



The front of the orphanage, one of Shlomo's first photographs, taken in his childhood.

Article 19 on the right to protection from abuse and neglect

Article 20 on the right to protection of a child without a family



This was a real change for me, a comfort that is hard to fathom today. This wild and penniless boy, having no framework, almost abandoned, with a constantly rumbling stomach, suddenly discovers that his childhood has

completely changed direction! I slowly gained the assurance that from now on I would be in a sheltered educational setting, with a full stomach, clean clothes, in a clean bed, and enjoying the comfort of life-long friends.



Stefania "Stefa" Wilczyńska (1886 – 1942) was Korczak's partner in the establishment of the orphanage and the education of the children, and she was his mainstay in its management.

Article 5 on parental guidance in line with a child's evolving capacities

Article 27 on the right to an adequate standard of living



Dr. Korczak believed that a sound education did not overlook any minor details and that the rules and customs of the place should be simple and structured for every child. This approach was evident in the strict daily routine of Korczak House. At the orphanage,

I learned the meaning of the words "order" and "organization" for the first time in my life. I learned that games and having fun went hand in hand with work, responsibility, and rules. Stefa was the figure in charge of our strict and regular daily routine.



The Quiet Room where the children prepared homework with the help of the group leaders. The library can be seen in the background. Photographed for purposes of documentation.



At the orphanage we bathed once a week. On wash day we changed our underwear and clothes. Other children in Poland at that time did not even have running water. Only wealthy families could bathe in public baths or at the "mikva".

Article 28 Right to education

Article 31 Leisure, play & culture



On our return from school, we would do our homework and play. To the modern reader, this schedule might seem trivial, but it was not to be taken for granted by a poverty-stricken boy, Jewish or Gentile, in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although compulsory education was in force, many poor children had to help support their families through hard physical labour and did

not have the privilege of attending school. Neither did they have any time to play games. They did not bathe for weeks and months on end, rarely changing their clothes, living in overcrowded conditions, and going to bed on an empty stomach. Children born to families similar to mine did not enjoy a childhood comparable to the one I was fortunate enough to have at the orphanage.



The children at the orphanage entrance, 1932.

Article 24 on the right to health and health care services



We received medical attention such as only children of wealthy families could afford to receive at the time. Adjacent to his private room in the attic of the orphanage were two other rooms. In one of these rooms, Korczak examined the children

and the other was an isolation room for children who required close surveillance. The doctor would regularly monitor the children's health and development and record all his notes in a separate medical file for each of us.



The orphanage children in 1933. Shlomo Nadel is in the middle row, second from the right.

Article 8 on the right to the preservation of identity



On birthdays, each one of us would find a packet of sweets and cakes waiting at his place in the dining room. Most of the children did not remember their dates of birth because they were so young and nobody celebrated their birthdays

where they came from anyway. But Doctor Korczak was pedantic about checking up the dates in the office records and bought the sweets out of his own money at one of the expensive pastry shops in Warsaw.



Lag Ba'Omer on the lawn of the orphanage, 1932. Shlomo is wearing a hat and is sitting next to the group leader Bolek Drukier.

Article 14 on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion



Although daily life in the orphanage was secular and excluded prayer, Korczak certainly did not dismiss the Jewish calendar and traditions. For example, if a child wished to say “Kaddish” for his parents, Korczak would wake up early with that child and join in the prayer. The Sabbath was respected by means

of a festive meal and a break from studies. It was the weekly visiting day for the relatives of the children. We celebrated all the Jewish holidays as I explained in this book. Children could go to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and fast on Yom Kippur. Our favourite holidays were Hanukah, Purim, and Passover.



Shlomo Nadel with the walnut he received from Korczak, kept safely to this day in his pocket and wrapped in a handkerchief. When it started to disintegrate, he moved it into a box. The walnut has become part of Shlomo over the years. Photographed in 2000.

Article 14 on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion



Despite the doctor's liking for the Hanukah festival, Passover remained the principal festival of the orphanage. The "Seder" night was a magnificent event, attended by important guests such as the head of the Jewish community in Warsaw and various philanthropists who supported the orphanage over the years. We read the "Haggadah" and sang the songs which one of the group leaders

had taught us beforehand. Since 107 orphanage children participated in the Seder, the "Afikoman" ritual demanded a creative solution. This led to a tradition in which the Afikoman was won by the child who found a walnut in one of his "kneidelach". The winning child received five "zloty" which was then enough to feed a small family for a whole week.



