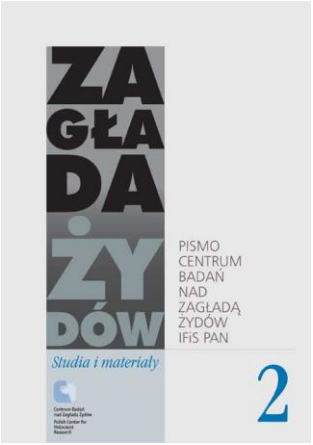


Holocaust Studies and Materials
Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały

VOL. 2 (2006)

ISSN: 1895-247X
eISSN: 2657-3571
DOI: 10.32927
WWW: www.zagladazydow.pl

Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFiS PAN
Polish Center for Holocaust Research

Adam Żurawin – a Hero of a Thousand Faces

Adam Żurawin – bohater o tysiącu twarzy

Agnieszka Haska
doctoral student at the Graduate School for Social Research of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences

agnieszka.haska@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0545-5250

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32927/ZZSiM.186
Strony/Pages: 177-201

CC BY

OPEN ACCESS

Agnieszka Haska

Adam Żurawin, a Hero of a Thousand Faces

To leave a testimony. These words, so crucial to the motivation behind writing personal documents, gain resonance in the case of the texts of Holocaust survivors. Survivors in two senses; on the one hand, we have the texts themselves which, hidden, buried, kept or accidentally found among rubble, are often the only trace left by their authors. On the other hand, there are survivors, i.e. those who survived their experience and who give testimony of the fate of those who died. Reminiscences, diaries, memoirs, testimonies, notes, describing their authors during the war, are an invaluable source of information for a researcher; an insight into the world they present, the experiences, feelings and ways of describing reality, as well as the reality itself; all of this allows us to try to make our way into that time, attempt its reconstruction and try to reach an understanding. To put it as Jacek Leociak did, the very existence of such texts is a challenge.

> My children, Michael and Iris, knew many of the stories of our experiences during the war and here in the United States. They knew, but I was certain they didn't comprehend. . . . I often wished I could leave them a legacy – a legacy of understanding what really happened to us.[1]

These words come from Adam Żurawin's memoirs, written shortly before his death in 1992. This text, extraordinary in many respects, is undoubtedly a formidable challenge for a researcher. Just the very fact, and a rare one too, that the author of a document is someone considered a collaborator during the war and for a long time afterwards, means that Żurawin's memoirs are worthy of analysis from a number of complementary points of view: historical, psychological and from the point of view of literary studies. Thus, on the one hand, the factual verification of the events described in this text should be considered. On the other, the analysis of the poetics of a personal document, which does not require such verification, compels one to focus on the style of description, the narration and the elements of self-creation contained therein. Finally, the extraordinary challenge which these memoirs are, offers a unique opportunity to inquire into their protagonist's motivations, feelings and morality. Moreover, what is also important is the context which earned Żurawin the

[1] Adam Żurawin, *In the Presence of My Enemies*, a typewritten text, chapter 39, 9. Unfortunately, the text does not have standard pagination; I shall be referring to chapter numbers and page numbers therein.

reputation of a collaborator. Confronting a text written by one of the chief organisers of the Hotel Polski affair, unexplained for many years and unequivocally defined as a Gestapo trap aimed at bringing Jews out of their hideouts on 'the Aryan side', in order to rob them of the rest of their money and then kill them, allows us to look at those events from a different point of view. And because this is a personal document written shortly before his death, one could hope that it was also a confession.

Unfortunately, this hope proved illusory. For Adam Żurawin, self-creation was most important. Apart from his children, the intended readers of this document are primarily those who accuse him. Żurawin was directly stimulated to write this text by the publication of Abraham Shulman's book, *The Case of Hotel Polski*, in 1982, and by its consequences; Shulman had collected testimonies of those involved in the affair, who identified Żurawin as a Gestapo collaborator and organiser of the entire operation. This publication brought about the return of accusations against Żurawin and his family; thirty years earlier, Żurawin had had problems in the United States as a result of his past. In 1953, Jana Turkow, who had been an actor and theatrical director before the war and in the Warsaw Ghetto, and who survived by hiding on 'the Aryan side', published his memoirs in English. Turkow described the Hotel Polski affair and Żurawin as a Gestapo agent. The FBI became interested in the case, but the investigation was closed due to insufficient evidence. In order to clear himself from the charges within the Jewish *milieu*, Żurawin agreed that the matter be examined by a rabbinate court, which found him not guilty, also due to lack of evidence. Adam and his wife Liza decided then that the matter was finally closed, but Shulman's book renewed the questions about the past. Żurawin ignored the accusations for a long time; after all, he believed he had been cleared. However, his son, Michael, persuaded him to write his memoirs. They were intended to finally answer the question: "Why are you accusing us? This is not true!"[2]

Let us, therefore, take a closer look at this reply and, using the opportunity afforded by this extraordinary testimony, examine Żurawin as he saw himself, confronting his memoirs with the documents and testimonies available to us, and with his wife's memoirs, written in 2001. However, at this point, an important remark needs to be made; neither of these texts was written by their authors, as they were edited by Judith Elbaum Schumer, a friend of the family. Although first-person narration was retained, these documents were fictionalised by the inclusion of numerous dialogues, descriptions and dramatic endings to individual chapters. Furthermore, it seems that Liza's memoirs are sometimes based not so much on her own opinions as on the text regarding Adam, which complicates the matter even further. Both texts retain a chronological order and, despite the fictionalisation, the narrative course is not interrupted by digressions or retrospections.

Childhood

Adam Żurawin was born in 1919 in Warsaw; he came from an orthodox Jewish family living at Dzielna St. 28. He was the eleventh of twelve children; his father

[2] Liza Żurawin and Michael Żurawin, telephone interview by author, 29 April 2006.

had been married twice. Adam remembers that, despite his parents' orthodoxy, the family was quite liberal in terms of religion, views and opinions. Żurawin's father traded with Poles, selling overcoats and rubber boots. As a youth, Żurawin attended heder; he remembers being terribly afraid of the rabbi and one day escaped from school; turned back by force he jumped out of a window. His parents then decided to send him to another school, but there was no place for him in Jewish schools, so, finally he enrolled in a Polish state school, where he was the only Jew. Even though, as he himself emphasises, he had grown up in an exclusively Jewish environment, initially no one in the Polish school realised that the nine-year-old Adam was a Jew, as he purportedly spoke perfect Polish. In any case, the news of his origins spread around the school; the boy was beaten up, but when attacked again, he was reportedly defended by a classmate, Antoni Kolczyński, the future European boxing champion. Żurawin writes:

> But this had taught me an important lesson, one that I believe later saved my life. Young as I was, I learned that I must try never to show fear; if I showed I was afraid, I would become a victim. I promised myself that I would adopt a brave, even an arrogant demeanor. This would be the face that I would show to the Polish world around me.[3]

At school, Adam started attending religious classes, as he writes, out of curiosity. On the one hand, this was another stage in the construction of a double identity, Jewish and Polish; on the other hand, this was the start of his interest in Zionism (he joins Ha-Szomer ha-Cair); he also says that on Sabbaths he went to synagogue with his father. At sixteen, he goes to audition for the National Opera, as he purportedly had a good ear for music and a beautiful singing voice. There are, however, certain inconsistencies in this story. Żurawin says that he was admitted to the opera school at the Great Theatre, then called the Musical Institute in Warsaw; firstly, this was the name of the State Conservatory of Music in Warsaw (later to become the Academy of Music); secondly, we have been unable to establish that such a school, as described by Żurawin, existed at the National Opera. Thirdly, Żurawin completed his grammar school education at seventeen, so he could not have possibly been a student. It seems likely that he attended not a school, but singing courses at the Great Theatre, or had a subscription card for all performances. In any case, he had a personal ID with a photograph, which would prove important later.

At that time, he became friends with a Pole, Zenon Panasiuk, his neighbour from Dzielna Street. Panasiuk was supposedly a member of the youth militia of the ONR (*Obóz Narodowo Radykalny*, the National Radical Camp), but their daily trips to school contributed to the Polish-Jewish dialogue. Although Żurawin's memoirs reveal that he felt threatened by Poles, which was, admittedly, combined with the desire to blend in with the Polish environment, he does stress his double identity and the fact that Poles did not identify him as a Jew. This element of self-creation will become increasingly important further into the narrative, when Adam is hid-

[3] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*, chapter 1, 4.

ing his Jewish identity and tries to persuade the reader that everyone around him perceived him as a Pole.

