

## **TERESA (THERESE) GADOMSKA NÉE SZLENKIER**

Teresa Michalina Bogumiła Szlenkier was born on 21 September 1924 in Warsaw. Her parents were Karol Stanisław Szlenkier and Halina Stanisława, née Pfeiffer, both Polish. The Szlenkiers were a prominent Warsaw family, known for their patriotism, philanthropy and enlightened social capitalism. Teresa's great-granduncle, Franciszek Ksawery Szlenkier (1814-1871) was a member of the 1861 City of Warsaw delegation to famously issue a protest to the Tsar over the bloody repression of patriotic demonstrations in Warsaw. He was later imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel and forced into exile for his patriotic activities.

Teresa's grandfather, Karol Jan Szlenkier (1839-1900) founded a successful industrial empire, with factories and interests in Berdyczów, Warsaw and Lodz. He was a social pioneer, providing his employees with a pension and sickness fund, as well as personally funding a school for the children of his workforce. In 1881 he commissioned the well-known architect Witold Lanci to design and build a residence in Warsaw on Plac Dabrowskiego. It is still known as the Szlenkier Palace to this day and now serves as the Italian Embassy.

Teresa's aunt, Zofia Regina Szlenkier (1882-1939), used her inheritance to found the Karol i Maria Children's Hospital in Warsaw. Named after her parents, it was one of the most modern hospitals in Europe as well as the first children's hospital in Warsaw. Situated in the district of Wola, the hospital treated poor children regardless of religious or ethnic background – one of Zofia Szlenkier's founding stipulations. She studied at the Florence Nightingale schools of nursing in London and Bordeaux, later becoming the Director of the Warsaw School of Nursing, which she also helped to found. She was considered to be a pioneer in raising the standards and status of the nursing profession in Poland, for which she received the Polonia Restituta Cross and the Nightingale Medal from the International Red Cross. She was also made an Honorary Citizen of Warsaw.

Teresa's father, Karol Stanisław Szlenkier (1884-1944) inherited the factory in Berdyczów (a tannery) as well as the family estate (Nowy Zawód) situated nearby. He was a reluctant industrialist; first and foremost he was a physicist, completing his doctoral studies under Professors Wilhelm Roentgen and Arnold Sommerfeld at the University of Munich in 1912.

On 8 May 1915 he married Halina Stanisława Pfeiffer, daughter of Mieczysław Pfeiffer and Maria née Maciejewska. They settled in Nowy Zawód after their marriage but in 1916, due to the war and events in Russia, they decided to return to Warsaw. The German-Russian front stood in the way: they had to embark on a long and circuitous route of return. Three of their five children were born during this journey. Teresa's elder sister, Maria, was born in Oslo in 1916; her eldest brother, Tadeusz Karol, was born in Vevey in 1917 and her brother Ksawery Mieczysław in Cannes in 1920. Back in Poland, her brother Karol Ksawery was born in Konstancin in 1921, and she herself was born in Warsaw in 1924. All of Teresa's brothers and sisters were Polish citizens. Her brother Ksawery Mieczysław (aged 92) is still living in the family's pre-war summer residence in Radachówka, near Kołbiel.

The factory in Berdyczów and estate in Nowy Zawód were lost following the Bolshevik Revolution. The resulting change in financial circumstances forced the sale of the Szlenkier Palace in 1922. From around 1925 to 1929 Karol Stanisław moved his family to Radom where he had bought a small transmission belt production factory.

Teresa Szlenkier therefore spent her very early childhood in Radom. When the family returned to Warsaw she continued to be tutored by the family's governess, Pani Irena Kuczkowska, at the family home at No. 16, 6-go Sierpnia Street (currently Aleja Wyzwolenia). Before the outbreak of WWII she spent a brief period at the boarding school for girls in Szymanów. In school year 1938/39 Teresa attended the Szczuka sisters' school for girls in Rabka, St. Teresa's (Św. Tereski).

In September 1939, at the outbreak of the WWII, she was in Radachówka. After the fall of Warsaw, she returned to the capital and attended the Emilia Plater school for girls for the autumn term. In spring of 1940 she returned to St. Teresa's in Rabka but the school was closed later in the year by the Germans.

