



## Egodocumentality of personal file: personality – mentality – world of values. On the example selected archives of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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### ABSTRACT

Personal files are documents, collected by the creating agencies, which reflect the course of a career path in each workplace. The source documents from the studied records are treated as egodocuments, because their authors tell stories about themselves. Preserved documents can be used to create biographies, analyse historical facts present in the lives of individual people, provide information about the surrounding world or help explain various complex processes – economic, sociological, etc. This article attempts to analyse personal files from the perspective of anthropological research, which in a certain way helps to get to know a person, their experiences and their understanding of reality.

Archival materials were selected using the representative method. A random sample was used, which involved selecting random items from a closed general collection. The general population in the study comprised personal files of Bydgoszcz City Hall employees from the interwar period, as well as personal files of members and dependants of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz.

The selected files were used for an in-depth analysis in the context of egodocumentality aimed at understanding the author's world of values. But does every resume or elaborate application give us enough information to precisely analyze someone in terms of their personality? Does it provide enough data to conduct research? Are the sources classified as egodocuments really what they appear to be? This article seeks to answer all these questions.

### KEYWORDS

egodocument,  
biography, inner  
world, self-narrative,  
personal file,  
ZBOWiD, Bydgoszcz  
City Hall

## Egodokumenty w pracowniczych aktach osobowych: osobowość – mentalność – świat wartości. Na przykładzie wybranych materiałów archiwalnych z XX w.

### STRESZCZENIE

Akta osobowe są dokumentami, gromadzonymi przez aktotwórców, w których odbija się przede wszystkim przebieg drogi zawodowej w poszczególnych miejscach pracy. Źródła, które wystąpiły w badanych aktach, traktowane są jako egodokumenty, gdyż autor dokumentu opowiada w nich o sobie. Zachowane dokumenty mogą posłużyć do tworzenia biogramów, analizy faktów historycznych poszczególnych osób, podawać informacje o otaczającym ich świecie, czy też pomagać przy wyjaśnianiu różnych złożonych procesów ekonomicznych, socjologicznych itp. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu spojrzenie na akta osobowe z perspektywy badań antropologicznych, które w pewien sposób pomagają w poznaniu człowieka, jego doznań i sposobie pojmowania rzeczywistości.

Materiały archiwalne zostały wytypowane przy wykorzystaniu metody reprezentacyjnej. Użyto próby losowej polegającej na wyborze przypadkowych elementów z zamkniętego zbioru generalnego. W omawianym badaniu populacją generalną były akta osobowe pracowników Magistratu Miejskiego w Bydgoszczy z okresu międzywojennego oraz akta osobowe członków i podopiecznych Związku Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Wojewódzki w Bydgoszczy.

Wybrane jednostki służyły pogłębionej analizie egodokumentalnej, której celem było poznanie świata wartości bohatera. Czy jednak każdy życiorys czy rozbudowane podanie daje nam podstawy do prześledzenia go właśnie pod kątem osobowości człowieka? Czy daje wystarczająco dużo materiału do przeprowadzenia badań? Czy źródła zakwalifikowane do egodokumentów rzeczywiście są nimi? Na te pytania stara się odpowiedzieć tekst artykułu.

### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

egodokument, życiorys, świat wewnętrzny, samoświadectwo, akta osobowe, ZBOWiD, Magistrat Miejski w Bydgoszczy

The issue of discerning the world of values is one of the most significant dilemmas that a human being faces. The humanities are subtly hinting at opportunities to learn and analyse human mentality. This article addresses the problem of getting to know a person's personality through the analysis of egodocuments, formalized writing forms such as resumes, applications or questionnaires that appear in official records and archives of a veterans' organization.

First, the meaning of the term "personal file" is explained. Subsequently, the contents of personal records from selected fonds of the State Archives in Bydgoszcz are presented. The source documents from the studied records are treated as egodocuments, because their authors tell stories about themselves. What is unique about the sources is that they have certain intrinsic characteristics that allow the researcher to interpret the behaviour of the authors. But does every resume or elaborate application give us enough information to precisely analyze someone in terms of their personality? Does it provide enough data to

conduct research? Are the sources categorized as egodocuments really what they appear to be?

This analysis will help answer these questions. The ego-documentary/self-testimony theory has been developing since the 1950s. For some time, it has attracted the interest of Polish researchers and is an increasingly used term, although it can cause controversy in the Polish humanities<sup>1</sup> and be confused with, for example, oral history. Although the ego-documentary theory develops as part of the history of mentality, it would be a great mistake to identify it with oral history. The theory of ego-documentality is much closer to study of memoirs and autobiographies<sup>2</sup> than to oral history, which consists in recording, archiving and interpreting the accounts of witnesses or participants of historical events<sup>3</sup>. The author of the analysis follows the “open understanding” of the ego-documentary theory, which is based on the researcher’s approach to the source, and not on the specific features that could seemingly indicate the ego-documentary nature of the source. According to this approach, no cultural text is classified as

<sup>1</sup> W. Chorążyczewski, A. Pacevicius, S. Roszak, *Egodokumenty. Tradycje historiograficzne i perspektywy badawcze* [Egodocuments. Historiographic traditions and research perspectives], Toruń 2015; W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, *Samoświadectwa pracowników polskiej kancelarii królewskiej czasów nowożytnych. Przypadek Jana Piotrowskiego* [Self-certifications of employees of the Polish royal chancellery in modern times. The case of Jan Piotrowski], [in:] *Polska kancelaria królewska między władzą a społeczeństwem*, [The Polish royal chancellery between the authorities and society] vol. 4, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, W. Krawczuk, Warszawa 2011; A. Rosa, *Testamenty fordońskie jako egodokumenty mieszczańskie* [Fordon wills as bourgeois ego-documents], “Kronika Bydgoska” 2008, no. 28; A. Rosa, K. Siuda, *Analiza egodokumentalna pamiętników archiwistów jako przyczynek do poznania mentalności określonej grupy zawodowej* [Ego-documentary analysis of archivists’ diaries as a contribution to understanding the mentality of a specific professional group], [in:] *Pogranicza archiwistyki*, Toruńskie Konfrontacje Archiwalne [Borderlands of archival science, Toruń Archival Confrontations], vol. 6, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, Toruń 2019; S. Roszak, *Archiwa sarmackiej pamięci. Funkcje i znaczenie rękopiśmiennych ksiąg typu silva rerum w kulturze Rzeczypospolitej XVIII wieku* [Archives of Sarmatian memory. Functions and importance of manuscript books of the silva rerum type in the culture of the Commonwealth of the eighteenth century], Toruń 2004; *Kultura wsi w egodokumentach* [Rural culture in ego-documents], ed. H. Czachowski, V. Wróblewska, Toruń 2016; J. Zając, *Świadkowie zbrodni – druga wojna światowa w egodokumentach polskich dzieci* [Witnesses of the crime – the Second World War in the egodocuments of Polish children], “Filoteknos” 2022, no. 12.

<sup>2</sup> M. Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie* [The Autobiographical Triangle. Testimony, Confession and Challenge], Kraków 2000; I. Skwarek, *Dlaczego autobiografizm? Powieści autobiograficzne dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Why autobiographism? Autobiographical novels of the interwar period], Katowice 1986.

<sup>3</sup> A. Niderla, *Historia mówiona a etnolingwistyka* [Oral history and ethnolinguistics], “Etnolingwistyka” 2010, vol. 22, p. 13; P. Filipkowski, *Historia mówiona i wojna*, p. 1, [https://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/Content/9618/Historia\\_mowiona\\_i\\_wojna.pdf](https://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/Content/9618/Historia_mowiona_i_wojna.pdf), accessed 21 August 2023.

an egodocument in itself. When a researcher decides that the analysed text allows them to learn about the characteristics of the author, their personality or the way of perceiving the world, relationships with other people, emotions, passions and actions, the text can be considered as having ego-documentary features.

At the beginning of the article, the term “personal file” is characterized. The purpose of discussing the term is to present the nature of personal files in different countries (Poland, Germany and Anglo-Saxon countries). Subsequently, the content of selected personal files is presented. Through analysis of the archives, documents regarding a person and their environment have been identified.

