

Translation/Analysis of Oral History Interview with Stanisław Sieradzki

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I am not a citizen of Warsaw by birth, since I was born in 1921 in a small town called Iłowo, not far from Mława. This was a railroad workers settlement. Only railroad workers lived there. My father was such a railroad worker. He worked in the locomotive yard. In Iłowo, we had few Jews. I remember only two families, the Liebshitses and Zefirshteins. I visited their stores to buy some chocolates and candies, because they lived near me. However, when I started studying at the gymnasium [middle school] in Działdowo, there I became friends with the daughter of a store owner who sold silk and fabrics. She attended my gymnasium and was in my class. Her name was Anna Shpiegel. We became friends, since in my class she was the only Jew. Everyone else was Polish.

I know that the daughter of the Liebshitses in Iłowo was murdered by the Germans when they entered the town. One should remember that Iłowo was only 4 km from the German border. Given this proximity to the border, Jews had to quickly decide whether to hide or to run. The Liebshits family did not run away and must have fallen into the hands of the Germans. I know that the entire Liebshits family was shot. Most likely the same fate awaited the Zefirshteins. The Zefirshteins were poor Jews. They had a small shop, and it was evident that they weren't doing all that well. Annie Shpiegel was well off. Her parents had a large store near the market in Działdowo.

I, unfortunately, was taken to Germany as a prisoner. I managed to escape from there in 1942. In June, I made my way to Warsaw. In Warsaw, I began a new life. I had to destroy my old documents and my old passport, because the Gestapo—known as the Geheime Staatspolizei, [German Secret State Police] was looking for me. I had to hide. But thanks to some kind people, I managed to get an I.D. card and a new passport. And from that moment, my name became Franciszek Brożek. Franciszek Brożek was an individual, who died as a soldier in 1939. He was older than I. So these documents belonged to a deceased soldier.

I received these documents, even though I was born in 1921. Therefore, I had to adapt myself to Franciszek Brożek, a man who was born in 1915. I had to create a new resumé for myself. I was born somewhere in Brześć Litewska. My parents were farmers. I had to learn all of this anew. But I also started some conspiratorial activity. Thanks to my acquaintances, I made contact with the underground Boy Scouts. These scouts were called Szare Szeregi [Grey Ranks].

My troop leader was Florian Marciniak—a Scoutmaster who came to Warsaw from Poznań. In Warsaw he became the commanding officer of the Underground Union of Polish Boy Scouts.

I lived in Stare Miasto [Old Town]. I had to find a job. Having studied German quite willingly, I knew the language well and I continue to know it well even now. Thanks to this knowledge, I was able to find work. When I went to an employment office and they heard that I spoke German, I was offered work in a German military hospital. It was a hospital in Warsaw, for German soldiers wounded in the Soviet Union. And there I recall my subsequent contact with Jews, who, like I, were hiding under false documents.

Ewa Lubelska was an office worker in this hospital. This was her false name. I don't know her real one. Jan Karski worked with me, who after the war became a famous man in the West, in the United States and in the United Nations. Also alongside me worked a Jew, Anton Izadora (?)

There was this incident where I was asked to translate for two ladies, who desperately wanted to work in this hospital and were willing to work at anything. For them, it was a chance to survive, to hide. These ladies, I remember as if it was today. One was called Jadwiga Zender; the other one, Katarzyna Mucha. Both spoke German rather poorly. It fell to me to explain to the Germans that they wanted to work and were willing to work. These two ladies were accepted to work at this hospital and they became my friends. I must admit that with Jadzia Zender, I became quite well acquainted. We would spend a lot of time together. We took walks together. I liked her. She was a pretty girl. She was my age, perhaps, 21, 22 or perhaps 23. I recall an experience that we share, that is worth recording for posterity.

I asked Jadzia Zender on a date—a walk, something that was common then among young people. On a particular Sunday, we decided to go to Wilanów, where there is a beautiful park and the Wilanów Castle. In this park we planned to spend the day. We agreed to meet in Warsaw. And imagine, I am waiting for her at a tram stop near Czerniakowska Street. She lived nearby, but at the time I did not know where. Later I found out, during the Warsaw Uprising. Jadzia came to the agreed place--the tram stop. The tram did not come for a long time. While we waited, we paced back and forth near the stop. Suddenly, from behind the buildings, a German patrol appeared, consisting of 4 gendarmes. When they saw us, two young people, standing at the stop; and I was wearing a white summer overcoat and high boots up to my knees—attire that the Germans did not like, it was inevitable that we would be subject to a document check.

