

Shlomo Adler

A Jew Again

*From Bolechów to Communist Poland
to the Jewish State*

Contento de Semrik

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This book contains occurrences not known before
the Hebrew edition appeared



Sara and Abraham (Dolek) Adler, my parents in the late 20's.
Thanks to them I was born.



Angels Maria and Michal Raduchowski in the late 30's.
Thanks to them, I survived.



**This book was written in the blessed
memory of:**

My parents, Sara and Abraham Adler. Thanks to them, I was born.

The Raduchowski Family. Thanks to them, I am alive.

*Citizens of Bolechów and the surrounding area, mostly Jews, who
were killed in the Holocaust by the Nazis and their collaborators.*

My Sister Miriam Adler

My Grandmother Berta Adler

My Uncle Herman Adler

My Aunt Luba Adler

My Uncle Israel Adler

My Aunt Ruzia Adler

My Uncle Wilhelm Najder

My Aunt Antonina Najder

My Cousin Nunek Najder

My Uncle Jehuda Diamand

My Aunt Alta Diamand

My Cousin Pepcia Diamand

My Uncle Joshua Freilich

My Aunt Chawa Freilich

My Cousin Lola Freilich

My Cousin Klara Freilich

My Cousin Mozes Freilich

All those family members I never met whose existence I found out about and who were murdered.

Colonel Josef Matecki, “Sęk”.

My teachers, schoolmates, close friends: Śiunio and Jakób Lew, Gedaliahu and Izio Ajzenshtab, Lonek Akselrad, Kuncio Josefsberg, Arcio Artman, Siemek Kurcer, Gina Mandel, Matylda and Lena Landes, Hinzler, Cymerman, and many others.

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Part I

Innocent and Sobering

Childhood and Winds of War

“You are a traitor!” Bogdanov, the captain of the Red Army, spoke to me bluntly. The room turned quiet. My thoughts ran wild. A traitor? Could he be talking about me? Maybe I discovered something I shouldn’t know. Or maybe I said something forbidden. But what? I had no important information that might cause damage if it was delivered. I had no idea what they wanted.

I was a policeman and employee of the Z.W.Z., *Związek Walki Zbrojnej*, an organization for armed combat. I was familiar with, and a close friend of, Colonel “Sęk” Małecki, the Polish deputy head of police. He was a member of the *Sejm*, the Polish Parliament, head of the A.L., *Armja Ludowa*, at the time of the Warsaw uprising and general secretary of the Z.W.Z. organization.

The year was 1946. It was a year after the end of the terrible and bloody war. Nazis were still looking for ways to flee from Poland, which was under the total control of the Communist

Russians. For three days, I had been sitting in a cellar that served as a prison in the house in the middle of the K.B.W. camp corpus for interior security. It was a unit that dealt with counter-espionage for the Poznan area. (I later found out who I think was responsible for my arrest.)

Forward

This book is based on events that happened in my life. They are reported as they were, and told from the perspective of the young boy, born in 1930, who faced them. All events portrayed in this book happened to me, were heard by me first-hand, or were copied from published witness statements. Most of the names have not been changed or altered in any way. They are the names of the actual people involved.

For many years, I could not write this book, because it contains material that was too painful to face. After the war, I carried feelings of uncertainty about my very survival. Would I wake up one day to find that this had been a dreadful dream? Would I find that my parents, my sister, and my relatives would suddenly appear? I waited for my real life to resume with all of my family and friends around me.

I tried to establish a new life under a false Polish identity. I almost succeeded in becoming completely absorbed in the typical behavior of the Poles around me. But the suspicions that dominated Poland in those years brought me to a prison where I was being accused of betrayal and Fascism.

Later, it became apparent that the arrest caused a positive change in my life. It forced me to rethink my attitudes and options. I returned to my Jewish roots and ran from Poland.

But my *aliyah* to Palestine didn't improve my feelings. After my marriage, I didn't want to have children. My children might have the same feelings toward me that I had for my parents — loving feelings. I was afraid I would lose them, too. I could not forget what happened to my parents and my sister. I could not let go of the atrocities that occurred in the Holocaust and in its aftermath.

I feel certain now that the reason I survived was because of my desire to seek revenge and also to tell about what occurred in the Holocaust. I returned to my childhood home of Bolechów in 1996. That influenced my decision to begin telling my story. I would put on paper what had happened there.

In Bolechów, there are empty spaces where Jewish homes and tombstones used to be. I became aware that the past was disappearing. Nothing will remain before too long. My dear ones will not be returned to me. The real world is the one I live in. I can no longer deny or avoid the past.

