

Jagna Wright

Obituary printed on telegraph.co.uk

The website telegraph.co.uk printed an obituary of Jagna Wright, who died on June 16 aged 57. Jagna tried for five years to persuade broadcasters to make a television film about the 1,700,000 Poles deported to the depths of Russia in 1940, then bought a secondhand digital camera and made it herself.

She had no experience, no budget and a home with a husband and three children to run. Television executives repeatedly declared, in answer to her stream of letters and phone calls, that the public was tired of stories about the Second World War. Radio producers and newspaper features editors said the same. But, with the witnesses dying off, Jagna Wright started to interview some 40 survivors, who also assured her that the film would never be shown.

They recounted the Poles' month-long journey in cattle trucks to Eastern Russia and Kazakhstan; the Russian assurances that bourgeois Poland was finished, and that they would never leave the forests where they had arrived to work with little food or shelter.

After Hitler's invasion of Russia some were allowed to walk to Persia to join General Anders's army. They fought bravely in Western Europe, then found their homeland falling to Soviet rule despite Allied promises.

Only some 500,000 of the deportees were later accounted for. Jagna Wright filmed by herself for a year.

She then went into partnership with an editor, Aneta Naszyńska, who explained that some of the quality was too poor and that, like many photographers, she had sometimes failed to frame her pictures properly.

But working at night in a borrowed studio for a further two years (during which a one-minute interview with the smug Foreign Office official Sir Frank Roberts was purchased from an otherwise uninterested BBC for £3,000) they eventually completed *A Forgotten Odyssey*. Further struggles followed to get the hour-long film shown.

"We made a film that nobody wants," Jagna Wright would say, adding: "The film that exists is better than the one that doesn't."

Eventually she lured a television critic to preview the programme before a showing at the Imperial War Museum by offering him a Polish dinner at her home. The History Channel eventually screened it on September 17 2001, the 62nd anniversary of the Russian invasion of Poland.

It has since been shown on television in some 14 countries, and inspired an internet chat room devoted to the subject (in which Jagna Wright participated enthusiastically).

The daughter of two members of the wartime underground, she was born Jagna Rapf at Gdynia on July 15 1950. After school she studied to be an interpreter in French, Russian and English, then joined a booking agency for foreign musicians in Warsaw. There she met Stephen Wright, an English manager of classical musicians. When they married and moved to Acton in 1977 her interest in the deportations, which Britain long refused to acknowledge, was kindled by meeting an aunt, who was one of the deportees.

After *A Forgotten Odyssey* was shown abroad, the two film makers worked on *The Other Truth*, a three-part documentary aimed at rebutting slurs about Polish-Jewish relations, which was completed before Jagna Wright's death from cancer. □

Jean-Marie Lustiger, French Cardinal, Dies at 80

A New York Times article by John Tagliabue dated August 6, 2007 tells of Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, who was born to Polish Jews, converted to Roman Catholicism as a boy, then rose to become leader of the French church and an adviser to Pope John Paul II, died Sunday, the Paris archbishop's office said. Cardinal Lustiger, whose mother died in a Nazi concentration camp and who always insisted that he had remained a Jew after his conversion, was 80.

As archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Lustiger (pronounced li-sti-ZHAY) led France's 45 million Catholics for almost a quarter century, until his retirement in 2005.

He was an early champion of interfaith relations and accompanied John Paul to Damascus, Syria, in 2001, when John Paul became the first pope to set foot in a mosque. Earlier, Cardinal Lustiger was involved in efforts to close a divide between Jews and Christians over the presence of a convent at the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland, where his mother had perished.

Jewish-Christian relations were a concern of his throughout his career. He spoke on that theme repeatedly. But his assertions that he had remained a Jew despite his conversion drew outcries from some Jewish leaders. "I believe he saw himself as a Jewish Christian, like the first disciples," said Gilbert Levine, the conductor and a close friend of the cardinal.

Like John Paul, Cardinal Lustiger was a conservative. He opposed abortion and the ordination of women and married men to the priesthood, and he sought to preserve the priestly vow of celibacy. He was accused of replacing older, liberal clergymen with younger, conservative successors.

He was also amiable and often informal. He would wear loafers and black corduroy suits with stylish cuts and sit on the edge of a desk, legs dangling, as he talked to students in a packed church hall. But the core of his message was traditionalist.

Besides his Jewish heritage, he was an unlikely and surprising choice to lead the Roman Catholic Church in France as archbishop. A former parish priest, he had few patrons in the French church establishment and had made a point of saying he felt more at ease talking to children and workers than to clerics.

But it was precisely his outsider status that may have appealed to John Paul, a fellow Pole. The pope was concerned that France had grown complacent about its Roman Catholicism. On a visit to the country in 1980, he had asked, "France, what have you done with the promises of your baptism?"

Many church analysts said they believed that John Paul had intended to provoke the French church by skirting the ecclesiastical bureaucracy and choosing a son of Polish Jewish immigrants to be archbishop - a man whom the Nazis had forced to wear the yellow Star of David during the occupation of Paris.

