

# LIFE IN TRANSIT

JEWS IN  
POSTWAR ŁÓDŹ,  
1945-1950

# **Studies in Russian and Slavic Literatures, Cultures and History**

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JEWS IN  
POSTWAR ŁÓDŹ,  
1945-1950

SHIMON REDLIŃCH

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*For my teachers and friends from the Hebrew Ghetto  
Fighters' School in Lodz*

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PREFACE *and*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE IDEA OF WRITING ABOUT POSTWAR LODZ HAD ALREADY GERMINATED while I was working on my Brzezany book.<sup>1</sup> The basic premise of both projects was to place my personal memories within a wider historical context. I lived in Brzezany as a child for the few prewar years and then during the war. We moved to Lodz in the summer of 1945, and left for Israel in early 1950. Thus my adolescence, in a large industrial city in central Poland, was completely unlike my childhood years in a picturesque and pastoral small town in the eastern Polish borderlands. Whereas as a child in Brzezany I had to face the tragedies of the War and the Holocaust, my Lodz years coincided with a significant and meaningful period in the history of the Jews in Poland immediately after the war.

For decades, the lives and fates of the survivors in the immediate postwar years were insufficiently researched and discussed. They were overshadowed by the tremendous events of the War and the Holocaust on the one hand and by the emergence of Israel on the other. Zionist-oriented historiography has tended to accept a rather simplified, almost predestined, formula of “Holocaust and Redemption.” The few in-between years got lost somehow. The prevailing and stereotyped image of Holocaust survivors was primarily one of passive and helpless remnants of vibrant Jewish communities. It is only since the 1990s that this perception has begun to be challenged. My study of Jews and Jewish life in postwar Lodz is, in a way, part of this novel approach.

Lodz, in the years 1945-1950, was the major urban center of Jewish population in Poland. A basic feature of Jewish life in postwar Lodz, as it was throughout postwar Poland, was its fluid and transitory nature. Yet, despite the ever-shifting scene, there was a strong sense of vitality and purpose. Although some research on postwar Jewish life in Poland has been emerging recently, studies of specific locations are rather scarce. As for research of the history of Jews in Lodz, the few studies that have been published focus on prewar Lodz and on the Lodz Ghetto. Very little has been written on Jews and Jewish life in postwar Lodz.

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<sup>1</sup> *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002).

In some ways, my mental and emotional journey to postwar Lodz has been similar to my return to prewar Brzezany. Both were happy periods in my life. Unlike those who view the early postwar years as a rather sad postscript to the war's tragedy and trauma, I've always recalled my postwar Lodz years fondly. One reason for this, perhaps, is the fact that my Lodz years were preceded by the Holocaust and followed by emigration and adjustment to a new life in Israel.

My physical return to Eastern Europe has been facilitated by the fall of Communism. I've made repeated trips to Warsaw and Lodz. While the memories of Jewish Warsaw were unearthed and discussed there increasingly in the course of the 1990s, a similar process has begun in Lodz only in the last few years.

As I did in *Together and Apart*, I decided to base my Lodz book both on conventional sources and on interviews with people who lived in the city in the postwar years. I sought to check, verify and confront my adolescent postwar Lodz memories with the memories of others who lived there at the same time. I was curious to find out whether my Lodz impressions, mostly positive and pleasant, were correct. The very act of meeting with and listening to people who shared my Lodz experience was moving and gratifying. Historians are reluctant to make use of life stories, because it often brings up the familiar charge of lack of objectivity. Having gone through enough formal documents, I've become increasingly convinced that they too do not always tell us the objective "truth." I am convinced now even more than in the past that individual voices are highly significant in the writing of history, no less than the more conventional and traditional sources.

Since most of my adolescent life in postwar Lodz took place in a Jewish-Zionist milieu and since most of the Jewish writings deal with that milieu, I was determined to include others in my study too: the Communists and the assimilationists. Unlike the Brzezany book, which discusses the Polish-Jewish-Ukrainian triangle, the Lodz book centers primarily on Jews. I also faced a structural dilemma. Whereas the Brzezany book covers a quarter of a century, the Lodz book deals with less than five years. It made sense to present my Brzezany story chronologically. The Lodz story centers mostly upon the major aspects of Jewish life during the postwar years. Initially, I intended to write only about the early postwar years in Lodz, but as my research and interviews progressed, I came to realize that Jewish life in postwar Lodz could not be comprehended unless the wartime background of those who survived the war and the Holocaust, was also presented.

\* \* \*

IN RESEARCHING AND WRITING THIS BOOK I'VE BEEN ENCOURAGED AND assisted by friends and colleagues. When *Together and Apart* — a blend of historical and personal narratives — was first published, I was quite apprehensive. The positive reception of that book by both professional historians and ordinary readers vastly surpassed my expectations. It has encouraged me to continue along similar lines.

I am deeply indebted to my colleague, friend and neighbor, Professor Yuval Lurie, with whom I discussed my Lodz project during our numerous “walking seminars.” I appreciate his critical approach and his insightful suggestions. Professor Gaby Schreiber encouraged me to persist. Professor Jerzy Tomaszewski sent me a document concerning my Hebrew school in postwar Lodz, and helped me in the early stages of the Lodz project. Professor Matityahu Mintz, who was an emissary of Hashomer Hatzair in postwar Poland, suggested some interesting interviewees and was kind enough to share his personal memories with me. Professor Joanna Michlic shared her research on Lodz in the post-Communist era with me. Henryk Grynberg, a friend and a contemporary of my Lodz years, gave me much of his time and attention. Dr. Maurice Preter shared with me his interest in and enthusiasm for *Undzere Kinder*, a Yiddish film produced in postwar Lodz, which his father and I had participated in as child actors. Professor Gaby Finder, who researched the history of that film, has become a close friend.