I was standing next to Jadzia. As they approached, they removed their guns from their shoulders, ready to use them on us. One of them shouted: -“Hands up!” [In German]. Another one came up to me and asked, if I had my documents. I answered: -- “Yes, I do.” He demanded: -“Show them to me!” [In German]. As I was reaching with my hand into my breast pocket, a

German soldier standing at some distance, and wanted to scare me, just in case I might be reaching for a gun, fired his gun into the air. I wasn't carrying a gun. If I was going for a walk with a girl, would I carry a gun? Of course not. I once again raised my hands and said in German: "You get them out!"

At that moment, I noticed that Jadzia Zender took a few steps away from me. I thought to myself: "Poor thing is afraid of being shot next to me." Perhaps she thought to herself: 'This Franek is in some organization and the Germans found him and will start shooting. 'Why should she die?' So, she moved away from me."

The Germans saw my I.D. They saw that I worked in a hospital and I let them know that my girlfriend also works in the same hospital. The Germans returned my I.D., apologized, saluted and let us go. Jadzia approached me and we went to that park. In the park I said:

"-Jadzia, you didn't want to die with me. You moved away from me."

--"Franek, I thought they recognized me because I am a Jew."

-"Jadzia, I knew about this. But I never spoke about this. And why should I have? So that someone might overhear? I know that you are hiding. That you want to live like I do? I was also hiding from the Gestapo. And you were hiding from the Germans"

At that point, Jadzia started to cry in the Wilanów Park. Today, however, I realize that I am indebted to that girl. She thought that the Germans recognized her as a Jew and that they would start shooting at her. And she didn't want me to get killed because of her. That's why she moved away from me. This is touching, my dear lady [speaking to the interviewer], as I speak about this now. That Jadzia was a decent human being, a pretty lady, with whom I had spent lots of time.

I don't know what happened with her later, since afterwards I went to an organization, where it was told to leave and join a partisan unit in the forest. I was a partisan in the woods. And there again I met Jews. In the woods near Wyszków there were various partisan units: Russian; the Polish People's Army and the Polish National Army [in which Stanisław Sieradzki served]. The units under the People's Army were not inclined to collaborate with the units of the National Army. However, members of the Jewish Battle Organization (JBO) were quite willing to seek assistance from the Polish National Army. They would come to get bread, jam and when on occasion there was a surplus, they would even get meat. This happened once, after an attack by a National Army unit on a large farm, known as *liegenschaft*, during which they took cows into the woods with them.

But before I go on with my story about my sojourn in the woods with the partisan unit, I must describe how I lived through the Jewish Ghetto Uprising.

It was in the spring of 1943. I remember where high walls were built that encircled the Jewish residential quarter. We knew that behind these walls, the Germans created living conditions for Jews. We also assumed that these Jews were sentenced to extermination. We read about this and we were told about this. First we'll take care of the Jews and then we'll tackle the Poles. And that's how, in fact, it was. It is known to me that our Boy Scout organization the Grey Ranks, extended help to Jews. I never entered the Ghetto or even approached the encircling wall. I didn't bring arms to the Jews. But I know, because we were told by our commander, Stanisław Broniewski, [pseudonym, Orshak (?)] that Jews in the Ghetto had to be helped. That we needed to supply them with weapons, because they didn't have any.

We also lacked weapons. We would acquire them by killing Germans, or by taking them from the Germans. We managed to buy some arms from the Hungarians, who lived in Warsaw and served in the former Hungarian Army. However, we got the greatest amount of weapons from parachute drops. Allied planes would fly over Warsaw, first from England and then from Italy. I've participated in an action when we collected parachuted weapons. We then would transfer these to Warsaw, where they would be saved and hidden. Some of these weapons, depending on our ability, we'd give the Jews who were fighting in the Ghetto. Obviously, the Jews concealed those weapons, because they were invaluable. Because they were in short supply, they had to be valued and well concealed.

I must admit that I wouldn't have thought and I didn't know that an uprising would break out in the Ghetto. However, today, having lived through the Jewish uprising and I, myself, having participated later in Warsaw Uprising, understand that the Jews had to resort to weapons. It was their only way out. Given that by Stawka Street, there was a so called Umschlagplatz, to which the Germans would pull up trains with passenger cars, and invited Jews to these cars, by telling them that they were going to places of work, that they will be earning money; whereas these trains and these cars were going to Treblinka near Małkinia, and there they entered onto the territory of this extermination camp, where on exiting from these cars, Jews were tortured, murdered, shot or gassed. We knew about this. We understood that even in this Ghetto, Jews had to save themselves. They had to resort to weapons. It's only unfortunate that they lacked more weapons.

