

# The Taste of Life in the Ghetto #22. Children's day-care facility – Nowolipie 30

**We invite you to read another article by Agnieszka Witkowska-Krych in a series entitled “Life in the Ghetto”, in which the authoress writes about such issues as problems with feeding the residents of the ghetto, the activity of meal points that were organized on an ad hoc basis for its starving residents, as well as kitchens dedicated to children and infants, Transferstelle.**

The author talks about the buildings of Courts that served as trafficking points for food smugglers, Janusz Korczak's efforts to obtain help for the Main House of Shelter, the so-called house committees, about people and institutions which had to face a nearly impossible task: feeding and saving people from starving to death. The articles are published on our website every week. We invite you to read these uneasy accounts, based on diverse and solid sources.

Bogdan (Dawid) Wojdowski, born in Warsaw, was placed in the Warsaw ghetto as a teenager. He portrays the hunger that accompanied the life of the residents of the closed district in a dramatic novel entitled “Bread for the Departed”, based on facts and his own experiences: “The first days of hunger are the worst, then it becomes bearable. First comes the weariness, your arms and legs feel heavy, each word becomes a painful noise ringing in the ears. The colours do not bring joy to the eyes, the light hurts them. (...) You feel constant thirst; chapped lips dry out. The jaws clench of their own accord and you feel pain behind the ears at the sight of a tin spoon abandoned on a table. Then, thoughts about food start; terrible, exhausting daydreams. The stomach works like a syphon. A simple thought about a piece of swede is enough – suddenly your teeth tear the stringy pulp apart with a crunch, and the juice resembling black turnip, milder and sweetish in taste, flows down your throat and wets the swollen tongue, leaving a tart residue in the mouth. (...) The thought separates itself from swede and floats high above. – When will they bring the bread?” (1971, pp. 24-25).

Bread – the object of desire of dozens, hundreds of thousands of people crammed in a small,

designated area of the so-called North District. People, the vast majority of whom died of hunger, illness, exhaustion, during displacement actions, and in the Treblinka death camp. Food: in the ghetto, next to people who were craving bread and dreamed about swede, there were those who ate at the L'Ourse café, and "Gazeta Żydowska" ["The Jewish Newspaper"] informed on August 1, 1941, that the kitchen at 11 Leszno Street „will distribute 50 grams of candy for adults and additionally for children.” This does not change the general picture of the place in which acquiring food was a matter of great importance – necessary for, but not a guarantee of survival.

Prof. Konrad Zieliński, Head of the Scientific and Research Department at the Warsaw Ghetto Museum

### Children's day-care facility – Nowolipie 30

In the Warsaw Ghetto, due to the closure of schools, it was necessary to organise other types of child care. Among such solutions were day-care facilities, where children were brought to spend time with the childminders working in the centre for several hours a day. According to the preserved documents of Jewish Self-Help, one of such institutions was located at 30 Nowolipie Street (Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, file no. 211A/248.) and was a part of an extensive network of ghetto day-care facilities. Unfortunately, not much is known about this particular facility, although thanks to the corpus of materials collected by Emanuel Ringelblum's co-workers, documenting the work of several others, one can per analogiam guess how it worked. These are extremely interesting records of the childminders working in day-care facilities, i.e. women who spent time with the youngest inhabitants of the ghetto, organising educational activities for them, but also, and perhaps even most importantly, feeding them.

The conditions of the children's ghetto day-care facilities were quite diverse. In the building at 28 Śliska Street, the rooms were large and bright, and the day-care had tables, sitting benches and a wardrobe at its disposal (Archiwum Ringelbluma. Dzieci – tajne nauczanie (Ringelblum Archive.

Children – secret teaching in the Warsaw Ghetto , vol. 2, Warsaw 2000, p. 197.). The situation was quite different in the facilities at Ogrodowa and Stawki Street. There wasn't enough coal to heat the rooms and there was unpleasant smell in toilet (Ibidem, p. 191 and p. 184.). The charges of day-care facilities usually did not come from Warsaw. Motrolowa, first name unknown, who was working in a day-care at 76 Nowolipki Street, wrote about her charges: *"Some of them are children of refugees who arrived [...] two years ago, others are children of refugees from February 1941. There are sixteen orphans in the facility. [...] Forty percent of children don't have shoes, stockings, underwear, clothes. They wear shreds. [...] These children are dirty, infected with scabies, drawn, apathetic and by no means interested in anything"* (Ibidem, p. 188.). The children looked after at 3 Dzika Street were, to quote the words of the woman working in that facility: *"partly drawn, sick (tuberculosis) and exhausted creatures. [...] They are all infected with scabies, barefoot and naked. [...] They sleep in rags, do not undress at all. The case of orphans is particularly tragic. There are about a hundred and fifty of them. Usually round [i.e. full] orphans die. In November and December [1941] about forty of them died"* (Ibidem, pp. 183-184.).

In spite of the disastrous health conditions of the charges, the teachers tried to make the time more pleasant for the children. A day-care worker from 25 Nowolipki Street wrote about herself: *"I start my daily work with a cleanliness control, two older girls and special hygienists help me with this. We send dirty children home, but often, depending on the conditions, we wash them ourselves"* (Ibidem, p. 186.). The most important thing for the children themselves, however, is the fact that they can get a meal and eat it in the day-care without disturbance. A woman working in the day-care at Bagno Street wrote about it: *"Breakfast was served at 9.30 a.m. Each child ate breakfast in the presence of a day-care worker and one or two ladies from the Children's Committee. Only those who see [...] that a breakfast not eaten in the day-care centre is eaten completely or, in better cases, partly by the parents, will know what a great significance this has for the child. There were also children at my facility who did not want to eat breakfast in the day-care centre at all because they were afraid of being punished by their mothers, [who] beat the children and scratched them because the child ate breakfast and did not bring it to her"* (Ibidem, p. 196.). The hunger occurring among refugees and resettled persons, who were most often the parents of the day-care centre charges, in a situation of extreme starvation made them even rob their own children from their food.

**Agnieszka Witkowska-Krych** – anthropologist of culture, Hebraist, sociologist, in recent years a custodian at the Museum of Warsaw, researcher of the life and legacy of Janusz Korczak, collaborator of the Forum for Dialogue Foundation and the Centre for Yiddish Culture, author of texts on “the final issues” – the last journey of Korczak and his charges, the last performance given by the children from the Jewish Orphanage and the final notes in Korczak’s Diary.

Photo: 30-38 Nowolipie Street around 1942. (Warsaw 1939 Foundation, source: photo scan sent by Tomasz Lerski)

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