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The Threads of Life

By

Malka Glikstein,

Jerusalem,
Israel, 2011.

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PROLOGUE

My memory seems to be stretching like an elastic band back into my earliest childhood. Visions of those early days so long ago confront me now more than ever before. Looking back over the past I see a large screen on which my life is recorded. The memories bring back to me pictures, sounds, feelings and even aromas of gardens I used to play in or the lovely smell of my mother's cooking. Above all the imaginary screen brings back to life those lovely familiar faces of my youth.

My earliest vision of myself takes me back to when I was between 4 or 5 years old. I see a bed on which my father lay sick. The bed seemed to me very high. All I could see was my father's pale, slim hand resting on white sheets. All I understood was that up there on the bed was my *Tati*. This picture became embedded in my mind forever.

I see my grandfather's room, where I would often sleep. My grandfather was a *sofer* and he used to write the Torah at night so as not to be disturbed. I would wake up in the middle of the night and see a shadow on the wall; it was a reflection of my grandfather bending over the parchment with great concentration. An oil lamp with a small flame inside a rounded glass was the only light. On the desk stood large jars of special black ink that did not penetrate the parchment but seemed to remain on top as if hardly touching the parchment. If G-d forbid a letter was not absolutely perfect it was a cause of great sorrow to my grandfather. He was prepared to make a day of fasting as repentance. If a letter had to be removed, it had to be lifted off the parchment, but never scraped away. The pens for this special purpose were shaped from real goose feathers. We, children, were trained never ever to touch anything on grandfather's desk.

I remember a cold Shabbat afternoon in February 1929, when we became aware of some unusual activities in our house. My grandmother and my Aunt Chaya, my mother's elder sister who lived directly opposite us, were

talking in whispers. My mother was standing with her back against a ceramic hot oven, rubbing her back as if in pain.

As soon as the Sabbath ended, my elder sister, Sala, and younger sister, Basia, and I were sent over to join our cousins in my aunt's apartment. While we were gathering our pajamas to spend the night there, I overheard my aunt saying, "We have to send someone to fetch the midwife." That night our youngest sister, Hannah, was born.

Those are the early threads in the fabric of my life. It is a tapestry woven with bright and dark threads of many colours, and even with some bare threads upon which my whole life hung.

TARNOW

My world in 1938-1939 was very small indeed. My horizons did not go beyond my immediate family and neighbourhood in Tarnow, Poland, a medium sized city with about 60,000 inhabitants. Approximately half the population was Jewish living more or less in the centre of the town. This area contained apartment houses, businesses, schools, synagogues and light industries. The non-Jewish population lived on the outskirts of the city. They were mainly teachers, bankers and office employees.

We had very little contact with the non-Jewish population. One exception was the janitor who lived in our apartment block. He lived there with his family and his responsibilities included keeping the building clean and safe. He locked the front and back doors of the building at 10:00 p.m. every night. If someone came to visit after that hour, he had to be summoned to open the door. He gladly obliged for a small fee.

I also had contact with non-Jewish teachers who taught in the girls' state school, which I attended. At that time, anti-Semitism was strong in Poland but for political reasons it was not displayed openly. Our teacher, although not wanting to appear anti-Semitic, managed to seat us in such a way that we were actually segregated from the rest of the class. There was a row of benches on the right side of the classroom and another on the left, with an aisle in the middle. The right side was near the windows with sunshine and fresh air coming in. We, the Jewish girls, sat on the left side. The way in

which the teacher segregated us was not immediately obvious. After I had taken a seat near a window, she told me, "You are tall, so you can sit in the back" indicating a seat not on the sunny side of the room. This process continued until the teacher had us sitting exactly where she wanted us – the non-Jews near the sunshine and fresh air and the Jewish girls on the opposite side of the room. This kind of classroom segregation continued throughout my school years but I did not realize the implications until several years later.

In 1938, at the ripe age of 14, my formal schooling ended with the completion of seven years of study at the Konopnicka primary school in Tarnow. The major tragic event of my life until then, took place in that same year when my father, Baruch Berglas ז"ל (of blessed memory), passed away just after *Pesach* (Passover). He had been ailing for many years and finally succumbed to heart failure at the age of 42.

Both my parents operated a small retail clothing store in Tarnow and when my father passed away, my mother continued to run the business. My three sisters and I helped her out whenever possible. In 1938, my eldest sister, Sala (Sara Feiga), was already half-way through her studies to become a corsetiere. The training took place during morning hours and she was free to help in the shop in the afternoons.

When my father died Sala was almost 17 years old. I have very definite memories of her from my childhood. I always thought of her as an adult even though she was only two years my senior. I do not remember her ever playing with toys or just having fun. She was always so serious. She seemed to me to be an introvert. Whatever she learnt and whatever she knew, she kept to herself.

Sala was a perfectionist. She loved sewing and knitting and her work had to be perfect. One incident taught me a beautiful lesson that I remember to this day. She was knitting a sweater and had almost completed a whole section when she noticed an imperfection in the stitches a few rows from the beginning. It was enough to make her undo the whole section that had taken her hours and hours to knit. I was aghast! "No" she insisted, "I will know it is faulty. Every time I will wear the sweater I will see the mistake," she explained. To her the extra hours of work were worthwhile in the end. She

was right. She took pride in everything she did. From this incident, I learned to look ahead and to consider the consequences of my actions. In this way I try to avoid ever having to tell myself, "I should have …" To this day, whenever a situation arises where I have to make a decision, I think of this fundamental rule.
Sala had many qualities that I wished I had. She was everything I wanted to be. She never said or did anything that was not right, whereas I thought everything I did was wrong. She was too quiet, I was too lively, and I was often punished for my behaviour. However, after our father passed away and we assumed greater responsibilities, we realized that our differences complemented each other. She was better at things relating to the home or business and I was better at fixing things and relating to the outside world. The family knew she had wisdom far beyond her years and I admired her tremendously.

Sala was also deeply religious. She recited the daily prayers with sincerity and was very careful with her observance of the *mitzvoth* (Commandments). Even now, after almost fifty years, I wonder how different things might have been had she been here to guide me.

Basia (Basha) ע"ה was also a unique personality. In 1939, when the war broke out, she was barely a teenager, only thirteen years old. She had completed 6 years of primary school and my mother was looking forward to having her trained to help in the family shop.

She was quite mature for her age: cute, curly haired and very clever. She always said and did the right thing. When she was asked to stay with our grandparents in Ryglice in order to help them out with their daily chores, she gladly agreed little realizing that she would never see us again.

Throughout my childhood my sisters and I would spend our vacation in Ryglice with our paternal grandparents, Reb Avraham Chaim and Rachel Levi ז"ל. *Bobie* and *Zaydie* Levi had a bakery and grocery shop in the village. We loved being with them and having the freedom to run around in the fresh air and sunshine for over two months every year.

My family name was Berglas, however, it really should have been Levi, after my paternal grandfather. I recall my father explaining the reason for

this. In Poland, at the turn of the century, there were no compulsory civil marriages. Jewish couples, of course had the organized religious ceremony. Children born to a couple were registered under the family name of the mother. When a law was enacted requiring married couples to go through a civil ceremony, my grandparents duly appeared before the Registrar. They stated that they were the parents of 9 children, my father being the oldest. The clerk then asked my grandfather, "Do you admit to being the father of these children?" "Yes I do," he answered. I recall my father telling me this story and jokingly adding with a twinkle in his eye, "I wonder how my mother would have felt had my father answered in the negative …?"

The summer of 1938 was my first summer without a vacation. I was not a school girl anymore; it was time to decide what I should do. On my mother's advice I enrolled for a course in designing and sewing ladies clothes. I was told that I was good at it.

At that time news reached us of the persecution of Jews in Germany. The adults listened with concern and we watched their serious and sad faces but to me it all sounded so vague, so far away. We did not listen to the radio or read newspapers. There might have been only one radio set in the neighbourhood in those days, so people would gather under the window of the apartment from where the latest news bulletin could be heard. The news was then passed on by word of mouth with endless commentaries and discussions.

I think it was late autumn of 1938 when the news came that **all** Polish born Jews residing in Germany were to be expelled en masse. They were driven by the thousands to the border town between Germany and Poland. Trainloads of people were literally dumped on the ground, which by late autumn and the beginning of winter, was wet and already freezing.

Polish Jewry immediately organized a rescue campaign. They managed to provide train transportation from the border town to all cities and towns wherever there lived a Jewish community. Then, in turn, each local community arranged private accommodation and some necessities, as most of those refugees came with only what they could carry. In our street, Brodzinskiego, we received a number of families whom we tried to help.

With one particular family, I think the name was Symanowitz, we became friendly. The father, a gentle *frum* man with a grayish beard came to borrow a hot water bottle for his wife who suffered from frostbites from sitting in the snow at the border town. They had sons and daughters, the eldest one, Paula, eventually married my second cousin, Shimon Strom. The younger daughter was my age and we became good friends.