Having graduated from grammar school, Żurawin starts working as a salesman in a tarpaulin and canvas factory in Graniczna St., owned by one Futterman. At the same time, he meets his future wife, Liza (Miriam Leah) Krystynfrynd (Krystynfreund). Liza, two years younger than Adam was much impressed; "Adam had a boat that was a kind of kayak with a sail, he belonged to a sports club and studied opera part time at the Warsaw Institute of Music. He was strong and decisive and yet with me he was sensitive and gentle."[4] He also became a friend of the family after defending Liza's parents when they were attacked by Polish hooligans.

Żurawin as a Polish merchant

The outbreak of the war is an important turning point in Adam's efforts to construct a double identity. Earlier on, being a Pole had been something of a game for him; now the stakes become much higher. In October 1939, Żurawin was taken ill with typhus; according to his testimony, when he was in hospital at Czyste, he was to have avoided the census of the Jewish population carried out by the *Judenrat*, ordered by the occupation authorities on 28 October 1939. When he left the hospital in mid-December, he decided to disobey the ordinance regarding the obligation to wear the armband bearing the star of David, and consistently pretend to be a Christian Pole. It seems that his choice was not motivated by ideology but by practicality. His brother Meir had taken over their father's business and needed someone exempted from restrictions on the amount of cash which it was permissible to own. Adam, under a false identity, became a partner in the family business.[5] Soon, the first in a series of mysterious characters appears in his life; a Greek entrepreneur, the owner of a shoe store in Warsaw. He proposed that Żurawin set up a shoe store in partnership with his brother-in-law, Nicholas Bukis, an Italian citizen. Bukis was to help Żurawin obtain materials, contractors and customers, in return for a share in the profits. Adam accepts the arrangement with a view to the upkeep of his family; he and Bukis are to go to Łódź for merchandise. But, first of all, they need to obtain a permit to enter the Reich, so they go to the Brühl Palace. There, Żurawin meets Herman Hoffman, a German official who becomes his customer as he is issuing the required documents. When Żurawin returns from Łódź, Hoffman and his wife visit his shop. According to Adam's testimony, Margot Hoffmann took a liking to him, as, supposedly, he looked like her son, who had been a Luftwaffe pilot, and she began to invite him to dinner. This acquaintance will prove to be very useful for Adam.

At that time, Adam and Liza get married, on 7 July 1940. According to his account, two days after their wedding, he was summoned to report for forced labor on a work detail, on the basis of an ordinance issued by the occupiers on 26 October 1939, which introduced compulsory labor for all Jewish men aged 14–60. Even though Żurawin had not registered during the census of the Jewish population, his

[4] Liza Żurawin, *From Hotel Polski to Vittel*, copied typewritten text, 19.

[5] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*, chapter 5, 1.

personal data were found at the *Judenrat*. During his visit to the *Judenrat* Adam meets an old acquaintance, who, as a wedding gift, acts on Żurawin's request to destroy all his family documents. The name Żurawin is struck from all the lists:

> For the first time since I decided not to wear the armband, I was free of the fear of being stopped by the Germans. Now, if I were asked to identify myself, I could calmly show my card from the *Teatr Wielki.* My name could no longer be traced to the roster of Warsaw Jews. To further ensure our security, I told my mother and brother to start using different names. My mother took the name 'Citron' and my brothers took old family names.[6]

Out of concern for a more complete safety, Żurawin obtained a false certificate of baptism issued in his real name, Adam Żurawin, born in Złoczów on 6 March 1917. In spite of this, he says that throughout the war he used his Great Theatre ID, which, in the light of the then realities, appears to be no more than an element of self-creation in the text.

His construction of a double identity is finally completed when Adam decides not to enter the ghetto. Although he puts his entire family there, he decides to remain outside in order to provide for them. But he constantly operates in two parallel dimensions; often going into the ghetto, where he is known as a Jew and does not hide it, but beyond its walls, he's a Pole. A few questions need to be asked here; why did he decide to keep his name? What about the potential threat of being recognised by his Polish acquaintances or by former contractors and customers who had done business with his father? Indeed, he changes his address, but the risk remains. His false certificate of baptism did not guarantee safety, either. Żurawin's memoirs do not answer these questions at all. Apparently, he kept his name in order to stay in contact with Mrs Hoffmann, who knew him as Żurawin. At the end of 1940, Bukis tells Żurawin that he is returning to Greece. A few days later, Margot Hoffmann comes to the shop and having found out about his problems, decides to help and become his partner. Adam agrees immediately.

This is one of many lucky strokes of fate in Żurawin's memoirs. This story is full of *deus ex machina* solutions, which is, on the one hand, a result of the editor's fictionalisation of the narrative, and, on the other, is another element of self-creation. Adam Żurawin wants to provide for his family's basic upkeep, why not seize the opportunity? Obviously, the question is if this really was accidental. The fact that Żurawin maintained 'extra-business' contacts with Margot Hofman, and probably with her husband, a clerk from the Brühl Palace, indicates that it was not a mere coincidence. Moreover, doing business with the Germans, not simply trading, but the joint ownership of a shop, was far from ordinary at that time, and could have been seen as reprehensible collaboration with the occupier and not at all restricted to the necessary minimum. From his point of view, this situation appears normal, as he is able to provide for his family. There is only one issue related to this matter, that of hiding his true identity: "But the more I thought about it on that November day, the more I realised that this was the perfect cover for me. Who would ever expect that

[6] *Ibid.*, chapter 6, 4.

a *Reichsdeutsche*, a real German citizen, would be working with a Jew?"[7] Żurawin must have felt quite secure in that situation, because when Margot accidentally meets Liza, introduced as Adam's fiancée and realises that she is Jewish, this fact has no consequences; the ladies even become friends. Adam is a frequent visitor in Hoffmann's home, and it can be read between the lines that they were also friends.

In July 1941, there is another coincidence in Żurawin's story; Adam meets a German, Teddy Stauffer, who was buying shoes for his wife and his little son in Żurawin's shop, and he turned out to be a good friend of Mrs Hoffmann. According to this story, Stauffer had some contact with the ghetto and brought Liza food parcels from Adam. The two gentlemen must have trusted each other, as Adam gave Stauffer Liza's address in the ghetto, and Staufer asked Żurawin for help when he had problems. He was arrested in the autumn of 1941 and, according to Adam's testimony, gave him a telephone message with a number to contact a 'friend'. This person gives Żurawin a message to the effect that Stauffer was arrested on a charge of 'racial offence', i.e. an affair with a Jewish dancer, and that he is awaiting trial. In order to help Teddy, Adam could testify that Stauffer had been keeping in contact with the Hoffmanns' late son's fiancée, so he could not have possibly have had an 'improper' relationship. Adam agrees and goes to testify before a court-martial in Cracow.

This story raises a few doubts. First, why does Adam agree to help a German? Was it for camouflage again? Żurawin never said so much as a word about it in his memoirs, but it is logical to assume that by appearing in court, he risked exposure. Second, it seems rather unlikely for a Pole to be one of the main witnesses before a German court-martial during the occupation. It has proved impossible to verify who Stauffer was, and there are no traces left of such a trial in Cracow. But this name was quite famous before the war, and not only in Germany. A Swiss musician, Teddy (actually Ernest Henry) Stauffer, known as the 'king of swing', formed his famous jazz band, Teddy And His Band, in 1929, and toured throughout Europe. It must be a different person, as Stauffer the musician was in Switzerland after war broke out, and, in 1941, he left for Mexico. It is possible, therefore, that Żurawin hid his German client's identity in his memoirs. It is possible that there were two Stauffers, and the second one, like his famous namesake, assumed the diminutive. But there is one more possibility; that Żurawin made up this story to justify his acquaintance with Stauffer's 'friend'. This, another mysterious figure, is important in the story.

Żurawin describes him as 'Dr S.' These initials stand for SS-Untersturmführer Gerhard Stabenow[8], a Security Police and SD (Security Service) officer in Warsaw. Stabenow was the immediate superior of Abrajam Gancwajch, chief of 'Thirteen', i.e. The Office for the Combating of Profiteering and Speculation, at Leszno St. 13, a German agency in the Ghetto.[9] He will reappear in Żurawin's memoirs of the war-

[7] *Ibid.*, chapter 7, 3.

[8] Information confirmed twice by author in telephone interviews with Liza Żurawin of 24 November 2004 and 29 May 2006.

