

Recollections

Part One

**(Zgierz, WW II, Lwów, Siberia, Uzbekistan, Persia,
Palestine/Egypt, England)**

A. J. S.

Partially written onboard **s/v *Running Free***

During our Caribbean Voyages

Between 1993 and 1998.

Then:

Expanded in London in 1997 and 1988,

Continued in Salem, MA after 1999,

And in Fort Myers, FL from 2007.

(Hard disk failure in 2007 caused much loss of prior content)

CONTENT – PART I

1930: Lullaby	1937: Easter	1940: June – Deportation
1931: Zgierz	1938: Fst Communion	1940: Malina's Diary, 1941
1933: Love affair with cars	1938: Wine Cellar	1940: Kopeysk, Rafał
1933: Does a guinea fowl fly?	1938: Shotgun	1940: Kopeysk - Christmas
1933 Our New House	1938: Maria	1940: Kopeysk - Fall / Winter
1933: Seaside	1938: Jews	1941: Kopeysk – Wintr / Sprg
1934: Cyganka	1938: "Red Menace"	1941: Oct–Journey South
1935: Zgierz	1939: 1 September	1942: USSR to Palestine
1936: Quarrel	1939: 2 September	1943: Allied Parade in Cairo
1936: Lights	1939: 3 September	1944: Ain Karem
1936: Kefir	1939: 4 September	1944: Rafał's Diary - 1
1936: Our Vacations-38	1939: 5 September	1945: Latrun, Bedouins
1936: Swimming Adventure	1939: 6 September	1946: Confront'n near Haifa
1936: Gr. Parents-D	1939: 7 September	1946: Jerusalem, King David
1937: Wikcia	1939: 8 September - Łuck	1946: Letter from penfriend
1937: Malina	1939: 17 September	1947: Egypt to England
1937: Summer	1939: 18/19 September	1947: In England
1937: Fall	1939: October - Lwów	1956: UK to USA
1937: House Art	1940: Spring - Lwów	

CONTENT – PART II

1956: UK to USA	1983: Voyage South1-Outbd	1996: Trinidad
1956: Meadville, PA	1987: Voyage South3-Inbd	1996: London, Marblehead
1973: Mama Dies in London	1988: Szumski	1996: Trinidad, November
1973: Mama's Last Letter	1995: London, Tata	

1930 (cir.): Early Memory

I recall a lullaby which our mother frequently sings for my sister and I. She has a wonderful voice, and the memory of her singing lingers. I still remember it today. The lullaby she sings most often goes as follows:

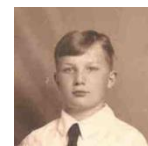
<i>Śpij dziecinko już</i>	<i>Sleep my little baby, sleep</i>
<i>Śliczne oczki zmrz</i>	<i>Close your beautiful eyes</i>
<i>Słyszysz, deszczyk pada tam</i>	<i>Listen to the rain drops falling</i>
<i>Piesek szczeka, grozi nam</i>	<i>And dog barking in the distance, warning us</i>
<i>W bramie dziad wyciąga rękę</i>	<i>A beggar's hand is reaching through a gate</i>
<i>Pies rozerwał mu sukienkę</i>	<i>His garment is torn</i>
<i>Śpiących strzeże Anioł Stróż</i>	<i>The Guardian Angel protects those asleep</i>
<i>Śpij, dziecinko, już!</i>	<i>So sleep my little baby, sleep...</i>

1931: Zgierz (Poland) - 1933:

We are a family of four. My mother, *Mama*, is Janina Barbara nee Rola - Danielewicz (her family coat of arms "Rola" is shown on right). She was born on February 2nd, 1906, in Radogoszcz, a suburb of Łódź. Father, Czesław Tadeusz, we call him *Tata*, was born on March 30th in 1903 in Rokicie, also a suburb of Łódź. My sister, Maria Wiesława, was born on February 2nd 1927 in Zgierz, and I, *Jędrrek*, although my baptismal name is Jędrzej, was born on March 26th in 1928, also in Zgierz. My sister is variously called Malina or Malinka.



We live in an upper story apartment in a large sprawling house which belongs to *Mama's* parents, Waleria and Leon Danielewicz. Grandmother Waleria, we call her *Babcia*, and grandfather, *Dziadek*, occupy the ground floor. The house is located on a large fenced-off parcel of land, not far from railroad tracks, in proximity of a railroad bridge. The property is surrounded by farmlands, mostly wheat, barley, corn and potatoes. The address is ul. Piłsudskiego No.101¹. There are no other houses nearby. The railroad tracks are on the East side of the house, and a highway to Łagiewniki runs on the South side. The highway passes under the railroad bridge. Several trains pass this way each day, some running to Warszawa, others branching off to Kutno. A sign by the rail tracks says that Warszawa is 120 kilometers away. Zgierz is a railroad junction town. From the front windows of the house we can see the railroad station less than a kilometer away to the South.



Note: The photographs on left show what remains of the Danielewicz house in 2006. The house and sheds are in ruins.



The main entrance to the house, as shown in the adjacent photograph, is from the courtyard away from the highway. Several gardens surround the house; some with fruit trees others with vegetable plots. A driveway connects the courtyard with the access road at the front of the house. It runs along the west side of the house. There is a manual water pump (*studnia*) in the courtyard. Everyone gets water there. There is no running water in the house and no toilets. A long brick

¹ "ul." is a commonly used abbreviation for "ulica", meaning "street". Street number may not be accurate.

and wood shed (*komórki*) runs along the western boundary of the land. It contains storage sheds, a large laundry room, a slaughterhouse where pigs are killed, chicken and pigeon houses, and the lavatories at the very end.

We live in an apartment upstairs. The marble stairway and the hallway are always dark. We have a large kitchen upstairs. The kitchen cooking stove is coal fired. The ceiling slopes towards low windows on the courtyard side. The windows sills have a built in ledge, like a bench, on which we can sit, and watch *Mama*, and helping women, do the cooking. Sometimes they make *pączki*, doughnuts. One common activity, every year, is to barrel *kwaśna kapusta*, sauerkraut. Women shred cabbage, pack it into large wooden barrels, and seal them. Where the barrels are stored, I do not recall. And who are the women that help?

Adjoining the kitchen is our dining and living room, which is sunny with large west facing windows. It is nicely furnished. *Mama* keeps homemade ice cream in a small pantry room, off the dining room. To the left is our one bedroom. I recall a door frame, but no door. The bedroom has small windows in the front side of the house. The ceiling slopes down towards these windows. I have my crib there, and my sister *Malina* does too. One morning I wake up and watch *Mama* naked sponge-bathing herself, using a large bowl of water. She does not know that I am watching her. I am probably two to three years old. When she discovers I am watching her, she yells at me, and makes me lie down, until she finishes her sponge bath.

There is no bathroom in our apartment, and no running water. How do we manage? I recall bed pots. Water is brought into the apartment in buckets, I imagine by servants. No names or faces come up in my memory as to who these people may be. I do not recall *Mama* performing any of these chores.

1932: Sun Eclipse - End of the World?

We are standing at the end of the driveway, on the west side of the house, watching a very, very red western sky. I am listening to scary tales about the imminent end of the world, or a war that is surely coming. There are several people gathered by the gate in the driveway, women and girls with kerchiefs on their heads, men and boys, all very serious and frightened, and intently looking at the setting of the eclipsing red sun. Everyone is seeing different images in the sky, and the talk is of the sun fighting the moon for dominance of the earth and our fate. Which shall win? The Earth is going to burn, for sure. Neither *Mama* nor *Tata* are there. I am particularly anxious, because this sun eclipse compounds my own secret fears; yes, I am really scared, but no longer remember why and of what?

Early Childhood

1932: Love affair with cars

I am fascinated by my father's new car. It is a beautiful open black Fiat, similar to the inset picture. I keep comparing it to the red Lancia in which *Tata's* friend, *Tadeusz Malinowski*², often gives us rides. Today, the Fiat is parked in grandmother *Danielewicz's* courtyard by the old manual water pump. It faces the driveway. The gate, at the end of the driveway, is opened. I am four years old, and determined to drive that car this day. Never mind the sharp turn that is required just outside the gate. A car driven straight from the driveway through the gate would roll down the embankment to the highway below. I get into the car, start it (no key required) and get under way towards the gate. The car is moving too fast and I am not able to control it, nor drive it straight along the narrow driveway towards the gate.



² Mr. Malinowski is a managing chemical engineer at the Boruta Chemical Plant in Zgierz

Before I reach the gate, the car swipes the concrete wall of the house and stalls. People run out yelling, and yank me out of the car. I do not recall being punished for this deed.

Another day, probably also in the year of 1932, one of Tata's associates comes to our house for a business conference. He comes in a brand new, chauffeur driven, Citroen. Malina and I want to have a ride in this car. The associate instructs his driver to take us for a drive to Łagiewniki. As we drive along the highway, I urge the driver to go faster and faster. Gradually we reach 100 kilometers per hour, and I am absolutely in awe of this machine. Imagine 100 kph! It's like reaching a sound barrier. The day gets spoiled, however, when the associate leaves, and I jump un-noticed onto the rear fender to get just another ride in this car. I figure that at the bottom of the access road, when the driver has to turn onto the main highway, he will stop, and I can jump off. However, the car only slows down, and I have to jump off anyway. I get quite bruised up. Unbeknown to me, Mama and Tata observe the whole episode from the house window. I struggle back home to quite a reception, and the first belting of my life from Tata. He has a hard leather belt in his hands, Mama wildly objects, he locks the door, she screams outside, and I get clobbered with the belt on top of my bruises.

1933: Does a guinea fowl fly?



I am determined to find out whether one of Babcia Danielewicz's guinea fowls, *perliczka*, can fly? I catch it and carry it to a low branch on an apple tree, just inside Babcia's fruit orchard, and throw it down. I am not sure whether it did fly or not. I catch it again, and take it higher up the tree. Still I am not sure. Higher and higher we go, and then I suddenly notice that the bird no longer flies, nor runs. It is dead. I am mortified and scared of Babcia's reaction. I feel very guilty about killing the bird, and especially for committing a "mortal sin".

1933 Our New House (ul. Średnia 60, Zgierz)

Our new house is ready. Uncle (*wujo*) Roman, Mama's brother, takes me to the new house as carpenters are clearing their tools and preparing to leave. The house is constructed of wood. By custom, the construction carpenters wait to present the new owners a wreath made of wooden tools, replicating those used in the construction of the house. There is no one else to receive their gift, and I believe uncle Roman does not want to offend the carpenters, so I receive the bounty. I catch the wreath, thrown from the finished roof of the house and absolutely love the tools. We move into the new house in 1933.



[The new house](#) stands on a large rectangular parcel of land, which adjoins the Danielewicz land. Originally located between Pilsudski Street and Lipska, at western end, Dziadek and Babcia Danielewicz ceded almost half of their land to Mama to build a house on and have a large garden, too. Our access gate, intended for walking and driving, has been placed on Lipska Street. However, our street name has been changing. What started with ul. Lipska then became Średnia, later to be again renamed to Bolesława Limanowskiego (whoever he was?). The main entrance to the house faces east. Our land is completely fenced

in with a tall chain-link fence. However, there is a gate and a garden path which we use to walk over to Babcia's house. The solitary house nearby belongs to our neighbors, Mr. Zając and family and another railroad worker's family. It is a couple of hundred feet away, closer to the railroad tracks. Then, of course, there is Babcia's house. Other houses are quite a good distance away.



Our new telephone number is "Zgierz 101". There is just one receiver hanging on a wall just inside the foyer. All calls must go through a local telephone operator. Mama and Tata have their bedroom downstairs. Malina's and my bedrooms are upstairs. A dimly lighted hall and a wide dark stairway connect upstairs with downstairs. The hall connects the front door entrance to the inner house foyer. It contains a cabinet with electrical gear and meters built into a wall, a

door to the wine cellar and a raised frame bed for our dog [Rex](#). Almost all the rooms downstairs can be accessed from the inner foyer. Thus Malina and I, when we go to our bedrooms upstairs, must "leave" the "security" of the inner house. This feels especially scary at night when we need to come downstairs to the bathroom (off the inner foyer). It is a challenge to avoid *ghosts* in the dark cool stairway and hall, and reach the safety of our bedrooms.

Rex is Mama's dog. He is a thoroughbred hound and responds to her calls only. He disappears one day and after several weeks is found in someone's captivity. When recovered, Rex is sick with distemper. To Mama's sorrow, he has to be put away.

There are four rooms downstairs. The parent's bedroom is to the left from the foyer. Next to their bedroom is the main dining room. It connects to a large glassed-in verandah. A piano room is in the back of the house and Tata's study (*gabinet*) is in the far right corner of the house. Our one bathroom and the kitchen are on the side and in the front right corner of the house, both, again, accessible through the foyer. The bathroom has a "modern" wood stove for heating bath water. The kitchen stove is coal or wood fired, but it is also equipped with a couple of "hi-tech" gas rings for surface cooking.

Upstairs, Malina's and my bedrooms are on the south side. The maid's room, in the south-west corner, adjoins my room. There are also three other rooms with a large balcony, upstairs, which are occupied by Tata's parents, Babcia and Dziadziuś Syska. The upstairs landing has five doors, one door to my room, two to Babcia's apartment, plus two more doors leading to large storage rooms, one of which Tata uses for winemaking. Another stairway from the upstairs landing leads to the attic where a glassed cement water storage tank is located. An electrical pump from a deep well in our back yard pumps water to the tank. Here, we do have running water!

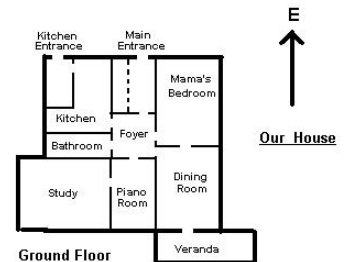
Babcia and Dziadziuś Syska

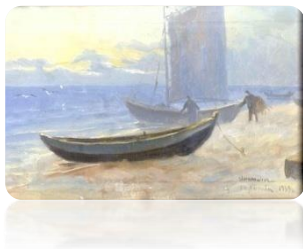
Walenty Syska owned large tracks of land in Rokicie, near Łódź. He sold the land, unfortunately, just before the government unexpectedly announced and carried out a major devaluation of the Polish currency. That unexpected devaluation destroyed all his wealth including the money from the sale of the land and left him penniless. He and Babcia Syska moved into our house around 1935. I keep finding piles of this worthless currency in our attic storage room. I play with this paper money frequently.

1933: Seaside (Hel, Baltic)



We arrive by train into a small fishing village named Jastarnia, near Hell on the Baltic seacoast. Tata is to follow later. The afternoon sun reflects in the sea creating a shimmering image, appearing to merge the sea with the sky. From the train, to my amazement, I imagine that the sea horizon reaches high into the sky.





Mama is frying flounder fish on a little alcohol surface stove. We are staying in a small guesthouse ("*Pensjonat*"). The smell of the fish is great. Malina and I are eager to taste the fish.

At the beach, I am reluctant to venture into the waves. Mama asks a stranger to carry me into the Baltic Sea surf. I am frightened, and scream my lungs out. This man, a giant in my eyes, is holding me high above his shoulders, out of the reach of the waves, and walks deep into the surf. I dread what he is about to do. Yes, he throws me into the waves! I survive, of course, but have never completely forgotten this frightening experience.

Note: This painting by Horanowicz, purchased by Mama in Jastarnia in 1933, was given to me by Malina at a Thanksgiving dinner in 2003.

1934: Cyganka

An old Gypsy, *cyganka*, comes to the gate and begs to be admitted. I can't refuse her so I let her in. She comes into the kitchen where Mama or Wikcia, although greatly alarmed, give her food.

This is 1934, and you just do not refuse an old Gypsy. She is a horrible looking old woman, but is fond of me. She returns once in a while. One evening, when she is sitting in the kitchen, I show off with my new "cork" pistol and aim it directly at my cousin Jadzia's face and pretend to fire it to scare her. To my horror the pistol actually fires (there was not supposed to be a live cork in the barrel, but, it was there!) startling everyone and frightening Jadzia terribly. Fortunately she is not hurt, she is OK. That is the last time I see the Gypsy.



1935: Zgierz (Cow milking)

One of the fun highlights is to go to the forest and pick mushrooms. On the way we stop at a farm from which Mama buys milk. The farmer lets me milk the cow and I drink some of it by squirting it directly into my mouth. I enjoy the taste of the fresh warm milk. We then continue to the forest and look for mushrooms, hazelnuts, and berries.

1936: Quarrel (Zgierz; Mama, Tata)

I walk into the dining room and hear loud exchanges between Mama and Tata. A full-fledged quarrel is under way. I don't know what it is about. Mama is hysterical, grabs a table knife from a credenza drawer (*kredens*), and screams that she is going to kill herself. She points the knife at her chest. Tata looks at her, and calmly says: "go ahead". I am really scared that she might do it. They don't realize I am witnessing the scene. She doesn't kill herself, but breaks down, and cries.

1936: Lights (Zgierz; Malina)

Mama has gone to Łódź, by tramcar. Tata is away. Malina and I are home alone. It is a late afternoon, and soon it will be dark. I am curious whether a bulb from a flashlight would work in the bedside lamp socket. I remove the large light bulb from its lamp fixture, and proceed to insert the small flashlight bulb in its place. There is a sudden flash, and the entire house goes dark. Every light in the house is off. Malina and I become very scared. We are terrified. We drop on our knees, and pray.

Mama, half way to Łódź, gets a premonition that something is wrong. She jumps from the outbound tramcar, and catches another back to Zgierz. She finds us in the dark house still praying.

New experiences in 1936 - 1937

1936: Kefir (Zgierz; Tata)

I am eager to spend more time with Tata. He is not home very often. He loves cold kefir (curdled milk), and this day he invites me to join him in the garden to taste it. I am glad, but also worried. I know I hate kefir. We sit on a garden bench, and Tata pops open a bottle for me. Kefir is prepared in bottles that are hermetically sealed with a rubber washer and a ceramic spring plug, like those used on some beers. He watches me as I try it. It is vile, but I smile and pretend that I like it. He is pleased. Weeks later, I drink kefir with him regularly. I have developed taste for it.

1936-38: Our Vacations in Country and Mountains

Mama takes Malina and I on a short vacation to a village deep in the countryside, surrounded by forests, and fields of flax (*len*), which are just blooming in beautiful blue (or is it yellow?) colors. We walk for hours through the forest trails. All the time Mama is teaching us to memorize multiplication tables, months of the year, days in each month, etc. I am good at it, and enjoy "bettering" my older sister. Mama is relentless, and we just have to learn it all.



