

The Ulma Family – The Blessed Samaritans of Markowa

*Faciamus bonum dum possumus** – “Let’s do good while we can”

*Inscription on the church bell in Markowa



Józef and Wiktor were born in Markowa in Subcarpathia. They grew up there, and in 1935 they married in the St. Dorothy Parish Church. They welcomed six children and were expecting a seventh at the time of their deaths. In their native village they were considered honest, hardworking, devout, and passionate people.



Józef Ulma - Catholic, patriot, farmer, innovator.

Józef's parents owned a three-hectare farm where he helped out from his earliest years. He graduated from a four-grade general school, which he supplemented with studies at an agricultural school in Pilzno.

He founded the first nursery of fruit trees in Markowa and quickly began to make a living by selling seedlings. He promoted the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, bred silkworms, and was a beekeeper. His ingenuity and commitment in this regard were rewarded at the Przeworsk District Agricultural Exhibition, which was organized in 1933 by the District Agricultural Society.

He was a man of broad horizons. To this day a part of his book collection has been preserved which bears the ex libris “Home library – Józef Ulma”.

Among these books, one can find A Handbook of Electrical Engineering, A Handbook of Photography, and The Use of Wind in Agriculture. He built a household wind farm, making him the first in the village to light his house with electricity rather than kerosene lamps.

Józef's greatest passion was photography, however. At first he used a camera that he had built himself, but he eventually started using professional equipment. He was passionate about documenting the daily lives of Markowa's residents. Many of the photos have survived to this day; some of them appear in the infographic.

He was also an avid community activist who was active in the Catholic Men's Youth Association, and later in the Union of Rural Youth of the Republic of Poland (Wici). For some time, he was also the manager of the Dairy Cooperative in Markowa.

In 1935 Józef married Wiktor, née Niemczak, who was 12 years his junior.

Children quickly followed: Stanisława (born July 18, 1936), Barbara (born October 6, 1937), Władysław (born December 5, 1938), Franciszek (born April 3, 1940), Antoni (born June 6, 1941), and Maria (born September 16, 1942).

Wiktor, like her husband, was quite engaged in the community. She acted in the village theater and attended courses organized by the People's University in Gać, and in 1931 she presented Wincenty Witos with a harvest wreath when the leader of the Peasant Movement visited Markowa to open a new Community House.



Wiktor Ulma, Franciszek, Stanisława, and Edward Ulma (Józef's cousin) with Barbara seated on his lap



Józef Ulma's parents with their sons (Józef on the right)



