



Grodzka Gate in Lublin

Nimrod Ariav

Stories from the Gate
Nº 1

Editor and publisher
The Team of “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center

The author of the idea
Tomasz Pietrasiewicz

Translated by
Elżbieta Petrajtis-O'Neill

Typesetting
Amadeusz Targoński

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INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning of the existence of NN Theater, Grodzka Gate has been its seat. This Gate offered us many unique meetings with different people and with their stories. Let us quote here the fragment of the text describing the activity of “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center:

It is here, in Grodzka Gate, which is also called the Jewish Gate, and which used to be a passage between the Christian and Jewish town, that we attempt to get to understand what this place means for us today, what message it conveys.

Here we talk about books, poetry, art, and in the noise and chaos of everyday life we try to protect and save the sense and order of the world. (...)

It is here that we found numerous friends, we learned a lot, and we experienced a lot.

We owe this beautiful journey to Grodzka Gate.

We would not have started this journey without it.

To save the memory of these meetings we decided to describe them. In this way, the publishing series *Stories from the Gate* was created. The first publication in this series is the story of the meeting with Nimrod Ariav. We met him several years ago thanks to Marian Turski, the historian and journalist. This story is described in this book.

Tomasz Pietrasiewicz



Nimrod Ariav.
Photo by Joanna Zętar, 2006.

THE STORY OF NIMROD ARIAV

Nimrod Shalom Ariav (Szulim Cygielman) was born on September 24, 1926 in Lublin. The son of Marta, maiden name Wajsbrodt, and Lejb Cygielman. The father's family is from Lublin (his grandfather lived at Kowalska Street), and mother's family from Bełżyce. He lived in Lublin at Nowa 17 Street. He had a twin-brother Abraham. They both attended Tarbut and started education at the Jewish Gymnasium at Niecała Street. After the outbreak of the Second World War his family left for Bełżyce, where he worked as an assistant at the power station. In 1942 his father was murdered. Nimrod left for Warsaw, where he lived using "some kind of papers" (he used the name Henryk Górski). He took part in the actions of the Home Army. In 1943, he persuaded his brother to come to Warsaw. Several months later they were denounced and his brother was killed. Nimrod changed name to Godlewski. At that time, his mother also lived in hiding in Warsaw. Nimrod took part in the Warsaw Uprising, probably as a member of "Parasol" battalion (as "Henryk"). He fought at Sienna

Street and in the Old Town, where he was wounded. After the defeat of the Uprising he got to the hospital in Krakow, where he stayed until liberation.

In 1945, he returned to Lublin for a short time. Later, he went to Germany; he studied at the Unra University in Munich. He participated in the illegal transfer of Jews from Germany to Italy. He became the commander of Hagana training camp in France. In 1948, he went to Israel, where he joined the army (the air force). He spent seven years in the army, and left it as a captain. In the period 1954–1973 he worked at the Israeli aircraft enterprise (Israel Aircraft Industries), and in 1983 he was appointed the President of this enterprise. Later, he established his own aircraft company. In 1963, Nimrod Ariav came to Poland for the first time after the war. Since 1987 he has come here regularly. Each year he visits Bełżyce, where he found his father's grave. He organized reconstruction of the devastated Jewish cemetery. He was gradually getting involved in the life of this local community; he provided financial support for the hospital and schools in Bełżyce. He has a wife (who is French) and two sons.

Lublin
20 X 2005

THE STORY TOLD BY NIMROD ARIAV

oral
history

Family. The family house

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I was born in Lublin on September 24, 1926. My parents were Marta, maiden name Wajsbrodt, and Lejb Cygielman. My father was from Lublin, and my mother from Belżyce. I had a twin-brother. I have one photo of him, which I keep in my house in Tel Aviv. Someone gave it to me. I lived at Nowa Street. The apartment was quite comfortable – each of us had a room. I have one photo of my father with my aunt. My father was a very quiet man, he liked to write poems. But he was not a good merchant. My mother told me that grandfather gave his son a “dowry” twice. He was an educated man, was good at mathematics, but I have no idea what formal education he had. He was a religious man. He was not very pious, but much attached to tradition, whereas my mother – not at all. But we always celebrated the Sabbath. I remember that when I walked by the church I should take my cap off, but I did not know why. My mum was a Zionist. She was deeply involved in the Zionist movement. She participated in the Zionist congresses, in Mariensbad, in Carlsbad. She sent me and my brother to Tar-



Avraham Cygielman, Nimrod Szulim Cygielman's brother, Lublin, 1939.



Nimrod Szulim Cygielman (Nimrod Ariav), at the back, with his brother Avraham, Lublin, before 1939.



Matylda Cygielman, the mother of Nimrod Szulim Cygielman (Nimrod Ariav),
around 1918-1920.

but. I finished Tarbut here. There I learned Hebrew. Who attended Tarbut? Those who believed in Israel.

Basically three languages were used at home. My parents spoke Yiddish, I and my brother – Hebrew and we had a tutor, Gertrude, who spoke German to us. I also knew Polish – not too well, but well enough to communicate in Polish and I had no accent. This rescued me during the war.

Father's family

My grandfather's family was very religious. I remember my grandpa: when I came to the synagogue on Friday evening with my father and brother, I kissed his hand and escaped because I was afraid. Grandpa sat in the synagogue, he had his place there. He supported the construction of Yeshiva Chachmej Lublin in Lubartowska Street. He took me there once – there was a small scale model of the Jewish temple from Jerusalem and he showed it to me. He lived in Kowalska Street, not far from us, but I rarely visited him. He had a big apartment but it was sad and dark – it was not a place that I liked to visit.

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Mother's family

My mother's family was rich. They had a big textile shop in Belżyce. My mum had three or four brothers, who lived in Siedlce and in two other places, and three or four sisters. Some of them gave birth to their children in Lublin, they arrived to our apartment. At that time women did not give birth to children in hospitals. And there was also my mum's uncle with three children.

My mum's family was not very religious. My grandpa from Belżyce died in Berlin. He went there with my father in 1926 to be operated on. He died and they brought him in a coffin to Belżyce. My mother told me that when they had brought him, and it had been Saturday,



House at Nowa 17 Street in Lublin, the family house of Nimrod Ariav (Szulim Cygielman).
Compilation of three photos by Stefan Kielsznia, 1938.

the whole town had not lighted the candles, so that no one could say that my grandpa had arrived on Sabbath. The coffin they brought him in was made of metal – this is prohibited in the Jewish ritual, so they took him out and buried him according to the Jewish tradition. About ten years later someone told about it and they wanted to open the grave. I remember that my mother went to Warsaw and arranged it somehow.

Bełżyce before the war

Each year we went with domestic, Gertrude, to Nałęczów for holiday. She lived there with us. We also went to our grandma to Bełżyce. We traveled by horse coaches. Such journey lasted 4-5 hours – the distance was 25 kilometers.

In Bełżyce there was a market square, where various things were sold once a week; the market square was surrounded by houses. This was a real Jewish *shtetl*. On Friday night everything was closed, because 60-70% of the population were Jewish – about three thousand inhabitants. Real *shtetl*, like those you sometimes see in the films. My grandparents were prominent persons there: when I arrived there some 40-50 years later, I introduced myself and said I was the grandson of Szlamianka, and all people knew who he was. There still live some people, who know very well who Szlamianka was.

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Outbreak of war in 1939

Bombs started to fall. We were in the cellars. When the Jews thrown out from Germany came to Lublin, we had three guests who stayed in our apartment. There is one thing I will never forget. Before we left Lublin, I used to walk along Lubartowska. Today I passed that way and I recalled that I had walked that street with a Jewish band and three Hitlerjugend (maybe they were Poles or Poles-Germans, volksdeutsch) had pushed me from the pavement saying that I, as a Jew, might not go that way when they walked along the pavement. And

starostwa puławskiego.	administracji ogólnej.	W rola* W medja Zbier. Lolli* ktem
<h1>Oszczercą przed sądem</h1> <h2>Za rozsyłanie fałszywych wleści spotkała go zasłużona kara</h2>		
W dniu wczorajszym w Wydziale Odwoławczym Sądu Okręgowego rozpatrywana była sprawa Wincentego Winiarskiego, właściciela restauracji w Bełżycach.	sprowadzonego w zamkniętej trumnie do Bełżyc, mogły być pochowane według rytuału żydowskiego. Jak głosił Winiarski wysokość łapówki sięgała 500 zł.	11.58- Obi w t
Winiarski oskarżony był o to, że w październiku ub. roku w Bełżycach, mając złość do komendanta posterunku PP, Juliana Próskeńskiego, za spisanie mu 19-tu protokółów, publicznie oskarżał go o branie łapówek od pewnych osób.	Wobec tego, że wiadomości te były fałszywe i uciążliwe mundurowi policyjnemu Winiarski został pociągnięty do odpowiedzialności sądowej.	12.10. 13.10- 15.00- 15.35- 15.50- 16.45-
Łapówkę miał on wziąć za to, żeby zwłoki niejakiego Wajsbrodta zmarłego w Berlinie, a	Sąd Pokoju w Bełżycach skazał go na 2 miesiące więzienia. Na rozprawie apelacyjnej w Lublinie karę tą obniżono Winiarskiemu do 2 tygodni aresztu i 100 złotych grzywny.	17.15- 17.45- 19.10- 19.20- 19.35- 19.40- 19.55- 20.00- 20.15-

“Ziemia Lubelska” 15.01.1931. Page 4 with a press note *Slanderer before the court*, referring to the funeral of Nimrod Ariav’s grandfather Wajsbrodt.

“Ziemia Lubelska” January 15, 1931, p. 4.

they had beaten me badly. I took off that Jewish band and I never put it on again. Later, people started to talk that the Germans wanted to kill us and we decided to go to Belżyce. It seems to me that we went there in 1940, but I do not remember well. All our family went there – father, mother, my brother and me. The whole mother’s family was there; my father’s family stayed here and they were all killed.

Our relatives from Belżyce had a large apartment and we stayed there. Everything was all right. We played with our cousins – our mother had a younger brother – and we teased them. I started to work when I was fourteen. I worked in Belżyce, at a power plant. The engineer, who was the manager of it, employed me. It seems to me that he did not pay me but I worked there and I learned quite a lot.

Situation of Jews under the Nazi occupation, Belżyce

Everybody felt threatened. We feared our Polish neighbors. We feared the Germans, but we were even more afraid of Poles. We thought that they wanted to deprive us of everything. People talked about it. I did not hear much, because I went to work. We wanted to do something to survive. The Germans came from time to time and people collected money and gave to them. Once they bought a white horse for one of the Germans. He took it and for a while everything was quiet. And one day someone said that there would be an action, so we ran away. They frightened us. I do not remember where we got to – Chełm or Zamość. It must have been in 1940-1941, but I do not remember well.

My mother’s uncle and his three children also went with us. There was a girl, who was older than me, a boy – my age, and another girl one year younger than me. During one of the actions they were caught and killed. I saw it happen. And when my mother’s uncle saw that I and my brother stayed alive, he wanted to kill us – he really wanted to kill us. This uncle survived the war and we talked a lot about it. He died some 20-30 years ago. When he



The house of Wajsbrodt family (grandparents of Nimrod Ariav) in Belżyce.
Photo by Tomasz Czajkowski, 2008.

looked at me, he saw his children. He could not forget that I lived and his children were dead. He no longer wanted to kill me, but he remembered it well. When he was dying and was in the hospital, I was the only one, whom he asked to come to him. I visited him three times and when I came for the fourth time, he died. He held my hand and talked to me. But I always had this feeling that he did not see me but his children and that he had never forgiven me until his death. This is what I felt.

Later, we went back to Belżyce. My father said that he would not let them catch him and he planned what he would do, if they catch him. In 1942 another action took place. I ran away. Everybody escaped. And they killed my father and took some members of my family to Majdanek. My father was killed at the place where the Center of Culture stands today, and at that time the synagogue was located there. He was not killed by the Germans, but by the Lithuanians. They were worse than the Germans. They were the murderers. Maybe one of them was German, but the whole dirty work was done by the Lithuanians or the Ukrainians, and some of them were from Latvia and Estonia. They saw that my father was trying to swallow something, because he had a poison on him – my aunt, who survived the war, told me this. And one of them said: “Why are doing it, I will help you”. And he shot him. They shot about 150 people. When the Germans left, we went there, a lot of young men and we took all the killed people from the synagogue to the Jewish cemetery. According to the Jewish ritual, people who are killed on the same day may not be buried separately – they are buried in a common grave. I remember that my father was buried as the first one on the right. And we finished it. Then the ghetto in Belżyce was established. I spent a few weeks in the ghetto, but I decided it was not the place for me. I went to Warsaw. It was the end of 1942. Later, I went back to Belżyce to take my brother with me.

Leaving for Warsaw, 1942

I had no papers [documents], nothing; I went by train but not from Bełżyce – I do not remember where from. I know that I got off the train in Warsaw. I had an address, where I should go. There was someone who helped me at the beginning. These were also the Jews, who lived in hiding. I made documents myself. I went to the Municipal Office, I saw that someone at my age died, so I took his name, I went to the church and asked for the certificate of christening. My new surname was “Henryk Górski”.

I began to attend school (...) I did not learn much. I had Polish colleagues. I told them that I was from Lublin, my parents were killed, and I arrived to Warsaw. They helped me because I was already in AK [The Home Army]. It was 1942. I lived in three places in Warsaw – I remember two of them. Some facts flew out of my head and they do not want to come back. In 1943 I went to Bełżyce to take my brother to Warsaw. I remember that when I arrived in Warsaw, we saw the ghetto burning from the train window – this is why I remember that it was April, 1943. My brother, I, and our friend with his wife, we all lived at Sienna Street. They were also from Lublin – Mr. and Mrs. Rajs. They studied in Belgium before the war. She was believed to be French. She was a beautiful woman.