[9] Adam Czerniaków, *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron and Josef Kermisz, eds,, trans. Stanislaw Staron and the Staff of Yad Vashem (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee

time days; Adam admits to having had contacts with Stabenow, who supposedly did him various favours. But he does not give his name, as this does not fit the image of the Żurawin who never tarnished his good name by collaboration with the SD. It seems rather unlikely for a high-ranking Security Police Officer and a protector of Jewish agents to have helped Żurawin out of sheer sympathy. Their contact becomes closer when, after the Hoffmanns left for the Reich in the summer of 1941, Adam closes his shop. Again by coincidence, in the ghetto he meets an old acquaintance of his, Welk (Wolf) Szymonowicz, who offers him a business deal. Emil Weitz, known in the ghetto as 'the king of the brushmakers'[10] needed someone who could move about freely outside the ghetto walls and get materials for brush making. It should be noted that Welk Szymonowicz is another link between Żurawin and the Germans, as he was a 'Thirteen' collaborator, killed by the Germans on the night of 23/24 April 1942, during an operation aimed at the liquidation of those who were 'active' in the Office. Adam, naturally, agrees and obtains a permit from Stabenow to bring the materials into the ghetto. His business relationship with Weitz makes him a wealthy man: "I was making more money than I ever had in my life."[11]

Żurawin engaged in other business operations with Szymonowicz as well. We learn about them from but one entry in Adam Czerniaków's Diaries. On 27 February 1942 Czerniaków writes: "One Adam Żurawin came with a letter requesting permission for opening a photographic studio for the Kennkarten [identity cards]. When I told him that we were not authorized to grant concessions to Aryans he replied that behind him there is a Jew, one Wolf Szymonowicz."12 This letter was to be signed by Stabenow and Johannes Müller. The latter was the commandant of the Security Police in Warsaw District until August 1941, and subsequently transferred to Lublin. The matter reached the high levels of administration. According to Czerniaków's notes, a meeting was held in Karl Georg Brandt's office, chief of the Jewish department of the Gestapo, with Stabenow, Żurawin and Szymonowicz participating. But Czerniaków did not agree to the establishment of the atelier, and was also supported by Heinz Auerswald, the German commissioner of the Jewish district in Warsaw.13 Furthermore, Czerniaków adds that Szymonowicz and Żurawin "blackmailed" him.14 What do we learn from the note? First, this is another indication of Żurawin's close contacts with Stabenow and 'Thirteen', and of the significant German support he enjoyed. Second, it demonstrates that Żurawin kept his Jewish identity secret, as he approached Czerniaków as an 'Aryan'. But it is hard to believe that Żurawin's German 'patrons' did not know about the origin of their protége.

Publisher: 1999), 280.; A. Rutkowski, "O agenturze gestapowskiej w getcie warszawskim", *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, 1956. No 18–20.

[10] Weitz was an entrepreneur and organiser of the so-called 'brushmakers' shop and one of the richest men in the Warsaw Ghetto. He was famous for his charity work: sponsored the *Dobra Wola* orphanage at Dzielna St. 61. See B. Engelking, J. Leociak, *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2001), 317.

[11] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*., chapter 10, 5.

[12] Adam Czerniaków, *op. cit.*, 331.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] *Ibid.*, 332.

They did know, as it turns out. The riddles hidden in Żurawin's memoirs in connection with his collaboration with Stabenow are explained by the latter's testimony of the early 1960s: "A Jew, Adam Żurawin had been my agent since late 1940 and reported to me faithfully about what was going on in the Ghetto, particularly about economic matters."[15] This is the key proof of Żurawin's collaboration, corroborating other circumstantial evidence and exposing the entire self-creation in his memoirs, according to which, it was Stabenow who helped Żurawin out of sheer sympathy, and their contact was purely accidental. This testimony demonstrated that both gentlemen had met earlier than Żurawin claims; it must have taken place when Margot Hoffmann proposed that he run the shop. This is another trail showing that the story of Teddy Stauffer is fictitious and actually serves to make the acquaintance with 'Dr S' credible.

Let us return to the memoirs. In early 1942, Liza breaks her leg, and Adam takes her out of the ghetto, hides her in Podkowa Leśna, in the villa owned by his friends, Zenon Panasiuk's family and arranges papers for her in the name of Jadwiga Podhajna.[16] Meanwhile, Żurawin moves to a new flat. One day a neighbor knocks at his door; Karl Fischer, chief of Todt Organisation in Warsaw.[17] Even without Stabenow's testimony, such a neighbourhood shows that Żurawin was collaborating closely with the German at that time. His new flat must have been located in the German district of Warsaw, as it is highly unlikely that such a high-ranking official lived in a tenement house together with Poles, and without the support of the Germans, it was impossible to obtain such a flat there. Żurawin writes that he was disappointed: "[it was] my bad luck . . . having this man as a neighbor"[18], but he meets him socially, accepts Fischer's invitations to dinner, and takes Liza with him, they listen to music together. Eventually Fischer finds out that the Żurawins are Jewish. Adam writes that what gave them away was his question about the chance of sending several people to Hungary, which Liza Żurawin does not confirm. In September 1942 Fischer makes Żurawina a business proposal; for a certain amount of money, which Adam will give him, he will buy a plot of land in the Reich and employ Żurawin's family as workers there. But as this proposal only concerns the women, the family turn it down. Both gentlemen, as if nothing had happened, continue their social contact. However, this must have gone far beyond listening to the music; a Home Army counter-intelligence report of June 1943 reads:

> Without consulting the housing board, Żurawin Adam, of Smulikowskiego St. 9, Flat 7, moved into the flat vacated by Todt Organisation clerks, and, when asked on what grounds he exercised this lawlessness, replied that he had been authorised by German police. He instructed the caretaker that he

---

[15] Bundesarchiv, Stelle Ludwigsburg, KdS Warschau trial, B 162/3666, Dr Gerhard Stabenow's testimony. I am greatly indebted to Prof. Jan Grabowski for making these materials available.

[16] On the basis of a telephone interview, carried out by the author with Liza Żurawin on 29 April 2006.

[17] The paramilitary Todt Organisation was mainly engaged in the construction of military installations.

[18] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*., chapter 11, 2.

> should be referred to 'Mr. Adam' and all those wishing to see Mr. Adam were to be directed to his flat. He is very frequently visited by Gestapo officers, who arrive in their motorcars, and often by young people [...] The German are very polite to him and apparently they value Żurawin much.[19]

Again in Żurawin's memoirs there is not even the slightest reflection on this acquaintanceship, and this is not all; Adam makes no mention of his family situation either, and the idea described above for getting them out of the ghetto was supposed to have come up accidentally in a conversation. Liza Żurawin remembers that Fischer was "a very nice man. He knew that I was Jewish and everything was all right."[20] Neither the contact with Stabenow nor with Fischer are described by Adam Żurawin as purely social or business meetings. From his point of view everything was all right and purely accidental.

The Hotel Polski

In February 1943 Adam Żurawin finds out about the possibility of obtaining South American travel documents and, thus, of leaving the General Government. Apparently he received this information from a Bund activist and representative of the Social Council (Rada Społeczna), at the JOINT in the Warsaw Ghetto, Maurycy Orzech, who was hiding on the 'Aryan side' and had Uruguayan papers. In fact, many people in the Warsaw Ghetto tried to obtain such documents, because Jew–foreigners were not subjected to all the decrees of the occupation authorities. Possession of such documents meant greater chances of survival, which became evident during the deportation action on July 1942, when foreign citizens were interned in Pawiak prison to be subsequently transferred to the Vittel camp in France and there await exchange for German prisoners of war interned by the allies. Two organisations from Switzerland acted as agents in passport matters; The Relief Committee for Jewish War Victims RELICO (*Komitee zur Hilfsleitung für die Kriegsbetroffene Jüdische Bevölkerung*) established by Dr. Abraham Silberschein, a lawyer and a member of parliament in Poland, and the Jewish Refuge Relief Organisation HIJEFS (*Hilsverein für Jüdische Fluchtlinge in Shanghai*), established in 1941 by Recha and Isaac Sternbrick in Montreux. These organisations bribed the honorary consuls of South American states to issue such documents. Thus passports from the following countries were obtained: Paraguay, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Haiti, El Salvador, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama, Uruguay and Venezuela. These documents were subsequently sent to the General Government. The Jewish underground was aware of this and in early 1943, a committee was set up; among its members were: Dr. [Icchak?] Schipper, Menachem Kirszenbaum and Emanuel Ringelblum. This Committee compiled a list of people to be saved and sent it to Switzerland.[21]

---

[19] AAN (New Acts Archive), Armia Krajowa, III-105/50.