I get sick. Mama suspects my stomach. My head bursts with unbearable pain, especially upon any movement. (This happened again in Marblehead, at Maple Circle, in early 60's). I must be taken to a doctor. Tata arrives from Zgierz. I am placed in an open horse driven cart, lined deeply with hay to protect me from the bumping and rocking of the cart over rough country lanes. Everyone walks, while I am being transported. The doctor is unable to diagnose my problem. A few days later I am better and able to travel back home. Gradually the ailment disappears.

One winter in Zakopane we stay in a guest house (*pensjonat*) close to a small ski area called Lipki. Mama buys new ski boots for Malina and I, custom made by a cobbler. A narrow path leads from the guest house, located on top of a hill, towards the ski slopes and we ski to it every day. The path, fenced on both sides, takes a sharp 90 degree bend near the bottom. This turn presents a challenging ski maneuver for us in which we occasionally fail; we end up with the skis stuck in the fence pickets.

We vacationed in Rabka and in Zakopane. We ski during the winter, and in the summer we hike the mountains and the valleys. Normally, Mama alone travels with us and with the luggage and Tata arrives later. He also tends to leave before Mama, Malina and I depart. One year we are booked into an exclusive children's resort, *Krasnoludek*, in Rabka while Mama and Tata are to stay and enjoy themselves in Zakopane. Malina and I hate the place. We have made such fuss that the management contacts our parents who are forced to travel to Rabka and take us back with them to Zakopane. We are treated to a ride in a brand new "*Torpeda*" train, a single motorized luxury coach with large windows and reclining seats, which travels at high speed. Back in Zakopane, Tata is unable to find larger hotel space to accommodate us all. Malina and I



are therefore ensconced in a glassed-in veranda, just outside the parents' bedroom, with a perfect view of Giewont Mountain. One night we watch a violent mountain thunderstorm and see during frequent lightning flashes a perfect image of the iron cross installed on top of Giewont. One mountain climber is reportedly killed on top of Giewont that night.



This is the year when the popular song "*Jedziem Panie Zielonka*" is in the vogue;



*Jedziem Panie Zielonka, ja dzisiaj humor mam, ja dzisiaj forse mam
Nic nie dowie się sie żonka, pijmy za zdrowie dam.*

Tata hikes with us through some of the Tatra Mountains valleys (*Dolina Strążyska* and *Kościeliska*); we eat goat cheese, talk to mountain locals, "*górale*", and enjoy the beautiful scenery. We go to a circus and I watch a large snake being fed a live rabbit. We pet lion kittens and have a photo taken with a famous mountain man (*góral*) Mróz (photo on left).

On the return journey we stop in southern Poland, where Tata's brother Mieczysław Tarnów district governor ("*starosta*"). This is a very prestigious political office in Poland and Tata is quite older brother's accomplishments. I have not met the

Here, in the inset photo, Tata's brother (stryjek) is Poland's Marshall Śmigły – Rydz at some military



Tarnów, in Syska is the high and proud of his family before.

shown hosting function.

We meet his wife (*stryjenka*) Inka (Irena) and their three children Janusz, Basia and Jurek, stay overnight in their huge apartment and in the evening go out and see the movie *Rose Marie* with Janet McDonald and Nelson Eddie. That visit has left me rather disconnected from that side of the family. That huge apartment and everyone in it, in my recollection, has been very impersonal. Not unfriendly, yet not friendly. Cool, not warm. Not family-like. Official-like.

1936 sic. Swimming Adventure in a country pond (*staw*)

With a group of school friends we are walking along a road towards Łagiewniki. We see several stork nests on high perches close to roadside huts. We plan to explore a nearby lake area comprising several large ponds, *stawy*. The ponds are known for their population of large pike, *szczupaki*. Two or three of my friends are with me. Our parents do not know of this outing. We are supposed to be in school. The ponds are large, and partly overgrown with reeds. There is a small island in the middle of one of the larger ponds. My friend and I decide to swim to it. Since I do not yet swim, only barely, I make a raft from reeds, and swim partly supported by it. I get to the island, and realize that it is much farther from the shore than I thought. For some reason, perhaps filled with overconfidence, I leave my raft there. Swimming back, however, my strength or my confidence, gives up, and I cannot swim any farther. My friend has already reached the shore. I have to stop and rest! When I do, I find that there is a shallow spot in this otherwise deep bottom pond, at the very spot where I pause. I am able to stand on it and rest before finishing the swim to shore. Was that a *miracle* ?

1936: Wigilia (Zgierz; Babcia)

We seem to have a big crowd in our house each Christmas Eve. It is not different in 1936. The large dining room table is extended, and there is barely room for the Christmas tree, *choinka*. Malina and I are lost in the crowd. All we want is the presents, but can't get to them until all the meal courses have been finished, and the deserts are about to be served. Babcia Syska, Tata's mother, is our friend, and takes care of us. To spice things up, she passes glasses of wine to us under the table. We crawl under the table unnoticed, among all those legs, find Babcia's hand holding the wine, and drink the wine there.



1936: Babcia i Dziadek Rola-Danielewicz (Zgierz)

Although *Babcia* Danielewicz is undoubtedly a loving and affectionate woman, I do not feel any special attachment or affection towards her. Later in life I barely have any recollection of her. She is always nice to Malina and to me in a kind of detached way. She does not hug us.

Dziadek Danielewicz is an intense, quiet man. I am often afraid of him. He has threatened me with a belt. I would rather run away from him, than approach him. Consequently, later in life, I recall very little of him. He has a heavy set figure, wears darkened glasses and tends to stare at me, as if ready to grab and belt me. I guess I do not trust nor liked him.



I am told that *Dziadek* is a brilliant man, very well educated in Poland and abroad, and has held high management positions in various firms. He studied economics in Antwerp, also attended universities in Manchester, England, in Germany, Italy and Spain. He speaks several foreign languages. The family has owned large tracks of land in Poland including small towns and villages. Danielewicz family has been entitled to display the "Rola" coat of arms since, apparently, 15th century. *Dziadek* married Waleria Buczek, *Babcia*. I was not told anything about her family background. *Babcia* is a simple, uneducated person, more comfortable in the kitchen than at the table. I notice little interaction between the two of them. *Dziadek* appears to be a very autocratic person. He is the law.

1937: Wikcia (Zgierz; Wikcia)

Wikcia is our maid. One day, probably in 1937, Malina and I conspire to find out if Wikcia wears any underwear. Wikcia is quite old, and normally wears long heavy skirts, but is there anything underneath? Today she is washing the kitchen floor, scrubbing it on her knees. It will be easy to creep up on her from behind, yank the skirt up, and see. Malina stays in the background. I do it. Wikcia screams with fury, grabs an iron hook from the kitchen stove, and rushes after me. I am petrified, and run for my life. She is very mad and I imagine she could kill me! She chases me through the garden, but I can easily outrun her. I avoid her for several days. I never do find out about the underwear!

1937: Malina



We quarrel a lot. I am frustrated with Malina. She gets me constantly into trouble with Mama. She provokes me and then screams when I retaliate. And I get belted, literally. On one occasion, downstairs in the house, as we stand in the doorway between the dining room and Mama's bedroom, she starts screaming when I threaten to hit her for having aggravated me. This is too much. I pick her from the back with my arms around her waist, turn her into horizontal position, and throw her with all my strength down onto the floor. It's a miracle she is not hurt. Mama runs in, Malina continues to scream, and I get punished. However, this may have been the last time Malina has taunted me like that.

The next confrontation is of my doing. I hang her favorite doll by a string, wrapped around the doll's neck, and place her in a doorway between our bedrooms. When Malina comes out from her room, she runs smack into the hanging doll. This gives me some perverse pleasure. She screams her lungs out. Mama runs in, I get belted.

Mama keeps the whip hanging on the wall in the kitchen. It has several leather straps, about 12 inches long, attached to one end of a short wooden handle, about a foot long. Mama uses it a lot, almost exclusively on me. One day I hide the whip, and return it only after she promises to forgo the punishment she has had in mind for me.

1937: Summer (Kayak; Krakowski Farm)

We are at a small station of Grotniki on Kutno Line (not Warszawa Line). Tata and I stop there on the way to a farm owned by Krakowski family, *Babcia Syska's* kin. We rent a kayak on a river (or was it a pond?) and Tata shows me how to row a kayak. We then go to visit the relatives on the farm, but I have no recollection of any details, except the low ceilings in the village cottage, *hata*. A few weeks, or

months, later, Mama, Malina and I go to stay on that farm for a few days. We arrive at the local train station but the horse cart that was supposed to meet us there has not arrived. I convince Mama that I can lead the way to the farm. We walk through fields for two to three hours, and arrive safely at the farm. It was a long way. I do not remember any specific people at the farm, but the ceilings are still low, and the horse riding is great fun. I can have any of the horses saddled any time and I can gallop through the fields to my heart's content.

One night we go out to catch crayfish (river lobsters). Village people have open flame torches, and we wade in the water and reach with arms under the riverbanks to catch the crayfish. Afterwards we follow the others to a village party, but get shooed away home very quickly. Never did find out why?

1937: Fall (Cemetery Ghosts)

Mama is away. It is fall of 1937, the winds are strong and leaves are falling. A bunch of kids gather late in the evening. We can stay out late. We plan to dare each other to touch a gate at the protestant cemetery (*ewangelicki*) at precisely midnight, when the ghosts of the dead are about. We stand at the far end of the maple tree alley, *Aleja Cmentarna*, that leads to the cemetery and at a minute or two before midnight we race towards the cemetery gate. I get there first, touch the gate, and run for my life, away from the ghosts. It is really scary. I see no one else behind me! I race back home without stopping.

1937: House Art

Our house is filled with pictures, crystals and items of art. Few of the art faxes survived the war. Mama and Tata have managed to retrieve some pictures after the war. After their deaths in London a few paintings found their way into our home. Among them are:

[Village view by Hałaj](#), 1935



[Children playing by K. Drewnowicz](#), 1930



[Winter horse sled scene by H. Setkowicz](#)



[Girl's face by A. Kędzierski](#)



[Poniatowski, główka](#)

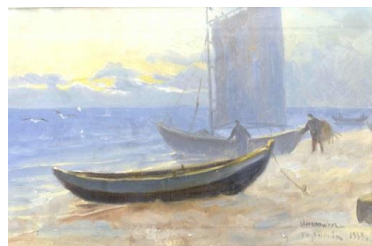


[Święto Jordanu by T. Axentowicz, 1893](#)



Changing Times and
up in 1938 and on...

[Jastarnia](#)



Growing

1937: Books

Tata has assembled an impressive library in his study room (*gabinet*). It contains many large and expensive volumes, all bound, many in leather covers. He allows me to use a small side section in his book cabinet for my books. I have many books, among them Jules Verne's Journey to Mars, Around the World in 80 Days, Around the World in Submarine, plus some wild west, cowboy, books by a German author Karl May. I read a lot.

When German occupation forces moved into our house, Ciocia Ania told us during our visit to Zgierz in 1967, one of their first acts was to throw all the books in the back garden, pour gasoline over and burn them.

1937/38: Easter & Christmas (Zgierz)

Easter this year is very strange. Is it 1937 or 1938? The weather is bad, with heavy rains, and strong winds. Our parish priest is very late to bless the Easter Table, *Święconka*. We must wait for him before we can touch any food on the table. He finally comes in the afternoon in a horse driven coach (*dorożka*)! Mama has been upset and everyone is agitated. The Easter spirit just is not there.

Christmas Eve, this year, is also very strange. *Wigilia* is held at Babcia Danielewicz's house. It is a small and spiritless affair. There are no presents. Malina and I are told we are too old for toys, or presents? I am very disappointed.

1938: First Communion (Jewish tailor)



I am having a new suit made for the First Communion; a dark colored jacket and shorts. Our family tailor is unable to fit us in and have the suit made in time. Mama, in desperation, goes to a Jewish tailor, but wants to keep it hush-hush. We are not to tell anyone and must be very discreet when we enter his Jewish shop, so that no one, who can tell, will see us. The suit turns out fine and my communion ceremony goes off well.

1938: Wine Cellar (Zgierz, wine cellar; Malina)

The wine cellar is full of various wines, mostly home made. Tata takes pride in making good wine. In the season, large glass decanters in special baskets are percolating in the attic rooms. The cellar is dark and cool. Malina and I decide to taste some wines. We uncork bottle after bottle and taste the wine. It does not taste very good. We re-cork the bottles and place them back on the shelves. Years later Tata tells us he suspected some mischief, because too many bottles went sour.

1938: Girlfriends (Zgierz)



A blond girl in our class, Rita, captures my attention. She is German, and her parents own an estate outside Zgierz, in Łagiewniki. I get invited to her house often, she to ours. At one party we are discovered under a bed kissing. That is the last time I recall seeing her.

Another girl, that Mama is trying to dissuade me from seeing, is a little older, round faced with blond hair and blue eyes. She goes to my class in our Grade School, *Ćwiczeniówka*. I have her photograph, and insist she looks just like Mama, and therefore she is the right girl for me. Mama disagrees. The war comes and solves this problem. (Note: I can still recall the girl's face in 2010).

1938: Tata gives me a Shotgun (Zgierz; Władek)



I pester Tata to buy me a small motorcycle. I am only ten. He comes close to promising me to do so. Then he changes his mind, and proposes to let me have his light semi-automatic Belgian shotgun until I am eleven or twelve, at which time he will buy me the motorcycle; and I can keep the shotgun, too. I love the gun. I clean it, play and parade with it. Then I discover where the cartridges are kept. I "borrow" a key from Tata's bureau, and remove several cartridges. [Władek Zajac](#), my neighbor friend, goes with me into the fields, where I load the gun, take aim at a small bird, and pull the trigger. The noise is awful, I am thrown back to the ground with a bleeding nose, my friend is gone, the bird too, and the shotgun lies several feet from me. It's a very scary experience. I clean the gun meticulously so Tata will not discover what I did. I pretend that the nose bruise is from a fall. Tata does not even notice, but I am not likely to try it

again.

Władek Zajac

When visiting Poland and "our" house in Zgierz, in July of 2006, Jean and I accidentally learn from a neighbor whom we have approached for some local directions that Władek has just died. He has lived in Zgierz all his life, although not in the same house as before the war, but in a very close proximity, on the other side of the railroad tracks

1938: Maria (Zgierz, Lwów; Maria)

Wikcia has retired. She only comes to our house part time now to help with the housework and do the laundry. The new maid, Maria, has a small room of her own next to my bedroom. Maria is young and has dark curly hair. She must pass through my bedroom to get to hers. It's part of her job to check on Malina and I before retiring herself. Malina's bedroom door is also off my bedroom, on the opposite side of Maria's room. Maria "checks" on me by getting into my bed, raising her nightdress and allowing me to explore her. I am fascinated by her belly and dark pubic hair. I enjoy the experience, but I am a little frightened too; what if someone discovers us? Maria seems to be satisfied with just being there and does not provide any instructions. After a few nights though, Malina gets wind of it, and Maria's visits stop. Maria is afraid of being found out and getting fired.

Later, during the war, when in 1939 we are staying temporarily in the Bishop's Palace in Lwów, I confide in Mama. I am now eleven. She calls Tata, and tells him. Both appear to be shocked and horrified, seemingly at me. I regret sharing, and suddenly feel guilty.

1938: Fall (Zgierz; Roman)

Roman M. comes to stay and live with us in Zgierz while he attends his first class in Zgierz *gimnazium*, the high school. He is several years older than I. He invites me to go with him to the new municipal covered swimming pool, *basen*, where I love to go. Mama lets me go in Roman's care. Swimming is great, but when we dress in the dressing cubicles, Roman attempts to fondle me and then he wants me to

reciprocate. We go there several times, and then I refuse to go anymore. Roman is very much annoyed with me. I tell no one.

1938: Jews (Zgierz; Jews, Palestine)

I am persuaded by a friend, a son of one of Tata's subordinate directors, to join him, and go "on town" to scare the Jews. My friend is older than I. He tells me Jews should be leaving Poland for Palestine. We go to the Jewish section in town, a ghetto, and burst into several Jewish stores, yelling: "Jews, go to Palestine". I really have no idea where Palestine is. After a series of such intrusions, the friend suggests that we rough up a Jew. We find a big Jewish boy, in a long black robe, and *pejsy*, and go for him. He stands his ground, hits my friend who then runs, hits me and I take a fall to the ground. The boy disappears. I return home humiliated and scared that someone may tell Tata about this shameful escapade. I feel a strong sense of guilt, for playing so foul.

I also recall one of our family friends, Mr. Kamiński. He is an important public official in Zgierz fire department. His wife is Jewish, and we whisper about that. We are told not to talk openly about it, as it may harm Mr. Kaminski's career. Her parents own and run a small shop in the Jewish ghetto in Zgierz.

1938: "Red Menace" (Zgierz; Red Pigeon, Wlodek)

One day I see a pigeon flying back and forth in our general area, with a long red streamer attached to its leg. It flies for a while and then disappears behind the neighbor's house where Wlodek Zając, my friend, lives. I think nothing of it until Tata questions me about it a day or so later. Next, I am in the courthouse where I meet some old officials in dark suits. They question me about that pigeon, the red streamer, and the message on it. After a while, I find myself agreeing with the officials that the pigeon came from Wlodek's house, and sign some statements. Wlodek's brother is arrested. Wlodek does not talk to me anymore. I feel awfully guilty for contributing to this arrest. I barely saw anything, and hardly understood what was involved. But I signed the statement. The red streamer implies a communist conspiracy! I resent being left alone by Tata with those people in the courthouse and allowing them to question me and influence me.