I have to say that since I know history, Mordechai Anielewicz, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, led the Jews into battle. I saw how hard the Jews fought. It was really hard for them, because the Germans were stronger. Germans had better weaponry, they had artillery, and they had planes. The Jewish district could be bombarded from the ground and the air.

I, myself, walked on Świętojerska Street. By Krasińskie Square, along the length of Bonifraterska Street, in the middle of the pavement ran a high four-storied wall. Half of the street was inside the Ghetto and there, behind the wall, lived and walked Jews. The other half of the street belonged to Poles. We lived here and we walked here. I approached this wall when the Jewish uprising erupted. Purely out of curiosity I wanted to see how this Jewish uprising looks. Behind this high wall, high residential buildings were burning. I saw in the windows, women who were trying to save themselves. I saw a Jewish woman holding a child in her arms and how a German cannon surrounded by a few German soldiers was being fired in her direction. We Poles, who stood a few steps from these Germans and their cannon, could only clench our fists and feel our aching hearts. How could we help this woman? I could throw myself at the well, but then I would be shot. And in front of our eyes, this woman with the child, preferred to die falling to the cobblestones rather than dying in the burning building. It was terrible tragedy and we Poles witnessed it. We saw how the Jews suffered. However, not everyone could help. We know that in Warsaw there was an organization of assistance for the Jews, named Żegota. This organization helped people in the Ghetto. I also helped.

The Warsaw Uprising began September 1, 1944. By then, the Ghetto no longer existed. The wall was destroyed and the dead Jewish district was demolished. The fires had gone out and the bombings and the artillery fire had stopped. The entire area looked like an enormous sea of rubble in the middle of Warsaw. We were unable to walk there, because in the midst of his rubble, near Gęsie Street there was a German concentration camp, where the Germans kept Jews and Poles.

The uprising begins. We are in the district Wola, right near the camp Gęsiówka. And as luck would have it, we were able to help the Jews. The battalion Zośka, with the Boy Scouts in this battalion grouped together, taking part in the battles of the Warsaw Uprising, we had an opportunity and ability to fight for the liberation of Gęsiówka. Already on the first day, at 5:00 PM, when the uprising erupted, I killed a German who stood by the entrance gate to the camp in Gęsiówka. We stood on the territory of the Jewish cemetery Hirkut, near Okopowa Street 49-51. Our Boy Scout units entered the territory of the ghetto. We hid between the graves, behind the headstones marking Jewish graves. There were many graves. Now, regrettably, this cemetery is a scene of poverty and despair. These graves are so terribly neglected. They are overgrown by weeds and by trees. But I often got to go to this cemetery, because I conduct tours for Polish children to show them where the Boy Scouts/insurgents fought and from where they fired on the Germans.

Already on September 1, when we came out on the street, the wall surrounding this Jewish cemetery had holes cut out in it. That is how we ended up in the cemetery, among the graves. I ran to the entrance gate of this cemetery, which faced Okopowa Street. Through the metal grill

of this gate, some 300 – 400 meters away, I could see a German with a gun, standing on guard to the entrance to the concentration camp. I immediately took off my automatic rifle... I must say that I was the commanding officer of a 9-men unit. We manned this hand held automatic rifle. Immediately, I took off this rifle from my shoulder and positioned it on the fence. I aimed at that German and killed him. This was the first German to be killed during the Warsaw Uprising. It was a German who guarded Jews in the Gęsiówka Camp.

On September 5, an order was given by our authority, Colonel Radosław Jan Mazurkiewicz, who was the commanding officer of our formation of insurgents, numbering some 3,000 people, that the Battalion Zośka will liberate the remaining Jews, living in this camp.

We didn't know, that just before the outbreak of the uprising, during the last days of July 1944, the Germans deported virtually all remaining Jews to the concentration camp in Oświęcim. But a group of Jews in this concentration camp on Gęsie Street remained. Those who remained were good craftsmen, experts, locksmiths, tailors, cobblers. These were Jews that were needed by the Germans to make shoes, sew uniforms, repair guns, to service German tanks and German armored cars. This camp had workshops and these Jews worked in these workshops. How many of them were there, we did not know. We knew that they had to be saved. Otherwise, during the upcoming days of the uprising, the Germans would kill them. That was known to our commander.

