

Witnesses to Polish-Jewish History

The Stories of Holocaust
Survivors, Former Prisoners
of Nazi German Concentration
Camps and Righteous Among
the Nations

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Publisher:

Fundacja Galicia Jewish Heritage Institute
Galicia Jewish Museum

ul. Dajwór 18, 31-052 Kraków
www.galiciajewishmuseum.org

Editing: Monika Stępień

Translation: Gina Kuhn-Deutscher

Development of the biographies:

Larysa Michalska

Photographs: Chris Schwarz, Jason Francisco,

Ada Kopeć-Pawlikowska, Sobiestaw
Pawlikowski, archival photographs

Cooperation: Ada Kopeć-Pawlikowska,
Katarzyna Kotula, Anna Janeczko

Layout and graphic design:

Studio graficzne Papercut, www.papercut.pl

Print: Know-How

ISBN: 978-83-940542-3-6

This project was co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the Republic of Poland.



Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland

This publication expresses only the views of the author
and is not related to the official stance of the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

Kraków 2016

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Stories of the War Years

One of the most important elements in history education, particularly in the context of the Second World War and the Holocaust, are personal accounts – this statement today seems indisputable, and even sounds like a cliché. The Galicia Jewish Museum has worked with survivors and witnesses almost from the very beginning of its existence. We have tried to spread their stories and disseminate their message among visitors from around the world. Our work with Holocaust survivors, former prisoners of Nazi German concentration camps and Polish Righteous has taken on different forms: from exhibitions, publications and educational materials based on their stories, family photographs and documents to organising meetings at the Museum with young people and adults from Poland and abroad, giving the opportunity for direct contact and asking questions. In 2015, approximately 10,000 people took part in such meetings. The biographical materials and personal documents collected for various projects are extremely valuable and we have tried to preserve them as much as possible, knowing that they are the voice of a fading generation.

The Galicia Jewish Museum's goal is to preserve traces of memory – remnants of a world that no longer exists – but also to restore memory and actively participate in the revival of Jewish communities. This world in Poland did not disappear with the Holocaust. Although Jewish life was not revived and re-born on such a scale as it was before the war, Polish Jews are present. That is why we do not

concentrate exclusively on the Holocaust, destruction and loss – we must also talk about life, about duration and continuity. In this context, survivors play an extremely important role – their stories are a reminder of the tragedy of the Holocaust, but they themselves are living proof of the endurance of the Jewish community in Poland.

On the other hand, accounts of the Righteous – those who risked so much to save people who were sometimes strangers – particularly enrich the discourse on Polish-Jewish relations in the past and today. Of course, overexposing the role of the Righteous would be to falsify the picture of the diverse attitudes of Polish society during the Holocaust. Saviours were a minority, and the differences in responses to the tragedy of Polish Jews mentioned previously clearly show in the stories of the Righteous and survivors. In some family stories we can see the scale of attitudes – from the minority actively providing aid, to the silence of the majority, to that minority that co-operated with the Germans in various ways. The stories of the Righteous also provide a picture of how Polish society functioned under the German occupation: constraints and difficulties in everyday life (incessant inspections, rationing of food), attempts to deal with the realities of the occupation and resist despite the constant threat.

The stories of prisoners of German concentration camps are an entrance to a totally different world – a descent into an abyss, to hell on earth, beyond the comprehension of those who were not there. The terrible images of people in striped uniforms, beaten, downtrodden, hungry, forced to work beyond endurance and, in the end, murdered en masse or

dying of starvation and disease remain in the memory of listeners forever. But they also contain scenes full of hope and faith in humanity depicting mutual help and solidarity among the prisoners.

In particular groups of stories, we can isolate many common points. Survivors most often begin their stories by sketching a general picture of life in pre-war Poland, describing the situation and the diversity of the Jewish community during this period. They speak of the atmosphere of the first days of the war, of life under the German occupation, also indicating to some extent the successive stages of the implementation of German policy towards Polish Jews – from armbands with the Star of David, to the confiscation of property and forced labour, relocation, to imprisonment in the ghettos and deportation to the death camps or mass executions, as well as the diversity of the attitudes of ethnic Poles towards the persecution and annihilation of Jews. Similar elements presented, of course, from a different perspective can be found in the stories of the Righteous. Of course, former prisoner focus in their stories on the conditions in the labour and concentration camps, relations between the prisoners and methods of survival; they also describe their return from the camps, attempts to find their relatives, return to normalcy and coping with trauma.

One can, of course, wonder whether young people are properly prepared for direct meetings with witnesses to history, if the stories of the witnesses are not “a look into the abyss” which can leave deep scars on the psyche of the audience. The story of Holocaust survivors, people who survived the hell of the camps, abound in extremely gory details. Participants

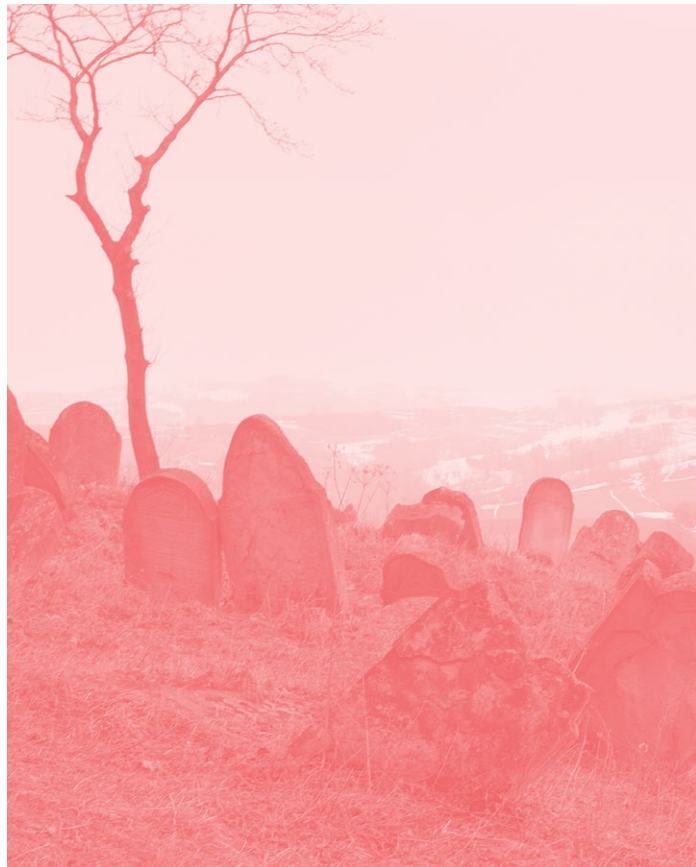
in meeting with witnesses to history are thus confronted with the unimaginable: with the scale of the evil, brutality and contempt beyond their ability to comprehend. This issue should definitely not be underestimated – the weight of these stories is difficult for an adult to carry, much less a vulnerable teenager. We should also not compare this with watching brutal films or playing computer games which supposedly have “desensitised” them – this ar-

vidual character and experiences of the teller. Some have been able to work out an outline that they keep to consistently – their story is usually ordered chronologically or thematically, and they always follow this order, even repeating the same wording. Others have not developed such a narrative – the confusion and directness of their statements are also very important. We must note, however, that behind an “arranged” narrative lie the same

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gument is often made, but it is fundamentally false. Whilst watching films or playing games, we are always aware that this is fiction, a virtual world – even if they are to some extent built on facts. We can turn off the television or computer any time we want. Here, we sit face-to-face with a real person who is telling his or her personal story. About how he or she escaped a horrific death. This sweet old lady miraculously survived Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was a victim of pseudo-medical experiments. The Germans killed almost the entire family of this charming, elderly gentleman. It really happened. Not so long ago.

It is of great importance, of course, to properly prepare young people for what they are going to hear. But the way of transmission is also important, and this depends on the indi-



things as in a “chaotic” one: pain and fear. An outline allows one to avoid the most dramatic details – it is a defence mechanism. As the wife of a former prisoner of Sachsenhausen once told us: “He doesn’t tell you even half of what he went through...”

We must, of course, remember that personal stories show only a fraction of the realities of war and the occupation, and should be embedded in the broader historical context. They do not replace textbook knowledge, but rather augment it, making the dates and numbers cease to be abstractions. The emotional character of these meetings is not always conducive to remembering. The personal experience of tragedies, even the deepest, are not in any way identical to knowledge, but certainly – and this is no less important – has a strong influence on one’s attitudes towards and perceptions of the world. One must also take into account that the factual level of some stories is up for discussion. There are not the stories of professional historians. Retired engineers, economists, doctors, midwives and technicians are the ones today telling the story of their survival. Another issue is the mechanisms of human memory, which are sometimes incomprehensible and surprising: their personal memories have superimposed on them images seen later in photographs or films, information from books and conversations, which are woven into these personal stories as an integral part. Inaccurate dates or numbers given by survivors and witnesses as well as those that are not part of their own experiences are of secondary importance in our opinion; what counts the most is contact with a living person who is speaking about their own, personal experiences. Certainly some elements of their stories should be ver-

ified later and checked against the findings by professional historians.

In the stories of witnesses, the most important thing is the universal message, the universal dimension of what they experienced in their lives. When each of them repeats the famous

Meetings with survivors and witnesses are – as seen above – unique history lessons. By showing the fates of real people and their experiences makes the facts and figures from textbooks closer and more real.

phrase “Never Again”, can we seriously wonder if the Second World War and the Holocaust have taught us anything? Referring to the current political situation in meetings, to the conflicts and humanitarian crises in different parts of the world, some witnesses sadly ask this question.

Often, important questions about the universal human experience are raised by the audience – Holocaust survivors and former prisoners of German concentration camps are asked many times about the possibility of forgiveness. Some answer conclusively: “No, I don’t forgive them”, while others say: “I forgive. But forgiveness does not mean forgetting.” Here we touch on the most difficult moral and ethical questions: “Can I forgive those who murdered my mother and sister? Do I have that right?” asked one Holocaust survivor.

The heroes awarded the Righteous Among the Nations medal are usually asked about their



motivations – what guided them? Why did they decide to take the risk and help? Were they not afraid? If they could do it all over, would they have done the same thing? The responses are as numerous as the stories, but a pattern is certainly clear. In the case of rescuers and rescued who knew each other beforehand, the answer lies in their mutual relationship – friendship or even sympathy and compassion, inasmuch as the selfless rescue of a stranger induces one towards deeper reflection. Some devout Christians refer in their answers to their religion and the teaching of Christ about loving others, which in their lives has become something tangible, real and not an empty word. Others point to the patriotic dimension of their actions – they were saving Polish citizens from a common enemy, and giving help was also an act of opposition to the policies of the German occupiers.

Over the years, listening to the accounts of witnesses to history, we have seen many common characteristics and patterns. Their unusually positive attitude, optimism, openness and re-

spect for others are of particular importance. A sunny disposition and remarkable sense of humour don't seem to fit the image of a person who survived such dramatic circumstances, i.e. of someone who lost their entire family or went through the hell of the concentration camps during the war. All of them, naturally, agreed that the trauma has remained with them throughout their lives.

Most of them began talking about their experiences later on, when they reached adulthood. Earlier, it was too painful, too fresh. In some cases, their silence was also due to the political situation: in the past, it was safer not to reveal your Jewish roots, involvement in rescuing Jews or associations with the Home Army; this fear still impacts some people to this day. Each of these stories is shocking. Each of them contain dramatic choices, fear, pain and often also helplessness and loneliness. But witnesses to history return to these experiences, telling about them over and over again, because that is their mission, their obligation. As they themselves say, in giving their testimonies



they try to prevent similar tragedies and preserve the memories of those who died.

Meetings with survivors and witnesses are – as seen above – unique history lessons. By showing the fates of real people and their experiences makes the facts and figures from textbooks closer and more real. They teach how historical experiences impact the individual, how they shape lives. As a result, the contents of historical publication take on newer, deeper meanings. The stories of these people also encourage reflection on fundamental issues: good and evil, solidarity and indifference, respect for one’s fellow man and scorn for others. Meetings with Holocaust survivors, former prisoners of Nazi German concentration camps and Polish Righteous should thus be seen not only in the context of transferring knowledge, but also – above all – as educating and shaping attitudes.

What guided them? Why did they decide to take the risk and help? Were they not afraid? If they could do it all over, would they have done the same thing?

Anna Wencel has been working at the Galicia Jewish Museum (Manager of the Education Department, previously Education Assistant) since 2008 and is a graduate of the Department of Jewish Studies at Jagiellonian University. She is the author and co-author of many museum exhibitions and publications, including *Houses of Eternity*; *“All the Roads” – Histories of the Jews Who Survived the Holocaust*; *Zapiski z zielonego zeszytu. Pamiętnik Racheli* [Notes from a Green Notebook. Rachel’s Diary]; and *Contextualizing Visits to Poland*. She has been involved for many years in projects devoted to Polish-Israeli school co-operation and youth exchanges; the co-ordinator of key educational programmes for the Galicia Jewish Museum, including the *Through Polin: Discovering Jewish Heritage in Poland* study visits for Polish and Israeli educators and the *Teaching the Holocaust in Context* seminars for teachers.