After a few months, someone said that the Jews lived there. One day I came home – the doorkeeper warned me that the Gestapo was in my apartment, so I did not go there. They caught my brother and Mr. Rajs, but not Mrs. Rajs. And they killed them. At the gendarmerie station in Sienna, I do not remember the number. I changed the place of living and the name to “Jerzy Eugeniusz Godlewski”.

I had to make living, so together with my friends from Warsaw – I do not remember a single name, they were all older than me – we did something, we were involved in small trade and in AK. I was in the Polish environment and I forgot I was a Jew.

I also brought my mother to Warsaw. The Polish family offered her a hiding place at Polna Street. I do not remember the number. My mother is dead, so I cannot ask her. And so she lived there with my aunt. My mother did not go outside because she did not have such a good look as I had, she looked more Jewish. I did not look Jewish. Also my uncle lived in hiding in Warsaw, at the “Aryan side”. But they paid a lot for the hiding place. They had a lot of money. My mother did not know where I lived. I knew where she lived but I did not go there. When my brother was killed I was afraid to tell her about it and I told her much later. She never forgave me.

Memories of Anna Langfus¹

At that time I was at school, I had friends, I was active in AK and I lived... And I knew Mrs. Rajs. She survived the war, left for France, and got married. I visited her from time to time. She began to write. She wrote a book, for which she won Prix Goncourt in 1962. It was Anna Langfus. Anna was a beautiful woman. This also helped her to survive the war. She once walked the street in Warsaw, where the patrols consisting of 2-4 Germans were inspecting the streets. One of them stopped and said: “Anna, I know you, we attended the same school”. She answered: “You do not know me and I did not attend that school”. They arrested her but they had to let her go, because they could not prove that it was otherwise. She said that she was French – she spoke perfect French. Later she told me that, indeed, she was at the same school as this German gendarme. This bustard recognized her and denounced her but she managed to save her life. I met her from time to time. Once we met in Warsaw and I noticed that someone followed us, so I said: “Anna, when we get to the corner, you go right and I go left and we run”. And that’s what we did. One of those men started to chase me, and the other – Anna. He caught my hand and I said: “Please, piss off!” And I ran. Anna also escaped. Later, we met a few times more, and since the Uprising – nothing.

After the war I found out that Anna was in Paris and I went there to see her. She was sad. She met a man, who was an engineer. His name was Langfus. She married him and had a daughter. I invited her to come to Israel – she came once and did not want to come again. I heard that she won Prix Goncourt. She asked me to read her books, but I could not and did not want to read them.

Once I was at a dinner in London. A woman sat next to me. She was young and very pretty. We talked and she said that she studied Holocaust at the university. I told her: „Look, do me a favor. There is a certain lady, Mrs. Langfus. She won Prix Goncourt. I do not know what book was awarded and she always wanted me to read it. Find it out for me”. Two months later she called me: “Mrs. Langfus won Prix Goncourt in 1962, her book was translated into English in such and such year, and you can get the book under this number”.

Several years later a man from Israel called me; he wanted to meet me in Paris to show me some paintings. “Okay – I said – I will meet with you, I will sit in “Crillon” hotel with a newspaper in my hand”. He arrived; he spoke Hebrew and was much younger than me. I was about 60 and he was probably about forty. We went to see the paintings. We visited several places but I did not like anything. I told him: “Listen, I had a friend, please, get me this book in French or in English”. He replied: “What did you say? What name?” I said: “Anna Langfus”. His face got white and began to tremble: “How come you know her?” I said: “And how come Y O U know her? You are quite young and Mrs. Langfus was older than me, so how come you are in it?” It took him a few minutes to calm, and he told me his story. He had been a student in Paris. Anna had left her husband and daughter, she had left everything. And she died on his hands. I nearly got a heart attack when he told me how she had died. He was white pale when I said: “Anna. I cannot believe it”. He sent me a copy of the book, which Anna Langfus signed for him.



The plaque commemorating Anna Langfus (maiden name Szternfinkiel) on the façade of the house, in which she used to live, Lublin, Lubartowska Street 24. The plaque was funded by Nimrod Ariav and “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center.
Photo by Marcin Federowicz, 2008.

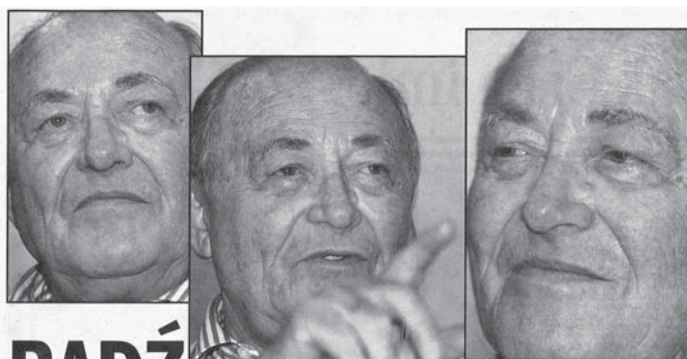
The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

I looked at it from the other side. What did I feel? I don't remember. I looked carefully because I knew perfectly well who I was. Maybe I did not talk about it and I wanted to forget but I knew it damn well. What could I feel? How did the Poles react? Sadly. One could see that it was painful for them. I did not see a single person of those who stood and watched together with me, who would be happy about it.

I will tell you a story, which I will never forget. We met at my friends' place and we drank vodka. I was probably the youngest, I was 18-19 and I looked over twenty. We all were drunk. A girl was sitting on my knees. And suddenly she said: "Henryk, if I did not know you and your colleagues, I would say that you are a Jew". I opened my eyes wide: "Why?" I will never forget her answer: "Something in your eyes". Later I thought that she was Jewish, surely she was. My eyes nearly deceived me, but nothing happened... We continued to drink together and everything was all right.

The Warsaw Uprising

I was at the Cadet School in Warsaw. During the Uprising I was at Sienna Street, and later I fought at the Old Town, where I was wounded. They took me to a cellar, where a hospital was located. My hand and both legs were shot. My colleagues came every day. There were just few doctors. I lied next to someone, who died and remained there for two days – there was no one to take him. And when I had to leave the hospital, my friends brought big shoes, wrapped everything in bandages and – the wounded were not allowed to be taken away, but they managed to do it – they took me to the sewer canals. We walked for four and half hours. And I walked, with my wounded legs. I was unable to get out, so they had to pull me out. And then I got a shot in head and they took me to a hospital at Polna Street. For 3-4 months I could not move my head. They thought that I would never move it again. But



RADŹ CZŁOWIEKIEM

Nazywano się Nimrod S. Arias-Cypelman. Mieszkając w Warszawie nazywano się Henryk Górski i Jerzy Eugeniusz Godlewski. A przynajmniej mówią mi Cyp – tymi słowami przedstawia się człowiek, którego historia życia jest jak scenariusz filmu.

Lublin przedwojenny

Nimrod Arias urodził się w 1906 r. w Lublinie. Przez 15 lat mieszkał z rodzicami i bratem bliźniakiem przy ul. Nowej (dziś odnówek ulicy Lebahartowskiej). Tutaj chodził do Tarbutu, czyli żydowskiego gimnazjum, gdzie nauczył się języka hebrajskiego. – Dziadek zawsze siedział na swoim miejscu w ławicy. Przypodobał mi się w piątkowy wieczór, zabawiał w rękę i uciekałem, bo się bałem – opowiada Nimrod. – Dziadek był jednym z budowniczych Instytut Chasydów Lublin, na Lebahartowskiej. Dobrze to pamiętam, bo raz miał tam szklany i pokazał mi, jak wyglądał żydowski i żydowski. W 1940 r. Nimrod z rodziną wyjechał do Boleych. – Ostatnie wspomnienie z Lublina: tuż przed naszym wyjazdem idę ul. Lebahartowską w stronę żydowskiej. Trzech Hitlerogrodzi stało mi na drodze. Mówią, że ja jako Żyd nie mogę tam chodzić. Zbli mi się poruszać. Wtedy zgłębiam tą spaskę. I nigdy już jej nie widziałem.

W Boleych mieszkała rodzina ze strony matki. Jej ojciec był pastorem, znaną i poważnie szanowaną. Jeszcze w latach 80. ludzie dobrze pamiętali Szlamkankę. Ale historia dopisała Nimroda w 1942. w Boleych powstaje getto, a ojciec Ariasa ginie, zabity przez Niemców. Sam Arias ucieka do Warszawy.

Powstanie

Tu nie chce być jak Żyd. Żebywa dokumenty i przynajmniej Henryk Górski. Wskazując na niego nie wie, że jest Żydem. Nawet kulebki z Armią Krajową, do której wstąpił zaraz po przyjeździe.

Kiedy w getcie wybuchło powstanie, Henryk Górski jest po drugiej stronie muru.

– Wtedy nie wiedziałem co robić. Byłem zupełnie beztępy – wspomina tamte chwile. Dziś, patrząc na Nimroda, nikt by nie powiedział o beztępości. Mimo wieku wciąż dobrze się trzyma. Widać, że to silny człowiek. Taką rolę podoba Powstania Warszawskiego.

– Chybałem za brzo. Walczyłem na Starówce i tu zostałem porażony. Kiedy trafił do szpitala, Niemcy wracając do Warszawy. – Trzeba było mnie unieść. Zostałem młodemu lekarzowi i mówię mu: „Ja jestem Żydem, jak mnie umyja, szpitalnik, młoda, że jestem przemyślny (obeznany – red.) i dżemina Niemcom – wspomina Nimrod. – Nawet nie poznałem nazwiska człowieka, który uratował mi życie.

Uciekł mnie i niepowiedział o pogoni. Z Warszawy do Krakowa.

W krakowskim szpitalu zostało uwięziony przez Niemców.

Po wyjściu odwołuje matkę i razem z nią wyjeżdża do Łodzi.

Komendant

Powojenna zawierucha rusza Nimroda do Monachium, ale stare nawyki zostają. Oweżem, Nimrod studiował, ale działał też w Haganie, tajnej żydowskiej organizacji bojowej.

Jest Żydem pochodzącym z Lublina. Jako żołnierz Armii Krajowej walczył w Powstaniu Warszawskim. Mimo odniesionych ran przeżył. Wyjechał do Izraela, gdzie był lotnikiem. Potem jednym z dyrektorów największej izraelskiej fabryki samolotów. Po latach przyjechał do Polski i zbudował w Boleychach kirkut. Jest tu co roku w listopadzie. Razem z rodziną staje nad grobem ojca, którego zamordowali hitlerowcy

W 1948 Hagana organizuje obóz szkoleniowy dla Żydów, który wyjeżdża do Izraela. – Byłem komendantem tego obozu i zacząłem na nowo mówić po hebrajsku – Nimrod nie ukrywa dumy. W końcu sam trafia do Izraela.

Po wyjściu ze statku zaczyna się do wojny. Będzie lotnikiem.

Sukcesy w Ameryce, w szkole oficerskiej i jako mechanik. Po siedmiu latach opuszcza wojsko w randze kapitana. I tu jest dopiero prawdziwe podleganie z bronią. Czas na zwycięstwo, czyli...

produkcja samolotów w Izrael Air-craft Industries. – Przewoził mi się inżynierowie z Boleych. Oni for d'u i Politechniki Warszawskiej. I każdy

z nich twierdził, że jest najgorszy. Cóż, nie było łatwo z Żydów z całego stworzyć agnity nopol – śmieje się nasz bohater.

Powrót

Nawet, ledwo już. Polska Nimrod Arias poznaje dopiero w 1963 r. Był tylko tydzień, bez skutku szukał grobu ojca w Boleychach.

Potem, jak wiadomo: Żydem, którym udało się przeżyć koszmarną nazistami, widzi o tym weryfikację zapamiętań. – Długo 42 lata po wojnie po raz pierwszy rozmawiałem z synami o wszystkim, co przeżyłem. Przecież...

Żyć do Polski, pokazać im, gdzie są moje korzenie. Pochodziłem z Majdanku, do Oświęcimia...

Do Boleych. Szukał grobu ojca. – Prawdopodobnie do burmistrza, a on mówi: chodź, to ci pokazuje. Idziemy, patrz, a tu plac zabaw. Nie było żadnej mogiły, strasznie – mówi Nimrod. – Chciałem jakoś upamiętnić to miejsce.

Nimrod S. Arias-Cypelman otrzymał pozwolenie na budowę kirkutu.

Spotkanie

Anna Rajca-Łangfus to żydowska pianistka pochodząca z Lublina, która w 1961 r. otrzymała prestiżową francuską nagrodę Prix Gersonota. Wciąż wydawana na Zachodzie, w Polsce jest kompletnie zapomniana. Ostatnio jej książkę wydano u nas w 1992 roku.

Nimrod poznał ją jeszcze w czasie wojny; w Warszawie. – Wypłynęła z Anna, jej mąż i mój brat. Mieszkał przy ul. Sienockiej. Mój brat i ja myślałem, że jest kapłanem. I tu jest dopiero prawdziwe podleganie z bronią. Czas na zwycięstwo, czyli...

Po latach poznał w Paryżu kolekcjonera obrazów. Przez przypadek dowiedział się, że mający takie same Anne Łangfus. – Umiecia na jego rękach. O mało nie dostałem ataku serca, kiedy mi to powiedział. Potem przyszedł mi kaskiet, która Anna podziela dla niego.

Chwałki

Co roku, od 16 lat, Nimrod Arias razem z rodziną przyjeżdża w listopadzie do Boleych. W cieniu składa kwiaty na grobie ojca. – Transcendencja, on przeszedł. Czy to dobre, czy złośliwe, nie wiem. Nie mogę powiedzieć miłemu ludzkom co robił. Jedną rzecz tylko mogę powiedzieć: dał cześć z siebie innym, ludzkom innej wiary, ludzkom innej krwi – epokowe słowa Nimroda. – Będę człowiekiem.

