

LINDENBAUM AND LANDAU FAMILIES COLLECTION, circa 1918-1945
2006.226.1

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Appendix A. Biography of Rebeka Ilutovich (née Lindenbaum)

The following biography of Rebeka Ilutovich (born Renia Lindenbaum, 1917-) is housed in the donor files of the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. The author of the biography is unidentified.

Rebeka Ilutovich, Tel Aviv, Israel

Rebeka Ilutowicz was born as Rebeka Renia Lindenbaum in 1917 in Warsaw. She is the youngest daughter of Tobiasz Lindenbaum (d. 1939) and Curtla Rozen Lindenbaum (d.1942), who lived at 27 Nalweki Street. Tobiasz was a part owner of that building and administered it as well. Curtla took care of her six children: Dawid (b. 1902); Wella (b. 1904); Sara (b. 1908); Abraham (b. 1909); Leon (b. 1910), and Renia, the youngest in 1917.

Renia attended the “Schtrauch Schlesinger” Jewish Gymnasium in Warsaw, where she joined and became quite active in “Ha ‘Noar Ha’Zioni” Zionist youth organization. After graduation Renia attended accounting school in preparation for immigration to Palestine, where her two brothers: Abraham and Dawid were already settled. In 1937 Curtla Lindenbaum visited Palestine to check if it was possible for the family to settle there and she decided that the climate was too difficult. The family was to remain in Warsaw.

Renia started to work and save to go on as many trips as possible. On 27th of August 1939 she went on a cruise to the Baltic Sea, which ended the next day. The German invasion of Poland started on September 1, 1939. In early October a group of friends, Leon Ilutowicz (1914-1997) among them, planned to flee occupied Poland and invited Renia to come with them, but she felt an obligation to stay with her parents.

On October 8, 1939 German soldiers entered the Lindenbaum apartment to loot and beat up Tobiasz Lindenbaum. Two days later he died during the night of an apparent heart attack. Renia took over her father’s job as the building administrator, even after a German *Treuhandler* was nominated. She was the only provider for her mother and grandmother.

In July 1940 Renia again met her future husband Michal Landau, who managed to escape from the Łódź ghetto. She had met him during his Law School studies and their mutual Zionist activity. Shortly after his arrival he contracted typhus and was admitted to the hospital, which was a hospital just by name. There were no medications and no food in this ghetto hospital. Renia was stricken by typhus as well and she was taken care of by her mother at home. The very moment she felt better Renia made sure to take Michal out of the hospital and bring him home. It took a long time and a lot of effort to bring him back to health.

On November 11, 1941 a proper Jewish wedding took place in a rabbi’s study and Renia and Michal were married. Sara Sala Kunigis, Renia’s sister, insisted that Renia should wear her white wedding dress, from nine years before. The whole Lindenbaum family gathered for the first and last time in the ghetto. Sala even baked a carrot cake.

In early 1942 Renia’s grandmother died in her sleep and Renia’s mother Curtla died in May 1942. On July 22, 1942 the mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto started. Renia’s sister, Wella Goldberg was deported and murdered in Treblinka. Her husband Mietek Goldberg and son Sewek survived in the ghetto till that last liquidation in 1943 when they were deported to Trawniki and murdered.

On September 6, 1942 the Germans ordered all remaining Jews to gather between a few city blocks and formed a so called “cauldron.” 32,000 so called “life numbers” or work permits were

distributed before this *Aktion* and according to the German intentions only able bodied and productive Jews should remain in the ghetto. During the *Aktion* 54,269 Jews were deported to Treblinka, where they were murdered; 2,648 were shot and killed during the *Aktion* and some 400 died of natural causes or committed suicide.

Renia prepared the most important photographs and documents and hid them on her belly. Renia and her husband Michal Landau let their sister-in-law, Rutka Labenska Lindenbaum, who was in her ninth month of pregnancy, between them and covered her belly with a raincoat. By an utter miracle they managed to pass through the German selection and returned to their dwelling in the Schultze factory. Two days later Rutka Lindenbaum gave birth to her daughter Krystyna with assistance of Dr. Solowiczyk. The baby was smuggled to the Aryan side and placed with a Polish woman, Michalina Janiszewska, who kept her till 1946.

On the night between the 8 and 9th of February 1943 Renia and Michal Landau escaped the ghetto. They really had nowhere to go. Their only contact, Zygmunt Podsiadly, as Polish policeman, took them to the Czachurowski family in Grochow, in the Praga district. There they were placed in an attic, where no one could stand up. At night they could leave and get some bread and soup and go to the toilet. Once a week they got some water to wash up. In March, Mr. Czachurowski said that Renia and Michal had to leave the attic and hide in the open field because the Germans were searching the neighborhood. He promised to return, but he never did. Polish children found them and yelled "Jews." Fearing that they would bring the police Renia and Michal wandered around until they found Zygmunt again. He took them in and later found another shelter very close to the ghetto.

For two months they lived in a room in an apartment which belonged to Olga, a prostitute. From this room, Renia, Michal and two and sometimes three other hiding Jews observed the fighting ghetto and deliberated if they should go back in to fight.

