

# JANET'S STORY

## I MEET HENRYK

I first met Henryk in April 1938. Henryk had been living in Paris at the time and had come to London with a visa for two weeks, to visit the museums and galleries. It was his first visit to London. Little did he imagine he would return to England the following year and remain almost twenty-seven years until his death. Nor that within two months he would be married to an English girl twenty-one years his junior. At the time we married, Henryk was forty-eight years old whilst I was within one month of my twenty-seventh birthday.

I remember so well the moment I first set eyes on my future husband. The man to whom I was at that time engaged (William Peace, a journalist of Polish British extraction) had been invited to a party given by Feliks Topolski for Jozef Retinger. Topolski had but recently arrived in London and was already attracting attention. Jozef Retinger, who came from Cracow, Henryk's home town, was at that time living in a bed-sit off Shaftsbury Avenue, wrapped in an old sheepskin jacket to keep warm, playing patience all day long and reading detective novels. He was a very interesting man, had known Josef Conrad very well and is said to have been involved in various rebellions in Mexico. On his arrival in London he had immediately been embraced by the Polish intellectual colony in London. It was not until the war began and a Polish government in exile was established in London that Retinger found a *raison d'être*. In no time he was general Sikorski's aide de camp, accompanying him on all his travels. After the war he found himself working with Winston Churchill on his project for the federation of Europe.

Having known Jozef Retinger in Cracow, Henryk, just arrived in London, was of course invited to Retinger's party; he was already there when I arrived with William at about ten o'clock. As the door of the flat opened I caught sight of Jozef engaged in conversation with a man who was standing in profile, dark, not very tall but erect, slight, but with broad shoulders. His face was that of an ascetic; yet at the same time the twinkle in his eyes told one that here was a man who was warm and human, and capable of enjoying the pleasures that life has to offer. The stranger was talking animatedly, using his hands as continentals do to emphasize points. As Jozef caught sight of me in the doorway he interrupted Henryk to say something to him and beckoned me over. Speaking in French he said: "Oh, Henryk, here is Janet. I know she speaks French. Now you'll have someone to talk to." Poor Henryk, he had been finding the party rather tedious – he spoke no English and apart from a few Poles most of those present were English. But Janet spoke French! This fact was to change the whole of both of our lives. Henryk's French was fluent, but he had quite a strong accent and it was the French of the non-French in the Montparnasse in Paris. His English remained to the end extremely personal; he never tried to speak correct English but in his own peculiar way he always managed to express his thoughts and ideas clearly and graphically. He always said he had an 'anti-talent' for languages. Perhaps he had; but I always noticed that, consciously or unconsciously, Henryk never expended energy, physical or mental, that he did not consider essential. He conserved his energy for the only thing that really mattered to him: painting.

And so we met. I remember we sat talking until the early hours of the morning. I do not remember what we talked about: I do remember that Henryk offered me one cigarette after another, and I, a non-smoker, accepted one after another.

We arranged to meet the following evening at the Café Royal, still in those days a meeting place for artists and writers. Henryk had made up his mind to ask me to marry him, but, as he told me later, he was more than a little worried about my “addiction” to cigarettes. Provided he was not too extravagant, Henryk had at that time no money worries; on his father’s death a few years earlier, he had inherited some property in Cracow and the income from rents gave him a secure basis for living. Henryk had not always enjoyed security: there had been times in Paris when, had it not been for the help of his brother Gabryk, an exuberant, warm-hearted and generous man, he would have been very short of money. He could never expect help from his father, a banker, who never forgave his eldest son for not following in his footsteps. How would a wife who apparently spent large sums of money on cigarettes affect his financial security? Nevertheless, Henryk was resolved, even if it meant financial ruin, to ask me to marry him.

And so, believing that the way to my heart lay in buying for me the most expensive cigarettes he could find, as we sat down on the red plush velvet seats of the Café Royal, Henryk produced from his pocket a packet of Balkan Sobranie cigarettes and proudly offered me one. To his astonishment and delight I said: “No thanks, I don’t smoke.” Vastly relieved to find that the only obstacle that he could see in the way of our marriage had disappeared he popped the question. Being a little more cautious, I said that I needed a day to think it over. I gave him my reply the following evening. And I have never smoked since the day of that party to this.

During the remainder of Henryk’s two weeks in London, we met every day, or rather every evening, for I was working. None of our friends was in favour of our marriage: they saw only the difficulties and uncertainties: I did not know Henryk, he was twenty one years older than me, he came from a “far-off country” – Poland; I would lose my British nationality; he was a painter, which meant “no security”; I was not his first wife, would I be the last? And so on. And in an effort to persuade me to change my mind, William put up the banns in the Hampstead Town Hall, and visited me every day, bringing me presents; chocolates, flowers, books. But the *coup de foudre* was too strong. It wasn’t exactly that I had made up my mind: it was simply that there was no other way.

Two things stand out in my mind from those last days in London. One evening, after we had had dinner in Soho, we walked in St. James’s Park. Henryk was due to return to Paris two days later; I was to settle my affairs and join him as soon as possible. Looking back now on our conversation, I see that Henryk had decided to make it quite clear that although he loved me and wanted to marry me, his work, painting, would always come first, and he would never allow anything to interrupt his work. He told me, neither of us speaking very perfect French, that he did not know what the future held: on the one hand, he might enjoy commercial success; on the other, it could happen that his pictures would not appeal to the public at all. But no matter what happened, he would never do anything but paint.

On that evening in St. James's Park, Henryk was trying to warn me that life with an artist was likely to be marked by many vicissitudes, as indeed it was. The wife of any man dedicated to his work must be prepared for a life of sacrifice, putting her husband's work before all else. Such men make big demands on their wives, but they cannot help themselves. Their single-minded devotion to their work consumes them at all times. Essentially they are lonely men. Henryk loved company. He was vivacious, a good conversationalist, and had a wealth of stories to tell. Yet, his life's journey, in spite of my presence, and in spite of his friends, was *au fond* the lonely one of a genuine creative artist.

Neither, at that time, did Henryk want the responsibility of a family, for sitting on a bench in St. James's Park, he suddenly said, as if he had just remembered something important: "By the way, Janet, no children." At that moment this did not worry me. The completely new life which lay ahead was far too exciting. Henryk's reasons for not wishing to have children were entirely in line with his character: a family would mean responsibilities: to have to support a family would mean that for a time at least he would have to be the only breadwinner and this might interfere with his freedom to work quietly, without worrying whether he sold pictures or not. At least, that is how I think he felt.

Later, however, he changed his mind. His first one-man show opened at Roland, Browse & Delbanco in September 1945. Henryk did not stay for the private view. He flew off to Warsaw the day before the exhibition opened, accompanying some members of the English Pen Club on a visit to Warsaw. I remember seeing him off in a ramshackle Dakota at Hendon, wondering if I should ever see him again. However, the Canadian pilot who flew back to England the next day, telephoned me to assure me that my husband was safe and sound. So the exhibition opened without Henryk. It was a huge success – everyday more and more pictures were sold and the reviews in the press were all that we could have wished for.

