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Hiding Together in Occupied Warsaw, 1942–1944: The Mutual Aid Network of Jews from Sandomierz

https://doi.org/10.1515/eehs-2025-0014
Received April 14, 2025; accepted November 25, 2025; published online January 19, 2026

Abstract: This article examines the mutual aid network of Jews from Sandomierz who were hiding in occupied Warsaw between 1942 and 1944. The article focuses on the experiences of three individuals: Cesia Grynszpan, Aleksander Wasserman, and Lea Zoberman, and their efforts to survive the Holocaust. The article details the challenges faced by these individuals, including finding shelter, obtaining forged documents, and evading blackmailers known as *szmalcownicy*. It also highlights the crucial role of mutual support within the Jewish community, as well as the limited but significant assistance provided by Poles.

Keywords: Holocaust; Jews; Warsaw; Aryan side; Sandomierzu; networks

The digital humanities, an increasingly prevalent discipline in recent years, have by no means circumvented the disciplines of history and Holocaust studies. Digitized sources are now used for archival research, genealogical research, network research, digital mapping, and related areas. As regards Holocaust research, a database of the Warsaw Ghetto (https://getto.pl), an atlas of Holocaust literature (https://nplp.pl/kolekcja/atlas-zaglady/), and the Visual History of the Holocaust project (https://www.vhh-project.eu) are prominent examples of the expanding use of digital technology. Resources like these have contributed to the writing of articles and books on network connections during the Holocaust.[1] Moreover, mathematical tools are now being applied in network analysis, as may be seen in the article by Alberto Giordano and Tim Cole on social and spatial networks in the Budapest ghetto (Giordano and Cole 2011, 143–170). These researchers created a spatial model of the

1 Cf.: Adler and Aleksiun 2023; Bělín et al. 2022; Feldman and Seibel 2005; Slucki 2017.

This article is an outcome of research supported by the grant NCN 2019/35/B/HS3/02899, "Caught between help and threats. Hiding on Warsaw's Aryan side, 1940–1945 – phase II. Development and continuity," and is taken from a chapter of a book planned for publication.

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city based on the information that residents of the ghetto could leave it only between the hours of 2 pm and 5 pm, and this yielded a geography of persecution in Budapest. The authors determined the maximum possible range within which public institutions, hospitals, shops, etc. could be reached by foot in that three-hour window, and then visualized this data on a map illustrating the limitations of everyday life for Budapest's Jews. Extrapolating from this map, the authors analyze and interpret information about the network of contacts between Jews and non-Jews, as well as about the isolation of the former – not only in spatial, but so too in social terms.

Marten Düring also used network analysis to describe the case of Erna and Aron Segal, who were hiding in Berlin.[2] This wealthy couple (owners of a furrier business and a number of townhouses) had been hiding in the city since 1942, and were aided by a total of 79 people, most of whom the Segals had not previously known. Düring categorizes information on the motives for extending help (its nature, frequency, and duration), builds models based on this, performs mathematical calculations, and illustrates the article with graphs of trust and help networks as are to be derived from this history. On the basis of his research, he arrives at the admittedly rather obvious conclusion that the condition for the Segals' survival was to establish a bond of trust with strangers, thereby making the coalescence of a help network possible.

In a slightly different way – by focusing on analysis of personal accounts, historical documents, interviews, and elaborations – Fred Coleman reconstructed an aid network centered on the activities of Moussa and Odette Abadi during the years of occupation in Vichy France. The Abadis created an extensive aid network in the Nice region and contributed to rescuing more than 500 Jewish children. With the support of local and regional helpers, they placed Jewish children in Catholic institutions and with benevolent families in the area, thereby protecting them from deportation to death camps. They forged documents, provided food ration cards, and organized safe places. Odette paid for her efforts with arrest and deportation to Auschwitz. Fortunately, she managed to survive (Coleman 2013). Regarding occupied Warsaw, the first scholar who, in writing about the help extended to Jews, called attention to its network character was Gunnar S. Paulsson. He presented the example of a network created and managed by a single individual (Stanisław Chmielewski), who made avail of his private contacts in order to help a dozen or so Jews (Paulsson 2002, 42–54).

2 "The dynamics of helping behaviour for Jewish fugitives during the Second World War: The importance of brokerage. The Segal Family's Case," http://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/dynamics-helping-behaviour-jewish-fugitives-during-second-world-war-importance-brokerage-se.

In occupied Poland, the Germans ruled by means of terror. They used both targeted terror – i.e., directed against the underground, its leaders, and the intelligentsia – as well as random, daily terror aimed at steadily intimidating the entire population. Widespread violence intensified starting in 1943 when roundups in the streets – for forced labor, for transport to concentration camps – became more frequent, as did the shooting of randomly seized Varsovians in city streets. There was the death penalty for disobedience, conspiracy, and failure to obey German regulations, including helping Jews. Amidst the population's rising hatred and desire for revenge on the Nazi occupiers, German terror was foremost accompanied by a ubiquitous, manifold, and ever so understandable fear: of death, of punishment, of the Gestapo, and of the occupier's eager readiness to apply collective responsibility. Indeed, the German occupation of Poland signified a complete inversion of moral values: one risked being killed for helping Jews, and yet could expect reward for turning them over to the Gestapo.

In this miasma of fear and terror, Jews hiding on the Aryan side of German-occupied Warsaw formed, through their sundry connections and contacts, a clandestine network – indeed, one of many conspiratorial networks woven across the city. These networks can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, whether by examining them according to the requirements of network analysis or from a structural perspective (organized aid, individual aid, Jewish self-help, and sabotage networks). Taking inspiration from the general description of social ties, we can also divide aid networks into natural (common descent, kinship), state (organized forms imposed by law, society), and associational (formed on a voluntary basis by people belonging to specific social organizations) (Rybicki 2006, 133–141). As in this paper, one may also describe such networks from a micro-historical perspective.

Among the tens of thousands of Jews[3] hiding in occupied Warsaw during the years of Nazi rule, was a group of refugees from Sandomierz (some of whom had previously been deported from Kalisz) who formed an aid network based on friendship and mutual acquaintance. To borrow from Barbara Rosenwein, we may define their group as an "emotional community" (Rosenwein 2002), in which the binding force was that of shared experience and emotion. Their interrelationships and connections, along with the scope and capabilities of the network they jointly created to help some 40 Jews is the subject of my article. In examining this network, I rely not on mathematical data, but on qualitative analysis of first-person documents. This is because information on the experiences of this group can be found in many sources: memoirs, interviews, and accounts made by individual members. This

3 Their number is estimated to fall between 15 and 20 thousand (Gutman and Krakowski 1986) and 28 thousand (Paulsson 2009).

above all concerns three of its most active participants: Cesia Grynszpan (Grünszpan),[4] Aleksander Wasserman,[5] and Lea Zoberman.[6]