We youngsters accepted this situation as almost normal. We were fascinated with the stories these refugees from Germany used to tell us. They were taken from their homes without any warning. An SS man walked into their homes and ordered the people to pack whatever they needed for a short trip. One woman told the story; she was in the middle of giving a piano lesson when she was ordered immediately to start packing, she had to leave everything and go. Another woman was in the middle of cooking and preparing for Shabbat, when the SS man burst into her apartment. He would not even let her change her clothes or anything, just the way she was standing in her kitchen, was the way she had to leave.

One family was tricked; they were told that they could pack up their whole household, furniture and all. They spent days packing everything carefully so that there should not be any breakages. This family was well to do, they had expensive china sets, crystal etc… They arranged with a shipping company to have it packed in a big container, but when they arrived in Poland, none of those things had arrived. No wonder the Germans were so eager to send the Jews out of Germany. They were then able to confiscate all the properties.

Little did I understand then the tragedy those refugees were experiencing, yet the worst was yet to come. This was still in 1938, the year Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia after taking over Austria. No one ever thought that a year later he would continue to march eastwards to take over Poland.

The summer of 1939 was like any other summer. I was not aware of the political storm that was gathering all around us. At the age of 15, and already a year out of school, I felt almost grown up and life seemed uneventful. Then on the lst of September suddenly large posters appeared

everywhere announcing a Declaration of War between Poland and Germany.

At first, it all sounded so exciting, people walking and talking in little groups. The street where we lived was in close proximity to the army buildings. As children, we used to watch the soldiers in their Sunday best going to the Church and marching in time to the military band. Often we would follow the army so that we could listen to the music a little longer. It was fun to watch them, but now the mood was different. Mobilization was in full swing, there were men standing, sitting and even sprawling on the sidewalks and lawns. They were waiting their turn to be registered and given uniforms. The faces of those newly drafted recruits were serious, some were bored, and others looked worried, they came mostly from the surrounding towns and villages.

A few days after the recruitment we saw them marching again, but this time there was no music, and they were not going to Church – they were going to the Front – little did they know that only a handful of them would return.

The entire economic system collapsed. Banks, offices and schools closed down. Industry came to a complete standstill. Big firms opened only for a few hours every day. The people who were the first ones to suffer were the pensioners who were dependant on their monthly pension, which came from the government through the bank. Since the Polish Government ceased to exist, there was no money coming in.

Elderly people were left with absolutely no income, and no savings to fall back on, the tragedy was great. My mother would send us with a basket to collect some food items. One of those in need was my Uncle Yakov. He was an invalid from the First World War and he was fully dependent on the pension he received. It was very painful for him to be a recipient of collected food. Another elderly couple who had been very rich when they were younger, found themselves at the outbreak of the war old, lonely and penniless, and was shy to take help. To those kinds of people, my mother reached out with help in such a way that it would preserve their dignity.

POLAND OCCUPIED

In the first two weeks of the Blitz-Krieg in September 1939, the Polish army was smashed when the German Army marched in with tanks. Tanks in columns kept rolling in along the streets, hour after hour until they occupied every street and every empty block of land. Some cities were bombed, but Tarnow was not damaged.

The first four days under the German occupation did not seem as if much had changed. However, soon afterwards, new laws and regulations were announced almost daily. Everyone had to wear on his left arm a white armband with a blue Magen David star sewn on it. Almost immediately, those bands were on sale on every street corner. Next, we were forbidden to walk on the right sidewalk, for us it was only the left sidewalk. If anyone with an armband dared to walk on the right sidewalk, he was immediately arrested. In the beginning, we were still allowed to ride in the back of the trams, which would take a person only from one end of the city to the other. After a short while, we were not allowed to ride on the trams at all. The Germans had a very efficient method of separating us from the non-Jewish population. Men were taken off the streets and forced to do street cleaning and other heavy work. As the male population diminished, because many young men went into hiding and others left town, the Germans did not hesitate to take young women and girls to do the jobs.

When they became aware that the men-folk had left the towns, they took hostages, firstly to prevent more men from leaving, and secondly, they thought that by holding hostages, the ones who had left might return. Of course, no one dared to return to a sure death sentence, so after three days they shot the hostages. A group of 10 men were chosen from amongst the nicest *balabatim* in town, the most respected people. The whole community suffered a terrible blow. On another occasion, they shot six men, supposedly for a deed they did not commit. They had them lie down on the ground to instill fear in all who saw them.

Food became scarce and was rationed and one had to get up early in the morning to queue up under the bakery window so as not to miss the allotted portions. I remember there were times when I stood in the queue from 3 o'clock in the morning. The bakery did not open until 7 o'clock but by that time, the queue was three blocks long.

During the first year, our family was fortunate. We had enough bread, eggs and cheese which our paternal grandparents used to send us from Ryglice, a small village about 8 kilometers from Tarnow. However, as time went on, it became too dangerous to travel and gradually this also stopped and we had to rely on whatever rations we received.

Living conditions became more and more crowded. The Germans started resettling the Jewish populations to make the smaller towns and villages "*Yudenrein"* (free of Jews). The people moved to larger cities, at that time one still had the choice of where to go, so naturally everyone tried to move in with relatives. To us came our family from Krakow. An uncle, a younger brother of my mother, Pinchas Weisenberg, with his wife Lea, daughter Zunia (Zisl), son Vilek (Wolf) and a younger daughter Renia (Regina-Rivka). With them came Aunt Lea's mother, six people in all. Luckily our apartment and Aunt Chaya's, my mother's elder sister, were very close together so we managed to accommodate this family between our two apartments. It was not easy, but life kept its rhythm as nearly normal as possible. My uncle still kept working at making women's handbags and travel bags, of which there was a demand, as everyone kept packing and repacking their belongings. A few of us younger ones were working at making brooms and brushes by hand, something we had learnt easily.

One can imagine the *balagan* and gradual discontent which emanated from three families living together in two small apartments. We had to take turns in cooking and eating, three housewives in one kitchen and one eating area is not fun. Even with the best of intentions, quarrels were inevitable. One example left me feeling very guilty: I was doing something in the kitchen and needed advice, and it happened that Aunt Lea was in the kitchen at the time, so I asked her. Later on, I noticed that my mother looked very hurt, she felt offended that I preferred Aunt Lea's opinion rather than hers. I apologized but don't remember whether I had the perception to explain to my mother that this little incident had not diminished my love and respect for her. However, I resolved not to do it again. My mother was in her mid-forties at that time but she had turned grey very early, so to me she appeared old.

I became aware of the fact that the atmosphere between the three families, living so close together, was becoming tenser with every passing day. After all, five adults and nine children, packed into two small apartments, needed a lot of patience and understanding to survive.

ESPERANTO

In 1940-41, there was great movement of population. Some people came from smaller places into a larger city thinking it might be safer, some went to live with Polish country folks to hide in underground bunkers and many were in transit, traveling towards the Russian border. Refugees seem to be everywhere.

The two apartments, my Aunt and ours, already accommodated three families, yet there was still room for a wayfarer or refugee who would come to stay for a day, and sometimes a week or two. To us youngsters, these people were especially interesting, so different from what we were used to. They came from different parts of the country so naturally they had different accents and expressions. We would burst out laughing at what we thought was a mispronunciation of a word.

What impressed me about one particular man was his ability to speak several languages. For example, I remember when in the final years of my primary school, the teacher asked us two questions: what we would like to be when we grow up and what we would like to learn. To the first question my answer was that I really did not know, I guessed that I would probably go into dress designing. To the second question, my answer was quite definite that I wanted to learn foreign languages as it always held a special fascination for me, having been brought up speaking only Polish with a bit of Yiddish used when speaking with our grandparents. To be able to speak another language seemed like magic.

A clear picture of one of the refugees stands out in my mind and slowly emerges from the deep well of my memories. He was of slight build, not very tall, with a small black moustache and his hat and suit were grey. In our religious circles, we would call him “modern”. A stark contrast to the Chassidic garb our men wore. He told stories about the various countries he visited. He could have been a teacher who came to Poland on a visit and

became stuck. Whatever his past, he was willing to teach us Esperanto. So, four of us girls: my sister Sala, myself, cousin Hinda (my Aunt's daughter) and cousin Zunia (my Uncle's daughter from Krakow) – aged 15 to 18 years old, were the official students, while the younger ones looked on without participating. His idea was that if everyone in the whole world would speak the same language, people would understand each other better and then there would be no wars. He was too idealistic to realize that the greed, aggression and prejudice, which is either inherent or acquired in the human being, needs much more than a language to make the world more agreeable. There is no substitute for our Torah's Dictum ... *"Love thy neighbour as thyself."*

This man opened for me the door to etymology. He taught us that the basis of Esperanto is Latin, as it for Italian, French, Spanish, English and German. He explained the relationship of words to their roots, and in a wider sense, the relationship between languages. He emphasized that the backbone to a language is grammar – grammar is the instrument that allows us to create and recreate a language into a comprehensible communication. Only now, I realize how much I owe this man for introducing me to the intricacies of learning a language.