In Polish archival literature, personal files are discussed in the context of appraisal and the possibilities of using this type of archival source<sup>4</sup>. Few works

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of works on personal files, see: J. Jaros, *Problem akt personalnych do roku 1945 w przemyśle węglowym* [The problem of personnel files until 1945 in the coal industry], “Archeion” 1965, vol. 62, pp. 73–84; S. Nawrocki, *Porządkowanie i inwentaryzacja akt personalnych w archiwach zakładowych* [Classification and inventorying personnel files in archives current], “Archiwista” 1968, no. 2, pp. 1–6; T. Grygier, *Wartościowanie materiałów archiwalnych (Uwagi dla potrzeb administracji i archiwistyki kościelnej)* [Appraisal of archives (Notes for the needs of church administration and archivistics)], “Archiwa, Biblioteki, Muzea Kościelne” 1976, vol. 33, pp. 5–52; K. Peplowska, *Dokumentacja osobowa i płacowa* [Personal and payroll documentation], [in:] *Współczesna dokumentacja urzędowa*, Biblioteka Zarządcy Dokumentacji, [Contemporary official documentation. Documentation Manager Library], vol. 2, ed. H. Robótka, Toruń 2011, pp. 115–150; K. Strykowski, *Dokumentacja masowa i jej wartościowanie w archiwach wybranych krajów frankofońskich (na przykładzie akt osobowych)* [Mass documentation and its appraisal in the archives of selected Francophone countries (on the example of personal files)], [in:] *Dokumentacja Masowa. Z problematyki kształtowania zasobu archiwalnego* [Mass Documentation. From the issues of shaping the archivale], ed. I. Mamczak-Gadkowska, K. Strykowski, Poznań 2012, pp. 79–102; Z. Krupska, *Problemy oceny akt personalnych wytworzonych w okresie Polski Ludowej* [Problems of appraisal personal files created in the period of People’s Poland], “Archeion” 1983, vol. 76, pp. 5–18; K. Paterski, *Zabezpieczenie dokumentacji osobowo-płacowej zakładów pracy w II poł. XX w. oraz u progu XXI w.* [Securing personnel and payroll documentation of workplaces in the second half of the the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century], “Problemy archiwistyki” 2009, no. 1(1), pp. 50–58; A. Łosowska, *Problemy przechowywania i przetwarzania masowej dokumentacji osobowej w szkole wyższej* [Problems of storing and processing mass personal documentation at a university], “Archiwista Polski” 2001, no. 1(21), pp. 45–54; P. Falkowski, *Wartość źródłowa akt osobowych Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej na przykładzie zespołu archiwalnego KW PZPR w Bydgoszczy* [The Source Value of Personal Files from the Polish United Workers’ Party Based on the Example of the Archival Fonds of the PZPR Voivodeship Committee in Bydgoszcz], “Przegląd Archiwalny IPN” 2021, vol. 14, pp. 55–74; D. Magier, *Dokumentacja personalna PZPR w praktyce metodycznej archiwów państwowych (exemplum Archiwum Państwowego w Lublinie)* [Personal documentation of the Polish United Workers’ Party in the methodological practice of state archives (exemplum of the State Archives in Lublin)], [in:] *Dzieje. Wojsko. Edukacja. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Henryka Hermanna w 70. rocznicę urodzin* [History. Army. Education. The jubilee book of Professor Henryk Hermann

offer a detailed consideration of the archives-creating processes involving personal files in individual institutions and consider the usefulness of their content for academic purposes.

German archivists focus in their deliberations on accession personal files from various institutions<sup>5</sup>. Different methods of appraisal are discussed in the texts<sup>6</sup>. There are some works in German literature that discuss possible use of the personal files for scholarly purposes<sup>7</sup>.

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on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth], ed. M. Bednarzak-Libera, J. Gmitruk, Warszawa–Siedlce 2010, pp. 285–296; R. Jarosz, *Ukryty skarb. Akta osobowo-płacowe PZPR/SdRP w Archiwum Rotacyjnym „Ład” w Lubnej* [Hidden treasure. Personal and payroll files in Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) and the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP) in the “ŁAD” Archive in Lubna], [in:] *Dzieje biurokracji* [History of Bureaucracy], vol. 4, p. 2, ed. A. Górak, K. Latawiec, D. Magier, Lublin–Siedlce 2011, pp. 802–810; R. Miłoch, T. Szafron, *Akta osobowo-płacowe bylej PZPR zgromadzone w Archiwum Państwowym w Katowicach jako przykład źródła do badań nad historią PRL* [Personal records of the Polish United Workers’ Party in the State Archives in Katowice as a source for research of the history of the Polish People’s Republic], “Szkice Archiwalno-Historyczne” 2010, no. 6, pp. 145–148; J. Louchin, *Masowość dokumentacji personalnej oraz jej wartościowanie na przykładzie zasobu Archiwum Państwowego Dokumentacji Osobowej i Płacowej w Milanówku* [The mass of personal documentation and its appraisal on the example of the State Archives of Personal and Payroll Documentation in Milanówku], [in:] *Dokumentacja masowa...*, pp. 177–186.

- <sup>5</sup> Examples of work: A. Martens, *Archivierung von Personalunterlagen der Beschäftigten der Bundesverwaltung – Das Archivierungsmodell des Bundesarchivs, dargestellt am Beispiel der Bundesfinanzverwaltung*, [in:] *Archivischer Umgang mit Personalakten Ergebnisse eines spartenübergreifenden Fachgesprächs im Westfälischen Archivamt, Münster* 2004, pp. 10–16.
- <sup>6</sup> Examples of works: C. Rehm, J. Treffeisen, *Perspektiven der Personalaktenbewertung – Zwischen Samplebildung und Totalüberlieferung. Erfahrungen aus Baden-Württemberg*, [in:] *Archivischer Umgang mit Personalakten...*, pp. 34–51; K. von Hochstuhl, A. Straub, *Bewertung von Personalakten das baden-württembergische Modell*, [in:] *Historische Überlieferung aus Verwaltungsunterlagen*, ed. R. Kretzschmar, Stuttgart 1997, pp. 227–233; B. Horn-Kolditz, *Modell zur Bewertung von Personalakten in einer großen Stadtverwaltung*, “Archive in Thüringen” 2005, Sonderheft, pp. 51–56.
- <sup>7</sup> Examples of works: F.W. Kersting, *Benötigt die Forschung Personalakten? Ein Erfahrungsbericht aus regional- und psychiatriegeschichtlicher Sicht*, [in:] *Archivischer Umgang mit Personalakten ...*, pp. 90–103. R. Hering, *Personalakten in der historischen Forschung: Parteimitgliedschaften Hamburger Hochschullehrer in der Weimarer Republik*, [in:] *Archivischer Umgang mit Personalakten...*, pp. 103–111; R. Herget, *Erstmals Personalakten des Landesamts für Verfassungsschutz übernommen*, “Nachrichten aus Staatlichen Archiven Bayerns” 2018, no. 75, pp. 39; N. Bruns, H.-J. Höötman, *Grundzüge der Bewertung von Personalakten im Archiv des Landschaftsverbandes Westfalen-Lippe*, “Archivpflege in Westfalen-Lippe” 2018, no. 86, pp. 27–36; W. Bick, R. Mann, P.J. Müller, *Massenakten als Datenbasis der empirischen Sozialforschung. Methodische Voraussetzungen und institutionelle Erfordernisse*, [in:] *Sozialforschung und Verwaltungsdaten*, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 9–15; *Arbeitskreis Bewertung kommunalen Schriftguts. Überlegungen zur*

In the Anglo-Saxon countries, the subject of personal records and personal papers was discussed primarily in archival journals. Several papers related to personnel files have appeared in “The American Archivist”<sup>8</sup>. The “Archival Science” published articles on personal records, but in the context of personal (private) records<sup>9</sup>. “Archives and Manuscripts” also considered the problem of personal files in the context of private records<sup>10</sup>.

## What is a personal file?

Personal records accompany people through the various stages of life. Personal files comprise documentation showing the course of careers, the lives of individual people, as well as information about the surrounding world. Preserved documents can be used to create biographies, analyse historical facts, or explain various complex processes – economic, sociological, etc. They can also be used

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*Bewertung kommunaler Personalakten – Eine Handreichung, “Archivpflege in Westfalen-Lippe”* 2014, no. 81, pp. 50–54.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of works: V. Stewart, *Problems of Confidentiality in the Administration of Personal Case Records*, “The American Archivist” 1974, no. 37(3), pp. 387–398; M. Barritt, *The Appraisal of Personally Identifiable Student Records*, “The American Archivist” 1986, no. 49(3), pp. 263–275; F. Ford, *Some Legal Problems in Preserving Records for Public Use*, “The American Archivist” 1957, no. 20(1), pp. 41–47; A. Wright, *The Scholar’s Interest in Personnel Records*, “The American Archivist” 1949, no. 12(3), pp. 271–279; P. Brooks, *Archival Procedures for Planned Records Retirement*, “The American Archivist” 1948, no. 11(4), pp. 308–315; P. Lewinson, *Problems of Archives Classification*, “The American Archivist” 1939, no. 2(3), pp. 179–190; U. Haller, *Processing for Access*, “The American Archivist” 1985, no. 48(4), pp. 400–415; K.R. Rimkus, B. Anderson, K.E. Germeck, C.C. Nielsen, Ch.J. Prom, T. Popp, *Preservation and Access for Born-digital Electronic Records. The Case for an Institutional Digital Content Format Registry*, “The American Archivist” 2020, no. 83(2), pp. 397–428.

<sup>9</sup> Examples of works: J. Douglas, *A call to rethink archival creation. Exploring types of creation in personal archives*, “Archival Science” 2018, vol. 18, pp. 29–49; B. Cannelli, M. Musso, *Social media as part of personal digital archives. Exploring users’ practices and service providers’ policies regarding the preservation of digital memories*, “Archival Science” 2022, vol. 22, pp. 259–283; D. Sinn, S.Y. Syn, *Personal documentation on a social network site. Facebook, a collection of moments from your life?*, “Archival Science” 2014, vol. 14, 2014, pp. 95–124; J. Niu, *The need for shared personal/family archivists*, “Archival Science” 2021, vol. 21, pp. 219–241.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of works: M. Henderson, *Archiving the feminist self. Reflections on the personal papers of Merle Thornton*, “Archives and Manuscripts” 2013, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 91–104; V. Hess, S. Ledebur, *Taking and Keeping. A Note on the Emergence and Function of Hospital Patient Records*, “Journal of the Society of Archivists” 2011, vol. 32, pp. 21–33.

for anthropological research aiming to learn about people, the world they live in, their experience and understanding of reality.