1 Sandomierz

When the war broke out, these three people were already adults. In the summer of 1939, Aleksander Wasserman (b. 1913) had just completed his engineering studies in Toulouse and returned to his parents, who lived in the western Polish city of Kalisz. Lea Zoberman (b. 1914), whose father owned the "Progress" bookstore, had studied pharmacy in Prague before the war and was a nurse in her eastern Polish hometown of Sandomierz, where Cesia Kurcbart (b. 1917) was a teacher. In the first days after war with Germany broke out on September 1, 1939, Cesia and Aleksander, like hundreds of thousands of people, evacuated eastward. Aleksander returned after a few weeks to Kalisz, as he did not want to leave his parents alone; his older brother Jerzy, a doctor, was in the army and had been taken prisoner. Cesia, in turn, was arrested by the Russians and was sent briefly to a prison in Sambor. In December 1939, she met Henryk Grynszpan (Grünszpan), born in Międzybrodzie near Żywiec. Henryk, an engineer and second lieutenant in the Polish Army, had fought in the September campaign and escaped from Soviet captivity. In January 1940, Cesia and Henryk married in Lwów/Lviv and decided to return to Sandomierz, to Cesia's family. Lea had not fled the city: she saw the Germans enter and thereafter witnessed the worsening persecution of her hometown's Jewish residents.

As soon as November 1939, the Germans began deporting Jews from Kalisz, which had been incorporated directly into the Reich; by mid-December, some 15,000 Jews had been deported in ten transports either to cities in the *Generalgouvernement*

4 Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (AŻIH), 302/53 i 302/54 – Celina Grünszpan née Kurcbart, (assumed name, Janina Skoczowska). These are two handwritten notebooks, partially transcribed in typescript. It is not known when they were written and the address on the last page of the first notebook (Łódź, 67 Cegielniana Street, Fflat 10) suggests that they were written shortly after the war. When and how they found their way into the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute is unknown. The frontispiece bears the date 1988. The form of the surname "Grynszpan" is most often used in the accounts, and this is the form I use in this text.

5 One of the three parts of the diary, pertaining to the period of World War II, is in the Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O33.6975. I am very grateful to Alexander's son, Prof. Natan Wasserman, for providing me with the entire typescript, entitled "The Life of Alexander Wasserman or Michal Mielczarek by Himself Described," and for additional explanations. For instance, the memoir was "censored" by Alexander's wife: several pages are missing from it, and some passages concerning other women are erased.

6 YVA, O.33.1787, the recollections of Lea Zoberman, committed to writing in Toronto in 1980, and also: Zoberman 2017, 216–260.

(GG) or to labor camps. A train heading southeast, which included Aleksander Wasserman and his parents, stopped in Sandomierz. "The Jews in the city soon learned that there was a train at the station. So they gathered up food and took it by horse-drawn wagons to the train. And then one of the carriages was opened and 43 or 44 families climbed out and were taken immediately into the city,"[7] recalls Lola Praport, whose parents and brothers were also in that carriage.

In Sandomierz, Aleksander's father, Natan Wasserman, fell ill with typhus. Despite the care of his son Jerzy, who was a doctor and had come from Warsaw (after his release from captivity he found himself in that ghetto), Natan died in September 1941. Aleksander, meanwhile, took part in various kinds of forced labor there (unloading wagons, asphalting the highway, etc.), and also performed other tasks (illegal production of rapeseed oil) to earn a living. He made many new acquaintances and became involved with Hania Salomonowicz. Her husband had been deported to Auschwitz and was presumed dead, leaving her alone with their little son Stefanek and a Polish maid, Zosia, who accompanied and helped them until the end of the war. Aleksander and Hania remained a couple until the end of the war.

One of Aleksander's many new acquaintances in Sandomierz was Cesia Grynszpan, "known for her resourcefulness and risk-taking."[8] She worked briefly at the Jewish Community (*Kehila*) and then at the Social Self-Help Center, while her engineer husband found employment in nearby Mokoszyn at a farm where a dozen Jews worked. It was managed by a German named Bulion, and thanks to his kindness, several dozen other Jews obtained jobs there in October 1942 – this, at a time of intensified round-ups for the Skarżysko labor camp and of deportations to a death camp.

Lea Zoberman continued to work in Sandomierz as a nurse. When the liquidation of the local ghetto commenced in October 1942, Lea hid in a shelter with 40 other people, and when their hiding place was discovered by the Germans, she saved herself by lying among the murdered Jews and feigning death. Lea's parents and two of her sisters (a third sister, Hania, was in the USSR) decided to stay in the ghetto and were later taken to labor camps during the liquidation: Gucia and their father to Pionki,[9] her mother to Starachowice,[10] and the youngest sister – Frania – to Radom.[11]

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7 YVA O3.4182, Lola Praport.

8 Aleksander Wasserman, YVA, O33.6975, 71.

9 The forced labor camp for Jews alongside the ammunition factory in Pionki existed from January 1941 to November 1944.

10 Near the Starachowice ammunition factory the Germans established three camps for the factory's Jewish workers. These camps were liquidated in July 1944.

11 In 1940, the Germans created a forced labor camp on Szkolna Street in Radom, right beside a weapons factory. Laboring here were Jewish, Polish, and Soviet prisoners.

Even before the liquidation of the ghetto, when news of the deportations began to arrive from other towns, Aleksander, "being convinced that death awaited everyone in the ghetto," started to think about forging documents. He arranged for *Kennkarte* blanks through Janek Kotowski, the son of the landlords from whom he rented a flat, as Janek worked at the magistrate's office. It should be added that Jews were initially allowed to live throughout the city as the Sandomierz ghetto was established relatively late – in May-June 1942. The ghetto contained about 8,000 Jews, including more than 1,200 refugees from Kalisz, Sieradz, or Vienna, and about 2,000 displaced persons from neighboring towns.

Through another employee at the magistrate's office, a Mr. Domagała, blanks were also obtained by Lola Praport's father: "We had many of those blanks, and we filled out each one. That is, not only for ourselves, but for friends, too (…) We affixed real photographs. He gave us the original blank forms, we filled them out and gave them stamps."[12] These stamps were made for a few hundred złoties by a certain Hasid whom Cesia knew, and through her Wasserman met with him: "When I stood eye to eye with the future forger I was taken aback by his appearance and immediately lost faith in the success of the whole intention," he recalled. "He was completely unkempt and seemed unremarkable. A cliché of the ghetto Jew: pale and skinny, hunchbacked. He naturally wore a long beard and sidelocks, and I surmised he couldn't count to three. Nor had he ever toiled as a stamp maker or engraver. However, he claimed to possess a knack for fine precision work. He asked to be provided with a good pencil eraser of the right size and the pattern of a *Kennkarte* with a stamp imprinted on it. (…) We then waited for the result and, to be honest, without any faith in the success of his efforts. After a few days we received our order. To our utter amazement, the workmanship surpassed our wildest hopes. This simple man had been able with an ordinary razor blade to make a stamp on a rubber eraser, the ink print of which did not differ from a genuine seal."[13] Thus they launched the production of forged papers: "We gave some blanks to friends free of charge, and managed to sell a few for 1,500 złoties a piece."[14]

2 To Warsaw

Aleksander's mother, Felicja Wasserman, went to Warsaw in the autumn of 1942, though he himself stayed in Sandomierz. Here, on October 29, 1942, the

12 Lola Praport op. cit. During the liquidation of Sandomierz's ghetto, Lola escaped eastward – first to Rawa Ruska, then to Lwów/Lviv, where she survived the war.

