



Renata Guzera From the Darkness

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BA Diploma

**From the Darkness. Archive and present time.
Aspects of memory.**

Kraków, 2018/2019

*From the Darkness. Archive and present time.
Aspects of memory.*

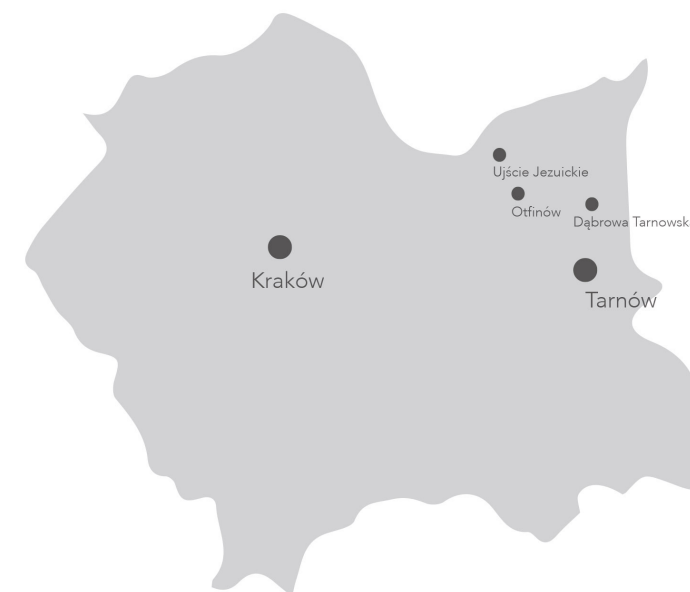
Table of contents

1. Genesis
2. Archival photo
3. History
4. Portraits
5. The desire to find the answer
6. Lists of Testimonies
7. The barn as a symbol of the process
8. Continuation
9. References
10. Technical description



Genesis

The work *From the Darkness - archives and present times. Aspects of memory* is based on photographic archive of a local photographer Stanisław Chłoń (1912-1993) - my grandfather's uncle, who worked mainly in small towns in the vicinity of Tarnów, Dąbrowa Tarnowska County in Poland. The negatives I have developed go back to 1960s' – 1980s', and had been found in the basement of his home in Otfinów (Lesser Poland Voivodeship). The impulse to start the project was, accidentally discovered archival photo from World War II, which was shared on Facebook by my mother's cousin.



Archival Photo

The photograph posted on Facebook shows my great-grandmother Katarzyna Koziół, and her sister Józefa Chłoń, serving some refreshments to the Blue Policemen, who, as I assumed, visited my family's home in Otfinów. In the background there is a barn that might be the prototype of the barn located on yard of our house. However, my family members disagree on where exactly the photograph was taken. The picture was taken by Stanisław Chłoń - my great granduncle.

For random viewer this photograph may be interesting as the image attracts attention to the way people are dressed and the way they are posing. Perhaps photography could have been scrolled down without being noticed among other photos on Facebook. For me this random encounter created strong anxiety since people portrayed there are my family members.

The topic of the World War II was often discussed at family meetings, and the family's fate and their survival was frequently mentioned by my grandfather and grandmother, who both had been children during the occupation. I've heard about the Polish Blue Police in Otfinów, who worked under the authority of a notorious German criminal and fear-inspiring gendarme named Engelbert Guzdek, who terrorized the whole county, as described in Adam Musiał's book "Bloody Ghosts". I've heard about the Blue Policemen who worked with him, bullying the local Polish and Jewish community. However, the topic of my great-grandfathers, who must have somehow survived the occupation, has never been touched. I had to ask myself, and my family, some uncomfortable questions.

The photograph shows my grandmother and her sister smiling, while serving food and drinks for local Blue Policemen. This is not a picture of misery and fear I have heard about as a child. Why nobody has ever mentioned the fact that blue policemen had anything to do with our family? Was our family forced to do serve them? Some questions have not been answered yet. My grandfather, who, as a child, lived in Otfinów, passed away in 2015. His wife, and my grandmother, Regina Koziół, inspired by my questions, assisted me with tracing the history, and became very much involved in the project.

