Sentenced to Remember

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My Legacy of Life in Pre–1939 Poland and Sixty-Eight Months of Nazi Occupation

William Kornbluth

Edited by Carl Calendar

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I dedicate this book to the following, very important people to me:

First and foremost, to my best friend, my wonderful wife Edith, who will forever have a special place in my life. Her love and caring have constantly tried to compensate for the emotional trauma resulting from my Holocaust experience and cradled me especially during the emotionally difficult process of compiling this manuscript.

To my brother Natan who acted as a surrogate parent when our real parents were gone; who tried valiantly to shield me from Nazi evil on an ongoing basis—often at considerable risk to his own life.

Above all to my very young sister Bronka who was made to suffer so cruelly before she was allowed to die. At times when I had no strength or desire to go on, her last outcry echoed in my ears: "You must stay alive to tell the world. . . ." This was her final message to me. This book is intended to do just that. Bronka's command, more than anything else, inspired this book. This mission fulfilled, I can depart this world in peace.

Finally, let me also mention here Major Timothy Brennan who was in command of the American unit that liberated me and Natan on May 6, 1945, in Ebensee, Austria, only a day or two before we would have surely expired. His unit's timely intervention made this book possible. The major's name and whereabouts came to my attention only recently, thanks to Dr. Seymour Siegler of the Brookdale Holocaust Center. My wife Edith and I, along with my friend Victor Dorman (another Ebensee survivor) and his wife Ellen, a Holocaust victim in her own right, met Major Brennan and his charming wife Vera for the first time on May 4, 1992, at Brookdale College in Lincroft, New Jersey. The meeting was arranged by Dr. Siegler.

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Chronology

1933	
30 January	Appointment of Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor (Prime Minister)
23 March	First concentration camp is established at Dachau
1934	
2 August	Death of President Hindenburg. Hitler becomes head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces
1935	
13 January	Saar region annexed to Germany
17 March	German army enters the Rhineland
15 September	Reichstag passes anti-Semitic "Nuremberg Laws"
1936	
25 October	Hitler and Mussolini form Rome-Berlin Axis
1937	
16 July	Buchenwald concentration camp opens
1938	
13 March	Austria is annexed into the Third Reich. Nazis apply anti-Semitic laws
6 July	International conference at Evian, France, fails to provide a refuge for German Jews
29–30 September	Munich Conference, attended by Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, and Mussolini. Britain and France agree to the German annexation of part of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia
28 October	Over 17,000 Jews of Polish citizenship are expelled from Germany to Zbaszyn on the Polish border

9–10 November	"Kristallnacht," anti-Jewish riots in Germany and Austria. Some 30,000 Jews are arrested, 191 synagogues destroyed, 7,500 shops looted
1939	
15 March	Germans occupy Czechoslovakia
23 August	Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact is signed
1 September	German army invades Poland. Beginning of World War II
3 September	Britain and France declare war on Germany
17 September	Soviet occupation of eastern Poland
21 September	Ghettos to be established in occupied Poland, each under a *Judenrat,* by order of Heydrich
23 November	Wearing of *Judenstern* (six-pointed Star of David) is made compulsory throughout occupied Poland
28 November	First Polish ghetto is established in Piotrkow
1940	
9 April	Germans invade Denmark and Norway
27 April	Himmler directive to establish a concentration camp at Auschwitz
10 May	Germans invade Holland, Belgium, and France
22 June	French army surrenders
27 September	Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis is established
15 November	Warsaw Ghetto is sealed off
1941	
22 June	Germany attacks the Soviet Union
31 July	Heydrich is appointed by Goering to carry out the "Final Solution"—the extermination of all Jews in Europe
15 September	Wearing of the Jewish star is decreed throughout the Greater Reich
23 September	First experiments with gassing are carried out at Auschwitz
7 December	Japanese attack Pearl Harbor
8 December	Chelmno extermination camp is opened in Poland
11 December	Germany and Italy declare war on the United States. The ship *Struma* sets sail from Romania for Palestine—on 12 February 1942 it strikes a mine and sinks with all aboard

1942

20 January	Wannsee Conference. Here the details of the plan to exterminate eleven million European Jews were drafted
1 March	Extermination begins at Sobibor. By October 1943, 250,000 Jews had been murdered there
17 March	Extermination begins at Belzec. By the end of 1942, 600,000 Jews had been murdered there
1 June	Treblinka extermination camp opens—700,000 Jews murdered there by August 1943; wearing of the Jewish star decreed in occupied France and Holland
22 July	300,000 Jews from Warsaw Ghetto are deported to Treblinka

1943

18 January	Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto launch uprising against Nazi deportations. Street fighting lasts four days
2 February	German Sixth Army surrenders at Stalingrad
19 April	Revolt of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto begins. Fighting continues for weeks
16 May	Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto
June	Himmler orders liquidation of all ghettos in Poland and the USSR
2 August	Revolt in Treblinka death camp
16 August	Bialystok Ghetto revolt breaks out
2 October	Order for the expulsion of Danish Jews. Thanks to rescue operation by the Danish underground, some 7,000 Jews were evacuated to Sweden, and only 475 were captured by the Germans

1944

15 May–8 June	Deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz begins
6 June	Allied invasion of Normandy
24 July	Soviet troops liberate Maidanek death camp
7 October	Sonderkommando uprising at Auschwitz
24 November	Himmler orders destruction of Auschwitz crematoria as Nazis try to hide evidence of death camps

1945

17 January	Evacuation of Auschwitz. The prisoners' "Death March" begins
11 April	American troops liberate Buchenwald death camp
15 April	British troops liberate Bergen-Belsen death camp
30 April	Hitler commits suicide
7 May	Unconditional surrender of Germany
22 November	Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal commences

1946

1 October	Nuremberg trials concluded. Twelve defendants were sentenced to death, 3 to life imprisonment, 4 to various prison terms, and 3 were acquitted.

Foreword

When I first met Bill and Edith Kornbluth in fall 1991, I thought I knew a reasonable amount about the Holocaust. Throughout the previous decade, I had participated in various programs for the Brookdale Holocaust Center, usually those involved with literature and the Holocaust. It didn't occur to me, when Bill brought me his manuscript—several hundred pages written out in his miniscule, careful handwriting—that I was about to get a much more intimate look at the hell created by the Nazis.

When I first began to put Bill's prose into my word processor, the reality of his experience began to haunt me. I would dream about being hidden in the forest with Edith's family. At strange times, watching a movie or riding my exercise bike, I would suddenly see Ukrainian guards breaking my own children's skulls with their rifle butts. It took nearly a year to get over these feelings, but I could hardly complain. It has taken Bill a lifetime to partially subdue such feelings.

It took months to transcribe the handwritten manuscript to computer disk, and months more of wrangling with Bill Kornbluth over minute details of language. Bill is a stickler for the truth. He wanted the amount of daily bread allotted by the concentration camps to the inmates to be precise, not an estimate. He wanted the words chosen to reflect the experience of a Holocaust survivor as precisely as possible.

The task wasn't easy. In the course of growing up, surviving four concentration camps, and emigrating through Europe to America, Bill spoke at times in Polish, Yiddish, German, English, and smatterings of other languages. He had to decide, often, between a German, Polish, or an English equivalent. If I got even a small word wrong, Bill would call me up as upset as if I'd lost a chapter or invented episodes.

Always my goal as an editor was to keep Bill Kornbluth's story exactly in his own words and phrasings. I helped him make some choices in structure, suggested chapter breaks, and corrected his spelling in English almost as often as he corrected mine in Polish. If I didn't understand a passage, he would rewrite it until I did.

It is my opinon that it takes a book like Bill Kornbluth's memoirs to really understand the individual, human dimensions of the Holocaust. A student of this period needs to know what life was like in Eastern Europe before the Germans took control as well as what challenges postwar Europe presented to the Jewish survivors. He needs to know what eventually happened to the survivors and how the experience of the Nazi horrors affected the entire patterns of a victim's life. He needs to know surviving is always a relative term.

It gives me extreme pleasure to have had some small part in helping Bill Kornbluth bring his story into print, both for his children and for a general readership. The Holocaust Center and its cofounders Dr. Seymour Siegler and Prof. Jack Needle deserve much credit both for setting up the project and for sympathetic support along the way. It is all our hope that such books as this memoir will help keep such atrocities from happening again. A Holocaust book is never just history—it is a warning to the future.

CARL CALENDAR

Preface

From The Holocaust Center: The Man and the Book

The Book

When pushed through the Gates of Hell, one might say "words fail me." Whatever the pain and energy required, however, words can in fact be summoned, considered, and ultimately placed deftly to describe horrendous events in a way that leaves the reader emotionally wrenched and exhausted. Such literature remains crucial in our culture and shapes our lives. Bill Kornbluth's account of life in Hell, *Sentenced to Remember,* is literature with the power to change the lives of readers. To read this work is to suddenly ask the question, "Can this have really happened?" And to know that it did.

In our daily pursuit of becoming more fully human, do we ponder the depths of dehumanization? And when, fearfully, we do consider those depths, how do we handle the jolt of fear, the disgust, with tool and technique, the grave disappointment with the handiwork of fellow humans? To handle or not to handle is a real question. In fact, life persists and humanity insists. The insistent heartbeat of a human facing death conveys the essential power that motivates one to live. Insistent, as well, are the rules of chance, circumstance, and coincidence.

Bill Kornbluth's history is unique. The personal details make it so. But it is also representative of the fate of so many others in the Nazi period. It becomes clear why death was the rule and survival the exception. Bill's words leave us with no doubt about the capacity for atrocity among the perpetrators. Mentally multiplied by millions of such cases—and added to by the millions of apathetic bystanders—one feels first the anticipatory terror of discovering horror around the corner and then the profound fright and grief when what is in the darkness is revealed. It becomes nothing less than the knowledge that culture and civilization failed. How to persist with this knowledge in place—how to affirm life through family, work, and faith—how to summon the courage to

survive the nightmares, memories, and blank spaces, are questions which will challenge readers of this extraordinary story.

Where does it take us? The prewar days of the familiar—people, place, purpose—give way to concern, worry, pain, dislocation, terror, horror, pain, pain, pain. . . . The war days are in fact excruciating minutes and hours, each second of which fills us with a consuming dread. And the postwar days force us to ask how can one pick up pieces if you don't know what pieces are left or where they are? And if life goes on, how well does it go on? And when one sets pen to paper to remember the bad times, what is the cost, what is the benefit—in personal terms?

This book is a necessary piece of Holocaust literature. There is, in fact, none like it. To become familiar with its words is to rethink definitions of good and evil to reconsider the meaning of life and to reevaluate personal goals. *Sentenced to Remember* can inspire us toward redoubling the humane goals often espoused in our culture. The strength to set my personal goals comes in no little measure from Bill and his book.

SEYMOUR SIEGLER
February, 1993

* * *

THE MAN

Occasionally in one's life, one meets someone whose life experiences offer both terrible and inspiring insights. I first met Bill Kornbluth nine years ago. He had volunteered several years earlier at a local high school to testify about his horrendous imprisonment and torturous existence in the Nazi charnel houses. One of his talks had been videotaped and my colleague Dr. Seymour Siegler and I used a copy of his testimony in our interdisciplinary course, "Dimensions of the Holocaust." Bill described his excruciatingly painful experiences in four concentration and death camps and the heart-wrenching imprisonment in the ghetto, where families were torn apart, was worse than that of surviving the camps.

We were so moved by his words that we asked Bill to speak to our class. He has done so every year since, retelling this tragic period of his life. Bill is never volatile or dramatic. In fact, he is extremely soft-spoken. At any point, though, his recounting can bury him in a swell of emotion and pain. Yet Bill feels he must go on with this obligation to testify for the millions who were lost in the Holocaust, especially for his mother and dear younger sister.

Bill holds those responsible for wholesale murder and creation of a searing hell to an eternity of guilt. But he preaches that he has no time or energy for hate. Hatred corrodes and eventually destroys the life of the hater. He and his lovely wife Edith, also a Holocaust survivor whose experiences parallel Bill's, are determined to triumph over adversity. Humanity and the joy of life remain their lodestone. Those, and the constant goal to remind the world never to forget.

Bill's, and Edith's, story is part of Holocaust history. Elements of the story are identical or similar to thousands—millions—of other victims. And yet it is the personal, private experience of an individual, spared by the grace of God and the accident of history.

Bill and Edith, only happiness and sweet dreams from now on.

JACK NEEDLE
February 1993

A Message to My Children

For some time I have been contemplating the idea of putting down on paper what is, for various reasons, so difficult to tell you face to face. The fact that you both are so busy, that your time is so limited, hasn't made it easy for me to get through to you any other way. But time isn't standing still. My advancing years shout out to me: "Now or never! This is your last chance!"

The thought of leaving this planet with my story, and your mother's story, untold makes me shudder. Every human being, at some time in his life, needs to know about his roots, where he came from. In your case, I strongly feel you also need to know what your parents had to endure in their lifetime.

As I sit with Edith in our comfortable home in Jackson, the events that transpired half a century ago in Poland seem unbelievable. But, I assure you, they were very real to me, to your mother, and to our unfortunate families.

Life is a continuum, a living book. Someday you may want to read the missing pages. Who knows, when you decide to write your own chapters, you may even have an overwhelming urge to trace your roots, your history. I will take you back as far as my information and memory take me. The story begins when your grandparents met.

WILLIAM KORNBLUTH

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Prof. Jack Needle and Dr. Seymour Siegler, both cofounders of the fine Brookdale College Holocaust Center, for lending me their good names and through them, the prestige of the institution. Their cooperation was quite instrumental in securing this credible publisher. I will forever appreciate the many kindnesses they expended on my behalf.

It goes without saying that I am very grateful to Dr. Carl Calendar, Chairperson of Humanities at Brookdale, for doing a fine final clean-up job editing my manuscript. He corrected my syntax and punctuation when necessary. He also entered it into his word processor in proper marketable order. Dr. Calendar's advice—less is more and when in doubt, leave it out—added to the cohesiveness and fluidity of my account.

As a footnote, let me ask his forgiveness for having to put up with my impatience and excessive punctuality that he so skillfully learned to tame.

Sentenced to Remember

Prologue

Once upon a time I was very young and had many dreams. I thought that the world was full of goodness and light, that all issues were black or white, that the grass would always be green. The sky, for me, was an eternal blue.

As I was growing up and became more observant, I noticed some gray mixed in with the blue of the sky. The green grass was tinged with brown, and snow, which heretofore had always looked pristine and white, now appeared dingy and dirty in spots. Worst of all, the color black sometimes held a dark, exaggerated hue.

It began in the public school in Tarnow, a city in southern Poland. I was scared the first day, but only with the fear of all first graders just cut loose from a mother's apron strings. I felt awed and bewildered for a time. After a while, however, I began to like the schooling. But I also began to notice the dark clouds appearing against the blue sky.

"Dirty Jew!" was a common catcall of my gentile classmates. When I came home crying, my mother would reassure me, "Don't cry, my child. You are in fact a Jew; that is nothing to be ashamed of. And you are not dirty—chances are that the boy who called you that name is dirtier than you are!"

All in all, I loved school initially and couldn't wait to arrive there in the morning. I made new friends, played soccer and chess, and learned different things every day. In class we sang many songs, usually anthems in praise of my Polish fatherland. "Poland is not lost as long as we live." What counted most was that my teacher liked me and told me I was a good pupil. I felt so proud. Our teacher also instructed us to love our country and, of course, I listened. Singing the Polish national anthem brought tears to my eyes.

It is hard to remain patriotic, however, when the gentile children call you "rotten Jew" and other horrid names for no discernible reason. "Was I a Pole or was I a Jew?" became a constant question for me. One day two gentile boys beat me up on the way home from school. I came home bewildered. When my parents heard what had happened, my father said, "You should thank God that

it wasn't too serious. You must pray to Him, praise His name so He would always protect you. You will see that no harm will ever befall you."

It didn't take long for me to become obsessed with God's protection. At Shul (synagogue) the next Saturday, I noticed that Brother Natan only pretended to read word for word from the Prayer Book. "How will things get better if you don't pray for real?" I implored him. "Don't we all have to do our part to please the Almighty?"

As I got older, I noticed more and more things that made me question God's benevolence. I began to see that the poverty, hunger, and disease in Tarnow were commonplace. Injustice of every description was the rule. Even my own house had problems, like the discord between my parents. "Why?" I asked my father. "Why doesn't the Almighty God help? We pray and follow his commandments. Is he a God of mercy and justice or isn't he?"

"My child, it's not for us to question, only to accept," father replied. "We don't understand the ways of God."

In Cheder, our religious school, the teacher told me the Jews were the "chosen people." At public school, as I grew older, Jews were repeatedly chosen to be beaten up. After one severe beating I again questioned my father: "Why? Aren't we supposed to be children of God? In Cheder they said we Jews discovered God—why doesn't He help?"

"Blasphemy!" Father covered up his ears. "I will not listen to such sinful talk. I told you long ago that we musn't question; we must believe with all our hearts and minds and praise the name of our Lord—Period!"

From then on I knew what to expect from father. When Jews in Tarnow were beaten or stabbed, I didn't discuss it with him. When they picketed Jewish stores and shouted insulting names, I endured it in silence. But I was getting more scared each passing day, and it didn't look like God would intervene.

Then, in 1939, the Germans came. Under their "new order," father could really test his faith in God. He couldn't go out in the streets openly, for the SS troops enjoyed cutting off the beards and earlocks of pious Jews. Sometimes they even tried to pull them out, usually to cheers from Christian on-lookers.

When the Germans burned all the Shuls, father had to sneak through a back alley to fulfill the compulsory daily ritual of praying with a minyan (ten men) surreptitiously. He somehow found a way to communicate with the Lord every day. Each evening, he thanked Him for whatever fate He sent his way on that day. When the SS decreed that Jews had to cut their beards or suffer terrible

consequences, he simply stayed home, studying the Torah and praying all day long.

We were worried. Father still wanted to slip out twice a day to find a minyan, and with his beard and earlocks, these excursions were doubly dangerous. After much pleading, he shaved his locks. He was a small-boned man, about five feet, four inches tall, and he had worn his beard all his adult life. Without it, he looked pathetically sad, a stranger with a gaunt naked face.

Perhaps it was because father still never complained, and continued his daily praises, that God was convinced that father, the pious Reb Sumer, deserved a place in heaven and called his number. But it was the Germans who arranged to send him off in style. Father's escort were SS officers. They dispatched him to Heaven with a bang.

When he got to Heaven, God put him on a throne reserved for righteous Jews and asked, "Do you, Reb Sumer, have any special requests? You have proven that you are truly deserving . . . all your wishes will be granted."

"As a matter of fact, I do have a request," father replied. "I miss my wife Chana and would love to have her beside me."

"No problem," said God, "Your wish will soon be fulfilled." In no time Chana joined him in heaven.

But Chana was lonesome for her daughter Bronka, her youngest. She asked Sumer to intercede with God on her behalf. "Dear Lord," father petitioned, "My Chana was always very attached to Bronka; they need each other a lot. Bronka is only twelve and has hardly had time to sin. Does she deserve a place in heaven?"

"No question about it," God replied. Bronka soon appeared in Heaven. Again, the Germans were the instruments of the Almighty.

"Don't you miss your other children, Reb Sumer?" asked God.

"Yes, my Lord, but they are probably not ready yet. They must be tested some more, especially my youngest son Wolf. He should undergo additional trials before he proves worthy to enter your kingdom. Sometimes he questions your ways."

"I know exactly what I will do to make him see the light," God smiled mischievously. "I will make him *REMEMBER*. . . ."

1

Edith's Story

For most of my adult life I was a clam. Until 1983 I told very few people about my past experiences, about the horrors that I and my family lived through. My children Renee and Phil know little of my story; I couldn't speak of the unspeakable with them or with anyone who did not share a similar background. I was a man with a hidden past.

About 1948 I tried to write down some of my experiences. When I put some things on paper, the events began to come back to me in nightmares. It was as if I was living through the Holocaust years of Tarnow once again, this time emotionally.

My wife Edith, on the other hand, was better adjusted. She could talk about what happened to her during the terrible years in war-torn Poland. Those years had been brutal for her too—she lost all her immediate family, while I at least had two brothers and a sister survive. But she was younger than I was, and she wasn't in the camps.

All I knew when we were first courting was that she was a child survivor. Like all young people in love, we had long conversations. We drew closer all the time. Ours was no longer an ordinary friendship, but a fellowship of survivors. Soon the larger story started coming to light, an unusual and touching account. Her golden hair and gray eyes didn't make her look Jewish. Edith had survived the war pretending to be a Christian youngster.

Perhaps I should let her story flow through her own voice. She told her story this way:

"My parents met at a wedding of mutual friends or relatives. A young man named Pinia, from another village, saw Feiga, my mother-to-be, and asked for a dance. Pinia must have liked Feiga, who was reputedly quite pretty, and asked if he could see her again. She must have liked him, too, because the answer was 'yes.' Although Pinia lived a good distance away, in the village of Medina near the town of Lancut, he would walk many miles each Saturday

to meet Feiga in her village of Kupno. He didn't ride his bike because he was afraid to offend Feiga's father, Nuchem Seiden, who was a religious Jew, and who didn't approve of bike-riding on a Sabbath.

"Feiga's parents, Nuchem and Grandmother Pearl, operated a farm and owned an inn in the village of Kupno, near the town of Kolbuszowa. Some villagers would frequent my grandparents' inn on a daily basis. A few would buy on credit, promising to pay when they would sell their produce in Kolbuszowa during market day. Others had to be carried on the books until harvest time. Every night some drunks had to be gently coaxed out of the inn. On occasion some would turn violent and break something, an event that was an occupational hazard. There were few Jews in Kupno; therefore the Seidens had to be on their best behavior at all times.

"My mother was from a large family with eight siblings, three of whom died during the First World War as a result of an epidemic. One sister came to a more dramatic end, shot to death by a jealous gentile boyfriend who also shot her husband and their baby. The man had been madly in love with her and threatened to kill her after she married another man. 'If I can't have you, no one will!' he said. And he made good on his warning.

"The village of Kupno held little opportunity, so two sisters, Gussie and Lena, emigrated one at a time to America. When they were married in the United States, Grandfather Nuchem traveled twice to America to their weddings. Both times Gussie and Lena begged him to bring along Grandmother Pearl and settle in America. 'Why put up with drunks in a Polish village?' they reasoned with him.

"But Grandfather Nuchem was a cautious man, who didn't want to drop an established life in Poland for an uncertain future in America. After all, he could see that Gussie was not picking up gold in the streets. Her husband, Sam Sturtz, was an impoverished cloakmaker who eked out a living working long hours in sweatshops. He was a decent man, and hard working, but the unions in the garment industry were corrupt and new arrivals were easy to exploit. In order to survive, Aunt Gussie had to pitch in as a finisher in the garment center.

"Sister Lena fared better. She married Sam Wachtel, the owner of a small grocery. Not that their life was easy either—the store stayed open seven days a week till 11:00 P.M., but at least they were in control of their own business. Uncle Sam Sturtz's life in the garment business was unpredictable—his work was seasonal and he never made enough money to put aside for a rainy day,

although many of his days were definitely rainy. On occasions when his gas or electricity had to be turned off for nonpayment, his brother-in-law Sam Wachtel or some sympathetic neighbor would have to bail him out.

"Grandfather Nuchem must have felt that life in Kupno wasn't luxurious, but it was at least predictable. Every morning they opened the inn and in the summertime they supervised the help that worked on the farm. After Gussie and Lena left for the United States, my mother-to-be Feiga and her brother, my Uncle Avrum, were born. Feiga grew into a pretty young lady and Uncle Avrum was the tallest man in the village. He was even known as 'Tall Avrum.' It was into this world, at a wedding, that Pinia walked and asked Feiga for a dance.

"Pinia and Feiga became engaged after a brief courtship and married soon afterward. Pinia was a business school graduate, but Poland offered few opportunities, especially in the villages, and my father made his living, for a time, as an itinerant cattle dealer. Because he did not have the money to go into business, or to build a home for himself, he moved in with his in-laws. It was commonplace in those days to endow a daughter with a dowry, and the Seiden's parceled off fifteen acres from their farm for their new son-in-law. Pinia continued to deal cattle while Feiga and a maid worked the fields.

"Soon I came along. When I was about three or four, my father's education suddenly paid off. He was able to land a job as an assistant administrator of a large estate that belonged to seven brothers named Wang who were among the richest Jews in Poland. Although they lived in the nearby city of Rzeszow, their major holdings were around Kupno, our village. They owned thousands of acres of forests and artificial man-made fish lakes. The Wangs took a liking to Pinia and in a short time promoted him to administrator, with a commensurate increase in salary. We soon built a nice home and moved out of my grandparents' place to the nearby village, Poremby Kupienskie.

"Father was the envy of the entire village. When another sister, Chavcia, was born, our house was swamped with well-wishers for several days. By that time father supervised a large staff. The forests were being cut down for lumber and my father kept exact account of every tree that was processed. The lumber was mostly exported. Pinia also supervised more than forty foresters. In addition, he also was responsible for the entire fish farming operation: stocking carp in the lakes, the selling of the fish, and the hiring and firing.

"The Wangs depended on my father completely. He soon developed a friendship with the youngest Wang brother, Edward, who would often drive over and visit us or invite us to his house in Rzeszow. His daughter and I became best friends and often slept over with one another.

"The villagers referred to my father as the 'nice Jew.' They respected him because he treated workers humanely. Besides, my mother was an excellent housekeeper and an equally fine cook, skills that made it easy to round up help at harvest time on our farm. The help loved her baking and Jewish dishes like gefilte fish and cholent, a dish that went into the oven Friday night and stayed there until noontime Saturday. Anytime a peasant was about to make a major decision about his property or personal life, he came for my father's advice. In most village disputes, he was the final arbitrator. My father's second title in Poremby Kupienskie was 'wise Pinia.'

"My parents' happiness hit its height three years after Chavcia's birth when a boy, Goetzaly, was born. Like most parents with two girls already, my parents wanted a son, and the new arrival was immediately pampered. Even Uncle Avrum would drop in every few days and bring along lots of goodies of every description. There was so much joy in the family that it is hard to believe what the next few years would bring.

"My situation was equally satisfying. I attended school in the nearby town of Kolbuszowa, rather than attend the one-room school in Kupno. I stayed in town during the week with a widow named Brancia Laufer, attending public school in the morning and Hebrew school in the afternoon. Mrs. Laufer owned a small candy store and needed the extra money she got for keeping me. She had no daughters, and treated me more like her own child than a boarder. Every Friday father would come for me, and when I got home, everyone welcomed me with kisses, affection, and love. 'Amor,' our dog, jumped all over me, his tail wagging with happiness.

"Our weekends were festive. Mother cooked and baked all day Friday, because Saturday friends and relatives visited. Sunday evenings Father took me back to Kolbuszowa on the handlebars of his bicycle. I always had mixed feelings leaving that lovely house with its large, warm kitchen. I enjoyed being home, but I looked forward to Mondays and my friends at school. Luckily, I was an extrovert who made friends easily and adjusted quickly to a new environment. I had little idea when I left with my father on cold

Polish Sunday afternoons that these very character traits would soon save my life.

"In 1937 tragedy struck my family. Goetzaly, now a cute three year old, came down with a high fever. My frightened parents brought a doctor from Kolbuszowa who diagnosed diphtheria, a serious illness at that time. The sick little boy soon developed complications of double pneumonia, and despite heroic efforts Goetzaly died. The grief in our home was indescribable. My parents had been hoping for a boy for many years; Goetzaly was their pride and joy. Now he was gone forever, and they were beyond consolation. Nothing was ever the same after my brother's passing.

"In fact, his death seemed like an omen. The political situation was growing precarious for Jews in Poland. You didn't feel it so much in Poremby Kupienskie, for my father was still 'Wise Pinia' there, but in Kolbuszowa anti-Semitism was like a raging disease. Hitler's hatred was like a virus that infiltrated all of Poland, turning gentile Poles more and more hostile toward their Jewish countrymen. Here and there Jews were beaten up, and the atmosphere in Jewish communities was gloom-and-doom. My parents tried to keep this atmosphere from their children.

"In September 1939 the Germans marched into Poland, and with their usual efficiency, soon had Kolbuszowa and the environs under German occupation. The Nuremberg Laws were implemented in stages, restricting every facet of Jewish lives. School was out of the question for me. The Wang holdings were confiscated, although father continued to work there in his former capacity. But his supervisor was German. Sensing instability, father bought gold coins, American dollars, and English cloth as a hedge against inflation, or in case he needed something to exchange for food in the future. When the German occupiers found out we were well off, however, they paid us several visits. They beat my father, ransacked the house, and confiscated stuff that was not well hidden. For a long time, we lived in fear of these visits.

"At the end of 1940 my family was ordered to leave our house. We had to move into a two room apartment with a local peasant family. Ironically, our house was taken over by Germans. 'Wise Pinia' had taken precautions, however, and smuggled our best valuables out of the house. He left them for safekeeping with a nearby friend, Pastula. At the time, it seemed like a clever ruse to cheat the Germans. In fact, with all the dangers my father faced over the next four years, it was this act of deception that sealed his death warrant.

"The noose continued to tighten. Six months later, the Germans

ordered all Jews evacuated from the villages to nearby towns. My parents had to choose nearby Kolbuszowa or Glogow, some distance away. The Gestapo chief in Kolbuszowa was known for his cruelty, so they opted for Glogow, hoping that the SS authorities there would be more lenient.

"It made little difference, however, which torturer we chose. The German commanders kept narrowing the circle, moving inexorably toward the final solution. We lived for a few weeks in a small, two-room apartment, before we were ordered to a ghetto within Glogow. We shared a single room with another family, the Klugers. A few weeks later the perimeter narrowed, and we shared a room with two other families. The crowded conditions and constant arguments were unbearable, and Pinia had to report daily for forced labor, sometimes under brutal conditions. After two months of this enforced communal living, a rumor swept the ghetto that the Glogow Jews would soon be liquidated.

"My father still had a few valuables that had escaped German detection, and he knew he had to escape with his family from the deathtrap of Glogow. He made contact with Orzech, a good gentile friend who had worked for him as a fisherman in Poremby Kupienskie. Orzech promised to give us shelter until father could find another accommodation. The agreement was for me to go over first, and my parents to join me the following day.

"Orzech's agreement took courage. Any contact with a Jew was punishable by death to all concerned. I went over to Orzech and was relieved when I saw my family walk into his yard on the following day. Father was familiar with the neighboring forests, having supervised the estate, and went out to check if there was a possibility of refuge there. He felt guilty risking Orzech's family's lives, and wanted an alternative solution. All he could see to do was to spend days in the forests and nights with Orzech.

"At first we slept in his house, and within a week or two, in his barn. After several weeks, Orzech told father that we could no longer stay overnight at his barn. He was scared and could no longer risk the lives of his wife and children. We could well understand his fears, but we were devastated.

"From that moment on we took up full-time residence in the forest. Some nights father would sneak in to Orzech to buy food—he kept some valuables with Orzech—and two other gentile friends would sometimes sell us food, too. On some occasions, Orzech would deliver bread and other necessities to us in the woods at a prearranged place. Usually, he knew our location. On one of these trips he reported some news that made the forest seem not so

bad. Only one week after our departure, the Glogow ghetto was 'liquidated.' One benefit from staying with Orzech was the lesson I learned from his daughter Stasia, who was just my age. She taught me the Christian prayers in Polish, just in case.

"If any prayers have ever saved a life, those saved mine.

"Staying in the woods meant more than just being exposed to the elements. Marauders of various descriptions made forays into the woods to hunt Jews. Some wanted their belongings, and others wanted their lives. Some Jews dug underground bunkers and left them camouflaged and inconspicuous. Oftentimes we lived in a rough hut built of logs and brush, and sometimes we lived like animals in a bunker dug right in the dirt.

"Some of the Jew hunters were themselves fugitives from the law. Just as dangerous, however, was the 'Polish Home Army,' units of Poles whose purpose was supposed to be fighting Germans. It was easier, and more lucrative, however, to attack defenseless Jews than well-armed Germans. Besides, they hated Jews and Germans equally.

"Sometimes nearby peasants would join in the hunt, attacking Jews with scythes, sickles, or axes. At first they merely robbed them, and, later, when they had nothing left, would sometimes hack men, women, or children to death. Other times they delivered them to the Gestapo to collect a bounty of sugar or salt. So much for each Jew. My life could easily have been traded for a condiment.

"This raid left us with nothing but one pot that mother used to cook potatoes on a small flame in the woods. It doubled as a place to boil our clothing to hold down our lice infestation. We were left with just one set of clothing—on our backs. The conditions were terrible, but what was the alternative? Jews who had escaped liquidation in the ghetto kept joining us, and my father, who was most familiar with the local forests, was chosen leader. At one point we were over one hundred Jews, men, women, and children, including a few newborn babies, all scattered in the large forest. We lived like animals, our numbers fluctuating, usually downward, our lives unbearable.

"One chilly fall day in 1942, my parents took me aside. 'Child, we have heard that some Jewish youngsters live on the outside as gentiles. Do you think you could do it?' I was stunned at the notion of being separated from my parents. I was only eleven and a half, and the past two years I had looked to my mother and father as my only protection from the hostile world in which I found myself. 'Here in the woods life is getting harder each day,' argued my

father, 'We, your mother and I, have no choice. And Chavcia is only eight. . . . What do you think?'

"The idea frightened me, but I understood my peril. My parents were right—I was mature, blond, and didn't look Jewish. Why, I even knew the Christian prayers. I might have a good chance to survive. My parents concocted a story for me, and implored me to stick to it no matter what. They told me that from now on I must not think Jewish, not act Jewish in any way, not even dream Jewish. Finally, they took me to the edge of the woods to bid me good-bye. We wept, kissed, and hugged for a long time. My little sister Chavcia cried uncontrollably and would not let go of my hand.

"My parents visibly tried to control their emotions to make my departure a little less painful. After a while they said to me, 'Go, Child, and don't look back. May God watch over you. Don't look back, just keep on walking.' I did as I was told.

"Tears ran down my cheeks, and I wondered if I would ever see my dear ones again. I also wondered as I walked down that desolate country road where I would go. As I completed the first few kilometers, a new thought assailed me: 'What if someone recognized me?!' Soon I reached a village and saw some huts in the background. Four people were digging potatoes in the fields. I walked over and asked a woman if anyone needed a girl to take care of children. Her dialect was so thick, I could barely understand her. The younger man of the group, however, spoke clear Polish. While his family glanced me over, he asked about my whereabouts.

"Using the story my parents concocted, I told them I lived several villages away. My father fought in the Polish army, I told them, and was most likely killed, since we hadn't heard from him in a long time. My widowed mother had five young children of whom I was the oldest. Since she couldn't support all of us, she had sent me out to find some type of work. I told them I was good with children. I must have sounded convincing, because they didn't seem to doubt my story.

"They obviously didn't suspect my Jewishness. My features could well have been gentile, and I spoke fluent Polish. In many Jewish homes, only Yiddish was used, but in my home, Yiddish or Hebrew were only used when my parents didn't want the help to know what they were saying.

"The woman said 'yes' in response to my question. 'We have relatives in Rzeszow who need help with two little children. They should be here in two weeks and we are sure they will hire you. In the meantime, if you wish, you may stay with us and help out

in the fields.' I agreed to the arrangement. I gave my name as Stasia Orzech. My parents told me to use this name as a final precaution—in case of an unforeseen problem, they could count on Orzech for whatever cooperation he could give.

"For two weeks I stayed and worked the fields, using my familiarity with farm work to make me seem more like a peasant girl. Then the relatives from Rzeszow arrived, the Depas, a dour couple with two children. The man was missing a leg. I thought they liked my appearance. Despite the farm work, I kept clean and neat, even keeping my shoes shined. My gold blond hair was in braids, and, no matter what, I kept a sunny smile on my face. The Depas asked few questions and took me home with them to Rzeszow.

"It was soon clear to me why the Depas wanted cheap help. They were not well-to-do people. Mr. Depa had been a train conductor, and during the previous winter he had fallen off the slippery steps of a train and broken his leg. It was a bad fracture; gangrene had set in, and it had to be amputated. As a result, Mrs. Depa had to become the bread winner in the family. She eked out a meager living going to flea markets where she bought and sold used clothing.

"My life was hard with the Depas. I would get up at 5:30 in the morning and help with the domestic chores before the children got up, and Mrs. Depa went to the markets. Their apartment had two small rooms and a kitchen. My bed was in the kitchen. I did the shopping, standing in the long food and milk lines. Every possible household chore fell to me. Much of the time I didn't go to bed until 2:00 in the morning. For that long a day, I was paid not a penny, just meager food and a corner in a room. To give them their due, the Depas ate the same food I ate: they could not afford better.

"Once in a while Mrs. Depa would present me with an old blouse or dress that she picked up at the flea market for me. At bedtime, I said the Christian prayers with the children and went to church on Sundays. All the while I lived in fear, especially when I had to go out. Someone from the Kolbuszowa area might spot me. People from my village and from Kolbuszowa sometimes came to the 'big city' to do some major shopping.

"I wasn't the only Jew living as a gentile. Nearby in a small bungalow, a mother and son lived a solitary life style. I suspected they were Jews on gentile papers. I sensed they suspected the same about me. Whenever our eyes would meet, they would send a friendly 'we know' smile in my direction. We never stopped to speak to one another, so as not to arouse suspicion—just a smile or nod, from one fugitive to another.

"One time, in the market place, I spotted a Jewish girl from a village not far from ours. A dark-complexioned girl with black hair and brown eyes, she didn't have what was now commonly called 'a good appearance,' but somehow she had convinced people she was a Christian. She recognized me, too. We exchanged brief conversation and she told me that she worked for a local lawyer as a housekeeper. She gave me the address and asked me to visit. 'My only time off is Sunday afternoon,' I told her. 'Fine,' she replied, 'Sunday afternoon my bosses are never home.' We met in her place on the following Sunday, and she treated me to things I had not eaten since the Germans had thrown us out of our home.

"Buttered white bread, topped off with fried onions or bacon drippings. Sugar-sweetened hot water. Milk. Luxuries I could only dream about at the Depa's, where what little milk we could get with rationing coupons was saved for the children and where saccarine was substituted for sugar. From then on we met every Sunday, always 'feasting,' and sharing our experiences, memories, and especially our nagging worries about our families. Were they still alive? Rather than meet in the street, where we might be recognized, we would only speak very briefly in the marketplace to make plans. One day she didn't show up. I never saw her again. Given her complexion, I had always been worried for her. Most likely she was caught in the net of bounty hunters or informers who roamed the streets of Rzeszow.

"About five or six months into my stay with the Depas, I asked for the time off to visit my family. I said that I would return in three days. They agreed. I started out early in the morning and walked all day. By evening I reached the Orzech's house. They were friendly and told me that my parents were alive. They offered to take me to the woods to meet them. Orzech knew their constantly changing locations because they bought food from him. I was elated that my family was alive and was filled with happy anticipation as Orzech and I walked a kilometer or so into the woods. Then I saw my parents, and my heart sank.

"They looked haggard and profoundly sad. My father was unshaven, his face gaunt and grim. My mother, though only in her early thirties, looked like an old woman. She was on the verge of tears. My sister Chavcia was nowhere in sight.

"'Where's Chavcia?' was my first question. My parents told me her story.

"About two months after I left the woods, there was a large, well-organized raid by a group of local peasants. Everyone ran in different directions to avoid being hacked to death. Following the

raid, the survivors straggled back to find each other. To my parent's horror, they couldn't find Chavcia.

"Apparently she had run with Aunt Gita, who was pregnant and who held on to an eighteen-month-old child. During the raid they lost their sense of direction and came out suddenly to a trail in the woods. Peasants passing by on a wagon saw them and shouted 'Jews.' They forced them to get on the wagon and drove straight to the Gestapo headquarters. There was a bounty, of course.

"For some reason the Gestapo didn't shoot them instantly but put them in the cellar at the local police station. This is how we found out their fate—Cousin Ely happened to work at a nearby forced labor commando, and he found out their whereabouts. When he had a chance, he sneaked them some bits of food.

"'Don't risk your life,' Chavcia told him through the tiny window to the basement. 'We are as good as dead already. If they catch you, they will shoot you.' This is from a little girl barely nine years old.

"After a week in the cellar, the Gestapo took them out to be shot. The Gestapo officer ordered a German soldier to shoot them, but he refused. 'You may shoot me if you wish, but I will not shoot them.' I guess shooting two young children and a pregnant woman was too much for him. This small act of decency did no good. The officer drew his gun, and shot the three of them. The soldier was taken into custody. Another raid soon followed where sixteen of my parents' friends and relatives were hacked to death. One woman had her skull split in two.

"I was horrified at the news, and completely heartbroken. 'I'm not going back,' I told my parents repeatedly. Life no longer made sense to me, and I had no desire to go on living. Whatever my parents' fate would be, I wanted to share it.

"My parents were more pragmatic. It was winter, they argued, and life in the woods was unbearable. First there was the constant, bone-chilling cold. Then the rain came and soaked everyone in the bunker, and there was no means to get dry. Snow was worse, for then they feared to come out from their camouflaged hiding places and make footprints, a dead give-away to raiding parties. At such times they were confined to the bunker, starved and freezing, feeling the melting snow seep into the bunker and soak their clothing. At night their clothes would freeze stiff like boards.

"My parents even enlisted Orzech and Stasia's help to persuade me to go back. 'There is little hope for us, Child,' they would say, 'but you will survive. We have always felt this.' Reluctantly, and with terrible misgivings, I finally agreed to leave. The last night I stayed in the woods, savoring every moment I could be with my

parents. Not many words were exchanged between us. Just many tears and tight embraces.

"The road back to Rzeszow was a long one, filled with images in my mind of my family's suffering. I walked the whole day, refusing rides so that no one would question who I was. I kept visualizing Chavcia's execution over and over again. When I got back to the Depas, they asked me if I had a good time.

"Of course I answered 'Yes' and went on with the hard, dull routine life. Yes, my mother was managing. Yes, it was good to see my siblings. Their superficial questions didn't show any suspicions. It was lucky they didn't suspect—throughout my stay I had heard the Depas make derogatory, even hateful remarks about Jews. Newspaper stories about Jews being found in secret bunkers filled them with delight. Mrs. Depa was especially anti-Semitic, although neither of them seemed to have any sympathy for the Jewish plight. Mrs. Depa's favorite saying was 'They get what they deserve, the Christ-killers.'

"About two months passed. The last encounter with my parents was always vividly before my eyes. I was full of anxiety for them and couldn't get my mother's face out of my mind. How terribly she had aged. How could either one of them possibly survive under such severe conditions, surrounded by so much hate. Or did they survive? Finally I asked again for three days' leave and was granted permission.

"It was late afternoon when I knocked on Orzech's door. I was dressed inconspicuously in my peasant costume, and my heart seemed to be beating louder than my knock. I stared at Orzech face, trying to read something in it. He understood immediately. 'Your parents are still alive.'

"We didn't have to go far to find them this time. It was the middle of winter, and another peasant had let my parents stay in his barn. It was cold outside, and this former employee of Pinia's must have felt some pity for them. 'Remember,' he told them, 'You came in here without my knowledge or permission. I knew nothing about it.'

"My parents looked even worse than my first visit. Both were dressed in rags. Father's face was more gaunt, and both my parents looked tired and resigned. Living in the woods like hunted animals had taken its toll. Food was difficult to get, and they often went hungry. In the summer time at least they could steal some potatoes in the fields to sustain their lives. But they were happy to see me, and we hugged in a three-way embrace. In hushed voices we exchanged all kinds of information. 'Where were their good

clothes?' I asked. It turned out that my mother's woolen skirt was torn off her body by a peasant out hunting Jews, leaving her to face the winter in only a slip. Mrs. Orzech had given her the old torn skirt she had on now.

"Still, my father was cautiously optimistic. He had been able to get underground newspapers several times and found out that the Germans were suffering reverses on all fronts. Pinia was hopeful that the war would soon be over. Both mother and father urged me to be on my toes all the time. "Don't show any emotion in the presence of the Depas, no matter what they say about Jews,' they begged. 'Please, be very careful. Don't give yourself away. Who knows—we may soon be reunited as a family.'

"Late into the night we stayed in the barn, talking. They asked me repeatedly about the Depas: Did I get enough to eat? How did I cope with the workload? They, in turn, filled me in on who was still alive and who had been killed in the latest raids. In the morning, the peasant woman brought in some food. My parents savored every morsel of it and made sure I ate enough to hold me over till the evening meal. We stayed all day and night in the relative safety and comfort of the barn.

"My parents kept on touching me to be sure I was real. The morning of the third day, I left. The parting, for whatever reason, was especially emotional. They would not let go of me, and kept on hugging and kissing me, as if they felt it was the last time. Notwithstanding my father's overt optimistic assessment of the situation, they intuitively sensed calamity. 'Too many peasants still suspect we are alive.' said Pinia. He seemed worried.

"'The next time you come,' added my mother, 'Go to a woman named Preneta.' Orzech, it seemed, had told them to sever all contact with him. He wanted to help, but some villagers suspected that my parents were hiding in his place and he could no longer jeopardize his family. 'Mrs. Preneta and her daughter Helcia have been helpful,' said my mother. 'They will know where we are.'

"The long walk back to the Depas was filled with ambivalence. I was terrified for my parents, suffering day to day with danger always lurking behind every bush and tree. On the other hand, I was heartened by the newspaper stories my father had mentioned. My parents had always been liked in the village; my father knew the terrain and somehow I hoped that they would make it. Maybe God wants them to survive for a special reason, I thought. They had been so deft until now in cheating death.

"I was still lost in thought when I reached the Depas. While I ate a little food, Mrs. Depa casually mentioned that I would be

going awhile to her sister's house in Przemysl. Her sister was about to give birth, and I would help her out on a 'loan' basis. It didn't make a difference to me where I worked, except that Przemysl was far away from my village, certainly not within walking distance. I would not see my parents for a long time.

"Of course I had no choice in the matter. I no longer remember the sister's family name. All in all, it was more of the same: long hours, hard work, sparse meals, long lines for spartan rations. In a way, I was much safer here, for Przemysl was a large city, far distant from my village. My chances of being spotted by someone I knew were slight. It was a long eight or nine months for me, however, until the Depas wanted me back. A few days after I returned to Rzeszow, I told the Depas that I was missing my family a lot and asked for permission to go and see them.

"The long walk was the same. I remembered my parents' advice and refused several chances to hitchhike. I went straight to the Prenetas. As soon as I walked in, I could read in their eyes that something was amiss. They had difficulty facing me. When I asked for my parents, they didn't give me a straightforward answer but beat around the bush with evasive talk. They had not expected me and were not prepared to 'handle' me.

"I kept on insisting that they tell me the truth. After some hedging, they reluctantly, almost apologetically, told me that my parents were no longer alive. I was horrified and started screaming from shock. The two women hugged and caressed me. They let me cry in their arms for a while. Then I heard the story of my parents' fate.

"Wise Pinia's fatal mistake had been made several years before, when he entrusted some valuables with his 'good' friend Pastula, for temporary safekeeping. Now that the war was nearing the end, Pastula was worried that Feiga and Pinia would try to reclaim their belongings, and he was not about to part with the 'nice' furniture, silver candelabra, and other valuables. So Pastula, under the guise of concern, kept tabs on my parents' daily whereabouts. One cold night, when they were staying in a neighbor's barn, he reported their location to the Gestapo.

"It had been rumored that Pinia carried a gun, so Pastula and the Germans approached the barn cautiously. My father was unaware of the raid and stood in the barn near the door, smoking a cigarette. Probably he was trying to keep the lit cigarette away from the hay and other flammables in the barn. The cigarette betrayed him to the Gestapo—they ordered him to come out with his hands raised above his head.

"When they asked him for Feiga, he replied that she was no

longer alive, hoping that she would remain hidden in the hay. It didn't work. When she heard her husband being apprehended, she voluntarily came out. She had always been so close to my father, and their bond must have been even stronger now having shared so many hardships. I suppose she did not want to go on living without her husband. They were both shot on the spot."

2

Origins

Edith's story, of course, does not end in that barn in Poremby Kupienskie where her parents were shot in exchange for some furniture. But Pinia and Feiga had nearly made it to the end of the war, and it was not much longer before Edith was able to leave the Depas, admitting her Jewishness. The story of how she got out of Poland to where I met her in America will be told later in my book. The time has come for me to take my own pen (and courage) in hand. It is time for me to dig into my own roots and to reconstruct my life in the Polish city of Tarnow. It is time to face the events that inevitably led myself and my two brothers to the German camps. The story begins with my parents' marriage.