When Henryk returned from Warsaw the future seemed very rosy. Poland had been devastated, but Henryk and his leftish friends then looked forward optimistically to the rebuilding of Poland, a new Poland, a Poland rid of the injustices of the pre-war regime. The "official" artists of pre-war Poland no longer held the key positions; instead, Henryk's friends, the independent artists, now held professional positions at the academies, which gave them security and ample time to paint. Moreover, at that time, the new Polish government gave artists and writers complete freedom in their work. While in England, his first one-man show was a tremendous success, and it seemed that overnight Henryk had become "established".

And so, without really discussing the matter, we decided that our circumstances now made it possible for us to think of having a child; within two months I was pregnant and the baby's arrival was expected for July 1946. But fate decided otherwise. My baby arrived two months early and did not live. The gods ruled that this was to be my only experience of motherhood. Perhaps, as things turned out, it was a blessing in disguise.

## THE SILK PYJAMAS

To return to our meeting in London. During the next two weeks, Henryk and I met every evening for dinner in Soho, drinks in the Café Royal and walks in the park. And sometimes, we walked home, to stand awhile on the corner of the road where I lived to say goodnight. One night, something quite unexpected happened. Suddenly in the darkness, a figure appeared. It was William, and without saying a word, he gave Henryk a sharp punch on the nose. Henryk fell back, stumbled and blood began to flow from his nostrils. I could feel that William immediately regretted what he had done; he stepped forward to assist Henryk. But there he was, blood streaming from his nose. Something had to be done. We helped Henryk to walk along the road and took him into the house where I lived with my parents. My dog, Susie, a small white mongrel, did not like the situation at all. From her bed in the corner she began to bark and growl. My mother, tactful as usual, did not appear, despite all the noise and commotion. I bathed Henryk's nose as he lay back on the sofa, but to no avail. And William and I agreed that we should get Henryk to a hospital. Fortunately, we were able to get a taxi and in ten minutes we were entering the casualty department. Half an hour later, Henryk was well enough to leave the hospital and we found another taxi and we took him to his hotel.

How slowly the hours passed the following day; it seemed that 5.30pm, when I finished work, would never come. But finally, I left my office and hastened to the Bloomsbury hotel where Henryk was staying. The receptionist informed Henryk that I had arrived, and I entered his room, without knocking on the door. There was Henryk, sitting comfortably in bed, smiling, glad to see me, obviously recovered, and wearing magnificent blue silk pyjamas. Whether or not he had put them on to impress me, I do not know. In the short time that I had known him, I certainly did not have the impression that he bothered very much about his clothes. He wore, and was terribly attached to, a tweed hat which he had bought several years earlier in Greece. It acquired a very original shape. I think that in the whole of the time we were married, he had only one suit, dark blue, and it had to serve if we were invited anywhere formal dress was required. It is true, he did rather like good hats. In London, he bought dark green felt ones at Lock & Co, in St James's Street, which very quickly acquired the same peculiar shape Henryk gave to all his headgear.

I never learned how Henryk came by those silk pyjamas, but if he had intended to impress me, he undoubtedly succeeded.

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Henryk's two weeks in London passed quickly. When he left for Paris; we dined at Stones restaurant with Jozef Retinger before going to Victoria station to see him off. We had arranged that I should "settle my affairs" and join Henryk in Paris as quickly as possible. It must have been about three weeks later that I arrived in Paris, in May, the loveliest month to be in Paris. What a happy time it was. How Henryk enjoyed taking me to the Sainte Chapelle, Chartres, the Louvre. He showed me his favourite pictures: Rembrandt, Vermeer van Delft, Cézanne, Titian, Bonnard, Chardin and Delacroix, Goya, Velasquez; he talked to me about them and described to me some of

his favourite pictures which were not in the Louvre. I recall how movingly he spoke about Rembrandt's *Saul and David*, and he pointed out how Saul held a corner of a curtain to his eye to wipe away a tear. I felt then how much Rembrandt meant to him, how much he admired him. He spoke of Rembrandt with an almost religious feeling. He also spoke a lot about Vermeer in those days, whom he greatly admired.

We walked about the streets of Paris, hand in hand. I met his friends – Ruzkowski, Menkes and Jacek Zulawski, all painters, a Polish count who collected paintings, whose name I forget, Saltz, who became a famous dealer, now in New York, and was at that time collecting Bonnard; there was Marek Schwarz, a sculptor. And I remember visiting Kisling in his studio, so tidy with all his works neatly stacked on shelves. I did not mind at all that we were to be married in a *mairie* – in Saint-Germain-des-Prés. I had no desire at all for a “big wedding”, a white wedding, with lots of guests and presents. As far as I remember, we didn't receive a single wedding present! Jozef Retinger had borrowed not only the money for the fare from London to Paris, but also a coat from Feliks Topolski, so as to be able to be with us on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1938, our wedding day. Jacek Zulawski and his wife came, and also the Commercial Counsellor from the Polish embassy in London. His name was Merdinger and he came from Cracow. It was a very brief ceremony. We waited in a large hall, together with about six other couples and their friends, all sitting on benches arranged in rows. Not very romantic! At one end of the room there was a raised platform, with a table and some chairs. At the appointed time, in walked a typical bearded French mayor and the ceremonies began. He called out the names of the first couple to be married and they went up to the platform. Fortunately, we were the second couple to be called. When the mayor discovered that I was British he congratulated me in English, saying, “I hope you will be very happy.”

Afterwards, I was not quite sure whether I was married to Henryk Gotlib or Jacek Zulawski, for it was Jacek who, as we were walking down the stairs after the ceremony, suddenly remembered that Henryk had not put the ring on my finger. Whereupon Jacek placed it on my finger himself. In the evening we all met for dinner in a Spanish restaurant, drank lots of wine and were very merry.

One slight cloud marred this happy state, making me a little apprehensive. By marrying Henryk, I lost my British nationality; my British passport had to be surrendered, and a Polish one obtained in its place. We planned, after another month in Paris, to go to Warsaw, where Henryk had a studio, where he had been living for the past year or so.

And so Henryk took his rather subdued wife to the Polish consulate. I had many Polish friends in London – writers, painters, film producers, journalists. I had never thought very much about Poland itself: if Czechoslovakia was a faraway country of which the British people knew little, Poland was perhaps even more so. I said nothing, but Henryk sensed my anxiety about my newly acquired nationality.

## POLAND 1938/9

At the beginning of July, we left Paris by train for Warsaw. On the Franco-German frontier, I had to show my new Polish passport to an arrogant German official: once again the loss of my British nationality was brought home to me!

On arrival in Warsaw, in the early morning, we took a *doroszka* (horse drawn cab) to Henryk's studio. This was in the centre of Warsaw, in Wierzbowa, close to Pilsudski Square, as it was then called. I am not quite sure how long Henryk had been living in Warsaw. Maybe two, perhaps three years. Previously, from the time he returned from France in 1934, he had lived in Cracow. I know that he left that city in a hurry, for he had been informed by the mayor of Cracow that if he remained in Cracow he would have no alternative but to arrest him. For Henryk had committed a crime – in the eyes of the Polish authorities – of attending and taking part in a much publicised conference of leftish intellectuals – artists, sculptors, writers, poets – held in Lwow in 1935 to protest against Poland's reactionary government. Many of those taking part were later arrested and imprisoned. As a young man Henryk became a member of the Polish Socialist Party, never the Communist Party, although some of his closest friends were communists. He often spoke to me with great affection and warmth of Lech Piwowar, a young poet and I believe a communist, who was killed in Katyn during the war. Then there was Peiper, a poet, Kruczkowski, a writer, who became Poland's first Minister of Culture after the war, and many others. There was a strong avant-garde movement in Cracow, especially in the theatre, with which Henryk was actively connected. It was Henryk who thought up the name of the experimental theatre group created in Cracow by Josef Jarema. A group of painters, actors and actresses and writers were sitting in the Esplanade Café in Cracow one evening, discussing what name to give Jarema's theatre. Suddenly, Henryk said: "What about Cricot?" The word meant nothing; Henryk simply thought that phonetically it sounded amusing. Thus Jarema's theatre was christened Cricot. Henryk did the decorations and costumes for several of the productions there. Today Cricot II has been started by Tadeusz Kantor and is well known and highly thought of in Europe and America.

