threats of blackmail. Balicka mentions blackmailers (szmalcownicy) only once, but they appear in many other testimonies. Jews were blackmailed when they did not wear a compulsory band with the Star of David and when leaving the ghetto. In 1941 the Germans introduced the death penalty for Jews in hiding and those who helped them. The blackmailers extorted money and valuables from Jews and from Poles helping them. This practice became more widespread after the "Great Action" in the summer of 1942, when numerous Jews attempted to survive among Poles on the Aryan side of Warsaw. The scale of blackmailing is difficult to assess but there is no doubt that its influence was significant. Many Jews were afraid to leave the ghetto even when they still had the possibility of doing so. Many Poles refused to help.

Balicka had contacts with the ghetto because several of her friends decided to live inside. Amongst them were Marysia Hirszfeld and Ola Zweinbaum, whose parents – Hanna and Ludwik Hirszfeld and Juliusz Zweibaum – were outstanding doctors and researchers. In 1940–1942 they organized the Sanitary Course for Fighting Epidemics (Kurs Przysposobienia Sanitarnego do Walki z Epidemiami). It was part of the Warsaw Medical University and an opportunity to educate Jewish students and conduct scientific research.[7]

Balicka went to the ghetto to visit her friends secretly. She entered through the gate on Chłodna Street, where the area of the ghetto was the narrowest. She pretended to be a schoolgirl and presented the false pretext that her school was on the other side of the ghetto and entering it would shorten her journey. This gave her the possibility of spending a few hours inside the ghetto and exiting it through the same gate. She visited friends' homes, informed them about the world outside, but also observed how life on the streets showed ever more appalling evidence of the disease, hunger, and death. She was thus one of the hundreds of people who became witnesses of life in the closed part of the city.

At this point, Balicka`s personal story becomes entangled with difficult questions about Polish-Jewish relations. The Jews were confined in the ghettos by the Nazis, but they were still Polish citizens and the Polish Underground State tried to speak up for Jews and help them, but all these actions were limited. This is also a story of abandonment.

The leaders of the Polish Underground State in the first half of 1942 thought that informing the world of the extermination of Jews would itself decrease the scale of murders. We must note, however, that at this time a similar opinion was held by many Jewish communities – e.g. the Jewish socialist party "Bund." The Polish underground authorities were convinced (and the western Allies shared this point of view) that the quick ending of the war would stop the terror directed against both Poles and Jews. The reactions

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[7] Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, Warsaw Ghetto: a guide to the perished city (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 249-51.

to the extermination of Jews were restricted to passing on the information. The number of the dispatches and reports was definitely smaller than in the case of those concerning Poles.[8]

The terror directed against Jews was broadly observed and many underground journals gave information about the fate of Jews. The main Home Army publication, "Biuletyn Informacyjny" (News Bulletin), wrote in alarming tones of the mass murders of Jews in the East and the extermination policy in occupied Poland.

In February 1942, the "Jewish Department" was established within the Polish Underground State. This small cell with Henryk Woliński at its head provided information to the Polish government-in-exile about the Holocaust. The information was collected widely by people living in or with contacts in the ghetto, who gathered evidence and data for reports concerning the terror.

Polish underground authorities tried to contend against the plague of blackmailers. In spring 1943, a special unit was established to deal with Jew hunters. It delivered evidence concerning the victims' names and an underground court condemned unmasked blackmailers to death. After the executions were carried out by the Home Army soldiers, information about them was published in the underground press as a warning. The truth is, however, that the hundreds of Poles actively engaged in helping Jews were a small fraction of the entire Polish society.

On 22 July, 1942, the massive deportations of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the extermination camp in Treblinka ("Great Action") began, lasting for eight weeks. During this time about 240,000 Warsaw Jews were deported and killed in Treblinka.

Only after the great deportation action was the Council to Aid Jews (Żegota) established as a part of the Polish Underground State. Żegota distributed Polish government-in-exile funds to people in hiding, provided false documents and shelters for Jews, always too small given the needs.

Similarly, the military aid provided during the ghetto uprising in April-May 1943 was very limited. The Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB) was formed at the end of July 1942, mostly by members of Jewish Socialist Party (Bund) and the left Zionist youth groups, such as Ha-shomer ha-taz'ir and Dror. Its goal was an armed struggle with the Nazis to stop deportations. Their primary contact with the Home Army was Henryk Woliński. He served as liaison and tried to convince his superiors to hand over weapons to the Jewish underground. The Commander of the Home Army, Gen. Grot-Rowecki, was not convinced of ŻOB's combat capabilities. He did finally give an order to help the Jewish fighters in the ghetto, but only a very limited amount of arms and ammunition was delivered.[9]

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[8] A Puławski, Wykluczenie czy samowykluczenie? Trzy aspekty obecności Żydów w wojennym społeczeństwie polskim na przykładzie 1942 roku, Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość 1/2008 s. 156; Antony Polonsky, The Jews in Poland and Russia, Vol III, 1914-2008 (London: The Littman Library of the Jewish Civilization, 2019), 482-3.

[9] Adam Puławski, Wobec niespotykanego w dziejach mordu. Rząd RP na uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, AK a eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej od "wielkiej akcji" do powstania w getcie warszawskim (Chełm: Biblioteka Rocznika Chełmskiego, 2018), 816.

The ŻOB was seeking weapons and allies, and made parallel contact with the small communist-controlled People's Guard, which was in conflict with the Polish Underground State.

Although Helena became a member of the communist underground that was outside of the Polish Underground State, she did not discuss this tension between the two orientations.[10] The political split and military aspects are not part of her story. In her testimony, she focuses on the rescue of Jewish citizens. In the circle of people with whom she lived and cooperated the necessity of help was obvious and was based mostly on prewar social relations and professional connections.

But this help had some limitations too. The narrative of Helena Balicka Zwolińska sheds important light on interactions between Jews and Poles in occupied Warsaw. She mentions that apart from people who were deeply assimilated before the war she had hitherto known almost nobody from a traditional Jewish community. Poles and traditional Jews lived in one country, but in social and cultural separation. Close and friendly relations between them were rare. The only girl from a traditional Jewish family whom Balicka knew was Sarah Biderman. Balicka met her shortly before the war and visited her a few times in the ghetto before summer 1942.

When information on the massive deportations from the ghetto came out, Balicka warned her closest Jewish friends, but Sarah lived in a distant part of the ghetto and it was not possible to warn her to run away. A few months later, Balicka received a letter from Sarah informing her that she had survived the summer deportations. They met secretly at the Czerniaków Farm, which belonged to the Polish landlord Wojciech Zatwarnicki, who employed young Jews from the Dror – one of the Zionists organizations. They lived and worked there for food and salaries. It was also a secret base of The Jewish Fighting Organization.[11] Only then did she find out that Sarah was not only a member of the Zionist movement but had also joined the Jewish underground. Sarah explained to her that she had tried to get out of the ghetto but failed. Balicka realized then what Jews faced when attempting to leave the ghetto. It was not only a wall or a pointed weapon; the ghetto was a bad accent, cultural alienation, and a lack of friendly outside contacts. Traditional Polish Jews could not simply loose themselves in a street crowd. Their strangeness was visible and made them vulnerable. This confession is moving: " I did realize something that I should have known earlier, what I had known theoretically, but only then did it get to me. The isolation of the Jews from Polish society […]. Only then, in Czerniaków, did I understand the meaning of the isolation of those two communities that had supposedly lived next to each other for a thousand years."

Sarah and the rest of the Jews on the farm had disappeared before Balicka could organize shelter for her. A few months later, in April and May 1943, Balicka was among those Warsaw citizens who helplessly observed the Jewish struggle during the ghetto uprising. On their defeat, dozens of Jewish fighters evacuated themselves and tried to survive, hiding among the few friendly localities in Warsaw. Then Sarah found shelter at Balicka's family home. When she was badly hurt by the German soldiers they

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[10] For more information about the tension between the Polish Underground State and communist-controlled forces see Polonsky, The Jews in Poland and Russia, 480-2.

[11] Yitzhak "Antek" Zuckerman, A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 75-7.

organized emergency medical help for her. From that time Balicka maintained contact with the ŻOB couriers.

The Home Army military help was still very limited. The ŻOB soldiers felt neglected and disregarded by the Polish underground authorities. At the same time, they had contacts with the chief of staff of the Peoples' Army, Gen. Wacław Jóźwiak, which resulted in support for the Jewish fighters.[12] It is something of a paradox that the ŻOB fighters, mostly young Zionists who had nothing to do with the communists, took part in the Warsaw uprising in August 1944 among the ranks of the People Army's units. It was at this time that Balicka made friendships among them and came to understand the goals of the Zionist movement and their dreams of the own homeland.

Her testimony is a great example of the life-attitude of those open-minded people who helped their Jewish co-citizens, often at the risk of their own lives. As before the war, this circle of people was active in many parties and simultaneously created a network of help on ethical grounds to save people in danger. This help, despite their good will, courage and determination, had many limitations and could not always penetrate the barriers of incomprehension and mutual strangeness.

Understanding of these limitations motivated Balicka to get to know Jewish tradition and the history of the Zionist movement. After the war, Balicka and her family maintained close contacts with Jews who had survived the ghetto uprising. She wrote memoirs in which she described her Jewish friends' fight in the two uprisings of 1943 and 1944.[13]

Shortly after the war most of her Jewish friends emigrated to Palestine. Balicka maintained contact with them, even after 1968, when in Poland the ruling Communists exploited antisemitic rhetoric and it was necessary to use a kind of subterfuge to correspond with those in Israel. Then she would give letters to her friends who traveled to West European countries and they mailed them to Israel.

Balicka graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics (Szkoła Główna Handlowa, SGH) and worked there as an assistant professor. Her friends recalled her spontaneous performance during one of student meetings in March '68. A member of the staff in her department called the young people protesting against antisemitism "a spoiled youth." Then Balicka, sitting next to her, stood up and smacked her in the mouth.[14] After this incident, she was prosecuted, but finally acquitted because of her veteran's past. Eventually, she lost her job for many years.

In 1980, Balicka was a member of the Solidarity movement, struggling for democracy and civic liberties in Poland. Until the end of her life she was engaged in building close Jewish-Polish relationship, especially after the collapse of communism in Poland. She was one of the founders of the Association for

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[12] Zuckerman, Surplus of Memory, 427-32.

[13] Helena Balicka – Kozłowska, Mur miał dwie strony (Warsaw: Znak, 2002).

[14] Memories of Balicka's school friend, Zofia Celińska, https://portalplock.pl/pl/11_wiadomosci/13274_przeczytacie-o-nich-w-wikipedii-byly-z-jednej-klasy.html.

Polish-Israeli Friendship. She wrote articles and gave talks about Israel and Zionism. She died in Warsaw in 2003.

Helena Balicka and her parents were nominated by her Israeli friends and received the medal of Righteous Among the Nations from Yad Vashem.

Transcript

INTERVIEWER: Go ahead.