Paving the paths between the bungalows at the summer camp. Photographed by Shlomo in 1934.

Article 29 on the goals of education

Article 32 on protection from harmful labour



We were constantly infused with notions of personal responsibility and contribution to society. One of the methods of implementation was by including all the children in the maintenance of the place, with the exception perhaps of the youngest or weakest ones who could not fulfill any duties.

Thus, besides preparing food for which the cooks were responsible, or housekeeping which demanded better professional skills than the children were capable of displaying, all the chores in the orphanage were performed by the children themselves, according to a roster of duties.



Gardening at the summer camp. Photographed by Shlomo in 1933.



Picking fruit at the summer camp, Rozyczka farm, with youth leaders, children, and local staff. Photographed by Felek Grzyb in 1934.

Article 27 on access to an adequate standard of living

Article 32 on protection from harmful labour

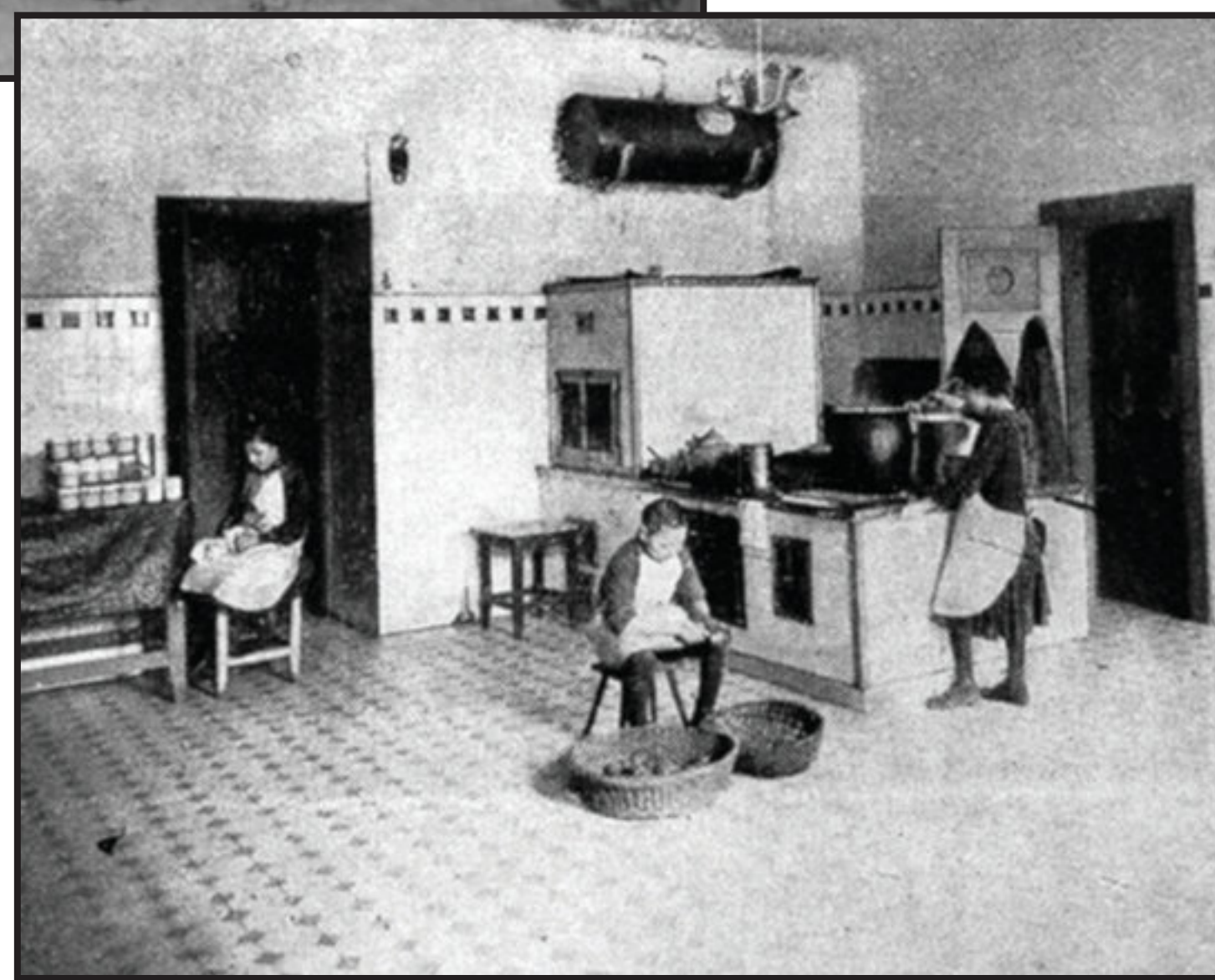


The older children tended the fruit trees and worked in the greenhouses in which we grew vegetables. These were covered with glass boards which we closed up during the cold Polish summer nights, reopening them in the morning. The work was not easy; lifting the boards required great physical strength. We, the older boys, were extremely