Sumer and Chana, our parents, met under the canopy, or "Chuppa" as you would say in Hebrew. My maternal grandfather Srul Gross went on a search for a son-in-law for his comely seventeen-year-old daughter. At a Yeshiva in Lublin he found a brilliant student, Sumer, a man totally devoted to religious studies and completely unfit to function in the modern world. The fact that Sumer was hardly qualified to earn a living, even the fact that he essentially was still living in the Middle Ages, apparently didn't matter to Srul. He met my grandfather's criteria for a son-in-law. Chana's criteria for a husband were of no importance.

Srul's wishes were the ultimate law in that society, and Chana had no recourse. She didn't like her future husband, a man eight years her senior. She told her father so, but to no avail. "In time you will learn to love him," said Srul. That was that. Chana never did learn to love him.

Srul was in the timber business and reasonably well-off by Polish standards. He gave Chana a decent dowry, which Sumer invested in a bakery. The bakery didn't prosper, and Sumer soon lost it. You see, my father-to-be's mind was not on "trivial" things like making a living.

His mind was on learning Torah. With his father-in-law's assist-

ance, he either built or bought another bakery, but that, too, ended in failure. Having little other choice, he took a job as a baker, although at that time it was almost unthinkable for a respectable religious Jew to be in a trade. He was not any more successful in that endeavor, for he could never concentrate on work or "trifling" things like making money. Sumer couldn't wait to get home and read his holy books. He had complete faith that God would always help; his bread was always either burned or raw.

According to my calculations, my parents were married in 1906 or 1907. They lived in Rudnik, a town in the southern Polish province of Galicia. In 1909, a daughter, Keila, was born, followed by a son, Simon, in 1911. A second son, Nusen, came along in August 1914. A common sentiment in those days was that "each child brings its own luck," but it was hardly true for Nusen. World War I had broken out a month before his birth, and the town of Rudnik was entirely destroyed in a fierce battle.

Having no choice but to move elsewhere, Sumer and Chana picked up their family and moved to Tarnow, a much larger town in Galicia. By Polish standards, the forty-five thousand inhabitants of Tarnow made it a city. They arrived penniless, and their initial encounter with Tarnow was a disaster. In Rudnik, everyone was intimate—in Tarnow they knew nobody. Father couldn't find work, so the family went hungry. Nusen got scurvy, and the situation was desperate. The neighbors had no inkling of our problems.

The black market was rampant in Poland during World War I, and a next-door neighbor was involved. One day she knocked on our door and asked us to store a package of sorts in our closet, never revealing the contents. The package held two small bank bags. Probably her reputation as a black marketeer made her nervous to keep them in her own apartment. My family had had no food for several days, and the three children were famished. Out of curiosity, Chana checked the bags and discovered gold coins in them. You can imagine her temptation with three starving children.

My father, who was basically responsible for the family's plight, was now horrified by my mother's suggestion of stealing a single coin. He instantly found the neighbor and ordered her to remove the source of such terrible temptation. Luckily, the woman asked why, and when she found out our situation, she brought my family its first food in two days, which my parents reluctantly accepted.

The neighbor knew many people in Tarnow and arranged for my father to get a job in a bakery. For a while there was bread on the table. Once again, however, the Torah took precedence over employment, and my father was out of work. Chana, realizing that

she had little choice, set out to become the bread winner in the family.

Probably to everyone in the family's surprise, we quickly became affluent. Mother made some connections and was soon a prosperous flour dealer, moving from a small to a broader scale. She had two partners, Reinholt and Schwamenfeld. Flour is a critical commodity in war time, and Chana's business acumen helped them build the business until they were leasing a good-sized flour mill, the second largest in Tarnow.

Inflation ran unchecked, currency fluctuated on a daily basis, so mother kept her equity in grain and flour, all stored at the mill. Unfortunately, she didn't have the sophistication to invest in real estate or other assets, and she knew nothing about insurance. To my knowledge the only insurance company operating in Poland was Lloyd's of London, and they had few agents, and offices only in the largest cities. My mother carried no insurance, an oversight that turned into financial ruin. The night before the fire, mother was supposed to put down a deposit on a good-sized apartment house, but she somehow neglected to do it, something she would always brood about.

A fire broke out in the mill one night, and it burned to the ground. The owners of the mill carried insurance, but it didn't cover the grain and flour. Overnight mother went from rich to poor. The war was ending, inflation was coming under control, and mother's flour business was unnecessary. To make matters worse, about that time mother had contracted either typhus or typhoid, which left her with a lifelong heart condition.

In the same period, mother gave birth to another child, a boy named Reeven. At the age of two this fourth child contracted an illness and died. Probably to fill the void caused by his passing, my parents decided to have another baby. That child was me. I was born in 1922.

The town I was born into, Tarnow, was a provincial city, one of the leading clothing manufacturing towns in Poland. Poverty was commonplace. The houses ranged from one story to five, and the Szczepanski Building, our "skyscraper" of seven stories, had the only elevator in town. It was Tarnow's Empire State Building.

A single trolley track ran the length of the city, about three kilometers. By and large Jews and gentiles lived in separate sections and almost never socialized. Their only real contact was in the business district where Jews owned many small retail stores. On Saturdays Walowa and Krakowska Streets at the heart of the business district became promenades for Jews. Sundays the Chris-

tians strolled the same streets, the boys and girls displaying their finery and exchanging flirtatious glances.

We lived in an old one-story, seven-family house in a lower middle-class section of the city. We had no electricity and shared outdoor toilet facilities with six other families. We paid our rent quarterly and were allowed a small vegetable and flower garden adjacent to our apartment. In the wintertime we hung our wash in the attic where it was sometimes stolen. Theft in Tarnow was as common as poverty.

Drunkenness was common among the Poles, and I personally knew men that drank their entire paychecks and beat their wives when they complained. Polish coal porters were notorious in this regard, and they spent Fridays, the pay day, drinking and quarreling in bars. They liked to fight with knives. Often they doubled as guards or strongmen when a job called for it.

As in all of Poland, Tarnow had pronounced class distinctions, but it was sometimes a bit difficult to find where you belonged. Professionals were on the top, with business people a class below, depending on the size of the business. Tradesmen had several separate categories with porters at the bottom, one rung above beggars. Jewish porters operated in the business district and congregated mostly where the Lwowska Street and the Market Place met. As poor as they were, they had a code of ethics they adhered to strictly. Regardless of the degree of their religious commitment, they never worked on the Sabbath. On Saturdays, you could see a long row of push carts lined up idly on Lwowska Street. They were waiting for the Jewish establishments to reopen on the evening after the Sabbath. Some of the porters were muscular and burly, but regardless of size, most were deceptively strong and could negotiate tremendous burdens. The porters, therefore, were the vangard of our protection against sporadic physical attacks on the Jewish community.

Like most cities in Poland, Tarnow had its red light district where the streets filled with prostitutes in the evenings. Mostly, they were young peasant girls driven by extreme poverty to sell their bodies in the city. At night you could be mugged in this area of the city, but, in fact, it was never safe for a Jew in any gentile area at night. There were also several Jewish prostitutes who likewise were driven to the world's oldest profession by extreme poverty. The one exception was a girl from a relatively well-to-do home, who engaged in prostitution to get even with her parents for favoring a younger sister of hers. They owned a bakery in our neighborhood so we were familiar with their shame.

Social security or welfare didn't exist. In the Jewish quarter, the wealthier families taxed themselves to help the poor. On Thursdays, swarms of Jewish beggars from the dilapidated barrack district where they barely survived would descend on the city and invade every household and business. They were loosely organized and set a minimum of two groshen (pennies) per stop. If you gave less, they cursed, argued and slammed doors. The Kehilla (the Jewish administration) gave them some subsidies on an ongoing basis, but hardly enough to sustain their lives.

The Jewish community was concentrated predominantly in the poorer and also in the business sections of the city. Only about 10 percent on the richer Jews lived in the more elegant gentile areas of Tarnow. The tradesmen and poorer Jews lived mostly in a section called Grabowka—usually in a one- or two-room apartment without indoor plumbing or electricity. These Jews were by-and-large not strictly religious and formed about half of the Jewish population. The Orthodox formed the other half and belonged in most cases to several sects, each one with a better-known rabbi at the helm. This group were mostly small store owners where every variety of merchandise was dispensed. One store catered to the peasants and sold saddles and whips—it had a long poem in peasant language posted by the door to entice customers to enter. All Jewish stores, without exception, were closed on Saturdays and had to remain closed on Sundays by law. Some, however, would let you in through a rear door. When caught by a policeman, the transgressor would slip him a small bribe. The same policeman would come back every week to "his territory." This bribe was considered a normal business expense.

For centuries Tarnow had had a Jewish presence; however, until the turn of the century it was a sleepy provincial town. During the early decades of the century, a large influx of Jews turned it into a relatively vibrant city. Ninety-five percent of small businesses as well as most industry belonged to Jews, who employed both gentiles and Jews in their establishments. It's ironic that the richest man in Tarnow, Count Sanguszko, who without a doubt was wealthier than all the Jews in the city combined, didn't invest his inherited wealth in Poland at all—his investments were elsewhere in Europe, mostly in England. Everyone knew.

One of the largest Jewish establishments was an ultramodern flour mill. It belonged to Mr. Szancer, and school children visited it on trips to admire the modern wonders of industry. I remember the giant sifts going rhythmically all day long. The machinery in this mill was imported from Austria and Germany.

Just like any other people, we had a number of abnormal types, some of whom engaged in antisocial activities. There was, for instance, a man on Lwowska Street who had a candy kiosk. He was always called by his first name, Leib Joel, and he would use candy to lure young boys to engage in sex acts in the back of his oversized kiosk. Eventually his perversions came to the attention of the Polish authorities who arrested him and then played the crimes to the hilt, much to the embarrassment of the Jewish community.

Another case of considerable shame to Jews was a young couple, a man with a red beard and his attractive red-headed wife. They operated a "Cheder," a religious school, for teenage boys. Thirty-two boys from well-off families formed the student body. My best friend Chamek Hammer bragged to me that he and other boys in the Cheder (religious school) had regular sex with the redheaded wife who was in her twenties. I didn't believe him. Eventually one of the younger boys, not a participant, blew the lid off that secret. It was one of the biggest scandals ever to occur in our community, so embarrassing that it was hushed up to avoid mention in the papers. The couple were forced to give up teaching forever, and were totally ostracized in the community.

Overall, however, notwithstanding the abject poverty, in the greater Jewish quarter the crime rate was miniscule. I knew of one Jewish boy whose entire family were porters and lived in the very poorest section of Tarnow called "the Barracks." He was a sort of juvenile delinquent, known to carry a knife and get into fights. The family were pariahs in the quarter and were avoided like the plague. The one Jewish drunkard was the butt of everyone's jokes and had no standing in the community. Heavy drinking was not acceptable among Tarnow Jews.

Poland had very few mental institutions, and Jews had little chance to get admitted to one. As a consequence a number of "crazies" roamed the streets. They were usually followed by youngsters who would cruelly call them names, make fun, and sometimes throw stones at them. One, Srulek, turned half-wit after his father hit him on the head with a board for disobeying him. The father threw Srulek out of his house. This short, chubby boy always had a smile on his red cheeks, but he frequently accosted young girls and asked them to have sex with him. He was totally harmless, really, and occasionally knocked on our door to ask for a piece of bread. He was one of the victims of Lieb Joel and also the one to blow the whistle on that child molester.

Another—"Long Srul"—never uttered a word. Summer and winter he would run barefoot through the city streets and no one knew

where he slept or how he survived. One mental defective was from an affluent family, an engineer who lost his mind when he couldn't find a job. We called him "Koniki-Byki," a meaningless word invented by kids, probably because the man did nothing but talk nonsense. He was clean, good-natured, and nonviolent. Youngsters would form circles around him and entertain themselves at his expense.

There were two half-crazy sisters, spinsters, who would stuff their chests with rags to enlarge their busts. Boys would occasionally pull out those rags in the middle of the street, while the sisters screamed. There were many others with various degrees of mental incapacitation. Some were violent and had to be avoided, including a twosome of short women dressed in rags. Both looked like tiny scarecrows and carried pots. If they happened to arrive at dinnertime (noon), they always asked for soup. We never invited them in, because they were dirty and lice-infested. When children disobeyed their parents, they would be threatened that Chanaly or Dasaly, as they were called, would stuff them into their big, dirty bags. Many times I saw these two women in my nightmares.

Like elsewhere in Poland, and around the world, we had a number of people in chronically bad health. Facilities for them were extremely limited in Poland. Tuberculosis was prevalent and incurable. The sick mingled with, and infected, unsuspecting people. A few lucky ones gained admittance to the Jewish hospital in Tarnow which was better equipped and more caring than the larger but impersonal city hospital. The Jewish hospital admitted Jews and gentiles alike in order to create good-will toward the Jewish community. Polish peasants with tuberculosis were the largest part of the admittees to the city hospital, brought in on Fridays by horse and wagon. They would leave the hospital after a few weeks—some dead, some alive, but none cured.

Friday was marketing day when peasants from neighboring villages brought vegetables, fowl, eggs, and firewood to the central markets. Haggling was the rule, and it was a noisy business. At the center of the city was a beautiful cathedral that was always well attended on Sundays. When the gentiles returned from church, it was safer for the Jewish community to remain unseen. The least one could expect from that crowd was an angry, insulting remark or a hateful look.

Our next-door neighbor was Mrs. Hollander, a widow with three daughters, two of whom had already emigrated to Cairo and Paris, respectively. She received both money and packages from them and lived quite well on these subsidies. She and her remaining

daughter Ryvka took a strong liking to me and took over a great deal of my care. Mother was in ill health, the duties of a household in those days were overwhelming, and she welcomed the relief. I called Mrs. Hollander "Bubba" (grandmother), and she certainly acted like a bubba.

My real maternal grandmother passed away when I was less than two, and my only recollection is of a short woman with a kerchief on her head. Late in her life she disappeared one day and was found later a kilometer away in the shallow Wontok river. The community were certain that the devil had a hand in the episode, but it was more likely Alzheimer's disease. Her husband Srul, my grandfather, outlived her by two years.

Two of Srul's sons, my uncles David and Max, lived in America and were able to send $40 a month to him. This princely sum not only supported my grandfather but allowed him to be well known enough for his charity to have one of the largest funerals in the town's memory. He was eighty-four in 1926 when a stroke killed him, and I still remember the candles at his bedside when he was laid out.

I have no memory of my paternal grandparents, probably because mother was not overly fond of father to begin with and wanted nothing to do with his family. Mother was only five feet two inches tall, but she had the same dominant personality of her father, Srul, and she ruled the roost. When her brother David returned for a visit from the United States, he stayed with us and pushed my father even further in the background. My mother must have envied David, because he ran away to America to escape a bad marriage that Srul had arranged for him. In America he could get a divorce. Father abhorred David's presence, but he was allowed no say in the matter.

I did know my Uncle Benjamin, a powerfully built man who was rumored to have eaten an entire goose and a kilogram of bread in one sitting. Like his father Srul, he was a forester, buying forests for a French consortium. He could estimate the lumber yield of any given forest. He looked and sounded like the folksinger Burl Ives, and on high holidays he was often chosen to be a cantor. Like mother, he had been forced to marry a spouse he didn't love, a rabbi's daughter a few years his senior who was not pretty. Sometimes he would leave her and live with us for weeks at a time, to father's great displeasure.

Mother's sister Aunt Rosie lived in Grybow, a town sixty kilometers away. She used to visit us once a month while shopping for piece-good supplies in Tarnow; my family loved her visits because

she brought along chocolate. Another aunt, mother's oldest sister, was named Malka and lived with seven children in the United States. She was poor, busy, and seldom wrote.

The last uncle I remember was Mordechai, my mother's brother who lived in Lesko, another small town in Galicia. He was in the retail tobacco business and had a wife Baila who fought with mother. It seemed that Baila suspected that Srul shared some of his money from America with us, and she wanted her "share." Under her influence, Mordechai wrote us lengthy, venomous letters. In truth, we never took money from grandfather Srul.

Such was my family in 1922 when I was born. My mother's family was large and important, and my father seemed insignificant in comparison, partially because he spent so much time in study and religious observances. He never hugged or kissed us, and he seemed to feel his only paternal obligation was to be very strict at all times, and beat us for any small religious infractions. I can't forget how at the age of ten or eleven my father beat me on Passover for breaking an egg against the edge of an uncovered table, an extremely minor religious misdeed. For two or three weeks, I had trouble breathing. Mother was interested in our general well being, including our education, and rewarded us for good report cards. Father and mother argued constantly. Naturally we gravitated toward mother and shared her views toward both her own family and her husband.

3

The Clouds Gather

Poland had traditionally had a strong undercurrent of anti-Semitism. We Jews tried to be inconspicuous, to blend in with the surrounding Poles, even to the extent of speaking only Polish in public and using Polish versions of our names. My Jewish name "Wolf" became Vovek or Vilek, Nusen became Nusek or Natan, Keila became Klara. Only Shimon retained his Hebrew name, for he was a member of "Bobover Hasidim," a Hasidic sect that wore religious garb and earlocks. Since the Hasidim wouldn't attend public school, my mother hired a tutor to instruct Simon.

My uncles David and Max wanted to send us visas to come to America, but father wouldn't hear of it. He felt it would be impossible to pursue religious values there and that his family might become assimilated. My mother wanted to go and was extremely unhappy with father's decision, but his consent was necessary to emigrate. Strangely enough, I was happy with father's decision, for school had turned me into a Polish patriot. I recall having tears in my eyes whenever the national anthem was sung or played. My parents and siblings knew better about Poland, but they didn't want to discourage my naive feelings.

In January 1930 another child joined our family, a girl named Brandaly. We soon Polonized her name to Bronka. It was not a good time to add a child to the family. Mother was forty and had a heart condition. The depression had begun, and our precarious economic condition was going from bad to worse. The new baby, however, brought great cheer to the family, although Bronka was a serious child, too bright and mature for her age. It was almost as if, having been born into a troubled time, she took on its somber mood.

Both Bronka and I excelled in school. Although I spoke only Yiddish when I entered the public school, I brought home straight "A's" at the end of the first year. Bronka's teacher told mother she didn't have to attend parent/teachers conferences because her

daughter was doing so well in school. Mother, of course, was proud of her children's accomplishments, but father was indifferent. He viewed secular education as a distraction from the "real thing," i.e., religious studies.

Reading in Polish opened up new horizons for my inquiring young mind. I started to write in both prose and verse, and I would read voraciously. At the age of eleven I wrote a poem inspired by *In the Desert and Jungle,* a book by Henry Sienkiewicz. Mrs. Kozlowska, the teacher, read my lyric "Caravan" aloud in class and suggested that I send it to "Plomyczek" ("Flicker"), a nationally distributed school publication for young children. However, she drew me aside at recess, placed her hands on my shoulders, and said: "Child, in my opinion, you shouldn't sign your full name under the poem, just use your initials." I got her drift. . . . Still, I was thrilled beyond words with my great "achievement."

The teacher's remark, however, got me to thinking. In a public school, no Jewish child could miss the anti-Semitism of the other children. As I looked at society-at-large, it was clear that my devotion to Poland was not reciprocated by my fellow citizens. I felt an alien in my own homeland. Slowly, as I grew older, my patriotism evaporated.

My family, meanwhile, began to adjust to the worsening economic conditions. Natan, always a child with an enormous sense of responsibility, started his own business when he was only twelve. From clothing manufacturers he would buy scraps of material left over from the cutting of the garments on band-saw machines. The separated, assorted scraps would be sold to wholesalers. Having no overhead, Natan made a handsome profit, all of which he turned over to mother. Even with his small spending allowance, Natan earned more for the family than father.

Simon, the oldest, attended a Yeshiva, but at home he worked as a machine operator. This he did in strict secrecy, for in those days, a Yeshiva student wouldn't be caught dead in the "trades." Sister Klara, the eldest daughter, worked in the garment trade, so our family survived the hard times.

Uncle Mordedchai from Lesko sent his son Shimon to Tarnow to work for us for a while as a machine operator. Cousin Shimon soon decided that Germany offered more opportunity than Poland, and he moved to Berlin and started a prosperous pants factory. While there, he bombarded my sister Klara with love letters. Klara, an attractive girl, wasn't interested in Shimon, but did have an interest in the local, impoverished music teacher from whom she took mandolin lessons. Poland, however, was rapidly becoming

worse for Jews, and the good life of Berlin was an incentive. In short, Klara relented, and after a small wedding, she left for Germany.

Freedom Square, the location of our home in Tarnow, was converted at this time to a bus station. Mother, being opportunistic, used a loan from Klara to convert half of our large kitchen into a candy store. From then on I had to help out in the store after school and do my homework late into the night.

Every Friday after school I went to the main post office to buy stamps for our store. We carried stamps as an accommodation to our customers. I always combined that trip with shopping for tobacco supplies at a tobacco warehouse located near the Post Office. In Poland, as a government monopoly, this warehouse was the only place in town where it was sold wholesale. Both places were about one mile from our residence. Mother always gave me money for the streetcar, but sometimes I walked and used the money to buy school supplies.

When I got home, mother would check all items against a shopping list she had given me. One Friday, we found an extra one hundred stamp sheet of fifty groshen stamps. Mother handed me twenty groshen and told me to catch a trolley immediately and return the extra sheets. I was only too happy to comply. When I got to the trolley stop, the car had just pulled away. That meant at least a fifteen-minute wait.

I was very anxious to return the stamps as soon as possible, partially because it was getting late in the day. I still had to bathe and change for the Friday evening services at the Shul, so I ran with short cuts to the Post Office. I got there out of breath.

To my disappointment there was a long line of people waiting at the glass-enclosed cubicle to purchase stamps and related supplies. I had no time to stand in line, so I walked over to the cubicle, knocked on the glass door, and asked to speak to the young saleswoman. She got agitated.

"Stay in line like everyone else!" she shouted. Everyone in line echoed those sentiments—some were ready to beat me up. I was less than thirteen at the time.

When I persisted, she came out angrily, grabbed my shoulders, and shook them as hard as she could. "You Jew! You have some nerve to knock on my door when I'm so busy; what do you think, you're somebody special?! Go on line like everybody else!"

"You must listen to me! I have something important to tell you!" Then I whispered in her ear why I had come. I wanted to be discreet and not jeopardize her job.

Her anger evaporated and turned into gratitude. She embraced and kissed me repeatedly, then took me in front of the waiting people and announced: "This Jewish boy just returned to me a fifty-zloty sheet of stamps. This represents a full month of my wages."

A murmur of amazement radiated toward me in response. I felt ten feet tall.

Three weeks later, again we checked our tobacco shopping against the list, we discovered that I was given one box of Cuban cigars in place of cheaper Garcias. The price difference was one zloty, approximately eighteen cents. I wanted to run back right away to make the exchange, but Mother wouldn't let me. It was Friday late in the day; Sabbath was setting in, and mother told me to wait till the following Friday. I had no choice but to agree, however reluctantly.

Next Friday, a zloty in hand, I walked toward the clerk who took care of me the previous week. He had discovered the mistake, and before I had a chance to open my mouth, he called me "Jew Thief" in front of all the waiting customers. I tried in vain to explain myself—to tell him to check with the Post Office and find out that I was honest. But he wouldn't listen to me.

From then on, each time I would come for new supplies, he would greet me: "Here comes the Jew Thief." I had no choice but to continue doing this shopping, albeit an unpleasant chore now. There was no one else at home available on Friday afternoons.

Sometime in the spring or early summer 1933 a natural disaster smashed into Poland. Heavy rains fell for two weeks, forcing many rivers to overflow their banks. In Galicia, the Dunajec and the Biala, two rivers normally miles apart merged into a giant lake. The shallow Wontok, which cut through Tarnow, turned into a raging torrent. Hundreds of villages were under water, and many poorly constructed peasant huts simply floated away. Countless cattle and other varieties of animals drowned. The lives of the peasants became desperate, and the entire economy, already weak, suffered a setback from which it never really recovered.

Hitler had come to power in Germany in January 1933, and the disasters for our family began. Cousin Shimon was reported to the police by a disgruntled worker in his factory, and his business was confiscated on a trumped-up charge. Shimon was arrested. Klara managed to bail him out so that he could illegally escape Germany, first to Belgium, then Holland, and finally to Palestine. Klara, afraid to stay in Germany, returned to Tarnow with her son Aron and worked in the candy store.

Conditions for Jews became far worse as Nazi propaganda began

to enter Poland on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis. The Poles were fertile soil for such ideas; anti-Semitic sermons in church had been common for centuries. Besides, the vicious incitements against the Jews gave the Poles a scapegoat for their own desperate economic woes. Now Jews were fair game, on a nearly daily basis, for intimidation, beatings, and even stabbings.

In reaction to these events, I joined a Zionist youth group when I was twelve. "Akiva" was one of many such groups in Tarnow that attracted the bulk of Jewish youths who had no strict religious orthodoxy. My father, like many doctrinaire Orthodox Jews, was bitterly opposed to the Zionist philosophy of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Although he, like all other Jews, recited by rote during the Passover services, "Next year in Jerusalem," he was set in his conviction that Jews must wait for the coming of the Mosiach (Messiah) to reclaim their ancient homeland. He ordered me to quit Akiva, but having mother's and brother Natan's support, I refused to listen, especially since Akiva was a centrist and religiously oriented organization. My father's standard reply to those arguments was, "All -isms are equal." He disapproved of all of them.

Some groups were leftist and looked east, toward the Soviet Union, for salvation. There was little else to turn to for disenfranchised Jewish youth, for in these groups they found like-minded friends with similar aspirations. These affiliations were a refuge from our sad reality and filled a void in our daily existence. They could not, however, shield us from the hostile world around us.

Try to imagine a summer camp where your children had so little food that they had to forage for fruit in the nearby forest or raid the orchards of local peasants. Go further and imagine that the peasants hated your children, not only for the foolish raids, but simply because of their ethnic background. At night, guards would be posted around their tent, and occasionally peasants would shoot blindly into the camp, hoping to hit your child. And, strangest of all, imagine that your child loved every minute of it.

This was exactly my experience at the Akiva summer camp, a gathering of over three hundred Jewish youngsters in the Ukranian village of Kaclowa near the town of Grybow. Mother hadn't wanted me to go, and it took all of Natan's eloquence, plus the urging of my group leader, to gain her consent. It was an unforgettable experience, and I didn't mind the low rations, for I knew that half of the campers had to be subsidized by the organization which was always short of funds. The fact that several children were wounded from gunshots in the night just seemed to make it more of an

adventure. This feeling was fortified by camp lectures telling us that the love of Zion, and the hope of going to Palestine someday, justified these hardships and dangers.

The end for me came when some Ukrainians ambushed us on a hanging bridge across a river. The bridge was so narrow we had to cross single-file, and our attackers waited until many of us were on the long bridge before they started pelting us with stones. Where could we go? Most of my friends sustained some injuries. I wasn't on the bridge, but when mother heard what had happened, I was ordered home immediately. Heartbroken, I had no choice but to obey.

The Ukrainians formed 20 percent of the population of Poland. They hated the native Poles with a passion, which the Poles reciprocated. The only thing the two groups agreed on was how much they hated Jews, the final 10 percent of the Polish population. The constant friction among the three groups originated in a fight for their own portion of a small economic pie. The only thing they shared in common was poverty and helplessness.

Not that my life was entirely bleak. School, where I excelled and blossomed, was a refuge from my drab home life. Another new source of enjoyment was my budding romantic awareness, especially in the person of Sabka Siedlisker, a pretty brunette. While my infatuation was purely platonic, I used to shadow her every weekend, following her into the sprawling city park in the summertime. She couldn't help become aware of me, because I showed off my weight-lifting and gymnastic prowess within sight of Sabka every time I could. She and her girlfriends would giggle when they saw me trailing behind them, and several times she let me know by eye-contact that she was interested. But I didn't approach her—I was at that age when I wanted to keep a romantic halo around her.

Reality soon intruded. Sabka started to grow rapidly, and one time when I walked by her in the park, I realized that I was looking up into her face. Sabka had become four inches taller than I was.

In the summertime, after the 6:00 A.M. prayer session at the synagogue, I was free to enjoy the rest of the day with my friends. Sometimes my best pal Chamek Hammer and I took long hikes to Piaskowka, a place several kilometers outside the city limits where we could catch colorful salamanders or net monarch butterflies. Other times I would march with my Akiva scout group to Gora Marcina at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. The mountains were no more than three kilometers from Tarnow and were visible from anywhere in the city. There we would dance the Horah, sing

Hebrew songs, and listen to intriguing lectures about Israel. With other friends we would eat a hearty meal of black bread with freshly made sweet butter and sour milk at the nearby inn. In the ruins of an ancient castle on a local hill, we would yodel just to listen to our echoes. Simple pleasures, to be sure, but satisfying.

Soccer was popular in Tarnow, and I always tried to catch all the games of my favorite team "Samson," one of the four local Jewish clubs. At least as many gentile squads competed in town. If I did not have ticket money, I would climb over the fence. When the perimeter was guarded, I would peek through a crack or join my friends digging a hole under the fence. Nothing deterred me.

Some weekends, especially when it rained, I would attend one of the several sports clubs to play ping-pong. Tarnow was prominent in that game. As a matter of fact, a Jewish lad in our town, Milek Schiff (known professionally as "Gutek") was national champion five years in a row. The number three standing in Poland also belonged to a Jewish boy from Tarnow. Sokol, our "Madison Square Garden", was on several occasions the site of national and even international ping-pong competitions. I was proud to watch Gutek play against the giants of the game and win. For two years he was number three in Europe. Despite his position, exceptional good looks and uncommon intelligence, he was modest and approachable to all. He spoke seven languages and was an ardent Zionist. As soon as World War II began, he somehow escaped from Poland and made his way to Palestine where he survived the war, only to commit suicide there in 1947. No one knew why.

On rare occasions we would hike the great distance to the River Biala where we played soccer or basketball. On one Saturday excursion, someone suggested a race to the riverbank, where the winner would be the first person to hit the water. The prize was nominal, but I ran hard and hit the water first. Unfortunately, I also struck a rock, dislocated an ankle, and fainted from pain. My friends pulled me out of the river, but I couldn't stand, and it was over an hour before I could hobble home with my friends' assistance. When father saw me limp in, he offered no sympathy whatever. "God punished you for swimming on the Sabbath," was his comment.

This "punishment" didn't deter me from racing. I was dying for a bicycle, something my parents thought a foolish luxury. When a local haberdasher named Goldfarb offered a bike as a prize for a footrace among Hebrew schoolchildren, I entered the competition without their knowledge. It was a grueling course, many circles over several kilometers of cobblestones and up several levels of

stairs before we reached the finish line. I wanted that bicycle so badly, that I gave forth a superhuman effort, and I won. Or, at least, I thought I won. It turned out I had misjudged the poorly marked finish line, and the boy who had been second behind me crossed the actual finish line first. The effort I had put into the race left me so exhausted it hurt to breathe for several weeks. But the pain was nothing to my broken heart.

Poland is cold in the winter, something like Vermont or New Hampshire, so wintertime meant sledding and skating. A nearby street with a steep downgrade was perfect for a sled. I had to skate on one skate that I found in a nearby junkyard, and some winters I just used my shoes with special hobnails in the soles. They would be a poor substitute for skates in this country, but in Tarnow in the 1930s they allowed me to skate with my friends.

Every Friday night my brother Natan would leave a zloty and a half in my pants pocket so I could enjoy some of the weekend activities. On rainy weekends I would attend one of the three movie houses in Tarnow. If the films were American, and I had enough money, I would go to all three. My all-time favorite was "The Good Earth," and I also loved the Eddie Cantor films that made me laugh until my stomach hurt. My father had no knowledge of my weekend activities.

Unbeknown to me, my mother had pledged me to Aunt Rosie and Uncle Leibush's daughter, my cousin Sara. This "betrothal" was why they treated me so specially when we visited them in the summer during vacations. For a while, I wondered why I was such a favorite. Then I started to go out with another girl and didn't pay much attention to Sara. It had never dawned on me that I had any special ties to Sara. When I got back from one outing, I found Sara sobbing. My aunt let me know in subtle terms that I had better head home.

Life brought other small gratifications. Thanks to a Polish government travel promotion, one summer I had a chance to see some of the country and visit relatives I had never seen before. A letter with money or a package with American clothing would arrive from America, a very big deal for us. Natan was always close to me, and one summer he even took me on vacation in the Carpathian Mountains. We stayed in Villas, met people from throughout Poland, and made new friends.

In the summer I would tend the small garden next to our house where we grew flowers and a variety of vegetables. This activity was especially satisfying to me, and I worried one spring when a builder (Mr. Eisenberg, a shoe dealer from a nearby town of Pilsno)

started an apartment house next to us. If it blocked the sun, future gardening would be impossible. One Sunday, when there was no construction activity, I snuck into the building site and turned on the water full blast. I hoped to flood the foundation and slow the building process.

I didn't know the owner was hiding in a shack on the premises. He came out, grabbed me, beat me, and warned me never to come near his place again or he would have me arrested. I, like most Jewish youngsters, was not of a destructive bent. I just needed to vent my frustrations somehow. My parents scolded me severely, reminding me of the dangers for Jews that had arisen in the mid-1930s.

One thing that gave me most pleasure, in some strange sense, was leaving Sabbath food bundles for the poor families in the quarter. Every Friday, mother and the maid would be up by 5:00 A.M., cooking and baking for the day. By noontime, they would be done, and I would be given bundles of food to distribute. My instructions were to leave the food on the doorstep, knock to let them know I was there, then quickly walk away before they could greet me. Public assistance didn't exist in prewar Poland, and those who had a bit more felt an obligation to those less fortunate. For me, it was an extremely gratifying task.

When I turned thirteen, I became "Bar Mitzvah." Forget the elaborate affairs in contemporary America. Father and I simply took along cake and whiskey to the synagogue, and after the prayers, the entire congregation was treated. At home again, I was presented with an "Enigma" pocket watch, a gift from my watchmaker uncle from Grybow. Characteristically, I took it apart the following day, and it never ran again.

4

The Christ Killers

School was where I most felt the change in the Polish attitude toward Jews. Two large boys named Ricker and Bieniarz were members of the fascist youth organization in our school, the "Endeks." The group operated openly, intimidating, beating, and even stabbing Jewish boys. I distinctly remember Ricker and Bieniarz bragging about their "heroic" exploits, i.e., some encounter with an unfortunate Jew. They would brag in gory details about the attacks, imitating their victims pleas for mercy, much to the delight of the other boys. When one listener challenged them to "prove" their alleged bravado, they showed up the next day with blood-stained knives that they claimed had been used the night before on Jews.

The "Endeks" operated with complete impunity. Newspapers didn't bother to report such attacks, and the police invariably refused to investigate. If they did intervene, it was always on the side of the attackers, not on the side of the victims. Knowing this, I was somewhat scared when a member of Endek handed me a note. I was still a preteen, and was surprised to read that it would be "scandalous" and an "insult to the Christian race" for a Christ-killer to outshine Christian boys. If I got a straight A report card, the note continued, I would pay with my life.

At first I didn't take the note too seriously. The boy was a meek and mediocre student whose fascist connections I had never suspected. However, one member of the gang worked in the school office and saw my scores before they were given out in class. Luckily for me, my friend Itzek Goldklang heard about it. He ran breathlessly into the class where I was getting my report card and told me that two boys were waiting for me outside with butcher knives. They were going to kill me as soon as I left class. My teacher, Prazuch, told me to stay in class until he gave out all report cards, and he would take me home. Through this man's decency I got home safely.

These boys knew my life pattern, however. Two weeks later, as I worked out with my weights in the park, a group of Endek members surrounded me. One, a boy called the "Jap" because of his oriental features and because he knew karate, put on brass knuckles. "Defend yourself, Jew," he said, but before I had the chance, I was hit on the temple with the brass knuckles and fell unconscious. Sometime later I came to, lying under a park bench. It was dusk, and the park was deserted.

They had apparently kicked me when I was unconscious and I was in great pain getting up. On my forehead I could feel dried blood. As I staggered out of the park, I saw the blue uniform of a Polish policeman. Naively I walked over to him and said, "Look what they did to me!"

"Jew Boy!" He grabbed me by the shirt lapels, "Dirty swine! You have ten seconds to disappear or I'll take you in for the night!" Such was Polish justice in those days. Despite the beating, I decided to go back to the park only two weeks later. This time mother insisted that she would go with me. To her horror, I was again surrounded by several toughs, and in her presence I was beaten up severely with fists while she screamed and begged them to stop.

One phrase I heard all my life, as a synonym for anyone Jewish, was "the Christ killers." With phrases like this, thrown out every Sunday from the pulpits of Poland, it was hard to blame the Polish people for their attitudes. The sermons went on to claim that the congregation was poor because the Jews had the money that was rightfully theirs. All the Polish people had to do was look around to see that the vast majority of Jews were as impoverished as they were, but the Poles were a religious people, and the church formed their attitudes.

In reality, the church was a mouthpiece of the large landowners, the counts, and the princes—men who owned the country and bled it dry. They paid no taxes and lived lives of luxury in marble palaces while common people nearly starved. They had the priests point fingers at the Jews to divert attention from their own corruption. The bulk of the Polish people were peasants, dirt-poor farmers who often went to bed hungry. In a pre-1939 census they formed 76 percent of the Polish population, but they had no power. Illiterate and poor, these small landowners couldn't even afford fertilizers to maximize the meager yield from their plots.

Their poverty dragged down the rest of the economy, for they could buy almost nothing. Even simple items like butter, sugar, or soap—items civilized nations feel are necessities—were unreach-

able luxuries. Many peasants had tuberculosis or other diseases related to deprivation, and the mortality rate was high.

The cities offered no escape for the young, for Poland had little industry, and male children stayed home, splitting the family landholdings into ever smaller parcels. Poverty accelerated, and many daughters were sent to the cities where they were exploited as maids for a few groschen a day, but at least they could eat. You will remember during the war my wife Edith, pretending to be an impoverished peasant girl, worked eighteen-hour days for subsistence rations. It was little wonder that such a backward and miserable culture needed the Jews as scapegoats.

We employed many such girls as maids. Mother had a heart condition, and with the heavy work of household chores, we had little choice. Modern conveniences were unheard of, and the physical demands of the household meant most of our maids wore out after several months, despite the relatively good treatment in our household. Getting a new maid, however, was easy. There was a constant influx of peasant girls to the city, especially after a bad harvest, and all one had to do was call on one of the many agencies operating in Tarnow.

Fridays were market days, and the city streets were invaded by peasants in horse-drawn wagons selling their produce and buying a few basic necessities like salt or saccarine. Count Sanguszko, who lived in a castle just outside the city limits of Tarnow, came driving into town in one of his three sports cars. I think it was a Jaguar. Sanguszko came from a long line of aristocrats who at one time owned up to two thousand estates in Poland and Czarist Russia. He was the only person in the area who owned cars for pleasure.

That Friday I saw him on Lwowska Street driving through a myriad of wagons at what seemed to me a high speed. He barely paid attention to the congestion. Sanguszko probably felt he owned the place, a feeling for which he had lots of justification.

One of the horses, unaccustomed to the sight and sound of a motor vehicle, panicked and blocked Sanguszko's path. The Jaguar struck the wagon, killing the peasant and the horse. Miraculously, the peasant's wife escaped without harm.

The count took several leisurely minutes to survey the situation. First, of course, he checked his car and was relieved to find that it sustained only superficial damage. He did express his condolences to the woman, but he paid little heed to her lamenting; his demeanor was calm and detached without visible signs of remorse, like a man who has inadvertently killed a cat or a dog. In the end,

he handed the peasant woman five zlotys and drove away. Five zlotys was the equivalent of about a dollar.

There was no police report, no public outcry. The stunned onlookers shook their heads in disbelief as the count left the scene, but they knew the woman had no recourse. Sanguszko was the law unto himself. The incident, however, left a strong imprint on my impressionable young mind. I will remember it forever as a symbol of the great injustice of Polish life.

While the peasants' misery remained basically stable, the situation for Jews went from bad to worse. As usual I felt it in school, my one-time place of refuge, my haven where I escaped the realities of our dreary existence. Most of the Jewish boys in school ate only kosher foods, a custom which gave the gentile boys a new idea for a "game." They would catch a Jewish boy, hold his arms behind his back, and force a piece of lard into his mouth. A variation on the game was to urinate on the lard.

The difference between our customs and the gentiles gave continual fodder to lies about Jews. I brought my lunch from home, and even though we weren't well-to-do, I usually had enough to share with the poorest boy in the class, a Christian friend named Kobylak. He was always ravenous. One day during Passover, I offered him a matzo.

"No!" he replied, shocked. "You wouldn't expect me to eat food baked with our children's blood!" When I asked him how he came to such a bizarre idea, he told me he had it on "good authority." The priest had spoken about it on the previous Sunday.

Most of the Sunday sermons were so anti-Semitic that my friend Maciejczyk could hardly look at me on Mondays. By Tuesdays he was asking me searching and weird questions about Jews killing Christian children. Always, the sermons came back to the "Christ Killers."

I knew by that time that public high school was out of the question. There were several high schools in Tarnow, but they had only a token Jewish presence, perhaps ten children in all three schools. Not that this exclusionary policy was official, but it was still a fact. You had to be a convert to Christianity or an "Einstein" to get in.

Universities were just as bad, operating on a quota system called "Numerus clausus" or "numerus nullus." Some majors were simply closed to Jews; others had limited access. Many Jews who enrolled dropped out, discouraged by the "special" treatment. Besides the continual verbal abuse, they had to sit on separate benches where they were exposed to occasional beatings or the always popular Polish custom of slashing with knives or razors.

Jews who had enough money simply went abroad to study, mostly in Austria or Germany. Mr. Eisenberg, who built the apartment house next to ours, had two sons studying medicine in Vienna, and the rent from that building subsidized their studies there.

Despite these obstacles, I begged my mother to send me to high school. I had already missed going to middle school, an option my parents simply wouldn't hear of at the time. They had just as little use for high school, since there was not much one could do in Poland at that time with an education. Besides, the private Jewish high schools were expensive, and the Polish economic infrastructure couldn't absorb all the gentile graduates, let alone the Jews. After long haggling, the compromise was that I would attend the newly opened "Einspruchowa," the Business High School, although I had no special proclivity to business subjects. This private school was Jewish-owned and took only Jewish students.

The Einspruchowa was located outside the Jewish quarter, and a number of times I was beaten on the walk, a fact I hid from my parents so they wouldn't have an excuse to pull me out of school. In some ways the danger on the commute to school was no different from life on the weekends out of school where I would perform gymnastics in the park, often to a small audience. My exercise was gradually denied to me by Endeks who roamed the park looking for Jews to beat or slash. Sometimes they would throw them into the lake for sport.

I did well in business school, especially in the nonbusiness subjects. I became editor and publisher of the school newspaper which appeared monthly, and I contributed most of the articles and poems. One day, the district curator stopped in unexpectedly for an accreditation inspection and snooped around in every corner. The newspaper was affixed to one wall. He found one of my poems subversive and recommended in his report that the school be closed. It cost the distraught owners of the school a handsome bribe to have his recommendation reversed. I was severely reprimanded by the owners as a result. From then on, my writing was censored.

My sister Klara had been staying with us since 1933 with her child Aron, but in 1936 she received a visa from her husband and joined him in Palestine. We missed Klara, but our emotions were mixed. Mostly we were glad that she had gotten out. By that time her husband Simon had turned carpenter, joined a building co-op as a partner, and was in a position to support a family. When Klara arrived in Palestine, a nice villa awaited her.

Simon had built it himself. Meanwhile, my brother Natan had

prospered. He had been working for a clothing manufacturer as a pattern-maker and cutter, a trade he learned by subscribing since the age of fifteen to German and American trade journals. He now decided to go into business for himself along with the star salesman of the company he worked for. Natan saw things through the rose-colored glasses of youthful enthusiasm and simply ignored all signs to the contrary.

At first, it seemed that Natan was right. A political accident helped him; a small portion of Czechoslovakia called Zaolzie was ceded to Poland by Germany. Zaolzie was suddenly cut off from its regular suppliers and dependent on Polish sources for goods. One day a department store owner from this region walked in to Natan's place, checked the product thoroughly, and asked the firm to manufacture for him exclusively. The terms were favorable, and the business prospered beyond even Natan's youthful expectations.

Natan had had a stroke of unbelievable luck. The stranger had come to Tarnow because he knew it was a center for clothing manufacturing, but he didn't know a soul. When he noticed a boy carrying a stack of finished jackets, he stopped him and asked if he could look them over. The boy, a lad named Jack Birnhack, was surprised at the interest from this distinguished looking man, but he complied. Eventually the man gave him a zloty tip, more than the youngster earned in a day, to take him to the manufacturer. By coincidence, Jack Birnhack survived the war and is now an affluent retired clothing manufacturer living in New Jersey.

Despite Natan's budding prosperity, the harbingers of disaster were all around us. One rainy day in 1938, a priest walked into our candy store and announced that he would be waiting three hours for a bus connection because of the weather conditions. We had little business, and he harangued me without pause about Christian theology. This was hardly a dialogue—a Jewish boy didn't challenge a priest.

I guess he hoped to make a convert of an impressionable Jewish boy of sixteen. That was certainly the mindset of the Polish clergy in those days. But all I heard was the same message that my friend Maciejczyk had told me over and over when we sat together in school. It was the common message of the Polish pulpit in those times. After all these years, I still remember his words verbatim: "Only through conversion can you be redeemed. Jews in every generation are as guilty of deicide as were the Jews in the time of Christ!"

5

The Germans Arrive

By the late 1930s, the news from Germany was disquieting. SS and S.A. (that is, "brown shirts," an early variation on the storm troopers) horror stories started to leak into Tarnow, and we heard about places called "Dachau" and "Buchenwald," something called "concentration camps" where Jews and other undesirables were sent. Then came "Kristallnacht," the night when most Jewish storefronts and synagogues in Germany were burnt. Jews were beaten, stabbed, shot, or exposed to every variety of excess imaginable. That day, November 9, 1938, brought the first random executions of Jews. It didn't take long for the stories to reach us.

Exiles from Germany streamed into Poland in a constant procession, expelled from their homeland, often without warning. Sometimes they were simply brought to the border and driven across by vicious dogs or whips and rifle butts. Some of them settled in Tarnow in conditions far below what they had been accustomed to. The "Kehilla"—the Jewish administration—couldn't cope with the new influx. There had never been enough money to ameliorate existing poverty, so the newcomers had to endure both deprivation and resentment from the local Jews. They found us inhospitable, and we thought it unbelievable that there was a place where Jews were treated worse than we were in Poland. We still couldn't reconcile ourselves to the fact that Germany, the cradle of culture in Europe, was capable of such brutality.

In August 1939 the Germans found a pretext to invade Poland. They staged incidents in Gdansk and upper Silesia which made it appear that Germans were being attacked or mistreated by the Poles. On September 1, German troops crossed the border.

The first few days the Polish radio boasted continually about our "great victories." Soon we found out the truth. Already Polish soldiers were retreating from the front in panic. Their feet blistered, their shoes joined by shoelaces and carried over their shoulders because the peasant boys weren't used to wearing shoes, they

streamed into town, starving. Soldiers raided stores, especially Jewish stores, of food, tobacco, or anything they could lay their hands on. Three days into the war, Tarnow was bombed by a single German plane. Several buildings, including the main post office and hospital, were damaged. I was angry at the Germans, and in my innocence, I thought everyone in Tarnow would pull together against the invaders.

The first German soldiers hit Tarnow on September 8, just a week after the onslaught. A single motorcycle entered the city, followed soon thereafter by numbers of German Wehrmacht accompanied by rumbling tanks and light and heavy artillery pulled by trucks. The streets were totally deserted—only those who dared to look out the curtain-covered windows were witness to this tragic event. Almost immediately, within days, the first decrees were imposed on the population at large.

We were ordered to reopen all stores so that "normal" life would return. The city was crawling with spies and saboteurs who kept an eye on us and reported everything to the German authorities. They were "Volksdeutschen," part German Poles who gave their allegiance to the occupiers. Only a few days before, August 28, 1939, they had dynamited the train station, resulting in numerous casualties and causing panic in the city. They circulated false rumors designed to disrupt normal life and instill fear and to otherwise demoralize the Polish population. One of the collaborators was Ricker, a father of the boy whom I mentioned previously as having, along with his friend and criminal partner, Bieniarz, stabbed Jews. It turned out that Ricker, who was part German, was on the payroll of the Gestapo; he was caught as soon as the war started, giving signals to German planes during the first bombing of Tarnow.

