

“Europe for Citizens: Promotion of Active European Citizenship”. The Righteous and the
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The Polish Righteous Among the Nations

I. “A moral dilemma is at your door”

“A moral dilemma is at your door” is the metaphor employed by Szymon Datner to describe the moment when a fugitive from the ghetto would ask an acquaintance or a stranger Pole for shelter. The one asked for help faced the choice of one of three possible courses of action: denouncing the Jew (aversion); not denouncing, but nonetheless refusing to give any help (indifference); giving help or shelter (aid).

The aid could be temporary - feeding, sharing clothes, arranging false documents, helping in finding a job, renting an apartment, letting the fugitive stay a couple of hours or through the night. But the help could just as well be long-term (several weeks to several years) and consist in hiding the fugitive or fugitives in the house, the household, or in the area; providing them with food, attending to their basic needs.

At the beginning of the 1960s Israel’s Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority, initiated a large project to remember those people who, during the Second World War, risked their own lives to save Jewish lives. First, in 1962, on a hilltop in Jerusalem, an avenue of trees commemorating such persons was created. The following year a special commission was created to analyze meticulously each case, and then in the name of the State of Israel to bestow medals and titles of Righteous Among the Nations. Currently the list of Polish Righteous features over 6200 names.

II. “Underground” and “Above The Ground”

“When a Jew found himself in the Aryan side, he had two alternatives: either stay ‘on the surface’ or go underground” - these words were written in the autumn of 1943 by Emanuel

Ringelblum, a historian and the founder of the Warsaw Ghetto Archives, who was himself in hiding in the “Kryisia” bunker at Grójecka Street 84 in Warsaw, at the residence of the Marczak family.

Life “above the ground” (or “with Aryan papers”) meant staying, using forged identification and an assumed name, in the areas designated for Aryans only. Hiding “under the surface,” or underground meant living in confined hideouts with the means of leaving either limited or non-existent. The Jews staying in such hideouts required help from either individuals (Poles or, more seldom, Jews possessing "Aryan" papers) or institutions (“Żegota” – The Council for Assistance to the Jews).

The phrase referring to this model of hiding was often meant quite literally, referring to locations placed physically underground, such as basements, caverns, disused sanitation pipes, or wells. But the notion could also apply to such hideouts as rooms or parts of rooms (as a pantry, a walled-in recess, or a tile stove), attics, or even entire apartments, physically located above ground, but due to lack - or severe limitation - of any opportunity to leave, defined as “underground.”

Some Jews, attempting to escape the ghettos, had prepared locations on the Aryan side beforehand. Others would look for hideouts while already on the run, after leaving the closed-off district. Their choice of the type of hiding depended on the looks, the knowledge of Polish and financial capabilities.

Jews with “good looks” usually opted for live “above” – moving around the town equipped with false IDs, posing as Poles. The ones unlucky enough to have “the wrong looks” were usually destined to remain in confined hideouts constantly, dependant on the help of their Polish keepers. “The wrong appearance,” writes Hanna Wehr, forced you to be extremely cautious: never showing in public, staying at the house, often in a hidden room with a masked entrance ... ‘behind the closet.’ People like that had to be looked after by others.”

Escaping the ghetto and living “on Aryan papers” was a choice usually made by assimilated Jews – those familiar with the culture and the basic holiday customs of the Poles, knowing the basic Catholic prayers and elements of liturgy, versed in the recipes for traditional Polish dishes and, first and foremost, fluent in Polish. Those who could not use the language well enough nor had the acting skills required for impersonating Poles, chose life in confined

hideouts, where the threat of encountering a blackmailer, a Gestapo officer, or even a suspicious passer-by was greatly decreased.

Many of the Jews living “above” were able to take up paid jobs. Jews hiding in confinement were usually deprived of any way to earn an income. Usually, those hiding underground had to count on the hospitality of their Polish keepers and use their own savings or, sometimes, the money provided by Żegota.

III. Portraits of the Righteous

Who are those people, who has helped polish Jews? What were their motives for the help they have given? What did their relations with the hidden look like? This paper is an attempt to present several from among the Polish Righteous.