Of course, we have other means of communication and expression, but language has in it a binding force, and we humans are the only creatures to be privileged to have this special gift from G-d.

Aunt Chaya also accommodated a very young Chassidic man who said he was the son of a Rabbi, who had become separated from his family and asked to be put up for a couple of nights. After about a week, he was still there, with nowhere to go. Aunt Chaycia did not have the heart to turn him out into the street. Not only did she let him stay, she also shared the little food they had with this young man. When asked by the rest of the family "how long can you keep him?" her reply was "maybe in this merit someone will take care of my child, my son Avigdor, who is somewhere in Russia".

Indeed, almost miraculously, Avigdor and Yocheved Helfgott survived the war in Russia. After the war they came back, and then settled in Israel. I am sure that it was in the merit of his mother's good deed that someone took care of him in Gorky.

THE LOOK

At about the same time when the law was passed that all Jews had to wear armbands with the blue Magen David, it became dangerous for a man with a beard to be seen in the street. Many of the younger men shaved off their beards. However, the older men found it difficult to do so, to them the beard was not some kind of an outside décor, but was a part of their inner being. Thus the older men usually remained indoors.

An incident occurred before the ghetto was fully established. It was still a time when people out of town could come and go, although there was always the danger of being caught. One day my sister Sala and I were standing in a large square courtyard with tall three storey buildings all around. There were densely populated apartments, on Twarski Street because of the influx of people from surrounding towns and villages. In one building lived the parents of my Uncle Shmuel, Mr. and Mrs. Rosen, with a son Aka and three daughters, all grown up. They came to Tarnow from their little town, Mystenice, somewhere near Krakow. They, with all the other Jews of this town, had to leave when the Germans decided to make it *Yudenrein.*

My Uncle Shmuel was new to our family. He married my Aunt Mindle about three years prior to the outbreak of the war. I was very fond of him. Firstly, because I was old enough to participate in their wedding ceremony in Ryglice; and secondly, he treated me as almost grownup unlike my other Uncles who remembered me from my childhood and treated me like a child. For some reason I also liked him because he was a Bobover Chassid. To me he seemed old, with his reddish beard and black velvet hat, but I think he might have been close to 30 years old. He lived in Ryglice with the rest of the family, my paternal grandparents, two unmarried uncles, David and Simcha, Uncle Shmuel and Aunt Mindl who had two little girls, Rivki and Malka. Uncle Shmuel had not seen his parents, who were now living in Tarnow, for over four years from the time of his marriage, so he decided to pay them a visit even though it was risky – really very dangerous.

Once, as we were standing in this large courtyard, a group of men walked in, dressed like men from the country with high, black leather boots, short,

hip tight winter jackets and the kind of hat a man from the country would wear, similar to the kind that the Russians are now wearing. At first I did not give them a second look, then something caught my eye, and I said to Sala, "One of them looks like our Uncle Shmuel." But it could not be this man had no beard. I looked again and he seemed to smile. Yes! It was Uncle Shmuel, but different – that look … logically I knew it was the same person. I tried hard to reconcile the two images. Had only the outside changed? Had it affected the inside of the person, did it influence him in any way? How painful it must have been for his wife and children, when the children ran away from him in fear, not recognizing him.

We did hear of cases where this kind of changed image did influence the person's behaviour, some men completely separating themselves from *Yiddishkeit*, never to return. Whatever mixed feelings I had, the image of my Uncle, the Bobover Chassid with the reddish beard and black velvet hat – this image was shattered. This experience left such an impression on me that it influenced my thinking later in life.

Many, many years later when my daughter, Glenda, was in high school, one day she and a friend came home with a little make-up around her eyes, and a little different hair-do. I glanced at her, and tried to control my negative reaction so as not to put her on the defensive. In my mind's eye, I saw a picture from a front-page magazine. I observed her for a minute, and then with a voice, not betraying any anxiety, I said. "I cannot see my sweet little Glenda from behind THAT LOOK" …. and left it at that.

Later on, in the evening, when I felt I had my emotions under control, I explained, "A little make up does not seem wrong, a little change in a hair style seems quite innocent, but what is dangerous about it is to try to take on someone else's look, as if to fit another one's personality. The next step is to try to act as this look would expect you to act. After a little while, one believes in this role, and this leads to confusion. No wonder so many young people are searching for their identity. They have lost their identity by trying to imitate others. You do not have to search, you know your identity, you know who your parents are, you are attending wonderful *shiurim* three times a week and go to *shul* every *Shabbat.* The outside look must correspond with the inside person."

With a little persuasion as gently as I could and a lot of prayer in my heart, next morning I had my sweet little girl again ב"ה, she listened.

THE TUESDAY *YIDELE*

Before the war, our house was always open to whoever needed help. Yeshiva Bochrim came in for a hot cup of coffee; they learned next door and had no facilities. This was the Yeshiva of the Radomsker Chasidim. In winter, poor people would come for a hot bowl of soup; my Grandmother was always ready for whoever knocked on the door.

Every Tuesday morning a little old man came for breakfast. His clothes were non-descript but I remember his gentle features, short grey beard and particularly smiling blue eyes. We knew that a tray had to be set aside with pieces of bread and cheese, or whatever we had eaten for breakfast, with a big pot of coffee. He would wash for *motzi*, finish what was on the tray, then *bentch* and then he would go on his way. This went on regularly for quite a while. When the war broke out, our *Yidele* did not come and we wondered at first, what could have happened to him, but after a while, we forgot. There were so many things happening, so many people coming and going, everyone looking for a safer place. It was like a stormy wind was blowing, leaves being blown back and forth, the skies getting darker and darker and not a sign of peace on the horizon.

It might have been the spring of 1941, the Ghetto not yet closed in, and we were still in our old apartment when one day there was a knock on the door, a little old man looking strange as he stood in the open door, his movements indicated as if our place was familiar to him. I studied his face, his blue eyes were sad, but there was a gentle smile, then suddenly, I recognized him. "Our *Yidele*" had come back. We let him in and found something for him to eat. He was so happy that we recognized him, his eyes were smiling now, and to him it was like coming home. This was the last time we saw him. I do not have to guess what happened to him, no doubt he fell into the murderous hands of the Germans and he perished, as did all my family in Ryglice, amongst them my younger sister Basia.

This story of the Massacre at Ryglice was told to me after the War.

Sometime during 1943, I think it was July; the Germans gathered most of the Jewish population, men, women and children of Ryglice, into the shul and set it on fire. Later, the bodies were thrown onto a truck, with arms and legs hanging out, and they were taken to a mass grave and buried there. I did not go back to search for that grave. It was reported that my Grandfather, Rev Avraham Chaim Levi, was in the middle of saying his prayers in his *tallit*, when the Germans came in. He ran up to the attic but they followed him, wrapped him up in the *tallit*, threw him off the roof onto the ground and shot him. Thus, my Grandfather, the whole family, my sister, Uncle Shmuel and his family and all the Jews from Ryglice died on *Kiddush HaShem*.

CHARACTER TESTS

There is a saying, “During a storm the mud of the river comes up to the top,” and so it is in human society. We find that during a war the lowest characters of society suddenly rise to leading positions. This in turn drags down the moral values of such a society. The whole pattern of behaviour changes so that what was once forbidden is now acceptable. I heard a daughter of one of those “leaders” exclaiming to a friend, “Can you see this beautiful winter coat? That is a gift from my mother's friend." Frankly I was too naïve to understand the implication. The Germans also recruited young Jewish men as policemen. Some went because they had no choice, others volunteered because of the status and power it gave them.

I recall two people who reacted in opposite ways to a very similar situation. This was still in the first year of German occupation. Three men were caught for some minor offence and were taken to the cemetery to be shot. First they had to dig their own graves, and then two policemen had to hold the man down for the execution. In one instance, one of the policemen said he could not possibly do it, he could not be part of this execution, and he could not bring himself to remain indifferent to the suffering of his fellowmen. Immediately the German shot them both. He was such a fine, gentle person, In his religious upbringing he learned of the three major transgressions by which a person should rather give his life, one of those is "*Shefichus Damim"* spilling of blood. He felt that holding a man down for

execution was like spilling his blood. When this tragic news was told to his wife, she responded with "he followed his conscience, I cannot hold it against him." They might have been married only a short time, she had a little baby and was left alone and unprotected. Eventually they all perished.

The following incident of a policeman in a similar situation illustrates the base character of a person who brutally sold out his own parents together with a large group of people, young and old.