In the following days, thousands of German soldiers passed through the city, traveling east in pursuit of the fleeing Polish army. Some stopped for a brief rest. The street reverberated with German patriotic tunes. The songs were in praise of their "Heimat" (homeland), endlessly extolling the glory of the Third Reich. However, the most often heard song was the "Horst Wessel Lied" (Horst Wessel Song). We Jews clearly understood the blood-curdling meaning of the German words that spoke of the pleasure that follows when "Jewish blood comes gushing out the knife," a cruel omen of things to come. We refused to believe it, but still, the message was clear.

I spoke to one of the German soldiers a few days later. Most of the occupying soldiers were simply members of the Wehrmacht

and didn't seem unfriendly. We Jews, for the most part, could even communicate with them, since Yiddish is chiefly old German as it was spoken in some provinces in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In a bit of incredible irony, the Poles envied us our advantage: "The Jews always wind up on top," they said.

What a mistaken notion! Only days later the administrative arm of the German occupying force arrived, and soon everyone in Tarnow felt the weight of their oppressive regime, but especially the Jews. It would be impossible for me to pinpoint the exact sequence of events, so rapidly did they occur in such overwhelming succession. One of the first blows, in my recall, was the murder of the Jewish intellectuals as well as members of the Jewish Kehilla (Council). They were rounded up by the SS, and they disappeared, never to be heard from again.

In the place of the old Jewish administration, they installed on Nova Street the "Judenrat," a Jewish administration of their choosing. Even our police force was Jewish, the "Ordnungs Dienst," or O.D. for short. The first head of the O.D. was a Jew named Miller, and the second one was named Wasserman. The next one was an Austrian Jewish exile named Distler, who fully and brutally cooperated with the Gestapo. The rumor was that he was only part Jewish and he acted like a Nazi as if he were trying to underscore this rumor. The O.D. locale was on Magdenburg Square, diagonally across from our house.

The alleged function of these two administrative bodies was to run the daily affairs of the Jews, but, under the threat of death, they were completely subordinate to every whim of the SS. Ultimately they became an instrument and accessory to the liquidation of all Jews in Tarnow, a tool in the "final solution," that famous Nazi term coined in 1942.

With the advance of the German armed forces, many Poles, and Jews in particular, tried to escape to the Russian border. My brother Natan and I actually packed to leave, but our parents' sad faces deterred us. We decided to stay with them, whatever fate would bring our way.

Those who took this route of escape didn't fare well. The roads were clogged with people and disabled or creeping vehicles, while German planes bombed and strafed them mercilessly. Food and lodging were expensive and hard to come by—the law of the jungle prevailed. Polish peasants would ambush hapless Jews and rob them. Many escapees returned to the city, and it seemed that Tarnow was the better option. We still hoped that the German armed forces would soon crumble under the combined strength of the

Allies, who had recently entered the war against Hitler. Little did those who returned realize that they had come home to die.

On September 17, 1939, only two weeks after the German invasion, the Soviets invaded the eastern half of Poland. This move followed a secret agreement between Von Ribbentrop and Molotov on August 23, 1939, to divide Poland. Some of the Jews who lived in the new Russian territories made their way to the Soviet Union.

Tarnow was in the German section. Every morning I was greeted by new yellow posters plastered on walls in the Jewish quarter. The new restrictions grew progressively worse. It was early in the German occupation, however, and we could still mingle with the gentiles, although contact with them was "verboten." But just as Edith had observed from her village home, the noose around our necks was tightening.

One day the SS rounded up a group of Jews and ordered them to dig a grave on the outskirts of the city. The grave finished, they were told to jump in and lie on their stomachs in order to be shot. They weren't. After a while, the game over, they were ordered out of the grave, and a group of Polish intellectuals and members of the Polish resistance movement were brought over by truck from a jail, lined up by the grave, and mowed down. Following the shooting, the Jews were severely beaten and told that the same fate awaited them if they disclosed what they had seen.

Similar executions occurred on a more or less regular basis, usually involving well-known Jews. The Judenrat tried to slow down that process with bribes, and they supplied the German henchmen with a steady flow of alcohol, jewelers' goods, furniture, and other luxuries—all to no avail. Jews were continually rounded up, arrested, and shot. Gestapo Grunow, Romelman, Von Malotky, and Novak were the most notorious henchman. They and their other German cohorts regularly invaded Jewish homes and helped themselves to valuables. As a rule they beat and otherwise intimidated the inhabitants.

Some in the Judenrat, most notably Lehrhaupt and Soldinger, fully cooperated with the Gestapo. Another was Volkman who sold imported fruit in his store on Walowa Street in Tarnow and was known as a pretty decent individual before the war. Lehrhaupt, Soldinger, and Volkman did not survive the war. When they were no longer needed by the Gestapo, they got their due. Volkman's two children were my acquaintances. They survived the war and now reside in the United States.

One day Gestapo Novak injured himself superficially cleaning his gun. In a cruel twist of logic, the Germans rounded up all Jews

from a large apartment house at Nova Street and sent them to an extermination camp in retribution for Novak's accidental injury.

Unexpectedly, a visitor arrived at our house, haggard, unshaven, and tired. It was the man from Zaolzie, Natan's best customer. His department store had been confiscated, and he felt unsafe in Zaolzie. His family was with Christian friends, and he intended to make it to Russian-occupied Poland. He wanted us to make him a pair of pants with secret pockets and told us price was no object. The request was a difficult one because Natan only knew how to design and cut clothing—he couldn't sew. However, we couldn't refuse him, so we found someone to make the pants. He had been honest and decent with us, a wonderful business connection. Somehow we fulfilled his request and watched him continue his journey eastward. We never heard from him again.

Barely ten days into the occupation, Natan sent me on an errand to get a bundle of our cut cloth from a woman named Kozinowa who lived half a kilometer from the Jewish quarter. The cloth was ready for sewing, and we hoped she would be willing to return it, since we had been friendly with her. I made it safely to her house, thinking that no one recognized me. I can't recall what happened with the woman, but when I came out, a band of ten or twelve youngsters surrounded me and ordered me to kneel and shout at the top of my voice: "I am a dirty Jew!" "I am a thief!" "I killed Jesus Christ!" Their parents, standing in doorways of the one-story homes, laughed, and egged them on. While I yelled, they punched and kicked me, acting like a school of piranhas. Suddenly I got up and ran as fast as I could toward home. They followed me for a while, unleashing a barrage of stones.

On October 26, 1939, we had to put on the infamous twelve-centimeter wide white arm bands with a blue star of David affixed on them—a badge of ignominy designed to distinguish us from the rest of the population. Clearly they were a mark of humiliation, but they were also a dangerous brand. Nobody wearing one was safe on the streets. The O.D. and the SS roamed the city, rounding up anyone wearing arm bands for involuntary work assignments.

On October 26, Hans Frank, the German occupation governor, issued a proclamation stating that Jews would have no room in German-occupied territories. Soon thereafter, a forced labor decree took effect. The first Jewish labor commandos, whose functions were designed to do menial and the most dangerous work, were installed; and the Gestapo, with the complicity of the Judenrat and the O.D. (Jewish Police), took charge of Jewish affairs.

Sloyme Bergman, an old friend and neighbor, was now a Jewish

O.D. One day he grabbed Natan in the street to put him on a work detail. "You're kidding," Natan said, "We're friends. You wouldn't do this to a friend, would you?"

"Yes I would," he replied. "Practically everybody in town is my friend, and if I don't deliver fifty people in half an hour, only God knows what will happen to me."

Soon, we were made to report to work on a daily basis. Those who could afford it would pay someone else a few zlotys a day to answer to their name. Some of the work was extremely demanding. One time I had to load clay into metal wagons which were pushed on rails to a brick factory. O.D.'s and their German foreman harassed us and whipped us as the heavy wagons moved forward along flimsy rails. Some wagons overturned down the embarkment, and it was an heroic job to push them back up onto the rails, even without the shouts and whips of the overseers.

One day Natan was detailed to work in a large lumber mill called "Mieszczanka," a place where the work was notoriously hard. I decided to sneak in at noon during the fifteen-minute break to answer the call in his name. The job was to stack immensely heavy logs three stories high. The SS foremen here encouraged us by hitting our backs with rifle butts. Several workers were crushed by the logs. I was "lucky"—I only suffered a hernia.

The worst day was when I was put in a railroad station, shoveling coal in a dark, deep cellar. The coal moved relentlessly down a shoot through a window, and I was supposed to move the coal away from the window singlehandedly. It was steamy and dusty, and soon I could no longer work standing. Lying on my stomach, I tried to move the coal away from the window, but my superhuman efforts were futile. At the point of complete exhaustion, I ran away, heedless of the consequences. Had I been noticed, I would have been shot instantly. When I made it home, my mother sent me to stay with friends for a few days, just in case anyone came looking.

On November 26, Governor Frank ordered the registration of all Jews in German-occupied Poland. All bank accounts were blocked, and owners of large accounts were briefly allotted 1,000 zlotys a month, about $200. Soon it was down to 250 zlotys—an amount which inflation had made practically worthless. It almost made no difference when they closed the accounts altogether. Naturally all Jewish cultural activities stopped—strictly verboten.

The SS weren't the only worry. The "Volksdeutsche," German and half-German commissars, slowly started to take over Jewish businesses. To rub salt into the wound, the owners had to stay on for a while to instruct the commissars in the mechanics of the

business. Natan's place was no exception. We tried to salvage as much merchandise as possible ahead of time, an extremely dangerous undertaking that had to be done without raising any suspicions. The bulk of the material we pushed under the floor of the factory. In countless trips, risking our lives, we carried other merchandise away on our bodies to two other hiding places. At that point, we still hoped the war would end soon, and the hidden materials would be the nucleus of a new business.

Slowly the sanctions increased. All means of travel were denied. Assembly was limited to two or three people. Mail communication was forbidden. Jewish children could no longer attend school. Only our underground schools and prayer meetings in inconspicuous locations kept us united.

The "Nuremberg Laws," which had been promulgated in Nuremberg, Germany, became the order of the day. These punishing racial laws were designed to cripple Jewish life. Yellow posters ordered us to surrender all valuables, like jewelry and furs, to specified collection points. Some did; most didn't. We needed those items to exchange for food. Either way, we took chances with our lives.

All the decrees were backed at first by a ten-year jail sentence and soon afterward death by shooting. Gloom and anxiety was all around us. Adding to our hopelessness were German publications that occasionally fell into our hands. It seemed that German civilians, the occupying bureaucracy, deliberately planted those in our quarter. Among them were newspapers like *Voelkischer Beobachter, Krakauer Zeitung,* and *Der Sturmer.* They spoke of "Gross" German victories on all battlefields and of the "Thousand-Year Reich" that would follow in their wake.

Der Sturmer was the most frightening to Jews. In word and caricature it graphically portrayed Jews as vermin, carriers of disease and epidemics, and the lowest form of life that must be totally eradicated for the good of humanity. Ugly, greedy looking, lusting for blood and money, Jewish faces were superimposed on rat bodies for emphasis. *Der Sturmer* openly and crudely predicted our fate. The other two did so somewhat more subtly at first. The *Krakauer Zeitung* was the official organ of Governor Hans Frank. The more than six hundred Nurenberg racial laws appeared in this paper one by one with almost daily regularity. There Governor Frank espoused his philosophy and goals versus the Jews under his protectorate; it rested initially on the basic principle that Jews must be starved and worked to death. All publications had a mission to confuse, plant fear, terror, and hopelessness, and to encour-

age total submission to German hegemony in Poland at large and in the ghettos in particular.

We were issued identity cards, complete with photos, and had to carry them at all times. We were forbidden to use the sidewalks, and if a German did pass us in the streets, whether military or civilian, we had to salute him. If we forgot the salute, we were beaten. But if we did salute, the response often was: "How dare you, a Jewish swine, greet a German? Did you think I was your friend?" It got to a point where one didn't venture out unless one absolutely had to.

The SS reserved their best theatrics for pious Jews who kept their beards and earlocks. Sometimes they merely pulled at these marks of orthodoxy; other times they cut them off, always accompanying the snipping with other public humiliations. My father, who would not consent to cutting his own beard, stayed home most of the time. It took all our pleadings to get him to shave, and, in the end, it was a trade off: he would cut his beard, but he would sneak out twice a day for prayer meetings.

All assemblies, especially prayer meetings, carried a death sentence. On a couple of occasions, however, the SS were "lenient," at least by their standards. When they uncovered the prayer meeting, they contented themselves with tearing the prayer books and forcing the Jews to spit on the Torah. Then they were taken outside and forced to do strenuous exercise while being shouted at and beaten. Still, they were extremely lucky to escape with their lives.

Adjusting to my father's new appearance was as difficult as adjusting to all the changes that the Germans brought with them. I had known my father all my life with a beard—now his face looked naked and gaunt. His visage was like a symbol for all our unpleasant reality.

In summer 1940 the Gestapo rounded up a large group of Orthodox Jews, chased them to the Market Place with whips and vicious dogs, ordered them to put on prayer shawls, and trample over a Torah and spit on it. They then put fire to it. Many Germans soldiers stationed in Tarnow watched this spectacle. Following the "show" they cut the beards and earlocks of those hapless Jews. The Jews had probably been found during an underground prayer service as well. They, too, were lucky to get away with their lives. These spectacles were part of a pattern repeated many times.

Getting food became increasingly more difficult and dangerous. The rations of food allotted to Jews was always half that allotted to Poles, and the Polish rations were half that allotted to Germans. Sometimes late into the night, after a day's hard work, we had to

stand in line to collect those measly handouts. The rations got progressively smaller, sometimes down to only two hundred calories a day, and some of the food, like the potatoes, was invariably spoiled.

Buying and selling food on the black market was dangerous for both Christian sellers and Jewish buyers. Nevertheless, we obviously couldn't survive on so little food and had to supplement it somehow. As long as our money lasted, we bought food for cash; when the money was depleted, we bartered our belongings, sometimes down to the last shirt. If you were caught in these transactions, the penalty was often death.

Even waiting in the food lines became dangerous. It was a good place for Germans to find Jews to insult or to beat. Sometimes the O.D. would round up all of the people in the food line and take them to work, either locally or in a nearby labor camp. Not only did we end up without food, but we had to toil more long hours, starved and exhausted.

Sometime in 1940 I got out of Tarnow for several months to work on a large farm estate. My cousin, Oskar Gross, had some connections with the Judenrat, and he intervened on my behalf. This was a somewhat privileged assignment. The estate we went to was on the plain about twelve kilometers from Tarnow, a village called Partin located near a small town called Zabno. The thirteen people in the group considered themselves lucky to get away from the dangerous existence in the city. True we had to work fourteen hours daily on the estate and received no pay, not even food. Some of us had funds that we used to buy food from the peasants. We worked right along with the regular work force, and we were not beaten.

The estate belonged to a rich Polish gentleman farmer who was obliged to deliver a sizeable percentage of his crops to the German military authorities. This arrangement entitled him to free Jewish labor. We rented sleeping quarters from a nearby peasant Zeszutek. It was a flea-infested attic with hay. We developed a good rapport with our landlord, and he let us use his stove. In order to get a good meal, we would hire ourselves out to another local landowner evenings or Sundays. He made us lug 100-kilogram bags of grain up a spiral staircase, usually for two hours at a time.

During my stay in Partin I got to be friends with a fourteen-year-old peasant girl named Janka. Janka had had to grow up quickly, for her father had been killed in the war and her mother had died of tuberculosis. She had to work a four-acre farm by herself and care for her four-year-old brother. The land she worked was of poor

quality, and she couldn't afford fertilizer, so she and her brother subsisted on a meager yield of potatoes and cornmeal. She never ate butter, sugar, or even bread. Janka offered to keep me in hiding for the duration of the war in her poor, run-down farm house. I declined the offer. I didn't want to jeopardize Janka and her little brother, for they would have risked certain death if they were discovered hiding a Jew. Besides, I wanted to share my fate with my entire family—I didn't want to be saved alone.

Some Sundays I would walk home to Tarnow to see my family. My mother, to the degree possible, supplemented my food for a few days. The weight of the events that were transpiring had taken its toll on her. Her face had gotten wrinkled, and she could barely muster a smile when I walked into the apartment. Eventually these Sunday walks home became risky. We had to pass the barracks of paramilitary Ukrainians stationed on the road. For their amusement, they would harass us, sometimes beating us or making us clean up their barracks, mostly the toilets.

After several months, our group was dissolved and ordered home. As the new decade arrived, life in Tarnow was getting worse, something I had hardly thought possible. You didn't dare stay on the streets. The Gestapo, basically the German version of the Russian K.G.B., visited the ghetto almost daily, randomly killing anyone they encountered. The slightest real or imagined infraction was cause for shooting. The streets became deserted when we sensed their presence.

One Gestapo officer named Romelman made a ritual of shooting a Jew. He would first pull on white gloves, then order the intended victim to lie face down on the street. His gun was a small caliber, decorative pistol. He always shot his victim in the temple.

Slowly we became aware of a new labor camp, perhaps twenty or thirty kilometers from Tarnow, with the name Pustkow. The Jewish police had to deliver a steady stream of work power first to build and then to service the camp. We had not heard much of "concentration camps" at that time, but we found out about conditions at the camp from personal experience. The O.D. came into our neighborhood one day and took away all the males present. Natan had the bad luck to be there. Natan was so shocked by conditions at the camp that he risked his life to escape the next day. Providentially, the place had not been fenced in as yet, so when the SS guards posted around the perimeter turned their backs, Natan ran into a nearby grove outside the camp. He hid until evening. After dark he walked to a peasant's hut and

persuaded him to take him back to Tarnow in a wagon. He paid the peasant handsomely.

Later other Jews escaped the same way and returned to the ghetto with stories of Nazi atrocities. One stands out in my mind, both for the unbelievable brutality and for the need for the SS to mortify and humiliate Jews before they killed them.

Any sexual encounter between a gentile and a Jew was called *Rassen Schande*—race pollution or race shame. Pustkow still held a mixed population of males and females, with the females kept in separate barracks. One German foreman forced a Jewish girl to have sex with him. When the rape was reported to the SS authorities, they meted out the punishment without delay. The foreman was arrested and sent away, probably dispatched to the Russian front. The real punishment, however, was reserved for the victim.

The girl was dragged to the main square of Pustkow and forced to undress. Three inmates, three fellow Jews, were ordered to hold her down on the ground, spread-eagled. The camp commander, Hans Schmidt, a tall brute of a man strode over to her. In his hand was a shovel. In front of the entire inmate population, he inserted the pointy handle of the shovel into the girl's vagina and repeatedly ripped away at it. The girl screamed like a butchered animal.

Such stories taught us the true nature of the German camps.

6

Ghetto Life

To make the gloom and apprehension in our house worse, mother began to complain of chest pains. We had not had a maid to help her with the endless household chores since September of 1939. Gentiles weren't allowed to work for Jews, and besides, how could we have paid for or fed a maid? My little sister Bronka, who was mature and cooperative way beyond her years, tried to help. She was barely eleven.

Simon had married a first cousin in 1936 and moved to Grybow to live with the in-laws, our Aunt Rosie and Uncle Leib. The last we had heard, he was working as a watchmaker, a trade he learned from his father-in-law. Now we had no communication from Simon and no idea of his fate. We had literally no idea whether he, or any of our other relatives scattered throughout Poland, were dead or alive. Jews in Poland were completely isolated.

The idea of the ghetto became stronger with the new orders that all Jews in Tarnow must move out of their apartments if they happened to be located outside the Jewish perimeter. They had to move into a delineated area that was the core of the Jewish quarter. Gentiles were moved out of that area and relocated in the evacuated Jewish apartments. This frightened everyone, for contact with gentile Poles was indispensable to our survival. They were the source of our food. I remember the distinct sense that the noose around our necks was tightening again. Some resistance was kept alive by "Hashomer Hatzair," an underground Zionist organization that clandestinely kept up contact with the "outside." They manufactured forged identity documents and made them available to anyone willing to risk life outside the ghetto. A number of youths possessing the so-called "good appearance," i.e., Aryan features, chanced life outside the ghetto in order to bring in food supplies. Girls with dark hair would bleach it. Soon the Nazis caught on, and bleached hair turned, literally, into a "dead" giveaway. Every-

one with bleached hair was automatically stopped for interrogation.

Circumcision was even more of a "dead" giveaway. Bounty hunters roamed the streets outside the ghetto, forcing suspicious males to lower their pants for a circumcision check. The SS had posted a price of one kilogram of sugar or two kilograms of salt per each Jew caught outside the Jewish quarter. Sugar was severely rationed and hard to come by, even on the black market, and the bounty hunters became prosperous sugar dealers. The Jews they turned in were generally shot on the spot.

Some young men, of otherwise "good appearance," underwent surgery or tied weights to their foreskin to reverse their circumcision. Some others, whose Semitic appearance gave them no chance of changing to a Christian identity, looked for refuge in nearby forests, the same sort of escape that nearly worked for my future in-laws. This animal existence, hiding from the peasantry and the Polish home army, proved to be as dangerous as living in the city.

In any case, Natan and I decided to remain in the ghetto. Our parents were not in a position to leave, and we wanted to be with them. Natan was a skilled craftsman and able to get a job with a German clothing manufacturer named Madritsch. Eventually Natan got me a place there, too, learning one phase of the work well enough to stay. These jobs turned out to be instrumental in our long-term survival. In the short term it enabled us to continue a hazardous but essential practice—returning back to the ghetto with food.

Every week new arrivals would be brought into the ghetto, and not just people from our immediate vicinity. The existing Jewish population before the war had been around twenty-five thousand, and even with the frequent killings and many runaways, the population in our small quarter swelled to over forty thousand. Our crowded apartments became more congested. Some of the new arrivals were from far away, as the new German policy was to concentrate Jews in few places for better control and easier processing in present and future eventualities.

Because food rations kept getting smaller, and because soap was given out only on rare occasions, disease became rampant in our quarter. The Judenrat was ordered to take quick remedial measures. They confiscated all hidden supplies of soap and sent out teams of nurses to check for cleanliness in individual homes. Don't think for a moment that the SS was concerned for our welfare;

they simply wanted to prevent epidemics which might spread to the Germans.

When typhus broke out in the ghetto, the O.D. ordered the entire Jewish population to go in stages to the local sauna-bath, where we were checked for lice. Young female hygienists checked our heads, underarms, and genital areas. In my case, the young woman was a former librarian, Miss Seiden, a very intellectual Jewish person. The last time she had seen me, I had been looking for books. Now she was checking my genitals for lice.

To my further embarrassment, there was also a young nurse whom I had just met days before. She used a pencil to investigate the hairy areas on the young man next to me while I tried to make light conversation to hide both our discomfort.

On June 22, 1941, operation "Barbarossa" began. That's when Germany attacked the U.S.S.R. in contravention to the treacherous nonaggression pact between Molotov and Von Ribbentrop prior to World War II. That pact decided the partitioning of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. The invaders pushed on relentlessly into Russian territory. Trainload after trainload of German soldiers and war material passed through Tarnow on the way to the Eastern Front. Soon countless thousands of Soviet P.O.W.'s were going west in constant succession. In no time the repression against Jews accelerated markedly.

As difficult and risky as our lives were, we had learned to cope with each new demand. However, there were rumors of events we could not cope with or comprehend. Some girls who had managed to survive on the "outside" temporarily brought back the terrible news. In the eastern territories, they told us, near the Soviet border, entire towns and villages were emptied of Jews. The populations were taken en masse to nearby ravines or cemeteries, made to undress, dig their own graves, and then mowed down by machine guns into the open pits. Despite the frequency of the rumors, most of us dismissed them as ridiculous.

"How could that be possible?" we asked. "Who could be so cruel as to kill innocent babies? What would the civilized world think? How could such a thing be kept secret for long?" How naive we were. . . .

On December 7, 1941, the news of Pearl Harbor reached Tarnow. Up to that point, we had listened hopefully to false, unrealistic rumors just to sustain our fading spirits and to get through each day. We held the delusion the war might be over in a few weeks. As the Germans advanced on all fronts, our spirits flagged, and we stopped paying attention to new rumors. Invariably they turned

out to be false and disappointing. Now there was a brand new element to ponder. Could Hitler stand up to the legendary American might? Would the entry of America into the war help us, . . . or hasten our demise?

As it turned out, after Pearl Harbor, our situation took a sharp turn for the worse. Jew killings, which had been sporadic, became frequent. Terror in the streets accelerated, and our meager food rations went noticeably down. The norm was about six hundred calories, but often it went as low as two hundred calories. There was a feeling of a "gloves-off policy" toward the ghetto inhabitants in Tarnow.

Natan and I continued to work, always under heavy guard. We desperately needed the positions, but every time we left the ghetto, we wondered whether we would find our family alive when we returned. At work, we faced the same dangers. For instance, two of the Jewish foremen at Madritsch, Pincus and Moishe Rosenbaum, were making custom suits for the local Gestapo. When the Germans came in to be fitted, often unexpectedly, they would make a search for food and check for any other possible infractions. Their arrival always brought panic and usually ended in beatings and pistol whippings.

One time they found food in the Rosenbaum's working quarters. The brothers had intended to smuggle it to the ghetto. Natan happened to be alone in that room when the Gestapo man made a surprise entrance. Only by telling the officer that the food belonged to Rosenbaum did Natan save his own life. Luckily for us, Madritsch was an influential Austrian industrialist who kept the Gestapo happy with good cognac and expensive gifts on a steady basis. They also gave him grudging respect for his high connections in Berlin.

Returning home one night, we saw Grunov, the most feared Gestapo in Tarnow, standing at the gate. As quickly as we could, we discarded the food supplies we were smuggling back. We were willing to take our chances with the O.D. who often checked us on our return, but we wanted no part of Grunov. When Grunov asked to whom the respective bundles belonged, no one in the area answered. At random, he took two young men out of the crowd and shot them. On April 24, 1942, fifty-six Jews were rounded up in our city and shot. No reason was given. This killing was part of the pattern of steadily increasing terror since June, 1941.

The rumors of death camps being built in several places in Poland filtered back to us, but we preferred to dismiss them with disbelief. Sometime in the middle of May, 1942, a tax levy "contri-

bution" was imposed on the Jews of Tarnow. Within ten days, 500,000 zlotys, fine furniture for five hundred German apartments, and several kilograms of gold had to be collected. The rumor was that noncompliance would result in killing the entire Judenrat, or one hundred other Jews. Some said a thousand Jews would be killed, but you could never separate fact and fiction in the ghetto. The fear was enough—the items were delivered on schedule and disaster was temporarily avoided.

On June 10, 1942, we were ordered to report to a designated place for registration. Our I.D. cards were stamped by the Gestapo, with three different stamp categories. The pattern was obvious: young people capable of hard labor, and those in the employ of German authorities, were given a stamp with a swastika and "S.D." affixed; those over fifty, sometimes over forty, were given a letter "K"; those under fifteen were given a white card, a questionnaire of sorts.

When his turn came, Natan saluted the SS man seated at the table and said: "My brother and I work for Madritsch, a uniform manufacturer for the German armed forces; therefore we should be entitled to 'good' stamps for our parents." Natan had caught on to the pattern.

"Jew swine," the man replied, "you are entitled to nothing. But, out of the goodness of my heart, I will give you a good stamp for one parent and you will have to decide in three seconds which it will be."

There was no arguing, and Natan knew it. No one could be sure what the respective stamps signified, but the answer from the man showed the SS was up to something bad. Because of her long-standing heart condition, Natan chose mother.

Immediately the rumors began to swirl. The official line, disseminated by the Judenrat, was that those with the letter "K" would be sent to a labor camp. This information made no sense. Why would old people and women be sent to a labor camp? Another rumor, much more conceivable, was that those with the letter "K" would be shot, as well as most of those with the white card. The 500,000 zloty contribution collection, cynically, had been to pay for the bullets expended in the shootings, the rumor stated.

That same afternoon, yellow posters appeared on the ghetto walls, ordering all Jews, under threats of execution, to wait at dawn before their respective apartments. Each family was told to take along a ten-kilogram bundle, including all of our valuables and best belongings, because we were about to be resettled. By dawn, whole families were anxiously waiting in front of their houses. The quiet

was eerie. Only the children, awakened so early, cried out. Their worried mothers tried to soothe them, in order not to draw attention to themselves.

Pretty soon the Jewish policemen and the Polish blue-uniformed police appeared, gathered the waiting families, and led them up to the marketplace; my parents and sister were among them. Natan and I were ordered to go to work as usual. We left the ghetto full of terrible premonitions. Our work station was not far from the marketplace, and, although we had no exact knowledge of what was going on, we had a good idea. Neither of us could concentrate on work, so worried were we for our family. We tried to block the unimaginable from our minds. But all day, from the direction of the marketplace, we heard mass shootings.

Finally evening came, and we were escorted home by several O.D. The grotesque stories we heard, from numerous eyewitnesses, seemed impossible. We heard that that as soon as the first arrivals were herded into the marketplace by the police, all hell broke loose. The "Einsatzkommano," the Special SS Kommando, started barking orders: "Leave your bundles in a pile! Form ranks of eight! Walk single file to the Selection Table!" Several forms of intimidation enforced these commands. The SS, along with black-uniformed Ukrainians, charged repeatedly into the crowd, whipping people, smashing heads with rifle butts, even bayoneting them. Specially trained dogs attacked people in the crowd. Indiscriminate shots killed random individuals. Hundreds of Jews were dead even before they reached the selection tables.

As the Jews walked before the selection tables, they were fingered to the right and left. All those motioned to the left had to kneel on the cobblestones and lower their heads. Those who dared to look up had their heads smashed with rifle butts or were attacked by the vicious dogs. The O.D. had been given quotas per each O.D. and were threatened with execution for incomplete compliance within a specified time. The O.D. kept feeding new victims to the killing machine all day.

Young children fared the worst. The Ukrainians smashed their heads on the cobblestones which lined the Marketplace. Much of the area was covered with blood, and the curbsides turned into red rivulets. Some of the blood flowed over the cobblestones into adjacent streets and had to be hosed off, later in the evening, to disinfect the area. The place resembled a slaughterhouse, where the victims were not chickens or cattle, but helpless little children.

The O.D. had the job of collecting their battered little bodies, some still showing signs of life, and loading them on horse-drawn

wagons. The corpses were taken to the Jewish cemetery to be dumped in a mass grave.

No civilized people would kill animals the way the Germans and their Ukrainian underlings butchered the Jews in Tarnow. In the late afternoon three thousand people from the ranks of the kneeling were marched off under heavy escort to the cemetery. Some had to dig graves; then all were mowed down by machine gun fire. The rumors from the eastern part of Poland had been true.

Among the three thousand shot at the cemetery was my father.

Another three thousand with "bad" stamps ended up loaded into cattle cars, one hundred fifty to a car, and were taken away. We later found out that the destination was Belzec, a death camp. Those who were fingered to the right were told to go home.

Miraculously, Mother returned from the marketplace. The "good stamp" wasn't her guarantee of protection. Many carrying such stamps had their I.D. cards torn up in front of them before they were dispatched to eternity. Mother was in a state of shock, and I'm not sure how her heart stood the ordeal.

My sister Bronka was also alive, much to our relief. I no longer remember how she escaped the selection process. I do know that our employment with Madritsch offered her some temporary protection.

Natan and I could hardly grasp the enormity of the tragedy. It didn't seem possible that father was dead. Father had always loved mother dearly, even though his affection was not reciprocated. At the tables mother was fingered to the right and father to the left. Mother said father was overcome with joy that she had been the one saved. When mother turned to the right, she saw a smile of happiness on his face.

On June 14 there was a repeat performance of the June 11 blood-orgy. When not enough victims showed up voluntarily at the marketplace, units of SS, accompanied by blue-uniformed Polish police and the usual Ukrainians, went house to house on a Jew hunt. Whenever they found some unfortunates with the letter "K," or an unvalidated white card, they either ordered them to the marketplace or else shot them on the spot. The doors and windows of such apartments were sealed for future confiscation of property.

When the Polish police came to our apartment, they inquired if anyone had been "taken" from our family. When they found out about father, they sealed our apartment and ordered us to go to the Judenrat to get instructions. Now we had no place to live.

Outside, we walked along frightening streets. The O.D. were leading horse-drawn wagons, picking up bodies of elderly or crip-

pled Jews who had been thrown out of windows onto the pavement. The SS solution for a bedridden Jew was to shoot him first, then let the Ukrainians throw him out the window. In many instances, the invalids were still alive when they were tossed to the street.

The four of us, mother, Bronka, Natan, and myself, hurried through back alleys to the Judenrat. When we got there, an O.D. named Henry Gruber spotted us. "What in the world are you doing here? You are facing certain death if you stay in the streets! Nobody here can help you. Everything is in disarray. Go back home immediately if you can make it!"

Making it was the trick. We tried the same covert route, but this time our luck seemed to run out. A Gestapo in civilian dress, carrying a pistol, stopped us. "Walk forward!" he ordered in a slurred voice. We did, always expecting the worst. Gradually we recognized that he was barely able to stand up. Mother, Bronka, and I broke away, leaving the Gestapo officer and his gun entirely focused on poor Natan. Soon, however, Natan caught up with us, telling us that as the man was pushing the gun against his back, he fell against a wall and appeared to be asleep.

Another O.D. appeared and exhorted us to disappear immediately. "Look for shelter," he advised, "if you want to live!" Desperate we ran toward our apartment house. Neighbors let us in to their apartment, but reluctantly, since they were risking their lives by shielding us. The seal on our apartment was a death sentence, and helping the condemned was a crime. It was so crowded in the apartment that we slept several to a bed. I slept across the width of a mattress with my entire family.

June 14 turned out to be Hell revisited for the ghetto of Tarnow. The horrors of the marketplace were the same, with one alteration. This time the three thousand people were not taken to the cemetery, but trucked outside the city limits where a Polish work detail had already prepared their graves. Again, three thousand individuals were loaded like cattle and shipped to Belzec.

The following day was quiet, but my family was desperate. Without an apartment, we were easy prey to the first passing SS Commando. "Where will we sleep tonight?" we asked each other. "How can we go to work?" Natan and I questioned, knowing full well that not going to work was itself a serious transgression. From behind a fence, Natan noticed several SS Officers standing on our square and decided to take a desperate gamble. He walked over to them, saluted, and began in his decent German: "Honorable Gentlemen of the SS. My brother and I work for a German company Madritsch that produces uniforms for the German armed

forces. I man a key position in the factory, and much of the work would come to a standstill if we don't show up to work." He went on to tell them that our apartment had been mistakenly sealed and that we couldn't go to work without access. To our surprise, the gamble worked. The SS ordered the chief of police to have our apartment unsealed. We could go to work and had a place to sleep for the night.

On June 18 came another "action," the new term for the homicidal selection process. Once again three thousand Jews were driven away from the marketplace. Babies were thrown against the cobblestones, and the diabolic Nazi minds couldn't rest without new experiments. One new concept was to pack Jews into "Red Cross" vans like sardines. The exhaust pipes were led into the van, so that the unsuspecting passengers would die a slow and painful death on the trip to the cemetery. No bullets were needed when these victims were put into mass graves. Such was the nature of German "economy."

The "off days" between June 11 and 20 were mopping up days for the SS, the Ukrainians, the Polish police, and the O.D. By the end of this period, 21,000 Jews were "missing"; about 12,000 Tarnow natives and 9,000 people who had been brought from other parts of Poland for "processing." Everyone in the quarter was in profound shock. Not one family was untouched by the awesome tragedy. We lived in a state of numbness.

Undoubtedly, among all the atrocities, the worst story concerned four hundred and fifty youngsters who were taken to a nearby school which had been converted to a sauna. The Nazis herded them into the sauna and turned up the heat to scalding. Their screams were heard from a good distance away for a long time.

A young nurse, a friend of mine, had been assigned that day to service the sauna. She told me that she would be haunted forever by the agonizing outcries of the scalded children.

Forever wasn't long in her case. Soon afterward, she committed suicide.

7

Mother and Sister

The first step when life in the ghetto returned to "normal" was to take inventory of remaining family and friends. Whenever we encountered a familiar face, we greeted that person as if he or she had returned from the dead. There was no happiness in such greetings, however, just relief in the middle of our immense grief.

My family was relatively lucky to this point. True, we had lost father, but his inflexible ties to orthodox practices, and his age, meant his loss was inevitable. Through Natan's quick thinking and bravery we had kept Mother, our young sister Bronka, and we still had our jobs and our apartment.

"How long will it be before all of us are finished off?" was the predominant theme on everybody's lips. The Judenrat's official line, under Gestapo orders, was that, for the time being, there was nothing to worry about. Privately, however, the individual O.D.'s weren't so optimistic. Gloom predominated, and we couldn't forget the painful awareness that numerous Jewish police had cooperated during the ten-day ordeal. The same unfortunately could be said about the Judenrat, our "government."

There were some exceptions. Paul Reiss, a Jewish-German exile, was the acting chief of the Judenrat. On June 11, 1942, after the horrifying events of the first "action," Grunov, the worst of the Gestapo in Tarnov, called him on the phone and ordered him to deliver within the hour one thousand Jews for execution. "I can only deliver one Jew," Reiss replied, "and he is waiting right here."

"Fine," replied Grunov, "wait right there at your desk. I'll be over." He showed up in less than thirty minutes, and Reiss was shot on the spot. Grunov also shot eight other members of the Judenrat for good measure.

A man named Volkman was made acting director and got the same assignment. The thousand Jews were delivered on time.

In fairness, it must be said that the Judenrat and the O.D. were in a dilemma. These two bodies were created by the SS and the

Gestapo administrations, and some people took these jobs with altruistic intentions—they thought they could help their fellow Jews. None, whatever their motives, were even remotely aware of what those jobs would entail. When some of them realized the terrible truth of their situation, they tried to resign, but you don't easily resign from a position created by the Gestapo. Rather than continue in such a position, some resigned by suicide.

Sadly, for what it says about human nature, it must be honestly said that those who tried to get out of the O.D. or the Judenrat were the exception. The majority were cowardly individuals who were willing to meet every order of the SS that came their way in the faint hope of saving family and self. Some went beyond the call of "duty" to please their German masters.

O.D. Avram Traum is a case in point. During one of the later "actions," Traum was given a list of several hundred Jews to be delivered within a specified time. People had already figured out what the Germans were up to, and Traum couldn't locate some of the people on his list. His time was nearly up; incomplete delivery would result in his execution.

Traum knew of a large bunker with Jews hiding in his apartment house. He knew of it well because his mother was hiding in it. Nonetheless, he walked over there and yelled into the bunker: "Everybody *raus*!" There was no doubt—he wanted to save his own skin.

"Avrumele," called his mother upon hearing his command, "Did you forget your mother is here?"

"No, I didn't," was her son's reply. "Everyone! Come out right now! I'm not about to give my head for yours, Mother. You've lived long enough."

I don't know how long Avrum Traum actually survived after betraying his mother, but most collaborators met the same fate as the rest of us—just later. Their absolute obedience didn't earn them points with the SS henchmen. In the end death was the reward for service.

Several weeks after the June action, the remaining Jews in Tarnow were moved to a small, slum area of the ghetto. In some cases up to twenty people had to share a single room. There was hardly room to move around, no privacy, no means to wash, and occasional fights over crumbs of food. The next move was to fence the perimeter of our quarter for greater security. My mother, under all the stress of the recent events, suffered a heart attack. I recall sitting on her bed as she was having excruciating chest pains. All I could do was let her hold my hand against her racing chest. A

while later, I managed to locate a Jewish doctor, Dr. Siegfried, who examined my mother but found little he could in the circumstances. My mother survived that attack.

Several days later Mother suffered a second attack. I was sleeping near her and was awakened by her final gasp. Bronka and Natan were with me. There was no pulse, and since it was after 7:00 P.M., I risked being shot if I went for a doctor. Few doctors were available anyway, but there was one a few houses away. I tried to get there by climbing fences, bypassing the streets, but eventually I hit a high fence that was impossible to negotiate. At any rate, it would have been futile to see him. He wouldn't have dared go out after curfew.

Mother's death brought immense sorrow into our home. She was fifty-two years old at her passing, and we had all been strongly attached to her. Bronka was especially distraught and overwhelmed with grief. She and mother had been inseparable.

The following day we buried her in the Jewish cemetery, not an entirely safe endeavor because the Gestapo frequently brought people there to be shot. Bronka, crying uncontrollably, and refusing all efforts to comfort her, wouldn't let go of mother's body. Natan and I had more mixed emotions. We felt grief no less than Bronka, but we were also glad in a strange sense that she would no longer have to endure the daily hardships and horrible anticipation of future selections. In a way, I envied her, just like I envied father when he was killed.

Back home, after the burial, Bronka had to assume mother's duties. She did mother's jobs so willingly, and with such a sense of responsibility, that it breaks my heart even now, fifty years later, when I see Bronka in my mind's eye. At the ripe old age of twelve, she never had a smile on her face, for she was well aware that children her age had little chance of survival. Her large, brown eyes constantly betrayed fear and anxiety.

A couple of weeks later, toward evening, Gestapo Grunov brought six male Jews to our square to shoot them. We knew all of them personally. Several of the victims fell to Grunov's feet, embraced his booted legs, and begged, to no avail, for their lives. Grunov didn't have room in his heart for mercy. After all, the six had been apprehended on their way home from work walking on a rail bed, trying to stay out of a muddy road. They didn't know this was "verboten." Grunov shot all six.

My sister Bronka witnessed the execution. All of a sudden she was so overcome with fear that she bolted. We found her a while later collapsed on the ground a half mile away in a state of complete

exhaustion. She lay near the ghetto fence. Overwhelming terror was all that was in her eyes.

One day as I walked into the ghetto returning from work, I suddenly noticed Gestapo Romelman arrive on our square on a horse-drawn carriage. There was no hiding or running away now. Fortunately for me, his attention was on a middle-aged neighbor from the next house. Romelman asked for his identification papers and then inquired about his place of employment. When he got an unsatisfactory answer, he ordered him to lie down on the ground, face down. He held the man's head down with his boot, pulled on his white gloves, then drew from his holster his small caliber decorative pistol. He shot him in the head. Humming a song, he walked over to a nearby phone at an inactive drugstore and called an O.D. to remove the body. All this time I stood petrified, not daring to make the slightest move until he was gone. Romelman casually boarded his carriage and drove away to continue his hunt.

While the ghetto perimeter was being fenced in, a number of desperate young people attempted to save themselves by escaping to the outside. The Gestapo, anticipating such a possibility, posted extra guards to apprehend them. One person planning escape was Bella Weisberg, a daughter of well-to-do parents and one of the prettiest Jewish girls in Tarnow. She never made it out of the Ghetto. A German commissar in charge of their business suspected Bella's intentions and notified the German authorities. They arrested her, and as she was taken by the Gestapo toward the Jewish cemetery, she jumped off the ornamental carriage and was shot dead on Szpitalna Street, not far from the cemetery.

This version of her demise differs substantially from the one I had originally heard. It was given to me recently by a friend of mine, Kalman Goldberg, who had been Bella's good friend at that time. It was not easy to get at the truth in the Ghetto. So much happened on a daily basis, and many rumors were circulated that were difficult to verify. Most were deliberately planted by unprincipled O.D. in order to instill fear in the Ghetto.

A distant cousin of mine suffered a similar fate not far from our apartment. She was seventeen, with blond hair and gray eyes. She had made it out of the ghetto and stood at the ticket office of the railway station, trying to buy a ticket out of Tarnow. She must have appeared nervous, because a Polish policeman asked her for her identity papers. Her forged papers didn't look kosher to him, so he took her to the Gestapo.

At their headquarters, she was made to undress and a team of

doctors "examined" her. Every part of her anatomy was probed and measured. During the "examination" she was beaten constantly. Finally she broke down and admitted her Jewishness. Instead of taking her down to the courtyard for the usual execution, the Gestapo ordered an O.D. to take her back home. Upon seeing her alive back in the ghetto, some people said that a miracle had occurred, a miracle they attributed to her grandfather, a famous rabbi. Their wonder was short-lived. Several hours later a Gestapo officer arrived at her house and raped her. Then he took her outside and shot her right next to the entrance stairs.

About a half hour later, having heard about a Gestapo visit and someone shot nearby, I went to investigate. To my shock I discovered that it was my pretty cousin who was the victim. Her body had already been taken away for burial by a Jewish O.D. The puddle of blood was still visible in front of her house.

Inside the house her father and brother were telling all the gory details of the incident. I was also told about her prior "interrogation" by the Gestapo. Her father and brother had been hidden in a bunker under the floor and heard the rape above them. There were many similar incidents, too many to list in one book.

Even those few who escaped the Tarnow ghetto rarely survived. I remember one young man named Romek who was brought to Tarnow with his family in a transport of Jews from Eastern Galicia. The father was a dentist. I developed a friendship with Romek, but one day he disappeared, and it was months before I found out what happened to him. His whole family was fluent in Ukrainian, and since Romek didn't look Jewish, he used de-circumcision and forged documents to get into a Ukrainian labor commando. He soon became buddies with his Ukrainian roommate at the unit and foolishly disclosed his true identity to him. His friend's loyalty didn't go deep enough. He immediately reported Romek to the Gestapo who tortured him for hours and shot him the same day.

Not too long after the June "Action," a small group of members of Hashomer Hatzair, a Zionist organization, left the still-open Ghetto and went underground. They managed to make contact with a Polish resistance group friendly to Jews that sold them four guns and ammunition. A bit later on they bought three more guns from Italian soldiers.

At first they didn't look for a confrontation with the Germans. They wanted to feel out the situation. One of their members, an acquaintance of mine named Chasek Krieger, an aggressive and explosive individual, broke away from their ranks and operated

solo. Chasek wanted quick action. He ambushed and killed more than thirty Germans before he was cornered and shot.

The rest of the group established themselves in a forest from where they made daring forays. They committed sabotage or attacked food and ammunition depos. They turned bolder all the time. One night they carelessly made a fire, sat around it, and sang Hebrew songs. A forester alerted the local SS who raided the camp and opened fire on their tent after they had gone to sleep. Three men with guns in hand broke out, but they were wounded during an exchange of fire. Two died of their wounds, one managed to escape and made his way to the Tarnow Ghetto. He was another acquaintance of mine, Kuba Kupferberg. Kuba survived the war.

In the beginning of September 1942, there were persistent rumors that another action was imminent. We were desperate and tried not to believe it. Subconsciously we wanted to reject such a horrible prospect. The memory of the June "Action" was still painfully fresh. Realistically, however, the tell-tale signs were all around us, and a few members of the Jewish police deliberately leaked hints so that some Jews might have a chance to escape. It was common to hear of someone in the quarter who had committed suicide.

Escape was what we wanted for Bronka, who was only twelve, frail, and a prime candidate for "selection." But it was easier said than done: Where could she go? Frantically we came up with a possible solution. Natan got in touch with a gentile friend, Kochan, who had worked for Natan before the war and seemed trustworthy. We were somehow able to contact him and begged him to come to our workplace outside the ghetto. To our surprise, he showed up.

At first he resisted our request to save our sister. After much pleading, persuasion, and promises, he relented, and said he would be back the following day to take Bronka into hiding. The plan was to take Bronka to his parents who lived in a nearby village. The following morning, however, after we had smuggled our sister out to our workplace, Kochan showed up to tell us he had changed his mind. Bringing Bronka in the first place had been risky, and Kochan seemed scared and uncomfortable. We couldn't really blame him for refusing us. He had his own family to think of. Had they been caught keeping a Jew, his entire family faced execution. To this day I don't understand why he showed up a second time. The most plausible explanation would be that he was undecided until the last moment.

Desperate, but with little choice, we smuggled our sister back to the ghetto. Luckily there were no SS at the gate. That same eve-

ning, the surviving inhabitants of our apartment house, thirteen in all, gathered. We made a decision to commit mass suicide. We would go to the Feigenbaum Apartment, the only one in our building with a gas installation, and turn on the gas. When we broke the news to Bronka, she started to cry. She and a little boy of nine hysterically begged us not to go through with it.

"We are still young," they pleaded. "Perhaps a miracle will happen and we will be spared. In the face of such pleadings we couldn't go through with a suicide pact.