SUBJECT: I thought I could put something in here, so that it would be more comfortable to sit here.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: I am already here. [laughter] My name is Helena Balicka-Kozłowska, nee Balicka. I come from a family that has been part of the intelligentsia for some four generations. My father died in '59[1]; he was a civil engineer. My mother died in '57; she was a pediatrician.[2] The family has been socialist for four generations, and that had a large impact on our activities during the occupation. I want to add that our pro-independence traditions are much older, so my grandparents and great grandparents, grandparents on both sides participated to some extent in the January uprising.[3] My grandmother's brothers, my grandmother helped the insurgents, etc. My parents were heavily involved in the Polish Socialist Party in the 1905 revolution.[4] Father was in the Communist Party, mother was not, but she was very left-wing throughout her life, although maybe a little more critical than father. I was an only child, born in 1920, I went to a good public high school, back when it was a "gimnazjum", not "gimnazjum" and "liceum", that was under the old system. I finished school a year before the war, in 1938. Then I took part in the defense of Warsaw on the Metropolitan Committee of Social Welfare.[5] We provided refugees and fire victims with places to stay, and I worked on recruiting volunteers for the Workers' Brigades for the Defense of Warsaw for a few days. In the following years of the occupation, I created a self-teaching club, I did paid

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[1] Zygmunt Balicki (1888-1959) – a Polish engineer, as a student joined the socialist movement, after WWI he became a radical leftist activist and finally joined the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). During WWII he was engaged in saving Jews in Warsaw but from 1943 was a prisoner of Auschwitz and other Nazi labor camps. After the war he worked in the Ministry of Public Transport. Posthumously, he was honored with the medal of the Righteous Among the Nations.

[2] Jadwiga Balicka neé Heryng (1894-1957) – as a teenager she became a member of the socialist movement. She studied in Vienna, afterwards working as a pediatrician. Together with her husband, she was posthumously honored with the medal of the Righteous Among the Nations.

[3] The January uprising against Tsarist Russia broke out on 22 January 1863. Poland was not then a sovereign state. The partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between Russia, Prussia (later Germany) and Habsburg Austria (later Austro-Hungary) lasted from 1795 until 1918. During this time there were several independence insurrections, of which the January uprising was the last. After the defeat, many of the participants and their families were punished by forced settlement in Siberia. Halina's father, Zygmunt Balicki, was born in Tomsk in Siberia.

[4] The Russian Revolution of 1905 started with diverse social groups demonstrating against the Tsar's autocracy and social inequalities. The protests included liberals, striking workers, student riots and terrorist assassinations. The revolt spread to non-Russian parts of the empire. On Polish lands the revolt had manifold social, political and national dimensions, and all political parties were engaged. The Polish socialists demanded workers' rights and at the same time developed an independence movement and organized expropriation actions to acquire funds for revolutionary activities.

[5] Poland was attacked by Germany on 1 September 1939, and Warsaw defended herself until 28 September.

work, and I finished a school of architecture, it was a two-year continuing education school, and then I started at the Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology, which was running underground courses.[6]

INTERVIEWER: You are saying that was all during the occupation?

SUBJECT: During the occupation. I took part in the Warsaw Uprising[7] in the ranks of the People's Army.[8] First in the Stare Miasto [Old Town], then in Śródmieście [Downtown]for a month, first in the north part, then south. I left Warsaw on October 5th with the civilian population. Later I managed to escape the camp in Pruszków[9], and, in Skała near Cracow, during fighting on the front, as Germans were dropping bombs, or Russians, because we do not know whose plane it was, that was two hours after the Red Army entered, I lost an arm.[10] We returned to Warsaw only in May, because I had been in hospital for almost four months, and the other family members were severely injured. Father had been in Auschwitz since '43. He came back only in September of '45, and then we could live in peace, work, do things, etc. When it comes to…

INTERVIEWER: So tell me… I will ask you a question. You were born in Warsaw, were you not?

SUBJECT: Yes, I was.

INTERVIEWER: Which borough did you live in before the war?

SUBJECT: I was born on Nowowiejska St, near Plac Zbawiciela, and later we lived in Mokotów since '35, on a backstreet a few minutes from Puławska St. But why are you asking?

INTERVIEWER: Were there Jews among your classmates?

SUBJECT: There were. I mean, it was a public high school, which recruited children of government employees first. There was only one girl of the Jewish faith in my class, the one that was in the ghetto

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[6] In occupied Poland, high schools and universities were closed by the Germans. The Polish Underground State founded a secret education system that encompassed thousands of students, e.g. the Warsaw University of Technology had 1500 students in 1944. The classes took place in small groups, usually in private apartments.

[7] The Warsaw Uprising began on 1 August 1944, while the Red Army was approaching the eastern suburbs of the city. The political goal of the Polish underground authorities was to liberate and take control of Poland's capital before the Soviet-backed Polish Committee of National Liberation could do so. The Polish resistance fought with the Germans for 63 days without Soviet support. After the defeat, all citizens were expelled and the city was destroyed by the Germans in retaliation. The Red Army entered the empty, ruined city in January 1945.

[8] The People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL.) was the communist partisan force set up by the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) in January 1944, during World War II. The People's Army incorporated the People's Guard (Gwardia Ludowa, GL), formed in 1942. Both were financed and controlled by the Soviet Union.

[9] The temporary camp for expelled Warsaw dwellers was established by the Germans in the vicinity of Warsaw in Pruszków. From there they were sent to labors camps or different towns and villages.

[10] Cracow was liberated by the Red Army on 19 January 1945.

later, daughter of a researcher at the University of Warsaw, apart from those, two Evangelical protestants, and a few, say, half-bloods. The relations in our class were friendly, and that did not mean a lot.

INTERVIEWER: The friend you spoke about…

SUBJECT: What?

INTERVIEWER: The friend who was in your school, in your class, was that the Sara that was later in the ghetto?

SUBJECT: No, no, no.

INTERVIEWER: Was that someone else?

SUBJECT: That was, as I said, a daughter of a researcher at the University of Warsaw, from a family that was not baptized but fully Polonized.[11] I had no contact with unassimilated Jews, and the first person from that environment that I met in '38, in the summer of '38, was Sara Biderman[12], and our meeting was during a drawing examination. There was a huge room in the Faculty of Architecture, and we had a few hours to draw a model, there were some gypsum models there, everyone had a huge piece of plywood on a stand and drew, but we did not have to stay seated, we could move around the room and rest because we had a few hours. We all moved around more or less, I only saw… We were seated, it seems, by last name, there, in front of me, behind the plywood, I cannot see anyone, that person is not showing. And I just went there, because we could move, and I see that it is a woman of a clearly Semitic appearance, and she appears to be very scared. I look over her shoulder and see that there is something terribly wrong with her drawing, that her perspective, instead of converging, diverges. So I stood there and started quietly saying to her, you might fix it a little here, and here, and here… She told me years later that she was ultimately so scared, that she did not know if I was giving her the right advice, or the wrong one. And then, since her name also started with B, and she sat behind me in math, I was better prepared in math and gave her a cheat sheet, we talked a little there. I did not get in for architecture because I failed compositional drawing, and she, I suppose, failed more subjects. I essentially lost touch with her. But wanting to sit the exams for architecture in '39, I enrolled in a municipal school for decorative art, to learn drawing for a year.[13] There was a group of Jews there, youths my age and some older ones. It was a big group that stuck together, and they were from the Jewish borough, partly spoke Jewish to one another, they stood out, but I did not see any signs of anti-Semitism against them. I randomly asked the, if they knew about a Jewish girl that had sat the exams for architecture but not gotten in, etc., because I had been careless and not asked for her address. It turns out that they know her and we got in touch right before

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[11] Ola Zweibaum was a daughter of dr Juliusz Zweibaum. She lived with her parents in the Warsaw ghetto and moved to the "Aryan" side in July 1942.

[12] Sara "Krysia" Biderman (1920-1972) – a member of the underground Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB), took part in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April-May 1943 and the Warsaw uprising in 1944. After the war she emigrated to Palestine.

[13] The City Art School (Miejska Szkoła Zdobnictwa i Malarstwa), established in Warsaw in 1920, was a professional school open for young people regardless of nationality.

the war, but we hardly talked. And that was the first person from that environment that was strange to me then because there had been many Jews that came to our house, but they were all fully Polonized. That does not mean people who would hide their background, but people who considered themselves Poles. They spoke good Polish, generally had a good, or, say, average appearance, but that was a different environment. Meanwhile Sara was the first person from an environment that spoke Yiddish at home, as it later turned out, a Hasidic environment, and that was something new to me.

INTERVIEWER: Did she speak good Polish?

SUBJECT: Her Polish was flawless, but she had a rather noticeable accent. She went to one of the schools for Jewish youth, where the level was high, they cared about the quality of spoken expression, but since the youths stayed in that environment, they had a very noticeable accent. But I will add something about my father from earlier, that was the time before the war. Father lost his job for political reasons three times in the interbellum period. He was once accused of communism, of communist contacts in '33. I found in his files just after his death that in 1919, when he was an assistant at the Warsaw University of Technology, he lost his job for defending Jewish students, but I do not know the details. And in '37 there was a rather notorious case; father was in the Association of Polish Architects, and they wanted to introduce numerus clausus, maybe numerus nullus.[14] Father along with some other architects very strongly opposed it. One of them was Roman Piotrowski[15], the future minister for construction. And then father said, "In this moment, I am ashamed to be a Pole." And this sentence became notorious and both the Jewish and National Democratic press wrote about it, others did not. Father lost three jobs within one week. In the Society of Company Towns, which by the way was a very decent institution, they evidently did not want to mess with someone. He had lectures in a railroad school, he taught statics, and he had lectures in that women's architecture school, which I graduated from later. He was left out in the cold. And a few days later the architect Mrs. Jankowska [16]came and on behalf of Feliks Wiślicki[17], the director of the artificial silk factory in Tomaszów,[18] he was an industrial tycoon, offered father a job as an engineer for the expansion of the factory on very good conditions. After a year father was offered and even better

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[14] The radical far-right National Democracy party in Poland promoted the *numerus clausus* system to limit the number of Jewish students at the universities. In the early 1930s, the Camp of Great Poland advocated even *numerus nullus* – a complete exclusion of Jews. Polish radicals demanded also segregation of Jewish students, first asking for "voluntary" segregation and, when this was refused, physically attacking Jewish students. *Numerus clausus* was not officially implemented. In 1937-8, following violent demonstrations by radicals, most Polish universities introduced segregation (ghetto benches) and the number of Jewish students decreased.

[15] Roman Piotrowski (1885-1988) – a Polish architect and member of the Praesens Group, which encompassed Polish modernistic architects and urbanists. In the 1930s, he designed one of workers residential neighborhoods in Warsaw. After the war, in 1945-9, he was the Head of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office.

[16] Janina Jankowska (1889-1979) – a Polish architect who studied in Vienna, engaged in the Workers' Children Friends Association (Robotnicze Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci, RTPD) and designed, among other projects, a modern, comfortable kindergarten pavilion.

[17] Feliks Wiślicki (1886-1949) – a Polish chemist, engaged in the socialist movement from the 1880s.

[18] A town in southern Poland.

and more interesting job in building a new celulose factory on the Niemen river, that was the last year before the war when father did that, so this story of his losing three jobs ended up very favorably for us, because this job was very interesting and much better paid. In any case this incident was widely known. And what else do you…

INTERVIEWER: You said that you met that Sara, your friend, on those exams and then just before the war. And you said that she was the first person from the so-called circle of religious, hasidic Jews.

SUBJECT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to their house before the war?

SUBJECT: Before the war I did not. We never… She never invited me, maybe because of their living conditions. She did come to my place, I do not know, maybe twice.