Paweł Buczkowski

Dziękuję za pomoc Tomaszowi Ciesielskiemu z Ośrodka Brama Grodzka Teatr NN

“Dziennik Wschodni” February 17, 2006, a release Be a man, Paweł Buczkowski.

the worst thing was that they had to cut my hair. I had thick hair. When they cut it, there was no anaesthetization – I passed out several times, the whole skin was gone. Since my mother was at Polna, I managed to let her know and she came to visit me at the hospital. We did not talk at all; she just looked at me from a distance. This hospital had to be moved from Warsaw. I had to be washed and I had both legs and arms in plaster. I called a young doctor and told him: “Doctor, you know, which army unit I belong to because my friends came to visit me. I am a Jew; I have to be washed. If the orderlies do it, they will see that I am circumcised and will tell the Germans. Do whatever you want because I cannot even raise my hand”. I do not even know his name. He washed me and carried to the train. I owe my life to him. They took me to Krakow and put me at the hospital there. I stayed there with my colleagues who were also wounded. And in Krakow I was liberated by the Russians. I have photos of this hospital in Krakow, but I do not remember any name of my colleagues from the Warsaw Uprising. I do not remember where exactly at the Old Town I got wounded, either. I want to find this place and I cannot find it. I walked through the Old Town fifty or sixty times. There are some things which leave your head and they do not want to come back.

The end of war. Lublin, Łódź

Half a year later when I was able to walk, I started to search for those members of my family who survived the war. I thought I had to go to Lublin to find them. And I went by a fray train to Lublin. In Lublin I went to the Jewish commune and they told me that my mother was alive. It was in 1945. So I met my mother, aunt, and my uncle, who survived. I spent a week with them and I ran away because I was in the Jewish environment and I did not want to be there. I do not know why. When I think about it now, I think it was silly, but that is the fact. I escaped to Łódź and I spent some time there. My mother got married in Łódź. And several of my colleagues from Warsaw also stayed in Łódź. One day I invited them to my



Nimrod Szulim Cygielman (Nimrod Ariav), the first one from the left, with his fellows in hospital, Cracow, December 1944.



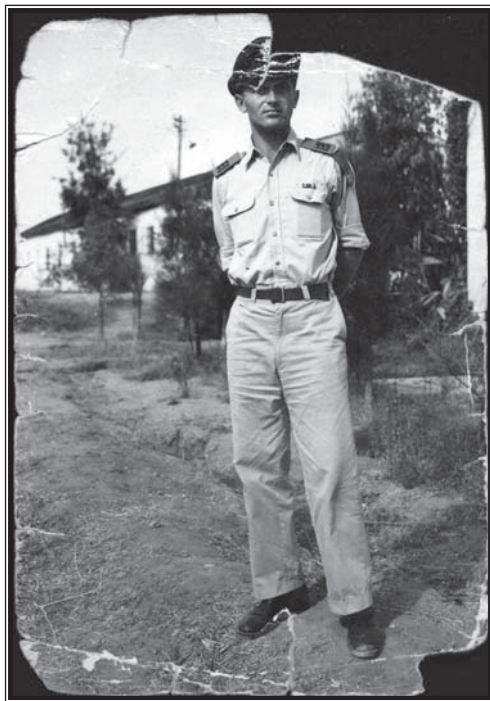
Nimrod Szulim Cygielman (Nimrod Ariav), on the left, with a friend in a street of Łódź, 1945.

place; they saw my mother and said that she must be Jewish: “Are you a Jew?” I said: “Yes”. Our relationships were not the same afterwards. I decided that this was not a place for me and at the end of 1945 I left Poland.

Leaving Poland. Germany, France

I went To Germany in UNRRA clothes. There I was kept at a DP camp. I returned to Poland once again, at the beginning of 1946, in UNRRA uniform, to take back the child of my aunt and uncle, who they left under the care of peasants from Belżyce. They did not want to give the girl. They loved her. When she began to live with them, she was 3 or 4 years old. When I came to take her, she was 8 or 9 and they did not want to part with her, but we managed to take her by paying them. She herself did not want to leave and there were many problems with her. Later she left for Israel and now she comes to Belżyce with us from time to time, and her children come too. Last year she was here with her granddaughter. But in 1946 we took her and we again went to Germany “through the green border” [illegally – translator]. And at that time my mother went to Israel with her second husband. She had no more children. My mother was a very energetic and active woman and she had good life. She worked, she had money, she had everything she needed but her heart was broken. She died in Israel in 1969. She had never forgotten her second son. There was a three-hour difference between my birth and his birth. It is a lot.

I decided to stay in Germany and to study something. I began to study at the University in Munich. At that time, the Jewish underground organizations got me involved in their activities. I was in two of them – in Hagana and in another one. When one of them did not offer much activity I joined the other. I did not care that one of them was rightist and the other leftist. After some time I understood that there is a place where I must go one day. It was Israel. I “smuggled” the Jews from Germany to Italy. I was in France, near Marseille.



Captain Nimrod Szulim Cygielman (Nimrod Ariav), Israel, 1952.



Odette Ariav, the wife of Nimrod Szulim Cygielman (Nimrod Ariav), 1972.

Hagana organized a training camp there for those who were going to Israel. I was the commander of this camp. I began to speak Hebrew again. This is why those boys thought that I was from Israel.

Leaving for Israel

32 I went to Israel when the war started there. I got straight to the army. It was in 1948. They sent me to the aircraft forces. In 1949, I was sent to school in America. I spent two years there. When I returned, I worked as an aircraft mechanic. I served at all ranks, from the lowest one. Later they sent me to the officer school. I served in the army for seven years. I left it as a captain. I began to work at Israel Aircraft Industries. I worked there from 1954 to 1973. When they employed me, I said to the President of IAI that I would hold his position and so it happened. He is 87 now – I reminded him about it and he remembered it. At IAI I was responsible for the production of aircrafts. I was in the States and in France several times, because I continued my studies.

I left this company as a *senior vice president manufacturer*. I was 48. Together with my friends I established a private firm with branches all over the world: in the USA, Great Britain, and Switzerland. We sold civil aircrafts. And this is what I had done until the time when I left Israel in 1987 and settled in London, because it was more convenient from the point of view of my work. But I visited Israel several times a year, because my children lived there.

Children and grandchildren

I have two sons. One was born in 1958, and the second one in 1964. They are both French citizens, because their mother is French, and they also have the Israeli citizenship. When it was time for them to join the army, the French military attaché in Israel called them and asked: “Where do you want to go through your military service?” They said: “In Israel”.

One of them was in the marine forces and the other one in the tank forces. Why? Because I worked for the aircraft forces. I wanted them to serve in the aircraft forces too, but I failed. After the military service they studied; the older one went to America and he studied there for ten years. He graduated from four faculties in Los Angeles and Stanford, in: informatics, finance, and marketing. The other son went to Australia. Later he studied in the States. He worked in Hollywood and in New York. He decided to go back to Israel, the same as the older son. The younger one married a Slavonic woman but they got divorced after a few years – they had no children. And then he married a Polish woman, Agata. The other one got married in Israel. I have three grandchildren. My granddaughter serves in the Israeli air forces, one grandson will join the army next year, and the third one will have a *bar mitzvah* next year. And I will be 80 next year.

Poland and Polish language

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I did not use Polish language because I did not want to have any remnants from the past. I did not say a word in Polish ever since I left Poland. My wife is French, I had no friends from Poland, because if you have friends from Poland you speak Polish and I did not want to. I spoke Hebrew.

I came to Poland for the first time in 1963. Poland wanted us to repair its aircrafts; it had western aircrafts. So I came to Poland to buy the machines. I spent one week here, which was unpleasant, because I also wanted to see my father's grave. So I went to Belżyce. I went to see the town leader and I told him that I was Szlamiarka's grandson. He knew perfectly well who I was talking about and was afraid that I came to take away from them all that had belonged to my grandfather. He told me that there was no grave there and that's all – he threw me out. It was in 1963. Until 1987 I did not know what the word "Poland" meant. I did not speak Polish. In 1987, when I already had my own firm and did not work for IAI,

Ja, Ariav od kirkutu

Ja sam odbudowałem ten kirkut, ja sam dbam o niego. Kiedy umrę, będą to robić moi synowie – powie dziś w Bełżycach Nimrod S. Ariav-Cygielman

Nimrod S. Ariav-Cygielman, niegdyś wysoki rangą izraelski pilot wojskowy, dyrektor izraelskiej fabryki samolotów i „handlarz” boeingami, od 13 lat w październiku przyjeżdża do Bełżyc. Stąd pochodziła jego rodzina.

— Unowałem się, bo nie byłem podobny do Żyda – wspomina. Polacy traktowali go jak swego. Walczył i był ranny w Powstaniu Warszawskim. Wyjechał, budował Izrael. Zyciorys dosłownie filmowy!

Po wielu latach postanowił odnaleźć grób swego ojca, którego – rozstrzelanego przez Niemców w 1942 r. – sami potajemnie pochowali. Jednak w Bełżycach po kirkucie nie pozostało prawie nic. Zaróśli wysokimi topolami. Nimrod S. Ariav-Cygielman zapłacił za ogrodzenie terenu, ufundował tablice upamiętniające bełżyckich Żydów i płaci za utrzymanie monumentu. — Tak będzie do końca mojego życia – zapowiada.

Przy wejściu, na ścianie muru jego twórcą stworzył rzeźbą drzewo przypominające menorę, najpiękniejsze tego rodzaju dzieło cmentarne w Polsce.

Od 1990 r. w rocznicę śmierci ojca na bełżycki kirkut Ariav przywozi Żydów z całego świata, aby pokazać tę dbałość o pamięć przeszłości. Ponieważ wciąż wiele kirkutów i miejsc po nich w Polsce nie ma swoich opiekunów. Przywozi nie byle kogo: wielkich przedsiębiorców i polityków. W ubiegłym roku był wśród nich np. Mosze Arens, wielokrotny minister obrony i spraw zagranicznych Izraela.

Ariav kupuje świece i kwiaty, by gości mogli złożyć hołd zamordowanym w październiku 1942 r. – najpierw przy kamieniu upamiętniającym getto w Bełżycach, potem na kirkucie. Dla bełżyckiego szpitala kupił aparat rentgenowski i ultrasonograf, dla szkoły – komputery. Dziś również przyjeżdża do Bełżyc.

GRZEGORZ JÓZEFCEK



Współczesne Bełżycy

Miasto może pochwalić się znakomitą basenem i halą sportową, aktywnym domem kultury. Jednakże o dziwne, wielokulturowa przeszłość Bełżyc jest nadal zupełnie zapomniana, a nawet wymazywana z pamięci. Na oficjalnej stronie internetowej miasta znajduje się np. tekst poniżający mieszkańców tu przed wiekami i innowierców – kalwinów i arian, chociaż już dawno nie ma po nich śladu. O Żydach na www.belzyce.pl przeczytamy, że „od czasu Reformacji zaczęli panoszyć się w Bełżycach”. Nie ma słowa o kirkucie, a tym bardziej o pomocy, jakiej udzielił miastu Ariav.

“Gazeta Wyborcza” October 5, 2004. A release *I, Ariav of the kirkut*, Grzegorz Józefczuk.

the President of IAI, who was my good friend, called me in New York and asked me to come to dinner with somebody, who I would be interested in. I took a plane and I went there. It was dinner with the President of PZL, Mr. Krężlewicz. When I came to this dinner I did not speak a word in Polish. And after two bottles of vodka I began to speak Polish. He invited me to Poland. I told him that I had an Israeli passport and at that time Poland had no diplomatic relationships with Israel. "I will host you". "Okay". I flew to Poland. He waited for me at the airport. He wanted to tell me what they did. He organized a dinner for me in Łazienki Park restaurant. And it was then that I decided to say a few words in Polish; I prepared for this. I recalled Asnyk's poem and I said: "Instead of consistently decorating one's head with the dead laurel twigs". A young engineer – there were all engineers from PZL – stood up and ended the poem. I began to speak Polish. I asked him to give me a driver because I wanted to look for my father's grave. I did not find it. I came to Poland five times but I did not find it.

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Search for father's grave in Belżyce, reconstruction of the cemetery

In 1988, I decided that my sons should know what had happened here. We never spoke about it at home – I did not want to talk about it. My sons studied in California at that time; I took them to Warsaw and I went with them to visit all those places: Auschwitz, Majdanek – we were in all those places. And finally I said: "Good, now we are going to look for my father's grave, for the place where I buried him". We went to Belżyce, walked around but we could not find it. My sons said: "Why don't you ask someone?" I was too proud to do it. They forced me to go to the mayor of the town. I said: "Sir, I am the grandson of Szlamianka". And he knew very well who I was. If I had said "I am Ariav-Cygielman", no one would know, but "the grandson of Szlamianka – he knew perfectly well. He was a very nice, decent man. I told him: "I arrived here with my sons to look for my father's grave, for the place where

I buried him and I cannot find it”. He looked at me and said: “Come with me, I will show you”. I nearly got a heart attack. We went to the place, where we had been before. And what did we see? It was a place where children played and trees grew. He said to me: “This used to be the Jewish cemetery”. Not a single tombstone, nothing. “You are sure, yes?” We went to see the registers and we checked. This was the place but there was nothing there. I asked him for help and he helped me. Mr. Krężlewicz also helped me and Mr. Turski helped me a lot. I wrote a letter to the minister and within a week I received his reply, in which he assured me that this place would be sacred for Poles. So I took steps aimed at obtaining a permit for building a Jewish cemetery there. I obtained this permit and I built the cemetery. I hired two architects from Warsaw; I did not want anybody’s help – either a priest or a rabbi. When I built this cemetery, people came to me and said that they had the furniture that had belonged to my grandfather. They asked me if I wanted to buy it. I said I did not want to buy it and told them to keep it. One man brought me a candlestick; he said it used to be my grandfather’s candlestick so I bought it from him. I did not want to see any of these things – I told them that they could keep it, sell it or do whatever they wanted. I only bought this candlestick – it stands in my apartment in London. I did one thing wrong – I plated it with silver; it had been black and I should have left it black.

Yiddish

I spoke Yiddish before the war. Today I rather listen than speak. When someone speaks Yiddish to me, I understand, but I do not speak Yiddish. I have a cousin, who came from Sao Paulo. I haven’t seen him for more than twenty years. He is from Lublin. He left Lublin with his family in 1939. I have a problem with him: he speaks Portuguese and I do not know this language; he also speaks English a little, he remembers some Polish, but not much, because he is three years younger than me. We both remember how we used to play together,

but he knows Yiddish, so when we went to Belżyce we spoke a bit in Yiddish in the car; but otherwise I do not speak this language. Sometimes I use some words, which I remember, and which have the meaning that cannot be expressed in any other language.

Meeting with young people. Belżyce, 2004

Last year I was invited by the students of the last class (before graduation exams) of school in Belżyce. They wrote an e-mail to me asking me to tell them what had happened in the past and so on. I wrote back that I would not do it by e-mail but that I was ready to come and talk to them. They agreed so I went to Belżyce. There were a lot of students – from two schools, the headmasters and teachers; I stood there and spoke in Polish. They asked me questions, very good questions. I answered in a “politically correct” way – not the whole truth, because there is no truth. They asked me, what Poles had been like. What was I to tell them? They were too young. I told them that there had been good and bad Poles.

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Message to young people

I think that I have never been a man about whom people say: “I would like to be like you”. I cannot tell young people what to do and how to do it; I am unable to tell my sons how to live. But one thing I will tell you: learn, learn and – what’s most important – give a part of yourself to others: people of different faith, different origin, because nowadays there is no room for statements like: “He is a Jew, I am an Orthodox and he is a Lutheran.” Be a man. If you work and you have some luck, you will get something you want – if you know, what you want, because I saw many people in my life who did not know what they wanted. And so they spent their lives like this: they did not force their way into life but went by or over it, somehow. And one must force one’s way into life, get to know it, to feel, what it is.

This is the first time, after so many years, that I am sitting here with you and talking about those times. Well, I have only told several stories, but I also have other stories from my work experience. I participated in all the Israeli wars, I worked with many people and I met many outstanding persons. I do not know what it all means. If I had not achieved it myself and had not wanted it...

Archives of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center.
Participants: Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, Tomasz Czajkowski, 2008.
The whole narrative on: www.historiamowiona.tnn.pl

NIMROD ARIAV AT GRODZKA GATE. MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

In November 2005, the film with the story told by Nimrod Ariav was shown to young people from the Civil Academy that was active at the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center. They sent a letter to him and a CD, on which their impressions and thoughts are recorded. Here are the fragments of their statements:

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Kasia:

“Thank you for something important, for the fragment of history that we were not witnesses to, and for your message about tolerance”.

Agata:

“I would very much like to participate in the meeting with you. I believe I could learn a lot from you. What you can hear from someone is totally different from what you can read in the books”.



Nimrod Ariav in conversation with journalists.
Photo by Marcin Federowicz, February 13, 2006.

Piotr:

“Some information that we heard during this conversation shows the situations and places, which we could not see, experience or hear – for example the information about the pre-war Lublin or the Warsaw Uprising”.

Aleksandra:

“I only want to say that this story does not focus on any philosophy or what we should or should not do. This is a true story and I believe that if one is sensitive it will be important for him/her and will be remembered”.

Anna:

“It is surely more meaningful to me than the books I read about the history of Poland and Polish – Jewish relationships because all that you went through shows us what these relationships were really like, what human life was like. I would like to thank you for that. I do hope that more persons will be able to see this interview and to learn what I have learnt”.

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Ola:

“I would like to thank you for your message “not to slide through life, not to be over it or aside of it”. This may be an inspiration for me and for many other persons how to live, how to force our way into life. Thank you very much”.

On February 13, 2006 Nimrod Ariav came to Lublin to talk to young people. This meeting was held at Grodzka Gate Center.



Nimrod Ariav and Tomasz Pietrasiewicz at Grodzka Gate.
Photo by Joanna Zętar, 2006.



Nimrod Ariav's meeting with youth at "Grodzka Gate – NN Theater" Center.
Photo by Joanna Zętar, 2006.

Lublin, 12 grudnia 2005r.

Szanowny Panie Nimrod!

21 listopada 2005r. na Spotkaniu Akademii Operatekskiej Tomasz Pełtasiewicz zapropował nam obejrzenie filmu. Nie zdradzi, co to będzie. Nie możemy przypuszczać, jak wiele emocji wzbudzi w nas nagrana rozmowa.

Akademia Operatekowska to zespół wolontariuszy, których poza zajęciami w szkołach i na izachach potrafią zrobić coś nowego. Podstawowym celem A.O. jest podnoszenie jakości, które można określić jako dydaktyczne. Obszary zainteresowań? Historia, kultura, edukacja, sztuka, polityka, wolontariat, ekologia, samorządność. Poprzez spotkania, warsztaty, dyskusje, a przede wszystkim realizowane projekty, pokazujemy, że w naszym społeczeństwie można poprawić naszą sytuację, zaktualizować rzeczywistość, żyjącą w najbliższym regionie Dni Europejskiej. Oto nasz Grodzki Świat.

Akademia Operatekowska powstała na przełomie 2004 i 2005r. przy Grodzku, Bratka Grodzka – Teatr NN. Grodzki, jak Panu wiadomo, zajmuje się historią przedwojennego, wielokulturowego Lublina.

Akademia w swoich działaniach bierze to, co przesłanie z tymi co teraz żyjemy. Staramy się kontynuować pracę Grodzka – wypełniając pustki. Z masłki nudy luki naprawiamy, uzupełniamy, nieparzystych, potrzebujemy odnowy. Tamten czas odnowy, to trudne zadanie, tym bardziej cieszymy się z pobudzenia się z nami swoją historią. Jednocześnie pragniemy zaprosić Pana do spotkania się z nami, na którym nam zależy.

Tomasz Kimowicz
Magdalena Kawa
Aleksandra Krawiec
Zuzanna Krawczyk

Anna Kotłowska
Aleksandra Kuligowska

Monika Słomka
Agnieszka Witkowska

Emilia Sobieszczańska
Katarzyna Dęgińska

Iwona Fedorkowa
Ula Aleszek

Krzysztof Szwedowski
Monika Krawczyk

Z wyrazami szacunku

Olga Górska
Barbara Knap

~~Wojciech Szlachetka~~ Proti Chworo's
Aleksandra Dziś Monika Górska

Esther Kuc' Barbara Makinić
Monika Krawczyk

Marta Skalska
Katarzyna Knap

Monika Krawczyk
Krzysztof Szwedowski

Magdalena Dziś
Zuzanna Krawczyk

Tomasz Kręciński
Kasia Kamińska
Monika Szwedowska
Aleksandra Krawczyk

Monika Krawczyk

The letter of the young people connected with "Grodzka Gate – NN Theater" Center to Nimrod Ariav, Lublin, 12.12.2005.



Warszawa drugim domem

– Moje nazwisko dzisiaj brzmi Nimrod S. Ariav, przedtem w Lublinie nazywałem się Cygielman, w Warszawie byłem Henrykiem Górskim i Jęrzym Eugeniuszem Godlewskim. Ja nie będę przemawiał, chcę usłyszeć pytania, odpowiem, co przeżyłem, co ja czuję – mówił gość wczorajszego spotkania Akademii Obywatelskiej w Bramie Grodzkiej. Nimroda Ariava pytano przede wszystkim o szczegóły życia w przedwojennym Lublinie. – Byłem wtedy małym chłopcem. Jak było? Jak teraz, tylko nie mieliśmy komputerów – odpowiadał z uśmiechem. Nimrod Ariav walczył w Powstaniu Warszawskim i omal nie zginął. – Walczyłem dla Warszawy i dla siebie. Warszawa jest drugim moim domem.

GRJ

“Gazeta Wyborcza” February 14, 2006
A release *Warsaw my second home*, Grzegorz Józefczuk.



Nimrod Ariav at Grodzka Gate.
Photo by Joanna Zętar, 2006.

Nimrod Ariav:

My present name is Nimrod Ariav. When I lived in Lublin, it was Cygielman, in Warsaw – Henryk Górski and Jerzy Eugeniusz Godlewski. And my friends call me Zigi, so please call me Zigi. And now you begin. I will answer all your questions. Yesterday I was in Warsaw and my friend asked me if I prepared myself for this meeting. I told him I didn't, because I cannot prepare for it in any way. I did not come here to deliver a speech, I want to hear your questions, and I do not need to prepare to answer them. I will tell you what I went through, experienced, and what I feel – if you want.

Olga:

Since December 12 I have thought about the beginning, when we wrote a letter to you. Because what can we say? First of all, the interview that Director Pietrasiewicz had with you was very surprising to us. And please, believe me: what you say is very important to us. For this place and for the people, who are here – sometimes by accident, but in most cases not by accident – this is an essential issue. And I am happy that you are with us.

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Ariav Nimrod:

Thank you.

Anna:

It seems to me that the main reason for us to invite you here is that we want you to tell us how to talk about what your generation went through with such people as us. How to initiate this dialog, which in a way is carried out on the two edges of this abyss – the years that have passed since the war.

LUBLIN

Mówiłem po polsku i wyglądałem jak Polak

Gościem dzisiejszego spotkania Akademii Obywatelskiej będzie Nimrod S. Ariav-Czygielman, którego życie mogłoby posłużyć za kanwę fascynującego filmu

Urodził się w Lublinie, miał rodzinę w Białymostku. Walczył w Powstaniu Warszawskim. Był wysokim rangą izraelskim pilotem wojskowym, dyrektorem fabryki samolotów, potem nimi handlował. Pod koniec lat 80. przyjechał do rodzinnych Białymostka, aby odnaleźć i odnowić tamtejszy kirkut. Zaczął wspomagać białymostki szpital i szkoły, ufundował ultrasonograf, aparaty rentgenowskie, pracownie komputerowe. Historię życia Nimroda Ariawa poznali członkowie Akademii Obywatelskiej przy Okręgu „Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN”, słuchając jego nagranych relacji. Wysłali list: „Nie mogliśmy przypuszczać, jak wiele emocji wzbudzi w nas nagrana rozmowa” – napisali i zaprosili go do Lublina. Spotkanie odbędzie się dziś o godz. 17 w Bramie Grodzkiej.

„W domu były używane trzy języki. Rodzice mówili po żydowsku. Ja z moim bratem chodziliśmy do Tarbutu, to mówiliśmy po hebrajsku. I mieliśmy guwernantkę – Gertrud, która mówiła do nas po niemiecku. Znałem także język polski, nie za dobrze, ale na tyle wystarczająco, że mogłem mówić i wysłuchiwać się po polsku nie z żydowskim akcentem. I to mnie uratowało” – wspomina Nimrod Ariav w rozmowie dla programu „Historia mówiona” Teatru NN. W reportażu „Powrót” Agnieszki Czyżewskiej-Jacquemet z Radia Lublin wyznaje: „J nie wyglądałem jak Żyd. Byłem członkiem AK, przeżyłem szkołę, byłem podchorążym. Miałem dużo nazwisk: Henryk Górski, Jerzy Eugeniusz Godlewski. Podczas powstania byłem na Ścieńce, północy walczyłem na Starówce, gdzie roztętniono rannych. Choc znalazłem to miejsce i nie mogłem. Przeszedłem Starówkę może z 50 razy. Są rzeczy, które wychodzą z głowy i nie chcą wrócić”. W Warszawie poznał Annę Rajsi-Langfus, labelską Żydówkę, która w 1960 dostała nagrodę Prix Goncourt.

W grudniu 1945 roku Nimrod Ariav wyjechał do Polski, najpierw do Niemiec, trzy lata później do Izraela. „Zaczęłem myśleć, że ja jestem Żydem i że moje miejsce jest w Izraelu” – wspomina. Zrobił karierę w lotnictwie. Był na wojnach



Nimrod S. Ariav-Czygielman na kirkucie w Białymostku (2003)

Izraela. Został prezesem Israel Aircraft Industries, aby później zająć się handlem samolotami. „W 1988 roku postanowiłem, że muszę jeszcze coś wiedzieć, co tu się działo. Nigdy w domu nie mówiłem o tym i ja nie chciałem mówić o tym” – opowiada, jak zdecydował się odwiedzić grób ojca, którego – rozstrzelanego przez Niemców w 1942 r. – sam potajemnie pochował. Jednak w Białymostku na kirkucie nie pozostało prawie nic. Zarosł wysokimi topolami. Dzięki Nimrodowi Ariawowi białymostki kirkut

wydobło z zapomnienia. Na ścianie muru przy wejściu znajduje się reliefowa rzeźba drzewa przypominającego menorę, najpiękniejsze tego rodzaju dzieło emigracyjne w Polsce. Od 1900 r. w rocznicę śmierci ojca na białymostki kirkut Ariav przywozi Żydów z całego świata, aby pokazać tę dalszą o pamięć przodków. Był wśród nich – oczywiście incognito – Mosze Areni, wieloletni minister obrony i spraw zagranicznych Izraela.

GRZEGORZ JÓZEFCEK

“Gazeta Wyborcza”, February 13, 2006.

A release I spoke Polish and I looked like a Pole, Grzegorz Józefczuk.

Ariav Nimrod:

I have no answer for you how to do it and whether to do it at all. I believe I made a mistake not to talk about it at home. They asked me to go to schools and tell the students what had happened here. I did not want to. I did not want to talk about it at all. In 1988 – when I was over sixty – I spoke about it for the first time with my sons, I told them what had happened here. I invited them to Poland to show them and tell them about their roots and about what had happened here as seen through my eyes. Everyone may interpret it in his or her own way. They listened and said nothing. I did not hear a word about it from them for about a year, and later they went back to school abroad and I went back to England, where I already lived at that time. We did one thing together: we went to look for my father's grave – today there is a Jewish cemetery there. Since that time, i.e. 1990, my family, colleagues and friends have come to Bełżyce with me; there is no priest or rabbi with us. My sons and their wives say a poem or a fragment of the Bible – they decide themselves what to say. I say kaddish, the prayer for the dead. We put flowers and we stand there in silence. Is it necessary to go to schools, and talk about it? Maybe it is? Now, when I am talking to you I think: it seems that it should be done. It seems so. But am I sure? I do not know. I do not know if anyone can do it. I am probably more moved here and now than when it actually happened. I tell my family what I went through but I do not know if I have the right to tell what I feel to other people. Maybe I have.

