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Summary from Radio Kielce

Episode 36: Life's most important – Helena Senderska, Teofil Nowak, Radkowice / Bronkowice, Pawłów commune

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Stories about Poles

Helena Senderska, nee Nowak - Righteous Among the Nations

Teofil Nowak - Righteous Among the Nations

Czesław Senderski - Helena's husband

The people who stayed in the hiding

Tema Zylbersztajn (false name: Teresa Śmiechowska)

Fela Zylbersztajn (false name: Władysława Radło)

The story told by

Ireneusz Senderski - Helena Senderska's son. Senderska was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations title

It is a pity that we talk about it so late. Until the 1990s nobody dared to talk about, it was a taboo topic – Ireneusz Senderski begins his story. Senderski was a several years old boy during the Second World War ...

At the war time his parents and his two years older sister lived in a forester's lodge in Radkowice (Pawłów commune). His father, Czesław Senderski was a forester, his mom Helena née Nowak was not a typical village woman. She was famous for her passion for horses. She would breeches and played cards. They were brave people – remembers Ireneusz Senderski. They tried to help the Jewish population ever since the war started, For example they provided food for Jews. They maintained relations with others involved in helping Jews, including Teofil Nowak (Helena's brother) and Jan Ciok from Wąchock who worked in the Wierzbnik mills. The sisters: Tema and Fela Zylbersztajn who originally came from Łódź worked in the in the Jews labour camp. Jan Ciok, the Senderski and Teofil Nowak decided to help the sisters. The elder sister, Tema was rescued first. She was to get detached from the column of Jews whilst they were returning from work place to the ghetto and meet Jan Ciok at a set place. Because she was of Aryan appearance and spoke perfect Polish she easily blended into the crowd in the street. Jan Ciok hid her in Teofil Nowak's house in Bronkowice. A few days later he also helped the younger sister Fela to get out of the ghetto. The girl was ill with typhoid fever. If she had not been rescued, the Germans would have killed her because it was a serious illness – says Ireneusz Senderski. Fela was recovering at his parents' home in Radkowice. Helena and Czesław brought a midwife who advised on how to look after the patient. Fela spoke perfect German too. When she recovered, Teofil Nowak had Aryan documents made for her. She passed by as a Polish woman and the volunteered to work in Germany.

Tema used false documents for the name of Teresa Śmiechowska and stayed with Teofil Nowak. She took care of his 6-year-old son, she did daily home chores and helped Teofil. She would give us candies so that my uncle would not see it – recalls Ireneusz Senderski with a smile on his face. She also often visited the Senderski in Radkowice. She and Fela helped caring for Ireneusz and his sister. We had fun together, they would feed us, teach how to read and write. They were very nice. They required us to keep order in the room. Neither me nor my sister were allowed to make any medd. I remember that one of them demanded me to learn how to wash glasses. That was a challenge for me, I broke a few glasses too. Later I always took care to keep things in order – says Ireneusz Senderski. He smiles whilst recollecting the past events.

Tema and Fela were presented as Senderskis' cousins from Wrocław. However, people began to gossip. ... Someone even suspected that they were Jewish. At the end of the war the rumours reached the Germans who arrested Tema and Teofil Nowak and Czesław Senderski. All three of them spent at least a week in Wierzbnik-Starachowice prison. Ireneusz Senderski recalls that Tema was given various tasks because the Germans were hoping that something would reveal that she was of Jewish origin. However, this did not happen and all three of them were released after a while.

Tema lasted the war ou in Teofil's house until the end of the war. When the are bacame an active war theatre again, she met her brother who was in the Russian army. They also contacted the youngest sister, the fourth of the siblings. First, they left together towards Szczecin, and then each of them took went different ways: Sweden, the United States and Israel.

It was not until 1992 before they contacted the Senderskis. As a result Helena Senderska and her brother Teofil Nowak, as well as Jan Ciok received the Righteous Among the Nations in 1994 medal."