

Q: *“This tram isn’t going any further. We’ve stopped because the shipyard has also stopped.”*

“Ten tramwaj dalej nie pojedzie. Stoimy, bo stocznia stoi.”

R1: Solidarity or Solidarność is a Polish trade union that was founded in 1980 and was the main center of resistance against the communist regime until 1989, the end of communism in Poland. In discussions of the history of Solidarity, more emphasis is put on the role men played in the movement. On the other hand, women are almost entirely forgotten, presented only as the ones helping men and nothing more. We would like to restore the memory of women who were not only wives but were also very active in the Solidarity movement. One of them is Henryka Krzywonos, the woman who stopped a tram.

R2: Henryka Krzywonos was born in 1953 in Olsztyn, Poland. She grew up in a troubled home. Her father died when she was 13 years old. Her mother had a drinking problem, and, as a result, Henryka was sent to an orphanage, where she spent four years. After returning home, she was the one carrying the responsibility to provide for her family on her shoulders.

Henryka lived in the port workers’ district of Gdańsk, in the North of Poland. As a teenager, she worked very hard to take care of her home and her younger sister. She was employed as a cleaner and, after hours, she also worked as an office typist. At the age of 20, encouraged by one of her neighbors, she became a tram driver. Between October 1978 and September 1979, she worked as an operator of lifting equipment at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, and then in October 1979, she returned to the position of tram driver in Gdańsk. She was known as “Henia the tram driver”, whereas she referred to herself as a “normal, down-to-earth woman”. She drove the no. 3 and no. 15 trams that brought laborers from the Lenin Shipyard to work.

R1: One thing that certainly influenced how her future would look was the fact that she gained most of her professional experience during the years of economic downturn in the second half of the 1970s. At that time she had already seen the underground newspaper *Robotnik* but did not consider becoming involved in the



resistance movement. That was because she felt responsible for her mother and her younger sister.

R2: In August 1980 she joined the **strike of the Coast's public transport**. Henryka herself has said that, at the time, she did not know much about politics. On August 15th, 1980, 27-year-old Henryka Krzywonos stopped the no. 15 tram that she was driving near the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk. This event is described as the beginning of the public transport strike in Gdańsk that took place during the August events. The August Agreements were an agreement concluded in Poland between the communist government of the People's Republic of Poland and striking workers. The main provisions of the August Agreements included the government's consent to legalize the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity". Even though, bus drivers had already started the sit-down strike earlier, shortly after four in the morning. When Henryka Krzywonos stopped her tram, she went on to say the sentence that would later become famous. The very same words presented at the beginning of this podcast:

Q: *"This tram isn't going any further. We've stopped because the shipyard has also stopped."*

R1: As she recalls in her interviews, she was very afraid of the passengers' reaction, unsure whether everyone present supported the activities of Solidarność. She was driving laborers to work, and nurses to the medical university. To her surprise, however, people started to clap, showing support for her decision to go on strike. She found that reaction very empowering, and it made her feel sure that she had done the right thing. Other trams started to line up behind her tram. A sit-down strike of bus and tram drivers began in the morning at the bus depot on Karl Marx streets. That's why they decided to choose this place as the strike's headquarters. One day later on August 16th, when an agreement with the management was signed at the Gdańsk Shipyard. With that, Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Solidarność, decided to announce the end of the strike. Together with Anna Walentynowicz and Alina Pieńkowska, Henryka persuaded shipyard workers to continue with the solidarity strike to support the demands of other enterprises.



R2: Due to her feisty personality and courage to express her opinion, she was elected a member of the Praesidium of the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk and participated in negotiations with the government. She recalls that those discussions were not easy because the representatives of the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee had to negotiate with very experienced party activists. In September 1980 she became a member of the Praesidium of the Inter-Enterprise Founding Committee “Solidarność” Gdańsk; however, she was removed from this position due to a disagreement within her company.

R1: During martial law, she helped to organize assistance for interned people; she was also involved in the distribution of independent publications. At the beginning of 1982, she was beaten unconscious for her resistance activity and suffered a miscarriage as a result. A week after that, she lost her job and had to leave Gdańsk. Between September 1980 and March 1981, she was under continuous surveillance by the secret police. She recalls that the repressions continued until 1988 when the Secret Service searched her house for the last time while she wasn't at home. She managed to survive due to assistance in kind provided not only by her acquaintances but also by strangers. She initially lived in Masuria and later in Szczecin. In 1986, when she learned that she had cancer, she returned to Gdańsk and was employed at the Education Centre for Foreigners. In many interviews, she has stated that ever since her signing of the August Agreement, she has been doing the same thing, namely, helping people as much as she can.

R2: Today, she is the only surviving female signatory of the August Agreement (Alina Pieńkowska, a friend of Henryka Krzywonos-Strycharska, died in 2002, and Anna Walentynowicz was a victim of the Smolensk plane crash in 2010).

In 1987 she married Krzysztof Strycharski, with whom she adopted and raised twelve children – first, starting in 1989, as a foster family, and later, beginning in 1994, as a Residential Foster Home.

The extensive actions of Henryka Krzywonos-Strycharska, aimed at assisting other people, have been recognized many times. Henryka Krzywonos-Strycharska has been awarded numerous medals and titles, including the title of



Honorary Citizen of the City of Gdańs. In 2009 the Congress of Polish Women granted her the title of “Polish Woman of the Bi-Decade”.

Since 2015 she has been a Member of the Polish Parliament, aiming to make a change even after all those years since the events of the 1980s.

