Notes from the Second World War

Agnieszka (Agnes) Muszyńska

Dedication: *To my grandchildren who do not speak Polish language…*

Introduction

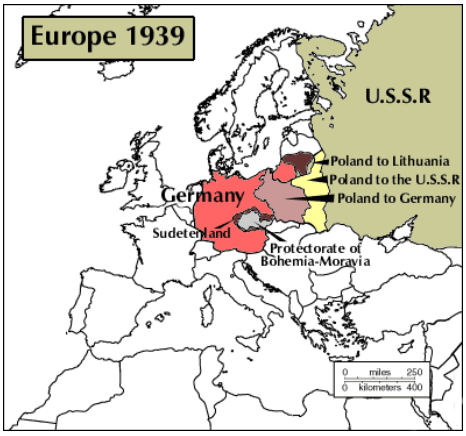
My family lived in Warsaw, Poland. My parents, who were both physicians, owned an apartment in the center of Warsaw, at the corner of the 6-th Sierpnia (6-th August) Street (now Nowowiejska Street) and the Zbawiciela (Redeemer's) Circle. This Circle was named after the monumental Redeemer's Church.



Redeemer's Church on Zbawiciela (Redeemer's) Circle before 1939. On the right side – buildings at the Mokotowska Street

When the Second World War began on the September 1, 1939, I was less then 4 years old.

The Polish Authorities realized that the war with Germany was inevitable and, in August 1939, called men to arms. My father, Professor of Medicine at the Warsaw University, was mobilized with the rank of Lieutenant, and departed from Warsaw. Generally, the Polish people believed that the war would be brief and successful for Poland. At least, local media put forth such prognosis during the preceding months ("we are strong, solid, and ready!"). For sure, nobody thought that this war, which the Germans started that first day of September by the invasion of Poland, without even any official Declaration of War, would become 'The World War' with over 50 million victims, including 6.23 million Polish citizens killed (17.2% of the pre-war population), enormous destruction in over 30 countries in the world, and that it would last almost 6 years! The German pretext for the war was (a false) claim that Polish troops had committed "provocations" along the German-Polish border, as well as a dispute over German "rights" to the Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk) and free passage between Germany through the "Polish Corridor" from East Prussia (the small red spot on the map). Poland was the first country to resist Hitler (before that time the Nazi's Germany "peacefully" annexed Austria and Czecho-slovakia, called "Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia).



Brown and yellow colors indicate the territory of pre-war Poland

It soon became clear that this German invasion of Poland was going to be a war of extermination. Germany, as it was claimed, needed "living space" and Poles, along with other people of all Slavic nations, were regarded as "inferior", and were designated by Hitler to be erased from the world. Their extermination would then provide large and fertile grounds for the "greatest German nation". Specifically, it was German policy that the non-Jewish Poles were to be reduced to the status of serfs, and eventually replaced on the Polish lands by German colonists. Hitler had other, even much worse, plans for the Jews.

Nazi Occupation

My family, comprising my mother (a doctor of ophthalmology), my elder brother, Jasiek, and myself, managed to survive the massive Nazi's land and air attacks during the month of September in 1939. It was, however very scary, as the war overtook us on vacations at a small village, Rybienko, about 30 miles east of Warsaw. At the beginning, we were hiding in the near-by forest, as it was dangerous to stay in the small, and unprotected vacation house. We watched the Polish/German airplane battles. The Germans heavily bombed the town Wyszków in the vicinity. They used both highly explosive and fire bombs. In the evening after bombing, we saw huge flames of fire. Wyszków was destroyed. After two days, everything started looking more serious than anybody expected. We decided to go back to Warsaw. My mother rented a horse carriage with a carter. On the way to Warsaw, several times we had to run to the field in order to hide from German fighter planes shooting to civilians on the highway. By the evening, after a long and terrifying day of traveling, we reached our apartment in Warsaw. During several following weeks, Warsaw was under heavy bombing.



My mother, Dr. Wida Galinowska in 1943

By the end of September Poland capitulated. Our apartment house was spared, although window glasses in our building, as well as in practically all structures in Warsaw, were broken due to heavy artillery and air bombardment. Many buildings were destroyed. In fact, 10-15% of the city was destroyed. Our nearby Redeemer's Church lost one tower. Soon thereafter, Nazi military forces, followed by the Gestapo (Secret Police), SS (Schutzstaffel – Protective Squadron), as well as German civil administrators, entered Warsaw and began to make their "rules".



My brother Jasiek in Warsaw, 1943

Immediately, a special squad was sent to take down all Polish historical monuments from the streets, squares, and parks. Stone monuments were destroyed, and bronze or other metal-made monuments were taken down and sent to German foundries (important metals for the Nazi war industry!).



Author in Warsaw in 1943

One of the first Nazi's orders was a demand to all Polish citizens to deliver to German offices several items, possession of which was forbidden. Anyone who was confronted having these items would be killed. On this long list of items were, among others, cars, motorcycles, radios, skis (longer than a specified length), bicycles, and of course, all military equipment including arms and ammunition. We apparently did not have the latter items, and we partially complied with the rest these orders. My mother borrowed a saw, cut 2 inches off the rear of my father's skis, to keep within the ordered limits, and we did not give them to the Nazis. She also destroyed the interior of our radio and stripped all accessories from my father's bicycle before depositing it to the Nazis. Fortunately they allowed keeping junior and women's bicycles and these became our major means of transportation.

We lived in our apartment near the Zbawiciela Circe throughout the entire German occupation, including the period of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

By 1941, a large number of Germans moved to Warsaw. Since the capitulation, the Nazi Authority started preparing accommodation for the Germans. Polish people from selected apartments and entire buildings and streets received orders to move out. Soon Germans moved in. Some German officers were not eligible or did not want to occupy entire apartments; they were looking for just one furnished room. For many Polish families living in larger apartments, renting a room was a reasonable solution: from one side, this provided additional modest income and from another – some degree of protection that neither the apartment would be taken away, nor Nazi troops would search it. Eventually, such apartments often became hiding places for the Polish Underground organizations. In 1943, my mother decided to offer for lease one furnished room, which used to be my father's doctor office, in our 5-room apartment; otherwise we would lose the entire apartment. Soon a Wermacht captain, Mr. Martin, moved in. He was a polite, cultural man, who practically every day disappeared in early morning and returned late at night. We never learned what he did during the days. The important equipment that he brought with him to his room was… a radio. Since the capitulation, Polish people did not have radios, but were obviously very hungry for news from outside Germany. During the afternoons, my mother, with a few colleagues and relatives involved in the underground Polish Army, put my brother, Jasiek, on our balcony to watch for Mr. Martin return, as they listened to BBC or other special Polish underground broadcasting on his radio. Most probably, Mr. Martin was aware of this daily procedure, as when he was reaching the apartment, the radio lamps were usually still warm. Even though, he never caught us violating his room privacy, and he never complained. One day he even brought me a present: a book "Robinson Crusoe" translated in Polish. I was quite frightened, when he suddenly appeared and started talking to me in German. I did not understand him. Later on, we figured out that this book must had been just taken from some unlucky Polish family, who was arrested… A couple days before the Warsaw Uprising started, Mr. Martin moved out. We never heard about him again.

Life under the Nazi occupation was very difficult. It was unstable, hectic, and very often terrifying. Everything was in short supply, including fuel for heating, medical supplies, clothes, and food. There existed, however, a large underground market. Risking their lives, some farmers were bringing their crops and meat to Warsaw and other cities and depositing them at their "contact locations". Except during and after the Warsaw Uprising period, we did not starve.

At the beginning of the occupation, the Nazis allowed the Polish schools to operate, so my brother Jasiek, continued to attend the fourth grade of elementary school, and I went to a preschool. A couple years later, the Nazis ordered closing of the Polish schools. We were then secretly taught by our teachers in private apartments. One of them was our apartment. It was forbidden by the Nazis and of course risky. In case somebody was at the door ringing the bell, or Mr. Martin unexpectedly returned, the children were instructed to quickly hide books and notes in specially prepared hiding places, and to start playing, imitating a birthday party. A large number of such secret schools, teaching at all levels, including university level, operated in Poland during the Nazi occupation.

Soon the western part of Poland was annexed and became an "Eastern Germany". Polish people were not allowed to speak Polish, and Germanization process there was very severe.