At the beginning of this discussion, definitions of the term “personal file” are presented. The cited terms have been taken from Polish and international archival terminology. No literal comparison of the terms was made, with the exception of analysing the explanations of the terms and indicating the similarities and differences. Based on the following considerations, the authors will attempt to answer the question: what is a personal file?

In Polish archival dictionaries from 1952<sup>11</sup>, 1973<sup>12</sup> and 1974<sup>13</sup>, personal files are defined as documentation created as a result of employment and concerning personal data of a person. In the 1973<sup>14</sup> and 1974<sup>15</sup> dictionaries there is also a definition of personal files as private records.

Regulation of the General Director of State Archives No. 16 of 10 November 2014 on the introduction of methodological guidelines for valuing, collecting and organizing personal records, defined a personal file as “all documentation resulting from employment relationship, starting from the moment of application/referral to work until the end of the employment relationship, as well as after its termination, collected in a personal folder or envelope”. According to the above-mentioned standard, a personal file does not include recruitment documents or copies of payroll-related accounting records<sup>16</sup>. The provided explanation indicates that a personal file is created as a result of a person’s professional activities, and besides it provides personal file with a chronological framework. This is the current standard that is used by the State Archives. This concept represents best how personal files are understood in Poland.

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<sup>11</sup> *Polski Słownik Archiwalny* [Polish Archival Dictionary], compiled by A. Bachulski, K. Konarski, A. Wolff, Warszawa 1952, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Kolankowski, *Materiały do słownika terminologii archiwalnej krajów socjalistycznych* [Materials for the Dictionary of Archival Terminology of Socialist Countries], Warszawa 1973, p. 279.

<sup>13</sup> *Polski Słownik Archiwalny* [Polish Archival Dictionary], ed. W. Maciejewska, Warszawa 1974, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 292.

<sup>15</sup> *Polski Słownik Archiwalny*, 1974, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Zarządzenie Nr 16 Naczelnego Dyrektora Archiwów Państwowych z dnia 10 listopada 2014 r. w sprawie wprowadzenia wskazówek metodycznych dotyczących zasad wartościowania, gromadzenia i porządkowania akt osobowych [The Head Office of State Archives, in Order No. 16 of the Head of State Archives dated 10 November 2014 on the introduction of methodological guidelines for valuing, collecting and organizing personal records], <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/d9d9c0d2-373a-44f4-8054-4ac1d38ca34b>, accessed 21 August 2023.

At this juncture we should move on to a discussion about foreign definitions of personal files. The presented terms are derived from archival terminology in Germany (*Personalakten*) and Anglo-Saxon countries (personal papers, personal records, personal file). The definitions come from archival literature (textbooks and dictionaries of terminology) and websites.

In German archival science, the personal file is referred to as *Personalakten*. Adolf Brenneke, Heinrich Otto Meisner and Johannes Papritz state in their publications that initially the personal file was a collection of files that covered given categories of civil servants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussia, separate personal files for individual officials were introduced, and when an employee changed jobs the personal file followed him<sup>17</sup>.

German archivists define personal files as documentation created as a result of an employment relationship, which contains information about the relationship between the employee and the employer<sup>18</sup>. German definitions indicate a great similarity with Polish terminology – the personal file comprises records that were created during the course of employment. German archival science does not define personal files as private records.

In English-speaking countries the terms: personal papers and personal file are used. Both terms refer to private records that were not created as a result of employment. The documents were collected or created by an individual<sup>19</sup>. One exception to such definition of personal files is found in the *Dictionary of Archival Terminology English and French* which states that these are files created as a result of employment<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> A. Brenneke, W. Leesch, *Archivkunde*, Leipzig 1953, p. 18; H.O. Meisner, *Aktenkunde*, Berlin 1935, p. 156; J. Papritz, *Archivwissenschaft*, Band 1, Nachdruck der 2. durchgesehenen Auflage von 1983, Marburg 1983, p. 353.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 355; A. Menne-Hartz, *Schlüsselbegriffe der Archivterminologie: Lehrmaterialien für das Fach Archivwissenschaft*, Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, no. 20, Marburg 1992, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> *Dictionary of Archival Terminology English and French. With Equivalents in Dutch, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish*, ed. P. Walne, München–New York–London–Paris 1988, p. 124; *Dictionary of Archival Terminology English and French. With Equivalents in Dutch, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, ed. P. Walne, München, –New York–London –Paris 1988, p. 115; R. Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, Chicago 2005, p. 292; Multilingual Archival Terminology. Personal papers, <http://www.ciscra.org/mat/mat/term/263>, accessed 7 September 2023; Dictionary of Archives Terminology. Personal papers, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/personal-papers.html>, accessed 7 September 2023.

<sup>20</sup> *Dictionary of Archival Terminology English and French. With Equivalents in Dutch, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish...*, p. 124; *Dictionary of Archival Terminology English and French. With*



Based on the analysis of foreign terms, one may draw the following conclusions: First of all, the definitions of personal files in the terminology of Anglo-Saxon countries are different from those in Polish and German terminology. In Anglo-Saxon terminology, personal file is understood to contain private documents or private collections of documents. It is only in the *Dictionary of Archival Terminology English and French* (both editions) that the personal file is defined as documentation created with regard to employment. Polish and German definitions have similar meanings, as according to them personal files reflect the relationship of employment. There are minor differences, though. German terms specify the person who oversees personal files and ensures that access to personal files is guaranteed, whereas Russian terms have reference to the content.

The question whether the term “personal file” should be redefined must be answered in the negative. The term personal file is widely known in the archival community. It should be noted that the current concept of personal files has been extended to include other social/professional groups, e.g. personal files of students<sup>21</sup>, personal files of soldiers<sup>22</sup>, personal files of patients<sup>23</sup>. The above documents are not related to employment, which results in a different structure of the content of files and the process of their creation.

A distinction should be made between a personal file and personal (private) documents, as these terms refer to different types of files. The former refers to records created as a result of work, while the latter – to records collected by an

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*Equivalents in Dutch, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition..., p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> P. Bunkowska, *Zarządzanie dokumentacją osobową, studencką i awansu naukowego w Archiwum Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika. Teoria i praktyka* [Management of personal, student and scientific promotion documentation in the Archives of the Nicolaus Copernicus University. Theory and practice], [in:] *Postępowanie z dokumentacją osobową. Przepisy prawa, praktyka, postulaty. Materiały z XI Ogólnopolskiego Seminarium Archiwalnego Sekcji Archiwa Zakładowe Stowarzyszenia Archiwistów Polskich, Oddziału w Koszalinie Stowarzyszenia Archiwistów Polskich i Archiwum Państwowego w Koszalinie* [Handling of personal documentation. Law, practice, postulates. Materials from the 11<sup>th</sup> National Archival Seminar of the Department Archives of the Association of Polish Archivists, the Koszalin Branch of the Association of Polish Archivists and the State Archives in Koszalin], ed. A. Jabłoński, Poznań 2016, p. 148–149.

<sup>22</sup> Archiwum Wojskowe w Oleśnicy [Military Archive in Oleśnica] 2023. Dokumentacja osobowo-płacowa [Personnel and payroll documentation], <https://wbh.wp.mil.pl/pl/pages/dokumentacja-osobowa-pacowa-2018-10-19-n8j6/>, accessed 21 August 2023.

<sup>23</sup> M. Radzimińska, *Dokumentacja medyczna – przedmiot, wykorzystanie i kwalifikacja archiwalna w praktyce archiwum zakładowego* [Medical documentation – subject, use and archival qualification in the practice of the company archive], [in:] *Postępowanie z dokumentacją osobową. Przepisy prawa praktyka postulaty...* [Handling of personal documentation. Law, practice, postulates...], p. 171.

individual. In the first case, a personal file is created as part of legally regulated relationships between a specific person and another entity. In the second case, it is an independent action aimed at creating a collection related to a person.

For the purposes of this text, the authors decided to propose their own definition of a personal file. Personal file will be understood as “a set of documents concerning a person and their environment created as a result of legally regulated mutual relations between said person and another entity”. According to such a definition, a personal file will be understood to include documents created in the course of employment, that is, from the beginning until the end of the employment relationship, as well as documents created as part of membership in an organization which collects information about its members, such as the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy or the Polish Red Cross.

## Content analysis of the personal files

Having introduced the term “personal file”, we should move on to discussing the typical contents of personal files, using selected examples. Two archival fonds were selected for the study, namely, “Akta miasta Bydgoszczy” [Records of the City of Bydgoszcz] and “Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Wojewódzki w Bydgoszczy” [Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz]. Both fonds are preserved at the State Archives in Bydgoszcz. The choice of these particular fonds should be justified by the fact that they contain personal files with different characteristics. Archives produced by the city hall contain files related to the employment relationship, which demonstrate the mutual relationship between employees and the employer. In the case of the “Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz”, the files were accumulated in the course of the society’s statutory activities and collection of information about the members.

In Polish archival practice, a number of collections of city files are created. They contain archival materials concerning all aspects of the city’s life. Besides the files of the city hall, documentation of municipal companies may have been preserved, e.g. gasworks, hospitals. Records of the city of Bydgoszcz comprise about 58,000 archival units from 1559–1950. The fonds has been

divided according to the chronological framework and into archival collections. It contains archival materials concerning history of the city of Bydgoszcz and the city hall records. Apart from these files, there are also photographs, maps and technical documentation<sup>24</sup>.

The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy was founded in 1949 and integrated various veterans' organizations into a single union. Its tasks included: verification and approval of veterans' entitlements, material support, collection of archival documents, organization of celebrations. The union ceased its activity in 1990, and the Society of Veterans of the Republic of Poland and Former Political Prisoners was established in its place<sup>25</sup>. The archives of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz contain materials concerning the functioning of the association, as well as personal files and member questionnaires<sup>26</sup>.