I shared the idea of the Lodz project with Prof. Antony Polonsky and Prof. Padraic Kenney. Both made helpful comments. I also discussed the Lodz project with Prof. Mordechai Altshuler and Prof. Omer Bartov. Prof. Janusz Wrobel and Prof. Leszek Olejnik assisted my research in Lodz. Mr. Ryszard Bonislawski walked the streets of contemporary Lodz with me, pointing out the geography of postwar Jewish Lodz. Prof. Halina Goldberg introduced me to her parents, who had remained in Lodz through all those years. While in Warsaw I was frequently hosted by my longtime friends Professor Ludwik Czaja and Professor Jolanta Brach-Czaina. I spent some very pleasant times in Lodz with my friend Dr. Kaja Kazmierska and her family.

I deeply appreciate Sir Martin Gilbert's enthusiastic response to my Lodz book and his preparation of the maps. Ms. Roni Bluestein-Livnon of Ben-Gurion University's Geography Department assisted me in preparing the map of postwar Lodz. I would also like to thank Mr. Zeev Baran,

Honorary Consul of Poland in Jerusalem, for letting me examine his collection of *Mosty*.

Invaluable help has been extended to me by those who searched for relevant materials in Polish libraries and archives. My special thanks go to Ms. Ewa Kozminska-Frejlak in Warsaw and to Ms. Katarzyna Szafranska in Lodz. Mr. Wojciech Lasota, Dr. Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov and Mr. Radoslaw Peterman were also of great help. Mr. Roman Zakharii conducted several interviews for my Lodz project, for which I am thankful. My former student at Ben-Gurion University, Mr. Boaz Vanetik, conducted a search at the Yad Yaari Archive in Israel. I would also like to thank the staffs of the Library and Archives at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, of ZIH, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and of the IPN Archive in Lodz. The meetings and interviews with my Lodz classmates were moving and educating. I also learned a lot from other people who lived in postwar Lodz and were willing to share their wartime and postwar memories with me. I thank them all.

Assistance for my Lodz project was graciously extended by the Israel Science Foundation and by the Rabb Center for Holocaust Studies at Ben-Gurion University and by Professor Jimmy Weinblatt, Rector of Ben-Gurion University.

I appreciate very much Dr. Saadya Sternberg's editorial assistance. I am grateful to Margo Schotz for preparing the manuscript for publication and to Yossi Regev for his help with computer-related problems.

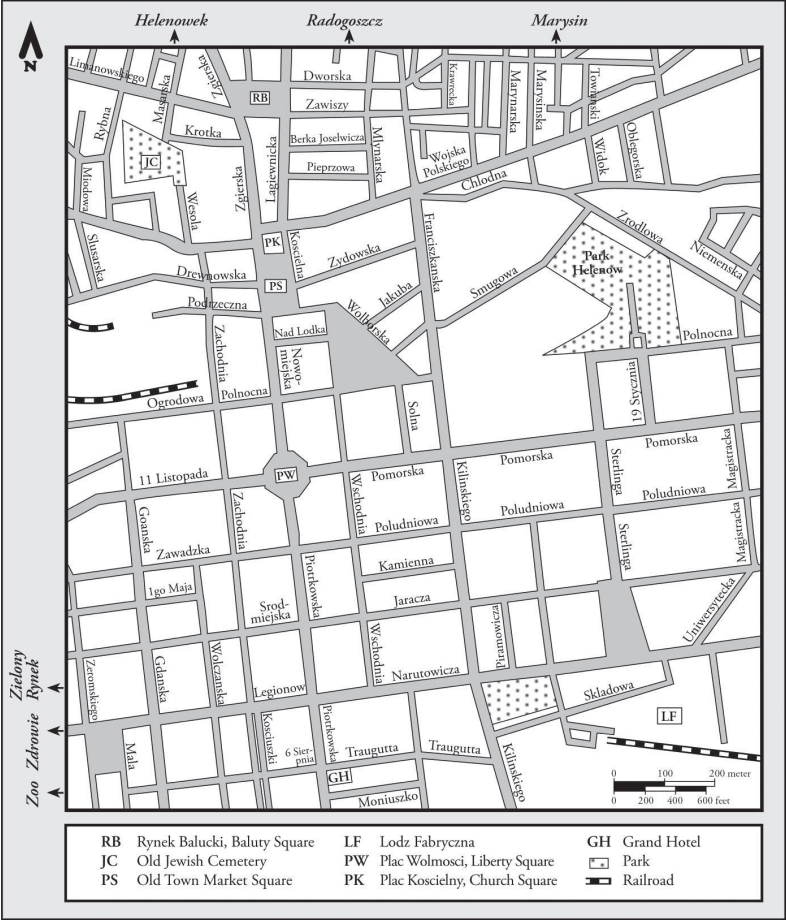
Professor Lazar Fleishman of Stanford read the manuscript and recommended its publication. The staff of Academic Studies Press was most helpful and cooperative.