She was then sent by her parents to stay at her aunt and uncle Kleniewski's estate in Kluczkowice, Lublin province. For school years 1940/41 and 1941/42 she and a number of close cousins were home schooled by two tutors, as part of the clandestine network of secondary schools organised by the Polish underground state. During this time she sat exams for the Gimnazjum Rejtan in Warsaw.

In 1942 Teresa was recruited and sworn into the emergency medical service of the Home Army (AK) by the local AK doctor, Dr Spława-Neyman, the general practitioner for Wrzelowiec/Kluczkowice. She underwent training which included basic wound and burn care instruction. Her pseudonym was "Jaga".

In the same year, AK intelligence discovered that the Germans had become aware of the clandestine school at Kluczkowice and that they were planning to have the students deported as forced labour to the Reich. Teresa and her cousins had no more than two hours to pack and disappear. The cousins and the teachers fled to Radachówka where the studies continued for a time. However, after two bandit attacks on the house, Teresa's parents decided it would be safer for her in Warsaw.

She returned to the capital and completed her graduation examinations as part of the Gimnazjum Rejtan underground programme in 1943. Rejtan was a boy's school but included girls at that time. In 1943 she started a clandestine university course at Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW), in Agriculture. During this time Teresa was given a number of AK assignments, mainly involving the clandestine distribution of underground newspapers.

At the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, on August 1, 1944, Teresa was assigned by the AK to an auxiliary nursing unit based in an ad hoc hospital on the third floor in a building of a seminary on Krakowskie Przedmiescie. She recalls a Dr. Kossakowska and her daughter Barbara. There were also a number of AK soldiers who had been unable to reach the liberated parts of the city (the area remained in German hands). There was a great influx of casualties late in August/early September when the Old Town fell. The Germans set fire to the Old Town, burning many people alive. She recalls being sent to a basement on Długa Street to attend to the injured and to help evacuate them to Krakowskie Przedmiescie.

The Germans started to systematically evacuate the civilian population in convoys of trucks. When her part of Krakowskie Przedmiescie was evacuated she and a number of other young people were taken to the kitchen of the nearby Bristol Hotel and put to work peeling potatoes. She feels fortunate to have been placed there as often the outcomes of similar "evacuations" by the Germans were lethal – as in the case of her parents.

On 5 August 1944, just days after the start of the Uprising, the Germans torched the apartment block at 6-go Sierpnia Street. Teresa's parents were forcibly evacuated, her father was arrested and taken to Gestapo Headquarters on Aleja Szucha. He was executed as a "hostage". Her mother disappeared without trace. It is known that she went to Gestapo Headquarters on al. Szucha to find out what was happening to her husband. It is almost certain that she was murdered there as well.

Two of her brothers were also in the AK and participated in the Uprising: Ksawery Mieczysław ("Mietek", dyw.1 p.szwol. Mokotów – Śródm.) and Karol Ksawery ("Atos", dyw.1 p.szwol. Mokotów) were assigned to units in Mokotów. Her eldest brother, Tadeusz Karol, was at this time a Spitfire fighter pilot in the Polish Air Force in Great Britain.

On October 2 1944, on the day of capitulation, Teresa was taken to Brwinów outside Warsaw and set free. From there she made her way to the country house near Głowno where her sister Maria was living and whose husband was the administrator for the estate. She enjoyed a period of relative recovery and peace.

However, during this time she also undertook clandestine missions for AK Headquarters, carrying paper and gold dollars sent from London to fund AK activities. Amongst others she travelled to Lublin, Piotrków and Czestochowa.

On May 8 1945 she started an accelerated course in agriculture at SGGW. She knew many of the professors from her clandestine studies before the Uprising and it was relatively easy to re-establish herself as a student. She lived in SGGW accommodation on ul. Rakowiecka [8] and organized a medical service to care for the students. Initially, Teresa also served as a nurse.

By 1946 it became clear that Poland would not regain its pre-war independence and that it was to become a Soviet satellite. Following the tragic loss of her parents and encouraged by her brothers in the West, she decided to leave for Belgium where her brother, Karol Ksawery was studying following his release from a German PoW camp. Tadeusz Karol and Karol Ksawery paid \$100 for a guide to take her through the green frontier. Before setting out in November, she destroyed her German-issued Kennkarte.