13 Aleksander Wasserman, YVA, O33.6975, 71.

14 Ibid.

extermination operation began. Aleksander, Hania, as well as Cesia with her husband and many friends survived the deportation by hiding at various sites, including Mokoszyn.[15] After her bunker was discovered in October 1942, Lea Zoberman escaped to Warsaw, despite having swollen legs, and carrying merely 300 złoties and the birth certificate of one Irena Jagiełło. She knew only the *Warszawa* address of her cousin, Zosia Kupferblum. Lea spent her first evening at a hotel near the train station. That night the Germans carried out a search there and detained Lea on suspicion that she was Jewish. She managed to convince them, however, that she had come to see a doctor, so they referred her to the Lutheran Hospital. There, she was kindly taken care of by Dr. Stefan Schmidt, who treated her swollen legs and also helped her later. At the hospital, Lea (now as "Irena Jagiełło") was visited by her cousin Zosia Kupferblum and her acquaintance, Dr. Stern's wife. The two women had fled Sandomierz earlier and were living in Warsaw as Poles. They told Lea "who of us is in Warsaw: Rachela Lerner with her husband Aron Grun and their child; Chilek Ceylon with his wife Runia; Gutka Zylber and her sister-in-law with her child; the dentist Genia Rosenberg with her husband; Helena Rubinowicz with her daughter; and a few further people, but all scattered around Warsaw, hiding under assumed names."[16] It was good to know who to turn to in case of trouble or who to help in case of need.

After recovering, Lea began working as a nurse at the Lutheran Hospital (located right next to the ghetto wall). During the Ghetto Uprising, she saw "the burning ghetto from the hospital windows. People are jumping from the windows so as not to be taken alive. I watch with a bleeding heart. (…) An extraordinary sight – living streaks of fire flying into the abyss."[17] She lived on Złota Street for a short time, and after being warned of blackmailing informants (*szmalcownicy*), she moved in with her cousin Hela Edelman (from Puławy, five members of her family were also in hiding in Warsaw) who rented a room at 13 Krochmalna Street. Hela was denounced some time later and tortured to death by the Gestapo.

Hania Salomonowicz, with Aryan papers as "Skotnicka," from the autumn of 1942 (after jumping from a train car, being caught by the Germans, and then successfully escaping), and Aleksander Wasserman (as "Bronisław Stankiewicz") arrived in Warsaw in December 1942. Hania, with her son and Zosia, initially stayed in Otwock on the right-bank of the Vistula, and later moved into Warsaw and lived with Lea and Hela at 13 Krochmalna Street. , in a room on the third floor. "All our

15 On November 10, 1942, the Germans established in Sandomierz what they called "a remnant ghetto". Jews who survived the liquidation of the first ghetto and those brought from the Reich were gathered here, making a total of about 7,000 people. In January 1943, the Sandomierz ghetto was fully liquidated. At that time, about 700 Jews still able to work were taken to a labor camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna, and the other approx. 6,300 were deported to the death camp in Treblinka.

16 Lea Zoberman, YVA, O33.1787, 16.

17 Ibid., 19.

walls are papered with saintly images… There are three of us in the Krochmalna flat and we struggle materially. We jointly pitch in to buy what we can so that we don't starve to death."[18] After being blackmailed at Krochmalna, Lea and Hania moved to a room on Grzybowska Street. After arriving in Warsaw, Aleksander went to the flat of a schoolmate, Tadeusz Wittich, who with his newly married wife lived at 7 Śniadeckich Street in a tiny room. And even though it was very cramped there, the couple took in the fugitive.

Celina Grynszpan ("Janina Skoczowska") with her husband Hersz (Henryk, "Franciszek Dębowy") and cousin Samek Kurcbart ("Stanisław Wachowski"), with the help of a paid Pole, escaped from the Mokoszyn camp on April 23, 1943. In Warsaw, they went to recommended addresses, but no one wanted to take them in: the Ghetto Uprising was underway, arrests had intensified, and there was a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion. Celina managed to get a toehold near Warsaw at an estate in Antonin as a housekeeper, but soon, overly abused, she gave up. Thanks to an advert, she found a job as a maid at an estate just outside Falenty near Warsaw. For 120 złoties a month she cleaned 10 rooms, served tables, churned butter, did laundry, mended clothes, cleaned shoes, etc. Celina's cousin became a night watchman, while her husband, who took up residence in an attic in the district of Marymont, became involved in the underground (he was a pre-war Polish Army officer) and had contact with officials who issued documents. On his own initiative he saw to it that many Jews in hiding received them. As Lea Zoberman recalls, "Franek has a mustache and wears high boots, in which there is always a revolver. He works in an underground organization, has contacts, and we will help our people together. We have the required paperwork and stamps at our disposal. (…) We are starting to work together, forging *Kennkartes* and birth certificates."[19]

3 Setting Up Life in Warsaw: A Roof Over One's Head

Aleksander Wasserman felt like an intruder in the Wittichs' tiny room – indeed, all three slept in the same bed. Tadeusz, who earned money from various businesses, including shady ones, showed kindness and willingness to help, but it was urgent for Aleksander to find other lodgings. Meanwhile, Aleksander's mother ran into her son's schoolmate Bronek Walkowicz on the street. He was being helped by a junior-high school teacher from Kalisz, a Silesian who had signed the *Volksliste*. He

18 Ibid., 20.

19 Ibid.

arranged for Bronek and his wife, Genia Alter, to live in nearby Mińsk Mazowiecki, where Bronek, as a protégé of this important *Volksdeutsch*, became manager of a sawmill. He had money, led a rich social life, threw parties, and received many guests. He offered to help Felicja Wasserman and located a flat for her in Mińsk. Some time later, suspected of collaborating with the Germans, Bronek was killed by the Polish underground.

