

*How many roads traveled in total?  
How many paths are trodden?  
How much rain, how much snow  
hanging over lanterns?*

... .

*Your eyes are like beautiful candles and, in your heart, the source of a ray.  
So, I would like to save your heart  
save from oblivion....*

*(K.I.Gałczyński, Songs III)*

### *Memories of Jola Altman-Radwańska.*

When, in June 2020, I recorded Jolanta's memories of her childhood and youth in the Częstochowa TSKŻ, I did not expect that it would provoke me to my own thoughts about her, as an arabesque, intricately entwined, personality and identity.

In November 1970, on the day of the founding of the first student cabaret, "UŚ-iótek", at the Śląsk University in Katowice, fate happily caused us to first meet and then united us for a then, for us, unimaginable fifty years. At that time, I had no knowledge of her past and of her dramatic family experiences, including the most recent during the years 1968-1970. I gradually gained that knowledge. These I acquired gradually and, to me, they were both emotional and memorable. They were emotionally memorable to me, becoming (whether I liked it or not) mine also, albeit sharing with her a common experience.

Without claiming any infallibility, from the reservoir of memories, I will try to extract elements for preliminary reconstruction of the mosaic of the image of her cultural and national identity. I was encouraged to delete a concise memoir, in the form of a commentary on the recording, referred to at the beginning. But I must stipulate that the following reflections will, by nature, only touch this delicate and fascinating matter.

From my own perspective, therefore, I will report some "basic" information provided to me by her over our years together, which may enable the reader to answer the question about her identity. I would like to add that the facts from her life known to me, in my current view, and their present assessment, appear in a slightly different light, prompting me to give them more mature and slightly different, though, legitimate meanings.

I do not feel specifically and emotionally motivated to point out that Jolanta was a child of a post-war (1947) Jewish-Polish (or Jewish-Christian) marriage. When I recently used this term in a conversation with our good friend who has lived in Israel since 1970, she immediately pointed out to me that, at that time in Poland and that environment, with some exceptions, it was not really of interest to anyone. There were a number of similar marriages known to her. Also, for children, it was not a topic of interest.

Jolanta emphasises this in her account, in the description of the photographs which she made available and which were published in the book by C. & J. Szymański: "House and Road - the Way and the Home" (2020). As she mentioned, the objects of interest and a kind of "envy" amongst the children were the rare cases in those families who (still) had a grandmother. The role of a "common" grandmother, in the Częstochowa TSKŻ community, was played, for example, by Mrs. B., with whom they were willing to be photographed.

It is in this context, I will mention a German book (entitled, in Polish translation, "A Meaningful Gaze. Our Mothers, Marked by the Years 1938-1958. Daughters Remember" (2007), co-authored with K. Adenauer (the daughter of the former German Chancellor), containing memories of her own mother, but appearing in the text under the pseudonym "Sara Jakubowicz", thus "taking over" the personality of her own grandmother, who lost her life during the war and who was always missed by granddaughter, always missed, although, as I remember, of whom she did not have any photographs. One of Jolanta's first pieces of information about her family was that she was supposed to be "very similar to her grandmother", according to her father and aunt.

While recreating the "basic" situation of Jolanta's family, I became aware of my own similar, though slightly later, surprising experiences from 1973-1975. The person, who hired me to work in one of the Opole institutes, discovered, with some interest, that I come from a "mixed marriage" - my mother was a Ślązaczka, born in Germany, my father came from Małopolska. However, after our wedding in 1975, my mother-in-law's neighbour asked her why she had given her daughter to Germany (i.e. to a man from behind the old cordon, meaning from German Silesia). Both of these past, minor events surprised and "froze" me, because I perceived them intentionally as a kind of rejection or segregation. There was, therefore, an analogy of our "derived" relationships, albeit in two slightly different contexts or even "worlds".

But, let me return to Jolanta's family affairs. Her father Dawid, a pre- and post-war journalist (after 1945, he founded the mutations of "Dziennik Zachodni" in Wałbrzych). He later became a municipal official. He came from a merchant-intellectual family, associated with Przyrów from at least the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which settled in Częstochowa at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I am aware of the family's broad connections, including, among other, with the Hirsfeld couple, outstanding medical-blood group researchers, and a well-known side branch of the family in Sosnowiec, professionally dealt in photography.

