INTRODUCTION TO THE TESTIMONY OF

Władysława Zawistowska

By Pawel Machcewicz, Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Science

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Introduction

In many ways, Władysława Zawistowska's biography may be regarded as typical of young Jews in interwar Poland who, having been raised in traditional Orthodox families, attended Polish secular schools and universities and gradually departed from the way of life of their parents, assimilating into a Polish cultural identity and adopting left-wing political views. In the 1930s many of them, like Zawistowska, joined the ranks of the Communist Party of Poland and, after World War II, worked to create a new political and social reality. Nevertheless, Zawistowska's experience was in many respects exceptional. First of all, unlike 90% percent of Polish Jews, she survived the war. More significantly, her wartime odyssey encompassed so many different stages and places, far more than we would expect from a single biography spanning a short period of just a few years. Her activities in this period included: illegally crossing in fall 1939 the German-Soviet border established after the collapse and partition of the Polish state; living for more than a year and a half in the Soviet zone of occupation, first in Białystok and then in Galicia; time spent in the latter region under Hungarian and German rule in 1941-1942; escaping from Galicia under dramatic circumstances to reach the Warsaw ghetto, where she witnessed deportations to Treblinka; and two and a half years of hiding on the "Aryan side." Even this last act was more dramatic and complicated than in the cases of many other Jews who survived. In the final months of the war, after the defeat of the Polish uprising in Warsaw in fall 1944, Zawistowska hid in the ruins of the city – like Władysław Szpilman, whose experience Roman Polański presented in the Oscar-winning film *The Pianist*.

To make sense of this astonishing biography one must scrutinize Zawistowska's background and the larger context of her actions. Interwar Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in Europe: 3.3 million Jews lived in the country, constituting roughly ten percent of the

population. The majority were traditional, religious Jews who did not fully assimilate. They spoke Yiddish, Polish being a second language with varying levels of command. They usually lived in different neighborhoods from ethnic Poles, dressed in a recognizable way, which significantly reduced their chances of hiding and surviving the German occupation. One can assume from her testimony that Zawistowska's parents belonged to this group. Her father was a shoemaker, producing uppers. Craftsmen, along with small traders and workers, constituted the largest professional category among Polish Jews.[1] Zawistowska's family lived in Łęczyca (she was born there in 1913), a small town in central Poland, near Łódź with a large Jewish community, who had lived there since the 15th century and then constituted about one-third of its population.[2]

For Władysława Zawistowska (her original family name was Zonabend), attending a Polish school turned out, as for many other young Jews, a path towards assimilation, acculturation and secularization. It brought about tensions with her parents, which were typical for many Jewish families at that time and reflected the diverging attitudes and interests of the two generations.[3] Zawistowska's father was very distressed that his daughter had to attend classes on Saturday and attempted to hinder it. One anecdote worth recalling concerns her brothers, made to say prayers by their father but humming popular tango or foxtrot melodies while doing so.

In 1931 Zawistowska passed her high-school finals and moved to Warsaw to study psychology and pedagogy at Warsaw University. She recounts a vibrant intellectual, cultural, and social life and brilliant professors, but also rising anti-Jewish sentiment and violence. During the 1930s, Polish universities became one of the main realms where nationalistic movements attempted to implement their antisemitic agendas, aiming at reducing the Jewish presence in Polish culture and the economy.[4] Warsaw University was the biggest institution of higher education in Poland, with the largest number of Jewish students (about 23 percent when Zawistowska began her

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[1] Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. III: *1914 to 2008* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 61-2.

[2] "Łęczyca, Virtual Shtetl," Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/l/495-leczyca/99-history/137623-history-of-community.

[3] Alina Cała, "The Social Consciousness of Young Jews in Interwar Poland." In *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 8, *Jews in Independent Poland 1918-1939*, ed. by Antony Polonsky, Ezra Mendelsohn and Jerzy Tomaszewski (London/Washington: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), 55.

[4] On these antisemitic movements and narratives see: Szymon Rudnicki, *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny: geneza i działalność* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1985); Anna Landau-Czajka,. *W jednym stali domu: koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskie lat 1933-1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton; Instytut Historii PAN, 1998).

studies), and with the majority of Polish students supporting nationalistic organizations.[5] In the 1930s it became one of the most significant arenas of violent actions against Jews in the country. Zawistowska recalls in her testimony anti-Jewish riots on campus, instigated by right-wing Polish students. Jewish students were physically attacked and often severely beaten. The nationalist groups had two basic demands. The first was to reduce the number of Jews at the university (so called *numerus clausus*) so that Jewish students did not exceed their percentage in the overall population. Official restrictions were never formally implemented, but met some success in practice as the various local authorities within the different departments, e.g. medicine, decided who would be admitted to study. The second demand was the separation of Jewish and non-Jewish students, with separate seats in each university auditorium – so called "ghetto benches." Separation was officially introduced at Warsaw University in 1937, after Zawistowska had graduated; but it had earlier been informally imposed by nationalist students who beat those Jews who did not comply and intimidated reluctant professors.[6]

Zawistowska does not elaborate in her testimony on how this rather traumatic experience influenced her views; but one may assume that, as in case of many other Jewish students, it reinforced her left-wing leanings. In fact, she had begun to be politically involved even before she began her studies at Warsaw University. Still in Łęczyca, as a 16 year old high school pupil, she became a member of International Red Aid (known as MOPR from its Russian acronym, derived from: Международная организация помощи революционерам). MOPR was a relief organization that helped left-wing political prisoners and organized propaganda campaigns in their defense. It was established in Moscow by the Communist International and boasted a very large number of members (over 14 million) across the world.[7] The organization was controlled by the Communists but enoyed the participation of numerous left-wing intellectuals and activists. In Łęczyca there was a prison with many political prisoners, mostly Communists. Becoming involved in helping them opened for Zawistowska a path towards the Communist movement. She joined the Communist Union of the Polish Youth, a satellite organization of the Communist Party of Poland that conducted underground activities, made illegal by the Polish government.[8] For her father, an Orthodox Jew, her involvement with communism was "a tragedy," as she mentions in her testimony. In the sociological study of this generation, based on

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[5] Piotr. M. Majewski, "Społeczność akademicka 1915-1939." In Piotr M. Majewski, ed. *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), 113-4.

[6] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 77-8, 87.

[7] J. Martin Ryle, "International Red Aid and Comintern Strategy, 1922-1926," *International Review of Social History* 15, no. 1 (1970), 43-68, 43.

[8] See M.K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

interviews with about 100 hundred Polish Jews, Jaff Shatz found that most of them became engaged very early in the Communist movement, on average at the age of 17 in the case of children of artisans, workers and petty traders.[9] The reaction of the great majority of their parents was strongly negative. One can clearly see that Zawistowska's experience in this respect was typical for a broad group of Jewish youth in Poland.

Zawistowska does not share too many details about her early political involvement but mentions that she distributed underground leaflets and other publications, and admits to having been a member of a section carrying out political propaganda in the ranks of the Polish army, which was a very difficult and risky job performed only by trusted activists. She was arrested and spent several months in prison in Warsaw. It was a formative experience. Zawistowska recalls other prisoners, their self-organization and self-education activities, which were typical of imprisoned Communists, aiming at self-help and consolidating their beliefs under dire circumstances.

"Generally, Jews would flock towards that [Communist] movement at some point, seeing in it an escape from discrimination, some way to gaining equal rights, and we deeply believed that we would build that great beautiful world"; she declares in her testimony. Jews and other national minorities, in many ways discriminated against in interwar Poland, were highly overrepresented in the Communist movement, in which they saw an instrument for achieving a more just and equal social reality. In 1933, among members of the Communist Union of Polish Youth, to which Zawistowska belonged, Jews constituted 31 percent, Byelorussians 19 percent, Ukrainians 17 percent and ethnic Poles 33 percent (the latter constituted about two-thirds of the overall population). In the Communist Party of Poland in the 1930s the percentage of Jews oscillated around one quarter, but was much higher in its more important echelons. It is estimated that Jews constituted 75 percent of the apparatus for production and distribution of propaganda materials and occupied most of the seats on the Central Committee. Interestingly, the percentage of Jews in the party cells was usually the highest (sometimes over 60 percent) in smaller cities, like Łęczyca where Zawistowska was born and raised.[10] This might be explained by the concentration of Jews in such localities and also, most likely, by their poverty and lack of opportunities for social advancement, which were more easily available in big cities. It is also worth mentioning that in the Polish section of the MOPR – where Zawistowska was active – out of its 6,000 members about 90 percent were Jews. At the same time, one should remember that Jewish Communists – there might have been up to 10,000in the 1930s – were only a tiny

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[9] Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 104, 114.

[10] Schatz, *The Generation*, 85, 96-97.

fraction of Poland`s Jews, the overwhelming majority of whom supported and voted for other parties, including conservative Jewish groups, Zionists and socialists from the Bund.[11]

After her release from prison, Władysława Zawistowska resumed her studies and graduated in 1936 (or 1937 – she was not certain). As a person known for her involvement in the Communist movement she could not get a job at any state-run school, and earned her living giving private lessons and looking after handicapped children in Jewish families. The outbreak of the war (September 1, 1939) caught her in Łódź, where her family had lived since 1935. She soon decided, as did many other dozens of thousands of Jews (not only Communists), to flee to the Soviet zone of the partitioned Poland. In September 1939 the Soviets, acting in cooperation with Nazi Germany, invaded Poland and annexed more than half of the Polish pre-war territory, which was incorporated into the Byelorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics. A risky but successful attempt saw Zawistowska cross the Soviet border and make it to Białystok, the largest town in the northern part of Soviet-occupied Poland, where many left-wing activists gathered. After some time she moved south, to Galicia, where she remained until the end of the Soviet rule in June 1941. She first worked in an orphanage in Stanisławów (nowadays in Ukraine: Ivano-Frankivsk), one of the most important cities in this region. After having completed courses for teachers, she moved to the countryside and taught in a village school, and later again in another school back in Stanisławów. Władysława Zawistowska benefited from new opportunities of employment and social advancement created by the Soviet authorities. Many Jews not accessible for such positions in prewar Poland could now occupy positions in the administration and education.[12] However, she was not enthusiastic about Soviet reality. It might sound a paradox for a Communist activist, dedicated to the cause and imprisoned in Poland, but in fact these feelings were shared by many who made it to the Soviet zone. Zawistowska married a Polish Jew from Warsaw who had also fled from the Germans. She recalls the poverty, and even hunger, that they experienced at that time, as well as fear and knowledge about Soviet repression. She mentions deportations to the east, which included dozens of thousands of Jews who, like her, had fled the Nazis and were now regarded by the Soviet authorities as a potentially disloyal element to be forcibly removed.[13] On the one hand, she hid her membership in the

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[11] Paul Hanenbrick, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 21-2; Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, "Who Voted Communist? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 87-109, 105.

[12] On the situation of Jews under the Soviet occupation see Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry Under Soviet Rule, 1939-1941* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Ben-Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews Under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[13] The most comprehensive study (although a little outdated, written in the 1980s) of Soviet policy available in English is Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland`s*

prewar-Communist movement, since in 1938 the Communist Party of Poland was accused of "treason" and "working for imperialists" and dissolved by the Communist International. Many of its leaders and activists were executed or sent to the labor camps in the Soviet Union as a part of the Stalinist purges.[14] On the other hand, Zawistowska also kept secret that she had graduated from Warsaw University, which in the eyes of the Soviets could make her a member of the Polish elites, distrusted and persecuted by the new rulers.

In spite of poverty, Zawistowska did her best to help her parents who, in the meantime, had moved from the Łódź ghetto to the Warsaw ghetto. She sent them a package with pork fat. Although food in the ghetto was scarce from the outset, as Orthodox Jews they were outraged, did not eat it and gave it away to non-religious Jews. This is an example of a firm adherence to religious identity even under extreme circumstances, but also of diverging attitudes among two generations of Polish Jews.

On June 22 1941, German forces and their allies attacked the Soviet Union. The Red Army suffered heavy losses and the Nazis rapidly occupied western parts of the USSR. Zawistowska did not manage to evacuate to the east and spent the subsequent months with her husband in the village of Korolówka (Korolivka in Ukrainian) in Galicia, near Kołomyja (nowadays in Ukraine: Kolomyia), first under the Hungarian, then under the German occupation. They survived thanks to good relations with Polish and Ukrainian neighbors in the relative safety of a small village where German troops rarely showed up, at least in the initial months of the war. Nevertheless, they soon learned about massacres of Jews committed in nearby localities. The Wehrmacht was followed by special units (*Einsatzgruppen*) of the security police who systematically exterminated Jews, first mostly men and, from the late summer 1941, entire Jewish populations, including women and children.[15] At least 20,000 Jews had been killed in Galicia already by fall of this year. The large-scale massacres took place also in the Kołomyja district where Zawistowska lived.[16]

In March 1942 Zawistowska and her husband were contacted by a man sent by their families, hired to organize for them a trip to Warsaw. It was a very risky endeavor in terms of logistics (they could be easily arrested by the police) but they decided to go, mostly because they wanted to join their families and also because it was no longer safe to stay in the Galician countryside,

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Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). See also the more recent account in Polish: Albin Głowacki, *Sowieci wobec Polaków na ziemiach wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1939-1941* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 1998).

[14] Henryk Cimek, *Komuniści, Polska, Stalin* (Białystok: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1990), 112-33.

[15] Saul Friedländer, *Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 226-45.

[16] Martin Winstone, *The Dark Heart of Hitler`s Europe: Nazi Rule in Poland under the General Government* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 152.

where the German hunt for Jews intensified. At the moment when Zawistowska took the decision to move to the Warsaw ghetto, the fate of the Jews living in the General Government (the central and biggest part of German-occupied Poland) was already sealed. In this very month the Germans began the so called *Aktion Reinhardt*, the systematic extermination of the almost two million Jews living there, mostly in three newly established annihilation camps in Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka. In the latter camp the majority of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto – about 240,000 – were killed within two months.[17] The deportations from Warsaw to Treblinka started on July 22 1942, not more than four months after Zawistowska had joined her family. One should remember, however, that in early 1942 her settling in the Warsaw ghetto might still seem a rational decision, regardless of any eagerness to be together with her family. In Galicia mass killings of Jews continued and, until *Aktion Reinhardt*, living in a ghetto in the General Government could be reasonably regarded as a safer solution. The imagination of most Jews, even the most pessimistic (or realistic), did not conceive that the Nazis would attempt to kill every single one of them. Zawistowska mentions this explicitly in her testimony, recalling what she knew and sensed at that time when she still could not conceive what was about to happen and believed that the Germans would need at least some Jews in the workforce.

In hindsight, one might say that the decision to move to Warsaw may have saved the lives of Zawistowska and her husband. In the Galician countryside they were isolated and without any resources, in Warsaw they could count not only on their families but also on a much broader network of social contacts in the city that Zawistowska knew well from before the war. Settling in the Warsaw ghetto meant joining the biggest Jewish community in German-occupied Europe. It was established in November 1940. and populated at its peak by nearly 450,000 people, including 150,000 Jews deported from other localities. The majority lived in extremely crowded and squalid conditions, continually deteriorating. This situation is reflected also in Zawistowska's testimony, where she describes how they lived after they had arrived. Having a separate bed was an unavailable luxury, they had to switch – one person using the bed at night, another sleeping during the day. The food situation was dire, for most of the Jews were shut in the ghetto and even the smuggling of goods from outside could not alleviate the shortages in the long run, and certainly not for those without financial resources. It is estimated that more than 60,000 Jews died of hunger in the Warsaw ghetto.[18]

In Warsaw, as in other ghettos, a Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) was created, which acted under strict German supervision and was responsible for running institutions related to food distribution, education, welfare, health and public safety. One of them was the Jewish police (Jewish Service

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[17] Ibid.156-67.

[18] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 61.

for the Maintenance of Order), strictly controlled by Gestapo. In the summer of 1942 it was employed by the Nazis for organizing round-ups and gathering people at the Umschlagplatz from where they were brought to Treblinka.[19] There were also cultural and educational institutions (like schools and theatres) in the Warsaw ghetto,[20] but Zawistowska does not recount having any contacts with them during her rather brief stay. During this time she earned some money (and a hot meal, which was even more important) taking care of two handicapped boys. In the last weeks she worked in a workshop outside the ghetto. In many places, like this one, Jews worked under surveillance outside the ghetto and returned to the ghetto at night.

Zawistowska mentions having contacts with the wife of Emanuel Ringelblum, a Jewish historian who created a clandestine archive documenting all aspects of Jewish life in Warsaw and other places in occupied Poland. Before the liquidation of the ghetto the archive was hidden in milk cans dug into the ground, partly preserved and uncovered after the war. One of these milk cans is now at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, another at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The documents from this archive are the most valuable source of information for the wartime fate of Polish Jews.[21].

On July 22 1942, the Germans began deportations to Treblinka. On the very same day Adam Czerniaków, chairman of the Jewish Council in the Warsaw ghetto, committed suicide in a gesture of helpless protest.[22] Zawistowska's elder sister was one of the first victims, brought via the Umschlagplatz to Treblinka at the beginning of the deportations. Their parents, like many other Jews, attempted to hide in a makeshift hideout, but were discovered and also sent to their deaths. When Zawistowska learned of their fate she decided to stay outside the ghetto. She did not return from work in the shop outside the ghetto's walls and instead went to a place on the "Aryan side" that had been arranged beforehand. Zawistowska and her husband had managed also to obtain ahead of time false birth certificates confirming their assumed Polish-Christian identity, crucial documents for Jews in hiding, which later they used to obtain identification

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[19] See the most recent and in-depth analysis of the Jewish police in the Warsaw ghetto: Katarzyna Person, *Policjanci: Wizerunek żydowskiej Służby Porządkowej w getcie warszawskim* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego), 2018.