Personal files were examined using the representative sampling method. The study used a random sample which involved selecting random items from a closed general collection. The general population consists of an isolated set of objects that are differentiated by the values of certain characteristics<sup>27</sup>. The general population in the study consisted of personal files of Bydgoszcz City Hall employees from the interwar period, as well as the personal files of members and dependants of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz. Both fonds are closed collections, as no new entries are supplied to the fonds; they are also diverse in terms of contents.

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<sup>24</sup> State Archives in Bydgoszcz (SAB), f. 6/189/0 Akta miasta Bydgoszczy [Records of the City of Bydgoszcz] 1559–1975, Karta zespołu Akta miasta Bydgoszczy [Fonds card Records of the city of Bydgoszcz].

<sup>25</sup> Polish History Musuem. Powstanie ZBOWiD [Foundation of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy], <https://muzhp.pl/kalendarium/powstanie-zbowid>, accessed 21 August 2023.

<sup>26</sup> SAB, f. 6/1457/0 Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Wojewódzki w Bydgoszczy [The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz] 1947–1990, Karta zespołu Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Wojewódzki w Bydgoszczy [Fonds card Records of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz].

<sup>27</sup> A. Burzyński, T. Sozański, *Elementy statystyki dla historyków. Materiały do ćwiczeń, wykładów i metodyki prac badawczych* [Elements of Statistics for Historians. Materials for Tutorials, Lectures and Research Methodology], vol. 1, Kraków 1980, pp. 230–231.

The sample was calculated with a sample size calculator<sup>28</sup>. The size of the population was represented by the number of archival units (personal files) from the given archival fonds. For each of the criteria, following values were adopted: the confidence level was 0.95<sup>29</sup>, the maximum error was 0.05<sup>30</sup>, and the fraction size was set at 0.99<sup>31</sup>. The above values were constant for both fonds. There are 786 personal files from the interwar period – all of them kept in the “Records of the City of Bydgoszcz”. In the “Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz”, on the other hand, there are 196 files of members and dependants. The sample score for the “Records of the City of Bydgoszcz” was 15, and for the “Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz” it was 14. In order to select random archival reference numbers, a random number generator was used<sup>32</sup>. Once the reference numbers were selected, the contents of personal files were analysed using the qualitative method. When discussing the contents, a single appearance of a particular type of documentation for a particular group was highlighted.

The following items were randomly selected for each fonds:

1. Records of the City of Bydgoszcz, items: 3055, 3069, 3241, 4620, 4647, 4714, 4740, 4815, 4862, 4944, 4956, 6558, 6631, 6646;
2. The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz, items: 376, 395, 40, 436, 443, 447, 454, 455, 459, 499, 508, 539, 548<sup>33</sup>.

Contents of the selected personal files from archival fonds of the “Records of the City of Bydgoszcz” are presented as first. In the 15 files in question, 46 different types of documents were identified. Resumes of individual employees were included in all 15 files. 14 files contain pledges that were made prior to taking office. 13 files include: photographs with the employee’s signature

<sup>28</sup> Sample size calculator, <https://pbs.pl/dobor-proby-badawczej/>, accessed 7 September 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Sampling Calculator. Confidence level – an indicator of confidence with the obtained results, <https://www.naukowiec.org/dobor.html>, accessed 7 September 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Sampling Calculator. Maximum error – tells us how much ‘correction’ needs to be assumed, <https://www.naukowiec.org/dobor.html>, accessed 7 September 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Sampling Calculator. Fraction size – an estimation of the prevalence of a particular trait in the population, <https://www.naukowiec.org/dobor.html>, accessed 7 September 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Random.org, <https://www.random.org/integers/?fbclid=IwAR18OK7QbLN5r7Nph9jOUiKHfz zCZbKXuqfruJxDawFW52C85sU4s2EMJCo>, accessed 7 September 2023.

<sup>33</sup> The records of members and dependants of *The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy* are kept as a collective file, and once an individual was randomly selected, another random selection was made within a given reference code in order to select files concerning 1 person.

(the first document in the folder), lists of service status (personal questionnaire), motions with regard to various matters, such as a request for a trip to the Olympic Games in Berlin, a request for the permission of marriage or a motion for tied accommodation; contracts of employment. 12 files include: payroll records, most often related to requests for a pay rise, advance payments, etc.; opinions issued by superiors or by previous employers; requests for, and corresponding certifications of clean criminal record, (most often issued as a single document); medical records (related to issuing employees' medical certificates, or to employee check-ups). Besides those, 12 files contain records from the personnel department, related to the employment, promotions, etc. 11 files contain birth records related to the employee, their spouse or children. 10 files included holiday requests. 9 files contain certificates/statements issued by either former or the current employer. 7 files included lists of family status – these were forms that supplemented information about an employee with the status of his family; 7 of the files also included copies of school certificates and diplomas. Additionally, in 7 cases there was documentation related to termination of employment contracts. 6 files contained varied types of documentation: bank records, pertaining to the employee's liabilities; military records pertaining to call-ups for military training, service certificates from other places of employment, and citizenship certificates. 6 files contained professional training certificates. 5 files included court documentation, which in most part related to the settlement of outstanding debts. 4 files included debt payment requests and records related to employee insurance. Only 2 files contained: copies of ID cards, pay slips, excerpts from city council resolutions on lifelong tenure and approval to hire a second veterinarian, employee ID cards, letters of appointment to a higher position, and documentation produced after 1945 (certificate of employment). The files include single occurrences of: an apprenticeship certificate copy, a military draft card, request for terminating employment, income and property history, certificate of morality, service questionnaire, certificate of registered residence, letter of commendation, committee minutes, letter from the tax office, pension declaration, letter of change of address, certificate of fighting for independence, documentation of disciplinary investigation (denunciation, opinions, letter of reprimand), job offer, medical bill for wife, request for references<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> SAB, f. 6/189/0 Akta miasta Bydgoszczy [Records of the City of Bydgoszcz] 1559–1975; items: 6/189/0/4.1.1/3055, 6/189/0/4.1.1/3069, 6/189/0/4.1.1/3241, 6/189/0/4.1.1/4620, 6/189/0/4.1.1/4647, 6/189/0/4.1.1/4714, 6/189/0/4.1.1/4740, 6/189/0/4.1.1/4815,

Having completed the analysis, one may observe that personal files mainly contain documents related to employment and the course of work. They can be divided into: application documents with attachments, e.g. application for employment with a resume, documentation concerning the employee, e.g. questionnaires, documentation of the personnel department related to the maintenance of personal file, documentation related to the regulation of the employment relationship, e.g. contracts of employment, opinions of superiors, personal documentation of the employee, e.g. copies of certificates, documentation produced by other institutions and related to the employee, e.g. a call-up for military training, or remuneration charges. The following should be classified as egodocuments: resumes, applications, or questionnaire forms completed by the employee. Based on the analysis of the contents, it should be concluded that the term “personal file” fully encompasses the above presented archival files.

In the archival fonds of the “Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz”, 34 different types of documents related to the members of the society were identified. 14 of the files included resumes, which in most cases were attached as a separate document, however, in some files resumes were also entered in the membership declaration. The files may include resumes of ZBOWiD members, as well as the resumes of spouses who received pensions after the death of the member. 13 files included membership declarations. 12 of the files included documentation issued by the ZBOWiD, birth records, and a criminal record inquiry. 11 files contained membership certificates. Documentation related to pensions was kept in 10 files. 9 files contained testimonies of witnesses that authenticated participation in fights for national independence. 7 files included certificates from the Central Military Archive in Warsaw of documents related to participation in fight for independence, such as confirmation of military service in insurgent units. 6 of the files contained: verification questionnaires and certificates of awarding national medals. 5 of the files included: certificates from other institutions, documentation from the Social Insurance Institution, requests for ID cards, applications for medals. 4 files contained certificates of participation in the Greater Poland Uprising, questionnaire of the Association of Greater Poland Uprising Veterans,

certificates from State Archives. In 3 cases, there were: supplementary sheets, opinions, membership cards. 2 of the files contained: rulings of the verification committee, memoirs of the Greater Poland Uprising veterans, social interviews about the member, a copy of the military service book. Single occurrences of the following were found: appointment to a committee, an appeal against a decision, a Kennkarte, a mobilization card, a decision not to double a pension, a record sheet, a member's statement about the work he performed and his record of participation in fight for independence<sup>35</sup>.

The documentation collected in the personal files of the members of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy differs from the personal files of the city of Bydgoszcz. First of all, the files from the Society include forms that were filled out by the member or a spouse. These files include: documentation that constitutes evidence of membership in the Society, i.e. membership declarations; documentation describing activities undertaken as part of fight for independence, e.g. memoirs, resumes; documentation related to pensions, as well as documentation of members' spouses receiving pensions for them. The following should be classified as egodocuments: forms filled out by the members, resumes, memoirs, witness accounts, and community interviews.

It is important to emphasize an important fact, namely that the personal files of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy were not created as a result of an employment relationship, but as a result of union affiliation. The files concern specific individuals and the particular relationship occurring between the member and the institution. According to the definitions of the term "personal file" cited above, the files of members and dependants of the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy should not be included in this group. However, on the other hand, the files concern specific individuals and contain personal data along with information about activities in the society. In order to eliminate similar situations, the understanding of the term "personal file" should be expanded.