In Warsaw, as well as in all Polish towns, the Nazis limited the freedom of the citizens more and more as time went by. Most Poles were daily engaged in a desperate struggle to survive.

Many buildings, entire streets, and establishments, like restaurants and parks were designated "Nur für Deutche" (for Germans only), and were guarded by armed soldiers. The transportation means, like trams, busses, and railway wagons, were divided and a separated part was for Germans only.

Every so often, the Nazis organized "Łapankas" (literally "caching games") to randomly round-up people in the streets and from the public transportation means. The captured civilians were then transported to prisons, questioned by the SS or the Gestapo, tortured, then sent to concentration camps, labor camps, forced labor in war-related industries, or immediately killed. It is estimated that 400 civilians were killed daily in Warsaw alone. Some captured Poles served as hostages. When, for instance, a German was killed by the underground Polish Army, the Nazis killed a number of hostages in retaliation. Actually, the Nazis did not even need any excuses to execute civilians; they did this regularly to just terrify the population. During daytime, the handcuffed hostages were placed in front of a selected building wall, in a busy Warsaw street, and shot by a Nazi squad in front of terrified Polish civilians in the area. Often, after the killings had taken place and the Nazi departed, these Polish witnesses collected some of the splashed blood, which they treated as sacred. Later, in spite of Nazi terror, people kept putting fresh flowers in these sacred places. Hundreds of such places existed in Warsaw. Today, they all are memorized by special plaques imbedded into buildings, and they are always decorated with flowers and with white and red ribbons (the Polish national colors). Each plaque explains details of these sad events, which took place during the war.

In spite of the Nazi's terror, the spirit of free Poland was not, however, completely suppressed. New songs about free Poland and songs ridiculing Germans arose every month. They were called "forbidden songs". Risking their lives, many Poles, even children, sang these songs in trams or in building backyards. Polish people cheerfully listened to these songs and offered money or goods to the performers. The "artists" learned well how to quickly vanish if any German appeared in sight.

Inside occupied Poland, anti-Nazi resistance was consolidated around the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, in Polish), an underground military organization loyal to the Polish Government-on-exile in London, UK. The Home Army was involved in sabotage, self-defense, and retaliation activities against the Germans. It also provided a great service to the Allies in the area of intelligence, obtaining information on German forces ad their activities in the east and, in particular, on the development of Germany's secret V-1 and V-2 rockets. The primary purpose of the Home Army was, however, to prepare for the anticipated German military collapse and the liberation of the country.

When schools were still operating, my brother, Jasiek, commuted daily to school on his "junior" bicycle. After school, he usually visited our relatives who lived nearby. Our aunt was involved with the Polish resistance, and she regularly received underground publications – a few-page bulletins. After having been read by my aunt's family, these pages were rolled and pushed inside the Jasiek's bicycle pump. This way, he daily transported these publications to us, after which they were passed on to other Polish readers. One day when he was on his way home, suddenly two German soldiers that he passed in the street yelled after him "*Halt*!!" This cry was well known and terrifying to every Polish person. Horrified, Jasiek stopped. The soldiers started loudly yelling, pointing out toward a small registration plate installed behind the bicycle saddle. The numbers on this plate were written on a white-red background! The Polish national a white-and-red colors were not permitted in the occupied Poland! Together with his bicycle, they arrested Jasiek, and led him to the prison on the Rakowiecka street. Amazingly, after three hours of interrogations, writing a report, and a few pokes, they let him go, but they kept the bicycle – together with the fatal pump. Terrified Jasiek returned home and revealed the reason of his long delay. My mother was horror-

struck. She realized that sooner or later somebody would ride this bicycle and try to use the pump, finding its real contents. Then our entire family would be jeopardized: arrested, sent to concentration camp, or killed immediately! My mother was very brave. She decided that there was only one solution: to go to the prison and to get back the bicycle! She started preparing herself for a "big battle": she put on the most elegant dress, a gentle make-up, and in her bag, she concealed a bribing "gift", a large bottle of vodka. She also looked up nervously in the Polish-German dictionary to refresh her German language and find the right words for her big, life-saving speech. Then she and Jasiek went to the Rakowiecka prison. My mother explained to the guard at the gate the reason of their visit. Soon they were sent to the office, in which, earlier this afternoon, Jasiek spent several hours. It was already a late evening and the German staff in the prison had changed. At the desk there was sitting a different uniformed man. My mother explained that they came for the small bicycle, which was necessary for Jasiek to commute to school, and that the junior bicycle would not be useful for the German Army. In the meantime she pulled the bottle from her bag and delicately put it on the desk. The soldier at the desk did not know anything about the bicycle. He apparently did not read the report. He glanced positively at the bottle and got the phone receptor: "Is there any small bicycle?" "Yes? Then bring it here!" In a few minutes another soldier arrived with Jasiek's bicycle. The pump was still there, apparently intact. My mother started another long speech about the smallness, wear and tear of this bicycle, and thanking the men for finding it, and at the same time giving signs to Jasiek to take the bicycle, hang his jacket over the saddle in order to hide the culprit, the white/red plaque, and to start leaving the room. The soldier at the desk did not even have anything to say… The bottle of vodka remained on his desk like a victory monument, while a few minutes later my mother and Jasiek were on their way home…

Sometimes my mother used Jasiek's bicycle to ride with me, instead of using the often-dangerous public transportation. A small blanket, coiled around the front frame rod and secured by a cord, made a comfortable seat for me. One day, we were riding on a street. Suddenly, from an opposing side a big German truck, with soldiers sitting in the back, approached and without neither signaling nor stopping, started turning left. It ran straight into our bicycle. The front of the bicycle got totally smashed, we fall down and blood splashed around. My palms, holding the front bar, got most seriously injured. Six of my fingers were broken and there were opened wounds on my hands. The truck did not even bother to stop, although the soldiers sitting in the back, who saw this accident started yelling. Germans demonstrated their "superiority" and impunity.

By the end of 1943 and during 1944, the Soviet army began to efficiently push the Germans toward the west. On several occasions, the Soviet Air Force bombed Warsaw. Perhaps they tried to destroy the Nazi's barracks and SS and Gestapo headquarters at Szucha Street, but their bombs mostly devastated numerous city buildings where Poles lived. Unfortunately, we lived quite close to Szucha Street. At the west, was the "Polish" side of the Zbawiciela Circle and the East side, where the Warsaw Polytechnic campus used to be, was occupied by Germans. Szucha Street was one block further to the East.



Mula's kittens; 1943

My mother had a Siamese cat, named Mula, who lived in our Warsaw apartment during the last 15 years. Mula was not only older than I, but she was even older than my brother! Almost every year, she had kittens, so we were used to have animals around. Mula's normal lair place was in the kitchen, located on the backyard side of our building. One evening, Mula carried one by one, all her tiny, still blind, kittens to my mother's room, situated at the street side of the building. This evening, my mother accommodated Mula with the

kittens in her room. During the night a bombing occurred. One small bomb, which fell in our backyard, partly destroyed our kitchen and Mula's lair. Mula perfectly predicted the danger and escaped death. Later on, we always closely watched Mula's behavior. Like many other animals, she had a magnificent gift of sensing danger.

Since the beginning of the war I was very much afraid of bombing. The bombing usually occurred during nights. My mother never wanted us to go to any shelter; we always stayed in our apartment, although ready to leave, if necessary. First, loud sirens announced the alarm. Then the whiz of a coming bomb, the roar of explosion, and then quakes of our house from the air blast terrified me. Many years later, living in Nevada, I was awoken at 5 o'clock in the morning by a loud noise and big shake of my entire house. Before I realized that it was an earthquake, my half-conscious mind told me: "War!! Bombing!! Bombing again!!"

During one particular bombing raid in May 1944, a Soviet bomb, instead hitting Szucha Street, it completely destroyed the building right next to ours on 6-th Sierpnia Street. Hundreds of our neighbors were killed. All the windows in surrounding buildings were broken by the air blast of the explosion. In our apartment, the windows remained broken until October 1944, when after the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising we were forced to leave home.

