

“...to be modest, I’ve never lost a fight against rats. And I don’t intend to. Otherwise, I would quit all of it...”

Jan Stromidło is from Toruń, with a degree in sociology from KUL (Catholic University of Lublin). In 1981, as he was arriving home with his diploma, he would have never thought that fighting rats would become his job. On the contrary, he found a job fitting his education in the Regional Board of Solidarność in Toruń. He only worked for a couple of months. When the martial law was declared, he went into hiding for some time. One of his attempts to return home ended in a failure – the Security Service (SB) officers were watchful. Later, it turned out that he wasn’t dangerous enough to be arrested, interned, sent outside of the country. He was set free, but he had to regularly check in – they kept an eye on him. Because he couldn’t be a parasite – there was a special law that forbade it – he applied to several institutions to be hired as a sociologist. In total, he visited sixty five state institutions in the Toruń region. There was no work for him.

“In a really tight spot, I decided to try working in craft. I found several loopholes in the law, which allowed me to practice without special qualifications. I started to make wooden shoes, ordinary clogs. But I was not especially satisfied with it.”
 “I had a chance encounter with my friend from Solidarność who also had been fired from his job. He tells me: ‘You know what, I want to try spraying.’ I reply: ‘I thought the same thing, but I had no idea how to do this.’ We started to dig deeper and look for people who do it professionally. We found a state-owned company. They tried to discourage us: ‘gents, it’s a terrible, impossible job.’ I almost quit and my friend quit on the spot. I decided to try harder. I knew that there was a guy who did this on a large scale. I mean deratization, because I wasn’t interested in just spraying for insects. I found him and told him right away that I wanted to open a deratization company and I had no experience, apart

from a bit of knowledge I gained from reading specialist literature, including foreign publications. He told me upfront: ‘you’re starting in a very difficult line of work.’ And he tried to send me back to the state company, probably to get rid of the problem. I told him I had already been there and the qualifications presented by those men were not high enough to even have a conversation. I think he realized that he was dealing with a tenacious man. So he advised me to try, first in smaller buildings – so that I could test myself, to find out if I could take it, mentally.

He was an apprentice to Wiesław Dobrzeński, the protagonist of the documentary “Szczurołap” [eng. “The Rat-Catcher”] directed by Zbigniew Czarnecki. As a side note, it is important to mention that the film, which was shown a long time ago on TV, has gathered a considerable amount of awards on different festivals in Europe and around the world, and supposedly still is.

“After completing several small jobs in accordance with the standard set by the master of the trade, I gave an ad in the press. No one responded. So I visited several of the Residents Affairs Bureaus. I worked in several buildings, but it wasn’t what I wanted. They gave me deratization jobs and I wanted to completely eliminate rats. Not just leave out poison and put notices on the doors that in that building or basement rat poison had been placed. A friend who had a sense of humor told me once not to put up the notices, because the rats may read them and run.”

“In the 80’s rats were an uncomfortable subject and in the 70’s they were a political matter. No one was to talk about them. There was no way to get a permit for deratization. Only for agriculture some exceptions were made.”

HUNTING RATS

Bogumił Drogorób

"I started to work in the field, in different buildings. When I saw the reality of the situation and realized that it was the end of the 20th century, I became even more determined to fight rats."

"We work only at night. Rats feed in the dark, only the weakest and youngest ones appear during the day. After three or four days of work in one of the first buildings, I told my teacher that I would handle them on my own the rest of the way. He was very glad to hear that and waited for my results. I did it, but it took me two days longer than him. It was then that I swore to myself to achieve a level of proficiency where I wouldn't need a fishing pole, a dog or a gun."

