

Stefania Popel (1919-1995)



Profession: Kindergarten teacher

1919: Born on 15.6. in Boryslaw as Stefania Supyk

Attends a girls' school, then a lyceum for kindergarten teachers in Warsaw; returns to Boryslaw

1942: Marriage with Vasili Popel

1943: The Popel family hides Etká Lippman and her son Józef. Birth of daughter Orysia

1944: The Popels again hide their former Jewish neighbours, the Lippman family. After a warning of a raid, the Lippmans leave their hiding place; in the last weeks they live in the woods. At night Etká Lippman sneaks to the Popels, who continue to supply them with food

After the liberation: Head of a kindergarten

1947: Because of the conviction of her husband Vasili, she is considered an "insecure class element" and is dismissed as head of the kindergarten. She can no longer find a job in her profession. For money she looks after the children of friends

1957: Return of her husband from Siberia, who remains unemployed for a long time

1995: Death after a long life full of deprivation, danger and humiliation

2003: On 4 June posthumously honoured as Righteous among the Nations

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After the Second World War almost everyone was suspected - Ukrainians (nationalists and collaborators), religious (followers of a god other than Stalin), peasants (disguised kulaks) and rescuers of Jews (helpers of cosmopolitans). Stefania was all of these.

»For Stalin and his helpers there was no doubt: the suffering of the past years should have been the suffering of the Soviet people, not of the Jews. That is why the Holocaust disappeared in the heroic history of the Great Patriotic War. In 1948, after the founding of the State of Israel, Jews turned back into enemies because Stalin suspected them of being a fifth column of foreign powers.« (Baberowski, Verwüstetes Land – own translation)

Sources: Yad Vashem Righteous database, M.31.2/9968/1; Lipman, Memories; Jörg Baberowski, Verwüstetes Land: Die Sowjetunion nach Holocaust und Krieg, in: Deutschland Archiv, 22.5.2015, Link: <http://www.bpb.de/207010>