When the Germans were searching apartments for people to deport, they often gave the Jewish policeman a quota of how many they must bring in for deportation. They knew that people were hiding in offices and cellars. In a building about half a block away from our house lived the parents of one of those policemen. All the people in that building had a false sense of security. They thought that surely since one of their own was a policeman, he would protect them. When they heard him calling, *"Tate, mame kumt arrois"* - "father, mother, come out, it is all clear," they trusted him. The whole large group came out, only to be confronted with a number of SS men, and they were all deported. Amongst that group was family Strom, our second cousins, Golda and Peretz, with their youngest son, Shmuel who was a Yeshiva student at the Lubliner Yeshiva. When the war broke out the Yeshiva was disbanded and all the students went home. I saw him only once or twice. He was about 18 or 19 years old, tall, slim with a sweet gentle smile, shining eyes and dimples on his face. I remember thinking, "When I will look for a *chasan*, I will want one like Shmuel."

The searching of apartments was going on periodically; the deportations were done in smaller groups, not all at once. On one such occasion, when we knew the Germans were coming to search, we had a brilliant idea. Our apartment had one room where the door was slightly shorter than the other doors, so we decided to stand a large wardrobe in front of it, and people could hide in that room behind the wardrobe. It was a great idea and as many people as could fit in were sitting on beds, chairs, tables and the floor hiding behind a door camouflaged by a cupboard.

My sister, Sala, and I were in the front rooms as if we were the only occupants of this apartment. We spoke a little German, our mother was

educated in the German language under the rule of Austria's Keiser Franz Josef, and so the German language was familiar to us.

When the SS man came in, the people in the back room had to literally hold their breath. We explained to him that we were the only two of us living in the apartment. The young SS man noticing we could speak a little German started a conversation. We were now exposed to a double danger, one was that if he stayed a little longer someone in the back room might cough or move. The second danger was that he could become "too friendly". We prayed in our hearts that some miracle would happen – and it happened. Another SS man walked in and called him out saying "we finished with this building". Our relief was indescribable, and so was the relief of the people from the back room. As they were let out, we became aware of the tension we had been in. Officially, the SS men were not permitted to have any contact with Jewish girls, but there were cases when it happened.

In our neighbourhood lived a woman, Dr. Bloch with her only daughter, a beautiful girl about my age, or a year younger. I used to admire her and even though we both lived opposite the school called Konnopnicker, which I attended, Miss Bloch attended the only Hebrew (but non-religious) school in Tarnow, so we really had no personal contact. This did not stop me from admiring her as a beautiful girl wearing lovely clothes. I used to like to watch her from my window how she rode her bike up and down the street. At some point she became involved with an SS man. I will never know whether she resisted him or if they were reported, no one really knows, but in the end he shot her in front of her mother. For the mother this meant the end of her life, her mind snapped … she was led away a broken person.

We had neighbours, a family called Kurtz, and their eldest daughter, Freidl, was my very good friend even though she was a year older than I was. She was the eldest of five children. This was still before the ghetto was established and one could travel out of the city. She and her girlfriend did not look Jewish at all so they tried to help their families by bringing food from the countryside. They were mostly hitch-hiking. This went on for a few months. Then one day they were picked up by a truck driven by German soldiers. At first the soldiers thought they had picked up two non-Jewish country girls. However, along the way they realized that the girls were Jewish, they took them off the truck and shot them by the roadside.

When this news came through, I could not believe it. I grieved very much. She was a little older than I was and I somehow needed her support. Her family was devastated. We never knew how or where they were buried, probably along the roadside. I am not sure if Tarnow had at that time during the war an official *Chevra Kadisha*. It is possible that in a case where someone was shot in the city, an unofficial group would take care of the burial although there were no funerals.

The winter of 1942 was very, very cold. There was no heating, not much to do, and not much to eat, so to keep warm we would stay in bed, sometimes fully clothed even with gloves on. As we were breathing the steam was visible in the air, and we used to play games competing over whose breath would stay the longest in the air. Sometimes G-d eases one's suffering with beauty. Although we were freezing inside, the window panes were a miracle to behold. The ice and the frost had created the most beautiful pictures of flowers, most of them in the shapes of tulips and those long stemmed chrysanthemums. When the sun shone on them, it gave the impression of brilliance as if those flowers were diamond-studded jewels. I would sit and watch them until the midday sun melted the lot. Another benefit of staying in bed longer on those frosty mornings, besides keeping warm, was that we then needed less food, and in that manner we survived the winter.

THE TARNOW GHETTO.

In the spring of 1942, the boundaries of the ghetto in Tarnow were marked. The street called Brodzinskiga where we lived was considered outside of the ghetto, therefore we had to move. It was still a time when one could choose with whom to move in, as long as it was within the boundaries of the ghetto. It seemed to me that the ghetto was the size of one square mile into which area thousands of people were squeezed.

Hersh Strom, our cousin, lived in a tiny apartment on Luonski Street. One side of the street was the boundary of the ghetto, the other side was already considered as outside of the ghetto. In fact the factory where I later worked was on the other side of Luonski Street. Since he lived on the permissible side of the street he did not have to move. In this tiny apartment, he lived with his wife and two children, a boy and a girl. It was very kind of them to allow my mother and the three of us sisters to move in with them.

Hersh's house being so small, we tried to keep out of each other's way. There was an entrance hall, which served as a bedroom for mother, Sala and I slept in a room with a girl from next door.

I wish to mention here a few words about Hersh and his wife, not only as singular victims of the Nazi murderers, but of the great potential that was lost in people like them and millions like them. Six million lives is a staggering number, and if we consider that two generations later, they would have numbered eighteen million, it boggles the mind. It only proves that this horrendous crime is not diminished by time, but with each passing year, the unfulfilled potential grows.

Hersh was a handsome, tall man. He married about eight or nine years before the outbreak of the war. His wife, an intelligent girl from a well-to-do family, was very proud of her husband. He fitted well into her family and he became one of the nicer *Balabatim* of that small town where they settled. His hobby of collecting stamps later turned into a profitable business and he had contacts with people all over the world. They were looking towards a bright comfortable future until the Germans decided to make their little town *Yudenrein*. They, their parents, six sons and a daughter with their families and their own two children were wiped out.

The ghetto, as tiny as it was, was further subdivided with one section for people who went out to work and the other for the younger and older people. The division of apartments turned into division of rooms. A room was divided into four sections by placing wardrobes in such a way that they served as a wall on one side and a wardrobe on the other. Into these little squares, as many beds as possible were fitted. It did not matter if you knew the person in the next bed or not. Of course we were all girls. A girl walked in one day after all the beds had been filled. The only place left for her was on the floor next to my bed. Well, I couldn't let her sleep on the floor so I said, "I don't mind if you sleep in my bed with me." This girl was Regina Schwartz and we became best friends. We stayed together until the end of the war. She got married soon after the war and my husband and I were her *unterfiehrers.*

At first we could visit each other from one part of the ghetto to the other whenever we wanted to but after a while, only on weekends. It must have been one of those pleasant spring Sunday afternoons when everyone was out in the street on each side of the wooden fence that divided the two sections. Relatives were eager to hear what transpired during the previous week. Every minute was so precious as the time was nearing 6 p.m. and the curfew. On that particular Sunday, my mother and I were just about finishing our conversation, maybe we delayed an extra minute, when a Jewish policeman started hitting my mother with his baton. Perhaps she was not badly hit, but I was horrified – someone dared to hit **my** mother … I could not get this picture out of my mind for a long time. Even now after almost 50 years, my heart misses a beat when I think about it.

During the resettlement into the Ghetto, anyone who did not vacate his apartment was shot. My uncle Yaakov, my mother's brother, and his wife Frieda Weisenberg lived in the same building as we did. They were elderly and childless. My uncle was an invalid from the First World War where he lost a leg. We children were brought up knowing that we had to help whenever possible. He was such a sweet-natured person. He had so much patience with us. I especially liked to listen to his stories about when he served as a soldier on the Italian Front.

On the morning of the final clearing out of apartments, Uncle Yaakov and Aunt Frieda decided that it was impossible for them to move. They stayed in their beds waiting for what would happen to them. Soon, two SS men came to their home, pushed in the door and seeing them in their beds, he shot them. Since it was a time of great confusion, families were separated, each trying to find a small space inside the fenced-in Ghetto, we didn't even have the presence of mind to warn our Uncle.

There were other people who preferred to die in their own homes and not be tossed around in the wind. Next door to our building in Brodzinskiego Street lived such a family by the name of Mehl. They arrived in Tarnow from Germany, running away from Hitler, in 1935-36. They had a grown up son and daughter and for a time, they lived quietly and comfortably on the savings they brought with them. Mr. Mehl was retired and tried to be active in the local community. He did his best to patronize the two or three small shops equally. Since he had time on his hands, he would often visit my

father who (as mentioned before) was sick in bed for a long time. On that fateful morning, when everyone had to move into the ghetto, they decided to die in their home. From the time that Germany occupied Poland, they knew what to expect, so, from the very beginning, they had cyanide capsules in their possession. Before the SS men had a chance to open the door, all four of them swallowed the capsules. Thus, the family Mehl ceased to exist.