[20] The most detailed description, as of all other aspects of everyday life in the Warsaw ghetto, is in: Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the *Perished City*, trans. Emma Harris (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[21] See: Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[22] See Czerniaków's biography: Marcin Urynowicz, *Adam Czerniaków 1880-1942 Prezes Getta Warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009). Czerniaków's diary was translated into English as *The Warsaw diary of Adam Czerniakow: Prelude to Doom*, edited by Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron, and Josef Kermisz; trans. Staron and the staff of Yad Vashem (New York: Stein and Day, 1979).

cards issued by the German authorities. The next two and a half years she spent on "the Aryan side," hiding her Jewishness, not only surviving but also saving her brother-in-law. Zawistowska shared an apartment with a Polish family and pretended to be a Polish gentile woman who earned her living trading various goods, selling them in the streets of Warsaw. For eighteen months she kept in her room (most of the time under a bed) her husband's brother, whose appearance was too obviously Jewish for him to risk going outside. She paid each month an agreed amount of money (not very substantial) to their landlords. Occasionally, when the latter panicked and threatened to denounce her and her brother-in-law to the Germans, she blackmailed them, declaring that in such a case she would accuse them of having given consent to hiding a Jew. Her husband lived in another place, with a Polish gentile woman who protected him after having fallen in love with him. He visited Zawistowska in her apartment under the pretense of being her fiancé. Equally complicated and dramatic situations could and surely must have occurred in the extreme circumstances of these times, but Zawistowska's testimony is a rare explicit account.

It is impossible to discover how many Jews hid on the "Aryan side" in Warsaw. The highest numbers have so far been proposed by Gunnar S. Paulsson, who estimated that it may have been around 28,000 of whom about 11,000 survived.[23] Some received help from the underground Council to Aid Jews, which since late 1942 distributed funds to Jews in hiding and their Polish protectors.[24] Zawistowska, however, had to rely on herself. She survived thanks to her ingenuity, bravery and, certainly, lots of luck. But sociological factors were also decisive: a very good command of the Polish language and her socialization in the Polish culture, which she had acquired at school and at Warsaw University. One other thing she mentions several times in her testimony is financial resources. Zawistowska emphasizes that her husband`s family was very wealthy and that he received from his parents substantial funds that they used to prepare for living outside the ghetto and in subsequent years.

The greatest danger for Zawistowska and other Jews living on "the Aryan side" were blackmailers (*szmalcownicy*), who extorted money and other valuables on the threat of denunciation to the Gestapo. There were very many such blackmailers, who circulated on the streets of Warsaw looking for prey. They are mentioned in practically all Jewish testimonies and memoirs of those who survived. A very vivid description of their modus operandi was provided by Emanuel Ringelblum: "…blackmailers and *schmalzowniks* are an endless nightmare to the

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[23] Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 148-52.

[24] See Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942-1945* (Pol.) (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982).

Jews on the Aryan side. There is literally not a Jew <on the surface> or <under the surface> who has not had something to do with them at least once or more than once, who has not had to buy himself off for a sum of money …Every Jew who leaves the Ghetto is a prey for a *schmalzownik*. In *schmalzownik* terminology a Jew is a <cat> slinking through the city streets…The *schmalzowniks* walk around in the streets stopping anyone who looks Semitic in appearance…They are a real plague of locusts, descending in their hundreds and maybe even thousands on the Jews on the Aryan side and stripping them of their money and valuables and often clothing as well"[25].

Zawistowska describes one such an encounter, in which she was recognized as a Jew and robbed by a young Polish man. She considered herself lucky that he did not manage to follow her and find out where she lived, for in such a case blackmail and extortion would most likely continue and completely jeopardize their hideout.

On August 1, 1944, the Polish underground Home Army in Warsaw started a general uprising against the Germans. The part of the town where Zawistowska and her brother-in- law lived came under the control of insurgents (her husband lived on another side of the Vistula river, which was soon liberated by the Soviets). However, it was for them only a partial and temporary relief in the ongoing ordeal. The civilian population suffered from German bombardments. Zawistowska, along with other dwellers of their building sought shelter in cellars, but her brother in law stayed in the apartment, despite a real danger of being harmed or killed by bombs. What they both feared more was that neighbors would recognize him as a Jew. Zawistowska witnessed searches for Jews in cellars by armed Polish nationalists, "bandits" as she rightly said in her testimony. Once recognized, Jews were taken out and executed. Several cases like this were documented by historians and evoked a heated discussion in Poland in 1990s.[26]

After two months of harsh fighting the Home Army capitulated and the whole civilian population was deported from the city. Zawistowska and her brother-in-law decided to remain and hide in a cellar of one of the destroyed houses, since they feared that the he would be recognized as a Jew. It was a very risky endeavor, since the Germans executed those who were caught, and the deserted city was regularly searched by special units whose task was to blow up and burn remaining buildings. They ate what they found in adjacent cellars and were lucky that the omnipresent rats were more interested in the piles of corpses. This experience of a handful of

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[25] Emmanuel Ringelblum, Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, edited and footnotes by Joseph Kermish, Shmuel Krakowski ; introd. by Joseph Kermish, Jerusalem : Yad Vashem, 1974, pp. 123-4.

[26] See the most detailed study on the fate of Jews during the Warsaw uprising: Barbara Engelking and Dariusz Libionka, *Żydzi w powstańczej Warszawie* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2009).

Robinsons (as they were soon called), mostly Jews, received worldwide attention several decades later when Roman Polański made his Oscar winning movie based on the memoirs of a renowned Polish pianist, Władysław Szpilman (*The Pianist*, 2002). In January 1945, after two and half months spent in this final hideout, they were liberated by Soviet and Polish soldiers.

After the war Zawistowska stayed in Poland, unlike thousands of other Polish Jews who emigrated to Palestine. For her this was an obvious choice given her political convictions: "As members of that prewar Communist movement, we believed that it was our duty to build the new Poland, a different Poland... it seemed that our dreams would come true here." Zawistowska first worked in the trade union apparatus in Łódź, then in Warsaw in the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Propaganda. As many other Jewish Communists, she accepted the guidance of the Party leadership and abandoned her Jewish last name.[27] She and her husband decided to assume the name that they had used in hiding, stated in his false "Aryan" documents: Zawistowski (Zawistowska is the female version).

Zawistowska's contacts with Jewish organizations in Poland were for a long time rather loose and one may assume that her Jewish identity was not crucial in defining her self-perception, nor what she did in her personal and professional life. This changed in 1968 with the vehement anti-Jewish campaign organized by the Communist authorities.[28] It was a deep shock for her, a vivid reminiscence of the Nazi language, as she said explicitly in the interview. For many Jewish Communists it marked the collapse of all they had believed in for most of their lives, the ultimate failure of their ideal. Many emigrated along with almost twenty thousand other Polish Jews. This was also the decision taken by Zawistowska's only daughter, who left for Sweden.

The rebirth of virulent antisemitism in 1968 was the turning point that initiated Zawistowska's return to a Jewish identity, not in a religious form (this was long gone, already in the 1930s), but in its secular version. At the end of the 1980s she began cooperation with a Jewish language newspaper, *Folks-Sztyme* (People's Voice), published in Warsaw, and later became active in animating Jewish cultural and social initiatives. She mentions in her testimony organizing in the 1990s a public discussion of revelations about murders of Jews during the Warsaw uprising. For her this was not only a part of the history of Polish Jews, long silenced, but also a very real

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[27] Schatz, *The Generation*, 213-4.

[28] On the antisemitic campaign of 1968 and the subsequent wave of Jewish emigration from Poland see Dariusz Stola, "The Hate Campaign of March 1968: How Did it Become Anti-Jewish?," *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* 21 (2009), 16-36; Artur J. Wolak, *Forced Out: The Fate of Polish Jewry in Communist Poland* (Tucson, Arizona: Fenestra Books, 1994); Audrey Kichelewski, "A Community under Pressure: Jews in Poland, 1957-1967," *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* 21 (2008), 159-86; Anat Plocker, *"*Zionist to Dayan": The anti-Zionist campaign in Poland 1967-1968 (Phd diss., Stanford University, 2009); Hans-Christian Dahlmann, *Antisemitismus in Polen 1968: Interaktionen zwischen Partei und Gesellschaft* (Osnabrück: Fibre 2013).

experience she witnessed herself. Zawistowska's biography indeed offers insights into many dimensions of the fate of Polish Jews in the 20th century. It should be studied by researchers dealing not only with the Holocaust but also many other topics, including the secularization of the younger generation of Jews in prewar Poland, their involvement in the Communist movement and the disillusionment that they eventually faced.

Transcript

INTERVIEWER: Yes, please.

SUBJECT: May I?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: My name is Zawistowska Władysława, I was born in Łęczyca[1] in 1913. My former last name was Zonabend.

INTERVIEWER: Can you say something about your family home?

SUBJECT: I was raised in a home that, in principle, followed Jewish traditions, father was, I do not know exactly, but they called him Gerrer Chusyd, he must have been a Hasidic Jew that followed the rebbe from Góra Kalwaria[2]. As I understood later, because then I still had a difficulty understanding such things still. There were eight people in my family, five brothers and three sisters. Of all of them, only one brother and I are alive.

INTERVIEWER: You were the youngest, the oldest, somewhere in the middle?

SUBJECT: I had one younger brother that was born 5 years after me, and all the others were older, more or less by two and a half years.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of town was Łęczyca? How do you remember it?

SUBJECT: Łęczyca was a small town, near Ozorków, near Zgierz, we would say that was in the Łódź voivodeship. It was actually a tri-national city. Of course the largest number was that of the Poles, there were also many Germans, owners of mills, various trade companies and so on, and of course there was a Jewish population. How many there were, I cannot say exactly now, in any case we lived on a street that was literally called Żydowska [Jewish] St. It was a narrow, small street, everyone knew everything about each other; everyone just lived very close to each other. There were very few rich people there. Actually, only some, a maximum of 10 families had a higher standard of living because our houses had no indoor

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[1] Łęczyca is a small town in central Poland. In the interwar period it had around 10,000 inhabitants, one-third of them Jews who had begun to settle there from the end of the sixteenth century. In 1940 the Germans burned down the synagogue and established the ghetto. Most of Jews from Łęczyca were murdered in 1942 in the death camp in Chełmno (Kulmhof). ("Łęczyca, Virtual Shtetl," Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/l/495-leczyca/99-history/137623-history-of-community).

[2] Góra Kalwaria, near Warsaw, was the most important Hasidic center in interwar Poland. It was created by Yitshak Meir (Itshe Meyer) Rothenberg Alter (1799-1866), the founder of the Ger Hasidic dynasty (the name derived from the name of the town). After the war, a new center of the Ger dynasty was established in Jerusalem (Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 838). Under the third Gerer Rebbe, Abraham Alter (1866-1948), Hasids from Góra Kalwaria played a key role in establishing the Israeli Orthodox political party Agudat Yisrael.

plumbing, no running water, the sanitary conditions were, of course, very bad, and in those richer houses there were some elements of civilization. So I would go to a classmate's place to use their bathroom. When it comes to the conditions… The conditions were difficult because there were two rooms and a kitchen, and one room was used as a workshop. Father and brothers made shoe shanks. These were not soles but shanks, and they mostly provided the peasants with shoe shanks because there were many villages around Łęczyca, and our relations with the peasants were quite tight. Among other things, there were markets twice a week in the town square, and the peasants would bring butter, quark, dairy products and other foodstuffs to supply the population. As much the Polish one, as the Jewish one. The social contacts between these two nationalities were essentially nonexistent. I was just within the reach of that community because I went to a Polish Educational Society school.[3] From my earliest years there, of course because of poor material conditions, I had to tutor just to help my parents a little, and the tuition there was expensive, but most often I could take advantage of reductions because I was a good student.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a Jewish school?

SUBJECT: No, no, it was a school of the Polish Educational Society. A par excellence Polish school, with patriotic traditions among the teachers… It is difficult for me to define what views they had, but there were not many especially chauvinist or nationalist, or anti-Semitic ones there; there were no such problems there, but I had a problem in that father was very disappointed with me going to school on Saturdays and tried to interfere with it. And that collided with the interests of the school because there were often tests and visitations on Saturdays, and the school wanted all the good students to be there then. So there were arguments and misunderstandings on those grounds at home, and sometimes, just taking into account the feelings of my parents, I would try as much as I could not to go on Saturdays, not always. I do not know what problems…

INTERVIEWER: That is, I understand that it was a Jewish home?

SUBJECT: It was a totally Jewish home. We followed all those… Of course I, too, went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur, sometimes on Saturdays, too, but very early on I joined the leftist circles, and among our, say, duties was opposing religion.

INTERVIEWER: And when was that? When did you join the leftist circles?

SUBJECT: It was rather early because already when I was 16 years old, I was a member of the International Red Aid[4], it is an organization dedicated to helping political prisoners, and at a young age, I

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[3] Polska Macierz Szkolna (Polish Educational Society), an educational and cultural organization founded in 1905. In the 1930s it ran over one hundred elementary, high and vocational schools.

[4] International Red Aid (known as MOPR from its Russian acronym, from: Международная организация помощи революционерам). A relief organization helping left-wing political prisoners and organizing propaganda campaigns in their defense, established in 1922 in Moscow by the Communist International, with a very large number of members (over 14 million) across the world. See J. Martin Ryle, "International Red Aid and Comintern Strategy, 1922-1926," *International Review of Social History* 15, no. 1 (1970): 43-68.

became very involved with that movement in that we helped prisoners, because there was a very vig high security prison in Łęczyca. Let us say that, it will be anecdotal, but a classmate of mine was the daughter of a prison officer, and that prison officer warned father that I could face serious repercussions, including expulsion from the school, if my contacts were discovered. Of course, there was no separate youth organization there, there were few people there, and everyone helped each other and so on. I remember that when we had elections in '28[5], even a representative from Łódź came; we were printing leaflets in a very primitive way, using a hectograph. So it was more casual, friendly than organizational. But nonetheless the repercussions that faced us were such that we were noted by the police and we had our apartments searched. In '31… Well, maybe I will say that I graduated from high school in '31, I passed the leaving exams and went to Warsaw to university.

INTERVIEWER: But please tell me… I understand that you left the traditional Jewish life already in Łęczyca, because you got involved with the leftist movement, right?

SUBJECT: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And that was a tragedy for your father?

SUBJECT: It was a great tragedy. It was a great tragedy because even mean people would tell father or the local rabbi that we gathered in the "Igła" [needle] union[6] and ate on Yom Kippur, and even women smoked cigarettes there. That was not the case, but the rabbi called father, and father was in a very unpleasant situation. In some sense…

INTERVIEWER: And did your siblings also abandon their faith in that time?

SUBJECT: Yes, that is my siblings… Well, the sisters were very removed from religious life, even from practice, and only went to the synagogue on the principal, biggest holidays, while generally we celebrated the holidays according to all the religious rules. So that rhythm of life swallowed us all, except that, say, on Fridays after dinner I would try to get allowed to go out earlier because my friends were waiting for me, and that was more interesting to me. But I remember those religious songs from that time, very beautiful ones, that the boys, that is my brothers, would sing together with father, except that father just…

Would try to force my brothers into those daily prayers and so on. Of course, they did not want to make him sad, but I remember that they sang various fashionable tango or foxtrot, or other melodies while pronouncing the right words from the prayer book. Of course, they went to the synagogue on Friday evenings and, as long as they were still in Łęczyca, practiced seemingly.

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[5] Elections to the Polish parliament (Sejm).

[6] Zawistowska probably means a trade union (Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Igły) encompassing textile workers and artisans.

INTERVIEWER: And your friends, at school and in the organization, were there more Jews or Poles among them?

SUBJECT: We were in an organization that was majority Jewish. There were many fewer Poles there. Generally, Jews would flock towards that movement at some point, seeing in it an escape from discrimination, some way to gaining equal rights, and we deeply believed that we would build that great beautiful world.

INTERVIEWER: In '31, you said, you passed your exams, right? And you went to Warsaw to university?

SUBJECT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What did you study?

SUBJECT: It was a course in psychology, actually it was the Faculty of Philosophy, but my specialty was pedagogics, and the even narrower specialty was developmental psychology. We had outstanding professors such as Kotarbiński[7], Tatarkiewicz[8], Nawroczyński[9], Baley[10], and so on. So I can boast that my studies were in fact complete, very rich in content, they just left me many directions for my later life, although after the war I could not return to my profession, even mental hygiene was being discriminated against, there were no psychological practices, and life just went some other way. A few years ago, I once again became involved, but only socially, with the Psychological Society, with the Mental Hygiene Society, but I had left the profession a long time ago because the research today is different, and the knowledge is different, and I absolutely could not be useful to anyone, besides, for a long time, because already since '63, I had been receiving disability payments and doing various other… But I used my studies to give talks in schools about psychophysical adolescence, the difficulties of growing up, I had talks for parents, teachers, and so on, in many schools. So that required preparation with the current syllabus and further studies, and getting familiar with the books that presented knowledge about the latest theories. I was also in a section of a third age university, then in a family counseling clinic, where again there were those difficulties of everyday life. In any case, I tried not to lose all touch with the field, up to some point.