But once installed, Cardinal Lustiger used his intelligence and frankness, and not least his sense of humor, to try to disprove the pope's fear that the French church was, in John Paul's words, Rome's "tired, oldest daughter."

Cardinal Lustiger had been ill for some months, though the cause of his death was not provided. "In the course of phone conversations that I had with Jean-Marie Lustiger in the course of the last weeks, I found a man of great courage, lucid about his condition, but full of the hope of soon meeting him to whom he had consecrated his life," President Nicolas Sarkozy said in a statement announcing his death.

Aaron Lustiger was born on Sept. 17, 1926, in Paris, the first of two children of Charles, who ran a hosiery shop, and Gisèle Lustiger; his parents had met in Paris after moving to France from Poland around World War I.

After the German occupation of France in 1940, Aaron was sent with his sister, Arlette, to live with a Catholic woman in Orléans, where the children were exposed to Catholicism and where Aaron, at 13, against the wishes of his parents, decided to

convert. He was baptized in August 1940, adding the name Jean-Marie to Aaron. His sister was baptized later.

In September 1942, their mother was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she died in 1943; the father survived the war, returning to Paris, where he died in 1982.

After France was liberated, the future cardinal studied literature at the Sorbonne before entering the seminary of the Carmelite fathers in Paris in 1946 and later the Institut Catholique de Paris, a training school for the clergy. He was ordained in 1954. His father watched the ceremony from a seat far in the back.

Until 1959, Cardinal Lustiger was student chaplain at the Sorbonne, and for the next 10 years director of the Richelieu Center, which trained chaplains for French universities. In 1969, he was appointed pastor of Ste. Jeanne de Chantal, in the 16th Arrondissement, one of Paris's wealthier neighborhoods. He transformed the parish, perhaps a model of the complacency the pope feared, into one of the archdiocese's most active.

Cardinal Lustiger appeared to have undergone a spiritual crisis in the late 1970s, when he considered leaving France for Israel. "I had started to learn Hebrew, by myself, with cassettes," he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 1981. "Does that seem absurd, making your aliyah?" he said, referring to a Jew's return to Israel. "I thought then that I had finished what I had to do here, that I was at a crossroads."

Then, in a surprise appointment, he was made bishop of Orléans, the city where he had been baptized. There, he called attention to the plight of immigrant workers in the region.

The pope appointed him archbishop of Paris in January 1981, and if the French clergy were surprised, the appointee felt burdened. "For me," he told an interviewer, "this nomination was as if, all of a sudden, the crucifix began to wear a yellow star."

In an early interview as archbishop, he said: "I was born Jewish, and so I remain, even if that is unacceptable for many. For me, the vocation of Israel is bringing light to the goyim. That is my hope, and I believe that Christianity is the means for achieving it."

Reactions to his appointment were sharp. A former chief rabbi of Paris, Meyer Jays, told an interviewer that "a Jew becoming a Christian does not take up authentic Judaism, but turns his back to it."

Archbishop Lustiger soon earned the nickname "the bulldozer" for his energetic, impulsive, sometimes authoritarian spirit. He built new churches and founded a Catholic radio station, Radio Notre Dame, and a Catholic television enterprise, KTO. In 1983, he was made a cardinal.

Countering those who said that European youth were not receptive to religion, Cardinal Lustiger in 1997 organized a World Youth Day, which was held in Paris and attended by more than a million people, including John Paul.

He had earlier been involved in the dispute over a convent of Carmelite nuns that had been installed in 1984 near the Auschwitz concentration camp. Many in the Polish church believed that a convent at Auschwitz

was justified because Poles had died there. But many Jewish leaders were outraged, saying that 9 of every 10 camp inmates had been Jews.

Roman Catholic prelates, including Cardinal Lustiger, and representatives of Jewish organizations worked out an agreement to move the convent, but the plan was thrown into doubt in 1989 when Cardinal Józef Glemp of Poland ruled out a move. Cardinal Lustiger pressed John Paul to intervene, and in 1993 the pope ordered the Carmelites to move, resolving the crisis.

In his later years, Cardinal Lustiger accompanied Pope John Paul on his pilgrimages to promote understanding among faiths. But the cardinal's boyhood decision to be baptized never sat well with some Jewish leaders.

In 1995, while he was visiting Israel, Yisrael Meir Lau, the Ashkenazic chief rabbi and a concentration camp survivor, said Cardinal Lustiger had "betrayed his people and his faith during the most difficult and darkest of Periods" in the 1940s. The rabbi dismissed the assertion that the cardinal had remained a Jew.

In response, the cardinal said: "To say that I am no longer a Jew is like denying my father and mother, my grandfathers and grandmothers. I am as Jewish as all the other members of my family who were butchered in Auschwitz or in the other camps."

He stepped down as archbishop in 2005, but with the pope's death that year, the cardinal was frequently mentioned as a potential successor.

He countered such speculation with characteristic humor. Asked by a Jewish friend over dinner whether he thought he might become pope, the cardinal responded in French-accented Yiddish, "From your mouth to God's ear." ♣

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