I profoundly thank my wife Judith who for years has shared my passion for and obsession with Brzezany and Lodz. I also appreciate the interest in my research and travels of my daughters, Shlomit and Efrat. Hopefully, I will some day be able to take my lovely grandchildren, Oria, Shay and Alon to Brzezany and Lodz.

*Modi'in, June 2010*

*A Note on Transliteration*

Transliteration has been simplified for the convenience of the reader. Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish titles were translated into English. Polish diacritical marks have been omitted.



Postwar Łódź.



Wartime and postwar Poland, showing the locations mentioned in this book.



The Soviet Union, showing the locations mentioned in this book.



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MY LODZ MEMORIES

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I RETURNED TO LODZ, AFTER 37 YEARS, IN APRIL 1987. My host in Warsaw at the time was Karol, who with his father Stanislaw were friends of my Grandpa Fishl before the war. Indeed, they were so faithful to him, and so courageous, that they helped us with food during the war itself, when we were hiding in the empty, half-ruined Brzezany ghetto. I lived in Brzezany, in eastern Galicia, up to age ten, and have always cherished the memory of the first six, “normal,” years of my life there, before the arrival of the Germans. I was a happy, secure and loved child when the Germans occupied Brzezany in the summer of 1941, and it is to those few normal prewar years that I always return for solace and hope. At the same time, however, Brzezany is for me a site of loss and trauma. My father, along with Grandpa Fishl and numerous members of our family, were either deported from there to the Belzec death camp or shot and buried in the local Jewish cemetery.

In German-occupied Brzezany we first lived in the ghetto, and then, following its liquidation, hid in the nearby village of Raj until the summer of 1944 when the Red Army arrived. We left Soviet-Ukrainian Brzezany, as it was now referred to, a year later and settled in Lodz, where we stayed for nearly five years before departing for Israel. Karol and his family moved to Poland as well, but for many years there was no contact between us. My first contact with him was made only in the early eighties, and he arrived in Israel in May 1986 to be awarded, together with his late father, the title of Righteous Gentile. Karol planted a tree at Yad Vashem. A year later, on Easter Monday, I traveled with him from Warsaw to Lodz.

It was a gray, cold and drizzly morning. The trip took less than two hours. I had been thinking about, imagining and dreaming of Lodz for some time, sensing that a return might become real. And here was the mid-city train terminal, Lodz Fabryczna, much smaller than in my memory. After a five-minute taxi ride we were on the corner of Gdanska Street and 1go Maja, May First Street. I had often thought about this corner house, and now here I was, facing the Gdanska Street entrance. The street was completely deserted, nothing but dilapidated buildings. The small palace opposite “my” house — the “palacyk” which I knew served as a music

conservatory — was all black and gray. The sight was depressing. As I approached “my” house, I felt dizzy, experiencing an eerie sense of being catapulted back in time. I started checking the list of the tenants’ names at the entrance as if expecting to find somebody I had known there years earlier. Then I walked to a neighboring house, on the other side of the street where some of our acquaintances used to live, and looked for their names. I hardly noticed the group of teenagers standing farther back in the courtyard. Suddenly I was all wet. The remains of a bucketfull of ice-cold water was running down my neck. I was instantly hurled back into postwar Lodz. I was being chased by Polish teenagers. Now and then: in the very same streets. Breaking into my immediate reaction of anger and fear, Karol apologized and reminded me of the ancient Polish custom of Lany Poniedziałek — Wet Easter Monday.

I do not recall a prevailing atmosphere of anti-Semitism in postwar Lodz, as some of my Lodz friends and schoolmates do. Some incidents, though, have remained in my memory. I’m walking home in the late afternoon, along Narutowicza Street. It’s almost dark. Suddenly two Polish boys, older and bigger than me, appear out of nowhere and push me into a building entrance. They slap me and disappear. I do not recall any words being spoken or shouted, though I’m sure that they must have called me names. Another memory: It’s a bright summer afternoon, on the left side of 1go Maja. I’m walking toward Wolczanska Street. Two or three boys surround me and start calling me names. This time, for some reason, I’m not scared. Feelings of anger and rage overcome me instantly. I reach into my pocket, pull out a penknife and draw the blade. They run away and I chase them.

I never thought I would return to Poland. The first time I became aware of a real prospect of doing so was in the mid-1980s. In an Israeli newspaper I had read a short, emotional poem by a very unlikely author, Professor Shlomo Avineri, a political scientist from the Hebrew University. He had just returned from his first postwar visit to his hometown in Poland. Avineri wrote: “To return to the town of your birth and feel like landing on Mars.”<sup>1</sup> Yehudit Hendel, an Israeli writer whose parents left Warsaw for Palestine before the Second World War, traveled to Poland in the fall of 1986 and told the story of her visit in a series of radio talks in early 1987. I was fascinated by her torn emotions and her strong urge to travel to Poland, which ultimately prevailed. “I was scared and my first impulse was to refuse. But suddenly it all began to move, and soon I couldn’t think about anything except going to Poland. Suddenly I felt I had to go to Poland, and yet, at the same time, I felt a tremendous hesitation. All that baggage we drag around with us from Poland. Suddenly I was plunged

into a vortex of dread and regret, and memory, and longing to forget, and hatred.”<sup>2</sup> Eva Hoffman’s return to Poland was of a completely different kind. In her *Exit Into History* she wrote: “I was born in Poland and got my primary schooling there. I emigrated in early adolescence, but for a long time afterward, Poland remained for me an idealized landscape of the mind. It stayed arrested in my imagination as a land of childhood sensuality, lyricism, vividness, and human warmth.”<sup>3</sup>