proud of our masculine ability to fulfill these tasks. The produce of these greenhouses was at the disposal of the camp's kitchen and we gorged ourselves on the vegetables until our stomachs hurt. Nobody could convince me that a tomato or cucumber one has cultivated oneself has the same taste as one purchased from a store.



Peeling potatoes on kitchen duty. For safety's sake, only the older girls were called to do this job.



Kitchen duty. Lonia the cook is in the background.

Article 18 regarding parental responsibilities

Article 24 on access to health and nutritious foods



The [dining] hall had thirteen tables. Bursists sat at the head of each table and their roles were to serve the food which was placed in the center of the table and to make sure that all the children were eating. If a child refused to eat, the

doctor sat next to him and persuaded him to eat together. "One spoon for you and one spoon for me," he would say. At the end of the meal we went out to school, every child holding a sandwich in his hand.



Shlomo's classmates on the day they left the orphanage. Shlomo is on the right in the front row. Photographed by Felek Grzyb.

Article 13 on the right to freedom of expression

Article 31 on the right to rest, leisure, play, recreation, and cultural activities



I was mischievous, rather good looking, and clean-cut. Being the orphanage photographer also proved to be an advantage. Although I was only a beginner, the others thought that I was a certified photographer. The girls showed interest

in me, if only to have their photographs taken at any opportunity. My first love's name was Fela. I still have her photograph with an inscription to me. I met Fela once again on my return to Poland at the end of the war. She was already married by then.



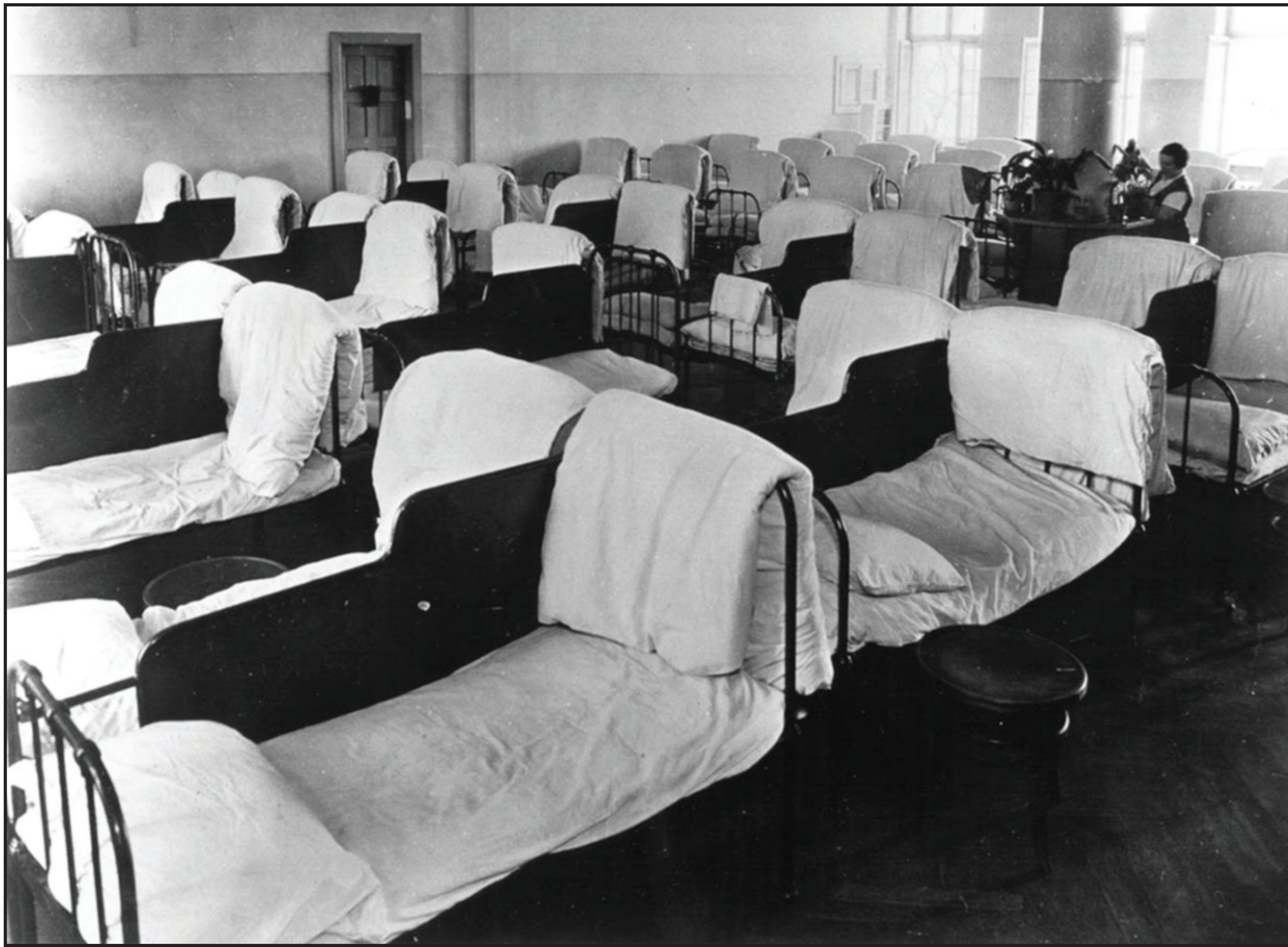
Janusz Korczak with orphanage workers at a summer camp. The photograph was taken by Shlomo in 1934.