Alexander, in turn, ran into an acquaintance from Sandomierz, Nach Rozenberg ("Marian Kozlowski"), who was renting a double room from a Polish woman and Nach offered him the chance to stay there. Wasserman moved in with him. They lived at Mrs. Stróżewska's, on the corner of Marszałkowska and Koszykowa on the third floor. The neglected room and a kitchen had seen better days: on the wall hung portraits of ancestors in gilded frames, there were many beautiful trinkets, and the 70-year-old landlady had "the manners and behavior fit for a royal court. (…) Accompanying her was a kind of lady-in-waiting in the person of one Władysława. Władysława obeyed every order of her 'mistress,' [as when she] said: 'My Władysława, please serve dinner to the gentlemen.' At these grandiose words Władysława, with a serious countenance, would bring a pot of potatoes to our room."[20] Alexander and Nach also had to keep up appearances; they were destitute, had no jobs, yet carefully maintained the pretense that they were working somewhere and earning money. "So the claim was made that we did a little trading on the side, something that in occupied *Warszawa* was quite well regarded. That's why, regardless the weather, we left the house for a couple of hours every day. We wandered aimlessly around the city, getting wet in the rain or freezing in the cold. We spared our clothes as much as we could, as it was imperative to look decent. We walked around hungry. Our daily ration consisted of a piece of dry bread and bitter coffee in the morning and evening, and dry potatoes for dinner. In front of Mrs. Stróżewska we pretended to be eating out, and that the potatoes Władysława cooked for us were just our whim. As we'd say 'they're awfully tasty.' I suspect, however, that Stróżewska was aware that those potatoes were the basis of our nourishment. After all, she and Władysława also knew hunger well, but never admitted it or complained."[21]

The living arrangements on Koszykowa ended on May 12, 1943, when the building was hit by a bomb during a Soviet air raid and burned down. At first, Aleksander moved around among his friends, then found a room from an advert at the home of a former military officer, Mr. Kowalski, at 10 Mińska Street, close to the home of his mother, who was then renting a room from one Mrs. Kowalowa in the district of Żoliborz. Here Aleksander settled under the new name "Michał

20 Aleksander Wasserman, 81.

21 Ibid., 82.

Mielczarek," which he maintained until he left Poland in 1957. Owing to the help of Antoni Kornacki, he soon also found a good job.

Jews dwelling in Warsaw thanks to Aryan papers did not only bump into each other by chance on the street, as happened to the Wassermans, but also kept in deliberate, regular contact. "Every Sunday we go to the church, where we meet with all our Jewish acquaintances," wrote Lea Zoberman. "This is the safest place to gather, and this is how we manage contacts with escapees from the ghetto, along with newcomers joining our mutual acquaintances."[22]

When the Lutheran hospital was closed during the Ghetto Uprising, Lea found work in a glass and china shop owned by one of her former patients. "In the store where I work," she noted in her memoirs, "there is a public telephone, the owners of the store are very decent, and in time they developed faith in me, entrusting me with the keys to the store and, for the most part, leaving me alone in the store. This helps me immensely in contacting my friends, with the store becoming a kind of speak-easy for anyone in need of help."[23] Among other persons, Lea helped her friend from Sandomierz, Frydka Nusbaum, take care of her family in hiding in Warsaw. This group of 15 people was staying in a cramped hiding place behind a false wall at the home of a Pole. They dared not show themselves because of their "bad" appearance. They therefore had to be supplied with food, medicine, etc. Chaim Janowski, who was Frydka's friend from Sandomierz, came to her in Warsaw with his father (who had jumped off a train to Treblinka and broken his arm) after unsuccessful attempts to hide in the countryside. Chaim carried new papers (his name was now "Karol Wirtek"), found work with the Germans after a few weeks, and began helping Frydka take care of her family. Chaim's father, Mordechai, also helped: once having settled near Warsaw he became busy bringing food acquired in the village via trade for things he took there from the city. Chaim, along with some of the Nusbaum family, decided to go to the Hotel Polski[24] – he survived in Bergen-Belsen, where several

22 Lea Zoberman, 20.

23 Ibid., 22.

24 The Germans, having fellow citizens interned by the Allies, planned to exchange them for Jewish citizens of neutral countries. Jewish organizations from Switzerland, with the support of the Polish diplomatic mission in Bern, arranged for Jews in the General Government to obtain passports from South American countries. When the documents arrived in late 1942 and early 1943 in Warsaw, most of the people for whom they were intended were already dead. These documents could therefore be bought (Jewish agents of the Gestapo acted as intermediaries in the transactions) and thus was born the "Hotel Polski affair." Over the spring and summer of 1943 the Germans gathered Jews with foreign passports at the Hotel Polski at 29 Długa Street. Some of them were deported to camps in Vittel and Bergen-Belsen, while several hundred were shot at Pawiak. On April 19 and May 18, 1944, Warsaw Jews were sent to Auschwitz, where most of them perished. For further details on the story of the Hotel Polski, see: Haska 2006.

members of the Nusbaum family also survived (thanks to Palestinian papers). Mordechai Janowski was handed over to the Germans by Poles and murdered.[25]

Lea brought her family to Warsaw after her sister, Frania (Freidla, b. 1922), who was at a camp in Radom, had informed her that, "they are about to liquidate this camp and send everyone to concentration camps." So, Lea recounted, "I prepared a [baptismal?] certificate, stole a liturgical book at the church, put the certificate inside the cover, sealing it up without a trace. Then I sent it to the address she indicated, writing in an enclosed letter that we have treasured this holy book in the family for many generations, that she should pray often and be careful not to destroy the cover. She understood. She took the certificate out of the cover and thanks to the selfless help of Heszel Szlafsztajn, who was in the same camp, she slipped out while going to work, hid somewhere in a pigsty – and then partly by cart, a little by train (illegally), she came to me in Warsaw."[26]

By then, Lea was already living on Chocimska Street. She and Hania had had to leave their previous lodgings after blackmailers struck, so they then split up and lived apart. Later, Lea got the remaining family out (she had false documents for all of them). She rescued her mother from the camp in Starachowice, who then became a housekeeper at the home of Mrs. Zofia Bereźnicka, Lea's former patient. Her other sister Gitla (Gucia, b. 1917, "Elżbieta Szymańska") and father (Samuel, "Jan Zamojski"), rescued from the Pionki camp, also found themselves in Warsaw. Gitla bleached her hair and got a job washing dishes in a restaurant. One evening as she was walking home, some little 10–11 year old boy began calling after her, "Jewess, Jewess." Gucia ran away, but long terrified by the incident, she stopped leaving the flat. She read, sewed, knitted, but most often she stood in the corner of the room looking out the window and envying people who walked the streets in relative freedom.[27]

Officially, only Lea Zoberman and her sister Frania lived in the room on Chocimska Street. Nonetheless, they were concealing (including from the landlords) her father and Gucia, too. Her dad slept in the only bed, his three daughters on a mattress on the floor. Frania started working, but, as Lea recalls, "our joint earnings are not enough for decent food, especially since we have to feed Dad and Gucia, who are hidden with me. There is a cafe near my workplace where they sell cookies – I asked the owner for a few dozen and then Frania takes them to the factory to sell them for a profit. They were cookies with cream. I remember that we often opened the boxes of

25 For more details on the fates of the Nusbaum and Janowski families, see: VHA 3687 Mark Nusbaum, VHA 18540 Josef Janowski, VHA 1310 Solomon Nusbaum, VHA 5506 Chana Nusbaum, VHA 22206 Aron Nusbaum.