Except for 123,000 soldiers and officers of the Polish Army killed during the war, almost 3 million (non-Jewish) Polish civilians died as a result of the Nazi occupation of Poland. In addition, over 120,000 Poles were killed in concentration camps in Poland and in Germany: over 35,000 in Dachau, 33,000 in the camp for women at Ravensbruck, 30,000 in Mauthausen and 20,000 in Sachsenhausen.

My Father

Ever since the beginning of the war we worried very much about my father. We did not get any news from him. Then, in November 1939 we received a postcard from Starobielsk, in the Soviet Union. My father wrote that he had been captured by the Soviets and that he was in Starobielsk prisoner's camp. He mentioned that that place was very cold and asked us to send him some warm clothes and his ski boots. My mother immediately mailed off two packages to the given Starobielsk address – each boot was packed separately (to reduce the possibility of the theft on the way!). At that time, we were full of hope. In May 1940, however, both packages were returned with the annotation "*addressee unknown*".



My father,
Dr. Zdzisław Galinowski

We received no further news from my father, nor did we got any information as to what happened in the Starobielsk camp.

Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1990s, we learned that the prisoners of the Starobielsk camp were killed 50 years earlier, during the spring of 1940.

However, during several years of the war, and during the post-war years of intensive search for my father through all possible international organizations, we still had hope that he was alive.

One day, just before Christmas 1942, we received a package from Istanbul, Turkey. Inside the package there were various candies, dried fruits, a can of sardines, but – neither name, nor address of the sender. We were very happy, not only due to receipt of some delicacies unavailable in Warsaw, but also, because we believed it might have been our father who had probably originated this dispatch.

It was 37 years later, while already living in the USA, that I learned the solution to this parcel puzzle. One of the older Polish ladies that I met in Dayton, Ohio, told me that she escaped the war and spent several years in Turkey. There, she had belonged to a circle of people who helped Poles during the war. Before every Christmas, they would send packages containing sweets and other items to addresses taken… from the Polish telephone books! Several packages returned, if the building had been destroyed or the addressees were no longer there. Then – they sent these packages to the next addresses from the book. I was very glad that after so many years I was able to thank this lady for the wonderful effort of these Poles-on-exile in Turkey. The package we received certainly brought a lot of renewed hope to us.

The reality, however, was much more grimmer. According to the secret Hitler-Stalin pact (known as Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact), the Soviet Army crossed the Polish eastern border on September 17, 1939, just 17 days after the Nazi's invasion from the west. There were almost no battles between the Polish Army and the Soviets, as the Poles assumed that they came to help fighting the Nazis. In reality, however, with accordance with the Pact, the Soviets proceeded to occupy a large part of Eastern Poland. Thus, during the next 18 months, Poland was partitioned between Germany in the West and the Soviet Union in the East, across the historic "Curson line" (the border proposed, but not implemented after the First World War). This occupation was full of tragedies. From the land occupied by the Soviets, they deported many Poles to labor camps in the Asian part of the Soviet Union. Many of Poles, mainly the intelligentsia, were immediately killed.



Commemorative monument erected in Warsaw in 2000: "In memory of Polish Army Officers killed by Soviet totalitarism on the whole territory of the Evil Empire after September 17, 1939"

The Soviets also captured a large part of the Polish Army, which happened to be in the Eastern part of Poland. Ordinary soldiers were eventually dispersed throughout the entire Soviet Union, while regular and non-commissioned officers, as well as policemen, were taken to three main prison camps: at Kozielsk, at Ostaszków, and at Starobielsk. Only after the communism collapse, we learned that by the spring of 1940, the Soviets murdered almost all Polish officers (14,552 killed, only 395 escaped). The Polish officers from the Kozielsk camp near Smolensk were killed and buried in Katyń Forest, the officers from Starobielsk – near Kharkov, and the officers from Ostaszków – in Miednoje near Pskov. For a very long time the Soviets denied this crime. They still do so – at least their media continue propagating the lie!

The graves of 4,000 Polish officers in Katyń Forest near Smolensk were discovered by the German Army in 1943, after the Nazi's invasion of the Soviet Union; Hitler soon broke the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, while, amazingly, Stalin trusted and admired Hitler, and had a very high opinion of him. When the Germans discovered these graves in Katyń,

they immediately broadcasted the news to the world. The Polish Government-on-exile in London, asked the International Red Cross committee to inspect the site. This commitee confirmed that the graves contained Polish officers and that they had been killed with Soviet weapons. The Soviet Government insisted that the Germans had fabricated the discovery and firmly denied the crime, blaming Germans for killing Polish officers. The Soviets also accused the Polish Government of "cooperating with the Germans". Then – Stalin took advantage of this odd situation: he broke all contacts with the Polish Government-on-exile and immediately set up the nucleus of a communist-controlled Polish Government, as well as he began recruiting for a Communist Polish Army. Both of these were eventually instrumental in creating of the communist Polish Peoples' Republic, under Soviet's domination. This Republic lasted 45 years, until 1989.

The Soviet communists never permitted any further investigation of the Polish officers' graves found in Katyń, and never revealed what had happened to the additional thousands of Polish officers captured and imprisoned in Starobielsk and other camps. After the Nuremberg Trials, during which the Katyń crimes were never examined, it was absolutely obvious to everybody that not Nazis, but Soviets were responsible for the Katyń crimes.

The sad and grim truth was exposed only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and of communism. In 1990, a number of large mass graves were found in several places on the ex-Soviet Union territory. Further investigations revealed that in the areas of Eastern Poland during the Soviet occupation in 1939-1941, they killed additionally over 25,700 Polish citizens, mostly Polish intelligentsia. Eventually, the Russians allowed for exhumation of the Polish officers and other Polish citizen's corpses. Later, they were reburied at designated cemeteries in Russia, White Russia (Byelorussia), and Ukraine.



A monument commemorating Poles deported by the Soviets to the Gulags. Erected in Warsaw in the 1990s

It is now known how the Soviets killed the prisoners from Starobielsk camp: During the nights, some number of prisoners were boarded onto trucks, and then transported to the building of NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) in Kharkov. There, one by one, the handcuffed prisoners were led to a deep cellar and killed by a revolver shot into the back of the neck (the killers found that using this method, the least blood to be cleaned was produced). Then, still during the night, the bodies were transported outside Kharkov and buried in shallow mass graves in a forest. (During the succeeding years, the local people kept finding in this forest some items belonging to Polish officers, such as medals having Polish inscriptions, or uniform buttons with Polish Eagles, but talking however, about this was very dangerous.)

By the end of the 1960s, I discovered that at the Warsaw University campus there exists a large bronze commemorative plaque, devoted to those Warsaw University professors who had been killed during the Second World War. The text was written in Latin (apart the years 1939-1945, which were Arabic, not in Roman, numerals, visibly in order to make it clear to people unfamiliar with the Latin). It explained that Warsaw University professors lost life in this period of the war. Below the text, there was a list comprising over 50 names. Among them – the name of my father, Zdzisław Galinowski. It was interesting that during several years neither my mother nor anybody from our family knew that such a plaque existed. Interesting also was the fact that while most likely the majority of the passed away professors were killed by Germans, my father, and probably several

others, were killed by the Soviets. I started a secret "underground" inquiry (the issue of Starobielsk and other Soviet death camps was very delicate and dangerous). After several years, in 1972, I finally met a person associated in some way with the organization that was responsible for conservation of the memorial monuments. I trusted her and asked her to find the solution: How did it happen that the communists allowed displaying and honoring their own victims? The answer came after some months. This lady said that many Polish patriots worked in this organization. They did not want to manipulate the real history; they wanted to present the unvarnished truth. But, by doing this, they risked a lot. So they asked me not to speak too loudly about this matter.



Commemorative plaque at Warsaw University Campus with my father's name

I suspected such a solution. But I considered it my duty to tell the history of my father to everyone whom I trusted, and particularly to all western guests visiting Poland whom I had the opportunity to guide during their visits in Warsaw. Since I spoke three foreign languages, I was delegated from my Research Institute to take care of visiting scientists, so I did this "guiding" quite often. My usual path from the Institute at Świętokrzyska Street was in the direction of Nowy Świat and Krakowskie Przedmieście, where the Warsaw University Campus is located. While showing this campus, I always pointed out the plaque and the name of my father. Later on, while going north toward Stare Miasto (rebuilt Old Town), I would tell the story about abominable Soviet mass murders and about their denials and lies. In almost all cases, the Western visitors knew nothing of these matters – the Soviet technique of admitting nothing clearly had worked! Some of these visitors were even communists. I did it over and over again. It was risky to do this in the communist system, but fortunately I was never punished for it.