Zgierz – Miscellaneous memories

- Tadeusz Malinowski is our parent's best friend. He drives a red open Lancia. He is a chief chemical engineer at Boruta Chemical Works in Zgierz and visits our home frequently. (Jean and I meet his son Krzysiek in London around 1951. Krzysiek lives in USA and is visiting our distant relative Staszek Łopatto, in Łopatto's West Kensington "posh" flat. Łopatto dies a few years later in Canada.)
- Mr. Prokiesz is my history teacher in our [Ćwiczeniówka](#) Grade School; he is a bearded man with a belly that sticks out. We meet him, accidentally, in Zakopane on a mountain hiking trail, perhaps around 1936. He complains about "these tourists".
- Ćwiczeniówka is our primary (grade) school. One year we make wine from wild blue flowers, (*habry?*), which we collect in the fields. We place glass bottles, filled with water and flower petals, on window ledges in the sun. We cover the bottles with cloth "corks". The "wine" tastes OK.
- One day at school I have an argument with another boy and we decide that the only way to resolve it is to have a fight after school. We gather with a large group of cheering kids on a grassy patch outside the front of the school and begin to fight with our bare fists. The fight drags on, we are both exhausted and it seems that neither of us is winning. Finally an adult shows up, perhaps someone from our school, and orders us to disperse. I get home exhausted and maybe even bruised, but no one notices.
- Graffiti on telephone poles: on the way home from school, I draw with white chalk some indecent pictures or words on several telephone poles. I get caught by a man in the street who threatens to tell my father about it. That stops it. I am never sure, however, whether he has told Tata or not.

- Easter bang! "Chlorek" is a yellowish powder. I place a small amount of the powder in small cloth pouches; tie them with string, then lay each on a stone to be smashed with another large stone, most frequently thrown from a few steps up a ladder. This results in an explosive bang, which is quite dangerous. Some boys lost fingers doing it. We do it at Easter.
- Worker's Demonstration in Zgierz: one Sunday I am witnessing a demonstration march in Zgierz, probably around Kiliński Square. I must be about 9 or 10 years old. I keep asking Tata why are these people marching? There are throngs of "workers" in the street. They carry many banners and signs. I am told that that is a communist conspiracy; that those workers will be punished.
- Going to movies on my own: I am allowed to go downtown (Zgierz) to a movie theater by myself. The movie is "Hurricane" with Edward Massey, as the evil governor of a tropical island. I get home after dark. Everyone is at the dinner table; there seems to be little concern whether I am OK. This may even have taken place during the first days of September in 1939.

September 1939 – WAR!

1939: 1 September

Early in the morning, on **Friday**, September 1, my sister Malina and I are alerted by a sound of an airplane buzzing close to our house. We are at my bedroom window and are watching a low flying small plane, with clearly visible German black cross insignia. The plane is circling Zgierz railroad station, and the main highway bridge, near Babcia Danielewicz house. We see a railroad worker, near the bridge; he shoots at the plane with his revolver. A small object drops from the plane, we hear an explosion and see smoke. We know the war has begun. The plane flies away. More is to come!

1939: 2 September

Mama insists I need new shoes. It is Saturday. We walk downtown to Zgierz trying to find an open shoe store. German air raid is expected any moment. We get sneakers, but cannot find shoes. As we rush back home German planes begin to arrive. Rather than go to our house, we run into the fields across the street from our house. Other people are there. We lie down on the ground, and watch the bombers drop bombs over Zgierz. Other lower flying aircraft strafe people, cattle, and anything that moves. Thank God no one close by is hurt.

1939: 3 September

Sunday! France and England declare WAR on Germany. We see train after train, packed with troops, traveling West on the way to the front, towards Kutno. Malina and I prepare baskets of fruit, vegetables, and cigarettes for the soldiers on the trains. As we throw the packages to the soldiers on the passing trains, we shout that France and England are with us, and that we will defeat Germany. Some fruit and tomatoes splash on the uniforms. The trains move fast. We are ecstatic and believe that we are helping the war effort. We are bound to win this war.

Dziadziuś Syska tells me it is time to hide valuables. He digs a deep trench between the storage sheds and the hen-coop, just on the left side of steps leading to the outhouse toilets. There, we bury my Belgian shotgun, Tata's shotgun and other items such as silver cutlery and crystal. He digs a second trench at the back of the hencoop, near the air-raid shelter. I do not know what *Dziadziuś* buried there.

Have any items ever been found and recovered by anyone? I do not know. None of our relatives spoke about it. However, during our July 2006 visit to Poland, Maciek, son of the new owners of "our" house, a relative of Rafał Będziński, Ciocia Ania's husband, asked whether it were true that a "treasure" had been buried or hidden in their yard by the pre-war owners of the house. I told him that that was true and pointed to the approximate location which by then has been covered with new construction. How that story has been passed on to strangers (?) I do not know. Obviously, someone else knew of the buried valuables.

In the afternoon, more German planes arrive. There is no bombing, but they fly low and shoot at anything that moves. We run into the air shelter which Dziadzius dug under a large tree in Babcia Danielewicz garden. The shelter is totally hidden by the tree foliage. Soon after the planes leave, we discover that there is a "suspicious" person walking by our fence, nearest to the railroad bridge and peering into our garden. Wuj Roman takes his gun out and challenges the man. Everyone is paranoid about the German 5th Column, spies and saboteurs. Tata is not around to day.



1939: 4 September

For some reason, our maid Maria takes us for a very long walk. She wants to visit her friend at an apartment complex far on the other side of the town. We do not know her friend. The friend's apartment is large, with many large windows, and no furniture. On the way back, we walk by our church in downtown Zgierz, and notice that the high wall surrounding the church has been bombed and partially destroyed. The church appears undamaged. We see much destruction in the town of Zgierz. I feel satisfaction at seeing the protestant (German) church in ruins. The anticipated air raid does not materialize. Mama is mad with Maria for taking us with her that far.

1939: 5 September

It is Tuesday and it is the fifth day of war. A car drives up to our house in the afternoon. It is a taxi. Tata gets out and tells us we are leaving, and must take very little luggage with us. Mama runs around packing what she can. Tata is saying she is taking too much. Dziadzius Syska sneaks two large containers of homemade honey into the car. Tata does not see it. Much of our luggage had already been taken away. Tata says the luggage will follow us in horse driven carts, on automotive rubber tires, and we should have access to it every day. The whole "evacuation" is very carefully planned, he says. We leave just as it is getting dark. The good byes with Babcia and Dziadzius Syska are emotional. Mama does not think we shall see them again.

Tata takes us to the town of Łęczyce, where he is the director of the District Inland Revenue office. The office with all key employees, money and records, is to be evacuated. Families are included. The police have commandeered two cars to accomplish this task. One is a taxi, driven by a nice elderly taxi driver, Mr. Strzelecki (I recall his name in 1997). He is forced to abandon his family in order to drive our "official" family. The other is a refrigeration truck belonging to "Eksport Bekon Gniezno". Its driver was in the process of delivering ham and bacon to customers in the area, when the truck has been commandeered by police. We stay in Łęczyce overnight, in Tata's office, and sleep on the floor. There is much conspiratorial whispering around. Tension is felt in the air. It is apparently not safe to be outside. Why? We are waiting for news, wondering what is going to happen to us.

1939: 6 September

We leave very early on Wednesday. Our family rides in the taxi car. The office staff and their families, the safe with money and documents travel in the refrigeration truck. It is still dark. The roads are in chaos. We see potholes and bomb craters everywhere. Everybody seems to be moving northeast, towards Warszawa, by foot, horse, bicycle, and car. The progress is very slow. In the afternoon we pass our luggage "train" comprised of modern looking horse driven carts, on rubber tires, just as Tata had said. We do not stop, and realize, we shall not see our luggage again. We must go with what we wear and what we have with us in the car.

By dusk we are entering Warszawa's suburbs. Despite craters in the roads, we cannot use headlights. We would be accused of being spies, or saboteurs, and probably lynched on the spot. The mood of people in the streets is ugly. And it seems that everyone is in the streets. People stand watching traffic, and peer into the car. Some try to open the car doors, which have been locked. We feel surrounded by hostile elements. We drive by a large lake and hear explosions. The driver tells us that people are

"fishing" with explosives and scoop up dead fish for food. Finally we reach the city, and our destination for the night. It must be another government office, but I am not sure. As we are waiting in the car for Tata, who is conferring with his office superiors, a loud radio voice in a nearby cafe is announcing that the Polish government has left for Rumania, urges calm and promises victory.... No one believes, everyone is depressed, it seems like the war has just been lost. We spend the night in the car.

1939: 7 September

We leave Warszawa early, probably around 4 am. It is Thursday, and still dark. As we approach Most Kierbedzia, a bridge across the river Wisła, a lone figure in the darkness hails us down. We stop. He is a priest or a monk. He says that he has been entrusted with the relics of [St. Andrew Bobola](#), and implores us to take him with us so that he can carry the relics to safety. We need fuel to get out of Warszawa. He talks to Tata and they both go back to his church or monastery, around the corner, and get a large can of alcohol, which we pour into the fuel tank. The priest gets into our car, and huddles the relics close to him.

As dusk breaks and we are on the way out of Warszawa, a total chaos in the street is revealed. Cars are scattered everywhere. Many, many abandoned for lack of fuel. And the expectation of a pending bombing raid is desperately felt. We want to rush, but have to move slowly. Daylight has come. And suddenly we see our truck behind us, the "Eksport Bekon Gniezno" refrigeration van, pull off the road and stop. We stop too. Tata gets out, and finds out that the van is out of fuel. As they debate what to do, a man approaches and offers 80 liters of gasoline if we take him, his wife and their child out of Warszawa. There is no choice. We put them in our car. There are now eight people and a child in our car! We move, and finally leave Warszawa behind. When we stop for a snack, good many miles away, we see German bombers diving and bombing the suburb areas through which we had passed just a couple of hours before.

We now arrive in Siedlce. Tata has to confer with government people downtown; the priest wants to stop with the relics in a monastery. The family with the child just disappear. Mama, Malina and I wait for Tata. Suddenly the air raid sirens sound and we hear German planes swooping on the town. Malina urges us to move through a narrow passage between a house and a fence, which leads to a large deep pit (with a ladder). We follow her, and in that instant I or we sense danger, run and blindly and jump into that pit. An incendiary bomb falls onto the passage we had just passed spewing smoke and heat. Fortunately the bottom of the pit is soft. We huddle in the corner of the pit. The air raid lasts for about an hour. We hear terrible explosions very near to our location. Finally we climb out and start looking for Tata. The streets are deserted; no one around. Smoke is thick and rubble is strewn everywhere. We feel an expectation of another raid.

Then, in the distance, we see Tata approaching. Mama kneels in the middle of the street to pray and thank the Lord. They hug each other. Tata hugs Malina and I, and then he drags us with all speed to a large playground field that he saw in town. There we lie down on the grass, under a large tree and wait out the next air raid, which has followed very soon. However, no bombs fell in the field near us.

The car is still there and the driver too. However the priest never shows back. Perhaps he was not as lucky as we. The family with the child does not return either. We meet the truck, and drive out to nearby woods, where we fall deeply asleep. We thus miss another raid on the city, and the strafing of nearby country road, where peasant horse carts were shot at and bombed. We eat smoked ham from the refrigeration truck.

September 7th Postscript

In response to my question regarding the relics of St. Andrew Bobola, which I believe we had encountered during our war time travel (7th September 1939), a Jesuit Priest in Warszawa writes on December 19, 2004 , as follows:

There is a Jesuit monastery in the vicinity of bridge "Kierbedzia", located in a side street named Świętojańska. The problem is that the relics of St. Andrew Bobola were not transferred to the Jesuit church at Świętojańska until the end of September, just prior to the capitulation of Warszawa. On the 7th of September, these relics were still resting at a Jesuit monastery at 61 Rakowiecka Street. I have no idea who was the Jesuit who met you on 7th September. I am not able to speculate any further. No hypothesis comes up to my mind.
Ks. Felicjan Paluszkiewicz SJ.

Then, in a subsequent email, Fr. Paluszkiewicz clarifies his initial understanding of my question:

The relics of St. Andrew Bobola are contained in a heavy silver clad coffin of normal size, which a man alone would not be able to move nor lift. Most likely the priest you had met was in possession of a small fragment of St. Andrew Bobola's bone, enclosed in a decorative metallic frame. That's it.
Greetings.
F. Paluszkiewicz.

The next day, 8th September, as we pass through Siedlce, the men notice an overturned gasoline tanker truck lying on the front lawn of a police station. We stop, open the cover and find that gasoline is pouring out. Tata buys a bucket (by force) from a small Jewish boy passing by, who protests loudly. We fill our tanks, and return the bucket. The police chief, in front of whose building this activity has been taking place, comes out with a small bottle asking for some gasoline for his cigarette lighter. He gets it. The priest with the relics has not come back.

We pass Brześć around noon, and plan to meet there another priest from Zgierz, father Polak (we call him *ksiądz* Polak), who as a chaplain has been assigned to an army unit stationed near Łuck (pronounced Wootzk). When we meet, Fr. Polak decides to leave his unit and travel with us!!! To me it sounds like desertion, but Tata and Mama are furious with me when I mention this. We meet the priest at the Army barracks, and then find lodgings for the night. As we sleep in a peasant hut, a man wakens us up about 3 am and tells us that a band of men (Ukrainians, apparently) are on the way to "get" us. We rush into the cars in our night clothing, and take off. I hope nothing happens to the man who warned us.

Fr. Polak always tells jokes, and plays cards. One of his jokes describes a lord in a horse driven carriage, and the driver who takes his hat off in front of every roadside wooden cross, but not when they pass a tree. Asked *Why?* The driver replies, because one is a holy cross, and the tree is just a tree. But the lord says, *one is wood, and the other is also wood.* After a while, the driver asks the lord: *Do you kiss your lady on her hand or her behind (dupa)?* The hand, of course, is the indignant lord's reply. *Why?* The driver says, *one is flesh, and so is the other!* Laughter!!!! Ha! ha!

We are not allowed to listen to his jokes, but the telling of jokes continues in Lwów, until Fr. Polak leaves us, to cross the "green" border (covertly) back to the German occupied Poland.

I do not like the priest, nor trust him. He visits us in the 70's in Marblehead, but my initial feeling towards him had not changed.

1939: 17 September (Russians, Hoszcza, Korzec)

Rumors abound about the Russians coming to "help" Poland. People are whispering. We are staying with a peasant family in their village house (*chata*). The plan is to leave early in the morning to avoid any unfriendly action by the local peasants (Ukrainians, we are told). The villagers have not been friendly during the past few days. In Hoszcza (16 September) men had to walk with guns in open view to protect our "convoy". News that we carry government money and documents seems to precede us. Hoszcza is not far from the Russian border. It is there that Tata decides to turn all these government papers and money to a local Inland Revenue office. He no longer feels he can protect it. The safe box has become a serious liability. More trouble is expected. Early in the morning, 17th September, someone sneaks into the house to warn us that once again the village men are coming to get (murder) us. We leave instantly. It is about six in the morning, and we are on the way. We still have the two vehicles. The taxi with the

driver, in which our family rides, and the "*Eksport Bekon Gniezno*" refrigeration truck, also with its driver, but now without the office safe, money or documents, which have been transferred to a government office in Hoszcza. The office clerks and their families ride in the refrigeration truck. The remaining smoked hams are being rapidly consumed by all of us.

We stop at a roadside farm, where we kids get milk and bread for breakfast, and the adults buy kefir. We all see a bus full of people going by at high speed. There are many small planes in the air. Not German. Moments later we hear explosions. Apprehension grows. After a while we leave, but very slowly. We come to a column of tanks. As far as we can see, there are Russian tanks and trucks. The smell of exhaust fumes from Russian gasoline is different from the smell of Polish gasoline. It is nauseating. The bus that had passed us is in the ditch, destroyed and smoldering. There is no sign of life, nor any people moving near it. The Russians are just ignoring the bus.

Solders approach us with guns pointed at us. An officer tells us that the Russian Army has come to help Poland fight Hitler. Why the guns, then? We wonder. Now they want to take our guns from us. Tata says we have permits to carry guns. They decide to let us keep the guns. We move cautiously on. Tata tells us: "Poland is no more". We are stopped every few minutes by more Russian soldiers, then by the Russian police, the GPU (or KGB?). They take the guns away! We arrive in **Korzec**, a small town on the Polish border with Russia. Tata finds the house of the town Elder, *burmistrz*. We move into his house, but there is chaos outside. The cars have been taken away from us. Ukrainian horsemen are charging around, Russian tanks mill about, etc. We are very uneasy about our safety. Tata decides we must move to a safer house. He finds a vacant house which is partly hidden from the street. The house is located near a river and close to a highway bridge. Rumors continue to abound that the Ukrainians are out to kill Poles. We barricade the front door of the house. Tata finds a heavy hammer. This is the only weapon we now have. There is shouting outside, men charging around on horses, shots being fired. Our lights are out. We are waiting, quiet and scared. Midnight passes, outside noises subside. I have no recollection what Mama and Malina are doing or saying. My full concentration is on Tata. I stand right behind him by the door. The immediate danger is passing

.1939: 18/19 September (Korzec)

Armed Russian soldiers are guarding the river bridge in Korzec and shoot at anything that moves. The river is not very wide, perhaps 70 to 80 feet, lined with tall poplar trees on the other side. The trees are crowded with black crows. We are told not to go near the river or the bridge. However, Zbyszek, the son of Tata's office manager, and I decide to sneak under the bridge structure, above the water level, and make our way to the other side of the river. We do it in early evening. The guards never see us! Then, somewhat scared, we decide to come back. What if we get discovered, or have to stay on the other side of the river? Or even get shot at? We do make it back, but get discovered by someone in the family. I get my second belting from Tata in my life. Zbyszek runs from his father, who proceeds to follow him and belt him. The father catches his thumb on Zbyszek's heel, and nearly breaks it. We think this is funny.

Next day we run through the hills, in the vicinity of the bridge and the guards. There is a barbed wire stretched across the path. Zbyszek doesn't see it, and runs full face into it. His cheek is torn through. Someone stitches it. That puts the end to our irritate-the-Russians game.

1939: October, November – Lwów

We leave Korzec with sigh of relief. After a short trip by cart and bus, we pick up a train from Równo, a larger town a few miles west from Korzec, to Lwów. At one point the train passes an overturned locomotive, obviously derailed by war action. The sight fascinates me. We arrive in Lwów.

Fr. Polak secures temporary quarters for us in the "Bishop's Palace" in Lwów. Nuns of the Boromeuszki Order run the "Palace". They are kind and very quiet, but make it clear we can only stay there a few days. We are given a dark bed-sitting room upstairs and eat our meals in the nuns' dining room. The nuns fear an inspection by the Russians, which may result in the expulsion of all. The Palace grounds are magnificent, and the location is close to the public school which we shall later attend.

This is a period of religious awakening for me. I go to mass every day, sometimes morning and afternoon. I learn the intonations that priests use during the mass, including the Latin phrases that go with the intonations. I begin to pray deeply and sincerely. I think I want to become a priest in the future.