INTERVIEWER: And where did she live?

SUBJECT: On Pawia St.[19]

INTERVIEWER: And when the war broke out, you were not in touch with her?

SUBJECT: So when the war broke out, she did not reach out to me, I lost her address, so I could not reach out to her. I was not hearing from her, so I thought that she either had died, or, like a lot of Jewish youth, and she sympathized very much with the communists, she had crossed to the other side of the Bug river. And she showed up a few days before the closing of the ghetto, of course wearing an armband.

INTERVIEWER: You mean in '40, in March, she came to your house?

SUBJECT: Yes, as I describe in the book.

INTERVIEWER: So can you talk about it? I mean before… Maybe we will start differently. Do you remember, from the period before the ghetto was established[20], any repressions by the Germans against the Jewish population? Things you witnessed.

SUBJECT: I witnessed the cutting of beards. On Zbawiciela square, that was maybe '40, this old man surrounded by a wreath of Germans, maybe officers, but it is hard for me to say for sure, and a larger circle of onlookers, and the bullied man stood so still, I remember. And the Germans were bursting into laughter. And then I saw many cases, I was in the ghetto three or four times.

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[19] During the war Pawia Street was located within the northern part of the Warsaw ghetto.

[20] The order that Jews must wear armbands with the Star of David was issued by the Germans in November 1939. Construction of the wall surrounding the Jewish part of Warsaw began on 1 April 1940. The ordinance of the establishment of the Warsaw Ghetto was signed by Ludwig Fischer, the Governor of the Warsaw District, on 2 October 1940 and on 16 November the Jewish part of the town was closed and henceforth strictly guarded.

INTERVIEWER: We will get to that. I mean…

SUBJECT: Sir, I will add, because my family was very left-wing, very anti-fascist, for us, what was happening in the first years of the war was not a surprise, because we knew what fascism was. So only after a certain threshold was crossed, well, before the war there was no mass extermination, but all the harassment against the Poles, and much more against the Jews, we had been expecting it. We knew about the Kristallnacht[21], and so on, and so on. It was not a surprise for us. Just as when the ghetto was established, and, say, there were Jews who believed that it would be better if they were separated, we thought that it would be disastrous for the Jews. And there were talks and likely no one from our family friends went to the ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: And in the first period, before the ghetto was established, did you or your parents come into contact with the Germans, were you victimized?

SUBJECT: Never.

INTERVIEWER: Never?

SUBJECT: I mean, father was arrested, but just at the moment that an injured Sara came to us, which I write about.

INTERVIEWER: Good.

SUBJECT: And before, not personally.

INTERVIEWER: Then let us say, you remember that, out of the blue, Sara Biderman came to your house? That was in Mokotów[22], was it not?

SUBJECT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: With an armband.

SUBJECT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe this meeting? This was a surprise, I imagine.

SUBJECT: I mean, above all, I was happy that she was alive, because I thought she was either abroad or dead. She described the unbelievably poor conditions they lived in, she described, because I asked about September,[23] she wrote that she had been putting out fires…

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[21] *Kristallnacht* – the Night of Broken Glass – was a pogrom against Jews carried out by the Nazi paramilitary force (SA) and civilians throughout Germany on 9-10 November 1938. The name comes from the broken Jewish shop windows.

[22] Mokotów is the south-western part of Warsaw.

[23] In September 1939 during the defense of Warsaw many houses were burned down.

INTERVIEWER: You mean she said that?

SUBJECT: She wrote. I did not visit her then, and the ghetto was closed soon. I was in the ghetto a few times…

INTERVIEWER: No, no. I mean… On the day she came to you, she…

SUBJECT: No, she came for an hour…

INTERVIEWER: For an hour.

SUBJECT: I do not remember many details.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know that a ghetto was being established? Everyone knew that.

SUBJECT: Of course.

INTERVIEWER: And considering that you knew that, because you just said that both you and your parents were opposed to it.

SUBJECT: But one could be opposed to that with respect to assimilated people, not those with a bad appearance, a bad accent, coming from that environment. They had no chance. Then there was no sword hanging over their heads, and no one knew it. So such an unassimilated family had no chance, and no one saw any need to…

INTERVIEWER: So why did she come to you?

SUBJECT: Just to find out if I was alive, and how things were going for me.

INTERVIEWER: So you just said goodbye, and she went to the ghetto?

SUBJECT: I mean, she had just gone out of the ghetto, a few days before it was closed. The ghetto had been open for a few weeks.

INTERVIEWER: And then, when was your next contact?

SUBJECT: Later, I only visited her once, despite going to the ghetto a few times, because she lived on the other side, and I only went in for a few hours, not many, and the problem was that I came to the ghetto twice in the narrowest spot, through Chłodna Street.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

SUBJECT: Because that was possible then, when the guards were better, I put on my school uniform, I looked a few years younger, and I said I was rushing to school and did not have money for a tram, but I need to get to school, I would give the name of some school on the other side. Both times the guards let me through and I needed to get back at the time when one would come back from school.

INTERVIEWER: But why did you go to the ghetto?

SUBJECT: I had some friends there. A family friend and that classmate I spoke about, the one that was the daughter of a researcher, after the war a professor of the University.

INTERVIEWER: Can you say what that classmate…

SUBJECT: I was once a few steps from here in the parsonage of the All Saints' church at the Hirszfelds' place. [24] Because Marysia Hirszfeld and I were in the same class before high school, that is in the first few years of school. Mrs professor Hirszfeld[25] was my doctor for some time.

INTERVIEWER: Considering this, I understand that for you…

SUBJECT: I mean, first of all, I visited the people I knew better, I did not know Sara well, and second of all, those who lived closer, closer to Chłodna St, so the Zweibaum's, that professor, they lived maybe on Chłodna St, in any case very close, and I was also in a few houses, but that was all either the Small Ghetto or the beginning of the Large Ghetto[26]. Once, I wandered so far in…

INTERVIEWER: And do you remember your first visit in the ghetto?

SUBJECT: Sir, all my visits blend together.

INTERVIEWER: Sorry?

SUBJECT: Those visits blend together.

INTERVIEWER: I understand. But that first sight…

SUBJECT: I only remember that there were different roads, that I once went through the courts…

INTERVIEWER: On Leszno St, right?[27]

SUBJECT: Right. Once I was even caught on the Aryan side as a Jew, because I was exiting there.

INTERVIEWER: Who caught you, the guards?

SUBJECT: And once through the Collegium, because professor Zweibaum, along with a few professors of the Medical Faculty, created those courses, legal courses on fighting epidemics. And that was secret,

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[24] The Hirschfelds were Christians, among a hundred people living in several buildings that belonged to the parish of the All Saints Church in the ghetto.

[25] Hanna Hirszfeld (1884-1964) – a pediatrician. Before WWI she worked in Zurich and after the war she moved to Warsaw. With her husband she conducted research on the serological conflict.

[26] The ghetto consisted of two parts – smaller and larger – divided by Chłodna Street, which was open for gentile Poles. A narrow connection enabled communication between the two parts. Buildings at Chłodna Street belonged to the ghetto.

[27] The state courts building on Leszno Street was on the ghetto border. The courts served all citizens. The main entrance on Leszno street led to the ghetto, and the entrance from Ogrodowa street to the "Aryan" side. Although it was strictly forbidden, it provided a way in and out of the ghetto.

underground medicine for the first two years, then professor Hirszfeld expanded it to further years. I knew many people there. And the building where these courses were held was on the Aryan side, but it was adjacent to the guard post, on the corner of maybe Leszno St and Żelazna St. That house even still stands. And one could get through by entering that building and then, in a crowd of youths carrying IDs and passes, walk through, there were only twenty meters, through the guardpost and into the ghetto. Those with the course taker's IDs were allowed to, professor Zweibaum issued such an ID for me, too, and I went through with the youth. This way I entered the ghetto once. Through the building of the Collegium, those were the courses on fighting epidemics. So I remember my ways, but they all blend together. I only remember that, let us say, I saw, I remember that huge courtyard, where there was ripped asphalt and potatoes, maybe carrots, grew, in any case I was shown that it was a common occurrence at that time. I remember that stark contrast between the Small Ghetto and the Large Ghetto. But I describe all of that in my book. But I do not remember specific things, only the general picture… Apart from that one would see the ghetto on the tram, in public transit.

INTERVIEWER: And was that a great shock for you? Visiting the ghetto? In comparison to Warsaw?

SUBJECT: Yes and no. I mean, I knew more than the average Varsovian what went on in the ghetto. First of all, a friend of mine, I do not remember now, where he worked, but he had a pass, he went to the ghetto daily, so he told me about it. Then my friend from an organization…

INTERVIEWER: From what organization?

SUBJECT: I was in the Union of Youth Struggle.

INTERVIEWER: The Union of Youth Struggle, right? And did she also go to the ghetto?

SUBJECT: She went to the ghetto, I do not know now by what ways, likely different ones, and she kept in touch with people in the organization, and she told me much about it. Apart from that the leftist press wrote a lot. Sometimes the Biuletyn[28] wrote, too. So from what one learned from other people and the press, and thirdly by riding the tram, one could notice a lot. And then there were many more of those tragic panhandling children, which, say, did not reach Mokotów, I mean they very rarely did, those in the best condition, that is those least exhausted, say teenage and not extremely exhausted. Meanwhile on the streets of Śródmieście, say, half a kilometer from the border of the ghetto, there sat those tragic figures, children absolutely unlike people.

INTERVIEWER: Did your friends, those you visited…

SUBJECT: Sorry?

INTERVIEWER: Your friends, such as the family of doctor Hirszfeld, was their situation in the ghetto reasonably normal at the start? Could you say that? That is, was there hunger? Did you bring them food?

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[28] Biuletyn Informacyjny – the main Home Army journal.

SUBJECT: No. I mean, there was poverty. When it comes to the Zweibaums and the Hirszfelds, they had a single room in a shared apartment of the whole family, the amount that they ate was very limited, but by no means did they hunger. The Hirszfelds also got a room for the three of them from Fr. Godlewski, and a few baptized Jewish families lived there, too.[29] But the conditions there were more or less like, maybe a little worse than those on our side, our living standard also decreased greatly.

INTERVIEWER: Fr. Godlewski was a priest… He was a so-called Jewish convert?

SUBJECT: I am hearing it for the first time, that he…

INTERVIEWER: No, I am just asking because I do not know. Fr. Godlewski was a very interesting character.

SUBJECT: During the war he must have been about eighty.

INTERVIEWER: And was he the parish priest of the All Saints' church?