I was very much concerned, thus needed to know what the fate of not only my family had been, but, primarily, the fate of the Jews who lived in Otfinów and around. I did not know their history, I did not even know their names, though they lived so close to their Polish neighbors.



History

Due to the publication of Professor Jan Grabowski from 2011 *Judenjagd. Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German Occupied Poland* that described the fate of the Jewish population living in Dąbrowa Tarnowska County (also Otfinów), I encountered written history and description of the Poles' attitude towards their Jewish neighbors. Having read *Judenjagd* I learned about the active participation of Blue Policemen in the so-called *hunt for Jews*.¹

Grabowski describes the involvement of the Blue Police, in collaboration with the German occupants, but - more importantly - describes the involvement of the rural population in the *hunt for Jews*. There is no doubt that in the last three years of the war the *hunt for Jews* had become one of the most important tasks of the gendarmerie police in occupied Poland.²

Grabowski managed to trace the fate of 277 Jews who hid in the area of the county. He found the data in witnesses' testimonies who had been accused in post-war trials for collaboration with the Germans, in Jewish survivors' accounts, and in German documents.

*According to these reports, only 38 Jews survived.
239 were killed.
Information about 49 people is unknown.*

*Circumstances of death of other local Jews:
84 Jews were killed by the German police, on the denunciation of the locals.
6 were murdered by peasants.
11 were found and killed by the Polish Blue Policemen.
82 were handed out by the locals, and then killed by the Blue Policemen.
7 died without the involvement of local people, they were killed by the German military police.*

*Most of them, then, were murdered as a result of betrayal of the Poles.*³

This historical background and the archival photo taken by my grandfather's uncle, triggered my anxiety and inspired me to conduct more research. I wanted to know if there are any more photographs left by my great grand uncle.

¹ a term introduced into the historical literature by Christopher R. Browning, a Holocaust historian who collected testimonies of police officers, SS-men and gendarmes accused of committing war crimes against Jews Grabowski Jan, *Judenjagd. Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German Occupied Poland* Warsaw 2011, page 9

² Grabowski Jan, *Judenjagd. Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German Occupied Poland* Warsaw 2011, page 9

³ Bikont Anna, Puścić Żyda na Zajęczka. Gazeta Wyborcza Duży Format Magazine, 20.02.2011

In Polish spirituality, the Jewish theme or the subject of anti-Semitism has, in fact, been, and still is a taboo subject until nowadays. This subject of the taboo, of course, is not a taboo for Polish anti-semites who repeat all over again that all Jews are to be blamed for everything. It is a taboo subject for what is good and noble in Polish culture. Polish culture cannot cope with it because it cannot cope with what Jan Błński perfectly described, and what I will say with my own wording - Polish culture cannot cope with the phenomenon of faultless guilt.⁴

Adam Michnik

⁴ Interview with Adamem Michnikiem. Tygodnik Powszechny Magazine. Jewish Poland. 23.01.2019

Portraits

The photographer's descendants handed me his archive for research purposes. Finding the negatives was a surprise indeed, as most of my grandfather's uncle pictures were burned in the fire of a barn where they were stored for years.

The first stage of the work was to organize damaged negatives, clean and digitize them. Already during the cleaning process, my attention was drawn to the portraits of Dabrowa Tarnowska county inhabitants. Among more than 3,000 photos of weddings, funerals and first communion, 168 photos were the portraits of the local population, which struck me with their power.

Archival portraits became an impulse for questions and reflections:

- Are people from the portraits willing to tell stories about the fate of their Jewish neighbors?
- Would they want to share what they had seen or what had been told them?
- Did they help their Jewish neighbors? Did they take part in the hunt, or rather kept aside, or maybe were they indifferent?
- What experiences, what stories did they pass on to the future generations?

The collection of portraits can be divided into three generations of witnesses - photos of elderly people who certainly, remembered the time of the war, young people and the youngest generation, who probably do not remember anything from the period of the German occupation. Portraits of children became the part of the project intentionally, as, despite their no war experience, these people, already in middle or elderly age now, are carriers of memory or oblivion for next generations.

