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Bożena Sieradzka-Baziur
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4214-7268

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland
https://ror.org/009j14p05

The Reich and Mikołajków families from Dębica in the face of the Shoah

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to show the history of the Jewish Reich family hiding during World War II with the Polish Mikołajków family on Kościuszko street in Dębica, in the light of biographical accounts and previous studies, and to present the negative and positive conditions for helping a family by another family in a situation of direct threat to the lives of members of both families. The biographical method was used in the writing of the article. Examining a fragment of the history of two families from a biographical perspective allowed for a better understanding of individual fates against the background of historical events.

Keywords

family studies, Polish family, Jewish family, Shoah, Righteous Among the Nations

1. Introduction

Politicians who drag entire nations into wars destroy them, degenerating not only the generation that participates in them, but also the ones that follow them, and the process of accusations, settlements, ethical instability is experienced by subsequent generations. The bloodiest war in history, World War II, claimed an estimated 60–85 million victims. The nation that was most brutally treated by Nazi Germany was the European Jews. Between 1939 and 1945, the Germans murdered about six million Jews in Europe, including about three million Polish Jews. Only a few survived.

This article presents the story of the rescue of the Jewish Reich family by the Mikołajków family from Dębica during the German occupation.

As Włodzimierz Bonusiak writes, Dębica found itself within the range of war operations as early as September 2, 1939. Around 6 p.m., 30 German planes dropped dozens of bombs, causing significant damage to the city. On September 8, the Germans crossed the Wisłoka River near Pilzno and the 22nd Armoured Corps occupied Dębica. A long period of captivity and fighting began for the city and its residents. The civil authorities of the district office, which was Dębica, cooperated with the police, which was divided into two formations (the security police and the order police). The security police (Sipo) was represented in Dębica by the Gestapo, the security service and the criminal police. W. Bonusiak states that near Dębica there was a large military training ground ("Heidelager"), a POW camp, a forced labour camp, and in the city itself there was a detention centre, which means that the residents of the city and its surroundings were under strong police surveillance and great physical and moral pressure. The German invader was convinced that he could use terror to ensure the safe operation of the war machine and the implementation of specific population and economic policy goals. In terms of population policy, the primary goal adopted by the German Nazis was the direct and indirect extermination of the inhabitants of the city and district. According to estimates, at the beginning of the occupation, the population of Dębica was about 10,000, including about 3,000 Jews and 7,000 Poles. As a result of German actions,[1] at the beginning of the occupation, as Ruben Siedlisker-Sarid writes, the Germans, with the help

[1] W. Bonusiak, *Podczas wojny obronnej i okupacji niemieckiej*, in: *Dębica. Zarys dziejów miasta i regionu*, eds. J. Buszko, F. Kiryk, SECESJA Publishing and Printing House, Kraków 1995, pp. 449–462.

of the city authorities, organized a census of the entire population of Dębica and issued yellow identification cards (Kennkarte) to the Jews and grey cards to the Poles "The Jews of Dębica understood that they had found themselves in a trap from which there was no escape."[2] In 1941, the Germans established a ghetto in Dębica, where 12,000 Jews from Dębica and the surrounding towns were crammed into a small area in tragic conditions. The Nazis systematically deported Jews to the death camps in Bełżec or murdered them in the ghetto or in the Jewish cemetery. They also selected a group of Jews, who were transported in trucks to the place of mass execution in the Wolica forest, where an estimated 180–600 people were shot. The final liquidation of the ghetto in Dębica took place in April 1943.[3] The Jewish community of Dębica, which at that time was about 1/3 of its inhabitants and had been shaping the life of the city together with the Poles for centuries, ceased to exist. Only a few citizens of the Jewish community survived, who managed to escape from the city or were saved by the people of Dębica or the inhabitants of nearby towns. The tragedy of the Jews during World War II unfolded before the eyes of Polish citizens, who at the same time were also subjected to German terror. The majority of Polish society remained passive towards the tragedy of the Jews, many showed hostility and hatred towards them, and only a few provided them with help, as Elżbieta Rączy[4] wrote about it. The Mikołajków family from Dębica, who helps the Jewish Reich family and other Jews from Dębica, belong to this minority. Jacek Leociak states: "Heroism is not a social norm and does not set universally applicable standards of behaviour. Not everyone can and wants to be a hero. There is no heroism on a mass scale. Heroism is a 'deviation from the norm,' an exception, defying the instinct of self-preservation in the name of values higher than preserving one's own life. If we do not want to acknowledge this, we betray the memory of the Righteous and plunge them into the abyss of banality. The natural reflex of each of us is to move our hand back when we find ourselves near a flame.