SUBJECT: Yes. So I found a mention of him when I was writing my PhD thesis saying that he spoke against the Warsaw Charitable Society, that it has been taken by the left and so on from a very backwards point of view, in a very mean way. Then an acquaintance told me about him, one that has been dead for many years, it is hard to say, a Jew by origin, because he was assimilated, but he very much underlined that he was a Jew. He was some dentist's apprentice, because he was very talented, and he worked for some very good dentist, he was a prosthodontist, and his boss told him once to make a prosthesis for Fr. Godlewski, because he had golden hands and could do it well. He had an appointment and just as he moved towards the chair, Fr. Godlewski said, "No, a Jew will not put his hands in my mouth." And a few years later the same Fr. Godlewski went to Bronek Anlen[30] and told him to give him his daughter, and he would put her in a convent. Anlen did not give him his daughter, and the daughter and the mother died in Treblinka. And Bronek survived because he was held by the SS. They just took him, and he… Even in Mokotów in the SS house, he was making prostheses for SS men in the study. He managed to escape after a few months, he was not there in the worst period. And later there were wonders being told of Fr. Godlewski, how he saved, how a lot of children that went to the convent went through his hands. But

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[29] Marceli Godlewski (1865-1945) became a parish priest at the All Saints' Church in Warsaw in 1915. He held the position for 30 years. As a young and socially sensitive priest he was active in helping workers, later in the 1930s he became engaged politically and was known for his antisemitic rhetoric. Because of his age at the beginning of the war he wanted to retire. However, he decided not to abandon the parish when the order establishing the ghetto was issued. He opened a kitchen for the poor and issued false baptismal certificates that helped many Jews go into hiding. With the help of nuns he transported Jewish children out the ghetto to an orphanage in the Warsaw suburbs. Posthumously he was honored with the medal of Righteous Among the Nations.

[30] Bronisław Anlen (1907-1984) – lost his whole family during the deportations. After the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto he hid in a Polish friend's apartment. Recognized as a Jew on the street, he was arrested but was liberated by the Polish fighters during the Warsaw uprising. As a doctor (and dentist) he then organized the first medical care for wounded in the Old Town.

they did not believe him at the start. There was a similar story with Waldorf,[31] he had been one of the great "Jew-eaters" before the war, who got to Auschwitz. And I heard that from various people, but father confirms this, that when he was in Auschwitz, they called Waldorf the Jewish daddy, and he had been one of the best known "Jew-eaters". I myself, say, had a friend in professor Święcicki,[32] who would say after the war, "I do not like the Jews," I would say, "but why," "I just do not, that is it." And later I learned that they had been hiding Jews, some of them for long, he had two small children. He disliked Jews, but he hid Jews because he thought that was his Christian duty. People were very different.

INTERVIEWER: And Fr. Godlewski initially was in the Small Ghetto? In the All Saints' church?

SUBJECT: I mean that was the only open church in the ghetto, the border of the ghetto was right behind the church, as far as I remember. In any case the church was in the ghetto, on the edge of the ghetto. I was in the parsonage once, at the Hirszfelds'.

INTERVIEWER: Please tell me, when did you find your friend Sara Biderman in the ghetto?

SUBJECT: I mean, I had… Because, when she visited before the closing of the ghetto, she left me her address and I went there then.

INTERVIEWER: Of course, you describe the way to that Sara, but do you remember her, how was it? Because your book came out…

SUBJECT: Fifty years later, I remember what I wrote ten years after the war, and it is hard for me to add anything new.

INTERVIEWER: Please tell me. Because only I know that, but…

SUBJECT: Above all a crazy crowd and wailing. What stuck out first was that one walked into a crowd of people, ragged people, wailing, some of whom burst through the crowd to get somewhere, others stood and traded whatever: two matchboxes, three shoelaces, and so on. Among those trading were many small children, as she explained to me, because I walked around the ghetto with someone later, sometimes those children are supporting their parents because sometimes people, those who still have some means, will buy something they do not need from a child, just so that the child can make some money. I remember that, I do not remember which street that was on, as I was walking to Sara's, some hands sticking out of windows, maybe even from behind bars, unbelievable numbers of hands and a horrible scream, mumble in Polish and Jewish: "help, give bread," I do not remember the words, and then that friend of mine I was walking with explained that it was a place for those driven away from the vicinities of Warsaw, those who were expelled as they were, who had nothing to exchange for money and no possibility of working, and that there were such buildings in the ghetto where they lay crowding on the floor. The toilets are clogged and everything is spilling out outside, they get some watery soup once or twice a day, there is typhus there

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[31] Jerzy Waldorf (1910-1999) – a journalist and outstanding music-critic. Before WWII he became famous as an admirer of Mussolini's cultural policy.

[32] Andrzej Święcicki (1915-2011) – a sociologist and, during the war, a soldier in the Home Army.

and other serious diseases, and they are all dying, and the municipal authorities are trying to keep them locked up for the sake of all the rest, so that they will not spread the disease. And then, during those walks through the ghetto I saw those horrible, lying down… Those people that looked like corpses, both those terribly famished and those swollen from hunger. And maybe the scariest impression was that of the small children that were completely wrinkled. Those arms, legs like sticks, such dark faces, as I wrote in my book, more like little monkeys, really.

INTERVIEWER: And you visited that Sara, where did she live then?

SUBJECT: On Pawia St.

INTERVIEWER: On Pawia St, right? What did that house look like?

SUBJECT: A regular large tenement house, with a house, a well, heaps of trash as usual, because there were problems with waste disposal there, there was a stench… I remember that a whole family of many people was in one room. But we talked on the stairs, because she, she felt a little awkward…

INTERVIEWER: Was she ashamed?

SUBJECT: She went out with me, we talked on the stairs, and then she walked with me for a bit. And then there were those later stories…

INTERVIEWER: And what did you two talk about then? What did you talk about on that first meeting? Was she happy that you came?

SUBJECT: She… Yes and no. For her, I was a guest from another planet. So she was more or less surprised rather than happy. I asked her how their life was, although that was actually a stupid question. And she said that she gave some lessons, still learned drawing because she still dreamed of architecture. That she was terribly hungry. She had a few siblings, but I do not remember how many. Her father was maybe in a chalat overcoat when he opened the door for me. I was asked above all what the political situation was, if there was hope. Everyone in the ghetto was talking about it, anyway. "What do you know on the Aryan side, when will the war end?" - there were questions, details - depending on when one talked.

INTERVIEWER: Did you bring any food then?

SUBJECT: What?

INTERVIEWER: Did you bring any food to the ghetto then?

SUBJECT: No, I did not bring her any food, but it was strange that I went with flowers, about which someone wrote an article in "Fołks Sztyme"[33], nonsense. Because we lived in a small house, the owner had a garden, and as I told him that I was going to the ghetto, he cut some freshly bloomed, very beautiful

[33] *Fołks Sztyme* was a newspaper published in Polish and Yiddish in Communist Poland. It was established in 1946.

peonies from the bush and gave them to me, I think to myself, I will not come back home so that I will not bring bad luck on myself; when one comes back, then it will not work. Only for that reason did I take that bunch of fresh, beautiful flowers. As I was walking through the streets of the ghetto, people asked me, "Where did you buy this, where did you buy this," I replied, "on the other side." And then I was in a few homes and left a flower in each home. I did not even know if I would reach her.

INTERVIEWER: You mean that talk then, that meeting was short?

SUBJECT: Short.

INTERVIEWER: Because it was on the stairs and she walked you back?

SUBJECT: Well, she walked me back for a bit, but the meeting was short.

INTERVIEWER: And then, when was the next meeting?

SUBJECT: The next was in November of '42.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: And the first one I talked about was in '41.

INTERVIEWER: In '41.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe summer. Well, when peonies were blooming, so that must have been June. I got a postcard then saying "I am still alive, if you want to see me, go to the Czerniaków' estate[34] behind Plac Bernardyński at 8 pm, or after 8 pm. I was sure that she went with the outpost to that estate. So I took some food, some sweaters or something like that and went there. That was far from us, with some stops for transfers, it was a long way. And I went, I was past the buildings, you could not see anything, no group was walking. I went in the last of those buildings, actually it was much like a rural hut or some small house, and I ask if any Jews were working on that estate. Yes, there are, and I say, "Did they go back to the ghetto yet?" And the woman says, "But they live there, in those barracks, you go there to the right, close, they live there." And then I went, and that was one of my greater surprises. I saw, I do not remember how many barracks there were, one, two, three, but in any case there were such wooden barracks, and I heard a conversation behind the wall, livened voices in Jewish, even laughter. I started calling, but I was scared that there might be a guard, I called quietly, no one was coming, no one heard anything, although I saw them walking around outside.

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[34] Helena probably met Sara at the Czerniaków Jewish farm that existed in Wojciech Zatwarnicki's estate. Young Jews from Zionists organizations lived and worked over there for food and salary. In July 1940, Zionist youth groups (like Ha-shomer ha-tza'ir, Dror and others) and members of the Jewish socialist Bund established the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB, Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa), an underground organization to engage in armed struggle against the Nazis against deportations. The farm became a base for the ŻOB fighters. It existed until December 1942, when the ŻOB members returned to the ghetto in order to prepare an uprising. The Jewish uprising ended on 19 April 1943, when SS troops commanded by gen. SS Juergen Stroop entered the ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: Excuse me for a while, the pause will be short.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, please.

SUBJECT: So, because no one was reacting to my calling, I, standing by the gate, fully unconsciously somehow turned the handle. The door gave way, I went inside and was incredibly surprised, because how? Here are Jews, a few months after almost the whole ghetto was liquidated[35], a low fence that essentially anyone could jump over and an open gate, too. Someone was walking there, and I asked him to bring Sara Biderman. He asked her. We talked for a while because it was late, because it was past curfew, and I had to walk for an hour or an hour and a half. And she told me that… I mean, I mostly wanted to learn what it was like during the great destruction because I was very worried about her, because other friends, we generally managed… We generally managed to get my other friends out of the ghetto. For example, Oleńka Zweibaumówna, that friend of mine, daughter of that researcher. She was on the Aryan side then, and as she learned of the horrible roundups on the first day, she ran to the court and saw that the doors were still open on both sides. We all had agreed on a code with the ghetto, and it had a name, I do not remember what it was. In any case, she communicated to her brother that there was a passage through the court. We called the Hirszfelds and some other people that had a telephone to say that one could still get out through the courts. That is, one could do that then, but it was not known if that way would be open the day after tomorrow, tomorrow, or in two hours. The Hirszfelds were supposed to go straight to us, but in the end went to someone else. They only alerted us. The people that were warned that they could… I mean not warned, but alerted, that it was possible to go through the courts, they managed to get through in the first two, three days. But there was no way to alert Sara, firstly because she did not have a phone, and then she was too far from the people who had a phone, my acquaintances, for anyone to dare go there during those horrible roundups. And I did not know… I thought she had died. She was a very helpless, impractical girl, kind of a fantasist. I, although I had kept her card, was very glad that she was alive and started asking her about everything. She said that she managed to avoid the liquidation; it was actually a series of fortunate coincidences. Her entire family was taken to the gas chambers. She was then, or had been earlier, a member of Dror. [36]They were not fully mobilized, maybe partly, in any case she was already in the organization. And she managed, she managed to escape from the way to the Umschlagplatz[37] many times. She once kicked a gendarme who was dragging her, and he fell down the stairs. In any case, she survived miraculously, and the organized youth managed to find work in

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[35] The ghetto was entirely liquidated after the defeat of the uprising in May 1943. After the greatest wave of deportations in the summer of 1942, however, the ghetto area still existed (with workshops where Jews had to work for the German war economy) and about 35,000 people still lived in the ghetto.

[36] Dror (Hebrew: Liberty) – one of the youth Jewish organizations in Poland preparing its members for agricultural work; Dror was part of the "Hechalutz" movement, founded to prepare youths planning to emigrate to Palestine.