At the school, we are busy preparing for festivities to celebrate some Russian occasion. We are given no choice but to participate. When my teacher learns that I have played piano, she assigns me to play two piano pieces during the celebration, from the auditorium stage. Both are Russian pieces. I refuse, and after some arguments we strike a compromise: I will play one of her pieces, but the other must be Ave Maria. Why? She is very angry, and finally relents. I end up playing Ave Maria followed by "Dietsky March" (Children's March).

A school bully, his last name is Bonie, forces me to lend him some money. Later he refuses to pay back the loan. I find his home, ring the bell, go up to the apartment door on the first floor and speak to his mother. The boy is there listening. She pays me the money he owes. Bonie does not bully me again.

1940: Spring, Lwów

Mama, Malina and I are walking in downtown Lwów. Streets are busy; there are many people around. We hear shouting, and see several people running. Someone says that the Russians are chasing a Polish officer. Shots are fired. They sound like firecrackers, so flat and insignificant. We see revolvers in the hands of the pursuers. A man falls. They are on top of him. Mama takes us away. We hurry "home". I do not know who was shot, nor why? But the fear stays.

Loudspeakers installed at each street crossing are blaring Russian music and broadcast announcements about curfews and the need to be home when air-raid alarms sound. It is during the air-raid curfew periods that the Russians invade homes and deport people to Siberia. Our school classroom is a barometer of deportations. Each day fewer pupils show up in the class. We whisper about the friends and families which have been deported. When will our turn come?

To Siberia

1940: June – Deportation from Lwów

Air raid alarms sound several times on 28th of June. Everyone is ordered to stay home. It is now late at night. We can hear footsteps of a troop detachment marching on the pavement below. Tata says the Russians are deporting again. We live on the third floor of a house at 41 Kurkowa Street in Lwów. The rooms are small, with sloping ceilings. The windows overlook a church, across a narrow driveway. We hear the footsteps again, and then the banging on the ground floor door of our house. A long pause follows, and then the sound of footsteps dissolves down the street. The same sequence repeats again, until finally, the footsteps stop at our third floor apartment door. The Russians bang on our door. Tata opens it. Two Russians in civilian clothing enter; the armed guards remain outside the door. We are given twenty minutes to pack. Can we bring a mattress? "Yes", he says. "It may be very useful to you". He talks to me. He laughs frequently. "You will be an engineer in the Soviet Union"! I am very excited. Mama and Malina are crying. Tata is very tense. I am looking forward to this adventure! We are marched down the street to the railroad station sidings. There we wait till the next day before we are loaded into guarded goods wagons.

The train moves out two days later. In the meanwhile scores of local people come to the rail siding fence. Despite intimidation from Russian guards posted around the train perimeter, they throw loaves of bread, clothing, shout words of encouragement, and pass family messages. Malina's shoes are at the cobbler. Someone offers to fetch them and they do bring them back. The initial depression is wearing off. Finally we board the goods wagons and the train leaves Lwów. It crosses the "Russian-Polish border" at Szepetówka during the night, and I am up late into the night to see the old border signs through a small port high up in the wagon side. It is disappointing that nothing momentous has happened during the border crossing. I expected something. We are just there, in Russia, and have left Poland behind.

We pass Kiev in the afternoon, but the train rushes by at full speed, and we barely catch sight of the town.

We cross river Volga at Syzran, over the "longest bridge in the world". This is another big and exciting event for me. I stay out late, peering through the small port in the wagon. We cross the river at night. I see very little, other than the bridge trestles. We seem to take "forever" to cross it, so the bridge must be very long.

Our "toilet" procedures have taken time to work out. Our goods wagon has some 100 people in it. There is one hole in the floor at each end of the wagon for our entire toilet needs. Tata assumes leadership and persuades our side of the wagon not to make use of the hole, unless in emergency, in order to avoid the smell, and to maintain hygiene. All agree, but emergencies arise: dysentery and stomach ailments are on the rise. The usual procedure is to wait for the train to stop at a station. When we are allowed to get out, under the watchful eyes of our armed guards, we cross the rails under the wagon, and proceed with the call of nature, one next to the other. After a while we do not see any problem with that. Other wagons are not as fortunate, and some travel with occupants quarreling among themselves, surrounded by stench and human waste. Getting boiled water for tea is another important necessity. Whenever the train stops at a station, Tata runs to the front of the train and bribes the engine driver to let him have some oil smelling boiling water from the steam engine, and this works sometimes. But mostly we must check out the station "restaurants" to buy boiled water (*kippiatok*), and be back on the train before it leaves. The train always leaves at unspecified times.

1940: Deportation Route, June

Voronezh, Saratov, Syzran, Kuybyshev, Ufa, Zlotousta, Chelyabinsk, Kopeysk

1940: June (Kuybyshev)

As I wonder through the vast railroad-shunting yard in Kuybyshev, I come, between empty rail cars upon this family scene: a slim, small husband, wearing a mustache, a very large fat wife, and a small child. The husband is attempting to wash his wife at a solitary water spigot. She is naked under a loose covering of a colored shawl, there is no one around, and they don't even notice me. I am mesmerized. I have not seen a naked woman before, particularly one so large and fat. He is washing her legs, private parts... and then I hear this awful scream full of obscenities in Yiddish and Polish. It is time to make a fast getaway. I run back to our train wagon.

1940: July - Chelyabinsk

The train stops at a small station near a river. Zlotousta (Gold Mouth) is the name of the town, or perhaps the river? We are allowed to run on the pebbly shore and take a quick dip. But then, at the next station, before reaching Chelyabinsk, still in the Urals, the guards forbid us to come out of the wagons even to relieve ourselves. Everyone is stressed out. Tata tries to persuade them, but to no avail. The train moves. I am very pressed, too. We all have a form of dysentery. As we are about to pass the Chelyabinsk station, Tata lifts me to the wagon port, my observation window near the wagon roof, tells me to drop my pants, and I have to stick my bum through the port, and relieve myself, as we pass the station. This was his way to get back at the guards, and the system, but rather rough on me.

Rafal

1940: July - Kopeysk (n/r Chelyabinsk, Asia; Mama, Mrs. Wang, Rafal)

We have been detached from the main train. Only two or three wagons comprise our train now. The rest of the wagons continue farther East. Our destination must be near. We arrive in Kopeysk, just east of the southern tip of the Ural Mountains. We are directed from the train to proceed to a large white building, which houses a trade school, "*UczKombinat*". The school is closed for the summer. The weather is beautiful, sunny and warm. We move to a large hall, probably a gym, or an auditorium, and

find space on the floor for the family. There are probably two to three hundred people on the auditorium floor.

Within a day or two I become seriously ill. High temperature and I cannot walk. Mama is desperate. There is no doctor, and no medical supplies. People are beginning to gather and gawk at me, as I lie on the floor delirious. Mrs. Wang, a Jewish lady with two children, procures a chicken somewhere, probably in exchange for a gold bracelet, and cooks chicken broth with which she feeds me all night. Or is it two nights? I slowly recover, and gradually begin to move around. It is many days later, however, before I can walk properly; but even then, the slightest push topples me over, to the amusement of Russian boys. One boy, however, begins to protect me, fends off the other Russian kids, and helps me on my feet. His name is *Raphail Taypov*, or Rafal. We become friends, trade stamps, and then swap stamps for potatoes.



Mrs. Wang's husband is in Costa Rica. The family is planning to buy their way out of Siberia, and join him.

Rafal's parents are gone. He doesn't know much about them, except that he believes they may not have been part of the Bolshevik system. Rafal's grandfather, a Tatar, has brought him up. His uncle is young and cruel. Rafal persuades the grandfather to allow him trade with me some of their potatoes for stamps. I meet the grandfather. He offers me a boiled potatoe with molten butter. I love it. The uncle gives Rafal a beating for trading potatoes. Rafal and I become inseparable. He lives about a mile or two away, past two huge coal slag mounds, where cable pulled wagons from the coal pit are discharging the slag. Sometimes we go there to look for good coal pieces that have been overlooked by the sorters. Occasionally we play war with matches at night. We flick match sticks at each other in wooden barracks under construction pretending we shoot rockets at each other. When flicked, matches light.

Kopeysk

1940: Christmas (Kopeysk, USSR; Babcia, Dziadzius, Tata, Mama, Malina)



Just before Christmas, in 1940, Tata has been imprisoned for refusing to work down in a coal mine. He is concerned about his lungs that were badly damaged during his 1938 bout with pneumonia. He nearly died then. On Christmas Eve Malina and I are taking food to Tata, who is held in the Kopeysk prison some three miles away. There is plenty of snow on the ground, and it is very cold. We walk through open fields (steppes), the snow is hard, crispy. We don't say much to Tata, perhaps we are not permitted to, I am not sure. We are in a small dark room and barely can see him. We are afraid to be there, and want to get away as fast as possible. We leave the Christmas food with him and take quick leave. On the way "home", we are in awe of the night sky so full of stars and of the moon, which is so bright and yet so cold. We get back home long after the first Christmas Eve star has appeared. We find Mama crying. A letter has arrived from Zgierz. Both Babcia and Dziadzius Syska, Tata's parents, are dead. It appears that Dziadzius was either pushed by the Germans, or jumped himself from a moving train as he was being deported, and was lost. The letter implied his body was not found. Babcia died soon after that. Other news concerns uncle, *wujo*, Roman, Mama's youngest brother who was in the Polish Air Force. He too, appears to be dead, shot in a German prisoner of war camp in Austria. However, a parcel with food also arrived.

1940: Fall-Winter (Kopeysk, USSR; Mama, Tata, Malina)

We live in a "forced resettlement" compound in Kopeysk, east from the southern end of the Urals Mountains. The compound was erected in the middle of grassy plains, called steppes, a mile or two from the nearest populated area, but close to a coal mine and a slag disposal heap. There are about 10 long

wooden barracks in the compound, each containing 24 small rooms, twelve on each side of a central corridor. Our barrack number is 12, and room number 16. A secret police commandant rules over our lives. Passes are required to leave the compound for any reason. Mama, Tata, Malina and I live in one of those small rooms in the end barrack, and share a double bed made up of two twin beds pulled together. Our two mattress halves, brought with us from Lwów, cover only the upper part of the bed. Wooden slats support our feet. Another single man, pan Kazimierz Śrutka, older than Tata, is assigned to live with our family, and share our room. He sleeps on a cot, at the foot of our bed. Red bedbugs have infested the barracks in the millions. When the light is flicked on during the night, the walls appear alive with the red bedbugs. Everyone, except for me, is suffering from the bedbug bites, especially Malina and Tata. Mama never complains. We regularly have to singe the beds and the wooden slats in order to kill the bed bugs. We do this by pouring kerosene into the cracks of the wooden slats and bed frames and lighting fire to them.

Mama sings all day. Her favorite song is one about an old gypsy and his violin, called [Stary Cygan](#).

Stary Cygan

Hen, w ciemnym borze mieszka niebożę,

Cygan staruszek, od wielu już lat.
Smętne piosneczki z jego skrzypczki
Niegdyś płynęły... Dziś nie chce ich świat.
Znów przyszła wiosna, wonna, radosna,
I słodko w gałązkach zaczął znów ptak.
W sercu Cygana znów krwią broczy rana,
Więc szepce cicho do żony swej tak:

"Gdzie są me skrzypki lipowe?

Serce drży we mnie jak liść,

Hen, tam do miasta gwałnego

Muszę dziś jeszcze iść.

Zagrać chcę jeszcze raz w życiu

Tę starą piosenkę swą.

Jam Cygan z dziada pradziada

I żyłem tylko nią.

Jam z pieśnią żył i umrę z nią".

Więc idzie stary przez pola, jary,

Choć starość mu ciąży na plecach jak garb.

Idzie, kuleje, pot zeń się leje

I mocno ściska skrzypczki, swój skarb.

Już jest nareszcie w wyśnionym mieście,

Do sali wspaniałej się zbliża, a drży.

Serce mu wali, bo niegdyś w tej sali

Słuchano jego piosenek i gry:

"Przepraszam, mości panowie,

Czy nie pamięta, kto z was?
Grywałem tu niegdyś, przed laty,
Pieśnią słodziłem czas.

Zagrać chcę jeszcze raz w życiu

Tę starą piosenkę swą.

Jam Cygan z dziada pradziada

I żyłem tylko nią.

Jam pieśnią żył i umrę z nią".

Wtem ktoś wyskoczył z śmiechem ochoczym:

"Moi panowie, ten oszust z nas kpi!

Włóczęgo! Fora z pańskiego dwora!

Piccolo! Hejże, otwieraj mu drzwi!"

Na rozkaz pana kelner Cygana

Za drzwi wyrzucił i uderzył w kark.

Znalazła potem skrzypki pod płotem

Stara Cyganka i łkała wśród skarg:

"Już on nie zagra wam nigdy,

O ludzie bez serc i dusz,

Zmilkły już jego skrzypczki

Zamilkły na zawsze już!

Jest w ciemnym lesie grób cichy,

Śród leśnych kwiatów się skrył,

Leży w nim Cygan staruszek,

Który dla pieśni żył.

Żył tylko z nią

i umarł z nią".

The melody is beautiful, so are the words. She has a wonderful voice, with so much feeling in it. I can still hear her singing that haunting melody, but no longer remember the words...until, in 2007, when I Google'd the title I found the full text of Mama's gypsy song!

The winter is hard and very cold. There is very little food. Malina and I dig in the frozen soil in the garden plots outside our window in search for leftover carrots and beets. We eat them raw.

Bread and food are rationed with allowance for working members of family. When Mama does not work we have to share Tata's one ration among us all. We have ration cards for bread and soup. I am the one who most often stands in bread lines to buy the bread. On the way back home, a good distance away, I usually "pinch" a few crumbs of bread that "accidentally" seem to break off. I know better, and yet Mama has never scolded me for it. Occasionally I erase very carefully the penciled "X" marks from the ration card that I had just used, and buy another ration of bread. I have not been caught. Soup is very difficult

to buy in a canteen. Russian men line up for it and make it impossible for us kids to sneak in and stay in the line. The soup is normally the cabbage soup, *zupa shchi*. It is foul, and contains an occasional shred of meat. We rarely can get it. As I remember, it is us, the kids, who always stand in line up for bread, potatoes, and soup.

Another picture of our life in Kopeysk can be gleamed from Mama's and Tata's letters to friends in Lwów from whom we had rented an apartment, out of which we were deported.

(Note: several of these letters to friends in Lwów have been returned to our family by the recipients' daughter Katarzyna Drzewska, now living in Gliwice, who saved them and together with her daughter traced me here in Florida through Facebook and returned the letters).

Mama grieves that it is absolutely impossible to obtain basic food for the family such as oats, beans, or macaroni. Not even peas, absolutely nothing, she says in her letter. Oh yes, we are allowed ½ kg of barley on our ration card she says, but that is all. Literally, there is nothing to put in the pot. The children are completely ignored by the food rationing authorities. They receive no food allowance at all. A working father even with 5 children would still be only allowed ½ kg of barley, a ration assigned to one working person. Ration cards are only issued to workers. The same rules apply in bread rationing. And children are not even allowed to enter soup canteens, although they manage to sneak in occasionally; that privilege is reserved only for the workers. Mama writes that a working mother must sacrifice everything to find something for children to eat. Only in school can children buy a sweet bun or a slice of bread, she says. (Letter dated: Kopeysk, 28 November 1940)

Although Mama expresses happiness beyond measure, when she learns that a parcel is on the way from Poland and will probably arrive in time for Christmas, **Mama** is becoming more and more depressed. In her correspondence she shares her fears and concerns with friends in Lwów "because life here is so terribly difficult". **Mama** rejoices when Malina receives a letter with a small amount of money from her school friends in Lwów.

Tata braves the elements. He writes about the severe winter, which has descended upon us in full. Freezing temperatures reach down to -36°C, he says. We are braving the cold, but terrible winds blow constantly and penetrate us to the bones. We could face the challenge of the weather better if we had some warm clothing. Children do not have to go to school on those very frosty and windy days.

Tata works as a book keeper in a construction company. Although he has extensive responsibilities in several departments, he writes that he has not been issued the required work papers and therefore gets paid very little. Unfortunately he has no choice and must accept the reality. At least he is not freezing outside. Workers at construction sites are required to be at their jobs outside even in temperatures down to -45°C and in blizzard conditions. Tata manages to avoid that. He has also been able to secure a job for Mama in the same construction company. He writes that she attends to open fire wood furnaces. These wood furnaces are used in new buildings under construction to prevent concrete from freezing and disintegrating. Mama, thus, also manages to avoid working outside, but in return she has to work 16-hour shifts every second night. That is exhausting work, yes, but warmer. Considering what Mama has to wear, she could not last long working outside. If only they can both last through the winter, he remarks in his letter! Summers here are more tolerable and the next one may bring changes. Tata is clearly physically exhausted but mostly because he sleeps very little. To complete his assigned work he must work late into the night, often till 1 or 2 am; then at 5 am he gets up to go back to the office. He must work so hard, he says, to ensure that the children survive.

1941: Winter-Spring (Kopeysk; potatoes, getting beaten-up)

We find out one day that a Co-op store a couple of miles away has potatoes to sell. Malina and I get dispatched to find out. We make our way across the snow-covered steppes to the store. There are no

trees, bushes, or roads to guide us. Deep snow is covering the steppes. We find the store, line up for half a day and obtain a sack of potatoes, perhaps 20 pounds. We are exhilarated with our success. But then the reality sinks in: how do we get the potatoes back home? I drag the sack through snow, often sinking to my waist. We almost give up, and consider leaving the potatoes in the snow, hoping that perhaps we can get help, and go back to find the sack. However, we continue, but I no longer am sure whether Malina is still with me? We get back home by the late afternoon, totally exhausted.

Russian boys are out to get us again. They think everyone in the settlement is a Jew, and they badly want to bully the Jews. One winter day (January or March), with snow several feet high, a group of Russian boys, all in their teens, set out for our settlement on a bullying mission. I know about it, but refuse to take any notice. I go out to our settlement store in defiance. The store is some 100 feet from our own barrack. I see the Russian gang outside the store, but after doing the shopping, and despite warnings to wait them out, I come out regardless. I am not going to be scared by these Russians. They confront me, and surround me. The snow is deep, and there is only one narrow path with high snow banks on each side for me to run for safety of my barrack. I punch the nearest guy in the face, break through, and run. Then, almost on the steps of our barrack I slip, or get tripped, and fall. They are all over me, kicking and punching. I put both arms over my head to protect myself. Someone comes out from our barrack, and screams. The boys run. I am not hurt.

One day a pretty blond Russian girl shows up near our barrack and we talk. She teaches us Russian songs and one jingle, which I still remember: "samoliot letit z vierzhu kolami, etot nash letit z konsomolcami...". She stays with us for several hours. She is just a little older than my friend and I, and very attractive in many ways. We quickly become very friendly. However, I never see her again.

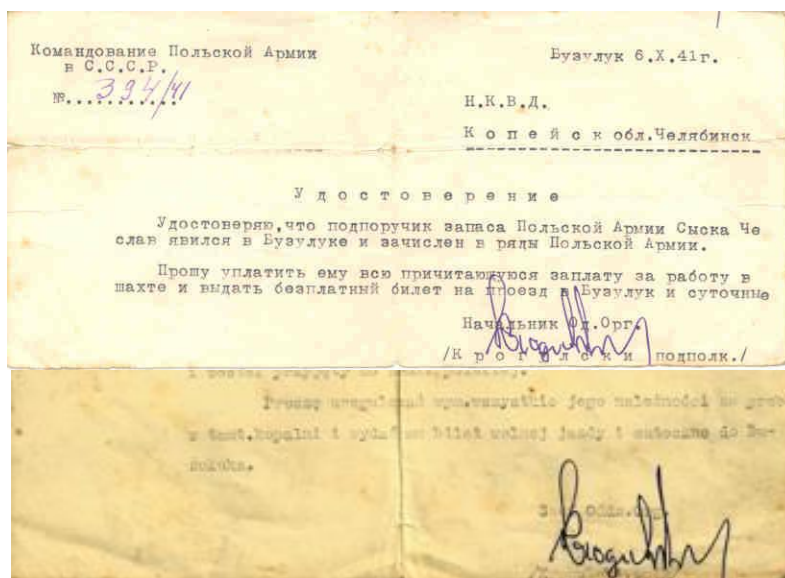
1941: Summer (Near Kopeysk; Germans, Malina, Mama, Dąbrowska sisters)

We are bathing and swimming in a river near Kopeysk. The water is cold. The beach is wide, flat and pebbly; no sand. I use my underwear as my swimming shorts. When out of the water, unbeknown to me, my wet underwear has become nearly transparent. Two sisters, twins from our barracks in Kopeysk, Micia and Ola Dąbrowska, look at me and giggle. They are a few years older. I am mortified! Mama just looks and smiles. Word has just come that Germans invaded Russia. We are excited, believing that perhaps we will be released from Siberia.

Malina and I sign up to work on a *kolkhoz* (a collective farm) to earn some food. We must walk there for some three hours each way, work in the fields, and then we get a meal! Occasionally we stay there a few days at a time, and sleep in barns. The mosquitoes are dreadful. We smoke cigarettes to keep them away. I wear a modified pajama outfit at work, with long striped pants, that someone sent us from Poland. Mama sewed buttons in the front. After several days of working at the farm, when the pay shares in the farm produce have been determined, we find we have not worked enough to receive any farm produce. Still, we did get the food, and we are satisfied. One day we are given a small bottle of sunflower oil, and gorge ourselves dipping bread in the oil.

From Siberia to Uzbekistan

1941: October - Kopeysk (Going South)



Although we hear very little about it, Germany appears very successful in its war against USSR in 1941. In October of that year, rumors reach us in Kopeysk that Polish Army is being formed somewhere in Russia, and that Russia has now become our ally. Tata is convinced that we can get out from Kopeysk and Siberia when he joins the Polish Army, but first he must get more information. He manages to get the necessary permissions from our NKVD overlords, and travels to Buzuluk (Kuibyshev) where he believes the Army headquarters is located. His vision of getting us out of Siberia drives him to heroic acts.

Without any help, he finds The Polish

Army headquarters in Buzuluk and obtains there all the necessary documents to enable us leave the forced resettlement compound in Kopeysk and travel to join the Polish Army in the South of Russia, near Fergana in Uzbekistan. He brings us a few apples when he returns. Although his authorization only covers travel for men who are joining the Army, he manages to convince the local NKVD that the families of the men and other specified families are also included in the order. He "charters" and fills two passenger coaches with the men joining the Army, and their families. I plead with Tata and Mama to take Rafał with us. His grandfather also came to beg them. In spite of the risks, they finally agree to smuggle Rafał out with us. NKVD police is very active, suspecting that more people are leaving than should. Mysteriously Tata's briefcase with all papers, money, and our deeds to land in Poland disappears. Police are not interested in finding it. Tata suspects the truck driver, who is certainly under the secret police (NKVD) orders. People on the train make a collection and provide us with some amount of money to survive. During all these activities, document checks, and very long periods of waiting, Rafał is hiding among pieces of luggage on top of luggage racks.

We finally leave **Kopeysk**, and after a brief and tense stop in **Chelyabinsk** (what can go wrong now?), we move through Ural Mountains towards **Orenburg** (Chkalov), and the South. We marvel at the spectacular beauty of the Urals. We are in high spirits, despite the loss of money. We think we are free again.

Our train stops at the main station in Orenburg (Chkalov) for a scheduled stop of 1 hour. Tata and several men go to town to get bread. About 10 minutes later we hear the engine whistle and the train suddenly pulls out. Mama is hysterical. No one will listen. We just keep going faster and faster. After a couple of days of non-stop travel we stop at a small station, and our coaches become mysteriously detached from the train, and put on a siding. We are waiting. We hope that this wait may enable Tata to catch up with us. Nobody will tell us anything. A few days later all men arrive. Tata tells us that he bribed the stationmaster in Orenburg to detach our coaches so that they could catch up with the families. Fortunately he carried a small bottle of Vodka in his pocket for just such occasions, and that did the trick. The reunions are full of joy and tears.

Just as we begin to feel secure in our progress south, we run into more problems. Our train stops unexpectedly at a small station siding south of **Aktyubinsk**. Several policemen in NKVD uniforms burst into our coach and order Tata to accompany them. They leave before anyone realizes what is happening, taking Tata with them. As we find out later, he is being arrested, his belt already removed,

and charged with activities harmful to the Soviet Union. However, he apparently rallies all his courage in the police station, "the last stand" he told us afterwards, and blasts the Russians with a tirade of "patriotic" admonitions of how Poland and the Soviet Union being now allies, have to fight the common enemy, the Germans, together; that he, as an officer of the Polish Army traveling under orders to join his unit and fight the enemy, should be receiving all the cooperation from the NKVD in order to accomplish that objective. They release him! But that is the closest call Tata will ever recall. The moment he returns to the train, the train is allowed to leave. Mama gives a sigh of relief. We, the kids, have little idea at the time that there has been a problem.

The train makes frequent unannounced stops near some villages or in plain fields, far from regular stations. We watch people running across fields to the nearest houses, some hundreds of yards away, clearly with the intention of buying food or getting water, and finding themselves left behind when the train suddenly moves on. The frantic cries for it to stop were chilling. The train never did stop.

We pass through **Tashkent**, the capital of Uzbekistan, at high speed, without stopping, and arrive at a junction station of **Gorchakov**. We are being delayed here by the authorities, and are unable to learn whether we will be allowed to proceed to our destination of **Fergana**. As we finally leave Gorchakov we realize that we are being re-routed East, towards **Frunze** and **Alma-Ata** near the China border. In the afternoon the train stops at a station in **Andizhan** where Tata organizes a boycott, and we all get out with our luggage and camp on the open platform. Later that day we visit a local Uzbek market, gape at all the fruit and vegetables, but have no money to buy it. Rafał and I trade stamps with a Russian major in a stamp shop. Finally, in the next couple of days, after sleeping on the open platform, we are being promised a train back to Fergana. We refuse to board the train until we see the locomotive coupled to the back end of the train for the return journey. We now believe that we are going to be allowed to go back, and we do. We finally reach Fergana. However, not for long!

In Fergana we find out very quickly that the local authorities, once again, have "no room" for us in that Uzbek city. They have never heard of the Polish Army camps near Fergana. Once again, we find ourselves being forcibly moved. They are sending us by train to some distant and unspecified "kolkhoz", a collective farm. Tata jumps out from the moving train, and tells us he will find us, and will be back to get us. We end up in a small Uzbek village house, where the local kolkhoz elder is eyeing Mama with very fiery and persistent eyes. She is scared, and we know we are not safe, and must get out soon. We stay there a few days, and we kids stay always very close to Mama, wondering if Tata will ever find us. No one has been sent to do any work. The Uzbek elder, with his blazing eyes, reddish hair, and small mustache, is our constant companion.

Then, early one morning, an "arba", a horse pulled cart on two very large wheels, arrives with Tata and an Uzbek driver. We pack and quickly get away from the kolkhoz. The horse is weak, and we end up walking most of the day, until we reach Fergana, and the house, which Tata obtained for us. He, by this time, already has a job as a bookkeeper in a silk factory, named Rosa Luxemburg (or was it Ilia Rosenberg?). A friendly director at the factory, of Polish descent, has helped Tata to locate the kolkhoz to which we were sent, and to secure the house. He also made it possible for Rafał and I to be hired as workers in the factory's vegetable warehouse. We were not going to starve.

One day Rafał and I fill our long pants, tied at the ankles with string, with all kinds of vegetables, including potatoes. We are stealing. To leave the warehouse, we must pass through the guardhouse. We show our ID cards, and they let us through, although how they miss the fact that we can barely walk because the pants are full of heavy produce, I will never know. Providence.

A pig farm is located next to the silk factory, primarily to make use of the silk cocoons as feed for the pigs. One day, as a huge favor, the silk factory allows us to buy a small amount of pork. We are overjoyed because eating meat is a very rare luxury indeed. However, we are in for a huge surprise. None of us, despite constantly living in near-hunger state, can eat the meat. It smells tastes and even appears to look like the silk worms and cocoons that we are seeing daily floating in water canals near our work at the silk factory.

I recall days when our food situation has become extremely desperate. We have learnt of a wetland area where a local slaughterhouse discharges its waste. We harvest from that muddy wetland minute pieces of meat, which we place into small cloth kerchiefs. Many local people avail themselves of this source of "food". Mama carefully sorts out the harvested meat and adds it to the stew of vegetables which we manage to obtain from the silk factory warehouse.

Our house is nice, with large back yard and a tree, but there is no furniture and no heat. We sleep on the floors. Rafał and I steal wood to burn in the cooking stove and to heat the house. Although we are in the South, the winter of 1941/1942 is cold. We steal wood from a railroad yard, when armed guards are not looking, or wooden stools from places like the local "*banias*", steam bath houses. We manage.

1942: March. We run into another confrontation with Russian and Uzbek boys. Rafał, Kazik (another boy traveling with us from Kopeysk) and I are walking about a block away from our house in Fergana, and are suddenly surrounded by a gang of boys. We immediately break through the ring by punching the nearest face, and running for shelter. A stone throwing battle ensues. We are outnumbered. We send Kazik home to get Mama. In a while, like eternity, she runs out screaming. The Russian boys run for cover. We return home.

From Uzbekistan to Palestine, and we all make it!

1942: It is Time to Go! Late in the evening on **23rd of March 1942**, Tata arrives in a horse driven cart to the house in Fergana, which we have occupied for several months now and tells us: "it's time to go". The house is on the outskirts of **Fergana**, about 20 minute walk from the silk factory, where we all have worked. We gather our belongings and leave quietly, after dark. We must not attract any attention from the police, or factory security. We head for the railroad junction of **Gorchakov**, which is close to the Polish Army base camp and get dropped off there. We sleep that night in the open air. The next day, on 24th of March, we board an army transport train bound for Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea. We are worried about Rafał. How shall we get him past the border guards at Krasnovodsk? He has no papers, but Tata has coached him how to respond to anticipated questions: *he was born in Zgierz, was separated from his parents, is now traveling in our care, etc.* On the way, we are given large size army overcoats to hide our civilian clothing, and our youthful appearance. No civilians are allowed on that train. Tata keeps it very quiet.

We pass **Kokand**, then **Samarkand** without stopping. All we can see around is a vast expanse of steppes (savannas). Little hopping animals (like miniature kangaroos) are everywhere. On the 26th, my 14th birthday, our train passes **Bukhara**, and then goes through **Mary** and **Ashkhabad** at night. We arrive in **Krasnovodsk** on the 27th of March, late at night. Our concern for Rafał grows, as we get near the Krasnovodsk harbor. We are told to don our large army coats and act like soldiers. Russian sentries are everywhere. They look at everyone. It is dark, and we get through the guard checks, and board the ship "**Krasnyi Profintern**" (*Красный Профинтерн*), bound for Pahlevi, Persia. The ship is crowded. We sleep on the decks. I have no idea where Mama, Tata, Malina, or Rafał are. We all have become separated. We sail through the Caspian Sea, and arrive in **Pahlevi** on the **30th March 1942**. Good-bye USSR!

As the ship docks in Pahlevi, I am struck by the traffic in the streets. Huge colorful trucks are everywhere. Cars and trucks are honking, their exhaust pipes are spewing smoke, and the streets are crowded with people. What a different world.

As we disembark in Pahlevi, I don't see Rafał anymore. We must have been assigned to different transports. I go in one truck, while, apparently, Rafał had to go by another. The wharf is busy with trucks, and vendors sell food everywhere. We are dropped off on a beach, where we spend several days, sleeping on the sand, eating peanuts and margarine. Rafał shows up on the beach one day. He tells us, in passable Polish, that he has been assigned to go with another group of young people to Teheran, Persia. We will meet up later. I am staying with Tata's transport. I think Malina has gone with Mama.

We leave Pahlevi on, or about, **6 April 1942**. A great number of civilian Persian trucks are assembled to collect us and transport us south. The Persian drivers drive like madmen. The road winds through high Alborz Mountains, and always, it seems, on the very edge of deep ravines. Below, hundreds of feet down, we see trucks like ours, smashed to pieces. We wonder what has happened to the occupants, people like us. We look with horror how close to the edge of the road we constantly appear to be driving. By nightfall we arrive in **Qazvin**, and are bivouacked in a palace belonging to the Shah of Persia. We sleep on the tiled floor of a long palace corridor.

The next day, **7 April**, Indian military drivers take over from the Persians. The trucks are smaller. We drive through a flat desert terrain, and the drivers are good. The first night we stop in **Hamadan**, and sleep in the open. On 9th of April, we arrive at **Kermanshah**. West from the campsite, we see tall mountains in the distance. The jackals are howling all around us! It is a desert. The tents are pitched on the sand. While standing near the trucks and absorbing the surrounding image, I feel hands cupping my eyes. Who's the joker behind me? I go for his crotch! Then hear a scream. It's Mama! Her transport also stopped for the night in Kermanshah; she was able to locate me and decided to surprise me. I am embarrassed.

On **April 11th** we stop in **Baqubah** for the night. On the **12th of April** we quickly drive through **Baghdad**, and stop for the night in Habbaniyah, just south of Bagdad. We swim in the Habbaniyah Lake that evening. The desert is very flat; there are no roads, just desert tracks. After two more days, sleeping under the sky, we arrive on the **15th of April** in **Mafraq**, Trans Jordan. On **16th of April 1942** we cross the narrow Allenby Bridge into **Palestine**, my "home" for the next five years.

We reach **Gedera** transit camp that afternoon. The following day we move to Qastina, a more permanent camp. In Qastina, being the youngest "solder" in the camp (just 14), I was asked (told) to read some poems from the theater stage during May 3 celebrations to a large military audience.



pt Syska in Isdut

We move to a British established camp of **Isdut** (Ashdod) on the Sea on **7 May**. I am there till 29th June 1942 (see photo). I am then transferred, despite my vocal protests, to a school camp, **JSK** (*Junacka Szkoła Kadetów*), in **Bashit**. I leave Bashit in July and re-join Tata's Army unit in nearby camp **Beit Jirja**. I still find it hard to make it on my own! However, that reprieve ends on 23rd September when I am ordered and dispatched back to Bashit. On 3rd October I formally join the 4th Cadet Company in Bashit. The entire School is subsequently moved to a more permanent camp in **Qastina** on **18th October, 1942**, and finally to a more developed and suitably equipped Camp **Barbara** on **30th July 1943**.

There is a reason for my reluctance to go back to school. I have not attended school since the end of 1939 and I have difficulty in remembering anything that I had learnt before. My first class at Bashit is a disaster; I am determined to get far, far away from this school. Tata does compromise and takes me back under his wings; he has me transferred back to his unit in Beit Jirja. When I am finally ordered later in the year to rejoin the Cadet School, back to Bashit, I am still facing a huge struggle with my "blank" memory, total lack of recall and a walk which resembles a lame man. I stoop and drag my leg, a legacy of my bout with polio in Kopeysk, Siberia. As I struggle to regain confidence I am making progress and gradually begin to excel at school in subjects like Latin, English, Mathematics (with "Buła's" help), in individual sports and in general leadership (I become company cadet captain).

The joke is that I do not study seriously. All I need is for "Buła" to spend a few minutes reviewing for me our homework assignments, before our class begins, and I am able to respond to all teachers' questions, proving I had seriously studied the assigned material. Conversely, I spend hours with "Buła" helping him with Latin and English, but that is never enough. As bright as he is in Math's he does constantly get into hot water with English and Latin.

1942: March - Freedom Route (Gorchakov, Krasnovodsk, Rafał, Malina, Mama)

Chronology of Events: (as recorded by Tata in my 1942 Diary)

- 23 March 1942 I am enlisted in Polish Army in USSR (4th Company, 26 p.p. (?), 9th Division in Tashlak
- 30 March 1942 I cross the border from USSR to Iran (Port Pahlevi) with the 26 p.p., 4th Company.
- I remain with the 4th Company till 6 May 1942, Qastina, Palestine
- From 7 May till 3 August 1942 I am assigned to 4th Company, V Battalion, II B.S.K. (?) stationed in Isdut and Qastina (Isdut from 7 May to 29 June, 1942).
- On 27 June I am detached (forced by Tata) from V Battalion in Qastina to join Cadet School in Bashit. Briefly!! I hate it. Insist on returning to Tata's Company.
- On 1 July I return to Beit Jirja, and remain there to 23 September 1942. I am attached there to the Administrative Branch of C.W.B.S., and assigned to Tata's Group.
- On 23 September 1942 I am returned (forced !!!) back to Cadet School in Bashit
- There, on 3 October I am assigned to 4th Cadet Company
- On 18 October 1942 the School moves to Qastina
- On 29 November 1942, I am "nominated" to be a Cadet
- Around 30 July 1943 (?) the School moves to camp Barbara

1942: Beit Jirja, September ("C.W.B.S." - Centrum Wyszukolenia Broni i Służb)

The following [Army communiqué](#), dated 16 Sep 1942, formally puts me on Army payroll. It was issued by the Commanding Officer of the Administrative Branch of the C.W.B.S.:

<p>[C.W.B.S. Oddział Administracyjny 16 IX 1942]</p> <p>L ds. I43/42.</p> <p>Komendant C.W.B.S.</p> <p>Proszę o umieszczenie w R-zie dziennym C.W.B.S., iż z dniem 3. VII. 1942 r został przydzielony do Oddz. Administ. CWBS Syska Jędrzej rocznik 1928 i który od 10. VII. 1942 r pobierze żołd strzelca.</p> <p>Migoleski (?)</p> <p>Dowódca Oddziału Admin.</p> <p>[Centrum Wyszukolenia Broni i Służb]</p> <p>[L.dz. 1448 dnia 18-9-42 r] STAMP</p>	<p>STAMP</p>
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On 18 Aug 1996, in London, Tata found a crumpled and half-torn Army memo, pertaining to my temporary transfer in 1942, and authorization to pay me a private's stipend. This communiqué dates my transfer from Bashit (School Camp) to Beit Jirja, Palestine, where Tata was stationed. The date was 3 July 1942. I am to receive the private's pay from 10 July 1942.

1942: Beit Jirja (Palestine; Tata, Manoli Hatzidakis, Officer)

I become friendly with a group of Greek airmen, stationed in a camp east of Gaza. Every afternoon, as the airmen pass in trucks by our camp Beit Jirja, I look for them, wave, and we exchange greetings. One afternoon they stop and ask me if I would like to see their camp and their planes. I am delighted. They will bring me back after supper. I decide I don't need to find Tata and let him know where I am. Three of the Greeks are in the cab of the truck, and many more in the back. I am invited to go in the cab. As we go and I try my English at conversation, I feel hands on my thighs, and up. I suddenly become scared, and realize this may be a trap. When we arrive at their camp, I fake distress over a key to the barrack, that I just found in my pocket, saying that my father will not be able to get into his quarters, will begin looking for me, will raise an alarm, and I will get into trouble, etc.. They buy it, or maybe I am misinterpreting their intentions, for nothing has happened, and they do take me back to my camp. I never see them again. Years later, I realize from the name written in my diary by one of the airmen, that one of the Greeks may have been "the" Manoli Hatzidakis of the *Never on Sunday* fame.

One of Tata's friends, an officer in his unit, asks me to accompany him for an evening walk. Since he often talks to me, I am glad to go. However, this time it quickly becomes apparent he is interested in pursuing his homosexual inclinations, and makes serious advances. How do I get away and not offend Tata's friend? After some preliminary explorations, I find an excuse to run. He does not talk to me anymore. I miss that.

The Arabs regularly cut our telephone lines to the camp. Almost every night a patrol is sent out to locate and repair the damage. One night, unbeknown to Tata I persuade the designated patrol corporal to allow me to accompany him on this mission. There are only the two of us. We walk in the night following the field laid telephone wires until we locate the break in an orange grove quite some distance from the camp. I stand guard with the rifle; he says the Arabs may attack, while he fixes the wires under the light from a torch. It is exciting and scary at the same time.

1943: Ain Karem -1944 (Rafał, Ain Karem; Miss Carey)

[Ain Karem](#) is a small picturesque Arab town located in the hills a few miles Southwest from Jerusalem.

In Byzantine times a small cave in Ain Karem was traditionally identified as the place where St Elizabeth and her son, John the Baptist, took refuge from Herod's slaying of the first-born. Over the cave was built a church commemorating the birth of St John the Baptist and further up the hill another church was constructed to remember the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth when both women were expecting.

Polish civilian authorities setup a secondary school for girls here in Ain Karem. The school is housed in a vacant monastery located in the hills and surrounded by expansive gardens and woods. It is absolutely a beautiful location. Malina is a student there, and Mama has been assigned by the Army to manage the provisioning logistics. She has an apartment just outside the town,



within a short walk from the school. Rafał and I visit Mama (and the girls) quite frequently, and stay in Mama's apartment. Tata also comes for less frequent visits. A very tall agaves cactus grows close to Mama's balcony. It must be 20 feet tall. One morning we hear a loud explosion, and find that it is the cactus that has exploded. Apparently that happens every 40 years, or so?

Sometime, during this period, Tata surprises me by presenting me with a camera, the first in my life. It is a German camera, Welta Freital, which he purchased from Photo Europe in Jerusalem.

There is a covered fountain in Ain Karem, at the bottom of the main street, just before the climb to the Polish girls' school. Local people get their water there, when rainwater tanks are used up. A story goes that Mary and Joseph stopped there on the way to Nazareth to replenish their water needs.

Rafał is baptized during a small ceremony in a local Church (St. Johns?) on 18 August 1944 (or was it 1943?).

One day I sense agitation and alarm at the school. The girls are saying that Rafał has a gun, that he went into the hills and is going to shoot himself. I rush in the direction I expect him to have gone, call out for him, and finally find him up the hill behind large trees. We talk. In the end he gives me the gun, and we walk down back to the school. *(Now, in April of 2002, I no longer remember the reason for his upset, but think it had something to do with an unsuccessful love affair ("affair" in the "old" sense) with one of the girls at the school. We have never talked about this episode in his life, since.)*

The Ain Karem school faculty is working hard to produce a Polish folk dance show. The dance is to be performed for Miss Carey and her English guests, at her mountain top house in Ain Karem. Miss Carey has been some sort of a benefactor to the Ain Karem School. Girls have been practicing for this event for some time. When I arrive in Ain Karem to visit Mama and Malina, I am urged to participate in the show, in a male role. There is no one else. I cannot refuse. And, there is no time to practice. The folk costumes are all prepared. We go to Miss Carey's house, where the guests are having afternoon tea, and begin our performance on the roof terrace. I blow my step, and from that time on, do not catch up with the group. It is awful; the more conscious I become, the worse my performance becomes. I want to vanish from the earth. Never again! I am sure that performance at Miss Carey's has left a mark on me. I will only compete if I am sure to win?

We befriend a local Arab family, named Abis, in Ain Karem. Their teenage son Jaal (we call him Jan) learns Polish. He wants to meet the girls at the Polish school in Ain Karem. He learns very fast and is able to converse freely in Polish. One week in circa 1945 we stay in the Abis home. The father is one of the Christian mayors of Ain Karem. There are several mayors, both Moslem and Christian. Abis family has a workshop in their house and produce wooden carvings of religious scenes and figures, for sale. Maria, Jan's sister, is a very talented carver.

In later years, we have learned, Moslem activists kill the father, because, as one of the town mayors, he approves the sale of land to a Jew. On 31 March 1997 I come across Jaal's photo, dated 4 Jan 1948, in Tata's papers in London. I wonder if Jan is still there.

1943: Allied Parade in Cairo



Our Cadet Company is chosen to be included in the Polish Forces contingent at the Parade in Cairo. We are stationed in a British camp near the pyramids in Giza. I recall an excellent desert served there one day. It was trifle with custard! The day before the parade we walked the streets of Cairo, and got into trouble when the local shoeshine boys tried to extort more money from us than we had agreed to pay. After a lot of shouting and a scuffle, we pulled our bayonets from the holsters to chase them away. Then thinking better of it, we ourselves quickly departed the scene. The parade is an all day affair, and seems like an endless meander through the streets of Cairo. We pass the reviewing stand without actually noticing it. The following day, my friend Jurek Rogulski and I go by tramway to Giza and climb the Cheops pyramid. Cheops is the English name. Egyptians call the pyramid Khufu. The view from the top is magnificent. We have a bird's eye view of the second pyramid Chephren (Khafre) as shown in the adjacent photo. We also visit the Zoo, and the Cairo Museum. It has just opened after the Rommel campaign, and the death mask of Tutankhamen is



displayed there for the first time since the Museum's closure. I also recall seeing many carriages dating back to pharaoh's times.

1944: Extract from Rafał's Diary

We leave Qassasin on a day trip to Cairo early in the morning on **August 18th**. Navigable canals run alongside the road. Boats of all kind ply the canals. The weather is cool, the road is bumpy. The Egyptian morning is beautiful. We see many indigenous birds in the surrounding fields. By 10 am we reach the bridge on the outskirts of Cairo. The bridge is open to boat traffic and our wait is long. We finally reach our destination "base", the Polish Red Cross ("P.C.K."), where we are treated to breakfast. Next we visit the pyramids in Giza and enter the inner chambers under torch lights. We then drive to Memphis to see the statues of Ramzes XII, then to Saqqara to see the oldest pyramid in existence and the tombs of Apis Bulls. We return to Cairo and have dinner at PCK followed by the final visit to the Cairo ZOO.

1944: JSK - Palestine - 1946

Father (*Ksiądz*) Lorenz is our chaplain and a religion teacher. He had studied at the Monte Cassino Benedictine Monastery and was a librarian there before WW II. We constantly bait him in the classroom and have very challenging discussions. He well understands our rebellious attitude towards church and teaches us well. When totally frustrated he had on several occasions thrown his books onto the floor. Other people I recall are: Sierż. Wilkoszewski (company chief), Ignac (Macek) Witwicki, Zbyszek (Gajda) Rybarczyk, Witold (Zośka) Jarmolowicz, Marian (Buła) Chlebik, Franek (Kapral) Ramik, Tadeusz Walląg, Andrzej Laskowski, Janusz Krawiecki, Michał Giedroyc, etc...
Camp Barbara is located near Ashkelon (Roman ruins, beach), a few miles north of Gaza.



Our cadet school – Junacka Szkoła Kadetów – is run in a quasi military fashion. We attend school in various classrooms five days a week, we are subject to military discipline and continue with our general military training (marching, rifle ranges, night guard duties, physical training, weapons instructions...). We have an excellent cadre of teachers, many were university professors in Poland. Brigadier Anderson, commander of the 9th Army British Education Group, has taken interest in our school and, through his auspices, the Group provides us with necessary school supplies. He makes frequent visits

to our Camp Barbara, where the school is located.

Years later, after the war, Brig. Anderson becomes the chancellor of the University of London. In that position, he apparently facilitated the acceptance by the University of our Cadet High School Certificates for the University entrance applications. We were not required to sit for any additional entrance examinations.

Administratively our JSK school belongs in the Polish 3rd Division commanded by Gen. Anders. His "boss", Gen. Sikorski, the commander in chief, visits us in Camp Qastina. He dies in an aircraft accident on take-off from Gibraltar on his return trip to London and is replaced by gen. Sosenkowski.

I have a tape worm in my intestines. After several unsuccessful attempts to remove it, finally the doctors achieve success. The unusually large worm is removed and preserved in a large glass jar at the camp infirmary for all to see. I was losing worm segments for some time. Successful removal occurred during full moon. I have been plagued by wet dreams (embarrassing, inconvenient, wondering what's wrong with me). I am appointed company cadet captain for a year. We live in tents, eight cadets to a tent, six if you are lucky. I am getting involved with Danusia Gorczynska, daughter of our school director. She is very fond of me.

1945: May (Jerusalem, Latrun; Rose-Marie, Bedouins)

It is May in 1945. I am determined to see Rose Marie, a movie with Nelson Eddy and Janette McDonald that I had seen before the war during our only visit to Tata's brother Mieczysław and his family in Tarnów, Poland. Despite considerable distance, I decide to hitch-hike from our army camp Barbara, near Gaza, to Jerusalem, which is several hours away by car. I enjoy the movie immensely, but it ends late. The streets in Jerusalem look beautiful, lights everywhere, but the reality of being so far from my camp begins to sink in. It gets much later when I finally get a ride in an army truck going from Jerusalem to Latrun, roughly a halfway point, where I must find another ride towards Gaza. It is now very late. However, the night is bright and calm. The full moon provides lots of light. As I sit on a low bridge abutment in Latrun waiting for some traffic, I become aware of very quiet movements around me. Soon, several young Bedouins approach me. I am concerned, but act brave. There is no traffic on the road. My sleeveless army shirt does not cover my wristwatch that I had just recently bought in the Camp store. The Bedouins want to see the watch. I remove it from my wrist, hand it over, and then say forcefully "Five Pounds", showing my hand with five fingers clearly reinforcing my statement. The Bedouins talk among themselves, hand me a five-pound note and disappear with my watch into the night.

Finally a Jewish kibbutz truck gives me a ride out of Latrun, but not far enough. To reach the next highway, I must walk through an Arab village. The standard procedure is to take your boots off, and walk in your socks to minimize the walking sound and not alert the dogs that would wake everyone. It has not been considered safe to pass Arab villages at night. After another short ride, and another long walk past another Bedouin camp, I reach Barbara, our army camp. It is very, very late, but it has been worth it.

1945: Fight Outside Movie Theater (Egypt)



I am visiting my parents in Egypt during the summer of 1945. They are stationed in a sprawling military base in Qassasin, between the Egyptian towns of Ismailia and Zagazik. Mama and Tata live in a family tent. She works as a librarian, he is with the 320 Transportation Company. Their tent is furnished in army style, but Mama has flowers, pictures, mementos that transform the tent into a home. I stay with them during my school vacations. I often enjoy going to evening movies in the base theatre. One evening, as I wait outside the theatre to be picked up by Tata, I am suddenly surrounded by a group of drunken soldiers who insist that I am a trooper from Gen. Maczek's armored division. That division fought very valiantly in the German campaign. My blue Cadet epaulets must have appeared to them similar to those worn by the armored division. It is obvious they are looking for a fight. I keep telling them I am a Cadet, but to no avail. I must prepare to fight my way out. But how? There are so many of them, and they are much older than I. I quickly punch one guy on the nose, and as he becomes momentarily disoriented I rush out through the gap. They are now really mad. Someone, very strong, grabs me and shoves me into the theater side door, tells me to keep quiet, and locks the door. Knives were already in full view. When Tata arrives in his jeep to pick me up after the movie he quickly realizes that there is trouble outside the theatre. He calls an MP Sergeant, who was there all the time, reprimands him for his lack of control. The MP tries to arrest Tata. He does not. Another group of sane people surrounds me and escorts me from my hiding place to Tata's jeep. There is a near riot going on now. We take off. The MP reports Tata for "assaulting" him. A Court Martial follows. Tata is exonerated.

1946: Summer (Jerusalem; King David Hotel, Damascus Gate, JSK)

I volunteer, but in reality have no choice, to attend a summer seminar on the subject of English terminology in math and sciences. The seminar is held Jerusalem in the summer of 1946 for graduates of our cadet High School. There are no sleeping quarters prepared for us. We pitch our tents in an olive grove garden that belongs to the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch. The gardens and the "palace" are located just outside the Old Jerusalem wall, almost adjacent to the Damascus Gate. We only have one cold-water spigot for the entire group of some 20 cadets, and there are no toilets.

The program is very intensive, but no one is trying hard. We are there to have a good time. A large group of girls who graduated from the Army high school in Nazareth also attend the seminar. Wira is among them, which makes me quite happy. Our group of cadets frequently visits NAAFI bars and enjoys

trays of beer glasses. We duck curfew patrols, and continue as if the world were at peace. We eat our meals, served by nuns, at a convent (Ratis Bona?) located in the Christian section of the Old City, not far from the Damascus Gate. One day, as we are having lunch on the roof of the convent, under canvas awnings, we suddenly hear a series of explosions and sounds of gunfire. The New City of Jerusalem has violently come to life. The sounds of sirens, bells, and speeding trucks are overpowering. We also see smoke. We are quickly ordered to stay put, and not leave the building. Later we learn that Jewish terrorist groups bombed the King David Hotel. There are many casualties. The city goes under very strict curfew. The date is 26th July 1946.

1946: Fall (Nazareth; Malina, Wira)

I am determined to visit my girlfriend Wira in Nazareth. It is autumn in 1946. My application for a travel pass has been denied, because of uncertain transportation, and the increased Jewish terrorist actions throughout Palestine. More and more military transports are being blown up on the roads. However, I believe that I can get away with it. I leave the camp perimeter through a back gate, well away from the location of our company. I am on the main Gaza to Tel-Aviv road, ready to hail a passing army truck, when a small pick-up leaves our camp gate, and stops at my side. Inside is my own company commander. "So where are you heading to, Syska?" I am already thinking of the solitary punishment I might be facing. "Just down the road to the next camp" I respond, "to get some supplies". I get dropped off at that camp, and the commander continues on. I wipe sweat from my forehead, and wonder whether I dare to proceed? Just then an army truck stops to give me a ride. I hop in. We drive past Gedera, Rehovoth, Richon-le-Zion, and onto Tel-Aviv and Haifa. We pass Hebron, stop in a NAAFI store there. I buy chocolate and cookies. I catch another "lift" to Affula, then a final one to Nazareth. I stay in the YMCA downtown in Nazareth. It is an awful place, no privacy. I dutifully see my sister Malina the next morning, and then spend the rest of my time in Nazareth with Wira and friends.

After three days in Nazareth, I must return to my camp. I am hitchhiking again. In Haifa I pick up a Palestinian Police truck going to Hebron. The driver forgets me, turns off the main road, and after about a mile finally stops in response to my banging with my fists on his cab roof. I walk back to the main road, and when I get there, I am facing a British patrol setting up a roadblock. Several armored vehicles are suddenly pointing guns at me. They think I might be a Jewish terrorist.

Their commanding officer motions me to approach. I explain who I am. He says that my explanation and my uniform are not a proof of my identity. He demands to see papers. I refuse to produce my papers. I ask him to identify himself first. There is a standoff. The guns are still pointing at me. I am stubborn, and fortunately he is older and much wiser. He stands to attention, and tells me that he is "the assistant high commissioner of the Haifa District". I point out that he has not proven his identity, either, but when he asks again for the papers, I produce my pass. The signature is mine. I forged my commander's signature. He tells me I am free to continue my journey to Gaza. I pick up a huge army Mac truck to Tel-Aviv, then hitch-hike further, and get back to Barbara, our camp, by early evening. I sneak into the camp through an orange grove, and I am just in time to join the evening roll call and prayer. My friends tell me "I have been covered" during my absence. Someone was in my bed during a check every night.