The following morning, September 12, 1942, the O.D. greeted us with bullhorns. Everyone was to go immediately to Magdenburg Square, the new name for Freedom Square. Since we lived on Freedom Square, all we had to do was open the door. Outside we saw people streaming in from all directions. Within minutes there was deliberately staged terror and chaos. The SS and Ukrainian guards shouted confusing orders. Rifle shots punctuated the air. German shepherds and doberman pinschers chased us from place to place, barking and biting into our flesh. The SS and Ukrainians charged repeatedly into the crowd, pushed and shoved us without a stop, and beat us with whips and rifle butts. Mothers and children became separated and hysterically called out each other's names.

A number of people were cut off from the bulk of the crowd and pushed into an adjacent lumber yard. Several hand grenades followed them. Screams of injured and dying Jews were now mixed with the SS orders to form ranks and walk single file before selection tables. It was the first time I had actually participated in an "action," and I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The scene, cruel and unreal, was like an outpost of hell.

Miraculously, Natan, Bronka, and I were still together. We watched the selection pattern of choosing which Jews were to live or die: those fingered to the left were mostly aged men, women, or children. Regardless of their age, women who carried babies were automatically encouraged to go to the left by whip handles. There the Ukrainians tore the babies from their arms, grabbed their tiny legs, and smashed their heads against one of the two trucks that were standing nearby. Some of the babies thrown on the truck were still screaming.

I recall vividly one young mother who refused to give up her baby to the guard. She held on to it with all her strength. As the Ukrainian tried to wrestle away the child, another hit her on the head from behind with a rifle butt so hard that he smashed her skull. Both mother and baby fell to the ground. The one guard repeatedly kicked the mother's corpse, and for good measure

stomped on her with vengeance. The other picked up the infant and swung it with an extra strong wallop against the metal edge of the truck.

All cripples were likewise picked up by those Ukrainians and swung onto the trucks like sacks of potatoes. Most of the time the guards didn't bother to shoot cripples. When the truck was filled, they just drove to the Jewish cemetery and dumped the bodies into a mass grave. Many were still alive and moaning. The O.D. who went on to the cemetery described this to us.

Some young mothers, trying to cheat death, left their infants by the curb, where they were trampled to death in a minute. Those kneeling to the left were terrorized by the vicious dogs. Not far from where I stood, a group of five kneeling boys simultaneously leaped up and tried to run. They were mowed down in seconds. An Austrian policeman, who stood nearby, noticed the splattered brain of one of the shot children. He covered his eyes. "Oh no!" I heard him gasp. Soon, however, he recovered his composure and went on with his work.

The eerie silence of the condemned was momentarily broken by the repeated outcries of a woman on her knees. "My mother is a Christian!" she shouted hysterically. She did have a Christian mother, but she obviously had lost her mind, because anyone shouting out would be shot. Before the war she was a fowl dealer, and mother had sometimes bought chickens from her. After the third or fourth scream, I heard a shot. Again silence reigned among the kneeling.

All the time, Natan and I managed to stay with Bronka, despite the mass confusion. We all felt total terror while watching these proceedings and hearing the repeated screams of the injured babies. I will never forget the fear in Bronka's face. She saw what was happening to all youngsters under fifteen. Almost without exception they were fingered to die.

One contingent of SS and Ukrainians went to the Jewish hospital located several hundred yards from the cemetery. The ambulatory patients were made to walk to the cemetery for their execution. The bedridden were shot where they lay, and their bodies thrown down from the windows onto the pavement. For variety some were thrown out alive. The corpses, or near corpses, were taken to the cemetery by the O.D.

Not counting those randomly killed by bullets, rifle butts, or hand grenades, the SS took thirty-five hundred Jews from the ghetto. Many were taken away by cattle train to Belzec. The quotas were filled by 6:00 P.M. Those of us lucky enough to be sent to the

right, or who, like ourselves, had not reached the segregation table on that day, were told to go home. Bronka, Natan, and I were among them. Natan and I were brokenhearted at watching such atrocities unfold before our eyes, but we were also relieved that our sister was spared for the time being. Of the thirteen neighbors who had formed the suicide pact, only the three of us were left that night in the apartment house. Exhausted, we fell on our beds. Between nightmares, we slept.

The following morning, as we sat at our table eating a silent breakfast, we heard a knock. "Please let me in!" a voice pleaded. I opened the door, and there was my brother's friend breathlessly announcing that the Gestapo buses had just arrived on Freedom Square.

The next knock was much louder. I did not get a chance to answer the door before it was broken down with a crowbar and a loud voice ordered us outside. There we were confronted by several members of the Gestapo who brutally pushed us toward the center of the square. To our horror we realized that there was going to be a repeat performance.

Again we soon heard shouts, barking, shooting, moaning. Again we formed lines before the selection tables. It went on for hours; then it was our turn. My heart pounded as I watched my little sister nearing the table. She knew what to expect, and it happened. Bronka was pushed to the left and looked back in desperation. Natan tried to follow her to the left, but the man in charge of the table wouldn't grant this "favor."

"I decide who goes where!" he ordered. "We can still use you for a few weeks." Like Natan, I too was shoved to the right. Far to the left we could see Bronka kneeling.

In the mid-afternoon a torrential rain poured down. I prayed to God that a miracle would somehow finish all this misery. Instead, the SS used the occasion to order the kneeling people to lie flat on their stomachs in the mud. The quota wasn't filled until late afternoon. At that point, the "lucky ones" on the right were told to disperse.

Numb, in a state of shock, we left the square egged on by rifle butts. Nobody cried. It seemed like our hearts had turned to stone. But people knocked their heads against walls, tore at their hair, and several individuals ran back toward the square, shouting hysterically. The SS simply gunned them down. Those on their stomachs were ordered to rise. They were marched out of the ghetto for processing.

An eerie silence reigned on Freedom Square. Natan couldn't

reconcile himself to the idea that Bronka would die. Being the eldest, he felt responsible. He returned to the square, noticed an SS henchman, walked over, saluted him and offered himself in exchange for Bronka. I watched from a distance petrified, certain I would lose my brother as well as my sister. Instead, to my amazement, the two men carried on a conversation. After a few minutes, Natan was ordered to leave. I couldn't believe he was still alive.

Natan told me what happened. "What for?" had been the officer's good-natured reply. "You will be next very shortly. You are all doomed people." Then in an afterthought the officer made his offer. "If you take me to a bunker with twenty or more Jews, you will get your sister back."

"I know of no bunker," was Natan's response. "The only person I can offer is myself."

"Right here where we stand there must be Jews hidden." He was right. There was a bunker with thirty-one people nearby, but my brother didn't feel he had the right to exchange any one else's life but his own, even to save his own sister's life.

All Natan's bravery and pleading had been in vain. We silently walked home. We heard that the German SS announced on the Magdenburgh Square following the selection that anyone who would disclose the location of a bunker with twenty or more people would have a loved one returned to them in exchange. Some fell for that trap and led the SS to a number of hiding places. One of the largest was located near our house in a large building known as the Mandelbaum Building. They were all shipped to a death camp after a vicious beating.

Predictably the Germans didn't honor their promises. Some of the "loved ones" were temporarily released, but in most cases it did no long term good. Following this cowardly betrayal, most of the informers forcibly joined the rank of the condemned. It served them right. By the next morning accounts of the two actions were coming in. People marched away on the first day were already either in mass graves or en route to Belzec. But those who had marched out on the second day were temporarily placed in barracks on the outskirts of town, awaiting their transportation to the death camp. Our sister was alive!

A rumor ran through the ghetto that it might be possible to buy back a limited number of children. Through an intermediary, we approached one of the O.D. with Gestapo contacts. His name was Kartagener and he lived in a building adjacent to ours. His twelve-year-old daughter was my sister's friend. He told us that, indeed, such a possibility existed, provided we could deliver several hun-

dred kilograms of coffee. We started searching for coffee, racing against time. We begged, we offered everything, but got nowhere. Coffee was unobtainable at any price.

After two or three days the cattle train arrived. Under heavy escort, the thirty-five hundred half-dead people were marched to the station where they were packed in, one hundred fifty to a car. As the train was about to leave, something unusual happened—a policeman arrived with a message from the Gestapo to halt the train. He proceeded from car to car, calling out the name "Mrs. Green." At one of the cars there was a response, and Mrs. Green stepped off the train, holding her child's hand. Bronka was clinging to her skirt. As they were walking away, an SS man stopped the trio.

"Are both these children yours?"

"No, just one," came the frightened answer.

Just as my sister was pushed back on the train, she managed to yell out: "Tell my brothers not to despair. They must not commit suicide! They are still young! They must live to tell our story!"

Mrs. Green delivered the message the following day. She felt guilty, but still duty bound to deliver my sister's message. These were the last words we heard from Bronka.

A few weeks later I found out how she perished. The Polish engineer of the cattle train was back in town and covertly told some of the Jews working outside the ghetto about the trainload of people. He was so horrified that he felt he had to tell the Jews what had transpired. Instead of taking them to Belzec directly, a trip of several hours, his orders were to leave them on a railroad siding for two weeks. Before the Jews had been packed into the cars, the floors had been lined with untreated lime, and a few hours later the Ukrainians sprayed a chemical, some sort of an irritant, into each car. All the prisoners began coughing uncontrollably.

When this train finally arrived in Belzec, two weeks later, it was too late for a death camp. The transports were gray, bloated, slippery, and partially decomposed. The smell was inhuman. Special machines had to be used to move them into the crematoria, devices with metal hooks that could get a strong bite on the bodies.

Natan is still unaware of this story—I wanted to spare him the pain. As it is, to this day he can't come to terms with the Holocaust period and lives in a state of perpetual gloom.

8

Liquidation

Natan still blames himself for Bronka's death. His emotional burden is awesome. He has the unreasonable notion he should have done more to save her. But hadn't he beseeched Kochan to take her into hiding? Hadn't he approached an SS officer, an unheard of act, to try to trade his own life? Hadn't he spoken to O.D. Kartagener, our neighbor, in fact, to everyone he could on her behalf? In my opinion he expended every effort humanly possible trying to save her.

I have my own guilt to deal with. I never made the attempt to exchange myself for her which is a heavy cross for me to bear. I can't forgive myself this cowardice.

Bronka's death wasn't the only episode on that day that lingers with me to the present. At the end of the first day of the action, I heard that my best friend, Chamek Hammer, was still alive. Undaunted by the curfew, which on that day was not well enforced, I walked to Chamek's house to verify his safety. I tried the gate, but it was locked. I whistled our secret whistle. After a few minutes I was about to walk away when Chamek came out to the balcony. He appeared to be in deep shock and didn't even look at me. I begged him to talk. He just stared into the distance. After a couple of minutes, he went back into the house without uttering a word.

Sometime later his mother told me what happened. He had been caught that day and taken by the SS to assist in the killing at the cemetery. His function was to tie the hands of young, nude girls to an overhead wire. The SS were shooting at the girls, using their breasts as bulls-eyes. An SS man stood near him, holding a giant dog on a leash. The next target he was to tie was his former girlfriend Esta. I knew her well; she was also my friend.

When he stalled for a minute, the dog jumped on him, restrained only by the SS handler. "If you wait one more second, this dog will eat your body!" the SS man told him. Chamek had observed the other dogs. They tore at the hapless victims, usually at female

breasts or male genitals. Chamek had told his mother that the SS appeared to be under the influence of some kind of drug. He continued his gruesome job. The only blessing was that most of the victims were soon shot and relieved of their misery.

I never saw Chamek again. His silence, and the terrifying scene in the cemetery, stayed with me in nightmares over the years. Chamek was a strapping six footer, but at twelve years of age he had barely survived diphtheria. He was an only child, and after this scare his parents, a pretty woman in her thirties and a successful diamond importer around forty, lavished attention on him. After the events of September 12, he stopped talking to his parents and went into deep depression.

Eventually life settled down to ghetto norms. We went each morning to Madritsch's and returned evenings, waiting resignedly for our fate. Still another event lingered with us from the actions of September 12 and 13. We were involved only because I happened to peek out into the square on the evening of one of the actions. I noticed the Gestapo henchman who had been in charge of the selection process on that day enter the gate of the apartment house adjacent to ours. Behind him walked a gorgeous young Jewish girl. She was an exile from Berlin, where I was told her father had been a well-known industrialist. I also knew she had a handsome boyfriend, another Jewish-German exile. She had been working for the Judenrat as a typist and stenographer during the latest selection. The Judenrat's temporary branch office was in a one-story diagonal building which stood in the center of the square. Before the war it had served as a restaurant, ticket-office, and waiting room serving the bus line.

As the duo was entering the door, unbeknownst to the high-ranking SS officer, his chauffeur, a lower-ranking Gestapo, peeked from behind the office building and saw his superior with the girl. This chauffeur was the same man whom Natan petitioned a few days before to allow him to exchange himself for Bronka. Perhaps because of that coincidence, he noticed us looking out the door as well.

The following day, when we returned from work, a large black limo, filled with Gestapo, sat just in front of our house. They asked our identity and ordered us to walk to the station building at the center of the square. There we were ordered to stand against the separate walls of the station house. Behind us stood two SS with rifles pointed. Soon a woman stenographer set up a table with steno equipment outside the building. Natan was called over to the table for questioning. A few minutes later he was back before the

wall, and the same Gestapo men called me over for grilling. That the chauffeur had reported his superior's encounter with the Jewish girl was obvious from the line of questions. According to the Nuremburg Laws, having sex with a Jewish person was tantamount to high treason.

Luckily for us our lies matched completely. We both corroborated that we saw nothing, despite repeated questions designed to trip us up. To our surprise, we were discharged and told to go home. In actuality, we knew quite well that the girl had been working at the station house, compiling lists of Jews to be killed, when the SS henchman noticed her. He told the chief of O.D. that he wanted her that evening. The O.D. in turn ordered his subordinate O.D. Kartagener to arrange it. Kartagener lived in the building adjacent to ours, diagonally across from the station house. He contacted a certain Mrs. Kornreich, who lived one story below him, to have the "rendezvous" in her apartment. We knew the secret because Mrs. Kornreich was a close friend of ours.

The day after our interrogation, around 11:00 A.M., a Jewish O.D. showed up at our place of work at Madritsch's, and took Natan and I to the Judenrat. Mrs. Kartagener and Mrs. Kornreich were already there, waiting. Bienstock, the O.D. liaison to the Gestapo, took the four of us to Gestapo Headquarters. On the way we asked him, "Why"? He gave no answer.

"Are we going to be executed now?"

He smiled. "How many people do you know who came back alive from there?"

We were taken to the yard at Headquarters and ordered to sit on four benches, spaced well apart. We were cautioned not to utter a single word or even exchange glances if we didn't want to be shot instantly. We sat there for hours. Twice a Gestapo man came out, pointed his rifle at us, and cocked it. It turned out to be just a bluff.

I was completely calm. I knew with certainty that my end had arrived. As in a REM dream, my entire life passed swiftly before my eyes. While we sat there, we observed the traffic on the glass-enclosed staircase within the building. We saw the Jewish girl, her boyfriend, Volkman (the chief of the Judenrat), and a number of Gestapo ascending and descending. It seemed to me a trial was in progress, and we were in reserve as potential witnesses. I felt no fear, but just wanted my life over with as soon as possible. My only emotion was impatience.

Toward evening, a high-ranking Gestapo came down and called the four of us over. I recall his exact words: "All that you have

heard or seen . . . keep your mouths shut or else . . . you are free." I couldn't believe my ears. Later, we found out that this officer was the chief of the Krakow Gestapo, in charge of the entire district. All major decisions were made in Krakow. Pretty soon O.D. Bienstock took us back to the ghetto where rumors of our demise were already widely circulated. When we were seen alive, no one could believe their eyes.

On November 15, 1942, without any warning, the SS struck again. They surrounded section "A" of our ghetto, the section that held people who were unable to work. There were only one thousand five hundred of them; the SS quota was two thousand five hundred. They went to several work stations to collect additional section "B" residents, individuals who were strong and fit. Without selection, they were loaded on a train to Auschwitz to feed the crematoria. My friend Chamek Hammer and his father were among them.

Few in ghetto "B" who remained blinked an eye. The third "action" hardly deserved a yawn. "So what else is new?" In the near future we expected the same for ourselves. Strangely it was not to be. We settled into a "normal" routine, with people being killed randomly as usual; such events now made hardly a ripple.

Sometime around that period, my brother Simon joined us. We had heard nothing of him since September 1939. My memory of how he joined us is foggy, but I think it happened like this. Simon worked for a time with a Jewish prisoner work commando near the town of Novy Sacz for a German company discharging a military contract. By coincidence, another group of prisoners, inmates of ghetto Tarnow, worked nearby on the same project for another German company. From them Simon found out that Natan and I were alive.

Simon decided to join us, no matter what the risk. One day, on the way from work, he jumped off the transport truck as it rounded a curve. The Ukrainian guard couldn't pursue him without fear of losing the rest of the group. He shot at Simon several times, but Simon ran into the forest and eluded capture. Later he managed to sneak into the group from our ghetto and make his way to Tarnow.

The joy of our reunion was tempered by the news we exchanged, the sad chain of events in the family since September, 1939. First father, then mother, finally Bronka. Simon recounted his own story. One day, without warning, all the young Jewish males in Grybow, where Simon and his family lived, were rounded up and sent to a labor camp near Novy Sacz. At approximately the same time, all the remaining Jewish inhabitants of Grybow were taken away for

execution. The victims included Simon's wife, his sister-in-law, and our aunt and uncle.

Simon's life in the labor camp had been brutal. I no longer recall his many stories, but there were beatings, hard labor, and starvation. (He is no longer alive to ask, having died in 1982 of a heart attack.) An I.D. was absolutely necessary for Simon, and we had it arranged with an influential friend in the Judenrat. Without identification, you got no rations. When you were stopped, identification was all that stood between you and execution. The same person arranged for Simon to work with us for Madritsch.

Although his latest training had been in watchmaking, Simon was also an expert sewing machine operator, a fact that he had kept secret before the war. Hasidic Jews avoided most trades—this type of work would have been a disgrace. Now, this skill made him valuable to Madritch, and it kept him alive, able to hear the litany of misfortunes that our family had been through. We listened to each other's horror stories and cried on one another's shoulders. In short, under the existing circumstances, life seemed temporary, hopeless, and normal.

We were glad to see Simon alive, of course, but there could hardly be much joy in a situation where death was anticipated every moment. The only real question was "When?"

Every day we went to work and returned to the ghetto. Stories swirled around us of atrocities in other parts of Poland. In a town in Eastern Galicia, for example, the SS rounded up Jews and herded them into a synagogue. Then they torched the building. Those who tried to break out were mowed down by the SS guards standing outside with machine guns. A similar mode of killing had apparently been employed in other parts of Poland. Our Uncle Benjamin, the one who resembled Burl Ives, lived in the same town at that time and was among the victims. So was Natan's good friend Natan Zweig who happened to live there at the time.

Hunger, at least on ghetto terms, wasn't one of our problems. Our work outside the ghetto enabled us to purchase some food like bread and very rarely meat from gentile Poles greedy enough to risk their lives to sell it to us. We had to use money we had saved and hidden, since Madritch never paid us a penny for our work. Until summer, 1942, we had been lucky enough to keep our residence, albeit sharing it with another family. Our surroundings, at least, were familiar.

One day an O.D. walked into our house, with no warning, and told us to move to a two-room apartment across the square. That apartment was already occupied by the remnants of several fami-

lies, and one resident was a good friend of mine, Henek Klein. He was the only survivor of his family. As soon as we were out of the house, the O.D. installed a group of young women there—I have to suspect he expected certain favors in return. The misery we faced moving out of our quarters, the fact that we lost many of our remaining belongings and all privacy, didn't concern him.

To add to the stress, everything of value in our new apartment was disappearing. Someone in our midst was a thief. A certain "H.A." in our group pointed a finger at a young man named Aaron, a Czech refugee living with us. Aaron vehemently denied it and broke into tears. He also had things missing, he told us. He appeared so honest that we tended to believe him, but we were puzzled. Then one day we came home early and caught H.A. looking through our belongings.

"What are you doing?" we asked him.

"If you don't keep quiet," he calmly replied, "I'll report you to the police on a trumped-up charge. You better know what's good for you." He survived the war and is now a wealthy international diamond dealer. He is doing quite well.

My friend Henek Klein, a boy not yet eighteen, was soon taken away. He was one of the brightest people I have ever come across. Besides his encyclopedic memory, he had a gentle nature and was sensitive to everyone else's feelings. He too was burglarized by H.A., but he never said a word, not wanting to hurt anyone who was innocent. When I asked him why, he responded philosophically, "What does it mean in the present context of things?" He was obviously right.

About this time there was an announcement to the ghetto that those who had a close relative in the United States should register with the German authorities. This message was a ray of hope on a very dark horizon. In the past, there had been an exchange of such people for German P.O.W.'s, so everybody chose to believe this procedure was on the level. People registered quickly. The Germans even announced that those Jews who were married or engaged could take their partners along as well.

This story was the talk of the ghetto, and people on the list were envied. I had a friend, Sala Korn, whose boyfriend offered to marry her at that point. He was a German/Jewish exile whose father lived in America. I was happy for Sala, a pretty, popular blond, who in better times had been sweet and bubbly. The night before her departure, about twenty boys and girls met in an inconspicuous apartment situated in the courtyard of our new residence to celebrate the good fortune. Those of us who were staying felt we had

no hope, but we still celebrated our friends' good luck. There was a lot of hugging and kissing, and not a little envy. "Tell the world about the ghetto!" we implored. Late that night we boys and girls assembled there fell asleep, exhausted, on two beds and on the floor.

The following day, all the lucky people on the list reported to the Judenrat and were allegedly delivered to the Gestapo. Weeks later we heard a rumor that all of them were shipped to Auschwitz and gassed. This rumor turned out to be not entirely dependable. Several years ago, a visitor from Israel told me that Sala Korn is alive and well there. There is the possibility that she is an exception, for I have never heard of any other survivor in that group. At any rate, I am very happy for her, and should I again go to Israel, I will definitely get in touch with Sala in order to find out the true facts. The Ghetto rumors were unverifiable in most cases and often false.

By August, 1943, the ghetto area of Tarnow had been reclassified as "Concentration Camp Tarnow," so my brothers and I were officially in our first concentration camp. Late in that month, rumors swept through the quarter that the "camp" was about to be liquidated. There had been no mass killing in Tarnow since November 15, 1942, the date of the last "action." Our ghetto was lean, productive, and essential to the war effort, we thought. Perhaps we'd be spared. Pure fantasy. Concentration Camp Tarnow was doomed.

We should have known that on August 30, when Amon Goeth, the SS commander of the nearby Concentration Camp Plaszow located seventy-five kilometers from Tarnow, appeared on the streets. By that time, only twelve to thirteen thousand Jews survived in Tarnow. Goeth was a giant of a man, an extraordinary brute who had "distinguished" himself in several previous "actions," one of them in Krakow. More recently he had liquidated the large Jewish community of Ghetto Radom as well as several smaller ones. Rumor had it he had come to survey the situation for a future action. After all, he had impressive credentials. He was known for his extreme sadism.

On September 2, 1942, there were machine gun emplacements at the perimeter of the ghetto. Concentration Camp Tarnow was surrounded by the "Einsatz Kommando" of SS, Ukrainian guards, and Polish blue-uniformed police. Nothing was taken for granted. Soon the selection process started, the standard orgy of depravity and brutality that had been deployed in previous "actions," but this time with extra touches that were unique to Goeth's style.

His reputation was legendary, and he didn't want to disappoint SS expectations.

Eight thousand Jews, more than half the population of the ghetto, were selected and marched off to the railway station, a good distance through town. As they trudged through the thoroughfares of Tarnow, they were beaten mercilessly by the SS and Ukrainian guards. Those who couldn't keep up the pace were killed with rifle butts or bullets. From their windows, the Polish people witnessed this march.

At the station waited a long cattle train. The marchers were swiftly and brutally loaded, 170 people per wagon. As if this were not crowded enough, the train stopped in Bochnia, near Krakow, and picked up an additional two thousand Jews that had been selected to die the day before. Of the ten thousand Jews shipped off to Auschwitz on this train, more than half had died from suffocation on the trip. The "survivors," more dead than alive, were taken straight to the gas chambers for processing. So much for our "essential" ghetto.

All those who worked for Madritsch, Natan, Simon, and I included, went to a separate selection. A number of women, I no longer remember how many, were separated from the main group. Madritsch had been asked to make his contribution to the ovens of Auschwitz, and he must have felt he could do without these people. The selection could not have occurred without his approval. No one, however, has tipped off the Israeli government of this decision, since Madritsch was honored by Yad Vashem as a "Righteous Gentile" after World War II. Actually, his motives for operating the plant were based on pure greed, period.

Following this second selection, those people destined to work for Madritsch were loaded on a cattle train, only ninety-five per railway car, to be shipped to Plaszow. Before the doors closed on us, Goeth stopped off before each car and announced that if only one child would be found in a given wagon, all people in that car would be shot. He, personally, would do the shooting. An O.D., Max Zimmerman, had tipped him off that young children were hidden in the luggage. Zimmerman was hanged in Poland after the war for being a vicious collaborator.

At this point, Simon, Natan, and I were numb to such actions; nothing surprised us any longer. Still, some of the people without young children immediately demanded that the youngsters be surrendered. Forty children were soon delivered, joined by fourteen mothers. The fifty-four people were loaded onto a truck and taken back to Magdenburg Square. Goeth's limo followed close behind.

At the square, Goeth's ordered the women and children to come off four at a time and to lie down, neatly, on the ground. Then he shot them. Four more were told to lie on the bodies of the first four. Then they were shot. Toward the end of this gruesome process, a boy of about five, an unusually good-looking child, panicked and attempted to run away.

"Don't be afraid, little boy," Goeth called after him, in soothing, almost fatherly tones. "Would I harm a boy as good-looking as you?" The boy, somewhat at ease, took a small pocket mirror, probably his only possession, and handed it to Goeth. The German took it with his left hand as he shot the boy with his right. The job finished, he made an O.D. bring him a basin of water and soap to wash the blood off his hands.

These details became known because the SS left fifty Jews—a mixed group of mostly males and some young females—as a cleaning commando in the ghetto. Several managed to escape from the Ukrainian guards. Two of them survived the war and testified at the Goeth trial in Poland in 1946. At the trial, countless more heinous acts of bestiality came to light. Amon Goeth was sentenced to death and hanged.

During the last few months of ghetto Tarnow, the SS commander was Blache. Blache had three children, a girl in her late teens and two boys, thirteen and ten. The girl was overheard boasting that the "Führer" had made her father a "present" of the remaining Jews in Tarnow.

After the final liquidation, there were still about nine hundred Jews left hidden in bunkers. Some were systematically sniffed out by dogs and shot. Most left the bunkers voluntarily when their food and water supplies were exhausted. Without other Jews in the ghetto, they had no means of replenishing their supplies. All of them were shot.

Most of the executions were performed by Blache's two young boys. The ten-year-old was encouraged to do most of the shooting to "prove he was a man." While he shot Jews, SS members stood by, applauding. They heaped praise on him, telling him to be proud. He had done good service for the Fatherland.

9

Plaszow

On September 2, 1943, our cattle train left for Plaszow. Our wagon was dark and smelly, but there was room for some women to sit. Those who had to eliminate went to a corner and did so without the benefit of any privacy. We were all scared and didn't know what to expect. This trip was an experience unlike any other we had undergone heretofore. Parents were grieving over their lost children and we were asking one another, "What do you think is going to happen to us now?"

We arrived at night. Our first glimpse of a camp was the powerful beams of light coming down from guard towers, crisscrossing the entire camp. A nine-foot high, electrified barbed wire fence surrounded the camp, and guards manned the towers at several hundred yard intervals. The beams showed the silhouettes of countless barracks.

This was our first encounter with a "real" camp. At that time, Plaszow was designated a "work camp," but it was just a matter of semantics. True, it didn't have the apparatus of a death camp or a concentration camp, i.e., the gas chambers and crematoria, but they "managed" without it. We disembarked from the cattle train, our senses overwhelmed by so many sudden, new impressions. It was so upsetting and disconcerting, I have trouble in my mind sorting out our first hours in Plaszow.

Vicious dogs barked, rifles discharged, and the SS and Ukrainian guards called us names and cursed. We were ordered into lines and marched to a compound where we had to abandon all of our belongings. The O.D. appeared and led us to a dimly illuminated, fenced-in yard. The ground there was soft and sandy, probably by design. Those of us who still concealed valuables buried them in the soil when we were told that a personal search was coming.

The search was very thorough. Every inch of our clothing was examined and the hidden valuables, jewels or family heirlooms, or even coins hidden in a double-bottomed dish would invariably be

found. A Jewish O.D. from Tarnow, whose initials are B.S., gave the searchers hand signals indicating which Jews were wealthy and should be especially well searched. After the search, we were led to the camp kitchen where they served us a bowl of some sort of soup called "saga," which I have been told was made from a ground-up root. It tasted like soap suds. Although I was very hungry, I had trouble swallowing this stuff.

"You better learn to eat it," an inmate working in the kitchen observed, "or else you'll not survive for long." It took another day to resign myself to eating saga.

Scared, excited, and overwhelmed, we didn't sleep that night. The following morning, or soon afterward, we were taken to showers where our clothing was painted with stripes. The regular prison uniforms were not in use yet in Plaszow. After the painting, we were given our daily ration of bread that tasted like sawdust and black unsweetened ersatz coffee.

When prisoners tried to reclaim the objects they had buried in the sand the night before, they learned there would be no access to that fenced-in yard. That sandy soil was a well-planned scheme, not by the Nazis, but by the O.D., who set the same trap for each group of newcomers. The O.D. simply unearthed the hidden valuables on the following day. My brothers and I had some money in Polish notes on us, but instead of burying it, Natan gave it for safekeeping to an O.D. outside the enclosure. He was an acquaintance from Tarnow who had lived with us for a while in our apartment there, and we half hoped he would return it after the search. We hoped in vain; he refused our pleadings to give back at least a portion of the money.

We were now assigned to a barrack, one of a number of large wooden buildings built in rows that could accommodate about three hundred inmates each. There was nothing in the barrack itself except three-tiered bunk beds. We slept, Natan and I, two to a bunk, on wood, at first with no blankets. Early in the morning, a bugler woke us. We were counted, given our daily ration of "sawdust" bread, and shipped off to work on foot. Natan, Simon, and I continued to work for Madritsch, for a factory had been established there already. At this point, our apprehension lessened a little. We knew we were intended to work now, not to die, and we had not yet gotten a good sense of life in our second camp.

The Jews from Krakow, who were brought to Plaszow earlier, had operated the factory for months already. Krakow Jews, in fact, founded Plaszow. Prior to 1939, fifty-six thousand Jews had lived in that city, and thousands of others were crowded into their ghetto

to be decimated in several "actions." Most ended up in the ovens of Auschwitz. Some were temporarily shipped to other ghettos and liquidated elsewhere. During the final "action" in Krakow, the SS took several thousand fit individuals to Plaszow where they erected barracks and built the camp infrastructure.

Like all Jewish work groups, they were subject to beatings or being shot during the building process. Nonetheless, they had the "advantage" of being established in the camp. The entire O.D. were initially drawn from their ranks, and they sometimes favored people from Krakow. For example, they might bypass friends or acquaintances during selections for "special" assignments or even for execution. Inmates from other towns, now living in Plaszow, were taken instead.

Plaszow was a strange place, as camps go. The inmates were under the administration of the O.D. who formed the lowest strata of camp government. The O.D. in their turn had to answer to Ukrainian guards. Above everyone was the camp SS, with Amon Goeth at the helm. If a Jewish O.D. was lenient to a prisoner, his actions would sometimes come to the attention of the SS. The SS would show him how to act in the future, using his own body as an example. No one forgot such a lesson.

At least when watched by the SS, the O.D. had to perform "properly." Some of the O.D., however, notably Wilek Chilowich and Mietek Finkelstein, went beyond the call of duty. They acted like animals, almost on a par with the Ukrainians or SS guards. Upon our return from work, at times they would take us for strenuous exercise, beat us, and insult us. The most respectable people would be singled out for special treatment, like especially heavy work details. They loved to call us animals of one sort or another. They made us crawl on the dirt and bark like dogs. They called us the vilest names imaginable. The unspoken excuse was that their cruelty shielded us from far worse actions by the SS.

Of all the sadists at Plaszow, Amon Goeth, the camp commander, was undisputedly the worst. Even among the SS his antics were legend. Sometimes from his balcony he would observe the camp through field glasses and shoot unsuspecting passersby. Other times he would order his large dog "Rolf" to tear at the flesh of prisoners for no apparent reason. Just the sight of Goeth brought extreme panic.

Another well-known member of the SS was the "eggman." He earned his nickname by his peculiar mode of torture and killing. He would hide behind a barrack, and when an inmate came face to face with him, he would kick him with his heavy boot in the

groin. The kicking would continue while the victim was on the ground, doubled up with excruciating pain. Most inmates caught this way begged to be shot. The "eggman" mostly obliged.

The Ukrainian guards, in the main, were equally sadistic. Rumor had it they were given money or other incentives to push their bestiality to the limit. They rarely used their whips the way they were intended, preferring to wallop their victims with the handles. They would use their rifle butts for almost any provocation. Those who worked for Madritsch were luckier than inmates who were shipped out each morning to the other workstations in Plaszow or in Krakow. In contrast, workers for Madritsch worked less strenuous assignments inside barracks. We also were the beneficiaries of an unwritten law in Plaszow that workers at Madritsch's were not to be shot. Otherwise we were not spared, and we shared the normal camp regimen. We suspected that Madritsch bribed Goeth generously for this favor or else the camp commander was a silent partner. The plant produced around twenty thousand military uniforms a month and was immensely profitable. Madritsch paid the German authorities 7.50 marks a day for each male prisoner and 5.00 per female. The profits for everyone involved were enormous.

Madritsch's pretty daughter came along with her father on occasion and she fell in love with a young Jew from Tarnow named Sandt. It was common knowledge, but we didn't publicize it for obvious reasons. Sandt had been a violin prodigy before the war and was quite handsome to boot. Her visits had to remain purely platonic as well as secret. Naturally nothing came of it. Raymond Titsch, a humane and decent man, supervised the plant. He smuggled bread into the factory barracks from Krakow to supplement our meager camp rations, an offense that carried a stern punishment if discovered.

My brothers and I worked in the same barrack, but Natan, having special skills in the clothing line, tried to be assigned to the cutting room. People there were key production personnel, and from what we had heard, they had certain privileges. "Stay put and have patience," Hudys, the cutting room foreman, told him. One day Hudys invited Natan to the cutting room.

"You say you were an expert. Show me what you can do." Nearby was a stack of material, sixty ply high, marked and ready for cutting. The patterns lay nearby on the same table. Natan took a cursory glance at the layout.

"I can save you at least 10 centimeters in this cutting." He began to relay the patterns. The savings at the end was 700 centimeters of cloth. Hudys assigned him to the cutting room on the spot.

It is no wonder the foreman was impressed. The Germans apportioned a set amount of cloth per uniform, so now hundreds of yards of material became surplus. Titsch smuggled it out of Plaszow to Krakow where he exchanged it for food. From then on we had an occasional piece of salami or even butter.

One day an SS, Willy Haase, dropped into the cutting room unexpectedly. At first Natan didn't notice him. When he did, he didn't know how to react. "Should I have stopped working and saluted, or should I have continued working?" he asked us later in the barracks. "Either way I might be guilty of a capital infraction." In the end, Natan chose to continue working, which incited Willy Haase to walk over and slap him on the face. He drew his gun.

"Jew swine, you didn't salute me—outside!" As he was about to shoot Natan, Titsch came running, and grabbed Haases's arm.

"You can't shoot this man!" Titsch said. "He's indispensable here!" The SS man slowly put the gun back in the holster, slapped Natan again, and ordered him back to work.

We talked it over that night and decided that Haase, being a lower ranking SS henchman, wasn't paid off by Madritsch and wanted to show his displeasure by shooting a key person in the plant, in this case Natan. It reminded us of a case back in the ghetto when two German foremen in charge of two separate Jewish inmate work details on the same project did not get along. They manifested their antipathy to one another by beating each other's Jews on a regular basis.

Of all the inmates at Plaszow, the prisoners working the stone quarry had the toughest time. The stone quarry was considered the worst assignment in the camp. Quarry work, breaking stone for the roads in camp, was arduous, as was building the roads. The supervisors were the indescribably brutal Ukrainian guards. They pushed the workers beyond their capacities. They beat them. Few people lasted on the detail more than a few days.

The part that would kill you eventually was the isolation from the outside. There was no access to extra food. One couldn't survive long on the limited camp food rations, beatings aside. Outside work assignments were sometimes just as tough, but at least you were able to supplement the rations. Some prisoners even smuggled food into the camp, obviously at the risk of their lives. From most of the labor commandos, you also had to worry about unannounced selections. Plaszow, like all other camps, had to feed the ovens of death camps. Only Madritsch's factory was different; we were the "lucky" ones.

At first, if you were condemned to die in Plaszow, you were

simply shot. The execution ground was called, with typical concentration camp humor, Hujowa Gorka, "Prick Hill." Thousands of prisoners died there and were buried in the nearby forest. Jews caught in or around Krakow on forged Aryan identity papers were also normally shot at Hujowa Gorka. When the forest became saturated with bodies, the SS had to resort to alternate means of disposal.

In January, 1944, Plaszow was reclassified a concentration camp. Not much changed with this designation. I do remember at that period there were at least two executions by hanging instead of shooting. In one instance the rope broke. The young victim begged on his knees for his life, to no avail. The second time the rope worked.

There was a clinic in Plaszow, run by Dr. Leon Gross. It had a dual function: if you lived through the rough treatment and recovered within a few days, you had a chance to survive. If your recovery was slower, and you couldn't return to work, Dr. Gross had you injected with Benzene and dispatched you to die.

I find it sad that, like the O.D. in the camps, Dr. Gross was a Jew. A brute of the first order, he gave the SS every cooperation in and out of the clinic. When he found people lying on the infirmary floor, he would kick them with his boots and order the hospital personnel to "make room." From time to time, SS women would round up people randomly in the camp and take them to the clinic to donate blood. Since it was forbidden by the Nuremberg racial laws to use Jewish blood to transfuse Germans, I don't know who benefited from this practice. Those who gave blood rarely survived for long—how could they on camp rations?

Using the camp latrine in Plaszow was torture in itself. To get to it you had to cross a veritable lake of urine several centimeters deep. All the latrine spaces were covered with excrement from the many prisoners with diarrhea who couldn't hold back until they found a place. There was no paper and not enough space. The O.D. rushed everyone, first with verbal threats, then with whips. The only small consolation was the latrine at the Madritsch barracks which was cleaner than the one at camp.

Sometime around 1944 one of the barracks burned down because there wasn't enough water to fight the fire. Goeth decreed that all Plaszow inmates dig water reservoirs to be completed within seventy-two hours. If the Jewish police didn't get this assignment completed, rumor had it that Goeth had threatened them with their lives. They got it completed, whipping us and egging us on with shouts as we dug at the wet soil in the middle of heavy rains. We

were not allowed to sleep and got almost no food during this ordeal. The reservoirs were completed on time and the normal routine returned to the camp.

Just because we were not beaten in the Madritsch factory, we weren't necessarily immune to punishment in the camp. My brothers and I were beaten on numerous occasions by the guards and the O.D. Usually we were beaten on the way to our barracks returning from work or in camp after work. Once, on the way home, a high-ranking SS officer randomly picked a number of inmates from our ranks to do some work in the camp. Though I worked as hard and fast as I could, he wasn't satisfied and singled me out. He whipped me repeatedly over my entire body and, for good measure, turned around the whip and beat me over the head with the handle.

Sometime in spring, 1944, the entire camp was ordered to report to Appel Platz, the main square. At the time, I was running a high fever to the point of delirium. Nevertheless, I had been reporting to work every day to avoid remaining in the camp barracks or going to Dr. Gross's infirmary. My brothers somehow covered for me at work.

It was still cold and raw outside, and we were wearing the standard thin-striped prison garb. We stood at attention for hours awaiting the beginning of a selection. I had a strong urge to cough, but held back with all my will-power, silently coughing inside to muffle the sound. Had I coughed aloud, even once, I would have been selected to die by injection. During one coughing spell, I felt a sharp pain in my groin area. It turned out to be a hernia.

As we stood there, continually inspected like cattle in a marketplace, loudspeakers blared beautiful lullabies. The music seemed so out of place in the grim and stark location; we soon learned, however, that it wasn't designed for our benefit. While the barracks were empty, and the entire camp population was on the square, the Ukrainian guards and the SS were searching the camp for children. They searched every conceivable area that could serve as a hiding place.

One of the incentives to become an O.D. was the chance to bring wives and children into Plaszow. The children kept a low profile, always hidden away in the barracks. I had not even been aware of their presence. Now they were brought out from their hiding places and taken to the square to the sound of lullabies. Their mothers were beside themselves.

One by one, the children were gathered on the square. Tall and mean-looking SS women shouted at the crying children and whipped them viciously. Each mother who saw her child join the

ranks of the hapless children broke into hysteria. It was all done to the "soothing" strains of lullabies, a device meant to maximize the mothers' pain.

The SS women in charge of this action were by and large as cruel as their male counterparts. Two hundred sixty-eight children were transported to Auschwitz and gassed (according to *Schindler's List* by Thomas Kennealy). Eleven youngsters evaded discovery during the SS dragnet by hiding under the latrine. They stood all day, waist deep in human excrement, choked by ammonia fumes. Flies ate them alive. Eventually, however, they, too, were discovered and shipped to Auschwitz. Something like fourteen to sixteen hundred adults joined them on their trip to death. After seven hours at attention, the rest of us were told to return to our barracks.

Soon after this action, a transport of young women arrived in Plaszow from Hungary. They appeared to be in their late teens or early twenties and were well-fleshed with rosy cheeks. The Holocaust hadn't come to Hungary until spring 1944. The newly arrived girls were separated from us with barbed wire. Through the wire, they told us that they had arrived from Auschwitz where the rest of their large transport were gassed. They, the "lucky ones," were shaven on their entire bodies and were given oversized burlap bags without sleeves in place of the pretty dresses they had worn upon arrival in Auschwitz. They wore no underwear, period, and only wooden clogs for shoes. The next day they were taken to the stone quarry.

We could see them from a distance, pushing carts loaded with stone up a steep grade while being abused and whipped by the guards. As hard as it was upgrade, it was more difficult to hold the carts downgrade. Sometimes they would fall down the embankment and had to be pushed up to be righted on the flimsy rails. This required a superhuman effort.

During the pushing process, they were whipped nonstop on their nearly naked bodies. I saw a cart fall on the women pushing it up the embankment. They were severely injured and probably shot afterward. Completely isolated from the main camp, these Hungarian girls were given less than starvation rations for their toil. In the evening, they stood near the fences to beg a small piece of bread. A couple of times I gave them my food ration. After a few days, they were shadows of their former selves. They were kept in Plaszow only transitionally; after a short time, they were shipped elsewhere.

During the mid-summer of 1944 we were told that an important

detail of the Gestapo in charge of concentration camp affairs would inspect our work barrack at Madritsch and elsewhere in Plaszow to make a determination about the fate of our camp—should it be liquidated immediately or should its demise be postponed for a while. Indeed, soon thereafter a group of high-ranking Gestapo officers showed up in our barrack. There was electricity in the air as they walked in. We knew that our lives were at stake, so we did everything to impress those beasts. Our sewing machines sounded the speed and intensity of fine-tuned machine guns. I pretended to be deeply immersed in my work with my big shears. On command we stopped only momentarily to salute when they entered and left. They left after several minutes without saying a word. It was difficult for me to understand how they could draw any logical conclusion from such a brief visit. We didn't know what they decided and were left with much anxiety and no clues.

Sometimes in August 1944 we heard what sounded like artillery rumble in the still of night. Should we allow ourselves the luxury of hope? Did it spell liberation or just our end? What was next? A sudden evacuation order was announced by the O.D. We of Madritsch, and many others, were rounded up and chased to the railroad siding within the camp. Amid deliberate chaos, the SS guards barked commands and hurled insults. We were ordered into groups of one hundred fifty persons to board cattle trains. Natan, Simon, and I didn't know what to think; our thinking process had stopped.

German guards counted us repeatedly to make sure no one was missing. We stood at attention for hours, the eerie silence of terrorized prisoners contrasting with the shouting of the guards and the barking of German shepherds. Rifles discharged, and inmates were taken at random from our midst for beatings or maulings by the dogs.

A guard pointed his finger at me. "How dare you look at me? Come forward, Jew swine!" I did. He proceeded to wallop me with two sticks, one in each hand. The blows landed all over my body until my head was numb, my body in severe pain, and my skin bloodied everywhere.

I was barely conscious and fully expected, even hoped, to be finished off by a bullet. Instead, at that crucial moment, there was a shouted command and a whistle in the distance to board the train immediately. This caused the SS guard's distraction and spared my life. Within seconds we had to run toward the train. Simon and Natan helped me, for I couldn't walk unassisted.

Guards were posted on each side of us, and as we were running, their bullwhips landed on our heads. They packed in one hundred

and fifty inmates to a car; there was only room to stand. When the doors closed, the only light came from a tiny window near the top of the car. The only source of air was a crack under the door. Outside, the temperature was boiling, probably somewhere in the nineties. In no time, It was oppressively hot inside.

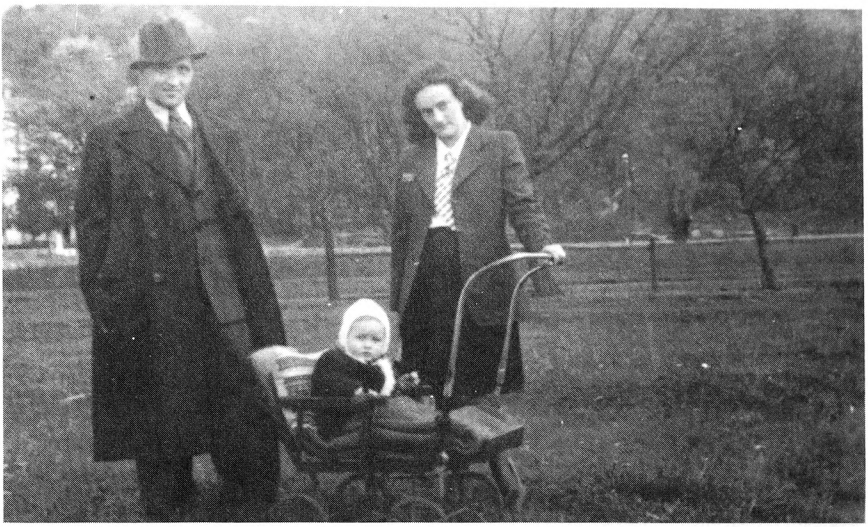
All of us had been given a loaf of bread before boarding while forming up into groups, but no water. We had not eaten all day, but what we craved was water, and there was none. Soon the train started rolling. It traveled for some hours, then stopped in some unknown location. Outside the guards were talking, and we soon learned where we were.

We were on the outskirts of Auschwitz.

Standing left to right: Brother Natan, Father Sumer, Brother Simon, Sister Klara. Seated left to right: Mother Chana, Maternal Grandfather Srul. Standing next to Mother is Bill at age 3 or 3½. Photo given to us in 1948 by an American relative.

Brother Simon in 1950.

Engagement Photo (Edith and Bill), 1948.

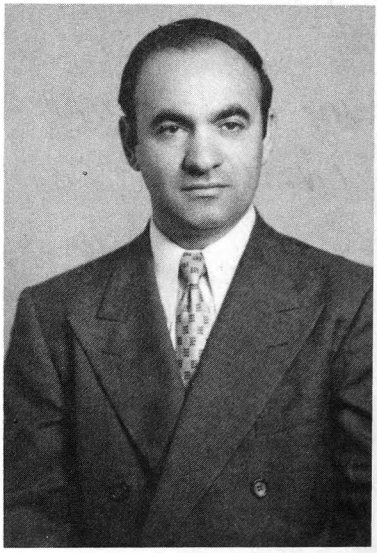


The Depas, for whom Edith worked during World War II in Rzeszow.