Article 20 on the right to protection of a child without a family




And who were these teachers who were designated to implement Korczak's doctrine? Korczak was of the opinion that a young teacher could have a stronger influence than any adult pedagogue or psychologist. He therefore established two institutions. One was called the "Bursists", the young apprentice teachers who monitored the children's behaviour in the home and made sure that it was actually managed according to the rules. The

second institution was that of the "Apotropos", or guardians, of whom Felek, the young man that I met when I was accepted to the orphanage, was an example. Apprentice teachers, the Bursists, were students who, in exchange for food and lodging, were employed as group leaders of the children at the orphanage. They spent four hours a day working with the children, and were free for the rest of the day.



A bedroom in the orphanage.

Article 27 on access to an adequate standard of living



There were two bedrooms on the second floor of the orphanage. One of them contained beds for fifty-one boys and the other was populated by fifty-six girls. Every bed had a small locker beside it in which we kept our school equipment. There was a narrow room with

a radio and gramophone player between the two bedrooms. We would fall asleep to the sounds of music, or the doctor telling us one of his stories. Our clothes for the next day were folded next to our beds, ready for the morning.



Jonasz Beler playing his violin. Photographed by Shlomo in 1935.

Article 31 on the right to rest, leisure, play, recreation, and cultural activities

Article 13 on the right to freedom of expression



Jonasz was a gifted violinist and could play full pieces without sheet music. He won awards at a very early age, including awards from the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra (which later became the Israel Philharmonic). Jonasz played a Mazurka by the Polish composer Henryk Wieniawski. I

was standing in the audience, not far from Stefa. Our eyes met for a moment and I was surprised to notice that her eyes had tears in them. Here stood the tough Stefa, unable to hide her joy and emotion at hearing Jonasz playing the violin. I do believe that she felt like a proud mother at that

moment. As for Jonasz, I have no idea what became of him. I am sure that he would have had a bright future ahead of him, had it not been for the Holocaust. Jonasz was younger than me and therefore remained at the orphanage after I had already left.



Dr. Korczak uncharacteristically complied with the request of the photographer, Shlomo Nadel, to be photographed with his children and one of the group leaders in the courtyard of the orphanage. Photographed in 1934.

Article 28 on the right to education



The school was a Jewish institute intended for boys at first, later becoming co-educational. We played inside the classrooms during our breaks because the yard belonged to the residents of the site. We studied

mathematics, literature, geography, history, physics, chemistry, music, and bible. My favourite subjects were physics and chemistry, owing to my interest in photography, my future profession.



The kayak was built by the children with Igor Newerly, Korczak's secretary and later a renowned Polish writer. His hobby was building and carving in wood. At the children's request, he voluntarily gave a woodwork course. Holding the oar in the center is the group leader, Felek Grzyb. This magnificent watercraft did not last very long. The oarsmen lacked experience and sailed it on the Wisła River straight into the bridge. The kayak collapsed and sank, but luckily the oarsmen escaped to safety.

