

Jewish Stories from Poland

***Jewish Stories from Poland* is a working title for our newest project, a book which will come out at the beginning of 2020.**

Since 2013 our team has been publishing *Chidusz* Magazine, born as the successor of a bulletin for members of the Wrocław Jewish Community. Our objective is to educate and strengthen the identity of Polish Jews. *Chidusz* comes out ten times a year and it is nowadays considered a renowned and opinion-forming magazine, frequently quoted by the Polish mainstream media. Yet, our mission does not end here.

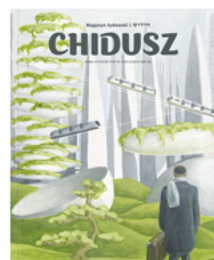
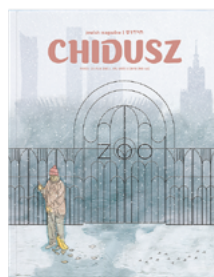
Another of our goals is to bring contemporary stories of Polish Jews to the attention of a wider Jewish community in Europe, Israel, the United States, and beyond. We want to give voice to those whose existence sometimes surprises, or is being doubted. We intend to show the multifold ways Jewish communities in Poland resurfaced after the end of the communist rule, and the way the Holocaust still resonates in many Jewish households. We hope to show our readers that being Jewish in Poland can sometimes mean something completely different from what it means anywhere else in the world. Most of all, we want to create an anthology of texts which will present Jewish life in Poland from many, sometimes not obvious, perspectives, in a way it has not been done before.

***Chidusz* and Jewish Stories from Poland**

This project is not our first attempt to tell Jewish stories from Poland to the non-Polish speaking public. So far, we have published three English-language issues of *Chidusz* (in [2016](#), [2017](#) and [2018](#)). They all summarized the most important events of Jewish life in Poland in a given year, and featured the best articles previously published in the Polish issues. Carefully selected material, including numerous reportages, showed the full scope of Jewish life in Poland. Each issue covered break-through political and cultural events and the most significant debates about the Polish-Jewish community. Yet, the English-language editions of *Chidusz*, published annually, were short-living and their circulation was limited.

The Book

Jewish Stories from Poland will be a compilation of texts, which will remain relevant for many years. On the next two pages you can read excerpts from three articles which have already been translated.




Poland's Mikvahs

The other *balanit* from Łódź, Teresa, is equally diplomatic. "There aren't many women," she says. That's why she always asks them to call and make an appointment so she can prepare the mikvah in advance. Since the water isn't heated up daily she needs to fill up the pool and chlorinate the water. She reminisces about the times when seven or eight women would visit the mikvah regularly. This is no longer the case; she opens the place sporadically now, although she does get unexpected visits on occasion, when, for instance, a group of Orthodox Jews comes to visit. They usually travel without women, but every now and again someone brings his wife along, and it might just happen to be her mikvah day. Maria also recalls another unexpected visit, though it wasn't really a ritual purification in the religious sense. An American woman once visited the mikvah; she told Maria that her mother was a Litzmannstadt Ghetto survivor. Her mother had been unable to use the mikvah because she had lost all her feminine bodily functions due to extreme starvation. Her daughter therefore decided that she would go to Łódź and use the mikvah in her mother's honor, seventy years later. The woman was very upset: she sat in her car for a long time, shaking and crying, unsure whether she was strong enough to go through with her plan. Maria accompanied her in the mikvah. After the bath, the woman grew calmer and seemed to be at peace. "It was incredibly important to her. She could tell herself: I'm alive and I'm in the city where my mother went through unspeakable horrors, but now there's a mikvah here, run by an Orthodox woman, a Jewish mother," explains Maria. "It was important to her, and it was important to me as well." ■

Birds of a Feather Flock Together

This happened in 2004. He'd gone on a trip to Israel the year before. He wanted to do some sightseeing, to see the country his friends had moved to. His wife used to always complain that he was interested in nothing but those Jews; that he talked about them way too much. But he grew up in the heart of a post-war Jewish district in a tenement house where five Jewish families lived. His best friend was Izaak, his neighbors' youngest son. It started with birthdays and name day parties. Izaak would visit them for dinner and when Rysiek's mom fried some pork chops, the boy always scoffed them up and had to swear not to tell when he got home. "One word," Rysiek's mom used to say, "and I'll never invite you over again." Later Izaak moved to Israel. They wrote letters to each other until Izaak's passing. "I still dream about that fried fish your mom used to make on Żeromski Street," Izaak wrote years later.