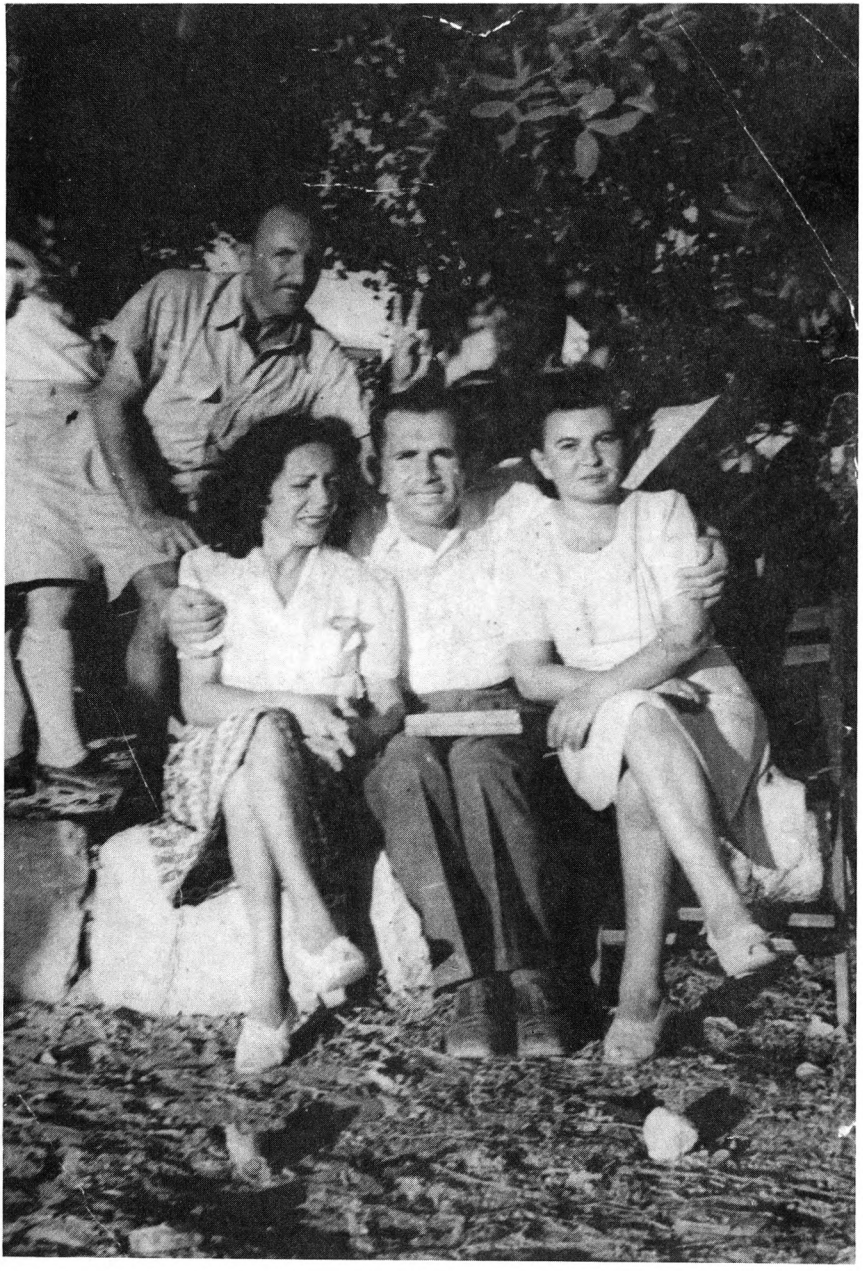
Edith at 16.

Wedding photo in 1949 (Edith and Bill)

Edith and Bill in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, in 1948.

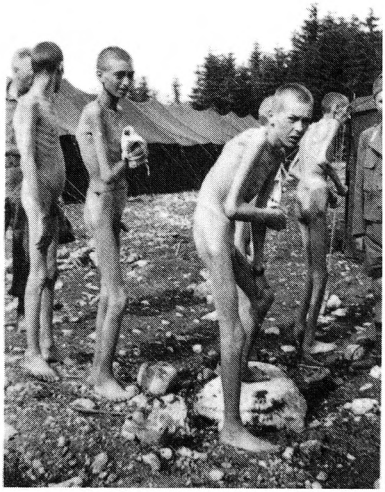


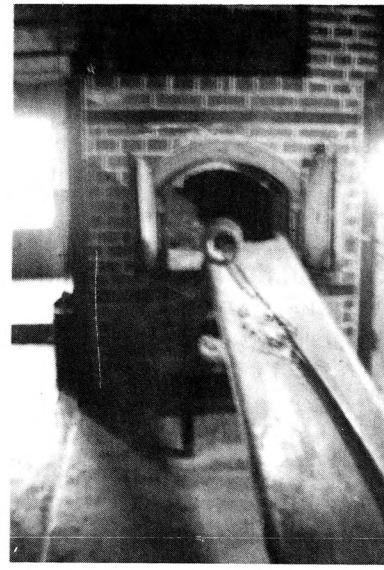
Brother Natan in 1950.



Sister Klara in Israel, at right—1938.

In Ebensee, Austria, May 1945. (Photos taken by U.S. soldiers.) Also small crematorium in Ebensee, Austria.





10

Mauthausen

It is hard to tell time in a boxcar. We must have sat there for at least two days, enduring a nearly unbearable thirst. As long as it was available, some of us drank urine. I couldn't drink mine, but the people pressed up against me fought over it. "Give us water or shoot us!" we begged the guards.

"We won't waste bullets on Jews" was the response.

Some of us could hear the guards talking. The ovens of Auschwitz were working to capacity, they said. We would have to wait two weeks to be processed. Delay, apparently, was out of the question. The order came to take us elsewhere.

Out of nowhere, the train began to move. After hours of travel, we stopped once again. The door opened, and there was a command for two men from each car to come out to carry water from a nearby well back to the prisoners. As weak as we were, there was no shortage of volunteers. Everyone tried to get access to the water. The guards used this opportunity to whip us to their heart's content, but no one paid much attention. After fifteen minutes, we were all shoved back into the cars, the doors shut again, and the train rolled on.

It didn't take long to realize that the stop for water hadn't been an act of generosity. We found out the hard way that the water was unfit for drinking without boiling. First, our bodies began to stiffen from the water. Some of us fainted. A few died from the intense humidity generated by our perspiration. Everyone had stomach cramps. Like everyone else, Natan, Simon, and I tried to push toward the crack in the door to get a whiff of air.

Finally the train stopped, the door opened, and a guard shouted, "Raus!" In mere seconds the train was empty, for we were prodded by whips, rifle butts, and the dogs that jumped up to the cars. The entire trip from Plaszow to Mauthausen had taken approximately seventy-two hours.

On the march we had to drag along the corpses of those who

did not survive the trip, for the cardinal rule of concentration camps was that the body count at destination be complete. I was lucky enough to have shoes, but one was wooden and too tight, and the other leather and several sizes too large. The march was constantly uphill, and the dogs and rifle butts performed their usual accompaniment. A couple of rows ahead of me walked my brother's former boss, the man who had taught him clothing design. His name was Shimon Koch, a man of around forty. A guard hit his skull with a rifle butt and dropped him to the ground. He, like all the others who fell, was either beaten or bayoneted to death. All the bodies had to be brought along by the other prisoners.

After several terrible kilometers, we finally reached a camp. Exhausted, ill, dragging our blistered feet, we entered the gates, almost happy to be at a concentration camp. We were in Austria. It was our third camp. The sign at the entrance read "Mauthausen."

The first sensation of this camp was the oppressive, organic smell which overcame us. Immediately our eyes and nostrils started to burn from the smoke emanating out of a large, concrete building. All I could see was the smokestack, belching black smoke over the camp. It was our first glimpse, and smell, of a crematorium.

To our surprise, instead of mud, there was an asphalt street with neat barracks on each side. We were marched to the main square and given a dish of hot tea. So far, so good. But we knew the processing would soon start. A loudspeaker announced that those who felt sick or had blisters must go to a clinic for treatment. Simon wanted to take advantage of this offer, but Natan and I, sensing a trick begged him not to go. Sure enough, the sick were taken straight to be killed.

The rest of us had to form a line, undress, and throw our clothing on a pile. I had to leave my hernia girdle as well. Being without a girdle under camp conditions meant certain death in the very near future. How could I lug heavy burdens without support? When the capo guarding the pile looked away for a moment, Simon darted over and grabbed the girdle. He surely would have been beaten to a pulp had a guard noticed.

Next came a search where they even looked into our mouths. It was standard procedure for those who had gold caps or crowns to be given lethal injections. It made it easier to extract the gold from their corpses. Afterwards the bodies were taken to the crematorium.

In groups of fifty we were ordered to the bath house. It took the prison barbers less than two minutes to shave each individual's body, with no charge for the cuts and nicks all over our skin. In

the showers, we were given only one or two minutes to wash, with a beating awaiting anyone who tried to take longer. Somehow the effect of a whip-lash is much more painful on wet bodies. Each one of us was given some torn underwear and taken to the barracks.

I was separated from my brothers entering the showers and took a great risk hiding behind a large barrel to wait for the next group of fifty inmates. Fortunately, Natan and Simon were among that group, and I was able to rejoin them unnoticed. Had I been seen, I might well have been beaten to death.

Again we had to undergo a search. This time a man with a rubber glove and metal forceps checks our rectums for hidden jewels. Those few on whom something was found were either taken away, never to return, or simply beaten to a pulp on the spot.

After this "processing" was over, we were given some thin soup and a small piece of bread. Few of us could eat it. Most had violent diarrhea from the water they had given us prior to entering Mauthausen. The water stop was routine and deliberate. To help matters along, the tea they had been so "kind" to give us was laced with laxatives and God knows what else to facilitate the rectal search. My diarrhea got progressively worse and developed into dysentery which resulted in constant bleeding.

The first two or three nights we slept at least two thousand to a barrack which was meant to accommodate three hundred prisoners. We were not issued the regular striped uniforms and remained in our underwear. Old prisoners whom we met told us that this procedure indicated that we were probably being quarantined to be sent to another destination—usually after ten days to two weeks. For the same reason, we were not assigned regular work.

Our days were a page from Dante's Inferno. Camp henchmen, called "Kapos," chased us irrationally from place to place, beating us constantly. Individually, or in groups, we were taken for different punishing labors. As in Plaszow, Mauthausen had its stone quarry, probably the most infamous of all the death camp quarries. Assignment to this labor often carried a death sentence. At the bottom of the quarry, two stronger inmates would place a stone on your shoulder and you had to carry it 186 steps up. No railings or barriers protected you on the narrow, steep steps carved out of the wall. Midway were landings occupied by guards. If you couldn't walk fast enough, you received a severe beating, often culminated by a shove that precipitated you to your death. I was lucky enough not to be chosen for the stoneworks. In my weakened condition with dysentery, it would have meant certain death. My brothers were equally lucky in this respect.

If the days were dreadful, the nights were worse. For the first two or three days we slept either four to a bunk, of course without mattresses, or on our sides on the floor, packed exactly like sardines. Our stomach and bladder problems forced us to run to the latrine constantly. We literally had to step on countless, cursing bodies to earn our minute or two to eliminate. Those who weren't finished on time, were rushed and viciously beaten. The process went on all night.

One night, plane engines roared overhead. Soon, the noise of German flak punctuated the air. Flares from the planes lit up the skies, and we heard explosions that seemed to be almost overhead. I, and everyone else in the barracks, prayed for an American bomb to hit us and finish our sufferings. Of course, we couldn't know if it was an American or English plane, but we called everything American. After some minutes, the planes flew away. Quiet returned. The camp was untouched, and our hopes were dashed.

The following morning, as we were given our customary pumpkin soup, a fellow inmate from our barrack, obviously starving, took the risk of standing in line for a second helping. He was recognized and his punishment meted out immediately. He was led to the square, and, in the presence of other prisoners, made to lower his underwear and bend over a bench. A specially trained Kapo inflicted the required twenty-five blows, but instead of a whip, he substituted a $2'' \times 4''$. At the end, a lifeless bundle of skin and broken bones lay on the ground in a pool of blood.

One day, I got assigned to a job where I met a Polish Kapo—a prisoner who had been there for some time. He befriended me, I think, because I spoke Polish. He told me many horror stories about Mauthausen, but one stands out in my mind. It concerns the fate of 965 Dutch-Jewish women and children who were brought in several weeks before I arrived.

They were well dressed, most with jewelry on their persons. Obviously they were told to take along their best belongings for a resettlement—the usual fairy tale. Immediately upon entrance, they were taken to the camp square and killed. In order to save bullets or injections—bullets could no longer be "wasted" on a Jew—the orders were to kill them with rifle butts or bayonettes. The Kapo's interpretation of this action was that it was retribution for German reverses on the battlefield.

He also pointed to a section of the wall surrounding part of the camp. "A number of political prisoners were placed alive in that wall," he said. "It happened during the initial stages of construction."

"What are those neat barracks I noticed by the front gate?" I asked him once.

"Reserved for administration personnel," he informed me. He also affirmed that we were most likely going to be sent for some work assignment to another camp, probably upon request for inmate labor, either by some government agency or by private industry.

Sure enough, after fourteen days of torture called quarantine, we were sent to another camp named St. Valentin, also in Austria. Upon arrival at our fourth camp, our spirits were in a shambles, our bodies looked like skeletons with boils, and yet we were about to start a new painful chapter in another of Hell's outposts. St. Valentin was merely a satellite camp of Mauthausen.

St. Valentin was small. We started out with fifteen hundred inmates, all living in three barracks. In addition to 500 Jews, there were 500 Russian P.O.W.'s, 200 Frenchman, 200 Italians, and a sprinkling of Yugoslavs, Spaniards, Dutch, Belgians, and others. We were attached to the Nubelungen Verke, a sprawling plant the size of a city. Nubelungen Verke produced the famous "tiger" battle tanks. We lived in the camp and worked in the factory, a ten-to-fifteen minute march away.

Conditions in St. Valentin, although not quite as bad as Mauthausen, were far worse than Plaszow. To get through a day there, in our broken condition, was a major achievement. As in most camps, we slept two to a bunk, three stories high, in unheated barracks. The only bedding was a thin blanket issued to two inmates. At four o'clock in the morning, three shrill whistles woke us. If you were not out of your bunk in seconds, you risked being beaten with lead-tipped, leather fringed whips. One wallop could incapacitate you for the day.

So totally exhausted were we from the previous day that our eyelids were too heavy to lift. Our bodies were covered with boils and our feet covered with blisters. I still wore my ill-matched set of a tight wooden clog and a loose leather shoe. I went to sleep hoping not to wake up. But when the whistles blew, I was terrified of the whips and up off the bunk in no time. It wasn't much consolation having Natan and Simon undergoing the same brutal routine. There was little time to talk with one another and little to say. Each of us was equally resigned and had his own cross to bear.

The routine was to run toward the outside water spigots to wash. Summer or winter, we stripped to the waist and washed with cold water. We had no soap and were told to use sand. Scrubbing the boils with sand simply irritated them. Occasionally we would get

bars of what resembled soap with the initials R.J.F. inscribed. This acronym allegedly came from the perverted German sense of humor—"Rein Judishes Fet" translated to "Pure Jewish Fat."

In reality, there was no "fat" in that "soap," just ground-up Jewish bones. The soap didn't foam and wasn't much more effective than sand, but at least it didn't get into our boils. You would think that the soap would have caused us to recoil in horror, but we were devoid of "normal" feelings. Life was so temporary anyway. As with every other activity in a concentration camp, beatings were administered to anyone who was slow. Dodging whips was just part of life in the camps. After washing, we ran to the "Appel Platz" for the morning count.

Actually, there was a small inside washroom in a nearby barrack, but I never dared to enter it. It was accessible to Kapos and stronger non-Jewish inmates. There was no fraternization with the other inmates, period, and it was risky for a Jew to wash there. Being fellow prisoners with us didn't mean other nationalities liked Jews. An oversized barrel filled with water stood in the middle of the washroom, and anytime a Kapo or other non-Jewish inmate felt like it, he would dump you head down into it, cover you with a lid, and drown you. For this action, his reward was your bread ration for the day.

The count lasted two hours. Summer or winter we stood there, at attention, dressed in thin-striped uniforms, while the SS counted us over and over. All the while they kept up the random beatings and harassment. You didn't dare cough or make a sound. If you coughed, you were taken to the infirmary, where twice a week a paramedic injected anyone unfit for work with benzene. After we were discharged, we ran to the barracks for our morning ration of bread and a bowl of black unsweetened ersatz coffee. Finally, the guards marched us off to work.

My job consisted of drilling holes of various sizes into different tank components. One didn't need a college education to do it. Civilian foremen supervised us, either Austrians or Germans, and with rare exceptions, they seemed indifferent to our fate. Around noon, we were given a bowl of soup, usually pumpkin or cabbage. I gave away the cabbage worms I found in my soup. Most of the inmates, however, hoped to find them—the more the better.

Around 6:00 P.M. we were allowed to march home. Twice, upon entering St. Valentin, we saw people hanging from their hands and feet, their bodies full of whip marks. After their shoulders finally dislocated, the Kapos cut their ropes and let them fall to the ground

like potato sacks. These were the Russian P.O.W.'s, being punished for trying to get an extra bowl of watery soup.

Rainy days inspired the SS to take us out for exercise. At the end of a strenuous routine, they would order us to crawl in the mud and bark like dogs. Apparently they used the same manual as the guards in Plaszow. If you didn't crawl fast enough to suit them, or bark loud enough, they whipped you mercilessly.

Other times, the SS would search our rectums with forceps when we returned to camp, looking for pencils or God knows what. I once found a piece of pencil that I hid in my rectum, but I quickly discarded it before a search. I had nothing to write on and no use for a pencil, but I had no other private possessions and the pencil seemed like a link to the past. Those on whom something was found, indeed a rare occurrence, were beaten to a pulp.

Back in camp, we ran again to the square for the evening count. Again we stood at attention for two hours and endured repeated countings. The SS inspected our uniforms for missing buttons and cleanliness, even if they had just been driving us through the mud on our hands and knees. We had no warm water, no soap, no time, no change of clothes, not even any thread, but none of this was their concern. Anything was a valid excuse to torment us.

A bowl and a spoon were our only possessions—losing them was tantamount to a death sentence. Inmates kept them attached to their bodies, day and night. We needed them when we were finally allowed to run back to the barracks for our evening meal, a watery soup. If we were lucky, we got a potato peel or two in this alleged soup, the refuse from the potatoes peeled for the guards. We drank this soup in seconds and licked the bowls clean for minutes.

My barrack was under the supervision of a middle-aged German criminal who had been incarcerated for killing his entire family in a fit of rage. His name was Fritz, and he claimed to be a lawyer. He was of small stature, but a beast in human flesh. His mood swung constantly. One minute he was engaging you in almost fatherly conversation; the next minute he would club you to death. He liked to make night inspections for lice, usually after we were asleep. There was no shortage of lice in the camp, but Fritz would make an example of those on whom he found a heavy infestation. He once told us that he had difficulty falling asleep unless he killed, or at least severely beat, one prisoner before retiring.

Fritz favored one of the young Jewish inmates M., a boy whom he kept as his sex partner. He fattened M. up and invited him to sleep in his own quarters. To the rest of us, sleep was nearly impos-

sible. Stomach and bladder problems afflicted nearly all of us, and we had to frequent the latrine most of the night.

The latrine was simply a hole in the ground, surrounded by wooden perches, located about seven hundred feet from our barrack. After 10:00 P.M., you had to make the trip barefoot in your underwear, even if it was snowing. The perches were covered with feces, and since many of the inmates couldn't hold it until the latrine, the ground was nearly as bad. We had no paper and were rushed when we got there. On guard was the German Kapo Willy Lipinsky, a criminal who had been transferred from Dachau to St. Valentin. He saw to it that no one stayed more than two minutes. Willy's favorite trick for those who did was to push them into the sewage.

Willy took a liking to me. He asked me to become his sex partner. Kapos had plenty of food, but they needed sex. I rejected his constant advances, even when he forced himself on me. One night he promised me food for sex, but hungry as I was, I pushed him away. He became enraged. "I'll teach you a lesson you'll remember," he said.

The following morning, when we stood in line waiting to go to work, Fritz called out the prison number I had been given in Mauthausen. Being exhausted and half-asleep, I didn't recognize it. Fritz returned to his room, looked up my name, and came back. This time I responded. He ordered me inside the barrack and accused me of sabotage. "You walked out of here in a sock!" he yelled at me. "That's German property!"

I knew I was supposed to walk barefoot and not destroy German goods, but I had kept one sock on because I couldn't get it off. The boils on my leg, the result of malnutrition, had grown through my sock, and the oozed puss had dried and held it fast. I had them lanced a week or two before, naturally without the benefit of painkillers, but new ones had formed. I knew full well that this medical excuse meant nothing to Fritz. The Kapos needed no excuse to single you out for torture. Moreover, everyone in the barracks knew Fritz's reputation.

Willy's threat of the night before came back to me. All of the prisoners knew that some Kapos practiced homosexuality in the camps. Consider their situation. They ate in the kitchen, as much as they wanted, and they were not exposed to the harsh conditions of the other prisoners. The only thing they lacked, except in exceptional circumstances, was women; they quickly found substitutes. If they wanted bread to buy sexual favors from an inmate, they

simply killed another inmate or two and collected their rations for the day.

Each Kapo had his boy "companion," whom they protected and to whom they fed extra rations to fatten them up. These companions got the soft jobs in camp so they could be available all the time. Willy Lipinsky, who had singled me out as a potential lover, was no exception. He was a low-life professional criminal, a cheat, thief, and murderer. Even the other Kapos, mostly criminals themselves, looked down on him. His night-time latrine detail had to be the lowest Kapo job in St. Valentin. Nonetheless, when his "sex rights" were challenged, Fritz would certainly help Willy. I would be "taught" a lesson as an example to others. And Fritz would make sure that M. noticed.

As I watched Fritz's face, trying to find a clue to my fate, I recalled one Sunday afternoon when we were off from regular work. Our orders were to stay outside in the stiff wind and the cold. When I didn't see Fritz around, I walked inside to get warm and stumbled on Fritz and M. in the act of lovemaking. I left quickly. Had I been seen, Fritz would have killed me on the spot.

Whatever other indignities I might face, I had vowed not to willingly submit to homosexuals. I had some close encounters but I always resisted. To Natan, Simon, and myself, we had to have some human dignity, some moral principles, even in the horror of the camps. No matter how hungry we were, we didn't eat the bark on trees or grass like some of the inmates. We didn't chew on coal or on cat and dog bones. Nor did we stoop to cannibalism like some other prisoners did near the end of the war.

Some of those who did submit to the Kapos' advances seemed to become like them. M., for example, was a chubby teenager, and you can imagine what the other emaciated inmates thought when he began to throw his weight around. He used his relationship to Fritz, and his good health, to bully other prisoners. One time he beat a man named Srul Koch to death. Koch, a brother of Natan's former boss, had been a highly respected man in Tarnow, and M. killed him for literally no reason. He simply didn't like his emaciated appearance, yet Srul Koch was considered one of the best-looking men in Tarnow before the war.

So I knew what I could expect from Fritz himself, having challenged the Kapo system of sex rights with the prisoner of choice. He announced my sentence: "You will get twenty-five blows with a rubber trencheon. You will do the counting!"

I didn't respond or protest. Excuses were useless, and there was no recourse. Defending myself would have only made it worse.

Fritz was the ultimate law here, the judge, jury, and executioner. Besides, had I begged forgiveness, my sentence would have been to acquiesce to having sex with Willy Lipinsky.

Fritz delivered each blow slowly and deliberately, most of them aimed at my head. After the first shocks, I thought my head would explode. Almost immediately, I partially blacked out, but somehow mechanically kept counting. Three. Four. Five. Eventually I fell unconscious.

Fritz poured a bucket of cold water on my head and made me stand up. "Start the count again!" he ordered. One. Two. Three. The wallops continued until I blacked out again.

"Get two men out here and get this Jew out of my quarters!" Fritz barked. My two brothers came running and dragged me out. They somehow got me to work where my foreman, who usually showed no emotion, felt badly enough about my condition to let me sit on the floor in the corner for a while.

Finally I stood up. My head was numb and spinning. I kept on touching it all the time to make sure it was still on my shoulders. I was oblivious to most of what went on around me, and my entire body ached. To this day, I don't know how I survived that experience. Such things were common in the camp, however. You just took them in stride.

11

Liberation

Shortly after we arrived at St. Valentin, Fritz made an announcement during morning count. "If there is a watchmaker among you, let him step out of the line." My brother Simon did.

When Simon reported to the factory, he was put to work on intricate components that went into the tanks. When the foremen learned of Simon's skill, they assigned him a separate room in the plant and brought their private watches for repair. This was easy work for Simon, and as a bonus, the foremen would sometimes sneak in a piece of bread or a couple of potatoes. Simon shared this "bonanza" with me and Natan, and it made a great difference. We had to eat it on the sly—if these meager bits of food had been discovered, we and the foremen would have been in serious danger.

Regular camp rations kept getting smaller all the time. As the war wore down, the inmate administration in the camp, in cahoots with the SS guards, sold much of the food on the black market. What little remained was tampered with. The Nazis were conducting passive medical experiments on us by adding different substances to our diet. One inmate who worked in the kitchen let someone in on this secret and eventually all of us knew. Many prisoners grew so weak that they could hardly walk. When they reached a stage when they could barely shuffle their feet, we called them "musselmen." I really don't know why. Musselmen usually died soon.

Once a week or so, St. Valentin had to deliver a quota of inmates to Mauthausen. The crematoria there had to be active twenty-four hours a day, and the satellite camps, ours included, had to feed those ovens continually. Rumor had it that whenever the Germans had reverses on the battlefield, they would tighten the screws a notch or two in the camps out of revenge. Twice the guards even shot at us from the watch towers when we walked at night toward the latrine. The shots were random. The guards were bored and having fun.

The SS needed to break up the dull routine of camp life. Several Sundays, instead of dishing out the soup as usual, the guards placed a large kettle with soup in the middle of the square and told all of us to make a run for it. Self service, if you will. Only a few of the strongest inmates gained access to the kettle, and they fought viciously over the food. Most of the soup spilled. Some prisoners tried to lick it off the ground, while they were being trampled by other hungry prisoners. The SS watched the melee from a distance, greatly enjoying themselves.

"What do you expect from such vermin?" they asked themselves, as they dispersed the crowd with their whip handles. My brothers and I didn't even attempt to get to the kettle; we didn't have the strength.

Before Christmas, they brought a dead horse into St. Valentin. You could smell the carcass all over the camp. Sure enough, on Christmas Day we had a holiday surprise—meat in our soup. Everyone got even sicker after eating it, but who could resist a piece of meat?

When the louse infection reached monumental proportions, they decided to remedy it. On a cold day, when deep snow covered the ground, they ordered us to undress, leave our clothes in the barracks, and walk barefoot under guard to an empty barrack outside of camp. We stayed there overnight—the inmates of all three barracks squeezed together in one barrack, naked, in an unheated building, lying on the bare floor. We were not even allowed to huddle together, strict orders. When we returned to camp the next day, we remained outside, our feet freezing to the ground, waiting our turn to be dipped in a large barrel of cold water mixed with disinfectants.

There were no towels to dry off with. Finally we were ordered back to our barracks. Our lodgings now had a sharp, burning smell, which permeated the barracks and irritated our nostrils. It was zyklon gas that had been used as a fumigant, the same gas they used in gas chambers. Our eyes burned for days. The lice were dead, temporarily, but they returned after a few weeks.

One day the big news in the camp was the apprehension of two Kapos who had escaped. We were not even aware they had gone. One of them was an Austrian who obviously spoke German. He had been a leader in the country's Communist party before the war, and he showed no outward evidence of being in a concentration camp. He was well fleshed and had civilian clothes. If he couldn't escape with all his advantages, no one else would have had a chance. The escapees were tortured for two days before

they were hanged. We intermittently heard their screams for forty-eight hours.

Not that we cared much for Kapos, whoever they were. Anyone who took that job became equally cruel—the intellectuals were no better than the others. In fact, they sometimes they used their superior intelligence to become more effective beasts.

As one example, a Kapo known to us as George, a political prisoner who came from Mauthausen, called a Jewish inmate out from the work line-up and ordered him to lie down on the ground. Probably there was no excuse. Perhaps their looks just crossed. Each time the grounded victim tried to inhale, George stepped on his neck. He continued doing so until the man lost consciousness. For good measure, he stomped on his face several times to make sure he was dead. On his lapel George wore No. 48 to indicate how early on he came to Mauthausen. He was a hardened Kapo and would sometimes tell us about how "soft" we had it in St. Valentin. "Mauthausen is a *real* death camp," he would say, telling us firsthand accounts of what inmates there had to suffer.

Sundays we did not work at the factory, which made it by far the worst day of the week. Sundays were reserved for "special" activities, military-style torture drills accompanied by the SS specialties of shouted insults and beatings. They would inspect us for lice and beat us some more. Paramedic inmates, accompanied by the SS, weeded out the musselmen for the ovens of Mauthausen. Anyone deemed unable to work on Monday morning was sent to the clinic to be injected with benzene.

Another Sunday "chore" was to load heavy wheelbarrows with soil and push them uphill to pile them upon a mountainlike heap. On rainy days the soil would be extra heavy; the wheels would sink into the mud. Pushing those full wheelbarrows turned into an impossible task. That was when the whips went to work.

Another Sunday job was cleaning out the latrine. The time I was chosen for this honor, I had to stand up to my waist in liquid feces, all the time being bitten by flies, and load heavy ladles of effluent into large wooden containers. Horrible as this sounds, we were so deadened by camp life that it was one more "normal" job. Two people carried away the containers.

One of the SS guards had the bright idea to fill up a particularly bitter winter day. We were made to form a human chain and hand each other bricks from a pile. The bricks were ice cold and in no time our fingers turned numb. At that point, the guards sped up the tempo and our deadened fingers began to drop the bricks on our own feet. If a brick broke, we were severely beaten. The next

Sunday, the order was reversed, and the bricks were returned to the original pile.

No matter how cold it was, they would never let us go inside on Sundays. One freezing day I was with four other inmates, huddled in a tight circle trying to get some warmth. "What would you do if you were offered a whole kilogram of bread," one man asked, "on the condition that you would be shot after you ate it?"

"What a stupid question," observed another man. "Wouldn't you say yes?" All five of us, in unison, agreed with him; there was no doubt about it. Bread was our obsession. Day and night we thought about it. If we happened to sleep long enough to dream, we dreamed of bread.

Finally the long Sundays would end, and we would be marched back to work. The factory was preferable to camp where we were constantly exposed to the whims of our tormenters. One day on the way to work, as we were about to enter the gates of the factory, we spotted a line of people marching by. We had heard that there was a large labor camp nearby that allegedly held non-Jewish people from all the German-occupied territories. Such camps were not concentration camps, and the people in them moved around freely.

This group was dressed in civilian clothing and appeared well fed. I suddenly overheard Polish spoken. When I tracked down the sound, I noticed a Jewish girl from Tarnow in the ranks. She was blond and blue-eyes. Her name was Maryla Westreich, and her brother had been an acquaintance before the war. She didn't notice me, of course, for she could hardly have recognized me in that condition. In comparison, Natan, who was less than thirty at that time, looked sixty. In contrast to most of the group, Maryla had a sad, compassionate look in her eyes. She knew who we were, and from the way we looked, she knew what we had to endure.

Late in our stay at St. Valentin, the Allies started to bomb our factory. The raids were massive, with saturation bombing. During the first raid, the guards and foremen ran for the underground shelters, leaving us standing at our machines. The damage to the plant was heavy. A bomb tore through the roof and fell not far from where I stood, but it didn't explode. Several bombs did explode at the other end of the giant structure and a few inmates got killed or wounded. From then on, the raids came regularly.

Whenever we saw or heard swarms of planes overhead, we had prayers on our lips: "Please, oh please, God, make those American planes destroy everything around us!" We didn't care if our prayers meant our own death. Anything was preferable to our miserable lot. To us, death would have meant deliverance.

Things changed after the first raid. The moment the sirens started wailing, we were rushed to an underground tunnel so no one could escape. As if escape were feasible. The tunnel was extensive and elaborate. It stretched for miles and held all kinds of installations. After one such raid, we returned to camp to find that a bomb had blown apart our clinic. I don't even recall what happened to the sick. By that time, such an incident barely rated a yawn.

After several raids, little of use was left in the factory. Instead of working at the machines, we were made to clear away rubble. Rumors started that we would soon be transferred elsewhere. On those occasions when we did work inside, our foremen displayed a changed attitude. One young Austrian foreman told me that he had always been opposed to Hitler and that the tanks being produced at Nubelungen Verke would never roll into war. He even brought me some food the next day.

Another foreman, also Austrian, a man who had always been harsh and demanding, changed completely. He spoke to me like an equal and nervously inquired what I thought would happen to him and his family should the Russians come in. The Austrians no longer hoped to win the war. Now they were praying for a more lenient American presence. This man told me that the war was coming to an end and that the madness would soon stop. He tried to ingratiate himself to me, to console me, to pacify me. Even the Kapos turned a bit more lenient. By that time, however, our ranks were terribly decimated. Of the one thousand five hundred inmates that populated St. Valentin less than nine months previous, somewhere between six hundred and seven hundred were left alive. If the SS had known the three of us were brothers, they would never have allowed us to live. Even in the ghetto we had put down different names on our identity cards so that the Germans would not know we were brothers.

Sometime in late April, 1945, without a warning, we were loaded on a cattle train to be taken away. We had no idea of our destination. We stayed on the train without moving part of the day and all night. After dark, we heard the rumbling of artillery and saw flares lighting up the sky in the distance. The Allied planes struck again, we surmised. By that time our feelings were so numbed that we didn't care if we lived or died. A bomb hitting the train and killing us would have been preferable to life under existing conditions.

The following morning we were transferred to trucks and taken to another camp. The name of our new prison was Concentration

Camp Ebensee, the fifth camp for Natan and me. For Simon, it was actually his sixth camp. It was located in a picturesque Alpine valley in the Austrian Alps, a quaint, postcardlike setting. The camp, however, did not live up to the charming name or lovely setting; in fact, it was merely a picturesque outpost of Hell.

As soon as we came in, a burly German Kapo came out to "greet" us. In his hoarse, strident voice, he outlined all the rules in and out of his domain. He was "in charge" of the barrack and was to be called "Block Alteste." I don't recall all the details. I do, however, remember his final words almost verbatim. It was a tongue-in-cheek message and reflected his confidence that no one could possibly last three weeks in Ebensee. "The one of you who will survive twenty-one days in this place will become camp commander. I guarantee it."

His message was quite true. Weakened as almost all the new arrivals were, there was no way they could survive the hard labor, the beatings, the malnutrition. The camp held sixteen thousand inmates, a mix of nationalities, and three hundred people died daily. Were it not for the fact that they kept bringing new arrivals, the camp would have emptied in no time.

Those of us from St. Valentin were supposed to work in a large cavern bored out in the Alps. The machinery that was salvaged from the Nubelungen Verke was to be installed in that cavern. Until they got that site ready, we were taken daily to a nearby railroad station, Atnang-Puchheim. Because that station was a strategic junction, it had been reduced to rubble by Allied raids. We had to walk several kilometers to Atnang-Puchheim to clear away the heavy debris. It was an impossible job for emaciated and starved people. We lost many of our comrades on the way to and from work. They simply fell by the wayside from exhaustion. More collapsed at work. We had to carry the bodies back to camp to be accounted for.

Working in the rubble brought some minor rewards. Sometimes you found bits of food like a piece of stale bread or rotting potatoes. Naturally, it was "verboten" to pick it up, but who could resist, even if the penalty was shooting. We were so starved that most of us would eat literally anything. One inmate was shot by an SS guard for eating a tube of toothpaste.

Our bodies had lost what little strength was left, and we were slowly sinking into the abyss. We looked at each other as condemned prisoners hoping to die soon. All around us in the town were normal people, doing the normal things we used to do when we were free. They wore civilian clothing, and they were not es-

corted by barking dogs. It seemed unreal to see a woman with a shopping bag, a loaf of bread sticking out the top. Bread! Real Bread! I would have given my life, without hesitation, for a chance to sink my teeth into this heavenly delicacy.

One day I noticed a woman pushing a baby carriage. I had nearly forgotten about babies. I couldn't help but conjure up visions of Jewish babies being slaughtered on Magdenburg Square in Tarnow. It had been years, but their mothers' screams once again echoed in my ears.

The wallop of a whip suddenly brought me back to reality. You didn't daydream on SS work details. You were condemned to spend your last bit of energy before they let you die.

I must have had some feelings left, because it was painful to me to see the way passersby looked at us. They had contempt in their eyes. They looked with disgust at the wretched, skeletonlike "criminal vermin" shuffling by in striped uniforms, as if our condition were our own fault. These were the same sort of ordinary townsfolk who later disclaimed any knowledge of the camp atrocities.

On the way to and from work we would pass trees and patches of grass, a welcome sight. Some of the inmates would tear off bark or pull up grass to eat. When passing the rail bed, others would pick up pieces of coal and chew on it. They paid a price: the guards beat them for "acting like animals," and, without exception, they got sick afterward from eating those indigestibles.

The work in the cavern never got off the ground. We went there several times, but the machines weren't fully installed, and we could do no meaningful work. Our rations were even less than at St. Valentin.

At least there, Simon could slip us food several times a week. Here I was completely dependent on the nearly nonexistent camp rations.

Some inmates, sensing that the end was near, determined to survive at any price. They could see the odds stacked against them. Ebensee had a crematorium working day and night, but it still couldn't keep up with all the corpses piled up nearby. Our German Block Alteste was trying to get in his final moments of extreme sadism. The moment we entered the barracks he chased and whipped us. Once, when he was frying horsemeat on his stove in the barrack, an inmate got within a few meters of the stove, trying to get a whiff of the aroma. The Kapo clubbed him to death within a minute for crossing the forbidden perimeter.

Natan and I could barely walk. Simon was in better shape—he

hadn't had to work as hard at St. Valentin, and he had gotten a little better nourishment. Natan and I were musselmen, shuffling our feet. With every shuffle, I knew the end was near. One day I looked up and saw what seemed to be apparitions. In front of me were men who looked Jewish, but they were dressed in civilian attire and looked well fed. "Are there still Jews who look like human beings?" I asked.

We found out that these individuals had been kept in a completely isolated compound within Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen, and their exclusive function was to forge pound sterlings, a counterfeit currency destined to be dumped in England. It was a plot to destablize the British economy. These men were specialists: printers, engravers, artists, and craftsmen with any necessary skill for counterfeiting. A couple of them had been plucked from the gas chambers only minutes before the chambers were activated.

About ten or eleven days into our stay in Ebensee, the SS guards were suddenly gone, replaced by Austrian Home Guards. Order was gone. Food rations, for the most part, completely stopped. We no longer went out to work. Everything was in limbo. Some inmates, most notably the Russian P.O.W.'s, started to cannibalize dead bodies, making fires with wood from broken fences and baking the human flesh. Where they found matches I have no idea.

Natan and I noticed an acquaintance chewing on an arm. "David," asked Natan, "How can you do that?"

"I didn't kill anybody," he replied. "Can't you see it's almost over? I am chewing the flesh of a dead individual. I've suffered for so long and somehow managed to survive till now. If I eat this flesh, I have a chance to live. If I don't, I won't make it." David survived. He now lives in Israel.

On the twelfth or thirteenth day into our stay in Ebensee, we were ordered by the home guard to march toward the cavern where the Nubelungen Werke was supposed to be reassembled. The guards, undermanned, took a chance and gave weapons to the German Kapo-inmates to help them round us up for the trek. The Kapos refused to cooperate. "Don't move!" they told us. "Don't go to the cavern! The entrance is mined and you will die there without anyone knowing your fate. If they want to kill us, let them shoot us right here. When they start shooting, we will shoot some of them as well. Don't move!"

We didn't move. On the hillside, American tanks were rolling in. Over the radio, the civilian population was warned that they would be held accountable for any harm that came to us. That night we

heard mines go off harmlessly in the distance. Those mines had been meant for us.

The following day, on May 6, 1945, a unit of the American army entered the camp. I didn't go out to welcome them. By that time, I could no longer walk and was in a twilight-zone of complete indifference. I didn't see the soldiers get their first look at camp conditions.

I didn't behold them look at the hollow faces of the inmates. I didn't watch them cry like children at the piles of decomposed, contorted bodies by the crematorium. Those seasoned soldiers were not prepared for Concentration Camp Ebensee. Their emotions overflowed with rage and pity. They gave us all their rations plus any other food they had handy.

The stronger inmates went to the bakery in the camp and distributed all the available bread. Some Russian P.O.W.'s were still in shape to take revenge. They hunted down several Kapos and threw the worst one into the crematorium alive. They decapitated others and carried their impaled heads around on poles. Later, they were affixed to a fence for display. Most Kapos, however, managed to escape. Fritz was stoned to death.

The following morning, the Americans set up a field clinic and examined all the inmates. They also weighed us. I weighed seventy-three pounds.

"Good thing you were liberated," said the army doctor who examined me. "At the most, you had two days to live."

12

Tarnow Revisited

Miraculously, I was not terribly sick when the Americans arrived, just horribly emaciated. Once I started to eat, I bounced back quickly. You had to start eating slowly. One of the terrible ironies of the camps was that inmates died from overeating right after the liberation. For a week or two, many people died daily—some from overeating, some from aftereffects of the camp conditions. One death makes a grim anecdote. A man named Abraham Flink, from Tarnow, had survived the war in good physical condition, thanks to his voice. His story was unusual; he came from a poor shoemaker's family. Abraham (they called him Umele) sang in the choir at the main synagogue in Tarnow. One version of the story is that someone influential recognized his potential and arranged for him to go to Vienna to study at the Conservatory.

I can recall one time when he came back from Vienna on school break. He showed off his voice in the streets, in homes, whenever anyone asked him to sing. In the concentration camps Umele sang for the SS and got extra food. In Ebensee, the SS gave him a job in the kitchen where he would have enough food for himself and could even sell a little. He somehow saved up $300, an astronomical sum in a camp where the inmates paying him had to hide their funds even from frequent rectal searches. Right at the end of the war the $300 was stolen. Umele was upset beyond consolation—he died soon afterward, seemingly of a broken heart.

Retribution was on the minds of many inmates. Some of the inmates, mostly Russians who were in better shape than the other inmates, were organized right on the day of liberation by a Soviet P.O.W., Wolodka Gonczarow, the son of a general. They went into Austrian homes to seek what they considered to be simple restitution. The Austrians turned meek now, and claimed that they had no knowledge of what went on in the camps. They also claimed poverty. "I'm starved myself," one woman told them, "I haven't a thing to eat in the house." In her basement they found a six-month

supply of nearly every conceivable foodstuff. They took everything.

Although the Jews suffered the most in the camps, we didn't join the other inmates in these activities. The Austrians, in general, were worse than the Germans to us, but I don't know personally of any case of a Jew attacking an Austrian. The forays lasted about three days until the American authorities put a stop to them.

The next problem, for both the authorities and the survivors of the camps, was what to do now. Those liberated inmates who were sufficiently recovered went out on their own. Some attempted to go back to their own cities or towns. Most went into temporary camps set up by the Americans to further regain their strength. Natan, Simon, and I were briefly among them. While in the camp, Natan did some cooking, and Simon started repairing watches on a limited scale. I spoke some English, having taken lessons when I was twelve. Eventually, I decided to work for an American Army unit stationed nearby.

This was my first experience with Americans. I was basically the same age as these G.I.'s, and I ate with them. They were a nice bunch of young men, and soon I was kind of a unit mascot. I didn't ask for pay and would have refused it if it were offered.

Being away from their wives or girlfriends created "problems" for most of these guys. They chased after Austrian "fräuleins" who, for the most part, were eager and willing to date Americans. One young guy was an exception. He was a handsome young man of twenty-one who was engaged to a beautiful girl back in the United States. Very much in love, he didn't chase the local girls. He even resisted their advances. At night, he kept his fiancée's picture under his pillow.

His unit was quartered in a private house where there lived a well-developed fifteen-year-old Austrian girl, the daughter of the owner. She did everything she could to interest this young man, all to no avail. Finally she found a solution. On some excuse, she lured him up to the attic, having him follow her up a ladder. When he looked up, he couldn't help but notice that she wore no undergarments. This trick broke his resistance; when they descended a while later, this was obvious from their faces.

Not even this pleasant American unit could hold me, however, for very long. I really didn't know how to handle my newly discovered freedom. One thing I did know; I wanted to meet as many survivors as possible, and I took short trips to neighboring D.P. camps. Like myself, many of the survivors were driven, confused people. We really didn't know what we were looking for.

Above all, I think I was trying desperately to escape the truth. I chased a phantom; I pursued something that wasn't there anymore. Since I didn't understand to what extent the world before the war was gone, I kept searching for it. I crossed borders illegally, in disregard for my life. Guards shot at me and I didn't care. My brothers, who were older, didn't share my restlessness to the same degree. My search kept me from facing the reality of what I had undergone for the past five years.

Once I had to cross the Danube from the Russian to the American Zone. I had no pass, so I couldn't use the bridge. Up river a mile someone was illegally taking people across by boat. I walked up there and saw German families trying to cross over to the American side. The Russians looked the other way; they tried to encourage Germans to leave at that time. I waited in line for my turn and soon boarded the large rowboat.

The boatman overloaded the boat, and, in the middle of the river we began to take on water. "Why don't we dump some stuff overboard?" I asked, worried.

"First we'll throw you out, you Jew swine. You should have been dead anyway a long time ago!" said a large German man from the other end of the boat.

I can't remember what I responded, but I was hurt and revenged myself verbally. "Wait until we get to shore," the man retorted, "I'll teach you a lesson!"

Luckily, the boat did make shore. The German approached me in a threatening manner, and I made a run for a nearby forest. The man had lots of luggage, one of the reasons the boat nearly sank, and was afraid it would be stolen, so he didn't pursue me. I owned nothing to pack into luggage, so I escaped.

I made my way to nearby Linz, a good-sized city. I knew no one there. There was, however, a D.P. (Displaced Person) Camp nearby. I went there and inquired if anyone from Tarnow was staying there. To my surprise I was told the names of three individuals, all my acquaintances—twin sisters named Weiss, whose younger brother Chilek was my friend before World War II, and a neighbor of ours named Pesach Teitelbaum. They all offered to share their quarters with me. Pesach even offered to share his bed, so I, having no better choice, accepted.

This decision turned out to be the wrong one. As soon as I fell asleep, Pesach attacked me sexually. I jumped out of bed, and he apologized, promising that he wouldn't touch me if I came back to bed. It was late at night so I went back, not having much choice. Only half an hour later, he tried again. It turned out that Pesach,

a burly man, was aggressively bisexual. I had known of his heterosexual escapades in Tarnow, but I never suspected his sexual deviance. Again I jumped out of bed, grabbed my few belongings and ran out of the room to spend the night outside leaning against a wall. The following day the camp administration assigned me temporary quarters.

While in Linz I found out that a Jewish man who had been a ranking O.D. in our ghetto and later on a "Sonderkommando" (he loaded corpses into the crematoria) lived there. Just the sound of the name Zimmet conjured up ugly memories. He was a brute of the first order; in the Ghetto, he beat a friend of mine, Srulek Fenning, to death. He committed other heinous crimes in the service of the Gestapo. I was told that the D.P. camp inmates tried to bring him to justice in Austria, but the local authorities wanted nothing to do with it. He was subsequently beaten up severely, but he stayed on in the camp, being afraid to venture elsewhere for fear of a worse fate. Some time later on, he made his way to Montreal, Canada where he was adjudicated by a "Bet Din" (a Jewish court) and released. The verdict was "insufficient evidence" and "it's a shame before the gentiles" to bring it out in the open.

A few days later I wanted to go back to the Russian side. To be safe, I asked the American occupation authorities in Linz for a pass. "That will take a week or two for processing," I was told. Impatient, as always I stood near the bridge to study the mechanics of crossing.

The checking of passes was done at one end of the bridge only, at the American zone end. Trolley cars and buses came from both directions, stopped at the check point, and let the passengers disembark to display their passes. I took a chance and boarded a trolley going in the Russian direction. Luck was with me, for a trolley from the Russian side arrived at the same moment. I got out, approached the official who asked me for my pass.

"I don't have one," I told him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I want to cross over to the American zone." I lied.

"No pass, no crossing." he said "Go back to the Russian side." I dutifully complied, arriving where I wanted to go in the first place.

One time when I tried to cross the border to Czechoslovakia, I nearly got on a cattle train loaded with people that sat at the railroad station. Unbeknownst to me, they were German P.O.W.'s heading for Siberia.

"Do you want a lift to Siberia?" a Russian solider asked me just as I was about to get on the train.

