

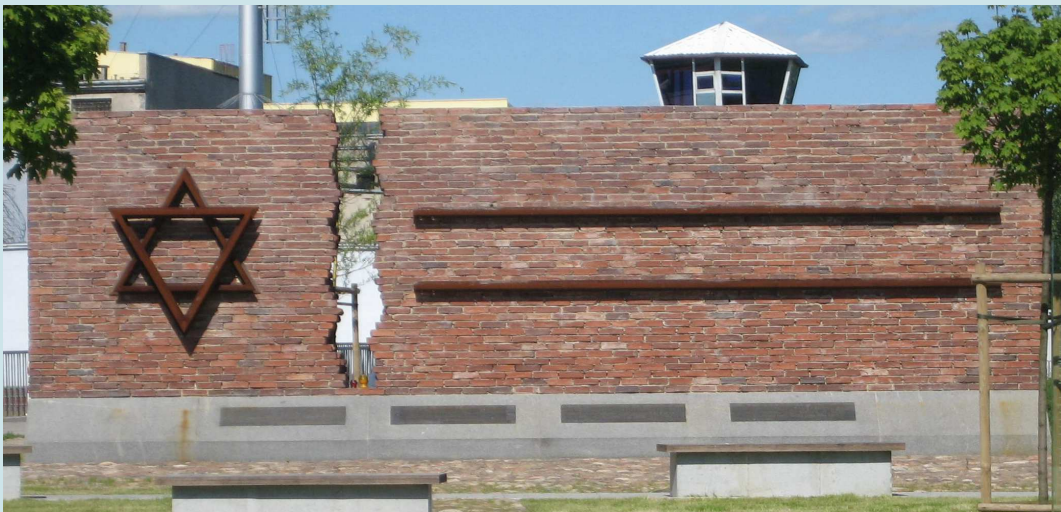
THE JEWS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA

CO-EXISTENCE, HOLOCAUST, MEMORY

The Fate of Częstochowa Jews 1945–2009

Translated into English by
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for her invaluable assistance.



Edward Gabriel Horowitz¹

Survivors in the Centre of Częstochowa

INTRODUCTION

The Jewish Technical School was established in Częstochowa in 1898. After a few years, at the beginning of the twentieth century, my grandfather, Perec Horowitz, who lived at the time in Warsaw, was offered the position of locksmith teacher at this school. This was how Piotr-Perec Horowitz, born in Odessa, after long service in the army of Tsar Nicholas and demobilised in Warsaw, moved with his family to Częstochowa. My father, Izaak, born in Warsaw, spent his childhood in Częstochowa and was educated, before World War I, within the then annexed Russian territory. He attended the Sienkiewicz junior high school, but did not complete his studies. At the age of 16, he accepted a clerical position in the firm, Warta Jute and Flax Spinning and Weaving Mill Sp.A. Every "Sp.A." firm had to have a company secretary and, over time, he took on the position as that company's secretary; before the War, it was an important and well-paid position. In the meantime, my grandfather resigned from the Technical School and, with his younger son Antek, established a metalwork factory, perhaps only a small one - P.Horowitz and Son. My father, apart from working at Warta, was a silent partner with another brother in another factory (also a metalworks) under "Braho" – (*Bracia Horowitz*) Horowitz Brothers.

The whole family was secular – meaning non-religious (maybe due to grandfather's long service in the army).

Salomon Reingold moved from Łódź to Częstochowa at the beginning of the century. In the 1920's, he had a so-called "expedition", meaning a firm when arranged despatches to all over the country. His daughter, Bala Horowitz (nee Reingold), was my mother. She graduated from the Jewish junior high school in Częstochowa. The school's director was the famous historian Mujer Bałaban. Bala ran my father's office and, later, the office of the "Braho" company.

Bala and her brother Meir (Majer), despite the fact that they came from a religious home, belonged to the Hashomer Hatzair youth organisation and, through this organisation, Meir left for Holland to learn farming. He later went to Palestine.

My father, Izaak, and my mother, Bala, knew each by sight, and their relationship developed within another Jewish cultural-sporting group, namely the Jewish Tourism Society (ŻTK). On outings along the length of the *Szlak Orlich Gniazd* (Eagle's Nest Trail), which was still natural and unspoiled, with its hills and castle ruins, the relationship deepened, culminating in their marriage in May 1933.