Extermination of Jews

At the start of the occupation of Poland, the Nazis ordered the Jews to be immediately separated from the reminder of the population, stripped of their properties, put in ghettos, then put into forced labor camps serving war-related industries as slaves, and then eventually exterminated in concentration death camps. The Nazis treated Jews far worse than Poles in general, and considering them to be "sub-human being".

Before the war, about 3 million Jews lived in Poland. During many centuries Jews did not have their own country; they were dispersed throughout the world. Most of the time, they maintained, however, their unique identity, religion, and traditions. During the Middle Ages, Poland was a big, democratic country. Jews were welcome, as there existed economical needs for their wisdom in regard to practical matters. They filled up the gap between the nobles and peasants. Many Jews settled in Poland and lived peacefully with Poles. By the 19-th century some degree of anti-Semitism gradually emerged. At that time, during 135 years, Poland was not independent; it was parti-

tioned and was under Russian, Prussian, and Austro-Hungarian occupation, which lasted until the end of the First World War in 1918.

After the capitulation in 1939, the Nazis ordered creation of closed compounds, the ghettos, for the Jews in all Polish cities. The ghettos were surrounded by barbed wire, brick walls, and armed guards. The communication between Poles and Jews in the ghettos was forbidden. The conditions in the ghettos were so bad that a large number of Jews died of starvation and diseases. In 1942, the Nazis began to impementing of the Hitler's "Final Solution to the Jewish Question". Accordingly, the Germans started a systematic killing of the Jews. Several extermination camps (Auschwitz, Bełżec, Treblinka, Majdanek, Chełmno, Sobibór, and Stutthof) were established, in which the most extreme measure of the Holocaust, the mass murder of over 5.5 millions Jews from Poland and other countries, was carried out between 1942 and 1945. Of Poland's prewar Jewish population of 3 million Jews, only about 50,000 survived the war. (Unfortunately, since during the war most of these camps were built by the Nazis on the territory of Poland, they somehow acquired in the USA an improper and awfully offensive name "Polish concentration camps", suggesting that not Nazis, but Poles killed Jews; a very regretable mistake)

From the ghettos, Jews were eventually transported to concentration and extermination camps: Oświęcim (Auschwitz)/Brzezinka (Birkenau; killed 1,200,000), Bełżec (killed 600,000), Treblinka (killed 700,000), Majdanek (killed 1,380,000), Chełmno (killed 320,000), Sobibór (killed 250,000), Stutthof (killed 65,000). Note that before and during the war, the Nazis created about 1000 concentration, labor, and extermination camps in Germany and on the occupied territories in Europe.

Many Jews in ghettos in Poland and across Eastern Europe tried to organize resistance against the Germans and to arm themselves with smuggled and homemade weapons. Between 1941 and 1943, underground resistance movements formed in about 100 Jewish resistance groups confined to ghettos. The most famous attempt by Jews to resist the Germans in armed fighting occurred in the Warsaw ghetto. On April 19, 1943, after Nazi troops and police entered the ghetto to deport its surviving inhabitants, the Warsaw ghetto uprising began. About 750 fighters fought the heavily armed and well-trained Germans. During the uprising, the Polish Resistance succeeded in evacuating a portion of the Jewish civilians to the "Arian" side via sewers or underground tunnels and then helped them to hide and change identity. The ghetto fighters were able to hold out for nearly a month, but on May 16, 1943, the uprising ended. Of the more than 56,000 civilian Jews captured, about 7,000 were shot, and the remaining ones were deported to death camps or concentration camps. The Warsaw ghetto uprising was the largest, symbolically most important Jewish uprising, and the first urban uprising, in German-occupied Europe.



Nazis burn residential buildings to the ground during the Warsaw ghetto uprising, April 19 - May 16, 1943

On April 19, 1948, a Memorial of the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto was unveiled. It is located on a Warsaw square, which was once the site of the main bunker of the Jewish Combat Organization. Ironically, this monument is made of the bronze and granite (labradorite) ordered by Hitler from Sweden in 1942 for a monument "honoring the victory of Germany".



Memorial of the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto in Warsaw

In the death camps, the Nazis elaborated on "efficient" killing methods. Among these, they used poisonous gases, like carbon monoxide or zyklon, pumped through shower-head-like devices mounted in the low ceilings in large bathhouse-like rooms. The victims, upon arrival at the camp or soon after, were informed that they had to take a shower. Men and women were separated and put in designated rooms. First, their hair was cut to skin level, since human hair was a valuable commodity for German industry. Then, the victims were made to strip off their clothes and leave everything behind. Naked, they were pushed to these "shower rooms". The poison gas was very effective. After only a few minutes everybody was dead. The camp "slaves" (prisoners, which were not killed immediately and were forced to work for the Nazis) transported then the bodies to the burning area: open wooden piles or specially built crematoria. Even the ashes of burned corpses represented a valuable raw product and were collected and sent to Germany! In the meantime, another group of "slaves" selected the victims' belongings. Valuable items were immediately sent to Germany to be used in industry or to be distributed to those Germans, who experienced war-related losses. The infamous "German efficiency" was applied everywhere.

Over 5.5 million Jews perished in the Second World War Holocaust, among them were Roman's (my son's) grandfather (father of my ex-husband), who was killed in Oświęcim (Auschwitz) and the best friends of my mother, Emilia and Adzio Ganiewski, who were killed in Treblinka. These latter people were for me and for my brother true grandmother and grandfather; we loved them very dearly. Adzio was a polonized Jew, a well-educated photographer. At the beginning of the occupation he was taken to the ghetto in Siedlce (a small town 60 miles east from Warsaw, were they lived), then transferred to the ghetto in Warsaw, and then transported to the death camp in Treblinka. Emilia was Polish, but when she learned that her husband was taken to this death camp, she voluntarily went there too. My mother worried a lot what happened to Emilia. Risking her life, my mother decided to look for her. She bribed a railroad employee to allow her to ride with him the train to Treblinka (civilians were not allowed to take these trains). In Treblinka, which was just a railway station and the death camp, my mother learned from Polish railroad employees that when Emilia started talking to a Nazi officer at the station, he killed her with his revolver right on the spot.



My brother Jasiek with our adopted grandfather, Adzio Ganiewski in 1938



Our adopted grandmother, Emilia Ganiewska; 1941

The Warsaw Uprising: 63 Days of Upheaval, Hope, and Destruction

The Warsaw Uprising was initiated by the Polish underground Home Army, on the 1-st August 1944, while the Soviet Army already occupied the east bank of the Vistula River which crosses Warsaw. At that time, the victorious Soviet Army together with the Polish communist Army (creat-

ed by the Soviets, basing on the Polish soldiers, captured in 1939) already liberated German-captured part of the Soviet Union and the eastern part of Poland. The Polish people were no more eager to be occupied by the Soviet communists than by the Nazi fascists. Encouraged by the D-Day invasion of the Western Allies, the Polish underground Home Army and all Polish people wanted to free the capital of Poland from the German occupation by their own efforts; on one side – counting that the Soviets and especially the Polish communist Army, created by the Soviets, would support this effort of fighting against the common enemy, and on another side – to prevent Warsaw, the capital of Poland, from being overtaken by the Soviets with their established administration. Historically, the traditions of fighting for independence of Poland were always deeply imbedded in the nation (during 135 years of Poland Partition many uprisings occurred). The Polish Home Army wanted to demonstrate to the world and to the future generations that Poles actively fought for independence of their country.

Predictably, Stalin did not intend to help, since he hated Poles and had other plans in mind. In spite that in several former incidents, the Soviet Army joined Polish underground Army to fight the Nazis together, Stalin allowed the Warsaw Uprising to fail. The Soviet offensive was stopped, while the Germans went on to ruthlessly crash the Uprising. After 63 days of heroic battles against the Germans, the Polish Home Army was forced to capitulate.