The Extent and Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland

Why do we know so little about the Righteous? If I could sit with one of them on a porch and talk, I would ask about that one decisive moment. Tadeusz Markiel of the village of Gniewczyna Łańcucka, twelve years old in 1942, remembered one of those very moments his entire life: “They stood still, they did not look me in the eyes. (...) They looked up only once; as a matter of fact they lifted their heads very slowly, then only looked at each other with those incredibly sorrowful eyes. (...) Their silent despair evoked painful empathy. Sorrow for their fate moved me to the core; it created a sudden heartfelt bond, especially with the boy, like with someone very close.”¹ What exactly was it like to have someone – homeless, dirty, hungry and deathly terrified – knock on your door and mutely beg for help? Why is it, that when we feel boundless fear, do some succumb and shut the door and others open their hearts regardless of the consequences? Rescued Jews who left their hiding places at the end of the war were asked by their caretakers to do so at night, in secret. It is terrifying, but rescue could not be accompanied by shared experiences of joy. Fear and meanness, prejudices and feelings of otherness, the widespread antisemitic stereotypes which caused

¹Tadeusz Markiel and Alina Skibińska, „*Jakie to ma znaczenie, czy zrobili to z chciwości?*” *Zagłada domu Trynczerów*, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warsaw 2011, p. 102. The English translation is adapted from Tadeusz Markiel and Alina Skibińska, *The Holocaust in the Polish Countryside: A Witness Testimony and Historical Account*, trans. Anna Solarzka, Bloomsbury Academic 2015.

people to close their hearts and drown their consciences, did not disappear with the advance of the Red Army.

How different from their surroundings, neighbours and, often, even members of their own families were those whom we today call the Righteous? From whence came these different, alien, independent people? We will never truly know. The trail leads to a “lonely lodge near the forest.” The secret lies in the infinite variety of the human personality, characters, temperaments, a multiplicity of factors and coincidences. The American scholar Nechama Tec, using sociological methods, analysed materials from several dozen interviews that she conducted with Poles who rescued Jews throughout Poland as well as with survivors.² In her opinion, people capable of long-term, selfless help are “autonomous altruists”, self-reliant individuals with high autonomy, unyielding to outside pressures, independent of social control and acting in accordance with an internal moral imperative, the roots of which can be extremely varied. The names of some of them are known, sometimes we know their biographies in depth, and yet we know so little about them. Certainly, they were not heroes devoid of imagination or human weaknesses, and certainly they cursed more than once as they relived moments of grief, despair and bitterness towards the Jews who brought them “only poverty and fear.”

The history of the Holocaust consists of the fates of thousands of nameless victims, but also of thousands of anonymous helpers and rescuers. Today, we would like to restore their names and identities to ensure memory and respect. We fill in the unknowns with statistics, estimates and extrapolations from con-

clusions often accompanied by the cautious phrases “it seems” and “presumably.” Numbers and statistics about rescuers and the circumstances of survival are deceptive, regardless of whether they have been calculated on the basis of a small or large sample size, because all of the available documentation have more blank spaces and question marks than hard facts. In the case of research on survivors and rescuers, the greatest problem is flawed sources. Recent publications emphasise the limitations of the conclusions drawn from the Righteous files from the archives at Yad Vashem because they deal with an extremely exceptional group – those whom someone *tried to rescue* and who *were rescued* – and thus are exclusively stories with a happy endings. I cannot answer the questions of how many Poles directly contributed to saving the lives of those condemned to death because they were Jews and how many gave (or provided) immediate aid. We know with complete certainty only that 6,620 Righteous Among the Nations medals have been awarded as of now to Polish citizens who helped those doomed by the Holocaust.

Jewish survivors in Poland, in my opinion, are no more than 1.5% of the pre-war population (in absolute numbers, approximately 50,000 people). Of these, at least a quarter survived in the forests without any help or occasional external support – only through their own determination, perseverance, ingenuity and resources – in partisan groups or family survival camps. How many escapees from the ghettos and camps were taken advantage of in vari-

² Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness. Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford 1986.



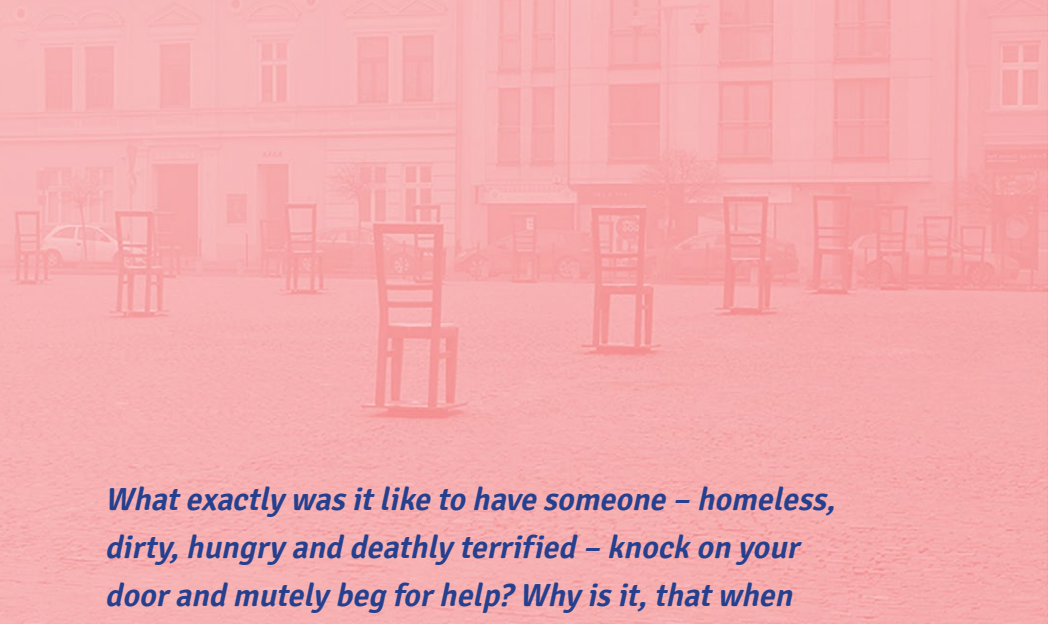
ous occurrences of *Judenjagd* (hunt for Jews), denounced, caught and killed? We still do not know this, but it is without a doubt that most of those seeking rescue did not survive the occupation. Surveys indicate that this number may even be 3-4 times higher than the number of survivors. The fates of these people – aided, but not saved – belong to the most tragic chapters of Polish-Jewish history.

The larger group other than those survivors on the “Aryan” side were Jewish forced labourers who spent the war in many concentration and labour camps both in the General Government (mainly in camps for the Hasag munitions factory), and in the Third Reich and other occupied countries. We estimate this group to consist of tens of thousands of people, but in this case the data is not complete. Not everyone returned to Poland, some emigrated via the DP camps³ to the Americas, Palestine (from

1948 Israel) or to Australia. Among them were also those (mainly women) who went to the Third Reich for forced labour “on Aryan papers.” Their number is still undetermined. Speaking of Jews liberated from the camps, it should be remembered that most of them went on “death marches” – weeks-long forced evacuations of the camps – an inhumane experience which many did not survive. Only a small group of Jews were liberated in the concentration camps themselves and those who shared in the worst of all fates – prisoners of the death camps – are a unique group of survivors, numbering no more than several dozen people. The “death factories” of Bełżec, Chetmno nad Nerem, Sobibór and Treblinka had ceased operation in 1943. At that time, the annihilation was almost complete. Only the gas chambers and crematoria of Birkenau “operated” until the end.

Many Polish Jews survived the war only because they were in the Soviet Union, in areas not occupied by the Germans. They included Polish Jews who lived in the Eastern Borderlands before 1939 as well as the so-called

³ Camps for *displaced persons*, people who found themselves outside of their home countries as a result of the war.



What exactly was it like to have someone – homeless, dirty, hungry and deathly terrified – knock on your door and mutely beg for help? Why is it, that when we feel boundless fear, do some succumb and shut the door and others open their hearts regardless of the consequences?

“bieżeńcy”⁴, escapees from central Poland. Before they returned to Poland in 1946 and in subsequent years, they faced a seven-year Gehenna typical of refugees: the loss of homes and property, stability, material goods, deportation to labour camps or areas for forced settlement in the Russian interior, a lack of work and social aid, the breaking of contact with their families. Jewish families returned from the Soviet Union decimated, but the personal losses among them were statistically the smallest. It is estimated that approximately 350-400,000 people survived the Second World War in the USSR.

Today, it is difficult to say which survivors emerged from the war the best physically and psychologically and which the worst. All of them experienced trauma and loss that is from today’s perspective unimaginable, inconceivable from the point of view of someone living in a relatively safe world. The scale of the Holocaust was massive. For Polish Jews it meant almost total annihilation. The Holocaust affected every family and every aspect of life for every person. Often, there were families of several dozen from whom only individuals survived. Most survivors had no one close, and their only surviving relatives were living in far-away countries. Survivors coming out of hiding or returning from exile had the right to expect special care and concern. Instead, they experienced discrimination and violence – in Poland a wave of pogroms took place, culminating in the Kielce

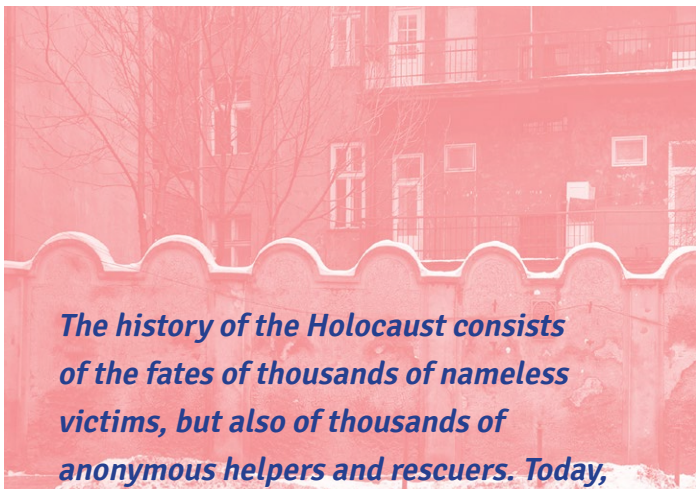
⁴ Russian: refugees.

pogrom of 4 July 1946.⁵ After experiencing the war, it was no longer possible for most Jews to remain in a country where survivors were threatened with direct, physical danger. Attempts at reviving Jewish life in post-war Poland, which for many was a massive cemetery for their families, ended in fiasco.

The high point for Jews returning to Poland occurred in 1945-1946 while the largest wave of departures was in the two next years (approximately 160,000 people left then), despite the fact that their situation in terms of security could be considered stable from 1947. Between 1944-1949, the Jewish community enjoyed relative sovereignty and even autonomy in the social, cultural and political spheres. There was a revival of political parties, associations, Jewish committees, religious communities and various organisations, which together were represented by the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland. In 1947, the Jewish Historical Institute, which continues to exist today and possesses vast and priceless archives, was established from the defunct Historical Commission.⁶ Jewish life was concentrated in large cities (Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Szczecin, Warsaw and Wrocław) as well in smaller centres in Lower Silesia, where the largest group of Jews repatriated from the USSR settled. However, in 1949 a radical change in the policies of the communist authorities towards the

⁵ Determining the exact number of Jews murdered by some Polish underground groups striving for "ethnic cleansing" is not possible, but we can establish the lower limit as 750 people, cf. Andrzej Żbikowski, *The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings*, [in:] *Jewish Presence in Absence. The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944-2010*, eds. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 67-94.

⁶ <http://www.jhi.pl/institut/historia> (accessed 15.05.2016).



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Jewish minority took place, beginning with the banning and elimination all existing Jewish parties and organisations, which was finalised in 1950. They were replaced by new organisation loyal to the communist regime called the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce*, TSKŻ).

Although the number of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust is estimated at several hundred thousand, no more than 98,000 of them were living in Poland by 1948. The reasons for leaving in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s were, however, varied and did not exclusively boil down to the hostility of Polish society towards Jews and the atmosphere of pogroms from the immediate post-war period. They immigrated en masse to Palestine (at least 100,000 by 1949) because they saw the opportunity there for the rebirth of a Jewish state, which came to pass on 14 May 1948. They left for western European

countries and from there further afield to countries where their surviving relatives lived in hopes of a better fate and better conditions in which to rebuild their lives. For most Jews, Poland was a place of suffering and unprecedented crimes against their loved ones. In taking the decision to leave, psychological factors played the leading role. The next important reason for leaving was disagreement with the new communist system controlling post-war Poland and the limitations on every aspect of life (including economic) that accompanied it.