At last, after all the panic and confusion of re-settling into the ghetto, everyone found a spot for himself, and for a while we thought that this kind of existence was normal life. Slowly, spring changed into summer, and it was much easier, one could be outdoors much more and not be cramped inside the overfilled rooms.

I heard that the Germans were looking for people who knew how to sew and manufacture clothing. Apparently some people realized, or were told, that this was going to be a good place to work, so immediately there were those who looked for "*protektsia*" and in no time at all, a long queue formed at the door of the makeshift office of the factory. I was too naïve to even contemplate looking for *protektsia,* I simply queued up and when my turn came, I stepped inside and said in German, "*Ich bien eine Schneiderin*-" I am a seamstress." He stamped my card and I was accepted. Next morning I presented myself at the ghetto gate, where this particular group had to meet. We marched outside towards the sewing factory. Once inside the building we were assigned to our individual jobs. I was told to join a group of women at the hand-sewing table; we were called the "finishers". After receiving the garment from the machinist, it came onto our table.

I became aware of certain side-glances the managers were giving me and at first I wondered if maybe they were watching me to see if I could really sew. After a while, one of them came over and asked me quietly, "How much did you pay to be accepted here?" I looked up in amazement. "Nothing" I answered. After lunch, another one of the managers asked me in a kind of friendly voice, "Whom do you know here?" I just looked at him. From that look he realized that he might be giving something away. There were no more questions, but suddenly it dawned on me that most of the staff and employees were people who managed to get their positions either by "*protektsia*" or money. I looked around and noticed a father, mother and children who had somehow all became "tailors. .

As a postscript to this, about thirty years later, in Melbourne, Australia, I was sitting opposite a lady about my age, I thought she looked familiar and searched my memory to find out where I had seen her before. We soon discovered that we had both sat at the very same table in the sewing room. Later on as other events followed, I realized that *HaShem* was guiding me; it certainly was not for my own merits.

In this factory we were manufacturing heavy winter coats for the German Army. The Germans were at that time pushing eastwards. The Russians were completely unprepared, and they were taken by surprise. Only one year before that, they had signed a Pact of Friendship, that divided Poland in half. The Germans occupied the west of Poland, while the Russians occupied the east. The river and the border town of Przemyse divided them. As the winter closed in, the Germans were not used to the harsh Russian climate and they were urging us to make more and more of the winter coats. The Germans progressed deeper into Russia. The winter freeze came upon them, so they started collecting fur coats. Every single person had to give whatever fur one possessed, even the men had to give up their *shtreimls*. It was forbidden to wear even the smallest piece of fur, under the threat of death. I had a winter coat with one fur button, just for show. This certainly did not keep me warm, yet I had to give it up. All these items were collected by the wagonload, and then quickly sewed by the furriers into different kinds of capes, and sent to the Russian front.

When the Germans prepared to attack Leningrad, the Russians really stood up and started fighting back. The Germans found themselves in the same situation as the French under Napoleon, 130 years earlier in 1812. Now the Germans were losing and they suffered great casualties. At this point, we were hoping that the war would soon be over, but it was not to be, our hopes were dashed when the Russians stopped advancing.

HERR MADRITCH

The general manager of the sewing factory was Herr Madrich, a German. The inside managers were Jews who used to be clothing manufacturers before the war so they were well qualified. The atmosphere at work was light hearted, people were telling stories and jokes, some were humming a

tune and others whistled under their breath. We could also buy a few miscellaneous food items from the non-Jews who came into the courtyard; the Germans did not bother us.

Until one day … On that day two SS men walked in demanding that one of the workers be handed over because his documents were not in order. It was suspected that he had "*Arieshe papieren*"- non-Jewish documents which, of course, were strictly forbidden. It could well have been that this was true, because as soon as he noticed the SS men walking in he disappeared. The SS men were angry for not catching the man they wanted; instead, they shot the sister of one of the managers, Miss Weinstock. This time we were stunned. After that, there was no more laughter and we spoke in whispers. Every time there was such an incident, it reached deeper and deeper into our hearts and souls.

It was also forbidden to bring in food or anything else from outside the ghetto. Nevertheless, people did buy various things and brought them into the ghetto for the members of their families who remained inside. It all went well for a while. However, quite unexpectedly, one evening, on returning to the ghetto gates, we found German soldiers conducting a search. We had to stand in rows, one behind the other, while the search went on. As the German was approaching one of the young men, who had two eggs in his hand, he put them into the hood of the woman standing in front of him. She probably was not even aware of it. When the search in the next row began, those two eggs were discovered in this woman's hood, she was taken aside into a corner and shot. Her last words were "My Children, My Children" as her husband witnessed this scene but could not help her. They had two sweet lovely girls of about 10 and 12 years old. The last words of this woman haunted me for years.

There were times later in my life, after my husband died, when I felt at the end of the road. It seemed to me then, that the easiest way out would be to drive my old Vauxhall car up onto a pole to solve all my problems. However, just at that split second I would hear in my ears the voice of this woman crying "My Children, My Children". At that instant, I understood that this poor woman was not given a choice, but with G-d's grace I do have a choice, and I thanked the Almighty there and then. I made up my mind that the responsibilities of bringing up my children (they should all be well)

is mine and mine alone, there is no one in the whole world who could do it for me.

While I was working at the Madritch factory, my sister Sala, with our Uncle Pinchas Weisenberg, his daughter Zunia and son Vilek were working in another factory producing some leather goods. My Uncle was an expert in making women's handbags and they thought they felt secure in this job.

In the non-working ghetto was my mother with my youngest sister, Hannah, Aunt Lea with her mother and youngest daughter Renia, Aunt Chaya with three of her children, Hinda, Sasia and Mendel, and all our relatives and friends, all of whom had survived the previous deportations.

Herr Madritch must have known what was coming because he pre-arranged that the whole factory be transferred to Plaszow, which meant the people and the materials. He did not have to worry about transferring over the sewing machines. They collected hundreds of sewing machines from abandoned Jewish homes in the Krakow area. What Madrich knew, but we did not, was that Tarnow was going to become one more city to be made Y*udenrein*.

LIQUIDATION OF GHETTO TARNOW

I think it was the first week of September 1943, a Thursday morning, we were told through a loudspeaker that we did not have to go to work. We had to assemble at a place called "*Zamlungs Platz*", a large open area which, before the war, was used as a central bus station. Each one of us had to go with the group we were working with, so naturally I stood with the Madritch workers. My sister with the other members of our family was in line with the leather workers. All the people from the non-working ghetto stood in a large group on the other side of this open space, but we could still see each other.

The assembly started about 8 o'clock in the morning and by late in the afternoon most or maybe the entire ghetto population was on the *Zamlungs Platz*. The day was called *"Ausziedlungs Tag"* – Deportation Day. As we were all standing and waiting, not knowing what we were waiting for, suddenly we heard some noise and a commotion coming from the other

group behind us. What happened was that a young father came onto this assembly place with a small child in his arms. A German soldier standing on guard tried to separate the child from the father, the father was supposed to join a group of young people destined for work. However, the father did not want to give up his baby, not even by force. He called out to the soldier, "you murderer, you are not going to separate me from my baby". At that moment, the soldier pulled out his gun and shot them both.

Incidents like this left us with a feeling of total helplessness. I wonder now, there were thousands of us in this place and only a few soldiers. Was it the power of **fear** for one's life that prevented us from reacting? Or was it the tiny spark of **hope** that it might not happen to us?

During that afternoon, groups started marching out through the open ghetto gates. Through the grapevine we had heard that we were all going to an "*Arbeiter Lager*", a working camp. Column after column of people kept moving slowly forwards. First went the people from the non-working part of the ghetto. In the last rays of dusk I saw my mother, my sister and all the other familiar faces already moving toward the gates - one more look, one more wave and they were outside. Next went the group that was working in the leather factory that meant Sala, Uncle Pinchas, Zunia and Vilek. They were told that they were going to a train but the destination was not given.

Gradually group after group kept moving out, until, late in the evening, our group was the only one left behind. I did not realize then that this was the last time I would see my dear ones although a kind of emptiness, like an invisible veil, enveloped me. The thought had not yet occurred to me that I would be left all alone in the world, the only survivor of a large extended family.

Our group was a large group, I did not know how many in number, but I observed that the majority were single people, men and women. By single, I meant alone, without any other family members, like myself. However, there were also those who did have a brother or a sister, or a mother and daughter. There were some complete families, parents and children. Now we were all sharing and facing the same uncertain future.

The evening was unusually mild for that time of the year. We were told that we were staying where we were until the morning. I was sitting next to my best and only friend, Regina Schwartz. She was a few years older than I, intelligent and it seemed to me very mature, and I liked her for her gentle nature. Most of her family had already been deported. The long and weary day had made us fall asleep at last, on the ground, with our little *pekele* of clothing, which we had taken with us, under our heads. After a while we woke up and with a sense of irony, watched the starry skies that seemed oblivious to what was going on beneath them

The hours were dragging on endlessly. Slowly the dawn crept up from behind the horizon; we got up, stretched out a bit and asked one another "what next?" At some stage during the day, it might have been morning or noontime; we started preparing for the journey. This was my good-bye to the city of my birth, Tarnow, forever. Of course, I did not know it then. It was not that Tarnow had vanished from my life; it was the family and the community in which I grew up, all those people from whom I had learned customs and moral values. They had given me strength, which in later years would sustain and help me to survive during the various situations I had to cope with.