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<sup>35</sup> SAB, f. 6/1457/0 Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Wojewódzki w Bydgoszczy [The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Voivodeship Executive Board in Bydgoszcz] 1947–1990; items: 6/1457/0/8/376, 6/1457/0/8/395, 6/1457/0/8/400, 6/1457/0/8/436, 6/1457/0/8/443, 6/1457/0/8/447, 6/1457/0/8/454, 6/1457/0/8/455, 6/1457/0/8/459, 6/1457/0/8/499, 6/1457/0/8/508, 6/1457/0/8/539, 6/1457/0/8/548.

## Analysis in the context of Egodocumentality

Researchers in the field of humanities and social sciences have long noted the new possibilities of interpreting a cultural text, in which the author shows his attitude to the world, insights or emotions through a written word. Although egodocumentality has been part of historiography for nearly seventy years, it is not a well-known term, and there can be even more confusion when the term is expanded to “self-narrative”<sup>36</sup>. When studying archival sources, it is important not to narrow the broad understanding of egodocuments down to autobiographical genres, but rather to expand them so as to include the concept of self-narratives, which refers to the internal criteria of the text by focusing on its content, and to extract the personality of the writer from each type of source on this basis.

Polish archival resources abound in egodocuments and microhistories, and this stems from many factors, including the very nature of self-testimonies. The process of searching for such texts in the archival resources is not a simple one, and the archival description does not offer such options. As we know, egodocuments may appear in different places of the resource, or even constitute the entire archive. The reason for this is the inability to clearly identify the source as a typical self-testimony, i.e. objectively existing, apart from the recipient, as it is the reader/researcher who subjectively evaluates the material. When making an analysis in the context of egodocumentality, the researcher does not focus on facts. So far, memory was supposed to complement other official sources in some way, possibly replacing them. When we assume the anthropological perspective in this type of research, it is not about facts, but about how facts are perceived by individuals. A personal account gives us a picture of the author’s mindset, his world of values, experiences, and perception of the surrounding world<sup>37</sup>.

The examined self-narratives are not limited to resumes, which are attachments to personal files, or a certain certification in the case of ZBOWiD files. During the examination of the documentation, all questionnaires, applications in which the author’s personality left its mark, were all taken into account. In most cases the documents were written by hand, there are a few cases of signed typescripts,

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<sup>36</sup> The article uses the terms egodocumentality and self-narrative interchangeably.

<sup>37</sup> A. Rosa, *Egodokumentalność polskiego zasobu archiwalnego* [Egodocumentality of the Polish Archival Fonds], [in:] *Archiwistyka między różnorodnością a standaryzacją*, Toruńskie Konfrontacje archiwalne [Archival Science between Diversity and Standardisation, Toruń Archival Confrontations], vol. 3, ed. W. Chorążyczewski, A. Rosa, Toruń 2013, p. 61.



as well as texts written down by a third party, but signed by the person who submitted the certificate.

The main focus of the research was the text, or more precisely, the story of the people behind the reference number. But not only that. The analysis also covered the language (the wording used, style, syntheticity), the handwriting or the form (handwritten or typed, deletions, additions). The analysis in the context of egodocumentality is made up of such details. When examining texts, especially those created under a certain institutional compulsion and burdened by a certain convention, the “ego” may be concealed, which is why it is so important to look at every aspect of the document – that which occurs in the text, what is repeated, what is underlined, what is mentioned only briefly and what is omitted.

The oldest documents date back to the 1920s, whereas the most recent ones – to the 1980s. Although the format of a resume is formalized and fairly homogeneous, one can observe manifestations of individuality and a certain attempt to distinguish the “ego”.

Resumes found in personal files are mostly mandatory attachments that are included with other documents pertaining to the given person/case. Occasionally, one file contains resumes of two people, this is usually the case of ZBOWiD documentation for spouses. This type of material is a standardized and abridged description of the course of the person’s life so far, as a synthetic representation of the most important events. For ethical reasons, personal data of the subjects has been anonymized.

The analysis demonstrated that the most important information, or information that should not be omitted, included: date and place of birth, information about parents, marital status, education, professional path, information on military service (in case of men). The form of recording this information, on the other hand, depends on the writer’s personality or his writing licence, so it can be both very formal or spontaneous. Both provide opportunities for an analysis in the context of egodocumentality, provided that the document is authentic. Usually, the nature of the writing was legible and did not obliterate interpretation of the content. Of course, the handwriting varied greatly, from highly aesthetic to careless. My research on the egodocumentality of the fonds of the Records of the City of Bydgoszcz and ZBOWiD was based on nearly 30 files. I may unequivocally state that the materials bear hallmarks of egodocumentality, although this is a purely subjective opinion.

Due to the quantitative limitations of this article, not all files will be cited. The analysis will involve 7 resumes (from the most individual to the most factual and formalized). Many of the sources had a routine form, with rather sparse information, not very helpful in making the analysis.

At the same time, I decided to cite larger, unedited excerpts from the text, in order to better understand the individuals, and to give the readers an opportunity to assess them for themselves. Some of the self-narratives could be analysed separately, so I have only provided some interpretive clues so that the reader can also decide whether they qualify as egodocuments.

### **Z. R., reference code 6/1457/0/8//400, G. 29/01/1984**

Z. R., daughter of J. and M., née B. I was born on 1912 in the village of J., district K., formerly L. Voivodeship. I went to school there and graduated from a 4-grade school. Since my parents owned a small, 4-hectare farm of poor soil, on which they had to feed 10 people – there were eight of us, siblings, and my Parents – 10 people in total, it was hard to make a living and clothe ourselves. This is why I went to work in Pomerania, district G. in 1936 and in 1937. I got married there. In 1939 the war broke out, and the Germans displaced all those who they hadn't killed, and we had to return to my Parents, as there was nowhere else to go. In the spring of 1940, we were displaced again because the Germans made a military training ground there. One German told us to go near Warsaw, as the farms were unoccupied there, so a couple of families went there and again we settled in the village of S. G., municipality R, district W. But the estate was dilapidated and everything had to be made anew. A derelict, little wooden hut, the land was lying fallow, and we had three children to feed and no food to go around. We would go to work wherever we could to earn a few pennies to make a living and prepare the land. Our family helped us a little in order to buy a little horse, together with my husband we had to toil away to buy a little cow for the children to give them some milk, but whatever we earned the Germans took away as a quota. There was no choice at that time and the husband joined the Organization in January 1941. And then I had to take care of everything, look after the children, work at home and in the field – my husband helped only casually. And since our little hut was so inconspicuous all kinds of meetings were held in here. [...] sundry newspapers, organizational meetings, weapons were stored in our house. I had to work as

a watchman to do sentry duty. I had to take the children by their little hands and keep watching all around to see if the Germans were coming. There were so many sleepless nights, so much nerve and fear during the round-ups so that the Germans wouldn't find something and take my husband away. It went on like that until 1944. Then, as the German troops retreated, the frontline drew nearer and they displaced us for the third time and drove all the people to the head of the frontline. Then, at the railroad tracks, they took away all the younger men, my husband as well, and I was left on my own in exile with three small children, with no roof over my head. I was left only with a cart and a horse, a little food taken from home, and sheets for the children. They drove us to the village of D., across the railroad tracks, where we were supposed to take a rest. The Germans burnt everything that was left behind – all the buildings, grain left in the fields, the things left behind by the people, leaving everything in ruins, trenches, there was nothing left to harvest and in addition, the fields were mined. The following day, bullets were flying overhead, the front was getting closer. The Germans continued to drive people forward to the head of the frontline. Together with a couple of families we hid with our children in a shelter that was made in the ground and we suffered like that for 3 weeks. The village kept being conquered by German or Soviet armies. They destroyed the village completely, but a Soviet Soldier came into the shelter and told us to run because the Germans were coming back again. We legged it, and the Germans fired at us from planes – we ran from tree to tree and finally reached our village of residence, but we still had to retreat 5 km back. The Soviet troops did not let us go to our homes because the fields were mined and everything was burnt. This is when real despair started – we had no roof over our heads, there was nothing to eat, the husband was gone, and the winter was approaching. We would go to the fields and gather whatever was left, make a hole in the molehill and cook that way, the children would go to the soldiers to get a loaf of bread and I would go to milk the soldiers' cows to get some milk for the children. We lived in the field until November because any stone buildings left unburnt were occupied by Soviet Officers, and in November they went to dugouts and we had to squat in one room with 3 or 4 other families. On 15 January 1945, the offensive began and the troops moved on. At the beginning of February my husband returned – he had been gone 7 months but there was nothing to do anymore – everything had been destroyed and burnt, there was nothing to eat or wear. What could you do? The buildings had been burnt down, the land had been

mined, the army wouldn't let anyone pass, they would go around and remove mines. Many of them died there.

The government appealed to whoever was interested to go to reclaimed territories, so we went to the village of B., municipality of R., former district of K., G. Voivodeship. There, we were given a farm with an area of 13.20 hectares. Again, everything was dilapidated and had to be made anew. At that time, my husband was appointed head of the village by the Staroste, became the Chairman of the Communal Peasants' Self-Help, was a member in various committees of the National Councils, a lay judge in court. But nevertheless, he maintained the household in an exemplary manner for which he was awarded and decorated with the Silver Cross, the Gold Cross of Merit, Silver badge of honour of the Gdańsk land, and several Diplomas. I was a member of the farmers' wives' association, took part in various competitions for which I also received prizes, such as a harrow, a washing machine and an iron. The children grew up, each starting their own family. We were left on our own, but we still farmed the land for a few years. But then we got worse and health deteriorated so we decided to give away the farm in exchange for a pension with the reservation that we would get 0.5 hectare free for life, but there was no land in this municipality and we did not get it. My husband died and I do not claim it now. I broke my leg and now I am not able to work this land and I don't get any payment for it. I wrote to Bydgoszcz and they replied that the State has not provided for such a scenario and no one is interested to help, and the pension is rather small.