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I was born a year and a half later and given two names - Edward Gabriel. Since my arrival in Palestine/Israel, I have used the name Gabriel. But all my relatives and friends in Poland, including the family of Wacław Miłowski who saved us during the time of the occupation, and with whose sons, daughter and grandchildren I am in constant contact, still call me Edek.

RESCUE IN CENTRAL CZĘSTOCHOWA

I was born on 21st September 1934 in Częstochowa, so that I was five years old when the War broke out on 1st September. On that day, my father woke me with the words, “War has broken out. We’re going to Warsaw. I hope that the capital will be protected by the Polish Army and will not fall into the hands of the Germans”.



A family photo from March 1939, half a year before the outbreak of the War – in Częstochowa. The children are, from left to right, my cousin Celina, me Edzio (four and a half years old at the time), cousin Haneczka (both cousins were a year younger than me). The adults at the back are, on the left, my mother and, on the right, Celina’s mother, Marysia Horowitz. Only my mother and I survived the Holocaust.

We travelled to Warsaw by goods train which was immediately attacked by German planes. At every air-raid, the train would stop and all the passengers would spill out of the goods wagons. In order to protect yourself from the bombs and shrapnel, you had to run quickly in order to distance yourself as much as possible from the bombed train. On the other hand, you had to be able to return to the train in time before it continued on its way. On one occasion, my father “threw” me into the wagon, but could not manage to get on himself. For a few hours, I travelled alone amongst strangers, not knowing if my father had managed to get into another wagon or whether I was travelling alone, without my parents. After a certain time, the train stopped and my father found me. On another occasion, my father jumped badly out of the wagon, and broke his hand. He had to wait until Warsaw before the hand could be put into plaster.

In Warsaw, we lived in the apartment of my father’s aunt who, herself, moved to live with other relatives. We “lived” – we spent more time in that building’s shelter (in the

basement) than in the apartment itself. One time, we returned to find that some fragments of bomb shrapnel had penetrated the apartment. We lived under those conditions (after travelling a week to reach Warsaw), until the fall of the city. We saw the triumphant parade of the German army – and, helplessly, we returned to Częstochowa.

I don't know why we did not return to our former apartment in the elegant (at the time) building at 11 Wolności Street, but we moved not far away, to the apartment of an aunt in an older building at 15 Wolności Street, where we lived until the establishment of the Jewish ghetto a year and a half later.

For a year and a half we lived kind of normally, but German harassment grew steadily. At the beginning, Jews were forbidden to travel on the train. We were totally forbidden to leave the city. After a time, adults were required to wear armbands, every now and then round-ups happened in the streets and those who were caught were forced to work for the Germans in the Częstochowa district. On the other hand, Jews from nearby small towns were transported to the city and became homeless in Częstochowa. Some of them were accommodated in the basement of the New Synagogue which had been burnt by the Germans. (The home of the Częstochowa Philharmonic Orchestra now stands on that site.) One of my uncles, Idel, looked after these people for the Jewish Community Council. As a result, he contracted typhus and died shortly thereafter. My aunt, his widow, and her children, my cousins, all perished in the Holocaust.

Returning to the harassment, Jews were required to hand over to the Germans their gold and other articles of value, furs, and the like. Soon after, Jews had their furniture appropriated to such an extent that they even took away my rocking-horse.

In April 1941, the Germans established the Jewish ghetto and, as such, a large number of Jews became homeless in their own city. Together with my parents, we moved into the apartment belonging to Piotr Horowitz's grandfather and grandmother at 5 Strażacka Street, at the corner of Targowa Street, vis-a-vis Villa Buhl.

That building stood at the end of the ghetto. We entered it from the Targowa Street side because Strażacka Street, as a major artery and being the only street along which the fire brigade could travel, was not connected to the ghetto – that means that it was on the aryan side which as it turned out, was very important – as I will relate further on.

Schools were not permitted in the ghetto, however I studied in an "underground school". I completed grades 1 and 2 of elementary school in the ghetto. We didn't have school bags – I carried my notebook under my shirt, my pencil in my pocket and classes were held in the apartment of the teacher, Stefa Meisler, if I'm not mistaken. In the years 1941-1942, I participated in a kind of camp which took place in the gardens on Krótka Street. I learned to read very quickly, which was later very important during the loneliness in the bunker.

In the summer of 1942, the Germans conducted an occupation and health inspection of the Jewish population in the ghetto. All adult Jews presented themselves before the

German commissions which examined their health, age and occupation. At the conclusion of the commissions' laborious work, everyone received a new identity card, but all people who were healthy and possessed a constructive occupation, received papers stamped with the German eagle and the rest, papers without "the little eagle". Everyone was certain that nothing would happen to those who possessed papers "with the eagle" because, otherwise, why would the Germans go to so much trouble? But that whole German effort had only one aim – to pacify and to "anaesthetise" the young and healthy section of the Jewish population, barely 2-3 months before the "*akcje*".

Our building, at 5 Strażacka Street, stood, as I've already mentioned, at the end of the ghetto and, from our windows, we could see part of the Aryan side. We saw everything which crossed Strażacką Street which led to the paper mill, and even a section of Krakowska (Narutowicza) Street, which was a very important artery.

In June 1941, we could probably see only a fraction of the German forces which passed through Częstochowa, heading east, for war against Russia. That fraction was enough for us to get depressed – so much artillery, so many tanks!! It looked as though the Germans were invincible!! Only my grandfather, Piotr (Perec) Horowitz, who had served as a youth in the army of Tsar Nicholas and who was already by then very sick, was convinced that the Russians could not be defeated, "You'll see that Russia will defeat the Germans." Shortly after that, my grandfather died, fortunately in his own bed, a year before the Holocaust, and was buried in the Jewish Cemetery (I still haven't been able to locate his grave). His wife, Sonia, suffered a different type of death and did not receive a funeral.

In September 1942, we saw, for the first time, police or army (?) units in black uniforms. Until that time (from September 1939), we saw the green uniforms of the Wehrmacht and the dark-blue Polish police who were active in serving the invaders. My parents understood that they were units of the SS and that their presence in Częstochowa was connected with the Jewish population – liquidation of the ghetto and driving the Jews into the unknown and to an unknown fate. No one in our circle of friends knew anything about death camps and about the so-called "final solution". I need to add that it was then 1942. After liberation, two years later (!), in 1944, the Jews of Budapest still did not know what fate was awaiting them – I put this down to German hypocrisy.

On the eve of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) 1942, a family meeting was held in our family's apartment, a part of which I heard. My father, always a sensible person, stated that there was nowhere to escape to and that the end of the War was still very far off. In September 1942, the Germans neared Stalingrad (!). In Africa, they were closing in on Cairo and, until now, they were undefeated (defeats at Stalingrad and El-Alamein took place later), and we didn't have enough money in order to go into hiding for any length of time. Uncle Antek, my father's younger brother, maintained that, whatever the case, we should escape from the ghetto and try to survive on the Aryan side.

THE DECISION TO ESCAPE

Antek, living in the ghetto, continued to manage the small factory which had belonged to us before the War and which, due to the War, had been confiscated by the Germans. He found himself under the supervision of a German commissar. That commissar, a German (!), agreed to write a "request" for 10 workers for the following day's nightshift; such a request was equivalent to a permit to exit the ghetto. The remaining issue was how to get the two children out of the ghetto - me and my one-year-younger cousin, Celina (I also had a male and female cousin on my mother's side, but here I refer to my father's side of the family).

It was decided that, in the evening, at "dusk", Celina and I would cross the bridge over the Warta (a part of the Warta comprised the ghetto boundary) and, alone, we would go to our former factory. The factory was on the Aryan side which was not far from the river. The last time I was there, I was 5-6 years old and then I lived in the ghetto for a year and a half. Despite that, it was dependent upon me to find our way there. My cousin Celina, at that time seven years old, stated that she would not go anywhere without her mother, and remained in the ghetto with her mother. They both perished when the ghetto was liquidated. My father's cousin was, at that time, in captivity in Russia, the result of being a Polish soldier in the September campaign.

And so, on the eve of the Day of Atonement, which fell on the 21st September 1942, exactly on my eighth birthday, I, my father and my uncle strode along Targowa Street and later Mirowska Street, in the direction of the bridge over the Warta. Along the way, we passed synagogues and *shtiebels* (premises serving as temporary synagogues). Crowds of people, who also sensed the impending danger, prayed to G-d asking Him for His love and favour.