My own first return to Poland, as well as subsequent visits, differed from that of most Jewish and Israeli travelers to that country. Jews and Israelis looked, almost exclusively, for camps and cemeteries. For me Poland was not only a place of murder, death and mourning. It was landscapes, language and culture as well. I did go to Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek, but I also spent time with my Polish friends, Karol and the Czajas. Ludwik Czaja, a professor of informatics, and his wife Jola, a professor of philosophy, both of whom I had met while on a sabbatical in the US, were mountain climbers on a nearly professional level. I went with them year after year to Zakopane, and we climbed the Tatras. Unlike most Jews traveling to Poland, I experienced it as a place where one could meet friends and go on a holiday.

Another kind of “return” to postwar Lodz was the reunion of former students of the Lodz Hebrew School in Tel-Aviv, in the early fall of 1997. The idea was mine, and a few of my Lodz friends were ready to implement it. We succeeded in getting together some 80 people, almost all residing in Israel. Two arrived for the occasion from abroad: Hanka Rydel from Montreal and Dr. Yossi Shalev-Spokojny from Las Vegas. I recalled Hanka as one of the prettiest girls in our school. Now she was a quite well-to-do, chain smoking Canadian whose former beauty still showed. Spokojny used to be a rather shy and withdrawn kid, pampered by his parents. He became a successful eye doctor in the gambling capital of America. A few of our former teachers, now in their mid- and upper-eighties, showed up as well. Among them were Baruch Kaplinski, our first principal, and our gym instructor, Captain Binyamin Majerczak.

Kaplinski, a retired lawyer and a Biblical scholar, started by quoting from the *Book of Psalms*: “I was young and now I’m old.” Then he told us how our school had started. He had arrived in Lodz from a Nazi labor camp in the spring of 1945. Fortunately for all of us, he soon thereafter met Antek Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin, both ardent Zionists and participants in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. “Towards the end of our chat Antek asked me whether I would do something for the Zionist Labor movement. He suggested that I set up a Hebrew school in Lodz, modeled on the prewar Tarbut Hebrew schools. Although I was doubtful about the

whole thing, I agreed. Antek asked me to name the school after the Ghetto Fighters. “Bravo!, I responded, there couldn’t be a better idea.”<sup>4</sup>

Natan Gross was there too. In postwar Lodz he was a young, freshly-minted film director. He filmed *Undzere Kinder* (*Our Children*), the only Jewish feature film to be made in postwar Poland. Since his Lodz years, Natan has directed numerous films, mostly documentaries, has written books and contributed regularly to the only Israeli Polish newspaper, the *Nowiny-Kurier*. At our gathering, in the Diaspora Museum, Natan pulled out a piece of paper and read a poem about orphaned Jewish children which he had written back in 1946. Excerpts from *Undzere Kinder*, in which some members of the audience had participated, were screened. The reunion ended with the singing of Hebrew songs, accompanied by an accordion. Some of them were the first Hebrew songs we had learned in our school on Poludniowa Street.<sup>5</sup>

My return to Lodz was in some ways different from my return to Brzezany, where I’d had a happy childhood before the war, and then gone through loss and trauma during the Holocaust, but in other ways resembled it. I had a strong urge to “return” to both. I always recalled my time in Lodz as a rather happy period in my life and kept, on the whole, good memories of those five years. I longed to return to my childhood town of Brzezany, but I was also drawn to Lodz, the city of my adolescence.

Four of us had survived our experiences in Brzezany: my mother, her younger sister Malcia, Malcia’s husband Vovo and me. My extended family, more than a hundred people, were either deported to the Belzec death camp or shot and buried in mass graves at the old Jewish Okopisko cemetery overlooking Brzezany. We departed from Brzezany on a hot and humid midsummer day, in 1945. We were part of the mass exodus of prewar Polish citizens who were allowed and urged to leave Soviet Ukraine and to resettle in the so-called *Ziemie Odzyskane*, The Recovered Lands, in western Poland. We rode in a roofless freight train with a few passenger cars in the front, surrounded by our few meager possessions and bundles of dry straw. For me, a boy of ten, it felt like a summer vacation and smelled of adventure. The train rolled slowly through picturesque countryside landscapes. From time to time big, heavy raindrops preceded an occasional violent midsummer storm. For me it was fun; for the grownups, not so much. On top of the usual difficulties of relocation, Malcia was in the last weeks of her pregnancy. Vovo secured a seat for her in one of the passenger cars. The first sizeable towns on the Polish side of the new postwar border were Krosno and Jaslo. It was in one of them that Malcia and Vovo got off the train. My aunt expected to give birth very soon, and they didn’t want it happening on the train.

I have no recollections of the remaining part of that voyage, but it must have taken a week for the train to reach Lodz, on its way to western Poland. I do not recall my arrival in Lodz, but I do know from family stories that while my mother continued the long journey to The Recovered Lands, I was left in Lodz. It must have been early autumn. I stayed with distant relatives from Brzezany, the Wagszals. My immediate surroundings had changed drastically: from a small-town neighborhood in eastern Galicia with a green countryside nearby I had come to a gray Polish metropolis. Lodz was known for years as the “Polish Manchester.” Already in the 19th century, it was one of the biggest centers for the cotton industry in Europe. I do not recall its smoking red-brick chimneys, but I do remember that a white shirt would turn gray in a matter of hours out in the streets. To me this did not make the damnest difference.