Those portraits for me are the symbol of an unspoken story, unsaid truths, and oblivion. I raised them from the darkness of the basements to be able to ask symbolic questions that bother me and represent the problem of memory or oblivion. Photographs presented in a different context are supposed to provoke thoughts and reflections, they are not intended to give a definite answer, as such answer seems impossible.

Gallery of 168 portraits from Otfinow archive

The desire to find the answer

During my studies at the Bezalel School of Art and Design of Hebrew University in Jerusalem (winter semester 2018/2019) I visited the archives at the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research.

It was there where I found documents that became the essential part of my diploma thesis - List of Testimonies - handed to the Institute by the families of Holocaust victims.

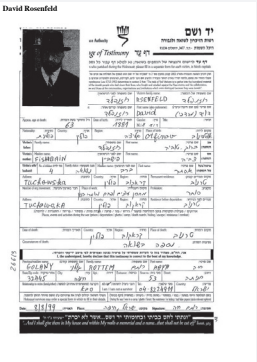
I found 16 names and family names of Jews from Otfinów, including the description of the place and circumstances of their death.

A nine-member Drelikh family from Otfinów was denounced to the Germans by their Polish neighbors. The remaining 5 people died in the Bochnia ghetto, and in the ghetto in Dąbrowa Tarnowska.

Lists of Testimonies

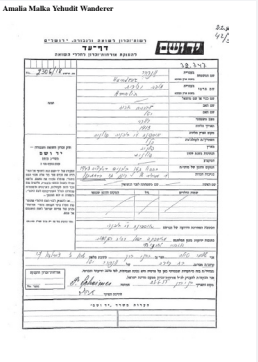
Jewish residents of Otfinów, who were murdered during Holocaust, and their death was documented at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

David Rosenfeld

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for David Rosenfeld. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of David Rosenfeld in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

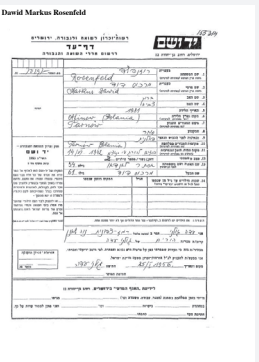
David Rosenfeld

Amalia Malka Yehudit Wanderer

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Amalia Malka Yehudit Wanderer. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Amalia Malka Yehudit Wanderer in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

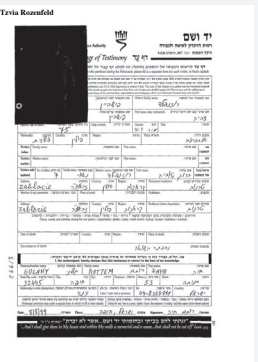
Amalia Malka Yehudit Wanderer

David Markus Rosenfeld

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for David Markus Rosenfeld. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of David Markus Rosenfeld in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

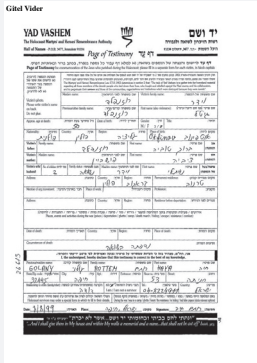
Dawid Markus Rosenfeld

Tzvia Rosenfeld

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Tzvia Rosenfeld. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Tzvia Rosenfeld in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

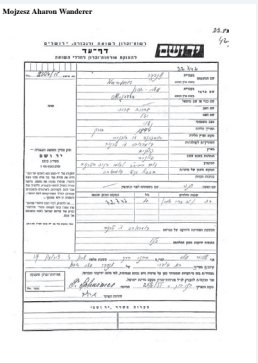
Tzvia Rosenfeld

Gitel Vider

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Gitel Vider. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Gitel Vider in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Gitel Vider

Mojzesz Aharon Wanderer

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Mojzesz Aharon Wanderer. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Mojzesz Aharon Wanderer in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Mojzesz Aharon Wanderer