A "navy-blue" policeman stood on the bridge. My father and uncle engaged him in conversation and maybe they gave him a bribe. In any case, supposedly unnoticed by him, I darted across the bridge – I went very much bent over so that no one would see the Jewish boy as he crossed over. After a short walk, without any problem, I reached the factory where a Jewish worker, who had been let in on my escape, was waiting for me. It was around seven o'clock.

At eleven o'clock, that same day, the alleged workers arrived for the night shift – my parents, uncles, grandmother, cousin Oleś and another two or three former workers at that factory.

As I mentioned, it was eleven o'clock. At that late hour, SS-men, in black uniforms, besieged the ghetto from all sides, "relieving" the navy-blue police from their stations. No one was now able to leave the ghetto! The following day, the 22nd September, the so-called "*akcje*" began – namely, the deportation of the Jewish population to their deaths at Treblinka, as it later turned out.

We were put into the attic of the factory. Through the attic window, on the following day (22/09/1942), we watched as the mass of Jews from the ghetto was led to the goods train station which was located not far from our small factory. People walked carrying suitcases or bags, still believing that they were to be exiled and not murdered. I will never forget that sight, and it was there before my eyes in October 2009, during the unveiling of the monument to the memory of those who had been exiled – sent to their deaths, which was erected on the site of the former goods railway station.

After a few days, the German factory commissar declared that the factory workers had learnt about our hiding-place. He feared that they would denounce us to the Gestapo, so must leave the factory premises. Where to? Where to? We had to split up. My grandmother was sent to friends of the family. It turned out that they would not take her in. To this time, we don't know what happened to her – whether she tried going to other friends or whether she returned to the ghetto. We never found out what happened to her.

The four of us, my parents, me and my fourteen-year-old cousin, Olek, left the factory in the night and headed for the depths of suburban Zawodzie, to a friend by the name of Bolek. Bolek had visited us in the ghetto (it should be remembered here, that, unlike other ghettos, Christians were permitted to enter and cross the Częstochowa ghetto) and he promised that, when the time came, he would be ready to help us. Despite that, when he opened the door and saw us, he was horrified. He told us categorically that we could not stay longer than twenty four hours. The following evening, we were faced with a crossing; we decided to seek shelter in Lisiniec. We walked the whole night, scared of every shadow and keeping to the side-streets so as not to encounter any German patrols. By the morning, we had reached the brickworks in Lisiniec which, before the War, had belonged to my mother's sister and brother-in-law. The brickworks foreman recognised us and put us up in the attic and the mice and a raging draught. We spent a month in that attic.

During the course of that month, my mother contracted an ear infection and had horrible pains. She needed medical assistance, but she only had sedatives, so-called "cock-erel" pills, and she lost the hearing in that ear.

After a month, there was a break in the "*akcje*". My father and Olek returned to the "Small Ghetto". My mother and I still remained for a short time in the attic at those brickworks, until the foreman denied us permission to stay any longer. After throwing us out, he probably took in another Jewish family who could pay him more than we could.

I don't know who organised it, but my mother and I, plus my father who had escaped from the ghetto, travelled 14 kilometres in one night, and were taken in by a peasant, whose home was one kilometre from the village of Zawada. There, we divided our time between the house (at night) and the barn (during the day). Apart from the farmer, his brother-in-law knew about us. His cottage was one kilometre away and also a kilometre away from the village. After a time, the brother-in-law demanded that we move to his cottage, as he also wanted to profit from us. For a few weeks, we stayed in the brother-in-