I did finally get into Czechoslovakia by pretending to be a guardian of a cripple who had legal papers to cross the border. The crazy thing is that those crossings and recrossings had no real purpose. I was driven by a nervous energy, chasing an illusion. All the time I was in the camps, I simply existed, too numb to question my existence. Now I spent all my time fighting depression, traveling aimlessly from place to place.

What I really wanted, of course, was to go home, to Poland, to see if any of my friends and relatives had survived. I wanted to see Tarnow again.

Finally the time came when I could actually go. The United Nations Relief Agency organized a caravan of three buses heading for Poland. I jumped at the chance. Once again, my life, which I had somehow saved in the camps, was threatened, this time by bus brakes which gave out on a steep downhill grade. The bus didn't stop until it got part way up the next hill. The wild ride seemed so hazardous, that two passengers jumped out and suffered broken limbs and bruises.

We traveled via Prague where we stopped for a week in a hospital and rehabilitation complex called Braniki. The Czechs, unlike so many of the people in Europe, welcomed us with open arms. These wonderful people extended us every hospitality. One day, when we arrived in a town at dinner time, many residents brought out their own dinners for us, even though we were not hungry. From Prague, the last leg of our trip took us to Poland.

When we got to Poland, we each went our separate ways to our respective villages, towns, or cities. The villages were especially risky. The Polish home army was not yet disbanded, and they were still Jew hunting. "We'll finish Hitler's job," seemed to be their motto.

My heart beat nervously when I saw Tarnow in the distance. Once it had been a vibrant city with crowds of shoppers going to market. Now I walked into a ghost town. In the old days, you had to elbow your way through Krakowska Street, the main boulevard. Now it was nearly deserted; I don't think I saw more than ten people in a stretch of one kilometer. The Krakowska street that in past years offered us glitter and excitement, now seemed drab and gray. Many buildings seemed in need of repair. A number of stores were vacant, and those that were operating were devoid of merchandise or customers. The pre-1939 elaborately decorated store windows were missing, which gave the street a depressing air.

The few people walking these drab, empty streets eyed us with suspicion, almost resentment. Apparently the old feelings about

the Jews hadn't died. We had been told that there were some Jews in Tarnow. Some of them were returnees from hiding places, and others had been possessors of "gentile" papers. We walked to the place that was the hub of the Jewish quarter before the war and noticed a few Jewish faces. On a corner was a small group of Jews conversing. I approached them.

"Is there a Jewish Committee in town?"

"Yes."

"And where might we find them."

"Do you know where Goldhamera Street is? Go there."

We followed his directions and found a small congregation of Jews standing outside. Among them was Salomon Schipper, a portly man with a perpetual smile who was usually called Slomek. Natan had known him before the war. We exchanged survival stories and found out he had been hidden by a Polish peasant family. He generously offered to share his apartment with us, and we took him up on his offer.

Slomek's younger brother was the president of the Jewish Committee, so the next day we were invited to the office of the Committee and asked what kind of assistance we required. (The committee was subsidized by the American "Joint Distribution Committee.") "None," Natan told him. He looked at our ragged garments. His mouth began to move as if to say "You are not telling the truth," but restrained himself.

"We've had no time to unpack," I offered. We made it a rule never to accept any form of charity.

A day into my stay in Tarnow I went to check out the old Jewish section of town and discovered very little standing there. I was told that Polish people took apart those buildings brick by brick, looking for "Jewish treasures." They even dug in the cellars when they found little or nothing in the walls. The still-standing houses were now occupied by Poles who had also taken possession of all Jewish stores.

Several dozen Jews now lived in Tarnow, but only a few of them had been Tarnow residents before the war. Jews from neighboring towns and villages had moved into Tarnow because it wasn't safe outside the city. Almost all of the people we talked to had harrowing stories of suffering and survival to recount. New people trickled in daily; I guess they were motivated by the same emotions that brought me back, including a desire to be with other Jews.

One day I spotted a familiar face. "Maryla Westreich, how are you?"

It took her a minute. "You're Vovek Kornbluth."

"Right. And I don't have to ask you what you did during war. I saw you working in the labor camp, right next to Concentration Camp St. Valentin."

"Yes, I was there. But I didn't see you."

"I was there, though. I worked in the Nubelungen Verke. My brothers and I were inmates of St. Valentin."

"What! How could anyone survive that horrible place. I used to feel literally sick when I saw the emaciated faces of Jewish inmates at that factory."

"We survived. I even saw you once with your work detail."

Maryla went on to tell me the details of her survival. Her most dangerous moment came when her Polish roommate began to question her. Why don't you get any mail like the rest of us? Why don't you laugh at Jewish jokes? Could it be that you're secretly Jewish? Eventually the girl turned Maryla in to the Gestapo.

For four days intermittently, the Gestapo kept questioning her, trying to break her story. On the fourth day, a young Czech paramedic, who had a bit of a crush on Maryla, came to her aid at great risk to himself. "I understand you're holding my cousin for interrogation," he told the Gestapo. "I can assure you she's not Jewish. How could she be and be my cousin."

His testimony won her release, and she returned to the work camp. Even her roommate was now convinced she was telling the truth—how else could she have withstood the Gestapo interrogation?

After the liberation, Maryla stayed for a number of weeks with the boy's parents in Czechoslovakia. They treated her with the love and affection they would have given a daughter. Their son was in love with Maryla. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you," he told her.

"Before I make such a final decision," she replied, "I want to go back to my hometown for a while, to see if anyone in my family survived and to wind up any affairs that need attention."

Now that she was actually back in Tarnow, she found out that she was the only survivor in the entire family and that she had inherited a good-sized apartment house left by her grandfather. She could hardly expect a windfall from this property. At that time Poland was under the Soviets, and it was widely expected that private property would be nationalized. A Polish gentile decided to take a chance and buy the building. She sold an entire apartment house of at least twelve apartments and several stores for $100.

A decision about the Czech who wanted to marry her was hanging over Maryla. "Should I go back to Czechoslovakia?" she asked

me in a long discussion of her dilemma. "I'm torn between two emotions. On the one hand, I feel pulled back toward my roots, back to being once more with familiar people. I want to feel Jewish." On the other hand, she also felt that she owed her life to a decent selfless man in Czechoslovakia who loved and adored her.

Once, in passing, she asked me my plans. I detected a hint there. "I have none," I told her. But I added that marriage was out of the question for the time being, since I had no way of knowing as yet where I would end up or how I would be making a living. "Go back to the man who loves you," I advised her strongly. "You owe him your life."

It seemed to me that common decency demanded that she return to the paramedic, even if it ran against some of her inner feelings. A short time later, when she had not gone back to Czechslovakia, the young Czech came to Tarnow. He took Maryla back with him to his home. I have never heard from her since.

In Tarnow I met other young women. Roza Schmuckler, along with her parents and brother, survived the war hiding in a bunker. A Polish peasant risked his life to save them. He was well paid, to be sure, but his risk was out of proportion to the reward. On the day of liberation, her brother went out of his bunker to inhale some fresh air and see the sun again. He didn't see the sun for long. Someone hostile to Jews saw him and shot him.

Another girl in Tarnow was Eva Fessel. It felt exciting to meet young women again. Roza and Eva were not only pretty but quite intelligent and from "good homes." Both were five years younger than I. Roza, Eva, and I became constant companions. One weekend we went to see a movie called "Rainbow" in one of Tarnow's three movie houses. The film depicted life in Russia under German occupation. It featured many cruelties.

Although I had seen and endured much greater horrors personally in real life, this experience, seated in the loge of a cinema, was somehow very emotional. I had not cried up to that time for years. My feelings had frozen into a zombielike state. Now my normal human responses returned with a vengeance. I could not stop sobbing for at least fifteen minutes, no matter how hard I tried to stop. From that time until today I cry at the drop of a hat, something I can't control. At times it is embarrassing.

Eva's family survived the war in a variety of ways. Early on in the war, a commissar took over their tar paper factory in Tarnow. It had belonged to Eva's parents, but Eva had to instruct him in running the place. Eva was pretty and intelligent, and when the "actions" came to Tarnow, the commissar kept Eva and her mother

in hiding for about a year. He even made an unsuccessful marriage proposal to Eva. What is especially strange about this story is that this commissar was one of the two boys who tried to stab me before the war for getting a perfect report card. His partial German heritage had helped him get the post. It is strange how a member of the "Endek" Fascist party before the war would eventually propose to a Jewish girl at a great risk to his life.

Her brother Zishek left Tarnow in June, 1942, and in 1943 he and his father Chuny Fessel somehow managed an odyssey across Hungary, Rumania, and Turkey to Palestine, where they survived the war. Pelek, the eldest sibling, joined the Polish underground with Christian identity papers. He was blond, gray-eyed, and even underwent de-circumcision as part of his disguise. Eventually, Mrs. Fessel and Eva joined Chunny Fessel in Jerusalem.

In that postwar period in Tarnow I heard many bizarre stories. In one case an acquaintance of mine had lived in another city on gentile papers and had a common law marriage with a girl from Tarnow. One day she was stopped by the authorities and arrested; my friend was sure she was shot. However, the girl was sent to a nearby concentration camp and somehow survived the experience. Meanwhile, my friend met another girl and married her. When the first girl returned to Tarnow, he found himself with two wives. This dilemma was solved for him by the first wife who graciously departed. Eventually all three of them ended up in America, although not together.

My old friend Szymek Lichtig survived the war by the unusual strategy of joining the German army. I saw him once in the ghetto days as I was coming home from work. The tall German soldier in an air force uniform was paying too close attention to us. His face was bandaged, but I recognized my friend Szymek by his unique gait.

The following day, I found out from a mutual friend, Szymek took off his uniform, scaled the ghetto fence, and went to his girl friend's house. Her name was Dora Fluhr, and she declined his offer to take her out of the ghetto. She probably didn't want to be separated from her parents. Disappointed, my friend left Tarnow the following day to rejoin his German Unit somewhere in Russia. It was a pleasant surprise that he had outwitted the Germans and survived the war. The last I heard of him, he was living in South America.

Every day a new and fascinating story was told to you on the streets of Tarnow. A girl named Kedzia Weiss, who had lived near us on Magdenburg Square during the ghetto period, came down

Walova Street one day, pushing a baby carriage. After a preliminary embrace, she told me her tale. She was an only child, and, to save her life, her parents persuaded a peasant family to take her into hiding. Her parents paid them generously. The peasant's son fell in love with Kedzia and secretly married her. When the Russian battle lines came close, he, familiar with the terrain, tried to cross with Kedzia to the Russian side where she would be safe.

It was a dark night when they made the attempt, and relatively quiet. Little military activity was going on, and Kedzia, proceeding first, made it to safety on the Russian side. The peasant followed a little later, was caught by a German patrol, and shot. She was already pregnant with his child. It was his child in the carriage.

As far as Kedzia knew, no one else in her family survived. She was living on handouts from the Jewish Committee. As a proud and dignified young woman, she felt upset by her predicament, and, most of all, worried about her child's future. She discreetly wiped away her tears as she recounted her story. A couple of weeks later I found out that Kezia had discovered a surviving uncle in Czechoslovakia and moved there to join him.

One of the more fascinating stories told to me was about a former friend and neighbor, Eli Kornreich. He had been a member of "Hasomer Hatzair," a Zionist organization that operated underground in the ghetto. When his parents were shot during an action, he left Tarnow and joined a partisan group. He turned very bold, and raided depots for food and ammunition. He was so brazen that he would sometimes eat his meals in a German uniform in the German officers' casino. One day, when he and a female Jewish companion were having dinner there, the Gestapo surrounded the casino. Realizing that death was near, and wanting to avoid being tortured by the Gestapo, Eli and his friend drew their guns and killed several Germans who were eating dinner. They saved their last bullets for themselves.

The end of the war wasn't the end of the dangers for Jews in Tarnow. One night there was heavy banging on our metal reinforced door. "It's the police!" they shouted. "Let us in immediately!" We didn't trust police and didn't open the door. Sure enough, we found out on the following morning that the men were members of the Polish Home Army. This made them little better than common bandits. If we had opened the door, they would probably have killed us.

We attempted to reclaim some of the merchandise that Natan had hidden before his business was confiscated. We were running short on funds. Natan hired a detective to gain entry and authority

for a search and took him to his former factory. There was a Polish family living there now. We lifted up the floors in several spots, but all the merchandise we had hidden there was gone. We tried a second location, but this time a group of young Poles spotted us. When they saw the detective, they realized what we were up to. A mob soon formed. "We want to share in whatever you find!" they shouted at us. In the end, we had to give up.

One day Simon mentioned that he would like to retrieve some documents that would make it easier for him to function on a daily basis. He had been living in Grybow after his marriage, and the town hall there had copies of those papers. Not that Grybow was an easy trip. The Germans had bombed most of the bridges during their retreat. Rivers could only be crossed on pontoon bridges. I was "elected" by my brothers to make the trip.

I hitchhiked the entire way, mostly in military trucks of the regular Polish army. Before the war, a train would have taken two hours; it took me all day. The last few miles, I paid a small fee to travel on a horse-drawn wagon. It was a cold, windy day, and I kept my muffler over my face to shield me. Soon we entered a trail in the forest. One of the other five people on the wagon brought out a bottle of whiskey and passed it around several times. I had no choice but to drink.

Refusal to partake would have been considered an insult and might have brought suspicion on me. Polish people seldom refused whiskey. Soon tongues were loosened and someone asked: "What would you do if you found a Jew here?" "I'd cut his throat," someone else replied. "I would hang him from his feet," said another. "I would hang him from his neck, cut off his 'private,' and stick it in his mouth," was the final suggestion.

I forced myself to laugh. There was a woman with us who didn't utter one word. Her eyes were brown, and to this day I think she was Jewish. I was scared. It seemed ridiculous, but scary. I had survived five concentration camps. I had been beaten, frozen, starved, and shot at. Now, I wondered: Is this the way I'm going to end up, surviving the Holocaust just to end up strung up from a tree in a Polish forest?

13

Odyssey

Much to my relief, the wagon soon left the heavy forest and arrived at a village. "I live here," the peasant told us, "and I still have chores to do before dark. You'll have to walk to town. It's only about half a kilometer to Grybow." Everyone but me paid the fee and left. I waited until they were gone before I reached into my pocket to pay the peasant. As I did so, the muffler fell from around my face.

"Jew!" exclaimed the peasant. I dropped the money on the ground and ran. He stopped to pick it up before he followed me, and since I was much younger than he, I easily outran him. Fortunately for me, there was no one else outside and the place was deserted. What he would have done to me, I'm not sure, since there was no longer a Gestapo and bounties for Jews, but I'm glad I didn't find out. It was dusk when I reached the outskirts of Grybow.

Grybow was a town of several thousand people, composed chiefly of one-story homes that by and large looked in need of repair. Before the Holocaust, several hundred Jewish families, who were mostly in small businesses or in trades, had lived there. Now there were none except Simon's friend the tailor. The very few who survived moved to nearby cities where it was safer and easier to eke out a living.

For me, the biggest attraction to Grybow had been the river Biala where I swam and socialized with friends during my rare visits. The only landmark was a handsome church in town. I had fond memories of a small park with a gazebo where I necked with a couple of local girls.

I approached two young kids standing in the street and asked them the address of the town's only tailor—that was how Simon had told me to find the remaining Jews in town.

"You're Jewish, aren't you?" asked one of the boys maliciously. He instantly called over two other boys, and the four of them

attacked me. Luckily for me, a girl came out from a nearby house. She had known me before 1939 when I came to visit Simon. She quickly intervened, chasing the boys away, and calling me by my first name to show the boys that she knew me.

"None of my Jewish friends survived the war," she told me, marveling that I had made it. "I'll be glad to take you to the tailor's."

Simon's friend the tailor was more than happy to put me up and insisted that I eat supper with them. "Aren't you afraid to stay in this place?" I asked.

"No. We're tolerated because I'm the only tailor."

The next morning I finished Simon's errand and left via a different, safer route that my host suggested.

A few weeks later Natan and I had some business in Nowy Sach, a small city in Southern Galicia, not far from Grybow. As we were about to sit down on a park bench to eat a sandwich, I noticed, seated across on a bench, a girl I had met in Grybow during my summer vacations. Her name was Dziunka Finkenthal and her father was the only Jewish lawyer in town. We had had a few chaperoned dates in summer 1939. She survived in hiding, the only one in the family. Dziunka burst out crying, telling me that she was "totally alone in the world." I talked to her for a while, for even with my brothers alive, I knew what she meant. I never saw her again.

In Tarnow I got word about some "old friends" from Camp Plaszow. The chief of the Jewish Police there, Wilek Chilowicz, and his partner, Mietek Finkelstein, were killed by Amon Goeth. He tricked them into an escape scheme, along with several of Chilowicz's relatives, and then had them shot. Their bodies were displayed on the square in the camp. I didn't understand the logic of this plot, since Goeth didn't need an excuse to shoot Jews. Perhaps he was bored.

The same source told me that Goeth ordered many thousands of Jews buried around Plaszow unearthed and burned in order to cover the traces of German atrocities. Years later, I read a report by the Polish War Crime Commission that eighty thousand people were disposed of in Plaszow. I can't vouch for the accuracy of that report, but certainly Goeth was responsible for a staggering number of murders in Plaszow and elsewhere.

Finally it became apparent to me that my future was not in Tarnow. Simon had already left to take a job as a watchmaker in Katowice. One day I heard about a university that had opened up

in Innsbruck, Austria, which gave free access to liberated concentration camp inmates. I decided to go there and enroll.

Slomek, the man we stayed with in Tarnow, suggested there might be a chance to combine some business with my trip. He had heard you could buy American allied war dollars in the city of Katovice, near the German border, for a fraction of the wartime value. These could be exchanged for German marks in Austria. In Munich, you could change the marks into real dollars. I double-checked the information and found it was true. All we needed was financing, and Slomek offered to invest several hundred dollars in the venture on a fifty/fifty basis. He was extremely provincial and thought I would be a help to him.

We boarded a military truck in Tarnow to go toward Katowice, intending to stay there for a while with Simon. On the way, the truck picked up sixteen more Jews, all making their way to Palestine. After we had traveled about one hundred fifty kilometers, our vehicle collided head-on with a Russian military truck. The passengers on the Polish vehicle, myself included, were thrown to the pavement by the impact. Two people were killed instantly.

I suffered a head injury and lost consciousness for thirty-six hours. As another vehicle transported myself and other victims to a hospital, I was losing blood rapidly. Even though a number of us were in critical condition, several hospitals in a row refused to admit us. "Too crowded," was the excuse. It took some intervention by the local Jewish Committee, probably a bribe, to get us admitted.

The following day, still unconscious, the hospital surgeon operated on me. During the operation, perhaps insufficiently anesthetized, I regained consciousness for a few seconds. "Stop moaning, you dirty Jew," the assisting nurse screamed at me.

Following the operation, my entire body ached from the impact against the pavement, as well as from the luggage that had fallen on me. The only things I could still move were my fingers and toes. What bothered me most was using a bedpan. You would think that the latrines of the concentration camps would make any other form of elimination seem pleasant by comparison, but the bedpan embarrassed me terribly. After a few days, I was able to crawl to the bathroom on all fours. This is the sort of behavior that wins over nurses.

The seventeen Jews in Myslowice, where the hospital was located, sort of adopted me. They visited me daily, bringing me various goodies. As always with European Jews after the war, they also brought tragic stories. One day I couldn't help but notice an

extremely lovely girl of twenty or twenty-one who was accompanied by a man I took to be her father.

"Who's that pretty girl?" I asked another visitor.

To my surprise, I found out that the older man was her husband. The girl had married him because she felt as if she were less than a woman after her incarceration in Auschwitz. Dr. Mengele had used her as a subject for his medical experiments.

She was operated on without anesthesia. Mengele simply strapped her to a table and cut, ignoring her hysterical screaming. The chances are that he was humming a favorite operatic aria during her terrible ordeal. Mengele had removed her ovaries.

After three weeks in the hospital, the entire shift of nurses, both male and female, came out to bid me farewell. At least two nurses wiped away tears. I recuperated for three more weeks in a private home in Myslowice. My brothers visited me and showered me with love. During our discussions, we decided not to return to Tarnow. Opportunities were better in the former German territories now annexed by Poland. We decided to leave Upper Silesia and settle in the city of Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) in Lower Silesia.

The Polish authorities had forcibly evacuated millions of Germans from that territory, and we moved into one of the vacated flats. People from all over Poland were streaming into Wroclaw. We opened up a watchmaking establishment that quickly turned profitable. Our life, however, was like a "frontier" existence, fraught with dangers. Characters of every description, who couldn't find a niche in Polish society, came to Wroclaw. Some of them dug illegally in the many ruins in the bombed out part of the city, hoping for instant riches. We had to reinforce our doors and windows at home and in the business, not just to prevent burglaries but for our own safety. It seemed as if the dangers for Jews would never end. We had several close calls there.

One evening, as I was entering our shop, I noticed a man holding a gun to my brother Simon's chest. I screamed in a gut reaction. The man with the gun got scared and escaped. He probably had no bullets in the gun. I was told by someone who saw him run away that he was a civilian Soviet. Simon, not understanding Russian, didn't even realize that a gun was held against his chest.

One day Dr. Taub entered our store to buy a watch. He was the partner to the private high school I had attended in Tarnow before the war. It was a chance encounter, but he and his pretty wife stayed and caught up on lots of things. It turned out that Dr. Taub had been a committed Communist before the war and was now cashing in on these credentials. He was the chief of the political

division of all Lower Silesia, the real power behind the secret police, and he was headquartered in Wroclaw. I made a mental note of the visit; such contacts could come in handy some day.

Slowly we developed a more or less normal life. Our cousin Oscar Gross owned a grocery store across the street, and Pelek Fessel was one of his two partners. Pelek hinted he would rather work with us, so we opened another store and took him in as a partner. Pelek and his wife Herta lived in a nice apartment in a better section of Wroclaw. Herta was a graduate of a Viennese culinary school and prepared some feasts for us.

A gentile girl, Ala, who had hidden Herta during the war, attended the Wroclaw University and lived with them. One day, when Pelek came into money, he offered Ala some of it as a token award for saving his wife's life. She was terribly hurt at this gesture and burst into tears, telling him that he had deeply insulted her. She had done what she did out of principle and would never accept remuneration.

Ala was a victim of the Holocaust in a very different way from Jewish people. She had protected Jews, and now her family and former friends had deserted her, unable to forgive her for her actions. Her own brother let her know, through a third party, that he would one day kill his "Jew-loving sister." He had been an officer in the Polish underground Home Army and had good credentials to back up his threat.

The Home Army, known by the initials A.K., was a resistance arm of the Polish government in London exile. The A.K. was known for its fierce anti-Semitism. They killed numerous Jews, even after the war—usually in a cowardly hit-and-run manner. They didn't disband immediately after the war and continued to operate clandestinely, switching their attention from the German occupiers to their Soviet counterparts. The effect of this activity was limited. They compensated for it in postwar Poland by ambushing buses and trains, singling out Jews for execution. They also killed or otherwise punished some Poles who had kept Jews in hiding during the war or who had helped them survive in any manner.

Jews who had escaped to the Soviet Union were returning en masse to Poland, and many of them stopped off in Wroclaw looking for opportunities. Our stores became meeting places for new arrivals, and I and my brothers became their confidants and advisors. Everyone brought stories. I found out that my friend Ludwig Hertz, who survived the camps, was killed by the Home Army when he went back to his home town of Novy Targ.

Ludwig was an amiable dark-haired man in his early twenties, a person who always greeted you with a friendly smile, no matter how he felt inside. He must have returned to Novy Targ for the same sentimental reasons that drove me. His father had been a respected lawyer there before the war, and he still had some pleasant memories. Life had been easy for him before 1939.

It wasn't until October 1990, forty-five years later, that I heard the end of his story. I had met a Jewish woman named Sydonia Kaufer who had been in Novy Targ briefly at that time. She and some others told Ludwig of the danger, but he dismissed the warnings: "I doubt anyone would want to harm a member of the Hertz family."

Anyway, he only wanted to stay long enough to restore the Jewish cemetery. What a mistake! One day Ludwig, along with three other young men and one girl, was shot by a member of the Polish Home Army. The news was one more shock to the already distraught and frightened Jewish survivors in Poland. Since nearby Krakow had an organized Jewish community, the five bodies were brought there for burial. When the funeral procession, Sydonia Kaufer included, proceeded through the streets of Krakow, Polish people shouted from their windows: "You'll be next!" or "You should have been gassed in Auschwitz!" They spat from the balconies on the funeral crowd. This was tough to stomach so soon after the Holocaust.

According to Sydonia, the man who killed Ludwig and the four others (and who knows how many more) never had to answer for his crimes, although his identity was well known. In fact, only recently he was awarded one of the highest medals Poland can bestow—allegedly for unrelated "acts of heroism." So much for Polish justice toward Jews.

In 1946 we were shocked by the news that there was a minipogrom in Kielce. A youngster spread a false rumor that he was abducted by Jews and taken to a makeshift slaughterhouse where he saw Christian children being killed for ritual purposes. He claimed to have escaped. It was obviously a hoax, but by the time it was brought to light, forty-one Jews were dead and fifty-two were wounded. Kielce was several hundred kilometers from Wroclaw, but the incident was still upsetting. The Poles were resentful when Jewish people attempted to reclaim their belongings; their reactions caused sporadic killings all over the country.

About two months later leaflets were handed out in Tarnow, calling for a pogrom. A woman alleged that her child was missing and that she had proof that it was ritually killed so its blood could

be used the following Passover in baking matzos. By that time nearly two thousand Jews lived in Tarnow. They were mostly returnees from the Soviet Union, those who had escaped east in the early days of the war. Most were not originally Tarnow residents. There were also other Jews who had lived prior to 1939 in nearby towns and villages. A few had been citizens of our city before 1939. All of them felt that a city offered a bit more security and better chance to make a living.

Immediately the leaflets caused a great deal of fear, even panic. The memory of Kielce was fresh. Luckily, the local militia found the child the next day and arrested the woman briefly. She was in jail only a few days for this nearly catastrophic offense. So much for Polish justice.

The Jews in Tarnow never intended to remain permanently. The place was merely a temporary stop-over before embarking to Israel or to the United States to make a new life in a friendly environment.

We considered Wroclaw, and even Poland, to be transitional homes for us, and news of the pogrom started us thinking about moving on. To say the least, our life was precarious. In order to do business in Wroclaw, someone had to travel to Krakow for parts and other merchandise. Travel was difficult and risky. If you went by train, the easiest way was to climb in through the window. At least half the people who fought to get in the door didn't make it. It was so crowded, that even if you did get a seat, someone sat in your lap! There were cases where the Home Army stopped trains and buses, ordering Jews to step outside. Then they shot them.

We decided to leave Poland to go temporarily to Germany. Our eventual destination was America, but such a trip was easier said than done. We decided to go to Dr. Taub and ask him to arrange a legal passage. I went to his office, where I heard someone in the waiting room say he was politically the most powerful person in Silesia. That news made me feel secure about my errand. My name got me immediate entrance.

"Can I do something for you?" asked Dr. Taub.

"As a matter of fact, yes," I told him. "My brothers and I would like to travel west. We could use your assistance to leave the country legally."

"Your place is right here." His smiling face had turned unfriendly. "We need you here to build a new communist order. As a matter of fact, if you should be apprehended trying to get out illegally, I will personally see to it that you go to jail for a long time."

I had never realized what a doctrinaire Communist Taub was. We didn't let this setback stop us, however; we just looked for new avenues. Trainloads of Germans were being exiled to Germany every day, and we found a way to join them with illegal papers. So as not to burn all our bridges, we left Natan behind, while Simon and I boarded the train with forged documents.

The train was routinely stopped at the border to check exit papers and search the luggage. Knowing this, we had Natan and Ala (wearing her university cap for credibility) go to the border town and rent a hotel room. They would find out the schedule for border checks and see me before the train departed. I would watch out the train window for them so they could give me a loaf of bread with some jewelry hidden inside.

The great majority of passengers on the train were bonafide German exiles, with lots of luggage; however, all around me I saw a number of Jewish faces. Before leaving, we had done some superficial investigating and thought we knew what to expect. The party who sold us the forged papers assured us that "things were taken care of." When the train stopped at the border between Poland and Germany, a Polish officer in military uniform boarded and asked to see our papers. Another man looked through the luggage.

"Sind sie Deutsch?" the officer demanded of me.

"Ja." My German was nearly perfect.

The officer asked a woman next to me the same question, and her reply was in a strong Yiddish accent. She even looked Jewish. The official smiled and returned her papers. It was clear that things were in fact "taken care of."

The formalities over, I stood near the window, expecting Ala. She showed up, spotted me, and brought me over a loaf of bread. "You must be very hungry now," she said smiling knowingly.

Eventually the train started moving, and finally it stopped. The order came to disembark. We were in Marienthal, I think, in the English Zone. The processing was done in a nearby transit camp set up for that purpose. At the entrance to that camp, we were dusted with a heavy dose of DDT. Simon and I looked like we walked out of a bag of flour. We were told to deposit our belongings in a Quonset hut and line up for registration.

The German exiles, who had been meek in Poland, suddenly asserted themselves. They turned bold, vocal, and insulting. In Poland, we were merely hated as Jews. To these refugees, we were hated as Poles and Jews all wrapped in one. They announced to the camp officials that there were Jews in the transport with illegal

papers. Consequently, when we passed the registration table, we were screened.

The true Germans were released to the camp, while all Jews were ordered to a nearby building where they were isolated in a room. I knew this game all too well. As soon as we entered the building, I looked for an alternate exit. There was a window which looked out over a high basement. Without hesitation, I climbed out and jumped. A German in a military uniform without insignia detained me for a moment, but I bribed him with two packs of Lucky Strikes I had bought on the black market for just such purpose.

Soon after I jumped, several other younger Jews followed suit. When the camp authorities discovered how many people were missing, they held a second registration and warned that everyone in camp must come forward. We stood in line again. Two men, one English and one German, were checking our papers and asking questions. I again asserted that I was German and told them my family resided in Salzburg, Austria, at Number 18 Friedrich Strasse, near the bridge. I happened to remember the location from a previous trip to Salzburg.

I spoke decent German, and I didn't utter one extra word. They let me go. A few minutes later, Simon appeared before the table. Since his German was heavily accented, he was disqualified. The German official now recalled speaking to another Kornbluth and asked if he was my relative. After questioning, Simon admitted I was.

Over the loudspeaker came an announcement that I should report to the office at once. I didn't. I figured that now that Simon was detained, if I should be arrested, our luggage would be lost. Above all, I didn't want to lose my bread. They kept calling my name and I kept evading them. The M.P.'s went looking for me but came back so frustrated that they began to beat and kick Jewish people around them. An English M.P. kicked a Jewish woman in the stomach—she was in the late stages of pregnancy.

It seemed to me that the English did not have much sympathy for eastern Jews. The Anglos felt much more kinship with the Saxons, notwithstanding the fact that the Germans were an enemy who had just devastated much of Europe and that we were among their principle victims. I had noticed such attitudes in other encounters with the British.

All the Jews, Simon included, were led away and locked up. The German exiles were told to be on standby for trucks which would take them to a nearby railroad siding. Volunteers were recruited

to load the luggage onto giant horse-drawn wagons. I offered to help. I made sure our luggage got loaded, then managed to wriggle underneath it. Before the wagon passed the gate, a guard jumped up and made a superficial check, but he didn't see me. I guess they were still looking for me; I shook from nervousness.

When we got to the train, I again offered to help with the loading. After marking down the car number with our luggage, I waited in a nearby grove, only a few meters away from the train. When the train was fully loaded, the same two men who had been checking my papers entered the train and stayed for about half an hour. As soon as they left, I got on. From the few disguised Jews on the train, I learned that they were looking for me.

A long time later we arrived at another camp with another registration line. This camp was large and open, and from here people were assigned to locations in the English Zone. While in line, a German exile insulted my Jewishness, and I said something rash back. Before I knew it, a threatening mob came after me, and I had to run out of the camp. Luckily my luggage was with a Jewish acquaintance who didn't look Jewish. When I returned, I slept near him on the floor.

The following morning, I, along with a group of other Jews in the camp, went to the mayor of the nearby town and asked for passes to the American Zone. He gladly obliged us; he had enough problems placing German exiles. The following evening we boarded a train, all of us on forged papers in the same car. At the border near the American Zone, the train stopped, and we heard an announcement from outside. First in English, then in German, the voice told us to leave the train, one car at a time, to undergo a border check.

When the officials stopped at our car, a man named Oestreicher, a German Jew who didn't look Jewish, went on the train platform and said in fluent German: "There is no one here except poor and tired German refugees. We suffered long enough at the hand of the cruel Poles; give us some rest now. Our women and children are asleep." By that time the bread had turned stale and crumbled; I had to keep my valuables in my pockets. In a search I might have lost them.

The American M.P. asked his German partner what the man had said. Unaware we were Jewish, the German repeated the request in English in a sympathetic tone. "O.K.," said the M.P., "let's skip this car."

Our next stop was Munich, where the Jews in the group were taken to a transit camp named Funk Kasserne. Several days later

Simon showed up. He was unshaven and haggard. The Jews detained in Marienthal had been arrested, but the police didn't know what to do with them. After a day or two of confinement, someone influential intervened and they were released. By the time Simon arrived, I had signed up to go to a "Displaced Persons" camp called Poking, also in Bavaria. One couldn't stay long at a transit camp, so I kept to my decision to go to Poking. Simon stayed on in Munich. We visited each other, and we decided that I would join him as soon as he was somewhat established.

Poking, a camp inhabited chiefly by Hungarian Jewish refugees, was a rather pleasant place. Most of the Hungarians spoke some German so I could communicate with them. It was funded by the United States, and we could go swimming in a nearby lake. In the relaxed atmosphere, I made some Hungarian girlfriends and even learned a little of the language.

I finally left the camp on account of a woman. I had become friendly with a young couple living next door in our barrack, and spent so much time with them that they felt like family. Soon, however, the relationship made me uneasy. The woman would squeeze my hand too tightly in the movies, and one time she dropped something to the floor in the dark cinema. When I bent down to get it, she kissed my forehead. It was uncomfortable.

One day her husband announced that he had to go to the English Zone for ten days and said kiddingly that he wanted me to take care of his wife in his absence. The very first morning he was gone, his wife knocked on the adjoining wall to my room. She asked me to come right away; she didn't "feel well." As I suspected, she was alone in her room. The remedy she wanted was for me to "rub her chest," and she grabbed my hand to show me how.

"I don't think this was what your husband had in mind," I told her as I left the room.

The next ten days were more of the same. It took all my will power to resist the advances. Worse, when her husband returned, he listened to camp gossip and refused to shake my hand or talk with me. I didn't dare try to prove my innocence—it probably wouldn't have helped me, and it certainly would have incriminated his wife. Soon I left Poking and went to live in Munich with Simon.

14

America

For a number of weeks, Natan knew nothing of our whereabouts. None of our letters reached him, and, of course, he had no idea where to write us. The postal service between Germany and Poland wasn't functioning regularly for a time after the war. Finally we got through to him with our location in Munich.

Three months after we had left Wroclaw, he decided to join us in Germany. Having our experience in mind, he chose a different exit route. Professional smugglers helped him to cross the border into Austria. He stayed briefly in a D.P. camp to learn the best way to enter Germany. The common advice was to use a river crossing.

Natan crossed at night, two suitcases in hand. It had to be done cautiously, because the river was illuminated with circulating searchlights. He could only proceed when the lights shone away from him. He made it to Munich and found us in our apartment at Romanplatz. Now that Natan had arrived, we rented another place in the center of town near the Deutches Museum where Simon opened a watchmaking shop. Finally we were all together and living in the free world. My brothers were working.

It felt good to be out of Poland, the gravesite of so many Jews. We knew well that we had no future there or anywhere in Eastern Europe that was Russian-occupied. This stop was the first lap toward our goal of reaching a place where we would eventually start building a new life. It wasn't completely clear to us whether this would be Palestine or the United States. There was a great deal of ambivalance. We had strong emotional bonds to the ancestral roots of Palestine, but after the ghetto and the camps, we needed stability, a place to rest our aching bones and live in peace, at least physically. Our immediate reaction was satisfaction that we were together again.

I had some ideas. I had always been fascinated by education and decided to enroll in Munich University, but first I had to take care of my double hernias. The first one was from substituting for Natan

back in Tarnow when the Nazis made him stack the huge wooden logs; the second one was from holding back a coughing spell in Plaszow. We inquired about a good physician and were steered to the Nymphenburg Clinic in Munich.

My recuperation took sixteen days, and my brothers saw to it that I got the best of care. I didn't realize it at the time, but the surgeon who operated on me was also Hitler's private physician when the Führer visited Bavaria. I had a private nurse and a large room all to myself. When I complained of postoperative gas pain, she told me, "I will give you something that will make you feel good."

She gave me an injection. I liked the "something" very much; not only was my pain gone, but also I thought I heard soft music and felt like I was on cloud nine. After three hours, when the effect wore off, she gave me another injection. This practice continued for ten days. Then one day, when I asked for my injection, she answered, "I can't give it to you any longer. That stuff was morphine. I stole it from the clinic's medicine cabinet. They discovered the theft and locked up the cabinet."

For three days I felt like I was in a straight jacket. I had no choice but to go "cold turkey," which meant terrible withdrawal symptoms. My anxiety level was incredibly high and I felt as if a thousand pins were attacking my body. I paced the floor, completely oblivious to my pain. If I had not been watched, I would surely have committed suicide. Finally, after three days, the anxiety subsided, and I gradually went back to normal. When I left the clinic, I found out that the "special attention" given me by the nurse was due to the generous tips she received from Natan. Natan had asked her to make me as comfortable as possible.

In order to matriculate, I had to pass an entrance exam. By then I was pretty rusty as a student, so I hired two tutors to help me brush up. The first one was a former college professor recommended by a German neighbor. He turned out to be a former functionary in the SS, still an avowed Nazi who admired and praised Hitler's achievements. "His only fault was his policy toward the Jews," he told me.

I doubt he really thought Hitler's Jewish policy was a mistake, but for all his political beliefs, he was an excellent tutor. He steered me on a narrow course of study, guessing almost entirely correctly how much I had to study. For a number of weeks prior to the exams, I slept only four hours a night so that I could cram in as much information as possible.

The second instructor was I.L., a Jewish postgraduate student.

She was a bright girl with an interesting past. She had survived the war posing as a gentile, working in the office of Von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister. As a result of living in continual fear of discovery, she was a nervous wreck.

While I was being tutored in her apartment, a couple of times I saw a young German deliver her a white powder. This man was later arrested and charged with selling codeine wholesale and retail. I suspected her of being addicted to drugs, probably because of her past. She ate little and seemed to live from fix to fix.

I narrowly passed the exams and was admitted as a student of philosophy at Munich University. I liked the idea of being in college. Education had been my beloved element in the past. My preliminary majors were English, German, and history. To my great consternation I discovered that I had severe difficulty concentrating. I didn't have time to socialize with many students, and I didn't detect much overt anti-Semitism, although I was certain that they were so inclined, having been indoctrinated for years in the Hitler Jugend.

Living in Munich was depressing to me. The Germans at large turned progressively more arrogant. Many people were openly anti-Semitic, and they acted on their feelings.

Once, on a trolley car to college, I watched a middle-aged Hasidic Jew seated next to a German woman of about forty-five who was standing, holding on to a strap. "Is it not a shame," she remarked, "that I have to stand while this Jewish vermin is seated." The man looked up at her.

"Yes, you!" the woman continued, "It's too bad Hitler didn't take care of you."

My blood started boiling. Before I knew it, I was strongly objecting to her remark, and a commotion started. The trolley was halted before the scheduled stop, and I was physically ejected. The push propelled me into a puddle of water where my books and everything else got wet.

Anti-Semitic incidents were commonplace. One time, when I was walking near my residence, a girl pointed me out to an American M.P. who was leaving a bar with her. He hit me over the head with his night stick. The pain wasn't the worst part; it was the insult of it. I felt the same anger when some stores wouldn't honor my food ration coupons if they realized I was Jewish. I went so far as to go to the State of Bavaria Interior Ministry to complain, but no one would give me an audience.

Another time I was on a train going somewhere in Germany, just looking out the window admiring the pastoral landscape. A pretty

blonde was standing next to me wearing a Polish University cap, so I spoke to her in Polish. I found out that she was a Ukrainian who didn't like Poles one bit. About fifteen minutes into our conversation, a Jew passed by.

"I thought that Hitler took care of them," she observed.

"Excuse me, but I'm one of 'them.'"

The smiling, friendly face turned sour. The girl gave me an angry look, spit on the floor by my feet, and left.

These situations just increased the depression that I had wrestled with since the liberation from Ebensee. I felt powerless in the face of so much hatred. Out of frustration and hopelessness, my brothers and I talked more and more often about the need to leave Germany, to settle somewhere that accepted Jews. We leaned toward the United States.

While we made our preparations and plans for emigration, some good things did happen to me in Munich. One day, while at the Jewish Committee in Munich, I met a group of people from Sosnowiec and Bendzin in Poland, two cities located near the German border.

"Do you know Lula Saltzman?" I inquired.

"Sure. She's living in Munich right now. Would you like her phone number?"

I was in a phone booth within minutes. I had been searching for Lula ever since the truck collision in 1945. She was one of the eighteen people injured in the crash, and she had stayed at the hospital when I was incapacitated to serve as my nurse and companion. She almost fainted when I told her who I was and that I lived in Munich too.

Lula had been on the truck to try to get to Israel to join a former high school sweetheart in Tel-Aviv. She had been married briefly, but had lost her husband in the Holocaust. She broke her arm in the accident, and had some serious bruises, but she was able to get around enough to help me. She helped me now in Munich, introducing me to her friends and spending lots of time with me whenever I could get away from my studies.

For Lula, our relationship was more than platonic. She started to hedge about going on to Israel until I told her that I wasn't ready for marriage. She had a great personality, but she was several years older than I, and at that time, it wasn't common to marry an "older woman." At that news, she made plans and left within a few weeks. It was a tearful parting—I handed her a bouquet of roses and enclosed a poem that I had written for her. Soon afterward, I

received a wedding invitation from Tel-Aviv. Lula married the former sweetheart and I never heard from her again.

My studies at Munich University were difficult. Because I did not know shorthand, I had to copy the lecture notes from other students. The curriculum was demanding and I got little sleep trying to keep up. I even rented a separate room so as not to disturb Natan and Simon when I studied late. Some weekends I would go to the Jewish Student Union to meet college friends. One time I met David, who, the last time I had seen him, was chewing on a cooked human arm at Ebensee. He was studying dentistry.

One afternoon a German woman entered our shop and told us that she lived in the same building and had a deal for us. She had been observing us for some time and noticed that we were "decent people." She proceeded to open our window and pointed to a nearby bombed-out building. "See that large ruin? It was once a block-sized building that held the second largest jewelry store in Germany. The building, and the store, belonged to a Jewish family who died in Auschwitz."

We looked over at the ruin and listened. The woman continued her proposition. "That property was taken over by a member of the Nazi party. None of the Jewish family survived, not even in the extended family. The present owner would have to undergo a denazification process and the property would be confiscated and nationalized. You have a chance to purchase it now for $3,000. It happens to be the best business location in town."

When the woman left, we discussed the proposition. Natan and I leaned toward the deal, but Simon was adamantly against it. "I don't want anything to stand in the way of our leaving for America as soon as possible." he said. The next day, we gave the woman a negative reply.

"Do you realize what an opportunity you are missing?" she asked us.

Years later, we found out what we missed. A man whom we met at the Garden State Art Center in New Jersey told us of a property in Munich that sold for $12 million. From the location, it had to be the building we could have bought. It had been purchased by other Jews for $2,000. The man told us that two brothers applied to the German government for a low-interest loan. The government, anxious to restore the cities, gave them a 2 percent loan with which they put up a brand new structure. They did it with practically worthless marks. Soon afterward there was a currency exchange. Prosperity gradually returned, and that building appreciated tremendously.

Our decision made, we proceeded with all of the formalities needed to get to America. Relatives in the United States sent us affidavits. In December, 1947, we left by train to Hamburg where we embarked aboard the *Marine Tiger*, a former troop ship. The passage took fourteen days, the accommodations were spartan, the winter seas were rough in the North Atlantic, but who cared. We were on our way to the "Golden Land."

This was my first trip by ship, and I didn't have a yardstick to compare it to a luxury liner. The Marine Tiger, although austere by tourist standards (as I later found out), impressed me. We slept on double-tiered bunk beds, and the food was plentiful and pretty good. We had movies nightly, and I made several acquaintances, including a brunette who had attended Munich University. We were together a lot on the ship, and she was interested enough in me to write to me in the United States. I wasn't interested, however.

On Christmas Day, 1947, we saw the Statute of Liberty, holding up her torch in the New York Harbor. I had tears in my eyes when I looked at that splendid lady, the universal symbol of liberty.

Our excitement was great. Waiting for us on the docks were two uncles and one cousin whom we had never met. They were excited, too, for we were virtually all that was left of our once large branch of the family in Poland.

It was emotional to meet close members of our extended family and to see my mother's features reflected in their friendly faces. Both Uncle Max and Uncle David were handsome, well-dressed men, middle-aged, and conservative looking. Both wore hats. Cousin Shirley was very tall and average looking. I later found out that she was disappointed that all her cousins were shorter than she.

Uncle David insisted we stay with him. "You brought Siberian weather with you," Uncle David kidded us as we drove past huge piles of plowed snow on the roads. He brought us to his small apartment in Brooklyn where my Aunt Clara proposed that we stay with them and pay her room and board.

The words "America" and "New York" conjured up exaggerated images for us. It was supposed to be big, generous, rich, a place that opened up avenues heretofore closed to you elsewhere. The sky would be the limit. Now our superficial impressions rose and fell with each area Max's car passed through. We had difficulty understanding why so many slums existed next to the skyscrapers. I was disappointed in Uncle David's small apartment. I had seen much better elsewhere in the West and had imagined my uncles to be "rich Americans."

When Aunt Clara served us our first meal, cold cuts and rolls, Uncle made sure to tell us: "Remember, Children, if anyone asks you how you like America, tell him: 'We love it!' regardless of how you feel." We were embarrassed to eat enough at uncle's and went down to a nearby luncheonette to supplement our meals. My knowledge of English came in handy, although I had difficulty understanding the slang terms used there when ordering food. The owner soon realized that we were newcomers. Someone engaged us in a conversation and we found out where the hub of New York was and how to travel there by subway.

We had different ideas from Aunt Clara about where to stay. Much to everyone's disappointment, we found a large and sunny room at 99 Riverside Drive and moved in within a week. Nevertheless, the rest of the family were all anxious to meet us, and we went to dinner with a different relative every weekend.

We had hardly gotten settled in America when we went to a "Landsmenshaft" meeting, a gathering of people from Tarnow who now lived in America. We met people who had arrived years ago, and some others who had survived the Holocaust like ourselves. Both oldtimers and newcomers formed circles around us. The oldtimers asked about their relatives: "Did you know such and such? Did they survive or what happened to them?" All marveled that we survived, but many walked away disappointed that their relatives had not. The newcomers hugged and embraced us and asked where and how we survived and what our plans were here in the United States.

All the newcomers had a common complaint: loss of identity. Even though we had only been here a few weeks, we felt the same way. American opportunities notwithstanding, having no standing in a new community is painful. One took many years in Tarnow to establish a name—now, all of a sudden, we were just a drop in the ocean called New York City. Finding a job, especially for those who had no trade, like myself, was also not an easy prospect.

We met a foreman from Longine's Jewelry Shop. "Any chance you could place my brother at Longine's," Natan asked. "He's a fine watch-maker."

"Let me see him on Monday at the shop." The man gave Simon a job on Monday, and he stayed there until his retirement.

Natan soon found employment as a cutter in the garment industry, a job substantially below his qualifications as a men's clothing designer. In order to become a designer, you had to be a member of a trade association that strictly limited its membership. My brothers urged me to return to college, but I was too foolish, or

too proud, to accept their offer to finance it. Instead, I took a series of low-paying jobs in the garment district.

For a while, I worked for a pattern-making company, where I displayed drawing skills I never knew I possessed. Unfortunately, I was no sooner "discovered" than the company, Originator Patterns, went defunct. I even had difficulty collecting my final paychecks, and when the checks did come, they bounced. Eventually I became a cutter and earned a half decent salary, but I couldn't earn the full cutter's scale because I couldn't get in the union.