INTERVIEWER: When you were a student in Warsaw, where did you live?

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[7] Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1886-1981), a philosopher, logician and ethicist.

[8] Władysław Tatarkiewicz (1886-1980), a philosopher, historian of philosophy, esthetician, and ethicist. Tatarkiewicz and Kotarbiński are regarded as two of the most eminent Polish philosophers of the 20th century. Their lectures at the Warsaw University were very popular and attracted a great number of students.

[9] Bogdan Nawroczyński (1882-1974), an educationalist and philosopher, professor at Poznań and Warsaw universities. During the war he was involved in organizing clandestine education for students.

[10] Stefan Baley (1885-1952), a psychologist, educationalist, physician. One of only two professors of Ukrainian descent at the Warsaw University.

SUBJECT: So I owe being able to study at all to my sister, who unfortunately was one of the first roundup victims, a victim of a purge in the ghetto[11]. I wrote about her for the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising[12], of course anonymously, about my stay in the ghetto until the great action[13], and actually I dedicated my memoir mostly to her. She was an incredibly noble person who lived only for others, not for herself. Besides, she was active in the Traders' Union, and because of that, we would always have our home searched before May 1st[14], and we would always get locked up in prison for two weeks, but she did everything to save me, to protect me, and one day she even locked me in a neighboring room because we lived in this room that the owner of the company she worked in as an accountant had arranged, furnished, and essentially even built, and later, as that owner came, he had to open the door for me because she had quickly eliminated one bed and was pretending that she lived there alone because she always took the risk, she wanted to take all the losses. And I owed that to her. She initially worked as an accountant in a chess club, that was in Pasaż Simonsa[15], she worked at night and got very poor compensation, but she shared even that food ration with me. And for many years, I, rather early, actually, started tutoring, but it was mostly about me getting free lunches from the families whose children I tutored. So she actually, our family sent us some boxes, but I mostly owe it to her because in that one tiny room…

INTERVIEWER: Where was that, where was that room located?

SUBJECT: That was on 13 Nalewki St. 13 Nalewki St[16] was a walk-through house, there were as many as 3 courtyards there. You could not get to the other side from there, but number 15 had gates you could walk through. So it was on the second floor, it was such an apartment: one designated room; there was a silk wholesale business; the owner imported the silk from Lyon: scarves, neckerchiefs, and so on. And

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[11] Round-ups in the Warsaw ghetto began on July 22, 1942. Victims were brought to the Umschlagplatz near a railway station and from there deported to the death camp in Treblinka. In two months about 240,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto were killed there.

[12] The uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was organized and carried out by the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa) and the Jewish Military Union (Żydowska Związek Wojskowy). It started on April 19, 1943, as a response to the German final attempt to liquidate the ghetto, when there were still around 50,000 people living there. It lasted until May 16 1943 and was the largest act of Jewish resistance of WWII. The Jews who survived the uprising were killed in the death camp in Treblinka or deported to the concentration camp in Majdanek. Some of the Jewish fighters managed to get out from the ghetto and continued their resistance in the partisan units and in the Warsaw uprising of 1944. See Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. from the Hebrew by Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

[13] This word comes from *Großaktion*, a German code name for the massive round-ups and deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka death camp, which started in July 1942 (see footnote 11).

[14] Labor Day. On that day, every year in interwar Poland, the Communists organized demonstrations and other political actions that were usually suppressed by the police.

[15] A large building containing many stores and offices. It was destroyed during the Warsaw uprising in 1944.

[16] In the heart of the Jewish part of Warsaw. Nalewki St. no longer exists – it was destroyed and burned down with the rest of the ghetto after the suppression of the ghetto uprising.

next to it, specifically for her because they were great friends, and he respected her very much, just a room like this, where, at night, a camping bed barely fit, of course a bathroom was out of the question, and there was a washbasin. And she, at an age when she could get married, and when she could have some friends over, and so on, I restricted her freedom a lot in that aspect, and she would sacrifice a lot by just taking care of me. Not to mention that I would often get sick, so she would go to the hospital, even risking her heath; she was an incredible person. About what happened to her, maybe later.

INTERVIEWER: Was she much older than you?

SUBJECT: She was 5 years older than me. She just failed 7th grade in high school, and she just stayed for one more year. Our parents could not afford to pay tuition anymore, and she just moved out. First she went to Łódź, then she went to Warsaw, and thanks to her I had this support, I could go to university.

INTERVIEWER: How was it at university? Did you feel that atmosphere of anti-Semitism?

SUBJECT: I was simply a victim of the ghetto benches[17].

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

SUBJECT: Of course. One day I was even witness to bloody incidents[18]; my classmates were badly hurt, and I took shelter in the room of Kotarbiński's seminar. Dina Sztejnbarg[19], that is professor Kotarbiński's wife, she was not his wife yet then, was teaching a seminar in one of the side rooms at the main courtyard, and it was there that the Jewish students found shelter with them. But the sight of all those bloodied people, the screams, swinging brass knuckles around, chasing those people, it left a horrible impression on us and brought us even closer to that leftist movement because there was also a right wing movement among the Jews, that is they gathered together, it was the so-called "Strzecha" [thatch] club[20], and we had our club called "AKLA"[21]. It was a student-run arts and culture club, actually an academic one, and people

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17 So called "ghetto benches," with separate seats for Jewish students in each auditorium, were officially introduced at Warsaw University in 1937. Earlier they were informally imposed by Polish nationalist students, who beat those Jews who did not comply and intimidated reluctant professors (Piotr. M. Majewski, *Społeczność akademicka 1915-1939*, in *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*, ed. Piotr M. Majewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), 113-4.

18 In the 1930s Warsaw University became the arena of violent actions against Jews organized by the right-wing nationalist organizations of Polish students (National-Radical Camp, Camp of Great Poland, Pan-Polish Youth). Jewish students were physically attacked and often severely beaten.

19 Dina Sztejnbarg (1901-1997), a philosopher and logician. In the 1930s she was lecturer in logic at the Warsaw University, after the war professor at Warsaw University (at this time she used the name Janina Kotarbińska).

20 Żydowska Strzecha Akademicka (Jewish Academic Thatch), a Jewish student organization at Warsaw University.

21 AKLA, Akademicki Klub Literacko-Artystyczny (Academic Literary-Artistic Club), a left-wing organization active among students and workers in Warsaw.

such as Lucjan Szenwald[22], Estera Wodnar[23], authors of satirical texts and plays, and so on, were associated with it. And apart from that, there was an active Polish literature club at the university, and Szemplińska[24], Szymański[25], and Szenwald were our three Ss. They often held various literary soirees in Żoliborz[26], and there was an atmosphere that really brought people in, bound us together and at the same time was a stimulus for us to get acquainted with literature, with poetry, and so on. Of course, the most important thing, what interested us the most was poetry. We would also attend the soirees held in that place on Karowa St[27], where I, among other things, witnessed Kruczkowski[28] get rotten eggs thrown at him. And while I was still in Łódź, I would attend all the events associated with, held by Schiller, so "Krzyczcie Chiny", "Cjankali"[29], and so on because there were very many shows in the theater then, and, of course, I continued that habit of going to the theater in Warsaw.

INTERVIEWER: Did you witness that story they wrote about in books, regarding the ghetto benches , in which professor Kotarbiński stood with the Jewish students[30]?

SUBJECT: Yes. So I do not remember exactly if I was there for that lecture, but it was a very notorious case. But professor Baley, too, in section, that is on Three Crosses Square[31], was protesting, and actually there were no ghetto benches in Baley's class. Nawroczyński, who was in principle known for his right wing beliefs, was also being very fair with respect to his Jewish students.

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22 Lucjan Szenwald (1909-1944), a poet, member of the Communist Party of Poland and the Communist Union of Polish Youth.

23 Estera Wodnar (1912-1993), in the 1930s a student in Państwowy Instytut Sztuki Teatralnej (State Institute of Theatrical Art), an actress and director in workers amateur theaters, after the war a theater director in Warsaw and Łódź.

24 Elżbieta Szemplińska (1909-1991), a left-wing writer.

25 Edward Szymański (1907-1943), a left-wing poet, died in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

26 A district of Warsaw where many of the liberal and left-wing intelligentsia lived.

27 Karowa Street is adjacent to the main campus of the Warsaw University.

28 Leon Kruczkowski (1900-1962), a left-wing playwright, poet and novelist, after the war chairman of the Polish Writers Union. In the 1930s, right-wing activists attempted to disrupt performances staged by left-wing artists and one of the methods they used was throwing rotten eggs.

29 Leon Schiller (1887-1954), one of the most eminent Polish theater directors; the two plays Zawistowska mentions are *Roar China*, by Russian playwright Sergei Tretyakov, and *Cyankali*, by German author Friedrich Wolf.

30 Tadeusz Kotarbiński lectured whilst standing up, a gesture of solidarity to Jewish students who did not accept "the ghetto benches" and chose to listen to lectures standing up instead of taking seats designated for Jews. (Zofia Trębacz, "Ghetto Benches' at Polish Universities: Ideology and Practice," in *Alma mater antisemitica. Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, eds. Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Jana Starek (Wien: New Academic Press, 2016), 131.

31 Plac Trzech Krzyży (Three Crosses Square) in downtown Warsaw, not far from the main campus of Warsaw University.

INTERVIEWER: What was the percentage of Jewish students in your year?

SUBJECT: It is difficult for me to determine now, but in any case there were many[32]. There were those assistants with leftist views such as Kunicka[33], Rybicka[34], they clearly sympathized with the leftist movement. And Baley turned out to be very tolerant, not only tolerant, but his students would just go to his secret classes during the occupation, and he would help many of them there. He has a very beautiful record.

INTERVIEWER: Please say if there was also, that is, did the Zionist[35] ideology have its representatives among the students?

SUBJECT: They surely did. They had a lot of money, and they often arranged summer camps. Among other things, with great support I got to the camp in Zawoja because I had a broken leg, and they had to operate in Rabka, and it was a good occasion for doing those procedures, that is, there were baths there, and then a masseuse would come to me to Zawoja and massaged me because the leg was totally, it had lost its muscles, absolutely torpid because it had been in a cast for more than a year, then on an elevation, was hardly recovering, and such a treatment was necessary. And there, among others, was the famous cook Pawlak[36], who would later play a big role in the leftist movement, who helped to feed those students so well. They had other options, other in that there were many students from very affluent circles, who nonetheless just joined leftist organizations. Among them was Aleksander Bachrach[37], who, when I went to his house once because I wanted to borrow money for tuition from him, I was just intimidated and felt very bad because a servant brought his food, he was sitting in a fancy armchair, and so on. And I was amazed that a man who comes from that background, is so wealthy, wants to endanger himself and be in contact with those poors. Besides, many of those people, Fidelski[38] and so on, had ministerial positions after the war and generally very high-ranking positions because of their merits.

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[32] When Zawistowska began her studies at the Warsaw University in 1931 about 23 percent of the students were Jewish (Majewski, *Społeczność akademicka*, 151).

[33] Joanna Kunicka, a psychologist, professor Baley`s assistant, detained by the Germans with her Jewish husband in Warsaw in 1943, died in the concentration camp in Auschwitz in 1943.

[34] Ewa Rybicka, a professor and Baley's assistant, during the war involved in the clandestine education of Warsaw University students and in the underground Council to Aid Jews, arrested and killed in a public execution in Warsaw in 1943.

[35] The Zionist movement, supporting the Jewish emigration to Palestine and the founding of a Jewish state there, had a mass following in interwar Poland and was divided into several groups, active also at the universities.

[36] Zawistowska might have meant Mikołaj Bondarenko-Pawlak (1907-1963), an activist of the Communist Union of the Polish Youth and the Communist Party of Poland, after the war a high-level functionary of the Polish United Workers Party.

[37] Alekander Bachrach (1911-1979), in the 1930s a student of law at Warsaw University, after the war professor of law at the Polish Academy of Science and judge of the Supreme Court.

[38] Roman Fidelski (1912-1988), in the 1930s a student at the Warsaw Technical University, in the 1950s minister of machine industry.

INTERVIEWER: And were there clashes between your orientation, say the left, and the young Zionists?

SUBJECT: I mean, there were often clashes, when there were those meetings in "Strzecha", there were fistfights, arguments and fistfights. Generally, they would boycott, come to our various meetings and just start huge brawls, and very often in their club because we would often go to their meetings, too, and very often very serious rows would result from that.

INTERVIEWER: And did you know any revisionists, Betarists[39] at that time?

SUBJECT: I do not remember now, but there undoubtedly were Betarists there, too.

INTERVIEWER: Did you hear about Begin[40] when you were in Warsaw?

SUBJECT: I heard about him, but I had no contact with him personally. In any case, those between us occurred most often in the "Strzecha" club.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you finish your studies?

SUBJECT: Because I was arrested, and one day they even took away my transcript when I went to the doctor, without warning. And in '36 I was in prison, and they involved me in the case of Aleksander… I do not remember now…

INTERVIEWER: So please tell me about that case.

SUBJECT: Yes, it was a case of, an accusation of espionage for the Soviet Union. For a plot to separate a part of Poland.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you end up in that case?

SUBJECT: Because at some point I was just involved in the distribution of illegal press, and the so-called military matters. That is, we would even go to the barracks to agitate among the soldiers, above all we would distribute writings there, brochures, and so on. And there was a snitch, and I do not remember how, but they arrested me, too, and attached me to that case. Aleksander Zawadzki[41].

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[39] Betar was a youth organization of Revisionist Zionism, created in 1920s by Vladimir Jabotinsky. Revisionists were a radical, right-wing faction of the Zionist movement, demanding Jewish sovereignty over the whole of Palestine and in the 1930s engaging in armed struggles against the British Mandate authorities.

[40] Menachem Begin (1913-1992), in the 1930s a student of law at Warsaw University and leader of the Polish branch of Betar, after the creation of the state of Israel, politician of the right-wing parties Herut and Likud, prime minister in the 1970s and 1980s.

[41] Aleksander Zawadzki (1899-1964), an activist of the Communist Union of the Polish Youth and of the Communist Party of Poland, head of the military section of the latter conducting propaganda in the ranks of the Polish army, after the war member of the Political Bureau of the Polish United Workers Party and chairman of the Council of State (equivalent to president of the state).

INTERVIEWER: Aleksander Zawadzki, the future chairman of the Council of State?

SUBJECT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what was the verdict in your case?

SUBJECT: There was no verdict because thanks to great efforts and even bribing the police, and so on, on my sister's bosses part, we managed to get the case dismissed[42].

INTERVIEWER: But you did spend some time in jail?

SUBJECT: Oh yes, a few months. In "Serbia"[43] where I met, among others, Eigerówna[44], that famous daughter of those… and such a great communist, besides, there were Ukrainians and Poles there, and we met many interesting people there and read Inprekor[45] and a lot of other things, we were just educating ourselves, there were even various foreign language classes held there, and so on, and there was a systematic syllabus, and so on. But let us say that it meant a lot on the mental side, but the physical conditions were crippling. Especially I had always had health issues, I was often sick, almost all of the hospitals that were open then and that student health practice, I would use almost all of them constantly.

INTERVIEWER: But all in all, it was a rather unpleasant stay in that prison, I understand?

SUBJECT: Well, the stay, I am saying, on the mental side, because the young women there were full of enthusiasm and impressed by people with a long record in the party, with difficult experiences, and so on, and thought of it as a school of life, a university, but on the other hand, what the conditions were like is very accurately described and well known that… I think I am not permitted, I can only speak of some personal… About the cold, the beds, the general inability, we could not even sit for many hours straight, about that bucket that stood in the cell, the impossibility of washing oneself, the lack of water, the food, except that our people were trying to do everything on the outside to send us packages. Of course, there was a commune, we would all share the packages, so there was no distinction, no one was excluded, and there the commune and the communal life fit us very well, especially the very young people.

INTERVIEWER: And did your Jewish background make your situation in prison worse and more difficult than that of other prisoners?

SUBJECT: When it came to the officers, no.

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[42] The trial of Aleksander Zawadzki and 55 other codefendants took place in April 1938. Zawadzki was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment.

[43] The women's ward in the Pawiak prison in Warsaw.

[44] Maria Eiger-Kamińska (1897-1983), member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, born to a wealthy family of Jewish industrialist, Silbersteins, after the war a high-ranking official in the Polish United Workers Party and in the Ministry of Public Security.

[45] *Inprekor* (abbreviated from: International Press Correspondence), the magazine of the Communist International.

INTERVIEWER: Not when it came to the officers?

SUBJECT: No. When it came to the internal relations, also not because it was all one big family. They were intelligent people, university graduates, who had cobblers for husbands, there were no difference in levels and so on, there were even women who had children that had given birth to who were somewhere among strangers, raised by strangers and so on. It was a totally different environment from what I had known before. It was very interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Sorry, let us come back to the fundamental question. What organization were you a member of? Was that not the Communist Party of Poland[46]?

SUBJECT: It was actually the Communist Union of the Polish Youth[47] At the start, when it comes to…

INTERVIEWER: The Communist Union of …

SUBJECT: When it came to the university, we were members of "Life"[48].

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: Of "Life" and the OMS. And the ZNMS. Of the ZNMS and "Life". Among other things, right after the war…

INTERVIEWER: And what is the ZNMS?