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2 R. Siedlisker-Sarid, *Zagłada dębickich Żydów*, in: *Sefer Dembic. Księga pamięci żydowskiej społeczności Dębicy*, ed. D. Leibel, Willa Wiluszówka, Dębica 2021, p. 182.

3 R. Siedlisker-Sarid, *Zagłada dębickich Żydów*, pp. 180–191; *Księga Dębicy. Kolebka naszej młodości. Wspomnienia żydowskich mieszkańców Dębicy*, ed. A. S. Więch, transl. and ed. by I. Socha, Society of Friends of Science in Przemyśl, Przemyśl 2014; I. Socha, *Żydzi w Dębicy*, https://dembitzer.pl/?page_id=693 (07.08.2024).

4 E. Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1945*, Institute of National Remembrance, Rzeszów 2008; E. Rączy, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie krakowskim w latach 1939–1945*, Institute of National Remembrance, Rzeszów 2014.

Those who dared to help Jews, risking their own lives and the lives of their loved ones, were able to hold their hand in the flame and not move it back."[5]

Maria Fern states: "Out of the blood-drenched pages of Nazi history have come countless tales of heroism and selfless courage, but few can match the story of the young Catholic physician, Dr. Alexander Mikolajkow, and his wife, Leokadja, who risked death for themselves and their two small sons "to show there were decent people left who valued human life and human dignity."[6]

2. Purpose of the work and methodology used

The aim of the conducted research is to show the history of the Reich family hiding during World War II with the Mikołajków family on Kościuszko street in Dębica—in the light of biographical accounts and previous studies—and to present the negative and positive conditions of a family providing assistance to another family in a situation of direct threat to the lives of members of both families. The biographical method was used in the writing of the article. It consists of describing and analysing the course of a human life or its fragment against the background of a specific fragment of social reality. The analysis includes oral and written texts concerning the life experiences of specific individuals. This method is useful in the case of research conducted within the humanities and social sciences. The presented article is situated within the family sciences, as the focus will be on the behaviours and attitudes of the Reich and Mikołajków families in the face of the Shoah. Thanks to biographical research, it is possible to describe a given phenomenon and better understand it by studying individual fates.[7]

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[5] J. Leociak, *Dyskurs o pomocy*, "Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały. Pismo Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFiS PAN"" 4 (2008), p. 13.

[6] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic… Next door was the Gestapo*, "New York Post", Sunday, 10.01.1960, pp. M4–M5.

[7] See also B. Sieradzka-Baziur, *Dokument osobisty jako źródło danych na temat polskiej rodziny żydowskiej w czasie drugiej wojny światowej i po jej zakończeniu*, in: *Obszar Europy Środkowej w geopolityce mocarstw (od Mitteleuropy do integracji europejskiej)*, eds. G. Baziur, P. Skorut, Publishing House of the State Higher Vocational School, Oświęcim 2017, pp. 207–229.

The corpus of texts examined includes:

1. The account of survivor Efraim Reich is contained in an article by Maria Fern from 1960. In it, he presented his war experiences as part of his broader efforts to obtain a US visa for Leokadia Mikołajków.
2. The account of survivor E. Reich and L. Mikołajków contained in an article by Maria Fern Eckman from 1961.[8]
3. The account of L. Mikołajków published in a book edited by Richard C. Lukas from 1989.[9]
4. *Za co dostałam medal Sprawiedliwi Wśród Narodów Świata*, a film interview given by L. Mikołajków in 1997 to journalist Zofia Zaks for the "Shoah Witnesses" foundation founded by director Steven Spielberg (DVD).
5. An account of E. Reich from the resources of the Institute of National Remembrance, https://zyciezazycie.pl/zyz/relacje/887,Efraim-Reich.html.