One of Jolanta's father's cousins, Charlotte Elisabeth, coming from the Katowice branch of the family (the graves are located in the Jewish cemetery in Katowice on ul. Kozielska), younger by only four months than David, became the second wife of the well-known Austrian-British writer and pacifist, Stefan Zweig.

Her mother Janina Kryspina was a pupil of the Lublin Ursulines. (She matriculated, after secret completions in the autumn of 1944, when the city had already been liberated.) Jolanta's parents were a harmonious, tolerant and happy couple, with quite broad, also indirectly political, contacts. They were visited socially by such figures as the then influential Jewish communist Jerzy Borejsza, the creator of the "Czytelnik" publishing house, also by former officers of the Polish Army of the Second Republic of Poland with their spouses, even including figures from the closest circle of Marshal Piłsudski.

However, the answer to the question of what and shaped the development and identity of the child born in this family in 1950, and how, is not simple. It is well known that young children were spared the brutal truth about the recent past occupation. However, over the years, including as a result of "eavesdropped" conversations, Jolanta learned about the family experiences of the Second Polish Republic and, later, about the extermination of many family members during the war. Suffice it to say that her father, an active journalist from Częstochowa in the 1930s, together with his siblings, was a supporter of the BBWR (Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government), tracking urban corruption. He was sued and even convicted a number of times, then amnestied. He was also beaten for political reasons and, in August 1933, he fell on ul. Katedralna in Częstochowa, the victim of a well-known assassination attempt, ordered by a Polish nationalist. He was severely wounded in the back with a knife.

During the occupation, her father's sister Chaja died in Treblinka (1942), together with her husband and two sons, Later, in May 1943, at the hands of German, his brother Lejb died after escaping from the concentration camp in Skarżysko Kamienna. In Częstochowa, her grandmother Sara died in unclear circumstances. David's older sister, Ides, lost her husband and son in the Holocaust. She survived herself, working on the basis of a fluent knowledge of German in the HASAG Czestochowa. Working in this armaments factory also saved Jolanta's grandfather, her father David and his younger brother Jacob.

Also, a relative Lea W. from Kraków, a prisoner of three concentration camps (Płaszów, Skarżysko-Kamienna and Buchenwald / Kommando Leipzig), worked as a prisoner for the same HASAG company, probably becoming a victim of "medical experiments". However, she managed to survive the war, while her husband and son died in the Holocaust. Another relative, Dora, lost her husband during the occupation, but she survived the war and emigrated to Canada or the USA.

Parallel to the "osmotic" penetration of knowledge about the Holocaust, already as a child, Jolanta experienced, with her parents, more and more consciously and dramatically, the gradual disintegration of her own known family as a result of emigration, first to Canada, and later (after 1968) also to Denmark. Even before Jolanta was born, her father's brother, Jakub with his family (1949), left the country. Then, in the 1950s, her grandfather Szmul and his father's sister-journalist Ides, with her second husband, [also left]. Following the events of March 1968 – 1970, the brother (Leon) of the already-mentioned Lea from Kraków, emigrated to Denmark, together with his family. On the side of Sarah's grandmother's family, her nephew Natan and his family left for Canada, and her niece's brother, Maurice with the family, went to England.

Earlier, however, in August 1958, Jolanta's father, who was extremely emotionally connected with his hometown, and as a journalist with the Polish language as a work tool, declined the already officially granted emigration visa to Canada for the whole family. In connection with the dominant role of the Polish language in the A. family, I would like to mention that the merchant-industrial association. In the spring of 1936, in the pages of the "Czenstochwer Cajtung", printed in Yiddish, congratulations were offered to Jolanta's grandfather on the marriage of his daughter (Chaja), through a Polish-language advertisement.

After 1968, in Warsaw at the Gdańsk Railway Station, Jola said goodbye to some of her emigrating

friends, just like years ago in Gdynia when relatives emigrating, on the "Batory", across the ocean. I would like to mention that my own personal, quite dramatic experiences with the Śląsk part of my family to Germany, starting from 1958, were emotionally similar in a sense.

It can be guessed that the above-mentioned real events, intertwined with her cultural upbringing within the TSKŻ, the secular nature of the school under the patronage of the Secular Schools Association and, later, also Jolanta's significant acting period at the Ida Kamińska Jewish Theatre in Warsaw, all played an important formative role. She played the role of the wife in Sholem Aleichem's play "The Bewitched Tailor", her manuscript of the text she used has been preserved. Years later, she recalled that some of the sets for this theatre were made by Jerzy Duda Gracz, who associated with the TSKŻ in Częstochowa and the author of a number of linocuts and paintings inspired by the writing of Sholem-Aleichem.

All this, I suppose, shaped her sensitivity more and more clearly and sharpened her cultural profile, influencing the emergence of a sense of a specific separateness. Additional pressure was probably exerted by the fact that, although it was not explicitly stated but, "between the lines" was felt as a kind of "apartheid" as a result of the growing political and social discrimination of 1967-1970 which affected "Jewish circles". It can be assumed that this gradually built up the trauma of external "separation" and "selection" due to "origin". Jolanta recalled that, according to her knowledge, it was only because of her father, a Jew, that the cell in the National Council (urban greenery?) was reorganized in such a way as to release him only. It ended in a severe heart attack and her father's constant inability to work, resulting in the family's financial degradation.

Her own relevant experience, after graduating from high school in 1968, was related to her plans to study medicine. After completing the preparatory course and passing the examination, with a high number of points, to the medical faculty of the Medical University of Białystok (the relevant confirmation has been preserved), the documents sent by her were sent back without justification, after prior negative consultation with the KW PZPR. A year later, the situation was repeated with admission to the Medical Academy in Katowice, when the "technique" of the authorities turned out to be identical. Even the work of an aspirant-nurse at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Częstochowa (1968-1970) did not bring the so-called points, but it was necessary due to the financial situation of the family. So, the decision was made to study abroad, in Sweden, at the well-known medical university, the "Karolinska Institute".

The trip, planned for 1970 (translations of the relevant documents have been preserved), was cancelled by the SB [Security Service] refusing to grant permission for her individual departure. The entire family was expected to emigrate permanently, which was no longer possible due to the state of her father's health. An official of the Katowice passport office asked Jolanta, ironically, whether she was going to Israel to "beat the Arabs" (she had to give Israel as the destination country for emigration), probably knowing that she had achieved great results at school shooting contests (1967).

In the autumn of 1970, as a result of the protection granted by the personal secretary E. Gierek, she was accepted for an interview by the head of the Polish United Workers' Party in Katowice. E. Gierek, after listening to the reports on the harassment concerning studies, stated that she should be patient, because "a lot will soon change here. A few weeks later, Gomułka resigned from his post and Gierek was elected the new head of the PZPR and the "leader of the nation". In this situation, Jolanta finally decided to give up emigration and undertake history studies at the Śląsk University in Katowice. Initially, she began "unofficially", without being entered onto the list of students and only became an official student after the events of December 1970.

Studying in this typically Śląsk city introduced her to a new cultural, ethnic and political environment also because concurrently worked as a teacher in Katowice schools, having intense contact with the local youth, who fascinated her. During her studies, she was practically interested in the genealogy and history of her father's family. In the Registry Offices of towns such as Przyrów, Żarki and Mstów, the record books of Jewish synagogue districts, at the time, were still stored there. She made detailed notes from old Russian-language entries, gaining and expanding knowledge about her origins. She graduated in 1976, with a master's thesis on the Częstochowa Aero Club, whose president was, for several years, her father.

The research work undertaken, after graduation, at the Central Museum of Prisoners-of-War Opole (1977), lasting 11 years, was devoted to the fate of Polish soldiers and the officers in Wehrmacht captivity. Concurrently, she conducted pioneering research on the fate of Polish and Ukrainian workers and forced laborers during the war, which began later in Germany. It became her almost thirty-year passion. Her interest in individual people, during the years of World War II, became her professional-emotional distinctive personality component.