SUBJECT: The Union of the Independent Socialist Youth. For many years…

INTERVIEWER: I am sorry, the cassette is ending.

SUBJECT: May I?

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[46] The Communist Party of Poland, founded in 1918, was a member of the Communist International. In interwar Poland it was made illegal and acted as an underground organization. Many of its activists were imprisoned. In 1938 the Communist Party of Poland was dissolved by the Communist International under false accusations of having been infiltrated and controlled by the Polish secret police. Many of its activists, who were at that time in the Soviet Union, were executed or sent to labor camps. See M.K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976; Henryk Cimek and Lucjan Kieszczyński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski 1918-1938* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza 1984); Henryk Cimek, *Komuniści, Polska, Stalin* (Białystok: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1990).

[47] Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, founded in 1922, a youth wing of the Communist Party of Poland.

[48] Związek Niezależnej Młodzieży Socjalistycznej (ZNMS) "Życie," the Union of the Independent Socialist Youth "Life," founded in 1923, since 1928 using the name Organizacja Młodzieży Socjalistycznej (OMS) "Życie" (Organization of the Socialist Youth "Life"), an organization encompassing Communist and radical left-wing students, close to the Communist Union of the Polish Youth and the Communist Party of Poland.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: After the case was dismissed, my rights as a student were reinstated, and eventually… In '36 I graduated from university. I do not remember that moment now, because I have… a diploma for graduation in '37, or in the academic year, or '36 through '37.

INTERVIEWER: And what was next? Did you work?

SUBJECT: Working was out of the question… Even… let us say starting a kindergarten, or even just working in a kindergarten. Getting a job at a school was out of the question. Actually, those experienced teachers, older than myself, worked at Jewish schools. Getting a job at a state-run school was out of the question. Let us say that… I did… apprenticeships in various, in a developmental and vocational counseling center and in other counseling centers just to widen my qualifications. I even remember that Adolf Berman[49], who was a psychologist, was running such a developmental and vocational counseling center in CENTOS[50], and he would pay me small sums for scoring Binet-Terman[51] tests. So a steady job was out of the question, but I had so called "conditions" all the time, that is I was just tutoring students. Just students, but I would go to various rich homes, so that partially included food. I was there to keep the children company because I would go on walk with such girls, or I would go to the theater with them, in any case those were not hour-long sessions, but they lasted many hours.

INTERVIEWER: Were those Jewish homes?

SUBJECT: Yes, Jewish homes, but some were very assimilated. For example, one such family were the Szapiros[52]. He was actually away at work, he was even friends with Fitelberg[53], he was in Argentina then, his wife had a huge store with women's ready-made clothing and so on. But I also had "conditions" in less well-off homes. Apart from that, from time to time I would take care of retarded children, and that was better paid. Even in the ghetto I substituted for a friend in taking care of two such retarded boys from Twarski's facility, which was designed for such children, but it obviously did not exist in the time of the

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[49] Adolf Berman (1906-1978), a psychologist with a PhD from Warsaw University, an activist of the left-wing of the Zionist movement, one of the leaders of the Jewish underground in the Warsaw ghetto. After the war he was the chairman of the Committee of the Polish Jews and in 1950 emigrated to Israel where he became a member of Knesset and an activist of the socialist party Mapai, and later of the Communist Party of Israel. Berman testified as a witness at Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1961.

[50] CENTOS **(**Centrala Towarzystw Opieki nad Sierotami, Federation of Associations for Aiding Orphans), children's aid society, founded in 1924, continued its operations in the Warsaw ghetto with Adolf Berman as its director. One of the institutions financially supported by CENTOS was the orphanage run by Janusz Korczak.

[51] Binet-Terman tests – IQ tests measuring the intellectual and psychological capabilities of children, developed in the 1920s by the American psychologist Lewis Terman.

[52] Szapiro was a popular name among Polish Jews and it is impossible to find out which family Zawistowska meant.

[53] Zawistowska probably meant Grzegorz Fitelberg (1879-1953), a Jewish conductor, violinist and composer who, in the 1930s, was the chief conductor of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra.

ghetto. So those were just tutoring sessions, something we would call babysitting today. Something like that…

INTERVIEWER: You lived off that, right?

SUBJECT: In principle yes, but my sister would help me, and from time to time I mostly spent money on clothes because mother was constantly trying to send some packages with food from home.

INTERVIEWER: You, of course, would go to Łęczyca?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to Łęczyca at that time?

SUBJECT: So my parents actually moved to Łódź in 1935.

INTERVIEWER: So did you visit Łódź then?

SUBJECT: Yes. Yes, and before that I obviously went on vacations. Łęczyca was a perfect place for holidays, because there was the river Bzura there, there were very many orchards, very many rivers… very many meadows. And that was great relaxation after the big city. Apart from that, the food at home was much different from that during my studies. And that would allow me to somehow regenerate strength. And then, in the Łódź period… The Łódź period was very difficult already because the apartment was very packed, small, that workshop was in just one room. A lot of heat was needed for the workshop, there was a huge oven there, on which shoes were left to dry, and it burned throughout the day. And because the windows opened to a shared bathroom, and the smell from there came in through the windows, there were no… There was just a sink, there were no sanitary appliances, and it was very difficult. Before the outbreak of the war, in '39, I got diarrhea from eating raw fruit, and almost all family members got it from me. And there was not even…

INTERVIEWER: You mean, you came back to Łódź at some point?

SUBJECT: Yes, I came back for the vacation.

INTERVIEWER: For the vacation, right?

SUBJECT: And already in '39, I was there on vacation, and the war took me by surprise in Łódź.

INTERVIEWER: Please tell me, did you get married before the war?

SUBJECT: No.

INTERVIEWER: I mean, if not, then we will leave that for later. To put it differently, you lived off that tutoring, partially off packages from home until '39, right? And you would go to Łódź for vacations?

SUBJECT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And do you remember that last vacation of '39?

SUBJECT: Yes, I do.

INTERVIEWER: Yes? Can you say something about it?

SUBJECT: Yes. First of all, the atmosphere was very tense already. I still remember Zaolzie[54] before that, and that euphoria, and those demonstrations on the streets. And that arrogance and just all those slogans with which people went out on the streets. It was very difficult… actually that was fall already, but the summer had been very difficult because it had been very hot, and in our conditions that was even harder to bear and also added to that sickness. I remember September 1st was incredibly hot[55].

INTERVIEWER: Did you know that the war would break out? Were you convinced of it? Or did you not think that at all?

SUBJECT: Actually… we did think about it, there were various talks and various… the best evidence that… My aunt and her son emigrated to Palestine in '35. And a lot of people were saying that they should emigrate from Poland, too. And firstly, the symptoms of anti-Semitism were increasing because we remembered both the demonstrations in front of the stores[56] and the demonstrations on the streets, on Nalewki St, often demonstrations of anti-Semitism. And actually, the atmosphere was as if charged with electricity, and generally the Jews were afraid, the Jews were always afraid anyway, but they were the most afraid in that period. And at some point it was dangerous to even ride those trams. So there were symptoms, and the symptoms were increasing, but there is always this self-preservation instinct that tells you to defend, not to believe. And in principle, the war was obviously a surprise for us, except that when Warsaw was being bombed, everyone thought, because there already was a blackout order and so on, that it was a drill. We remember all the radio and the announcements. I remember, that from Łódź, not only from Warsaw, all men were told to leave, among others my oldest brother left, too, and they slept in a field, and one just slept on top of another, just to get some hear. And he came back home in a horrible state. In that period, my sister was in Warsaw, and one of my brothers, when he left Łódź, found himself in Warsaw, too, and luckily so because she had had a surgery and was just lying bloodied on the ground in the hospital on Karowa St. And at least he could help her a little at that time. She came back, too, when she felt better, she came to our parents in Łódź. And we remember that September 1st perfectly; I remember all the details and so on. We were going down to the shelter, but my mother was exceptionally calm and even exceptionally dutiful. Immediately on coming back to the apartment she would start making food for the family, and she would think right away that we had to live normally, go down to the shelter and so on, protect our lives, but that life had to go on as normal. I also remember that a friend of

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[54] Zaolzie is the Polish name (meaning: "on the other side of the Olza river") for a part of Silesia, now in the Czech Republic, which was disputed between Poland and Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. In 1919 it was occupied by the Czechoslovakian army and annexed by Czechoslovakia. In October 1938 it was occupied by the Polish army and incorporated into Poland at the same time when other parts of Czechoslovakia were annexed by Nazi Germany according to the Munich agreement between the great European powers.

[55] On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, which was the beginning of the WWII.

[56] In the 1930s nationalist right-wing parties organized boycotts of Jewish stores and held demonstrations in front of them.

mine from Warsaw, who had run away from the military, took shelter with us. And we took him in, and I even put him somewhere later, we gave him different clothes, he was dressed like a peasant, we gave him money, and thanks to this, on various horse-drawn carts, partially on foot, he came back to his native Warsaw. So the echoes, after the conclusion, after the defeat, could also be felt in our personal experiences, in our personal lives.

INTERVIEWER: And when the Germans came in, were you in Łódź?

SUBJECT: Yes. There were very many Germans in Łódź. It is known, because one third there was Polish, Jewish, and that German one third. And, interestingly, there were also Greek families. Zakumakis and so on, various such last names. Because my brothers, actually father, later had that workshop for luxurious home, pardon, travel footwear. That was footwear one would take when traveling. In those special cases and so on. Made from very good leather, very elegant. And they actually… The customers were German companies. Because of that our family was sometimes warned about various actions and so on. And in that first stage brothers were often taken for various works, but because father was old, had a beard, and those like him were caught first and had their beards torn away with the flesh, and so on. We protected father, and in that first stage you could still find someone who would stand in for him for a price when called by those local Jewish authorities. So for a long time they continued that… Well, before the ghetto…[57] they actually worked rather normally. They even had trade deals with those German companies, and my sister would help get things done in the city. Already at the beginning of October I decided to leave Łódź, seeing that, and there were rumors, and it was known that… also those first repressions were an indication of what would come next. And most young people and those who just had support because they, with various groups of people who had families in Stanisławów[58], in Lwów[59] , and so on, or in Białystok, just went to the Aryan side. That is, excuse me, to the east. Among others, my husband left Warsaw then, and he also left permanently.

INTERVIEWER: You mean, your husband was…

SUBJECT: My husband was not my husband then. So… When I came to Białystok…

INTERVIEWER: But please tell me about the road. How did you actually get there – from Łódź to Białystok?

SUBJECT: Yes. From Łódź we just went through Siedlce and so-called Mordy.

INTERVIEWER: On foot?

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[57] The ghetto in Łódź was created in February 1940 and existed until August 1944. It was the second largest ghetto – after Warsaw – in German-occupied Europe. Jews who lived there were killed in the death camps in Kulmhof (Chełmno nad Nerem) and Auschwitz.

[58] Today in Ukraine: Ivano-Frankivsk

[59] Today in Ukraine: Lviv.

SUBJECT: No, no, no. Of course we were going by train then. And there, in Siedlce, we had to wait for a few days, and we came in touch with some peasants…

INTERVIEWER: But who was there with you? Because you are saying…

SUBJECT: I was there with two other… With a group of two more people, two women from Łódź.

INTERVIEWER: You mean your friends, colleagues?

SUBJECT: Yes, yes. Because one of them… had a sister that lived in Stanisławów because her husband was from Stanisławów. And that sister was going there. And I was with her. I do not remember exactly if there were more people, in any case we were together. But later we were separated on the way. So we moved. Of course there was that dramatic scene of crossing because the Russians were sending people back and we could not. On one hand we had… we had to beware of the Germans, and on the other hand of the Russians[60].

INTERVIEWER: But you as a member of the left then…

SUBJECT: But no. That was very poorly received then. I will tell you about it later. And apart from that, the Soviet soldiers and guards were turning back those inhabitants, people, refugees, automatically. They were sending them to the other side, but they jailed them first, placed them in some locked rooms, and then just sent them back to the other side.

INTERVIEWER: And were you also a victim of such a crossing and return?

SUBJECT: Not crossing, so we managed. It was just that my backpack got lost somewhere, and I had everything there. The minimum necessary for life. And my parents had also made me those shoes with double soles, and they put the money in there. So that gave me some security, except that later, in Stanisławów, I had those shoes stolen early in the morning when I was sleeping, and the homeowners had left the door open. So I had an address of some people… There were scary things in Białystok because everyone had gathered there, and there were those… A kitchen that gave one very poor, just one meal. And there were Dantesque scenes there because people were getting lost and looking for one another. But actually one could find that whole intelligentsia, that whole Jewish intellectual world there at that time. So… I just… started… I went to a school that prepared teachers for Belarusian schools. But I realized that

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[60] On September 17, 1939, the Soviet army invaded Poland, acting upon the grounds of a secret clause of the non-aggression pact signed previously between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on August 23, 1939. On 28 September, 1939, a new agreement was signed in Moscow dividing Poland between these two states along the Narew-Bug-San rivers. The Soviet Union gained more than half of the Polish territory, with approximately 13 million people, of whom Poles were the largest ethnic group (almost 40%) but the majority were constituted by the erstwhile minorities (Ukrainians, Belarusians and Jews). Newly conquered Polish territories were incorporated into the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics. See Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

there were no resources, that it would take me a lot of time to learn the language, and I got in touch with some friends that had families in Stanisławów, and from Białystok I went to Stanisławów.

INTERVIEWER: Was it better in Stanisławów?

SUBJECT: So in Stanisławów I just went to a school where they actually had children, so-called "piglitki"[61], but I had to… they were better students that I was because they just knew the language. And it was a school that prepared courses, prepared teachers. Of course they immediately warned me not to admit to communist activities because in '37[62], when they disbanded the communist party, there were those purges, murders, and so on, those people, who were coming from there, at least in some places, were being harassed, so one had to hide it. And when I told such a teacher, lecturer, that I had a degree from Józef Piłsudski University[63], he told me to hide it somewhere deep and to never admit to it. Because just the name Józef Piłsudski was appalling. So I just… It was most important, so I went, first I worked in a foster home where the conditions were horrible. Hunger and so on, absolutely terrifying. And then I did that course, and from there they sent the teachers to the countryside, to various villages. And because… the issue of passports materialized[64]. So people, displaced persons, runaways, were given a passport with a special article that limited where they could stay to Krzemieniec and so on[65]. Such people were not allowed in the border zone. And I applied and… Because there was a special office, the NKVD was stationed there and a passport bureau. And they considered our applications, and it took them a long time. It was in that office that I met my husband. That is, I knew, we had many mutual acquaintances, he had finished chemistry in Warsaw, but he lived, actually it was the house of his grandparents, parents on 24 Grzybowska St, and 26 later, there was a Jewish community then… in the ghetto. And we had many acquaintances and so on, from Warsaw, from the academic circles and so on, but we had not known each other personally. NB they lived next door from the Grombs. Gromb[66] was actually, along with Cusia

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[61] *Piglitki*: in Soviet schools, children between 11 and 15 years old.

[62] An error regarding the date: The Communist Party of Poland was dissolved by the Communist International in 1938. Many of its activists, who were at that time in the Soviet Union, were executed or sent to labor camps.

[63] Warsaw University was renamed the Józef Piłsudski University in 1935. Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935) was one of the main leaders of the Polish independence movement in the first two decades of the 20th century. In 1920 he was Chief of State and commander in chief of the Polish army that defeated the Soviet forces invading Poland. In 1926 he led a military *coup d'etat*, which gave him dictatorial power that he held until his death in May 1935.

[64] The Soviet authorities granted former Polish citizens Soviet citizenship, the material sign of which were Soviet passports.

[65] People who had escaped from German-occupied Poland to the East were regarded by the Soviet authorities as potential security risks and were not allowed to live in the zone close to the Soviet-German border.

[66] Dora Gromb, in the 1930s an activist of the left-wing Jewish youth in Warsaw, spent the war in the Soviet Union, after the war held an important position in the Polish film state industry, left Poland after the 1968 antisemitic campaign, died in 2014.

Wodnar[67], the creator of a certain leftist choir. So we would just meet there every day for a long time. Then we kept in touch personally. And then I tried to get in a school that was next to where he was employed, later as the director of a local brewery. It was the village Korolówka, a Polish village. Because he started working as a physical laborer, he would carry very heavy frozen hides in the winter because he needed a job immediately, so they could only offer him such a job. And he was not exceptionally strong physically. And still he survived. So they sent him away from there with the task of establishing a chemical laboratory in the local brewery in Korolówka. So I got a job at a school… that is, an elementary school in Ceniawa. In the winter, I had to go through very difficult roads, and once I was almost snowed in, and in the summer there were rivers I had to cross, with water literally up to here, so that I could get there. And I tried my best; I worked there for a year, and I tried to get in that Polish school, where I could be together with my husband, and the conditions were just different. But unfortunately the war broke out…

INTERVIEWER: What did you teach?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: What did you teach?

SUBJECT: I taught everything. But my Ukrainian was said to be Czech by the parents. Actually they did not know what language I spoke. It was… the participants were children on one hand, on the other "piglitki", those were youths 15 or 16 years old, some of whom would even romance with the Soviet soldiers stationed nearby. So the discipline there was very difficult, and my lessons went very well when there were inspections because then the children kept quiet and I could actually enforce something. But normally work with them was very difficult. And in the evenings we ran such courses with youths whose… knowledge of life far exceeded mine, and who were generally very confident and did not really want to learn. But they were under the obligation to learn. Of course I remember those elections, how they were done[68]. I remember that some Soviet teachers came, and they would constantly threaten that if someone does not want to work, they will take them to the polar bears[69]. The director was a Pole. But, of course… No, not a Pole. Conversely… Pole or Ukrainian? I do not remember actually… I do not remember. In any case, he was later resettled; I even met him in Warsaw, he was in Warsaw a few years ago. In any case, he was very… obedient, he carried out all duties at the expense of teachers and so on. So life and work there were not easy.