Stalin was really very happy with the result. Germans saved him a lot of trouble by killing the best Polish Patriots for him. What was unknown to the world at the time – and certainly unknown to the Poles – was that the year before, Roosevelt and Churchill had already "given" Poland to Stalin at the Tehran Conference. Eventually, the Warsaw Uprising did not feature in the Nuremberg tribunals at all. It would have outraged the Soviets and would had embarrassed the Western Allies, since they had allowed Poles to fight for Warsaw without their support and they had allowed unbelievable atrocities to happen.

During those 63 days, my family was in the middle of battles, as the Zbawiciela Circle, where we lived, was continuously divided into the west – Polish and east – Nazi zones.

My mother, who kept in touch with the Polish Underground Army people, knew about the Uprising plans, but the exact day of its beginning was a secret. Early on the afternoon of the 1-st August 1944 we went to Pole Mokotowskie (Mokotowskie Field) to collect our vegetables. Pole Mokotowskie used to be a horse race and later – airport field. At the beginning of the Nazi occupation, this field was transformed into agricultural area, where Warsaw citizens could rent small allotments of land to raise crops, mainly yearly vegetables. My mother rented such allotment, and we cultivated some carrots, beans, green peas, onions, cabbages, cauliflowers, some fruits and other useful plants, all of which provided needed nutrients and vitamins, as food in the occupied Warsaw was in short supply. The weather was good that day. We always took a bicycle with us, when we went to our small “garden”, because it was easier to hang heavy bags laden with crops on the bicycle than carry them. Suddenly, when we were collecting our vegetables, we heard rifle shots and machine gun fire. We crawled into thicker bushes of peas and tried to be still. My brother and I did not know about the Uprising plans, but my mother at once realized what these shots meant: at 5 p.m. the Warsaw Uprising began. On the nearby street, the Germans set several machine guns and began shooting at the field where we were hiding, and where hundreds of other people were also collecting their crops. We had to be very quiet and not move. For us children (I was less than 9 years old), this was very difficult. It was even more difficult when, as the evening came, mosquitoes started to bite us and we had no cover, only light summer clothes. All around us, we saw bullets hitting the

ground and kicking up plumes of dirt. Many people were shot that afternoon in the field. After sunset, the shots stopped, and mosquitoes went to sleep, but it became cold. It was 11 p.m. when my mother decided to move and escape from the field. We couldn't dare to leave our crops and the bicycle, so our journey to the nearest street, Polna, was very long and frightening. Fortunately the night was dark, with no moonlight. We heard shots all the time and saw many colorful phosphorescent bullets flying around. We reached Polna Street after midnight, wondering whom we would meet there… Fortunately, when we emerged from the field, a Polish Home Army soldier stopped us. He was in civilian clothes, and he was armed with a gun and grenades attached to his belt. He also had a big white/red band around his arm. We greeted him joyfully! This was the first time to see the Polish Colors since September 1939! He told us that only a part of this area was in Polish Army hands, but that it would be difficult for us to return to our apartment, because there was a German tank with lights turned on, at the Zbawiciela Circle standing in front of the Redeemer's Church. We knew that the half of the Zbawiciela Circle "belonged" to the Nazis… My mother was very brave – we had to make an attempt to reach home! It would be best to do so during the night. She decided to first go with me, along with our bicycle carrying crops, and then return for my brother. We both took off our shoes and slowly began to crawl along the building walls of the Circle, trying to avoid light beam of the tank, which menaced us only about 50 yards away. After a short but awfully frightening journey, we succeeded in reaching the gate of our apartment building, but the gate was locked! We rang the bell for the doorkeeper, but there was no response. Then we started to knock and knock, very delicately. Eventually a neighbor came down and opened the door. He told us that in the afternoon, the doorkeeper had been executed by a Polish Home Army, as a Nazi spy! This was big news for us, needless to say!

Our journey home was quite long, especially for my brother who was waiting for my mother to return. He was terrified! Then I was very scared waiting alone for them. Finally, my mother made a successful trip back, and soon we all were at home and went to sleep.

Early morning, we were awakened by a loud noise in the street. A glance from the window (our apartment was on the second floor) revealed that our 6-th Sierpnia Street was being blocked by a barricade. The barricade was made up of barrels, wooden cases, furniture, and a lot of other small items. We thought that it perhaps would serve well for hiding and observing the German side of the Zbawiciela Circle, but certainly would not be able to stop a tank… But it was just a beginning of the Uprising. The most important and uplifting aspect for us was the view of the Polish white and red flag placed on the top of the barricade! Some time later, this barricade was reinforced by concrete slabs taken from the sidewalks. This barricade survived and withstood Nazi attacks during the entire time of the Uprising, and its white and red flag proudly fluttered until the very end of 63 days.



The barricade across 6-th Sierpnia Street built on August 2, 1944. My mother took this picture from the balcony of our apartment. A few yards to the right there was Zbawiciela Circle

After just five days of the Uprising, the Polish Home Army controlled about 70% of the city. Unfortunately – not for a long time.

Our life during the Uprising was very different from the relative steadiness in the occupied Warsaw. We stayed in our apartment, which was just at the border of the Polish and Nazi zones. In order to prevent direct bullets, which were flying almost continuously through the 6-th Sierpnia street, and in order to avoid Nazi snipers, often climbing and shooting from the roofs, we moved mattresses from our beds to the windowless corridor between three rooms on the street and two rooms and the kitchen on the back yard side. We spent there most of the time during the Uprising.



Boy Scouts acting as field postmen



A monument of a "The Little Insurgent" in Warsaw's Old Town;

During the first days of the Uprising, in the cellars of most of the buildings that stood back-to-back along the streets, connecting passages were excavated. Also, tunnels were dug under the streets. In this way, a communication system within the besieged city was soon established. Most often, children and teenagers served as postmen and messengers. Many children and teenagers became Home Army soldiers. For them, this looked at the beginning as a continuation of "Indian and cowboys" plays; however they soon realized that it was a very real and atrocious event. Many of these children perished.

After the aboveground communications lines among the city's districts were severed, all couriers supplies and evacuation traffic was passed through the sewers. On September 1-st and 2-nd, approximately 5,300 Old Town defenders successfully evacuated to the City Center and to Żolibórz, in the north part of Warsaw. In the Old Town the battles were very brutal and intense. During 30 days of fighting, several buildings changed hands many times.

Relentless battles with Nazi soldiers continued days and nights in all Warsaw districts. The Home Army had over 40,000 fighters relatively well prepared, but they were not sufficiently equipped. Soon, there was a shortage of everything – ammunition, water, food, and medical supplies. There was no electricity, no gas, and no telephone connections. No assistance from the Soviets was forthcoming. On the areas still occupied or re-conquered by the Nazis, mass shootings in reprisal, together with the building burning, including hospitals with staff and patients, was typical of the Nazi 'clean-up' operations. Women and children were often tied to Nazi tanks as protection against ambushes. Just a few days after the uprising began, an estimated 35,000 men, women, and children were killed by the Nazis in cold blood. Hitler's response to the Warsaw Uprising was unequivocal: he ordered Himmler, his SS chief, to mercilessly crush it. Then Himmler's orders to his men were blunt: "Every inhabitant to be killed ... no prisoners to be taken ... every single house to be blown up and destroyed."



New insurgents being sworn in the Home Army



An insurgent watching in a devastated street

By the end of the Uprising, Himmler told Hitler: "From a historical point of view, the revolt of the Poles is a blessing. We shall finish them off. Warsaw will be liquidated."

Every day, my mother passing through the tunnels, cellars, and underground passages, made her rounds to several primitive field hospitals. I often accompanied her. My brother, who was 13 years old, got a basic training as a nurse, and he served as a helper in these hospitals.

Later on during the Uprising, the Nazis began to attack Warsaw from the air, pounding mercilessly with their most modern and most deadly weapons. One of the worst of these, really frightening, were the rockets containing an early version of napalm. The Germans used multiple, eight-rocket launchers. First, a dreadful noise was heard (we called it "a cow roar"), and a few seconds later there were explosions. Next, where the rockets struck, everything was burning, even the asphalt in the street burned.

One afternoon, my mother decided that she would not go to the hospitals for her usual rounds. The next day we learned that one of the field hospitals was burned to the ground after a rocket attack, apparently just at the time of my mother's rounds… Despite being clearly marked with giant red crosses painted on the roofs, the hospitals were frequently targeted by the Nazis.



A successful airdrop in a street of Warsaw

Note that the Soviets had means to prevent the abominable destruction, but Stalin wanted Warsaw, together with most Poles to be erased from the world. The Soviets not only offered no assistance, but also would not allow the western Allies to help the insurgents. Stalin did not allow refueling behind Russian lines, which was needed for the Allies' planes providing supplies to the insurgents. In spite of this, from 4 August until early September 1944, 196 bombers B24 Liberator* took off for Warsaw from Brindisi in Italy (a shorter distance than from the Great Britain, but a more dangerous route over Nazi-controlled territory). Only 85 aircrafts reached the target area and safely returned to Italy. Unfortunately, the planes, which reached Warsaw, often dropped supplies from such high altitude that only less than twenty percent of them reached Polish hands.



A fragment of the large monument memorizing Warsaw Uprising of 1944, erected in Warsaw in the 1990s. Rebuilt Krasinski's Palace in the background

By the end of the Uprising, my mother started preparations for a possible evacuation: rucksacks, clothes, and important documents. She sawed our gold chains and christening medallions into seams of our clothes ready to be taken with us (wearing the gold items was dangerous, as they would be exposed and possibly robbed). My mother also sawed to seams of her clothes a gold pocket watch of my father her few gold rings and bracelets, and a few silver

* Not only B24 bombers, but also B24-J Liberators took part in the supply-for-Warsaw action. A replica of the bomber B24-J will soon be on display in the Warsaw Uprising Museum in Warsaw, Poland. This museum was created in 2004. http://www.1944.pl/

coins from before-the-war. During the war, such valuable items often provided means of survival. We anticipated an evacuation. Nobody, however, thought that it would be so extreme.

After the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising, Germans arrested all soldiers of the Polish Home Army. We witnessed the survived Polish soldiers marched in columns through destroyed Warsaw streets toward the square in front of the Warsaw Polytechnic, where Germans collected all their arms. Then, the Polish Insurgents were taken to German military prisons. Next – the Nazis drove out all Polish civilians – the citizens of Warsaw from their homes and forced them to march on foot to Pruszków, to a primitive concentration camp at the west outskirts of Warsaw. Some civilians succeeded to escape and hide in the ruins; most were taken to labor and concentration camps.



Warsaw inhabitants on the way to Pruszków…

Surprisingly, the Nazis did respect the international humanitarian agreements, and all remaining Warsaw hospitals with wounded and sick people, as well as the personnel with their families, were supposed to be transferred to a new location. Chaotically and in a big hurry, the patients and personnel of all Warsaw hospitals got assembled at the Warsaw Railway station. About 3,000 hospitalized patients and hospital personnel had to be accommodated in a relatively small place of the station and adjacent streets. Many patients were often laid down to the ground, without any mattresses. After the chaotic period of assembling, relatively quiet period of over 2 weeks followed, interrupted daily by German soldiers inspecting the crowd, looking for arms and for members of the Polish Home Army. Nurses often tried to disguise young men by bandaging their heads. If the Nazis noticed any young man – arrested him without any discussion. His fate was then miserable.

Soon my mother realized that there was no organization to provide the food to the patients as well as to the personnel. She remembered seeing during the Uprising a large military field cooker on the Warsaw Polytechnic campus. She decided to bring it to the Railway station. With several other brave people, she made a secret trip to the campus. It was unauthorized by the German guards. The team indeed found the cocker and drew it down to the street and eventually to the Railway station. On the way back, they stopped to look for food and fuel in deserted houses. Most apartments had open doors, as the Nazis had already plundered them. The team was lucky to find some food, sufficient to get started cooking a warm meal for the people at the station. During the next days, most people who could walk were furtively leaving the station to search for food.



Marszałkowska Street in the fall of 1944

After the successful trip to the Polytechnic campus, my mother decided to make a trip to our own apartment and possibly bring more of our belongings to the station. My brother and I accompanied her. After a half hour of walking through depopulated streets full of ruined houses, we reached our apartment building. We found our apartment door broken down. The apartment was already partly plundered, but luckily the building was not yet marked for the ultimate destruction. Fortunately, our bicycles were still there. Later on, we used them as the means of transportation to the station for our bundles of belongings. My brother stood guard, watching for Germans coming to the building. Fortunately, they did not come. We had to take with us to the station our meager remnants of food, some warm clothes, bedclothes, pillows, counterpanes, and

blankets. In a big hurry, my mother pulled out also some additional important documents to be taken, her doctor's instruments and medications, as well as a few family treasures. Among them – several pictures, and a silver sugar bowl that used to belong to my great grandmother about 100 years earlier and was offered to my mother by her mother. Today, after many upcoming adventures, this bowl took a prestigious place in my house in Gardnerville, Nevada.

All our goods wrapped in blankets were loaded on the bicycles. We "sneakingly stole" our own belongings from our own home! On the way to the station, we inevitably fell upon a Nazi guards. Showing them her physician's documents, and referring to the Geneva Convention, my mother tried to explain that were taking necessary blankets and other bedclothes to the hospital at the station. Speaking German was very helpful, and apparently this Nazi guards had some other important orders to follow and they went away letting us go. The items that we brought to the station hospital proved to be very useful. We could sleep on blankets, not directly on the ground. Later on, my mother succeeded to do several more trips to our apartment, before the building was condemned to Nazi's fire. Eventually, the rest of our belongings, which were left in the apartment, perished.

During that nomadizing time at the station, I often walked around alone. I saw many animals – cats, dogs, birds, which were left behind by their owners. Some of them I brought to the station and shared with them my modest food.

Once in the broken window of a small grocery store I noticed a familiar chocolate bar. This was a fantastic finding for a starving child! I put the bar into my pocket and decided to eat it all, quietly alone. In the evening such a moment came. I removed the paper and put the bar into my mouth. However, the welcome familiar taste did not come. I tried to bite it – with no result. Then I looked closer and realized that the bar was just a wooden substitute for the store window display! My disappointment was boundless…

On October 11, 1944 Hitler issued the order to level to the ground the entire city of Warsaw. I witnessed how Germans meticulously were robbing and destroying the depopulated city. First, there were teams that pulled out all telephone and electric cables from the poles and from underground canals and took them away: Germany needed metals! Then the buildings were treated with German precision: First, there was a team to rob apartment, by apartment, house by house. They were looking for valuables, but also liked to take away appliances, furniture, carpets, framed paintings, clothes, and what not. They loaded these bits and pieces on big lorries. The last thing to do was to mark the building that it was "cleaned up". Then a new team arrived, which set fire to the building using gasoline and huge flame projectors. For larger structures, like our Redeemer's Church, they used mines.

The Warsaw Uprising capitulation lead the Nazis to a total annihilation of the city, killing of thousands of civillians, and to destruction of the Polish Home Army as a fighting force. The main beneficiary of this, however, was not Hitler, but Stalin, who was able to impose a communist government on postwar Poland with little fear of armed resistance.

The catastrophe that befell Warsaw during the Uprising is hard to overstate. In terms of death and destruction, it was the equivalent of a September 11 attack every day for 63 days in a row, finished up by the ultimate leveling down the entire city of population 1,300,000 (in 1939).

Overall Polish casulties during the Warsaw Uprising are estimated to be between 150,000 and 350,000 killed, many during mass executions conducted by German troops. About 90,000 civilians were sent to labor camps in Germany, while 60,000 were shipped to death in concentration camps. The city was almost totally destroyed after Germans systematically demolished building after building. Totally ignoring the negotiated terms of the capitulation, Hitler had ordered the entire city to be razed to the ground, all bulidings demolished, in particular, the remaining monuments – demolished, and specifically, all library and museum collections burned. In summary, 96% of Warsaw, together with its infrastructure, was entirely destroyed, including enterprises, factories, laboratories, schools, universities, palaces, the historic Old Town, and the Royal Castle. In more detail, material losses were estimated at 10,455 buildings, 923 historical buildings (94 %), 25 churches, 14 libraries including the National Library, 81 primary schools, 64 high schools, Warsaw University and Warsaw Polytechnic, and most of the historical monuments. Almost a million inhabitants of Warsaw lost all of their possessions. The exact amount of losses of private and public property as well as pieces of art, monuments of science and culture is unknown. However, various estimates place it at an equivalent of approximately 40 billion 1939 US dollars. In 2004 the Warsaw government authorities estimated that the approximate loss of the municipal property was 45 billion 2004 US dollars (this included only the property owned by the city of Warsaw on August 31, 1939). The municipal council of Warsaw is currently disputing whether claims for German reparations should be made.