But, following the advice of the mayor, Henryk left Cracow, which he loved, where he was born, where he had always lived when in Poland, and where he had so many friends, and went to Warsaw.

To reach Henryk's studio, one entered a wide gateway, typical in Warsaw, into a courtyard, and thence up a not too clean staircase. It was an excellent studio, but it was not exactly a comfortable home to which to take one's bride. But then, when Henryk had left Poland three months earlier, he did not dream he would return married to an English girl. There were several easels, and pictures everywhere, stacked against the wall. On one easel was Henryk's large picture of the Spanish civil war. He had not been in Spain at the time of the war – he had left Spain not very long before it began. But the dreadful fate of the Spanish people affected him greatly and inspired him to paint the picture, as the 1939-1945 war later inspired him to paint his large Polish war triptych. (Note: Perhaps this is a good moment to tell how the triptych came to hang in the National Museum. As is known, Goebbels presented the triptych to the Polish government. It was crated and sent to Poland, whereupon it was lost for nearly twenty years. We were friends with Ambassador Milnikel when he was

in London. At the beginning of 1966, I could see that Henryk had not long to live. I wrote to Milnikel, without telling Henryk, asking if he thought that Henryk could have the satisfaction of seeing his triptych hanging in Warsaw. Milnikel wrote to me and said he would see what he could do. In July 1966, Milnikel came to London, telephoned us and asked us to go up to London for dinner. At the dinner, he took the opportunity to say to Henryk: "Henryk, the national museum would like to hang your triptych. When would be a good time for you to come?" Henryk suggested October. And in October, we did go to Warsaw, and his triptych was hung in the National Museum. All we did was go to the museum ourselves, and quietly sit down and see the work hanging on the walls. Henryk never knew that it was my approach to Milnikel that brought about the hanging of the triptych.)

In the corner of his studio there was a bed, with a mattress the like of which I had never seen before: it had lumps all over it, and seemed to have been permanently waved. There was an old gas cooker in the corner farthest from the window, and a few shelves on which Henryk's cooking utensils were piled; and through the door in a dark corridor was a bathroom, with a noisy and highly inefficient geyser. My thoughts went back to the crowds at the Polish consulate in Paris.

But Henryk had already decided on his plan of campaign, to allay my fears: lunch on the first day at Warsaw's best hotel, the *Europejski*. But before leaving for lunch, I decided to do a little washing. "Washing?" said Henryk. "*Pourquoi?*" He never could understand why one had to spend one's time on some of the practical chores of life; it was all a waste of time for him. A discussion ensued as to how the washing should be done, and more particularly, how it could be hung out to dry. Obviously Henryk had never had to face this problem before. In his bachelor days, his daily had always taken the washing home with her. Eventually, it was decided to tie some string onto one easel and stretch it across the studio to another, and Henryk undertook to rig a line up in this way. Alas, Henryk was never very practical: no sooner had I hung up the washing, than the string broke away from one easel, and the washing landed on the floor! Fortunately, Henryk did not intend that we should live permanently in this studio – ideal though it was for a painter living alone. I quickly picked up the washing from the floor: it was time to change and leave for lunch.

We stepped out into the July sunshine, down Wierzbowa, and across the enormous square to the hotel, a walk of about four minutes. I wore, I remember, a simple grey flannel suit which I had bought at Jaeger, and which I had worn in Paris at our marriage. Soon we were sitting up at a bar, drinking vodka and eating caviar, surrounded by a crowd of lively, well-dressed men and women.

Several people greeted Henryk and looked at me with curiosity. Looking through Henryk's papers after his death, I found a scrap of paper on which he had written: Life consists of three things: love, creativity and boredom. Obviously, I was not the first woman in his life. Henryk had been married once before, when he was quite young, to a pianist, and was divorced. Later, he had very much wanted to marry the daughter of an aristocratic Polish family, but this fell through, although Henryk changed his religion to that of a Calvinist, in order to gain the consent of her parents. Henryk was an agnostic, and changing his religion was a mere formality. He had also been very fond of an English woman who lived in St. Paul in the South of France. (She ran a teashop there, which was frequented by Henryk and other painters living in

St. Paul). Her name was Joan Smith, and she died there in about 1969. And of course, there were others! Now, here was Henryk suddenly appearing in Warsaw with a stranger, an English girl, much younger than him – in fact twenty-one years younger.

One of the well-dressed men approached Henryk and greeted him warmly. I was by now getting used to seeing men kiss each other three times on the cheeks, as I was becoming accustomed, and not disliking it, to having my hand kissed gallantly, on being introduced to someone of the opposite sex. The well-dressed gentleman was Edward Wittig, a sculptor who enjoyed great success in Warsaw, for he was given many official commissions for statues and monuments. So, for the first time in Warsaw, I was introduced: “My wife” said Henryk. I felt that he was deriving a certain puckish pleasure from the situation. Wittig looked incredulous and glanced again at me. “Yes,” said Henryk, “we were married in Paris. We met in London.” Wittig made an effort to control his astonishment and then followed more kisses of congratulations. The three of us went into the restaurant to have lunch together. The conversation was carried on in French, Henryk filling in the details of our meeting, Wittig telling Henryk about the present stage of a large monument he was working on. Wittig was a happy, jovial sort of man, fond of the good things in life. We had an excellent lunch, helped down with one of Henryk’s favourite wines, Saint-Émilien. This was my first contact with Poland: nothing uncivilised here. Dining out in London for me had meant little French, Italian or Spanish restaurants in Soho, not grand hotels on the scale of the *Europejski*, where the waiters behaved in an exaggeratedly obsequious manner. Strangely enough, when Henryk’s Polish triptych was hung in the National Museum of Warsaw in October 1966 and we stayed in this hotel as the guests of the Polish government (it had of course been destroyed during the war but had been reconstructed and was still known as the Hotel *Europejski*), one of the waiters recognised Henryk. He greeted Henryk warmly, unable to control his surprise at seeing him there or his pleasure at seeing an old client. But the respect was still there: He bowed and said: “My respects, Sir”, the typical formal greeting used in pre-war Poland, but rarely heard in post-war Poland. He had been a waiter at the *Europejski* before the war and had found his way back now, in 1966. His manners now seemed strangely out of place. He smiled ruefully, muttering something about the good old days having passed.

Gradually, I met Henryk’s friends in Warsaw. His marriage to me broke up a trio that had been in the habit of meeting every evening in a café for their supper of scrambled eggs and coffee: this was the painters Tom and Polanski and Gotlib. Kazimierz Tomorowicz, a painter was also a close friend of Henryk’s, also Alexander Wat, a poet. Tomorowicz was perhaps the most frequent visitor to our flat during the winter that we spent in Warsaw. Another friend of Henryk’s was a solicitor named Friedecker, a patron of the arts and a friend of many artists in Warsaw. Without doubt he perished in one of Hitler’s concentration camps. (There is a photo of Henryk, Friedecker and me sitting in a café in Warsaw.)

