

Solidarity's Secret

Solidarity's Secret

the women who defeated communism in **poland**

shana penn

the university of michigan press ann arbor

Copyright © 2005 by Shana Penn
All rights reserved
Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
∞ Printed on acid-free paper

2008 2007 2006 2005 4 3 2 1

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise, without
the written permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Penn, Shana.

Solidarity's secret : the women who defeated Communism in Poland /
Shana Penn.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-472-11385-2 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Women political activists—Poland—History. 2. NSZZ
“Solidarnosc” (Labor organization)—Political activity. 3. Communism—
Poland—History. 4. Poland—Politics and government—1980–1989.
I. Title.

HQ1236.5.P7P46 2005

943.805'6'0922—dc22

2005002603

For My Parents

*You've come to learn about Solidarity women, so I will
tell you the truth, but who will care to publish it?
Everyone in Poland knows that women started the
1980s underground, but no one bothers to talk about it.
—Barbara Labuda, Wrocław*

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Introduction: National Secret	I
1. Women at the Gates	29
<i>Anna Walentynowicz and the August 1980 Strikes</i>	
2. Solidarity's "Blank Spot"	66
<i>The Legal Period and Martial Law</i>	
3. Dark Circles	100
<i>Building the Solidarity Underground</i>	
4. Floating Offices	148
<i>Publishing the Underground Newspaper</i>	
5. Wild Card	179
<i>The Female Stereotype as Camouflage</i>	
6. A Third Space	206
<i>Mutual Dependencies and Cooperation</i>	
7. Patient Revolution	226
<i>Women and Leadership</i>	

8. “Our Romantic Model”	241
<i>Myth, Literature, and Women’s Place</i>	
9. In the End, the Beginning	262
<i>Adjustments and New Problems for Women after 1989</i>	
10. Filling in the “Blank Spot”	293
<i>The Public Discourse on Women</i>	
<i>Appendix</i>	325
<i>Notes</i>	341
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	355
<i>Index</i>	359

Illustrations following page 182

Foreword

irena grudzińska-gross

Imagine the following situation: it is a severe winter, most of the people you used to work with are under arrest, all the telephones are cut off, the streets of your city are teeming with policemen and tanks, soldiers are warming themselves by street-side fires. What are you going to do? If you are Helena Łuczywo, and this is December 15, 1981, two days after martial law was declared in Poland, you walk out of the apartment in which you are hiding and look for people with whom you can rebuild the Solidarity movement. And, rather quickly, you find that some of the people with whom you used to conspire against the communist government before Solidarity even existed have not been apprehended and are ready to conspire again. Soon, you assemble seven people and organize—it is exceedingly difficult—the first meeting, in which the future course of the resistance is set up. The most important task is to preserve the voice and the authority of the Solidarity movement, to prevent its disappearance. One of the seven people present at that first meeting takes on the task of finding and contacting any elected Solidarity leader who escaped arrest. The safety of the leaders is to be carefully managed so that they can lead the movement. And because they need to have a platform from which their words can be heard, a newspaper must be created. Hence a decision is made to

create the *Tygodnik Mazowsze* (Regional Weekly). The remaining six people sit down to plan how to accomplish this task. Such were the first steps in the long march that unseated communism.

What is rather surprising in this story is not only the courage, or should I say the audacity, of these seven persons, but the fact that all of them were women. They immediately found the formula for how to act against the political and human disaster of the introduction of martial law. And, what is even more remarkable, they persevered in their stubborn resistance for eight long and exhausting years. They hid in ever-changing apartments, evading arrest, missing their children's birthdays, working around the clock. Only one of them, Ewa Kulik, the one who went in search of leaders in hiding, became a member of the underground's decision-making structures. When in 1989 their activities bore fruit and the communist system collapsed, they went on to the next task without once receiving or demanding gratitude or simple recognition. They did not want to think about themselves as veterans of past battles and therefore marched right into new challenges. They also rejected any gender analysis, saying: we were all in it together, and we did what was needed, because it was the right thing to do. And while many people wrote themselves into the history of resistance against communism, the women of *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, as well as countless other women conspirators, are rarely mentioned. Today, barely fifteen years after the fall of communism, these are unsung, forgotten heroines of the Polish underground.