The big welcoming banquet was set up in mid-May 1948 by our wealthy cousin Irving, who invited the entire American family. Irving was Aunt Malka's son, the oldest son of my mother's oldest sister. Unfortunately we never got to meet Malka, because she had died several months before we arrived. Irving manufactured pocketbooks and employed hundreds of people on two floors in the garment center of Manhattan.

The gathering was made more festive by the news that Israel had declared independence. Everyone was discussing the new Jewish state, but not everyone had the same opinion. Finally cousin Morris Greenblatt, a middle-aged, medium-built, serious-looking gentleman, stood up and banged his hand on the table.

"If this Israel talk doesn't stop this minute, I'll go home. Shame on you! What kind of Americans are you? I'm an American, first, last, and always. Israel doesn't mean a thing to me and I couldn't care less about it." The mood of the party changed with this outburst, and conversation died down. Everyone looked at us with embarrassment.

We were upset at this outburst and felt somewhat responsible, since the banquet was for us. We also felt angry with Morris. I had been a Zionist of sorts since I was twelve years old, and for those of us caught in the Nazi web, Israel has a special meaning. I was not overly impressed with my rich relatives, and I was bored with their conversation. They discussed things that by-and-large I had no interest in and which seemed superficial.

Cousin Irving invited us to his plant at 32nd Street and we accepted his invitation a few days later. He took us on a walking tour, proudly showing us his spacious factory which he bragged he had started with $1,500 of borrowed money. Now it was worth millions. However, when Natan asked him to give me a job, he refused. "As a matter of policy, I don't hire relatives," he said.

Some of our new family was open and generous to us. Irving's brother cousin Marcus tried to push a roll of bills into my hand, but I refused. Our "policy,"—Natan's, Simon's, and mine—was not

to accept handouts. We even refunded our relatives the money they laid out for our passage to America. Uncle David took the refunded money and sent it to cousin Ruven, son of Uncle Benjamen, who survived the war in Russia and who now lived in Israel.

One weekend we went to visit a friend in Brooklyn, Leibush Saleschitz, who had been our neighbor in Wroclaw. In fact, it was his room in Munich that I "inherited" for my study room when he went on to America. "It's too bad you didn't get here sooner," he said as we walked in, "even thirty minutes sooner. A very fine girl from my hometown just visited with us. She would have been perfect for Willy."

"It wasn't meant to be," I told him, not terribly excited about other people picking out "perfect" girls for me.

Leibush wasn't the only one interested in my romantic inclinations. Uncle David kept nudging me also to "meet a nice Jewish girl" and settle down.

"A young man has certain needs," he said to me, "and should get married. Look at this ad in the matrimonial section of this Jewish paper *The Day*." I read: "Fine, educated and pretty girl, respectable Jewish family, jewelry business, 5′ 3″ tall, would like to meet decent Jewish boy under 30."

"Do me a personal favor," Uncle David demanded, "Meet her."

I was upset at the request, but I couldn't just refuse Uncle David, so on Sunday afternoon I found myself reluctantly boarding the 96th Street subway to head for Brooklyn. A respectable-looking young man sat down next to me, and we began talking. He appeared to be about 5′10″ tall, in his early thirties, and conservatively dressed in a dark gray coat and hat. His attire somehow indicated to me that he was from religious stock. "Where do you come from?" he asked, intrigued by my accent. I told him.

"Do you know how to get to King's Highway in Brooklyn?" I asked in turn.

"Don't worry," he responded, "That's where I'm going. You have to transfer at 42nd Street and take a Sea Beach train."

"Where on King's Highway are you going?" he asked as the trip continued. I told him the number on my slip of paper.

"That's the house I live in," he said in surprise, "What apartment number are you visiting?" This time I showed him the slip of paper.

"Why you must be my sister's date," he said in great wonderment. "You're nearly an hour early."

"I know," I replied, "But I'm unfamiliar with Brooklyn and wanted to give myself enough time, in case I got lost."

"My sister will never be ready—let's go to Coney Island for an hour."

"Sure. I've never been there before."

From Coney Island, the young man called his family to tell them about his unusual meeting. Ten minutes before the appointed time, he took me to his place. His sister turned out to be more like 5′8″ than 5′3″ and not especially good-looking, but I did spot a comely 5′3″ girl across the room. The family marveled at our chance encounter in a city of eight million people. I could read in the family's eyes that they thought this was a good omen.

Her father was in his early sixties and dressed in a typical dark Hasidic attire with a long gray beard and gold-rimmed glasses. Her mother was a few years younger and wore a wig that indicated how Hasidic she was. We spoke briefly. They asked me where in Europe I came from and how I survived the war and then went to another room.

The omens weren't good. It was clear to me pretty quickly that there had been a switch here. The call from Coney Island was probably to suggest that they substitute sisters. He must have thought that a refugee like myself wouldn't be too fussy. In any case, I took the homely sister out and found that she was personable, intelligent, but not for me. For one thing, she was taller than I was and a bit older. Uncle David was quite disappointed.

On the following Saturday I had a date with a girl from Krakow and didn't make the usual weekend trip with my brothers to my uncle's house. Uncle David had a guest who brought along a pretty, eighteen-year-old girl, a child survivor of the Holocaust. My brothers liked her and told me to call her. Intrigued by their description, I called her the same evening to arrange a date for the next day.

At first the girl put me off, but when I insisted, she agreed to meet me on Sunday. I had to cancel a date to do this and so did she. I met her in Brighton Beach, near the subway station, recognizing her by what she was wearing. I saw a blond girl wearing a blouse with golden sequins. It was my future wife, Edith.

Edith insisted that we go to her Uncle Sam and Aunt Lena's house to be introduced. I was not overly impressed with Sam and Lena Wachtel. They were rather plain and uneducated. Our conversation was forced. I resented the personal questions, and I was glad when the "interview" was over. I could, however, understand that in the absence of Edith's parents, they felt responsible for her well being.

Edith had moved here after living for a time with Uncle Max

who had sent her the affidavit for passage. He, his wife, and his son lived like paupers in a five floor walk-up with no refrigerator, just an icebox. Edith arrived on Sunday, and on Monday she was working in an umbrella factory. On Friday, Uncle Max took $10 from her $23 paycheck.

Edith enrolled in night school, made some friends, and adjusted to her new life as an American. Sometimes she had four or five boys escorting her when she arrived home.

"Look at her," said her Uncle Max. "Girls here have trouble finding men, and this greenhorn refugee comes home with a whole slew of them." Max was a bit jealous, because he had designs on Edith for his son Shloymee, a man who behaved strangely and was much older than Edith.

Edith hardly spoke to Shloymee. She got promoted and brought home more pay. She hated staying with Uncle Max; she especially hated the hot apartment and the old-fashioned ways. Every weekend, her Aunt Lena, Edith's mother's older sister, kept on asking Edith to move in with her. "I have an empty beautiful room in Brighton Beach near the ocean," she said. "It's just waiting for you. And I'm a closer relative than Max."

In December 1947, Edith made the move to Aunt Lena's over Uncle Max's protestations. Edith was the sole survivor of the family in Poland, and Aunt Lena treated her like a daughter. Edith enrolled in the nearby Abraham Lincoln High School, and after school she worked in Uncle Sam's grocery store for a good wage. Edith dated, adjusted to her new environment and even went to a speech clinic where she learned to speak English with only a slight accent.

I was most impressed with this young Polish woman whom I had just met. We chatted for a while with Aunt Lena before heading for the movies and a restaurant. It was an hour and a half trip for me to get out to Brighton Beach, but the distance didn't matter. I made a date for the following weekend and took her to the boardwalk. I was almost eight years older than Edith, but she told me she had a preference for "older men."

After that, I didn't see any other girls—as far as I was concerned, we were going steady. The first rainy weekend, Edith and I went to visit Leibush Saleschitz, the man who said I had just missed a "very nice girl." We discovered he meant Edith. When we walked in together, he nearly fell over.

"How in the world did you two meet?" he asked.

We explained it to him, but he just kept shaking his head. "I guess it was meant to be," he finally concluded.

That day, Leibush happened to mention that he was looking to buy a grocery store. Leibush had lost all his family, including wife and children, in the Holocaust, but he had remarried and wanted to run a type of business he was familiar with. Both he and his father had owned grocery stores in the old country. Edith mentioned that her Uncle Sam was looking to sell his store. Leibush eventually bought it, on the condition that Edith continue to work there, and he soon doubled the sales. Leibush was a lot better than Sam at the grocery business.

Edith and I quickly came to know everything about one another, including the terrible story of her family's trials in the Polish forests. Her parents' death had nearly been the end of Edith's will to go on. But, like so many of the Holocaust survivors, her tale didn't end with the liberation. I'll let her continue, again in her own words.

15

Edith Emigrates

"Preneta, the woman who told me of Mother and Father's death, was weeping when she finished their story and tried hard to console me. I was crying softly.

"'I want to die too,' I told her. Preneta held my hands. 'Get a hold of yourself, child. The war is coming to an end. You have to go on living, no matter what.'

"'Life no longer makes any sense to me.'

"'Time heals all wounds,' Preneta continued. "You, too, will recover. You are very young and all of life is still ahead of you. You can't give up after suffering so much. Go back to Rzeszow and go on living. . . .'

"I stayed with Preneta for two days, in a state of shock. Emotionally numb, I finally went back to the Depas. I didn't take my usual precautions on the road, since I no longer cared if I lived or died, but I made it safely.

"'How is your mother?' asked Mrs. Depa. 'How are your sisters and brothers?' Nothing she asked was in depth; she had her own problems just surviving day to day.

"Despite the burden of my grief, I managed to continue my chores in a robotlike manner. Several more weeks passed, and the war was over. My mother and father, thirty-four and thirty-seven years old respectively, died when the war was nearly finished. They had overcome inhumane suffering in the woods, dodging the raids, enduring cold and hunger. Less than twelve weeks before the liberation, their lives came to an abrupt end, all because of the greed of a peasant.

"Pastula, the man who betrayed them, didn't need to inform the Gestapo to protect his 'treasures.' During my last meeting with my parents, father told me what he would do for Pastula should he survive the war. He planned to leave him all the belongings that he had held during the war; in other words, exactly the goods that had motivated him to finger my parents to the Germans. Moreover,

Pastula was high on the list of peasants that my parents intended to reward handsomely for protecting them during the war.

"Before the war, Pastula had worked for Pinia and they were good friends. My family and his visited each others homes on a regular basis. The children played together. Now Pastula was their murderer.

"The news of the war's end spread like a brush fire. Everyone ran into the streets and yelled out with joy, 'Have you heard? Have you heard?' Even strangers embraced and hugged. 'We are free again?' they shouted.

"Here and there a Jew or two emerged from bunkers, tiny remnants of a once sizable Jewish community in Rzeszow. One man rubbed his blinking eyes, having difficulty adjusting to daylight. His chest appeared to expand, trying to get a whiff of fresh air. He seemed to want to inhale the newfound freedom. Such people looked pale, tired, and worn. Tears of joy stained their still-fearful faces.

"It was easy to read in their eyes, 'We made it . . . but at what price?' They looked from side to side, or behind them, to make sure that no one was sneaking up. The euphoria was still tempered with distrust. Like many of them, I wasn't sure what to do, and I seemed to walk aimlessly. It was all too new and overwhelming.

"Eventually I returned to the yard of the Depa's apartment house, but instead of going inside, I approached the bungalow where the mother and son whom I suspected of being Jewish lived.

"'Yes, we are Jewish,' they told me, 'but please don't make it public yet. We knew you were Jewish, too.'

"'I have a favor to ask,' I said to the son, after we had exchanged some conversation. 'Would you go over to the Depas to let them know I'm Jewish.' I took a short walk while he went on the errand.

"Later I returned to find out the reaction. 'Mrs. Depa was furious,' he told me. "How could I be so stupid?" she said. "I kept a Jew all this time? At least I could have kept a rich Jew."'

"The son tried to tell them that I had worked hard for them, but Mrs. Depa didn't listen. She just kept shaking her head in disbelief and anger. I never returned to the Depas. I would have liked to see the children again to give Basia and Janek a good-bye kiss. Mrs. Depa, however, did not deserve any better.

"What else could I do but go back to Poremby Kupienskie? There was no other place where I knew anyone. I hitchhiked much of the way, no longer worrying if anyone knew my background, and arrived at Mrs. Preneta's home in the evening. All around me were the familiar landmarks of home. My old house was an easy

walk away. The lakes stocked with carp and pike lay still in the evening mist. All around me was the vast forest where Feiga and Pinia had hidden for so long. Before the war, my father Pinia would have picked me up on the handlebars of his bicycle, and brought me back to where my mother was baking delicacies for the weekend. Now there was no one.

"Mrs. Preneta and her daughter Helcia welcomed me warmly and served me a decent meal. I had almost forgotten that I hadn't eaten since morning. Both women insisted that I stay with them for the moment; not knowing where else to turn, I took them up on the offer.

"Helcia was just my age and seemed to like having a new sister. She was a friendly girl, a bit shorter than I, who always seemed to have a smile for me. During the day, she had someone to share her chores, and in the evening, we could talk late into the night, exchanging countless stories from past and present. Local boys, friends of Helcia, stopped by, and several of them offered to marry 'the new girl.' They probably didn't realize I was Jewish.

"Marriage, however, especially in a sleepy Polish village, was the last thing on my mind. I was only fifteen, and I wanted an education, some excitement, some chance to 'see the world.' Besides, after pretending to be a Christian for three years, I wanted to see what it was like to be with Jews again. I didn't want to spend my life as an imposter, to continue denying my heritage.

"Several weeks into my stay at the Preneta's, a distant cousin of mine, Martin Rosenberg, suddenly showed up. He was two years older than I, and before the war had lived in the nearby village of Widelka. He had twenty-one siblings, and we used to meet his entire family on Saturdays when my parents took us to their village synagogue for services. He and only one sister, Itka, had survived the war.

"I hugged Martin as hard as I could, for he represented a sentimental link to a past that I thought was irrevocably lost. Martin had been kept hidden with Itka by a Polish peasant. I can't recall how he found out about my whereabouts to come and get me.

"'There are other Jews who have survived,' he told me. 'I know of nine Jews who survived in a bunker in Kolbuszowa. A peasant woman named Wichta and her daughter Wladka kept them in hiding and supplied them with food and other necessities.'

"It must have been nearly impossible for two poor women to supply nine people during such a harrowing time. The odds against their survival seemed enormous. Yet the nine men had lived, and now, joined by other survivors, stayed together in a house owned

by Maniek Notowicz. I knew Maniek—he was slightly older than I was. Now he was the sole survivor in his family. The group showered love on the poor woman Wichta and made sure that she and her daughter had a better life.

"'Come with me to Kolbuszowa,' Cousin Martin asked. I was easily persuaded. I said an emotional good-bye to Helcia and her mother. 'I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness and hospitality,' I told them. All of us were crying. I got my few things together and walked away from Poremby Kupienskie for the last time.

"The first thing I did in Kolbuszowa was to go to the town hall and get my identity papers. Without them you were a 'nonperson'—you couldn't move anywhere. But there was also a symbolic reason. Now I was me again, a full member of human society.

"The group in Kolbuszowa was happy at my arrival. Each new survivor was a triumph over the Nazis, and I was more unusual because I was a young woman. Wichta was at the helm of the household, and Wladka and I helped with cooking and keeping the place neat. This arrangement lasted until the end of 1945, although throughout this period, members drifted away, looking for greener pastures.

"One day a man named Siesel Feuer showed up in Kolbuszowa and claimed to be a distant relative. He lived in the town of Mielec and was part of another artificial family unit with a somewhat similar arrangement to the one we had in Kolbuszowa. Feuer insisted that I join his 'family' in Mielec and refused to leave unless I went.

"When we arrived in Mielec, we were greeted by another middle-aged man, Szulim Hollander. Mielec was a sleepy town of several thousand people, drab and unimpressive. The town had suffered damage during the war, and bombed-out ruins were all around. Hollander and Feuer lived on the upper floor of an old two-story house that belonged to a Jewish survivor, Yankel Feit. Jews had been a sizable proportion of the population before 1939, approximately four thousand people, but now we were the only Jews in Mielec.

"Hollander and Feuer had been married to two sisters who perished in the Holocaust. They dealt in commodities and whatever else they could and used almost their entire income to reclaim Jewish children who somehow survived the war disguised as Christians.

"Another young woman, also named Itka, lived with them. She survived the war in hiding, but her entire family had perished. Seven years older than myself, she was a thin, average-looking

brunette, and her unsmiling face reflected fear and hardship. She worked continuously, either cooking for the two men and constant drop-ins or trying to tidy up their three-room apartment which had no furniture except a table and chairs and several beds to accommodate the ever-present guests. I originally thought I came for a visit, but Feuer appealed to my family instincts. I agreed to stay, sharing the household duties with Itka and helping the two men with their operation to reclaim Jewish children.

"One day a Polish peasant woman brought in a dirty toddler dressed in rags. The little girl's entire body was covered with fine hair.

"'I found the baby abandoned when the Jews in my town were executed,' the woman told us. 'It was playing in a puddle of water. It called me Mommy.'

"'Didn't you suspect it was Jewish?' Feuer asked her.

"'I surmised it was Jewish,' she responded, 'but I kept it anyway.' The woman wore a ragged dress hardly better than the baby's clothing. She must have been extremely poor.

"'I can't afford to keep the child,' she went on. 'Perhaps you could give the baby a better future.'

"Some haggling followed in which Hollander and Feuer gave the woman a cow and a pig in exchange for the child. The infant was turned over to me. I gave her a good bath and rolled her in dough to clean her body of the fine hair. She turned out to be quite pretty. We named her Halinka, and the little girl brought new life and sunshine into our home. We pampered her with love and attention.

"Our house was an open door for survivors or returnees from Russia who needed a meal or a place to sleep. Feuer and Hollander even gave financial assistance when they could, no questions asked. One such couple of transients was Moishe Blumenkehl and his wife Adela who were traveling from the Soviet Union to the town of Bytom in Lower Silesia. They wrote back to me in glowing terms about Bytom and invited me to stay in their spacious apartment. I took them up on the offer.

"It was dull in the drab Polish town of Mielec and my ultimate intention was to move west until I got to America. My mother's two sisters, who lived in New York, were the only close relatives I had left. For two weeks I stayed as the guest of the Blumenkehls. From there I went to Austria to be one step closer to my goal.

"There in Salzburg I stayed in a D.P. camp briefly. I could hardly wait to leave Salzburg—the Austrians were unfriendly and anti-Semitic. They would insult us and even throw stones at us when we ventured out of camp. It took three weeks before I managed to

get a semilegal pass to Germany which allowed me to move to Lansberg Am Lech, and a D.P. camp in Bavaria.

"For two months my life was very pleasant. It was easy to make friends and the ratio of girls to boys was small, so I had lots of boys interested in me. Some of them even proposed marriage, but I had no interest in that at sixteen.

"One night when I was dancing, my partner asked me where I came from. In conversation it turned out that this man, sixteen years older than myself, was a distant cousin. His name was Leon List. While I was at the camp, we became inseparable.

"My singular goal was still to reach America, so I got in touch with a certain Mr. Muhlbauer, who arranged for me to live in Prien, Bavaria, in an orphanage for surviving Jewish children. This was the easiest way to emigrate to America.

"Prien had two hotels for us, each run by a manager who supervised the operation. We had training in a trade of our choosing, conducted by the international organization named ORT, and I took up sewing. We also had instruction in English. Life was not half-bad in Prien. It was a beautiful resort town on a lake, where we could go boating, and the supervisors sent us on excursions to picturesque places nearby.

"Once again, I formed new friendships that were destined to be broken quickly. Sometime in early August of 1947, I, and a group of other youngsters, were moved to Funk Kasserne in Munich to be processed for emigration. It took a month before we were shipped to Bremerhaffen, a port in Northern Germany. From there, we boarded a former U.S. troop ship, the *Ernie Pyle.* I felt seasick most of the trip and even fainted once during a shower. Everyone thought I had fallen overboard until the found me unconscious, lying under a running shower.

"After fourteen days at sea, the *Ernie Pyle* docked in Manhattan. Two dozen of my relatives waited on the pier to size up the 'miracle' youngster who had survived Hitler's Gehenna in Europe. When I got through customs, they all touched me as if to see if I were real. I was disappointed that my mother's two sisters, my real aunts, were not there. It took me a while to realize that Uncle Max was probably behind it, keeping my arrival a secret.

"I couldn't quite believe the skyscrapers of New York were actually towering above me. I had reached my goal. Max drove me out to Brooklyn, where a new chapter in my life was ready to unfold."

16

Americans

I had heard many stories of survivors, but I was in love with Edith and her story was especially moving to me. Edith and I drew closer until our engagement was imminent. I had no trade and no secure source of income to bring to a marriage, and Natan and Simon wanted me to go back to college. With marriage on my mind, what I wanted was an immediate source of income. I was too old for college, I rationalized, and so I took in a series of low-paying jobs, mostly in the garment center. Since I wasn't a union member and had no trade, I was taken advantage of every way possible. Not only did I work for low wages, but I had to work overtime for regular pay. In one instance I had to kick back $10.00 a week to the shop steward from my meager pay. I later found out that the shop was Mafia dominated.

We became engaged in December, 1948, during the Chanukah festival. I had lost my job a few days before, but kept this bad news secret from Edith. I soon found a better paying position, but the work was hard and the commute long. Edith, meanwhile, kept working in the grocery store, saving most of her salary.

September 18 was our wedding date. We had selected a place for the reception on the East Side, a newly renovated catering hall called Little Hungary. We didn't have much money, so we made an arrangement with the owners for cold cuts as the meal. Edith, having no parents to fall back on, wore herself out preparing for the event. She lost so much weight that on the day of our wedding she had to have the wedding gown pinned on her.

We invited one hundred fifty people. When we arrived at Little Hungary for the photo session, we took a glimpse into the reception hall. Our hearts sank. The place was set up for a full-fledged dinner, something we could never afford.

"There must be a misunderstanding," I told the owner. "We can't afford this kind of meal."

"No misunderstanding," he replied. "Relax. I want you to have

a nice wedding. The difference in price is on me; I will make it up on others."

To this day I can't forget his generosity. There were tears in my eyes when I left his office.

We had no real honeymoon, just a week in Peekskill at my Uncle Max's hotel. We moved into a modest apartment in Flatbush, Brooklyn, thanks to some influence and a bribe. Aunt Gussie's nephew, Nathan Sturtz, owned a large apartment house on Newkirk Avenue, and Aunt Gussie's pleading got us an apartment—that and a $200 donation "to the Red Cross."

The Saleschitz grocery prospered, so Edith felt free to quit her job in Brighton Beach and take one in Manhattan, working for Glensder Textile Corporation, a wholesaler. Edith had saved up $700—my "dowry" she jokingly called it—and I had some savings. The wedding gifts were generous; Natan tried to force $1,000 on me, but I bargained him down to $250. Even when I was unemployed, we were able to save something out of my unemployment checks. Slowly Edith furnished a tasteful apartment, complete with a green sectional couch and a club chair that Edith kept covered with colorful slip covers. The couch was nearly always reserved for guests. Eventually I was able to land a union job which enabled us to save more money.

The only thing that troubled our happiness at this time was the specter of my Holocaust experiences which hung over me constantly. During good or bad times, my nights were visited by terrible nightmares. Edith would wake me up to interrupt the torturous dreams. Luckily, Edith came out of the war in better emotional shape than I did. To my knowledge she had few nightmares. My brothers, on the other hand, shared my problem, especially Natan who is still depressed because of his Holocaust experiences.

A neighbor of ours, a doctor, spoke to Edith about my problem. It was his suggestion that I talk about the past a lot to get it out of my system. From this advice, I decided to write a book based on my Holocaust background. Two chapters was all I could complete, however. Reliving these horrible experiences didn't have a healing effect on me. In fact, it magnified my nightmares. When I tried to put some of the painful scenes on paper, I would break down crying.

Life went on. In August, 1951, our daughter Renee was born, and our apartment was too small for the three of us. We had no cross-ventilation, and, common for those times, no air conditioning. On hot summer nights, we would get up in the middle of the night and take a cold shower.

Visitors came nearly every weekend. Icek and Mayer Stub and Ephraim and Natan Brodt, all of them survivors of the bunker supplied by Wichta, came often. They kept regular contact with Wichta in Poland and sent her money and packages. They even offered to bring her to the United States. We also saw Leon List, the cousin whom Edith had met at a dance in Landsburg. He now lived in Bradley Beach, New Jersey. Edith loved people and made everyone who came feel welcome.

It was clear to me that it was time for a drastic change in our life-style. Our apartment was tiny, the commute to my job at "Peter Pan Brassieres" in Newark, New Jersey, too long and tiring. About the same time, my Uncle Max (Menashe), who owned the hotel in Peekskill, sold it and bought a poultry farm in Jackson Township, New Jersey. The allure of living in the country with lots of fresh air sounded inviting, so I visited Max for a weekend to check out the situation.

The next weekend, Edith came out with me. We helped with the chores to get the feel of farm life, and Edith, particularly, liked the idea. She was from a farming background, and the idea of raising a family in the country, away from urban hazards, appealed to her. Best of all, the nights were delightfully cool, even after the hottest day.

Eventually we made the decision to try poultry farming, an idea that would kill two birds with one stone. We would have our business and our residence with one purchase. We didn't have enough money for such a venture, so we asked Natan to become a partner. He tried hard to dissuade me, arguing that I had no farm background and would hate "living in the sticks." I pointed out that Edith had the right background. On my insistence, we went out every week end looking for farms, which at that time were expensive, because many other survivors of the Holocaust had the same idea.

In the end, we decided to build our own. Uncle Max's farm was thirty-four acres, and he offered to let us have ten of them on which to build our farm. We opted instead to buy ten adjacent acres. During summer, 1953, Edith and Renee, now two, spent the season in the Catskills. I came out each Friday after work. For once, we were in a camp of our own choosing. They enjoyed this bungalow colony immensely, swimming in the nearby river and getting great tans.

In January, 1954, I took a leave of absence from my job to build a chicken coop on my newly purchased ten acres. We moved in temporarily with Uncle Max while I supervised the construction

of a large coop and a modest dwelling. We moved in around May, 1954, but we had to cancel our order for chicks because of news of a bad year upcoming for chicken farming. I stayed on at my job, living during the week with Natan in Passaic, New Jersey.

In fall, 1954 we finally stocked our coop with chicks. I kept working while Edith, "assisted" by Renee, cared for the chicks. When the hens were six months old and ready to lay, I quit my job to stay on the farm full time. Natan stayed at his job to subsidize our fledging enterprise.

Nearly every weekend we saw cousin List who lived only twenty-five miles away in Bradley Beach. He had married his first cousin, a twice-divorced woman, and they adopted a baby from Tennessee whom they called Teddy. On July 25, 1955, Edith gave birth to a boy, Philip. As was customary, he was circumcised the eighth day after the birth. During the circumcision, I fainted. After all I had been through, I still couldn't stand the sight of blood.

Our friends and family continued to arrive in the United States. Natan found out that Pelek and Herta Fessel, our former partners from Wroclaw, had recently arrived and were living in Brooklyn. In 1955, our sister Klara and her husband Simon asked for help in moving to America from Israel. We put wheels in motion and were reunited with Klara in 1956. Simon came later with two children, Rina and Aron. Natan found an apartment for them in Passaic, and furnished it, as well as finding well-paying jobs for both of them. The grown children, Aron and Rina, also found work easily. Natan moved in with them for a while to guide them through the transition period.

At this point Natan worked as a band-saw operator in Clifton, New Jersey where he made a respectable wage. He looked well, and one could hardly tell with what emotional torment he had to cope. He kept a normal facade and went out with several women, but he didn't want a commitment and never married. The shadow of the Holocaust followed his life, and each of our conversations invariably led to our past, although I tried to avoid the subject matter.

Simon, on the other hand, married a Viennese woman, Trudy Lemnon, and settled into a normal life. He exhibited less emotional trauma than Natan or I. Eventually he bought a home in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn. In addition to his job at Longines, he did a bit of trading on 47th Street in New York. He also kept a watchmaker's bench at home where he worked weekends on his own. They had two daughters, Roberta and Suzan. Roberta was born with cerebral palsy.

Now that Klara was in the United States, we hoped to be a close family, but the distances made it impractical. We all had separate problems to cope with, and after working all week, we needed the weekends for ourselves. We tried our best, but we were never truly close.

Meanwhile, Uncle Max's farm was doing poorly. In 1959, he faced bankruptcy, despite two loans we had given to him to prevent foreclosure. His well-to-do children refused to help, saying "Let him drop the farm; we are tired of subsidizing Dad's dying business. It's a bottomless pit."

We felt sorry for him, and eventually picked up on his hints that we buy his farm. Egg farms weren't doing well at that time, and we could have bought a much nicer farm up the road for less, but we eventually bailed Uncle Max out, paying off his debts and giving him enough extra to buy a small house. We felt sorry for him, even if his own children didn't.

In 1960, at the age of thirty-eight, I suffered a stroke. It probably came from stress, for we had passed a tough winter. Perhaps the long tough years in the ghetto and in the camps were catching up with me. The snow that winter had caused many problems for me, forcing me to work in waist-high drifts and to hire bulldozers that didn't always come in time. One of our larger coops caught fire, just after we had stocked it with twelve-week-old uninsured chickens. I had to fight the blaze singlehandedly until the firemen arrived. Soon after the fire I had the stroke.

We had two young children and owed lots of money, having taken on additional payments for Uncle Max's farm. Edith was desperate. "Strokes only happen to old people," she said. We had just restocked the coops on both farms, and there was loads of work. With me in the hospital, Edith faced an impossible burden.

I soon developed the complication of nonstop hiccups which went on day and night. The prognosis wasn't good. I was rapidly losing weight and could not retain any food or liquids. The doctors tried everything from home remedies to medical cures. Even hypnosis didn't work. Finally, on the ninth day, they stopped of their own accord. I was completely exhausted, seventeen pounds thinner, and barely alive.

Seeing our situation, Natan quit his job in Clifton, New Jersey, and moved to the farm. Were it not for him, everything would have collapsed, and the farms would have been lost. After the hiccups stopped, I gradually improved. My paralysis lessened slightly, and my speech was a bit less slurred. I started therapy, and in stages, after three months, I went back to work on the farm. Natan decided

to remain on the farms permanently, just in case, and moved into the house that had previously been occupied by Uncle Max.

In 1963, a neighbor, Mr. Kessler, offered us his property at a bargain. He had a chance to buy his brother-in-law's business in Brooklyn for a fraction of its value, and he just wanted to sell fast. We couldn't resist the price, figuring we needed the extra capacity just to keep our income stable since the price of eggs was continually dropping. With the new acquisition each of us worked ninety hours a week on our three farms. We tried to hire help, but most of the transients quit after the first paycheck. Some of them didn't last a day. In the end, it was easier to put in the long hours ourselves.

In 1967 there was some building activity in Jackson Township, albeit on the other end of the large township near a main road. We decided to try to build some homes on our property as a second source of income. Given the long hours we worked, it was an impossible burden to get the subdivisions approved by the various boards, let alone find reliable contractors. In the end, we built three homes and had trouble selling them. In that endeavor, we were at least a decade ahead of our time.

Renee graduated high school as salutatorian and was about to start college, something I had always wanted for myself but had never had the opportunity to complete. Our daughter had many talents, and it was hard for her to choose a major. In the end, she chose art.

When Renee started student teaching, she realized that art education wasn't for her, nor was teaching going to be her chosen vocation. After some trial and error with other courses, she signed up for an IBM sponsored course in computers and finished at the head of her class. She made rapid headway in the field and recently went into business for herself. She is still a single career woman.

Our son Phil was also a good student, but he seemed to inherit some of my early interest and talent in athletics. He excelled in baseball, and by the time he was in his teens, his room was filled with trophies. Talent scouts from major league teams pursued him, and he was tempted to quit school and make baseball a career. We insisted that he finish college first.

Philip had won a Merit Scholarship Citation and had been invited to apply to many colleges. His first requirement for a college, however, was a good baseball team. We compromised on the University of Pennsylvania, more specifically, the Wharton School of Finance. Baseball scouts still courted him until his dream of the major leagues was shattered by a baseball injury. His biceps muscle sepa-

rated from the bone, and numerous doctors could find no way to correct it. Against the advice of doctors, he had exploratory surgery. In the end, nothing could be done. The injury was not serious enough to hamper Philip in everyday life, but it was serious enough to disqualify him from professional baseball.

Philip was heartbroken. He dutifully completed the Wharton School and took a position with five other gifted graduates at the Prudential Insurance Company. Prudential paid for him to get an M.B.A. and gave him a series of quick promotions. During this period, he met his bride-to-be, a girl who worked summers at Prudential. They were married in 1978 after a brief engagement. Philip was twenty-three.

Building activity in Jackson Township continued to pick up, and Natan and I expected to make a killing when we sold our three farms. Our dream was to retire wealthy. Our expectations came to an abrupt end one day, when a million acres in New Jersey were declared "environmentally sensitive" and came under the jurisdiction of the Pinelands Commission. An act of Congress gave this agency power to regulate all building or commercial activity within that area. The commission divided the area into seven zones, with various degrees of restriction. Our three farms fell just within a zone that permitted no building of homes unless each house was situated on at least ten acres and attached to a farm.

I immediately began to fight. I wrote letters to senators and congressmen, and received numerous form letters stating that "we can't do a thing about it. This is the will of Congress." I spoke at public meetings, but all my protestations went for naught. The law was the law.

The value of our land was now very low compared to others in nearby zones. I almost gave up the fight, but Edith convinced me to give it one last try. I wrote a letter to Governor Byrne explaining the inequity of the law. If the state wanted to protect an area, I wrote, the cost should fall on all the taxpayers, not just on a few who happen to live on the land. Why should my neighbor across the road, not in my restricted zone, reap the benefits of my financial misfortune?

I didn't give the letter a second thought as I stuck it in the postal box. To my surprise, two weeks later I received a mailing from Terrence Moore, the chairman of the Pinelands Commission, telling me that the governor had ordered a review of my case. A second communication stated that the commission could not take our property out of the Pinelands Zoning without an act of Congress, but it would rezone us into the "good" zone. Our farms, and

about fifteen hundred additional acres, were re-zoned. The owners of the other properties must have thought it was a miracle. I never told them about my letter.

The new zoning laws allowed one dwelling per 3.2 acres, with a change to 2.3 homes per acre if sewers were constructed. We didn't wait for the bonanza. Life is finite, and we were getting older. We sold two farms at minimal prices and left the largest one for speculation.

Strangely enough, I benefitted from the Holocaust experience because of my approach to death. It doesn't scare me. I had faced the specter of the grave so many times before, that I have developed a philosophical immunity to it. It is simply an unavoidable part of life, and I accept it without fear as a matter of course. I would fear being a burden before I die, and I certainly wouldn't want any heroic measures to extend an unproductive phase of my life. What an irony that would be.

One day in 1979 I got a phone call. "You'll never guess who's calling," a voice said in both English and Polish. A long pause ensued. "This is Alex Chevion, better known to you as Zishek Fessel." It was the same friend from Tarnow who had disappeared from the ghetto along with his father. I hadn't seen him since 1941. It turned out that he and his father had been smuggled to Hungary and from there had made their way to Israel. After the war his mother and sister Eva joined him in Jerusalem. My friend had gone on to get a degree in petroleum engineering in Israel and had moved to the United States where there was a shortage of such engineers.

Edith and I went to visit him at his home in Livingston, New Jersey; we had a lot of catching up to do. His Israeli wife was an architect, and he was a senior engineer at Exxon. I had the feeling that he was a bit disappointed to find me in farming. He told me that his older brother Pelek, my former partner in Wroclaw, had died of prostate cancer, and his widow Hertha lived at Cooper Village in Lower Manhattan. Hertha's only daughter was a law professor.

Again, there was such a difference between the early lives of the parents and the children. Both of our children were college graduates, too, with good jobs and good lives. They could never have achieved such education or such success in Poland; it simply wasn't available to Jews there.

17

Israel

In spring, 1980, Edith and I decided to go to Israel. We had always felt a special kinship to this beleaguered little country, born out of the belly of the Holocaust, and, in a great measure, from the extent of our suffering. I have always been grateful to the United States for giving me a place to rebuild my shattered life, but I had felt guilty in some ways because of emigrating to America instead of to Israel. I not only had an extensive family in the United States, I felt I had just endured one war and didn't think I was strong enough emotionally to be fighting a new one.

In order to be able to go, we had to reduce our flock of chickens to a size Natan could manage. I was excited beyond words when we boarded El-Al on a tour arranged by the American Jewish Congress. Not only was this my first flight ever, but it was also the most meaningful I would ever make. It was a sentimental quest, a journey I had yearned to make for years. It was a voyage of discovery—a pilgrimage to our ultimate roots. When I stepped off the plane onto the Israeli soil, tears of joy welled up in my eyes. Euphoria is difficult to describe, but I felt it in every fiber of my body.

Edith was excited, too. Every year during Passover Seder our families vowed to go to Jerusalem "next year," and this was finally the year. We arrived in Ben-Gurion airport, fifteen miles from Tel-Aviv where an English-speaking guide waited for our arrival. After a thirty-minute trip to Tel-Aviv, we settled into a comfortable hotel and rested up for the tour the following day.

Tel-Aviv and its twin city Jaffa are a study in contrasts. Tel-Aviv started out as a small village in the early twentieth century and grew to be a bustling modern metropolis. Jaffa came into being thousands of years ago, and much of it reflects its antiquity.

In Tel-Aviv we saw the spacious museum of the Diasporah as well as the sprawling Tel-Aviv campus of the Hebrew University. We saw the imposing Habima Theater and the Mann Auditorium. Fifteen miles south of the city we visited the Weizman Institute, a

place devoted to research and science by world-renowned scientists. In Jaffa we saw the old shops and architecture. Some of the excavations traced back the history of the city forty-five hundred years.

Each morning began with a sumptuous Israeli breakfast composed of both familiar and exotic foods. We saw a communal settlement named "Yad Mordechai" that distinguished itself in the 1948 War of Independence. We visited a sprawling military installation, complete with modern military hardware. In the Sinai we saw Yamit, the nucleus of a beautiful new city that the Israelis were building. It was heartbreaking to hear that this place was about to be razed to be relinquished to the Egyptians in exchange for a promise of peace.

As a farmer, I was interested in the intensive Israeli agriculture with yields unheard of anyplace on earth. We saw the ruins of ancient synagogues, hot springs in Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, and sites of historical battles, both ancient and recent. Our biggest disappointment was the River Jordan—we had always imagined a mighty river. Far from it, it is a narrow, tired stream, insignificant except in historical, and mythological terms.

The next stop was Haifa where we were taken to an "absorption" center for new immigrants where fresh arrivals were primed in the language and customs of Israel. The highlight of Haifa was the Bahai Temple and the surrounding, lovingly maintained gardens. Bahai is a religious sect that broke away from Islam in the nineteenth century and is now headquartered in Haifa.

In both cities we had visitors almost every evening. They were relatives whom we had never met before, and friends we hadn't seen in many years. Although we were tired after daily touring, the excitement of it all made our adrenaline work overtime, and it fed our energy.

One side trip was Caesarea, an ancient fishing harbor that featured ruins of a crusader city and a Roman amphitheater. Haifa itself is a clean, beautiful city, artfully laid out on the gentle and not-so-gentle slopes of Mount Carmel. From the window of our luxury hotel we could look down on this beautiful harbor. At night you could see the silhouette of this bustling port city against the shimmering lights.

The culmination of our tour was the seven day visit to Jerusalem. I asked a non-Jewish German "professional" tourist, "If you could visit one place on earth, what would it be?" He answered without hesitation: "Jerusalem." I don't know if Jerusalem is the center of the universe, as some people claim, but it is an unusual and deeply

spiritual place. Its blend of ancient and modern, with the ancient predominating, is special. Every inch of the place has historical significance. As you walk the streets and roads in and around Jerusalem, you can't help but feel thousands of years of ecstasy and agony beneath your feet.

Three major religions consider the city sacred. The steeples of churches and the cupola of the Dome of the Rock dominate the skyline. Near the Dome is the Western Wall, a sacred Jewish shrine, the only remainder of the Second Temple. The bells of the churches and chants from the minarets summon people to prayer and add to the spiritual character of the city. At the Western Wall you can always see Jews in Hasidic garb praying and swaying in the traditional Hasidic manner.

As you wind your way through the old quarters of Jerusalem, you see a mosaic of ancient architecture and people dressed in varying colorful garb. The Arabs wear turbans, the Hasidim are garbed in traditional black, and people from around the globe all sport their respective dress. Within minutes you hear ten different languages, and you rub elbows with different nationalities. The street vendors follow you with many offerings. The aroma of freshly baked Pita bread greets you as you near the Arab quarter.

A narrow, winding labyrinth with stalls and shops in it is called Shouk, a bazaar composed of Arab merchants hawking their goods. If you want to have a real Middle Eastern experience, you should be prepared to haggle. In one shop with various memorabilia, Edith and I were attracted to an artfully designed plate hanging on the wall. When the merchant quoted us 900 shekels, we started to walk out. Of course that bought the price down, in stages, to 300 shekels. Even though it was years before the Intifada, it felt a bit scary in the Shouk, and I was glad to be out of there. Nevertheless, the beautiful modern shops in the Jewish quarter of the city did not have the same haggling practices.

We toured the Hebrew University, where a woman professor acting as our guide told us that students from five continents are studying there. In the sprawling Haddassah Hospital we were told of the "miracle" cures effected and shown the famous Chagall windows. We saw museums that featured collections dating back thousands of years. We spent a day at the Golan Heights and visited a number of settlements there. The guide pointed out where Syrian artillery bunkers had shelled Israeli settlements on an ongoing basis. He told us that he was the Kibutz doctor. In the middle of the tour, another guide took over. The doctor explained that it was his turn to clean the Kibutz toilets. The egalitarian system required

that you take your turn cleaning toilets, no matter what your position in the Kibutz.

One day we went south toward the Dead Sea. What a difference in temperature! The heat was scorching, in contrast to the moderate temperatures in Jerusalem. We swam in the Dead Sea, where the salt content is so high that you cannot sink.

The main objective of this trip was nearby Masada, a massive rock which you can ascend by cable car. We explored the ruins of the Herodian fortress laid out over a twenty-acre plateau. The most moving part was the narration of our guide who told us about the 960 Jewish zealots who held out against a Roman onslaught for three years in 70 A.D. When they no longer could withstand the Roman expedition of twelve thousand soldiers, they all committed suicide. The story was documented in detail by the historian Josephus Flavius.

Another day we went to the West Bank and visited Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jericho. We stood over an excavation that unearthed layers of civilization going back nine thousand years. Jericho is the oldest place on an Israeli map; we were standing over our roots. The most meaningful stop, however, was the trip to Yad Vashem.

Yad Vashem is the Israeli monument to the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Before I entered it, I took a heavy dose of tranquilizers. I didn't know what to expect or how I would bear up under the burden of memory that the place is obviously designed to trigger.

This solemn monument is like a tomb of the unknown soldier for Holocaust victims. Every visitor to Israel is drawn to it, and it is designed to break the barrier of every tourist's mindset. It should soften your heart and show you where Jews have come from out of the horrors of the twentieth century. It helps unzip the wallets of prospective donors also, something essential to a country constantly struggling to survive. Most of all, it lets everyone know why Israel lives by the motto "Never again."

Edith and I walked from room to room at our own pace, our senses assaulted by sounds and sights that depicted the history of Nazi brutality. We were shown numerous audio and video exhibits of Holocaust scenes that tore at our hearts. Numbers and discussions of the destruction of countless European communities were not as effective as films showing heaps of shoes, of eyeglasses, of human hair. I tried hard to control my emotions. Overtly, I succeeded.

In the large "Hall of Remembrance" a perpetual flame burns,

with the names of twenty-one of the most notorious death and concentration camps displayed in front of it and spaced throughout the large floor. In front of me I read the word "Mauthausen"—I had only been there for fourteen hellish days, quarantined before I was shipped to St. Valentin. Those fourteen days seemed like an eternity. Symbolically, the walls in that hall are built with black lava rock. When we left Yad Vashem, Edith was completely drained.

Strangely, my feeling was anticlimactic. It may sound unreal, but nothing, not even this place so well designed to stir the emotions, can approximate the reality I had to endure under the Nazi occupation. It certainly can't fully recapture the hopeless mood of a ghetto or concentration camp. Most survivors I have talked to have had the same feeling at Yad Vashem.

As a note, my second trip to Israel and to Yad Vashem gave me a different feeling. A new Children's Annex had been added, and, in a haunting way, it surpasses everything in the main building. You enter a dark chamber, topped by a cleverly designed cupola that features thousands of prisms in which candle light is reflected, imitating a dark sky with countless stars. As you move forward toward the other end of the chamber, names of murdered children are being continually called out. I saw too many of those children die, including my sister. The net effect, even for me, was emotionally draining.

Overall the journey was a wonderful experience, however. And it wasn't just us, or even just Jews. A German gentile couple told us it was their best vacation ever. It took us six weeks to come down from this magic carpet ride. My first trip to Israel will forever be the highlight of my life.

18

My Debt to Bronka

More troubles came along with age. For a long time Edith had not been feeling well. The diagnosis of local doctors was cancer, but she put on a good act and attempted to console me by behaving like her normal self. I tried hard to play along, putting a smiling facade on a troubled mind. Eventually we made an appointment with a Dr. Daly from Sloan Kettering who had been highly recommended to us. He checked Edith out carefully and confirmed the previous findings.

He told us not to worry and scheduled her for an operation the following Wednesday. Renee and I went to the hospital the day Dr. Daly performed the surgery. We were somewhat relieved when Dr. Daly came over to us following several hours in the operating room.

"The operation was successful," he told us, "Edith will recover quickly."

When we saw her the following day, she looked like a space person, attached to numerous tubes and wires. She was still heavily drugged, but already had a faint smile on her friendly face. Only two days later she was off the bed and pushing her I.V. stand along to assist others who felt sicker than she did. The nurses couldn't get over her positive attitude.

Because of her numerous organizational activities and many friends, Edith's room soon filled up with flowers. She had so many, she began to distribute them to patients who had none. After two weeks, she was discharged from the hospital and sent home to recuperate.

On the July 7, 1982, my brother Simon died suddenly at the age of seventy-one. He had retired one year before. Simon and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, looking over the menu, when the attack occurred. He was taken immediately to a nearby hospital, but despite heroic efforts, he could not be revived. A couple of years later, his widow died, and soon afterward their older daughter Ro-

berta choked on food and died trying to summon help. All that is left from Simon's family is one remaining married daughter, Suzan.

Through all the years I had never forgotten my little sister Bronka's last message—she had called out while being pushed back to the cattle car that I must stay alive to testify to the horrors of the ghetto. She had continued her fatal journey to Belzec, but her message stayed with me, a nagging reminder of a mission in my life still unfulfilled. Edith's illness and Simon's death pointed out to me that life is short, and I had better get busy. At some point in my life, I knew, I would have to face up to this poignant legacy.

The catalyst came in early 1983, when I heard that a ten-day Holocaust exhibit was scheduled to open in a Lakewood, New Jersey, synagogue. I had been avoiding Holocaust-related activities—it was just too painful a chapter in my life. But with Bronka's last words on my mind, I summoned up my courage and went to an ad hoc committee meeting at the synagogue.

The meeting was chaired by Anise Singer, a pretty American woman who had worked for a year to get the exhibit prepared. Nervous, but inspired by a sense of purpose, I explained who I was and offered to help. I no longer recall what Anise and Howard said to me; at that point words didn't register in my mind. They were friendly, sensitive, and compassionate, however, and the committee was glad to accept my offer.

I was impressed that an American-born person would be so committed. Despite her kindness and my own strong motivations, however, I needed all the encouragement I could get. Edith gave it to me in full measure, attending all the committee meetings with me. Not only did she share my sense of purpose, she hoped that these encounters would prove therapeutic to me. She remembered the doctor years earlier who had advised memory purging to get rid of my recurring nightmares.

I soon became actively involved. I submitted two essays, one written back in 1963 under the influence of the Eichmann trial. The other I wrote specifically for the exhibit, dealing with my stay in Mauthausen. My teacher friend Arthur Katz and my son Philip printed them up to be distributed to prospective visitors. When the exhibit opened, I acted as a facilitator and spoke a number of times to incoming groups. The exhibit was successful beyond expectations. We drew in excess of seven thousand people. Most gratifying was the fact that many of them were school children.

I gradually overcame my severe apprehensions and now speak on a regular basis to high schools, colleges, and other assemblies.