In this body of biographical texts, the following are visible in the foreground: Efraim Reich, one of the rescued, and the rescuers: Leokadia and Aleksander Mikołajków, whose fates intertwined during the Holocaust of the Jews in Dębica. In the background there are other rescued members of the Reich family, in the next there are the young sons of the Mikołajków family, who also contributed to saving Jews, the dying Jews, the co-inhabitants of the Mikołajków family house, additional people supporting the Mikołajków family during the aid provided to the Reichs (the Kunysz family and Mrs Chmielowa, a baker, a milkman) and at the other end of the spectrum the German torturers and the blue police.

The research problem posed in the article is as follows: What were the negative and positive conditions for the help provided to the Reich family by the Mikołajków family?

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[8] M. Fern Eckman, *"Those were years not to forget…" A sequel to a tale of one woman's heroism*, „New York Post" Sunday, 05.02.1961, p. 5.

[9] *Leokadia Mikołajków*, in: *Out of the inferno. Poles remember the Holocaust*, ed. R. C. Lukas, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky 1989.

3. The Mikołajków family

According to the studies of Zbigniew Szurek and other data,[10] Leokadia Mikołajków née Wawrzykowska (1906–2004), Aleksander Mikołajków (1901–1944), Leszek Mikołajków (1933–2024); Andrzej Mikołajków (1937–…) was a Polish family that saved Jews during World War II, all members of which were awarded the Righteous Among the Nations distinction—the married couple in 1980 and the sons in 1989. Leokadia and Aleksander Mikołajków arrived in Dębica in the former Kraków province (currently the Subcarpathian province) in 1930 and lived on Kościuszko street. Aleksander graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv and was a doctor at the Social Insurance Institution. Leokadia was a graduate of the Warsaw School of Nursing and worked in Dębica in her profession.[11] Both were active social activists of the Polish Red Cross and sworn members of the Home Army. Leokadia belonged to the sanitary section of the Women's Military Service.[12] Aleksander Mikołajków was killed during the liberation of the Dębica district by the Red Army on August 24, 1944. After the war, Leokadia raised her sons in Dębica. In the 1960s, she moved to Warsaw, where she died in 2004.

[10] Z. Szurek, *Rodzina Mikołajkowów (próba biografii). Ofiarność, odwaga, poświęcenie*, Gryf Media Group Dębica 2013; Z. Szurek, *Rodzina Mikołajkowów. Ofiarność, odwaga, poświęcenie*, The District Branch of the Polish Red Cross in Dębica, Dębica 2018. See also the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Sawing Jews During World War II in Markowa, https://muzeumulmow.pl/pl/ratujacy/podkarpackie/mikolajkowie-leokadia-aleksander-andrzej-i-leszek/ (07.08.2024).

[11] The analysed sources contain a description of the Mikołajków couple. For example, in the article by M. Fern we read: "The Germans seized Dębica in 1939. There was immediate persecution of the Jews and of Polish intellectuals unsympathetic to Nazi objectives. Concentration camps were established, a ghetto created. Mikołajków, who was a State Health Insurance physician, felt disgraced by these developments. He had never been particularly drawn to Jews. He was not a crusader. But he had learned that injustice to one group is injustice to all" (M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4).

[12] Z. Szurek, *Rodzina Mikołajkowów. Ofiarność, odwaga, poświęcenie*.