The resume was written down at the end of Mrs. R.'s life (she died two years after writing it). Many of the events had faded from her memory, others became indistinct, but probably those that were the source of greatest emotions during World War II, she put on paper. The memories cited above are kept in chronological order. Most of the facts from her life are from the time of the occupation, and she tries to give dates and locations so that her story is more credible. Besides, she recalls mostly unpleasant moments, when there was not enough work or the work she did was not effective despite the energy she had put into it. One could infer from her story that they had been struggling all their lives. The only positive moment came after the war, when the farm and social involvement brought some benefits to the family. For example, she mentions what exactly she had won in a competition held for the farmers' wives' association.

Unfortunately, this is not the only resume based on difficult experiences and hard work. What is characteristic of this account is surely the diminutives “little hut”, “little cow”, and “little hands” which soften the harsh reality and overcome the trauma that underlies the story, while “Parents” spelt with a capital letter may signify the respect she had for them.

The testimony is rather elaborate, as it contains information that is generally not included in official resumes. This may indicate a need to share her emotions with the reader, perhaps as a form of therapy, or a desire to leave a testimony behind. She uses phrases that refer to fear, danger, but also courage, in order to reinforce her message. Importantly, the authoress, although she witnessed many tragic events, does not recall them in detail or thoroughly analyse them, which could make her story even more credible. This may mean that these memories are painful for her and she is trying not to recreate them.

Apparently, the language and style of the account is simple – it contains minor errors<sup>38</sup>. However, given the author’s education (she completed 4 grades of elementary school), it is an in-depth self-creation with multiple threads. It starts with a description of the harsh socio-economic situation in eastern Poland which forces young people to migrate for work, then continues with the crisis of war, which is the cause of an exile and wandering across the country, a change of residence after the war, and culminates with the last change of address at an old age. This is an example that shows what the fate of millions of Poles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century might have been like. This is a time when for many citizens the greatest wealth was the proverbial “little cow” that fed them, and a “little horse” that helped move from place to place. Mrs. R.’s story does not leave children out. She mentions them on several occasions, which may indicate maternal concern and bonding. The text also reveals a certain perversity of its authoress. In the last few paragraphs she mentions that she “does not claim” what the State had failed to provide (in this case land, or increased pension), but a moment later she adds that she called “Bydgoszcz” (probably one of the offices) about it, and that the application, resume, together with the questionnaire sent to ZBOWiD are supposed to improve her financial situation (through a pension credit).

There are many such stories, but not everyone chooses to put them on paper. People experienced many hardships like this, which traumatized them, leading them to suppress certain memories, and shut down their emotions. Therefore,

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<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible to reproduce the original spelling in the translated text.

it is often possible to miss the “I” in the testimonies from this period and fail to categorise a given text as an egodocument. This does not mean that it is not – the austerity of the texts is just a consequence of living in austere conditions. Anyone who wanted to survive, whether in the interwar period or during World War II or in the new socialist order<sup>39</sup>, had to adapt, which is why texts are so often heavily self-censored or even misrepresented in order to achieve a certain goal.

### **W. R., reference number 6/1457/0/8/400, G. 15/11/1979**

I, W. R. son of J. and M. née S. was born on 1914, J. district K., formerly L. Voivodeship. My father was an owner of a small farm of 3 hectares of poor land to feed 7 people. Being the eldest son, I had to look for work all over the country since the early age, and it was hard to get any.

Today when I tell my children and the younger generation what the old days were like, they simply do not believe that one had to walk several kilometres and work at night to earn a piece of bread, and sometimes there was no work available.

One couldn't even dream about going to school. And when a peasant, maybe one in a hundred, sent a child to high school, and even though the child was an outstanding student, he still wouldn't graduate. So the peasants organised demonstrations, held various rallies and demanded Reforms to improve their lives. Being a young man at that time, I would go to those rallies together with my father and others, often walking for several kilometres to places like K., C., M., O. T.

In 1937, I went to the village of Sz. in the G. district of Pomeranian Voivodeship. I started my family there. When I had 2 small children and a third on the way, the war broke out and the escapes and displacements started.

So, together with numerous displaced families, we settled near R. – I happened to settle in the village of G. S., municipality R., district R., all after the German colonists. It was a small farm with an area of 3.5 hectares, a wooden building with 1 room and a kitchen, a byre attached to the house only with boards, a barn with heaps of soil, not well maintained, and one had to think of supporting the family. With the help of family from both sides we got a horse and a couple of piglets – it was not perfect, but we managed somehow. It was the last farm in the village

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<sup>39</sup> I mention these periods because the analysed material is directly related to them.

of G. S., not far from the village of N. and the village of K. In all of these villages, Armia Krajowa (Home Army) was almost everywhere.

I joined this organization right at the beginning of 1941. My household was not very conspicuous, so the organization thought it was good to gather there. Meetings, as well as underground press readings were held there.

At that time there was an act of great courage on my part – I risked being ratted out, although lookouts were deployed, my wife took the children by their hands and did sentry duty for safety.

Mostly on bank holidays, we would go out into the woods to do military training. All sorts of actions took place, like the liquidation of the dairy in Wołomin 1942. The Arbeitsamt in Wołomin was liquidated in the same year. In July 1944, after the Soviet troops came, they manned various offices in Tłuszcz. The Soviet troops withdrew after two days.

In 1943, in the district of Radzymin, near Dobczyn, Germans took cows from peasants for undelivered quotas. They drove them to Wołomin, but our organization intervened. The Germans left the cows, and the peasants came to claim them.

I worked security detail for most of the actions mentioned above with a gun in my hand.

I'm sure there were more such actions but I don't remember the dates. It was difficult at times, and we had many sleepless nights because we always expected to be ratted out. I made a pledge to Poland and had to fulfil it. I obeyed orders from the Superior Authorities.

I was entrusted with the task of carrying the underground press – I was deployed as a lookout. In my farmyard guns were stored, mostly sidearms. On some occasions I was designated to distribute weapons and ammunition.

Once I was entrusted with the task of delivering a package to Wołomin. It was a distance of about 10 kilometres. The size of the package was 100x50 cm. We loaded the package and covered it with firewood as we had an order for delivery of wood to the private bakery run by Mr. Ź. It was in wintertime of 1943 and it was very slippery that year. The cart was overloaded and the horse couldn't make it to one of the streets. A unit of German soldiers was passing by and they pushed me out of the worst place. If they had taken interest in what I was carrying, I would've earned a bullet in the head. I had to keep my cool at all times. If I could find the Lieutenant (nickname Amon) he could confirm it.

When the Warsaw Uprising broke out in 1944 our Platoon Commander, G. O., teacher sergeant, called upon our Platoon to help the insurgents of Warsaw. As a father of small children, I was relieved of this duty, all those who went to Warsaw were killed.

At that time the frontline was approaching Warsaw, things were starting to boil, the enemy was almost in retreat, I was captured by the Germans and tried in the transit camp in Zgierz near Warsaw. They kept us hungry for 4 days. In the evening of the fourth day they drove us away in an unknown direction. As we later realized, they were driving us in the direction of Sochaczew. I jumped out of the moving car to escape.

Bruised, battered I couldn't feel hunger anymore. I managed to reach the first people, they gave me a slice of bread and I rested a little. Those people told me to go on my way explaining that Germans were organising repressions. Everyone had to be reported, no strangers could be kept. There was no other choice for me but go. I took the slice of bread with me – I couldn't eat it immediately because the stomach didn't tolerate food. I kept a low profile, nights were getting cold, it was an agonising experience, eating was impossible, I slept in the cold and quenched my thirst in the stream. After a few days, I came back to the village because I could not stand it any longer.

I begged these people to take care of me. If they couldn't, I asked them to put me in touch with a guerilla unit, but everyone explained to me that the guerilla unit went on to be closer to the enemy. I wandered like that until November. People fed me. What saved me was a family watch that I had – I sold it for a few pennies. Late at night I would sneak into a barn or byre without the owners' knowledge to get warm and sleep. Later, as the German repressions quieted down, I was taken care of by an old railwayman, S., in the village of M. where I stayed until 17 January 1945, when the Soviet troops came. My wife and children were on the other side because the frontline remained in the same place for more than 6 months. I returned home, but the house was no longer there as the Germans burnt it down. There was nowhere to live as our village of G. was almost entirely burnt down. My wife and children in took refuge in another village – N. 4 families lived there in one room. At that time there was no other way out but to respond to the appeal of the Government. In 1945, my family and I left for the reclaimed lands to the village of B., municipality R., district Sz., G. Voivodeship. There I received a farm of 13 hectares. At that time, the Polish Administration was being formed. By nomination of the District Staroste, I was



appointed the first head of this village. I took an active part in the organization of the Rural Cooperative. I was the Chairman of the Communal Peasants' Self-Help [...] the District Staroste even wanted me to accept the functions of the Commune Head but I refused for fear that I wasn't equal to this job.