The roll call is dismissed. I am relieved. Then, my captain's voice penetrates my consciousness: "Syska!" I freeze. He calls me. "And where have you been?" I decide instantly not to lie, and face it. "In Nazareth, Sir!" He looks at me for what seems like an eternity. "Dismiss!"

1946: Letter from a pen-friend

Sometime in 1946, in Egypt, I receive a letter from England. My name and the address are badly misspelled, almost unrecognizable. I wonder how it has ever reached me. It is from an English girl Jean Horsfield. She was given my name at an Anglo-Polish Society concert in Bradford, England. The audience was asked to write to Polish soldiers, and names were given out. Jean was handed my name. I

write back, ask for a photograph, and suggest we meet when I get to England, which I believe is to happen soon.

1946: [Graduation](#). I have done well at school and graduated near the top of the class.

1947: Egypt: I hitch-hike from Barbara/Gaza to Qassasin in Egypt via Beersheba and El-Kantara

1947: From Egypt to England

I volunteer after intensive prodding from Mama to sail to England with an advance party of aspiring university students. Having just been awarded my high school diploma with good grades, and because of my good standing in the English language, I am told I should be eligible to meet university entrance requirements in England. We are scheduled to arrive in England in time to apply for the fall sessions in most colleges and universities. Our small group is apparently being given a chance to be the first from the Polish Middle East Forces to apply and hopefully enter British universities in the fall of 1947, before the bulk of the Polish Forces arrive in England. Curiously, we do not get any advice how to go about it!

I travel to Egypt, visit my parents in Qassasin, and then get shipped to Port Said to board a troopship, the "City of Canterbury", bound for England. Under way, in the Mediterranean, the ship develops engine



problem and puts into the port of Algiers. To my astonishment, the pier is totally littered with broken glass. We soon find out about the rioting that has been rampant there for some time. Local Arabs are circling the ship in small boats, and throw objects at it. Shots are fired into the air. The broken glass on the pier stops the mostly barefoot crowds from approaching the ship too closely. There are explosions in the town, and much smoke. We are not allowed to leave the ship. Two days later we move out, bound for Gibraltar, and England. We pass Isle of Man, off Ireland, and arrive, in August 1947, into Glasgow (Govan). Although it is

10 o'clock at night, the sun is yet to set. Scotland has the "double summer time". We disembark; strike a friendly conversation with local port workers from Govan, then board a train for London. We travel overnight.

1947: We are in England

While we wait, at the arrival station in London (Euston?), to be shuttled to Liverpool Street station, we read in newspapers stories about Palestine and gape at poster size news-photos, displayed on station platforms. They show dead British soldiers hang heads down in an orange grove killed by the Jewish Irgun Zvai Leumi terrorist gang. We leave Liverpool Street station, switch to a connecting train at Marks-Tee and arrive in Sudbury, Suffolk, our first destination in UK. The weather is beautiful, and water in communal showers is plentiful. Men in shower stalls look like albinos, compared to us, the new arrivals, with our Middle East tanned skins. We hitchhike regularly to Sudbury, and Bury St. Edmunds. Someone says Leicester has a good technical college. I travel there by train and learn more about it. My English is halting, but colloquially passable. Many of my friends are going to Blackburn and apply to a textiles college there. I am not interested in textiles. I decide to apply to Leicester Engineering College and they accept me! But first, I must go to Amersham in Buckinghamshire (Buck's) where I am to be officially released from the Polish Army and transferred into a so-called PRC (Polish Resettlement Corps). I meet my sister Malina in London. She takes me to the offices of The Committee for the Education of Poles in Great Britain in Cadogan Square, off Sloan Square. The Committee decides whether I am to be eligible to receive a grant to attend a university in Great Britain. They waver and procrastinate. I am so disgusted with the process, that after several visits I am ready to tell them to go to hell, and quit the school notion altogether. Malina encourages me to persist and helps me to finally obtain the grant, which I need to attend the school. Early in October, I am back in Leicester, and enter Leicester College of Technology. I sign up for classes that prepare students for the external University of London "Intermediate" exams.

1948: Leicester and London -1954

I move into "digs" at Mrs. Gray at #3 Lavender Road. Mrs. Gray is an old, gray haired lady, and constantly coughs. The house is cold and damp. On the first day she invites me into her small dining room, and serves me tea and a biscuit, then leaves me alone. I look at the teapot, the milk, and the biscuit. I pour milk into the teacup, and drink it with the biscuit. I drink all the milk, which I soon come to find out, is her total ration for a day or two! I was only supposed to use a "dash" in the tea. Another time, later, she serves a piece of smoked fish on a plate and announces that for a "nice change" she did not prepare any potatoes with it. By this time Michael Giedroyc has joined me in the "digs", and we share not only the room, but also the one double bed! Needless to say we are both ready to dispatch Mrs. Gray! We stay with her for a few months, and then move to a student's hostel at 388 Narborough Road, run by Mr. and Mrs. Faux.



I manage to get in touch with Jean Horsfield, the English girl, from whom I had received that illegibly addressed letter in Egypt. She lives in Bradford, Yorkshire; about 100 miles north from Leicester. Yes, she does send me her photograph; she is beautiful. She marked herself with an "X" to be sure I know which one is she.

School is tough. My English is barely passable. Terminology of chemistry is beyond me. I elect to replace Chemistry with a physics course of Light and Optics, the last year such a substitution is allowed. I miss much that is discussed in the class, and unable to make it up at "home". I fail my first University of London Intermediate examination, held in South Kensington Examination Hall in London in 1948, which is a pre-requisite to continuing the degree course.

I decide to continue my studies part time, and get a job at British United Shoe Machinery Company, where a fellow student, Neil Mattinson, has a connection through his father ("R.T.Mattinson"), a Director of Works there. I start as a trainee machinist in a machine shop. Tom Moore, an old hand machinist in the shop, takes interest in me and helps me in adjusting to the machine shop environment. He is close to retiring age and we remain friends. Soon, however, I get transferred to a Drawing Office, as a trainee draftsman. Gordon Thwaites is the Chief Draftsman and the Drawing Office boss. Fred Rowe is my mentor and teaches me the Office procedures. Other draftsmen include Jack Mullen with a lisp lip, and Eileen Short, daughter of Works Personnel Manager. Stanley Frampton is a design engineer and I befriend him later. I become involved in the design of shoe machinery components to be produced by a "lost wax process". I dread answering telephones, which are mounted on center pillars in the office. Since conversations are heard by the office I am embarrassed by my still inadequate English. I work in the Drawing Office between 1948 and 1949, as part time student, and between 1950 and 1952 full time. Eventually, in 1949 I pass the Intermediate Exam, and get admitted to the three-year degree course, Part I and Part II. My grant continues.

Mr. Kitchen at Leicester College of Technology is an excellent math lecturer. His rendition of calculus and differential equations makes sense and is the foundation in my further studies of math. Mr. Morley teaches Engineering Drawings. Neil Mattinson is a student, Marian Kowalczyk is also a student; Marian served in the Polish Air Force. I attend the school from 1947-1949 full-time and from 1950-1954 part-time.

Rafał is also studying arts at Leicester School of Arts. He meets Pauline and gets married. Paul Tajpowski is born in 1950. Jurek Ramik is born to Franek & Vera Ramik. Jean and I are the god-parents.

I leave BU (British United Shoe Machinery Co) in Leicester to work on diesel engine design at Perkins Diesel in Peterborough. I am very interested in internal combustion engines, especially diesel engines. The year is approximately 1952. BU denies me all vacation benefits, claiming it is not required to pay such benefits when the employee leaves voluntarily. I am upset, but can do little about it. Later, however, when I request vacation time at Perkins, I am asked how much vacation pay I have already received from BU. Nothing. On advice from Perkins I write to Employer's Association, describe my grievance, and soon receive a check from BU for all accrued vacation, noting that it's policy has been

changed, and that from then on, all employees will be paid for accrued vacations. A small victory with far reaching implications for many! I spend approximately six months in Peterborough working for Perkins Diesel. The work is boring and monotonous. I do not get to participate in the design of the engines, merely draft changes on the drawing board. I also want to be closer to Jean. She is now attending Leicester Teachers College. While in Peterborough I undergo a minor hospital surgery on my wrist. Doctor removes a "ganglion" which has caused me considerable discomfort. I live in "digs" with Percy and Alice Allwood. They have two small children. I bike home for lunch during the lunch-breaks.

Within a year I am back at BU, now working in an experimental ("X") drawing office, a much better position than the one I had left, before going to Peterborough. John Lutyens manages the X-Drawing Office and John Pope is his assistant. Capt. Hardy C.C. is the corporate Executive Personnel Director. I work full time in the Experimental Drawing Office from 1952 to 1954. When I decide to leave BU and move to London in order to continue my studies RT Mattinson makes a concerted effort to dissuade me. Cpt. Hardy follows then acknowledges my determination to leave and to complete my degree. He then offers a small stipend to help with text book expenses: £24.00 per quarter, on condition that I return after graduation for a job interview at BU. I accept, but I make him sign a release that this grant under no circumstances obligates me, in return, to accept any BU offers.

(People at BU who made a difference: Stanley Frampton, design engineer; John Lutyens; mgr X-DO, AA Rivington, engineer; Fred Raw, draftsman, my mentor; cpt. Hardy, head of professional personnel; R.T. Mattinson, works director; Neil Mattinson, co-student, son of R.T. Mattinson; Eileen Hardy, draftswoman, daughter of works personnel mgr.; Tom Moore, machinist; Gordon Thwaites, chief draftsman, Jack Moulds – design draftsman, another young draftsman Keith Blackwell, lived in Oadby)

Other Events:

My interest in engines continues and now includes the rotary engines and gas turbines. I constantly sketch various new concepts of rotary engines based on the sliding vane air compressors, which I am designing for shoe machinery. I stop this activity when I discover that a new rotary engine has just been built in Germany by Wankle.

I move from Mrs. Gray's house at 3 Lavender Road to a student's hostel at 388 Narborough Rd operated by Mr. and Mrs. Faux. We call them "Foxes". The hostel house is located close to a movie theater. Foxes close the hostel during the Summer College vacations. I move to various other digs. There is no money. I often go hungry. Mama sends parcels with cheese, bread, tea.

I rent a room on 1st floor at 18 Central Avenue: Mr. & Mrs. Krzeczowski own the house. Zośka Jarmolowicz also rents a room there. I have a small green radio and listen to music and news. Jeanka visits me there. Dr. Redzisz treats me for stomach duodenal ulcer. He prescribes bottles of barbiturates to treat the ulcer. Another couple rents there, Tola Chołyńska and her husband Kazik. Edward Krzeczowski works at John Bull, a tire manufacturer. He later dies from lung cancer.

I move to Barrington Road, a house owned by Mr. and Mrs. Rowcroft, who are friends with and fond of Marian Kowalczyk & his girl friend Edna. Later, Marian marries Edna.

Jean and I rent a large single room at Knighton Spinneys on Ratcliffe Rd. The view of the gardens is magnificent. We share a common bathroom in the corridor with many tenants and a kitchen stove with Gino Lancini who lives in an adjoining room. He owns a silver colored Triumph.



1953: We are married on 1 Aug 1953 in Bradford. Zośka is the best man at our wedding. Mama, Tata and p. Stasiu stay at Jean's house. Zośka and I stay in a cheap hotel close to the church where we are to be married. We walk from the hotel to the church. Nana hired a bus to transport the [guests](#). The reception is at the Co-op function room. Zośka accompanies us on the train to London. We continue on to our honeymoon destination in Paris by train from Victoria Station, a ferry from Folkestone to Calais and then by train. We stay again in Hotel du Theatre.

1954: Anusia is born on 6 May 1954 at Roundhill Nursing Home in Leicester.

1954: We move to London; Jean and Anusia go by train. I cycle from Leicester to Wimbledon Park with the remaining household possessions. I stop in Northampton for a pint of Guinness, encouraged by "Guinness is Good for You" advertising posters! My BSA "Winged Wheel" (a 1hp bicycle assist motor) often fails, so pedaling is that much more difficult. I arrive at Dora Rd in the afternoon of the same day. Distance I biked is approximately 120 miles.

1949: London -1954

Mama rents a room in a house off Victoria Station, upstairs; dark landing. Tata visits there from his camp in Amersham. I was there only once.



Mama and Tata move to 3 Damer Terrace, SW10, in Chelsea, off Kings Road, probably sometime in 1947/48. Battersea Power Station is located at the back of the house. The apartment is on the first floor. I stay there occasionally in a back room facing the Power Station and Thames. I study in that room. On one occasion, when studying heavily and falling asleep, Mama brews cups of strong coffee for me, late into the night, to keep me awake. That does not seem to work. That is also the period when I am corresponding with Jean and want to meet her. London seems like the right place. I persuade Mama to let me invite Jean to come from Bradford and stay with us for a few days. But I continue to wonder whether Jean is she the person in the photograph, which she had sent me some months before? I ask Malina to accompany me to St.Pancras the day when Jean arrives. At the last moment I send Malina to greet Jean alone and signal me to come if all's well. She does signal me and I realize how lucky I am.

Next Mama and Tata move to 33 Vineyard Hill Road, Wimbledon Park (1949?). Mrs. Koenig is the landlady. We occupy the second floor of this large house. It's a very spacious, sunny and almost luxurious "apartment". Giercuszkiewicz's live on the ground floor. Mrs. Koenig lives on the top floor. Jean visits there several times. One day, as she descends the wide curving staircase Mama asks her: "Jean, when are you going to marry my son"? Jean is dumbfounded, has no answer, but the seed has been planted.

1954: Mama, Tata and Pan Stasiu buy a house at 126 Dora Road, Wimbledon Park, London, SW19. Tel: WIM 1850. I sell it 44 years later, in 1998, after Tata's death. Dora Road is the next parallel street to Vineyard Hill Road. Wimbledon Park is a beautiful area.

1954: London -1956

We live now at 126 Dora Rd, Wimbledon Park. We have no income, although I expect to have my educational grant restored when I resume school at the Battersea Polytechnic in the Fall. Although Mama and Tata insist on paying our expenses until we are able to become independent, Jean and I decide to treat their help as a loan and repay it as soon as we can. We both work during the Summer and do part time work during the school year. We keep track of the money and help we have received and pay it all back later that year.



Our second baby, Roman, is born on 11 December, 1955 at Nelson Hospital, Wimbledon. Roman dies 9 days later (perforated spleen), and is buried at Gap Cemetery, Wimbledon. He never leaves the Hospital.

1954: Plastic Factory in North London. I work night shifts there two to three times a week I cycle there late at night and return in early morning. The trip takes about one hour each way, through' Clapham, the City and the North End. In bad weather the ride is very unpleasant, often hazardous. My BSA Winged Wheel makes all the difference. I am so tired and constantly on the verge of falling asleep. But, we need the money.

1954: Waterloo Station. Platform hand, porter, etc. Depressing job. I am always embarrassed when accepting tips. The pay is seven shillings an hour and the tips, less taxes.

1955: Whitbread Brewery, East London. I work there just one day. Probably the most degrading job I have touched. After fishing out a dead rat from the beer vat I decide never to return there.

1954 / 55: Lyons. Lyons Main Depot in West Kensington and various Lyons Corner Houses are good to students and employ many on day to day basis. You stand in line early in the morning and although most of the time a job is available, every so often it is not. The most common tasks are cleaning and mopping floors and loading distribution vans with crates of prepared foods.

George Thomas and Karen. Austin Atlantic. Grapes for wine. Karen's father owns a Bristol sports car.

Battersea Polytechnic 1954 - 1956. I meet Maciej Filipowicz.

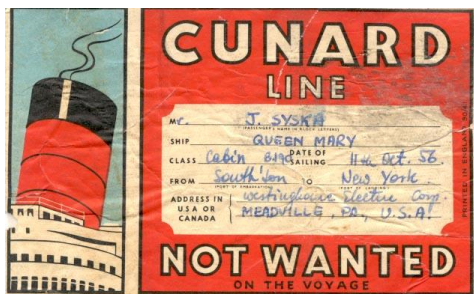
1956: Costain-John Brown, Upper Woburn Place (off Tavistock Sq ?): Jim Spicer (deceased - suicide). Supersonic Wind Tunnel, Bedford. Design Draftsman

BTH Rugby, designer and manufacturer of gas turbines for power plants and ships. Mr Forsling is an elderly Scandinavian engineer/manager. I accept a position in gas turbine design at £600 pounds/year. I promise to start my new position soon after graduating. However, later I change my mind and emigrate to US. I have guilt feelings about letting Mr Forsling down.

1956: To USA (Queen Mary, Hurricane)

During the summer, June or July, a Mr. Clarence Peck phones me at Dora Rd. I am across the street chatting with George Thomas, and Jean calls across the street to tell me about the phone call. I have no idea who Mr. Peck from Westinghouse Electric may be. Slowly I recall that I applied to Westinghouse in America for an engineering position, in response to their advertisement in some medium. I also recall that my letter of application was hand written on both sides of a letter pad sheet. Clarence Peck wants to see me in Park Lane hotel in London. I go there, and the interview takes place in his hotel room. He shows me lots of catalogues, and pictures of industrial furnaces. I have no idea what he is talking about. I have never seen a furnace. He strikes me as an honest and sincere man. I realize that I can trust him.

Two or three weeks later, I receive a letter from Clarence Peck offering me a design engineering position with Westinghouse Electric in Meadville, PA, USA, and advising me to visit the American Consulate in London to obtain the necessary entry visa. The visit to the Consulate is a disaster. Being Polish born, I must be put on a quota-based wait list to immigrate into the USA, and that, on the average, takes five years. Mr. Peck, now in Germany, suggests that Westinghouse can obtain a preferential visa, and advises there is nothing to be concerned about. When he finds out that Jean is British, he explodes in elation: "go back to the US Consulate, and use of the British quota", he says. We do. However we also find out at the Consulate in London that upon arrival into the USA I will be subject to military call up and must now sign that I acknowledge that. I object and ask what will happen when I refuse? "You will be deported" the lady Consul responds, "at whose cost?" I insist, "ours" she says. I sign the papers.