The next large wave of Polish citizens returning from the USSR between 1955-1960 included approximately 19,000 Jews, but most of them quickly took advantage of the opportunities created by the post-October of 1956 thaw and emigrated, as did tens of thousands of Polish Jews who had been living in the country (this was known as the “*Gomułka aliyah*”⁷). The final, near-total elimination of the Jewish community in post-war Poland was sealed by the antisemitic campaign of 1967-1968, as a result of which more than

13,000 people were forced to leave Poland on so-called travel documents (quasi-passports confirming the deprivation of Polish citizenship and allowing the bearer to leave Poland without the possibility to return). From that point on, Jewish life in Poland almost ceased to exist and was limited to several shrinking Jewish communities, the TSKŻ, the Jewish Theatre and the Jewish Historical Institute. Since 1989, and thus after the changes to Poland’s political system, we have observed the gradual rebirth of Jewish religious communities as well as of laical institutions and organisations. However, while these trends are positive, they should be put in perspective. It should be kept in mind that nearly 3.4 million Jews lived in pre-war Poland (making up ten per cent of the population) and in the first years after the war there were approximately 250,000, as compared with only several or tens of thousands of Jews (depending on how this is defined) living in Poland today.

⁷ *Aliyah* (Hebrew: to go up) – Jewish immigration to Palestine and, since 1948, to Israel; “returning to the land of our fathers”.

Alina Skibińska is a historian, the Polish representative of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington and works for the Museum’s International Archival Programs Division. She conducts archival research for the Museum in all major Polish archives and also in analysing materials reproduced in Poland for the USHMM archives. Since 2005, she has been part of the team of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences as well as a member of the editorial board for the scholarly journal *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* [Holocaust. Studies and Materials]. She is the author of many publications on Polish-Jewish relations during and after the Second World War as well as publications dealing with sources for researching the Holocaust. She is the recipient of the Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award for 2012. In 2014, she received the Decoration of Honour “Meritorious for Polish Culture” from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

Remembering the Righteous¹

*The righteous shall flourish like palms,
grow tall like cedars in Lebanon.
Rooted in the house of the Lord,
They shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They will still bear fruit in old age,
they shall stay ever fresh and green.*

Psalm 92:13-15

The Talmud teaches that when Cain killed Abel, he murdered not only his brother, but also all of his yet-unborn descendants (TB Sanhedrin 4:5). For “one who takes one life is considered as if he had destroyed an entire world”, and thus “one who saves a single life is regarded as if he saved an entire world.” This Talmudic citation, which is part of the diploma given to the Righteous by Yad Vashem, should be treated literally: not only those Jews who have been personally saved by the Righteous owe them their lives, but so do all of their descendants as well.

Thousands of Jews around the world are alive today because one day, decades ago, someone decided to risk his or her life to protect a hunted individual from one of the most

¹ The first version of this article appeared in the publication *Polish Heroes. Those who saved Jews* published by the Galicia Jewish Museum in co-operation with the Auschwitz Jewish Centre in Oświęcim and the Polish-American-Jewish Alliance for Youth Action.

implacable killing machines the world has ever known. The Pesach Haggadah teaches that we should all consider ourselves to have personally stood at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given, so should all the descendants of those saved by the Righteous consider themselves as having personally stood on their doorsteps, awaiting the decision which meant the difference between life and death. The heroism of the Righteous was limited in time, but our gratitude should know no limitations. It shall last as long as the Jewish people exist.

When a chain of Righteous, from acquaintances in Warsaw to a former employee in a tiny village near Jasło along with their relatives and friends, saved my grandfather under the German occupation, his daughter – my mother – was already grown and a soldier in the Polish Army in Russia. Neither she, nor I, her descendent, nor my children owe our lives directly to these heroes. Despite that, I also feel as though I had stood on their doorsteps. By saving my grandfather, they not only saved his life, but also saved for his descendants the belief in a world that is not irredeemably evil. If there had been no Righteous, had the only thing standing between Jews and death been guns – such as the one my mother carried in the trenches – some would certainly have survived, but would the world they had survived into been worth living in?

Nowhere in German-occupied Europe have there been as many Righteous Gentiles as there were in Poland – and we must remember that those who have been recognised using Yad Vashem’s strict criteria are only part of a larger group whose numbers we will never truly know. It is true that that this

is not due to some alleged moral superiority on the part of the Polish people over all other occupied nations, but to the fact that most European Jews lived here, in Poland. If Poles had not been the largest group of rescuers, it would be a disgrace. Nevertheless, this can in no way minimise Poles’ legitimate pride in their heroism. In each situation, the decision to save a Jew, often a pre-war friend but in many cases a total stranger, could result in a death sentence not just for the Righteous (the majority of whom were women) themselves, but also for their families and sometimes their neighbours as well.

Death indeed was the penalty for remaining human in the face of inhumanity. We know that at least 800 Poles were murdered by the Germans for helping Jews. As in the case of the Righteous in general, the true number of murdered people was likely much higher. The archives of a German court in occupied Warsaw contain the death verdict passed in 1943 on an elderly Polish woman, Stanisława Barbachowska, for “giving milk and shelter” to a Jewish child. Let us recall here the names of the judges: Dr Leitsmann, presiding, and the judges Mohr, Knoll and Richter. No less than the deeds of the Righteous, the acts of the vile should be remembered for all eternity.

I do not mention the names of those to whom my grandfather owed his life. Very often the Righteous avoid the limelight: they genuinely feel that their deeds deserve no special mention because they simply did what needed to be done. And yet I sense in that attitude something more than just naiveté: the Righteous, in their determination to save lives, must have been anything but naïve. Rather, I sense a stubborn belief in human decency being not the exception, but the rule. If the Righteous

were to be considered exceptions, this belief would fail. That is why they would rather give up being recognised rather than their hope.

This nobility of the spirit is not the only reason they avoid the limelight. Under the German occupation, the Righteous had to fear their neighbours more than the German occupiers. A hidden Jew was a potential threat for all of those living in the area, and the Righteous often had to seek shelter for their charges elsewhere for fear of their neighbours. There were also those who believed that the murder of Jews by the Germans was beneficial for Poland, and thus they should not be saved. However, we should not hasten to condemn those neighbours who acted out of cowardice and not wickedness, just as how we should not condemn those who for that reason refused to aid hunted Jews. While one can expect heroism, no one has the moral right to demand it. I can only thank God that I have never been put into such a situation.

This unfortunately does not close the debate, as many of the Righteous in Poland encountered hostility, even after the end of the war. Just after the war, when the Kraków liberal Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* began to publish information about the heroism of Poles who saved Jews, many of the Righteous mentioned by name in the articles called in to complain: their neighbours were furious, they said, that their safety had been risked in order to save loathsome Jews. Even today, many descendants of the Righteous refuse to accept the medal from Yad Vashem for fear of angering their neighbours or attracting the attention of thieves eager to lay their hands on Jewish gold. Antonina Wyrzykowska, who saved seven Jews in Jedwabne from the mass murder carried out there by Poles during the

German occupation, was run out of town for having aided the enemy; even decades later she would not return there. Henryk Sławik, a Polish representative in Hungary during the war who saved thousands of Polish Jews by issuing them IDs identifying them as Catholics, martyred in a German concentration camp, still does not have a street named for him in his native Sosnowiec. It was only in 2014 that a monument to him and his co-worker Jozsef Antall, later president of free Hungary, was built in nearby Katowice and a year later the square in front of it was given his name. Most damningly is the fact that the Polish Parliament repeatedly refused to grant the Righteous veterans' rights, conceding only in 1999.

There seems also to be a Poland which considers the Righteous to be traitors, not heroes. Yet this is the same Poland which grotesquely inflates the number of Righteous and trots them

Thousands of Jews around the world are alive today because one day, decades ago, someone decided to risk his or her life to protect a hunted individual from one of the most implacable killing machines the world has ever known.

out any time when accusations of Polish anti-semitism are made, as if there is some obscene moral arithmetic where heroes cancel out the villains. Although, luckily, claims that the enemies of the Righteous represent Poland are as baseless as they are insulting, the claim that the Righteous are the true representatives of Poland is also up for debate. Every



country has its heroes and villains, and it is by choosing whom it honours that it identifies its true representatives. Those who honour the Righteous deny their detractors the right to speak in Poland's name – and yet the latter try to claim moral credit through the heroism of those they otherwise condemn. Hypocrisy, as La Rochefoucauld famously said, is the tribute that vice pays to virtue.



For me, the choice is simple. *Hashem* would have saved Sodom if ten righteous people could be found there. More than ten people were involved in saving my grandfather, and occupied Poland was no Sodom, but a country horrifically oppressed by an evil not of its own making. I will be no more demanding than my Maker. Although only Jews and Roma were singled out by the Germans for annihilation, the fate of ethnic Poles was only somewhat better. Persecuted themselves by the murderers, the Poles might possibly be forgiven for being unable to help others – these actions would reduce their own chances for survival. However, therein lies the rub, as so dramatically shown by the number of Polish Righteous. While I believe that no conclusive judgment can be passed on those who, under these circumstances, denied Jews aid, I deny those Poles who betrayed them the right to claim that they acted in Poland's name. I maintain that the Righteous acted in the name of Poland and in the name of all humanity. I stand in awe of their sacrifice and have the deepest gratitude for those who make their heroism known to the world. The memory of the Righteous is indeed a blessing.

Konstanty Gebert is an associate fellow of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and a commentator for *Gazeta Wyborcza*. He is the co-founder of the independent Jewish Flying University (1979), the Professional Association (NSZZ) of Scientific, Technical and Education Workers (NTO, 1980) and the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, among others. During Martial Law, he was the editor and publisher of underground newspapers under the penname Dawid Warszawski, which he continues to use. He is the founder and, until 2000, the editor-in-chief of the Jewish intellectual monthly *Midrasz*. He is the author of 10 books and a lecturer at, among others, Hebrew University, the University of California and Grinnell College.



Witnesses to History

Emanuel Elbi

Emanuel Elbinger was born to a Jewish family in Kraków on 2 January 1931. He spent his childhood in Nowe Brzesko, where he lived with his parents, Bernard and Rozalia, and sisters, Pola and Lusia. Emanuel's family was religious – they kept kosher and went to synagogue on Friday nights – but also assimilated to a certain extent, as they used Polish as their everyday language. At the age of six, Emanuel enrolled at the cheder, where he acquired a religious education and learned Yiddish; the next year, he started elementary school. The outbreak of the war interrupted his education for nearly six years.

The Elbingers owned a textile store in Nowe Brzesko, which was closed after the German invasion and most of its goods confiscated. They were able to hide some of the materials with friendly non-Jewish families, thus securing the necessary means for survival.

The mass deportations of Jews from Nowe Brzesko began in September 1942. The Elbingers split up, seeking shelter with Polish friends. Emanuel and his father hid in Stręgoborzyce with the Migas family, who had prepared a hiding place for them in the barn for a price. At the same time, Emanuel's mother and sister Pola hid in the rectory in Nowe Brzesko. One evening, the curate Molicki noticed Pola and warned the rector that hiding Jews was punishable by death. After this incident, Mrs Elbinger and her daughter joined her husband and son.

The youngest member of the family, Lusia, was hidden with a Polish family in the nearby countryside.

But on the day of the deportations, the intimidated Poles took her to the market square in Nowe Brzesko; from there, she was transported to Charsznica, the mass execution site for the Jews of Nowe Brzesko and the surrounding towns.

The Migases demanded increasingly high payments from the Elbingers, and so Rozalia left the hiding place in order to go to her Polish friends and retrieve the goods and valuables they were hiding for her. The Elbingers' situation became even worse, however. Upon overhearing the farmers planning to kill them, they decided to flee. They then found shelter with the Komendas, a poor family living on the other side of the village. To make sure they had resources on hand, Emanuel and his mother left the hideout and tried to recover the remnants of their property. During one of these trips, despite disguising himself in women's clothing, Emanuel was recognised by his old schoolmates. Not wanting to take any chances, the family decided that he could no longer go to Nowe Brzesko. Rozalia continued to leave the hiding place. In mid-December 1944, she left for the last time. According to what Emanuel later managed to learn, she was caught and killed by the local division of the "Jędrusie" partisans.

After the end of the war, the Elbingers returned to Nowe Brzesko, but it was not a safe place – there were constant attacks on the surviving Jews. The Provincial Jewish Committee had been set up in Kraków at this time, and the family appealed to it for help. Bernard Elbinger was not able to take

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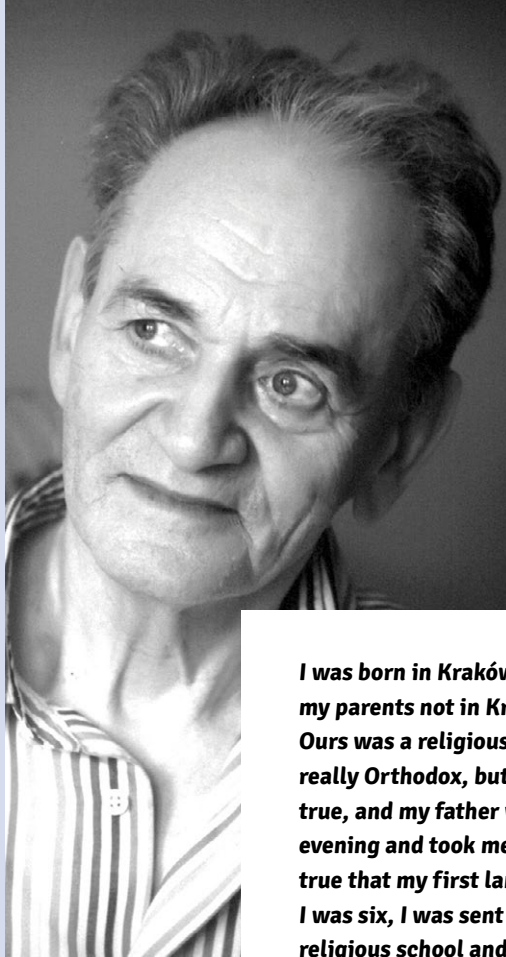


photo: private archive

care of the children himself, so Emanuel and Pola were taken to a children's home and then sent to a sanatorium in Zakopane.