[37] Umschlagplatz – a place within the ghetto where Jews were brought by the Germans and Jewish police to await (sometimes a couple of days) the trains deporting them to Treblinka.

the Czerniakóws' estate, where the halutzes (pioneers) from the Grochów farm[38] had been working since the start of the war, it was a hah-shara[39], one of the better known in Poland. I do not remember how many there were there. Whether there were fifty of them or a hundred in Czerniaków, I absolutely do not remember. She said the conditions were terrible, that the food was very bleak. They were digging out vegetables, still in November, they ate those raw vegetables from the field, they bathed in the lake in November. She led me in to the barracks, where there were only makeshift beds and a few little kerosene lamps. But the atmosphere was pretty good, although of course there was a great uncertainty. And I ask her, "Why do you not run away, you are not guarded?" They say, "Theoretically, we are guarded, one old Volksdeutscher[40] is watching over us, and he is a very decent man and helps us, makes things happen. He delivered that postcard to you. Many of us have tried to run. But we do not have the addresses, neither in Warsaw nor where the guerrillas are. And most of us either have a bad accent or generally speak Polish poorly. And those that have a good accent have a bad appearance and vice-versa." She says that some have escaped, but out of those that tried, some were captured. Germans or… In any case she did not speak in detail. She herself had been on the station, but she got scared and came back. And only then, by that gate and in that discussion with her, did I realize something that I should have known earlier, what I had known theoretically, but only then did it get to me. The isolation of the Jews from the Polish society. Not because of walls but because they did not have the addresses, and they had no means. And even if they did have the addresses, they could not get through except for… What was the difference between those that were assimilated, our various family friends that would live with us, some of them often staying overnight, some living with us for a few months, a few weeks. That was absolutely like heaven and earth. And they were in a desperate situation. Only then, in Czerniaków, did I understand the meaning of the isolation of those two communities that had supposedly lived next to each other for a thousand years. And then I told her, later I was terribly ashamed of saying that. That I could not take her in then, because someone was already living with us. At that moment, someone from the ghetto, that was Hanka Szapirówna-Sawicka[41], would visit us every few days and stay for the night. But if anything were brewing, then come to me. And I should have known that at the last moment… There is no chance to run, one has to run early. I could not forgive myself for that later. From an acquaintance of mine, a man, also a Jew, who was my boss in the architectural and urban planning workshop. By the way, there is an interesting

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[38] Grochów Farm was where "Hechalutz" members were sent in the 1930s to study agriculture in the pioneering training institute in Grochów in Warsaw.

[39] Hah-shara (Hebrew: training) – a Zionist pioneer training farm.

[40] *Volksdeutche* – ethnic Germans living in Poland before the war, or those Poles who during the war signed the German National List (*Deutsche Volksliste)* declaring adherence to the German nation.

[41] Hanna Szapiro (1917-1943) – a leftist activist. She studied law at Warsaw University and was a member of the radical leftist Social Youth Organization "Życie" (Life). During the German occupation she used the name Sawicka. She was an outstanding member of the hidden leftist movement. In 1942 she became a member of the Communist Polish Workers Party. In 1943 she was arrested and died in a Nazi prison.

digression with the workshop.[42] There were a few Jews, that is, the future Mrs. professor Syrkusowa[43] was the workshop's director, the engineer Dyszko[44] was one, my immediate boss, Toeplitz[45], the father of that KTT (Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz - MG)[46], also worked there, in any case there were very many of them in the Warsaw Housing Cooperative[47], in the Social Construction Enterprise[48], many Jews, but all of them absolutely assimilated. So I learned from one of my colleagues that he heard that they had come… No, sorry, I left her once and visited her again.

INTERVIEWER: On that farm?

SUBJECT: Yes, in Czerniaków. I am sorry I went too far. And then I went to her, that was around Christmas or just after it, also with some package, I saw that the barracks were deserted. I went into that same hut where I had asked the first time, and she said, "Madame, they were driven away a few days ago, but I do not know where, whether back to the ghetto or elsewhere. And then someone told me that they had been sent to some terrible camp, subcamp, little camp, where the conditions were as for Soviet POWs, that is, not even any barracks in the winter. Because of that essentially everyone is dying from the cold and hunger because the conditions there are exactly as in the camps for Soviet POWs[49], of which I knew well. Because in that period… No, that was in '41 to '42, earlier, father and I would go take pictures of Soviet POWs that had run away from those camps, and there were some 150 of them in

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[42] Balicka probably meant the Architecture and Urban Planning Studio (PAU, Pracownia Architektoniczno- Urbanistyczna), which prepared the reconstruction of Warsaw after the war.

[43] Helena Syrkusowa (1900-1982) – a Polish architect and one of the founders of the Preasens Group that popularized a modern and social architecture in Poland before and after WWII. See Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002).

[44] Aleksander Dyszko-Wolski (1913-1998) – an engineer who, during the Nazi occupation, hid with his wife and child on the "Aryan" side in many places, including Warsaw. At this time he worked secretly in the Architecture and Urban Lab. In 1944, as a member of the People's Army, he took part in the Warsaw Uprising. After the war he worked as a chief of the Department of Economy in the Ministry of Public Security. Probably in 1947 he left Poland. He died in Israel in 1998. At his request, the medal of Righteous Among the Nations was awarded to Stanisław Tołwiński (a member of the PAU – see note 8), who saved his life during the occupation.

[45] Kazimierz Leon Toeplitz (1902–91) – a lawyer who, as a member of the illegal Communist movement, was condemned to prison in prewar Poland. For many years he examined demographic issues concerning workers' houses.

[46] Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz (1933-2010) – a Polish film critic and journalist.

[47] The Warsaw Housing Cooperative (WSM, Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa) – established in 1921 by Polish left-wing activists, advocated workers cooperatives and cheap and modern workers' residential buildings.

[48] The Social Construction Enterprise (Społeczne Przedsiębiorstwo Budowlane, SPB) – was an association operating at the WSM; well-known for its extensive helping of Jewish people during the occupation.

[49] About 5.7 million Soviet POWs were detained in Nazi custody in terrible conditions. Starvation and disease resulted in mass death, estimated at 3.3-3.5 million victims. One of the Soviet POW camps was located in Dęblin, 40 miles from Warsaw.

Warsaw, they all went to the People's Army guerrilla. Father had a good camera, and either father of I went to those apartments they were hiding in, either alone or a few of them at once, and we took their photos for the Kennkarte[50]. I had an especially, twice, difficult task because I had to photograph Mongols, one was a Kazakh and the other an Uzbek, that were so like one another and so unlike Mongols.

INTERVIEWER: Were you making Polish Kennkarten for Mongols?

SUBJECT: They were made too. I mean, I was not making them.

INTERVIEWER: I understand, but were the Kennkarten Polish?

SUBJECT: Yes. And then, when I was told that it was not known if they had been sent back to the ghetto, I learned that they were in some camp and that they had all died of hunger. Which turned out, luckily, not to be true. And then for a long, long time I had no news of Sara. And maybe now I will go back to the other people. So at different times, there were a few people staying with us for a few weeks, but those people were as if related to the family and family friends. Mr. Szapiro[51], the father, met with Hanka regularly, every Wednesday.

INTERVIEWER: With Hanka Sawicka-Szapiro?

SUBJECT: With Hanka Szapiro-Sawicka. Her father, who lived as Bolesław Sadowski, would come… Then Hanka tried to be with her father for as long as possible. She and her father loved each other madly. Hanka would stay overnight often, she had some sublet room. In the August of 1942, when Mr. Szapiro came to us, it turned out he had a high fever, he stayed with us, it was typhus. Hanka would sit by his side all day, and the other one that sat was Kazio Zweibaum[52]. Currently he is professor Zakrzewski, who was an alumnus then, he was essentially a doctor already. There were three people then. Later there was also the issue of burying Mr. Bernard. After the arrest, already after the death of Hanka Szapiro-Sawicka, we had spies come to our place, too. They were pretending to be from some underground organization, it all looked so muddy, and then my parents decided that I should just leave Warsaw for a few weeks, and I did have a place to go because my classmate was near Dęblin.[53] And I went to her place for a few weeks. And about Sara…

INTERVIEWER: Maybe we will start from that moment, that you were in the People's Army. To the People's Army.

SUBJECT: Yes.

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[50] *Kennkarte* – an ID issued by the German authorities to all inhabitants of the General Government.

[51] Bernard Szapiro (1866-1943) – a Polish-Jewish socialist, trade union activist, and journalist.

[52] Kazimierz Zweibaum Zakrzewski (1918-2000) – a Polish doctor, studied at Warsaw University, son of Prof. Juliusz Zweibaum. During the war he took part in the research on death by starvation conducted by Jewish doctors in the Warsaw ghetto.

[53] Dęblin – a town south-east of Warsaw.

INTERVIEWER: From when?

SUBJECT: Sir, everyone in the Union of Youth Struggle[54] was counted as members of the People's Army, but really I was in the uprising, because earlier we used to say "we, members of the Union of Youth Struggle," and we were counted as the People's Army members, but I did not take part in any military work. I took part in educational work.

INTERVIEWER: May we? Yes?

SUBJECT: Already in the spring of '43, in the early spring, I worked in Żoliborz[55], and twice a boy came to our house without introducing himself. He was saying that he had some business with me, and he did not want to tell mother what the matter was. He said that he would come again, and the second time, he brought a letter from Sara, in which she asked us to make all the documents for her. "Do not think about the costs, I have the money." I did not know what that meant. But without the photographs, without any data, I could not make them. Then also came Frania Razmus[56], she was a great runner for the Jewish Combat Organization, who looked like a country girl.

INTERVIEWER: What was her name?

SUBJECT: What?

INTERVIEWER: What was her name?

INTERVIEWER: Razmus. Frania Razmus was from the Poznań voivodeship, looked like a 14-year-old country girl, and was 16. She had no trace of either the look or the accent. She was incredibly brave, calm, collected. She was to deliver the photograph and the money for the fake documents. She was saying that Sara would come to us before Easter in '43. As I said, I had gone to around Dęblin, and I got the news about the outbreak of the uprising in the ghetto. Of course, the news was fantastical. Some that the uprising had been crushed on the second day, other that the Jews had captured the Pawiak[57] and the Poles had joined, and that there was a general uprising. You know, as usual the news is absolutely inconsistent. I was driving and thinking that maybe Sara is at home. There was no one there, we were all very worried about the ghetto uprising. Because I worked in Żoliborz and lived in Mokotów, I would ride through the Krasińskich'square twice a day every day, I would see that famous carousel[58] twice a day, too. And once I

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[54] The Young People's Fighting Union (Związek Walki Młodych, ZWM) – was created in 1943 as a result of a merger of a few radical leftist and Communist organizations and published the journal *The Struggle of the Youth* ("Walka Młodych"). The Union became ideologically tied to the Communist Polish Workers Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) and its military branch, the People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL).

[55] Żoliborz – a part of Warsaw.

[56] Frania Rasmus – Frania Beatus see note 27.

[57] Pawiak – the German Secret State Police (Gestapo) prison in Warsaw

[58] Carousel on Krasińskich Square – Krasińskich Square, adjacent to the ghetto wall. In early spring 1943 a Warsaw photographer took a photo of boat-shaped swings and a carousel set up on the corner of Długa Street and Krasińskich Square. There is no proof that people came to play there during the

witnessed how, when there was a sewer hatch [59]open on the Krasińskich' square , a group of people stood there. A mechanic came out and says, "Now we have made a trap for the Jews, and I have hung a bundle of grenades, and when they come by, the grenades will explode." Then I remember my terrible powerlessness. Then, when they were cutting that old man's beard at the start of the war and later, that you could not say anything. And fortune wanted it this way that 15 months later I myself would be walking through that hatch, that sewer under gunfire.