26 Lea Zoberman, 26.

27 VHA 27050 Gertrude Kupfer née Zoberman.

cookies and scooped out the cream with a spoon. I later delivered it home, because Dad and Gucia looked horrible."[28]

Runia Ceylon escaped from Sandomierz in the fall of 1942, and in January 1943 her husband Chilek arrived under the alias "Wójcikowski". Chilek (b. 1916 in Sandomierz) was a sports instructor at the Maccabi club, and during the occupation he organized a Jewish underground unit whose members were murdered by partisans of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, underground Polish forces).[29] The Ceylons initially worked in a vegetable drying room in the district of Grochów, but after blackmailers descended, they had to change their address, jobs, and papers. They obtained documents under different names from friends in Sandomierz, and since they wanted to be together, they decided to get officially married in a church. "Sprinkled by the priest" they moved in together. "We couldn't forget this comedy for a long time," Lea recalls. Lea additionally counts among the tragicomedy the time when Mrs. Bereźnicka's daughter Ewa, with whom her mother lived, was detained by the Gestapo, suspected of being Jewish – though she was a native Pole. Mrs. Bereźnicka, though having no idea who Lea was, begged her to go to the station to certify her daughter's Aryan origin. "On my way to the Gestapo, I laughed so hysterically," Lea recalls, "that tears streamed down my face, and when Ewa finally saw me, she assumed I was crying over her fate. I managed to prove [her origin] with my Aryan face and insolence. I made a scene for the Germans that no actress could have outperformed."[30]

Another Sandomierz woman, the dentist Genia Rosenberg ("Michalewska"), worked as a cleaning lady at an orphanage run by nuns while her husband hid elsewhere and did not leave his lodgings. Genia visited him often and became pregnant: "At the orphanage there was nothing unusual [in the fact] that Miss Genia Michalewska gave birth to an illegitimate boy, but it was necessary to baptize him." Lea Zoberman and Heniek Grynszpan became the godparents. Zosia, Hania Skotnicka's Polish maid, instructed them on how to behave during the ceremony. They studied the prayers all night, but Heniek, feeling insecure and fearful of being caught, drank vodka for comfort. In the church, he could barely stay on his feet, and when the priest asked what he wanted for the baby, he muttered "vodka, Father. Please, vodka." The priest, "apparently accustomed to his drunken sheep," nevertheless gave the boy baptism. "These tragicomedies kept us alive, and with our collective help we were able to go on living," Lea stressed.[31]

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28 Lea Zoberman, 27.

29 YVA O3.3631 Chil (diminutive: Chilek) Ceylon.

30 Lea Zoberman, 29.

31 Ibid., 23.

4 Setting Up Life in Warsaw: Work and Sources of Income

"The fact of having a permanent job for people living on Aryan papers had great significance and impact on their safety," wrote Aleksander Wasserman. "Employment guaranteed asylum for many hours a day and counter-balanced the many hours hitherto spent aimlessly loitering in the streets. (…) The legitimacy from a workplace was a kind of guarantee of non-Jewish origin and made people less suspicious of the holder. Sometimes a steady job protected one from the numerous roundups. Finally, the money one received for work was not to be despised, although it was simply a pittance and very difficult to live on."[32] Some jobs offered special protection. Mosze Flakowicz, another refugee from Sandomierz, and earlier from Kalisz, recalls that the certificate of employment in a German company "which I received, turned out to be excellent protection and cover. It was a certificate from the Ministry of Armaments, with a swastika and SS stamps, and with the date renewed every two weeks."[33]

For the group of Sandomierz Jews in Warsaw, the place where Frania Zoberman found work is extremely significant – namely, the Toebbens furrier manufacturer. It was initially located in the ghetto, and from May 1943 (after the ghetto's liquidation) it was on the Aryan side, on Płocka Street. Hania Skotnicka and Aleksander Wasserman also worked there. They managed to get hired thanks to "Antoni Kornacki," whose real name was Abraham Kupferblum and who also came from Sandomierz. Born in 1903, he graduated with a degree in chemistry from Liege, Belgium. From 1936 he lived with his wife Fela in Warsaw, where he ran his own business. In 1940 their daughter Ewa was born, and just shortly afterwards they had to move to the ghetto. Abraham, as a specialist in curing hides, was hired by Toebbens[34] where he became an important official and had influence over the hiring of new employees. Thanks to him, "Flakowicz (…), a Kalisz bourgeois, unfortunately a handicap, as he was deaf," found work.[35] The Jew Mosze Flakowicz (b. 1911), co-owner of a Kalisz filigree and lace company, had lost his hearing in childhood as a result of complications from scarlet fever. However, he was able to speak and lip-read, graduated from a craft school for the deaf in Austria, and became a mechanic. He married and had two sons. During the war, they were displaced from Kalisz to Sandomierz, from where they escaped further displacement. Flakowicz's contacts in the deaf community helped.

32 Wasserman, 87.

33 Komem 2019, 215.

34 Eva Kuper, Wywiad VHA 47111, also Kuper 2017, 45–70.

35 Wasserman, 111. On the fates of deaf Jews in the concentration camps see Zurov 2016, 135–145.

His wife ("Mirosława Łagiewska") with her sons Józek ("Marek Łagiewski") and Ignas ("Marian Dąbrowski") first lived with the Jaworskis, a deaf couple in Sandomierz, from where they went to Brzesko, where they found accommodation thanks to the help of Antoni Herbert, a deaf antiquarian. The father of the family ("Mateusz Filipkowski") went to Warsaw, visited the family in Brzesko, and in 1943, when his wife was recognized on the street by an acquaintance from Kalisz who began blackmailing her, he brought them to Warsaw. He himself wore "a broad yellow armband with three black circles arranged in a triangle and an inscription in bold Gothic font in German and Polish: Taubstumm – Deaf and Dumb."[36] In the fall of 1943, he came across an advert in a Warsaw newspaper seeking a mechanic – and that's how he landed a job at Toebbens' furrier factory. He was shown around the factory, having it explained which machines needed repair. As Flakowicz recalls, "But I didn't pay attention to the machines. Instead, I looked at people's faces to see if anyone might know me and be able to turn me in. Scanning the faces of strangers, I came across the familiar face of Aleksander Wasserman from Kalisz. He was (…) a blond-haired man with blue eyes, a very handsome, beautiful young man, but now he looked bad. He also recognized me, but we pretended not to know each other. (…) I thought to myself that since Wasserman could work in this factory, it would certainly be suitable for me as well, and there'd be no special concern that I would be exposed."[37]

A feeling of camaraderie and trust developed among the Toebbens employees, as evinced in the frequently conducted radio "broadcasts" that were "transmitted" through a large tin tube. Parodying the official German press, real news from the front was reported from the underground. Moreover, a female employee blessed with a beautiful voice sang the most fashionable songs. "Our cheekiness and courage were strong," Wasserman reminisces. "Broadcasting enemy news was a lot of fun, albeit one could pay heavily for it. However, we counted on the solidarity of the listeners and the general hatred that everyone felt toward the Germans. (…) Sometimes even Marmor himself listened to our broadcasts, laughing himself to tears."[38] The Ludwik Marmor in question here was one of the directors of the company; he was generally thought of as a German or Volksdeutsch.[39] In reality, however, he was neither one nor the other; he was also Jewish. Born in 1917 in Chrzanów, not far from Kraków[40] to a middle-class, moderately religious Jewish