After his return from the sanatorium, Emanuel continued to live in the children's home. He attended a Jewish school. After high school, he began his studies at the Kraków University of Science and Technology, earning the title of electrical engineer.

Emanuel Elbinger still lives in Kraków; he takes part in meetings with groups from around the world organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum.

I was born in Kraków, but I actually lived with my parents not in Kraków, but in Nowe Brzesko. Ours was a religious house, not Hasidic, not really Orthodox, but religious. We kept kosher, true, and my father went to synagogue on Friday evening and took me with him. And it's also true that my first language was Polish. When I was six, I was sent to cheder. (...) Cheder is a religious school and I studied there in Yiddish. When I was seven, I went to primary school. I finished first grade before the war.

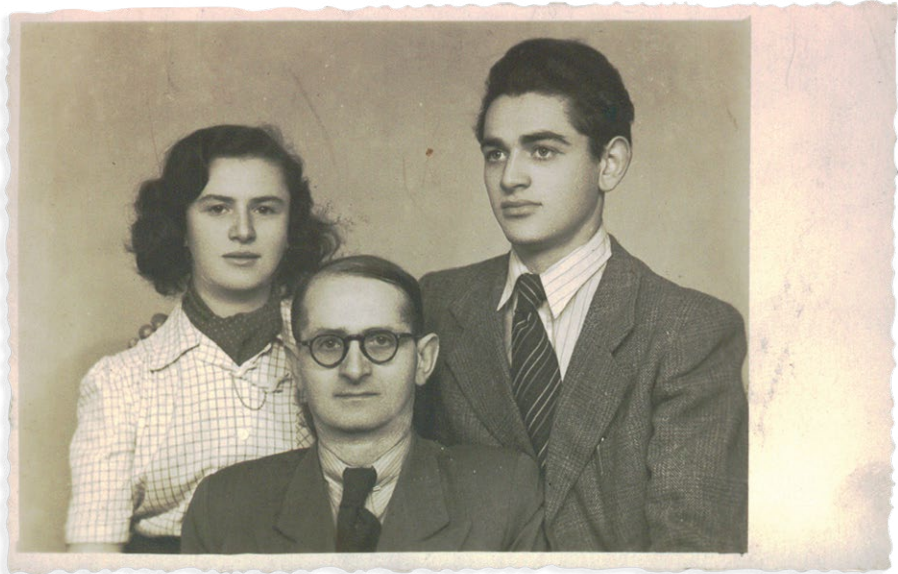
Emanuel Elbi



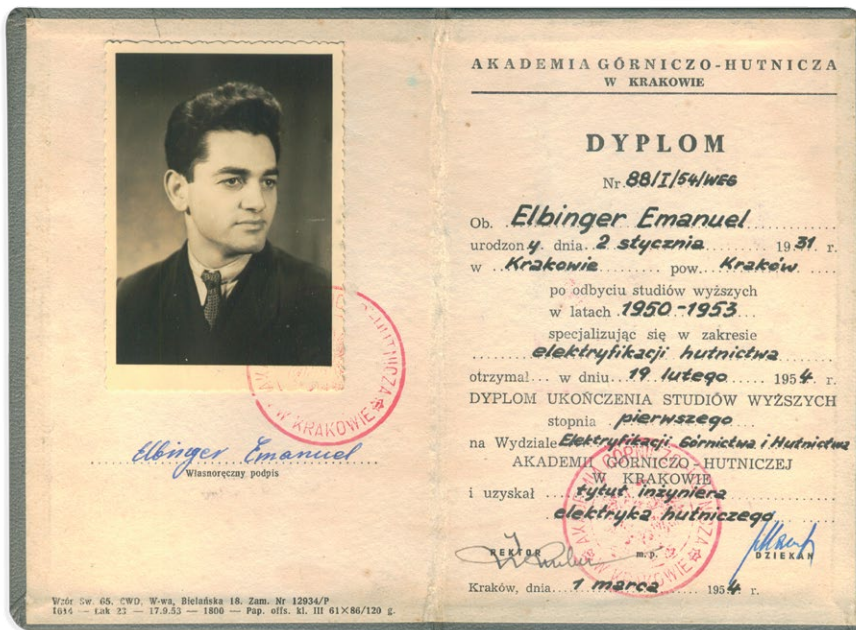
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1. Emanuel Elbinger's mother, photo: private archive
2. Emanuel Elbinger - photograph taken just after the war, photo: private archive
3. Emanuel Elbinger with his sister and father after the war, photo: private archive
4. Graduation diploma for the AGH University of Science and Technology in Kraków, photo: private archive
5. Emanuel Elbinger with his sisters Pola and Lusja, photo: private archive

Marcel Goldman

Marcel Goldman was born to a Jewish family in Kraków in 1926. His paternal grandparents were named Mosze and Nechama. Their family came from Cieszyn Silesia. Mosze and Nechama had three children: Genia, Mania and Mordechaj, who was also called Max. Max was a representative for a company producing leather goods and was constantly travelling around Poland. During one of his trips in 1924, he met Sara Goldberger in Kraków. Max and Sara married and settled in Kraków.

Before her marriage, Sara lived in Zbydniowice with her parents, Chana (nee Wichner) and Jakub, and four siblings, Izaak, Moniek, Frania and Janek. After Sara and Max married, the whole family moved to Kraków.

Although Marcel's parents were not particularly religious, they had a kosher kitchen at home, mainly because of his grandfather, who was an orthodox Jew. Marcel's parents observed the commandments of Judaism to a very limited extent, attending synagogue only on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, and then mainly due to tradition.

The Goldmans lived on Krowoderska Street and ran a shop on Słowiański Square. In 1933, they moved to a flat at 5 Tatarska Street. The shop also changed locations – from then on, it operated at 32 Zwierzyniecka Street.

Marcel was the oldest of three children. He had two younger sisters, Nelli and Róża.¹ When he was seven, he started his formal education in the first grade at St Wojciech Primary School (Public School No. 2). It was there that he encountered antisemitism for the first

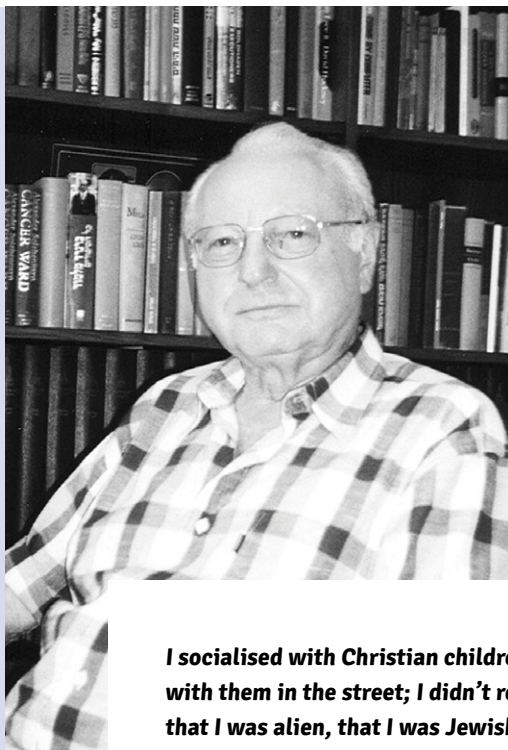
time. One day, his mother prepared him a sandwich made of challah for lunch, which caused a stir among his peers and became a pretext for ridicule and harassment. After this incident, Marcel's parents sent him to a Hebrew school. The outbreak of the war interrupted his education.

In 1940, the Goldman family were kicked out of their home at 5 Tartarska Street, and then moved to Borek Fałęcki. In 1941, the Goldmans were deported to the ghetto in Podgórze. In Autumn 1942, Sara Goldman's parents and sister were captured during one of the actions in the ghetto. After this incident, Max Goldman decided that the family must leave the ghetto. Already at the beginning of the war, with the help of a Christian friend, he had been able to secure so-called Aryan papers with the surname Galas for his family. Hidden in a trunk under their underthings, the papers were to be used only as a last resort. As he recalls, "This necessity knocked on our door in the autumn of 1942."² Marcel's father responded to an ad published in the *Krakauer Zeitung* and volunteered – as a Pole – to work in the Radom branch of the Bata shoe company.

In September 1942, thanks to the help of the police commander in the Kraków ghetto, the Goldman family left the closed district and moved to Radom. With his good command of the German language, Max began

¹ The Goldmans adopted Róża, Marcel's cousin, because her parents had been killed in the Mauthausen concentration camp.

² Marcel Goldman, *Iskierki życia*, Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2002, p. 21.



I socialised with Christian children and played with them in the street; I didn't really realise that I was alien, that I was Jewish. That was of no interest at all to me. Those sorts of things don't interest a seven- or eight-year-old child.

working in the Bata factory as the only Polish director (the remaining members of the management team were Germans). He was responsible for purchasing materials needed for production and their storage. Working in a high position in such an important factory gave credibility to Max's new identity.

The members of Marcel's immediate family survived

the war in Radom and returned to Kraków in 1947. One of Max's sisters survived the war in Hungary. Of the whole family, which numbered more than 20 people, only seven survived.

In 1947, Max and Sara Goldman decided to go to Palestine. Marcel did not plan to emigrate – he had finished his studies, started a well-paying job and had a girlfriend with whom he was planning a future. He changed his mind, however, and decided to support his family when his father had a heart attack and his mother asked her son for help. The trip to Palestine turned out to be a major challenge, because the borders were closed and illegal emigration was the only way. After many trials and tribulations, and two weeks in a Czechoslovakian prison, Marcel made it to Palestine, where he joined his parents and sister residing in a camp for immigrants near Haifa.

Within a few weeks, he found a job as an accountant and began his service in the Israeli army in 1951. He worked as a banker for many years.

Marcel Goldman visited Poland for the first time in 1988 and returned again and again over the years, always emphasising his commitment to Polish culture and language.

Marcel Goldm



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1. Marcel Goldman in his first year of primary school, photo: private archive
2. Marcel Goldman with his mother and sister on the Planty in Kraków, photo: private archive
3. Marcel Goldman's parents (1948), photo: private archive
4. Marcel Goldman whilst working at the Bata factory, photo: private archive
5. Marcel Goldman on the Main Market Square in Kraków (1947), photo: private archive
6. Marcel Goldman with his father on holiday in Iwonicz-Zdrój (1939), photo: private archive

Monika Goldw

Monika Goldwasser was born to an affluent Jewish family in Myślenice in 1941. Her father, Adam Goldwasser, was Romance philologist and philosopher, and defended his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in Paris. He worked as a French teacher and was also a poet (writing verse and epigrams) publishing in Kraków periodicals. Monika's mother, Salomea, had diplomas in philosophy and German from Jagiellonian University. Her maternal grandparents lived in Kraków. As Orthodox Jews, they took active part in the Jewish community's religious life, participating in services at the Remuh Synagogue. Her paternal grandparents, Hermina and Łazarz Goldwasser, were assimilated Jews. They lived in Myślenice, where Łazarz ran a law firm. He was a well-known and respected person in town. He sat on Myślenice's town council and also was involved in many Jewish organisations – he was the first president of the Hatikvah organisation as well as the president of the Jewish Gymnastics Association and the Maccabi club.

Monika's parents married in 1940 and lived in Salomea's family home near Wawel, but shortly thereafter, due to the deportations of the Jewish population ordered by the Germans, they were forced to move to Myślenice. However, they were victimised there as well. Soon, they were deported to Skawina where (due to its railway station and connections) the Jews of Myślenice were deported. Monika's parents managed to hide her in a village near Myślenice with a family of farmers. During the deportations, the number of members of the Goldwasser family checked out according to the list of Jewish residents

of Myślenice prepared earlier – Salomea carried a doll dressed in baby clothes instead of her daughter. The Goldwasser family, along with the other Jews of Myślenice, were sent to the Bełżec death camp. However, Adam and Salomea Goldwasser were murdered in Skawina, where a mass execution of Jews took place after a days-long selection was carried out.

After a short stay with the farmers, seven-month-old Monika was sent to the Ursuline convent in Kraków, which cared for Polish, Jewish and Hungarian children. During the war, Monika was taken in by a childless non-Jewish family, who surrounded her with love and care. Her carers were aware from the beginning of the little girl's origins, as she had come from the convent with a note containing her name and surname, date of birth and the names of her parents.