Article 31 on the right to rest, leisure, play, recreation, and cultural activities

Article 29 on the goals of education



The field of informal education was unknown in those days, but Korczak recognized its value alongside formal education and supplied us with as much informal education as possible. He strove to create an educational system at the orphanage to complement the formal knowledge that we acquired at school. A piano teacher came to the orphanage once a week to teach all the children who wanted to learn. Another teacher

established a mandolin orchestra, the mandolins having been a donation from the Jewish community. Yet another teacher by the name of Basia Abramov, established a children's choir for the orphanage. Janusz Korczak brought us closer to literature by reading his stories and books to us. We were exposed to the visual arts through visits to museums. All of these stimuli contributed towards us having an appreciation of culture.



Samek Nadel, brother of Shlomo, 1932. Samek, first on the left, is holding the hand of a young ward, who is holding the hand of one of the orphanage's group leaders, Stella Gutman. She survived the Holocaust and moved to the U.S.A. Since I did not possess a photograph of my whole family, I asked her if she by any chance had a photograph of my brother. To my surprise, she answered in the affirmative and stated that she had two photographs, which she would gladly give me. It is needless to express my great excitement at that moment.

Article 19 on the right to protection from abuse and neglect

Article 20 on the right to protection of a child without a family



My terrified brother was, in fact, taken in by people from the Jewish community and he was sent to an orphanage at 7 Twarda Street. A man called Frankel managed that institution in a completely different way to how Korczak's orphanage was managed. That orphanage accepted only boys and the conditions were

extremely harsh for the children. The boys received basic care and were sent to school, but they were treated in a cold and indifferent manner and their conditions bordered on criminal negligence. I heard, for example, that one of their dinners consisted of burnt rice porridge with milk. The children refused to eat it and as a punishment, it

was served to them again the next day for breakfast. Although they were very hungry, the children again refused to eat the burnt porridge and declared a hunger strike. Two of the people working with the children at the orphanage informed the Jewish community about this and it resulted in a huge scandal.



Pictured are the older boys at the orphanage. They are holding shovels in order to shovel the sudden snow of 1935. The janitor, Piotr Zalewski, who was in charge of the shoveling, is sitting in the first row, second from the right.

Article 9 on protection from separation from parents



In the spring of 1942, when the Germans ordered the orphanage employees to load all the orphanage belongings onto wagons so as to move them into the Ghetto, it was Piotr who insisted on loading his luggage, announcing that he, too, would be moving to the Ghetto. The S.S. guard in charge of the evacuation could not understand Piotr's behaviour and asked him,

“How can you, a Pole, want to move into the Ghetto with the Jews?” The Germans were suspicious of him and interrogated him at the Gestapo headquarters. A month after he was released, he died as a result of the torture he had endured at the hands of the Germans. A tombstone was erected in the orphanage courtyard in his memory, close to where his workshop was.



The graduation party at the summer camp in 1932. A play about a Polish wedding enacted by girls. Photographed by Adek Poznanski, an amateur photographer.

Article 29 on the goals of education



Today, I can understand that this story [King Matt] and others gave us confidence as a Jewish minority within a Gentile population. Korczak divided people into good and evil, regardless of their descent, religion, economic or social situation, or even age. I did not play any part in the writing of *King Matt the First*. It underwent several adaptations and was even performed at the Habima Theater in Tel Aviv. Like many of my

friends, I identified with King Matt, the hero of the story who, like us, was an orphan. We knew about his pain and loneliness. I actually mourned for my own father through King Matt's grief. Today, I understand that it was not by chance that Korczak wrote about an orphan attaining greatness when he decided to take fate into his own hands. This is a powerful message to orphans whose childhood had been maimed through an experience with death.



The mandolin orchestra at the orphanage. In the center: Mr. Fabian, a Bursist (apprentice teacher) who was also the music teacher at the orphanage. Photographed by Shlomo in 1934.

Article 31 on the right to rest, leisure, play, recreation, and cultural activities

Article 29 on the goals of education



Cultural events of this sort were intended for wealthy families, only they could enjoy the cultural prosperity in the Polish capital in those times, while most of the population of Warsaw were undergoing a daily struggle for survival and had no money for cultural activities. Needless to say, we originated from that socio-economic environment and would never have had the

chance to participate in cultural events. Korczak proved once again to be an innovator in that he stressed the importance of enriching the cultural world of the child. He stressed the importance of culture because he understood that, besides the aesthetic experience, culture also provides an intellectual stimulus for increasing one's knowledge and developing curiosity and thinking skills.



