



KAZIMIERA DEMBEK

Susz, 10 October 2000

To

The Archives of Modern Records

Hankiewiczza Street 1A

Committee for the Remembrance
of Poles Who Saved Jews

During the Hitlerite occupation, Jews from Kraków were brought to Włodawa on the Bug River. They worked in the city garden. When the news broke that they were going to be transported to a camp – to Sobibór, I think – my brother arranged for a Kennkarte to be issued to one Jewish girl, with the name of Hanna Brzezińska, and took her to our home in Otwock Wielki. It was count Jezierski's estate, and after the owners were expelled, it was under the jurisdiction of the Warsaw district. The district governor would take his secretary and spend almost every weekend with her there. Also young German airmen on vacation for a few weeks stayed there. This was not a safe place for Hanka and we risked a lot. Hanka would stay very close to us all the time, especially to me and my brother. On Sundays, we would go to church in Karczew, three kilometers away, sailed in a boat on the lake, etc. She lived a normal life among us. Nobody in our family expected any payment in return. Still, you could guess her origins from her facial features. Consequently, when rumors about her started to circulate in the neighborhood, we had to look for another safe haven. After a family meeting, we decided to lodge Hanka at our friend's; he had just written to us that he had taken up the post of gardener on the estate of the Bank Rolny [Agricultural Bank] in Sulechów, near Kraków. We took her there, but to minimize the risk still further, we introduced her as a relative of ours from Włodawa, who was hiding to avoid being taken for labor in Germany. Hanka was well off there. I exchanged correspondence with her all the time, sending my letters to an iron shop in Kraków, at Starodomska Street 13. After the liberation, we left for Susz, where I started a family soon afterward. After a while, I learned that Hanka married a man of the same religious affiliation and they set up a thread factory. Her health deteriorated and they planned to leave for France, where her older sister lived, whom she used to tell me a lot about. I remember that she gave birth to a child that weighed five kilos.

Once, when I was in Karaków, I looked up the shop at Starodomska Street 13, but it was already a different shop, and that lady did vaguely recall that there used to be an iron shop there once, but she did not remember anything else.

Recently, I managed to enlarge an amateur photo of Hanka, myself, and my brother. Despite the passage of time, the photo came out well. I have mailed it and I would very much like for it to be placed on the monument that is being erected. Maybe somebody from Kraków would recognize Hanka.

She was a pretty, cheerful girl, who liked to sing with us, and her favorite song was the one about Hanka whom Stach killed with a knife, which courtyard bands perform nowadays. I also remember her song about a girl from Lwów, *Night train*, 3rd class, etc. I can produce a witness if need be. My friend from the occupation period is still alive: she came around almost daily and remembers Hanka very well. She still lives in Otwock Wielki and, if required, she will surely corroborate everything. Staying with Hanka and then exchanging correspondence with her, I risked my life all the time, as did my entire family. We also helped many Jews who after the liquidation of a labor camp in Karczew decided to make their way to Warsaw. We became close friends with one of them, a man by the name of Pynia. He sang beautifully and he taught me a sad song called *Mir felta frain – I don't have a friend*. I no longer remember all the lyrics but I remember the beautiful, sad melody. I would very much like to one day hear this sad song again.

When I sometimes talk to my grandchildren about Hanka, they are puzzled that I have not yet received a Righteous among the Nations medal, which I rightly deserve. I have decided to apply for such a medal.

I would very much like for a huge photo of Hanka to be placed on the monument. She was a beautiful young girl and maybe some of the visitors would recognize her – maybe her children, if she had any. I regret that I never cared to know Hanka's real name, but at that time it was safer not to know. No letters from her have survived, but there is a page from my diary with a date, written by Hanka, and two amateur photographs of my brother, Hanka, and myself. My maiden name is Zaprzaluk.

Kazimiera Dembek
[...]

Attached is a photograph of Hanka and the pages from the diary.