INTERVIEWER: And did you know anyone else than Sara from those young people?

SUBJECT: Did I do what?

INTERVIEWER: Did you know anyone else?

SUBJECT: From that group?

INTERVIEWER: From the group of Union of Youth Struggle members in that period.

SUBJECT: Only at a later time. Only later.

INTERVIEWER: You mean, you came to Warsaw from Dęblin? On hearing about the uprising in Warsaw.

SUBJECT: From a village near Dęblin. Sara was not there, there was no news from her. I am saying that I was going to work and one day… I saw… I would need to check which day that was. I came home, mom says, Sarah has come, she is asleep. She said that Sara had come in a horrible condition, exhausted, drawing attention to her appearance because… Ten days after leaving the sewers, having spent 18 hours a day in the sewers, ten days without washing, hungry, in a forest. So she says that Sara, horribly lousy, had the time to wash herself, was sleeping.

INTERVIEWER: That was May of '43?

SUBJECT: That was May of 1943. Yes, it was, it was May 10th. And she came in the first group of 40 people that had stayed the night on Ogrodowa St[60] and then was given a ride away, thanks to Kazik, because the Polish Workers' Party organization had failed. They were transported to Łomianki, to around Łomianki, and a truck was supposed to come for them the next day, and it did not. And they were waiting there with weapons, without water or food. When they wanted to go to the well, they got scared because all the dogs in the village started barking. When those with the best appearance wanted to buy bread, they were able to buy little without attracting attention. Eventually, some decent peasant discovered them, and

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Jewish ghetto uprising, but this image of "bystanders to the Holocaust" became emblematic. The famous Polish poet Czesław Miłosz perpetuated the fame of this picture in a poem titled "Campo di Fiori."

[59] Sewer hatch – the municipal sewage system became a means of evacuation for Jewish fighters in 1943 and for the Warsaw uprising participants in 1944.

[60] See note 27.

he would bring them water and food. That was a drop in a sea for 40 people, because he also needed not to attract attention. Because none of them knew any addresses, Sara said that she could go and went with it. Almost all the way she went on foot because the shoes were unfit for walking after the sewers, I know something about it. I remember how she woke up thinking that she had to go. And I said, no way you will leave. She was exhausted and she was looking terrible. So that day and the next few days I was running errands for the Jewish Fighting Organization[61]. She did have, I do not remember where from, those addresses after all. Then runners started coming to us. That Frania[62] would come, Kazik[63] came maybe two or three times, I do not remember how many times. But I remember that Kazik would tell us about his recent walking through the sewers, entering the ghetto, about how he had looked for bunkers, for comrades. He would tell us, "that was a few hours ago." This is what he writes in his book.[64]

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: But I remember his reaction literally a few hours after his arrival.

INTERVIEWER: And when did he come? I understand that Sara was at your place for a few days, right?

SUBJECT: No.

INTERVIEWER: Only one day?

SUBJECT: She was at our place for some two and a half months.

INTERVIEWERS: So since May she was there for two and a half months, right?

SUBJECT: Right, two, two and a half, I do not remember exactly.

INTERVIEWER: And then you were running errands for the Jewish Fighting Organization?

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[61] See note 33.

[62] Frania Beatus (1926- 1943) – a courier between the ghetto and the rest of the city, conveying messages and smuggling weapons. She committed suicide three weeks after the Warsaw ghetto uprising began, prompted by the information that majority of the Jewish Fighting Organization's leadership had been wiped out on May 8 in a bunker on Miła Street.

[63] Kazik (Kazimierz) Ratajzer vel Simhah Rotem (1924-2018) – as a young man he became a member of the Zionist movement. Under the Nazi occupation he served as the head courier of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB). He took part in the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943 and in the Warsaw uprising in 1944. After the end of the war he joined the Nakam group, an organization of Holocaust survivors who engaged in revenge killing by poisoning of German soldiers and Nazis. In 1947 he emigrated to Palestine and lived in Jerusalem.

[64] Simhah Rotem, *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter: The Past within Me* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

SUBJECT: I was running errands for the Jewish Fighting Organization. That is, on that first day I went to Krzaczek[65]; I was lucky to find him.

INTERVIEWER: Krzaczek was the one responsible for the cars, the truck?

SUBJECT: He was the one responsible for the truck, and I said what the situation was like. And then I was in a few places. But I do not remember exactly. In any case it was that I was running instead of her and getting things done. And then runners would come to us a few times, those were Kazik and Frania. Maybe Lodzia[66] would come already then, but I am not sure about that.

INTERVIEWER: That is, you are saying that this Sara was hiding at your place then, with you and your parents?

SUBJECT: She was hiding in the sense that, of course, she was not registered, but she would go out sometimes, it was hard to stop her. She was behaving in a very non-conspiratorial way in the house and outside; she would meet someone she knew, family or friends, and she would embrace them expressively, she would expressively greet people on the street, endangering that person. She was being very non-conspiratorial at our place, too. So we had a big problem with her.

INTERVIEWER: And were you worried about the neighbors, for instance?

SUBJECT: So… We did not have such neighbors that would go and snitch to the Germans, but there were those that could demand of us, if they saw her, that she should go away, because I remember that they asked us to stop feeding the Jewish children that would come to us because they would sometimes come. That is, they would not have denounced us, but they would have put pressure on us. So except for the janitor and our family friends essentially no one knew. And later she would switch to an organizational apartment that was rented by the Jewish Fighting Organization in Rembertów[67] and was there maybe with Luba[68], and I do not remember with whom else. And there that gendarme…

INTERVIEWER: Shot her.

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[65] Władysław Gaik pseud. Krzaczek (1914-1944) – the People's Army soldier who helped the Jewish fighters evacuated from the Warsaw ghetto after the uprising's collapse.

[66] Lodzia (Lea) Hammerstein-Silberstein (1924-2014) – before the war she was involved in the Zionist youth movement. In 1941 she left the Warsaw ghetto and lived and worked under a false, non-Jewish, identity. She served as a ŻOB courier. In 1944 she took part in the Warsaw uprising. After the war she left Poland. She lived in Israel and finally settled in the US.

[67] Rembertów – one of Warsaw's suburbs.

[68] Luba Zylberg – Gawisar (1924-2011) – born in Warsaw into an assimilated Jewish family; a Jewish resistance activist in the Warsaw ghetto and participant in the uprising. Since 1946 she has lived in Israel, originally in the Lochame ha-Geta'ot kibbutz, then in Tel Aviv.

SUBJECT: But I knew two different accounts. One, that it was at home and he came there, other, that he caught her on the street. Actually, two or three people told me that slightly differently. But maybe that is not so important.

INTERVIEWER: You are talking about that event when she was in Rembertów and went out, that gendarme caught her and shot her, right?

SUBJECT: So, she… It was so… I do not remember why now, I did not go to work. I took a day's leave. I remember, it was around 8 am, when I should have been on my way or at work. The doorbell rang, and I saw that Sara was leaning against the doorframe and was as if green, looking horrible, powerless. She said in a barely audible whisper, "a gendarme shot me a little." I dragged her to the bathroom and saw that this "a little" was a hole next to the navel and another hole on the opposite side, finger-sized holes. And she survived because she had a dark blue woolen dress. And that blood clotted in that many hours, it was some 12 hours after the shooting, from the waist down, she had a wide stripe of coagulated blood that looked dark brown, unlike blood. And that actually saved her. She fell unconscious first, then waited it out while lying down, crawled to some puddle and drank water, which of course one must not do when one has been shot in the stomach. And she drank water the whole night. Later, as she told me, she crawled to the last stop for some four miles, walked maybe four hours without documents or tickets, rode two trams through the whole of Warsaw and reached us. So that was an unlikely feat. We laid her down and mother called father, who was at work, to come immediately. The matter was that she was in such a state, that there were more people to take care of her, and to a surgeon she knew, that he should come immediately because mother was in pain from appendicitis. And after almost an hour, when we were waiting for father and that doctor Jurewicz[69] from the Knights of Malta Hospital, the doctor came, saw that mom was not having any seizure and asked if there was anyone else sick or injured, and his first words were, "At the stop there was a military police patrol, a few other people and I were asked to identify ourselves and we were let go, and your father, no one knows why, was taken by the Germans. They could be here any moment. We did not know if father had a ton of pamphlets on him because in the morning, when he was going to work, he took a whole file of pamphlets, and we did not know if he had had the time to give them away. He could even have forgotten that he had gotten a phone call like that. There was no certainty. And he looked at her, saw those little holes, saw that there was an inflammation of the peritoneum, that a surgery was needed immediately, or she would die here. And in the other room he said, "Fourteen hours after the shooting? She will not survive the surgery. But take her because the Gestapo can be here any moment." That was the most memorable day of the whole occupation for me. All those uprising days were not as great, because that depended, in some way, on me. I mean, if you are waiting to see if a bomb will fall on your head or not, if the house will be hit by a mine, a so-called cow, that does not depend on me. Whereas here, not only Sara's life or ours depended on my speed and awareness of the mind. And maybe that is why it got so etched in my memory. I was even talking with Kazik. Kazik had a somewhat different account of some events. I say, "Kazik, there are two reasons why I remember it so well. First, I wrote my memoirs about Sara a few years after the war, the first draft, and I finished it later in 1958, but I wrote the first draft a few years after the war, while you are writing forty

[69] Jurewicz – it has not been possible to establish who he was.

years after the war. And apart from that, it was the most important day of the occupation, while for you it was a third or fourth-rate episode involving Sara. You just remember the most important ones best."

INTERVIEWER: And what were the differences between your accounts? Because I understand that Kazik, right?

SUBJECT: Well, that is a later matter. I will go on to Kazik soon, but I meant…

INTERVIEWER: No, because I mean this exact matter. Because I understand that a Gypsy told him…

SUBJECT: Yes. I will get to that soon.

INTERVIEWER: So how did his account differ from yours? What was the difference?

SUBJECT: Now, I do not remember, but there was a difference. And remind me to mention my father in Auschwitz.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SUBJECT: And the situation was such that the doctor said that he would look around to see if anything was possible. And I ran to the Wola Hospital on Płocka St, where we were friends with a young doctor. And it was really a miracle because had I come a minute or two later, I would not have met him because he was just leaving the hospital then. I just met him at the door of the hospital. I told him what the situation was. She did not even have those fake documents. That is, the documents themselves were authentic, in the name of someone dead, but then, of course, the German, it seems, had taken those documents from her. He said, "bring her here, I will alert everyone. Of course, someone should bring her here, some old women who found her on the street would be best. She must not say anything. We will take care of her, and she must not mention your last name." Well, we knew that ourselves. I, then… Those trams were so slow. Rare and slow. I remember that hellish haste, but going on foot would have taken much longer. And on the way, stopping to take a different tram, I visited some family friends on Królewska St. They were agents for some industrial and trading company, and they were the richest among our acquaintances. I came in and said, "give as much money as you have at home, because we will need to bail out soon." And they gave me the money, and I took the other tram, and I remember, I was running, like to that hospital, and we were living in a quiet backstreet. And before the turn, I remember that I stopped, it was a beautiful sunny day, I was too sacred to look whether there was a post in front of the house.