My machine gun unit was positioned near Glinjawa Street, near Feiffer's tannery. Right behind the wall of the tannery was a high wall that surrounded the concentration camp. At regular intervals, this wall had fortifications, and I, with my nine lads, were given the order to secure one of these fortifications. We had to capture these fortifications in order to get inside the camp. By the same token, it must be remembered that we had two tanks in our battalion that were captured from the Germans. One of these tanks facilitated our capture of the camp on Gęsie Street.

This tank pulled up to the entrance of the camp. The Germans thought that this was their tank, since how could the insurgents have a tank? So, the Germans opened the gate wide and proceeded to invite the tank inside. Meanwhile, the tank stopped a few meters before the gate. At that point, the Polish insurgents commented: "Look how they are greeting us." Meanwhile the tank fired a salvo from its cannon. Thanks to this tank, the capture of the prison camp was easy. The tank rolled through the open gate onto the territory of the concentration camp, while we stood waiting for a signal. The signal was a flare fired into the air. And then, my lads jumped into this bunker. The first to jump was Jurek Zastawny. He was from Miłosna, a Warsaw suburb. He sought cover under the openings of the bunker from which the Germans were firing. He was motioning to me that he didn't know what to do next. I yelled back: "Throw some grenades inside." Jurek tossed two grenades inside and jumped out from the other side so that the

grenades would not harm him. There was an explosion, which blew out a section of the bunker's wall. In a moment, we were inside the bunker. All 9 of us jumped inside. It was after we took control of the bunker that I saw through the windows of the bunker, up above, Jews, dressed in prison garb, who started to come out of the barracks. That was because our tank came from the other side and knocked down a wall to the barracks. And these Jews were coming out as free people. When they saw us on the turret of the tank, they started to run toward us. The guys and I then came out into the courtyard of this concentration camp and they started to kiss our hands. I now understand, as my life passes, I am 70 years old and my life is coming to an end, I understand how these Jews must have been happy. They must have known that they were destined to be murdered. The Polish insurgents liberated almost 360 of them. Is it surprising that these Jews wanted to kiss our hands? But we didn't let them.

I remember how a Polish Jew named Lederman ran up to me and kissed me. He didn't know how to thank me. Then he said: "Wait! In a moment I'll pay you for this freedom." In a moment, he came back carrying a full bucket of honey. He gave us this honey and he gave us spoons. And he said: "Eat this honey! This is what you saved us for." It's impossible to eat a lot of honey. I may have eaten 5 spoons of this honey. I gave the rest of it to our girls. And these Jews started a new life. They certainly did not expect that an uprising would erupt in Warsaw and that the insurgents would come here. They couldn't have foreseen that they would be freed. They couldn't have known that. Therefore, I am not surprised that these Jews wanted to repay us.

Some of these Jews dispersed throughout Warsaw. Some, however, asked to fight with us. It should be known that these Jews did not only come from Poland. Among them were Jews from Belgium, Holland; there were Jews from France, and Jews from Hungary. They were all specialists of a higher caliber. They all knew how to make something. That is why they were transported here and kept here. And thanks to the fact that they were experts, they lived to experience freedom.

Some of these Jews joined our unit. We had a Leon Michalski – a scoutmaster, whose pseudonym was Fil. He was chief quartermaster. He organized our life, prepared our meals, brewed coffee for us and cooked soup for us. Many of them volunteered to work under him. The largest number of these Jews chose to work in his kitchen. But there were also such Jews—there must have been at least 15 of them—who volunteered for the panzer platoon. We had this platoon because we had two tanks that needed maintenance and repairs. And these Jews, who worked in the German tank workshops, came afterwards to work for us. Some of them were repairmen, locksmiths, and there were those who rode in tanks and fired from them on Germans.

When the battle in the district of Wola came to an end on September 11, 1944, we had to burn the tanks, because the streets were blockaded with barricades and the tanks could not be transferred from Wola to Stare Miasto. The panzer platoon with its Jews moved on.

I met recently with the commanding officer of this platoon, Captain Waclaw Miczuta. He lives now in Geneva, Switzerland. Occasionally he comes to visit Poland. He's a man of means and is well off. He organizes memorial meals for us, during which we reminisce about our time and the days of the Warsaw Uprising. You cannot imagine how highly and eloquently this Wacław Miczuta speaks about these Jewish fighters of the panzer platoon. He is in the West, in Geneva, in France. He speaks the truth about the Jews who fought with us. I saw how accommodating these Jews were. How they constructed coffins for our fallen, so that they would be buried in coffins. These weren't elegant coffins. However, they were boxes nailed together by Jews for burial of killed insurgents.

I drank coffee brewed by Jews, in the courtyard of 12 Franciszkańska Street. All around, stood these high 4-storied residential buildings. In the middle there was a courtyard, and in the courtyard were kitchens in which they prepared our food. They prepared good soups, under the leadership of Fil, the scoutmaster, lieutenant Fil.

These Jews then went on with us to Czerniaków. In Czerniaków they fought until September 23rd. At that point we capitulated. The uprising in Czerniaków collapsed. We were then right by the banks of the Vistula. As the uprising was collapsing, on the opposite side of the river, stood the Russians and the Poles [the Polish People's Army].

We had no hope. At first yes. I, in fact, saved myself in this way. I was seriously wounded. I was wounded 3 times. The last time was in Czerniaków. I was buried by a caved in wall. In fact it was the Jews, under the leadership of Fil, who looked for me under the ruins of a collapsed building. Fil knew that on the balcony of the first floor, I, pseudonym Świst [Whistle] was manning the automatic rifle and together with the balcony I fell down. And in a moment, the whole wall collapsed. It was fortunate that the balcony fell at an angle, providing a support for the wall, creating a triangular pocket which left me alive, but unable to get out. I could only scratch at the bricks. Fil however, knew that I was buried under that rubble. And these Jews, under Fil's guidance, during the night, from the 16th to the 17th of September, dug me out and transferred me alive to a hospital in the basement.

The following night, from the 17th to the 18th of September, I was carried to the Vistula, dropped unto the sand from a door that was used in lieu of a stretcher and told: "Here, you may save yourself. Wait here. People will take pity on you." And, indeed, I was saved. I was taken to the other side of the Vistula.

Among us, during the battles in Czerniaków, was a Jew, who marched with us, served soup, took up observation posts. His name was Jakub Wiśnia. We were together—we, Polish insurgents, and he, a Jew, saved from the Ghetto, a fighter from the Jewish Ghetto. Jakub developed a friendship with us. But in the poverty of an uprising, when we went hungry, when above our heads bombs, grenades or artillery shells would explode, could there be any better circumstances? These were the only conditions for a great friendship.

Jakub and I became friends. However, since he remained and I made my way to the other shore of the river, I learned about his further suffering only a few years later, in his narration as to what happened to him?

When September 23rd arrived, he, Jakub, went up to the commander of the battalion and asked: "Captain, Sir, what am I to do now? You are giving up. What am I to do? You know that I am a Jew."

Our Captain, Jerzy, who was our commanding officer said: "Jakub, you cannot become a prisoner. You have such an appearance, such a face that the Germans will immediately recognize you. You have only one choice, to swim across the Vistula or to hide somewhere in basements. You have no other choice. You cannot give yourself up to the Germans."

Crossing the river, at this point was no longer an option. The Germans positioned themselves on the embankment with guns drawn. In light of this, Jakub decided to hide in basements. First, from Czerniaków, using underground canals, he made his way to Mokotów on September 22nd. Then, on the 26th and 27th September, he crossed once again with our insurgents and other Jews, using the underground canals, from Mokotów to Śródmieście. It was here in Śródmieście that Jakub Wiśnia's new life began. He couldn't give himself up. He decided to hide in the houses, in the vicinity of Twarda Street and Mariańska Street. Here were destroyed, bombed out buildings, without any occupants, but the basements were good. They were covered with rubble. You just had to know how to get into them. So, Jakub and 4 other people, hid in a basement. Until the capitulation of all of Warsaw on October 2nd, Jakub prudently and wisely collected water in one bathtub in a basement. Somewhere there was a well and water was flowing. He used buckets to collect a full bathtub of water, so that he would be able to drink, while hiding in basements.

From other basements he gathered jars with pickles, preserves with compotes. People had such things and suddenly they were forced to leave. He kept them for a rainy day, so as not to die from hunger.

