

WE JUST HAVE TO REMEMBER...

The wartime experience of Professor Zygmunt Grodziński, told by his daughter, Zofia Grodzińska-Zachwieja¹

On 6 November 1939 the Germans arrested Zygmunt Grodziński along with the other professors of the Jagiellonian University.² First he was in the Montelupich Prison, and later in the 20th Infantry Regiment barracks on Ulica Mazowiecka, where his wife was allowed to see him.³ He gave her a list of things he wanted her to bring: a blanket, his toothbrush and toothpaste, a needle and cotton. He was an experienced climber and walker, and knew that these things would come in useful in difficult times. Then for some time Professor Grodziński was kept in a solitary cell in Wrocław.⁴ There he wrote two scientific papers on animal anatomy and embryology. The manuscripts of these articles, which he wrote on toilet paper, have survived. They concern research which he did before the war.

Zygmunt Grodziński was an inmate of Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp until 8 February 1940. In letters sent home from the concentration camp he assured his wife that he was all right, but after his return did not want to talk about what he went through there. Nonetheless we know that he survived a very hard winter. Every day the prisoners were made to stay outside for several hours in temperatures well below zero, and wearing only thin prison clothes.⁵ The fact that the prisoners organised a series of lectures, talks and scientific discussions from their respective disciplines is evidence of their morale and general attitude to imprisonment in the concentration camp. Zofia thinks that her father may well have been the one who first suggested the idea of these lectures.

Professor Zygmunt Grodziński was respected and treated as a moral authority by his fellow prisoners, as shown by the fact that they chose him to be responsible for bread distribution. They were of the opinion that he would do this duty in the fairest possible way.

On 9 February 1940, after three months' detention in Sachsenhausen, he returned home in a bad condition. He was emaciated and had frostbite.⁶ However, thanks to the fact that he had a stalwart physical constitution, he made a rapid recovery. Before the war he did climbing, walking, skiing, and rowing. Soon he was given a job in the institute for typhus research, which was located on Ulica Czysta in Kraków.⁷ This job saved him from a second imprisonment in a concentration camp and

provided a modest source of income (apparently his pay was enough just for the children's milk). The family's valuables had to be sold to feed them. The Professor's wife made soap out of rosin and lard, and tried to sell it, but with little success. She gave most of it away to friends, and the family had enough soap for their own needs. Zofia remembers an episode when a bread roll, a rarity during the war, was wasted because it

was wrapped up in a bag which had been used for the rosin.

In the hard times of German occupation Professor Grodziński kept his optimism and extraordinary energy. He was an excellent husband and father. He organised games and excursions for his children which helped them forget about the ongoing

war. Every Sunday he and his friends from the YMCA, a club to which he belonged, made a trip out of town. In the winter it would be skiing in the Wolski Wood, and in the spring and summer to a place of natural beauty called Podgórk Tynieckie, where they would play volleyball while the children played games. They would round off the outing with a bonfire. He would take his son and daughter on a double children's seat on his bike, or one of his friends, Professor Zdzisław Przybyłkiewicz⁸ or Antoni Dziejcz,⁹ would take one of the children. His wife, who did not have a bicycle, would get there on foot or stay at home. Although it was not easy during the war to have a holiday, Professor Grodziński's family spent one summer at Będkowice (not far from Kraków). Under their father's guidance the children discovered the world of nature for themselves, observing animals and insects. The family returned home on a horse and cart, and on it the driver had a whole side of pork hidden under a sack of potatoes. The Germans stopped them when they were in the city. The transportation of foodstuffs was prohibited, but both the father and mother said they only had a few eggs, butter and cheese. Of course they never mentioned the pork. The Germans allowed the family to go on...

Professor Grodziński's efforts to allow his son and daughter to have a normal childhood despite wartime occupation were fully supported by his wife, who organised games for them and was full of good humour. The Germans evicted the family from their apartment on Plac Biskupi and they moved into a dingy place on the Krowoderska. There the Professor did undercover



Kenkarta prof. Zygmunta Grodzińskiego

Prof. Grodziński's personal ID card issued by the German occupying authority

work, held clandestine lectures and conducted examinations with students of Medicine, Agricultural Studies, and Biology. Students came for classes in the Krowoderska flat in small groups, and the Professor's wife would serve them tea.

Zygmunt Grodziński always took a positive attitude to life, he never complained and was always ready for action. Apart from his official job in the

typhus research institute, he was also engaged on secret research. He spent his afternoons working with the microscope in the Department of Fishery, where he had friends. The Germans closed down and put a bolt on the Department of Comparative Anatomy, where he had worked before the war, but he and his favourite laboratory assistant, Jan Wąsowicz,¹⁰ sneaked in through a neighbouring building and removed the microscopes, magnifying glasses and books, which he used for the rest of the war. After the war they were the first instruments and equipment in the new research institute he set up.