INTERVIEWER: And were you in touch with Warsaw, with Poland, with Łódź? With the ghetto?

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[67] Estera Wodnar (1912-1993), in the 1930s a student at Państwowy Instytut Sztuki Teatralnej (State Institute of Theatrical Art), an actress and director in workers amateur theaters, after the war theater director in Warsaw and Łódź.

[68] Zawistowska probably referred to the elections organized by the Soviet authorities at the end of October 1939 under conditions of police terror and pervasive propaganda pressure.

[69] Zawistowska meant deportations to northern Russia, Urals, Siberia and Kazakhstan. In 1940-1941 they encompassed about 330,000 former Polish citizens.

SUBJECT: Yes, we were in touch. That is… the letters actually came here. And one day we got in touch with the people who had been taken, because there were many people from my family there, up north, and I even sent them a package a few times, because they were employed at cutting down forests. A very delicate woman of poor health. I would send them fat, mostly… well… that fat…

INTERVIEWER: Fatback?

SUBJECT: Fatback, yes, and so on. And one day I sent such a package to the ghetto, and father was very indignant, very offended.

INTERVIEWER: Did you send that package with the fatback to the ghetto in Łódź?

SUBJECT: Excuse me, to the Warsaw ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: Because father…

SUBJECT: And I just wanted to say that, when in that first stage… of establishment of the ghetto in Łódź, very early, when there was still some possibility of leaving from there, my brothers, convinced that our parents had better chances of survival in the Warsaw ghetto, thanks to the help of those Germans they knew… sent, they made it possible, they helped our parents get to the Warsaw ghetto. But obviously there was much more freedom in the Warsaw ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: Roughly when did they move to Warsaw, to the ghetto?

SUBJECT: So the ghetto in Łódź was closed in May '40[70]. So in any case in the first stages of its existence.

INTERVIEWER: And your father was very indignant because there was fatback?

SUBJECT: Yes, actually, that it was his… Of course, they gave it to people, but my parents did not eat that. They believed it was some kind of affront, lack of consideration for their faith, and so on. I even knew people, even consumptives, who never, if they did not have kosher food, would die, but they did not eat non-kosher food.

INTERVIEWER: And what did your parents write to you from the ghetto?

SUBJECT: So… Only my sister wrote, and she did not want to worry me, and so on. She lived with our parents, but from those letters, because they went through censorship, you could guess very many things. At some point I was even in touch with a friend who worked in a Belarusian village in Białystok[71]; she even married a Belarusian. She was murdered by Germans while running away from there. So in the first stage there was contact also with the family on this side. Rare, of course, but there was. And also with other towns in the Soviet Union.

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[70] The Łódź ghetto was closed in April 1940 (Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 488).

[71] Białystok is a big town. Zawistowska must have meant a village in the Białystok region.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: So I must get to that, maybe that moment when I found myself in the Warsaw ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: No, that is the Soviet-German war broke out in June…[72]

SUBJECT: Yes, but I was…

INTERVIEWER: '40… '41.

SUBJECT: Yes, '41. So we stayed. We did not, actually… The brewery director, and the engineers, and people, Russians employed there just secretly in the first few days, at dawn on various horse-drawn carts, went to Kołomyja[73], where they were taken on trains. First in cars, then on trains, and they just went back home. But they did not let any of the displaced persons in on the secret. And it was so, that… I went to Lwów on vacation in that time. And from Lwów I came to Stanisławów, where I had lived for a long time and worked at a school. And from there, when… There I learned about the outbreak of the war. And then, partially on some trucks, partially on horseback, partially even, actually in a large part, on foot. I managed to return to that village, to Korolówka, where I lived with my husband. Of course my legs were so injured that any walking was out of the question for the next few days. And I had to treat them for a long time. And that we… It was the border zone, and on the second day after the outbreak of the war the Hungarians[74] came in. And outrunning the German planes was out of the question. And we had no chance of evacuating, no chance of getting to those areas. We were cut off and thus forced to stay there, in that village.

INTERVIEWER: No, you are speaking very well.

SUBJECT: It is not that extensive, I am just very tired.

INTERVIEWER: It does not show. [Laughter] Yes, and you… The Hungarians entered and how did they behave?

SUBJECT: We were witnesses to such scenes that they brought in Jews from there who were wandering around, did not have proper living conditions, and those people generally died very quickly[75]. We had been there since the beginning of the war, for the whole winter. We had Polish and even Ukrainian friends. For helping their children learn they would repay us in foodstuffs and sometimes invite us for dinners, but only I took advantage of that because the men were unable to freely leave then.

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[72] Nazi Germany and its allies attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

[73] Today in Ukraine: Kolomyia.

[74] Hungary was Germany's ally and took part in the aggression against the Soviet Union.

[75] In August 1941 the Hungarian authorities expelled from Hungary 18,000 foreign (mostly Polish) Jews. They were handed over to German troops in Galicia and most executed in massacres near Kołomyja (Kolomyia) and Kamenets-Podolsky. See Saul Friedländer, *Years of extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 249.

INTERVIEWER: But excuse me, you must have lost the thread because you said you came back and there were Hungarians there. How long had the Hungarians been there?

SUBJECT: The Hungarians were in principle… They were just the Germans' accomplices.

INTERVIEWER: And then the Germans entered?

SUBJECT: And then the Germans entered.

INTERVIEWER: But what, were there those SS groups?

SUBJECT: I do not remember exactly, in what period. In any case the Germans were in Stanisławów already, but where we were, in that area, there were no Germans yet. In any case, the Ukrainians started working independently because they were deceiving themselves that the Germans would give them a free Ukraine[76]. They were feeling very confident and started dealing with the local population. So there were murders, both sides settled their scores. Some Russians were staying, they were married to local Ukrainian women and somehow survived that worst period, those Ukrainians were helping them, hiding them, and so on. I would go to the city. Kołomyja was the nearest city, four kilometers away from our village. Initially I would buy poultry and so on. And I would bring it back before there was a ghetto in Stanisławów[77]. Then I could still sell it to various Jewish families. And there, on the market in Kołomyja, I would try to buy something for us. In any case, I would still go to a neighboring Ukrainian village, where I had a student, I even gave her money so that she would buy us grain because we were convinced that we would need to spend the next winter there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go with an armband?[78]

SUBJECT: No, without an armband, of course.

INTERVIEWER: And who knew that you were Jewish?

SUBJECT: All the neighbors and especially the boys who… Teenage boys were the most interested in catching Jews. If they knew someone, they were the greatest danger to that person. Meanwhile I was

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[76] Ukrainian nationalists created a government in Lwów (Lviv) in June 1941 when the city was occupied by the German forces. It was not recognized by the German authorities and its members were arrested. Nevertheless, at the local level Ukrainian organizations and institutions (among them auxiliary police) cooperated in many respects with German occupiers, including in actions against Jews. On the Ukrainian independence movement and its relationship with Nazi Germany see George. O. Liber, *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

[77] The ghetto in Stanisławów was created in October 1941. Before this over 10,000 Jews of this town were executed (Friedländer, *Years of Extermination*, 299-300).

[78] After the invasion of the Soviet Union, Galicia, where Zawistowska lived, was incorporated into the General Government, the administrative entity that encompassed most of the German-occupied Polish territories. Jews in the General Government were obliged to wear white armbands with a blue star of David already in December 1939. Those who did not comply could face the death penalty. (Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 374).

likely not known in the city and looked rather tan then, unlike the people from the ghettos. And I dressed like the locals, so it was difficult to tell me apart. Whereas men found it difficult to move, and they could only actually go outside in the evenings.

INTERVIEWER: Your husband?

SUBJECT: He did not go out then. I just forgot to say that… I will go back… Because we met while doing that passport business[79], and then I went to his village, and on March 6th, '41, we married. But the conditions surrounding our marriage were very unfortunate because we went to the city only to learn that it was not the right district. We had to go 10 kilometers back, and at the village council we just gave our signatures to some official. Even some perfect stranger, two strangers were witnesses. Without any family, without friends, without anyone, of course no special clothes. Except the director of the Polish school cooked us a nice dinner because I would eat at her place at that time. But this is just a little digression because my daughter, who recently recorded me for the grandchildren, was asking how our marriage went. And then I thought that it was in much different conditions than hers. But this is a digression. So we survived that winter. At some point an employee from that school district in Kołomyja, who lived there, came up to us and suggested that we take part in an illegal resistance against the Germans.

INTERVIEWER: Was he a Jew?

SUBJECT: No, he was an Ukrainian, but because I did not know him, I did not trust him, we said no. Meanwhile I was giving German lessons, although I did not know the language well myself, but while… I read a little and so on, to that neighbor's daughters, who had met some Hungarian soldiers and wanted to communicate with them, and simultaneously at some point I was helping those Ukrainian children, and that is why they helped us. There was even such a dramatic scene once; I came back from the village and did not go to our house immediately, but I went to the neighbors to warm up a little, and my husband was going crazy, he did not know whether to go out and look for me or not, and he did not know at all, he thought that something terrible had happened to me, and for the first time in my life I saw him so nervous and as someone who had really lost control because it really was not only inconsiderate on my part and a failure to respect the basic agreements that should bind us, but just a behavior deserving punishment because any such delay in coming home just caused the worst thoughts and suspicions. And I had to remember that. Except that generally, as in later periods, women had it easier and could move more freely than men because men were being exterminated. But there were cases at that time of local Jews being taken for various labors, for carving ice holes and so on, but they were very mild with respect to my husband. And they did not harass him. Even those Polish families that had husbands in captivity would try to bring him food. So both the local Polish and Ukrainian populations treated us very well. And even our Ukrainian neighbors… He was the leader of that group of Ukrainian locals, he would warn us when the Hungarians would be entering, and because we lived with a Jewish innkeeper, they requested vodka, and that Ukrainian held them up there for so long until I could find some bottles of vodka in the city, and then we handed those to the Hungarians through him. He saved us in that way. Generally, being

[79] Receiving Soviet passports (and Soviet citizenship) granted by the authorities to former Polish citizens.

saved, survival is always based on others' attitude towards you. At the same time, there were some, for a very short time, just after we left, our move to Warsaw in '42, there were instances of Jews and locals being buried alive, and that was the final call when we moved out of there.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

SUBJECT: So we had survived there until March '42, and one day some man came, a Pole, with a very suspicious appearance, but he brought us a letter from my sister. Of course I could recognize her handwriting in the dark. Besides, it was very particular, very beautiful…

INTERVIEWER: Was it the sister that had helped you? The older one?

SUBJECT: Yes, she was already living with our parents in the Warsaw ghetto. That is, she had lived in the Łódź ghetto first, and then, when our parents were moved to the Warsaw ghetto, she went there with them. And it was she who wrote that letter. She was working with Ringelblumowa[80] in the CENTOS, she was running an accounting office. And she had that document proving her employment, and that doomed her because she was among the first to be round up as she believed they would intervene and rescue her from the Umschlagplatz. I recognized her writing, and she wrote that the man was a carrier and would take us to Warsaw, to the ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: Because she wrote that it was better in the Warsaw ghetto than where you were?

SUBJECT: That was not it. Firstly, the situation there was getting tighter and tighter, everyone was just out there to see in the countryside, and one could exterminate that person at any moment, there was nowhere to hide, and apart from that separation and loneliness, and a lack of means necessary for living because we had some resources because my husband was from a wealthy family, and the wealth was then divided among its members, his uncles, and so on, and when he left, his family gave him various precious things that he could exchange for money, and which were easy to transport. Let us say some rings, little diamonds, and so on…

INTERVIEWER: You did not know exactly what was going on in the Warsaw ghetto?

SUBJECT: No, of course I did not know exactly, but it was enough that there was a ghetto, but I did not know that the extermination would affect everyone, that it would be total extermination. Meanwhile we

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[80] Judyta Ringelblum, a teacher, activist in a left-wing Zionist movement. Her husband, Emanuel Ringelblum, was an eminent Jewish historian who created a clandestine archive documenting all aspects of Jewish life in Warsaw and other places in occupied Poland. Before the liquidation of the ghetto it was hidden in milk cans dug into the ground and was partly preserved and uncovered after the war. The documents from this archive are the most valuable source of information for the wartime fate of Polish Jews. Ringelblum and his wife left the ghetto shortly before the uprising and hid in Warsaw on the "Aryan" side. They were killed in March 1944 after their hiding place was discovered by the Gestapo due to a denunciation. See Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

were still expecting some to survive, and that the Germans needed workforce and so on, but that is a different matter. And then they helped us, that is, there were two of them.

INTERVIEWER: Two carriers?

SUBJECT: Two people, two carriers. They helped us, that Polish family, because they had family in Kołomyja, and that family let us stay overnight at their place, and in the morning we took the train to Warsaw via Cracow. I will never forget that night, it was March 8th, because the Germans took away all warm things, that is furs and so on, and I only had a light coat and a big green kerchief that I wrapped around my head like the local peasant women. And those shoes that were so important to me, they stole those great shoes from me, lined with fur, that my family had made me for when I was leaving the ghetto in Łódź. Meanwhile I stood there the whole night, and later they threw me out of the line, crying, with spasms, and in despair, I got worthless shoes, totally unfit for that mud, that clay that sucked you in, and so on, but I only had those ones. So the night was very chilly, and they were moving the wounded from the Russian front, and they closed off the station in Lwów, we were going from Kołomyja to Stanisławów, and then to the Lwów station, and we were going from that Lwów station, and we had to stand on the street for a few hours, and I froze so badly then that I did not care either way. I just did not believe that I would heal and live. It was a macabre night, on one hand we were happy to see that load, those wounded from the Russian front, that filled us with hope that it would all end one day, but on the other hand, our personal situation was that we did not believe we would survive the night, and somewhere on the stairs, next to a toilet, some women were boiling water and throwing in some apple peels and so on, of course there was no point dreaming of real tea, but it was dangerous to stay there and keep drinking that tea, so we had to go out on the street constantly. Eventually I had to cover my face with that kerchief, we were pretending to be asleep. On border crossings, those carriers were handing the documents to the conductors, and they warned me not to talk at all because my accent, although it was not bad, could betray me. So we really could not talk the whole time. Of course there were Germans on that train and so on. And then we arrived in Warsaw.

INTERVIEWER: And were there any problems in Cracow?

SUBJECT: In Cracow there was an ID check, of course, and a Kennkarte[81] check. We had… We did not have Kennkarten at all then, we did not have anything yet, but they, I do not know how, the carriers must have had them, I do not remember now, some papers for us, some formal…

INTERVIEWER: Documents.

SUBJECT: So that they could get us through. And then, I do not remember, because they were going from one zone to another, I just do not remember the details of what rules that was under. Maybe some special passes were needed then. In any case, they had it for us. We arrived, and that carrier's den was on Karolkowa St. The woman must have been some professional prostitute. They were imbibing vodka, going crazy, shouting, arguing the whole night, and I was convinced that that it would bring the police

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

upon us, people, that someone would notice it, but the neighbors and locals were used to it and nobody took notice. Besides, we were sleeping on the floor, on the bare floor, just on some flat sheet, and bugs were biting us horribly, so that night was full of fear for us, at the same time sleepless, and in the morning they decided to lead us into the ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: Were they paid by you?

SUBJECT: Of course, they were paid by my husband's family and by my family because my parents did not want to stay behind, and my husband had a very wealthy family, but he did not have a father, because his father had died in '37 already. There were only his mother and brothers, his uncles had also died in Wilno[82] and so on, none of them was saved. Of course they were paid, but he would later come to the ghetto to be paid more because we had not had any luggage with us and he had not had the opportunity to steal anything from us. They entered the absolutely freely, in and out. They smuggled. They smuggled people from the east to here and from the ghetto outside, and the other way around. So we tried twice, on two days, and we did not succeed because we needed to bribe three posts[83], but he had his trusted ones, but he had to find them by chance. And on our third try we got through. We entered the ghetto in a column that was led to Leszno St for delousing. There was a place where they disinfected clothes and at the same time people bathed. And once or even twice a day they would lead groups from the ghetto there. And we got into the ghetto with one such group.

INTERVIEWER: The first sight of the ghetto?

SUBJECT: The first sight of the ghetto was obvious, that is bewilderment, crowds, it was March '42, so everything that was happening in the ghetto could be seen on the streets, but the first moment was of euphoria and that meeting with the family, and telling stories without end, and that shutting in in that inner circle, so the knowledge of those conditions was even weaker and made milder by our inner experiences. My husband's family lived in their own apartment on 24 Grzybowska St. There was even a bathroom in that apartment, there was a bathtub. In the first period, there was even a working telephone. Then they cut it off. And I lived in one room with my parents and sister. Of course in a very confined space, and the gas was so dosed there that they let in some gas at night, and a few times we narrowly avoided getting poisoned because there were interruptions, and when we wanted to cook something such as grains or beans, that took a long time to cook, we would just turn the gas on, and there were nights when one of us would wake up and just revive the others.

INTERVIEWER: Where was that? Where did they live?

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[82] Today the capital of Lithuania: Vilnius.