Whenever Henryk introduced me to his friends, he now produced our marriage certificate for inspection. Probably after seeing the astonishment with which Edward Wittig had received the news, he felt that his friends might not believe that we were really married! How could Gotlib have gone abroad for three months, to return with a wife? So, to still their doubts, they were furnished with proof. Henryk rather enjoyed



the situation, and was, I felt, rather proud of his shy young English wife and the impression she made on his friends.

We obviously could not stay long in Henryk's studio, and after about three weeks, we left for Cracow, where we stayed with Henryk's brother Gabryk, who had a large, beautiful flat overlooking the Vistula. By chance, the day of our arrival coincided with the annual celebrations on the Vistula, on which, in the evening, there was a massive firework display, amid boats crammed with people and bedecked with flowers; it was the anniversary of the day on which the Princess Jadwiga had thrown herself into the river rather than marry a German prince. And from Gabryk's flat, we had a grandstand view.

Gabryk was the most extraordinary, unusual, volatile, good hearted and generous person I have ever met. The brothers quarrelled and argued constantly – indeed Gabryk always spoke as if he were quarrelling – but, *au fond*, they were very fond of each other. How different they were one from the other, and how different they both were from their sister Ella, who also lived in Cracow.

Henryk had been born in Cracow in 1890, and he loved every bit of this Polish Athens, as it was sometimes called. The capital of the Polish kings until the seventeenth century, Cracow was for long the cultural and intellectual centre of Poland. Henryk, still intent on convincing me that Poland was a civilised country, lost no time in taking me to Wawel, a fortified castle in the centre of the city. The Polish Acropolis, as Henryk called it, a shrine of Polish culture, was filled with relics of Polish history and art treasures. We were taken round by Professor Szyszko Bohusz, the director of Wawel, who showed me the frescoes, tapestries, furniture and china, reflecting Poland's history and spiritual life. Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, all had left their mark on this magnificent edifice on the banks of the Vistula.

Nor was the rest of Cracow lacking in interest: its streets and squares had retained their medieval character, for very often the Renaissance or Baroque decorations were no more than an addition to the original gothic structure. From the heights of Wawel, one could look down on the churches and palaces of Cracow, all with their copper domes, which over the years had acquired a greenish patina. How beautiful and glittering they looked, and exotic too, in the sunshine. The large market square, where the peasants from the surrounding countryside sold their produce, dominated by the two irregular towers of the Church of St. Mary, kept company by the splendid Clothiers Hall – all this was especially dear to Henryk. I felt his deep attachment to his native city as he proudly pointed out to me the beauties of the square, which somehow reminded me of St. Mark's square in Venice. This is not surprising, for Poland's kings and queens at one time imported Italian architects, who designed and built many churches and houses. Certainly as a young man Henryk had been greatly inspired by Cracow's medieval buildings, and he must have painted them many times in his early days and also in his Formist days – I have a reproduction of one of his pictures of the Church of St. Mary painted in the days when he belonged to the Formist movement. He told me many times how he loved this church and how often he painted it.

Henryk loved too the parks of Cracow and especially the gardens which formed a circle round the centre of Cracow, a short distance from the centre; here the

professors from the University and the Academy of Fine Art took their walks or sat on the benches discussing matters of interest. I know that when in 1949 Henryk received a telegram from the professors of the Academy of Fine Art in Cracow inviting him to join them, he went back in his mind to the days of his youth, when he used to walk in these gardens and see all the professors of Fine Art strolling towards the Academy and dream that one day he too would be a professor at the Academy. In these days, it was the “official” traditional painters who held these positions: the independent artists were “beyond the pale” as far as these jobs were concerned.

Henryk’s background is strikingly similar to that of Cézanne; their fathers were bankers and both disappointed their fathers by becoming painters and not carrying on the good work in the bank. And, strangely enough, both were forced by their fathers to study law. Henryk’s father promised that if he obtained his doctorate he could then go to the Academy of Fine Art, and so he became Dr. Henryk Gotlib. As part of his training in law, Henryk was obliged to attend the courts everyday and do written reports of the cases. However, being Henryk, instead of listening attentively to what was going on, more often than not he sat sketching the various people around him: the accused, the lawyers, the judge, the witnesses. One day, at the end of the session, the judge called Henryk over to him and asked what he had been doing. Shamefacedly, Henryk showed him his sketches, which the judge studied carefully. Then he looked at Henryk and said; “Go home and paint young man. You are wasting your time here.”

There is a strange story that Henryk told me about his eyes. As a young boy, his eyes remained half closed. Try as he would, he could never succeed in opening them properly. Worried, his mother took him to an eye specialist, who after examining the eyes of the young boy, said: “I cannot see anything wrong with this child’s eyes. I do not understand why he does not open them properly. I can only assume that nature is conserving his eyes for the future.”

Henryk loved Cracow, adored his mother (whose forbears were Spanish – her name was Tilles), had a deep attachment to his brother Gabryk, and there was one uncle, his mother’s brother, a lawyer, of whom he was also very fond. Apart from that, he had very little in common with the rest of his family; they belonged to that rich middle class for which Henryk all his life had an aversion – his sympathies were with ordinary people. He heartily disliked their false ambitions, their petty jealousies, their love of possessions and desire to show off to each other. Henryk’s sister Ella belonged to this category, and that is why Henryk and his brother had so little in common with her. The war, however, changed her life completely. She and her husband, and their daughter, fled from the Germans to eastern Poland. There they fell into Russian hands and all three were sent to work in the forest of Siberia. Her husband succumbed and died. Left to her own resources, having lost everything, Ella became a different person. She returned to Cracow after the war, not of course to her luxurious flat and servants, but to a small room in someone else’s flat and started to work for her living as a guide to Cracow. Before being accepted for this work, she had to sit for an examination. One of the questions the examiner asked was; “Whom do you consider to be the best Polish painter of today?” “Henryk Gotlib”, replied Ella. “Oh,” said the examiner, “Why?” “Because he is my brother”, was the reply. When Henryk met her again after the war, when she was working and earning her living – a

very modest one – Henryk’s feelings for her were quite changed. Henryk always had more in common with his relations on his mother’s side than his father’s.

Much as he disliked his upper middle class background, Henryk was not averse to taking advantage of them as a young man when he needed money. He must have been very young when he started to paint the portraits of his uncles and aunts. I have two very early drawings of two cousins, daughters of his mother’s sister. I am not quite sure how old Henryk was when he decided to go on a grand tour of Europe to see the art galleries of Munich, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, perhaps about eighteen years old. In Poland, only poor reproductions of the old masters were available and the earnest young painter longed to be able to see the works of the “Great Painters” he had read about. He asked his father to finance his tour, but his father refused. He could not stop his son becoming a painter, but he was certainly not going to help him financially. So the young Gotlib went to his rich relations on his mother’s side and obtained commissions for portraits. He worked away for several weeks and eventually the aunts and uncles were invited to inspect the finished portraits. They apparently did not blink an eyelid when they heard the high price the young painter put on his work; they knew that he needed the money for his grand tour, felt that this ardent young man was worth helping, and paid up readily. On his return Henryk wrote an article entitled “The necessity for the promulgation of a law making it compulsory for the Government to arrange exhibitions of Europe’s old Masters”.