4. The Reich family

The Jewish, religious Reich family lived in Dębica at 22/24 Krakowska street.[13]

From the interview with L. Mikołajków in 1997, we learn that the Mikołajków and Reich families knew each other before the war. The youngest son of the Reichs, Efraim, was treated by Dr Mikołajków for anaemia. L. Mikołajków in his 1989 report states: "In 1940 a Jewish woman by the name of Reich came with her son, Froimek,[14] for an examination. She appealed to my husband to save her son from certain extermination. Froimek, who was physically weak, would probably have been shot by the Germans in several days on account of his unsatisfactory output at work. My husband and I decided to help Mrs. Reich and Froimek; he was registered at the Arbeitsampt as a messenger for the dispensary. From that moment, we helped the Reich family and other Jews many times with medicine and food."[15] According to L. Mikołajków's account from 1997, young, 14-year-old Efraim stayed in their house, playing with their sons and having decent living conditions. Every evening, however, he had to return to his family, to the ghetto. Years later, E. Reich reports that one day L. Mikołajków came to the ghetto with her son, bringing information about the upcoming liquidation of the ghetto and said that she would save him. However, he refused because he said that he and his family had decided that they would go everywhere together. Then, she gave him the key to the attic and told him to bring his whole family.[16] Efraim Reich hid in the Mikołajków estate, together with his parents, two sisters, brother, brother-in-law, three cousins, including one with a small child, uncle and aunt, a total of 13 people. All are referred to by E. Reich as the Reich family, and this was a closer and more distant family, whose members had different surnames.[17] More detailed information about the survivors is available on the website of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, por. "The Mikolajkow family, working with Efraim, managed to get Efraim's parents, Chaskel and Roza, Efraim's brother, Samuel, his two sisters, Rachel and Hanna, Hanna's husband, Ruven Wolf, aunt

[13] *Out of the inferno: Poles remember the Holocaust*, ed. R. C. Lukas, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington 1989, pp. 124–125.

[14] Polish version of the name Efraim, diminutive. Leokadia Mikołajków also used the term Froim.

[15] *Leokadia Mikołajków*, pp. 124–125.

[16] Relacja Efraima Reicha, ocalonego wraz z całą rodziną w Polsce w czasie II wojny światowej, film, 1'52", https://zyciezazycie.pl/zyz/relacje/887,Efraim-Reich.html (21.08.2024).

[17] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4; M. Fern Eckman, *Those were years not to forget…"*, p. 5.

and uncle and their two daughters out of the Dębica ghetto, for a total of eleven family members […] In addition to the eleven members of the Reich family, the Mikolajkow family also hid two other Jews from the Dębica ghetto."[18] The biographical data analysed show that one of the people (an aunt) died while staying in the Mikołajków house, and a cousin died of tuberculosis a few months after liberation. After the Red Army entered, the family left Dębica, first for Rzeszów, then for Austria, and then for the United States and other countries. M. Fern writes that Efraim Reich became a rabbi in Brooklyn. As soon as he had financial resources, he supported the widow Leokadia Mikołajków and her sons. According to Ireneusz Socha, Reich died in 2018 and was buried in Jerusalem.[19]

5. The story of survival

The Mikołajków family house on Kościuszko Street was located in the immediate vicinity of the Dębica gestapo and the criminal police, a few dozen meters from the entrance to the ghetto. On the premises (in the attic, garage and basement behind the garage), a Polish family hid 13 people. Efraim Reich reports: "We were to remain under the doctor's protection for two years, until the Russians came in August 1944, I think it was."[20] During those two years, they stayed in this shelter twice for a few days, and in the final period of the war for 9 months. Doctor Aleksander Mikołajków and his wife tried to make the shelter offered to the Jews as safe as possible. To this end, the doctor, together with Efraim Reich and his father, dug a secret passage from the garage to the basement behind the garage: "The doctor had only one hour's sleep a night. We had to dig very quietly, with our hands, with tools, to make a passage under the garage. Then, at night we went from the attic to the basement, where the doctor thought we would be safer."[21] When the Germans requisitioned the garage for their motorcycles, the Reichs moved to the attic.