[20] Telephone interview with Liza Żurawin carried out by the author on 29 April 2006.

[21] Icchak Cukierman's afterword to *The Last Writings of Izchaak Katzenelson, Hakibutz Hameuchad, Beit Lochamej Hagetatot 1956, quoted in*: A. Rubin, *Facts and Fictions about the Res-*

Żurawin was very much interested in this matter; through a Mr Luigi Galiardini, a Fiat representative who was just leaving for Switzerland, he arranged Honduran passports for himself, his sister and Liza's siblings. One question must be asked here; why did Żurawin, consistently posing as a Pole, obtain documents issued in his own name as well? In his memoirs, he explains this by his wish to remain with his family, but it seems that the answer lies elsewhere. It is early 1943, after the liquidation action, the Jewish Fighting Organisation passes death sentences on Jewish collaborators; a number of assassination attempts are made in February, including that of 21 February 1943 on a man by the name of Rosenberg. Lolek Skosowski, who later plays an important role in the story, is wounded in this operation. Moreover, those connected with 'Thirteen' were liquidated by the Germans, even before the action. Żurawin must have been aware that his safety was not fully guaranteed. Icchak Cukierman writes that the Jewish Fighting Organisation sentenced Żurawin to death, but does not specify whether the sentence was passed earlier, or in connection with the Hotel Polski [affair].[22]

The documents arrive in Warsaw on 22 April 1943. Meanwhile, Liza's family are detained in the Poniatowa camp. Adam begins to search for solutions at to how to get them out. In search of Emil Weitz, he goes to the Hotel Royal at Chmielna St. 31, turned into an internee shelter before the liquidation of the ghetto for Jew-foreigners. At the hotel, Żurawin meets Daniel Guzik, former director of the JOINT in Warsaw. Żurawin did not find Weitz at the Royal; Guzik, who was supposedly in a similar situation, as his niece was in Poniatowa, offers to help him. In return for getting his niece out of the camp, Guzik informs Żurawin as to how to get to the camp.

Part of Żurawin' story of how his family was freed from the labour camp at Poniatowa reads like a ready-to-shoot screenplay for a thriller and merits quotation in full.

> How in the world, I asked myself, was I going to get people out of a place I knew nothing about? Was it heavily guarded? I had no idea what to do. I decided to go to the only person who could possibly help me, Zenek Panasiuk. . . .
> "I know I ask the impossible of you, Zenek: If this war is ever over and I survive, I'm going to have to spend my entire life paying you back for everything you've done. But in the meantime, do you have any ideas?"
> "The only thing I can think of is that we need to get a truck. Then we'll drive to Poniatow, show them the papers and get the people out."
> "Just like that, we'll get them to release Jews?"
> "Adam, didn't you learn to act in the opera? Put on that face, the one you used when you were protecting Liza's parents. Maybe you'll scare them. What have you got to lose?"
> Of course, I had nothing to lose. We spent the rest of that day and the following morning trying to find a truck to rent, borrow or steal. One of Zenek's friends had an old truck with a canvas top, but it was missing two tyres, a few fan belts and it had no petrol. We found two tyres in the back of an old garage

cue the Jews, (Tel Aviv: 2003), 15.

[22] Icchak Cukierman, *Nadmiar pamięci*, transl. Z. Perelmuter, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), 313.

but only one fit properly. We decided to use the other one anyway, hoping that it wouldn't make much of a difference. We bought used belts on the black market and siphoned petrol from several cars. I prayed we had taken enough to get us to Poniatowa and back.

In the late afternoon of May 20, Zenek and I got into the truck and he started to drive. It was very hard to control because of the wrong sized tyre but he said that he could do it. On our way out of the city, Zenek told me he wanted to make a stop.

"Do you have any money?" he asked me.

"Yes, a little. Why?"

"I know this guy nearby, he's a *Volksdeutch*, a German who's lived here all his life. He may be useful. He's a big fellow and as a German he may make this seem more legitimate."

"But those people are real anti-Semites. Why should he help us?"

"That's why we need the money. To grease his palm a little. Also, I'll tell him you're a Polish official and we've been told to transport those Jews. I think he'll do it."

We stopped on a small side street on the outskirts of Warsaw and Zenek went into one of the houses. He came out about fifteen minutes later with another man. Zenek introduced me to him as an official of the Warsaw government. The German grunted something and then went to sit in the back of the truck. We drove to Poniatowa in silence. . . .

Zenek and I jumped out of the truck. The German got out from the back and stood with us. . . . . Zenek tapped my shoulder and pointed to a uniformed guard asleep on a stool near the shack.

"You there," I barked at the guard. "Are you in charge here?"

The guard jumped up and looked at me.

"What's the matter?" he sputtered. "What do you want?"

I immediately saw from his uniform that he wasn't SS or *Wehrmacht*. He didn't even speak good German. "Thank God", I thought, "he's a *Volksdeutch* soldier!"

"Are you in charge here?" I shouted at him again. "What the hell are you doing sleeping? I'm from Warsaw. I have orders here to bring the foreigners back to the city. The SS ordered it!"

Another soldier walked over to us. . . .

"Are you the idiot who's in charge here?" I asked the sergeant. "I've already wasted time. I have official papers here concerning citizens of a certain Central American country. The SS is waiting for them in Warsaw and I have to get them back there as soon as possible. . . .

The soldier obviously didn't understand what the papers said. He looked at the big German standing next to Zenek, then turned to me and said,

"You'd better call out the names yourself. I'll help you get them into the truck."

For a second, I couldn't believe what I had heard. He was really going to let us do it. It had been so easy.

About two hundred people now stood nearby. . . .

"I have the names of people who have been granted Honduran citizenship and are to come with me to Warsaw. If I call out your family name, come forward and step behind me."

> A murmur went through the group. Then I saw my father-in-law, staring at me in disbelief.
> "'Krystenfrynd'!" I called out.
> My father-in-law came forward, holding my mother-in-law by the hand. Then Liza's two sisters pushed through the group.
> "'Kadish'!"
> No one came forward.
> "'Kadish'!" I said louder.
> "Yes, we' re here. We' re coming." From the rear I heard the voice of my brother-in-law Isak Kadish. He came to the front with his son Rachmiel. . . .
> I continued calling out the names on my Honduran papers. Each time, when no one responded to the first call, two or three strangers came forward.
> Zenek counted them as they climbed in.
> "There are twenty-eight."
> Six of the people were members of my family and one was Guzik's niece. The other twenty-one were Jews who had made that split-second decision to take someone else's name when no one responded. "My God", I thought, as the two soldiers watched us, "we did it!"
> I told the German to sit in the front with Zenek and I got into the back of the truck. . . .
> It was very late at night when we arrived on the outskirts of Warsaw. We dropped off the German and Zenek drove slowly towards the centre of the city. Miraculously, no one stopped us. We arrived at the courtyard of the Hotel Royal.[23]

This incredible story is not a work of science fiction, if a few assumptions are made. First, there is the mysterious figure of the German; according to the testimony, he was a *Volksdeusch*, and, what is more, in civilian clothes. He therefore must have played a different role which Żurawin does not mention for obvious reasons; it does not fit Adam's self-creation as a person who did not collaborate with the Gestapo or with the entire *Sicherheitspolizei*. Second, it seems rather unlikely that the guards should release prisoners only on the basis of their Honduras documents; apparently, Żurawin must have had another type of authorisation, or the soldiers verified the entire operation by telephoning their superiors. Third, it seems that a single truck driving in the centre of Warsaw after curfew, and Żurawin writes that it was dark, must have caught someone's attention, not to mention the permit to drive that truck. Either Żurawin or Panasiuk needed to have such a permit.

After all, transport of Jews, citizens of South American countries, to Warsaw, was nothing unusual from the German point of view. Throughout the entire General Government, an internment operation of these people was being carried out on the basis of an ordinance of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) of February 1943. According to this ordinance, all Jews who, apart from a different citizenship, are also entitled to a British or American passport, are subject to internment. This document also mentions the planned exchange and "arousing the interest of Jewish organisations, so that it would be possible to exploit the Jews profitably."[24]

---

[23] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*., chapter 15, 5; chapter 6, 1;

[24] Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (later: AŻIH), NG 2856-P.