I must have been separated from my closest family for some time. My mother was in Chojnow, not far from the new Polish-German border, where numerous Brzezanyites were resettled in previously German households. Vovo went back to the town in southeast Poland, where Malcia gave birth. I was alone with my relatives, Dr. Wagszal’s family. Decades later, sipping coffee at the Ben-Gurion University Faculty Club, I heard from Nurit, Dr. Wagszal’s daughter-in-law, about how the Wagszals used to act as benefactors and sponsors for their “poorer relatives.” This was an eye-opener for me. Lipa and Pepka Wagszal willingly extended help and guidance, but at the same time made it quite clear that “they knew best.” Dr. Wagszal enrolled me in the newly founded Hebrew school. Lodz at the time had a Yiddish school as well, but the doctor, who was an ardent Zionist, decided that I should receive a Hebrew and Zionist education. He even decided that I should change my last name, from a German-sounding one into Hebrew. Thus, instead of Redlich — “honest” in German — it became Tsadik, “righteous” in Hebrew. I still cherish an old, brownish, handwritten, report card from the Lodz Ghetto Fighters’ Hebrew School, stating “Shimon Tsadik, born in 1935, attended the second grade in the school year of 1945/46.” I studied Hebrew, the Pentateuch, Math, Polish and Music. My grades were “very good.” The report card was signed B. Kaplinski, Principal. In subsequent report cards my name reverted to its original form. Apparently my mother didn’t approve of Dr. Wagszal’s decision.

It was already getting cold outside when Malcia and Vovo arrived one day at the Wagszals. Nobody spoke to me explicitly about it, but somehow I grasped from hushed conversations that the newborn baby girl had caught a severe cold on the train to Lodz and died of pneumonia. It is quite possible that Vovo brought the tiny body to the Wagszals, wrapped

in white cloth. I don't know to this day whether some sort of a funeral was held, and where this baby was buried. I never asked and nobody offered any information on this sad subject. Only now, more than sixty years later, am I aware what a tragedy it must have been, particularly for my aunt Malcia. She had lost a baby two years earlier, when she and Vovo were hiding at Tanka's. Tanka, a Ukrainian peasant woman in her late twenties at the time, whose husband was sent for forced labor in Germany, fell in love with my uncle Vovo, a very attractive man. The relationship between Vovo and the two women was extremely complex. Tanka agreed to hide them, and later to hide myself and my mother as well, on the condition that Vovo would divorce Malcia after the War. When Vovo and Malcia sought refuge in Raj after the liquidation of the Brzezany ghetto, Malcia was already pregnant. When she went into labor Tanka left the house and stayed away for hours. When she returned, the newborn infant was dead.

Vovo departed soon for Chojnow, to make arrangements with my mother to settle in Lodz. The two of us — Malcia, a thirty-year-old woman, and a boy of ten — were thrown together, once again at the mercy of "others." In this quite uncomfortable situation, we presumably drew solace from each other. I became a "substitute" for my aunt's lost child, and she a temporary, "surrogate" mother to me. This closeness between the young aunt and her nephew wasn't entirely new. Already in prewar Brzezany, Malcia who was significantly younger than my mother, had spent many hours with me while my mother was busy in the family store. Now, at the Wagszals, we were drawn to each other once more, forming a sort of "conspiracy" in the relatively affluent household of our relatives. One of my most pleasant memories of those gray and dark early evening hours in Lodz is of sharing cookies and cake with Malcia on the dark staircase leading to the Wagszals' apartment.

Vovo and my mother arrived in Lodz a couple of weeks later, and we settled into what would be my home for the next four years: 33 Gdanska Street at the corner of 1go Maja. It was a grayish, rectangular, four-storey building with two entrances, one on Gdanska and another on 1go Maja. The cobblestoned court, closed in on all sides, formed a small open inner space where people met and children played. Our closest neighbors were the Polish concierge next door and his son. I don't recall the son's name, but I do recall quite distinctly how he tried to educate me. He drew a profile contour of the lower parts of two human bodies, male and female, in a classical "spoon" position. This was quite exciting for a boy of ten or eleven; otherwise I would have forgotten it long since. A family living on the opposite side of the courtyard invited me once for kutia, a traditional

dish served at Christmas. I can still taste those sweet poppy seeds.

Ours was a ground floor apartment, with windows facing 1go Maja Street. One of my close friends, the short, stocky, muscular, and mischievous Heniek Napadow, used to climb into the apartment through one of those windows. To the right of the apartment entrance was a permanently dark kitchen, where for some time we kept our young German shepherd, Diana. I recall her leaps and bounds each time I returned from school. A long, dark corridor led to two rooms, separated by a door. Initially all of us stayed in the first room. The other was occupied by two strangers, a father and a son. Their last name was Burzynski, and the son's name was Natek. I soon learned that both were survivors of the Lodz ghetto. They showed me stamps and coins from the ghetto, and used to hum a popular ghetto song in Yiddish about Rumkowski, the King of the Jews: "Rumkowski, Chaim, er git uns klain — Haim Rumkowski feeds us straw." I can barely recall the father, seeing in my mind's eye just his balding, gray head. Natek was a tallish, unattractive, pockmarked, lean young man who wore polished black boots. He became my mentor in the art of step dancing, and also took me once or twice to a Zionist youth organization. I distinctly recall sitting with Natek high up on the balcony of the Wloknierz cinema hall on a Saturday or Sunday morning. The speaker at the podium was the renowned Soviet-Jewish writer and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, then on a tour of Poland. Natek told me to stand up and yell something about Jews desiring to go to Palestine. Decades later, I researched Ehrenburg's activities and writings concerning the War and the Holocaust in the newly accessible Soviet archives. I read dozens of letters written to Ehrenburg from all over Russia, and from the front lines as well, in which ordinary people, mainly Jews, wrote him of their despair and hope.