36 Komem 2019, 38.

37 Ibid., 214.

38 Wasserman, 90.

39 Ibid., 88.

40 VHA 49840, interview with Louis Marmor. After the war, Ludwik Marmor founded a furrier company in Warsaw, and sponsored the football club "Polonia." In 1948 he married Halina Bryskin, and in 1949 they moved permanently to Paris. Here he owned an exclusive fur store near Place Vendôme.

family with eight children, Ludwik graduated from a trade school in Kraków, became a furrier, and together with his brother ran a business there before the war. In September 1939, together with several men from his family, he escaped to the east, but they only reached Sokołów Małopolski where Germans caught up with them. They wanted to rob the group of Jews, but since Ludwik spoke excellent German, he defended them. This encounter with the Germans, and going unrecognized, was at the heart of the plan to pretend to be a non-Jew. He had the perfect attributes for this: he was a blue-eyed, tall blond man who spoke perfect Polish and German. After returning to Kraków in the fall of 1939, a Jewish acquaintance produced a new birth certificate for him: from Salomon (Shulim) he became Ludwik, and Chyrów was given as his place of birth (for the reason that it was in territories occupied by the USSR, and thus it was more difficult to check birth certificates). His surname, however, remained the same. On the basis of his new birth certificate, Marmor registered new documents and was swiftly functioning in Kraków as an Aryan. He took up trade in the fur business and helped his family. When there was talk of deporting the Jews from Kraków, Ludwik's large family – his siblings with their spouses and children – found a house in nearby Wolbrom, where they moved. Only the youngest sister, Maria,[41] stayed with her parents in Chrzanów (incorporated together with Upper Silesia into the Third Reich, and therefore separated from Kraków by a border). Ludwik did not live with them. While looking for work one day he read an advertisement in the *Krakauer Zeitung* that a German company in Gdańsk (Danzig) was looking for a skilled furrier. Since it was considered safe to work for the Germans, Ludwik wrote to Gdańsk and in response received an invitation to an interview at the Bristol Hotel in Warsaw. Marmor had sufficient experience in the industry, liked the German, and was hired in Fritz Schultz's company. To his surprise, Ludwik was given a pass to the ghetto, as the Schultz company, which supplied the Wehrmacht, was located in the ghetto's closed-off district at 44 Nowolipki Street.

Marmor settled in Warsaw at 70 Chmielna Street, and went into the ghetto every day to work. As he says in a personal account, the ghetto itself made a horrid, terribly sad impression on him. He tried (in special double-sleeve cuffs) to bring medicine for the needy, but was denounced by Jews who collaborated with the Germans. This might have ended very badly, but Schultz merely fired him. A few days later he found a job with a competitor: he was hired by Walther Toebbens, another German furrier factory.

There he met Halina Bryskin, daughter of the owner of the large Warsaw fur manufacturer "Kamchatka." He fell in love with her, made Aryan papers for her ("Maria Turczyńska") so she could work in his office, and later he set her up in

41 The parents – Jakub and Anna – were killed. Maria survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, see: VHA 3265, interview with Maria Marmor.

accommodation near Warsaw. It was not until after the war that Halina found out that Ludwik was a Jew. Her friend Regina Eber remembers that a German, the director Marmor, had a crush on Halinka, and this is why he helped Jews. She and her sister did not know what to think of him, and were a little leery of him. Nevertheless, they accepted his selfless help in escaping from the ghetto (Eber 2018, 72–74).[42] Ludwik Marmor did not want to leave Warsaw when the Toebbens firm moved to the Lublin area in the spring of 1943, so he suggested to his boss that they set up a workshop in the city. Already during the Ghetto Uprising in early May 1943, machines were transported to the company's new headquarters on Płocka Street.

Ludwik recalls that, as far as he knows, at least sixteen Jews with Aryan papers worked there, all of whom survived until the Warsaw Uprising. In addition to the radio performances described above and mentioned by Wasserman, there was other entertainment: Marmor organized a soccer team from among the Toebbens' employees. Toebbens himself was an avid soccer player having been a goalkeeper for Hamburg's representative team before the war.[43]

5 *Szmalcownicy* – 'Blackmailers,' 'Extortionists,' 'Scum'

Lurking for Jews hiding on Aryan papers in *Warszawa* was a range of threatening figures: from German soldiers, agents, and policemen to both professional and volunteer denunciators. Of course, the overriding threat to Jews was posed by the Germans, who however were not able to catch all the escapees from the ghetto. Therefore, on a day-to-day basis, the immediate threat to Jews arose from those who denounced them to the Germans or robbed them, and who blackmailed them with threats of handing them over to the Germans. The Polish term widely used for such dregs is *szmalcownicy*, which sounds rather like slime or scum. Each of the most active protagonists in the aid network described here encountered them at least several times. Lea Zoberman was tracked down by them in her flat at the beginning of her stay in Warsaw: "I'm with Hania Skotnicka and Frania in the flat when one evening two visitors pound on the door announcing that they are from the *Kripo* [German criminal police] and want money. They know that we are Jewish and start to upend the entire flat. They found all our savings, took them, and, seeing our confusion and unhappy faces, decided that we should disappear from the flat and

42 See also VHA 18819, Regina Eber.

43 Rzeczpospolita, February 28, 2014, "Byliśmy piłkarzami z żelaza", rozmowa ze Zdzisławem Sosnowskim, https://sport.rp.pl/pilka-nozna/art12607951-bylismy-pilkarzami-z-zelaza.

Sosnowski was a well-known Polish goalkeeperi During the war he played in the Toebbens team.

cover our tracks, because someone else might come and we would end up at the Gestapo. We took our modest bundles and moved to our aunt in the Saska Kępa district."[44] Tanchum Kupferblum ("Stanislaw Kornacki" and the brother of "Antoni") and his wife Mala escaped from Sandomierz to Warsaw during the liquidation of the ghetto and as he later wrote: "Ever since escaping from Sandomierz, we were constantly subjected to robbery and inhumane treatment by elements of the blackmailers, Blue Police, and sometimes the *Kripo*. Several dozen times we lost all material resources enabling us to survive."[45]

A few days after arriving in Warsaw, Aleksander Wasserman was accosted on the street by two *szmalcownicy* who dragged him into a gateway. "They asked if I wasn't Jewish by any chance. I denied it, showed an identity card of my own making (…) They had not yet seen any counterfeit cards that came from the provinces"[46] and so they let him go. As he writes in his memoirs, over time he gained experience on how to avoid the blackmailers' approaches: "I knew that you should not hang around aimlessly in a single place, that you should always walk very fast to give the appearance of being pressed for time, that you should not carry any notes or under any circumstances tell even your best friend where you live. It was necessary to always stash an object of value with you, in order to have something to bail you out in case of a mugging attempt."[47] Such behavior, however, did not protect Alexander from further assault by *szmalcownicy*. One day, he was stopped on the street by three men who presented themselves as secret police agents and demanded his documents. They took his ID, put him in a cab and headed for the Gestapo headquarters on Szucha Avenue. It turned out that they were led to his trail by an acquaintance from Kalisz, a Jew also hiding in Warsaw, Niko Pinczewski, whom the blackmailers had "robbed" the previous day. Apparently, the price of ransom was to turn over other Jews, which was in fact one of the methods of the Warsaw blackmailers. Wasserman ultimately managed to convince the *szmalcownicy* to let him go. He was nonetheless supposed to come the next day to pick up his detained *Kennkarte* at an agreed cafe with a larger sum of money. Instead of him, however, Tadek Wittich went and settled the matter with the extortionists, telling Wasserman that "maybe someday he would understand all this better."[48] Perhaps it was the suspicion that Wittich had contacts with the Germans that some of Wasserman's acquaintances warned him about Wittich. However, towards Alexander he always behaved altogether loyally and