Józef and Wiktor with their six children

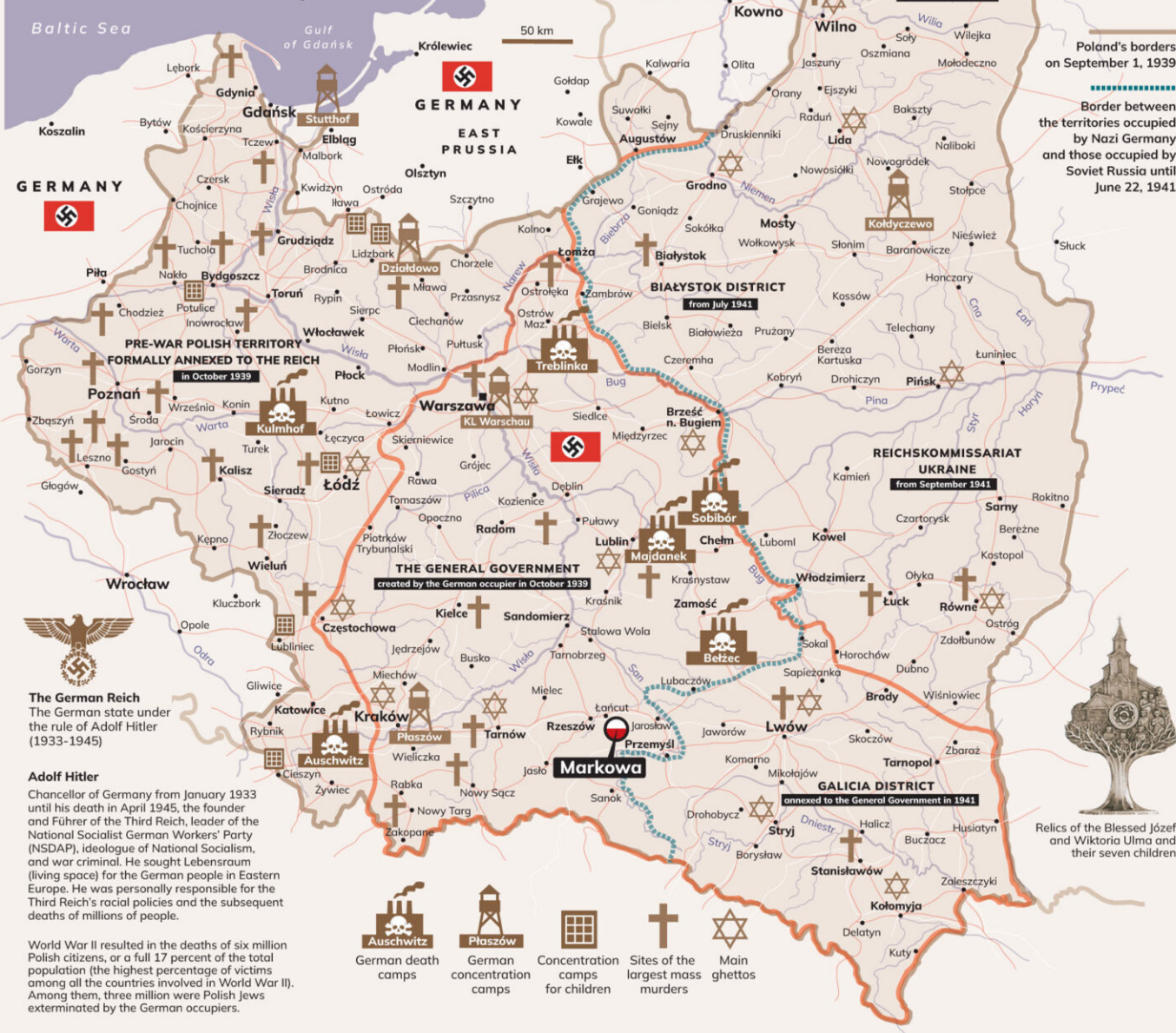


Józef and Wiktor with their six children

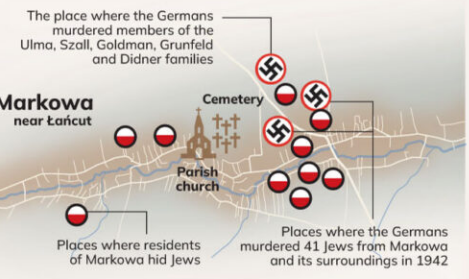
death sentence upon himself and his entire family. People knew this, and the Ulmas were likewise aware of it. Józef Ulma was a well-known farmer and social activist in the area, as well as an amateur photographer. Wiktor Ulma, his wife, was a committed housewife, raising six children: Stanisława, Barbara, Władysław, Franciszek, Antoni, and Maria. In 1942 the Ulma family decided to hide eight Jews who were members of the Szall, Goldman, Grunfeld, and Didner families in their home in Markowa. The Ulmas were denounced by Włodzimierz Leś, a member of the “Blue Police”—the wartime Polish police under German command. Leś was a displaced person from eastern Galicia as well

as a Greek Catholic considered “Ukrainian” by the locals. In the early morning of March 24, 1944, German gendarmes surrounded the Ulmas' home. In their brutal action that followed, all the Jews in hiding with them were dragged out and shot dead. Then the Ulmas – Wiktor was heavily pregnant – and their six other children were murdered. The youngest of them was only a year and a half old. The German commander, Lieutenant Eiler Dieken, gave the order to murder the entire family so that “there will be no more Ulmas.” The Polish underground, which pronounced death sentences upon anyone who betrayed Jews to the Germans, executed their denouncer a few months later.

The terror of the German occupation of Poland



INFOGRAPHIC: ORDO IURIS & CENTER FOR LIFE AND FAMILY, MACIEJ TUROWICZ-KWIATKOWSKI



Markowa was a densely-populated village, almost a town, where 25 to 29 Jewish families were living. Of the 120 Jews there, 21 survived the war. The Ulmas' heroic attitude was not an exception. Their Jewish neighbors were saved by Michał and Maria Bar, Antoni and Julia Bar, Antoni and Dorota Szylar, Michał and Katarzyna Cwynar, Jan and Helena Cwynar, Michał and Wiktorja Drewniak, Jan and Weronika Przybylak, and others. Each of the 21 rescued people survived only because someone among their Polish neighbors was willing to risk his own life as well as the lives of his loved ones in order to offer help.



Saul Goldman of Łańcut (third from right). During the German occupation, the Ulmas hid him and his four sons.



A still from The Story of One Crime, a 2023 film by documentary filmmaker Mariusz Piłis. Piłis discovered previously unpublished materials. He also followed the post-war trail of certain German war criminals, who never received punishment.



The beautiful honorific of the “Samaritans of Markowa” was awarded to the Ulmas in modern times. It was inspired by a copy of the New Testament that was found in their home after their execution. Among the numerous notes and comments made by the Ulmas in it, the most striking is the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is underlined in red marker, next to which the following word was added in big letters: “YES!” This copy of the New Testament is on display in the Museum of Poles Who Saved Jews in World War II in Markowa.