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Ola:

I would like to ask you about the time when Israel was established as a state. Suddenly, from all the countries where the Jews lived – those who survived in the Nazi-occupied Europe, those from the States and from other countries – they came to Israel. They spoke different languages, their cultural background and customs also differed. What was most difficult

when all these people, who were in a way strangers to each other, had to create their state together, to live together, to communicate and to build mutual relationships?

Ariav Nimrod:

The most difficult thing for me and, probably, for all of us, was the language. And this was not an easy process. I was lucky that I learned it quickly, because I had the educational base here in Lublin, in Tarbut, which was a Hebrew school. I spoke Hebrew a month after my arrival to Israel. But for most people this was the most important issue. The other one was customs, because what has a Jew from Poland in common with a Jew from Tunisia or Morocco? Zero. Nothing in common. But all of them are Jews! This got sorted out and settled with time. I will give you an example: I worked for Israel Aircraft Industries – this is the biggest aircraft plant in the area of Middle East. When I worked there, over twenty thousand people were employed at this plant and I was its President. We had engineers from over forty places in the world and each of them believed that his *alma mater* was the best! Because a Jew from France, from Sorbonne, believed he was better than the one from Oxford, and the one from Oxford was better than a Jew from the Warsaw Technical University or from Morocco University, from Texas or from any other place. And the major task was to make them an integrated unit working together because each of them had some good ideas. And it was not easy but they succeeded! I have my own theory why a Jew from Morocco and a Jew from Warsaw or Lublin are able to communicate. I will tell you what I think. I flew to Ikito – Ikito is near Peru and Brazil, somewhere that way, a small place at the end of the world! I landed in Ikito. I walked the street and I saw a Jew from Yemen. I ran to him: “How are you?!” And what do I have in common with him? Zero. But I was very glad to see him there, at the end of the world!

Lublin
20 X 2005

MEMORY OF NECHAMA TEC

oral
history

Memory of Nechama Tec (born in 1931 in Lublin), the Holocaust survivor, American writer, Professor of sociology, the author of autobiographical and memory books (*Dry Tears, In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Ru-feyzen*); the researcher of the Holocaust.

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When I was in Israel and I was sixteen or seventeen, we dated for a while. He had just arrived and he had no one there. He is a very nice and wise man. We used to go to the cinema or for a walk. I knew him quite well at that time. We did not talk about our life experience. I did not even tell my parents how I felt in Otwock all alone. My mum did not know, my father did not know, and my children did not know. They learnt about it when my book was published. I do not know how he survived. I have no idea. I would really like to read about his experience. He did not know about me, either... He did not know who I was, that I had parents... We never talked about our life or about the war. I did not want to talk about the war with anyone. And people were not interested in it, anyway. They never asked. And

I was glad they did not ask, because I wouldn't tell them. I know nothing about him. I only know that he was alone, poor and that he is a few years older than me. If you see Mr. Cygielman, send him my best regards. I have the warm feelings about him. He was such a nice man – wise and nice.

Archives of “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center.
Interviewer: Wioletta Wejman, Warsaw 29.10.2005.
The whole narrative on: www.historiamowiona.tnn.pl

NIMROD ARIAV'S HOUSE IN LUBLIN

The house, in which the ancestors of Nimrod Ariav lived in the twenties and thirties of the 20th century, stood in Lublin at Nowa Street, no. 17. It was built at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1937 (the archive materials on the house relating to this period are available) the building belonged to Frajdla and Sura Wajsbrodt sisters. On their behalf, the house was administered and managed by Josef Wajsfeld, who lived at Grodzka 14 Street. The house at Nowa 17 was a two-storey building made of brick, designated for housing purposes. It had two staircases – the main one and the back one. The estate also included a large yard of eighty square meters with bricked surface. In the building there were seventeen separate apartments – eight single-room apartments, five two-room apartments and four three-room apartments and utility premises situated on the ground floor. There was electricity, and water and sewage system in the house. In spite of the declaration of the owners of the house that it is designated for housing purposes, eight shops were located on the ground floor – such as “Fabryka Cukrów” [Sweet Factory], “Galanteria”, “Materiały piśmienne” [Stationery],

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The house at Nowa 17 Street in Lublin, the family house of Nimrod Ariav (Szulim Cygielman).
Photo by Stefan Kielsznia, 1938.



Lublin, Lubartowska 19 Street (previously Nowa 17 Street),
the house, in which the family of Nimrod Ariav lived until 1940.
Photo by Marcin Federowicz, 2008.

“Wytwórnia wafli” [Wafer production] – which belonged to Ezra Halckiener, “Wytwórnia czapek” [Cap production] – belonging to Aron Jeleniewicz and a shoe shop.

In September 1939, as a result of the war, a part of the house was destroyed, and its tenants had to take effort to get the funds for reconstruction and repair. From that period an application is preserved, which was written by Matla Rajzla Cygielman (mother of Ariav Nimrod), the attorney of the owners of the house; the application is addressed to the Building Industry Department of the Municipal Office, and relates to the permit for carrying out a repair of the destroyed premises. Nevertheless, the repair of the inside of the building was not carried out.

In 1946, the house at Nowa 17 Street was totally reconstructed, the arrangement of apartments and the front façade were changed.

Marzena Baum

*Based on the archive materials kept in the National Archives in Lublin,
“Building Sector Inspection of the city of Lublin 1926–1950 team” file no. 3309.*

CYGIELMAN FAMILY IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRESERVED ARCHIVE MATERIALS

The history of life and activities of Cygielman family, the parents and grandparents of Nimrod Ariav (Szulim Cygielman) in Lublin may be reconstructed based on numerous traces, such as the documents and sources that are kept in the Lublin archives, museums, municipal offices or cultural institutions. They show the everyday life of this family in two centuries – births, marriages, and deaths of its members, their professional duties, life in Lublin and nearby towns, as well as family customs and religious practices.

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The most valuable documents are the certificates kept in the archives of the Register Office. They evidence the births, marriages, and deaths of the members of particular families. Examination of these documents is usually the first step in getting familiarized with the history of a particular family and of its times. In the Lublin archives of the Register Office there is the birth certificate of Szulim Cygielman entered in the Lublin register of births of Jewish children in 1926.

14/4 dn. 11-33. do 163
Pani Matli Rajli Cygielman
pełnomocniczce reprezentacji
nr. 17 przy ul. Nowej
w Lublinie
zaświadczyć, że
Po rozpatrzeniu prosby Pani
z dn. 11 września br. o pozwolenie na re-
mont wnętrza w mieszkaniu nr. 17, miesz-
ka Bractwa, na nr. 17, w Lublinie
w Lublinie przy ul. Nowej, 17
Lublin 11 września 1933 r.
na wykonanie wymienionych robót

4/5
[Signature]

The answer of the Building Department in Lublin to the application of Matla Rajzla Cygielman for a permission to renovate the apartment at Nowa Street 17.

The certificates of the Jewish faith persons from the earlier years (1826 – 1894) were submitted to the National Archives; they include entries relating to the ancestors of Ariav Nimrod on the side of his father.

In the archives of the Register Office in Belżyce there are entries regarding births, marriages, and deaths from the period 1911-1936 of the members of Wajsbrodt family, which was the family of Nimrod Ariav's mother – Rajzla Matla.

Another important source allowing for following the fortunes of particular persons is the Registration Books and Population Registers of the city of Lublin, which are kept in the Lublin National Archives. In the entries of the Population Register of the city of Lublin from 1850 – 1915 there is a number of entries regarding persons, whose name was Cygielman, although it should be further examined whether all entries refer to the members of Nimrod Ariav's family.

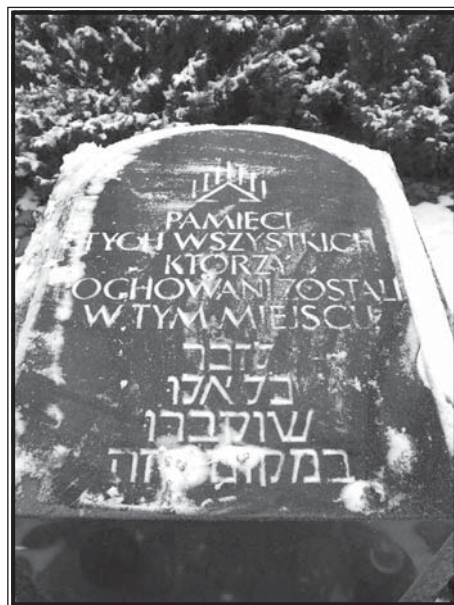
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The archives of the National Archives in Lublin also contain the sources regarding the place of residence of the close family of Nimrod Ariav – the house at Nowa 17 Street. They are gathered in the documentation of the Building Sector Inspection of the City of Lublin from 1926-1950 and contain the plans of the house, information on the surface area and characteristics of the building, number of apartments and shops, including the application signed by Ariav's mother – Matla Rajzla Cygielman (1936) for the permit for repair of the apartment. Another category of sources is the documents relating to religious life in Lublin. The Museum of the History of the City of Lublin has "The list of the owners of places in the Maharshal synagogue" of 1878 (the biggest synagogue in Lublin) and the name of Nimrod Ariav's grandfather and his relatives are on this list with an indication of particular number of places occupied in the synagogue, both in its part for men and for women.

The archive materials are supplemented with the photographs. In the iconography section of “Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center there are the photos of the house at Nowa 17 Street from the mid-war period taken by Stefan Kielsznia.

In order to illustrate versatility of the preserved documentation we enclose: 1) an excerpt of the birth certificate of Nimrod Ariav, 2) a list of places in the Lublin synagogue, and 3) the application of Matla Rajzla Cygielman to the Municipal Office of the City of Lublin.

Marzena Baum



A memorial plaque at the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce.
Photo by Joanna Zętar, 2005.

BELŻYCE

The Jewish community of Belżyce through the centuries

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Belżyce (Yiddish – *Belzhitza*) is one of the oldest towns in the Lublin province. The first mention on this town appeared in the location document of 1349, in which king Casimir the Great – at the request of the owner of Belżyce village, Rafał from Tarnów of Leliwa coat of arms – transferred it from the Polish to the German law.² The newly established town located near the major trade route of the Polish-Lithuanian state of that time leading from Krakow to Vilnius grew quickly and had a growing number of inhabitants.

The first Jews settled in Belżyce in mid 16th century³. The Jewish commune was most probably organized in the seventies of that century⁴. The Belżyce Jews mainly dealt with trade which resulted from the advantageous location of the town at the royal route from Krakow, through Sandomierz and Lublin, to Vilnius. The number of Jewish inhabitants of Belżyce grew significantly in the second half of the 16th century. At that time, a synagogue was built in a place located south of the market square and a school was opened. The 17th century



Recovered tombstones at the Jewish cemetery in Belzyce

sources mentioned already two synagogues in the town. The Belżyce Jews mainly dealt with trade and craftsmanship, taking advantage of the fact that the 17th century Belżyce was a significant center of different religious denominations and that the Arian and Calvin noblemen from all over Małopolska region arrived to the frequent synods and gatherings and they stayed in the inns and taverns run by the Jews⁵.

The fact that in 1643 the Sejm of the Jews of the Polish Kingdom, the so called the Council of Four Lands⁶ was held in Belżyce shows the importance of this town for the Jews. The growth of the Jewish community in Belżyce was brutally interrupted by the invasion of Chmielnicki Cossacks in 1648, but the local commune managed to promptly repair the destructions caused by the pogrom.

In 1676, the Jews constituted nearly 23 % of the inhabitants of Belżyce. They lived in their district marked by the following streets: Żydowska (currently 1000-lecia), Zatylna (currently Jakuba Nachmana), Zatylna Żydowska (currently Bednarska) and Południowa.

The 18th century was the time of the full legal organization of the Jewish religious commune in Belżyce. It was represented by the Council of the Elders, which managed the synagogue, school and cemetery, and which was established about 1810.

In mid 19th century the Belżyce Jews doubled their number and constituted ca. 45% of the total population of the town (in 1859, of 1693 inhabitants of Belżyce 757 were Jewish).⁷ At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the Jewish community in Belżyce constituted over 53 % of the inhabitants⁸.

When Poland regained sovereignty in 1918, in Belżyce – besides the big synagogue – 6 private prayer houses and 8 *cheders* (religious schools) operated, including the school located in the building erected for this purpose in the 17th century.

According to the results of the first census carried out in the Second Republic of Poland in 1921, in the mid-war period, the Belżyce Jews constituted half of the inhabitants

of the town.⁹ Most of them earned their living from a small-scale trade and craftsmanship providing their services to the inhabitants of Belżyce and its vicinity. The situation of Jewish inhabitants of Belżyce, the same as of other towns and villages of the region, dramatically deteriorated during the Nazi occupation. The first troops of German army invaded the town on September 16, 1939.

„The appearance of German soldiers frightened the Jewish inhabitants. The Jews did not leave their apartments being aware of the danger they were exposed to”¹⁰

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In the year of the outbreak of the 2nd World War approximately 2100 Jews lived in Belżyce. Extermination of this community began as early as 1940.¹¹ The Belżyce Jews were from the very beginning of the occupation treated as the free-of-charge labor force. In Belżyce, the same as in other towns of General-Gouvernement, the anti-Jewish legislation was applicable – order to wear bands with the Star of David, marking the Jewish enterprises and shops, blockage of the bank accounts, restrictions in movement, curfew, etc.