INTERVIEWER: If there was a what?

SUBJECT: A German post.

INTERVIEWER: That means -

SUBJECT: Cars. There were none, so I went ahead. Her condition got worse. I said that we need to transport her now and that we had a spot secured. And mom had also brought… Father's sister was there

and mom's friend, a Jew, Widerszalowa. No, sorry, Chodakowa[70], nee Widerszal. And we put my clothes on Sara, we brought in a cab, and I remember a great cabman who said, looked, and two people were carrying her, almost dragging her. He looked at her appearance, on her face, and he said, "Well, I had better put up a roof." It was a beautiful sunny day, and he put up a roof and said nothing more. There was trouble in the hospital because they did not want to admit her. Apparently not everyone had been alerted. About that surgery, as doctor Jurewicz later told us, surgeons across Warsaw were telling each other that it was unbelievable that they had made it. And she was behaving terribly. It was not her fault that she was talking nonsense in Jewish, of course, but if she got up and drank water against the doctor's prohibition when she was not allowed to drink for two days. And then the worst thing was that she gave our phone number, our last name and was asking about us and so on. We used someone to deliver messages to her, we told her that we would be very well informed, but that she must not ask. That was horrible on her part because she was conscious already.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know why she did that? She was experienced in working in secrecy. Right? It is 1943, still war. So she is breaking the secret.

SUBJECT: She really was breaking the secret. A few weeks after she left the hospital there was some denouncement and most of the doctors were taken on one day, they went to Auschwitz. The one who treated her, Grzela-Gromkowski[71], died in Auschwitz. And there was Mrs. doctor Tetmajerowa[72], whom I saw a few days ago, that remembers Sara from the hospital. They would take in Jews, injured guerrillas. She says that there were at least two, three Jews or guerrillas at the same time, so hospitals had to report all injured people to the Germans. So that hospital survived pretty long, because until mid '43, only later there was this incident. I do not remember how many, but many doctors went, and maybe other staff, too. So the problem was that mother and I were still expecting there to be some house search in relation to father, it was unknown what the investigation would look like. The house must be clean. In our free time, we would sit and dig through stuff all day, and we would keep finding completely forgotten things. Some old pamphlets, among others a ghetto armband. A year after the liquidation of the ghetto. We would run; father was on Aleja Szucha[73], we knew. We were guessing that he did not have the pamphlets, but there was still no way that we could take him in. And we lost touch, we did not have any addresses. We lost touch with the Jewish Fighting Organization. And we were saying with my aunt… That is, father was no longer there, mother, aunt, and I would say, "Maybe one of them, that is those runners, Jewish Fighting Organization members, would figure it out and call us because it needs to be said that they should contact us immediately." Bad luck wanted it that another aunt, who did know about it, when someone called,

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[70] Ludwika Chodakowa – a school friend of Jadwiga Balicka.

[71] Jerzy Grzela Gromkowski (?-1944) – an oncologist. During the war he worked at the Wola Hospital. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1943, he died in Auschwitz in April 1944.

[72] Alina Przerwa-Tetmajer neé Dąbrowska (1915-1996) - a pediatrician. During the war she worked at the Wola Hospital. In 1943 she was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz and in 1945 to Ravensbrück.

[73] Aleja Szucha – a street in Warsaw where the headquarters and detention center of the Gestapo were located.

asking for Krysia[74], she said, "We do not know her, please do not call again." We were in wild despair because Grzela [Gromkowski] was calling twice a day then, "Take her, take her, she is endangering the whole hospital." Luckily, there was this Gypsy who foretold to Kazik that "Krysia" is in hospital. And then Irka[75] called, and she took Sara and brought her to Pańska St,[76] first, 5. I had not seen Sara since leaving her at the hospital. We only met in the Old Town. But in the meantime…

INTERVIEWER: In '44 during the Warsaw Uprising?

SUBJECT: Yes. But Kazik would inform us many times about what was happening to her. That she was slowly recuperating, of course they discharged her from the hospital earlier than they should have. That supposedly she is fine but still very much weakened.

INTERVIEWER: Please tell, when did you first meet Kazik?

SUBJECT: He was coming to see Sara.

INTERVIEWER: What did he look like? Was he a ruffian one would write about?

SUBJECT: He was not a ruffian. He was a joyful boy from Powiśle[77]. A typical urchin from Powiśle.

INTERVIEWER: Did he not look Jewish?

SUBJECT: Not at all. Neither in appearance, nor in behavior, not a trace of the accent. He spoke with the accent of Powiśle. He grew up on Podchorążych St, among Aryan boys only. He was great. Just as Frania, so was Kazik, they were our best runners. They had a great appearance, behavior.

INTERVIEWER: You are talking about Frania Beatus, runner for Antek Cukierman[78]?

SUBJECT: Not Rozmus but Beatus, sorry.

INTERVIEWER: Beatus?

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[74] "Krysia" – pseudonym of Sara Biderman in ŻOB.

[75] Irena Gelblum (1923-2009) – she was a member of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB) living on the "Aryan" side. After the end of the war she joined the Nakam group with Symcha Rotem. Both went to Palestine, but after a year Irena returned to Poland. In 1969 she left Poland and lived in Italy, working as a journalist under the name Conti and pretending to be of Italian nationality.

[76] Pańska Str, App 5. This place was rented and used as a shelter by ŻOB members.

[77] Powiśle – a part of Warsaw.

[78] Antek Cukierman or Icchak Zuckerman (1915-1981) – as a young man he embraced the Zionist movement. Under the Nazi occupation he was a leader of Dror and was one of the leaders of the Jewish Fighting Organization. He took part in the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. After the war he emigrated to Palestine and was among the founding members of Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot (Ghetto Fighters' Kibbutz).

SUBJECT: When I was talking about Frania, I got the last names wrong, Beatus. Rozmus is a different lady, but the last names are similar, and I somehow…

CREW: We are changing the cassette here.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SUBJECT: Now?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: I reached 6 Stare Miasto [address in Old Town - MG]…

INTERVIEWER: Just one moment… That is, let us maybe finish with those Jewish Fighting Organization members. You said that you met Kazik Roten… Rotweisen…

SUBJECT: Ratajzer.

INTERVIEWER: Ratajzer then and Frania Beatus. And did you also meet…

SUBJECT: It is possible that…

INTERVIEWER: Antek?

SUBJECT: Also then, I do not remember, Lodzia.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: She was Hammerstein[79] then. The one that is in Washington, DC, in the Library of Congress now, with whom I am very good friends. And the others I met in the Old Town. That was on the 7th or 8th.

INTERVIEWER: Good. August 7th, 8th?

SUBJECT: August 7th or 8th. Someone is calling me by name, and I see Sara standing with a group of people, some of whom had the appearance. And how did you get there, she - how did I get here. "Because we came to join the People's Army. We had no place, we did not know where to go, and I had been searching for a few days when I found any contact. We were signing up for the People's Army, but they did not want to take us as a squad." I say that I also signed up for the People's Army and got no orders. There were many more volunteers than… than… In excess, they just did not take them on. And she says, "Right now Antek is talking in your command." And soon Antek came out and said that we were accepted to the 3rd battalion under captain "Hiszpan" [Henryk Woźniak - MG][80]. I was in the 4th battalion, so in

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[79] See note 80 above.

[80] Henryk Woźniak, pseud. Hiszpan (1909-1944) – a worker and a communist activist from 1928. In 1936 he joined the International Brigade in Spain. After the end of the Civil War in Spain he was an internee in

the so-called "Czwartacy". And then I met Antek, Cywia[81], both of whom I knew well from stories, Marek[82], Tuwia Borzykowski[83], Kazik was there, Stefan Grajek[84], Zygmunt Warman[85], Marysia Warmanowa[86] and so on, I do not remember all. We were quartered next to each other, because I was on 16 Freta St, and they were in the underground of the Market Halls on Świętojerska St. That was less than 5 minutes apart, so sometimes, when I had some free time, I would come to the hospital, because our hospital was in that basement, and they were quartered further out. And I remember a few discussions with Cywia. It was very interesting that then, in that worst hell, we talked about solutions to the Jewish Question and Palestine. For the first time I had some more exact accounts. And I must add here that my attitude towards the Jews was very much for assimilation, that I thought that solving the Jewish Question was a very long but necessary process because the Jewish religion causes great backwardness. There is a gap between the Polish and Jewish communities. That in the West, the Jews are keeping their religion but are not so distinguished from the rest as in Poland, that this process should actually be going on as in the Western countries. I believed that maybe rebellion was fine, but, on the other hand, keeping such a distinction of a mass of three million actually is not good. I did not have such defined beliefs, but, say, I

France. In 1942 he returned to Warsaw, where he became a member of the Polish Workers Party. In 1944 he was fatally wounded and died two days later.

[81] Cywia (Zivia) Lubetkin (1914-1976) – as a teenager she joined Dror. During the war she was one of the Jewish Fighter Organization leaders. She took part in the Warsaw ghetto uprising and in the Warsaw uprising. After the war she was very active in organizing Jewish emigration from Europe to Palestine. She was among the small group of ŻOB survivors who founded Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot (the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz).

[82] Marek Edelman (1919-2009) – before WWII a member of the Jewish socialist Bund (opposed to Zionism). He was a co-founder of the Jewish Fighting Organization and a leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising after Mordechaj Anielewicz's death. After the war he remained in Poland and became a valued cardiologist. In the 1970s and 1980s he was an activist of the democratic opposition against the communist regime. As the last ghetto uprising fighter still living in Poland, for many years he maintained a memory of the Jewish combat in 1943.

[83] Tuwia Borzykowski (1914-1951) – before the war an activist in the Zionist pioneering youth movement Dror. During the Great Deportation of summer 1942 he was at the Czerniaków Farm. He took part in the Warsaw ghetto uprising in April 1943 and survived along with the last of the ghetto fighters. He was in the unit of Jewish fighters in the People's Army in the Warsaw uprising in August 1944. After the war he emigrated to Palestine and became a member of Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetaot (the Ghetto Fighters' kibbutz).

[84] Stefan Grajek – a member of the Jewish Social Democratic Labour Party (Poalei Zion), during the war he served in the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB) and took part in the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the Warsaw Uprising. In 1949 he left Poland to live in Israel.

[85] Zygmunt Warman (1905-1965) – a lawyer who worked as the Judenrat of Warsaw ghetto's secretary; after 1943 he hid on the "Aryan" side. In August 1944, as a member of the Jewish fighters unit in the People's Army, he took part in the Warsaw uprising. After the war he was a judge in the Supreme Court.