[18] *The Mikolajkow family,* https://jfr.org/rescuer-stories/mikolajkow-family/ (21.08.2024).
[19] Biographical data indicate that E. Reich's grandfather, Dawid, was killed at the beginning of the war (interview with L. Mikołajków from 1997), and during the liquidation of the ghetto, his 19-year-old sister, cf. M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4.
[20] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4.
[21] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4.

Living conditions in all these places (attic, garage, basement) were dramatically difficult, but, as it turned out, survival was possible. As it results from the account included in the film interview that L. Mikołajków gave in 1997 to a journalist Zofia Zaks, the Mikołajków family bought food with their own money for the Jews hiding.[22] The young sons of the Mikołajków family smuggled food and medicine into the Dębica ghetto. Due to their professional activities—social and caring—the Mikołajków family also had the opportunity to receive additional food (milk and bread), which they gave to the family in hiding.[23]

According to L. Mikołajków's account, published in a book edited by R. C. Lukas in 1989, the Reich family was also given shelter by Mr Kunysz, an eighty-year-old resident of Dębica.[24] Ireneusz Socha states that the Reich's last shelter was the wooden house of the Kunysz family on Garncarska street.

6. Negative conditions for providing shelter to the Reich family

For hiding Jews during World War II in Poland, death was a threat not only to the people who provided this help, but also to members of their families and people who could be associated with this activity.[25] The negative conditions for providing shelter to the Reich family include, first and foremost, the fact that the Mikołajków family's house was located next to the headquarters of the Gestapo and the criminal police. Their house was inhabited by two strangers (a maid and a tenant) who had not been informed about the hiding of Jews, but could have guessed it, and the Mikołajków family feared betrayal on their part. Feeding 13 additional people was covered not only from the heroic family's own financial resources, but, as I wrote above, the Mikołajków family received an additional

[22] "They never got tired. They never did it for money. There were other Jews hidden by Christians, but almost always financial remuneration was involved. But not with the doctor and his wife" (M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 5).

[23] "The doctor was granted extra rations by the Nazis. But as the war progressed the food shortages grew"(M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 5).

[24] *Leokadia Mikołajków*, p. 125.

[25] "On Monday morning, the rabbi says, we were told that big signs had appeared on the streets. 'Anyone who does not denounce Jews will be killed'. One such sign was put on the house where we were hiding. „The doctor told me he felt threatened. I told him I saw it was hopeless and I didn't want him to die because of us. I said we were lost anyway. But he said: 'No. I'll always put my own life in danger to save decent, innocent people'"(M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4).

ration of milk and bread because of the social and care activities they conducted. This food was delivered by people who were aware that Jews were being hidden in the house and could have given them away. However, this did not happen. The Polish blue police also knew about the hiding of Jews in the Mikołajków house. E. Reich, in his report from 1961, said that three months before the liberation, a Polish policeman came to the Mikołajków family to warn them that it was already known that Jews were being hidden in their house. He added that because the Mikołajków family was very well-liked, no one had yet given them away. "But the police begged the doctor to get rid of us. He said he would think it over. He talked to his wife that night. He said he was sure we would be killed if he told us to leave. And so the next day he told the police that he would share whatever happened to us. 'They are going to stay here' he told his wife. «I will not let them go»."[26]

The negative conditions in this case also include the fact that the Mikołajków family had two small sons and a niece who was being raised by the couple. Saving people from outside one's family in a situation that posed a threat to the lives of the closest people, including children, must raise serious dilemmas. In an interview from 1997, L. Mikołajków relates that from the windows of her house she saw a murdered girl and Efraim's murdered grandfather, Dawid, and she saw the bodies of murdered Jews being taken to Wolica. The Mikołajków family knew that Jews were being taken to certain death to the camp in Bełżec, murdered in the cemetery in Dębica, in the ghetto, in Pustków and on the streets of Dębica. The inevitable fear in such inhuman circumstances was the negative conditioning. The report from 1961 included a telling dialogue: "During those years of the occupation, with 13 Jews finding sanctuary under her roof, had she been afraid?" "Who wouldn't be afraid?" Leokadia Mikolajkow countered. 'I was afraid for them—and for myself. I didn't want to die.'"[27] Doctor A. Mikołajków did not hide his fear either because he was aware of the death they were facing at the hands of the Germans.[28]

[26] M. Fern Eckman, *"Those were years not to forget…"*, p. 5.
[27] M. Fern Eckman, *"Those were years not to forget…"*, p. 5.
[28] See footnote no. 26.