44 Lea Zoberman, 28.
45 Letter from Stanisław Kornacki in: YVA. M/31/2/6660, in the file of Waleria Gałecka.
46 Aleksander Wasserman, 78.
47 Ibid., 78.
48 Ibid., 81–84.

helped him as much as he could.[49] After this "adventure" Alexander had to change both his dwelling and his name. He survived several more blackmail attacks, including one on Wilson Square where he was accosted by two of them demanding documents. He managed to buy his way out with a gold watch, "which, as a thing of value, I carried with me foreseeing such circumstances."[50] Wasserman met with another blackmail attempt from two "rogue amateurs" on a streetcar heading to Żoliborz. He bought them off for 400 złoties. But just a few days later he met them again on a streetcar going in the opposite direction. He coughed up another 400 złoties and they all went to drink vodka as friends. "From the conversation I learned from my pursuers that they had regular customers living in Żoliborz and that they simply looked for them on the streetcars. They were well aware that there was only one thoroughfare leading from Żoliborz to the downtown."[51] From then on, Aleksander stopped taking the streetcar, opting to walk to work – 7 km one way.

A serious threat to the group of Sandomierz Jews was posed by Polish acquaintances who followed them to Warsaw. One of them, "Romański, met Chilek [Ceylon] on the street, dragged him into a passage way, took all his money and, before fleeing, warned him they would meet again. Zosia (…), the sister of Abraham and Tanchun Kupferblum, had the same experience."[52] Lea Zoberman recalls that one afternoon in the store where she worked "I heard a familiar voice saying 'I have you at last, Jew'. I turned around and saw the son of Dr. Sobolewski, who bluntly gave the amount he wanted from me, warning me that across the street was the son of the photographer Kolecki."[53] They had a list of Sandomierz Jews hiding in Warsaw. Lea called Heniek Grynszpan ("Frank Dębowy") to bring the money, and at the same time "by an arranged signal I notified him that there was a fire and that he should immediately come with a fireman to put it out." Franek soon came with a comrade, both of them "wearing high boots with guns in them." They then left with the extortionists to "cut a deal" in nearby ruins. After a while, Heniek returned and announced to Lea that "everything was fine, that I shouldn't ask any questions […] that I shouldn't worry, I wouldn't see them again."[54]

49 After the war, Tadeusz Wittich was accused of collaboration with the Gestapo and the handing over of Poles and Jews, but the testimony of witnesses, including Wasserman, cleared him of these charges and the investigation was discontinued after several months, in November 1946. See: IPN GK 366/1007, Prosecutor's Office of the Special Criminal Court in Warsaw, Case Files: Tadeusz Wittich/Wittych.

50 Aleksander Wasserman, 93.

51 Ibid., 93.

52 VHA 54762 Stanley Kornacki, (Tanchum Kupferblum).

53 Lea Zoberman, 30.

54 Ibid., 30–31.

6 Help from Poles

All the Jews in the group of about 40 Sandomierz residents mentioned here had various kinds of contact with Poles. They received (or bought) documents or document blanks from Polish people, rented flats from them, and worked for them. Not all such Poles realized that they were dealing with Jews. Nor were these contacts always in the nature of assistance – they could also involve trade exchanges, transactions, or business deals. Help, understood as hiding Jews, who often did not leave their shelter, and taking care of them, was provided for those in the group under discussion here by Waleria Gałecka, who lived in a room with a kitchen at 55a Twarda Street, Flat 26. In the fall of 1943, Abram Kupferblum placed his brother Tanchum and his wife Mala with her."[55] Dr. Mieczysław Bakman and his son Jurek also hid with her, as did other Jews periodically. Abram paid for the upkeep of the Kupferblums, and also materially helped Ms. Gałecka's brother, Jan Cieślakowski, who was ill with tuberculosis: "We had a quiet and safe life there, since apart from the caretaker and administrator no one ever came to see us, and if a stranger did come, we hid in a closet or the bathroom. When in Warsaw before that, after every mugging by *szmalcownicy* we had to change our names and official documents with forged birth certificates and Aryan documents, something facilitated by our friend (…) Henryk Grynszpan." The Jews hiding at Gałecka's home also began to receive help from the underground organization over time through Abram's friend from junior high in Sandomierz, Reicher ("Kaminski"). He brought his brother "2,000 for each Jew in hiding. My brother [Abram], at the risk of his life, personally distributed the money, the receipt of which each Jew confirmed on the list, giving a usually fictitious name, and foregoing an address. We also received money from England distributed by the Polish organization to which General Kamiński belonged. Not only us, but our whole family and people from Sandomierz benefited from this aid."[56] This of course refers to the aid given to Jews by Żegota (funded by the Polish Government in Exile) or the ŻKN (the Jewish National Committee). Since everything was done in secret, Jews did not need to know exactly which organization was giving them aid. What is important is that Poles and Jews were active in the aid network, and the aid reached those in hiding most often through other Jews.

A second case of protective assistance from Poles for the group of Jews from Sandomierz concerns a child: thanks to their care, Abraham Kupferblum's daughter Ewa, born in 1940, survived the occupation. She began life with her parents in the

55 301/6237, Waleria Gałecka, also the file for Gałecka in: YVA. M/31/2/6660.

56 YVA. M/31/2/6660, Galecka's folder, in Stanislaw Kornacki's letter. I have not found the names of the Kornacki family on the surviving lists of Żegota or ŻKN wards; nor have I been able to find any information on Reicher ("General Kaminski").

ghetto, and during the deportation in the summer of 1942 found herself with her mother on a transport to Treblinka. She was pulled out of Umschlagplatz at the last moment by her aunt, Regina Bankier, who worked as a guard at the Jewish prison on Gęsia Street. Little Ewa's mother, Fela, was killed. During what ensued, her father hid with her in the cellar below a workshop, though they soon had to leave because the others hiding there could not accept the presence of the child, which posed too great a danger. At Abraham's request a physician friend, Dr. Lande, placed Ewa on the Aryan side with Hanna Rembowska,[57] who was already caring for a little girl named Zosia. Unfortunately, Mrs. Rembowska had tuberculosis and Dr. Lande, fearing that she might infect the children, within a few months arranged for them to be moved to a convent in Zakopane, in the Polish Tatra Mountains, where the nuns cared for blind children.[58] Safe with them, Ewa survived until the end of the occupation.[59]

7 The Warsaw Uprising

On August 1, 1944, Jews in hiding, like all Varsovians, became civilians or fighting participants in the Uprising. Lea and Frania Zoberman managed to reach their flat on Chocimska Street before 5 pm (at which moment the Uprising broke out), but lost contact with their mother for many months. After a few days, all four of them, along with residents of Czerniaków, found themselves in the transit camp in Pruszków, approx. 20 km outside Warsaw, from where they were taken to Stuthoff. Next they were dispatched to dig trenches near Grudziądz and Lea worked as a nurse in the infirmary. She escaped during the evacuation in February 1945 and was reunited with her remaining family in Warsaw. Her mother – deported to forced labor in the Reich – joined them in May.