law's cottage, He then arranged for an assault and robbery on my father not far from his home. After that, he evicted us on the pretext that the robbers now knew that he was hiding Jews. For that reason, we could no longer stay with him, nor return to his brother-in-law.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">BEKANTMACHUNG</h2> <p>Betrifft: Beherbergung von geflüchteten Juden.</p> <p>Es besteht Anlass zu folgendem Hinweis: Gemäss der 3. Verordnung über Aufenthaltsbeschränkungen im Generalgouvernement vom 15. 10. 1941 (VO. Bl. GG. S. 595) unterliegen Juden, die den jüdischen Wohnbezirk unbefugt verlassen, der Todesstrafe.</p> <p>Gemäss der gleichen Vorschrift unterliegen Personen, die solchen Juden wissentlich Unterschlupf gewähren, Beköstigung verabfolgen oder Nahrungsmittel verkaufen, ebenfalls der Todesstrafe.</p> <p>Die nichtjüdische Bevölkerung wird daher dringend gewarnt:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) <u>Juden Unterschlupf zu gewähren,</u> 2.) <u>Juden Beköstigung zu verabfolgen,</u> 3.) <u>Juden Nahrungsmittel zu verkaufen.</u> <p style="font-size: small;">Tschentschau, den 24. 9. 42.</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">OGŁOSZENIE</h2> <p>Dotyczy: przetrzymania ukrywających się żydów</p> <p>Zachodzi potrzeba przypomnienia, że stosownie do § 3 Rozporządzenia o ograniczeniach pobytu w Gen. Gub. z dnia 15. X. 1941 roku (Dz. Rozp. dla GG. str. 595) żydzi, opuszczający dzielnicę żydowską bez zezwolenia, podlegają karze śmierci.</p> <p>Według tego rozporządzenia, osobom, które takim żydom świadomie udzielają przytułku, dostarczają im jedzenia lub sprzedają artykuły żywnościowe, grozi również kara śmierci.</p> <p>Niniejszym ostrzega się stanowczo ludność nieżydowską przed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) <u>udzielaniem żydom przytułku,</u> 2.) <u>dostarczaniem im jedzenia,</u> 3.) <u>sprzedawaniem im artykułów żywnościowych.</u> <p style="font-size: small;">Częstochowa, dnia 24. 9. 42.</p>
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**Der Stadthauptmann
Dr. Franke**

An announcement from the city commandant, published 24th September 1942 during the ghetto liquidation: Those who helped Jews fleeing from the ghetto faced the death penalty. From the Yad Vashem collection.

My father managed to get in contact with his brother Antek, who had succeeded in convincing his friend, Waław Miłowski, to arrange a hiding-place – a "bunker" for his brother's family (for us) and, if everything worked out, he would be given ownership of the small factory in return. In his youth, he lived near the Horowitz family and, for a period of time, worked in the family's small factory.

Waław Miłowski – Righteous Among the Nations, a noble and exceedingly brave man, perhaps a little reckless (but if not, then ... ?), sincere, loving people, made it his mission to save our family. He sent his wife and four and a half year old son to the countryside so that they would not be on constant danger. He then rented a horrible, one-room with kitchen apartment on Krakowska Street, in the very centre of Częstochowa – one could say, until recently, the centre of the ghetto. Why was it terrible? Because it was located at the very end of a backyard, behind a rubbish tip, without running water or a toilet. Generally speaking, who would want to even go down to the backyard, avoiding the rubbish tip with difficulty, and see what was going on behind it?

A window black-out was in effect. In the mornings, the majority of people would remove the black-out material from their windows in order to let the sunshine inside. Our

Wacek always "forgot" and left one or two windows blacked-out throughout the day, and that became the one corner in which I could move around. There was a cellar in the kitchen, dug out under the floor and covered with a wooden flap. Usually, coal was kept in the cellar. Wacek created a wooden dividing-wall in the cellar and, behind the dividing-wall was a tight space for three people. At times of whatever danger, we hid behind that compartment. We were worried that if anyone lifted the flap, he would work out straight away that the basement had three stone walls and one wooden one – very suspicious. But that was the best solution under the given circumstances. We stayed there (not in the cellar, but in the house) from April 1943 to January 1945 – all of 22 months! Throughout that whole time, we didn't see the sun. We had no fresh air. The ability to move around was very limited, but the biggest problem was hunger. We had been robbed and for months, if not years, had been without any income. But Wacek, who was an ordinary worker with a wife and child leaving separately in the country to support, was in no position to support us too. But, in some measure, he did. With him as the intermediary (as we never left the bunker) we sold more or less all of our valuables and, again with his help, we kept in contact with our friends who had worked with my father, before the War, at the "Warta" Spinning and Weaving Mill – I remember the foreman, Władysław Bielobrodek and Aleksander Sosna. For a certain time, both of them sent us food and sometimes, a small amount of money. A part of that money was derived, as Bielobrodek related after the War, from hiding the Jew, Salomon Waga, with whom Bielobrodek was also in contact. Sometimes, Antek, who was in Warsaw and later in Germany on Aryan papers, would send certain amounts. My father, who was strongly self-disciplined, began to fast one day, and later two days per week. In the end, he was bloated from hunger. My mother also fasted one day per week, but they pressured me to eat whatever was there. To this day, I feel guilty that I ate. If I'd claimed to be full more often, my parents would have eaten more. They were hungry during our whole time in the bunker.