[86] Maria Warman nee Feinmesser (1918-2004) – belonged to the Bund, worked as a clerk in the secretary's office of the Bersohn and Bauman Children's Hospital in the Warsaw ghetto. In 1943 she rented a flat on Leszno Street on the "Aryan" side, which was a shelter for the Jewish Fighting Organization members. She took part in the Warsaw uprising as a member of the Jewish unit in the People's Army. In 1968 she emigrated to Sweden.

was the farthest from Zionism[87]. I thought that it was in fact a beautiful idea. I was never, say, opposed to it, but it was a beautiful idea, a total dream. Firstly, because it was Arab land, secondly, the place of a strategic clash between various imperialisms. An incredibly poor land, who would finance that? I knew little. I knew that there were groups of people who were leaving. I knew about those halutzes that were preparing, but few of them. And Cywia would give me entire lectures about what the halutzes were doing. I remember that she talked about the drying of the muds of Emek Jezreel[88], she talked about kibbutzim. She spoke a little about the history of Zionism, I do not remember the details. It was typical that as I later wrote about that discussion in my book, the editor of the publishing house of the Ministry of National Defense, Mrs. Wichowa[89] says, "You must change that because from the course of the discussion it follows that Cywia convinced you." I say that it was the case. "But you must change that." Luckily, she changed her job, and I kept that discussion in the book.

INTERVIEWER: And was that during the Warsaw Uprising?

SUBJECT: That was during the Warsaw Uprising. But Sara was not there because Sara… Again, I did not see Sara for a few days, and it turns out that Sara, Kazik, and some other people have gone to Leszno St for weapons or their archive, money, and so on. They were cut off. Only Marek, Marek managed to return; he had gone later. They stayed there. So again for me Sara, I do not know, disappeared for the tenth time. And I heard absolutely nothing about her, and when it comes for the group of the Jewish Fighting Organization members, we were to be evacuated on the night from the 27th to the 28th from the Old Town to Żoliborz[90], where the People's Army was, too. Yes, the 3rd battalion and the 4th as well. And it just so happened that I was not walking with my squad, but with the last ones entering the sewers. An absolute coincidence. And although almost all, at least 300 people got through, we, the last ones, had to turn back because the sewer water was up to our chins. A few people drowned, simply the shorter or weaker ones, the injured. So we, I do not know, tens of people turned back, and then I lost contact with them all. That is, I had lost contact with Sara, who stayed on Leszno St, earlier, and later with those. And only later, as I was lying in hospital in Cracow, after the amputation of my arm, one of my aunts wrote on a card that she had met Sara on the street. She came to our house, so she knew Sara. "Well, she came back from work in Germany and is even going to visit you in Cracow." I saw Sara two or three times then. I will remember that evening best, when I was staying overnight in the kibbutz on Poznańska St, there were a few apartments occupied by the kibbutz. I was there maybe a few times, but it was very far from Bielany[91] then, and I did not really have the money for a cab ride. Besides, that was before father came

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[87] Zionism – a Jewish political movement founded in the 1890s by Theodor Herzl with the goal of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

[88] Emek Jezreel – a fertile valley in the northern part of Israel.

[89] Teofila Wichowa (1910 - ?) –before WWII she was a member of the Communist Party of Poland. She lived in the Warsaw ghetto and after 1943 hid on the "Aryan" side. After the war she worked at the publishing house of the Ministry of National Defense. She was married to Władysław Wicha, the Minister of Internal Affairs between 1954 and 1964.

[90] Żoliborz – a northern part of Warsaw.

[91] Bielany – a north-western part of Warsaw.

back; we had nothing to live off. And I remember that we were invited for dinner, and we are all sitting and eating dinner, and Antek is missing. And Antek came, and I remember that very vividly. He stood in the door, rested against the doorframe and stood there silently. Because of that, the talk at the table got quiet. And he said very quietly, but in the silence one could hear it well, "Today, Germany signed its surrender." Then, I remember, everyone at the table said literally in one voice, "Too late." And I remember that scene very exactly. Sara visited me in Bielany, I was there a few times. She was saying something about wanting to go to Palestine. Firstly, because Poland was a cemetery, everyone had died, she did not want to part with her friends. I would say, "Will you be able? You cannot stand heat. The living conditions are very difficult there." But… And she did not tell me… Ah, and she was later in the kibbutz in Łódź, I drove to Łódź and met her in Łódź, and then, I remember, I was in the Ida Kamińska Theater[92] in Łódź, she took me there, and she was supposed to come to Warsaw, she did not come. And I lost her trace, for which time, I do not remember. And only in November of 1946 did I get a letter, already from the Yagur kibbutz. She wrote together with Cywia, they said that they had been in many countries. Sara had been in Czechoslovakia, in Germany, in Italy, before she came to Palestine. She described life in the kibbutz. And since that time we wrote to each other, but rather rarely because she wrote little. I only do not remember which year that was in when Bartoszewski[93] went to Israel.

INTERVIEWER: That was after the Six- Day- War[94], I understand, or even earlier?

SUBJECT: No.

INTERVIEWER: In the sixties?

SUBJECT: The beginning of the sixties.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe '61 or '62…

SUBJECT: I asked him to go to the kibbutz…

INTERVIEWER: Yagur.[95]

SUBJECT: And see Sara. He agreed, later he was very glad that he got to know that kibbutz, Lohamei HaGeta'ot.

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[92] Ida Kamińska (1889-1980) – a Polish-Jewish actress. She survived the war in the Soviet Union. After the war she created the Jewish Theater, which she ran until 1968, when she left Poland to live in Israel and in the US.

[93] Władysław Bartoszewski (1922-2015) – a Polish politician, journalist, writer, member of a democratic opposition in Poland under Communism. During WWII, a Home Army soldier and member of the Council for Aid to Jews.

[94] Six-Day-War – the Arab–Israeli war of 1967.

[95] Kibbutz Yagur – established in 1922 on the northeastern slopes of Mount Carmel, the oldest kibbutz in Israel.

INTERVIEWER: Because she was in the Lohamei HaGeta'ot[96] kibbutz later?

SUBJECT: What?

INTERVIEWER: Sara Biderman was in the Lohamei HaGeta'ot kibbutz?

SUBJECT: Yes, she was in Yagur for a short time, she was one of the founders, that is the group that arrived then founded Lohamei HaGeta'ot. And her case was sad because she never married, did not have children. She dreamed of college, she was unable to go there. She was not good at work, physically she was also somewhat unfit, as they say, she was butterfingered. She had no achievements, neither personal nor professional. And I do not remember after how many years, whether after 10 or something, she got schizophrenia. She started hating Cywia, Antek, and those closest friends of hers, she started hating the kibbutz, too. The kibbutz finally rented her an apartment in Tel-Aviv, it placed her in a workplace for the disabled. Several times in a year, she wrote to me those short cards, a few sentences each. About how unwell she is, how little she earns, how difficult life is for her, insulting her former friends. And that is a tragic picture. Before falling ill, she called me once. Then it was such an incredible expense for the kibbutz, when Cywia found out, she held her head. I saw Cywia…

INTERVIEWER: You mean, you never saw Sara again?

SUBJECT: I never saw her.

INTERVIEWER: But is she dead now?

SUBJECT: She has been dead for some 10 years.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

SUBJECT: Besides, we can check because I have photographs of her grave.

INTERVIEWER: And when were you in Israel for the first time?

SUBJECT: In '85 for the first time, in '88 for the second time.

INTERVIEWER: Was Antek still alive in '85?

SUBJECT: No, he was not.

INTERVIEWER: He was already dead.

SUBJECT: He was dead. Cywia was dead, Antek was dead. But I had such relations because I had met Antek rather early.

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[96] Lohamei HaGeta'ot Kibbutz (Ghetto Fighters' Kibbutz) – established in 1949 in northern Israel by former ŻOB fighters. The Ghetto Fighters' House museum is located on its grounds.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: Maybe during his first visit to Poland. And I wrote to her. There was a problem with correspondence because already in '67 it was very badly received to write to Israel. Unless one had some close family there. But I could not explain that to her since she had schizophrenia. I did write to others there but through other countries. If I was abroad, when I was in Denmark or elsewhere, I wrote to Kazik, or I wrote to the Abrams[97], or I even wrote in such a way that, when a friend of mine went to Switzerland, to France, to England, I gave a letter and asked for an immediate response, and that person would bring that response to me or tell me orally. I did have a lot of those letters. One could not explain to her why she had to write to Switzerland and not directly to me, and she would have written something stupid, so she was the only person to whom I wrote those short cards in that time. And then the Security Service[98] was bothering me, not about her but about my relations with the embassy. Because through Kazik I had very good relations first with Mr. Netzer[99] and his family. So I visited them at home a few times, they were at my place, I remember, at a winter holiday party with a group of children, and our Security Service knew that and bothered me a few times later. I said then, under their pressure, that I do not need to keep any relations with the embassy, but I could say already that if an old friend of mine came from Israel, I would keep in touch with them. And then, say, friends of friends asked where I got my contact with the embassy from, I said friends of friends. And then it was easy.

INTERVIEWER: And in what year did you receive the Righteous Among the Nations medal?

SUBJECT: What? I cannot hear you.

INTERVIEWER: In what year did you receive the Righteous…

SUBJECT: In '85 when I went…

INTERVIEWER: And who gave that to you?

SUBJECT: Kazik.

INTERVIEWER: Kazik.

SUBJECT: I suppose it was Kazik…

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: Kazik was the one who officially inducted me, gave that speech, and Kazik said something in the Cave of Remembrance.

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[97] Abrams – it has not been possible to identify who they were.

[98] The Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa, SB) – the secret police and intelligence and counter-espionage agency operating in the Polish People's Republic.

[99] Cwi Netzer – an employee of the Israeli embassy in Warsaw in the sixties.

INTERVIEWER: Well, please say something about yourself after the war. You, I understand, started a family…

SUBJECT: No, I…

INTERVIEWER: You finished your studies…

SUBJECT: I believe that something else is more important, what I wanted to say, that thanks to this acquaintance with the Jewish Fighting Organization members, firstly, I got interested in Zionism, and most importantly Israel. And that I later wrote a few articles and a book on those topics was the result of those contacts of mine during the occupation. I have five printed articles, I also have extensive unprinted material, almost a hundred pages. I gave many talks, lectures about Israeli topics. I am among the founder of the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society. And I am considered a kibbutz expert among friends. In fact, it was your friend who helped me in the embassy then, collected statistical data for me. I was writing this extensive monograph about Israel and that thing about kibbutzim was almost a hundred pages long.

INTERVIEWER: Are you an architect by profession?

SUBJECT: No, since I lost my arm, I could not…

INTERVIEWER: Because you did not say, you graduated from…

SUBJECT: I graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics.

INTERVIEWER: Ah, yes.

SUBJECT: And later I worked at the university for 20 years. In '68 they fired me on a short notice.

INTERVIEWER: For Zionism?

SUBJECT: Because I hit a Security Service employee[100] in the face in a public place; she was slandering the students, I was very offended, I disagreed with her, she was putting words in my mouth, and I hit her in the face. And I was a scapegoat because they fired a lot of people then, but I was fired on a very short notice, without any pay after 20 years of work. Apart from that I stood in court for hooliganism, I could have faced a year in prison. That was in two… there were even two hearings. In May and possibly October, I was eventually released from this, I had a son to support, a year before the high school leaving exams. I lost my job; I regained the job only after nearly five years. So for four years and three quarters, I was only doing contract work. That is how it was.

INTERVIEWER: And what did you teach?

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[100] Helena Zwolińska probably meant one of the departmental staff at the University who was also a Secret Service employee.

SUBJECT: Social policy. I have many articles on this subject, especially the rehabilitation of disabled people and social gerontology. And for a few years I have been mostly writing on Jewish and Israeli topics because I just find that interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you very much.

SUBJECT: And if you turn that off…

INTERVIEWER: Well, please turn it off.