Monika's adoptive parents gave her a true home and a happy childhood, but hid the truth of her origins from her. When Monika was 22 years old, Anna, her adoptive mother, told her the truth shortly before she died. This revelation was such a shock for Monika that she decided to never pursue the question of her roots further and kept her identity a secret for years. Everything changed when the sister of her biological mother came to Poland from Israel. Meeting her aunt started a new stage of Monika's life. As she says, her past caught up with her. She decided to learn as much about her family and origins as possible, and also searched for any living relatives. She found and visited family in the United States. Over the years, she has accumulated a broad collection of

wasser



photo: Ada Kopeć-Pawlikowska

documents from which she was able to reconstruct her history. After years of efforts, she managed to obtain the legal confirmation of her Jewish identity. An extremely important event for Monika was obtaining the Righteous Among the Nations medal for her adoptive parents from Yad Vashem.

Monika Goldwasser takes part in meetings with groups from around the world organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum.

I had two mothers – Salomea, who gave birth to me, and Anna, who saved me, raised me and gave me love. My adoptive Polish parents took me from the Ursuline convent in Kraków, where I was left by my biological parents, feeling that this was the only way to save my life (in the face of the impending Holocaust). The truth was revealed to me by my adoptive mother Anna on her deathbed, though she often wanted to reveal this secret.

Monika Goldw



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I was born in a time when most people of my origin were dying! I was one of the children who were born, but did not have the right to grow up! I belong to a younger generation of people who survived. I am alive and I am living proof of a great love and kindness that did not know fear, at a time when evil triumphed. I owe my life to courage, dedication and refusal to accept death. I realise how much fear my Polish parents felt of being discovered. We were all threatened by death! (...) My Polish mother made the dearest dream of my Jewish mother Salomea come true – she overcame her fear to save me and she surrounded me with great love. She fulfilled the love of the woman who gave birth to me and was not allowed to live. I will never accept hostility between people and nations; goodness is the highest value!

- 1.** Monika Goldwasser's parents,
photo: private archive
- 2.** Monika Goldwasser receiving the Righteous Among the Nations medal on behalf of her adopted parents from the Israeli ambassador to Poland, Anna Azari, photo: Sobiestaw Pawlikowski
- 3.** Monika Goldwasser's speech during the Righteous Among the Nations medal ceremony, photo: Sobiestaw Pawlikowski

Mirosława Gr

Mirosława Gruszczńska (nee Przebindowska) was born and raised in Kraków. She lived in the city centre with her mother, Helena, and sister, Urszula. In July 1943, Mirosława's aunt, Salomea Kowalczyk, showed up at the Przebindowskis' home asking for unusual help.

Since the beginning of the war, Kowalczyk family had been helping their Jewish friends, the Allerhands. After the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto, one of the Allerhand daughters, Anna, needed a safe place to hide. Salomea Kowalczyk tried to help the girl at all costs, which is why she asked for help giving her shelter, even for a few days. Helena Przebindowska consulted with her daughters and they all considered it their duty to help. They were certain that Anna would stay with them only for a few days, and so the decision was easier for them. Mirosława also admits that helping Anna Allerhand was for the Przebindowski family an expression of a private war against the Germans and Nazi ideology.

Salomea could not find anyone who could hide Anna, which is why she stayed longer than originally planned at Mirosława's home. Unfortunately, the girl fell seriously ill. Helena tried treating her with home remedies, but it soon became clear that they needed to seek professional help. Taking her to hospital was too risky, so they consulted a friendly pharmacist for advice. For fear of denunciation, they told him that it was Mirosława who was ill. After the prescribed medicines were administered, Anna recovered, but the Przebindowskis soon found themselves facing another threat. They were sharing their home with

another Polish family, who from the very beginning were ill disposed towards them. Hiding Anna's presence became increasingly difficult. To ensure greater safety for her, the Przebindowskis organised a small hiding place for her in their room between the wall and wardrobe, where she could hide when visitors came by.

Life in hiding was difficult for Anna and her protectors, so it was decided to ask Father Faustyn Żeliski for help. He prepared a baptismal certificate, which was extremely valuable because it was on the original paper and bore stamps from the church. Besides this document, Anna Allerhand received a new identity – she became Maria Malinowska, Mirosława and Urszula's orphaned cousin who moved in with them from eastern Poland.

Thanks to these new documents, Anna could finally go outside without being afraid of the neighbours. However, these outings became a threat to her and the Przebindowski family because she could be recognised.

One evening in November 1944, three German soldiers burst into the family's room, terrifying the girls, who were convinced that someone had denounced Anna's true identity to the Germans. It turned out that the reason for their visit was something else entirely and did not constitute any threat to them. But Mirosława still recalls to this day what a terrifying and stressful experience it was.

Anna remained with the Przebindowskis without any major problems until the end of the war. In May 1945,

Gruszczyńska



photo: Chris Schwarz

I'm extremely happy that Miri, Alexander and Shoshana survived and now live with their families in Israel. But I want to emphasise one thing: we were no heroes.

her father returned from a prisoner of war camp, followed soon after by her brother Aleksander, who was saved by Oskar Schindler and was liberated in the Brünnlitz camp. Anna's twin sister Rozalia also survived. Their mother was murdered in Bełżec. Shortly after the war, the girls decided to immigrate to Israel, and they were joined by their father and Aleksander in 1957. Mirostawa, Anna and Aleksander remained in contact and are still friendly.

After the war, Mirostawa Gruszczyńska graduated with a degree in technical construction and worked for many years in a design company making technical drawing for construction firms. She lives in Kraków and participates in many meetings with groups visiting the Galicia Jewish Museum. In 1990, Yad Vashem awarded Mirostawa, her mother, sister and the Kowlaczyk family the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

Miroslawa Gr

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Witnesses to History

1. Helena Przebindowska,
photo: private archive
2. Urszula Przebindowska,
photo: private archive
3. Mirosława Gruszczyńska during a meeting
with a group at the Galicia Jewish Museum,
photo: Sobiesław Pawlikowski

Tadeusz Jakubowicz

Tadeusz Jakubowicz was born on 18 February 1939 to a Jewish family. Both of his parents – Maciej and Róża (nee Pistol) – were members of large families.

Maciej Jakubowicz came from Wadowice. He ran a nitrogenous and phosphoric fertilizer manufacturing plant there. His wife Róża graduated from the Kraków School of Economics and Trade, but did not work in the trade.

The Jakubowicz family lived in Kraków on Smolki Street. In 1942, Róża Jakubowicz and her son were sent to the Kraków ghetto. Tadeusz can only recall a few images from this time – crowds of strangers and an overcrowded, cramped flat. He also remembers that he was held firmly in his mother’s arms all the time and that there were often quarrels and clashes between the people sharing the room with them as they fought over every scrap of sleeping space. Tadeusz also remembers that Jews came to the ghetto primarily with small possessions for everyday use, but also with tables, wardrobes and chairs. In light of the cramped conditions in the ghetto as well as the lack of possibilities to buy coal or wood, the furniture often became fuel.

When the ghetto was liquidated in March 1943, its inhabitants were herded to Zgody Square. From there, they were led in the direction of the Płaszów concentration camp. Tadeusz remembers that he walked with his mother, who held him by the hand. In her free hand, she carried a small suitcase. After walking several hundred metres, the little boy started to cry. His mother picked him up and carried

him; not long after, they both went through the gate to the camp.

Maciej Jakubowicz was also imprisoned in Płaszów. He was a worker at the factory of Julius Madritsch.⁴

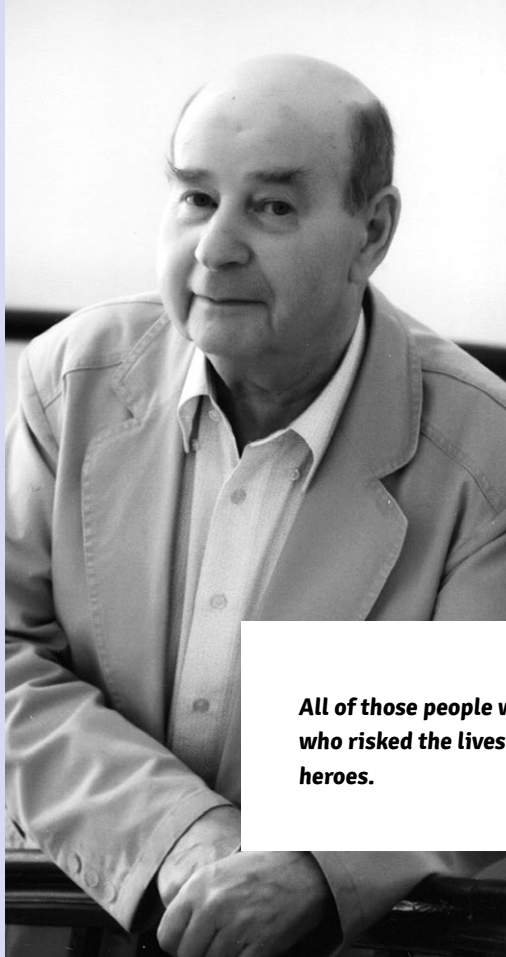
After several months in Płaszów, the Jakubowicz family managed to escape. Tadeusz was hiding in a wagon under a pile of dirt and was taken out of the camp by Mr Kajdas. The Jakubowicz family hid for the rest of the war in the forests near Dobczyce, Kornatka and Czastaw with the help of local people. Tadeusz recalls that they always found good and helpful people. In the town of Kornatka, the priest even asked his parishioners to help the Jews hiding in the nearby forests.

Among those who helped the Jakubowicz family during the war were the brothers Wojtek and Janek Krupa, the Morajek family and Piotr Kopera. Tadeusz remembers all of these people fondly and calls them true heroes. Tadeusz also owes his survival to his mother, who – using their “good looks” – some-

⁴ The Płaszów labour camp, reclassified as a concentration camp in early 1944, housed the following: a carpenter’s shop, shoemaker’s shop, machinery shop, watchmaker and radio receiver repair shop, locksmith, sheet-metal shop, brushmaker’s shop, metal workshops and a central warehouse. From May 1943, barracks for companies and workshops gradually transferred from liquidated ghettos and camps were built in Płaszów. These included: an upholsterer’s shop, barracks for furriery and hosiery, and workshops for tailoring companies, including the Madritsch company. For more information, cf. Ryszard Kotarba, *Niemiecki obóz w Płaszowie 1942–1945. Przewodnik historyczny*, Kraków 2014, p. 76–77.

bowicz

photo: Jewish Religious Community archives



**All of those people who risked their lives then,
who risked the lives of their families I call them
heroes.**

times snuck out to the Aryan part of town to get some food for the starving family.

After the end of the war, the Jakubowicz family returned to Kraków, where Tadeusz finished primary school and then Tadeusz Kościuszko High School (High School No. IV). After graduating, he began studying at the Academy of Music in Katowice.

Tadeusz Jakubowicz has been the president of the Jewish Religious Community of Kraków since 1997.

Tadeusz Jakub



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1. Maria Róża Jakubowicz (nee Pistol), c. 1950, photo: private archive
2. Tadeusz Jakubowicz's grandmother, Mindla Pistol, photo: private archive
3. Tadeusz Jakubowicz in the arms of his grandfather Abram Pistol, 1941, photo: private archive

Lidia Maksym

Lidia Maksymowicz was born Ludmila Boczarowa in December 1940 in Nowy Sambor, near Lvov, but later lived with her parents, Anna and Aleksy, in the village of Prybytki near Polotsk. Lidia's mother and grandparents were arrested under the pretext of having contact with partisans. All of them, including little Lidia, spent several weeks imprisoned in Vitebsk.

One day, Lidia and her family, along with the other prisoners, were packed into cattle cars and taken away towards an unknown destination. After several days of travel in minus 20 degree weather, in horrific sanitary conditions and without food or water, the train finally halted. The first sight Lidia had upon the opening of the wagon's doors was of a troop of armed SS-men with barking dogs. It was 4 December 1943 and she was in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

The first selection took place immediately upon arrival, on the ramp. Little Lidia's fear was intensified by the fact that everything was taking place at night, among the shouts of the SS-men speaking a language incomprehensible to the newcomers. Lidia found herself along with her mother in the group of people able to work, while her grandparents – along with the other elderly, sick and those “unfit for work” – were taken to the gas chambers. This was the last time the little girl saw them.

Along with a group of women and children, Lidia and her mother were taken to the “quarantine” barracks, where their clothing was taken and replaced with striped uniforms. The women's heads were shaved

and then the new prisoners were tattooed. The children were not spared from this process. Lidia was given the number 70072 and her mother 70071.

Lidia was then taken to the children's barrack, where she joined children from all over occupied Europe. She had to learn the rules of camp life quickly – no talking or playing. The language of communication was the camp jargon – a mix of the children's mother tongues. It was also necessary to know basic German in order to obey the commands of the SS.

Filth, cold, hunger and terrible longing for her mother were unbearable for Lidia, but she learned from the other children that something even worse awaited her in the camp. She had become a “guinea pig” for Dr Mengele. After one visit to the camp hospital, where pseudo-medical experiments were conducted, she did not even recognise her own mother. Lidia became pale and weak because so much of her blood had been drawn in order to be sent to German soldiers fighting on the front. As a result of the experiments, her body was covered with sores and she also had problems with her eyesight.