I also sat in various committees, and in the National Councils and its Committees – I held this honourable position from 1945 until the end of 1976 until I gave up the household to the State for a pension. This period was not favourable because at that time I received a pension of PLN 2,150. If I had given up the household later, the pension would have been higher, at least about PLN 5,000.

My health deteriorated quite heavily, this had to happen. Despite community service, I ran the household in an exemplary manner, for which I received numerous Diplomas and was awarded the Silver Badge of Honour of the Gdańsk Land. My wife always wished us to be near her daughter in old age. When I was registered and living in G., I was sent a Diploma of Recognition from R. municipality. The inscription on the diploma said: To citizen W.R. for his great contribution to the proper execution of tasks of the socio-economic plan for the development of the municipality, signed by Head of the Municipality A. G. and Chairman of the Municipal National Council A. C.

I hold a grudge to R. Municipality because I was always promised higher honours, but they did not keep their word. They took the honours for themselves and forgot to whom they were rightfully due.

Nowadays, it's not so easy to live on 2,000 – we should spend our old age in better conditions. Everything I wrote in this resume is based on the truth. I wrote it in brief, but with all conscientiousness.

I finished only 4 grades of elementary school. Although I was a good student, I did not have the opportunity to educate myself further.

W. R.

I forgot to mention how many times I drove various activists to R., W., T. because at that time there was no other transportation, and the train times did not always suit them.

The story of a family member or another close person can be used to supplement a resume or give it new meanings, which in some way gives credibility to our story. The author often witnesses events in which the main character also participated, while at the same time weaving in his own perspective, undoubtedly enriching

the narrative. In this case, we are dealing with the resume of the husband of the authoress of the previous resume. This resume also constitutes an elaborate and spontaneous narrative with multiple threads. And although in some places the handwriting made it difficult to read the text, and despite occasional errors, the description is quite clear, coherent, and very personal at times. In the very first few paragraphs of his story, the author points out that what he had experienced may not seem real to the younger generation, so it is important that his experiences survive in the memory of others. A strong aspect of the author's patriotism and social commitment resounds all throughout the text. From the participation in peasant strikes, to joining the Home Army, and then acting for the good of the society. Judging from his last paragraphs, working for the sake of the society gave him a lot of satisfaction; but at the same time, he felt he was not appreciated enough. He sought to fulfil the pledge that he made to Poland (probably a military oath) even after the war. This may be related to his patriotic upbringing and the traits of his character. The author broaches several important themes, and presents them in a rather emotional and sincere way. We can observe an argumentative communication pattern that appears in several places when the author evaluates his actions and those of his wife from the current perspective (their courage, life-threatening situations, etc.) In case of his wife, describing her tasks may be intended as the additional motivation for receiving monetary gratification. The resume contains elements of compulsive storytelling (unintentional in most cases). This is the case, for example, when the author presents details (the story about transporting weapons, the exact citation of the content of the diploma/award), or refuses to describe other events due to "not remembering" the exact dates, which in his opinion may discredit the authenticity of the account. This is also connected with the need to condense and index, so he chooses what he believes to be the most important stories, cites witnesses who would authenticate his involvement in the war, resulting in achieving the purpose of the written testimony/resume – a pension supplement. All the "background" information that he incorporates into his story provides an opportunity to reconstruct the value hierarchy of the author's experiences, which in many cases are but just briefly mentioned (experiences of hunger, lack of self-confidence, complexes due to lack in education, etc.). The ending of this narrative is quite suggestive and at the same time characteristic of this type of writing: "Everything I wrote in this resume is based on the truth. I wrote it in brief, but with all conscientiousness" and I vouch for its veracity "with my whole

being". The language of the message itself, despite problems with the legibility of handwriting and occasional linguistic errors, is clear and readable.

### **M. D., reference code 6/189/0/4.1.1/4740 B., 21/04/1936**

I, the undersigned M. D., was born on 1901 in U., district Ch. as the first son of a Polish National Railways officer J. and W. (née I.). of Roman Catholic denomination. From the age of 7, I attended a 6-grade Catholic public school in U. – on 21.10.1913 I was admitted to the first Holy Communion at the Parish Church in U. In October 1915, I graduated from the school mentioned above and stayed at my parents' home until 1 October 1917. In 1916, my father was transferred from U. to L. on the Warta River (Germany) because, as a Pole, he refused to change his Polish name. On 1/10/1917 I was accepted by the German Railway Authority as a Clerk in the L. n/W freight expediting company, where I worked until 30 September 1919. In view of the establishment of the Republic of Poland, my Father and I were transferred back to U., at my own request. On 1/10/1919 I came to be the first Polish railway switch operator at the National Railways in U., a position which I took over from a German officer. There, on 1/2/1920, I was assigned to perform the duties of a traffic officer. On 20/09/1920 I was called up for military service in the 64 Infantry Regiment in G. After two months of military training, at the request of the Railway Military Office at the Regional Directorate of National Railways in Gdańsk, I was discharged on 20/11/1920 and assigned to the National Defence – On 11/10/1921 I entered into marriage with S. S., born 14/09/1901, daughter of the deceased farmer K. S. of B., district Ch. I have three children – two daughters and one son – the eldest daughter A. born on 3/08/1922, H. born on 31/07/1923 and son H. born on 2/09/1924.

In 1926 I was delegated by the Regional Directorate of National Railway in Gdańsk to Bydgoszcz for a 10-month course for assistants, with a simultaneous attendance at a skill-improvement course at Business High School (paid by the Regional Directorate of National Railway). On 9/11/1926, I passed an exam at the Regional Directorate of National Railway in Gdańsk with a satisfactory score. On 1/1/1927, I was appointed Railway Assistant in the 11<sup>th</sup> group and transferred to P. to work as a stationmaster. Awarded a Decade of Independence medal, I was transferred to Sz. Sz. also to the position of stationmaster on 28/04/1929. On 29/02/1932 a train accident was caused by the staff of the Sz.

Sz. station, as a result of which I was suspended on 4/03/1932 as responsible for the acts of subordinate staff. On 30/05/1932 I was transferred to the Dz. station. From there I was transferred to B. at my own request on 30/03/1933. Based on the ruling of the Disciplinary Committee at the Regional Directorate of National Railway Gdańsk I was dismissed from railway service on 5/05/1933 without the right to pension. On 6/05/1933 I was employed by the company J. S. – Cegielnia Parowa (Steam Brickworks) at the post of an independent accountant. As Mr. J. K. former manager of the Steam Brickworks of the Peterson Company, promised me in May a relatively better paid position, I terminated my employment as of 30/08/1935 at the Stranz company and on 1/09/1935 I took on the position of an office cashier on a casual basis for the time being, but as a result of the termination of the employment relationship between the Peterson company and the manager in question, I was dismissed on 29/02/1936. Since then I have been without a job and my family and I live in abject poverty.

I have written the above resume with my own hand, without any assistance, which I truthfully confirm with my own signature.

Mr. D.'s story, although it adheres to formalized structures, is interesting on several levels, and its form allows us to make a more in-depth analysis in the context of egodocumentality. One of the characteristic traits of resumes of the interwar period is that they often mention religious denomination, which, on the one hand, can be regarded as an established convention and, on the other hand, as an identity factor which is far stronger here than in the other studied texts, due to mentioning the exact date of receiving First Holy Communion. This information may serve as a narrative backdrop, which the author will no longer refer to later in the text, but will make his socio-cultural affiliations clear. He uses a similar procedure when mentioning his father, who did not want to change his name to a German one. Polish is a largely unintentional indication that he is a Pole, a Catholic, a patriot, or at least he wants to be seen as such. Yet another interesting aspect that speaks volumes about the author's personality is the detailed information about his loved ones (information about the wife, the date of marriage, her background, as well as the names and dates of birth of his children). When presenting his story, he does not leave out the reasons for being dismissed from his previous position, which he considered prestigious (he highlighted his role as the first Polish switch operator) and that he felt it to be a continuation of family

traditions. In the analysed account, the author's experiences are worth noting. Although they are presented in a selective manner, they represent the social phenomena and processes (historical macro and micro processes along with his own biographical processes) and their effects. The process starts with the war, and moves on through forced migration, social advancement, assuming a respectable position, and finally ends with losing the position and struggling with the new reality that forces the author to seek new solutions. The use of the phrase "abject poverty", while not an isolated case in the stories from the interwar period, reinforces the message and makes it more impactful.

**A. W., reference number 6/1457/0/8/560<sup>40</sup>. The resume included in the ZBOWiD verification questionnaire.**

I was born on 1886 in B., I did not know my parents because they died early. I was raised in Ch. by my grandmother until the age of 13. I attended school there and learned carpentry. After my apprenticeship exam, I set out on a mandatory journey. From 1907 to 1909, I was drafted into the German army to the 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Regiment in Berlin Rathstewart. Having completed my military service, I worked professionally in Stettin, H. until the outbreak of war in 1914. Then I was called up again to my regiment where I took part in fighting on the Western and on the Eastern Front. In March 1918, being a model craftsman, I was withdrawn from the battlefield and worked at a shipyard in H. as [...]. On 6 November, I took part in street fights during the revolution in Hamburg. On 22 November I was dismissed by the then soldier-worker council. On New Year's Day 1919, I arrived through the Bydgoszcz canal and joined the insurgents, who were then located near Potulice. I took part in the fights of Nakło, Paterek, Rynarzewo under [...]. After the uprising ended, I joined the 4<sup>th</sup> regiment of the Greater Poland Guards. Later, I moved to the 1<sup>st</sup> regiment of the Greater Poland Guards and then became a civilian in April 1920. In 1921 I emigrated to France where I worked in the reconstruction of destroyed cities, then I worked as a painter in Paris and returned to Poland in 1932. In 1939, I had to go into hiding because I was in danger of being shot by the Gestapo, for the bloody Sunday, for the Polish

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<sup>40</sup> The files of A.W. contain 2 biographies, which are not identical, in addition, he attached "a brief description of A.W.'s participation in the fightings during the Greater Poland Uprising".