Jakub was also smart, having figured out that the Germans have trained dogs and that they could track him down, start barking and give him away. For that reason Jakub, very prudently made underground passages from this basement to basements in other buildings, so that he

could move about these basements and hide in them, so that the dogs couldn't sniff him out. In this way, Jakub survived until January 1945. On January 15, 1945, the Russians and the Poles expelled the Germans. At that time, Jakub, as if, rose from the dead. He came out of the basement and went to the Russians. He said to them: "I am a Jew and I survived."

It must be said that such people, thanks to such survival, were treated with great care. People took pity on them. The Russians also took pity on this poor man. And thanks to the fact that Jakub had a smart head, on Zielna Street he opened a small bar in which you could buy a roll, orangeade and some beer. Then this bar became slightly larger. He made it into a small restaurant. After the war, people, we, the young people and students, knew that there, on Zielna Street, some Jew was good to Poles and fed Poles on the cheap, that you could get fed well cheaply. And I went to that restaurant.

Can you imagine what happened when I recognized that this was Jakub?. Jakub said to me: "Stanisław, now you are not Franek. This is a new Poland. You are Stanisław and you must come here to eat dinner. I'll give you dinner free of charge, because you are a poor student." I didn't go there every day. It would have been awkward. However, I went often. Jakub extended a lot of help to me. On January 13, 1949, functionaries of Public Security, colleague of the Russian NKVD arrested me. I was confined to prison, where I spent 8 years, until November 1956. Throughout these years in prison I didn't know or hear anything about Jakub Wiśnia.

In prison there was another Jew, Julek Gojcherman, who was arrested, do you know what for? In the ghetto where he was held by the Germans, Julek Gojcherman was a Jewish policeman. He would beat his brethren with a rubber truncheon. For that, after the war he was sentenced and was sitting in a Polish jail together with me. In prison he was a good person. He did not brag that he used to beat Jews. He was a well-built hulk of a man. He must have been a good German gendarme. He was in the service of the Germans. Such was life.

I don't mean to say here that I am judging Gojcherman that I want to speak badly of him. That is not why I speak of him. I mention it because there were such things in life, Jewish policemen who helped the Germans, who forced Jews to board those trains that took them to Treblinka, to their death.

When I got out of prison, of course I did not think about Jakub Wiśnia, because I spent a year in a hospital. I tore my left lung due to vitamin deficiency. I spent a year in a hospital so that this lung would relax and expand. Today, I have two lungs and I'm breathing well. When I left the hospital and started a new life, it seemed to me that now everything will go well. And it has gone well in that I lived to have a wife and two children—a son and daughter. My son, Andrzej lives in Monroe, not far from New York City, in the U.S. At one point he lived in Lancaster,

Pennsylvania. I visited him there in 1984. All of that is in the margins, however. I would like to return to Jakub Wiśnia.

In post-war communist Poland, there were organizations to which combatants that fought against the Germans belonged, as well as organizations to which prisoners of concentration camps belonged. I belonged to the former. I belonged to the community that included the Association of Soldiers of the Boy Scout Battalion Zośka. We would meet once a month near Dubois Street, on the territory which at one time was the Jewish residential area. It is now close to Umschlagplatz—a monument, which was recently built in homage to Jews who fought in the Jewish Ghetto. One time, at a meeting of that organization, a man approached me and said: “-- A certain Jew is looking for you. You must give me your address.” I answered: “-I can give you my telephone number.” A few days later, I got a call:

Jakub: Greetings Stanisław.

Stanisław: With whom am I speaking?

J: Sit down! You won't believe with whom you are speaking.

S: Tell me, who's speaking?

J: My name is Jakub Wiśnia. Do you remember me?

S: Jakub, is it you? You are alive?

This is how I met up again with Jakub Wiśnia. The first meeting took place in that organization ZBOWiD, where Jakub demanded to speak first, to tell me what happened to him. I tried to stop him, by saying that I knew everything, since I knew everything that he went through in the Ghetto. I freed you. At that point, Jakub burst into tears and declared that he had to tell me everything. How he survived in those basements? Thanks to what did I survive? You have to hear me out. I am old. I am ill. I will die and no one will know what I lived through. I sat for a few hours, listening to what Jakub experienced. He lived through some terrible things.

Today, I understand what he must have gone through in those basements, where he couldn't light a fire. He couldn't boil potatoes for himself, because the smoke would rise through the ruins and the Germans would see it. In other words, Jakub had to live on everything that he had—the potatoes that he gathered, the preserves, the compotes that he collected. He drank the water from the bathtub through the months of September, October, November, December and January—for nearly 5 months, this man ate raw potatoes. One has to comprehend this. One has to witness this. I'm not surprised that, later on, Jakub wasn't healthy. He probably had destroyed his intestines and had ruined his stomach, under those terrible conditions.

