

This is a short description of the courageous act of Karolina Denkiewicz, nicknamed Wanda, who saved my mother, Luba (Izakson) Feder of blessed memory, in the city of Chelm. My mother was born in Chelm in 1924 and was raised there. In 1942, when there was still a ghetto in the city of Chelm, she and a girlfriend sneaked out at night time to a neighborhood at the outskirts of the city, to visit for an hour or two a Polish Catholic woman named Wanda Denkiewicz, who was a family friend of my mother's girlfriend. The girlfriend told my mother that Wanda promised her parents that if the need arises, she will hide her in her house. This was the first time that my mother met Wanda, whom she has not known before. It was not discussed with Wanda that she would help my mother, but the purpose of the visit was that Wanda will be acquainted with my mother so that if the situation required, my mother would join the girlfriend to hide in Wanda's house. At the time of this visit, both my mother and her friend had already lost their parents to the Nazis. At the end of the visit the girls returned to the ghetto. A few months later, in November 1942, the ghetto was already liquidated, and my mother and her girlfriend were in a small labor camp inside the city, which was actually a school confiscated by the Germans. The camp was not tightly guarded, and early every morning my mother or her friend would sneak out for a few minutes to buy fresh bread. One morning in early January 1943 it was my mother's turn to sneak out to buy bread. When she returned a short while later, she found that the camp was surrounded by SS men and their Ukrainian collaborators, who were loading all inhabitants on trucks with much screaming and beating. My mother realized that the camp is being liquidated and that all inhabitants will be sent to Sobibor to be killed. Of course she refrained from entering the surrounded area, stayed for a few hours until sunset at the apartment of a Polish acquaintance (the man refused to keep her for more than a few hours...), and at night time walked in the darkness to Wanda's house. Weeping, she told Wanda that the girlfriend is already on her way to Sobibor, and that she had nowhere else to go. Wanda immediately offered to shelter her, even though it was only the second time they ever met, and they did not really know each other. And so it transpired that my mother stayed the period until liberation in July 1944 with Wanda, a young widow (about 35 years old at the time) with two young daughters at home. By hiding my mother, Wanda was obviously risking her and her daughters' lives, and yet she asked for no reward. At a certain point in early 1944, an anti-Semitic neighbor (who noticed that Wanda was keeping a girl he suspected to be Jewish) threatened Wanda that he will turn her over to the Germans. But Wanda denied his allegations and sent my mother for a few weeks to stay with another family in the vicinity who were hiding a Jewish man (my father, who at that time knew my mother only superficially...). This way Wanda convinced the anti-Semitic neighbor that she had no Jewish girl hiding in her house. After the war, my mother kept in touch with Wanda and her daughters, even after she immigrated to Israel in 1949, and was sending them packages with clothes and candy. Wanda died of cancer in 1954, and my mother maintained the contact with her daughters. After my mother passed in 1991, my wife and I continued to correspond and send packages to the daughters. A few years ago the daughters passed too. In 2016 I obtained the required documentation and applied to Yad Vashem to grant Wanda the title of Righteous Among the Nations. The application was approved a year later, and in January 2018, the certificate and medal were given to Wanda's great grandson in a ceremony organized by the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw. I, my wife, and my oldest son attended the ceremony.