Lidia survived – as she says – thanks to a chain of coincidences. She managed to survive in the camp until it was liberated by the Red Army. Shortly beforehand, her mother was sent on a death march.

After the camp was liberated, residents of Oświęcim started to come to help the survivors. Among them were Bronisława and Ryszard Rydzikowski, who took over Lidia's care – they took her into their home and,

owicz



photo: Ada Kopeć-Pawlikowska

three years later, adopted her, giving her their surname and creating a new family. Lidia believed that her mother had been killed, but at the age of 19 she began looking for her to see if this was true. In 1960, she received the news that her mother had survived. They met in Moscow, and the event was publicised by the Soviet media as the return of a child liberated from Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet army.

Despite many offers to return and study in the USSR, Lidia decided to stay in Poland, where she started a family and worked for many years in a design office. Today, she is a proud grandmother and great-grandmother. She lives in Kraków and participates in numerous meetings with groups of teenagers and adults from many countries organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum.

In the camp, rules were enforced and I knew no other life. For a long time afterwards, I only played concentration camp with the other children in the courtyard – I would pick who would go with Dr Mengele and who would stay in the barracks. I would give commands in German and organise roll calls.

Lidia Maksym





4.



5.

1. Lidia (Rydzikowska) Maksymowicz in the 1940s, photo: private archive
2. Lidia (Rydzikowska) Maksymowicz opening the Memorial to the Child Prisoners of Auschwitz School in Brzezinka (1968), photo: private archive
3. From left: Anna Boczarowa, Rima, Svetlana, Olga and Alexei Boczarow, photo: private archive
4. Lidia Maksymowicz during a meeting with a group at the Galicia Jewish Museum, photo: Sobiśław Pawlikowski
5. Lidia Maksymowicz during a meeting with a group at the Galicia Jewish Museum, photo: Sobiśław Pawlikowski

Maria Nowak

Maria Nowak (nee Bożek) was born in 1920 in Kraków. Her father was a railwayman. The Bożeks lived in a flat in a block for railwaymen located on Wielicka Street.

Maria was a pupil at a secondary school for women, which was attended by girls of various backgrounds. She recalls that her class consisted of 20 Catholics, 10 Jews and two Protestants. Differences in background and religion were not, however, of great significance to the girls – all of them considered themselves Polish. Maria's best friend and deskmate was Helena Goldstein, who was Jewish.

After graduating in 1938, Maria began studying mathematics at Jagiellonian University while Helena chose the Higher School of Economics. The outbreak of the war interrupted the two friends' educations.

During the occupation, Maria found work in a textile store. Helena and her family were sent to the Kraków ghetto, which was established in March 1941. Helena's father was sent on the first transport from the ghetto to the Bełżec death camp.

Meanwhile, alarming information reached Maria's father about crowded trains heading to destinations unknown and then returning empty. Maria tried to pass on the information about these transports to her friends imprisoned in the ghetto. She also helped them by smuggling food and medicine.

In October 1942, Helena's mother was put on the list for people to be deported from the ghetto. Despite

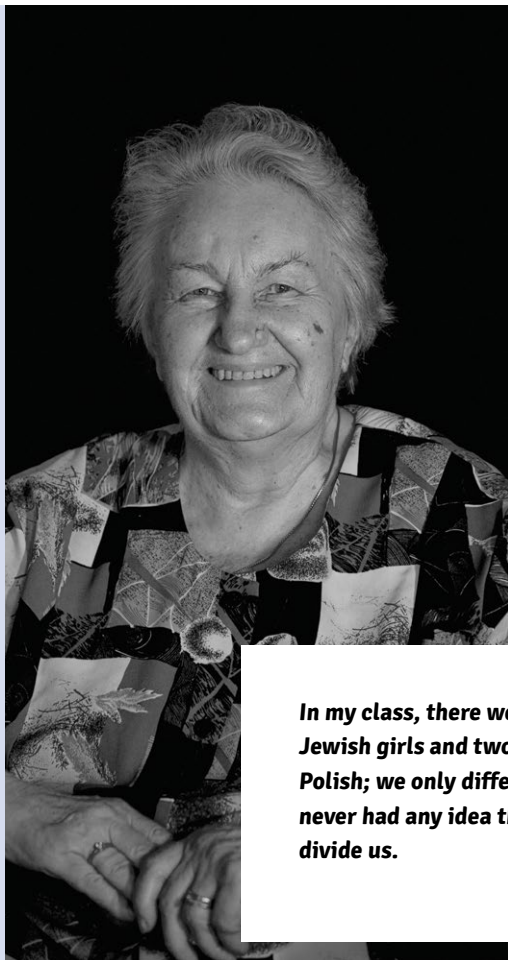
attempts to hide her, she was captured and was sent to Bełżec along with her son. Both were murdered.

Maria, learning of the latest tragedy for the Goldsteins, decided to help Helena escape from the ghetto. She was able to buy a blank identity card, to which she pasted Helena's photograph and entered her own personal information. The document was also accompanied by her baptismal certificate and a copy of her high school diploma.

Helena worked outside of the ghetto on Kopernika Street. One day, at the appointed time, Maria approached her, surreptitiously removed her Star of David armband and affixed a fur collar around her coat. Not having a fur collar on her coat could draw attention onto Helena and make people suspect she was Jewish, as a decree from December 1941 prohibited Jews from owning furs. The furs and warm clothing confiscated from the Jews were earmarked for the needs of the German army.

Hiding Helena at the Bożeks' house was too risky – the neighbours might recognise her. The two friends thus went to one of Maria's friends. Shortly thereafter, their mutual friend came for Helena and took her to Warsaw.

In Warsaw, Helena began working for the railways at the Central Railway Station. She announced the trains in Polish and German. Getting this work was made possible thanks to her false documents with Maria Bożek's name. Every month, Helena sent a letter to Maria in order to prove her identity and allay



any suspicions. The envelopes were addressed to Maria's father, Antoni Bożek.

Shortly after the Warsaw Uprising, Helena was sent for forced labour to Germany. In 1945, she returned to Kraków. She remained good friends with Maria after the war.

Maria completed her pharmaceutical studies and for many years worked in various pharmacies around the city. For many years, she participated in meetings with groups from around the world organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum. She lives in Kraków.

In my class, there were twelve Catholics, ten Jewish girls and two Protestants. All of us felt Polish; we only differed by religion. No, we never had any idea that religion could somehow divide us.

Maria Nowak



1.



2.


PRZEDŁOŻONO PRZY WPISIE
NA WYDZIAŁ FIZJOTRAFICZNY
UNIWERSYTETU JACIŁŁOŃSKIEGO
Dnia 17 WRZ 1938

PRZEDKANI WSKAZALI NA DOZWIENIE
Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego
w KRAKOWIE

KURATORIUM OKRĘGU SZKOLNEGO *krakowskiego i Trawonice*
PAŃSTWOWA KOMISJA EGZAMINACYJNA

ŚWIADECTWO DOJRZAŁOŚCI

Bożek Maria Franciszka / s.c. /
urodzona dnia *22* miesiąca *stycznia*
roku *1920* w *Krakowie*
województwa *krakowskiego*
wyznania *rymsko-kat.*
po ukończeniu nauki w *roku 1938*
w *Państwowym gimnazjum*
im. św. Barbary w Krakowie



do której była przyjęta *14 stycznia 1938 r.* z datą z
w *roku 9 maja 1938 r.* gimnazjalny zwyczajny
egzamin dojrzałości dawnego typu klasycznego wobec Państwowej
Komisji Egzaminacyjnej, powołanej przez Kuratorium Okręgu Szkol-
nego *krakowskiego* pismem z dnia *30 marca*
1938 r. Nr *5852/38* otrzymała następujące oceny ostateczne
z przedmiotów egzaminacyjnych:

z religii	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>
z języka polskiego	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>
z języka łacińskiego	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>
z języka greckiego	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>
z historii wraz z nauką o Polsce Współ- czesnej	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>
z fizyki	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>
z matematyki	<i>bardzo dobrze</i>

G. 10.
Drukarnia Państwowa nr 9724. 26.111.38. 120.

1. Helena Goldstein, photo: private archive
2. Maria (Bożek) Nowak, photo: private archive
3. Maria Bożek's secondary-school certificate, photo: private archive

Lech Rościszewski

Lech Michał Rościszewski was born in 1925 in Mazowsze. When the war broke out, he lived on Kremersowska Street in Kraków with his parents, Lech Marian and Janina Rościszewski, and his siblings, Janina and Jerzy.

Lech was a student at the Pauline Fathers' Secondary School in Kraków. He was beginning the third grade when the war broke out. In 1932-33, the Rościszewskis had built a house called "Szaniec" in the Będkowska Valley, and they moved there at the beginning of the war. Not long after, the Rościszewskis' property became a sanctuary for people hiding from the Germans, both Poles and Jews. Lech recalls that many people living in the area were helping Jews. It was probably due to this particular solidarity from the residents of the Będkowska Valley that it was a safe hiding place for many people.

The first Jewish person to seek help from the Rościszewskis was Dr Bieżyński, a family physician who ran a practice in Zabierzów. Although the Bieżyńskis were polonised – their children were baptised and brought up as Polish patriots – they feared that someone, knowing about their origins, would denounce them.

Over time, more and more Jews began coming to the Rościszewskis' home asking for shelter. Eventually, 15 Jews were hiding at Szaniec, including two ladies named Schreiber, the Eichhorn brothers, Mrs Wagnerowa and her son Paweł, Mrs Schenberg and her daughter Ewa, Mrs Berggruen and her daughters Józefa and Maria (m. Reder).

Hiding Jews was a huge risk for the Rościszewski family. The Będkowska Valley was home to a blackmailer who threatened to inform the German authorities about Jews hiding in the area. Lech then turned to the local branch of the Home Army. Its representatives used the threat of the death penalty to bully the blackmailer into silence. From that moment on, the family no longer had problems with him. Still, the threat of the Germans and the searches they frequently conducted remained.

In the summer of 1941, on a Sunday morning, the gendarmes knocked on the Rościszewskis' door. Some of the members of the household were at church at the time, while others managed to flee to the forest, but the search resulted in the Germans arresting Mrs Wagner, Mrs Bieżyńska, Mrs Schreiber and one of the Eichhorn brothers. The Germans were so focused on looting the Rościszewskis' belongings, however, that they did not pay much attention to the documents for the other people residing in the house. Thanks to Janina Rościszewska's claim that the remaining people were all family members, Mrs Berggruen, Mrs Reder, Mrs Schenberg, Ewa and Paweł were all saved. These events took place several months before 15 October 1941, when Hans Frank issued a regulation implementing the death penalty for all Jews who left the ghetto and for Poles who provided them with assistance.

The Germans returned many times to search the Rościszewskis' home, but after their past experiences the family was well-prepared for these visits and all of the people being helped were carefully hidden.

ewski

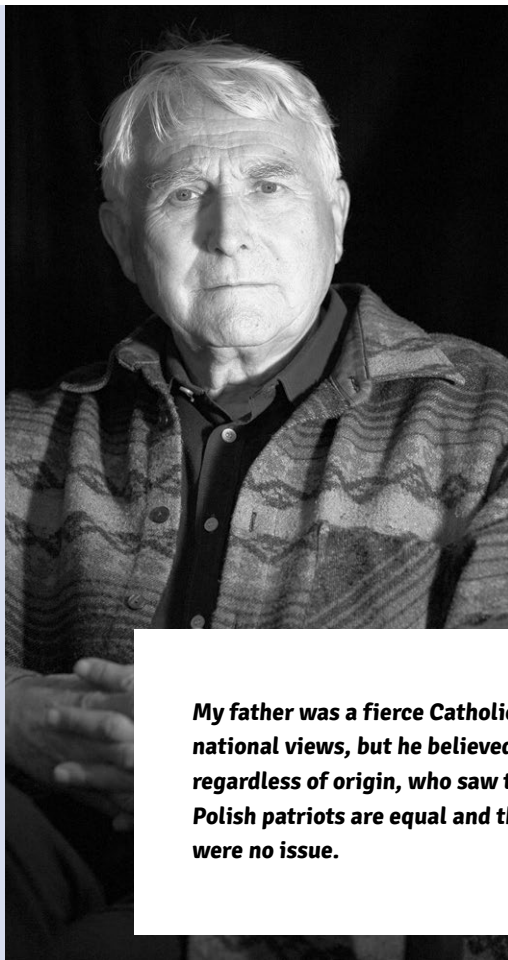


photo: Chris Schwarz

My father was a fierce Catholic in terms of his national views, but he believed that all people, regardless of origin, who saw themselves as Polish patriots are equal and that one's origins were no issue.

On 18 January 1945, the Będkowska Valley was occupied by the Russians. All of those saved by the Rościszewskis left Szaniec. Lech and his family returned to Kraków. They were initially also accompanied by little Paweł. After a time, however, he was retrieved from the Rościszewskis by members of a Jewish organisation. Thanks to this, Paweł was reunited with his father, who had immigrated to Palestine before the war.