The wall around the cemetery, many houses and factories were dismantled in the search for hidden jewelry. The local people built new houses using the bricks. Our Sages, of Blessed Memory, used to say, "You have killed and also taken possession."

A spring was located in the center of our fruit garden. A swimming pool was built over it. The spring continued to flow. The locals used to raise fish in it a long time ago, and now it is abandoned. The spring has no drainage. The area was

flooded, destroying the fruit garden, and it became a swamp. My father buried some of our family's treasure there, but it is now under water.

I understand that if I don't put onto paper all that I know and remember, it will fade into obscurity. In the future, it will be difficult to understand, or believe, that something like this occurred if people like me do not record their stories. Witness statements can be a powerful means of telling the story of the atrocities for future generations. Recollections of the Holocaust must not be forgotten, especially by the Jews. We cannot let this story fade into oblivion. It has to be like the order of the Torah: "And you should tell to your son."

Childhood in Bolechów

"Mazel tov, Mrs. Adler, you've given birth to a boy," said the midwife when she handed me over to the open arms of my mother. "May the evil eye have no power. He is big. No wonder he tortured you during these last weeks."

"Mr. Adler, you may enter. Your wife had a boy," shouted the midwife as she opened the door to the next room. My father entered and kissed my mother and looked at the "jewel" that was in my exhausted mother's arms. It had been a long and difficult labor and birth. I was suckling with great gusto, enjoying my first meal.

Suddenly my father noticed that they were not alone in the room. Someone was watching. It was a hot mid-June day.

The windows were open. Only a dark shade was supposed to hide what was going on within the room while allowing the beautiful smell of rose blossoms to enter. The red rose garden was right outside this room.

What had my father discovered? The shade was deflected to one side. Leaning on the window ledge outside the room was my six-year old sister Miriam, and her friends — Dyzia Lew, Fridka Haftel, and Bela Altman. They were all watching what was going on inside.

“Go away,” shouted the midwife. “You will have plenty of time to be aware of what is going on here.” (No one could imagine that almost none of them would live to become mothers.)



Abraham, Sara, Miriam and Salek (me) Adler in 1931.



Tarbut School director, Mr. Pesach Lew, and his assistant, Mr. Bratszpis.

Until I turned 12 years old, I was very religious, G-d-fearing and observant, although without the side-locks. Until the war started, I attended Jewish elementary school in the morning and *Tarbut* (culture activities) in the afternoon. There, we learned Hebrew and Israel's traditions. I believed that G-d was omnipotent, sees all, and knows all. My observance was unconditional. I tried to do good things and to behave nicely as directed by my parents and taught by my teachers. Despite my desire to behave, I frequently did things that irritated my parents. When this happened, I feared I would not go to heaven, and that maybe some warning or punishment would happen to me in this world. Possibly, from my very youth, I irritated my parents, not adhering to the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," as many children do.

My mother kept the Jewish traditions strictly, but she did not wear a wig. At home, everything was kept in accordance with the Jewish religious laws. Almost weekly, she would find a reason to ask the rabbi's opinion. "Is a limping chicken kosher?" "Is a fish kosher if it is caught in a river where a man drowned half a year ago and his body has not been found?" "How can I make a well kosher after a pigeon is found dead in its water?"

My father was secular, but I think he kept the traditions for the sake of his father, my grandfather, and out of respect for my mother, not because he feared G-d.

On Saturdays and holidays, my father went to the synagogue. He always took me with him. My mother insisted I go with him. She feared that if I did not go, the books in the other world would be debited, and in this world, I would face a reprimand from my teacher, Pesach Lew.



A wooden boarding house in the mountains.



Winter view in the Carpathian Mountains.

The shtetl Bolechów, where I was born, is located at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. Today it is in Ukraine. When I was born, and until I reached the age of nine, the area was under Polish rule. From the entrance of our house, it was possible to see the mountains that were not very far away. The green-covered slopes of the forests seemed to be a finger's touch away. The Jewish population was about one third of the total of Bolechów. Most of them seemed to me to be very religious or traditionalists. There were only a few people who were secular or assimilated.

Therefore, Rabbi Perlow, one of two or three local rabbis, was very busy. He was one of the rabbis my mother turned to for answers to her questions.

In the middle of the shtetl, there was a main square, the *rynek*. It was rectangular and paved with stones from the river. Through its center, on the diagonal, ran the main road from southeast to northwest. The road traveled from our county seat in Stanisławów, in the direction of the neighboring county

seat of Lwów. In this way, the square was divided into two triangles. Two kiosks stood on the edge of each one of triangles. Not far from there was a hand water pump and trough. The horses belonging to *ffaker*, coach owners, enjoyed the water. The horses belonging to the peasants, who gathered there on market day, also enjoyed it.