7. Positive conditions for the Mikołajków family to provide shelter to the Reich family

However, the positive conditions outweighed the negative ones and contributed to the fact that the Jewish Reich family was saved. These conditions allow us to understand how it was possible that in such tragic conditions of war occupation, under the watchful eye of the Gestapo and the criminal police, a large Jewish family was saved by a family with small children, living in the company of people who could give them away. At the beginning, it is worth mentioning that the Mikołajków family, due to their medical professions, helped other people and it was an obvious and natural act for them. L. Mikołajków said: "I am a nurse. […] All my life I helped people. So when this thing happened, I functioned automatically. I could not back out. In the end, I am a nurse. I studied at the Warsaw Nursing School. I graduated in 1928. The director was an American, Helen L. Bridge. Perhaps you will mention her name. She might read it. I was then Wawrzykowska, not yet Mikolajkow. I would like Miss Brigde to know, if she is still alive, that we practiced always the ethics she taught us."[29]

During the war, the heroic couple provided medical assistance not only in the Polish Red Cross, and later in the Central Welfare Council, in the Health Fund they ran, to which Jews belonged, in the ghetto, but they also helped partisans, being sworn members of the Home Army. As L. Mikołajków reports in an interview from 1997, wounded partisans were hidden on their property in Dębica, and the Mikołajków family provided them with medical assistance. It should also be emphasized that the Mikołajków couple shared the same ideals, and because of this, they could jointly provide help to all who needed it. They were consistent in their activities, they made no exceptions. They honoured values greater than themselves; the meaning of their lives was to help others. Efraim Reich also points out that the Mikołajków couple was guided in their behaviour by Christian ideals: "The patience and the kindness of the Catholic couple sheltering them was, the rabbi says, "saint-like." "All this time" he explains, "the doctor or his wife would bring food to us, at midnight, at two in the morning, whenever they thought it would be safe."[30] E. Reich and his family invited L. Mikołajków to the United States, where, as he says in 1997, she visited three times. During one of the stays, the survivor asked her about the motivations

[29] M. Fern Eckman, *"Those were years not to forget…"*, p. 5.
[30] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 5.

for her heroic behaviour and reported: "I was a youth of 15 when I saw her last. Now I am 34 and a father. I understand more. I realize even more what she did. I asked her what gave her the courage to endanger two children. She told me she remembered the Bible. She remembered that Abraham asked God if he save Sodom if He could find 50 good people there. And that finally God agreed to save the city if He found only 10 good people. She said it looked so dark for all Europe. She felt it was her duty to save the dignity of human beings—so that there would be a little opening left for life."[31]

It is also worth emphasizing the humanitarian, positive attitude of the Mikołajków family towards the people they were hiding from, whom they helped without charging any fees or expecting any remuneration. They treated them with respect, like their guests, caring not only for their health but also for their mental well-being. L. Mikołajków convinced this orthodox family to also eat non-kosher food to improve their health. E. Reich says: "Throughout the entire period of our hiding, we did not hear a word of complaint from those who rescued us, complaints that things were hard."[32] In a situation of direct threat to the lives of both families, mutual kindness, which was born before the war, is an important positive condition. Also noteworthy is the fact that the Mikołajków family took care to create a safe shelter for the rescued people and to find another hiding place in a situation of increased threat from the Germans.