Long after the war, all information on the Warsaw Uprising was suppressed. For the Polish communist government the Warsaw Uprising was always a very delicate issue and they still interpreted the Uprising as a "stupid capitalistic, imperialistic attempt". Later on, reluctantly, the Polish communist government allowed publication of a few books and production of a couple of movies related to the Warsaw Uprising. Fact is that in the entire world, only the "Warsaw Jewish Uprising" was well known; almost nobody knew anything about the Warsaw Uprising and its devastating material and psychological results. Today, it is, however, often mentioned that perhaps without the Warsaw Uprising, reflecting the measure of the Polish invincible spirit of freedom, there would not be "Solidarity" and communism would still reign in a large part of the world.

After the communism collapse, many testimonials, archival photos, and various historical data of the Warsaw Uprising started being collected. Later on, a part of them appeared on the Internet. Finally, spreading out the truthful and comprehensive information about the Warsaw Uprising we owe to the famous English historian, Professor Sir Norman Davies, who only recently published the full history of the Warsaw Uprising ("Rising '44 – The Battle for Warsaw", Pan Books, London, 2004).

On Exile in Kraków (Cracov)

After spending the nervous two weeks at the Warsaw Railway station, a train finally arrived. It consisted of wagon-trucks with the red-cross signs on the walls and roofs and had primitive wooden multi-level beds inside. After a week of travel, we arrived to Kraków (Cracov) in the south of Poland and were housed in a large building at 25, Kopernik Street. This building had once been a Jesuit Cloister. Two lower stories of this big building were assigned to the sick patients. The hospital personnel with families were placed on the third floor. Two families lived in our small room – two mothers, each with one son and one daughter. The children's age ranged from 9 to 18 years. My mother worked all the time in the hospital on the lower floors. Mrs. Rakowska, as well as her 18-year old daughter, Zosia, worked as nurses in the hospital. I was the youngest, but often I was

also called to help in the hospital. My 13-year old brother, Jasiek, and 15-year-old Jurek, the son of Mrs. Rakowska, worked as hospital nurses and as servants in the "laundry". This "laundry" consisted of two huge kettles slung over an open fire in the back yard of the building. In these kettles, the hospital bed sheets were boiled in hot water with a little soap. There was a plague of parasites everywhere: lice, fleas, and bedbugs. Boiling the sheets killed these critters. There were neither wringer, nor drying machines, so the sheets were hung to dry over ropes stretched across the yard, whenever there was no rain or snow. The weather from late October through March, however, seldom cooperated.

The Germans still kept often coming to the hospital, still looking for hiding soldiers of the Polish Home Army.

I was sent to school, now in the third grade. I had missed over two months of school time. I did not like this school, as all children treated me as a stranger, since I had come from Warsaw. They did not want to speak to me or play with me. Actually, I was not too surprised at this attitude, because I witnessed what the continuous Nazi's propaganda transmitted from megaphones installed in the streets of Kraków was "teaching" the local citizens: "Do not help Warsaw incomers! They take away your space, your food! They brought lice, they brought diseases! Keep away from them, do not help them!"

Lora

Food in Kraków was in very short supply, especially at the end of 1944.

One day, Mrs. Rakowska and I went shopping for food. Kraków streets were unpopulated; most stores were closed. The only chance to get some food was a marketplace, where farmers brought their crops, but the recent war conditions made raising crops as well as traveling difficult for the farmers. Suddenly, our way to the market, we noticed on the other side of the street a woman dressed in peasant clothes, walking in the direction of the market. She carried a big basket. It looked awfully promising! We ran toward her. A moment later, we learned that indeed there were a few eggs and… a large brown hen in the basket! Mrs. Rakowska immediately grabbed the hen under her arm. In the meantime several other people surrounded us; obviously they were also looking for food. Mrs. Rakowska was determined and did not let the hen be taken from her hands, even when some desperate people tried to pull out the hen, and even when a threatening gunfire resounded in the neighborhood. Together with the peasant woman and all other "shoppers", we had to run to hide in a courtyard behind a building. Using pre-war silver coin zlotys ("zloty" is the Polish currency), we paid for the hen and four eggs. The other people were still fighting for the rest of the eggs when we started going back to our hospital. Still the gunshots were heard nearby, but I was not afraid. I was very happy – not really that we found some food – but that in our small room we would have a living animal! I always loved animals and missed having a pet. Our cat, Mula passed away by the end of the Warsaw Uprising. When the Nazis chased us from our home, we would not have been able to take her with us anyway. Now a hen, that I immediately named Lora, would be our new pet!

My mother, as well as the rest inhabitants of our room, greeted us with joy. Lora's legs and wings were untied, which she welcomed with shaking her feathers and with a short acceptation cackle. She started walking freely around the room and getting acquainted with her new environment. We

offered her some water and grains to eat. The food disappeared immediately, as she was awfully hungry and thirsty after the long day full of adventures.

It happened that in the meantime my mother, who also went shopping, found some other food, so Lora received a temporary status of "iron reserve". I was overjoyed that Lora, at least for the time being, would stay with us!

Thus, Lora became the seventh inhabitant of our small room. During nights, she slept on the railing of one of our hospital-style beds, like on a hen roost. Everybody who woke up in the night was supposed to check whether Lora's tail was on the outside of the bed, above a newspaper spread on the floor. If it was inside, it was necessary to turn Lora around by 180 degrees.

The grain that we had and that Lora loved to eat was kept in a long, skinny fabric bag. Soon, she started recognizing that bag, and on the call "Cip, cip, cip!" she flew and ran with a loud cheerful cackle to the bag! She learned to eat directly from this bag dipping her head deeply inside the bag. When sometimes the door of our room to the hallway was inattentively left ajar, inquisitive Lora liked to go out, to explore new territory, and look for adventures. It was obviously dangerous for her, as well as for us. It sufficed, however, to call and show her the grain bag; she would run and fly back to our room. She was always ready to eat more. Evidently, the severe war conditions affected her also.

Lora easily adapted herself to her new life in our small room full of people. She was very curious. Soon we realized that her cackling language contained many different "words" with a large scale of sounds, timbre, and pitch. She expressed her moods, like surprise, anxiety, hunger, contentment, or anger, by using different words. We started learning her language.

One day after ironing some clothes, my mother left the shiny nickel iron on the floor to cool. Soon Lora approached the iron, the brand new object in her environment. In awhile, she started her multi-tone cackling, while ruffling up her feathers and furiously pecking the iron. The iron was heavy and sturdy and withstood the attacks. Lora seemed surprised that the iron did not respond with counterattacks. She several times receded and ran again to fight. It was a very funny scene! Soon we realized that in the iron, Lora caught a glimpse her own image! She thought that it was another enemy chicken, and she was ready to seriously brawl, as probably she realized that the food around was scarce, she did not wish to share it! It was easy to verify whether our explanation was correct. Soon the iron was removed from the grounds and my brother brought a large mirror and held it in front of Lora. This time Lora's "challenger" was clearly visible. For a short moment Lora froze, looking intensely at her opponent in the mirror, then ruffled her feathers and, with her wings spread out, ran to the mirror to fight! The mirror withstood the attack. Pecking the opponent's beak on the flat and hard glass of the mirror was a surprise, so Lora tried to attack the enemy from the side. And there was another surprise: the enemy suddenly disappeared! She returned to the front and the redoubtable, ruffled up opponent was still there, so she ran again to attack. She behaved as being entranced. All this was a very funny spectacle. However, in fear of Lora's health, my mother finally took the mirror away. Later on, we repeated this hilarious spectacle several times and even invited our neighbors to watch Lora's fights, as it was the only entertainment in our gloomy hospital.

Once Lora caught sight of my only toy brought from Warsaw, a small stuffed dog. She recognized it as an enemy. Before we managed to react, Lora succeeded pecking a large hole in my poor dog's

back. With a fury, she was pulling some sawdust out of the hole. Later on, my poor dog had to undergo a serious restoration operation.

