

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 31 July – August 2008

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A tribute to a long serving leader of Toronto's Ivansker Community.

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as told to David Blumenfeld and Audrey Taichman
transcribed and edited by Norton Taichman

An idyllic childhood in Ivansk is shattered by the onset of World War II. Henriette and her parents flee to the Ukraine but cannot escape the Nazis. Five terror-filled years follow, culminating in the murder of her parents. But Henriette survives, builds a new life and bears witness to the Holocaust.

Ivanskers Seeking Ivanskers: Belinda Milrod (London, UK)

I am Belinda Milrod. Please help me locate members of my extended family. I will summarize what little I know about my Ivansk ancestors.

Both my great grandfather, **Moishe Asher Milrod** (b. 1863) and my great grandmother, **Beila Ruchla Wagman** (b. approximately 1860) immigrated to Canada from Ivansk. Beila's mother was a Teperman and the Tepermans also left Poland for Toronto.

In Canada Moishe (Morris) Milrod worked for J. Teperman as a wrecking contractor.

If anyone can provide any leads regarding the names **Wagman, Teperman, Tepperman, Milrod or Milrad**, I would be very grateful.

My e-mail address is: MorganMildman@aol.com

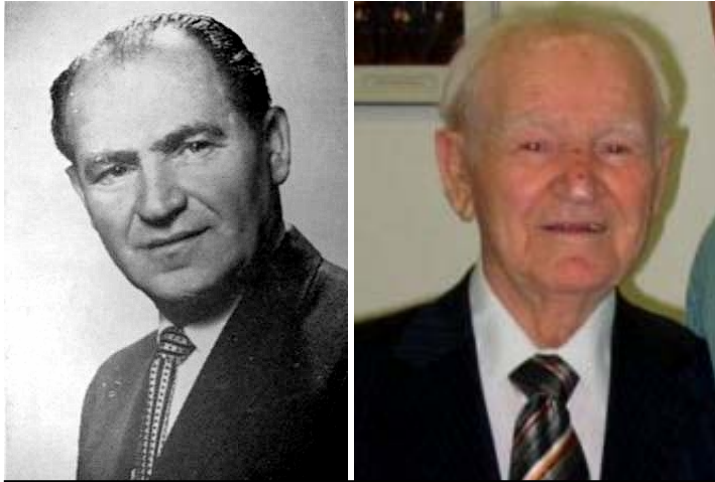
To all our readers, A Happy, Prosperous New Year.

~ 5769 ~

**A year filled with good health, close family and friends,
much humor and abundant peace!**

In Memoriam: Henry Lederman (1910 - 2008)

by Gary Lipton (Toronto, Canada)



Henry Lederman

Left: 1961. At the 30th anniversary of the I. M. B. S.
Right: 2006. At the 75th anniversary of the I.M.B.S.

Henry Lederman was born in Ivansk (Iwaniska) in 1910 and died in Toronto on 10 May 2008. His death marks the passing of one of the last and probably the eldest of the “original Ivanskers”, those who were born and raised in the shtetl. His early life hearkens back to an era before 20th century conveniences such as central heating, plumbing, telephones and automobiles. This was a time of Polish nobles, tsars, Cossacks and pogroms, a time brought to life in the literature of Sholem Aleichem, Ansky, and Mendele Mocher Sefarim. Although very much a modern man who adopted the ways of Canada and the New World, Henry was also a link to the Ivansk of our ancestors.

By the time Henry immigrated to Canada in the mid 1930's he had already lived a rich life in Poland. At his funeral, Rabbi Moshe Stern recounted that Henry had studied with the *Hafetz Haim*, the revered Rabbi Yisrael Meir (HaCohen) Kagan who was born in 1838 and taught until his death in 1933. Perhaps the Rabbi's longevity was infectious as both men lived long lives, together amounting to almost 200 years! His studies with the Hafetz Haim imbued him with a profound awareness and respect for the great culture and traditions of Eastern European Judaism.

For over 70 years Henry and his long-time friend Arthur Lipton led the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society. While other Landsmanschaften have floundered the IMBS remains strong thanks to their dedication. To use a biblical metaphor, Henry and Arthur are akin to Boaz and Joachim, the two pillars of Solomon's Temple, both of which supported and graced the temple.

Henry embodied old-world refinement, as well as the ability to embrace modern conventions. Those who worked with Henry will remember him as respectful of others as well as a keen listener. His enthusiasm for life was remarkable and contagious. His health began to deteriorate last year when his beloved wife of 72 (!) years, Minnie, died. Nevertheless, he continued to fulfill his duties as treasurer at the Steele's Memorial Chapel, attend meetings at the IMBS (still driving his big Cadillac to the meetings), and serve as the patriarch of the Lederman family. Henry will be deeply missed by his sons Martin and Sidney, and the entire extended Lederman family.

On a personal note, each time I addressed the Ivansker Society about the progress of the Ivansk cemetery restoration project, Henry always listened attentively. In our conversations afterward it was as if he was seeking information about himself, about his childhood. The relationship was reciprocated because for me Henry was the living link to the pre-Holocaust Ivansk.

Henry was guided by sound moral principles. In 1961 he served as president of the IMBS when it celebrated its 30th anniversary. He wrote an introduction to the Jubilee Book. His own words best

summarize his personal life and legacy:

“Our Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society is now celebrating its 30th anniversary and thus entering into its period of maturity. It is strong, not only because of its stable financial position, but also because it believes in a healthy principle- love thy neighbour as you love yourself. We inherited this principle from our parents and it has been passed from generation to generation. We continue to maintain the spiritual and moral beliefs of our parents. We value with great respect the memory of those of our relatives and friends in Ivansk, as well as European Jewry, who were murdered by the Nazis. We hold dear and precious the traditions that we brought with us from our native town.”

A Child of the Holocaust

by Henriette Kretz (Antwerp, Belgium)

as told to David Blumenfeld (Israel) and Audrey Taichman (USA)
transcribed and edited by Norton Taichman (USA)

*[Ed: **The world is small but Ivansk is big.** That's how I've come to see things. Other than my own family I knew a handful of Ivanskers before The Ivansk Project began. Now I have hundreds of landsmen all over the world. Many of them have become just like mishpachah (Yiddish; family). Ivansk and Ivanskers are important to the way I perceive who I am.*

*Many “new found” Ivanskers appear out of nowhere, in the most unlikely places and under the most unusual circumstances. **Henriette Kretz** is a case in point. She lives with her family in Antwerp, Belgium. She knew nothing about the “big world of Ivansk”; likewise we had no idea that she existed. That changed when **Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk**, a member of our Action Committee, chanced to tune to a channel on Warsaw late night TV. Here's how Greg describes what happened:*

It is one of those long, dreary winter nights back in 2004.