The municipality building, *Magistrat*, with its high, pointed tower, stood on the left side at the entrance to the square from the southeast. It still stands today. A huge clock was installed at the top of the tower, which was supposed to show the time in all four directions. For the most part, there was a time difference between the clocks because of the crows that used to sit on the clock's hands, moving them forward and backward depending on the time of day. Chestnut trees, *kasztany*, surrounded the *Magistrat*. They were so tall that they hid the tower and its clocks from view in the square.



Shlomo, with his son, David, in 2003 in front of the *Magistrat*, without the chestnut trees where the Ukrainians killed the Jews.



Shlomo and his wife, Ester, with the writer, Anatol Regnier, in front of the *Magistrat* in 1996.

Not far from the *Magistrat*, and on the same side of the square, was the Ukrainian Church, *Cerkiew*, equipped with several high, round turrets. Each had at its edge a double cross as is common in the Pravoslavic Church. Directly opposite the church, on the other side of the square, stood the tall synagogue. It remains there today. The height of the synagogue had to be lower than that of the church. Those were the conditions set by the master who allotted his grounds to build the shtetl some 400 years ago, although this master didn't charge for the ground on which the synagogue stood. The cemetery was established then, too.

The first synagogue was made of wood, but it burned down, along with the shtetl, about 200 years after it was established. Immediately after the fire, it was rebuilt with bricks. The new synagogue survived the Holocaust.

The synagogue had huge, stained-glass windows, painted walls that contained paintings of the signs of the Zodiac, the creation of the world and depictions of life in Paradise. The celebrated Jewish folk artist, Szabse (Shabbetai) Sack, painted them. He was born in Saloniki in about 1853. He was active in Galicia at least until 1935. Near the great synagogue were located the ritual bath, the *mikvah*, and several houses of study, *chederim*, or *cheders*, as they were called in Yiddish.

The square was paved. Next to the shops, there was a sidewalk. At noon, a herald or town crier, announced a special sale in this or that shop. He could easily cross the streets, because cars came to Bolechów infrequently, and the coachmen and their horses were used to him. The shops in the square were owned mostly by Jews.

Several youth organizations were located near the square, but I was too young to join them. My sister, on the other hand, was a member of the *Hanoar Hazoni*. They wore impressive uniforms, but the uniforms of the Betar members were even more impressive. They were particularly impressive when they marched in the streets of the shtetl during Purim. I presume those marches were for financial and membership mobilization efforts, since the government didn't allow marching publicly in uniform except for the army. At Purim, the uniform was recognized as a common disguise.



Girls of the *Hanoar Hazoni* in Bolechow in 1939. My sister, Miriam, is third from the left. To her left are her friends, Frydka Haftel and Musia Baron. In the center sits Neta Patrach.



Beginning of a market day in Bolechów.

On one of the summer vacations, my mother and I joined the other adults and went to the Carpathian Mountains not far from the shtetls of Worochta and Jaramcze. In such summer camps, it was common to make a bonfire and to throw branches from pine trees into the flames. The smell was wonderful. We started those bonfires in the forest clearing as evening descended. I can still remember the smell, the sparks, and the taste of the potatoes we baked in the fire.



My sister, Miriam.



Hanoar Hazioni at a vacation camp in the Carpathian Mountains. In the center, someone is wearing a hat that says, *Celek Najder* — these were the times.



My mother Sara, my sister Miriam, and myself,
looking down to the camp of Hanoar Hazioni.

To the northwest corner of the square, there was a small park. Parts of the park used to collapse because of the burial caves, like catacombs, that were discovered beneath it. They are from several hundred years ago.

Old linden trees grew on the boulevard that led toward the railway station; they gave off a delicate and intoxicating smell when they blossomed. This smell used to mix with the bad smell that the many tanneries spread. It would fill the entire shtetl. Despite that, Bolechów was a lovely town with its huge park, fruit gardens, and houses surrounded with rich vegetation. Visitors from remote places used to come there to rest and to eat the good fish in the restaurants.

The city was small, and people knew one another. Beside the fruit trees, each homeowner arranged flower gardens in different geometrical shapes. Almost every house had an orchard behind it. The best plums in the world came from Surkis' orchard. Sour cherries and gooseberries came from Haftel's orchard. There were rumors that the best pears came