His aunt lived nearby. "What do you want from me, auntie?" he asked, calling her 'auntie' for the first time in years. She looked at him and said, "Your father was not your real father. You are the son of Josef Gutkin who was a Jew from a town near Lviv. We've been hiding the truth from you for so many years, but I must tell you before I die. Your mother got married when you were four." ■

What Happened to Lolek?

'She told me to leave it,' says Joe about his mother's return from Poland. 'Every time I started asking questions, she got upset.'

Whenever he offered to go to Warsaw himself, Lola told him she had lost one son already. She was convinced that if she failed, their last chance was gone. What could Joe do, with his American temperament? He would only get in trouble. 'They'll kill you or put you in jail,' she said. Lola thought Poland a horrible country.

Joe needed an excuse. In 1978, he was 34 years old. He signed up for an international commercial law, which included a module on the Socialist system, and came to Warsaw. Joe remembers paying someone who claimed to be a detective to help him find Lolek, but the man just took his money and vanished. Joe went to Otwock to see the house owned by his family before the war. He asked a friend to come with him. They pretend to be a married couple looking for a place to stay for a night. They were told to go away.

'You know what my greatest dream was back then?' he asks me. 'I wanted to come to Warsaw as a visiting professor and live in that house.' (...)

I visit the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute with Joe. We find little about the search for Lolek. The testimony of Włodzimierz Kuliński only includes a short description of the accident and a brief note: "All seven of them [three Erlichsters, two Hochrat sisters and Ryfka with her son] – except little Lolek – survived until the liberation of Praga with the help of my mother and Jerzy."

Kuliński also mentions that after the war, his mother went together with Lola "went to numerous convents, but sadly, they never found Lolek." Helena Kulińska – along with the Erlichsters and other people they were hiding – moved to Lublin just after the Soviet Army entered Praga district. "They ran away because they were afraid that if the Germans recaptured Praga, they would execute them all," explained Helena's son. "They were also afraid of the other tenants of the house they stayed in, as their presence put everyone's lives at risk," he added. Even though the chances of finding Lolek were the highest straight after the war, perhaps this threat was the reason why they could not continue their search. Lola spoke to Sister Mary, a Daughter of Charity nun who claimed that she gave Lolek to some family but would not provide any further information. ■

The book will come out in January 2020 and will consist of no less than thirty stories (approx. 200 pages).

Almost all of the Polish texts are ready to be translated, and many of them have been translated already. In the last quarter of 2019 we plan to translate, edit and proofread the remaining articles. In January 2020 the book will be sent to print. We will be sharing updates on the book on its Facebook page.

Cost of Publishing

We expect the final cost of the product to be 31,000 PLN (around 7,150 Euro or 7,880 USD). Additional costs of promotion are included in the budget file.

Why Do We Need Your Support?

Chidusz Magazine is a non-profit project. The Chidusz Jewish Foundation is supported mostly by donors and governmental grants, although the latter have lately become determined by political factors. Moreover, each *Chidusz* edition is distributed to Jewish communities' members without any fee. The profits from regular sales are not sufficient to cover the costs of additional projects.

Jewish Stories from Poland will also be published by Chidusz Jewish Foundation, and, although we expect it to bring some profit, we need your support to start the project.

All information regarding the Foundation is public. Among its board members are the Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich and a leading Jewish intellectual and journalist Konstanty Gebert. If you wish to see the full list of our significant donors, please visit our [website](#). If you have any other questions regarding our financing, please contact us.

How Can You Contribute?

We will appreciate any form of contribution to our project. You can choose to donate money towards a specific goal (e.g. sponsor the proofreader's fee or translation of the articles). You can also help us reach Jewish institutions or museum stores in your region, and bring the book to their attention.

Once the book comes out, we would like to speak about it to a wider audience, either in various Jewish institutions or during Limmuds. Although we plan to have a launch event in Warsaw, the book is directed mostly to non-Polish audiences and such meetings would help us to promote it.

We will recognize all supporters in the book and on our website.

Contact Details

If you want to get more information about the project, we will be happy to provide it.

Kasia Andersz, the project coordinator, awaits your questions at kasia.andersz@chidusz.com.

How to Support the Project?

You can support the publication either through PayPal or regular bank transfer. In both cases, please indicate that you wish to support *Jewish Stories from Poland* project.

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