We get packed in October. In addition to many, many packages, we pack all our china into Anusia's perambulator filled with straw. Mama and Tata escort us to Southampton. We sail on Queen Mary, cabin class, departing Southampton on 11 October 1956. Jean is seven months pregnant with Rysiu. Anusia is two years old. During the second half of our voyage we are hit by a hurricane. Hours before, Queen Mary is trying to assist another ship, which has an injured person on board. The rendezvous takes place in calm waters, but during the transfer of the injured man into QM launch suddenly gale force winds arrive and the transfer is

abandoned. We proceed to New York, and the other ship to Nova Scotia, or Newfoundland, if I can remember it correctly. Queen Mary is dressed throughout with heavy storm lines to hold on to. We roll incredibly. Our cabin port seems to be looking at the water surface below one moment and then at the sky the next. Anusia does not mind. She wants to play despite rolling chairs in the cabin. We are having a good time. Jeanka, however is suffering, spends most of the time in her bunk. She is not enjoying it. The pregnancy takes its toll.



We arrive in New York on October 17th. The customs in New York are abominable. The agent makes us empty every bag and package. Finds straw, and makes us discard it, citing ban on the import of straw. We must scour the customs hall for old newspapers to repack our china. Much of it breaks in the final leg of the journey, anyway. Jean is crying from exhaustion, and the customs man suspects it is because she is worried that he might find stuff we may be smuggling in, some contraband!

We spend that day in Rockefeller Plaza, waiting for the bus to take us to Hoboken station, and then the train to Meadville, PA. Scores of people stop to talk to Anusia. She wears a long Scottish tartan skirt, far too large for her. She is a celebrity. People from To-Day TV Show invite us to participate. We decline, must catch our train. We notice a large billboard sign in Rockefeller Plaza advertising "Syska & Hennessy" engineering contractors. Wonder who

that Syska is? We eat very little: sandwiches cost about \$6.00 each! We arrive in Meadville the next morning.

END OF PART ONE

My late sister Malina's Diary, dated Sunday, 25 October 1942

Written in Betanya, Palestine. (Translated and edited by AJS in May 2010)

On the night of **28th June 1940**, the Bolsheviks sound an air raid alarm in Lwów. It is forbidden to have lights on, or be in the street. We can hear in the night the noise of heavy traffic and the sound of truck engines. Many empty trucks are parked in Kurkowa Street by the militia station. Everyone has a premonition that something awful is about to take place. At 1 am, after midnight, we hear the creaking sound from under the heavy boots of militiamen in our staircase. Dear God, they are coming for us! They are banging on our door with their rifle butts. Silence. They are banging on the door again! We have to open the door, or they will break it down. Finally Mr. Drzewski opens the door. They burst into

the apartment. One of them tells us to get ready. We know what he means. They are deporting us to Russia. Mamusia and I burst into tears. The militiaman orders us to pack quickly. He tells us to take bread for our trip. About an hour earlier, they took Mr. and Mrs. Kantecki and little dear *Grzesiu* from the convent of Franciscan Sisters, across the driveway. Then, from the 1st floor of our building, they took Mr. and Mrs. Siemiejski, and finally us. Mamusia³ does not want to take much bedding linen. But, *Tatuś* knows what awaits us. He packs some of the bedding stuff. Kasiunia sobs uncontrollably. The housekeeper does too. Pan Zbyszek is not at home. Mr. Drzewski is also crying. We do not have any warm clothes, or good shoes, and we are traveling to the Siberian frosts and blizzards. We are going without a penny. Mr. Drzewski borrows 300 rubles from his friends, and gives the money to us for the trip. The house watchman also cries. He manages to procure somewhere some bread for us. Some wet laundry belonging to pani Rządiewicz is hanging in our room. What are we to do about it? If their family is also being deported, we should take the wet laundry with us. Mamusia decides to take the wet laundry. Zbyszek Rządiewicz then drops in. He helps us carry our luggage to the militia station. My good shoes are at the cobbler's. I am now wearing some old shoes. We sit at the station till dawn. We are then transported in the waiting trucks to the railroad station. We meet Mrs. Wangowa in the truck. She is with her son Leszek and daughter Halina. And what amount of luggage they carry! How well they are equipped and how well dressed. Mr. Wang has a passport to travel abroad, and left for Cost-Rica. We arrive at the railroad station and by about 10 am we are assigned to the waiting goods wagons. One man was fortunate to escape from our wagon. Mr. and Mrs. Drzewscy are able to get through to the station by noon time. They bring us some provisions and coffee to drink. Then comes the watchman who managed to find the cobbler and brings my shoes. His wife baked a cake, which he also brings. Truly, people with golden hearts.

Later we find Rządiewicz family. They are in the same transport. Pani Rządiewiczowa is clad in a nightgown. Her dress and underwear is with the wet laundry, which, fortunately, we have brought with us. They are also without a penny. *Tatuś* gives them some of our money. While in Lwów, we have helped each other. The train moves in the evening. Dear God, we are going to Russia.

Other people in our wagon include: Pani Wangowa with Leszek and Halina, Pani Dąbrowska with Micia and Ola and her father, Mr. Gotfrid, Pani Gączowska Zofia, pani Wisłocka Kaja, Fela Wanerlich, Pan Kazimierz Śrutka, pani Maksynowiczowa Stefa, pani Stanisława Filipowiczowa, Mr. and Mrs. Więckowski, and three young men, one of them a Czech, pani Królowa with her nephew (siostrzeniec) Rysiek Sieradzki, and an old Jewish couple with a son. The other half of the wagon houses only Jews.

There are 80 people in the wagon, tightly packed. We approach the old Polish-Russian border. Initially our wagons were sealed. Then, the guards began to allow the doors to remain open. We stop and have a long wait in Dubno. Mamusia still carries our own wet laundry. She hangs it over the fence, at the station. Immediately some "*kacap*" (a derogatory term for a "Russian") yells to take it off! I also catch a glimpse, in Dubno station, of our "Export Bekon, Gniezno"⁴ refrigeration truck, which had been confiscated from us by the Russians. My heart is breaking. We traveled in that truck across Poland, from West to East. And now we are on the way to Russia! Oh, I just remembered. I left my diary at Mr. and Mrs. Drzewski in Lwów! I often think on the train about Kurkowa Street, No. 40-41.

³ In Polish, an endearing diminutive for Mama

⁴ One of the automobiles, which my father had used for evacuating the office east.

The border is here. Dear God, Russia begins. A huge triumphal red gate, most likely built by Ukrainians, greets us. A huge hedge stretches from Poland deep into Russia along the railroad track. We arrive in Szpetówka, an important Bolshevik railroad junction. From there we go into the depth of Russia.

We approach Kiev. Pani Maria Królowa recalls that she was there during the First World War. And the fate throws her there once more in her old age. We cross river Dniepr. What a huge river! We can see the towers of Kiev. The station is not very nice. Beautiful orthodox churches glisten in the distance. They say most are closed or used for other purposes. Tatuś brings ice cream and strawberries. We halt for a day on a siding outside Kiev. We are allowed to leave the wagons. We pass other deportation transports at various stations. People call out names of friends in the hope to locate them. We do not pass through Moscow. But I do see Volga. We cross it in the evening. As the train travels along the river, everyone in our wagon sings "Volga, Volga Russian river", and Wisła, Wisła! Pani Zosia has a beautiful voice. We have just crossed the supposedly rich Ukraine. Then the Urals. A large sign says the Border of Europe. We also cross river Ufa. We stop there for quite a while, and I bathe in the river Ufa. A beautiful river!

We arrive in Zlotousta at night. And here they divide our transport into two parts. The Rządkiwicz family is separated from us. Mr. Rządkiwicz comes over very early in the morning to say good-bye. He is very sad. They are not allowed to transfer to our wagon. We leave! Our wagon is No. 6. They uncouple 10 wagons, and we start towards Chelyabinsk. The remainder of the transport, including Mr. And Mrs. Rządkiwicz, Wanda, Zbyszek and Dzidek, goes to Novo-Sibirsk, deep in Siberia. Here's Chelyabinsk! The train is stopping at the station. We come out for a few moments, and then the wagons are sealed. We see through openings in the wagon sides that militia has surrounded the train. The train resumes its movement in the evening. We know we are approaching our destination. Kopeysk is not far ahead. The train stops far outside Kopeysk station. We disembark, and see in the distance a beautiful building, surrounded by mud huts. A number of onlookers in torn cloths gather. The militiamen chase them away. We sit on our luggage, in the fields, for a long time.

Oh yes, during the journey, Mamusia gets to know p. Mielnikowa. This comes about like this. When Mamusia was getting "*kipyatok*" (boiled water) pani Maryla and Kazik approached her and started a conversation. She related later that she was the only Polish woman in a wagon filled with Jewish families. As it turns out, the whole transport was composed mostly of Jewish deportees. So, when she saw a Polish face she needed to make contact. In the school building, "Kombinat", she stays close to us. P. Mielnikowa puts her belongings next to ours, when we disembark from the train. Soon after, trucks take us to a steam bathhouse, a huge facility, full of steam and water faucets. All women are gathered together, not separately. Awful! We are then taken to that beautiful from a distance building. A different view from close quarters, a shabby, cheaply made building! After two days there we are all sorted out and assigned to various workplaces. *Mamusia* and *Tatuś* are assigned to a construction company. Fortunately not to coal mines. They sell *kasza* (oatmeal) in the canteen, but we do not have a ruble to buy it with. Hunger is setting in. Mr. Śrutka⁵ buys me and Jędreka a meal. Mamusia and Tatuś come late from work. I wait impatiently for my dear tired parents. Jędrus sold his stamp collection to Russian boys. He parted with his beloved collection to get some rubles for our tired parents. He meets Rafail Tajpow. A few weeks later we move to newly constructed barracks. How terribly cramped we are there! However, each family there has its own small room. The girls, that is, Dana and Renia are confiding in each other.

⁵ Kazimierz Śrutka, the man who had been assigned to share our small room in Kopeysk? (2003 note)

And I also hear them. And, I too am thinking about someone. Initially we live in barrack #3, then #1 and finally #12. Just before leaving Kopeysk we are back in #3. I cook dinner myself and make sure that *Mamulka* and *Tatulek* (mother and father), overworked and tired, eat some food. We have a terrible heat wave that summer. The Commandant of the settlement orders us to sign up for school. The summer passes in hunger. *Tatuś* manages to get office work. He works in a small hut in an auto garage. He collects some fees. We are penniless, and incur many debts. *Mamusia* and *Tatuś* work beyond their strength. In addition to his office work *Tatuś* makes extra money doing physical work. I go to school. I show them my Russian school certificate from Lwów.

Winter approaches. It's a terrible winter; cold and filled with hunger. The temperature drops to minus 60°. The steppe winds are penetrating. *Mamulka* has no shoes, used cloth bindings, and wears summer overcoat. At work, she shovels snow and carries stones and boulders. Thank you God for allowing our family, all together and healthy, to leave the borders of this cursed Russia.

Tatuś gets sick. He has high fever, but must walk several kilometers to the clinic to get a medical note (Buletyn) to excuse him from work. Otherwise he will face prison. He has to go every day and have his temperature taken. Finally, having passed the crisis of his illness, his temperature drops. He is immediately ordered back to work. He returns home sick again. Our daily hunger pains are beyond description. Mama sells her jewelry to Domner for pennies. We are forced to sell that beautiful diamond signet for whatever Domner is willing to pay. The Jewish families around us, for instance: Mr. and Mrs. Tellerowie, Libermanowie, Kapelnerowie, and also pani Robakowa, who even bakes "*ptysie*", are doing better. Some people, like Olechowie, are dying from hunger. I spent the winter frozen to the bones waiting in line for bread. The spring is slowly approaching. The snow cover of the steppes is melting. Around us, we have puddles of water from melting snow. Despite this, it is very cold. After awhile, the sun dries the water puddles and muddy areas.

Tatuś digs a patch of land outside our window where I plant a small bowl of half rotten and inedible potatoes. Then, together with Mrs. Królowa I seed carrots, onions and other vegetables. I get the seeds in the mail.

Meanwhile, a parcel comes for me from Janina Serbanówna (Babcia) which contains a dress for me, an overcoat and a hat, also some food items. The parcel arrives at a moment when we have literally nothing to put into our mouths. On several occasions we receive money from pani Aniela Wrabec, who was my French teacher in Lwów. It appears that Pan Bóg (The Lord) each time helps us just in time. A group of my friends in Lwów also put together a parcel for us. That parcel contains some clothes for *Jędrus*. And there is some food included. Another parcel comes from *Krzysia* with books on history, religion and Polish literature.

Tatuś is taken to prison for going to the town of Kopeysk without permit. That was only a pretext.

Dear God! Amnesty, Polish Army, we are free to move; war with the Germans is over. All this news at once! *Mamusia* takes leave from her work at a coal mine. We are given official papers allowing us to leave at will. *Tatuś* is organizing the transport. *Mamulka* sells everything we possess, including our sheepskin furs. She collected 900 rubbles. She also sells bed linen and *Tatusia* overcoat. *Tatuś* left for Buzuluk in a jacket he borrowed from p. Tarwidowa. He returns after two weeks, brings for us two "*kawony*", one apple and bread. What joy! We are going south. An army is being organized there. A driver in Kopeysk steals our brief case with money and documents. By the way, Rafał is coming with us. We are going without any money. The journey is awful. In Orenburg (Chkalov), we meet people we have known. *Tatuś* goes off looking for bread. The train departs. Dear God, *Tatuś* is left behind. Three days later he catches up with us. I cried from hunger. There is nothing to eat. Close to us, p. Litmanowa is

urging Romek to eat more cakes, while I am crying in hunger. Thank God Tatuś was able to catch up with us. The atmosphere in our train wagon is bad; we have no money. There are quarrels. People are making collection for us. Pani Robakowa tells us she will make sure Tata will never be an officer in the Polish army. What we have to endure. They accuse *Tatuś* later that he has collected more money than he had paid to charter the train wagon. God forbid for having any dealings with such people. At one time, a Jewish guy in Russian uniform wants to search our belongings (to steal something, no doubt). *Tatuś*, being in charge of the wagon, does not permit the search. We do not have anything with us, anyway. But soon after militiamen appear and take *Tatuś* away. We do not see that, nor hear anything. Other people see it, but do not protest. They all turned away, there are no witnesses. Just as the train begins to move, *Tatuś* appears in the last moment. He was jailed, but manages to get out. He keeps his head on his shoulders. God, what a journey!

We are ordered to disembark in Andizhan. Local authorities will not let us go through to Fergana. At one of the railroad junctions, in Gorchakov, most of the Jewish people leave the train. We sleep outside on the platform. How freezing it is, it exceeds human imagination. Mr. and Mrs. Litmanowie remain on the platform, while the rest of us board another train back to Fergana. We disembark again, and stop in a local park, full of dirt. Soon, a militiaman appears. He checks our papers. Then tells us we can move to a tea house next to "Shetkomotalce". It is not far. Finally we get there. It is warm in the teahouse. We drink tea, and go to sleep. Next day, two men arrive, both of Polish ancestry, one an engineer. One is Sokolowski, the other Górski. They promise *Tata* work in the factory. Oh God, what a happy event for us that might be! *Tatuś* waits, but no call for work arrives. *Tatuś* constantly looks for work. We do not have a penny. And, we are being thrown out from the teahouse. There are no rooms to move to. At last, pani Aszenbergowa finds a tiny mud hut on the delta between rivers. The mud hut comprises a tiny kitchen and one room. We moved there with Rafał, pani Mielnikowa with Kaziu, p. Aszenbergowa, Mr and Mrs Propsztainowie. Mr Propsztain has died. We have to enter the house bare foot. We walk directly onto bedding blankets spread on the floor one next to the other. Each day I shovel mud from the kitchen floor and scrub it. Awful mud! The rooms are always damp. *Tatulek* works in "Shetkomotalce". He issues ration books for bread and sugar. But we go terribly hungry for a month until he gets paid. All of us share the cost of rent, which is 300 rubles a month. And we have to pay three months in advance. Rafał is covered with lice. He has no underwear. But we all are full of lice. Something terrible. Weeks pass.

Finally, one night, the militiamen appear at the door. They order us to pack, saying that all Poles are to be grouped in the Kazakhstan. Another forced journey. However, before we reached Tashkent the train is turned back, after an intervention of our authorities. They find that those scoundrels are deporting us north to Kazakhstan. But they refuse to allow us back into Fergana. They are taking us to a kolkhoz (collective farm) deep in Uzbekistan. We stop for three days in Ivanovo. We refuse to leave the train and be taken to the kolkhoz. They refuse to allow us buy bread, and we finally had to leave the train. As usual, we had no money, dressed in rags, hungry, cold. We are transported on arbas (two wheeled carts) for 40 kilometers. Mud everywhere and we are terribly cold. Frozen, we finally reach the destination, and a tea house. A few days later we are assigned a mud hut. *Tatuś* realizes we will die of hunger there, leaves three days later, and walks 30 km to Fergana, to look for work. *Jędrusi*, p. *Stasia* and I walk to work. *Mamusia* has no clothes which she can use for work. We gather cotton. There are bogs all around. Our feet are constantly wet. After day's work, which seems like eternity, we return to the mud hut. Our farm leader tells us to ride a donkey to work. I agree without thinking. He walks behind me, urging the donkey, but at the first opportunity this Uzbek swine fondles my breasts. I said nothing about it to anyone out of fear. Thank God. He could have easily killed me, or do other things. I come back home safely. I do not tell *Mamusia* anything so as not to alarm her. I understand the dangers to white young girls in this lawless country. I become very cautious. Later, my shoes fall apart and I stop going to work.

Jędrus does not go either. The Uzbeks stop providing us with food except for three small black "Syrian" breads full of mould, and a little thin soup. No other food.

At last Gorchakov! 10 more kilometers to Fergana. But this Uzbek is not willing to take us any further. This is probably in revenge for not getting tea from Mrs Mielnikowa. He stops and refuses to move any further. He is throwing our belongings out of the *arba*. Mamusia adopts a new approach. She starts screaming that he is trying to cheat us, shows him a letter from *Tatus* and declares that the letter is an official order for him to deliver us to Fergana. He is of course an illiterate fool and believes. After a haggle and in exchange for a piece of laundry soap he takes us to Fergana. We manage to get a house after lengthy negotiations with Wala Siramowicz. Our relationship with p. Litmanami deteriorates. From here, *Tatus* rejoins the Army in Tashlak. We meet there Zbyszek Barczak. It is impossible to describe the poverty and life, and the suffering in Uzbekistan.

THE END.