Professor Grodziński was confident that the research papers he had written under wartime occupation would be published some day, and that is indeed what happened. He was friendly and had a sympathetic, open attitude to individuals. He did not bear grudges.

His daughter Zofia remembers his calm and composure on hearing of the letter the bishops of Poland sent to the bishops of Germany in 1965, in which they wrote the memorable words, "We forgive and we ask for forgiveness." Zofia felt offended by what the Polish bishops had done. But her father said, "We must never hate anyone. We must not hate the Germans either. We just have to remember that in the past they have often done us



Prof. Zygmunt Grodziński po powrocie z obozu, 23 lutego 1940 r.

Prof. Grodziński on his return from the concentration camp, 23 February 1940

harm." After the war he revived his connections and continued to keep in touch with German scientists. He no longer published in German but switched to English, in accordance with the postwar trend.

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¹ Professor Zofia Grodzińska-Zachwieja is a retired director of the Department of Bromatology in the Jagiellonian University Medical College. Z. Grodzińska-Zachwieja, "Najlepszy ojciec", *Prof. Zygmunt Grodziński we wspomnieniach*, ed. B. Morawska-Nowak, Kraków,

2002, p. 62.

² Professor Grodziński never spoke about his arrest under Sonderaktion Krakau. His daughter's information comes from other persons and books.

³ The academics were detained in the Montelupich jail until 7 November 1939, and in the barracks on ul. Mazowiecka until 9 November 1939; J. Gwiżdżomorski, *Wspomnienia z Sachsenhausen*, Kraków, 1969, p. 40.

⁴ The academics were kept in Wrocław until 27 November 1939, and reached Sachsenhausen on 28 November 1939. W. Konopczyński, *Pod trupią główką*, Warszawa, 1982, p. 24.

⁵ S. Urbańczyk, *Wyrok na Uniwersytet Jagielloński*, ed. L. Hajdukiewicz, Kraków, 1989, p. 15.

⁶ J. Gwiżdżomorski, *Wspomnienia z Sachsenhausen*, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

⁷ As of 1 April 1940 Professor Grodziński was employed as a laboratory technician in the typhus vaccine production works the Germans set up in the Institut für Fleckfieberforschung (Typhus Research Institute) which they established in the Jagiellonian University Institute of Microbiology. After H. Szarski, *O profesorze Zygmuncie Grodzińskim*, Kraków, 1995, p. 12.

⁸ Professor Zdzisław Przybyłkiewicz (1908–1994), a microbiologist. H. Zwolska, "Zdzisław Przybyłkiewicz", *Wyrok na Uniwersytet Jagielloński*, ed. L. Hajdukiewicz, Kraków, 1989, p. 103–105.

⁹ Antoni Dziedzic was one of Professor Grodziński's closest friends. As of 1934 they went on numerous excursions together. B. Morawska-Nowak, "Sportowiec i turysta", *Prof. Zygmunt Grodziński we wspomnieniach*, ed. Barbara Morawska-Nowak, Kraków, 2002, p. 107.

¹⁰ Jan Wąsowicz worked for many years in the Jagiellonian University Department of Comparative Anatomy. Jagiellonian University Archives, File S II 620 (employees' personal files).

¹¹ Compiled on the basis of the recording made on 29 January 2009 by Bogusław Sławiński of the recollections of Zofia Grodzińska-Zachwieja, Professor Zygmunt Grodziński's daughter.

ZYGMUNT GRODZIŃSKI (1896–1982)

Head of the Jagiellonian University Department of Comparative Anatomy (1934), initially as a professor's deputy and from 1935 as extraordinary professor. Arrested on 6 November 1939 under the Sonderaktion Krakau operation and detained in Sachsenhausen concentration camp until 8 February 1940. On his return to Kraków he worked as a laboratory technician in the anti-typhus institute, while at the same time (from 1943) lecturing in Embryology and Parasitology in the Faculty of Medicine of the secret Jagiellonian University.

Resumed his post as Head of the Department of Comparative Anatomy in 1945 (appointed full professor in 1946), which he held until his retirement in 1966. Administered the Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences (1954–1956); Rector of the Jagiellonian University, 1956–1958. Internationally acclaimed for his comparative research on the development and structure of the blood circulation of vertebrates; for his experiments on cardiac behaviour in fish embryos; and on yolk structure in ontogeny and phylogeny. Published over 240 items, including 28 monographs and 9 anatomy and embryology textbooks, many of them in several re-issues. Member of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Poznań Society of the Friends of Scholarship (Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk), the International Institute of Embryology, and honorary member of the Polish Society of Anatomy (Polskie Towarzystwo Anatomiczne) and the Polish Zoological Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Zoologiczne); awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Toruń. Died on 12 October 1982.