“December 11, 1939, the order obligating all Jews from the age of 13 to wear the disgraceful bands and to bow to each German soldier. Any Jew, who would go out without such band, would be beaten and severely punished. If he forgot to bow to the German, he would face heavy beating. So each Jew, who could be recognized because of the band, became the target of repressions”¹²

The Judenrat was established, the local synagogues were destroyed, and in December 1940, the Jewish ghetto was established. The Nazis kept there not only the local Jews, but also those brought by the railway transports from Krakow, Lublin, Szczecin or Saxony.

“Masses of people from towns occupied by the German army are coming to our town. They tell horrifying things about the richest citizens of their town being imprisoned and burned alive. They also tell about burning synagogues, raping Jewish women and killing Jews together with the Polish prisoners of war”¹³

As a result of the transports, the number of the inhabitants of Belżyce ghetto in March 1942 amounted to nearly 5000 persons. Initially, the ghetto was not closed; in January 1942, it was fenced and stricter control was in effect.

In May 1942, the Nazis commenced liquidation of the ghetto in Belżyce¹⁴. Gradually, in the three subsequent transports, a large part of its inhabitants was sent to Majdanek camp.

“The German gendarmes with the Ukrainians came and surrounded the town. The men, mostly young ones, were caught. (...) They were gathered in the market square and then forced to go on foot toward Lublin. On the following day we learnt that they all were taken to Majdanek. People talked that no one would come back, since this was the death camp”¹⁵

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The big displacement of Jews from Belżyce took place in the autumn of 1942. In September, several hundred Jews were taken to Majdanek.

“Rumors spread among the Jews and Poles that a round-up of Poles would be organized, but when the day began, people said that the Jews would be relocated from the town. This caused panic, people hid in various hiding places and in the houses of their Polish neighbors, and I went with my sister to our brother-in-law, who lived in the Polish district, and we hid at the attic. We spent there a few hours; we heard shots, thuds, and laments. And the radio megaphones announced that hiding the Jews would be punished with the capital

punishment and the robbery of Jewish property – with imprisonment. We also heard that many cars with young people drove to Lublin”¹⁶

In October 1942, another transport of Bełżyce Jews went to the death camp in Sobibór, where people were immediately gassed. This transport consisted of 7230 Jews gathered in Bełżyce from seven neighboring municipalities of the Lublin district, such as Bychawa, Jastków or Wojciechów. The remaining inhabitants of the ghetto were gathered in about a dozen houses around the destroyed synagogue and the labor camp was organized in the building of the synagogue; it was separated by barbed wire from the rest of the town.

68 The most tragic day in the history of the Jewish community of Bełżyce was May 8, 1943. On that day, an SS troop shot the remaining inhabitants of the ghetto near the synagogue (750 women, 150 children, and about 100 men)¹⁷. 250 women and 350 men, who had been sent by the Germans to the labor camp in Kraśnik-Budzyń or to the ghetto in Piaski Lubelskie avoided the execution.

In this way, the Jewish Bełżyce ceased to exist. Only few Jews managed to evade death. Some of them survived the German camps, others found shelter in the Christians’ houses, or survived in the forests and in partisan groups. Anyway, they soon emigrated.

Now, the only remnant of the centuries-long presence of the Jews in this town is the monument and the stone in the square in front of the Municipal Center of Culture, where a synagogue used to stand, and a memorial obelisk at the old cemetery.

Marzena Baum

History of the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce

The cemetery, located at the road to Urzędów (currently Przemysłowa Street) about 1 km from the town, was organized in the thirties of the 19th century. It was surrounded by the ditch and earth wall.

It operated until May 1943, i.e. until the final liquidation by the Nazis of the ghetto in Belżyce, but it survived in a good condition until the end of the Second World War. It was destroyed by the local population, which used the tombstones for utility purposes. The cemetery waited over 40 years for human care and renovation (in the sixties, the area was fenced and trees were planted). It was finally renovated at the end of the eighties by Nimrod S. Ariav-Cygielman. [...] His father, who was shot before the synagogue, is buried at this cemetery. The religious ceremony connected with the completion of renovation of the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce took place in October 1990. The cemetery was designed by architect Zbigniew Gąsior. It was surrounded by a high wall made of white stone (bedrocks), which was covered with a roof made of red roof plates. The gate has the shape of a large dome. There is a pattern of the tree of life placed on the gate and the writing in Polish and Yiddish “Jewish Cemetery”. Inside the cemetery, several tombstones that survived and were returned by the inhabitants of the town are exposed. On the monument in the shape of a tombstone made of black marble we read the following wording: “In memory of all those, who were buried in this place”.

The benefactor of the cemetery, Nimrod Ariav, placed the following plaque in memoriam of his father:

In this Jewish cemetery, together with my brother Abraham, who was later murdered by the Germans, and with other Jews, who were at that time rescued from the ravages of war,



General view of the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce.
Photo by Piotr Sztajdel, 2006.



The Jewish cemetery in Belżyce.
Photo by Joanna Zętar, 2005.

I buried my father Arie-Lejb Cygielman, who had been shot by the Nazis in the square before the synagogue in Belżyce together with 149 Jews, on October 2, 1942.

Stanisław Jadczak, *Belżyce*.
Monografia miasta i gminy, Lublin-Terespol 2002.

Lublin
20 X 2005

THE ORAL HISTORY OF BELŻYCE

oral
history

An interview with Bogdan Abramowicz (born in 1943) in Belżyce, the governor of the town and municipality of Belżyce in 1982-1990.

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**Did your parents or grandparents tell you about the old-time Belżyce?
I mainly mean the multi-cultural past of this town.**

My father's family house stood very close to the synagogue, Jewish ritual bath, and the Jewish cemetery located next to the market square, so, of course, my father, who lived there, and all his family had very close contacts with the Jews before the 2nd World War. They went to school together, played together and my father often told me about it. As a young boy interested in the life of Belżyce I asked and my parents told me about their memories and mentioned different names. In the market square there were many shops, which were mostly run by the Jews.

Did you, as a child, go to the former Jewish cemetery? How do you remember it?

The areas of the Jewish cemeteries are the areas that were often neglected after the Second World War – because we know, what it looked like in Poland: these areas served different purposes. When I was a young boy I used to go in that direction or we played football with my friends there. This area was partly fenced – from Belżyce side; there were single trees, and in its further part – at least this is how I recall it – it was an empty area. Then, when Belżyce district was established, the local cooperative got the permit to build its base at this street, and it was, indeed, built and still exists. And the part that was fenced with the wire, and secured in a way, was not used. Everybody knew it was the Jewish cemetery, or, as we colloquially called it: Jewish *kirkut*.

74 What are your memories regarding the first meeting with Ariav Nimrod?

I do not remember the year, but I think it was in 1986–1987, maybe in 1988. At that time I was the governor. A man came to me and introduced himself as a person, who had lived in Belżyce during the war, and had been born in Lublin. He said he had a family in Belżyce, his grandparents. A very nice, very modest man. He spoke poor Polish; he asked me how long I had worked there and if I knew Belżyce. When I told him that I had been born in Belżyce in 1943 and where my father had lived, where his family house had been located – he asked me if he could tell me his story. When the Second World War broke out and the Nazis began to exterminate the Jewish population in Lublin (he had lived somewhere in the Old Town – their family house had been located there), they moved to grandparents to Belżyce. He told me that his grandparents had lived in the Market Square. After his arrival to Belżyce a terrible thing happened – the Jews were murdered at the place which is now called Tysiąclecia Street – at the back of the synagogue next to the Jewish bath –

the Nazis shot a lot of Jews there. Mr. Ariav told me that he had been 15 at that time and with a group of 3 or 5 colleagues he put the murdered people on the wheelbarrow and took them to the Jewish cemetery. And he said – this meeting took place at my office in the Municipal Office: “I remember that this was a street, which went along at the place where this murder was committed; we went along that street, south-west, and next, along the main street of Bełżyce. We carried the corpses on the wheelbarrow and we left Bełżyce; there was a fork crossing there: we went straight to this cemetery and on the right hand side – as Mr. Ariav said – I think there was the Catholic cemetery there”. And indeed, knowing Bełżyce so well I knew that this man was telling the truth, which I heard for the first time from him and I was very interested in it. And it turned out – as my father (now deceased) told me – that he [my father] knew one of the daughters of the grandfather of Mr. Ariav, whom I met later, when she came to the anniversary meeting one year, brought my Mr. Ariav. And later I realized that this was the girl, about whom my father told me that he had often played with and whom he knew from school.

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Next, we left my room and we went to the area next to the Center of Culture; Mr. Ariav recalled that this shooting had happened at that place and showed me which direction they had gone with the corpses. It was, indeed, Tysiąclecia Street, next, Krakowska Street (its former name was Urzędowska), and along Urzędowska they got to the crossing with the current bishop Wilczyński and Kościuszki Street and went straight. They carried the corpses of the murdered to the Jewish cemetery, whereas to the right, at Kościuszki Street, the catholic cemetery is located. We talked for a long time with Mr. Ariav; then he wanted to walk around the Market Square, so I asked him: “Do you remember where your grandfather lived?” He said: “I do not remember exactly where it was, but let’s try, if you have time”. I had time, of course, so we walked together around the Market Square. When we walked along the western side of the Square and we approached the crossing with Zielona Street,

DOBROCZYNNOŚĆ Za pieniądze Izraelczyka wyremontowano już szkołę i wyposażono miejscowy szpital

Pamiętają o Bełżycach



Wczoraj Żydzi złożyli kwiaty u stóp tablicy upamiętniającej zagładę ich rodaków

■ Co roku w rocznicę śmierci swojego ojca Nimrod S. Ariav przyjeżdża do Bełżyc. Towarzyszy mu liczna rodzina i grupa kilkudziesięciu przyjaciół z całego świata. Modlą się za zamordowanych tu Żydów i fundują wyposażenie miejskich instytucji.

„O Panie, uczyni z nas narzędzie pokoju” – zabrzmiał wczoraj kadysz na bełżyckim kirkucie. Te słowa głęboko zapadały w serca tych, co ocaleli z pogromu, a także ich dzieci i wnuków. Za ofiary Holocaustu modlił się także lubelski dominikanin, o. Tomasz Do-
statni.

– 2 października 1942 roku, na miejscu, gdzie stała synagoga, rozstrzelano 150 Żydów – wspomina Nimrod S. Ariav. – Pozostałych przy życiu wywieziono na zagładę do obozów śmierci. Moją ojczyzną jest Izrael, ale urodziłem się w Polsce. Uratowałem się z pogromu, walczyłem w powstaniu warszawskim, później uciekłem na Zachód. Przyjeżdżam tutaj każdego roku, bo tu są moje korzenie – moi dziadkowie pochodzili z Bełżyc. By złożyć hołd pomordowanym przyjeżdżają też moi synowie i przyjaciele.

Wczoraj do Bełżyc przyjechał też Daniel – najmłodszy, 4-miesięczny wnuk Ariava. To jego pierwsza wizyta w Polsce i na pewno nie ostatnia.

Władze miasta nie ukrywają radości z corocznych wizyt Ariava w Bełżycach. Za jego pienią-

dze wyremontowano już szkołę, wyposażono miejscowy szpital.

– Pan Ariav w 1990 roku wznosił ogrodzenie kirkutu w Bełżycach – mówi Bogdan Czuryżkiewicz, burmistrz Bełżyc. – Później ufundował pracownię informatyczną w Zespole Szkół nr 1, opłacił wymianę okien w szkole, wreszcie zakupił sprzęt do diagnostyki serca dla naszego szpitala. Teraz wyposaża salę klubową w Domu Kultury w meble, aparaturę RTV i fortepian.

– Dlaczego to robisz? Przez pamięć przodków, którzy w Bełżycach mieszkali przez kilkadziesiąt lat – mówi Izraelczyk.

Pierwsi Żydzi osiedlili się w Bełżycach na początku XVI wieku. W 1921 roku mieszkali tu 1882 Żydów. W 1945 roku nie było już ani jednego.

MARIA KOLESIEWICZ

6 Dniem Wschodni
Środa 11 października 2006 www.dziennikwschodni.pl

“Dziennik Wschodni”, October 11, 2006.

A release *They remember about Bełżyc*, Maria Kolesiewicz.

Mr. Ariav said: “It was somewhere here”. We got to the crossing with Zielona Street and Mr. Ariav said: “Here is the place, where my grandfather lived”. So I suggested: “Maybe we can talk about it with the inhabitants of Belżyce?” I asked some women, who were born in Belżyce and spent all their lives there, and who were sitting in front of their houses, if they remembered the family of Mr. Ariav. He started to talk to them and they indeed confirmed that his grandfather used to live there. So this was the confirmation that this man had his roots in Belżyce on the part of his grandparents. We got to know each other better – he told me what he was doing and said that he would like to come to Belżyce from time to time. He asked me if he could come to me – provided I would still work there – and to talk about his memories, maybe bring his family to show them. I assured him that he would be welcomed as a former inhabitant of Belżyce, who was not ashamed of his life story. Later he became closely attached to Belżyce.

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It is also worth mentioning that Mr. Ariav decided to take steps to secure the place, where the Jewish cemetery used to be. He took these steps and accomplished his tasks with your help. Can you tell us when you found out that he intended to take care of the cemetery? Did he tell you that on that first day when you went together to the cemetery?

It happened later. In the following year, Mr. Ariav came with his sons – one of them was about 22, the other one was younger. They came to me and he said that he brought his sons because he wanted to get them familiarized with his story and with the story of his family in Belżyce. He asked me if I could take them to the Jewish cemetery, where his grandparents were buried. We went there and he showed that place to his sons. I remember – I still see it – that he asked me: “Mr. Abramowicz, may I talk with my sons for a while?” I did not want to disturb them so I left them and stood in a distance. He embraced his sons, heads

together and for about 5 or 10 minutes he was telling and explaining something to them. And I think it was then that they decided to rebuild it. I still remember it. And I wondered what I would do if I were him.