From 1944, Lech Rościszewski was a soldier with the Independent Partisan Battalion "Skąta" of the Home Army and saw action in battle. After the war, he began his academic career. He is a professor of technical sciences and lives in Kraków. He participates in meetings with groups from around the world organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum.

The Rościszewski family remained in contact with most of the survivors. In 1990, the family was honoured as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

Lech Rościszewski



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3.

1. Janina Rościszewska, photo: private archive
2. Lech Marian Rościszewski,
photo: private archive
3. The Rościszewski family's house in Dolina
Będkowska, photo: private archive

Tadeusz Smre

Tadeusz Smreczyński was born 19 April 1924 in Zator. His father, like his grandfather before him, held the office of mayor. Zator was a Polish-Jewish town, which Tadeusz recalls as being free of acts of discrimination.

A curious child, Tadeusz learnt how to read at age five. From that moment on, he devoured books borrowed from the library of the Folk School Association, which was located in his family's home. After finishing primary school, he began secondary school in Oświęcim.

In September 1940, he was sent for forced labour to Germany. He worked in Saxony repairing railway tracks. After a time, he managed to escape. For six months, he hid in various places, waiting for the police to stop looking for him. He began working in a bakery when he returned to Zator. He also took part in actions to help prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau. He also helped refugees from the Reich enter the General Government.

He was arrested for his activities on 13 December 1943 and imprisoned in Mysłowice. On 26 May 1944, he was part of a group of 46 men sent to Auschwitz. They were led to the courtyard between blocks 10 and 11, where a summary court had been set up. The courtyard grew increasingly crowded as prisoners from subsequent transports arrived there. Tadeusz believes there were 200-250 people there in the end.

The court was held in a room in block 11 and was chaired by Johannes Thümmler, the head of the

Gestapo in Katowice. The prisoners were divided into three groups. Tadeusz was sent to the last and smallest – the only one that was not sent to the gas chambers. With twelve other young men, he was imprisoned in the camp and registered as prisoner no. 188506.

In the first week of July 1944 (probably the 4th or 6th), a group of approximately 1,000 prisoners were given clean uniforms, underwear and wooden clogs, and then taken to Birkenau. They were then loaded into cattle cars and transported to the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp. Upon arrival, the prisoners were given camp uniforms and those they had been wearing were returned to Auschwitz. Initially, Tadeusz was forced to work in the quarries, but later he was sent along with a group of other prisoners to the Linz III subcamp.

Constant hunger reigned in the camp. The food given to the prisoners did not satisfy even the smallest part of their needs. The barracks were overcrowded and unsanitary. Furthermore, the camp was located on a flood plain. The water level in this area sometimes reached 80 centimetres, making prisoners' work and daily existence even more difficult. Tadeusz was selected to work in the camp kitchen, where he spent 10 months. He says that it was because of this that he survived.

After the Allied raid on the camp in July 1944, seeing the hundreds of dead and the superhuman efforts of the prisoner-doctors and medics trying to save as many of the wounded as possible, Tadeusz promised

Smreczyński

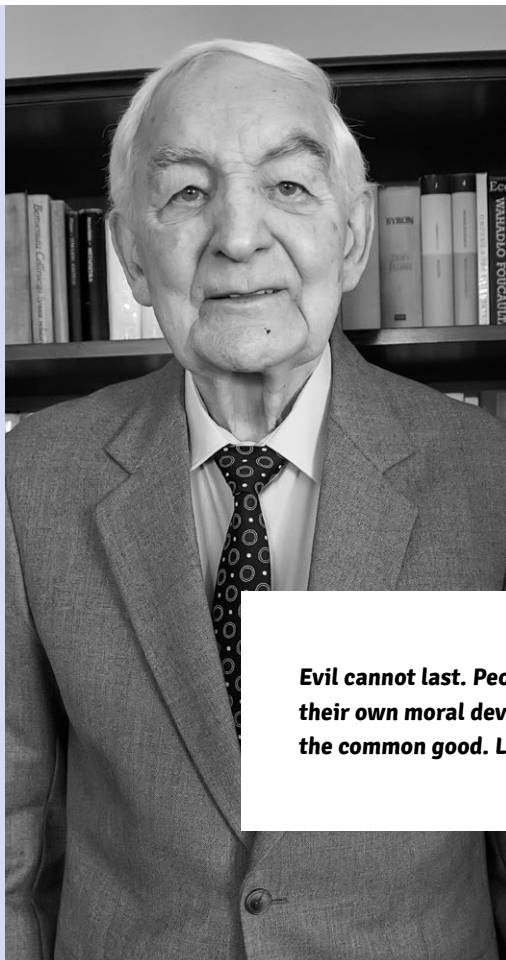


photo: Ada Kopeć-Pawlikowska

himself: “If I survive, I will become a doctor.” He was able to make good on this promise, graduating from medical studies and working for many years as a doctor in Brzeszcze. After retiring, he moved to Kraków, where he lives today.

Tadeusz Smreczyński takes part in many meetings with young people from around the world, including those organised by the Galicia Jewish Museum, sharing his experiences of the occupation and his time in a German concentration camp.

Evil cannot last. People should concentrate on their own moral development and work towards the common good. Live and let others live.

Tadeusz Smre



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2.

Smreczyński



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1. Tadeusz Smreczyński's mother, photo: private archive
2. Tadeusz Smreczyński's father in Austrian uniform during the First World War, photo: private archive
3. The first photograph of Tadeusz Smreczyński, taken about 1.5 years after he was born, with his father and older sister, photo: private archive
4. Tadeusz Smreczyński (aged about 1.5) with his sister, photo: private archive
5. Tadeusz Smreczyński and a friend (during the occupation), photo: private archive

Józef Rosołow

Gina Kuhn-Deutscher

I first met Mr Józef Rosołowski in January 2009. I was beginning my internship at the Galicia Jewish Museum and he had come in for a meeting with a group of visiting students. Newly arrived to Kraków and more than a little nervous about my Polish, I recall little of that particular introduction beyond having my hand kissed in greeting by a stately looking gentleman with sparkling eyes and a warm demeanour. He reminded me a bit of my grandfather.

I do, however, remember sitting in on that meeting and hearing his story for the first time. His opening made me and every other person in the room sit up a bit straighter: “*Szanowni państwo* [ladies and gentlemen], today I would like to tell you about how I survived the concentration camp Mauthausen, which was located in Austria. I was sent there because I was arrested for participating in the Warsaw Uprising. My transport consisted of 400 fighters. I was sixteen years old.”

Knowing the facts and figures of the Second World War, in particular the German occupation of Poland, only prepare you so much for the sights of the former concentration camps and hearing the stories of those who witnessed and experienced these atrocities. That is what makes testimonies like Mr Józef’s so powerful. His memories were powerfully detailed, aided by the artefacts he brought in to pass around – a piece of his uniform, sketches of daily life in Mauthausen drawn by a French prisoner, his repatriation card issued by the American army when he was liberated. What struck me so deeply about Mr Józef’s

story was the way he told it. His voice was calm, measured, but distinctive enough that I can hear him even now.

Mr Józef was a constant presence at the Museum, and I always looked forward to seeing him. He brought in boxes of *pączki* made by his wife for Carnival and bottles of homemade brandy as thank you presents for his translators. “I have to take care of all of my grandchildren,” he said. It was always a treat to get to sit and talk with him. He treated every single one of us as if we were the most important people in the room. He listened patiently and with interest, asking questions and not minding at all when I fumbled for words or had to ask him to repeat himself. Our talks ranged from light chitchat to funny stories about his childhood (which made his eyes sparkle even more as we laughed at his exploits) to my ambitions for the future. Talking to him and sitting in on his meetings made me want to improve my language skills so that we could not only carry on a conversation, but so that I could act as his translator. He laughed when I told him that. “Ms Gina,” he said, “I’d be honoured.”

When the time for me to start translating meetings came, Mr Józef was indeed my first ‘exam’. He was a delight for a nervous, first-time interpreter because he always spoke slowly and clearly, telling his story in the same way using the same words each time. He also was a great help during the question-and-answer session at the end of the meeting. “Many of the questions

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In memoriam

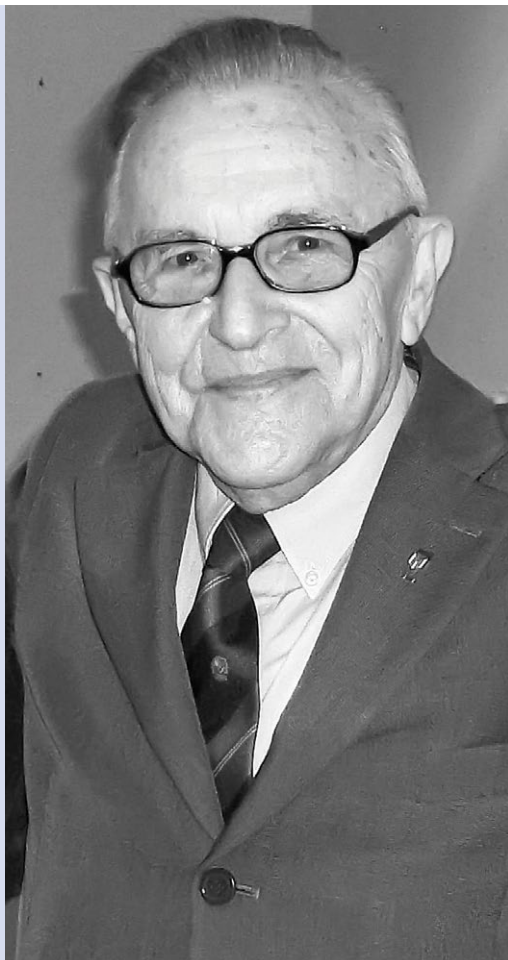


photo: private archive

are similar from meeting to meeting,” he assured me. “Just give me key words and I’ll give you a good, long response. And don’t worry so much,” he added, eyes twinkling. His confidence greatly bolstered mine so that I did not get rattled during the meeting, not even when I forgot the word for ‘guard’ during the Q-and-A. (Needless to say, that was never a problem again!)

The next time he came to the Museum, he presented me with a bottle of his “Józefówka” brandy, a gift I continue to treasure. When I got married last year, my husband and I used it to make our first toast as a married couple.

Of course, Mr Józef liked to keep us translators on our toes. Every so often, he would add in some new details into his story – just to make sure we were paying attention. I usually knew he had something up his sleeve from the twinkle in his eye, but was not fully prepared the first time he decided to ‘test’ me. During a Q-and-A session, he was asked about his role in the Warsaw Uprising. This was not an uncommon question, so I was prepared for his answer... until he decided to go into great detail explaining how he and his fellow scouts made what were essentially Molotov Cocktails. One word he used was *kwass*, which means ‘acid’ in Polish. At that moment, the only word my brain could come up with as a translation was *kvass*, a fermented beverage. Knowing that could not possibly correct, I muddled along as best I could. We both had a good laugh over my predicament later.

Józef Rosołow

There were other meetings, other milestones. I can clearly remember witnessing the meeting between Mr Józef and a woman whose grandfather confessed on his deathbed that he had been a guard at Mauthausen. Both cried as they embraced. “I think her grandfather must have felt some remorse about what he did,” he said later, “otherwise he wouldn’t have said anything.” When asked if he could forgive the guards, he always replied: “It took a long time... [but] I’m a believing Catholic and our Pope [NB: John Paul II] taught us that we must forgive. So I have forgiven the guards, but I will never forget.” As hard as it must have been, Mr Józef did not just ‘talk the talk’, he ‘walked the walk’.

As a child, I was taught the following meditation: “There is a destiny that makes us brothers and sisters. None goes his or her way alone. All that we send into the lives of others comes back into our own. I care not your race or creed, one thing holds firm and fast: that into this fateful heap of days and deeds, the soul of a man and of a woman is cast.”¹ No one I have met, before, during or since, comes close to embodying the essence of this meditation than Mr Józef Rosołowski. He opened his arms to the world and embraced it. Despite his experiences, despite the chasms of religion and nationality and age and language that lay between us – and between him and many of those he met – he made a profound impact on my life, and on the lives of untold hundreds. I will remember the stories, his voice and his sparkling eyes, the conversations we shared and his love of life.

I want to conclude with the statement Mr Józef always made to conclude his meetings. Perhaps it is not a “word for word” translation, but his words stay with me to this day:

“Of course it was hard [to recover]. When I came back to Poland, I had nothing and no one. I had to recover, to work and to study – because it’s only by studying that you can make something of yourself. I found some relatives in Kraków who took me in, and I worked, healed and studied all at once. It was hard, but I would always say that I had survived a concentration camp, and so I could handle just about anything else that life threw at me. And, I want to say, that I succeeded. I finished my studies in economics and worked for many years as an economist at a milk-producing firm, I met a lovely lady who became my wife, I have children, grandchildren. I think that, in the game of life, I have won.”

¹ This meditation is an adaptation of the poem by Edwin Markham used at Camp Birch Trail (Wisconsin, USA).