[83] Posts at the gates leading to the ghetto consisted of German and Polish policemen (functionaries of the so-called "blue" police acting under strict German supervision) and – on the side of the ghetto – members of the Jewish police (Jewish Service for the Maintenance of Order, under the control of the Germans and of the Polish "blue" police), which was responsible for maintaining public order inside the ghetto. See Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the *Perished City*, trans. Emma Harris (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 198-9.

SUBJECT: That was 10 Leszno St. All those houses were made of a few. They consisted of a front, some courtyard-facing apartments. We lived… The wealthy lived in those frontal apartments, the groundskeeper, and a lot of people were trying to become groundskeepers then because that gave you a place to stay, likely some additional privileges and some ration cards[84]. So that was on the third floor, in a side apartment and in one room, and if there was laundry, then of course in a bucket, and we would boil water in such a pot… Everything happened there, and on Saturday that room was just turned into a Synagogue because all the men from that house, the pious ones, would gather in my father's place, and the prayers took place there.
INTERVIEWER: So I understand that you and your husband separated?

SUBJECT: So at the beginning he would stay overnight with his family and then cross that famous bridge, we would even…

INTERVIEWER: The bridge on Żelazna St?[85]

SUBJECT: Yes, we were even in that film about the bridge, where my husband would give exact data about what it was like then, how people crossed the bridge, and so on. So we would meet each other. There is a film with Jagielski[86], and he is there with a children's tour, explaining topographic data to them, what happened then, and we who were there in the ghetto in that period, our statements are noted there. It is called "Most" ["Bridge" – MG]. It was a made for TV film[87]. Then he moved in to our place, but he only slept at day because, thanks to Ringelblumowa's protection and because she worked there, they needed a groundskeeper to keep an eye on those CENTOS warehouses. And a tailor lived there in a frontal apartment then, on the second floor, and he had a big hallway and he separated some place where only the bed was with a curtain. When my husband came back from his night watch, he would just sleep there. Well, later his sister would use that bed, too, for some time. And they alternated. No one could have his or her own bed, you always had to share it with someone else.

INTERVIEWER: And did you work in the ghetto? In that first period?
SUBJECT: I did not work in the ghetto. I was in touch with the Centos, among other people I knew Berman well.

INTERVIEWER: Adolf Berman?

SUBJECT: Yes.

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[84] Ration cards for food were differentiated depending on the kind of work one performed.

[85] There were four wooden bridged in the Warsaw ghetto, suspended over Żelazna, Chłodna, Przebieg, Mławska streets, linking its various parts that were separated by streets belonging to the "Aryan" part of Warsaw. Engelking and Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto, 118-9, 123.

[86] Jan Jagielski, historian from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

[87] The documentary film "Most" (Bridge) produced in 1993 by Polish public TV, directed by Sławomir Koehler. Zawistowska must have mistaken its date of production.

INTERVIEWER: But he was already on the Aryan side.

SUBJECT: No, no, that was all in the ghetto. The Centos was in the ghetto. And Berman was the director of the childcare unit. Among others, Barski[88] worked there, his previous last name was Zeiten. Although I tried to get a job there, it was impossible. Meanwhile one colleague of mine, an alumna of Baley, brought in a machine to Többens's workshop[89], and she and her husband got employed there. She had a little boy who stayed at home with a home helper, and she would take on one more boy, also… Two such retarded boys, and I would stay with those boys for a few hours. Above all, I would get dinner for that. It was very important because food was crucial, most important.

INTERVIEWER: And were you registered in the ghetto?

SUBJECT: Registered in what way?

INTERVIEWER: Registered as living in the ghetto?

SUBJECT: Yes, otherwise I would not be able to have bread rations. One needed to have ration cards after all. That one wedding in that Ukrainian village, and here we also had to be… had to have our relationship legalized just to use, and some rabbi married us, and then we could legally use ration cards. I say that we were married three times because after the war we needed two witnesses again to give proof for the changed last names and so on. Because then, when our daughter was born, we needed to legalize our relationship in a different way here.

INTERVIEWER: Did you regret coming back to the ghetto?

SUBJECT: Did I regret it? No, I could not regret it because I got a letter from that Ukrainian woman, the mother of a student of mine, to whom we had left, she was still able to send us back the money we had left her for the grain that was to have been for the next winter. So that money, she… Generally, every time I was there, when I went to the village, she would make a big dinner and so on, give me a lot of supplies, for both of us. And she helped us a lot. Besides, she was a Ukrainian who had a Polish husbands, whom the Ukrainians killed as part of that mutual settling of scores. There were various deals. Among them, too. So I could not regret it because the situation there got so much more tense when the Germans entered… Besides, they established a ghetto in Stanisławów and brought in all the Jews from the surrounding towns there. And here, in touch with the outside world, outside the ghetto, above all it was important that we were together, not alone. And I had the greatest support in my husband's family because they were above all young people. One of them worked for the Luftwaffe[90], he would even go out to the outposts, and the other, very lively, arranged, of course for a price… I forgot about that coffee, it must be cold now. It is

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[88] Józef Barski (1898-1993), before the war a member of the Communist Party of Poland, after the war the secretary general of Joint in Poland, member of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

[89] One of the biggest German enterprises in the Warsaw ghetto, owned by Walther C. Toebbens. It provided winter uniforms for the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front (Engelking and Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto, 485).

[90] Luftwaffe, the German air force, employed some Jewish workers from the ghetto.

completely cold now. He arranged for us… It turned out that my husband had to give up his job because there had been a big theft in the warehouses, and they laid him off then. And then that brother-in-law arranged with a colleague who was the director of an outpost that went outside and worked in the field on a Volksdeutsch's farm[91].

INTERVIEWER: On the farm in Czerniaków[92]?

SUBJECT: It was on Aleje Niepodległości[93]. It was...

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: In the meantime the actions started to intensify. There were murders of social activists, party activists, various groups[94]. We were learning about them after the fact, but the news spread quickly in the ghetto. We were expecting the extermination activity to intensify suddenly. There were also announcements calling people to come to work, to be sent away for labor. They were promising, of course, decent employment conditions and just the possibility of survival. Many people got tricked by that. The Germans were even sending various postcards, letters from those who confirmed the claim that they were being sent to legitimate labor camps, not even camps but places, outposts for work. In the meantime the so-called actions and the blocking of streets started, so at the beginning only the Jewish police took part in them, the Polish police, too, in part, and then also the German police[95]. In the initial period one of the first victims was my sister. It was done in such a way: all inhabitants had to go down to the courtyard. They were checking IDs. Of course the few people that had a hideout hid in that hideout and did not show up at all. My sister had a perfect alibi; she had papers proving that she is a CENTOS employee, and people were still deceiving themselves that such documents would protect one from being sent to the Umschlagplatz. She was only worried about whether our parents were hidden. When I begged her, asked not to go down, and it was still possible, because only Jewish policemen were there, she declined, convinced that she was so law-abiding and always believed, always wanted to do everything according to the law. Unfortunately, when she went downstairs, she never showed up again, I mean, I never saw her since. We also had some information from our neighbor who was a policeman that she was

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91 *Volksdeutsche*, ethnic Germans living in Poland before the war or those Poles who during the war signed the German National List (*Deutsche Volksliste)* declaring adherence to the German nation. Around one-third of the enterprises in the Warsaw ghetto were run by *Volksdeutsche*, who also ran many enterprises and farms in the "Aryan" parts of Warsaw – in one of which Zawistowska, her husband and her brother-in-law apparently started working.

92 Czerniaków, a part of Warsaw adjacent to the Vistula river.

93 Aleja Niepodleglości, one of the biggest streets in the Mokotów district of Warsaw.

94 Zawistowska probably referred to the action by the German police and SS on the night of April 17/18, 1942, which resonated broadly in the Warsaw ghetto. More than fifty people were killed, most of them with ties to the Jewish underground. On July 1, 1942, the Germans executed 110 people taken from the ghetto arrests, many of them smugglers. Engelking and Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto, 684-5.

95 The round-ups in the Warsaw ghetto and deportations from the Umschlagplatz to the death camp in Treblinka started on July 22, 1942 (see footnote 11). The Germans consistently repeated, throughout the whole action lasting two months, that people were being deported to work "in the East."

at the Umschlagplatz because the transports were not leaving for a few days because they had just taken too many people. We still could send her some bread or food. So she was just the first victim, but my parents were protecting themselves, I mean, they were hiding during the next actions until the hideout was unfortunately found, and they also went with them.

INTERVIEWER: Where were they hiding? Was there some bunker?

SUBJECT: Those were in the attic, various double wardrobes, imitation doors, and so on, just those kinds of hideouts, but of course there were often tragic situations when there were small children, and some were protesting against hiding small children because they could betray them, but those are different matters. In our house there was a telephone, and I would call from that outpost[96] every day, and when I learned that my parents were there, but every day I was expecting that this would unfortunately come to an end, and actually one day… Because there was this Polish-German company in that house. When I learned that they had unfortunately been taken away already. The information about how they were captured was given to us by the neighbors. The neighbors who were the directors of some big brush workshop, and who had enough money to keep buying their freedom from the Germans up to some point. My parents were absolutely convinced that they were leaving to their death because they did not even take any bread with them, and although it was the end of August they did not even take a sweater with them, no warm clothes.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the end of September of '42?

SUBJECT: July 22nd, but it went on, it went on until the end of September.

INTERVIEWER: And were you in Mokotów the whole time?

SUBJECT: We actually were on the side of… But I would come back to the ghetto for the night.

INTERVIEWER: And your husband?

SUBJECT: So would my husband, we were together and came back to the ghetto together.

INTERVIEWER: Guarded?

SUBJECT: Yes, yes. It was a horse-drawn cart, it took us outside, and we came back, too, and we came through the guard post, and we were very thoroughly searched when going through the guard post, and because more people would go through that post than there were registered, the Germans would get very angry, and my husband was even beaten a few times because he was the leader of that outpost for some time, that he cannot count, that he cannot count to 20, that he cannot count. Of course going out and through the guard post was dangerous every time. There was always a threat. And one day, just for his own satisfaction, a German shot and killed a member of our group at the guard post. Another problem were the relations on that farm, the Volksdeutsche's attitude towards the Jews, and so on. And one night the round-up reached such an extent that they called our farm owner from the ghetto, and he let us stay

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[96] Zawistowska means a farm outside the ghetto where she and her husband worked.

overnight in a barn because it was so dangerous to go through the guard post because they were not minding any passes, any permissions, they just murdered everyone as they came, took everyone to the Umschlagplatz. And that was the last evening. I will not describe our experiences. But mother would always leave out some grains to simmer under a comforter, covered in clean white cloth and under a lid so that we, when we came in the evening, would have something to eat. Of course none of us could eat anything that night. We took whatever was there, the remainder of those supplies, because in the beginning a relative of ours that had long hair would come out with us, and she smuggled some precious coins and so on that were to be used for a long time under her braids. Unfortunately she was later in the Little Ghetto[97] and died during one of those round-ups. And that was the last day of my stay in the ghetto, but I had an apartment ready.

INTERVIEWER: How did you arrange to have an apartment on the Aryan side?

SUBJECT: We had an Ukrainian acquaintance who had previously arranged for us… Above all you needed a birth record for a dead person, but that was a real record from a parish, and you needed a report saying that you came from the east so that they could not check that place, that registration. Based on that report, on that record, we would issue Kennkarten for ourselves, and that was on 78 Pańska St.

INTERVIEWER: And you had done that earlier?

SUBJECT: Yes, when my parents were taken away, when my sister had not been there for a long time, we had nothing to come back to the ghetto for and just stayed outside. But my husband and the other brother-in-law were in the factory, in Dering's factory, in which my husband's other brother, my other brother-in-law, and he would go to the outpost from there, while I stayed in that apartment on 78 Pańska St, and went to that outpost.

INTERVIEWER: I do not understand one thing. You are saying that you did not come back to the ghetto after the liquidation.

SUBJECT: I did not come back to the ghetto, but I still went to the outpost, where my husband and brother-in-law were employed. The outpost was still there because people who were employed in the ghetto were still going there, because there were various workshops in the ghetto and various German institutions, and my brother-in-law worked in Dering's factory[98]. My husband found shelter in that very factory.

INTERVIEWER: I understand this, but you said that you would go to the outpost while living on Pańska St.

SUBJECT: I did not go there as a worker, I would just visit.

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[97] Little Ghetto, the southern part of the Warsaw ghetto, separated by the "Aryan" streets from the bigger, northern part of the ghetto after its borders were changed in October 1941.

[98] The German factory where many Jewish workers were employed.

INTERVIEWER: Was there no danger?

SUBJECT: There was a great danger because they were waiting. I would always get there through meadows because outside *szmalcownicy*[99] were always standing in front of the gate….

INTERVIEWER: Please also say, how did you actually move from the outpost to Pańska St?

SUBJECT: From the outpost to Pańska St?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, how did you move there? I mean, you did not come back to the ghetto, at night, instead of returning, you…

SUBJECT: I did not come back to the ghetto, but I just separated from that outpost and got there by tram. It happened that way because I already had the papers on me. Those were Polish papers already, I had them on me, I had that birth record on me, hidden.

INTERVIEWER: And were you alone at the start?

SUBJECT: I was alone, yes.

INTERVIEWER: That was an apartment, a room?

SUBJECT: It was an apartment. We had had it arranged by an Ukrainian acquaintance who moved around very freely, who helped many Jews for a low price. He felt so comfortable that he would even go to Berlin and get things done there. And my brother-in-law found that man, I do not know through whom. He had arranged the apartment and the papers for us.

INTERVIEWER: What was your name according to those papers?

SUBJECT: Czechowicz. My name was Czechowicz.

INTERVIEWER: And first name? Do you not remember?

SUBJECT: I just have to check the name because I have it in the Kennkarte, I even have it in the ID. The parents were Jan and Marianna nee Grodecka. And my name was Czechowicz, but I do not remember the first name now.

INTERVIEWER: And who were you according to that ID?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: Who were you?

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[99] *Szmalcownicy*, a Polish word (derived from "grease") used for blackmailers who were searching for Jews outside the ghetto, extorting from them money and other valuables with the threats of denunciations to the German police. The most important study of *szmalcownicy* is Jan Grabowski, *"Ja tego żyda znam!" Szantażowanie żydów w Warszawie, 1939-1943* (Warszawa: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2004).

SUBJECT: I was a tailor in that ID. I was much older, born in 1909.

INTERVIEWER: Where from, from Lwów, from the east?

SUBJECT: From the east, I do not remember now, because that record…

INTERVIEWER: And was your husband's name also Czechowicz?

SUBJECT: No, no, no. His name was Zawistowski as it is now, and his mother's maiden name was Lętowska. He stayed with that name because after the war, he was liberated in Praga[100], he started working for "Życie Warszawy"[101] and used his Kennkarte then, and he stayed with that last name. Apart from that there was much pressure after the war that Jews who had changed their last names should not return to their old last names. Especially those who worked in the so-called ideological division and so on. There generally was such pressure. Party members had to, they were ordered to[102].

INTERVIEWER: Please say, if you remember, how did you feel on Pańska St[103], in a normal apartment? In different conditions? Was there a big difference between the ghetto and Aryan Warsaw?

SUBJECT: Oh yes! A huge difference, that was the apartment of very poor people. The father was…

INTERVIEWER: That was with other people, right?

SUBJECT: It was 78 Pańska St, it was almost on the border of Żelazna St. It was with a family. When I started living there, there were a daughter and her parents. The daughter worked at the post office, she sorted letters, and so on, she worked at the post office on Chmielna St. She often worked night shifts, which fit me very well. When I started living there, there was also her mother and father. The mother was very sickly and slept in a hole in the kitchen. One day, when I came back from the outpost, on the table, in the room where I slept, there was a coffin. It turned out that she had died and was in that coffin. But I was so tired and felt so strongly about it, that despite… I did sleep next to the kitchen on such a little bed ten, but that did not make much of an impression on me because there were so many other reasons to be afraid and to worry, whether my husband would make it out of the ghetto and that brother-in-law, too, and whether he would survive at all, whether we would meet again, and so on, that everything else had no

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[100] Praga is a part of Warsaw on the right bank on the Vistula river. It was liberated by the Soviet forces already in September 1944.

[101] One of the most important Polish daily newspapers, founded in 1944.

[102] In 1944/1945 the Communist leaders were concerned about the high percentage of Jews among trusted Party cadres, which was the consequence of the ethnic composition of the interwar Communist Party of Poland, of which between one-quarter to one-third of its members were Jews. It was often perceived by an important part of Polish society as proof of the alien character of the Communists in Poland (since 1942 – under the name of the Polish Workers Party). In order to disavow these perceptions and disarm antisemitism as a possible tool against the Communists, members of the Party were urged to abandon their Jewish names and use Polish ones. See: Schatz, *The Generation,* 213-4.

[103] Pańska Street is located in the Wola district of Warsaw. In 1942 it was very close to the walls of the ghetto (indeed, part of the street was inside the ghetto).

meaning. And then only that official's father and she herself remained. I was trying to pretend that I was trading, doing something, and so on. I would go out for a few hours, which was easy in the summer but very difficult in the winter. And at some point, when it started… It was in April of maybe '43, they were liquidating all German outposts[104], and my brother-in-law was led to Pańska St by some Werkschutz[105] from the factory, and from that time for 18 months my brother-in-law stayed at my place literally for hours under my bed. I was posing as a Pole who earns a living by cooking, washing, and caring for a Jew to my host. Besides, she could not forgive me for lying to her after the war.