But, I should say, they WERE unsung heroines because the book you are about to read reconstructs their actions and secures their place in recent history. The story of the Solidarity movement has often been told: How, in the face of government-ordered price-raises, the young electrician Lech Wałęsa jumped over the wall of the Gdańsk shipyard and ultimately founded the Solidarity Trade Union; how that union demanded and won not only economic benefits for workers but demanded fundamental liberties; how it acquired ten million members; how it was then suppressed by martial law. But Shana Penn is the first to relate in detail what role a Gdańsk shipyard worker, Anna Walentynowicz, played before that famous Wałęsa jump, and what happened next. Expertly written by a sympathetic outsider, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women*

Who Defeated Communism in Poland is a thorough telling and deep analysis of the story of women in the initially legal, then outlawed, Solidarity movement in Poland. The book is multilayered. Part oral history, part historical and sociological reconstruction of the traditions governing Polish womanhood, it is also a political analysis of a national history that in itself is hard to disentangle. Penn pays very close attention to the particularities of the Polish situation and endeavors to communicate all its nuances. But the book's chief value comes from the fact that none of these traditions blinds her vision. She steps in with seemingly very innocent questions: What about the participation of women? Why weren't they noticed? Why were they absent from the formal leadership? Weren't they recognized as leaders as well? What did they do? How crucial were their actions for the survival of the movement? Why did they refuse to differentiate themselves as women from their male colleagues?

The responses to these questions produce a new and fascinating description of what was one of the most important mass movements of the end of twentieth century. Solidarity was a sort of protracted insurrection, and, like all great national upheavals, quickly developed into a mobilization against a common enemy. Polish history—at least the history that was actively remembered—offered many models of revolutionary behavior: that of a partisan, a negotiator, a rebel. But each Polish insurrection also had a supporting cast of wives, mothers, and sisters, who kept the fight alive, passed around (and often wrote) the movement's manifestos, supported the men, and fought the enemy on a multiplicity of fronts.

In August of 1980, when the Solidarity movement was brought into existence by men and women of the anticommunist opposition, its eventual membership of ten million was evenly divided between men and women. But the leadership was basically all men, and when on December 13, 1981, martial law was imposed, most of its leaders, who had come together at an important meeting, were rounded up and arrested. Many women were arrested as well, but their numbers had been underestimated by the police. As we see in this book, they hid the few remaining male leaders, founded underground Solidarity structures, and published the

main Solidarity newspaper, providing the continuity to a movement that was in danger of extinction. And this is the untold history of the Solidarity movement in Poland.

Penn's perspective allows her to uncover an important element in Polish history, an element invisible to her subjects, blinded as they were by the persistence of the Polish romantic tradition, which valorized the activities of heroic men much more than those of women. In fact, in researching the book, she met with incredulous resistance by the women, who considered their activities to have been something completely normal and rejected any notion of heroism. They did not want to look at their struggle through a prism of gender, were afraid of being labeled "feminists," and were tired of any ideological affiliation whatsoever. With tact, persistence, and intelligence, Shana Penn pierced that resistance and here offers the reader the most complete and interesting history yet written of a social movement that shook the world. In *Solidarity's Secret* we see for the first time the complete cast of the movement that did not show much solidarity with its women. In this "family picture," men and women are seated side by side, their presence enhancing each others' roles. Only wise feminist scholarship could produce such a complete portrait and tell this important story of a group of brave, daring women, who took on a mighty state. And won.

A c k n o w l e d g m e n t s

Several institutions and individuals provided key resources without which this book and the Polish edition could not have been written. First, I wish to thank the Open Society Institute for awarding me an Individual Project Fellowship, which generously supported the last two years of my work on both *Solidarity's Secret* and *Podziemie Kobiet*. Open Society Institute also helped support the promotion of both books.

The Network of East-West Women's Book and Journal Project helped support the translations and book promotion, for which I am deeply appreciative. A Ludwig Vogelstein grant supported some of the research I conducted in the early 1990s.

Since 2000 the Women's Leadership Institute at Mills College in Oakland, California, has provided a beautiful setting in which to write and a community of colleagues from whom I have drawn intellectual and emotional support.

During my many years of travel between Poland and the United States, Peggy Simpson, an American journalist based in Warsaw, offered her apartment for use as my second home.

A book is a collective endeavor, an ongoing conversation between the author and the individuals who people her world—interviewees, mentors, colleagues, research assistants, editors,

translators, interpreters, literary agents, publishers, friends, and family members. I wish to thank a diverse group of individuals who supported, inspired, guided, educated, informed, housed, fed, and otherwise assisted me in the development of this book over more than a dozen years.