The other problem was to maintain our mental health. I had one, solitary book in the bunker. At least it was a wonderful children's book, namely Henryk Sienkiewicz's "In the Desert and In the Forest". I read it from beginning to end, and from end to beginning. I read excerpts – I knew them by heart. Eventually, we were forced to sell it, almost certainly for the price of a loaf of bread. From time to time, Wacek brought German-censored Polish newspapers, and I read them from cover to cover. Despite the Germans attempting to cover up their defeats, it was possible to read where the fronts were at any given time. We waited for a year and a half (all of 1943 and half of 1944) until the Allies had managed to invade Normandy. We rued the fact that the Russians had halted their offensive at the banks of the Wisła and waited half a year before resuming it - the worst, last half-year before liberation.

TWO PARTICULAR EVENTS DURING OUR STAY IN THE BUNKER

The first of them occurred on 22nd December 1943. Through a non-blacked-out window, we saw 3-4 German soldiers banging on our door. Before they had broken down the door, we had managed to run into the cellar and to sit behind the wooden dividing-wall. We were certain, that our end had come. The soldiers tore into the apartment and lifted the flap to the cellar, but in such a way, that the flap actually hid the wooden dividing-wall which had always been for us a source of fear that it would raise suspicion. We heard the German word “Kohle”, meaning that there was only coal in the cellar. After a few minutes, they left not having noticed either us or even the burning stove. We remained hidden as, following their visit, the door had been knocked down. Fortunately, not long afterwards, Lutek, Wacek’s brother who knew about us, came by. He fixed the door and then we could leave the cellar. Wacek then told us that, in the factory where he worked, the leather belts used in the machines had been stolen. It was actually sabotage and, on that day, a unit of the local garrison visited the apartments of all the workers in order to find the stolen belts.

The second event was repeated several times. Polish partisans came by the apartment and ordered that they be put up overnight. In those situations, we would sit in the cellar the entire night. There was not enough oxygen in the basement for three people to breathe over all those hours. My father crossed the dividing-wall and lifted the flap with his fingers in order to let a little air into the basement through the narrow gap. The lack of oxygen gave me fierce headaches, torso pressure and a lot of suffering.

In the end, by January 1945, the Częstochowa Committee, which helped fugitives from Warsaw (after the Warsaw Uprising), requisitioned the apartment containing our bunker. Wacek was, more or less, told, “You’re living on your own. We’re placing a whole family into this apartment”. There was no choice. Wacek took me to his parents-in-law who lived in Zawodzie (as it turned out, they were also hiding two Jews) and told my parents that they had to fend for themselves.

My parents saw no other alternative than to commit suicide. How would they manage to do that without, arms, knives or medical supplies? They decided to drown themselves in the river. On the way to the river, they heard from passers-by that the Soviets had now moved away from the Wisła and had begun a new offensive. Upon hearing this, my parents decided to go to Wacek’s in-laws, even though they feared his response to this - and, even more, the reaction of his in-laws. When Wacek saw them, he was very happy. His in-laws, Franciszek and Agnieszka Zmysłek, as well as perhaps Władek, the brother of Wacek’s wife, agreed to hide my parents also, as the distant sound of cannons could be heard. As far as I can remember, it took the Russians barely three days offensive in order to reach Częstochowa. On the 16th January 1945, the Soviet Army liberated Częstochowa.

EPILOGUE

We had been liberated. The danger and threats subsided, but there was no work, no income and no roof over our heads. My father was exhausted from long-term hunger, but gradually recovered. My father went to the “Warta” company looking for work. Certainly, they were prepared to hire him, but for the same money that he had received before the War. This alleged acceptance of his return was, in fact, a refusal, since during the War years of 1939-1945, there had been incredible inflation.