INTERVIEWER: That is, she thought that you were hiding a Jew?

SUBJECT: Yes, that I was hiding a Jew.

INTERVIEWER: But she was also in danger.

SUBJECT: Yes, she was in danger, of course. At some point, when they were searching for Jews in apartments, she reached such a mental state that I had to threaten her with my fiancé's revenge because my husband would visit me as my fiancé. And I told her that if she betrayed me, I would say that she was hiding that Jew[106].

INTERVIEWER: And where was your husband at that time?

SUBJECT: So my husband got stuck at some point because there were constant blockades, they were constantly taking the remaining Jews to a very small area from which they would be driven to the Umschlagplatz. And my other brother-in-law managed to escape through a Werkschutz in that he supplied bread to the Umschlagplatz and he first took my husband as his helper and then that other brother-in-law, too. This way he took them away from the Umschlagplatz. Because they were essentially there already.

INTERVIEWER: But they lived somewhere else since they left the ghetto?

SUBJECT: To that factory where the German Deringer worked, where my brother-in-law worked. And later they had those Aryan papers arranged and left one by one. On the street nearby there was a pharmacy, a drugstore, and from that drugstore I could, there was a telephone, there in that office where my brother-in-law worked, in Dering's office, and I could communicate with them and only using a code. Are they going out or not, what is it going to be, and so on? And I once lived through a night of happy euphoria that he would be able to get out mixed with fear whether he will manage to because my husband was going to go out to the Aryan side. And he did go out. In the meantime, that Ukrainian, the host, and I were preparing the apartment. For them. In the beginning they lived together in Bródno[107]. And with

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[104] Zawistowska means the closing down of the German workshops that used Jewish workforce from the ghetto (finally liquidated in May 1943 after the uprising had been suppressed).

[105] A guard.

[106] People saving Jews in German-occupied Poland faced the death penalty.

[107] A district of Warsaw on the right side of the Vistula river.

those two the stages, the stories are endless. One could really talk because constantly… Once the host of that apartment came back from the country; they had to leave. She rented out an apartment from an ad, as it turned out, from a Gestapo[108] collaborator. They kicked out my brother-in-law on the street at night. He hid in some gate and the groundskeeper took him in. All the resources we had we divided among ourselves, but three fourths, everything sank, they took everything from him. So we had to divide everything, and he finally found a very good apartment in Grochów[109]. He was a very handsome and delicate man. His host just fell in love with him, and he just lived with her. And she was in the countryside with her children and knew everything about him. She wanted to save him at any cost. In the meantime he developed appendicitis, and I arranged for an illegal surgery in the Omega. It was a… Now a children's hospital on Aleje Jerozolimskie. We had a doctor and a nurse on the inside. And he went through hell there because they were looking for those wounded that had attacked an outpost of the German military police. The wounded were lying in that hospital, and they were tearing off comforters and searching for those people. Well, if they had taken off his comforter, he would have died, of course. That doctor would later come and visit him in Grochów. So I had my brother-in-law with me, who stayed with me for 18 months. But one night I was too late because there was a curfew, and when I did not come back for the night, my brother-in-law made himself a nook in the chimney and stayed in the chimney for the whole night because if I were to die, he would, too, automatically. The apartment was always locked. When someone knocked on the door, he would instantly get under the bed. There was a neighbor who had suspicions, but he turned out to be decent and did not betray us, it later turned out that he was in a Polish Workers' Party cell. Actually, he knew everything but was being very fair.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brother-in-law not leave the apartment at all?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: Did your brother-in-law not leave the apartment at all?

SUBJECT: Not at all.

INTERVIEWER: For 18 months.

SUBJECT: He had such an appearance that he could not go out. Once an Ukrainian Werkschutz who made a Kennkarte for him came, took a photograph of him in the apartment, we made him a Kennkarte, but he could not do it at all. Not only there, later we spent 3 and a half months underground, in a bunker, he could not take a single step after the liberation, he was seriously sick. He could not walk at all, because he had stopped walking.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the Warsaw uprising?[110]

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[108] Gestapo (from *Geheime Staatspolizei*, Secret State Police), the German security police, combating political enemies of the Nazi regime and, during the war, hunting for hiding Jews.

[109] A district of Warsaw on the right side of the Vistula river.

[110] The Warsaw uprising against the Germans was initiated by the Polish underground Home Army on August 1, 1944. After two months of harsh fighting the uprising was suppressed. About 150,000 Poles

SUBJECT: I did not take part in the Warsaw Uprising, but I remember what it was like outside. I remember both. I sat down then… It was a holiday. All the Poles were going to church. Luckily my host was not very pious. She did not force it, because there were chapels in all the houses, and everywhere people were praying and singing "Kto pod obronę?"[111] and so on, those religious songs. She did not come downstairs, and that saved me because I did not know all those prayers, only a little. I never had the time to learn them. If I were tested on that, of course, I would have failed the test. And luckily she was a loner, did not keep in touch with her neighbors, and that also saved me from having to go down there. So on those holidays she did invite her aunts and so on, but I tried to be outside the house for the whole day. My brother-in-law was not there with me yet, only after those holidays, when they liquidated his factory, interestingly he was interviewed a few years ago about how he survived in Dering's factory, how he got to Pańska St later, and so on. Of course without others' help, without any Ukrainians or Germans or Werkschutze, and so on, not only Poles were needed here, one could not survive in some situations. It was mostly for money, but there were some people who would risk their lives for low prices. We paid our host 500 zlotys a month. Apart from some gifts she would get. Then I had such an alibi… I am going back again because I would buy stuff for him and cook for him, and that justified my staying so long in the apartment. From the ghetto, as long as it was still there, they would send us linens through the sewers, various things under the pretext that I was buying these things from people in the ghetto and selling them. I would do a lot of laundry and so on. Besides, attracting the attention of the neighbor that owned the attic. I would hang a lot of things with initials there. They knew that those had come from the ghetto, so I was pretending to be trading them, leaving, going out, and so on. But I skipped and came back. So we are at the Warsaw uprising, right?

INTERVIEWER: No, the Warsaw ghetto uprising, what do you remember?

SUBJECT: I remember, I was only an observer.

INTERVIEWER: And was it horrible?

SUBJECT: I saw flashes, I mean I would go to a laundry service opposite my apartment, on my street, on Żelazna St. At that laundry service I learned among other things about the burying of the shelter in which Ringelblum was hiding.

INTERVIEWER: You learned about that particular shelter in which Ringelblum was hiding at that laundry service?

SUBJECT: That on Grójecka St.[112]

(the overwhelming majority of them civilians) were killed and most of the city was destroyed. The entire remaining population was deported from Warsaw in October 1944. See Alexandra Richie, *Warsaw 1944: The Fateful Uprising* (London: William Collins, 2013).

[111] "Pod Twoją obronę," a religious Catholic song.

[112] This shelter was outsider the ghetto, in the Ochota district of Warsaw, discovered by the Germans in March 1944 after a denunciation from a Pole.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: They often told me that I feel sorry for them, so I must be Jewish myself. And when I was getting that Kennkarte, "you look just like a Jewess." There were various tricks. I would go there and back again in the city so as not to stay at home. Somewhere to Praga and so on. It was very risky because there were often specialized szmalcownicy on the tram stops who would accost you and that often cost me a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any experiences with a szmalcownik?

SUBJECT: Very often. That day when my husband came out, escaped from the ghetto and stayed overnight with me, he went to that apartment in Praga, and I was supposed to go to his place a few hours later. I ran into some half drunk boy. Without any warning he took me up several floors. He groped me very thoroughly. He took out my papers. Of course there was money there. He took the money immediately. I had to ask him not to take it from me, and after taking everything, a little golden chain, money, only then did he let me go. And then I had to walk around to erase all the evidence, to get there, to Mokra St, far away in Bródno, behind the Bródno cemetery, because I had to watch out so that I would not lead them to their apartment.

INTERVIEWER: But had he not known you before, that szmalcownik?

SUBJECT: Of course not. I was never blackmailed by anyone I knew.

INTERVIEWER: So he recognized you by the appearance, by the eyes?

SUBJECT: Of course. They had faultless intuition. They had a sixth sense. They could always tell.

INTERVIEWER: Were you indignant?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: Were you not indignant?

SUBJECT: What do you mean indignant, it its nothing to say I was indignant. I was just scared to death. Because he could have snitched on my apartment. And I would never have been able to get out of it then. He could have snitched on the apartment that I had arranged for my husband and brother-in-law. One blackmail led to another blackmail after all. It never ended. It was the worst if you led them to your own apartment.

INTERVIEWER: I understand, but…

SUBJECT: It is too little a word, inadequate…

INTERVIEWER: I mean, did you not deny that you were Jewish?

SUBJECT: Of course, I denied. Of course, I denied. At the beginning I resisted. When he said, let us go to the police bureau, I said with a cheeky expression, very well, let us go. We are going! But then I lost my

courage, and I knew that if I went to the police bureau, that would be the end of me. And then, at the cost of the greatest ransom and the greatest material losses, one had to get out of it.

INTERVIEWER: I understand.

SUBJECT: That was the price… A drunk boy is touching my most intimate places and looking for papers or money in my underwear, it was just disgusting, smells of vodka, and so on. His behavior was unpredictable because he was in an unpredictable state after all. I could never know… He was not doing it in public. He went up several floors with me. Because they also felt threatened to some degree. And they were trying to be discreet about it. Not outward. He decided. I could never predict his further movements. If, should he take everything, nonetheless…

INTERVIEWER: Go ahead.

SUBJECT: For example, on Pańska St I heard voices saying that they could not open the windows because they were burning up outside, and they cannot even sleep and open the windows. There were such voices, and there were others. Totally different, sympathy and so on.

INTERVIEWER: And what was it like later? Up to the Warsaw uprising? I mean, in your situation, what changed?

SUBJECT: So, it was like this, it was April, I mean, May '43. Yes. And we were there until… it was '43, and we were there until '44, until August, until the start of the Warsaw uprising.

INTERVIEWER: You mean in the same situation, that you went out in the morning, hung around…

SUBJECT: In the same situation, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Your brother-in-law was under the bed, and your husband…

SUBJECT: I would go out, I would do… Well, under the bed, when she was not there and when… Luckily the [male] host died, too, because as long as he was alive, there was no possibility of bringing him home to us. But at that time, before we took him to our apartment, the host's father just died, and we were able to take my brother-in-law in and take care of him.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband living in Bródno for the whole time?

SUBJECT: My husband was actually living in Praga.

INTERVIEWER: In Praga, yes.

SUBJECT: Absolutely elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER: And did you meet with him often?

SUBJECT: Yes, he visited me officially as my fiancé.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. And was there any contact with the left?

SUBJECT: No, not at all. I had too many men to worry about, too much business, to be engaged in politics. Politics was doing great without me. That was too much for one person. I needed to arrange an illegal surgery for my brother-in-law, I needed to feed another brother-in-law and care for his life and existence, what conditions were those to be breaking the secrecy and meeting strangers in the city? No. That would not have made any sense, I would not have saved anyone in those conditions.

INTERVIEWER: And did you meet any Jews, fugitives from the ghetto?

SUBJECT: I did not meet anyone. If I met someone, I got afraid and turned back, and ran away from them.

INTERVIEWER: Good.

SUBJECT: If… because every gesture, every word, every trembling of an eyelid could betray you.

INTERVIEWER: And on August 1st the uprising starts, and you are on Pańska St?

SUBJECT: Well, first I will say that we were generally trying to live normally. I mean, my husband and I met very often at the cemetery in Bródno. At one point some kids even bugged me there, started something about that, and I had to swear a lot at them. We even met in the Skaryszewski park[113]. There was this backwater where boats were sailing, we would even meet there. We chose such places where one would least expect Jews to be found. I would often go to greens, parks, where women with children were, with a book, and so on. One day my host and I even went to Anin near Warsaw by train, and a friend of hers lived there. We even met Germans in the forest, and the Germans did not recognize us at all. If a Pole did not betray us, Germans would not recognize us at all. So to some extent, right… I took out books from the library and went even to Praga. I tried to teach my brother-in-law German, but he really was not cut out for that. And just that day – especially that the evening was very long because there was a curfew – and the evenings were huge, and you had to fill them with something. I even remember that I was even reading books by Dołęga-Mostowicz[114] and others, even crime fiction, in which I ordinarily was not interested. But let us go on. So we are approaching the uprising?

INTERVIEWER: I mean, I understand that you were separated from your husband at some point because he was on the other side of the Vistula. Yes, so the Warsaw uprising: on the day it started my husband visited me. And he also gave some instructions, and he also brought some supplies, beans or something else, and as he left my place, the uprising started. And the crossed the bridge, reached his place. I was cut off already, but I went to the market to do some shopping, and I had to wait it out in some basement, and in the evening I came back to my place. Then started the gehenna of the uprising. It was enough to go out to bring some water, and the snipers would just shoot and kill you. People were dying constantly. Of course then those mortars… But one particular thing was that I did not take my brother-

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113 The biggest park in Warsaw, on the right side of the Vistula river.

114 Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz (1898-1939), a very popular Polish novelist.

in-law to the basement, I did not take him to the shelter, and I preferred him to die from a German bomb that ripped by the gangs that were going through the shelters, taking out Jews, and shooting them.

INTERVIEWER: You mean gangs of insurgents? The National Armed Forces?[115]

SUBJECT: I mean, those were not insurgents, those were bandits.

INTERVIEWER: But bandits belonging to any faction?

SUBJECTS: Bandits, but they wore black and… red and white armbands.

INTERVIEWER: Were they from the National Armed Forces?

SUBJECT: Ah, surely. Or they were impersonating them, and they were just regular bandits because there were many of them during the uprising, of them and thieves, and bandits, and so on, or they were impersonating them, but they had weapons and were taking out Jews and shooting them.

INTERVIEWER: You mean, did you witness it?

SUBJECT: I witnessed that they were dragging people out, and I heard shots.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know that there was this discussion recently, besides, you were there, around that Michał Cichy's article in "Gazeta Wyborcza"?[116]

SUBJECT: Yes, I was there, I organized it after all.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I remember that, but you did not write anything about it.

SUBJECT: No, no, no. There was a discussion, I just… These are just my observations, but firstly I do not know if they were from the National Armed Forces, I do not know who they were; after the war, when I met Adolf Berman, I gave him such a report. And when I mentioned it in the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia[117], such things happened, they wanted to literally lynch me. Because this is an insult, this is an insult of the red and white armband, because Cichy and I organized the meeting in my club, here in our club.

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[115] National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne), a nationalist, right-wing underground organization, partly a political and personal continuation of the National-Radical Camp from the 1930s. A vital element of their political and ideological agenda was antisemitism. The members of this group were blamed for killing numerous Jews in 1944 and 1945.

[116] Michał Cichy, a journalist of "Gazeta Wyborcza," the biggest Polish daily newspaper of liberal and left-wing leaning. In 1994 he published an article about the murder of Jews during the Warsaw uprising by some fighters of the Home Army and Nationalist Armed Forces, "Polacy-Żydzi. Czarne karty powstania" (Poles and Jews. Black Episodes of the Warsaw Uprising), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 29-30, 1994). It provoked lots of discussions and heated controversies.

[117] Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia encompassing mostly Catholics of progressive views, open to a dialogue with Judaism and Jews.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. I was there then, yes.

SUBJECT: And the National Armed Forces members came and so on, were arguing a lot. I even made a note about it. You cannot because such things must be based on sources. Of course, on accounts, too. And here I could act as someone who gives an account, as a witness. But I do not know who those people were after all. But the facts are that they dragged people out and came to the shelter asking, "Are there any Jews here?" And when Jews volunteered or were reported by someone else, they just… And there was once a very unfortunate situation because when I was taking my brother-in-law downstairs to another apartment from that fifth floor and the roof that was constantly burning, downstairs to such a, she turned out to be sleeping with Germans and so on, we would bribe her with food so that she would allow us to stay with her, and in the end I never brought him to the shelter for that reason. And then they were surprised. Later we lived in some abandoned apartment. And when inspection came, because there were so-called block committees, and he was under the bed, and he came out, they were very indignant that he was so scared and did not trust them. And it was hard to explain it to them. Well, of course our reaction to its taking so long, we understood nothing of it: why is the front standing still for so long, why is it all happening at the civilians' expense?[118] Those were questions we could not find answers for. The end of the uprising, my brother-in-law had such an appearance that he could not leave Warsaw[119], besides, he could not even walk, and any passer-by would recognize him. Because of that we stayed in the basement of a buried house, where we had contacted another Jew who passed for Polish, had a Polish fiancée, and he gave us that address. It was 8 Mariańska St, those were actually the premises of a former bakery. On the other side there was an door opening to that All Saints' church on Plac Grzybowski.

INTERVIEWER: It is somewhere here.

SUBJECT: Yes, on Plac Grzybowski. But already on that day, when we blocked the door, my brother-in-law went out and hid the entrance to that basement. And we survived there until the liberation.

INTERVIEWER: You mean in that bunker, that shelter, without going outside?

SUBJECT: Without going outside at all.

INTERVIEWER: Without going outside at all?