Later we went back to the Municipal Office and we continued our conversation. He asked me if he could take efforts to secure this area. I told him (I would like to remind you that it was the end of the eighties – we know what it all looked like) that I was not empowered to decide about it, and if he agreed I would talk about it at the Provincial Office. He said that he did not want to exert any pressure. He said: “Mr. Abramowicz, I would like to explain one thing: there will be no monument here, I just want to surround it by the wall, that’s all. And maybe I would place a plaque on the wall that this is a burial place of my father and a memorial for me as an inhabitant of Lublin and later of Bełżyce, for this 15-year old boy who carried away those murdered people. And if any other Jew finds out that the members of his/her family are buried here, let them also put a plaque to mark this place as a memorial place”. Like I promised, I informed the Lublin province governor about this initiative and asked if I could be in touch with the Provincial Office. He said he would get familiarized with this matter and we would meet in a few days to talk about it. He called me back a few days later and suggested that Mr. Ariav should start the formal procedure through the Committee for Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom and that the provincial authorities – thus, also, the municipal authorities – would give the consent for it. I informed Mr. Ariav that he could start this procedure, and he authorized Mr. Marian Turski, a journalist from “Polityka” weekly to keep the frequent working contacts with us. The procedure was conducted and finally he was permitted to erect the wall around this historical place; he applied for the permit to build the wall. We had the working contacts, since I was the governor of the town and municipality of Bełżyce, and, through me, with the provincial authorities.

The construction work and the cleaning of the area started. As far as I remember, the ceremony connected with the completion of work took place in October 1990.

How did the inhabitants of Belżyce react to these actions?

The people from Belżyce reacted in a very positive way, since most of us – I too, as a young boy – often came across these tombstones. And when the construction of the wall started to commemorate the murdered Jews, people began to bring the tombstones from their yards or from places where they had seen them, so about a dozen of them are gathered here. I must say that this is still the place, which is commemorated and honored in a dignified manner – both by the Jews, who come here when Mr. Ariav arrives each year, and by the inhabitants of Belżyce. There was a single case of desecrating the cemetery – letters were thrown out, but I suspect that it was done by some stupid man who had not enough money for bear. The cemetery is located at the street which is now called Przemysłowa, where the Agricultural School Complex is located and the students from these schools take care of this place, which is respected and honored by all the inhabitants. I am glad that it is treated as one of the historical places in Belżyce, respected in the same way as our catholic cemetery. The meetings held by Mr. Ariav with the youth, with other people, and children are smoothly incorporated into the everyday life of Belżyce. I must tell you that during these meetings at the beginning of the nineties people often came and Mr. Ariav talked to them. They told him – as my father once told me – where his family used to live; Mr. Ariav told me about it later. I remember these first years '90-'95, when a large group of Belżyce inhabitants attended these meetings, but recently only the close family and the friends of Mr. Ariav participate in them. And, of course, the municipal authorities also participate in these meetings.



Nimrod Ariav with his family at the Jewish cemetery in Belzyce.
Photo by Piotr Sztajdel, 2006.



Nimrod Ariav puts flowers at the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce.
Photo by Piotr Sztajdel, 2006.

I participated in this ceremony several years ago and I remember that I there were no ordinary inhabitants of Belzyce. I wondered if this was the ceremony organized only for friends and family of Mr. Ariav, for the municipal authorities or for the inhabitants.

My comment is as follows: I believe you came here at the end of the 90s or at the beginning of this century. There were no ceremonies organized to commemorate Jews or common Polish-Jewish celebrations, because Mr. Ariav did not want it. He said he wanted the ceremony to be very modest, no publicity – this was his and his friends’ private matter; he just wanted to be able to come to the cemetery where his relatives are buried. And we treated it this way. And those first meetings that I mentioned, were treated – also by me – as a kind of curiosity for our inhabitants: what it looks like, what it is, and – first of all – who it is, because they knew from private conversations, where each Jewish family used to live; they even remembered the names – when I mentioned who Mr. Ariav was, because they knew him a little, but not his family, except for the family on the side of the grandfather, whom they remembered very well. And those people began to contact Mr. Ariav, talk to him when he arrived, and this is why this was so spontaneous. But, as I said, this was at the beginning and later it did not catch so much attention. Now these are just the family gatherings of the friends of Mr. Ariav only on the anniversary of the murder. I believe this is okay. I am always invited and I try to attend these meetings as the person who is somehow connected with the whole thing and I am glad I could help. This is a part of Belzyce history, which is secured and preserved and one can read about it in different publications.

Please, tell me about further cooperation with Ariav Nimrod, since the reconstruction of the Jewish cemetery was not the end of his presence in Belzyce.

When Mr. Ariav applied for the building permit and waited for erecting the wall around the cemetery, he mentioned that in spite of his earlier fortunes – he had gone through hard times but due to his hard work he managed to gather a significant property – he was a rich man and his life was comfortable. He said: “I have money and I want to help Belżyce, if you think it is all right, so when you have any needs I will support you financially”. And remembering his offer, after the completion of the investment – for me it was a kind of investment for Belżyce, because it was carried out in Belżyce, for his money – I did not dare to ask him for any support, but he said that he wanted to help Belżyce. The first time I dared to ask him for such support – and I must admit it was very difficult for me – was when an urgent need occurred to purchase a Roentgen apparatus for Belżyce ZOZ [Health Center] – for the hospital. I thought that maybe Mr. Ariav could buy it. I asked him and he bought such apparatus produced in Israel – I believe it is still in use. We all – the patients of ZOZ and of the hospital – were examined with this apparatus. He did not want any thanks for this, but we felt we should thank him in some way, and I think there is a metal plaque on this apparatus with a name of the donor. I just wanted to show that this man, a stranger in a way, but yet related to Belżyce, gave his money and bought this medical equipment to help us as the patients. A few examples of his active help: computer room at the School Complex at bishop Wilczyński Street, computer room at Mikołaj Kopernik School Complex, support in warming and replacement of the window woodwork at the School Complex at bishop Wilczyński Street, purchase of a car, funds for the purchase of equipment for the hospital in Belżyce. Each year Mr. Ariav gives us some funds for urgent needs connected with Belżyce. I know he has never refused such help; what amounts and what they were designated for – I’d rather Mr. Ariav talk about it or other mayors, who have managed the town since early nineties. He feels he is an inhabitant of Belżyce, he has money, and he always gives these funds. When I asked him for help I tried to tell him, what we needed the funds



Nimrod Ariav with his family and friends in front of the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce.
Photo by Agnieszka Wiśniewska, October 10, 2006.



Ariel Ariav at the Jewish cemetery in Bełżyce.
Photo by Agnieszka Wiśniewska, October 10, 2006.

for and how much this would cost and I saw that he was happy to support us. I believe that regardless of who is the mayor of Belżyce, what is the composition of the Board, we should always treat him as the benefactor of Belżyce. I see during these annual meetings here that he gets his sons more involved in it, especially Ariel – he wants him to continue his work. His sons always stress that they will continue the cooperation with Belżyce, which their father started and that they will try to come here every year.

I am also glad that you managed to convince Mr. Ariav to talk about his life, even though he is very modest and he always says he does not want any publicity. I tried to convince him too, because his life is very interesting and very tragic at the same time. I mean his life, and his family, but his life in particular – we know that he took part in the Warsaw Uprising. As far as I know he had a meeting with young people once; I think he should do it more frequently, because this is a live history – all people should know it.

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Now I would like to ask you a question of “what would have happened if...” type. What would have happened if Mr. Ariav had not appeared then and had not come to you?

If Mr. Ariav had not appeared, everything would have probably looked the way it had been until 1990. This square had been fenced with wire, and had been treated as one of the municipal areas, but I doubt if any funds would have been obtained, if anybody would have taken any steps to do something like Mr. Ariav did. Now the situation is different, if we had any funds, maybe a small obelisk would be erected, like the one in front of the Center of Culture. I think that there would be no such wall, such beautiful and appropriate securing of the area where people were murdered and buried – but I am not sure, because I have never thought about it.



Opening the computer room at the School Complex no. 1 in Belżyce.
Photo from the collection of Bogdan Abramowicz, Belżyce, October 8, 1996.

And the last question: what did you feel when you were at this cemetery and you saw the reaction of Mr. Ariav – and when you heard the whole story?

I felt great respect for him, I felt embarrassed and I felt something that you in fact asked me about although you did not ask that question directly: I felt sorry that we – the inhabitants and the authorities of the town – had not taken such an action ourselves. Because this is our history, it is the history of Belżyce. So I am very happy that I could help him and that things went the way they did.

An interview by Tomasz Czajkowski, 2008.

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An interview with Mr Zenon Madzelan (born in 1959 in Majdan Skrzyniecki), the borough leader of Borzechów commune (near Belżyce).

Please tell us how and when you became interested in the Jewish cemetery in Belżyce and the history of Belżyce Jews?

My interest in Jewish matters appeared quite early – at the early stage of the secondary school. But I remember that even earlier I heard my parent's comments that the Jews were harmed in 1968 – over twenty years after the war they were expelled from Poland.

My parents, born in 1914 and 1917, knew the Jews in the mid-war period and later. They formulated very positive opinion about them. However, it was as late as after the martial law, when the writers of Jewish origin became to be published on a large scale in Poland, and independent research results and historical evaluations were presented, that my interest in Jewish culture and literature grew.

In this context, I was interested in Belżyce. What traces of Jewish community were left? Did any of the former inhabitants visit this town? I tried – in 1984/1985 – to initiate contact with the older inhabitants of the town. However, besides the names of the former Jewish inhabitants and some incomplete stories I did not learn anything that would be of real value. The inhabitants – I realized this later – were reluctant to answer my questions. This is why I was really glad to receive the information from Mr. Bogdan Abramowicz, the then Governor of the Town and Municipality of Belżyce, that Mr. Cygielman would come to Belżyce with Mr. Marian Turski from “Polityka” weekly. Both of them were interested in the reconstruction of the Jewish cemetery (*kirkut*). During the first meeting in 1989 I learned that Mr. Cygielman’s name was Ariav (he changed his name in Israel). His father was from Lublin and mother, maiden name Wajsbrodzt, from Belżyce. His grandfather was called “Szlamianka”. He ran a textile shop. I knew from the earlier comments that Szlamianka’s family was highly respected in the community of Belżyce Jews.

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I also learned during that meeting what were their plans concerning the renovation of the cemetery. It was supposed to be fenced with a wall made of stone brought from Sweden, which would be roofed with red roof-tiles. The entrance was supposed to be of an oval shape and an olive tree made of white stone was to be incorporated in the entrance wall. Inside, they planned to erect a granite monument, a small square hardened with field stones and on the inside of the oval wall they wanted to write down – in Polish and Hebrew – with bronze-cast letters, the history of Belżyce Jews, which was supposed to be written by Marian Turski. The construction of the cemetery was carried out very fast. It was supervised by the architect, Mr. Gąsior, Mr. Ariav’s colleague from the Warsaw Uprising.

At that time – not many people know about it – Mr. Turski made a film about the construction of the cemetery, recording the most important scenes from this project for the future generations. He also looked for the information about the remnants of the Jewish commu-

nity of Belżyce. Together we met with several, maybe a dozen inhabitants of the town. We looked for the photos, books, candlesticks (*menorahs*), tombstones (*matzevas*), anything that would be the evidence of the rich Jewish tradition. We did not find much. Some photos and several oral stories. For example, we met Mr. C. – he had a simple Jewish candlestick. Obviously, he wanted a lot of money for it. Mr. Ariav paid it because he wanted to have a souvenir from Belżyce.

We also came across very moving things. Mr..., well, his name is not worth mentioning, since he behaved as a typical anti-Semite, had a lot of primary school textbooks, for the 6th or 7th grade, in Hebrew and Yiddish. He wanted a lot of money for them. These were certainly the books that had belonged to the children living in this house and murdered during the war. As I have already mentioned, the process of construction advanced quickly. In October 1989 Mr. Ariav, together with his family, friends and local authorities, decided to make his war-time dream come true. He found the cemetery, where he had buried his father in 1942, reconstructed it and he could say *caddish* for his murdered family and for other Belżyce Jews. The ceremony was attended by a large group of Jews, about a dozen inhabitants of Belżyce and all representatives of the local government authorities. This event was recorded in the film made by Mr. Turski and described in the local newspaper. My participation in this ceremony was limited to the fact that I managed to find and bring the fragments of three broken tombstones, which still can be seen – as the only souvenirs of the former Jewish cemetery – in the hardened square inside the cemetery.

What was your impression of Ariav Nimrod?

From the very beginning I thought he was a very interesting, open and sympathetic man. I know that he came to Poland in 1963 and tried to find the cemetery, on which he buried



FOT. JACEK MIKOSZAK

Tu krzyczy cisza...

W każdą rocznicę śmierci ojca Nimrod S. Ariav przyjeżdża do Bełżyc wraz z rodziną i grupą kilkudziesięciu przyjaciół z całego świata. Wczoraj złożyli kwiaty u stóp tablicy upamiętniającej zagładę Żydów w Bełżycach i na tamtejszym kirkucie.

– 2 października 1942 roku, na miejscu, gdzie stała synagoga, wśród 150 rozstrzelanych Żydów był mój ojciec – wspomina Ariav. – Ja uratowałem się z pogromu, walczyłem w powstaniu warszawskim, później uciekłem na Zachód. Przyjeżdżam tutaj, bo stąd moje korzenie. I dlatego, żeby złożyć hołd pomordowanym. Przyjeżdżają ze mną moi synowie. Pierwszy raz jest także najmłodszy wnuk.

Nimrod S. Ariav w 1990 roku wznosił ogrodzenie kirkutu w Bełżycach, na którym – jak mówi – „nie ma macew, bo tu krzyczy cisza” (MAD.)

