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Summary from Radio Kielce

Episode 19: A friend to the very end – Leon Śliwiński, Kielce / Niwy

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<https://polacyratujacyzydow.com.pl/en/a-friend-to-the-very-end-leon-sliwinski-kielce-niwy/>

Stories about Poles

Leon Śliwiński (son)

Leonia Śliwińska (mother)

Bolesław Śliwiński (father)

The people in the hiding

Dawid Friedman

The story told by

Wanda Śliwińska (Leon's wife)

Dorota Putowska (Leon Śliwiński's daughter)

Before the war and at the beginning of the occupation, Leonia and Bolesław Śliwińska and their 4 children lived in Leśna Street in Kielce. A Jewish couple, Mr. and Mrs. Friedman with their children Dawid and Frania lived in the same tenement house. Leon and David were of a similar age and often spent time together playing football in the yard. This was the time when their life-long friendship started.

During the war times the Friedman family was sent to the Kielce ghetto, the Śliwiński family left Kielce and moved to Niwki village in the Daleszyce commune. They found it hard to make a living, Leon helped his parents. He would go to Kielce to sell bread and meat. He also smuggled food into the ghetto. One day Leon met David Friedman. David's parents were already dead – they had been deported to Treblinka and murdered. David and his sister were taken care of by Moshe Rosenberg. Rosenberg suggested Leon that he would help him get David out of the ghetto. Leon's parents agreed. On the day when the guards were Jews Leon went to see David.

“Rosenberg (...) engaged in a conversation and kept the guards busy. The others managed to get outside. When they left the ghetto, David's face was all blue ... be it from fear or from cold ... They went to Daleszyce by a narrow-gauge railway that was used to transport wood. Later, they reached the husband's and his parents house on foot. ” – says Wanda Śliwińska recalling the her husband Leon's memories. It was 1943. Leon's father obtained a false birth certificate for Dawid. The name in the document was Zygmunt Śliwiński. From then on they all lived together in a one-room house with thatched roofs: Leonia and Bolesław Śliwiński, four children and Dawid who passed by as a Bolesław's nephew from Warsaw.

David's younger sister Frania did not survive the war. She was hidden together with a group of Jews in Stefan Sawa's house. These were shot by guerrillas from the "Barabasz" unit. The partisans were supposed to get the information that German agents were hiding in this house.

David lived with the Śliwiński family in Niwki Daleszyckie until the end of the war. In 1947 he left for Israel. At Leon's request cut ties in the times of the Peoples Republic of Poland. In 1989 the contacts were re-established. From that time on they wrote letters to each other until Leon's death. Leon and his wife Wanda also visited Dawid in Israel. Leon's friend was waiting for them at the airport, in his hands he had the sign: "Zygmunt Śliwiński". He wanted to stress that he still remembered his false identity which helped him survive the war whilst staying with the Polish family.

Leon died in 2012. When I called David, he burst out crying. He said: I should have died first, not him because he saved my life – recalls Wanda Śliwińska.

Both Leon and his parents (Leonia and Bolesław) were awarded the Righteous Among the Nations medal."