SUBJECT: I mean, going outside meant that first on that day when all the people were leaving Warsaw, I went to get some water, besides, I had one arm that did not bend, was crippled, so I held all the vessels

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[118] The Soviet offensive in Poland was halted in August 1944 and it is still debated by historians whether this was due to a deliberate decision by Stalin, who did not want to provide help to the Polish Home Army that he regarded as a political rival, or was the result of the German military counteroffensive. The Home Army commanders, when they started the uprising on August 1, 1944, took it for granted that the Red Army would enter Warsaw over the course of a few days.

[119] After the capitulation of the Home Army in early October 1944, all remaining civilians were forced to march on foot to the transit camp in Pruszków outside Warsaw, and were then deported to various places in the General Government and in Germany, thousands of them being sent to labor and concentration camps.

with one hand, vessels I could find, water that lasted us for a week. There were I, my brother-in-law, and a lady from Częstochowa, whose sister was to have stayed with us, but who at the last moment got scared and left[120]. And in the night we went around the neighboring basements, only around the buried courtyard, and there we were searching for any dried bread crust, any pieces of fatback, or any other things. We were scattering, destroying things there, we stepped on photographs, albums, any precious collections that people had just left behind while leaving from the uprising. But we were only searching for food. It was worse when snow had fallen, then one could even find us by the footprints. But before we left, our neighbors, whom we lived with, in exchange for a golden watch gave us a jar of fatback, which was, it was half salted, and only a part of it was spoiled. And we had some grain and a a grinder to grind that grain. We were making pancakes with it, frying them on a pan and in a cooker. On the last evening, when we already were in that bunker, I went to some people, from whom I bought some spirit for a spirit stove. And as I was coming back, I heard the voices of Germans, it was dark, I hid somewhere there, I hugged a wall, in a demolished house, and I managed to bring those items home. And we survived there until the liberation. There were rats because there were corpses buried nearby, and they just had something to eat, and that is why they did not reach us. But throughout the night there was this noise, as if they were tearing paper, destroying something, and so on. In the last… The water supply ran out very quickly. Because of that my brother-in-law, who was in a very weak physical condition and very small and skinny but had some superhuman resilience and courage, broke the tiles in the basement with a pickaxe, and we managed to dig through after two days of digging, and we hid the dirt there in the corner, we turned piles of dirt and dug through to water that was mixed half and half with sand. And then a different life began because we could sometimes wash something because there had also been a plague of lice, so we had had to kill them with an iron because there had been no water. And one day we even had such a supply instead of water, that was a bottle of cough syrup, and we were rationing one little spoon for each of us twice a day. There were such tragic moments. But when there was that water, a different life began. In the final stage we heard calls outside, "Get out because we are laying down dynamite! We are laying… generally… Or we will blow you up."[121]

INTERVIEWER: Were the Germans shouting that?

SUBJECT: The Germans were shouting, yes. But they actually were not Germans but Poles who helped Germans in gathering valuables that Jews had left and generally in taking apart those demolished houses. And they were calling. We did not go out, but we were hiding – how naive that was – we covered ourselves with planks and hid, we kept our legs in the water in the basement. Would that have helped much against a grenade? I doubt it, but one always looks for some way of salvation.

INTERVIEWER: But please tell me, that entrance to the bunker was hidden? You would enter through the house?

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[120] Those civilians, who did not leave Warsaw upon the capitulation of the Home Army faced the danger, if caught by Germans, of being executed.

[121] After the uprising the German troops systematically destroyed the deserted city, blowing up remaining buildings.

SUBJECT: The house was demolished.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a ruin?

SUBJECT: It was a ruin, it was a demolished house. There were only the remains of some floor, some balconies, some windows hanging, and the entrance was from the courtyard. But we were burning in a so-called "koza" stove, we were burning and heating water there or cooked there sometimes, there needed to be an exhaust pipe, and that is why it had to be hidden. And at that time, when there were those voices, and there was too much movement, we did not burn anything there so that the smoke would not betray us. Of course, I almost went completely blind then because there was no light and only in this hole, through which light crept in from the courtyard, only by that hole could you read. I found some books by Czarska[122], about children, about youth, whatever was there was food for our minds. Every printed word was some kind of relaxation for us. And that is how we survived. One day someone got to that entrance, and we saw that young man who had shown us that entrance. And we set him a condition. We did not know that Warsaw was already liberated[123]. But we had been hearing bombardment for the last few months. And then it had been getting louder, and at some point it stopped. And we said that if they brought us a Soviet soldier, we would believe that Warsaw is liberated. We actually thought that it was someone sent by the Germans, someone who wanted to betray us. Because just as we did not trust the Germans throughout the war, we did not believe in the calls of that "Polish Hotel"[124]. Because one very wealthy aunt on my husband's side wanted to give us an apartment for that because there was this matter of buying those foreign passports, and then you could leave. And they died. They took them to Vittel and from there to Drancy, and they died there. So we did not have trust from start to finish, and maybe that allowed us to survive. And actually the next day we heard people talking in the courtyard, we went out. Of course in some unlikely clothes, we went out from there, in some coat with fox fur and some summer shoes, but those are details. My husband was in Praga. He crossed to this side and searched for us in the house we had lived in, on Pańska St, and we had left a sign there saying where we were, but had not done that in time because he was searching for us earlier. And on ice[125] I crossed to that side, to Praga.

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[122] Lidia Czarska (1875-1937), a Russian novelist, her books were translated to Polish in the 1920s and 1930s.

[123] Soviet and Polish troops liberated Warsaw on January 17, 1945.

[124] In 1943 the Gestapo spread news in Warsaw that Jews who were foreign citizens would be exchanged for German nationals interned by the Allies. Many Jews, also those hiding on "the Aryan" side of Warsaw, attempted to acquire foreign passports and reported themselves to the German authorities. They were placed in hotels in Warsaw, allegedly in order to wait until the exchange could be carried out. One of these establishments was "Hotel Polski" (Polish Hotel) on Długa Street and the whole story came to be known under this name. Most of the Jews who gathered in this and other hotels were brought to the camp in Vittel in occupied France and to the concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen. The majority were subsequently deported to Auschwitz and killed there. See Engelking and Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto, 745-8. See also the most detailed study in Polish: Agnieszka Haska, *"Jestem Żydem, chcę wejść": Hotel Polski w Warszawie, 1943* (Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą, 2006).

[125] Across the Vistula river all the bridges were destroyed at that moment.

INTERVIEWER: With your brother-in-law?

SUBJECT: No, no, my brother-in-law stayed, he could not walk at all. And we just… My brother-in-law, later my husband came there, we placed in his old apartment, where they actually had their own apartment, we moved him to Grzybowska St. And when I came there, it was in Targówek[126] at the place of a very poor woman who worked as a cleaner in the Main Welfare Council[127]. She was suspicious about my husband, but the Main Welfare Council generally helped Jews. And I asked, does that lady live here? She does. And is that young man who lives at her place there? He is. And after half an hour of waiting my husband entered the apartment. What we experienced then is hard to remember and talk about. And now we moved back to that apartment there, their old apartment, on Grzybowska St, and we started the search for an apartment. My husband was already working on the editing board, and after a long search we found an apartment on the fourth floor on Ząbkowska St. What is also interesting is that my husband had and invitation to the "Monopol"[128] for the opening of the "Monopol" or something like that, and there was salmon there, and there was great food. And after that bunker, after that hunger, after those horrible experiences, I suddenly found myself at such a libation. It is also an experience worthy of mention because there was a normal life going on already, and they were already having parties for journalists. And of course my brother-in-law was learning to walk slowly, he was ill because of all that, I instantly started work, I went to work at the Ministry of Propaganda, then I moved to Łódź in search of my family, then my husband moved to Łódź for work, too. There were great adventures with finding an apartment, I was already pregnant then, and gradually, gradually, we started a normal life.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work in Łódź in the Ministry of Propaganda?

SUBJECT: Not in Łódź.

INTERVIEWER: In Warsaw?

SUBJECT: In Warsaw. In Łódź I worked in the District Committee of Trade Unions as the director of the cultural and educational department. I was the first to introduce reduced fare tickets to theaters, cinemas, I worked on creating ensembles at large workplaces, dance groups, vocal groups, and so on. Those were the beginnings of mass-scale cultural work. Later I worked in the Central Administration of the Textile Industry, there, too, I introduced that social and cultural and educational initiative. Later to a printing administration, where I led the press department, up to that little printing cell, we were issuing our own little publication. Then I was moved to Warsaw for work, to the Ministry of Internal Trade, also to the press department. And so one by one, those are different stages.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you start working for the Jewish newspaper?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

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[126] A part of Warsaw on the right side of the Vistula river.

[127] Rada Główna Opiekuńcza (Main Welfare Council), a Polish charity organization.

[128] The hotel "Monopol" in Warsaw.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start working for the "Fołks Sztyme" Jewish newspaper?[129]

SUBJECT: Well, then already we were totally separated, separated from the Jewish community. Absolutely separated.

INTERVIEWER: Did you not think about emigrating to Palestine, to Israel?

SUBJECT: No, no, absolutely not.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you know, in Israel they are saying that Poland is a graveyard for the Jewish people on one hand, on the other that there is anti-Semitism there, and because of that Jews were emigrating from there.

SUBJECT: That was true, it was a graveyard. It was a graveyard, but we just, as members of that prewar Communist movement, we believed that it was our duty to build the new Poland, a different Poland, that is one thing. Apart from that, in the first stage the Jewish community was very lively, and all parties except for the far-right ones were allowed to exist. So it seemed that our dreams would come true here.

INTERVIEWER: You mean, you had nothing to do with the Jewish life, say until '68?

SUBJECT: Well, I did, in that just after the war, I contacted… I was always interested in history, above all the Holocaust and the war in general. I was in touch with Filip Friedman[130], a historian, whose wife, Ada Ebinowa[131] , developed instructions for research on Jewish children. And I took part in that research. And I was always interested in that topic, from the very beginning. And I was always searching, I was saying that when I retire, when I have the time, when I have raised my child, and so on, I will read about that time and those problems. Then an absolute taboo began. You could not say that there had been a szmalcownik, you could not… Polish-Jewish relations were being erased[132]. I could, say, write some memoirs, but only for my own drawer and so on. That problem was being totally erased. And in '68 it

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[129] "Fołks Sztyme" (Polish: Głos Ludu, People's Voice), 1946-1968 a Jewish daily newspaper, published in Warsaw, after 1968 as a weekly, since 1991 as a bi-weekly under the title "Dos Jidisze Wort" (Polish: Słowo Żydowskie, The Jewish Word).

[130] Filip Friedman (1901-1960), a historian, author of books on the history of the Polish Jews and the Holocaust, testified as a witness at the Nuremberg trial of Nazi leaders, in 1948 emigrated to the United States where he taught at Columbia University in New York City.

[131] Ada Eber-Friedman, a historian, received his PhD at Lwów university, helped her husband research his books. Zawistowska apparently misspelled her name.

[132] In the early 1950s Polish Communists began to eclipse memory of the wartime fate of Jews. The Party and state propaganda focused on a general category of all victims of Nazi occupation and terror without specifying the Jewish experience. This approach followed the Soviet model of war memory. See the most thorough study of this issue: Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

only started again[133], as I was standing in the Three Crosses Square[134], and heard "Grunwald's"[135] speech from those megaphones, I had the feeling as if I were standing during… during the occupation under a German megaphone. It was so anti-Jewish, anti, of course, anti Ministry of Public Security[136], but it was so generalizing.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you start working in "Fołks Sztyme"? When was that?

SUBJECT: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: When you started your work there.

SUBJECT: Oh, very late. I only signed up in '88. I knew the trade well, and that topic interested me very much, Ida Merżan[137] was also writing on the topic of Jewish children and Korczak[138], and so on. But I thought that it was a very low grade publication. And it really was so then, and then, actually, that it was only following the party line. And I even stopped going to the theater when it became a selling point of the Polish government. And in general it all changed. Of course in the beginning we went, when there was Ida Kamińska's[139] theater, and each premiere was a big event for us. I did not distance myself from

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[133] In 1968 the Communist authorities organized a virulently antisemitic propaganda campaign. Thousands of Jews were purged from the state administration, army, media and institutions of culture. See Dariusz Stola, "The Hate Campaign of March 1968: How Did it Become Anti-Jewish?" *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 21 (2009): 16-36; Artur J. Wolak, *Forced Out: The Fate of Polish Jewry in Communist Poland* (Tucson, Arizona: Fenestra Books, 1994); Anat Plocker, "'Zionist to Dayan': The anti-Zionist campaign in Poland 1967-1968" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2009); Hans-Christian Dahlmann, *Antisemitismus in Polen 1968: Interaktionen zwischen Partei und Gesellschaft*, Osnabrück: Fibre, 2013).

[134] Downtown Warsaw.

[135] This passage of the testimony is unclear. Zawistowska probably meant a speech of Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party, or of another Communist leader. "Grunwald" was a nationalistic, antisemitic organization, active in the 1980s, with close links to some Communist activists. See Przemysław Gasztold-Seń, *Koncesjonowany nacjonalizm* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012). Zawistowska might have recalled this more recent memory of links between the Communists and antisemitic rhetoric and projected it onto the more distant events of 1968.

[136] The antisemitic propaganda, in 1968 and in later decades, often exploited and inflated the actual presence of many Jewish communists in the cadres of the Ministry of the Public Security during the Stalinist period (1944-1956) in Poland. The Ministry of Public Security was responsible for the massive terror against political opponents.

[137] Ida Merżan (1907-1987), author of books and articles about Janusz Korczak and his work with Jewish children.

[138] Janusz Korczak, the pen name of Henryk Goldszmit (1878-1942), a pedagogue and author of books for children, director of the orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto; deported to the Treblinka death camp together with children in his care. See Adir Cohen, *The Gate of Light: Janusz Korczak, the Educator and Writer who Overcame the Holocaust (Madison, NJ:* Fairleigh Dickinson University Press*, 1994).*

[139] Ida Kamińska (1899-1980), an actress and director of the Jewish Theater in Warsaw, in 1968 left Poland for Israel and later the United States.

that, but I had a different life, a different field, I was very included in the central life of Poland, and not only that marginal Jewish life.

INTERVIEWER: And your husband was a journalist in "Życie Warszawy" until his retirement?

SUBJECT: No, he was there very briefly, he is a trained chemist, and he worked in the technical department of the Central Administration of the Chemical Industry, and then he went to the Ministry of the Food Industry, he worked in his field. And although he was the director of the department of international trade, he was able to leave the country, but he was always very modest and renounced that because he preferred to go on visits to factories and control their production, and so on. And always really with people, and not on some outposts, and so on. He also only joined the party after the war, he was not as blinded as I was, he had a very sober attitude towards such matter, and so on. And apart from that, he had such a field that he was not tied by ideology, so he did not have those jumps, those phases, and so on.

INTERVIEWER: And when was your daughter born?

SUBJECT: In '46.

INTERVIEWER: And that is your only child?

SUBJECT: Yes, our only child.

INTERVIEWER: And what does she do today?

SUBJECT: First, she got a master's degree in English in Poland. In '69, she emigrated to Sweden with her husband, they got their PhD's in Uppsala. Then Smolar[140] brought in the son-in-law, that is Krzysztof Dorosz[141]. He is a very well known journalist in the field of Christian ethics, he is even a member of the editing board of "Znak"[142], and he is very famous here. And both of them work in the BBC[143] in the Polish section. Since '78 they have been in London, and before, from '69, they had been in Sweden. She worked in Umea at the university, and it took her the whole night to commute there, as a lecturer at the university, she did translations. He also did his PhD there. And they both went and are working there.

INTERVIEWER: That might be all. Do you want to say anything more?

SUBJECT: That is probably all when it comes to those, let us say, trivia or unique things. Obviously, the return to my identity, even though I never left it, was clearly in '68.

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[140] Eugeniusz Smolar (born in 1945), a journalist and member of the democratic opposition, in 1970 left Poland for Sweden and later Great Britain, between 1988 and 1997 director of the Polish section of BBC in London.

[141] Krzysztof Dorosz (born in 1945), an essayist and journalist.

[142] "Znak," a Catholic intellectual journal of liberal leaning, published in Kraków.

[143] BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation, the British public television.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SUBJECT: It was a process, it was, right… You are either inside or outside, it was the realization. But my husband has no connection, actually, nor with the Jewish language, he does not know Jewish at all. His parents did not speak Jewish, a very assimilated household, and they were just married around the world, with German, French women, and so on. And to this day he has nothing in common, only a general interest for Jewish topics.

INTERVIEWER: I understand. Have you been to Israel? Did you go many times?

SUBJECT: Yes. I went there many times.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have family there?

SUBJECT: There was family, there is still a remainder of my family there, even this year in the spring I was there for three weeks. For the first time I was there in '63, then I went illegally in '82, via Sweden, later I was in '86, in '88, and this year. But actually, I just went to the editorial board[144] by accident then, but when I started working with them, my work would constantly intensify, I saw, later the profile changed, after Rok [145]joined, the level, the character of the publication changed, and I thought that… Because for many years, I worked with the press, I had lectures in schools. And I also connected my learned profession with it. And then I reached the conclusion that I am too old to be going to youths at all, and that my place is at home, at peace, and at work on "Słowo…", and to this day I feel very well there.

INTERVIEWER: In "Słowo Żydowskie", right? Good, thank you very much.

SUBJECT: And we were in time.

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[144] Editorial board of "Fołks Sztyme" (People's Voice), later "Dos Jidisze Wort" (in Polish: Słowo Żydowskie).

[145] Adam Rok, editor in chief of "Dos Jidisze Wort."