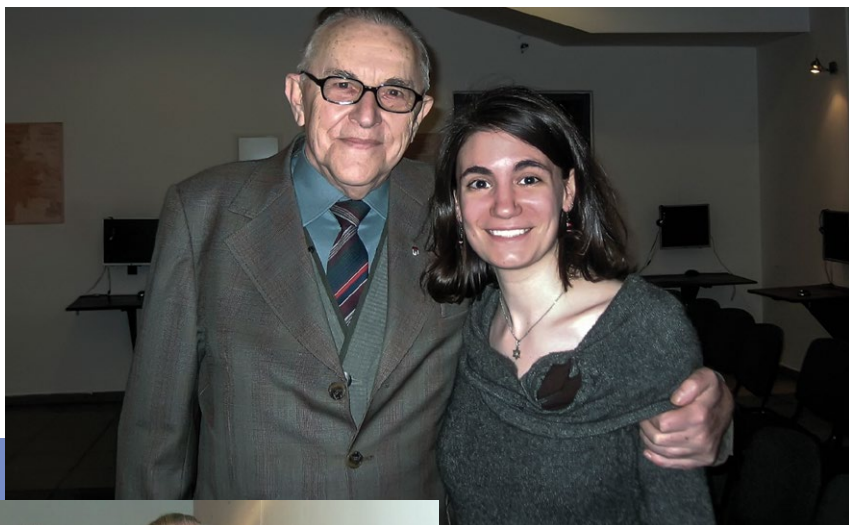
There is a destiny that makes us brothers:
None goes his way alone:
All that we send into the lives of others
Comes back into our own.

I care not what his temples or his creeds,
One thing holds firm and fast
That into his fateful heap of days and deeds
The soul of man is cast.

<http://allpoetry.com/poem/8550777-A-Creed-by-Edwin-Markham> (accessed 30.05.2016).

Mr Józef died on 1 May 2013. I can still remember exactly where I was when I received the news of his passing. It was like losing a grandfather. But I can still hear his voice, see

his smile and feel what it was like to walk arm in arm with him. May your memory always be a blessing, Mr Józef. You won the Game of Life, and you will never be forgotten.



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2.

1. Józef Rosołowski with his translator Gina Kuhn-Deutscher, photo: private archive
2. Józef Rosołowski during a meeting with young people at the Galicia Jewish Museum, photo: private archive

***And I ask that you do not harm others.
Love should prevail, not hatred.***

Józef Rosołowski (said at the conclusion of each of his meetings with young people)

Biographies of Memory

For many years, we have worked with a large group of witnesses to history, realising that they belong to a dwindling generation. This awareness was always present, but often put to the side. Many a teenager would envy these old people their love of life, energy and passion – it seemed that the passage of time did not touch them. And yet... There came times when we had to bid them farewell and accompany them on their final journeys.

We remember them as unique characters: on one hand, as peerless models of conduct, true patriots and heroes, and on the other as dear friends, warm and open, incredibly tolerant. They are people full of dignity, but without any sense of superiority, maintaining a healthy distance from themselves and having incredible sense of humour (although their humour was often dark or absurd).

Mr Paweł Roszkowski, recipient of the Righteous Among the Nations medal, died in 2009. For years, almost right up to his death, he met



with groups of young people and adults from Poland and abroad at the Galicia Jewish Museum. During the Second World War, Paweł Roszkowski and his mother, Anna Krupa-Roszkowska, saved the Jewish Kon family of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, hiding them in their home in Jedlnia, near Radom. Józef Kon, a shopkeeper, came to them first and not long after Anna Roszkowska got his wife and daughter out of the ghetto and hid them in her house. All of them lived to see liberation in hiding at the Roszkowski's house, and returned to Tomaszów Mazowiecki after the war. Paweł Roszkowski remained in contact with Maria, one of Józef Kon's daughters, until the end of their days. Yad

Vashem honoured Paweł Roszkowski and his mother Anna with Righteous medals in 2004.

One of the Righteous Among the Nations who also died, in 2010, was Colonel Józef Mironiuk. He was a member of a peasant family from the village of Jakówki, near Janów Podlaski. He had seven younger siblings. After the death of his father in 1941, the then-eighteen-year-old Józef Mironiuk, at the eldest son, became the head of the family. During the war, he was a member of the Home Army. He took part in raids on German trains and also transported weapons. Along with his relatives, he also led Soviet prisoners of war, escapees from

three nearby camps, across the Bug River. Additionally, he hid a group of Polish Jews who had managed to get out of the Biła Podlaska and Małaszewicze ghettos for twenty-three months in the family home. All of them survived the war on the Mironiuk's farm. After the war, fearing reprisals for his work with the Home Army, Józef Mironiuk decided to join the Polish People's Army. He served in the Air Force for forty years. When he retired, he settled in Kraków. His awards included the Gold and Silver Cross of Merit as well as the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

Henryk Czubaj – a scout of the Grey Ranks [*Szare Szereg*] and prisoner of Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen, who died in 2012 – was also involved in the underground during the Second World War. A scout before the war, after its outbreak he joined the Grey Ranks. At the time, he worked as a tram driver and ticket inspector. He also distributed underground letters and leaflets. In February 1943, he was arrested for this. After being interrogated, he was sent to the Montelupich Street prison in Kraków and from there to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Later, he was transported to Sachsenhausen, where he worked as a mechanic. He survived a death march. He returned to Kraków, where he worked for the municipal transport company until his retirement.

Józef Rosołowski also actively participated in the underground – as a sixteen-year-old, he took part in the Warsaw Uprising, and after its fall was, along with his brother and compatriots, arrested and deported from Pruszków to the Mauthausen concentration camp. He was sent to the Melk subcamp as prisoner number 95902. He was liberated in critical condition at the hospital of the main Mauthausen camp. After the war, he returned to Poland, where he



Henryk Czubaj, photo: private archive

located his surviving relative – an aunt, who survived the Ravensbrück concentration camp. His father, an officer in the Polish Army, was involved in the underground and was killed in 1943; his mother was one of the civilian casualties of the Warsaw Uprising; and his brother was killed in Gusen, a subcamp of Mauthausen. After the war, Józef Rosołowski graduated from the Warsaw School of Planning and Statistics and settled in Kraków. For many years, until his death in 2013, he was the president of the local branch of the Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps. As he himself said, he wanted to help and support other former prisoners through his work in the Association.

The life story of Józef Paczyński, a prisoner of Auschwitz from the first transport who died in



Józef Paczyński during a meeting at the Galicia Jewish Museum, photo: Sobieślaw Pawlikowski

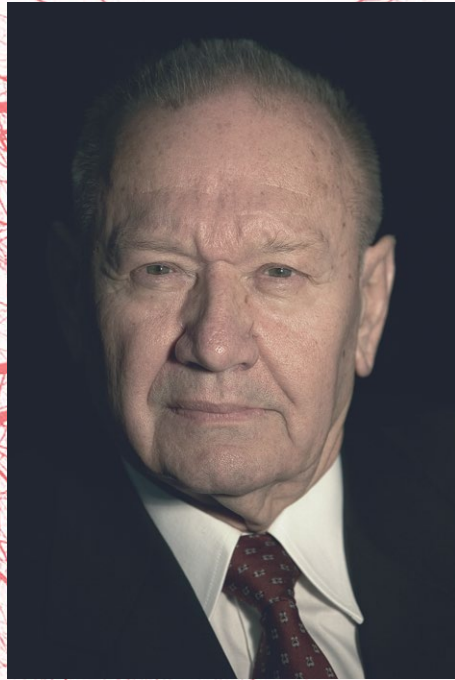
2015, was also incredibly dramatic. Born in 1920, Józef Paczyński fought in the September Campaign and was taken prisoner by the Germans. He managed to escape, however, and intended to go to France and join the Polish legions forming there. Attempting to cross the border of the General Government, he was detained by the Slovaks and handed over to the Ukrainian police. Along with those arrested by the Germans in Muszyna and Nowy Sącz, he was sent to the prison in Tarnów, from where he was deported in June 1940 to Auschwitz on the first transport of 728 Polish political prisoners. In the camp, Józef Paczyński, prisoner number 121, was a hairdresser and cut the hair of figures such as Rudolf Höss. After the camp was evacuated in January 1945, he was sent to the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp and then to Ebensee, where he was liberated. After the war, he returned to Poland. He became a mechanical engineer and worked in

vocational schools, including as the director of the Secondary Technical School of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering in Brzesko. He spent his last years in Kraków.

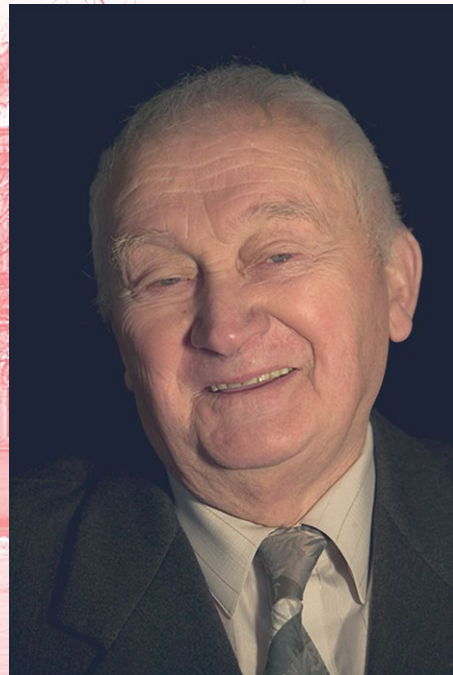
We treat the witnesses' stories described above as a precious inheritance which must be preserved for future generations. The memory of these people must go on. Each of them was an authority for us: every day, we learnt from them what it means to respect others, dignity, honour, patriotism, steadfastness, belief in oneself and faith in one's ideals. Their stories remind us of the great strength that lies dormant in the individual, how important it is not to give up, even in the face of greatest adversity.

Always well-groomed, dressed in somewhat old-fashioned suits, with impeccable manners from their pre-war kindergartens... Looking at these elegant, smiling, straight-backed gentlemen, it was hard to believe that they carried such heavy burdens of wartime tragedies. They did not cave under the burden of these tragic experiences, although each of them – particularly those who were in the concentration camps – lived with unimaginable trauma. To describe this, we can cite here a story from Józef Rosotowski about the greatest nightmare, dreams within dreams, with which he struggled for the rest of his life: "I sleep. I wake up and I'm in the camp. I know it's a dream, so I wake up again and I'm still in the camp. It's only when I wake up once more that I'm at home."

All of these witnesses met with groups of young people and adults from around the world and told their stories of survival in numerous interviews, viewing these public appearances as a mission – to make the memory of Nazi crimes last so that the terrible past would not return. They saw this as a commitment to all those who lost their lives in the turmoil of war.



Paweł Roszkowski, photo: Chris Schwarz



Józef Mironiuk, photo: Chris Schwarz



In 2004, British photojournalist Chris Schwarz established the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków. Through exhibitions, cultural events, and an educational outreach and community programme, the Museum presents Jewish history from a new perspective. The aim of the Museum is to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions typically associated with the Jewish past in Poland, educating both Poles and Jews about their own histories whilst encouraging them to think about the future.

At the heart of the Museum is the permanent exhibition, “Traces of Memory: A Contemporary Look at the Jewish Past in Poland.”

During its existence the Museum has become one of the most important Jewish cultural institutions in Poland. It has been recognized for its work by both national and local government as well as individual visitors. In 2013 the Museum has been ranked by the users of the site Trip Advisor as one of the three best museums in Kraków, as well as one of the top ten museums in Poland for 2014.

There is no other Jewish museum in Central and Eastern Europe of a comparable size that is as innovative as the Galicia Jewish Museum in terms of its positioning vis-à-vis exhibiting Jewish culture, the Holocaust and present-day Jewish life all under one roof. The compact size of the Museum, which is a well-designed and well-structured site, means that a visitor can learn a very great deal about the subject in a (typically) rapid visit. This learning experience can be built not only by way of a passive visit to the Museum’s exhibitions, but also through active participation in a wide range of cultural, artistic and educational programmes.



ul. Dajwór 18, 31-052 Kraków
(+48) 12 421 68 42

info@galiciajewishmuseum.org
www.galiciajewishmuseum.org

” This publication has a unique character. It is a special tribute to the witnesses to history, living and dead, with whom the Galicia Jewish Museum has co-operated over the years. It also demonstrates how important and rewarding the work carried out by the Museum’s staff in the field of preserving the memory of Polish-Jewish life is. (...) The stories of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, Polish Righteous Among the Nations and former prisoners of Nazi German concentration camps contained in this book can be effectively used for didactic purposes. The texts can indirectly become a type of history lesson – learning about the fates and experiences of specific people will give young people insight into well-known historical facts and make them real, allowing them to be examined from a broader perspective.”

Dr Piotr Trojański
Pedagogical University of Kraków

” If the fact of survival (of a tragedy, catastrophic events, the Holocaust...) defines witnesses to history, then surely they will share something precious with us – the will to live and joy in life, survival strategies, moral values and respect for others.”

Dr Edyta Gawron
Jagiellonian University, Kraków

ISBN 978-83-940542-3-6



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Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland

This project was co-financed
by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Poland.