At last the kids are asleep, and I get to go through the morning's newspapers and take my daily TV fix. I randomly select a channel. Let it be a documentary or a talk show, whatever. It doesn't really matter. I'm half asleep anyhow. Newspapers and TV - ten times better than any sleeping pill. Lethargy and fatigue sink deeper and deeper; my eyes no longer focus; my brain is shutting down. The welcome end to the day is at hand.

Suddenly, familiar words emerge from the tube and slice through the descending fog.

“IWANISKA!” “I lived in Iwaniska...!”

I'm wide awake – on the screen a woman in her seventies tells how she survived the war. The tale of a Jewish survivor must be - *ex definitione* - a mixture of atrocities and miracles, human brutality and divine intervention, bitter sweet memories of loss and survival. It's an account of a little girl the same age as my daughter, Basia. It's difficult to believe what I hear, that it really happened. Somehow, I hold back the tears.

"Childhood in the Shadow of Death" - the title of the documentary speaks for itself. The woman's name is *Henriette Kretz*. She now lives in Antwerp and is a member of “The Children of Holocaust” movement. And she's from Ivansk!

Just another set of coincidences? Or was it meant to be this way?

Why and how did I land on this particular channel, one among the hundreds beamed into my TV from satellites circling above?

No time to think. The documentary is ending; I *MUST* record the names of the producer and the director. Panic – their names flash quickly across the scene. I've got to get them down so I can find out how to contact Henriette. Does she know about the Ivansk Project? Is she in touch with other Ivanskers? Is she aware of what we are trying to accomplish? Does she have maps, photographs, papers or letters that would light up the past? No matter what, I must contact her!

Sleep is impossible now. I surf the web searching for Malgorzata Imielska, the woman who directed the documentary. After a couple minutes, maybe hours - I can't say which - I find it! I send an e-letter to Mrs. Imielska who replies that she has forwarded it to Henriette who will get back to me.

I wait anxiously to hear from Henriette. At last her letter arrives: she intends to be in Poland very soon and suggests we meet up in Warsaw. A few weeks later we touch base in the lobby of a hotel near the Old Town. I show her recent photos of Ivansk, copies of The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter and fill her in on The Project and the people I have come to know.

Henriette listens and views the documents with great interest. She smiles.

Another member of the dispersed Ivansk family is discovered and brought "home".

I can't help smiling as well.

When Greg told me of his discovery, I immediately contacted Henriette. Thanks to e-mail and Skype we have kept in close touch, and she has even translated Lazer Naiman's harrowing testimony from Hebrew into English. Lazer's story tells how he survived both the Nazis and the Russian Gulag and will be published in a future e-newsletter.

*I finally met Henriette in Warsaw in November 2007. She joined Greg, David Blumenfeld, my daughter Audrey and me in a vain attempt to alter the course of events that embroil the reclamation of the Ivansk Cemetery (see e-Newsletters No. 28 and No. 29, 2008; an up-date will be forthcoming soon). It was in Poland that Audrey and David interviewed Henriette for the e-Newsletter. Before leaving Warsaw for Ivansk, Henriette took Audrey and me to meet **Irena Sendlerowa** (in English, **Sendler**), the "angel" who saved some 2,000 Jewish children destined for annihilation in the Warsaw Ghetto. Being in the company of this remarkable woman, who had been honored by many nations and even nominated for the Noble Peace Prize, was a singular privilege and the highlight of the trip. Irena Sendlerowa died in May at 98 years of age.*

Henrette's account of her Holocaust childhood will shake you to the core. A 5 year old child suddenly becomes enveloped in a brutal war in which she and her parents are targeted for destruction simply because they're Jews. What happened to them will make you wonder whether we will ever find a way to live with one another. Henriette's survival against impossible odds is remarkable in itself. Just as amazing is her ability to recall events that happened long ago. We are indebted to Henriette for sharing her moving and powerful narrative.

* * * * *

A Child of the Holocaust

My name is **Henriette Anna Kretz**.

I was born in 1934 in *Stanislawów*, a small city about 40 km south of *Lwów* near the Carpathian Mountains. At that time these centers were part of Poland; now they are in the Ukraine and have been renamed *Ivano Frankivs'k* and *Lviv*, respectively.¹ While I was still an infant, my parents and

¹ **Lwów (Lviv, Lemberg, L'vov)**. Lwów is the Polish name for this city that is now situated in the Ukraine. In the late 18th century Poland was partitioned by three imperialistic powers, Austria, Germany (Prussia) and Russia. Austria controlled the region known as *Galicia* and changed the name Lwów to *Lemberg*. After World War I the area reverted to Poland, but in World War II the Soviets occupied the town, which they called *L'vov*. Following the collapse of the USSR the city became part of the independent Ukraine and is called *Lviv*. We shall refer to the town as *Lwów* to reflect its name during the period, 1919-1945.

I moved to Iwaniska where we lived until the outbreak of the war. Ivansk was a paradise for children; for me, it was the happiest time in my life.

But the Nazis destroyed my idyllic world and transformed me into A Child of the Holocaust. Only other "Children of the Holocaust" ² can fully appreciate what this means and how it feels. When we come together it is like being with my own family; we relate through the pain of the past; we don't have to say very much; we understand without words.

Despite being only 5 years old when war began, I have vivid memories of those times. I remember these "souvenirs" through the eyes and the mind of a child. And in telling my story I will try to convey what happened from a child's perspective rather than superimposing what I know now.

My Family



Henriette Kretz
Poland, 2007

My story begins in Vienna where my mother, **Elsa Schops** was born in 1909.

Her father, **Henryk Schops**, was born in Poland and studied law in Vienna, and that's where he met and married my grandmother, **Regina Schops**. Henryk died before I was born, and I was named after him. During the First World War Henryk was an officer in the Austrian army. His portrait hung in my grandmother's house; in uniform he appeared very proud and dashing. My grandmother tells a story that when they were courting my grandfather fought a duel with another man to protect her honor. My mother was an only child, and she studied law in Lwów. After Henryk's death she took over the law firm until she married my father in 1932 or 1933.

My father, **Maurycy (Maurice) Kretz** was born in 1903 in Lwów where his ancestors had lived for over 300 years.

His great grandfather served as a steward to a wealthy, landed nobleman, a descendent of the fabulously wealthy Potocki family. I would liken them to the "Rockefellers of America". The family controlled vast estates, villages, forests and other resources in Poland and the Ukraine. Jews commonly administered these estates because they were relatively well educated and able to read and write. It was considered a great honor for a Jew to hold such a position.

[Ed: More information on the relationship between Jews and the Polish nobility in pre-modern times can be found in The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 24, May-June, 2007.]

Eventually my great, great grandfather purchased his own flour mill. His son, my great grandfather, became a successful wholesale supplier of grains and purchased a very prestigious 17th century home in Lwów (the house still stands). He fathered 3 or 4 children and at 80 years of age moved to



Elka (Mund) Kretz
Lwów. ~1930-1935

² "Children of the Holocaust" is an association of persons who survived the Holocaust and who, due to their Jewish origin, had been doomed by the Nazi occupation forces to extermination and, for that reason, were imprisoned in ghettos, concentration camps, death camps or forced to conceal their identity, who were 13 years of age or less when the Second World War broke out or who were born during the war. You can learn more about the Children of the Holocaust on its web site: <<http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/>>

Jerusalem where he is buried on the Mount of Olives. His son, my grandfather **Jakob Kretz** carried on the grain business, built his own home adjacent to his parent's, and married my grandmother, **Elka Mund**. During the First World War the Kretz family feared that the Russians and the Austrians would confront each other in the Ukraine and that this could lead to the destruction of Lwów. They decided to flee to Vienna to stay with another branch of the family and returned to Lwów in 1918 when the conflict was over.

Jakob and Elka provided a rich cultural milieu for their 10 children, all of whom were well educated. My father played the violin, and all but one of his siblings were gifted musicians.³ My father was determined to be a physician, but quotas limited the number of Jewish students admitted to Polish medical schools. So, he went to study in Padua, Italy. He spoke several languages, including Polish, Ukrainian, German, English and Italian and had no problem earning his certificate. The family helped him with expenses, but he earned extra money playing the violin in cafés and bistros on the Piazza St. Marcos in Venice.



**My Parents
Maurycy (Maurice) and Elsa (Schops) Kretz**

Jakob died before I was born but I knew Elka, my paternal grandmother, as an imposing and able woman. I was the youngest child in the family and was fortunate to have many aunts, uncles and cousins living in Lwów. Whenever the family came together, I became the center of attention; everyone seemed to dance around me.

My parents were married in Lwów in 1932 or 1933 and I was their only child.

My Childhood in Ivansk

My parents moved to Ivansk soon after I was born where my father was employed by the government as a district physician. I don't know what prompted him to accept this position but assume that it provided a better income than the post he held in Lwów. We lived in a single story, wooden house on the Road to Staszow, a few steps from the community well [see *Kesten-Brauner Map on our web site*]. A room was set aside for my father to treat patients. He also used a horse-drawn cart to call on patients in neighboring farms and shtetls. I remember our living room being filled with light, potted flowers and plants. My bedroom was small and painted white. The kitchen had a large stove and Hela, my nanny, slept there in a small alcove with yellow curtains.

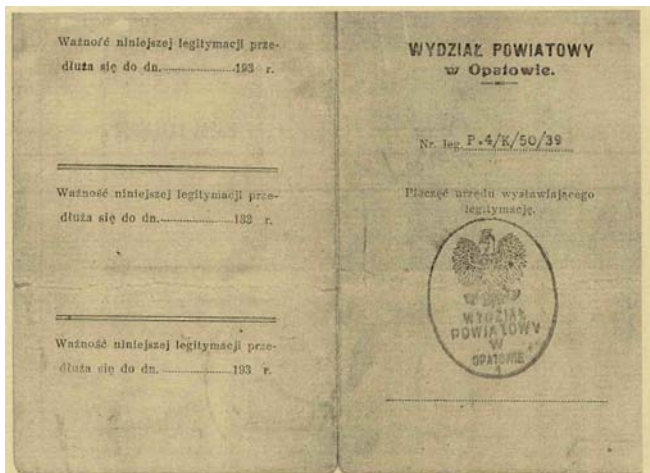
Behind our house was a large garden where my huge black dog, "Rolf" was tied to a "roving chain" during the day so that he would not threaten my father's patients. In the evening when he was set free, Rolf would usually push me to the ground and smother me with juicy wet kisses. "Rolf, Rolf let me go! Let me go!" I pleaded. I could not escape. I loved it!

³ In general this artistic background was characteristic of other branches of my father's family. For instance, a cousin, Leopold Kretz was an accomplished sculptor. Born in Lwów in 1907 he studied at the Fine Art Academy in Krakow and moved to Paris in 1931 where his first exhibition took place in 1932. In 1945 he studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Paris and his work was exhibited in France, London, Brussels, Prague and Vienna. He died in Paris in 1990.

For me Ivansk was a wonderful place. I had everything a child required: parents who adored me; Hela, my nanny, was like an older sister; Rolf who watched over me and many children to play with. I was never hungry or abused. Ivansk was nestled among trees, meadows, orchards, forests, horses and cows. The earth was “fat” and dark and yielded bountiful harvests. The water sparkled; the air was clean and fresh; our bread was “real bread” made from wheat grown in the surrounding countryside; our milk was produced by healthy cows, not poisoned with chemicals or other additives.



My mother was tender and loving. I adored her. Her eyes were light green and she wore her brown hair tied in a bun; when she let it down her hair fell to her waist; I wanted to have hair just like hers. Often, she and my nanny, Hela would take me for walks to the saw mill; Hela’s parents lived nearby. On the way, we passed through the neighboring fields and woods that were ablaze with bright flowers. One time I was bitten by a goose and my mother soothed and comforted me.



I remember helping some older peasant girls pick the ripened corn from the fields. When the job was done they set fire to the corn stalks and roasted potatoes in the ashes. I can still taste those delicious burnt potatoes. Ivansk was a place where you felt close to the natural world; it was a safe haven for a child. My love for nature stems from that time. In my heart I have always felt like a peasant.

My father’s physician license.

For relaxation my father played his violin in the evening. He tried to teach me how to play and purchased a “pint-sized” instrument for the purpose. But I was not an inspired student. Nevertheless, I believe I inherited his interest and love for music.

As the local physician my father was accorded a social position that elevated us above the common folk. My parents had several friends who formed the elite of the town including the Chief of Police, Mr. Bakas ⁴ and, the pharmacist, Mr. Kowalczewski. We even counted a landowner of noble extraction as one of our acquaintances. He lived in a large mansion somewhere in the surrounding area; it took about 20 minutes to reach his home by horse and wagon.

Many people came to our house to engage in conversation with my parents. On one occasion Mr. Czervonka, a teacher was our guest. He was very short in stature, and his wife had to bend low to exchange a kiss. I was fascinated by this little man. Seated on a table I was eye-to-eye with him

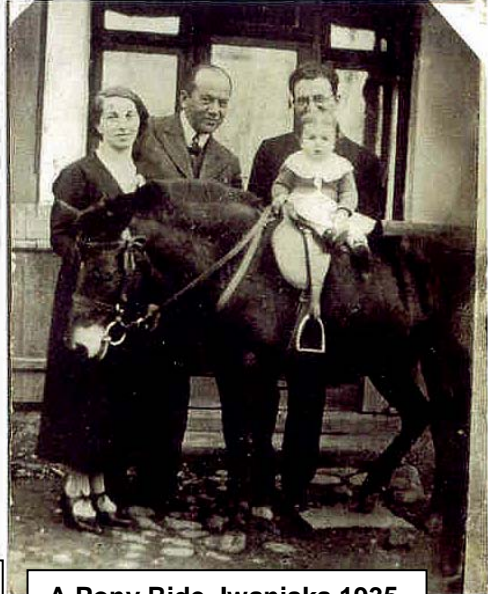
⁴ Mr. Bakas is mentioned in the testimonies of Yitz’chak Goldstein (Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 3, 2004) and Andrzej Martynkin (Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 29, 2008). As Chief of Police he helped his Jewish neighbors against the Nazis occupiers. He apparently was killed by the A.K. [*Armia Krajowa*, the Home Army]; he may have been suspected of cooperating with the Germans or being too friendly with communists.

and I gave him a cuddle on the head saying, "Please little boy, come and play with me." He was furious, and my embarrassed parents soundly rebuked me for this indiscretion.

As I said I had many playmates. We did things that children do everywhere. We played hide-and-seek, climbed trees and made houses out of sticks and scraps of wood. Most of my friends were peasant children. It did not matter whether anyone was Jewish or Christian. For most of my childhood in Ivansk I was not aware that tensions and suspicions affected the way both communities interacted with each other.



Aunts and Uncles in Happier Days, Lwów, 1932 or 1933.
(Left to Right): Aunt Mania (Uncle Gustav's wife); Uncle Gustav Kretz; Uncle Bernard's wife; Uncle Bernard Kretz; Aunt Helen (Uncle Oscar's wife); Uncle Oscar Kretz (visiting from Belgium)



A Pony Ride, Iwaniska 1935.
My mother and my father (behind me). The man in the middle may be Uncle Bernard visiting from Lwów

When I was about 4 years old I was playing in the garden with some friends. I told them, "You must obey me because my father is a doctor." My father overheard what I said and ushered me into his consultation room. "You can only be proud of your own accomplishments", he said holding on to my shoulder. "You must never feel superior to others because of someone else's accomplishments." This was my first lesson in humility, and I have tried to follow my father's teachings. He was a man of principle and honor, as you will see later in my story.

Hela, my nanny, was a beautiful soul. She came to us from a poor Polish family when she was about 16 years old, and she loved me without reservation. Hela told me fairy tales which I readily memorized. When I wanted to impress my friends or guests, I would take up a book and pretend to read one of the stories. People thought I was pretty smart, but in reality I was just a spoiled little brat. (After the war Hela became a district nurse, attributing my father's influence for her decision to study nursing. She married and had children and grandchildren. Today, Hela is a widow and lives in *Ostrowiec* and I visit her whenever I'm in Poland.)

Hela was very religious person and sometimes would take me with her to church. My parents were secular in outlook and consequently I had little understanding of religion in general and Judaism in particular. In the church I observed the strange, august happenings with great interest.

One day Hela's sister took charge of me; it was a Catholic holy day and I accompanied her to the church to mark the occasion. A solemn procession lead by the priest filed down the aisle, flanked by members of the congregation. The priest was dressed in a long robe that reached the ground.

His feet were completely hidden. He seemed to be gliding on air. My curiosity could not be contained; I had to see if there were any legs under his robe. As he passed in front of me I went over and lifted his robe. His face turned crimson and his anger was palpable. The women who witnessed what I did began screaming, and Hela's sister gave me a good whack on the face to appease the crowd. Otherwise, I think they would have lynched me. From that day I've always shifted to the other side of the road whenever I saw a priest approaching.

My earliest encounter with anti-Semitism occurred when I was about 5 years old. I was playing with friends in an apple orchard. The trees were heavy with green apples, which were not yet ripe but nevertheless delicious to eat. Perhaps they were so tasty because we were taking them without the farmer's permission. I wanted to join some of the kids who were picking apples in the trees. An older boy who was not one of my close friends exclaimed, "You are a Jew. You are a coward and cannot climb the tree."

I was deeply troubled, and when I arrived home I asked my mother, "What is a Jew?" She began explaining about religion, about going to synagogue, about prayers, and so on. But it was too much for me. I quickly lost interest and my mother let it go. As if to reinforce the unpleasant experience in the orchard, the boy who called me a coward took ill with typhoid fever. My father looked after him, and when he had recovered he brought a basket of green apples to our house as a sign of conciliation. My parents warned me not to eat the fruit but I paid no attention and secretly devoured several apples. The next day I awoke with terrible diarrhea; it was my birthday and I could not even eat my own birthday cake.

Before the war there were other, more ominous signs of anti-Semitism. I remember my mother preparing packages of clothing that I had outgrown.

"What are these for? Where are you taking them?" I asked.

My mother responded that they were Jewish people who had been thrown out by the king of another country.⁵

"What is a Jew?" I asked. "You are a Jew. I am a Jew."

"But why does the king want to throw them out?" "Because he's a very bad person."

It began to dawn on me that being Jewish might not be such a good thing.

⁵ **Deportation of Polish Jews from the Third Reich.** Henriette's mother may have been referring to the deportation of approximately 17,000 Polish Jews from Germany and Austria in October 1938. The circumstances were as follows: in March 1938 the Polish government enacted a law that would withdraw Polish citizenship from nationals residing abroad for more than 5 years and who had "lost contact" with the Polish state. The law was to become effective on 29 October 1938 and would have serious consequences for Polish Jews living in The Reich. The Nazis feared that the law would obstruct their plans to force Polish Jews out of Germany while the Poles dreaded the prospect of a massive return of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. To forestall Polish attempts to block the "homecoming" of these people, the Germans began arresting thousands of Polish Jews on 26 October and ordered their immediate expulsion to Poland. Polish authorities permitted initial transports to cross the border, but the bulk of the deportees were refused entry. They remained stranded in "no man's land" under deplorable conditions until the Poles were finally pressured to accept them.

It was during this crisis that Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Polish Jew residing in Paris, learned that his parents, who had been living in Germany since 1911, were amongst those trapped at the border. On November 7 he took it upon himself to wreak revenge by assassinating a minor German official in Paris. His mindless act provided the pretext for the Nazis to unleash their infamous *Kristallnacht* pogrom on 9-10 November.

My World Turns Upside Down

War was a meaningless concept to me but that changed in 1939. One September morning I sensed that something bad was happening. My father was hastily packing a bag as if he was about to embark on a journey. My mother was extremely nervous, and Hela was crying. The radio blared urgent messages about something I could not understand. No one, not even my mother, was paying attention to me. I felt like a dethroned princess. Now I understand that this was the day (1 September) when Germany invaded Poland and that my father was being mobilized into the army.

Outside, people were staring at the sky where airplanes were darting to and froe. To me they looked like butterflies. People were screaming, "They're our planes!" It was an air battle.



Henriette's World: 1934-1944
Poland & The Ukraine (Today's boundaries)

My father disappeared. One or two days later he returned in a lorry carrying many injured soldiers. Being a physician's daughter I was accustomed to seeing sick people. But these men had appalling wounds; their bandages were soaked with blood and many were in terrible pain and could not move. They were taken into our house and filled the living room and bedroom. Neighboring children came to see what was happening. Feeling self important, I proudly conducted them on a tour pointing out that this man was suffering from such and such a disease and that another was afflicted with a rare and serious malady. The following morning the soldiers were taken to hospital.

In the distance we could hear cannon fire, and my father knew that nothing could stop the German advance. He decided that we had to leave Iwaniska and try to reach Lwów to be with other members of our family. A taxi was hired to take us there.

Mr. Kowalczewski, the pharmacist and his son came to say goodbye. And the nobleman who lived nearby rode up on his horse carrying his saber to bid us adieu. Then, the taxi appeared and we were joined by a Christian man (a notary), his wife and their daughter, and together with Hela we set out to the southeast.

This was the first time I was ever in an automobile. The roads were packed with refugees fleeing in all directions. About half way to our destination our companions decided to return to Iwaniska. I don't know how long we were in transit, but when we finally arrived in Lwów the Russians were already there.⁶

My father's family welcomed us with much warmth and a sense of deep relief. The house was overflowing with relatives, and it was decided that I would stay with my grandmother while my parents went to be with an aunt and uncle. That first night I slept in my grandmother's bedroom

⁶ **Nazi-Soviet Pact:** On 23 August 1939 the Soviets and the Germans signed a pact agreeing to invade and partition Poland. On 1 September 1939 the Nazis moved into Poland on 17 September the Soviets followed. Poland did not stand a chance and evacuated all its forces to Romania and a Polish government-in-exile was set up and operated from London throughout the war.

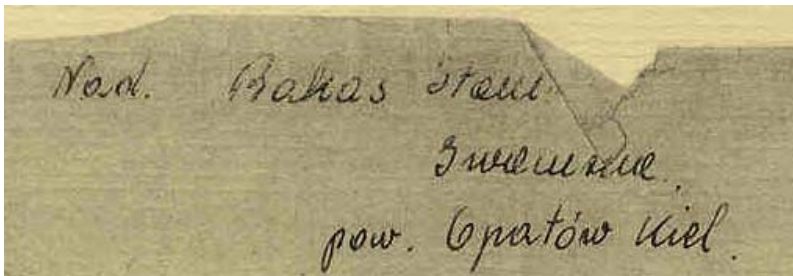
and witnessed her removing her teeth and placing them into a glass. It was a revolting sight. The next morning when my mother returned I told her that I would not stay with my grandmother anymore because she was a witch.

We stayed in Lwów for about a year. Although I missed Iwaniska, I was oblivious to what was happening in the outside world and went on with the business of being a child. But my parents did not feel secure. I suspect they had misgivings about life under the Communists and perhaps they had a premonition that we would not be safe in Lwów in the long term. This probably explains why they began exploring the idea of leaving the Ukraine for Romania and then moving on to Palestine.

While this was happening a friend from Iwaniska came to Lwów and stayed with us for a couple of days. His name was **Lazer Naiman**. Lazer was about 20 years old; several days earlier, he and a few comrades escaped from German-occupied Ivansk and made their way to the Russian zone. My parents invited Lazer to accompany us to Romania. But Lazer had other plans; he left for the north to join up with family in Białystok. Alas, my parents decided not to head for Romania, but I don't know why. [Ed: Lazer Naiman's story will appear in a future Ivansk Project e-Newsletter.]

In late 1940 or early in 1941 my father was appointed director of a sanatorium for children with tuberculosis. This meant that we had to move to *Sambor* (Polish; *Sambir*, Ukrainian), which was about 40 km southwest of Lwów. He spent long hours in the sanatorium, located in a small village some distance from Sambor, and could only get home once or twice a week. In my mind the sanatorium will always be associated with the smell of camphor that permeated his clothes.

For me the big event was being enrolled in kindergarten where we sang songs to the glory of "Father Stalin". His portrait was omnipresent in the hallways and in the classrooms.



The signature of the Police Chief in Iwaniska, Mr. Bakas on the back of an envelope addressed to my father in Sambor.

Late one night we were roused from sleep by commotion in the streets. Peering out the window we could see a stream of Russian lorries leaving town loaded with people. In the morning my mother quickly dressed me and gathered some of our belongings. She hired a peasant to take us by horse-drawn cart to the sanatorium where we met my father. It was 22 June 1941, the day the Germans began "*Operation Barbarossa*", their code name for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Sambor was only a few kilometers from the border of German-occupied Poland, and it would be a matter of hours before the Nazi tide would engulf us. There was pandemonium at the sanatorium: Russian doctors, nurses, laboratory staff and other personnel were hurriedly boarding lorries to escape. They pleaded with my father to come with them, but he refused. He felt responsible for the children who would be left behind because their parents had not yet been able to come and get them. He would not abandon them. This was another example of my father's sense of honor and responsibility.

My parents and a peasant removed the remaining children, placed them in the cart and took them to our house. I was very pleased because I did not have to go to sleep that night. In the morning their parents came to fetch them. But it was too late for us; the Germans were already in the town.

Under The Nazis

Our situation quickly deteriorated. Almost immediately my father was barred from working at the sanatorium but he continued to see patients in our house and at a clinic designated only for Jews. Also, Jewish, but not Polish children, could no longer attend school. I was supposed to enter the first grade and my parents were anxious that I not fall behind. So they hired a private tutor to teach me reading and writing.

I remember the day when we were sitting in our living room: the door suddenly burst open and two German soldiers barged into the room. They began smashing our possessions searching in every corner for “Gold! Gold!” My parents were in shock and did not resist. The Germans found no gold but stole our radio and my beautiful Shirley Temple Doll with curly locks and bright eyes that opened and closed, a gift from Uncle Henryk, my father’s brother. My parents did nothing; how could they let this happen? This was the first time they did not protect me. I think I was angrier at them then at the Germans.



Later all Jews were forced to vacate their homes and move into the town’s Jewish quarter (called the *Blich*). At this time the Blich was not a closed ghetto; Jews could still circulate through the town but it was dangerous to do so. They were compelled to wear the Yellow Star and risked being accosted by Germans and Ukrainian soldiers and even the local population. So most avoided leaving the Jewish quarter unless it was absolutely necessary.



We were assigned a room in a large dilapidated house that was overflowing with other people. A rabbi and his large family occupied a few rooms on our floor. This was the first time I had really come in contact with orthodox Jews. They were very foreign to me: their clothing and their manners were strange and they spoke Yiddish, which I did not understand. I did not remember seeing such people in Iwansk.

But soon I befriended the rabbi’s daughter, Vera; she was my age, about 7 years old. We had fun together, but most of the time we played indoors because orthodox kids feared being molested by Polish children.

1942: A letter addressed to my father in Sambor from his friend, Mr. Kowalczewski (the pharmacist) in Iwaniska. Both Sambor & Iwaniska were in Nazi hands.

Behind the garden of our house there was a sort of make-shift playground that was used by Polish kids. I longed to join them and said to Vera, “Come on, we’re going out to play.”

“No, I am afraid”, protested Vera.

“Don’t be afraid. All my life I have played with them. So what’s to be afraid?”

So we made our way to the playground. As soon as the Polish children saw us approaching they began shouting, “Jewess! Jewess!”

The “chief”, a boy about 13 or 14, approached us and asked me, “Do you want a slap?”

Naturally I said, “No”. He gave me a hard slap on the face.

“Do you want me to slap you again?”

I would not fall for this trick a second time and said, “Yes.” And he hit me on the other side.

I began to cry and Vera and I ran back to our house. I was beginning to appreciate the meaning of prejudice and how it was being specifically aimed against me, a Jew.

During this time my parents explored the possibility of returning to Ivansk because they thought we might be safer there. Although the mail was censored by the Germans, it was still possible to communicate with people in Ivansk. So, my father wrote to friends to find out what was happening in the shtetl. He received a coded response: “The climate is not good for your health. Stay where you are.”

“People noises” were a constant feature in the house we shared with the several other families. Their comings and goings, conversations, arguments, shouting and bawling were always in the background. There was very little peace or privacy.

One morning I woke up and everything inside was uncommonly quiet. But outside whistles were blowing, dogs were barking and men were yelling. My parents were pale and very frightened. “Be very, very quiet!”

Then from below we could hear aggressive commands, “*Raus! Raus!*” [Out! Out!] and doors were being smashed with rifle butts. Soon, heavy footsteps came up the stairs and stopped in front of our door. It was our turn.

“*Raus! Raus!*” My father opened the door and was confronted by two fearsome German soldiers.

We were ordered into the hallway. The white-bearded rabbi, his wife and children were already going down the stairs. No one said anything; no whimpering; no crying. Vera looked at me as if she no longer knew who I was, her eyes glazed and distant.

Out in the street groups of Jews were being assembled. We joined them and were marched off to the “gathering place”.

I can’t explain it, but I was not afraid. However, I felt deeply ashamed. We were guarded by men carrying rifles; I was old enough to know that this was the way criminals were treated. And I felt like one. On the sidewalks Polish people watched as we passed; somehow, they looked as if all this was quite natural.

Then we arrived at the “gathering place”. People were being herded into the square from all sides and pushed into lorries by the Germans and their Ukrainian helpers. Most of those that were taken away were deemed unfit to work; the old, the sick, the frail and young children.

We stood to the side. A Ukrainian officer was only a few feet away and my father approached him. “I am a physician. I’ve taken care of many of your people. Can you help me and my family?”

The guard looked at us and without any obvious signal went over to a German soldier and announced, “These three will be with me.” And then beckoning to us, “Come with me.”

We were lead towards the *Dniester River* at the outskirts of town. On the way the man spoke with my father and told him he was from a village near Kiev and that he had a wife and children. He said, "I will make an alliance with the devil if this will free the Ukraine."

When we reached the river he told us to hide in the bushes and then fired three shots into the air to dupe his accomplices into believing that he had disposed of us. He took me in his arms saying, "Pray for me" and then disappeared.

How does someone react to such a man? He murdered people in cold blood. But in this instance something gave way inside him. It does not absolve him from collaborating with the devil, the Germans. But it does say that even in such a person there a spark of decency.

In the morning we returned to our house in the Jewish quarter. Inside, everything was still in place except no one remained. I knew I would never see Vera again. (About 6 years ago I found out where she was buried and went to Sambor to pay homage. I stood silently before the grass mound where 15,000 murdered people lie buried.) Some young, fit adults could still be seen outside on the street but not a single old person or child. I seemed to be the only one left.