On August 1, Hersz Grynszpan (Franciszek Dębowy pseud. "Henryk") joined his wife, who lived in the district of Marymont, north of the city center. After a dozen or so days, he joined the insurgents and became an officer in the first company, "Żubr" [Bison] battalion, which arrived in Żoliborz (also a northern district of Warsaw) from the Kampinos Forest on August 15. Celina asked him not to take part in the fighting,

57 Hanna Rembowska (1912–1947) was an illustrator of children's books who worked in the preschool of the Workers' Society of the Friends of Children in Warsaw's Żoliborz district.

58 There is an inconsistency here: sister Klara Jaroszyńska, who was herself in the Zakopane area, hiding another nun (from Laski, where the nuns assisted the blind) due to her Aryan appearance, mentions in her account (AYV, O3.6990) that while on a trip to Kraków to get help from the RGO already after the Warsaw Uprising, she met Hanna Rembowska with two Jewish girls (in Kraków) and took one of them – namely, Ewa, whom she then took care of until the end of the occupation. Ewa, in turn, says that she was in the religious house together with other children.

59 VHA 47111, interview with Evą Kuper.

"to spare himself, as some did. (…) My words are to no avail. He stubbornly claims that this is what he lives for, to avenge the deaths of our families and friends. 'You are very dear to me, but more dear to me now is the cause'," [60] he replied. Grynszpan was severely wounded in combat with the Germans and died on the morning of September 2, as recalled by his wife, who was by his side in the insurgent's hospital. He was buried ceremonially, with the participation of a chaplain, in the courtyard at 6 Krechowiecka Street. After the war, his body was moved to the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street.[61]

Also fighting in Żoliborz was Aleksander Wasserman. Initially, he and his mother experienced the Uprising as civilians in a basement, but as he recalls, "at the urging of a friend I met, Antek Majorek, I signed up for the insurgent army." He joined the OWPPS[62] and fought in a sapper platoon. At the end of September, wounded in the shoulder, he was evacuated with some trouble to a hospital in Tworki, from where he went to Piotrków Trybunalski after convalescence. There in October 1944, after the fall of the Uprising, the Toebbens workshops were moved. Aleksander Wasserman, Hania Skotnicka, Cesia Grynszpan, Flakowicz, as well as Kupferblum and Marmor found their way there. The company operated until January 27, 1945 when the Germans fled – a few days later the Red Army entered Piotrków.

All the main characters in this story left Poland – some sooner, some later – after the war.

8 Conclusions

I have described the story of a group of Jews who, in Nazi-ruled Warsaw in the period 1942–1944, showed courage, ingenuity, and determination to avoid death and save their loved ones. The story deals with the key problems of hiding from the Germans: a roof over one's head, sources of income, and the greatest scourge of the Aryan side – the nefarious deeds of *szmalcownicy*, those who preyed on Jews in hiding. A response to these dangers came with the mutual help that Jews in occupied Warsaw extended to each other. They formed a natural network of help based on prior acquaintanceships formed in their town of Sandomierz: their "emotional community" helped them save each other in difficult moments, and provided a base for material aid and emotional support. I took great care in describing this group of

60 Celina Grynszpan, AŻIH 302/53, k. 268.

61 AŻIH, 302/53, the account of Celina Grynspan, k. 12–29 (manuscript, the entire notebook is devoted to the Uprising).

62 The Military Units of the Socialist Insurgent Army, formerly the WRN People's Guard.

Sandomierz Jews in order to make a clear departure from the harmful stereotypes about the activeness of Polish helpers and the passiveness of the Jews who benefited from the selfless kindness of Poles. Like those Jews I describe here, thousands of other Jews in hiding were also active on the Aryan side in Warsaw.

This small help network proved effective: a majority of those in the group – Jews from Sandomierz – survived the war. They owed their survival not only to mutual help, but also to the personal qualities and resources they possessed. This included non-Jewish physical appearance ("good looks"); assimilation into Polish culture; linguistic skills in Polish and German; useful professional skills; links to both Germans (esp. employers) and Poles; along with such psychological traits as adaptability, flexibility, and courage.

The mutual help of people who were persecuted, excluded, and threatened with death is deserving of very special attention. In the efforts of the circle of Sandomierz Jews described in this article, one can see how much help they gave each other, how often survival depended on co-operation between them, on mutual support – and on sheer altruism. How starkly injurious is the notion of Jewish passivity, for on an outright daily basis Jews in occupied Poland made many risky and bold decisions impacting the chances for saving themselves and their loved ones. It is very important to me to emphasize the (albeit limited) agency of the Jews – the determination, initiative, ingenuity, perseverance, and courage they displayed while hiding on the Aryan side.

Memories of war, told or written down years later, often – as is the case here – have the tenor of an adventure story in which emphasis is placed on the fact that the protagonist emerges unscathed from various dire threats owing to their dexterity, reflexes, ability to adapt to novel situations, and sometimes to bravado. However, let's not be fooled by anecdotes and the "happy ending," i.e., the fact that most of the Jews in the group described here survived the war. Beneath the seemingly "airy" language of the stories gathered here are dark feelings and gruesome experiences – ones Celina Grynszpan alluded to: "No one can comprehend our tragedy. The tragedy of people with no tomorrow, who nevertheless want to live, whose instinct for self-preservation pushes them to flee from the cemetery, from the hail of bullets, from behind bars, from under the whip, and from the hell of Treblinka. To flee into the abyss. After all, no one wanted us and no one extended a helping hand towards us. Those who do not know the tragedy of those who escape from a train wagon, wandering blindly, perishing at the hands of one's fellow countrymen, or handed over by them to the German torturers, do not know what black despair is. Nor even do we, who have lived through so much. We ourselves do not realize the enormity of the suffering and torment we witnessed. We lived as if under narcosis."[63]

63 Celina Grynszpan, k. 180.

Research ethics: Not applicable.
Informed consent: Not applicable.
Author contributions: Not applicable.
Use of Large Language Models, AI and Machine Learning Tools: None declared.
Conflict of interest: The author states no conflict of interest.
Research funding: NCN 2019/35/B/HS3/02899.
Data availability: Not applicable.

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