Sitting on my little *pekele* of clothing, I was still hoping that all those people who left before us, would still meet up with us at some other working camp. One does not feel lonely when sitting on a razor's edge, the tensions and fears are too acute, but aloneness – a feeling of no attachment to anyone – not belonging, like a floating leaf plucked off its branch.

Before closing the chapter on Tarnow, and its liquidation, I beg forgiveness from all those pure souls that went for *Kiddush HaShem.* If I have forgotten or in some way omitted to mention them, I will endeavour *(Bli Neder)* to add their names as soon as they come to mind.

"THE TREE".

Where is that tree with its numerous branches?

Where are the deep roots that kept that tree strong and flourishing for generations?

It is true, that the branches were cut off and have withered. But with G-d's help this floating leaf which has been through storms and winds, will float back to its branch, to its trunk and to its roots.

And with the gracious help of the Almighty, these same roots will now sustain and nourish new branches and new leaves for ever and ever.

THE TARNOW I LEFT BEHIND

The liquidation of Tarnow as a Jewish city, a city which had served the Jewish community for more than a thousand years, was almost complete.

Generation after generation had built up strong traditions; it was taken for granted that this was going to continue forever. *Shuls* of all kinds, *Shteiblech* and *Chedarim* on every block were thriving with spiritual life. The market place was all-Jewish; a street running off the market square was called The Jewish Street. Often streets were named after some Jewish banker or philanthropist and most of the businesses and light industries were run by the Jewish local population. There was never a great love or at even respect between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population. However, there was an unwritten understanding that each one played its role in maintaining life as it was, a kind of "status quo". No one particularly cared to change it. Although anti-Semitism was present behind a thin veil, this is how I remember Tarnow.

In November of 1943 it was a different Tarnow that I was leaving behind, the shops and years old traditions shattered into thousands of pieces. To me it already looked like a ghost city, even though the non-Jewish population eagerly moved in and occupied all the empty houses and apartments, fully furnished, which the Jews had to leave behind. Yes, it was a ghost city, desolate of Jews, *Shuls, Shtieblech and Cheidarim.* The businesses and factories were closed. The Jewish spirit which had lived within this throbbing and vibrant community was extinguished.

The Germans were indeed efficient in their organizational skills; everything they did seemed to function like clockwork. We were the last group to be disposed of, we were left there waiting, waiting, waiting…….

If my memory serves me well, it was Friday, 10 September 1943, the day we left *Zamlungs Platz* in Tarnow after spending the night in the open, on the ground. I also cannot remember if there was any food distribution in the past twenty-four hours. It was already midday as they counted and re-counted who was there. At last we started walking slowly towards the ghetto gates and I glanced back at Tarnow for the last time. A small group still remained in Tarnow perhaps only a few hundred, I assumed they were members of the *Gemeinde* (the local Jewish administration) and their families. I kept thinking to myself, "What are they so busy with? Sending their brothers to concentration camps, or worse still, to death?" I am sure that in the end the Germans did not respect their loyal services.

The walk to the train was steady and we were not rushed. The road to the station was located in the part of the city that used to be an industrial area. Somewhere, not far beyond that area, there were railway tracks. On those tracks stood a long line of carriages, not the kind people traveled on. These carriages were used in pre-war times to carry either cattle or other kinds of heavy goods. However, now they were standing with their doors wide open as if ready to swallow us.

We approached the wagons and started climbing into them; we needed to help each other, as the step was far too high. Once the first one managed to climb in, then the next one was helped, partly by being pulled up by the one who was already inside, and partly by being pushed from below. I think about 80 of us filled a wagon and we were much tighter than cattle would have been. Cattle were usually given some room to move around. We were lucky it was not hot or we would have suffocated.

There were some painful emotional scenes at the time of boarding the carriages. Families were separated, children from parents, sisters from sisters. We were looking on sadly at this segregation. In one such instance, a young mother, I think her name was Mondelboim, tall, gracefully slim, probably not older than in her late twenties, she was clutching an overnight bag, but instead of clothes, was carrying her tiny baby wrapped in a baby blanket. From time to time, she gave the baby something, probably some kind of pacifier medication, to prevent it from crying. As she was trying to board the train, one of the soldiers standing on guard noticed the baby in the

bag and gave this young mother a choice – either to leave the baby in the bag behind, or go with it. Without a second's hesitation, with a face ashen white and expressionless, she joined the group of people, already separated from those who were supposed to be going to work. By this time, the baby was probably half-dead from suffocation.

Another mother, who was already sitting in the corner of the wagon, knees pulled up to her face, her head resting on her knees, and sobbing bitterly, unable to overcome the will to live. She couldn't find in herself the strength to follow her three children who were in the other wagon.

When our wagon was almost full, there were still two sisters who desperately tried to squeeze in. There was room only for one more - who should go and who should stay behind to almost certain death? It is too painful to recall the horror of this scene. *HaShem*, in his kindness had somehow allowed me to live my life without such a terrible burden of guilt in my heart.

Postscript to the woman with the three children.

She survived the war, her husband survived in Russia. She feared greatly that he would hold it against her for her decision. I am happy to record here that they met, continued their lives together, had more family and settled in the States.

At last, the doors of the wagons were slammed shut. We felt the wheels underneath moving slowly. The train was taking us to Plaszow, a suburb of Krakow. The journey should normally have taken two hours but it took much longer. By the time we arrived at our destination it was late Friday evening.

PLASZOW

My first questions were addressed to some of the attendants. "Did a trainload of people arrive here the day before?" "No" was the answer, with an added casual remark "maybe they went to Auschwitz." I suddenly became aware of the evening chill or was it my blood running cold inside me? However, we did not have much time to stand and contemplate before

we were rushed off to the barracks. First, however, we had to walk past huge laundry baskets into which we had to throw every bit of jewelry we possessed, wedding and diamond rings, priceless brooches, pearls, watches, etc. Once we reached the barracks, we were allotted *pritchers*, wooden bunk boards. I found a spot on the upper *pritcher* for Regina and myself. I estimate that my share of the *pritcher* was about 75 centimeters. Next to me was Regina, the others I do not even remember. The height between the *pritchers* was only high enough to sit up, without hitting one's head. In the centre of the barracks was an iron stove with a pipe sticking out of the roof.

Very soon, we became used to the bare boards. After a little while, it did not bother us anymore. There must have been some kind of cover, but I know I used my coat on top of it. The rest of the clothing, which consisted of just one extra change, which we tried to wash whenever we could, we rolled up, together with our shoes, and this made a good pillow. Actually, it had a double purpose. The second one being that it prevented anyone stealing the bread, if any was left over, that was wrapped in the pillow. Every barrack had a *Block-Eldeste*, they did not like to be called k*apo*, but in essence, that is exactly what they were. Personally, I had no problems with them. I tried to follow instructions, a good citizen in a world called "Concentration Camp". But woe to anyone who dared to step out of line.

By now, it was already 11 o'clock at night, I think. In all this time, we forgot that we had not eaten for almost thirty-six hours. The news that my mother and sisters were not here, as I was hoping, dulled my senses to everything else. Big drums of sago, cooked in water without salt, were placed in front of the barrack doors. I do not remember what kind of utensils they gave us to eat the food. We certainly looked forward to some kind of a meal, but one taste of this glossy white pearl-like mixture completely without taste made our stomachs churn. Even though we felt we were on the verge of starvation, we could not swallow a single spoonful. I cannot even imagine an animal eating it. To this very day, if my daughter cooks something that just resembles this sago, I must leave the kitchen. Similarly, the bread we were given next day was baked on trays sprinkled with sawdust instead of flour, probably for economical reasons. It would be unthinkable to throw away the lower crust, it was too precious, and so we scraped off the loose bits as much as we could, the rest we ate. After all

wood is not poisonous, it is celluloid in quite a digestible form I believe. Such was our welcome to Plaszow.

Next morning we were woken up by a trumpet call. It was very early; I think it was 5 o'clock in the morning. We were told to get dressed quickly and come outside to be counted where we stood for two hours in columns, five deep.

Being new in the camp, the *Block-Eldeste* or one of the people who had arrived before us had to show us the location of the *latrina*. There was a long narrow building, and on one of the long walls were taps with running water. Of course only cold water, summer and winter alike. There were 50 or 60 such taps and below these taps, there was a long, long trough. These were the conditions for washing our hands and faces. On the opposite wall, there was a long bench with about 50 holes for obvious purposes. There was no such thing as privacy, there was gradual degradation almost de-humanization.