Żurawin brings Liza and his sister Bronka, who was also hiding on 'the Aryan side', to the Hotel Royal. On 18 May 1943, they are transported, together with other residents of the Hotel Royal, to the internment camp at Vittel. But Żurawin stays, under the pretext of searching for his brothers and sister. Meanwhile, more and more people come to Chmielna street, seeking an opportunity to purchase documents in order to confirm citizenship of a neutral country, or simply to survive. Most of them do not have papers that would entitle them to leave. And suddenly, such documents appear as if a magic wand has been waved. The Royal is filled to the limit of its capacity; in early June 1943, as many as 100 people are residing there. Thus, the Germans decide to move the residents from Chmielna to a larger building. They choose the Hotel Polski, at Długa St. 29.

It is at this momentthat Leon (Lajb) Skosowski, known as Lolek, a textile technician, an aspirant and an employee of the 'Thirteen', should appear on the stage. After'Thirteen' had been dissolved, he continued to collaborate with the Germans. He is known to have been in contact with the chief of department IV S, police commissioner SS-Hauptsturmführer Alfred Spilker. Skosowski decides on the career of a double agent and contacts Eugeniusz Glitterman of the Government's Delegate's Office counter-intelligence, who subsequently used Skosowski's information on the personnel structure of the Gestapo and employed him as an organisational intermediary in the release of some people from the hands of the occupier.[25] In return, the Government Delegates' Office gave Lolek a verbal guarantee of safety and "promised that after liberation, his work for the underground will be taken into account when the extent of his collaboration with Gestapo is established."[26] But it seems he did not have a long career, as, in February, an attempt on his life is made. Then, in the spring of 1943, the Home Army counter-intelligence starts taking an interest in him, because Lolek is seeking contact, via the Government Delegate's Office, with 'Pleban', Captain Bolesław Kozubowski, chief of the Warsaw District counter-intelligence. From then on, the Home Army watches Lolek closely .

In most testimonies regarding the Hotel Polski affair, the figures of Skosowski and Żurawin are inseparable; it is they who help those coming to Chmielna and Długa Streets obtain South American documents, simply by selling them at high prices, and they are both unequivocally described as Gestapo agents. Here are two examples of such testimonies: "these papers were arranged by Lolek Skosowski and a Mr Adam, Jews in the service of the Gestapo."[27] "Two Gestapo men were particularly involved; Skosowski Lolek and Adam (I can't remember his name). They had an entire staff of assistants and helpers at their disposal."[28] Żurawin's name appears in documents from that period, primarily in a report drafted for 'Żegota' and the Government Delegate's Office by Witold Bieńkowski, 'Wencki', head of the Jewish Section in the Department of Internal Affairs of the Government Delegate's Office: "

[25] See A. K. Kunert's note to: *Raport o likwidacji Skosowskiego*, in: A. Rószkiewicz-Litwinowicz, *Kontrwywiad Okręgu Warszawa AK*, (Warsaw, 1991), 159.

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] AŻIH, 301/576.

[28] AŻIH, 302/49.

. . . two Gestapo Jews took particular interest in them [i.e. the documents – A. H.], or rather, mainly their boss, Leon Skosowski, and an Adam Żurawin."[29]

Therefore, Skosowski should have appeared in Żurawin's memoirs, but he did not. There is not so much as a single word about Lolek in the entire text. The one faint trace that might lead to Skosowski is the mention of a person who brought the South American documents to the Hotel Polski. They were brought from the post office at Zamenhofa St. 19, where they arrived from Switzerland at the turn of 1942/1943, but their addressees were already dead, deported to Treblinka during the liquidation action: "One afternoon, a Pole, who I knew was in the Polish underground, arrived at the hotel with several sacks."[30] This person could have been Skosowski, although it is known that he was Jewish. On the one hand, it was evident that those documents must have been obtained with the help of the Gestapo; although Żurawin claims that the Polish underground found them at the post office in Napoleon Square, we do know that they were kept at the post office in the ghetto and were probably confiscated by the Germans. The Polish underground, very much interested in the Hotel Polski, does not confirm Żurawin's version.[31] It remains to be clarified whether Skokowski and Żurawin simply bought these documents from the Germans in order to sell them later at a profit, or whether the Germans decided that there was profit to be made from the sale of these documents and proposed an illegal partnership. Teresa Prekerowa writes that it was given to understand, by the Germans of the Auslandstelle themselves, that it did not matter to them who would use those documents.[32]

Żurawin is trying very hard to hide Skosowski's presence at the Hotel. What is odd, is that Liza Żurawin does remember him and can give a description of him.[33] How, then, does Żurawin account for the fact that, after the war, he was identified as the person who sold the documents? He claims it was Daniel Guzik's fault.

Guzik's role in the Hotel Polski affair is rather obscure; whereas Skosowski and Żurawin are unequivocally described as collaborators, opinions of Guzik are favourable. According to one account, the director of the JOINT, also involved in the Jewish underground (and described as its loyal member[34]), helped people obtain documents free of charge, and was sure that the entire operation would be successful (he also sent his family abroad through the Hotel). When asked by Icchak Cukierman why he was involved in the operation alongside Jewish collaborators, Guzik was to reply: "If I know that I can save but one Jew, I'll be ready to kiss Żurawin's and Sokowski's butt."[35] One of Guzik's achievements was the so-called 'Palestine certificates' delivered to Długa St.; when the Hotel Polski was an internment centre, he sent telegrams to the Palestine Agency in Constantinople, via the Government

[29] AAN (New Acts Archive), Armia Krajowa, III-105/43.
[30] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit*., chapter 17. 3.
[31] AŻIH, 301/4492.
[32] Teresa Prekerowa, "Sprawa Hotelu Polskiego", *Polityka*, 16 May 1987, No 20 (1567).
[33] Telephone interviews with Liza Żurawin (by author), 29 April 2006.
[34] A. Shulman, *The Case of Hotel Polski*, (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982), 229.
[35] Icchak Cukierman, *op. cit.,* 313.

Delegate's Office, requesting more certificate forms, as per his telegram of 26 June 1943: "The matter of certificates very urgent, please send more certificates *in blanco*. My address: Guzik, Warsaw, Hotel Polski, Długa St. 29."[36] Guzik gave these documents away free of charge, although some testimonies mention that small fees were charged for putting one's name on the Palestine list. He also had a certain number of South America passports which, apparently, he reserved for Jewish underground activists, soldiers of the Jewish Fighting Organisation and the Jewish Military Union. For this reason, Israel Kanał and Eliezer Geller of the Jewish Fighting Organisation, as well as the name of Chaim Łopata of the Jewish Military Union, were put on the list, among others. We do not know how Guzik obtained South American documents. Perhaps the underground had these documents, or perhaps Skosowski and Żurawin gave some of the documents to the underground, seeing this as a chance for future rehabilitation if charged with collaboration. It is highly likely that it was a package deal; those who paid large sums of money for the passports thus sponsored those who could not afford them.

Żurawin writes that Guzik proposed that he serve as his unofficial assistant at the Hotel, but fails to specify what that involved. Another interesting theme in Żurawin's memoirs regards fees charged for the documents. According to his account, it was Guzik who set the prices of passports, collected the money, and, additionally, supposedly threatened the 'residents' for that purpose, saying that Adam was a blackmailer (*szmalcownik*), who needed to be paid: "I was in the room when Guzik was trying to get money from a couple and he again pointed to me during his talk with them."[37] This, according to Żurawin, was the source of his legend as an organiser, while, in fact Guzik was the one in charge.