The Children's Court. Stefa Wilczyńska is in the center of the photograph, 1932. One of the main aims of the court was to allow a child who had been wronged to list his case and summon the offender to face the court. I believe that the court succeeded in drastically decreasing the amount of violence inside the walls of the orphanage. Very rarely did we witness fights between two children.

Article 12 on respect for the views of the child




The subject of the trial, the defendant and the accusation were announced on the notice board prior to the trial. The accused defended himself despite the fact that the judges could have been his own friends, posing a problem for children who were obliged to sentence a friend. Stefa was present at every trial, but she did not have the right to vote. She had the authority to give guidance

and advice in difficult cases, but the judges were not obliged to accept her opinions and could even reject them. A trial between friends became a known phenomenon all over Poland at that time. Janusz Korczak devised the constitution, consisting of one-thousand articles or judgments the judges could give out. This became the basis for the discussion of the court.



The dining room and assembly hall. Trials usually took place on the weekends. The children's court consisted of five child judges elected weekly by other children. The judges changed every week as Korczak did not want to create a class of judges. He wanted every child to experience both perspectives of being a judge and a defendant in a trial. The judges were democratically chosen by the orphanage children on weekends in an organized procedure which took place in the dining room after breakfast.

Article 12 on respect for the views of the child



In the introduction to the constitution, there was an explanation of how to treat an “accused” person, how to relate to the incident, and how to specify the functions and limitations of the court. Some of the points were: If a person wronged you, the best thing is to forgive them. If they wronged you because they did not know better, they already know this. If they wronged you unintentionally, they will be more careful in the future. If they wronged

you because they find it hard to adjust to norms unfamiliar to them, they will try harder to adjust to them in the future. If they wronged you because they were tempted by others, from now on they will not pay attention to them. If a person wronged you, the best thing is to forgive them and wait for them to mend their ways in the future. It is the duty of the court to protect the quiet, the weak, and the conscientious ones.

Furthermore, the court is required to administer justice, as it is those who suffer most through lack of law and order. The law court itself is not justice, but it aspires towards realizing it; the law court is not truth, but its goal is truth. Judges may make mistakes. They may punish for acts which they themselves are guilty. But it is shameful if a judge consciously hands down an unjust verdict.



After leaving the orphanage, Shlomo returned to visit in 1935. He was accompanied by an amateur photographer who requested to photograph the children together with Korczak who, as usual, refused to be photographed. Most of the young children in the photograph met their fate with Korczak in the camp at Treblinka. Shlomo is standing in the fourth row on the far right, with a peaked cap on his head.

Article 18 regarding parental responsibilities

Article 20 on the right to protection of a child without a family



No words can express how significant Korczak's orphanage was for a child like me. Korczak and Stefa were responsible for my having taken root, built my identity, acquired an education, and widened my horizons. Equipped

with all these tools, I left the protective gates of the orphanage, accompanied by my dream to become a professional photographer. This was, in fact, the end of my wonderful childhood.



Group leaders of the orphanage through the lens of Shlomo's camera in 1934. Sitting second from the left is the group leader Felek Grzyb. His wife to be, Bronka, is standing in the center.



The famous monument of Janusz Korczak at the Jewish cemetery of Warsaw, showing Korczak with his children, on their final way.

Article 18 regarding parental responsibilities

Article 29 on the goals of education



After leaving the orphanage, I heard that Felek had married Bronka, one of the Bursists who also worked there and that they had a daughter. I presume that this daughter was the young child Korczak was seen carrying in the last

famous photographs taken on the way to the train station and from there to Treblinka with his children from the orphanage. There is documentation to the effect that Felek, Bronka, and their daughter were murdered together with Korczak.



Shlomo about 10 years old (1930).



Shlomo Nadel in 2011.

Reflective of the entire Convention on the Rights of the Child



To my total amazement, I discovered that there are good, honest, and decent people in the world. Until then, the world seemed like a threatening and frightening place, where children were either neglected or abused. I could not imagine that a child was equal to any

human being, deserving of respect from adults. I became absorbed in an egalitarian society which accepted the young, the weak, and the other. A society that receives but also knows how to give and in other words, a society with rights and duties.