A special thanks to the people closest to me in the writing and editing of this book: Ralph Benson, Agnieszka Graff, Jill Hannum, Marjorie Lightman, Isabel Marcus, Ann Snitow, and Bozena Uminska.

Mentors, colleagues, readers, editors, publishers, and friends include Agata Araszkiwicz, Janice Baker-Weil, Dagmara Baraniewska, Erin Barclay, Tressa Berman, Chris Caes, Kim Chernin, Roma Ciesla, Violetta Cywicka, Arwen Donahue, Kinga Dunin, Felicia Eth, Paula Fass, Dominika Ferens, Izabela Filipiak, Małgorzata Fuszara, Elinor Gadon, Kasia Gawlicz, Tomasz Głęb, Janet Greenberg, Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Anka Grupińska, Agnieszka Grzybek, Agnieszka Iwaszkiewicz, Maria Janion, Ewa Kulik-Bielińska, Hanna Jankowska, Joe Lamb, Cheryl Lehman, Barbara Limanowska, Bogna Lorence-Kot, Elzbieta Matynia, Jarosław Mikos, Mary Morrison, Bernard Osser, Elzbieta Oleksy, Karen Payne, Sarah Pick, Joanna Regulska, Iwona Reichardt, James Reische, Joan Ringelheim, Ruth Rosen, Jane Rosenthal, Andrzej Rosner, Katarzyna Rosner, Dorien Ross, Adam Rozański, Teresa Sasińska-Klas, Edward Serotta, Naomi Silverman, Peggy Simpson, Robert Soltyk, Kathy Sreedhar, Renate Stendhal, Każimiera Szczuka, Laurie Wagner, Sławomira Wałczewska, Lech Wałęsa, Susan Weidman-Schneider, Michael Weil, Adam Winiarz, and Carol Zemel.

Institutions include the Baltic Gender Center, Fundacja eFKa, Hoover Institution, Jagiellonian University Institute for International Journalism, Judaica Foundation, Karta Center, NEWW-Polska, OŚKA, Rosner and Partners, Warsaw University Gender Studies, and the United States Consul, Kraków.

Regarding research assistants, translators, and interpreters, I was fortunate that, when I began my research, several Polish colleagues were able to assist me, even though interpreting and translating were not their sole or primary professions. Between 1990 and 1992 research and interpreting services were provided by philosophy professor Nina Gładziuk, Holocaust researcher and au-

thor Anka Grupińska, feminist pioneer Jolanta Plakwicz, and human rights advocate Małgorzata Tarasiewicz. In recent years, translations of primary source materials were made by Renata Firek, Katarzyna Gawlicz, Nina Gładziuk, Agnieszka Graff, Ewa Meducka, Iwona Reichardt, Dominika Suwik, and Ewa Turyk. A special thanks to Ewa Meducka and Dominika Suwik, both students at Warsaw University in 2000–2003, for their diligence, competence, and friendship during the final stages of the book.

Interviewees include Magdalena Abakanowicz, Jolanta Banach, Dagmara Baraniewska, Anna Bikont, Teresa Bogucka, Zofia Bydlińska, Zsuzsa Dabrówka, Anna Dodziuk, Małgorzata Fuszara, Małgorzata Gebert, Nina Gładziuk, Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Anka Grupińska, Joanna Gwiazda, Anna Husarska, Monika Krajewska, Ewa Kulik-Bielińska, Zofia Kuratowska, Krystyna Janda, Maria Janion, Barbara Labuda, Barbara Limanowska, Wanda Nowicka, Jolanta Plakwicz, Agnieszka Maciejowska, Małgorzata Pawlicka, Barbara Pomorska, Zofia Romaszewska, Izabela Sierakowska, Joanna Szczęsna, Małgorzata Tarasiewicz, Anna Titkow, Anna Walentynowicz, Danuta Winiarska-Kuroń, Ludwika Wujec, and Krystyna Zachwatowicz-Wajda.

And finally, I'd like to extend my gratitude to my literary agent, Felicia Eth, and to my colleagues at the University of Michigan Press—James Reische, Pete Sickman-Garner, Mary Bisbee-Beek, Kevin Rennells, Felice Lau, and Amy Anderson—who've made the publishing process an enjoyable collaboration.