Khana Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Khana Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Khana Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Khana Drelikh

Lola Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Lola Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Lola Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

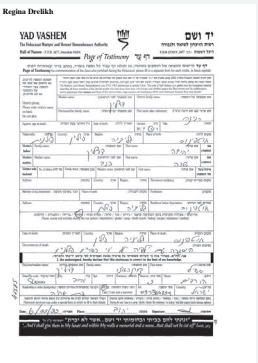
Lola Drelikh

Khaia Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Khaia Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Khaia Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

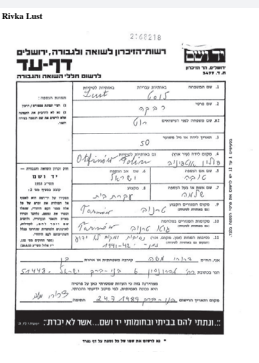
Khaia Drelikh

Regina Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Regina Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Regina Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Regina Drelikh

Rivka Lust

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Rivka Lust. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Rivka Lust in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Rivka Lust

Sara Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Sara Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Sara Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Sara Drelikh

Shlomo Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Shlomo Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Shlomo Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Shlomo Drelikh

Yehuda Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Yehuda Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Yehuda Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Yehuda Drelikh

Yosef Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Yosef Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Yosef Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Yosef Drelikh

Doba Drelikh

A Yad Vashem testimonial form for Doba Drelikh. The form is filled out with handwritten text in Hebrew and English. It includes a photograph of Doba Drelikh in the top left corner. The form is titled "YAD VASHEM" and "Page of Testimony".

Doba Drelikh

The barn as a symbol of process

During my work the barn, on the background of which Blue Policemen, in the company of two women from my family, had been photographed, became its important part, a symbolic image.

It triggered somewhat uneasy questions:

Had this photo been taken in the backyard of my grandfather's family site or, maybe, somewhereelse in Otfinów?

Other elements of my work are two contemporary photos - a barn in Otfinów as it looked in 2018, and its image just after its symbolic collapse in March 2019, while I worked on the project..



When did you think you would be taking photographs?

When I got scared, that I would get crazy spending my whole life travelling, and that nothing will come out of it. Nothing will change. I thought that as a photographer I could give something to others. And that maybe I will not be left alone with what I've seen.⁵

Mikołaj Grynberg

⁵ Interview with Mikołajem Grynberg. Tygodnik Powszechny Magazine. Jewish Poland.23.01.2019

Continuation

I believe that the BA degree is just the beginning of the project which I desire to continue. I see a very large part of the process that I wish to develop in the future, perhaps by involving families of victims from Otfinów and the vicinity.

List of Testimonies from the Yad Vashem archive in Jerusalem contain personal data of people who may still live or lived in Israel.

I will attempt to contact them to create a continuation of my project.

References

Bikont Anna, *Puścić Żyda na Zajęczka*. Gazeta Wyborcza Magazine Duży Format, 20.02.2011

Grabowski Jan, *Judenjagd. Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German Occupied Poland* Warsaw 2011

Grynberg Mikołaj. Interview with Justyna Dąbrowska. *Tygodnik Powszechny Magazine. Jewish Poland*. Special Edition nr 1 (9) Kraków 23.01.2019

Michnik Adam. Essay from „TP” 29/1995 *Tygodnik Powszechny Magazine. Jewish Poland*. Special Edition nr 1 (9). Kraków 23.01.2019

Musiał Adam Kazimierz, *Bloody Wraiths must have been. History of Dąbrowa Tarnowska during the Nazi occupation* Tarnów 1993

Collective work, *Traces of the Holocaust in the imaginarium of Polish culture* Warsaw, 2017

Archives

Archives in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem List of Testimonies

Technical description of the exhibition

The diploma exhibition includes:

1. Archival photo of the barn from World War II
2. Series of archival portraits of the Otfinow inhabitants -168 photographs, each in the format 21 cm x 30 cm - total format 2,5 m x 6,0 m
3. Two photos of the barn in Otfinów - each in the format 50 cm x 70 cm
4. Sixteen print-outs of the List of Testimonies from Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem

