

## About the Brandes<sup>1</sup> Household

Not many, perhaps, have heard of this household, which earned a world of merit among the *shtetl*'s dozens of *Shomrim* youth who enjoyed its warm hospitality.

The house, to all appearances, was a regular house like all the others, owned by a regular family of small traders. The front of the house was a grocery shop on *ul. Leśniowska*. One end was populated by Jews and the other end - the longer one leading to Leśniów - by Christians. The road to Leśniów led you through fields, trees, gardens, orchards and cultivated plots, until you reached the crystalline Leśniów springs.

All the youth in town gathered here, especially on Saturdays, to drink the pure water and to look at the spring's gurgling water as it gently flowed down the valley through woods and fields until reaching the *shtetl*.

From here, endless forests also spread out, which led to nearby Polish villages and also to many shady groves. The surroundings were beautiful and peaceful. Here, we spent the best years of our youth. Here, we learnt the song of birds and the sparrow. In the bosom of this Nature, we imbibed and breathed in a new atmosphere. Here, we sang the first songs about the [Jezreel?] Valley and the Galilee - "*My Homeland*" and "*Nights of Canaan*".

And when we returned, intoxicated with love for Nature, from the Leśniów woods, our first stop was at the Brandes [family's] house. Here, we unburdened our emotions. Here, we drank a glass of water to quench our thirst and continued singing. This house was open from dawn to late at night. Here, heated debates took place on religion and Zionism [and on] the Land of Israel and the Arabs. All the counsellors came here for advice. All the [Movement's] emissaries came here and even the emissaries from abroad stayed here. Here, we drank, thirstily, every word coming from the mouth of an envoy from the Land of Israel. We learnt a new song, a refrain, a melody - or just news from the wide world. Here, we could also read different newspapers which arrived from all around the globe.

More than once it occurred that a Gentile entered the shop to buy sugar or salt and there was nobody there. The client would come into the house, shouting, "*Pani* [Mrs] *Balcia! Pani Uncia*<sup>2</sup>!", but the sons and daughters were occupied with a heated discussion on politics, and no one noticed the client standing there, staring in disbelief at the "Jewish idleness".

There was merriment in this house day and night. The lights here shone brightly until after midnight and it was difficult to leave the Brandes home.

Entire groups [of *Shomrim*] were educated and soaked up wisdom and knowledge in this open household. Here, we borrowed books, newspapers and even things for the outings and [summer] camps, or just for friends. In hard times, we "pulled" anything we needed from this house!

And, indeed, it was from this household that Cwi Brandes emerged - the youngest of the Brandes family - who absorbed this house's entire fine legacy. He was the *Pillar of Fire* who lit up [the darkness] for many over the course of the years and who became the torch of the uprising in the Będzin Ghetto against the Nazi legions. He, the man of the book and profound thought, stood at the

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Also spelt Brandeis or Brandys; two sons of this family were Cwi and Aron Brandes, see above, pp.164-180 and 187-191.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: אונטצ'ע in the original; perhaps a variation of the name Hincia, which is short for Hinda.]

head of the revolt - and saved the honour of the Jewish People and of our *shtetl* when he fell holding a weapon against the murderers of our nation.

Blessed be his name for all eternity!

**Abram Ajzenberg**