“Dziennik Wschodni” October 6
A release *The silence shouts here...*, 2004, (MAD).

his father. He was treated very badly in Belżyce. He came again to Poland in 1988 without any grudge against the inhabitants and the local government authorities. He speaks Polish very well. During his annual visits in October and other, more frequent visits he is interested in the problems of the town and its inhabitants. By supporting education and health service he became one of the major private donors in the history of the town and municipality of Belżyce. In spite of his painful experience with Poland and the Poles during the war and after the war, I hope that Mr. Ariav is deeply attached to Poland, he has friends here, and as far as I know, one of his sons works in Warsaw and has a Polish wife. I do not understand – but I may be wrong – why the local inhabitants, especially young people, are not interested in him, since he and his family constitute a positive history of this town. His openness and social involvement (he financed several dozen scholarships for gifted youngsters in Israel), his financial position and business experience should be more appreciated.

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I would like to refer to what you said a moment ago – absence of Mr. Ariav's meetings with the youth of Belżyce. Maybe he treats these meetings as a kind of private meetings with friends? Maybe he would not like a large group of people to participate in them?

I am only aware of two meetings that Mr. Ariav had with the youth. One was held in Belżyce, and the other one in NN Theater, at Grodzka Gate. The October visit of the family and friends of Mr. Ariav at the cemetery and at the monument in Belżyce is an event that should be an impulse for all of us, especially for young people to learn more about the tolerance, respect for the dead, attachment to tradition, and knowledge regarding the nation, which lived in Poland for several centuries, and for over 400 years in Belżyce, as this is something they cannot find in the school textbooks.

I will give you an example of how history is treated in Belżyce. The only remnants of the Jewish presence in our town are a very modest stone obelisk, which is covered with grass in summer, and the Jewish cemetery totally reconstructed by Mr. Ariav. That is all. If not for the cemetery, the only evidence of the Jewish community of Belżyce would be just this obelisk. And they left much more: their beautiful names, houses, furniture, workshops, well developed trade, services, and they created the basic municipal infrastructure. They also left a rich religious tradition, which differs from ours, but for which they had been persecuted for centuries, and finally, in 1942/43, were murdered in a complete loneliness with the rest of local community remaining indifferent.

On the other hand, in the best-known place in the town we have a huge monument commemorating our heroic actions during the Warsaw Uprising – a special kind of a homage paid to a tragic action of the nation. We may commemorate our national heroic acts in Belżyce for ever, but above all we should remember about our co-citizens, who built our town from scratch with their hard work.

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What was the reaction of the municipal authorities and inhabitants to the initiative of reconstruction of the Jewish cemetery and to Mr. Ariav Nimrod?

This is very interesting. As far as the cemetery is concerned, there were no negative comments. The local authorities reacted in a very positive way. Thanks to Mr. Ariav a beautiful Jewish cemetery – one of the few reconstructed Jewish cemeteries in Poland – was created. He himself was an object of interest at the very beginning. People wondered when he would start to ask about the property left by his family. But he has never been interested in it. He always asked what he could do for our town. He was not interested in pursuing any property claims.

What would have happened if Mr. Ariav had never appeared in Belżyce, if he had not existed? What would have happened to the cemetery in Belżyce and to the town of Belżyce?

A good question. This is a hypothetical situation. Mr. Ariav will not come, his sons will not come, and no one pays for the maintenance of the cemetery. Everything depends on the attitude of the local authorities. I believe that the wise representatives of local authorities can cope with such a minor problem. But I am also convinced that 5 or 20 inhabitants of Belżyce could be found, who – if need be – would take the responsibility for the maintenance of the cemetery and preserving memory about it and about the now non-existent Jewish community.

An interview by Tomasz Czajkowski, 2008.

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An interview with Jan Kwiatkowski (born in 1940 in Jaroszewice), the mayor of Belżyce in the period 1994-2002, a deputy governor of the town and municipality of Belżyce for seven years; currently, a councilman of Lublin District Board.

What do you remember from the first visit of Mr. Ariav Nimrod in Belżyce? At that time you were the deputy governor of the town and municipality of Belżyce.

As far as I remember, we met for the first time in 1987. I know, even though I did not participate in that conversation, that Mr. Ariav asked Mr. Abramowicz to show him the place where his father was buried. Mr. Abramowicz knew the place and he provided some information to Mr. Ariav – this was our first contact. After he found this cemetery, he made

it a point of honor to bring the place, which rather looked like a forest and not like a cemetery, to a proper state. And within a few years a true Jewish cemetery was established. There is a beautiful wall and inside there are monuments and tombstones on the graves. And since that time – since 1987 – Mr. Ariav has come each year together with his family and friends to commemorate his parents and other murdered Jews, who are buried there.

Please tell me about your cooperation with Mr. Ariav Nimrod.

Our closer contacts started in 1994, when I became the mayor of the town. Mr. Ariav came each year and we met. His attorney informed me about the date of his arrival, we discussed the details of our meeting and Mr. Ariav came with a group of about 20 persons. His wife and two sons always accompanied him. Our conversation was not limited to conventional small talk, Mr. Ariav asked us in a father-like manner: “What good news can you tell me about your municipality, how about the budget, how do you realize it, how do you implement investments?” He was really involved in our everyday problems. I am really impressed by Mr. Ariav, his family and friends who gathered at this memorial place and prayed for their ancestors and later we talked about the links between our two nations. These are unforgettable memories. I believe that this is not an ordinary acquaintance. Each year we became closer and closer, we became – I dare say – friends, because I could feel the warmth emanating from Mr. Ariav, his involvement in our problems, and most of all his goodness, and – let’s be honest – generosity, because during these 8 years when we cooperated his generosity for his former town, for Bełżyce, was enormous. These are the gifts from the man of big heart who did what he did out of friendship and sympathy. He said once that he considered himself to be the citizen of the world, but most of all a Jew, a Polish Jew, and even more precisely, a Bełżyce Jew. I will always remember these words and I know that all his

good deeds, which will praise his name, are a proof of his goodness, big heart and of his attitude to his former compatriots, to all the inhabitants of Belżyce.

Let's go back to the beginning of the nineties when he began the reconstruction of this cemetery. Please, tell me what was the reaction of the inhabitants of Belżyce, what did they think about the fact that someone comes and does something at the cemetery?

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I must say that people were really interested in this action. Elderly people, who remembered the pre-war times, were aware that this was the man who used to live here with his family and experienced the horrors of the occupation. Some people were concerned that he might claim his property. But these were very rare comments. Two or three years later, when Mr. Ariav came here – first the ceremony took place near the Center of Culture at the monument, and later, at the cemetery at Przemysłowa Street – many inhabitants were going out to the street, watched the ceremony, and treated him in a nice way. And there were cases when people of Mr. Ariav's age came to him (he was over seventy at that time) and told him about his grandmother Szlamianka, whom he described as a very noble person. They had honest talks, so I believe that these visits and the way they were perceived by the inhabitants were good. I cannot remember, anyway, any nationalism-rooted riots. I cannot remember them, but my parents or grandparents would have told me if something like this had happened. I think that Belżyce did not have a negative opinion of a town known for nationalistic conflicts.

Have the authorities of Belżyce, in your opinion, taken a full advantage of the fact that someone like Mr. Ariav is interested in Belżyce and wants to cooperate with Belżyce?

I hope that these friendly contacts between Mr. Ariav, his family and friends and the local authorities will continue, just like it was during my term of office, but I know no details. I believe that the current authorities are interested in continuation of this friendship which is so good for our town. I think that the Municipal Management Body and the local authorities take a proper care of the cemetery – it is clean, everything is in order and I hope it will stay like this.

My last question is of the “what would have happened if...” type. Let’s imagine that in 1987 Mr. Ariav had not arrived in Belżyce, that he did not exist at all; what would it have meant for the Jewish cemetery and for Belżyce, if Mr. Ariav had never appeared in Belżyce?

If Mr. Ariav had not arrived here, it would be a shame for Belżyce. And what would have happened to the cemetery? I think that such an object as we have at Przemysłowa Street would not have been built, because it required a deep emotional involvement and big financial expenditure. I am sure that no one would have neglected this place, but it might get forgotten after some time.

An interview by Tomasz Czajkowski, 2008.



Nimrod Ariav with his son Avi at the monument commemorating the ghetto victims in Belżyce.
Photo by Agnieszka Wiśniewska, October 10, 2006.

COMEBACK

Seweryn Aszkenazy, a friend of the family:

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Ariav Nimrod does what he does because of his great respect for tradition, for his great-grandparents and for his father. He believes that he has to do it, because his father would be pleased with him and his mother also would be proud of him. This is a typically Jewish motivation. People do not realize that the Jews – rich Jews, are poor when they die because they give away everything or nearly everything during their lives. They give a bit to their children to help them start their adult life, and then, a man gives away everything he earned in his life before his death. There is a saying: “to give away money with warm hands” – this is a part of it. He has no business here, no other commitments except for history and his place of birth. Mr. Ariav’s children work here, but he does not.

Ariav Nimrod's son, Avi Nimrod

My father's story is very personal. One may say that I was brought up with this story and since I respect my father, I also respect his life story. But I have no nightmares because of it. We, the young ones, try to perceive it in a more positive way. When we started to come to Belżyce cemetery, we realized that we may carry out business in Warsaw. In this way the past had its effects on the future. Children returned and they work in Poland, just as my father would have worked – maybe – if not for the historical events. The Jews say: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!" I think that many Jews were strongly attached to the Polish culture. When they disappeared, all that was left was emptiness... Maybe the Poles do not feel the need to fill this emptiness, but I am convinced that each minority contributes its taste and tradition to culture and everyday life. Life becomes more interesting when it is versatile. So I think it is important that we come back here, because this will let you regain a part of your soul.

Ariav Nimrod's friends

Elsa Mercoy:

My name is Elsa Mercoy, I am a friend of the family and this is my husband Mundrzi – he conducts business with Ariav.

Mundrzi Mercoy:

I am Turkish and this is also a part of my life story. Hitler, when he planned the Holocaust, mentioned that no one remembered the crime committed on Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. So history has common trends. At the beginning our visits here were a sad occasion, now it is rather joyful – we meet friends and new people. I am a Muslim.



Nimrod Ariav with his son Avi at the monument commemorating the ghetto victims in Belżyce.
Photo by Agnieszka Wiśniewska, October 10, 2006.

Elsa Mercoy:

I am Christian and Ariav is a Jew, but we are friends. He is a very good man. He has good heart. He likes to share what he has with his family, friends, and with the country where he was born and brought up. His roots are here.

Mundrzi Mercoy:

I believe he should be an example for the young generation.

Ariav Nimrod on Belżyce Jewish cemetery:

There were only trees in this place, not a single tombstone, nothing. This was a playground for children, and on Fridays the “pig” market took place. So this is how I began my hard way to regain this place. First I got the document prohibiting any development here. Within the following year I obtained the necessary permits and the construction work began. This is a simple thing – I did not want to disturb the surrounding area. For fourteen years everything was all right, but this year the vandals ripped off the bronze letters. These, which are here now, are made of stone and I hope they will stay here. Let these people rest in peace at last. This stone is meant to commemorate all those who are buried here. I did not do anything special for my father, since this is not my private area. I only helped to rebuild this cemetery. Everybody may enter this cemetery...

Fragments of the reportage by Agnieszka Czyżewska-Jacquemet:
“Comeback”, Radio Lublin 2003

Endnotes

- ¹ Anna Langfus (1920-1966) born in Lublin, Holocaust survivor; after the war, a French writer, the author of the autobiographic novel *Le sel et le soufre* /*The Whole Laund Brimstone*/, the winner of Goncourt Award for *Les bagages de sable* /*The Lost Shore*/ (1962). More: www.langfus.tnn.pl
- ² S. Jadcak, *Bełżyce. Monografia miasta i gminy*. Lublin 2002, p. 23.
- ³ J. Muszyńska, *Żydzi w miastach województwa sandomierskiego i lubelskiego w XVIII w. Studium osadnicze*. Kielce 1998, p. 111.
- ⁴ A. Kopciowski, *Dzieje Żydów bełżyckich*, [in:] *Studia z dziejów Bełżyc*. Bełżyce 2006, p. 125.
- ⁵ The location of Bełżyce at the Krakow – Vilnius route which was often used by the Jagiellonian royal retinues traveling between the two capitals of the state, was very advantageous, S. Jadcak, op.cit., p. 80.
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 80.
- ⁷ A. Kopciowski, op.cit., p. 126.
- ⁸ S. Jadcak, op.cit., p. 81.
- ⁹ A. Kopciowski, op.cit., p. 126.
- ¹⁰ Hela Ferstman, Memories from Bełżyce ghetto, AŻIH file no. 302/2.
- ¹¹ It was then, in the first mass execution in Bełżyce on June 16 that the German gendarmes shot 13 persons, including 10 Jews, S. Jadcak, op.cit., p. 82.
- ¹² Hela Ferstman, Memories from Bełżyce ghetto, AŻIH file no. 302/2.
- ¹³ Hela Ferstman, Memories from Bełżyce ghetto, AŻIH file no. 301/50.
- ¹⁴ A. Kopciowski, op.cit., p. 131.
- ¹⁵ Golda Teich, Memories from Bełżyce ghetto, AŻIH file no. 301/1812.
- ¹⁶ Golda Teich, Memories from Bełżyce ghetto, AŻIH file no. 301/1812.
- ¹⁷ A. Kopciowski, op.cit., p. 133.

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“GRODZKA GATE — NN THEATER” CENTER

Ośrodek “Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN” [“Grodzka Gate – NN Theater” Center] is a local-government cultural institution acting in Lublin to protect the cultural heritage and promote education. In the implemented programs it refers to the symbolic and historical meaning of its seat – the Grodzka Gate, which used to be a passage between the Christian and Jewish town of Lublin, and to the location of Lublin in a place where different cultures, traditions, and religions meet. Initially, its activity was focused on realization of the author performances. With time, the creators of the Theater began to get involved in other, non-theatrical projects of the social and educational nature, which exceed the limits of art.