The Mikołajków family, who hid such a large Jewish family, did not live in a social vacuum. They created a support network, through which feeding such a large group of people under the conditions of Nazi occupation and universal hunger was possible. According to L. Mikołajków's account from 1997, this support network was made up of: a private baker, who, like her, was in the Home Army and delivered 13 loaves of bread a week, a man referred to as a "grandfather" who delivered food, and his wife. They were most likely the Kunysz family, who gave the Reichs shelter towards the end of the occupation; Mrs. Chmielowa, who sold the Reichs' belongings and thus helped them; the milkman, from whom L. Mikołajków received milk because of his social and caregiving activities. The Mikołajków family had friendly, supportive relationships with people, and none of the people who helped them betrayed them, despite the direct threat to their lives. It is also necessary to emphasize the positive conditions resulting from

[31] M. Fern Eckman, *"Those were years not to forget…"*, p. 5.
[32] Relacja Efraima Reicha, https://zyciezazycie.pl/zyz/relacje/887,Efraim-Reich.html (07.08.2024).

the attitude and behaviour of the Reich family. In his report from 1960, E. Reich recalls that while in hiding, they suffered from hunger, lack of light, and were overcome by negative feelings, but they had a strong desire to survive.[33] In an interview from 1997, L. Mikołajków emphasizes that the Reichs were an orthodox family and that they gained strength from studying sacred religious texts. "We had, I think, the will not die, not to die until liberation, not to die in such humiliation. My father, a rabbi and a student of the Bible and the Talmud studied with us. He wanted us to forget the hunger and the fear. It was very hard for us. There was a lot of friction. We would get angry, yes. But we had to control these feelings. My father always straightened things out. There was no way of getting out, we thought. Logically, there was no way. But the will to live was so strong that we thought, maybe, maybe we will make it. Sometimes we talked. But many times the talking went out of us. I was in the world of thinking."[34]

They had a strong desire to regain freedom, as E. Reich says, "We had wanted only to live for the day we became free. We did not care if we died then. We wanted to be free. That was what mattered."[35]

Notably, the discipline and mental resilience of the people in hiding, including a small child who was only 3 years old when arriving at the Reichs' house. During the months of hiding on the Mikołajków property, they did not reveal the location of their hiding place. The ties of kinship and affinity that bound them, the kindness and support they showed each other, were of no small importance in this case.

8. Summary

This article presents the story of the Jewish Reich family hiding during World War II with the Mikołajków family on Kościuszko street in Dębica. For this purpose, biographical accounts and previous studies on the subject were used. The article provides some answers to the questions formulated in the research problem: What were the negative and positive conditions for the help provided to the Reich family by the Mikołajków family?

[33] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4-M 5.
[34] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 5.
[35] M. Fern, *Thirteen guests in the attic*, M 4.

The negative conditions accompanying the actions taken were psychological in nature: overwhelming feelings of fear and anxiety about one's own children, about oneself and about the people being hidden; and situational: the immediate vicinity of the Gestapo and the criminal police, the presence of strangers in the house (the maid and the tenant) who could have suspicions about the couple's activities and betray them, the insufficiency of providing help to such a large group of people being hidden despite spending their own financial resources, the necessity to use the help of other people, which created the risk of betrayal, the awareness that the blue police knew about the Jews being hidden in their house and could give them up.

The positive conditions that determined that the Mikołajków family saved the Reich family are of an ideological nature: the Mikołajków family's medical professions and practice in helping others, the religious motivation for the help provided;[36] personal: the Mikołajków family was not only selfless, but also responsible in terms of their actions, providing safe hiding places and creating a support network for the actions they undertook; and relational: the orthodox Reich family and the Christian Mikołajków family knew each other and built friendly relations before the war, and the bond that connected them was still being built during the tragic, terrifying time of the Holocaust that threatened both of them.

Biographical documents on the Mikołajków and Reich families, who experienced brutality and cruelty from the German invader, contain statements by participants in tragic events that are evidence of disagreement with evil and violence, and actions showing that internal freedom and human dignity find expression even in extreme, borderline situations, when the individual fate of a threatened person is at stake.[37]

[36] "With deliberation, always aware of the danger, the Mikolajkows had risked their own lives and the lives of their two small sons «to show there were decent people left who valued human life and human dignity»" (M. Fern, *"Those were years not to forget…"*, p. 5).

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