III. 1.

On the day the war broke out **Mieczysław Małkowski** was 15 and was graduating from the junior high school of the Marian Fathers in Warsaw’s Bielany. He was living with his family (parents, 4 brothers, 2 sisters-in-law, and 2 nephews) in a wooden house at Potocka Street 20 in Warsaw’s Marymont district.

During the Second World War he helped Dawid Zylbert (born on May 15th, 1928) who after escaping from the ghetto in 1941, spent the night in the attic of a tenement house belonged to the Małkowskis. He did not stay there any longer for one of the residents, a “blue policeman,” spotted him and intended to denounce him. Dawid Zylbert was forced to spend the nights wherever he could: a bench in the Żeromski park, in the premises of the “Błaszanka” factory on Gwiaździsta Street. In 1942-1944 he dug a hole in the ground in one of Vistula’s sandbanks (today’s Kępa Potocka). When he slept there in winter, he would use tree branches to cover his tracks in the snow. Although no one frequented the place, there was always the possibility of some unnecessarily inquisitive person wandering there and bringing unwanted guests. Unfortunately insects were an indispensable element of the hideout. Dirty and lice-ridden, Dawid would come at set hours to Mieczysław Małkowski, who would then prepare him a bath, provide clean underwear and clothing, give him glass of milk and bread with lard.

They would only meet in the absence of the rest of the family, since Mieczysław's mother, afraid for her loved ones, was unwilling to see the fugitive from the Warsaw Ghetto at the house. Dawid Zylbert used Aryan documents in the name of Henryk Polkowski, received from Mieczysław Małkowski. He would earn his living selling papers and cigarettes at the Plac Trzech Krzyży square.

The wartime contact of Mieczysław and Dawid was cut off by the Warsaw Uprising. Dawid Zylbert fought by the side of Antek Cukierman.

In 1945 he left for Israel. The two men maintained written contact after the war.

In July 1993 Dawid Zylbert visited Mieczysław Małkowski. This unexpected visit became the result in a lively exchange of correspondence, lasting until Mieczysław's death (in 1998). However, Dawid Zylbert's contacts with the family of Mieczysław have not ceased, and are still very much continued.

Mieczysław Małkowski was honored as Righteous Among the Nations of the World on March 13th, 2000.

III. 2.

Janusz Tadeusz Urzykowski (born 1926) from 1938 lived in a multi-family home at ul. Dąbrowskiego 11 in the town of Nowa Miłosna near Warsaw. The ground floor of the house was divided into two parts. Janusz, his parents (his father was disabled and used a wheelchair to move around), and his brother lived on the left side. Their apartment was an enfilade – first there was the kitchen, next the dining room, then the bedroom, and finally Janusz's room. Janusz's grandparents from his mother's side of the family, along with a woman whose husband had previously been the caretaker of the building, lived on the right side of the building. The apartment on the first floor was rented out.

Mr. Urzykowski became a member of the Home Army in 1941, thus, his room was often used for meetings and classes.

Before the war the Urzykowskis had a good relations – both personal and professional – with Jews. Janusz recalls his friends from school: “We attended school with young people of the Jewish faith, there were always a few, a few... Our contact with them ended completely when

the Germans took them to the ghetto. It ended completely, there was no way to get in touch with them, to have any kind of relationships. [...] It's too bad, how that changed.”

For 18 months – from January 28, 1943 until August of 1944 – two doctors who had escaped the Warsaw ghetto, Henryk Makower and Emma Makower neé Wigdorowicz hid in the Urzykowski's home. The couple contacted the family through a family friend, professor Emil Paluch.

Janusz Urzykowski came to get the Makowers from Warsaw on January 28, 1943. He met them in Dr. Paluch's apartment, and just after dusk took them from the Main Station (Dworzec Główny) to Nowa Miłosna on the local train. “There was always a German police officer in front of the Main Station [...] and plenty of soldiers and [...] bahnschutzs (station guards) on the platforms. I had bought the tickets earlier, so we went downstairs quickly, and thank goodness, we didn't have to wait for the train long. [...] Luckily, the train's lights were out and we arrived without any problems” – recalls Janusz, in March of 2008.

The Makowers were placed in the last room in the apartment, which had been Janusz's room in the house at ul. Dąbrowskiego 11. “[...] my room was the last one, so I said: <We have to give them my room. And I'll move into the dining room>” – explains Mr. Urzykowski. The Makowers spent their days in the room. At night they were able to go out into the garden or the woods nearby because the house was far from any other buildings.