Accounts from the Hotel Polski contradict that. "People sat on their luggage in the corridors, on the stairs and in the hotel yard, fidgeting nervously, consulting each other, discussing the fate of their relatives, captured by the Germans. [...] One of the hotel rooms was Adam Żurawin and Lolek Skosowski's office, where they received people who were waiting in a long queue"[38] *Auslandstelle* officials, who put the 'foreigners' on transport lists, operated from the same office. People formed long queues at the door, waiting for the office to open. According to Nina Tomkiewicz, the office opened at 11, but it was necessary to start queuing the night before.[39] Those queuing up were mainly people who had no money for the trip, while the passport 'transactions', according to testimonies, were conducted via middlemen, or directly with Lolek or Adam, without waiting. Among the residents at Długa St., tips how to catch Adam or Lolek were circulated: "What was I supposed to do to join the next transport? In order to talk with Adam and Lolek, one had to queue for a long time and catch one of them as he was passing by, holding him firmly by the button of his jacket so he couldn't go away. Then one had to present one's case at a fast pace and with an appropriate amount of drama. This trick of holding them by

[36] AAN, Delegatura Rządu na Kraj, XV-2/343.
[37] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit*., chapter 15, 5.
[38] H. Schupper, *Pożegnanie Miłej 18*, quoted in: Icchak Cukierman, *op. cit*., 311
[39] M. Tomkiewicz testimony, quoted in A. Shulman, *op. cit*., 68.

the button, which had been recommended to me, was the most radical method, but I couldn't bring myself to do that, so I decided to queue."[40]

Those who could not afford the documents came to the Hotel, as well as those who arrived there by chance, such as Józef Gitler-Barski, who had his hideout on 'the Aryan side' 'blown', and people who simply had nowhere to hide. Everyone was faced with the dilemma: "to go or not to go" to Długa Street? On the one hand, there were some doubts, which stemmed from the fact that the organisers were Jewish collaborators, i.e. Skosowski and Żurawin. This aroused the obvious suspicion that the Hotel Polski was a trap set by the Gestapo to lure people from their hideouts and make a profit at the same time. The mechanism of stirring up false hopes of saving one's life was applied by the Germans several times in the history of the Warsaw Ghetto, particularly during the deportation action in the summer of 1942. Based on previous experiences, one might easily draw the logical conclusion that the Hotel was a trap.

But people did not want to believe that the Hotel Polski could be another fiction. The dangers of hiding on 'the Aryan side' determined their decisions, and despite the doubts, more and more people turned up in Długa Street. The argument that the organisers of the action were collaborators was countered by the argument that both Skosowski and Żurawin had sent their families on the transport. Lolek's family had Honduras documents and had left for Vittel, so the Hotel Polski was reliable. The Government Delegates' Office report of 21 July 1943 contains information that the sale of documents and organisation of transports was agreed with the heads of the Jewish department of the Gestapo and, for greater security, Żurawin went to Berlin, where "for the price of 25,000 dollars he obtained approval for the operation and the assignment of a special train for the transport."[41] The accuracy of the latter is nevertheless doubtful, as there were several transports, and Żurawin would have had to have enormous influence in Berlin; no confirmation of his trip has been found. Żurawin's memoirs do not mention it, either. The enterprise was lent credence by the widely respected Daniel Guzik and other people who had left through the Hotel; Icchak Kacenelson, Menachem Kirszenbaum, a Zionist activist and co-worker on the Co-ordination Committee of Jewish Social Self-Help, Joshua Perle, and the above mentioned fighters of the Jewish Fighting Organisation and the Jewish Military Union. Apart from them, the families of Jewish collaborators also left. There was a rumour circulated around Warsaw that Abraham Gancwajch's wife also left via the Hotel.

Both the relevant testimonies and Adam's memoirs show that Skosowski and Żurawin believed that the operation would be a success. Żurawin, of course, writes that he was only trying to save his family. It seems, however, that both gentlemen would also be able to use their involvement in the Hotel Polski affair as a chance to be rehabilitated after the war, for example by using the letter quoted in the Government Delegate's Office report:[42]

---

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] AAN, Armia Krajowa, III-105/44.

[42] See also Barbara Engelking and J. Leociak, op. cit., 703.

To our saviors

Messrs Adam Żurawin and Lolek Skosowski

On the day of our departure to the internment camp for foreign citizens of belligerent countries, we extend, on behalf of a thousand Jews, our eternal gratitude and thanks:

for their efforts, hard work and dedication,
for moral and material help
for keeping our spirits strong in the Jewish faith.

This altruistic and dauntlessly courageous act will never be forgotten by us or the generations to come and will be passed on to our children. Your humble names have entered the ranks of our national heroes. You had the honour of living in the most horrific turmoil in the history of the world.

Warsaw 4 July 1943
(several dozen signatures below).[43]

One thing must be stressed here; the Hotel Polski operated legally. I have already mentioned the RSHA ordinance regarding Jews–foreigners; the internment action was then in full swing all over the General Government, and at that time transports from Cracow and Lvov were arriving in Bergen-Belsen. Naturally, the Hotel affair is not the only case of the sale of documents on such a scale. Did the Warsaw Gestapo, acting on an order from Berlin, decide of its own initiative that it actually did not matter who would be using these documents, thus seizing an opportunity to make a profit? It is possible. In that case, the scale of the enterprise must have surprised those indirect organisers who decided that the Hotel was to be liquidated and those who found themselves there as 'squatters' were to be shot. One thing is certain. The Hotel could not have operated for nearly two months without Berlin's consent . Żurawin and Skosowski were only the middlemen.

Adam Żurawin leaves the Hotel in mid-June 1943. According to his memoirs, he had lost all hope of finding his family. His trip to Vittel is rather mysterious; it is not mentioned in other sources on the Hotel Polski affair. Żurawin himself writes that his trip was made possible thanks to a bribe of several thousand zlotys, and one hundred dollars, handed over to the Germans.[44] The obvious question is as to whether he had earned this money before or during the Hotel Polski affair. This is related to another unanswered question; what happened to the money the Jews paid for South American passports? Certainly some of it landed in German hands, but for the rest we can only surmise, as we do not know what kind of profits were made by Żurawin and Skosowski.

Lolek Skosowski stays at the Hotel until its liquidation on 13 July 1943, when two transports leave Długa Street; 600 people to Bergen-Belsen, and the remaining 400, most of them without documents, were transferred to the Pawiak prison. On 15 July 1943, 300 people from that group were shot there. A few days earlier, on 5 July 1943, around 1,200 left the Hotel for the Bergen-Belsen camp. According to different estimates, around 5,000 people passed through the hotel. Nathan Eck in

[43] AAN, Delegatura Rządu na Kraj, II-27.
[44] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*, chapter 17, 4.

his article "The Rescue of Jews" gives a number of 2,500 to 3,500 people.[45] On the other hand, Abraham Shulman estimates that as many as 4,000–5,000 people could have passed through the Hotel.[46] Gunnar Paulsson cites Eck and, based on his own estimates, gives a figure of 3,500 people.[47] All these figures are somewhat overestimated; a sum total of all transports from Chmielna, Długa and Pawiak to Vittel and Bergen-Belsen gives a figure of around 2,500 people and is most likely accurate. A detailed list has not survived and it is impossible to reconstruct it, as people left on the basis of passports and promises of visas issued in the names of people who were already dead.

Escape

Żurawin describes the camp at Vittel in similar terms to other internees; the end of a nightmare. The camp was located on the grounds of a spa, famous for its waters. The internees did not live in barracks, but in luxurious hotels, surrounded by a park. There were seven hotels; the Grand, also called 'Central', the de la Source, the Continental, the Providence, the Ceres, the Nouvel and the Vittel Palace. Three of them, the Grand Hotel, the Vittel Palace and the Ceres, were connected with one another, forming one sector of the camp. There was also a casino, a cinema-theatre building and tennis courts. The entire complex was surrounded by a triple, barbed-wire fence, which was watched by guards.

Adam's family was overjoyed; moreover, soon after his arrival, Liza becomes pregnant. However, Adam still consistently poses as a Pole with a Jewish wife. He tries to make use of this when, on 18 December 1943, a special commission from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrives at the camp to register and verify the documents of every person of Jewish origin. Panic breaks out among the Jewish internees. By the autumn of 1943, the Germans are beginning to suspect that their passports were not legally obtained, and the commission stays in the camp only a few days. At the same time, the Germans appeal to the South American governments for confirmation of the citizenship and identities of those interned at Vittel and Bergen-Belsen and holding documents issued by those countries. They either refuse to recognise those documents, or hesitate to take a position. As a result, on 28 February 1944, the Germans isolate the Hotel Providence; the Polish Jews interned there are kept under guard and are forbidden to contact anyone else. On 18 March 1944, a group of around 170 people are transferred to the Beau Site hotel, outside the camp as, reportedly, the South American governments refused to recognise their passportsand thus they cannot be kept in the same camp as the other internees.[48] On 17 April 1944, the hotel was surrounded by a double cordon of guards; 163 people are transferred from Vittel to the camp at Drancy, and then, on 29 April 1944,

[45] Nathan Eck, "The Rescue of Jews", *Yad Vashem Studies* 1957, No 1, 142.

[46] Abraham Shulman, *op. cit.*, 215.

[47] G. S. Paulssom, *Secret City. The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945*, (New Heaven – London: Yale University Press, 2002), 139.