What could I do for Jakub? So I said to him: "Since I know that you fought in battalion Zośka, that you helped bury our dead, made coffins for our guys, you fed me, I ate your soup from a soldier's pot, and you made coffee for me. What can I, also old, do for you today?"

He responded: "You know Stanisław, I dream of having on my chest the Warsaw Uprising Cross. That's the only thing I would want from you." I wrote down all his personal information; where he was born, where he lived, where he fought, and I submitted a motion to the authorities, asking them to issue this Cross to Jakub. However, Jakub, the poor guy didn't live long enough to receive this Cross.

He lived in Warsaw without marrying. He didn't make any marriage vows. He lived with a certain woman. I'm sure that somewhere in my papers I have that woman's address. And that might be good, but I don't know how to look for it. Perhaps I'll find it. If I should find her, I promise that I'll seek her out I'll tell her that my story about Jakub had been sent to the United States.

Why Jakub did not live to receive this Cross? It was from the woman with whom Jakub lived and who apparently was unkind to him. I learned all about this at Jakub's funeral. This was told to me by other Jewish women who attended the funeral as well. For that reason, I stopped advocating for this Cross for Jakub. I could have received it posthumously. Jakub was dead, but I could have obtained it for this almost-wife. However, once these Jewish women told me that she was unkind to him, I stopped. I would have brought it to a good person. I couldn't do that for someone unkind to Jakub.

Nonetheless, it was that woman who called me to let me know that Jakub passed away. I asked her when and where he will be buried. She told me that it would take place at the Warsaw Jewish cemetery, near Okopowa Street—that very cemetery from which I killed the first German, nearly 40 years earlier. I wanted to accompany Jakub Wiśnia on his last journey on this earth. I brought with me a friend with whom I served in prison, Antek Olszewski. I asked him to accompany me, in order to see what a Jewish funeral looks like. I stood in the midst of a great mass of people that surrounded the coffin. Next to the coffin stood a Jewish clergyman, who started the Hebrew prayers, which I did not understand.

Standing in this crowd, I turned to Antek and said: "You know Antek, I feel sorry for this Jew. He was a heroic Jew, and how much I am beholden to him? He cooked soup for me, he made me coffee, he hammered together coffins for killed insurgents--a real good Jew." These words spoken in Polish to my friend were overheard by the women standing in front of me. One of them turned around and asked: "You knew Jakub from the Warsaw Uprising?" I answered: "Yes Ma'am. He was with me in the Uprising." Then, that woman walked up to the clergyman and

said something to him. He stopped praying, while the woman positioned herself next to the coffin, waved to me and said: "Please come here and tell us what you know about Jakub."

Hearing this, I started crying, since I had no idea that I would be speaking at a Jewish funeral. This had touched me, because Jakub was good to me. Standing over Jakub's coffin I spoke a lot about his bravery, about the basements, about the raw potatoes. Silence fell upon the cemetery.

After a few years, together with Basia Wachowicz we made a film. Basia was deeply moved when I described Jakub. She insisted that I show her Jakub's grave. I took her to the Jewish cemetery, where no matter how many times I am there with Polish children, when I tell the children about the tragedy of the Jewish people, about the bravery of the insurgents of the Warsaw uprising, about the passing of Jakub Wiśnia, to convince these children, to make them realize and enlighten them, I take them to the grave, I point and say: "Here lies Jakub Wiśnia, dear children, a Jew with whom I became linked during the horrific life of the Warsaw Uprising.

Here I'd like to end. Should Madam have further questions, I'd be happy to continue.

[Stanisław Sieradzki continues his narrative]

If you'll allow me, I'd like to reach once again into my memories of those days, because I'd like to give more shape to my view on the tragedy of the Jewish people.

Without a doubt, there were more Poles than Jews in Warsaw, but just like the Jews, we were not experienced and unprepared for the massacre and exploits of the Germans vis á vis the Polish and Jewish people. Since there were fewer Jews, the Germans proved more successful in deceiving them. The Germans created in Warsaw a special residential district. It was called the Jewish Residential District. There they gathered Jews from all over Warsaw, so that they could live alone and for themselves. The Jews did not know that this was a plan for their annihilation.