In case of danger, they hid in the hideouts. The first one, which could hold four people, was dug under the room in which they lived; the entrance to the hideout was underneath a rug. The second hideout was located behind the wall in the cellar under the kitchen; two people could fit inside it. During three searches of the house, conducted by Germans, they managed to hide in the hideout.

After the war the Makowers moved to Lublin, and later to Wrocław. Following the war, they were in constant contact with Janusz Urzykowski and his wife Maria, visiting each other and sending holiday wishes.

Janusz Urzykowski and his parents – Feliks (born 1890) and Emilia (born 1906) – were awarded with the Righteous Among the Nations Medal in 1991. Asked, in April of 2008, if he would make the same choice to hide someone a second time, Janusz Urzykowski replied: „All

of them, along with their children, everyone. [...] I only saved two people, it's not very much. [...] The time had come to act like a human being, that's all. To help those, who needed help."

III. 3.

Jan Żabiński (1897 – 1974) and **Antonina Żabińska nee Erdman** (1908 – 1971) were awarded as Righteous Among the Nations on September, 1965.

Many Jews who were hunted and persecuted during the war found shelter in the one floor villa that stood on the grounds of Warsaw's Zoological Gardens, where Jan and Antonina Żabiński lived with son Ryszard. Friends called the place "the house under the crazy star," "an unbelievable house," "Noah's Ark."

Jan Żabiński had many friends who found themselves within the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto. Among them were: Professor Szymon Tenenbaum (1892 – 1941, entomologist) as well as Kazimierz Kramsztyk. He visited them: „We were able to stay in contact with them thanks to my connections at the City Department of Warsaw. I was able to secure a pass into the ghetto where I was to collect garbage for pig stys.” He brought them food and secret notes and letters: „There was a large group of friends surrounding two families mentioned, some of them we knew [...], some we met and I was slowly pulled into the aid <campaign>” - explains Jan Żabiński.

Those who came to the Żabińskis were people who managed to escape the ghetto, or those who quickly had to leave their former hiding places on the Aryan side. The Council to Aid Jews also sent people who needed shelter or other kinds of assistance to the Żabińskis. In his statements given after the war to the Jewish Historical Institute, Dr. Żabiński wrote: “I do not belong to any party and no party program lead me during the occupation [...]. I am a Pole – a democrat. My actions were and are the products of a certain psychological mood which resulted from my progressive-humanistic upbringing, which I received both in my family home, as in my The Kreczmar High School. Many times I have wanted to analyze the causes of the animosity toward Jews and I have never found any, other than those which were superficially created”.

The Żabińskis created a House at the ZOO – a safe refuge for those who had managed to escape the ghetto. Among others there was Magdalena Gross (1891 – 1948, sculptor). „Magdalena could not show herself anywhere outside the house, and had to disappear into the hideout whenever we signaled that someone was coming” – writes Antonina Żabińska. The signal they had agreed on was the melody from the operetta “Beautiful Helena” “Drive, drive, drive to Crete”, sung or played on the piano. When she heard it, Magdalena hid in the attic, bathroom, or closet. At the end of 1943 she was transferred to a hiding place with the Rendzners Family in Saska Kępa.

Maurycy Paweł Fraenkel – lawyer, inside the Warsaw ghetto he worked for the tax department of the Judenrat. During the war he married Magdalena Gross. He came to the House at the Zoo in the winter of 1943. “The thought that troubled him most, was that his presence in the house put its owners in danger,” – recalls Antonina Żabińska. At the beginning he didn’t even leave his hiding place (“he disappeared from the world”) Later, when he received Aryan papers with the name Paweł Zieliński, he was “officially” hired to work in the Zoological Gardens.

Rachela Auerbach (Aniela Dobruch) – translator, writer, born 1901, died 1976 in Israel. She appeared at the Żabiński’s house at the end of June of 1943. She was sent there by Janina Buchholtz-Bukolska who worked with the Council to Aid Jews. Rachela had “a good outer appearance” – she had brown hair with blue eyes. After leaving the ghetto, before arriving at the home of the Żabińskis’, she lived with a number of different people here and there. She dedicated herself to social work: she worked with Emanuel Ringelblum (founder of the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives), she worked for the Council to Aid Jews, „Żegota”, she ran a soup kitchen. She wrote a lot.