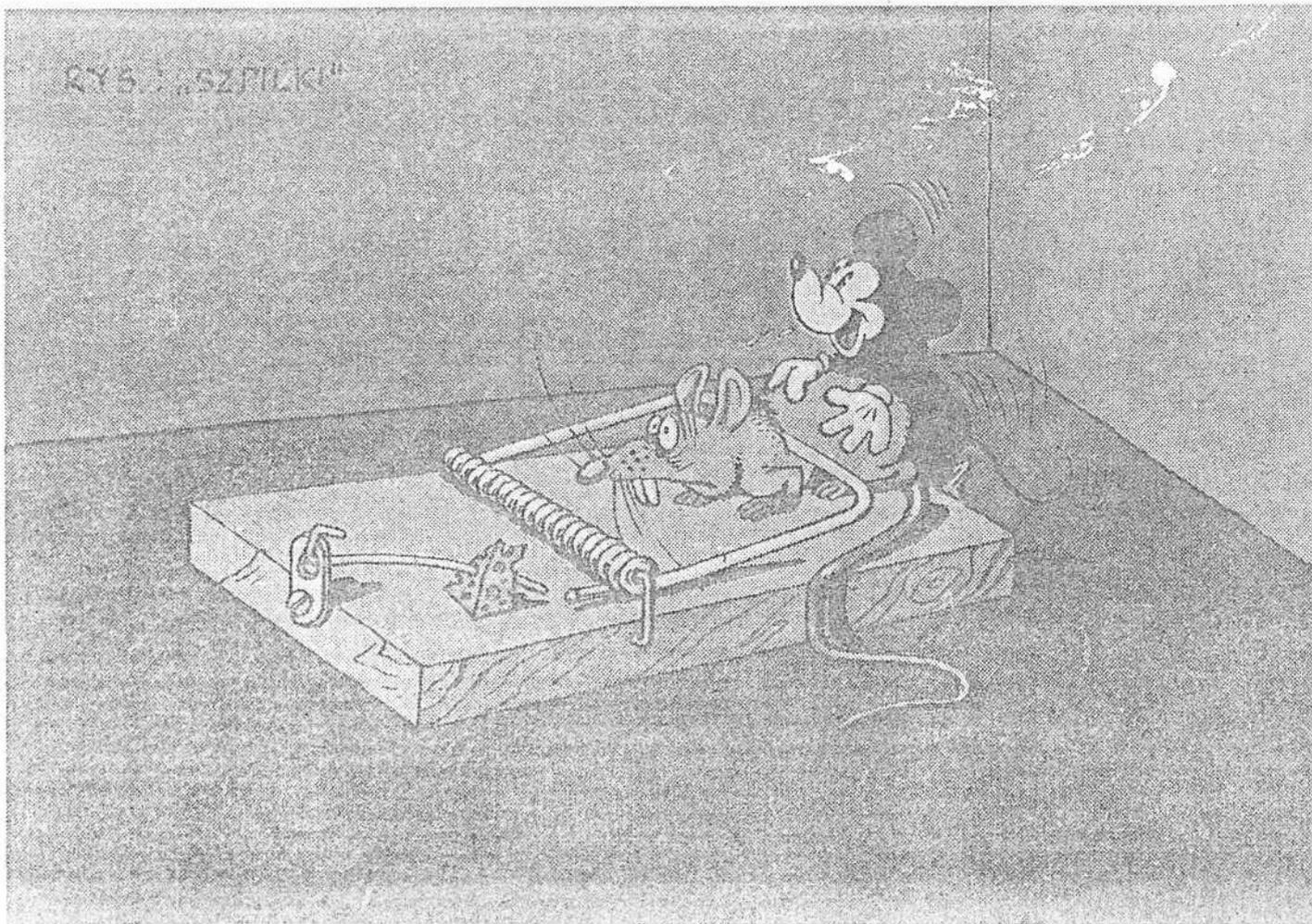
"They say that the last one, the one you have to catch with the fishing pole and throw against the wall is the king. I don't know if that's true, there is no crown."

But I'm convinced that there is a hierarchy. I watch them as they eat, go into their nests; which one goes first, which one goes second and which one is always last. And that's how it goes – even when there is chaos, the last rat will always be the last."

"The personality of the person is important; whether the rat will accept them. What I bring is my composure. After placing the bait, I don't come back. I can observe, but I won't disturb them. In this job, alcohol and cigarettes are unacceptable. I don't drink or smoke."

"I have a bigger problem with getting rid of three or four rats than with thousands. It's easier to fight them when there are tons of them, carried out on wheelbarrows. I get nervous when they won't come out. I'm excited when I see a mass of them."

"With my method, rats begin to die after the fourth or fifth day of administering bait. There are a lot of chemicals nowadays – I have mild, moderate and strong ones to choose from."



Mild chemicals are used most often. The reason is simple – not to let the rat or the entire colony know that something is not right. If the rat dies on the first or second day of feeding the bait, my work was for nothing. I can gather my gear and leave, defeated. And come back after six months or a year."

"Rats have to be outsmarted. They have to eat, drink, be certain of the food source. It is obvious that the colony sends the expendable ones first. I spray them with paint to mark them. On the second day, it is the same one that comes out first, and the cycle repeats for several days."

"We had a job near Mrągowo – I had a partner by then. Old buildings converted into a piggery. The pavements used to transport the fodder for pigs were so chewed through that they were caving in as we walked. I was warned that dozens of specialists had tried and failed. So we got to work, placed the food a couple of times. Everything disappeared immediately. At night we added four extra rations. After three days we called for the director – we had eliminated every last one of them."

"I often get asked about working in piggeries – what happens if a pig eats the poison. It does happen. But pigs can vomit, they can have their stomachs pumped. Rats have no gag reflex – if they eat something, then that's that."

"We had a situation when we thought we got them all. We go to get paid and a man runs up to us saying he's seen a rat. A claim like that means three or four additional days of work. Of course I found the rat, not one but three of them."

"The most pessimistic estimate is fourteen days. After two weeks have passed, I start to nervously wonder where did I make a mistake. The optimistic estimate is ten days, but we have had good results after only eight."

"Sometimes, I wonder whether I can do anything else, besides feeding rats. There is terrible stench in places we work in. When I return after two weeks, the stink clings on for a couple of days."

"My dachshund is an old working companion. He has never made a mistake. Fox terriers are also good. But there are issues with dogs on the job – they are not permitted in hotels and I can't leave him in the piggery, obviously."

(Dokończenie na str. 15)