The next six weeks quickly passed with Lora living with us. There was still some food available, so fortunately we did not have to condemn Lora to death. Mrs. Rakowska suggested, however, that it would be appropriate to celebrate my mother's upcoming birthday with a special dinner. I was very much afraid of this. And then – a miracle happened. Just one day before Lora's sentence was supposed to be executed, she landed on my mother's bed, found there her soft shawl, as appropriate building material for a nest, made her comfortable, and… laid an egg. It was a large, brown egg! What a fantastic gift it was! We had not seen any eggs during the last six weeks. The next day Lora repeated the production. At this point, her life was safe; we would not kill the egg-producing animal, our food provider! Ever since, Lora offered us regularly one egg daily, so each of us got one egg every sixth day. After eating an egg, its shell was returned to Lora. She greedily devoured the entire shells. It looked like the food we fed her was very poor in calcium.

When in the spring 1945 we were leaving Kraków, we couldn't take Lora with us. We offered her as a gift to a priest of the nearby Catholic Church. We noticed before that a few chickens lived in this priest's rectory backyard. We thought that this would be a healthy environment for our unusual pet, and also our provider in these terrible conditions of the war.

End of our Exile in Kraków

By the end of January 1945, Kraków was liberated from the Nazis by the Soviet Army. The battle was severe, but took only three days, and this ancient capital of Poland was practically undamaged. All the priceless monuments, including the old Royal Castle, Wawel, were saved. Only several mined bridges exploded, which caused window glass breakage in many buildings.



Wawel Royal Castle in Kraków



Soviet parade on the ashes of Warsaw; January 17, 1945

Unfortunately, this was not the case in Warsaw, where after the complete evacuation of the city, the Soviets let the Nazis finish the job of robbing and destroying the city. Only in January 1945, the Soviets started crossing the Vistula River, moved their troops to the west and "liberated" ruins of Warsaw on January 17, 1945. The battle for Warsaw was brief, since Germans succeeded to finish their dirty work. Immediately, Stalin set up his puppet communist regime in Warsaw and began rewriting history, imposing it over Poland. The members of the Polish Home Army were labeled "Hitlerite fascist collaborator bandits". Soon, the surviving ones were chased, rounded up by the NKVD, and either immediately killed or deported to Siberia labor camps – the gulags. Few, if any, returned.

We had to adjust to the new situation in Poland. Learning to hide the truth and our true feelings was a surviving strategy for the next 44 years.

Soon I became very sick with typhoid fever, a common malady during the war. This time, I was placed in the hospital as a patient. I spent there more than a month.

In March 1945, my mother went to Warsaw in order to investigate whether we could return there. She came back greatly depressed. Our apartment building was in ruins. Still a part of our grand piano was visible among the rubble… The cellar, where we concealed some of our belongings, had been robbed. Amazingly, the Nazis did not totally ruin our landmark, the Redeemer's Church on the Zbawiciela Circle. The Nazi's mines only partly damaged it.*

My mother did not want to move back to Warsaw, as seeing the ruins and possibly of living in those ruins for a long time, was too depressing for her. Several years later, she did regret, since Warsaw had always been her home.

Post-War Life in Siedlce

A month later, we moved from Kraków to Siedlce. This little and poor town was also hopelessly destroyed, but the small, very old house of our adopted grandfather, the photographer Adzio Ganiewski, was intact and available. Before Adzio was taken by Germans to the ghetto, he and his wife Emilia signed their will, offering this house and all its contents, to my mother and to us, children. This was a very generous gift for us and we moved temporarily into this house. It had served mainly as a photographic shop and studio, with old-fashioned photographic equipment in it. Adzio was one of pioneers of photography in Europe; there is now an exhibit about him in the Siedlce Museum.



Author in Siedlce in 1946

Two of Adzio's assistants continued working there, so the atelier was providing some welcome income. Many Soviet soldiers began to come to the atelier to have their "souvenir" pictures taken. Before this time, during the Nazi occupation, many German soldiers had done the same. Later, my mother passed on to the Polish authorities negatives of these Nazi soldiers' photographs, which helped to identify some war criminals.

Soon my mother started working in her profession. There was a colossal need for doctors and other specialists. A large part of the Polish intelligentsia, including many physicians, had been exterminated by both the Nazis and the Soviets. There were no hospitals, no special offices, no nurses, no medical supplies, though. Most houses and apartments in Siedlce had neither bathrooms nor running water. The conditions of life were extremely difficult. My mother taught me to become a nurse, so I was able to assist her when she performed operations. Many of these operations were related to eye injuries arising from ammunition explosions. After the war, there were plenty of dud (unexploded) shells all over the country. Curious children liked to play with them, usually ending up with tragic results.

At last by the summer 1945, farmers started providing food. Before that time, we often starved.

The war ended. Poland became a satellite of the Soviet Union and a communist government was established. The map of Poland changed: Soviets grabbed a big chunk of the eastern territory of

* Soon after the end of the Second World War the Redeemer's Church was restored. Its missing tower was rebuilt.

Poland including famous Polish cities Lwów and Wilno. The Soviets unilaterally declared the former Soviet-German border (approximately the Curzon Line) to be the new frontier between the Soviet Union and Poland. Much smaller territory at the west and north was taken from Germany and became a part Poland. A big displacement of people began.

Soon Polish schools opened, so my brother and I resumed our education. Many teachers, however, perished during the war, as the result of Nazi's, as well as Soviet consequent policy to exterminate Polish intelligentsia. The next wave of terror administered by Soviets against intelligentsia started just after the war. Our remaining schoolteachers were barely qualified to teach any subject. School buildings were poorly equipped even with basic furniture. There were no textbooks, no books at all, as libraries, as well as most printing offices were destroyed. From this post-war period I remember my enormous hunger to read books, which in no way could be satisfied.



Old map of Poland in 1939 (inside blue line) and new map of Poland after 1945 (inside red line), Nazi-Soviet act border (brown line). Blue area – annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945, yellow area – annexed by Poland in 1945.
o = Bydgoszcz

Poland was free, but very different from the one before the war. Poverty prevailed everywhere. We had to adapt to the new political system imposed by the Soviets and learn to be diplomatic or even opportunistic in order to avoid problems, as the residue of the pre-war intelligentsia were not appreciated in the new "People's Republic" conditions. The system did not persecute physicians, though, unless a person was suspected to have taken part in the Polish Home Army activities. We were not able to talk about our father, except that "he perished during the war". The names "Starobielsk" or "Katyń" were very dangerous.

At least, the sky was filled just with survived birds, not bombers.

The Second World War was a gigantic Apocalypse for Poland. Unfortunately, between 1944 and 1956 the Apocalypse did not stop, although it had much smaller dimension and was somehow hidden. The communist Government, supported by the Soviets, "cleaned up" Poland from all Polish citizens that "seemed" not to like the political changes. Brief – over 650,000 Poles got jailed as political prisoners, including about 500,000 farmers, who opposed collectivization. About 70,000 of them perished. In addition, about 250,000 Poles were deported to 300 newly created forced labor gulags (several were coal mines). Many of them died.

In 1947 we moved to Bydgoszcz, a Polish town about 150 miles northwest of Warsaw, which during the war was intensively Germanized, as it became a part of Germany. People there were much more submissive to Germans. (There was a joke: A Pole from one of the western Poland city has been asked: "Did you have Polish Underground Army during the German occupation?" "Oh no, it was forbidden!!").

Bydgoszcz was not much destroyed, so we were able to find a nice apartment with central heating, a bathroom, and running water. During the next several years my mother was extremely busy working, as she was one of only three ophthalmologists in the entire Bydgoszcz province (voivodship) with a population over 500,000.

References:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_Defence_War_of_1939 ,
http://www.ushmn.org ,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocaust ,
http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk ,
http://www.warsawuprising.com/res.htm ,
http://www.warsawuprising.com/witness/vaneyssen.htm ,
http://www.warsawuprising.com/doc/chodakiewicz1.pdf ,
http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3937155.stm ,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Ghetto_Uprising ,
http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/web/history/WWII/powstanie/link.shtml ,
http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/wwii/articles/WarsawUprising.aspx .

Gardnerville, Nevada, January 2006



Agnieszka (Agnes) Muszyńska, Ph.D., emigrated from Poland to the USA in 1980 and lives in Gardnerville, Nevada, since 1981