Plaszow was situated on a slight hill where there used to be a Jewish cemetery. Not only did the Germans desecrate the cemetery by building a concentration camp on it, they used the tombstones to make pavements in the muddy ground. They unashamedly laid out those stones with the writing on them. At first, we did not want to step on them, but there was no choice, so we stepped very carefully on the edges, we did not want to touch the writing. One could not help reading the different names. On some of the stones, there was the sign of the hands of the Cohen, or a Magen-Dovid, or some other sentimental signs.

Gradually, it did not hurt us so much to see this desecration. I feel angry now – why did I not feel angry then? When did I allow myself to become so unfeeling, blunting our feelings? However, one last place where the Germans could not reach us was in our minds; there we had all the freedom we wanted. We had the freedom to choose to be kind to the girls on the next *pritcher* or not. There we were free to believe in *HaShem*, and even if not able to keep the *mitzvos*, at least to know that we would have liked to keep them if we could. Of course, in this beautiful place, which was our minds, we could dream and hope.

It did not take us long to adjust to a routine of 12 hours a day shift work (7 a.m. to 7 p.m.) one week and 12 hours night shift work (7 p.m. to 7. a.m.) the following week. As mentioned before, Mr. Madrich established a sewing factory in Plaszow where we were sent to work after standing for two hours in the counting place to be counted over and over again to make sure that no one had run away during the night. The weather was already cool and often a small drizzle fell, there were also some mornings when the fog was so thick, we could hardly see each other. The thick fog had a peculiar smell. When I used to live in Melbourne, we sometimes had very foggy evenings and whenever I walked out in the thick fog, I remembered Plaszow. We were always counted once a day.

Our regular leather shoes were useless in the muddy ground, which we had to pass on the way to work. The girls, who wanted them, received wooden clogs. In the beginning, it felt good, the feet were high off the ground and dry, but after a few steps the mud clung to the wood, the clogs became very heavy and often were bogged down in the mud. It was difficult to keep up with the rest of the people and no one dared to stay behind. If someone slowed down, he had something bad coming to him. If from the Jewish *kapo* it meant a whack with a baton, and if a German noticed someone lagging behind, it was a serious offence.

On the way to work, we walked past a very long barrack called "The Dining Hall". As we walked past, we received our daily portion of bread weighing about 500 grams, but because the bread was dark and heavy, it did not look like very much. At the most, we could get five or six thin slices out of the bread and this was to last us for the next twenty-four hours. To slice the bread we had to borrow a knife from one of the men at work. In addition to the bread, we received what was supposed to be coffee, but in fact it was semolina cooked in water. It was so thin and watery and this served as a morning drink. This was our breakfast, which we ate on our arrival at the factory. At lunchtime, a drum full of hot soup arrived at the factory, which we ate during our lunch break. On our way back from work we were allowed into the dining hall where there were tables and benches. As we walked in we received our portion of hot soup. If we were lucky or if one had *protektzia*, it was thick. If not you received a soup from the top of a drum which was watery. Sometimes people would go to the end of the

queue, hoping they would get the thick part of the soup. This was our supper.

The weeks were slowly dragging on, the days were shorter, and the nights endlessly long. We seldom saw daylight, it was dark when we went to work at 7 a.m. in the morning, and it was dark when we came back about 7.30 p.m. in the evening. There were already some nights when snow fell. In the morning when we had to stand for two hours in the freezing snow, it was torture, yet this was not even winter yet. The wooden clogs gave us a new problem. Before, the mud clung to the wood making it difficult to walk, now, with the snow, it was even worse; it accumulated on the bottom of the sole and every few steps it felt like walking on hard snowballs, or worst still, like on stilts. The snow had to be scraped off every few steps.

The only time we saw daylight was during the "exciting" trip to the *latrina*. We were never allowed to go one at a time. Disregarding nature, we had to wait until five girls, or five men, felt the same way, and no other five could go until the first five came back. We were allowed to stay fifteen to twenty minutes but it was not strictly kept to that time.

Oh *latrina*, one could write an essay to you. The l*atrina* served a multi purpose, firstly, and very understandably, the right purpose. It was also the centre and source of all news. For any information, political or social, this was the place to hear it. Did the Russians move forward? Did the Americans decide to join the war? Are they going to hang Mussolini? In addition, on social issues, did anyone get twenty-five lashes? Was it a man or a woman? Did any one manage to escape? There was more and more and more …

It was also a wonderful place to meet people from other barracks. If two sisters worked in two different barracks, there were emotional scenes, you could compare the l*atrina* to the Grand Metro Station Subway in Paris.

In the barracks where we slept, we had two hours of freedom after work between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. Family and friends could visit each other, also the gate between the men's camp and the women's camp were open and husbands and wives or other relatives could meet together. If nothing drastic had happened that day, the mood was quite jovial. You could hear people talking, even joking and laughing as they walked between the

barracks. At 10 p.m. in the evening, the curfew sounded and everyone had to be in his or her respective barracks. This lasted until 5 a.m. in the morning, when once again the blowing of the trumpet would wake us up.

HIGH HOLIDAYS IN PLASZOW

Adjusting to life in the barracks where all the new rules and regulations had to be strictly observed, took me almost two weeks. We lived without a calendar therefore all dates, and in particular Jewish dates, became vague.

Soon after we had arrived at Plaskow, I suddenly I realized that it was *Rosh HaShanah*. I felt a pang but what could I do about it, except to celebrate the *Yom Tov* in my heart. I lived in a twilight zone, even during working hours. One-half of me was aware that I must pay attention to the sewing in front of me, the other half was dreaming of how *Yom Tov* used to be at home.

As youngsters, our excitement for the approaching *Yomim Tovim* increased daily. The adults, in contrast, entered the preparatory days of *Slichot* with solemn introspection and soul-searching. My parents would rise early, about 3 o'clock in the morning and they would slip quietly out of the house so as not to wake up the sleeping children. One such cold misty autumn morning, I remember feeling sorry for them, as I tucked myself into my warm blanket. Several days later when the *Yom Tov* actually began, the excitement intensified. My father and grandfather would dress in their holiday clothes, black silk coats (*kapotes*) and s*treimlich*, fur trimmed hats. After warmly blessing the children and fervently wishing everyone a happy New Year, they left to go to *shul* (synagogue). My mother and grandmother lit the candles and the atmosphere in our home was filled with holiness.

Sitting now in Plaszow and sewing on Rosh Hashanah, I felt a wrenching inner struggle. My physical, mechanical movements were not me, how could it be me? Would I have dared to transgress so much if I were at home? My conscience stung.

The following week we worked night shift. That was the week of the 10 days of Repentance between *Rosh HaShanah*, and *Yom Kippur* and my mood did not lift. I heard that in the men's camp, there were small groups of the more religious men who managed to organize a *minyan*. In our camp of women only, there was no such solace. On *Yom Kippur* eve instead of

going to *Kol Nidre*, a special evening prayer for forgiveness, we went to work. As we sat at our machines ready to start, I was thinking of ways of how to do as little as possible. I noticed two very religious girls, Rivka Horwitz and Peshke …. reciting some prayers. The management was more lenient during that night. There was not the usual pressure upon us. I joined Rivka and Peshke at the far end of the long rows of machines, and for a little while we were talking about the meaning of *Kol Nidre* and *Yom Kippur*. I went back to my machine and said a little prayer in my heart: "*HaShem!* You know that I remember that tonight is *Yom Kippur* – a day of forgiveness. You know that I would rather be in *shul* – not at work, that I would rather fast, not eat *treif*. Please *HaShem!* Accept my intentions as if they were deeds; please convert my transgressions to *mitzvos*."

On the way back from the nightshift, we were walking wearily, longing for some sleep, when suddenly we became aware of some unusual movements. In the early morning mist, we noticed a group of people standing on a nearby hilltop. It was still half-dark and difficult to discern who these people were. As we approached closer, we noticed that they were men and women, stark naked standing in a circle. All was still until our columns passed. The seconds were ticking away. The scene was obvious. No one uttered a sound. Then … it happened, muffled shots were heard from a short distance. No questions were asked.

Later on in the barracks someone told us what really happened. The barracks were searched for elderly people. The searchers had a list of people above a certain age and this group was being rounded up. When the Germans reached their quota, they led the elderly people to the hilltop and shot them. We walked into our barracks with heads and hearts sunk low. The moment I stepped into my barrack, I was told that the searchers were looking for an elderly person by the name of Mala Berglas, the same name as mine. The searchers were told that there was no older person there by that name, and they left.

Then a forgotten incident in the camp came back to me with full force. I remembered once standing in a queue for our bread ration. My name was called and as I reached out to receive the bread, an elderly person stepped out and said "I am Mala Berglas, who are you?" "So am I", I answered in surprise," How could this be? After a short conversation, we discovered

that there was a distant relationship, however, the most important issue on hand was how not to miss ones portion of bread.