From her studies but, above all, from her open, liberal family home, she gained a respect for Polish history and uniforms. This targeted correspondence and numerous personal meetings and contacts with a number of former officers during her work at CMJW allowed her to get to know this environment, because it was connected with his participation in the organization of exhibitions and scientific sessions. Some soldiers entrusted her with the only surviving photographs or war diaries.

I mentioned that she continued her research later during her work at the University of Bonn in the 1990s, then as part of a private project based on a scholarship from the "Degussa" company, as well as in parallel to her work at the "Beethoven House" museum. Prior to that, however, even in the "Polish" period, contacts were still maintained with family living in exile. For example, there were family meetings in Czechoslovakia (with aunt Ides from Toronto), in which I took part.

In the face of the realistic threat of the reintroduction of martial law in Poland in the summer of 1988 (Jola was a co-founder of "Solidarity" at her workplace), she took the private part of the collected scientific materials, when she emigrated to Germany, in order to finally develop them in her doctoral thesis, which had already begun in Opole.

The desire to also maintain close family ties from Germany, even prompted Jola to make the difficult decision to give up going to a 1996 social gathering of Polish Jews in Ashkelon, Israel. Those funds, instead, allocated towards her son's departure for the USA and Canada, where he met the only Częstochowa-born (1947) cousin of his mother and his family.

It is worth mentioning that Jolanta, who had a great memory, in the last months of her life, when reviewing photos from group trips as part of the TSKŻ, mentioned at least thirty-six names of the participants (I kept the list prepared at that time), coming from various branches of this organisation (Częstochowa, Warsaw, Łódź, Katowice, Szczecin, Legnica, Świdnica). Considering the passage of more than fifty years since these events, this testifies to the existence of an emotionally strong memory-based bond with these events and people.

The disease (multiple sclerosis), which had been clearly developing since 2004, led to an accident (2010) and ruled out further independent walking. Prior to that, however, Jolanta had visited Częstochowa twice, first taking part in a class meeting "40 years After Graduation" (2008) and, then,

in the reunion held by the World Society of Czestochowa Jews & Their Descendants (2009). Meeting with a group of friends from her youth, acquaintances from the TSKŻ, mainly "post-March" emigrants from many countries of the world (just like, two years earlier, the meeting in Paris, on the occasion of the wedding of the son of one of them) was a great joyful experience for her. As an expression of gratitude for the invitation, we sent our private video recording and photos, from these events, to the many participants.

In the last weeks of her life, Jolanta dictated to me an extremely moving expression of condolence to the B. family in Israel, well known to her from her Czestochowa childhood, remembering their apartment and grandmother – the *nestorka* [doyen] of the family.

Her remarkably persistent nature deserves special attention and admiration. Over a period of twenty-five years, until her last days, she displayed a reliability and caring towards the dozens of Polish workers and forced laborers and their children, who were officially invited to Bonn for the "Meeting Weeks", which were held regularly during the years 1991-2007. This was expressed in regular, extensive correspondence, telephone conversations and by receiving guests in her own home. In 2005, in recognition of her pioneering work on forced labour in the Rhineland and Bonn, she was awarded the "Rheinland-Taller" medal, which is highly regarded in the region.

Regarding her "postponed" or "delayed" emigration from Poland, elsewhere, I expressed the following opinion:

"Despite her living thirty-three years in German Bonn and her dual citizenship, she basically felt like a guest there, on a professional trip to fulfill an important (scientific) task... If I had to post *mortem*, as if in her place, formulate the motto of her attitude in life, it would probably sound like this - *If you do something, it should also be perfect! If you hold someone close to your heart, then it should be forever...* "

In the last, particularly dramatic health and existential phase of her life, Jolanta remained a type of "fighter"- fighting to the end. She did not think bitterly about the experiences of her youth, and focused her feelings on her charming little granddaughter Ava, who was the last source of joy.

Closing my memoir, I would like to emphasize that, of course, I am not Jolanta's "Avatar", whose



mouth defined her own identity. For this reason, I do not dare "state" anything in this matter definitively. However, recalling her multi-layered psyche and real attitude, I am intuitively inclined to believe that the family and life have shaped in her a harmonious, "unified identity" through a double inculturation, entwined in a strong braid and that "two hearts" always beat in her chest.

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