Alone

Soon afterwards a rumor began to circulate that the Germans planned to convert the Jewish quarter into a closed ghetto. If that occurred my parents realized our chances of survival would be diminished, especially if we tried to remain together. They understood that I was in immediate danger and that the best chance of saving me was to find a Polish family that would take me in and treat me as one of their own. And so they set about pursuing this idea.

I don't know how they did it, but they identified a poor widow who was willing to have me despite the grave danger. Yes, they gave her some money, but that was not the real reason why she offered to help. She was a devout Christian and regarded it as a sacred duty. When I was told what was about to happen, I cried bitterly. It is still so painful for me to think about this. And as you can imagine, it broke my parents' hearts to leave me behind. But they were brave enough to do what had to be done. They vanished, and I knew nothing of their whereabouts until months later.

So I went to live with this Polish woman and her 12 year-old son, whose name was Yacek, in a tiny one-room flat with a kitchen, outside the Jewish quarter. She treated me with great kindness and affection and taught me Catholic prayers and songs, which I loved to sing. Behind a wardrobe she prepared a little hiding place for me and warned me to remain invisible if anyone came, but only a few people ever visited. I was kept indoors all the time so as not to arouse suspicion. A sofa was procured for my bed but it was infested with bedbugs. Yacek poured petrol on the couch, and the lice scurried in all directions to escape. They reminded me of the Jews trying to flee from the Germans.

I do not know exactly how long I remained hidden in the flat, but estimate around 3-4 months. During this period the Germans established a ghetto in Sambor.

One day the widow went into town, and I remained with Yacek. There was a heavy knock on the door; quickly I hid behind the wardrobe. But through the tiny interstices I could still see into the room. Two men stood in the doorway, one in German uniform and the other in civilian clothing. They began searching the place. While they were preoccupied, Yacek ran down the stairs and escaped. As the men neared the cabinet I knew that I would be discovered. I came out from my lair and boldly asked, "What do you want here?"

"You are a Jew", one of them said.

"No, I am not. My name is Anna Kaplovitch and I live here with my aunt."

"No, we know you are a Jew. Come with us. Put on your clothes."

I began to cry but obeyed, and I was lead down the stairs to the outside. It had been months since I had left the dingy apartment and the dazzling light overwhelmed me. I felt unsteady on my feet and almost fell over. The civilian told the soldier to help me. But he protested saying, "How can you ask me to do that? I am a soldier and in uniform."

The civilian took me by the arm and I was escorted to a prison reserved for Jews. I was ushered down a corridor. One of the guards asked (in Polish) the man in civilian clothing, "Where did you get that nice little ape?" Believe it or not I was vain enough to be flattered at being described as "nice".

Prisoners were kept in detention cells until sufficient numbers were assembled and then they were put on the train to Belzec death camp. Even as a child I knew what this meant and realized that I would not be spared.

I was pushed into a cell packed with women; there was just enough room to stand or sit but not to lie down. Several women began squealing, "*A Kindt! A Kindt!*" (Yiddish; "A child! A child!"). Despite their wretched state they were warmed by the sight of a little girl and made a special place for me near the only window. Soup was brought in, but I refused to eat. This caused great concern, and they earnestly begged me to try to eat. I said, "I'd rather die from hunger than be shot." They could not console me.

Then the door to the cell opened, and a newborn baby was thrown in. Luckily, he was caught by one of the women and was not injured. The women bundled the naked baby in my coat and soaked a cloth in water that he sucked on, and with that he fell asleep. I took great pity on that child and vowed, "God, if I can get out of here, I will take this child with me."

As if to grant my wish the man who brought me to this place appeared, called my name and removed me from the cell. I was overjoyed. But in my ecstasy I completely forgot about the child and the promise I had made to save him. I was not, after all, the hero I wanted to be.⁷

As we proceeded down the prison corridor I passed a group of male prisoners who were being assembled as a work party. One of them grabbed my hand and told me to move into their midst. The prisoners formed a ring around me so as to make me invisible to the German guards. The men were marched to the ghetto and I was hidden among them. When we came to a halt, one of them

⁷ For many years the memory of this child haunted me. And then an incredible coincidence occurred. In 1990 I returned to Sambor searching for information on where my parents had been buried. I sought help from the local representative of the "Children of the Holocaust" who invited me to stay with her and her Jewish mother. On the train to their home, we struck up a conversation with a Polish man who shared the same compartment. He was about 50 years old and told us that his dying father revealed that he was a Jew and that his mother had given birth to him in the same prison where I was incarcerated. His name was **Jerzy Bander**. In an instant I knew that he was "my boy". He did not know how he came to be saved, but in my mind I have come up with a possible scenario: when the women prisoners were deported, the baby was left behind but was not noticed because he was wrapped in rags and was too weak to cry. He was discovered when the cell was being "cleaned" and those who found him took pity. Would you believe he was placed in the same orphanage as me but I did not know this at the time? Eventually, Jerzy moved to Israel; we corresponded for some time but have lost touch with each other.

pushed me out of the column.

I could not believe what happened next. There, standing only a few feet away were my parents! They fell on their knees weeping and hugging me with great emotion. I was so overwhelmed that I remember very little about what happened next and fell into a deep sleep lasting about 24 hours.

When I awoke I asked, "How come I am alive?"

My parents explained that after they had left me with the widow they returned to the ghetto. As mentioned earlier, Yacek escaped when I was taken prisoner and ran to the ghetto where he found my parents and told them what had happened. He probably knew of my parent's whereabouts because they continued to pay his mother to shelter me. (I never saw Yacek and his mother again, but I found out that both survived the war.) My parents then contacted a Jew who had been collaborating with the Germans and gave him money to seek my release. Perhaps this man bribed the guards and possibly some of the soldiers to let me escape.

My Family Temporarily Reunited

My parents and I returned to their house in the ghetto. We were hungry all the time. The pain in my stomach was constant and all I could think about was food, food, food. We were always scrounging for food and even ate grass to put something in our stomachs.

Even though the ghetto was now almost completely deserted, I came in contact with a few children who helped relieve the boredom. Do you know what we played? "Jews and Germans", a game akin to "Cowboys and Indians" only now the Jews were trying to escape from the murderous Germans. Despite our weakened physical state, and even in the face of starvation and death, children seem to have the resilience to find an excuse to play.