[48] Miriam Nowitch's testimony, quoted in: Abraham Shulman, *op. cit.*, 121.

in a transport of around 1,000 people to Auschwitz, where they all die in the gas chambers. Żurawin's family manage to avoid this deportation, but another one is organised on 16 May. This time only Liza is saved, as she was then in hospital, seven months pregnant.

This is how Żurawin describes this deportation: ". . . we were taken aboard a regular second class passenger train. About ten people were crowded into each compartment and some had to sit on the floor. The Germans had placed narrow planks of wood on the outside of the windows so that they couldn't be opened from the inside (...) The mood in my car alternated between false optimism and sombre silence."[49] As with the previous transport, this one also goes to Drancy first and then, on 31 May 1944, it goes on to Auschwitz: " This time, there were no compartments with second class accommodation. More than a thousand people were loaded into cattle cars and the heavy wooden doors were pulled shut and barred . . . . This time, I began to believe that we were going on our final ride."[50] Thus Żurawin decides to escape by jumping out of the train through a window when the train is approaching Katowice. He meets a peasant and introduces himself as Zbigniew Albinowski, as he had a signet ring engraved with the initials 'AZ'. As he had Swiss chocolate and American cigarettes with him, which he had received in a Red Cross package, the Poles helping him took him for a parachutist sent by the [Polish] Government [in Exile] in London. They help him reach Częstochowa, where he catches a train to Warsaw; there he turns for help to his friend Zenek Panasiuk and establishes contact with the Jewish underground.

Żurawin had had previous contact with the underground; he knew Jakub Celemeński of the Bund, who, as a courier, often brought illegal materials into the ghetto[51], and Dawid Klin, a representative of the Jewish Social Self-Help.[52] Klin reportedly helped him get Liza out of the ghetto in 1942. Now these two gentlemen help Żurawin obtain false documents. But Żurawin is under a death sentence, passed by the Jewish Fighting Organisation. Cukierman writes that Żurawin knew about it: "Around mid-1944, Dawid Klin of the Bund came to me and said that Adam Żurawin had come to Warsaw from Bergen-Belsen or Vittel . . . that he knew that ŻOB (the Jewish Fighting Organisation) had sentenced him to death and had said that he was ready to appear before the fighters' court. He had only asked for our help before he was sentenced, because he had did not have enough to live on. I told Klin to bring me his photograph and [personal] data. I did not intend to put him before any court. I was determined to carry out the ŻOB sentence. He was saved by the Warsaw Uprising."[53]

Cukierman also writes that Żurawin was involved in smuggling and, when he was caught as a Jew on a train from Łódź to Warsaw, the Gestapo made him an

---

[49] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit*., chapter 19, 3.

[50] *Ibid*., chapter 19, 12.

[51] W. Meed, *Po obu stronach muru*, transl. K. Krenz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Jacek Santorski, 2003), 231–232.

[52] B. Temkin-Bermanowa, *Dziennik z podziemia,* (Warsaw, 2000), 272.

[53] Icchak Cukierman, *op. cit.*, 313.

offer he could not refuse; from then on, he collaborated with them. If we examine Żurawin's memoirs more closely, in fact, it all started with his trip to Łódź or, more precisely, with the permit to go and collect the goods. This is, therefore, a probable version of events; however, we should not forget about Żurawin's camouflage. If, in fact, he was presented with the alternative of 'collaboration or death', why did he pose as a Pole the entire time?

He is caught in Wola by the Warsaw Uprising. He writes that, until 18 August, he was hiding, together with Zenek's family, in the basement of a building in Mszczonowska St., from where the Germans take them to the transit camp in Pruszków. Soon afterwards, Adam is deported to the labour camp in Soest, near the Ruhr, where he works in a munitions factory. One night, seizing the opportunity of an explosion in the factory, he escapes from the camp. He gets on a train, which, as it turns out, is heading for Berlin. "What the hell was I going to do in the Nazi capital?" I thought. I wanted to get to France, to Liza, [but] I was going in the opposite direction. I was also afraid that somehow, in the foremost Nazi city, I would be recognized as a Jew. But then I remembered that the Swiss Embassy was in Berlin and that ever since I had jumped out of the train near Auschwitz, my goal had been to contact Switzerland and let them know that the Germans had reneged on their promise and had sent the 'citizens' of Latin American nations from Vittel."[54]

Żurawin goes to Berlin as a Pole. At the railway station he explains to the soldiers that his factory has been bombed and he has been instructed to report to the Berlin *Arbeitsamt*. He does, in fact, report there and is employed in a Siemens factory. On his day off, he goes to the Swiss Embassy, where he manages to speak to the ambassador and informs him that the people from Vittel were deported to Auschwitz. According to Żurawin, the ambassador mistrusts him, showing him a list received from the Germans, which shows that Żurawin is being held in the camp at Vittel. In fact, the Germans had long maintained that no one was deported from the camp at Vittel and, later, that they are "somewhere in France."[55] The Swiss embassy tells Żurawin that it is not in a position to help him or his family. Thus Adam appeals to his old acquaintances from Warsaw, Karl Fischer and Stabenow. As a result, Żurawin moves in with Fischer. In mid-December, Stabenow takes him to Zeitz to visit the Hoffmanns. Adam's stay with the Fischers is idyllic; however, Żurawin wants to leave Germany. In March 1943, he finds himself in Baden-Würtemberg, where he is liberated by the French. He presents himself as a citizen of Honduras, not as a Jew and not as a Pole.

Żurawin's stay in Berlin is very mysterious. Even though he is determined to get to Liza, to France, yet, he spends several months there. Fischer's and Stabenow's behaviour is equally odd, as they no longer needed Adam's 'services' as their co-worker. Again, the only plausible explanation, if we are to assume that what Żurawin writes is true, and not a confabulation, is his determination to be rehabilitated. The war is coming to an end; perhaps Stabenow and Fischer needed someone to confirm, if need be, that they had helped a Jew?

---

[54] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit*., chapter 22, 10.

[55] AAN, Poselstwo RP w Bernie, 331/74.

After the War

On 29 April 1945, Żurawin finally finds his family in a transit camp at La Bourbole in Lorraine. It turns out that, apart from Liza and their newborn son, Michael, Adam's sister, Bronka has survived as well. Meanwhile, the first accusations begin to emerge. One of the women interned at the camp reportedly informed the police that Żurawin had collaborated with the Nazis. In his memoirs, Adam emphasises that such accusations are based on the conviction that Żurawin was not with the others on the train, but paid the Germans and survived, which was not true. Żurawin does mention that he was accused of being one of the Hotel Polski organisers, but later ignores this problem. It should be mentioned here that shortly after the war it was being stated in writing that the Hotel Polski had been a trap. One argument to support this assertion was the fact that only those who could afford to bought South American documents, while the key argument was the shooting of the 'illegal' residents of Długa St. 29 and the fate of those deported from Vittel and Bergen-Belsen to Auschwitz. The latter group, of around 2,150 people, were deported in three transports, on 21 October 1943 and 17 and 23 May 1944. The entire incident was called 'the Hotel Polski affair' and unequivocally interpreted as a well-conceived plan of the Warsaw Gestapo, which offered the chance of a legal trip on authentic documents, albeit with false names, and promising security, lured thousands of Jews from hiding, in order to rob them of their money and kill them. The bait used here was the fate of those interned at Pawiak and the Hotel Royal who, thanks to the passports and promises of South American visas, had gone to Vittel to await exchange. According to this interpretation, the Jews, often referred to as 'naïve' in this context, wanted to buy the guarantee of security for themselves, while the organisers, Skosowski and Żurawin knew nothing of the Gestapo plan; or, according to another interpretation they did know, but they had been guaranteed safety for themselves and their families, even though the promise was not kept.

As a result of the 'rumours'[56] of his collaboration with the Gestapo, Żurawin decides to leave France and goes to Italy. He is already applying for American visas for his family; he does not want to return to Poland or stay in Europe. In Italy he works as a translator; eventually he manages to obtain Cuban visas. In September 1946, the Żurawin family arrives in Havana and, ten months later, in New York.