After just a few days in Cracow, we left for the Tatra Mountains, where Henryk decided we should stay for two months, so that he could paint “from nature”. Later he turned away from this way of working, preferring to rely on dozens of sketches and his memory of colour when he returned to his studio. I have only one painting that was actually painted out of doors – olive trees in Italy – and one can clearly see there how he “was seduced by all kinds of attractive plays of forms and beauties of colour”. “You have to eliminate them”, he wrote. “They are disturbing and destroy the purity of the original joy, the original excitement of your discovery”. He used these words in 1957, when he wrote an article for Studio about his own work. He actually wrote three versions for this, all of which I have. But in Zakopane, we went out every day together, Henryk carrying his box of oils and palette, whilst I took care of his canvas or sketch book (see photographs of this).

Henryk knew every valley and peak in the Tatra mountains: he loved this part of Poland in all seasons – in the winter as well as in the summer. He had skied down the slopes and walked and climbed from the days of his childhood. He had derived so much pleasure in showing me the beauties of Cracow; now he could show me all his favourite places in the Tatras: the lakes, the dolinas (valleys), the streams, the rather strange looking, Chinese almost, houses where highlanders lived, the little wooden churches to which they flocked on Sundays, the colourful costumes worn by the highlanders not only on Sundays but every day. The only difference on Sunday was that their white trousers and short white cloaks (both lavishly embroidered in many colours) were clean! He told me stories of the Tatra mountains, some of his own experience – for instance, how one day he had been sitting quietly with a friend having a picnic lunch when suddenly a bear appeared in front of them.

But we did not go immediately to Zakopane, the main resort. Henryk had a painter friend whose name I forget who lived in Poronin, a small village in the foothills of the Tatras and who ran his house there as a kind of guest house. Poronin, not being a popular resort, was more attractive for a painter than Zakopane, and Henryk therefore decided that we should stay in the house of his friend as paying guests.

However, the little house in Poronin was not a great success. Although I was not accustomed to any great luxury in my life, I was not exactly prepared for such a primitive way of living: the minimum of furniture everywhere, none of it even pretending to be comfortable; bare boards underfoot all over the house, with not even a bedside rug in the bedroom. Some of the rooms, even bedrooms, had no curtains at the windows. The food was appalling, the lavatory impossible to use. I preferred to go out into the fields, even when it was raining. This was too much even for Henryk, and so after three or four days, we took a *doroszka* to Zakopane to look for more comfortable quarters. This was not difficult, and a day or two later we were installed in a small pleasant guest house, only ten minutes walk from the centre of Zakopane, the centre of Zakopane being for Henryk the Morski Oko café where his friends foregathered every day. Our little hotel had a wonderful view of the mountains; our room had its own balcony and here for the first time I was to be introduced to real Polish home cooking: cucumber with sour cream, small dumplings filled with a kind of cranberry and served with whipped cream, beef cooked in a mushroom cream sauce and served with a kind of Polish barley, and many other delights. Throughout his life, Henryk enjoyed his food; it was always a pleasure to cook for him and watch him eat with great relish. He went into raptures over *kotlet wieprawy* – pork chop coated with egg and breadcrumbs and usually served with sauerkraut. He used to tell me when he returned to Cracow after being away, that his mother always made *kotlet wieprawy* for him, followed by apple strudel, another favourite with Henryk. He also told me how at one time, returning by train to Cracow and arriving at three o'clock in the morning, he could not wait until lunch time for his pork chop, but ordered it there and then – with sauerkraut – at the station buffet.

We spent two very happy months in this little hotel. We were not alone, for many of Henryk's friends were also in Zakopane for the summer: Wittlin, the writer; Chwistick, painter, philosopher and mathematician; Witkiewicz, painter; Jan Viktor, writer; Meyerhold, musician, and many others. Our time was spent walking in the mountains, short walks in the countryside for Henryk to paint – the peasants, their huts, and above all cows. All his life Henryk had almost a passion for cows. As a child, when his mother took him to Switzerland for a holiday, he was no more than eight years old, he took with him a sketch book and began sketching cows. His mother, not realising the great talent of her son, thought there was something wrong with him, so eagerly did he follow the cows to sketch them from all angles.

And of course, Henryk was always a sociable person: he loved being with his friends, sitting talking in cafés. So a good deal of time was spent in the Morski Oko café. I had not yet started to learn Polish and I could not expect a group of Polish writers and painters to struggle in French for my sake; so I sat there observing Henryk's friends and what was going on around, I could not take part in their discussions. There was always much laughter.

But there was another occasion when I felt obliged to drink – or rather this time I should say “eat” sour milk. I have mentioned Witkiewicz, who besides being a painter and a writer himself, was also the son of a great Polish writer who had lived in Zakopane. The house in which his father had lived until his death stood just on the outskirts of the town. Three of Witkiewicz’s aunts, all elderly spinsters, still lived in the house – built in the typical Carpathian style, the structure largely wooden and the roof pitched low, rather like a Chinese pagoda. The three ladies maintained the house almost exactly as it was when the great man had lived there, and whenever he came to the mountains, Witkiewicz used this as his base. Witkiewicz committed suicide early in the last war. Henryk wrote an extremely interesting article about him.

One night we were invited to supper – to see the house, to see the room of the writer, exactly as he had left it, and to meet the three aunts. Henryk and I set out on foot, and arrived at the appointed time. Witkiewicz came out to meet us and for a while we sat out on a wooden balcony sipping vodka; at least, I sipped it, the Poles tossed it back. As usual, the conversation was in Polish, although now and then Henryk stopped the flow of words to explain briefly to me the subject of their conversation. After a while, Witkiewicz went inside for a moment, and returned to inform us that supper was ready. He led us inside, through a room in which one could hardly see the furniture, because the curtains were drawn, and into a smaller room, most of the space here being taken up by a large circular table in the middle. The three aunts were standing waiting to greet me. I think that they probably hardly ever left the house, received no visitors except for their nephew, and had little or no contact with the outside world. So that to have any visitor for supper would have been a great event for them – but a young girl just married to a Polish painter was something quite exceptional, startling even. And so, the three of them stood before me, eyeing me with curiosity, as if I were a creature from another world, as indeed I was for them. I felt uneasy, mesmerised almost, and I shivered. I edged a little closer to Henryk. This room was too dark, heavy curtains, antimacassars on all the chairs, dark covers on the tables, the furniture heavy, and ornaments everywhere. We stood there for a moment, while they conversed in Polish – obviously discussing me, although of course I could not understand a word. The whole evening, the three aunts hardly took their eyes off me.

When a peasant girl came in with some food, which she placed on the table, I was invited to sit down. I sat down next to Henryk, with Witkiewicz on the other side, and the three witches (as I was already calling them in my own mind) facing us on the other side of the table. I glanced at the table, as unobtrusively as I could, to see what we were to eat. All I could see was a large dish of potatoes and an equally large dish of sour milk. Horrified, I looked up at Henryk, who was already aware of the situation. He whispered to me that I should try to eat it, that I could not offend my hosts. He assured me that he liked it (as indeed he did, although it was not among his favourite dishes for a dinner), and having already served himself, began to eat, hoping to encourage me. And so, steeling myself, I took a little from each dish and began to eat. I battled on bravely, and eventually finished the small portion that I had taken for myself. Afterwards, we had stewed apples: a few apples swimming in large quantities of water. This too was one of the Polish dishes that I could never accustom myself to.

Whether it was the food that I had forced myself to eat, or the atmosphere of the house, largely created by these three old spinsters, I do not know; but the fact was I felt decidedly ill. We stayed on for about an hour after the supper was ended,

Witkiewicz and the aunts showing us the father's room – his desk, his pens, some manuscripts, the furniture untouched from the time of his death. I could not describe my "illness": it was not that I felt sick, or that my "tummy was upset". I think I was just bewitched by the whole atmosphere of this strange house and its occupants. How relieved I was when Henryk finally said: "I think we must go", and we escaped into the fresh night air of the mountains. The state of "bewitchment" lasted some time. I did not sleep that night and the next morning I felt decidedly weak.

The days passed quickly in Zakopane, walking, painting, eating good food and meeting friends in the café. However, there was one problem to be solved: where to live when we returned to Warsaw. Whilst we were in Zakopane, Henryk had been in touch with certain people in the capital, who were on the lookout for a studio and flat for him. One day news came from Warsaw that there was a magnificent studio available in Alberta Street, almost opposite the one in Wierzbowa. The living accommodation was just adequate – a smallish room, a large kitchen and a bathroom. If Henryk wanted it, he was advised to go immediately to Warsaw, because other people were after it; the key money was apparently not too high. During our married life, we had many studios and flats until we bought The Grange in South Godstone; always looking for somewhere to live, the most important thing was the studio. So many painters make do with large rooms and the minimum of light; not so Henryk; we always managed to find good studios and made do with whatever living accommodation went with them.

So Henryk departed for Warsaw and I remained alone in Zakopane. It was hot, and there was no point in my going with him. Later on, when we lived in England, the whole organisation of our life was on my shoulders, but for this one short year in Poland Henryk was the "administrator" of the Gotlib household. He was back in three days, having arranged everything, paid the key money and signed the lease. The flat was ours: Henryk was pleased and excited at the prospect of returning to Warsaw.

We had been married since June. Now it was late September, and so far Henryk had not used me as a model at all. He had not really had the opportunity. However, he intended to make up for lost time in our new Warsaw flat.

In no time, we were settled in. Henryk had not a great deal of furniture, but then we didn't really need much. One corner of the studio was arranged for living: there was a round table, a few chairs and two armchairs – all inherited from his father. In another corner was his desk. All the rest of the studio was kept free for working. Henryk put up on the walls a few pictures: the large one of the civil war in Spain (there is a reproduction of this). He did not dream that in a little more than a year he would be painting a similar picture of Poland at war. There was a large painting of an actress, Zaklicka, I believe her name was, a large self portrait, sitting, with a beret, and the inevitable pipe, and a picture of three Polish writers sitting round a table. And of course, many others, stacked against the wall.

There was another important piece of furniture in the studio: in a recess in approximately the middle of one of the walls, was a divan, on which during that winter I was to spend a great deal of my time posing for Henryk. To keep myself from getting bored – for after the novelty had worn off, it was really rather tedious to sit or lie still for an hour or two in the same position – I used to go through my

repertoire of English, French, Spanish and Italian folk songs. It did not seem to disturb Henryk when he was working, although in later years I discovered that music intruded too much into his thoughts for him to agree very often to sit and listen to one of my records, be it Bach, Beethoven or Mozart, in the evening when I came home from work. Indeed, he protested vehemently when I asked him one day – we were already at The Grange – if I might buy a record player. (Yes, I actually had to ask him!) We very rarely went out in the evenings; I came home tired, and it was a relaxation for me to sit and listen to good music. In the end, I did buy it, and there were rare occasions when we would sit on our sofa by the fire and listen to Oistrakh or Richter, whom we both greatly admired. He did really like music – I recall him telling me once how when he was a young man he had attended concerts of Schoenberg's every evening for a fortnight, because he wanted to get to know this music. But as the years went by, I think that music disturbed him by taking his attention of what was really the only important thing in his life – painting. He allowed nothing to disturb him or his thoughts. Whether he was in the studio or out of it, in his mind he was working. That is why he always had a little sketch book by his bed; if he woke during the night and could not sleep for a while, he would “doodle” in his little book. I was not very happy about this, for I could not sleep with the light on, and I had to get up each morning at 6.45am in order to get to my work on time. Sometimes Henryk even went to the studio in the middle of the night. I would wake up because of the light, glance at Henryk's bed to find it empty and then realise he was working in the studio. Probably having awakened in the night, his mind had turned to the picture he had been painting that day; perhaps the solution to a problem suddenly came to him and in his impatience he was unable to wait until the next day. I believe that the idea for his late large picture of three very different nudes came to him in the night; there is a tiny sketch of this picture, probably done in the middle of the night; and that is no doubt why he called it *Midnight Dream*.

Our life assumed a regular pattern during that winter of 1938/9 in Warsaw. I had no domestic duties at all; we had a Polish woman who came to keep the flat clean; she did the shopping and cooked our lunch for us, before leaving at about three o'clock to look after her own family. Her name was Nidzgorska. For many years I thought of her with great affection and wondered what happened to her during the war. This type of work was so terribly badly paid in Poland, even though we paid her twice as much as she would have received elsewhere. Still, I always had the feeling that we were exploiting her. One day she did not turn up in the morning for work. I noticed that she had recently seemed a little tired; she had put on weight and once I had come into the studio when she was cleaning to find her sitting down on a chair, which was most unusual. At about 10am that morning, her husband came to see us. He told us that she had given birth to a baby girl during the night and would not be able to work for two or three weeks. And neither Henryk nor I had the slightest idea that she was expecting a baby.

Her greatest moment with us was when she made a large quantity of *pasztet zajacy* – a delicious paté made from hare. The preparation for it went on for several days, until finally it was finished and she came into the studio, flushed and excited, bearing aloft on a large dish the results of her labours. I remember we gave her a large portion to take home to her husband, and we and Henryk's friends consumed the rest.

When she arrived in the morning, she would bring with her fresh rolls, still warm from the oven. She would make us fresh coffee, and this, with the rolls and good Polish butter, made up our breakfast each day. There was nothing Henryk liked better to begin the day with than fresh warm rolls. I posed for Henryk every morning. All the pictures that he did of me then were destroyed at the beginning of the war. Now for the first time I saw Henryk, the painter. As he painted, I felt that as a person I simply did not exist. Henryk stood there, with his easel, his colours, his canvas. He did not just look at me, observe me, or part of me, and then try to reproduce what he saw on the canvas. It was as if I was being drawn into his very being, as if the essence of my very being was then distilled, thereafter to be ejaculated by Henryk in spite of himself. While he painted, he had the appearance of a man not exactly in a trance, but as if the world had suddenly stopped still and he had to get the image of it quickly onto the canvas before it disappeared. The energy of his movements, the rapidity with which he approached me to look at me, before he darted swiftly back to the canvas, were astonishing. And he retained this energy in front of his easel to the very end. Away from the studio, he felt tired in the last year or so, his strength was ebbing, but in front of his easel he had the movements of a young man.

We usually had our lunch at about two o'clock. During the afternoon I would slip out to the patisserie to buy some cakes for tea – these I could manage to buy by pointing to those of my choice. At four o'clock we would have our tea, good strong, freshly made tea with milk, not the stewed, watered down stale tea that most Poles drank, and at about five o'clock I would leave to go to Zoliborz where I taught English in a college run by the American Methodists in Warsaw. This I did from five to eight pm, four evenings a week.

As soon as I left, Henryk sat down at his desk to write. It was during this winter that he wrote his book, *Travels of a Painter*. Henryk was not alone: our cat kept him company, Mitzi, an adorable little tabby cat, would sit on Henryk's desk and play with his pen as it moved across the page.

Alas, the drawings which Henryk made of the works of art he saw during his travels in France, Italy, Greece and Spain were left behind in Warsaw when we came to England in June, and were destroyed in the first days of the war. With due modesty, I must record that it is thanks to me that the manuscript itself was saved. When we left Warsaw in June to come to England for, as we thought, three months, I persuaded Henryk, rather against his will, to take one copy with us. If we had not done this, then not only the drawings but also the manuscript would have been lost for ever. *Travels of a Painter* would have been incomparably more valuable, interesting and unusual if it could have contained Henryk's drawings. It would have been so interesting if Henryk's detailed descriptions of a sculpture or a painting could have been accompanied by his drawing of it. For his drawings, as I remember them, were not just copies: they were Henryk's interpretation, an artist's interpretation, an artist's understanding of what the painter or the sculptor was expressing. Still, at least the manuscript was saved, and there are just one or two drawings, for instance the two in the Polish version as published in 1947, and two or three more in his sketch books of Raphael, El Greco and Rembrandt.

I remember one day in Warsaw something happened which gave us both a fright. Henryk received a telephone call one day requesting him to present himself the



following morning at the police headquarters for interrogation. It was in connection with the conference which Henryk had attended. Henryk immediately telephoned and went to see several of his influential friends. One of them was the Mayor of Warsaw. We spent a very sleepless night and shortly before 10am the next day, Henryk left the flat for his appointment. He assured me that there was nothing to worry about; he had many friends who would not let anything happen to him. But I felt that, as he said this to me, he was secretly not quite so confident as he would have me believe. His words did not still my fears. He was away for many hours and I sat all day waiting, wondering what I could do if he did not return. I felt so helpless. Henryk was Polish: so it would be useless to approach any British authority; in any case I was no longer a British subject. I knew Henryk's painter and writer friends, but they would be powerless to help. I just didn't know what I could do. And so I just sat and waited.

Finally, in the late afternoon Henryk returned, looking relieved, but I could see that the danger had not passed completely. He said that the next day he would go to see the Mayor of Warsaw, and seek some sort of guarantee from him. Henryk was sure that because of their past friendship, he could count on him. Henryk enjoyed a very strong position, not only in the art world. He was greatly respected for his integrity and for his firmly held convictions.

It was several days before Henryk felt confident that he would be left in peace. But the whole affair gave me a nasty jolt. It opened my eyes to see the kind of country that had become mine.

## RETURN TO ENGLAND

Henryk decided that he would like to spend three months that summer in Cornwall, painting. And so we packed to leave Poland for, as we thought, three months.

Before we left, rather light-heartedly, Henryk looked through his pictures. The political situation was very uncertain, but Henryk did not really believe that war was so close. Yet, he selected about ten of his pictures, put them together against one wall, and labelled them "masterpieces". He asked Friedecker, on whom he knew he could count, to look after these pictures, in the event of war. Poor Henryk and poor Friedecker. A fire bomb fell on the house in Alberta on the second day of the war, destroying everything, while Friedecker simply disappeared.

I had a contract to go back in October and teach at the American College of English. So we packed merely enough clothes for the three summer months in England, and took with us enough money to last this period. We also took with us four pictures: Henryk wanted to try to find a gallery in London which would give him an exhibition and so Henryk chose four pictures as examples of his work: They were "Artist and Model", "A peasant woman and a cow" painted in Brittany probably about 1929, "Three people in a Road", painted in Brittany in 1929, and there was another one from Brittany, people sitting on a cliff, which I believe Henryk sold during the war.

In London we stayed in a little hotel in Bloomsbury for a week or two before going down to Cornwall. We visited a number of West End dealers, taking the four pictures with us. Eventually, it was arranged that the Beaux Arts Gallery would put on a show

the following year. A contract was drawn up: Henryk agreed to pay a certain sum for the hire of the gallery, and put down a deposit of £30 there and then. The contract however contained a clause that in the event of war, the contract would be cancelled and the deposit returned. This sum of £30 certainly came in useful when in September 1939 we found ourselves stranded in London.

Before leaving for Cornwall, we went to the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate, the National Gallery and the British Museum. In a sketchbook of that time, there are some drawings of hands from Rembrandt's pictures, a head by Vermeer van Delft, and several from Raphael's cartoon at the V and A. He also made certain notes in this sketch book about the pictures. These few drawings show what a great loss to his book was the destruction of his sketches left in Warsaw. There is one sketch which I believe is Raphael from the V and A, where his sketch shows so clearly the composition of the picture. There is another from *Purification in the Temple*. And two or three sketches from *Peter and John Healing the Lame Man*. The drawing showing me looking at Cézanne, which now belongs to Douglas Hall, also comes from this time.

Soon we left by coach for Cornwall, stopping to look at Salisbury Cathedral on our way. Little Pinnick Farm, near Fowey, became our base for the next two months. As far as I remember, Henryk did not work with oils, but produced many drawings and watercolours, none of which are still in my collection. All the pictures he later, that is when we returned to London, painted, have been sold: *At the Gate*, *Cows in a field*, *Crossroads in Cornwall*, *A man on a horse in a road*, *Mother and Child*, although there are drawing or watercolours of them. The large *Cornish Panorama* now hangs in the British Embassy in Warsaw. It was always greatly admired when it was exhibited. The watercolour of a Mother and child walking along a road in Cornwall is one of his best watercolours and one of my favourite possessions.

Every day, we read the disturbing news in the newspapers – although we still spoke French together, as Henryk was unable to speak English. But even then we did not believe there would be war. One day we had gone to a village by the river, where Henryk had been sketching for several days, and Henryk went into the little village shop to buy some cigarettes. His ears were sufficiently tuned to the English language for him to be able to understand what was being reported on the radio: "Warsaw has been bombed, Cracow has been bombed". He came out and in a quiet, sad voice told me what he had heard. "We must go back to London immediately", he said. And so, we went back to the farm, packed our belongings, and the next day we were in a coach bound for London. Very little traffic was going towards London: most of it was coming from London, bringing young boys and girls to a place of safety.

For a week, we stayed with my mother, who was living in a little house in Finchley. Henryk had met her for the first time when we arrived earlier in June. Poor mother, she had been very apprehensive at meeting her son-in-law, a man not that much younger than she was, but she immediately took a liking to him, and Henryk to her.

We took stock of our position: about £20 left over from the holiday, and £30 to be returned from the Beaux Arts Gallery. One thing was obvious: I must immediately get a job. We had already been in touch with Jozef Retinger. As soon as the war began, a Polish publisher in London had the idea of issuing an encyclopaedia about Poland.

Retinger was asked to start work at once on this, and he asked me to assist him. So I got my first job at about £3.50 a week. And on this we had to live. About three weeks later we moved to a room in Clifton Gardens, Maida Vale; it was a large room, with two large windows, which gave fairly good light for work. There was no question of Henryk being “called up” – he was past the age for that. In any case, the Polish government was not established in London until several weeks later. I became quite adept at producing a meal on the single gas ring in our room – but of course our meals were not very elaborate. One of the Poles in London taught me how to cook a simple cheap meal, which was not devoid of nourishment: porridge was the basic element, and in it I would put some cheese, or bacon, or tomatoes, and this often constituted our main meal in the evening. Henryk started to paint at once. Somehow or other, we managed to buy some canvas; his box of paints and easel he had brought with him, as well as a few brushes. And he started to work with the sketches and water colours he had brought from Cornwall. In spite of everything, we were happy and optimistic.

It was in our room at Clifton Gardens that Henryk had the idea of painting a large Polish triptych, with a centre piece, size about 8ft by 10ft, representing Christ in Warsaw, September 1939.

To buy prepared canvas of that size was out of the question, we just didn't have the money. And so we bought ordinary linen, which I machined together to make the size that Henryk wanted. The preparation of the canvas presented another problem. The main ingredient for it was eggs, and for a canvas of that size, several dozen were required. And, eggs were already rationed! But of course, where there is a will there is a way, and I succeeded somehow or other, buying a dozen here, half a dozen there, in obtaining the requisite number for Henryk. This really was quite an achievement, and many of our friends thought it was such a waste of good eggs.

As soon as spring came and the weather began to get a little warmer, Henryk looked for a studio. He could not paint a canvas of that size in our room. He had no freedom of movement and no distance from the canvas. During the time he worked in Clifton Gardens, he made many sketches, pencil as well as watercolour for his “Warsaw”. (These I have since presented to the National Museum in Warsaw). I posed for several of the female figures. Topolski, Marek Zulawski, Tadcusz Koper, a Polish film producer, and Cękaliski also posed, and Henryk posed himself for the figure of Christ. Luckily, he learned from Topolski that there was an empty studio next to the one in which Topolski worked – still in Maida Vale, and overlooking the canal. Henryk decided immediately to take it – there was no living accommodation and the rent was extremely low, even for those days. The large canvas was taken to the studio, Henryk and I carrying it through the streets as it was not very far away; Topolski, who was very helpful to all those Poles who found themselves in London at the outbreak of war, very generously loaned Henryk a chair and one or two other items of furniture and continued to pose for Henryk there. And so, Henryk, pleased with his new studio, left our room in Clifton Gardens early every morning to work on his large canvas.

For our first Christmas in London, Topolski and Marian, his friend who later became his wife and mother of his two children, very generously put on in their studio next to the one that Henryk was using, a wonderful dinner for what seemed to be a large number of Poles whom the war had stranded in London.

We were able to take on the responsibility of a studio for Henryk because, in May of 1940, Henryk signed a contract with the Minerva Publishing Co. to write a book on Polish painting. It was to be published in an edition of 2000 copies, and Henryk received the magnificent sum of £10 on signing the agreement, and £5 per month for a period of eight months; in other words, a total amount of £50. Today, this seems quite ludicrous, but I can remember how excited we were that for the next few months our monthly income would be increased by £5, although almost all of it went on rent for the studio.

And so, a new routine had to be worked out; so many hours a day for painting, and usually in the evenings, so many hours for writing. Finding the material for the reproductions presented a great problem, and many of them were reproduced from reproductions, that is, old magazines, from catalogues, from books that we happened to find. Altogether, it was a miracle that the book was so complete. Henryk spent many hours browsing in the second-hand bookshops in Charing Cross Road, and it is surprising what he managed to unearth there. We spread the word around the Poles in London, and we found that many of them came to us bringing old catalogues, magazines and books. It was to deal with painting only, not sculpture, nor drawings.

So from about January 1940 until July or August of that year, we lived in Clifton Gardens and Henryk painted in the studio by the canal. Henryk never worked on one picture at a time, of course, and so, while painting all the time on his large Warsaw picture, he also continued to paint on the material from Cornwall. The picture of me sitting reading a book, in yellow tones, dates from the time we lived in Clifton Gardens.

In July or August, we moved to 13, Rudall Crescent, a studio house with an excellent studio. The house belonged to Dick Carline, who lived in Pond Street, Hampstead, and one of the previous tenants had been Mark Gertler. You entered straight into the studio; about half way down on the left were three steps which led into the bathroom, which had wide double doors. At the far end was a tiny kitchen and there was a gallery. We slept under the gallery: the gallery was our guest room. This was an unfurnished place, and so we acquired our first furniture in London. We had the bare minimum: two beds, which we had bought for £1.50 each from a firm that had evacuated to the country at the outbreak of war and now decided to return, a table, two chairs which cost us 25p each – beautiful wooden armchairs, solid walnut, which I still have today, and a large Victorian wardrobe which we also picked up for £1.50. But we now had our own home, with our own furniture and such a wonderful studio. Practically the whole of the roof was glass.

I had already given up work on the encyclopaedia about Poland: instead I had joined the small staff of *Free Europe*, a fortnightly political magazine, financed by the Polish government in London. Its editor was Casimir Smogorzewski, its aim to represent to the British public the Polish point of view. Later it widened its remit, and became, in a way, for all the Allied governments in London. My role at first was a humble one: to look after the administration. Later, I took over some of the editorial work, correcting the English of our many foreign contributors, proof reading, book reviews, as well as supervising all the business side. I was to remain there until early 1946.

Unfortunately, we were not to remain in Rudall Crescent long. When the Blitz began, and it lasted throughout the whole of the winter of 1940/41, it was quite impossible to sleep in a glass house. Bombs were dropping all around, shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns on Hampstead Heath fell everywhere. For a few nights, we slept in an air raid shelter, but we both agreed we could not do this the whole of the winter. And so, very reluctantly, we decided to leave the studio. Once more we took a furnished room. Our few pieces of furniture were stored in the basement of my office in Gower Street, and we moved to 6 Frognal Gardens. Here we had a large room. A large window opened on to a balcony which led down into the garden.

The ambience of this room suited Henryk very well, and a number of good pictures were painted there. "Interior", exhibited at Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, "Nude by the Garden door", bought by that gallery, "Girl with raised arms", "Girl by Garden Door", "Self Portrait with Dog", "The White House" and "White House in Hampstead". "Girl with Cat" and two other portraits of me. Two street scenes were also painted while we were in Frognal Gardens – "Entrance to Park" and "Red Houses in Hampstead". I still have the latter. And all the time Henryk worked on the large Warsaw picture.

It was while we were here that Henryk bought the tall narrow mirror, which went with us ever afterwards. A large mirror is an essential piece of furniture in the studio. One morning Henryk was posing in the nude in front of the mirror: "Warsaw" was finished here, and in July it was to be exhibited at Leger Gallery, in Old Bond Street, at an exhibition of Contemporary Continental Art. The mirror was at the far end of the room, away from the door. Twice a week, our help came to clean the room. Undoubtedly, she knocked on the door before entering, but when Henryk was working, he was deaf to everything. She showed great tact: seeing Henryk stark naked in front of the mirror, she simply turned her back on him and began to tidy up at the other end of the room. When Henryk did realise that there was someone else in the room, he reached for his dressing gown and continued to work.