We found an apartment at 15 Wolności Street, this one, owned by the Rosenberg family. The one surviving member of the family, Józek, was currently serving in the Polish Army (with the rank of lieutenant) and rented us the apartment. My mother, who was always very courageous, took up some minor trading and began to have an initial income. My father, who had an excellent command of the Polish language and knew how to carry on correspondence with municipal and government bodies, was asked by many people – Jews – to represent them, personally or in writing, before the authorities and the courts. It was mainly to do with reclaiming real estate and inheritances from deceased relatives. After some time, he would receive certain sums of money from them.

After a short time, the Jewish Committee was organised and aid arrived from American Jewry – finance, clothing and the like. I began to go to school, to the fifth grade of the elementary school on Katedralna Street. In truth, I had never passed grades 3 or 4, but I was admitted into the class because of my age at the time - ten years old.

Straight after liberation, my parents decided to leave Poland and depart for Palestine – today’s Israel. However, we stayed for one year longer in order to repay Wacek. Unfortunately, shortly before liberation, the Germans had transported, to Germany, the machines from our former, small factory and the factory which had been promised to Wacek simply no longer existed.

My mother went to court, the result of which was that she was recognised as the rightful heir to her deceased sister and obtained a few morgs of land on the edge of Częstochowa. She gave the land to Wacek so that he could sell it. Only after the court proceedings had concluded did my parents allow themselves to emigrate. With regard to that property – after our departure, the land was “nationalised”. In the long run, Wacek became a worker and foreman at a train-wagon factory in Wrocław, where he moved straight after the War and received a “post-German” apartment with a small garden. My parents and, later, I helped Wacek financially over many years. In 1980, we hosted Wacek and Hela in Israel and, during their stay in Israel, he was recognised a “Righteous Amongst the Nations” and planted a tree on the “Avenue of the Righteous”.

The decision to leave for Palestine/Israel was, in itself, not enough, as the Polish border and the gate to Palestine were both closed. Delegates of a Zionist organisation arrived in Częstochowa, but they concerned themselves with organising young people who had lost their parents. They established groups, so-called “kibbutze” and sent them to vari-

ous countries in Europe in order to transfer them, from there, to Palestine. The organisation, at least at that time, did not help families such as ours, families with children.

In February 1946, we went with Lucek, a young Jew, who "smuggled" people from Poland to Germany, on such an expedition. For a certain, quite considerable sum, he was to take us to Munich, which meant crossing three borders – from Poland into the Russian sector of Germany, from the Russian sector into the British sector (two difficult crossings), and the third, much easier one, from the British sector into the American.

The Nysa and Odra rivers represented the border between Poland and the Russian sector. Fortunately for us, there was an immense flood in February 1946. The border guardhouses near the banks of the Odra had to be evacuated, which enabled us to cross the river in rubber boats more easily. We crossed the Russian-British border in the closed rear of a truck. After two weeks, we reached Munich. There, we were put into one of the many camps for "displaced persons" – refugees. "Our" camp was in Einring (a former Luftwaffe camp) was located in the beautiful surroundings of the Bavarian mountains. I was there for only a few weeks.

In the camp, it was announced that King George VI had decided to grant child Holocaust survivors 1,000 certificates, i.e. documents permitting entry into Palestine – in this instance, for children only. Again, we had a family meeting. Should we separate after sharing such a long epic? Personally, I wanted to go and I convinced my parents that, in Israel, I would begin to study "for the long haul" and that I would be able to make up for those lost years of education.

I was accepted into the children's transport and, after the two weeks that followed, on 25th April 1946, I arrived alone in Palestine/Israel, as an 11 year old boy without his parents. For three years, I lived in Israel in a kibbutz boarding-school.

My parents could not manage to travel with me – for a year and a half, they could not obtain certificates, nor were they accepted onto an illegal ship. In the meantime, my mother fell pregnant and, in that condition, she fell victim to a car accident in Germany, as a result of which she lost the hearing in her other ear and sustained other injuries. Despite that, still in Germany, she gave birth to another son whom they named Perce, after his deceased grandfather.

It was not until 1948, during the time of the War of Independence in Israel, that we managed to reunite in Israel and to build our lives anew as a four-member family.



Wacław and Helena Milowski receive the "Diplom d'Honneur", the certificate of The Righteous Among The Nations, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1980. From left: a dignitary of Yad Vashem, Wacław and Helena Milowski, Bala Horowitz, E. G. Horowitz



Wacław and Helena Milowski plant a small tree on the Righteous Among the Nations forest.