When in the United States, they receive help from Adam's brother Rachmiel, who had emigrated from Poland in 1939. Adam works in his factory. He soon finds some business partners and opens a brush factory. He no longer uses a double identity and is now only a Jew. But, as a result of Jonas Turkow's book, the shadow of his collaboration with the Germans still haunts him. The rabbinate court clears him of charges, as the witnesses did not prove that Żurawin had collaborated with the Germans. The witnesses were Jonas Turkow, Hilel Seidman, who left Warsaw for Vittel, together with other Jew–foreigners in January 1943, having previously been interned at Pawiak for six months , and Sasza Krawiec, who had posed as Żurawin's relative in the Poniatowa camp. The sentence was ultimately influenced

[56] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit*., chapter 26, 8.

by the latter's testimony, as Żurawin actually did save his wife. It should be added here that, according to documents in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH), preparations for his trial before the Social Court of the Central Commission of Polish Jews were in progress in 1949. Żurawin was to be charged with "luring Jews to the Hotel Polski", a Gestapo trap. The proceedings were discontinued because the defendant's whereabouts were unknown.[57]

Cleared of the charges by the rabbinate court, the Żurawins led a quiet life. Adam set up his own factory, the Adams Brush Company, and made a fortune, and, in the 1960s, even founded an art gallery. Their son claims that his father did not tell him about his war-time experiences for many years; Michael Żurawin found out about the affair in 1982, from Abraham Shulman's book.

Żurawin, the knight and Żurawin, the collaborator

Adam Żurawin tells the story of a man who does everything to save his family from death amidst the turmoil of the war. In their fictional aspect, Żurawin's memoirs resemble the medieval *chanson de geste*; they do so further, in that they mix historical facts with invented events or interpret facts in his favour. This is a story of courage bordering on bravado, of care for one's family, of saving others and of false accusations. But the truth does prevail, which Żurawin repeats several times; the truth, i.e., his version of events. As a result, Adam Żurawin emerges from his memoirs as a contemporary knight, who fought against the enemy, perhaps not always honourably, but who with nobility and dignity, did play for the highest stakes, i.e., his life and the lives of others.

In the final chapter we read: "I never collaborated with the Nazis, not even to save myself or my family!"[58] This statement is the key to understanding who Żurawin was. In his view, he did not collaborate with Germans, as he only maintained business and social contact with them. As demonstrated above, he does everything to prove this thesis, but in vain. The very omission of the figure of Lolek Skosowski is argument enough to disprove this version of events.

As I have reiterated several times, there is no trace of his contact with the Germans in his memoirs. Let us therefore try asking the following question: why did Żurawin collaborate with the Germans? Was he forced to, as Cukierman says, or was it his own decision? It seems more likely, however, that it was a combination of a chain of events and Żurawin's own character traits. The image that is revealed by this text, which is a slave to self creation, is one of Adam Żurawin as a man who seizes every opportunity to confirm his self-esteem and build his authority. One of the most important threads is the construction of a double identity. On the one hand he does not deny that he is Jewish, while, on the other, he does everything in order to be a Pole. It seems that the Polish world fascinates him, but it is combined with a sense of his own superiority, of his being convinced of his own cleverness, which allows him to deceive the Poles and, later, the Germans as well. During the

[57] AŻIH, *Sądy społeczne*, bp.

[58] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*, chapter 31, 2.

occupation, virtually every time a business opportunity arises, Adam agrees to it without hesitation. Even though he might have been determined to save his family, he does admit that themoney he earned was far and away greater than he and his family required.

Żurawin is an actor, improving on his performance. The text refers several times to performing in an opera; Adam therefore sees himself as an actor. He certainly had within him the readiness to act on the brink of exposure, and thus, he acted for his life. Those fragments of Żurawin's story that deal with the Hoffmanns lead one to believe that their world also fascinated him, as the Polish world had previously, and it increased his self-esteem. When he talks of his contact with the Germans, he often mentions the satisfaction that stemmed from deceiving them. He was, however, exposed; his game turned into reality. His contacts with Stabenow and Fischer were not limited, as he wished, to teas and listening to opera. Stabenow's testimony challenges the entire construction most glaringly. In one sentence, Gerhard Stabenow says what Żurawin keeps denying for over four hundred pages of his memoirs, i. e. he knew that Żurawin was Jewish not Polish, that he was an agent and that his collaboration was not exclusively a business relationship. Thus Adam Żurawin's identities in the winter of 1940 are supplemented by the third, most deeply hidden one; the identity of a collaborator.

Incidentally, Skosowski paid a pretty penny for his game as a double agent; on 1 November 1943 he was killed by the Home Army counter-intelligence in the 'Gospoda Warszawska' restaurant at Nowogrodzka St. 28. One might surmise that, had Żurawin not left for Vittel, he would have met Lolek's fate.

Żurawin was charged, in the first place, with being involved in the Hotel Polski affair and with helping the Germans to lure rich Jews into the trap which was the Hotel. Żurawin was at the Hotel and it can be stated with certainty that he believed the operation would be a success. As I have already written, it was a perfectly legal operation, even though selling the documents, as such, was obviously illegal. The internment of Jews who were citizens of South American countries, putting them in special camps was legally sanctioned. It is, naturally, possible that the Hotel Polski affair was an initiative of the Warsaw *Auslandstelle* and the Gestapo, who decided that the passports they seized could bring them a profit. It seems, however, that this could not have been a pre-planned trap. The Hotel Polski affair had a tragic ending for two reasons; first, the *Auslandstelle* HQ failed to verify the passports and visa promises, probably as a result of having realised that their holders were not legitimate and, furthermore, that the guardian states knew nothing of their fate Second, the South American governments declined to recognise the documents in question, and when they finally did, on 31 May 1944, it was already too late. Of those who had passed through the Hotel, only those who had Palestinian certificates arranged by Guzik, in Długa Street, survived, as neither Great Britain nor the United States challenged the validity of their promises.[59] In this context, Adam Żurawin can only be accused of collaboration with the Germans and of charging fees for passports;

[59] See Agnieszka Haska, *Jestem Żydem, chcę wejść. Hotel Polski w Warszawie, 1943*, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2006).

charges to the effect that it was a purposeful luring of Jews into the Hotel and that Żurawin is responsible for their death, are, in this case, totally unjustified.

But let us not forget Adam's biography prior to the Hotel Polski affair. As this paper has demonstrated, Żurawin consistently denies ever having been a collaborator. He interprets facts in his favour or departs completely from the truth. He adds elements to his memoirs that are completely fanciful but fit his self-creation. According to his testimony, for example, during the occupation, he met the Government's Delegate, but fails to give his name, in order to ask him to help him save his family. When faced with direct charges, Żurawin employs two strategies, depending on the accuser. If charged by witnesses such as people from Vittel or the Hotel Polski, he dismisses the accusation as a downright lie. However, he finds it much more difficult to dismiss information from Czerniaków's diaries or Cukierman's memoirs. With reference to the former, Żurawin writes: "I knew that Czerniakow was a heroic man who had tried in vain to save the Jews of the ghetto. But I didn't understand how he came to write about me in his diary because I had never met him and I never was involved with any plan to open a photographic studio! I worked with Welek in the brush business and if he tried to begin another enterprise in the ghetto, he never told me about it."[60] Why, then, does Czerniaków describe the meeting in Stabenow's and Müller's office where both Żurawin and Szymonowicz were reportedly present? Żurawin, obviously, does not comment on that. As regards Cukierman, on the other hand, Żurawin quotes extensively and comments on the quotations that: "This was the only part that was true – Zenek had brought Klin and Celemenski to his apartment, where I was hiding after I escaped from the train, and they said they would try to get me a card. But they never did, because the Polish uprising began."[61] But he does not comment on the sentence [passed on him] at all, while, when it comes to his collaboration, he writes that when he read of it: "[he] was most horrified".[62] But he does labour the point discussed by Cukierman, when he wonders whether Żurawin believed in the success of the operation, since, after all, he did send his own family through the Hotel. Żurawin treats these conclusions as proof of his innocence; he did not lure Jews into a trap set by the Nazis and he extends them across his entire collaboration with the Germans.

Adam Żurawin leaves behind a testimony fraught with hidden contradictions. Despite his efforts to portray himself as a knight, we see his latent identity of collaborator. It is best visible in one sentence, used for the sake of any reader surprised at the contradictions in his biography and at the descriptions of his contact with the Germans, while at the same time denying any form of collaboration. The sentence reads as follows: "I often wondered what it was about me that seemed to attract Germans."[63] The answer is rather banal, but apparently true; it was he himself.

---

[60] Adam Żurawin, *op. cit.*, chapter 34, 6.
[61] *Ibid.*, chapter 34, 6.
[62] Ibid.
[63] *Ibid.*, chapter 11, 3.