Regina Kenigswein nee Sobol with her husband Samuel (before the war, a well-known boxer in the sports club “Makabi”) and their two children. Before the war, Regina’s father delivered vegetables to the animals in the zoo. They found shelter with the Żabińskis when they were thrown out of their previous hiding place on the Aryan side – Ms. Wala’s apartment on Karolkowa Street. She recalls how warmly they were welcomed into the House at the ZOO: “The director and his wife came, vodka in hand, they welcomed us in the cellar like that. And then there was warm soup, we had a shot of vodka.” The Kenigsweins spent their nights in the cellar. During the day, Samuel, dressed in a sheepskin coat and felt shoes, sat in the bird pen

which was locked from the outside. “Luckily the kids understood everything that was going on, they were always very careful, that’s how familiar they were with danger and how well they trusted the conspiracy. They knew how to be quiet for hours, to walk around without making a sound, to lie still without moving – they had already learned these hard lessons inside the ghetto,” – explains Antonina Żabińska. After a while the Kenigsweins were recognized by seamstress and they had to change their hiding place – the couple moved to Feliks Cywiński’s, their children to other “hideout apartments”. After the war Regina Kenigswein wrote about Mr. Żabiński: „It was as if he was not a man, [...] it was as if God himself had come down to earth to save me”.

Eugenia Sylkes – „She spent whole days with us, so as to minimize the risk of exposing herself with her accent”, writes Antonina Żabińska about the young woman. The Żabińskis hid her until the middle of July of 1944. Antonina Żabińska stayed in touch with her for a few years following the war.

At Żabińskis shelter found also: Marcelli Lemi-Lubkowski with his family, Marysia Aszerówna (translator, writer), the Keller couple with their child, Leonia and Irena Tenenbaum.

During the occupation, Jan Żabiński joined the Home Army, took part in the Warsaw Uprising and attained the rank of colonel.

III. 4

After the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, many different runaways from the capital began coming to the **Ludwika and Hjalmar Uggla’s** home: civilians, participants of the Uprising, Jews, nuns. At the end of 1944 there were approximately 50 people hiding in the Ugglas’ home in Milanówek (at the villa “Sówka”). Such activities meant that the whole family risked their lives.

During the most dangerous moments they would climb down to the cellar to hide in a specially prepared space. The hiding space was so small that they had to remain either sitting or laying down the whole time, until the danger had passed. In order to trick the Germans, the family’s goat, Basia, who served as a diversion many times, had its bed on top of the trap door leading down to the cellar.

Ludwika recalls a situation when: „They sat under the dinning room, so we had a signal, that if the Germans came we would knock on the floor. One day, Germans came, but not just regular ones, these were higher up [officers]. They began to question my husband [...], and he lied as much as he could, in those days you would lie all the time [...]. My husband was showing a certificate from a Swedish deputy and the German sat down for a while. The Gestapo officer hit the floor with his heel, and so they thought that it was safe to come out. [...] They sent Kazik up to check. When he heard people talking in German, he let the trap door shut with a bang. The German turned around, [...] but saw the goat there, and eventually left. Kazik got in big trouble for that. There were more stories like that, that’s what life was like.”

After the war, the Uggla family kept in touch with Zofia Lewartowicz and her son, Kazimierz. However, due to the problems of a political nature, this contact was cut off in the fifties. It wasn’t until 2006 that Ludwika’s son, Zbigniew, reestablished contact with Kazimierz Lewartowicz. The result of this was the honoring of Ludwika and Hjalmar Uggla as Righteous Among Nations, an event which took place in Warsaw in 2007.

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Received her Master’s degree in Cultural Sciences at the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. Concluding the last stages of her doctoral dissertation entitled *People in the hideouts and the ‘paper Aryans.’ A description an analysis of the experiences of Jews hiding ‘on the Aryan side,’* under the supervision of Barbara Engelking-Boni, PhD, at the Graduate School of Social Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She is working as an factual for the “Polish Righteous - Recalling Forgotten History” project of the Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. She conducts workshops and field classes on the subject of the Holocaust.