They had to flee this shelter and Zygmunt, the policeman took them back to Mr. Czachurowski. This time the conditions were worse, but there Renia met her brother Lutek and his wife Rutka. The three of them hid for a few weeks in very arduous conditions. They had to lay in a small space 3 x 5 feet, without movement for 15 hours a day. Michal was taken by Zygmunt to a different location.

After a few weeks Mr. Czachurowski told Renia, Lutek, and Rutka to leave, because the Germans were searching the area. He took them to an open field and again promised to return with Zygmunt. The three of them sat in the field throughout the night, in the rain. Renia decided not to wait for Mr. Czachurowski and tried to convince her brother and sister-in-law to come with her, but they decided to stay and tried to convince her to stay. Renia left.

She found Zygmunt, who told her that Lutek and Rutka were found and denounced by a Polish couple and executed by the Gestapo next to the Brudno cemetery. Zygmunt led Renia to her husband, who was hidden in a coal pit. She joined him there and they stayed there for another three weeks. Every few days Zygmunt brought them food and drink and notified them that he had no other hiding places for them.

Renia and Michal grew desperate and they planned to commit suicide by cutting their veins with a razor blade. On the fateful day they received a message from Renia's sister, Sara Kunigis. She sent them a change of clothes and the message that there is a place for them in Warsaw, in Hotel Polski on Długa Street.

They entered the hotel and saw a different world. From a coal pit they arrived in a coffee shop where Jews sat at tables and ate fruit and cake, things not seen by them for years. Large sums of money were necessary for "promessa" a document promising a visa to a South American country like Honduras, Paraguay or Uruguay. Renia and Michal didn't have any money and no prospects of getting any. After spending a nerve wracking week, they met Mela Shochat, a young woman who received a Palestinian passport sent by her husband. Mela directed them to Adek Engel, who was in charge of assembling a Palestinian list and after learning that Renia had two brothers residing in Palestine, he placed them on the list as brother and sister: Leon and Rebeka Lindenbaum.

A few days later Itzhak Zukerman brought money for them to purchase the "promessas" to South America and they had to decide what to do. Renia was distrustful of these documents and preferred to rely on Palestinian certificates based on true information that her two brothers indeed were there.

On July 7, 1943, German trucks and later trains took 2,800 Jews to the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. Apart from the Soviet POW's they were they first prisoners in this camp. Men were separated from women and located in barracks. Many people felt desperate, but Renia compared her experiences on the Aryan side of Warsaw to the conditions in Bergen-Belsen camp and felt that she was with her fellow Jews and she was relieved.

After a few weeks the Germans separated the "Palestinians" and "Americans" from the "South Americans" and left behind only the first two groups. From the "South American" group which included many of the fighters from the Warsaw ghetto, it was decided to leave one just in case if the "Palestinian" group would stay alive and the other will be annihilated. It was decided that Hela Schupper, from the Krakow ghetto and the courier from the Warsaw ghetto, should stay with the Palestinian group. She received an order and had to obey it.

The "Palestinian" group consisted of some 280 Jews and another 220 Jews with different passports. They were located in "Sonderlager" [special camp]; there was no work but there they prisoners of this camp suffered great hunger. The Germans tortured them with long roll calls, sometimes six hours long. The rumors that they would be exchanged persisted, but no one knew anything real.

During all the years of imprisonment in the camp Renia kept her photographs from home, which she was able to take from the ghetto, keep during her experiences on the Aryan side of Warsaw and in Bergen-Belsen. After a year and a half in the camp, Hungarian Jews (Kasztner group) arrived and after a few weeks they left for Switzerland. The Palestinian camp prepared a name list of all the prisoners to take to Jewish organizations to let them know of their existence. They wrote the names in Hebrew, in the Siddur (prayer book), between the lines, so the Germans would not notice. Indeed a few weeks later they received packages from the International Red

Cross. After suffering extreme hunger for a year and a half these packages, which the prisoners divided among themselves, helped them immensely, mostly psychologically.

In April 1945 the prisoners from the special camp “Sonderlager” were ordered to board a train, which traveled for many days. They were not given any food, but Renia and her friend Hela jumped off the train and were able to gather some turnips and potatoes. The train stopped near Magdeburg and the Germans abandoned it. The American soldiers appeared the next day and after a lot of confusion took the liberated prisoners to Hillers Leben village, where German SS Air Force base was located. Renia and Michal were told to move into one of the houses and slowly started to recuperate. The US military prepared special meals for them to accommodate their starved bodies to food again. After two months Renia heard on the radio that her sister Sara Kuniegis was looking for her son Jerzyk. Renia immediately sent a message to Sara who kept her wartime Polish name: Janka.

Renia and Michal Landau wanted to leave Europe as soon as possible and after spending a month in Belgium they boarded the British military ship “Mataroa” and arrived in Palestine in September 1945, during the Rosh Hashanah - Jewish New Year. IT was the beginning of their new life.