My life in Lodz in those few postwar years centered on three locations: the apartment on 33 Gdanska Street, the Hebrew school on 18 Poludniowa Street, and the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement building on 49 Kilinskiego Street. These were my most intimate spaces in that big city, whose outer reaches I scarcely knew. This was my personal Lodz geography. The numbers 33 and 49 remained engraved in my memory for decades; the school address was blurred, until other, older people, along with archival documents, reestablished it. Part of the problem was that the names of some of the streets in Lodz had changed. Poludniowa became in time Rewolucji 1905 r., the 1905 Revolution Street. A few years ago a small plaque was placed on the corner of Piotrkowska and Rewolucji 1905 r., mentioning the original name. When I first saw it during one of my Lodz visits, it made me feel good, as if an authentic piece of my past had been restored.



Another site I kept recalling was Piotrkowska Street, the main thoroughfare of prewar and postwar Lodz. I remembered it as bustling and crowded, lined with stores on both sides. One particular memory fragment: it's a bright, sunny day on Piotrkowska. I'm walking with Heniek, the "expert" on girls. We are giving "grades" to passing females, and Heniek comments on our decisions. Two locations on the corner of Piotrkowska and Poludniowa streets were significant for me: my uncle's taxi stand, and a coffee shop U Turka — At the Turk's.

It was quite unusual for a Jewish boy to have an uncle who was a taxi driver. Vovo owned a second-hand Citroen with the taxi number 23, one of those Lodz numbers which I had retained. Years later I gained visual proof of this memory when an old-time friend presented me with a photo I'd given him a long time ago. I'm standing at the fender of that old, gray Citroen, the number 23 within a circle painted on its door. I'm holding the leash to my beloved dog, Diana, and look very happy.

U Turka, At the Turk's, held another pleasant, sensual memory. It was based on looks, smells and tastes. They baked the best cakes in town, and I was an enthusiastic connoisseur. Sometimes Malcia and I would stop in and buy two pieces of their exquisite chocolate tart, which we devoured immediately, but more often, Vovo would show up at home at the end of his workday, when we were already in bed, and deposit on the table a rectangular gray box with that same delicious treat inside. Decades later, when I walked the streets of Lodz, I tried to verify these memories as well. I set out from the Grand Hotel with Pan Ryszard, the top tourist guide on "Jewish geography" in Lodz, early on a sunny Sunday morning. One of the central points of interest for me was, of course, U Turka. Ryszard told me that the Turk's last name was Erol and that he had three sons who still lived in Poland. The origin of the family had actually been in the Crimea, and "the Turk," Mr. Erol, was Catholic. He came to Lodz to do business, at which he succeeded quite well. He died sometime in the 1980s. If I had visited Lodz two or three years earlier, I could have met him.

My memories of the Gdanska Street apartment are split and sporadic. At one point we acquired a huge printing machine, which was deposited in the cellar. It printed kerchiefs in very bright colors and in various patterns. It would roll from side to side, and those kerchiefs would emerge. At other times big packs of cloth would be brought into the apartment. Then the cloth was delivered to tailors who turned it into suits and trousers. The reigning color, as far as I recall, was gray. Mother and Aunt Malcia would stand for hours on Zielony Rynek, the Green Market, and sell those suits and pants. This must have been before Vovo became a taxi driver.



Another memory from Gdanska: Since early childhood I had suffered from headaches, a trait I must have inherited from my father. I'm lying on a sofa or a bed, my temples throbbing with pain. There were no painkilling pills yet, so instead I'd fasten a tight wet cloth around my head. At times thin cool slices of a raw potato were inserted between the cloth and my burning forehead. My pain would then be somewhat eased. At other times, particularly in the evenings, I would stare at the lit windows of a building across the street, and this would gradually lull me to sleep.

When I got really sick my mother would ask Dr. Redlich to come and see me. I recall him, somewhat vaguely, as a balding, black-haired, thick-browed, middle-aged man. He lived at that time nearby on 1go Maja. Doctor and later Professor Franciszek Redlich was a distant relative. Although I was never a "roots seeker" and genealogy did not interest me in particular, I did try to establish some biographical facts concerning my namesake. Fredzio, as they used to call him when he was young, was born in Brzezany in 1896. His family was one of the very few assimilated Jewish families in town. He graduated from the local high school, the Gimnazjum, before the First World War, and started studying medicine. During the war he served as a medical assistant in the Austrian army, and after receiving his MD in Vienna, he specialized in pediatrics in Lwow, becoming one of the town's leading pediatricians. Years later I met people my age, both in Israel and abroad, who as children had been patients of my relative. One of the most unexpected and astounding stories about Dr. Redlich came from Joanna Szczesna, an ex-Solidarity activist and a leading journalist at *Gazeta Wyborcza*, in Warsaw, who told me that Dr. Redlich had saved her life in postwar Lodz.

In Lwow, Dr. Redlich married the divorced wife of a Polish army officer who hid him during the German occupation. After the war they, like us, settled in Lodz. From his official biography I learned that Dr. Redlich headed the Department of Pediatrics in the Lwow Ghetto hospital, and later was a prisoner at the Janowska labor camp, from which he eventually managed to escape.<sup>6</sup> After the war he served on the faculty of the newly-founded Lodz University. He obtained his professorship there in the early 1950s, and became, as he had been in prewar Lwow, one of the town's leading pediatricians. He held many additional posts and was awarded numerous distinctions for his service to the community. He was sixty-eight when he died. When I interviewed Marek Edelman, one of the legendary leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a cardiologist by profession, I was surprised to hear that one of his mentors at the Lodz University School of Medicine had been my relative. When Professor Redlich became ill with heart disease, Edelman treated him. I was also

intrigued by the fate of Dr. Redlich's only son. I knew from my days in Lodz that the doctor had a son my age, but while talking to Edelman and inquiring, as I often did when speaking to people who knew my relative, he couldn't tell me much, only that Dr. Redlich's son had left Poland. The stories seemed to have a tragic ending, but I have never found any specific details.

Some of my most pleasant Lodz memories are of the outings to the Zdrowie Recreation Park and to the City Zoo. These took place, usually, on weekends with nice, sunny weather. We would walk around the place or row a boat. One of my Lodz photos shows me standing on the pier, with Salek and Moniek Pomerantz on either side of me, and the water shimmering in the background. The three of us are bare-chested. The Pomerantz brothers, and other boys I knew, enjoyed swimming. I didn't. Our gym instructor at the Hebrew School, Captain Majerczak, taught us "dry swimming." Essentially, we lay belly-down on chairs and moved our hands and legs to his instructions. I never dared try this in real water. I have remained a lousy, water-fearing swimmer, limited to the breaststroke, and even that mainly in water I can stand in, should I become too scared. I do not recall the Lodz Zoo in detail, but I still cherish a photo showing a real elephant with us, four smiling Jewish youngsters, "riding" on its back. I'm the first one, holding on to the elephant's neck. Heniek Napadow sits behind me, his hands on my shoulders.

When some years ago an American-Jewish guest scholar at Ben-Gurion University discussed the fate of Jewish children during and after the Holocaust, and painted a starkly dark and depressing picture, I dared to challenge her, and argued that in spite of everything, there were also some bright and happy moments — at least in my postwar years in Lodz. The photo with the elephant was clear-cut proof of that. There were also outings to nearby forests, either with our teachers or with Hashomer Hatzair counselors. Most of my friends used to go to Hashomer Hatzair summer camps. I was never allowed to join them. My mother and the others in our small family must have been protective and afraid to let me out of their reach.

The most popular entertainment in postwar Lodz was the cinema. I was pleasantly surprised when in the Lodz Municipal Archive I discovered documentation confirming the impressions and memories of my adolescent self.<sup>7</sup> For decades I remembered the names of Lodz cinemas. The most popular films were postwar Polish productions, such as *Ulica Graniczna* (*Border Street*), or *Zakazane Piosenki* (*Forbidden Songs*). There were, of course, many Soviet films too. Of the American ones I vividly recall *Gunga Din*. I also went at least once to a performance of the Yiddish Theatre

headed by Ida Kaminska. It was “Mirale Efros,” with Kaminska in the leading role.

Some of my most exciting and happiest memories were from Hashomer Hatzair, the Zionist youth movement, at 49 Kilinskiego Street. When I returned to Lodz in April 1987 and went to see the building again, I was immediately shocked and depressed. The entrance gate was gray and black, with large patches of soot. The courtyard looked even worse, with the rusting corpse of a car, all four wheels missing, in its center. An elderly Polish couple came down the stairs, and we exchanged a few words. The man, on that early Easter Monday morning, was quite tipsy. I could smell the alcohol on his breath. When I asked whether they recalled any Jews living there, they said yes, there was a family, and they left for Palestine. I was astounded. Was this really the place that was once so full of life and vigor? I recalled many joyous moments on Kilinskiego Street, and when I met decades later with Fayvl Podeh, the first postwar leader of the Hashomer Hatzair in Lodz, he confirmed my memories. “Yes, the youngsters would march around the room with a white and blue flag and sing Hebrew songs. It was not only Zionism. We had to warm up in the unheated quarters at Kilinskiego. Then, there were discussions, recitations, book readings.”<sup>8</sup>

I must have joined Hashomer Hatzair either in the fall of 1945 or in early 1946. An old, blurred picture shows five boys facing what must have been a boxlike street camera, on the cobble-stoned corner of Kilinskiego and Narutowicza. All are wearing heavy second-hand winter coats made of rough cloth. Behind them, resting his hand on my shoulder, is Moshe the madrich, our counselor. Even in this small, creased picture, one can detect his nicely carved, gentle face. He wears some sort of a battle-dress, fashionable in the first postwar years. We adored him. Although I do not recall our meetings, talks and outings in detail, his image remains imprinted in my memory.

WE MET AGAIN IN JERUSALEM, ACCIDENTALLY, IN THE EARLY 1960S. I WAS about to leave for the US, for graduate studies at Harvard. Moshe told me that he was studying at the Hebrew University. He must have been around forty at that time. When I returned to Israel a few years later, I was told that Moshe had committed suicide. After that point I thought about him intermittently. His life and death fascinated me. I’m not sure why. He reminded me of my pleasant Lodz years, of the youth movement on Kilinskiego. But his was also a story of high drama and tragedy, or

at least, that's the way I perceived it. Finally, I decided to reconstruct Moshe's relatively short life and its tragic end by talking to people who knew him.

I called Moshe Lewin, an eminent retired professor of history in Philadelphia, and we had a long talk. It turned out that he knew Moshe Shmutter as a young boy, and had kept in touch with him for many years. The Lewins and the Shmutters were friends in prewar Vilna. Mishka Lewin was four years older than Moshe. He reminisced: "We used to walk together in a nearby forest, and young Poles attacked us there quite often. I had to defend him, since he was small. I would engage them with my stick while Moshe was running away. He couldn't protect himself then. Later he ended up even taller than me. He was a good-looking youngster. He was a student at the Vilna Tarbut Hebrew high school."<sup>9</sup>

Beniek Miznmacher met Moshe in Lodz, sometime in 1946. They lived in the same "shituf," a collective apartment, at 72 Wschodnia Street, and even shared the same room. "We weren't fully aware of it, but Moshe wasn't 'all there' already during the Lodz times. One day he was given money to buy food for all of us. Instead, he brought a couple of exorbitantly expensive oranges. "They have all the necessary vitamins," he argued, "and this is more important than food." Both Mishka Lewin and Beniek Miznmacher recalled that Moshe was very talented, and was known for writing poems and short stories.<sup>10</sup>

Pinhas Zayonts was fifteen when he arrived in Lodz with a group of youngsters at the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz, on Kilinskiego 49. He recalled Moshe very vividly. "He was a lively young man. He entertained us, and tried very hard to make us feel happy. I recall a winter outing near Helenowek — a bonfire, Hebrew songs, dancing the hora. Moshe was dancing with the kids. He was excellent in communicating. Perhaps the rather insignificant difference in age, made him acceptable. He seemed to be one of us. We trusted him and confided in him. Moshe had that special quality of empathy, and made us open up. When I told him shortly and haltingly what happened to my parents during the war, he embraced me."<sup>11</sup> Those teenage boys and girls, who survived the war either in Nazi-occupied Poland or in faraway places in Soviet Russia, longed for somebody to trust, for adult models in their shattered lives. There was also a vague erotic element in the relations between the young counselors, male and female, and the youngsters who adored them. The fact that many of these boys and girls had lost one or both parents, and had no family, made such emotional and romantic tendencies even more pressing and urgent.

Zipora Horowitz, then Fela Rozenstein, a survivor of Majdanek, told me that she was one of those teenage girls at Hashomer Hatzair who had

a crush on the handsome madrich. “There were rumors that Moshe was in love with the beautiful and talented Dziunia, one of the female counselors, who used to recite Pushkin.” Moshe recognized Zipora on a Jerusalem street a few years later, in the early fifties. He was glad to meet her. Since she herself was already at that time a madricha in the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Israel, Moshe offered his experience and advice. “He did not look well, and lived in a rundown place in a Jerusalem convent. I wasn’t too eager to meet with him again.”<sup>12</sup>

And then there was, of course, the sad and tragic story of Moshe’s end in Israel. Mishka Lewin told me that he was constantly worried about Moshe. “He could never focus on one particular matter. He would start something, leave it and start something else. His mental and emotional problems erupted a few years after he came to Israel. He lived in various places, but he always came for visits. It was increasingly obvious that he suffered from some sort of paranoia. He used to tell me that he was constantly surrounded by ‘agents,’ and talked about it for hours.” Mishka Lewin was told, apparently by Moshe’s younger brother, that while traveling one day in a public taxi, a sherut, Moshe decided that the people sitting nearby must be “agents,” whom he dreaded. He forced the door and jumped. During our long-distance overseas conversation, Lewin kept repeating, “We lost him, it was our loss.”<sup>13</sup>

I became obsessed with the need to establish how Moshe actually died. His death somehow fascinated me. It was like solving a sad, but still interesting and meaningful, puzzle. The most exhaustive and reliable source of information was Moshe’s brother-in-law Zeev, or “Vovke” as his Vilna friends used to call him. I met with him in a senior citizens’ home on the outskirts of Tel-Aviv. Vovke, in spite of his age, was vigorous and highly excitable. His memory wasn’t bad at all. “I recall Moshe as a boy of 12 or 13, in prewar Vilna. The Shmutter siblings, Rachel, Moshe, and their younger brother Binyamin, were excellent athletes. They were always referred to as ‘the Shmutters.’” Vovke met them again in wartime Russia, in Tashkent. He had just completed his service in the Red Army, and fell in love with Rachel, Moshe’s beautiful older sister. She spotted him at a victory ball, on May 9, 1945. She was then 21 and he was 23. “Moshe was 18 or 19 at the time, somewhat naive in his enthusiastic, vociferous support for Zionism. I advised him to shut up and to leave Russia as soon as possible.”<sup>14</sup>

Moshe arrived in Lodz in early 1946, and immediately became active in the local branch of Hashomer Hatzair. Vovke and Rachel arrived in Lodz in May, and Moshe arranged for them to stay at a Hashomer Hatzair collective on Poludniowa. Then they left for Germany, where