A Jewish shoemaker still operated from his shop in the ghetto. I was standing nearby when an SS officer, together with a little girl (his daughter?) and an Alsatian dog (German shepherd dog), came to the shoemaker's hut. The girl and the dog remained outside while the SS officer went inside, presumably to have something repaired. I stared at the girl; we were about the same age. She was so beautiful, so clean and dressed in such a lovely bright dress decorated with flowers. By contrast, I was ugly, dirty and unkempt and covered in rags. She looked right through me and I sensed that she did not see me as a human being. I asked myself whether I was indeed an "*Untermensch*" (a subhuman), not really a person. It was a solemn moment I shall never forget.

My father made plans to get us out of the ghetto. He sought the help of a former colleague, a Ukrainian physician who had worked with him in the sanatorium. During the Soviet occupation, this man had been sought by the Communist authorities because he was suspected of being a Ukrainian "nationalist", a "subversive". My father helped him to evade arrest by disguising him as a patient and removing him from the sanatorium on a stretcher.

After the Germans took control of the Ukraine this man did what he could to repay my father. He contacted us and was able to enter the ghetto, probably by bribing the guards. My father asked if he would help my mother and me escape, but my father indicated that he would not leave: "I am the last physician in the ghetto. They still need me. I'll stay and join you later." Another example of my father's sense of duty.

My father's colleague took my mother and me outside town to the home of a Ukrainian fireman and his Polish wife. We were put up in one room. Not long after, my father's friend came to tell us that the ghetto had been liquidated and that everyone had been taken away. My mother fainted believing that my father was dead. But a few nights later he appeared. My father saved himself by

swimming across the river that bordered the ghetto. The riverbank was lightly guarded because the current was treacherous and the Germans regarded it as an unlikely escape route.

During that winter we stayed with the fireman and his wife. One day he told us that the Germans had discovered Jews hiding in a neighboring dwelling. Everyone in that house was shot. Naturally the fireman was fearful of what could happen to his family, but he would not put us out into the street. Instead, he offered to hide us in a coal bin in the basement of his house. We remained there all winter. The fireman brought us food, and we lit our single candle only when it was time to eat. Otherwise, we remained in complete darkness unable to see one another. To keep me from going mad, my parents told me stories about their families and their lives. A Jewish man was also given shelter with us in the coal bin. But he stayed only for 3 days. Later, he would betray us (see below).

When spring arrived the fireman decided we would be more comfortable in the attic, which was bathed in light. Now we could clearly see each other; I was disturbed to see how very old my parents had suddenly become. My father was only in his early forties and his dark, black hair had turned completely white. At first the attic was a blessing but with the onset of summer it turned into a sauna and we suffered terribly. In addition, my father was a man not given to idleness; the endless days and nights with nothing to do began to affect his emotional status.

Some time later we heard footsteps coming up the ladder to the attic; it was dusk and this was not the time when the fireman usually came to see how we were doing. The trap door opened, and two German soldiers appeared in the opening.

"Jude?"

My father stood up and in a proud tone responded, *"Yah"*.

Outside on the street the fireman and his wife stood in silence, white as ghosts. I don't know what happened to them but assume that they were shot on the spot. As for us, we were lead away, presumably to prison and then to annihilation.

My father asked one of the Germans, "Who betrayed us?" The soldier revealed with some satisfaction that the man who had shared the coal bin with us had been captured and in an attempt to gain his own release told them where we were hiding.

This time my father must have known that escape was impossible and in a determined voice he exclaimed, "If you are going to kill me, do it here. I don't want to suffer any more."

"Wie Du Willst." (As you wish.) And the soldier began to draw his pistol.

Then my father threw himself on the man and yelled at me, "Run! Run!"

I was like an animal. I did not think. I just ran as fast as I could.

I heard a shot and my mother screaming. Then more shots. Then nothing.

I knew that I did not have my parents any more.

I kept on running and finally could go no further. I had nowhere or no one to go to. I was completely alone. I was standing in front of an abandoned house that was surrounded by thick bushes, and I crawled into the thicket and fell asleep.

At daybreak I awoke cold and covered with the morning dew. The sun had risen giving promise to

a beautiful day. Despite the horror of what had happened the previous day, everything around me looked beautiful. I cannot explain it.

An Orphan of the Holocaust

What shall I do? Where shall I go?

I gathered my thoughts and remembered that there was someone who might help me. My father had tended to a patient who was suffering from cancer; she was a nun and the director of an orphanage. I had met and spoken with her several times and she was always very friendly. I decided that my place was in that orphanage; so, I set out to find it.

I walked through the town in the general direction where I thought the orphanage might be. It was market day and as I passed through the town square I came upon a stall displaying religious articles. I stopped to look at the pictures and when the woman who tended the booth saw me she began yelling, "It's a Jew! It's a Jew! I know her!"

Within seconds I was surrounded by a crowd of onlookers.

"Are you Jew? You are a Jew!" she kept on babbling.

I remained calm. I was a child but I realized that now it was the time to grow up and behave as an adult. And you know what I did? Placing my finger close to the side of my head, I began to twirl it in circles to indicate that the woman was a screwball. It worked; it saved me.

I kept on walking and eventually found the orphanage where **Sister Celina Kendzerska** recognized me. She had already been sheltering other Jewish children and without any hesitation took me in.⁸

About a month later the Soviets came in and for us the war was over. But for my parents it was too late. We had survived for 5 years against all odds, and now, only days before liberation they were no longer with me.

A New Life

A woman (her name was Mrs. Menkes) who worked for one of the Jewish refugee relief agencies came to the orphanage, which was now run by the Russians, to identify Jewish children and try to reunite them with their families. I was interviewed and as a 10 year-old was able to provide details about my family. I am not sure if she represented one of the major relief agencies, such as the American Joint Distribution Committee; in the earliest days after the German retreat from Poland several small groups were active in searching for Jewish children.

⁸ Sister Celina saved 11 Jewish and 2 Gypsy (Roma) children. She belonged to the order, "**Sisters of The Family of Mary**". **Matylda Getter**, Mother Superior of the Order in Poland organized the rescue of hundreds of Jews, including many children. She told her sisters that saving Jewish children would save their own souls. The Order has been designated as **Righteous Among The Nations**. In a cruel twist of fate the Soviets suspected that Sister Celina had collaborated with the enemy because German soldiers had been billeted in the orphanage. This turned out to be a perfect cover for deflecting any suspicion that children were hiding within. Eventually, she was freed but could not return to her post as the Russians installed their own people in the orphanage.

