

RG-90.148.0021

Summary from Radio Kielce

Episode 21: So he would be one of us ... – The Kowalik family, Przyłęk, Jędrzejów County; The Story of Jurek Staszewski (Gerald Kaiser) part 2

05.08.2018

<https://polacyratujacyzydow.com.pl/en/so-he-would-be-one-of-us-the-kowalik-family-przylek-jedrzejow-county-the-story-of-jurek-staszewski-gerald-kaiser-part-2/>

Stories about Poles

Teofila Kowalik

Franciszek Kowalik

Aurelia Rudyk (née Kowalik), daughter

The people in the hiding

Gerald Kaiser (Jurek Staszewski)

The story told by

Aurelia Rudyk (née Kowalik)

During the war time Franciszek and Teofila Kowalik and their children Aurelia and six years younger Mirosław lived in the town of Przyłęk. One evening, Teofila's brother Stanisław Włodek from Węgleszy knocked in their house door. After a brief conversation Stanisław showed a 3-year-old boy in. He said good-bye and left. Upon entering the house the boy boldly introduced himself. He uttered, lisping: ""My name is Jurek Staszewski. Mommy is in Auschwitz, and daddy was seized by Bolsheviks"" – recalls Aurelia Rudyk, née Kowalik who was about 12 years old then. She emphasizes that Jurek immediately felt at home and started playing with Mirek. Mirek used to carve wood toys from and also pistols and sabres. My parents told Aurelia and Mirek that Aunt Wanda Włodek and her sister (Jurek's mother) were sent to Auschwitz. The boy was supposed to stay with the family until his mother returned. This was the official rumour spread in the village. Until the end of the war nobody, including Aurelia suspected that Jurek of Jewish origin.

The boy was cheerful, outstandingly talented and courageous. He soon asked if he could call his new aunt and uncle "mom" and "dad", just like Renia and Mirek did. He quickly learned the poems and songs' lyrics. In the summer he was glad to sing these songs to the partisans who made a stop-by at the foot of Saint Florian figure next to the Kowaliks house. Aurelia Rudyk remembers that Jurek was passionate when reciting patriotic poems to the partisans: ""I am Jurek, a little yet a brave boy, I will report to the commander in chief! Marshal! I report that when I grow up, I will always be bold when doing my military services. Commander – you will give me a real sabre then and we will defend our great Poland!""

Jurek was able to win people over. Women burst out crying when seeing an orphan in the church saying his fervent prayers. ""I prayed many times and begged that his family members

would not come back and he would be one of us""-recalls Aurelia Rudyk, deeply touched. The boy's mother survived the war and came back to collect the boy in 1945. It was a very difficult moment for the Kowalik family. They had raised Jurek as if he was their own son and brother. Only then did Aurelia learn the truth about the boy's origin. She saw his mother – Sylvia Kaiser's face and easily recognised the Semitic features. The boy did not want to leave, he did not recognize his own mother. He would said: ""My mom is here and I do not need any stranger to be my mother"" – Aurelia is deeply moved. Teofila Kowalik and Sylwia Kaiser persuaded the boy that his real biological mother came back for him and that they should be together.

The families cut ties for many years after Jurek and his mother's departure. Aurelia was worried. She wondered what was Jurek's fate – her war-time brother-in-law.

In 1975, the Kowalik family received a letter from Jurek. He sought contact with the Polish family. His aunt helped Jurek to find the Kowaliks. He came to Poland 10 years later for the first time. Little did he remember from his childhood years spent in Przyłęk and Węgleszyn. He has maintained contact with the Włodek and Kowaliks families to this day. The families' members were awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" medal."