Western Society, and for fighting against the Germans in the Squadron on 4 and 5 September 1939. Until 1945, I stayed in Podlasie. I returned in January 1945.

In the case of the story of our next author, we have at least two versions of his resume and several detailed descriptions of his life left in the ZBOWiD verification questionnaire, which differ from one another at certain points. A.'s story mainly focuses on his life until 1945. It stops once the war ends. On one hand, this is quite understandable, since the ZBOWiD was interested in documenting activities from the frontlines service, not one's personal life. Nonetheless, they accepted resumes of other members, most of whom made a holistic description of their lives. In his story, A. focuses on his professional work and activities during the war. The protagonist of his story emerges as a brave man who decides to emigrate after finishing school, probably due to the need to earn a livelihood. He served in the German army during World War I, but because of his profession and the needs of the army, he returned to work in the shipyard (in his second resume, he does not mention working in Germany). In a rather synthetic account, he includes the episode of participating in the November Revolution in Germany, a revolt against the dire economic situation after World War I. However, he does not provide an exact account of what happened during these strikes. In the same way, except for some terse information, he does not go into the details and motives of his decision to join the Greater Poland Uprising (he devoted a separate description to these battles, and the testimonies of other soldiers attached to the file demonstrate that he showed great courage and experience in the fights, and was a model for other insurgents). Once Poland regains its independence, he does not choose to remain in the country, but emigrates to France in 1919, probably for financial purposes. He does not say what he had been doing in Poland since his return in 1932. In his final sentences, he mentions Bloody Sunday, fighting in the first days of September 1939 and being forced to hide from the Gestapo all throughout the war. The extended version of his resume, attached to the file, shows that he did not just hide in Podlasie, but he also took an active part in the organization of the underground state in Warsaw, where he was involved in the organization of Fridays, and then stay in Ł. (Lublin Voivodeship), where he stayed "until the liberation of Bydgoszcz by the Soviet army in January 1945". When preparing his testimony, he was focusing on information that was relevant to the ZBOWiD. He left out the issue of marriage, possible children,

and included the names of his parents only in the second resume. He mentions that he did not know his parents, and was raised by his grandmother. Self-narrative, although seemingly conventional and strongly oriented to provide the most relevant information about the activity over time, is very interesting for analysis. The author does not necessarily reveal his emotions in the text. A conscious omission of information about personal life, using certain phrases such as: “1939 was a fateful year for me”, “I grabbed a rifle to maintain order”, “I let myself be demobilized... to return to my homeland”, “a new war with our eternal enemy”, etc. leads towards a stark narrative. Undoubtedly, he is a person who would like to keep quiet about many of his experiences. Building a story from a distance can indicate a certain alienation towards oneself, which in this case is easily visible. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that resume was created at the end of his life, and yet the author chose not to open up to the reader – in this case, the ZBOWiD.

#### **Application, R. L., reference code 6/189/0/4.1.1/4944. B., 28/12/32**

I, the undersigned R. L., request that I be accepted into the service of the Fire Department as a firefighter. I am healthy, I have the ability and willingness to work. In the Polish Army, I served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Sapper Regiment in Toruń. At the time of discharge I carried the rank of platoon sergeant. By profession I am a carpenter. Please find attached a brief resume. I am convinced that I will meet all the requirements for firefighting service – and thus my lot in life will improve. I am much obliged to you for accepting my request. Yours sincerely, R. L.

#### **R. L., Resume, Bydgoszcz, 28/12/32**

My name is R. L., son of A. and A. L., born on 1905 in G. (Germany). My father was a labourer, I finished 7 classes of the elementary school in B.. I served in the army from 13 October 1929 to 19 September 1928 in the 8<sup>th</sup> Sapper Regiment, and left with the rank of platoon sergeant. I am a carpenter by profession and I worked in [...] for 7 years where I was made redundant due to lack of work. I am married with 1 child. I am now 27 years old, with physique at its best, and height of 1.72. I have 3 brothers and one sister. The elder brother is [...] at the Telegraph

branch in G. the second brother is a shoemaker and works at the military academy in G., the third brother is a sculptor, currently without employment, the sister stays at home.

Yours sincerely, R. L.

Applications with resumes were common recruitment practice; however, not every personal file retains such materials. An application is a short form that contains basic data about a job applicant and a short description to justify the application. In the case of Mr. L.'s story, we have a very clear and consistent message that shows his high motivation, self-confidence, need for new challenges (despite his experience and qualifications as a carpenter, he feels the need to change his profession) and improved material status. He resorts to underlining the text only once, at the mention of his wife and child, which is meant to draw the committee's attention to the need for financial stability in the family, which they are lacking. Providing information about siblings and detailing their professions is not a common occurrence, so it may be indicative of certain traits of character. It may demonstrate his close ties to his loved ones or serve to show himself in a broader context that enables a moral evaluation of the candidate for a firefighter. In his short description, the author operates language in such a way as to maximize his chances of being given the desired position, e.g. "...physique at its best...", "I am convinced that I will meet all requirements...", which shows determination and belief in his own abilities.

#### **H. W., reference code 6/1457/0/8/436 I. 08/04/1982**

I, H. W., née K., was born on 1906 in G., district Ż., father I. and mother A., née B. My parents owned a farm. I graduated from elementary school and departmental school in G. After World War I, I completed an economic course in Poznań. Until 1929, I worked with my parents on their farm. In 1929, I married S. W., an elementary school teacher in P.

From 1932 until the beginning of the war, I lived in G., district I. where my husband was the head of the school. In the 1930s, I gave birth to three children, two of whom are alive: – daughter A. W., currently married to E. W., a teacher residing in L., and son L. W. also a teacher, currently residing in T.



With the outbreak of the war, my husband S., being a teacher, was arrested and imprisoned in I. prison where [...] the Nazis' crackdown on the city's intelligentsia.

In late 1939, my husband was deported to the General Government where he managed to escape from prison. At the beginning of 1940, I was deported together with my children to the Government where, in the town of D. near S., I worked in a fruit preserves factory for the duration of the war.

After the war in 1945, we returned to Góra near Inowrocław where my husband was head of the school until 1963. In 1963, my husband was elected president of the branch of Polish Teachers' Union and, as a result, we moved to Inowrocław where we have lived ever since. My husband, S. W., a ZBOWiD member, died this year.

#### **J. W., reference code 6/1457/0/8/459**

I was born on 1922 in the village of J., district I.. I graduated from an elementary school in B. In 1945, I got married and was dependent on my husband.

By citing the last two examples, I wanted to draw attention to the general problem of how women in biographical texts are positioned in relation to the world (in this case, husbands). Arguably, this constitutes a broader aspect of biographical research, however, in these descriptions we can notice some strategies for creating an "ego" that is only complete when referring to people with whom a certain relationship is maintained. In the first story there is only one passage in which the authoress talks exclusively about herself "...where, in the town of D. near S., I worked in a fruit preserves factory for the duration of the war". The rest of the text focuses on family life, with special attention to her husband: "...where my husband was...", "...my husband was elected...", "My husband S. W. ...", etc. From H.'s short resume, we learn more about her husband's life than her own. In the last source we deal with an extreme situation, which on the one hand is not very revealing, but at the same time it is very expressive: "I graduated from an elementary school, [...] I got married and was dependent on my husband". J.'s example says a lot about how women perceived themselves and, above all, about their unspoken ego.

Researchers of resumes emphasize that overly brief and general nature of the narratives results from the authors' inexperience in facing their own identity, or them not being used to sharing their own past<sup>41</sup>. I think there may be more reasons for short resumes in personal files, especially when the authors are subjected to some external coercion. Nevertheless, I tried to demonstrate that in both open and brief forms of self-narrative, a resume can highlight the personality of its author, given that this is the author's self-creation.

And while for the researcher of self-narratives the individual and their mental construction always play the central role, the picture of the world the authors present to us can be used for further analysis. Just a handful of resumes provided at least several new interesting themes for deeper analysis, for example, war traumas, migration, sense of identity and national belonging, social status of women, social exclusions.

Based on the analysis of the personal files from selected archival fonds, it can be concluded that the term "personal file" is appropriate. It does not need to be reformulated. A personal file contains important information about a particular person. Based on the personal file one may obtain biographical, sociological, ethnographic, anthropological, economic and other information.

A personal file depicts only a fragment of a person's life. It will include information about the person from the moment they start work or activity in an organisation, until it ends. Besides, it may contain additional data on education, family, previous employment, etc. Information about a person can be found in resumes, questionnaires, or applications. It should be pointed out that resumes, questionnaires or applications were created by a person who expressed themselves, described their world, reality or their own experiences, which are invaluable research material.

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<sup>41</sup> F. Schütze, *Analiza biograficzna ugruntowana empirycznie w autobiograficznym wywiadzie narracyjnym. Jak analizować autobiograficzne wywiady narracyjne* [Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of Autobiographical Narratives. How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews], [in:] *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii. Antologia tekstów* [Biographical Method in Sociology. Anthology of Texts], ed. K. Kaźmierska, Kraków 2012, p. 253.

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