In the course of these talks, I am often asked the same questions. Some student will query: "How much do you hate the Germans?"

"I don't," I reply.

They are always surprised. At one high school a girl who looked to be of germanic stock, followed up on my remark.

She said, "If you don't hate Germans, what are you doing here?"

"Well, I was invited to speak here," I told her first. "I never go anywhere uninvited. And the purpose of my talk isn't to spread hatred. On the contrary. I want to point out what follows when other people hate."

Sometimes I tell the groups that I refuse to take on the personality of my oppressors, in spite of the great bitterness I still carry within me. I cannot permit myself to cross that fine line between anger and hatred. Hatred consumes the hater before it touches the despised object of his hate.

"Do you believe in God?" is another common question. I try to give an evasive answer, but I must honestly say that my faith did not survive the Holocaust intact.

Family life with its joys and sorrows went on. Philip was passed over for promotion at Prudential, so he changed jobs to a position with an English company named Airco that manufactures industrial gases. He would be quite happy with the job and the salary except for the constant travel involved. He travels to foreign countries negotiating the purchase of helium, a hard-to-get byproduct of some natural gases.

We had another scare with Edith. Thirteen months after the operation at Sloan Kettering, she started to have slight pressure pains. Edith kept busy and kept her pains a secret. When the pain intensified to where she had to say something to me, I insisted she see a doctor. The local hospital did some tests and pronounced her healthy. When the pain turned excruciating, the local doctors recommended she return to Sloan Kettering.

It turned out that the local doctors had read the catscan incorrectly, and a second catscan in New York showed that the cancer had reoccurred. The doctor said he was remiss in not following up the first operation with radiation, and he assured us that Edith would be all right, but there was a likelihood she might need an "appliance"—a euphemism for a colostomy bag. Edith was terribly upset, and we both begged him to do his best.

The operation turned into an ordeal. Instead of the projected four or five hours, Renee and I paced the halls for eight hours before they wheeled Edith out. The good news was that the operation was successful, although Edith would have to use a bag for a

while. This time Sloan Kettering insisted that Edith get radiation treatments, which left her in great discomfort for a period. In August 1984, the operation was "reversed," and the bag removed, much to Edith's satisfaction. It has been six years since the last surgery and at her last checkup, Dr. Daly pronounced Edith cured.

Since I was now doing more public speaking, Edith insisted in fall 1984 that I enroll in a Dale Carnegie Public Speaking Course. I still didn't feel comfortable speaking in public. I graduated on December 17 with three pencils and the plaque. While I don't claim to be an orator, I do feel somewhat more at ease on the stage, and I speak with more frequency.

Edith's cousin Leon's family suffered a series of disasters starting in 1985. Their adopted son Teddy had become a drug addict, and the family had spent a fortune on him both for drugs and for numerous rehabilitations. In desperation, Leon's wife Emily stopped taking a medicine that she needed to stay alive, and by that indirect means, she committed suicide.

Leon was living in Florida by then, and Ted was still in New Jersey. One day we got a call from Leon in Florida asking us to bail Teddy out of jail in Freehold, New Jersey. This was not the first request of this sort, and we were getting tired of them. We reluctantly posted bail on a Friday afternoon. On Saturday, Teddy's former wife Kathy called us with the news that Teddy had been found dead under the Asbury Park Boardwalk. Another addict had stabbed him seventeen times; Teddy was twenty-five years old.

Leon was inconsolable. He had loved his adopted son, his drug habit notwithstanding. Ten months later, while he was visiting New Jersey, he started to feel ill. It turned out to be a brain tumor that would not respond to numerous radiation treatments. In July, 1987, he died. Within two years, the entire family was wiped out. Everyone blamed Teddy.

On November 18, 1986, our daughter-in-law Lisa, Phil's wife, gave birth to Jeffrey, our grandchild. We were delighted to have a first grandchild, someone to carry on our name when we are gone. When we hold this lovely youngster in our arms, however, we cannot help going back in memory to other huggable children whose heads were brutally smashed against the cobblestones of Polish cities.

By 1986 we had cut back to only one farm, partially stocked with chickens. Both Edith and I increased our participation in social organizations, enjoying the stimulation of other people. For me,

it's therapeutic, a diversion from my memory flashbacks and resultant depression.

Mornings I took to walking several miles to make up for the diminishing physical activity on the farm. One day, on Rosh Hashanah, I strolled past a nearby vegetable farm belonging to a Jew and saw him working in the field. I had always had the impression that this man was quite religious and was surprised to see him working. He walked over to explain why he was working.

"Once I was a Yeshiva student," he told me. "My father was a pious Jew who never missed his daily prayers at the synagogue. We praised God, no matter what. However, when one day my parents were taken away to a death camp and my three brothers were shot before my eyes, I stopped believing in God and have not prayed since. My wife comes from a similar background, and she feels the way I do."

I was deeply touched by this emotional outpouring. Many times my thoughts paralleled his. "I come from a similar background," I told him. "I understand."

My own relationship with God underwent a serious crisis. I stopped attending religious services after the Holocaust. Not at first. It was a gradual process. I tried to sort out my feelings in the years after liberation, but the harder I tried, the more I failed. It seemed that my liberation didn't extend to my emotions. Confusion and overwhelming anger were the end result. That's when I lashed out at "God."

I do go to synagogue on Yom Kippur, but only for two or three hours. I even fast. Why? Maybe because Edith wants me to. Perhaps because I want to, out of deference to the memory of the religious tradition my early life was steeped in. Above all, I think, because I want to affirm my roots and Jewish identity in every way possible.

These services tear at my heart. The familiar chants speak to me in ambivalent voices. There is much nostalgia. I am crying inside and struggle with my dual emotions. My conflicted relationship with God overwhelms me to a point where I have to leave when I can't take it any longer. I get so angry when I am expected to ask God to forgive my sins, when congregants beat at their chests with fists while listing a long litany of every imaginable transgression against fellow men and God. How ironic, I think. Isn't it "God" who should ask my forgiveness?

And what about my credits. Doesn't my Holocaust experience forever absolve me of any possible sin? It's now my inexhaustible reserve of "credits," and so, no matter what sounds come down

from the pulpit, my subconscious hears only one, in constant refrain. Like Jesus on the cross, my mind mumbles over and over again: "Ailee, Ailee, Lomoh Ozovtonu Ailee" ("God, Oh God, Why have you forsaken me?").

I sadly realize by now that I will never come down from my self-created cross, because "God" kept his promise to my father. He condemned me to the lifelong torment of memory.

In early 1987 I retired from poultry farming altogether. It was a relief. I had bought the farm thinking to work it for five years before selling it at a substantial profit and doing something less demanding. It didn't work out that way. Egg farming, which had been profitable during and right after the war, went into a steady decline. The cholesterol scare didn't help. It took years before the land went up enough in value so I could sell it. Meanwhile, I was stuck with the difficult and confining life of a farmer.

The long hours and hard work that farming entailed took a toll on all of us. Above all, I was frustrated that I could not spare enough time or energy to spend with our children. I had always loved to read, and during my farming years, I had to do it at the expense of sleep. Now that I am retired, I can pursue activities I could only dream about before.

December 3, 1987, was a big day for us. We moved into a new home that I had built. I didn't do the physical labor, but I did supervise the construction. For Edith, this was the home of which she had always dreamed. Our farm home was really a bungalow—this house is spacious and comfortable. Natan declined to live with us. He likes his privacy, and he still hasn't come to terms with the Holocaust. He broods constantly, and never watches anything on television that deals with the Holocaust period. He won't even read a book on the subject.

During the July 4 weekend of 1988, Edith and I attended the fortieth reunion of the "kids" from the Prien Orphanage, an event held at the Brown Hotel in the Catskills. We had registered months before and looked forward to it, although it was really the second reunion. Only Edith had attended the thirtieth reunion, held in Toronto, Canada, because I stayed home with farm responsibilities.

It was a sentimental four-day event for Edith, who was seeing some people she hadn't seen in forty years. Some she couldn't recognize. Her former boyfriend Moti, at one time the best-looking guy in the orphanage, was now chubby with a beard. I'll admit, however, Moti was still handsome. He and his family now live in California.

The reunion was typical of all reunions, complete with photos

of children and grandchildren. What struck me was how well those "kids from Prien" did for themselves. At our table alone were two wealthy individuals: one a successful builder and the other a widow of a Canadian builder who was left a great fortune. Many were professionals, and many more successful in business. I suppose the same could be said of most high school reunions in this country, but there is a special feeling of pride about war orphans who came out of the ruins of World War II to become productive human beings.

The overriding emphasis at the reunion was on now, not on the past. Another reunion was arranged for 1990, but we did not attend. I did put my name on file for a seminar at "Yad Vashem" in Jerusalem that was eventually cancelled. We kept in touch with the reunion group through a small format magazine they publish, albeit infrequently. The first issue featured two of my poems: one of them was composed during the reunion to catch the spirit of it.

In early 1987, Norman Saleshitz, a younger brother of the deceased Leibush Saleshitz called and asked to speak to Edith. He was in the process of compiling material for an autobiographical book with the emphasis on his Holocaust experience. Much of it would deal with his stay in the forests during the World War II period. He mentioned that he had spent a number of months there with Edith's family and planned to write about them.

Unfortunately, Edith had no photos of her parents to give him; in fact, not even one momento of her parents remained in her possession. I don't even know what her parents looked like. In November, 1988, Norman called again to tell us that his manuscript was completed and almost ready for publication. He invited us to his place in Springfield, New Jersey, to get reacquainted and look at his manuscript.

At the end of the call, he casually mentioned that Helcia Preneta would be there the same day. Helcia Preneta! That name was more than enough incentive to get Edith to go. Helcia was the daughter of the Mrs. Preneta who had lived in Peremby Kupienskie and who had given Edith news of her parents' death. Edith had lived with Helcia for a short time after the war ended.

Helcia was the same age as Edith, and she was in the United States to visit her daughter who lived in Chicago. Norman had learned of the visit, and had sent her a round-trip plane ticket to get her to New Jersey. We went to see them on a Monday night in November 1988.

Forty-three years had passed. The last time these two women saw each other they were both girls—one a Polish peasant and one

a Jewish refugee who had survived the war by deception. They had told each other stories late at night before falling asleep. They hugged one another for several minutes before speaking.

Afterward they told each other stories of the past. Many of them, unfortunately, were sad. "How are you doing in America?" she asked us. "You look so prosperous."

Helcia told us about some of the people from the village, but she had moved to the city of Rzeszow and had lost contact with many people. The two women kept breaking into tears, and during the conversation, they hugged repeatedly. They shared family photographs and caught up on four decades of their lives.

With all the emotional reminiscences, there was no time to look at Norman's manuscript. To make up for this oversight, we invited Norman and his wife to our house with his book. He left the incomplete manuscript for a week so I could read and evaluate it. I made a number of suggestions, but I have no idea if he followed them. Some of the chapters were quite moving; I thought it might sell well.

Norman's manuscript was yet another incentive for me to write my own account, and I soon came up with the resolve to follow up on this urge. After all, what I wanted to put down on paper had been in my mind for decades.

By chance, there are at least three other families in our immediate area who hail from my hometown Tarnow. One family is Ellen and Victor Dorman, who recently retired to a senior citizen complex near here. Victor's wartime experiences closely parallel mine. We were both in Ghetto Tarnow and were subsequently sent to the same concentration camps. Like most others, he finished the war as a living skeleton. I would never have believed he was going to make it, and he probably felt the same about me. Somehow we both did.

His wife Ellen lays down ground rules whenever we meet. "We will not discuss the Holocaust," she states. Rules or no rules, if we don't bring the subject up, she does. It is just so much part of our subconscious that it always comes to the surface. We are no exceptions. The same thing happens to all survivors.

We even ended up living near each other in Brooklyn for a time, but our paths parted, and he eventually became a clothing contractor in North Jersey. Now that we are retired, we have time to renew our friendship, and each conversation is inevitably a trip down memory lane. Our Holocaust memories permeate each fiber of our being.

Ellen is also from Tarnow, a niece of Szulim Hollander, with

whom Edith stayed in Mielec after the war, another coincidental bond between our families. She is a survivor as well. Recently she told me of an event that happened to her in Plaszow in spring 1944.

Her best friend Faigia was suffering from tuberculosis and had a high fever; her only choice was the camp clinic. Ellen, who also felt ill, decided to follow suit. She knew how to manipulate the thermometer to show a high fever so she also managed to get in. Everyone knew how dangerous it was to stay in the clinic, but she was so overwhelmingly tired that she decided to risk her life for a few days of rest.

Sure enough, several days later danger arrived. Dr. Leon Gross, the man in charge of the clinic, arrived with an SS officer. They walked in and "selected" three "older" women of around thirty-five to be shot at Hujowa Gorka. One of the women selected managed to escape the clinic, and she hid out in a nearby barrack. In her place, the SS took seven other girls; Faigia and Ellen were among them. They were taken first to the Police Station and from there under O.D. escort to Hujowa Gorka.

For some reason, the SS shot five of the girls and spared Faigia and Ellen. Ellen's father was working in Plaszow for a company called Grossschneiderei, and when he heard that his daughter was taken to the camp police, he came running after work to inquire after her. "She's already been taken to Hujowa Gorka," he was told. "She's dead by now."

Her father, who was only thirty-five at the time, turned gray at that moment. At least this is Ellen's story. When he found that evening that she was miraculously alive, she had to promise him that she would never again go to the clinic. She couldn't keep the promise. Shortly afterward, she developed appendicitis, and she needed immediate surgery. Dr. Lefkowitz performed the operation assisted by a paramedic named Schindler. Both men were Jewish inmates of Plaszow as well. After the operation, Ellen got a cold, and her coughing pulled the stitches apart.

For two weeks longer she remained in the clinic, in peril of her life. Every few days the Jewish doctors had to change her name on the record so she would avoid "selection." Once again she had been lucky; perhaps her good looks were part of that luck.

One month after leaving the hospital, Ellen was selected for Auschwitz. Her stomach wound had not yet healed, and she had a postoperative hole on her abdomen. To this day she can't understand how she escaped the selection process in Auschwitz. Mengele was not in charge that day, and she snuck over to the right side. A short while after she arrived, Auschwitz was liberated.

After the war she met Victor Dorman; they married and moved to America. In 1947 she was at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn to give birth to her first son, Stephen. To her surprise, the attending physician was none other than Dr. Schindler, the paramedic from Plaszow. He even remembered the hole on her abdomen.

"Dr. Lefkowitz is practicing here, too," he told her after they had kissed. When Ellen was discharged from the hospital, she arranged a reunion and celebration with the two M.D.'s.

Ellen's father was not so lucky. He died three days before the war's end, in Gross Rosen Concentration Camp. He was only thirty-six. Her mother, who was blond and on gentile documents, was caught and shot trying to bring Ellen some food when she was working outside the ghetto. Ellen's best friend Faigia did survive and is presently married to a Frenchman. She and Ellen meet each year, alternating between France and America.

Even though the seminar I wanted to attend was cancelled, Edith and I decided to visit Israel once again, this time for three weeks—two weeks with the American Jewish Congress, and one week on our own. We wanted to explore the country unhindered by schedules. We were determined to see the real Israel, not just the glamor spots. We wanted to meet the "average" Israeli and learn what he or she was thinking.

I approached people in the streets and in coffee houses to get their opinions on life in Israel. Taxi drivers, like their counterparts everywhere, had loads of opinions. One time I saw a man reading a Polish newspaper, and we struck up a conversation in Polish. He was a survivor who had come to Israel in 1946, and he worked as a dentist. He told me he knew he could make more money in the United States, but that the spiritual quality of his life was better in Israel.

Though the Intifada subtly permeated life in Israel, I still found the trip enjoyable, although the level of excitement was not comparable to the first time around. The Intifada caused tourism to fall off, and the hotels and restaurants were empty. As a consequence, the economy was sickly. Unemployment was high and there was a certain measure of gloom. Still, I would go there soon again, the Intifada notwithstanding.

While in Israel, we visited some of the installations Edith has been supporting for the past thirty-five years. We were taken to one of the orphanages that her organization subsidizes and were quite impressed with the quality of care being dispensed there mostly by unpaid volunteers. We visited a settlement where Szulim Hollander and his wife Itka now reside. The place has sixty-two

well-kept homes and is administered by a committee drawn from the ranks of the homeowners. Szulim's family has grown considerably, including his adopted daughter Halinka, now Chaya, the one he had "bought" in Mielec for a cow and a pig.

We met Chaya. She resides in a Tel-Aviv suburb and has four children of her own. She is now in her forties and turned orthodox to a point where she declined to shake my hand because I am a man.

We revisited Yad Vashem and the "Avenue of the Righteous," the place dedicated to gentile people who helped out Jews during the Holocaust period. We saw the names of people whom we personally knew and felt gratified. Oscar Schindler's name was there, the man who saved twelve hundred Jews, and Herman Graebe, who tried unsuccessfully to save one hundred fifty Jews in the Polish Ukraine.

Graebe's story at first came to my attention when I was reading *Holocaust* by Martin Gilbert, the famous English writer and historian. Subsequently, when I read about him in the obituary column of the *New York Times,* I wrote a letter of condolence to his widow in San Francisco. Herman Graebe had been forced to leave Germany following World War II, when his heroic deeds came to the attention of his compatriots and neighbors. He settled in San Francisco, where he established an engineering firm that became a financial success. His eighty-four-year-old widow and their lawyer son Fred responded warmly to my letter and even invited me to visit with them in San Francisco.

Recently I visited with another person from my hometown who lives in our area. Her maiden name is Lila Mann, and she is married to Jerry Schneeberg. Jerry was born in Germany; he met Lila in Israel where he served as a paratrooper. They moved to the United States many years ago. Lila had lived within only five minutes walking distance from me in Tarnow, and we had attended the same high school. She was in a lower grade, and our friendship has been dormant due to my lack of time. We seldom talk of the past, but recently I asked her how she survived.

During 1943, she told me, she was assigned by the Judenrat to do forced labor at a place that manufactured horse saddles for the Germans. The factory belonged to a Pole named Lacina. There a Polish Christian couple befriended her and offered to keep her and her younger brother Tulek in hiding. The hiding place was a narrow space in the attic. A loose shingle on the roof was their only source of air and light. They would pick it up to get a whiff of fresh air from time to time.

Their mother, secure in her mind that her children were more or less safe, decided to try to save her own life. Her husband had been "sent away" by then, so she got some forged identity papers and volunteered to go to Germany as a Polish laborer. Her mother was lucky enough to land a job in a restaurant in Frankfurt-am-Oder. The owner took a liking to her, and eventually she was able to disclose her true identity to him. He even let her return to Poland to visit the children.

When she returned to Tarnow, the sight of her children stuck in the tiny hiding place made her feel so guilty she wanted to stay with them. They convinced her to return to Germany to the relative comfort and safety of her position there. Why risk another life to the continual searches of the SS?

About six months into the stay in the attic, the SS discovered the children. Lila had no idea how. Perhaps someone noticed the tile on the roof lifted. One day the Gestapo arrived, went straight to the bunker, and ordered them out. They were taken to Montelupich Prison in Krakow for interrogation. Tulek was shot, and Lila was deposited in Plaszow. Eventually she was shipped to Birkenau in Auschwitz. Lila survived, reunited with her mother, and moved to Israel after the war.

There is yet another close friend from Tarnow living about thirty miles from us. Her name is Sara Marton, née Roth, and, like most survivors, she has a story. Her father and younger brother were taken away during the first "action" of June 1942. Her mother, her sister Ida, and herself survived by hiding in a bunker. Actually it was an annex they had built on to their house before 1939. They camouflaged this annex with old furniture, wood, logs, and with whatever else they found handy nearby. They piled this stuff against the door and windows and stayed inside for the duration of the next "action." Later they had great difficulty getting out. A surviving neighbor managed to squeeze them in some food through a crack in the wall. Eventually they got out.

In September 1943 the three of them were shipped to Plaszow. When Plaszow was liquidated, her mother was taken to Auschwitz and from there to Stuthoff, Germany, where the inmates were forced onto the thin ice of the Baltic Sea and drowned. Sara and Ida went from Plaszow to Skarzysko and then to Czestochwa, where they worked in a munitions factory. Once, during a fire, they were forced to stay inside and wait for the place to explode. The fire was brought under control just before an explosion. The Soviets liberated them in January, 1945.

Sara is a sensitive person who can't deal with her memories.

Her subconscious has blocked out much of the detail from the Holocaust period. Edith and I both enjoy her and her husband Henry's company a good deal, and occasionally Ida joins us for the get-togethers.

Every once in a while we go to Fair Lawn, New Jersey, to visit our surviving sister Klara. She is now eighty-one years old and very frail. It breaks my heart to watch her deteriorating body and mind. The once pretty and coquettish woman is now vegetating. For a year and a half she hasn't recognized us. A year ago she broke her hip and has been bedridden since, and she functions with the help of a full-time nurse. Her only daughter Rina, our niece, who teaches math at Brooklyn Community College, takes over weekends. Every time I visit Fair Lawn, I get depressed. It is not the same sort of depression as that caused by my memories—eighty-one is a respectable age. Still, seeing my once vivacious sister in a state of vegetation does something to me.

We celebrate our children's birthdays toward the end of July since they were born only ten days apart. Last year Renee brought along a former college roommate who lives in Puerto Rico. Normy is a talented artist and a tenured professor at the Arecibo University in Puerto Rico. For years, she has been asking me to write an autobiography. On this visit, she asked me to speak at her school. Under pressure from both her and Renee, I agreed to do so next year. I told her I had begun the book, and she was gratified that she had "convinced" me to write.

During the middle of 1989, after a speech I gave to a teacher's seminar at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, the feedback was touching beyond words. At the end of my talk, someone asked if I had ever written a book on my experience. "No," I replied, "but I am in the process of writing one now." Several teachers asked me to put their names on a list; they wanted to be the first ones to get a copy.

In the beginning of my talks on my Holocaust experience, the requests for my appearances came only during the months of March, April, and May—close to the commemoration period for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Now I get asked almost year round. Early on, I had at least two sleepless nights following each talk. Now the opposite seems to be taking place. I get so emotionally drained after each talk that I sleep better than usual.

Nevertheless, even now, after six years of speaking engagements, I can't tackle the subject matter without a tranquilizer. I need this extra support to steady my nerves so I don't break down under the weight of my memories. However, my greatest tranquil-

izer is to see Edith in the audience. She is always there for me, a reassuring presence in a front row seat.

Forty-five years ago I didn't think for a moment that I was going to make it, much less live in America in relative prosperity with a wonderful family. On September 18, 1989, Edith and I celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary. Our children sent a stretch limo to pick us up and take us to New York for dinner and a show. Two Jewish kids from provincial Poland became king and queen of New York City for the evening.

Soon Edith will turn sixty. Five years ago I didn't think she was going to make it to sixty. I am so delighted to have her alive and well, and to be retired from farming so that we can take some vacations together and do things we could only dream about before. My once shattered life that appeared to be beyond repair after my liberation from the concentration camp, that seemed to have no direction or purpose, is now as normal as can be expected. At least, it has a normal veneer.

Ever since I was a child, I had a great love for writing. In the public school, I had my poem printed in the national magazine; of course, I had to leave off my Jewish name. Now I have made the decision to put down the highs and lows of my troubled life on paper, at least as a testimony for my family.

Edith convinced me to go ahead, who else? I wrote quickly, needing only one hundred hours for the first draft and little more for a first edit. Such a short time for an inconceivable experience.

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Update

On June 27, 1990, my sister Klara died. Her emaciated body was laid to final rest next to her husband's in Oradel, New Jersey.

In the late summer of 1990, my wife Edith and I toured Eastern Europe with a group of thirty—eighteen Jews and twelve gentiles. Our principle interest was in Poland where we were scheduled to spend most of our time. I had a strong need to go back to my roots—to bring my emotions full circle. It was my first visit back to my native land since I left with my brothers in 1946, searching for a new life after the Holocaust.

Edith didn't want to go. The thought of going back to that "Jewish cemetery" was revolting to her. I had trouble convincing her, and even I had misgivings as well. But I had to satisfy a nagging need.

I had no exaggerated expectations; still I unrealistically, and perhaps, naively, hoped that this inhospitable country I left so long ago would have changed somewhat. I hoped that the Polish people would have learned from past mistakes (to say nothing of their own great suffering) to be wiser, more tolerant, and more compassionate toward their former Jewish countrymen. To my great disappointment, those hopes were largely misplaced. Even though only ten thousand or so Jews remain in Poland, not much has changed in the Polish attitude toward Jews. Anti-Semitism is alive and well in Poland.

Though Jews had lived many centuries on Polish soil, Poland never recognized us as bona fide Poles and never gave us full citizen rights. Only when they give out World War II casualty figures do they count us as Poles, a count that seems to magnify their sufferings. Usually Jewish identity figures are deliberately obscured. In fact, until recently they have only spoken of the many Poles who died in Auschwitz. Only since 1990 has Poland admitted that 90 percent of its victims were Jews, and that is only admitted to Jewish groups.

It is common to think that anti-Semitism can only thrive in the massive presence of Jews. Not necessarily so, I found out. The disease is endemic, so ingrained that it will likely take at least two more generations to effect change in Poland. I am convinced by now that centuries of indoctrination, mind control, and blind stereotyping can't be undone overnight.

The old generation, the carriers of the disease, will have to die out to give new ideas a chance to sprout so that a new mindset can erase hateful notions. Schools and churches have an important role to play in that process, especially churches, for they have a powerful hold on the Polish psyche, even after forty-five years of communism. The change will not come easy. It was shocking to me, knowing that the atrocities of the Holocaust are common knowledge, that you can still see numerous hate slogans in the cities of Poland. We read signs like: "Jews to gas," "Poland for the Poles," and other *love* messages, prominently displayed in Warsaw, Krakow, and Wroclaw. We were told these messages were common in other Polish cities.

It was painful when I listened to Polish guides at various tourist landmarks distort Jewish-Polish experiences within the historical context. Sometimes it was just stretching the truth at best. Such slanted information is also being disseminated through brochures either given out gratis or sold in kiosks located near tourist attractions.

Not all Poles participate in this sham. Our principle guide, Andrzej Klosinski, was forthright in his accounts. His honesty made me feel better, but it couldn't make up for the glob of spit I found in the middle of my clear broth which was served in a Wroclaw hotel.

It was disgusting to encounter an early middle-aged woman, who defiantly picked up her dress to expose her nude posterior to a small number of our group on the streets of Warsaw. We knew she had recognized our Jewishness, for she then exploded with a barrage of anti-Semitic obscenities.

It made me uncomfortable to overhear several disparaging remarks by unsuspecting Poles who didn't realize that I understood the language. Above all, I was deeply disappointed and hurt that I could not fulfill the main purpose of the trip, to visit the cemetery in Tarnow, where both my parents are buried. I also wanted to pay my respects to thousands of innocent Jewish women, men, and children, some of them my former friends, who were brutally slaughtered in that cemetery. We had planned to visit on a free day from the tour, but we were told that there would be no access to the cemetery and that all monuments are downed and overgrown

with weeds. We were also told that human bones are scattered all over the plot, dug up by dogs and other "animals."

Our guide Andrzej warned us that it would be unsafe to be there, especially after dark.

How coincidental and ironic that Lech Walesa, current president of Poland, brought the gate of the Tarnow cemetery to the United States—perhaps the same gate that kept me out during my visit—as a gift to the Holocaust museum in Washington. This public relations gimmick was meant as a good will gesture to the Jewish community in America. This is the same Lech Walesa who only the previous year, during the presidential election campaign against the incumbent Tadeusz Mazowiecki, allegedly circulated rumors that his opponent had Jewish associates and even some Jewish blood in his veins. Such rumors were more than enough to disqualify Mazowiecki in the eyes of the Poles, though he was by far the more qualified candidate and a devout Catholic to boot. Walesa denies these allegations vehemently.

Instead of going to Tarnow, we opted to visit Auschwitz, an optional trip. Only one couple in our group stayed behind. It is my opinion that Jews everywhere should feel duty bound to make such a pilgrimage. Every revisionist who denies the Holocaust reality should be made to go there and see for himself. He should be shown by a Polish guide at nearby Birkenau, which was part of the Auschwitz complex, the ruins of the four large crematoria that had the capacity to process twenty-four thousand corpses a day and which worked at full speed toward the end of the war. He also should be shown suitcases, prostheses, children's dolls, clothing, and many other objects that were taken away from the unfortunate victims of Nazi genocide before they were pushed into the gas chambers. On my trip, Jews and gentiles alike viewed those exhibits with tears in their eyes—some were openly weeping.

Our visit to Poland wasn't all negative. We were taken to sites that we only knew from history books. Now those places came alive and turned meaningful. Like all tourists, we visited museums, monuments, and landmarks.

Of special interest to Jews in our group was a visit to the Remu Synagogue in Krakow. This is the only reconstructed house of worship in a city that once had a Jewish presence of more than fifty-six thousand. Now less than four hundred Jews, mostly elderly, still live there. The once culturally and economically (by Polish standards) vibrant community is no more. Poignant and painful memory is its only legacy.

We also visited the Nozyk Synagogue—the only one in Warsaw.

It owes its survival to the fact that the SS converted it to a stable and then overlooked it during the process of systematic destruction of the city. We met Mr. Finkelstein there, who at the age of eighty plus was still the president of the Jewish community in Poland as well as the president of the Nozyk Synagogue.

He told us that Warsaw has only twelve hundred Jews at the most, compared to the more than four hundred thousand prior to 1939. Finkelstein said that the number twelve hundred is his best guess, since some Jews still feel uncomfortable identifying themselves in Poland.

Next to the Warsaw synagogue, there is a Jewish theater, where performances are given in Yiddish. Some of the actors are gentile Poles who speak the language phonetically. Most of the audience is non-Jewish. They tune in to earphones for a simultaneous translation. The whole thing is pure nostalgia, a faint echo from a bygone era. The concept is the brainchild of Szymon Szurmiej, a man in his eighties who returned from Soviet exile after World War II. The place was closed for summer vacation.

I had a chance encounter with a middle-aged Polish gentile couple from Tarnow, whom I met at our Wroclaw hotel. We spoke for half an hour, and they told me that Tarnow, which before 1939 had only sixty thousand inhabitants, now has more than one hundred fifty thousand and that the city was rebuilt to a point where I wouldn't recognize it. Toward the end of the conversation, we simultaneously embraced, hugged, and kissed. They also gave me their address and invited us to be their guests should we ever come to Tarnow again.

We had a pleasant surprise in Warsaw when someone who operates a branch of an English Company, Airco, came to visit with us in our hotel. Our son works for the company in America and is essentially his boss. Mr. Golembiowski came to see us after our son faxed our itinerary. He took us in his own car for a private tour of Warsaw, introduced us to his immediate family, and showed us the home where George Bush had dinner with a Polish family during a vice-presidential trip to Warsaw. Mr. Golembiowski was in the welcoming party then. In the evening he took all of us to the finest restaurant in Warsaw for a good meal. True, our son picked up the tab; still it was nice of him to give us so much time and attention. At least Poland met some of my expectations.

Soon after we returned from Europe, we read in the *Jewish Week* a story about Jewish youngsters from the United States and Israel who went on a pilgrimage to Poland. The trip was to visit the

infamous death camps—the mission was named "March of the Living."

According to their accounts, they were spat upon, had bottles and stones thrown at them, called insulting names, and otherwise harassed. The Polish police looked away with indifference. It was eerie how much their experience mirrored the experiences of the dead victims they had come so far to memorialize. Luckily they had some limited protection from Israeli guards who came along expecting such an eventuality. Being surrounded by hostility on unfriendly soil, even they had to be careful.

I was so mad, I didn't even write Mr. Golembiowski a thank you letter. Months later I finally came to my senses and sent him a note.

Basically I do not believe in collective guilt, and I never will. I know on a rational level that there are good Poles, just like their were good Germans, even in the midst of the Holocaust. People should never be condemned as an entity or by association. Ala, Oskar Schindler, and Herman Graebe speak convincingly to such reasoning. The numerous Polish names at the Avenue of the Righteous in Jerusalem also validate this point of view.

Those are the people who help me keep alive a glimmer of hope in the midst of my emotional torment. They give me a straw to hold on to in the vast ocean of evil. Above all, I am grateful to them for keeping me from hating. Were it not for their noble example, my life wouldn't be worth living, for hatred might have consumed the remaining emotional sanity still left within me following the Holocaust. Though my mood swings repeatedly take me from one realm to another, those heros provide me with an emotional anchor in times of contemplation, anger, and depression. Their muted voices shout out to me with silent thunder: "Never, never hate!"

Epilogue

The stories you have just read are all true. As grotesque and surrealistic as they may sound, they all occurred.

I know that it may be difficult for decent, "normal" individuals to accept so much horror as fact, but I vouch for everything that appears in this memoir. To be completely honest, I have to admit that in several instances I had difficulty reconstructing the exact sequence of events. For instance, the exact order of proceedings that followed our initial encounter with Plaszow is difficult to recall. Perhaps the shock of entering a real concentration camp was so great to me that it overwhelmed my thought process briefly.

Many of the details were omitted. After so many years such detail eludes me in the main, and I think it would be obscene and a desecration to "manufacture" it. No one could keep a diary in a camp. Pencils and paper were verboten. Perhaps in the ghetto writing would have been possible, but such a journal would have been confiscated upon entry to the camps. Soon after the war I could have reconstructed the events with more precision, but the emotional trauma resulting from my wartime experiences prevented me from doing so at that time. I spent five years and eight months under German occupation, longer than most inmates, and I was proportionately affected emotionally.

I wrote this account from memory. Whenever I wanted to check a fact, I compared notes with several people who had experiences almost identical to mine. The Germans helped in a strange way—they were so organized and methodical that many details of camp life were the same in nearly every camp. For some reasons certainly similar to my own, other survivors don't exactly recollect their first day in Plaszow.

Some forty years ago I bought the book *Tarnow,* written in Yiddish, a history of my hometown. It's a very limited edition, the creation, soon after World War II, of a distinguished committee of Jewish luminaries in Tarnow. The man in charge of the text was a writer-lawyer who had survived the war in the Soviet Union. Only recently did I consult the book to verify some facts in my memoir. I had put off reading it because I am not fluent in written Yiddish.

At first it took thirty minutes to read one page, but after only a day or two, I reduced that time to five minutes. In several instances the book was most helpful.

Sentenced to Remember is not ghost-written. As I have mentioned previously in the book, my love for writing goes back to my youth. In that sense I am two different individuals. Call it inspiration, but when I lose myself in thought in the course of my writing, I turn into another person, someone I can hardly recognize. In this state I become capable of bringing forth concepts from my subconscious that I normally do not seem to have at my command.

A writer friend of mine suggested that if I wrote the book in the form of a novel, I would have more license with facts and thus produce a more desirable product for publication. I immediately rejected such a notion. If I had to forsake total honesty, I would forego writing the book. Besides, this story hardly needs fabrication or any sort of embellishment. The maxim "truth is stranger than fiction" applies here.

Another person, an editor, suggested I write it within historical context. That suggestion shows how little people understand the nature of concentration camps. We were totally isolated and had no news, except rumors planted by the camp SS that were circulated on rare occasions. These fictions were designed to add to our infinite hopelessness.

Even in the ghettos we had nothing more than wild, unsubstantiated rumors. The "J.P.P." (our slang for "one woman said") was all we had.

I came to understand by now that it would be unrealistic to expect the American people to grasp the scope of our isolation and predicament. By way of some contrast, Jews with gentile documents or those hidden in forests sometimes had access to censored or underground information. We had none.

Not that their position was envious. They had to be on guard at all times, like hunted animals. Loathed by most Poles, they had tremendous difficulty surviving day to day. In the forest they endured the bitter elements, starvation, raids, and a host of other dangers—some of which I have mentioned. But despite the fear of the SS or bounty hunters, they were at least not living under a whip, and they had access to pencils and paper.

Sure, it is possible now to couple up those events with history, but this would be dishonest and confusing, for it would give the reader a misleading impression. While this book is history, it is not textbook history. It is mostly impressionistic and deliberately so.

The same writer told me to speak more about the Jewish Resistance. It would make good reading, he said. Let them see that not all Jews went to their death like sheep! Sure, there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of cases of small-scale resistance throughout German-occupied Poland that are depicted in many Holocaust publications—I mention only those that happened in or around my hometown in keeping with my narrative objectives. The point that needs to be made again and again is that all acts of resistance were desperate, albeit heroic, deeds, which were doomed to failure. We had no weapons, no help from the outside, and we were surrounded by an unfriendly populace.

All acts of resistance didn't amount to much cumulatively. Symbolically, yes; practically, no. Even the famous Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, while it goes down in history as a great act of heroism, resulted in limited damage to the Germans. The ghetto fighters there had practically no weapons, and not the slightest chance to win anything except admiration from fellow Jews. The story makes good reading and extolls some very brave Polish Jews, but it does not represent the situation of the great mass of Jews during the occupation.

I want to reiterate that this is a memoir, an autobiography; it stays in the range of my experience.

A few moments need to be devoted to the following footnote to the story. An acquaintance of ours, Norman Saleschitz, the man in the forest with my in-laws, had his book published recently. It was titled *Against All Odds,* and we couldn't resist buying a copy. It was shocking to Edith and me to find a totally different version about her family's demise.

The book doesn't mention Chavcia, Edith's younger sister, but it states that her Aunt Gita and her eighteen-month-old child were discovered in a forest bunker in January 1943, during a raid by local Polish peasants, and that they and sixteen other Jews were hacked to death. The book also maintains that when Gita's husband, "Tall Avrum," discovered the massacre some hours later, their bodies had already been partially eaten by wild animals. According to this account, a similar fate befell Avrum some weeks later when he allegedly was killed with axes or scythes.

As for Edith's parents, Pinia and Feiga, they were allegedly discovered in an attic. Its account describes the mayor of a nearby village who organized a raid in the forest that day and didn't apprehend anyone. He knew from a peasant that Pinia and Feiga were

hiding out that day in an attic, so, to make sure the raid wasn't a total failure, he decided to go after them.

This story maintains that Pinia and Feiga were taken to the mayor's yard where they awaited the Polish police who shot them there. Pinia, he said, had a gun and two hand grenades on his body; however, having had a good standing in the gentile community, which had always respected and liked him, he was certain that no harm would come to him from the hands of the peasants. Pinia misjudged the situation, and both were shot. Then they were stripped of their clothing.

This version makes good reading, but it leaves me with some doubt as to accuracy. Edith got much of her story from local peasants immediately after the war, and it is substantially different. The possibility exists that they slanted the facts in order to deflect the gory truth onto the Germans. Saleschitz vouches for the accuracy of his "eyewitness" account. It is difficult to know what to believe.

No matter, the allegations in *Against All Odds* caused Edith considerable trauma. She had already come to terms with the original story and now this one conjured up new images of horror. Was this necessary?

Another misconception: Edith was not "placed" with "friendly gentiles" as the book alleges. She randomly found this family after she left the hostile forests at the age of less than twelve, not "sixteen." Edith never disclosed her Jewishness to them.

Mr. Saleschitz should have corraborated those facts with Edith before inserting them in his book. We are still very much alive and entitled to such courtesy. A survivor's anguish is still real, even fifty years later. Norman should know: he is a survivor.

Finally I will mention a fact that I thought is relevant to my book. Niklas Frank, son of Hans Frank, the World War II governor of German-occupied Poland, recently translated into English a book he had published in Germany in 1987. It's English title is *In the Shadow of the Third Reich.* In it, he denounces his father as a cruel, overambitious, mass murderer who committed his crimes in Poland not for "principle" but for strictly practical reasons. He simply wanted to further his career. Hans Frank plundered Poland mercilessly, much of it to his own personal benefit. Countless other Germans acted likewise. They all carried away war booty to Germany. Frank's enormous greed came to light at Nurenberg.

Frank got what he deserved, writes his son, a death sentence. Hans Frank tried remorse as a defense tactic. He told the Nuren-

berg court: "A thousand years will pass and this guilt of Germany will not be erased." It didn't work.

He was sent to the gallows, but a thousand death sentences wouldn't begin to approximate his guilt. I wonder whether the revisionists took notice of Niklas Frank's book. The Germans certainly did, if the resulting controversy is any guide. The question of loyalty loomed big in the dispute.

No one in Germany denies the Holocaust, however. They know about it firsthand—it's documented in their extensive archives. The German government wouldn't have paid out billions in reparations to Jewish survivors if they didn't know for sure. Niklas Frank's book is just a final nail in the coffin of the Third Reich.

Conclusion

It has been many years since the events portrayed in this book took place.

Many times in different places I have pondered the Holocaust tragedy; the enormity of it is just beyond my grasp.

How could it happen? It's probably just a nightmare, a hallucination . . . to the entire civilized world, children are supposed to be special. How could "enlightened" humanity torture and kill infants? How could they gas and burn babies with such zest? How could the shooting of such innocents become routine?

"Where were the leaders of the civilized world?" I asked myself over and over. Were they deliberately looking the other way? Were they hoping Hitler would solve the "Jewish" problem once and for all?

I cannot come to any other conclusion. Long ago I learned that world leaders knew exactly what went on in German-occupied Europe. They pretended not to know or not to believe. Such was their callous excuse for their indifference.

Let us win the war first, and then things will fall into place, said President Roosevelt in response to many pleas for help.

They did indeed fall into place. What "fell" were six million Jews, including more than a million children. The "place" was the ravines, and cemeteries, and ovens of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and hundreds of other death and concentration camps.

If you doubt these facts, please read *The Abandonment of the Jews* by David Wyman, or *Beyond Belief* by Deborah E. Lipstadt. I exploded with rage when I read these books although it only confirmed what I had read in other well-documented accounts.

People often ask me what, aside from my personal suffering and loss of family members, is my most painful Holocaust legacy. My answer is easy: my greatest residual sorrow is my profound disappointment in the human race.

It's that simple. The Holocaust was not conceived, by and large, by criminal elements. Some of the best brains in Germany were at the heart of the killing process. They contributed the latest technology to refine and to streamline the death machine.

Mengele, the "Angel of Death" in Auschwitz, was a Ph.D. who hummed operatic arias while fingering Jews to the gas chambers or performing experimental surgery without pain killers.

Goeth, the brute among brutes, referred to himself as a man of letters. He composed tender poetry. There were thousands of others from every discipline of science and the arts who willingly, even eagerly, offered their services to Hitler's dream of a thousand-year Reich. They never stopped to think or care at what expense and over how many corpses this dream would come about.

They used their superior intellects to become superior henchmen. The prospect of personal gain was their only motivation. Each one of them had a choice. A German, Oscar Schindler, chose another path. Against great odds, he saved 1,200 Jews in a fake concentration camp. He followed the dictates of his conscience.

He was not alone. Others attempted to help. Between sixty and seventy thousand Jews survived the Holocaust with at least some assistance from Polish individuals.

These facts and numbers are both heartening and disappointing, for they show that there were options. In the overwhelming instances, however, they were not taken. If only one Pole in a hundred had saved a single Jew, then *200,000* additional human beings might have survived the Holocaust.

It is not easy to contemplate that the vast majority of the Polish people were at best indifferent to the tragic fate of the Jews. Think about it. Not a single Jew remains in my hometown of Tarnow. In September 1939, *25,000* Jews inhabited that city.

For thirty-eight years I couldn't talk about the Holocaust in public. It evoked too much emotion. To this day I am haunted by sounds, sights, and smells. I hear my mother's helpless moaning during her heart attack. I see my sister's tears as she cried over mother's grave. I can hear the screams of babies and toddlers being thrown on a truck like so much garbage, to be dumped alive into a cemetery pit.

Bronka's last message reverberates in my ears. I hear the echoes of "Shemah Israel" shouted by Jews being mowed down into mass graves. I hear rifle shots, and the barking of dogs, both canine and human. I can smell the stench of burning flesh from the crematoria.

I could go on. I had hoped that time would mellow me; it has not. If anything, the opposite seems to be happening. True, I no longer get regular nightmares like I got for thirty-eight years. But my pain is undiminished. My memories lie just below the surface, ready to haunt every waking moment of my life.

For the past six or seven years, I have been speaking to various

audiences about my Holocaust experience. I feel so inadequate to the task. I am convinced that neither I nor anyone can recapture that momentous experience properly. The tragedy transcends all known human concepts.

It goes beyond the capacity of the speaker to convey and the capacity of the listener to absorb. The Holocaust will stand alone as an impenetrable enigma. Sadly, the story of the victims, especially the day-to-day nuances, will forever remain an untellable secret that we survivors are condemned to carry alone to our graves.

This ineffability, however, does not absolve survivors of a responsibility to do our part to communicate the experience to the best of our ability. Right now, today, revisionists attempt to dismiss the Holocaust as an insignificant event, or, worse, a figment of the victim's imagination. This notion is so painful to a survivor that it becomes crucial to speak out, to counter these lies, to be a witness.

Who knows why Primo Levi, the renowned writer and survivor of Auschwitz, committed suicide? Perhaps it was the unbearable pain and frustration of such denials. In a recent conversation, an American friend touched on Levi's suicide.

"Why did Primo do it?" he asked. "He had so much to live for."

"He had so much to live with," I responded. "Perhaps what he had to live for didn't compensate."

How can a nonsurvivor understand the weight of emotional baggage a survivor is condemned to carry? To us survivors, this weight can be unbearable. One only hopes not to act on these feelings of depression in a moment of weakness.

Survivors must never forget the important message we have to convey. Such conviction is the driving force behind my Holocaust activities. I do my part because I feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility. I obey a silent command to speak out on behalf of those whose voices were silenced. Most especially, I speak out for my parents, and for my little sister Bronka, who beseeched me to do so as she was pushed into a cattle car.

Last, but not least, let me reiterate what I said in my Preface. I wrote this book for you, my dear children, Renee and Phil. It would be a shame and an unforgivable sin if I departed this world and left my incredible, although incomplete story forever untold.

This account is a legacy to you.

My Holocaust Memories

Once again this year—this memorial day,
Brings into focus a lingering view;
A Nazi crime flashback, a sad replay;
An eerie sense of reverse "Deja Vu".

Once again this Holocaust Memorial
Brings up images of heart-rending pain;
It conjures up a vivid pictorial,
Of a civilized world turned Hell's domain.

Some people may say: "We've heard it before;
Why not forget it—let's close up the file";
But if we do that, we open the door,
To soundings of doubt and wholesale denial.

Already voices of bigoted men,
Our Holocaust claim deny and conceal;
Via the media; by word and by pen,
Our bitter legacy they try to steal.

They state: "The Holocaust is a big lie!
A Jewish invention—Jews like to whine";
My blood pressure reading goes to the sky,
Whenever I hear this venomous line.

To me Nazi crimes are still fresh and real;
My little sister will always be twelve;
The pain of her loss forever I'll feel;
Old grief can't be put away on a shelf.

I will always hear the haunting last scream
Of babies whose heads were smashed on a wall;
Of Jews killed by fire, bullet and steam;
I clearly still now, remember it all.

The German Shepherd hounds biting to wrest
—Tear away private parts of naked men;
Dogs gripping and jerking at women's breasts;
Repeating this act again and again.

The brutal loading of trains to the camps;
The guns shots, the pleading I still can hear,
—Feel the hunger, the thirst, the stomach cramps;
Those visions still in my nightmares appear.

The march from the train, way up a steep hill,
Prodded by dog bites and sharp bayonets;
To soon be consumed by a killing mill;
Such trip to a camp one never forgets.

How well I remember those cruel whips,
The rifle-butt blows on my back and head;
Those leather whip fringes with metal tips,
Caused so much pain that you wished you were dead.

I still can't escape the organic smell;
The constant burning in my nose and eyes,
From smoke belching out, the chimneys of hell;
The horror I felt description defies.

I could go on with an endless lament;
This "tragedy" comes in quite a few acts;
But punishing you is not my intent
—I merely wanted to highlight some facts.

But if my account sounds to you gory;
Maybe too graphic—a little too real;
I must honestly say: I am sorry;
If too much discomfort I made you feel.

I assure you; it gives me no pleasure,
To resurrect facts of torment, of bane;
Though doing so relieves in some measure,
Those pent-up feelings that drive me insane.

For forty long years I stayed in a shell,
To nurture alone the wounds of my past;
Until I mastered the courage to tell;
To speak on my troubled conscience behest.

Should you care to listen now to my heart,
You would likely hear the sound of my pain,
That constantly nags and tears me apart.
With every heartbeat's rhythmic refrain.

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