Then they built this high wall. I understand, since I saw the burning of the Ghetto, its bombardment. I myself hid under a false name. So, I knew well what a tragedy the Jewish people went through. In my life, I did not have many contacts, but the small episodes and the fragments of my life where I came in contact with Jews say everything. If Jakub Wiśnia and I were sitting before a camera, we wouldn't have anything to reproach one another. He wouldn't have said anything bad to me, or I to him. We would only speak well about our coexistence.

I recall now, when I was working in the Ochota District of Warsaw, near Pasteur Street, where nowadays stand some tall buildings of the Chemistry Department of the University of Warsaw, during German occupation there was a hospital for wounded German soldiers. Once, I remember there was a panic. Germans were running as if they were scalded. What happened?

The Germans uncovered a hiding place at a gardener's where Jews were being kept safe by a Pole. This gardener had large gardens. In those gardens he had hothouses for growing plants and vegetation under a glass roof. But it turned out that the owner of these hothouses, beneath the soil, built a room where Jews were hiding. It was this secret place that was discovered by the Germans. Many special German teams arrived, since they had no idea how many Jews were there.

First, with guns drawn, the Germans dragged out into the garden the entire family of this Polish gardener, (I saw this) so that he would show them the entrance to this underground lair. When he refused, directly in front of his eyes, they first shot his wife, then his children—a daughter and son, and finally they shot the gardener himself. Throughout all this, he did not give up the information. The Germans had to find out on their own. They did this very carefully and with much trepidation, since they did not know what these people had concealed underground. Whether they had arms or grenades. Consequently, from a distance they threw bundles of grenades, to force these Jews to give themselves up. And I saw how these 4 people—one woman and three men came out to the surface. They were brought to the place where the Poles were lying dead and they were killed alongside them.

Here's a case where 4 Poles and 4 Jews were united in one death. After their death they could lie together on Warsaw soil. So was there collaboration between Jews and Poles? Had that gardener survived the war, today, he would have gone to Israel to receive the recognition as a Good Samaritan to Jews. But he won't be travelling there, since one day; he was killed together with those discovered Jew. I saw this with my own eyes. I saw it and I was horrified. I trembled from fear when I saw the bundles of 10 grenades, which the Germans were throwing unto the gardens, so that the ground would explode and the people below would choose to give themselves up. They believed that, if they gave themselves up, their life would be spared. Not true. Germans did not spare Jews. They only murdered them. I saw this myself. That's a terrible thing.

I forgot to tell you what happened with my Jadzia Zender, the Jewess whom I loved a bit and as a young man, she and I went on numerous promenades. I've wondered whether she's alive, whether she might see what I've been saying about her. Perhaps she might recall Franek Brożek? In any case we were close. We were friends. May I at this point refer to her not only as a work friend, but also as a girlfriend with whom I would take strolls? So it shouldn't seem strange, that during the years that followed I thought about Jadzia's fate.

When I came from the woods, where I had spent 3 months, I had no idea what Jadzia was doing at work. I immediately joined the insurrection. I started in Wola [name of district in Warsaw]. From there I moved through Stare Miasto [Old Town district of Warsaw]; then Śródmieście and arrived in Czerniaków—the same Czerniaków where at the tram stop, Jadzia moved away from

me. There I arrived as a fighting insurgent. So try to imagine Czerniakowska Street, with those high buildings, when I was walking through the courtyards of those buildings as an insurgent, with a weapon in my hand, in one of those courtyards, by the well, I saw Jadzia Zender. I yelled: "Jadzia, you're alive?!"

Jadzia invited me up to her apartment. This was during the Uprising. In her second floor apartment, sat her girlfriend and my friend, Katarzyna Mucha. They were both hiding then. When we worked in the hospital, I wasn't aware that they were such close friends. I thought that they met coincidentally, whereas, they lived together.

By the way, Jadzia could not be recognized as a Jew. She was an attractive woman, blonde, with a nice figure. On the other hand, Katarzyna Mucha, Kaśka, looked Jewish. And now I understand why Jadzia extended so much care towards her friend. She was protecting her. She helped her find work. She, most likely, found the apartment for them and lived there together. Kasia couldn't go out on the street without being recognized. Jadzia went out to get potatoes, bread, rolls, butter. Do I need to tell you how warmly we greeted one another? Not only because I liked her and I went on dates and walks with her, but because we met under such conditions; when buildings all around were burning, when the Germans were lobbying artillery shells and dropping bombs. It was under such circumstances that I ran into this dear woman.