She was in a group of about 50 women and children. They crossed the Polish-German frontier concealed in a freight train and disembarked somewhere in Berlin, in the Soviet Sector, posing as German refugees from Poland. They were then smuggled out of the Soviet Zone to the British Zone on foot, and clandestinely transported onward to the Polish Army I Corps base in Meppen, near the border with Holland. Here she and the others were interrogated by officers of General Maczek's Polish I Corps to confirm their Polish citizenship and to ensure any Soviet spies were filtered out. She was known to her interrogator – Tomasz Kępiński – a family friend who had attended Stefan Batory school with her brothers. He was easily able to confirm her Polish credentials.

On the basis of her AK membership, she was given a Polish Army uniform. She then left for Belgium with her brother, Karol Ksawery, who had arrived to meet her. Karol Ksawery was studying in Antwerp and had received a grant from the Belgian government.

Teresa applied for a grant to study at Gembloux Agricultural University. She was admitted to the fourth year of the Agricultural Engineering Master's programme and gained her degree in 1949 after completing her thesis on farm management. During this time she stayed with a Belgian family introduced to her by Tadeusz Karol. He had met this family during his time as a pilot in 308 Krakow Squadron during the liberation of Belgium. To pay for her board she looked after the family's five children. After she graduated, she obtained a job as assistant to Emile Larose, one of the university professors, for a year.

During this period Teresa met her future husband, Ryszard Andrzej Gadomski (born 23 March 1922 in Warsaw, Polish citizen, son of Zygmunt Klemens Gadomski and Stefania née Sagatowska). Ryszard was studying Maritime Commerce at the same university in Antwerp as her brother Karol Ksawery. They were married on October 28, 1949 in Gembloux.

They settled temporarily in Antwerp where their first child, Stephen, was born on July 30, 1950. After obtaining his degree, Ryszard Gadomski began to work in the wool importing business. In 1951 they applied to the United States consulate in Antwerp for an immigration visa as part of the Polish displaced persons quota. The visa was granted on October 16, 1951.

The family arrived in New York on December 10, 1951 and was granted permanent residency status. They settled in Westchester County, in the commuting suburbs of New York City.

They became US naturalised citizens on February 4, 1957. At some point Teresa started to use the French version of her name, Therese.

Initially Ryszard again worked in the wool importing business. He later became a financial advisor and went on to become a partner at Stanley, Marks, Lasser and Company on Wall Street. Teresa began working as a nurse's aide at Lawrence Hospital in Bronxville, New York. She worked the night shift caring for new-born babies.

They had six children: Stephen, born on July 30, 1950; Christopher, born May 28, 1952; Anne Marie, born August 13, 1956; Mary Helen, born October 12, 1959; Richard, born September 10, 1962; and John Paul, born December 8, 1964.

After Anne Marie was born Teresa became a full-time mother, and focused on raising children. She was active in supporting the various Catholic schools her children attended.

When her husband developed cancer, Teresa initially earned income from selling dried flower arrangements to hospital gift shops. After Ryszard succumbed to his illness (he died on December 30, 1973) Teresa sought full-time employment. She gained a position as a pathology technologist at Ciba-Geigy pharmaceuticals in Ardsley, New York. She advanced through the years into regulatory compliance which involved commuting to Summit, New Jersey. Ultimately she became a highly regarded consultant in this field. She specialised in assisting pharmaceutical companies to meet FDA criteria for investigational drug testing.

During this time, Teresa brought up their six children on her own, seeing them all through college, whilst running a home and continuing to develop her career. She retired in 1993.

Since then she has divided her time between Borrego Springs, California and Scarsdale and Cooperstown, New York, with regular visits to and from her children and her 16 grandchildren. She has been returning to Poland at least once a year for the past thirty or more years. During the communist period she actively helped her family in Poland, especially her eldest sister Maria, who had a family of eight children. She has been making regular donations to the Society for the Care of the Blind in Laski for many years and travelled to the Ukraine on a number of occasions as part of missions to help blind children organised by the Society.

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