Remembering this incident, I realized that there was *hashgacha pratit* – guidance from above – it had to be my turn to be working nightshift during the search to save my life. With a trembling heart, I climbed up onto the third tier bed and fell asleep.

Four hours later, I woke up it was midday. The first few seconds I did not remember where I was … I had just had a dream - I am at home, it is *Yom Kipur*, we are waiting for our father to come home from *shul*. Suddenly the door opens wide, my father, his *Talit* (the praying shawl) is still on his head and shoulders. He walks quickly to his desk, with a decisive motion puts a stamp on some paper and goes back to *shul* …

What a dream, so close to reality, I could not shake it off. I remained motionless for a few seconds. In my mind, I searched for an explanation. Tradition tells us that *Yom Kippur* is a time for forgiveness and renewal of one's lease on life so to speak. Had this dream been a sign that *HaShem* had stamped my life for another year? I felt once again G-d's guiding hand.

WINTER IN PLASZOW

We dreaded those winter mornings, standing in columns, five deep. The wind was freezing cold; it seemed to cut right through our bones. In this standing position the first and the fifth girl, were the ones to be worse off, the middle three girls had some protection from the cruel wind because we all huddled together. However, because we really cared and tried to be fair, we took turns; it worked well because in each five, the same girls always stayed together. In that little group, we felt responsible for each other. Also if it happened that we had to go outside during the night, with those cold winds blowing, and there was the danger of catching a chill or bladder infection.

I was unfortunate enough to find myself with a burning fever one day. Coming back from work, I could barely reach the barrack. I must have been delirious with fever. I did not know how or when my friends walked me to the "Kranken-Shtube" a barrack turned into a field hospital. A doctor and a

nurse woke me up, at first I thought maybe I had already died. I could not figure out where I was, everything looked so different, clean beds with white linen, bright lights, so quiet, so clean, the doctor and nurse both dressed in white. They noticed my bewilderment. I observed the young doctor's face breaking into a gentle smile. He took my pulse, the touch of his hand was very reassuring. He was young, probably at the very beginning of his medical career, and he was kind looking. The doctor diagnosed my illness as a bladder infection. I was in this hospital for four to five days, during which time, it was very sweet of the four girls from our group of five, to visit me every evening after work.

About two months after my stay in the hospital, it was a week of my night shift, so in the afternoon I stayed in the barrack to keep warm. While I was preparing to go out to work again, I chanced to look out of the window and noticed a group of men walking around, carrying stones. This was the "*Straffen Brigade*". These men were being punished for whatever offence they had committed. Suddenly I noticed a familiar face and after a close look, I recognized the young kind doctor from the hospital. It was difficult to imagine what kind of offence he could have committed. I was so tempted to run out and reassure him that to me he was still the same kind doctor as before, regardless of how haggard and sad he now looked, but that was far too dangerous. Later on, I found out that someone reported him for helping a patient with certain medication. I hope he survived, I wish I knew his name.

Three months passed, and the girls asked each other what was happening? We stopped having the normal women's body functions. Were there some medical additives in the food they gave us to stop the normal body functions. If so, what else were they giving us? We did not discuss how widely spread it was, we did not know whether men were affected in some way, but it gave us a very eerie feeling. Well, whatever it was, it had a long lasting affect, for some of us did not come back to normal until almost the end of 1945, after the liberation.

The atmosphere in the barrack where we slept was not very social. In the morning we were always rushing, half asleep and not very communicative. In the evening, after 12 hours of work and a muddy snowy trip back, there was not much to talk about anyway, unless something drastic had happened.

The girls who were a bit more forceful by nature and a shade louder in voice, crowded around the little iron store, either to boil up something or simply to keep warm. I did not like to push.
On the other hand, the atmosphere at work was completely different. Here we were in touch with people of mixed ages, men and women, working together. People were talking, joking, teasing even romancing. There was Mrs. Sacks with her son, Derek, whose special job was oiling our machines. Whenever he would take a fancy to one of the girls, he would tease her, or pay her a compliment. It was all in a very light-hearted manner. The cutter in our workroom was a Mr. Tierberger, who was a short, energetic gentleman, with grey hair. He seemed very old to me, but he was probably in his mid forties. He survived the war and I met him later in Melbourne, Australia where he went back to his profession. The people at work were from many different backgrounds, much like it should be in a normal human society.

At work we also received another treat. About once a month, we received on egg and one teaspoon of sugar, which was very exciting. Each person was the rightful owner of a cup or mug and a teaspoon. On that day we could hardly wait for our lunchtime break to come. As soon as it was permissible, we eagerly became busy with mixing the egg and sugar together into what we called a "gogel-mogel."

IRENA

We were sitting in a long row and working at our sewing machines, I was fortunate enough to be seated next to Irena. I had already noticed Irena back in Tarnow when we were working together at the hand-sewing table - she was different.

I think she was about twenty-four years old, tall, slim, very graceful with straight blonde hair tied up in a bun at the back of her head, she could very easily have passed as a non-Jewish person, her Polish language was pure and elegant. If she would have known what was coming, she could have probably tried her luck in the outside world. I do not remember her family name. While still in Tarnow we did not strike up any particular friendship, we just worked together. If I happened to walk behind her on our march

back to the ghetto, I observed how lightly she walked, one would think she hardly touched the ground.

Now, in the Plaszow barracks, as we were sitting next to each other at our sewing machines, I noticed some of her inner qualities. She was mature, intelligent, and had received some formal education, I am not sure in which particular faculty. If two girls had a quarrel, this did not happen often, there was not much to quarrel about, but occasionally if a dispute arose, Irena would say, "If you have to quarrel, do it intelligently, stick to the subject and don't call each other names." The dispute ended immediately.

On one occasion, a girl was walking past our chairs. Admittedly the passage was narrow, but this girl kept bumping every chair as she walked by. Irena looked around, leaned over and whispered into my ear "she should walk more intelligently." This expression really set me thinking. Until then I knew that intelligence was the function of the brain, meant for academic matters. To Irena it was a matter of applying herself to every facet of daily life, mental and physical.

From that time on, I started to observe people and their behavior as if through three-dimensional glasses. I noticed their expressions, their reactions and their relationships with others. Did they show respect or disrespect, were they selfish or kind. I was trying to detect from their behaviour, what kind of background they came from. It was as if a completely new study had opened up before me. In my mind I started to separate people I would have liked to be with, from the ones I did not like.

This in turn led me to introspection. Who am I? Into which category would I put myself if I had to make a choice? How are others seeing me? To Regina and Irena, I was the good girl. Both of them were older than I was, they were more mature, and better educated. I felt very inadequate, and then I realized that I was drawn to these two girls because I admired in them what I lacked. Their friendship gave me a small sense of social security. In retrospect I think this was a slow beginning of my growth and development. I mean slow, because it took me years, and not until I married a wonderful man in 1946, did I make quicker strides in this area.

BREAD AS A CHRISTMAS GIFT

December 1943 came, but it did not really matter what month of the year it was We could not celebrate Chanukah and were not thinking of Christmas, except for one bit of news we heard through the grapevine. Herr Madritch wanted to give us something for Christmas. We did not dare speculate what it could be, but when the time came we were told that each one of us would receive two full loaves of bread. **WOW** !!!! This was the most wonderful gift that we could have wished for, it was more precious than gold or silver – to really have enough bread without having to count every crumb. This was great! If any such thing could be called happiness, this moment of holding two loaves of bread in our hands, was happiness.

However, to me, this happiness was weighed down like a rock by the thought that I did not have my mother and my sisters to share the bread with. I went up to the top of my three-tier *pritcher*, held those two loaves of bread in front of me, my thoughts far, far away – when suddenly I became aware that my hot tears were falling onto the bread, one by one.

I could not bring myself to break off a piece of bread and eat it – I did not feel any hunger, nor did I feel any taste, only a sense of empty bitterness.

The end of December and the beginning of January were the coldest months in the Polish winter. Inside the barracks where we slept it was not so cold. Firstly there was the small iron stove which burned with pieces of wood collected from around the barracks which were left behind after the barracks were built. Even the pipe sticking out of the roof gave off some heat. Secondly, the mere mass of so many people together also gave off heat. The steam condensation on the inside and the freezing air on the outside, accumulated on the inside of the ceiling and a thick coating of snow formed right above my head. If I could have been bothered to scrape if off before going to work, it was OK, but if I was running late and left it, the snow melted and dripped onto the little bedding I had.

One cold and dark winter night, it was the week of my night-shift, and we were as usual sitting at the machines and sewing, when suddenly we heard a commotion outside, voices calling, people running. We were petrified. The managers peeked out of the cracks in the doors to see what was happening. A messenger from another barrack came rushing past and told us that men

and women from another factory like ours called *Gross Shneiderei*, were being taken away to a factory in another town, which was a factory similar to ours, producing winter army coats. No one wanted to leave but whoever was caught was forced to go. The Germans chose a dark night so as not to provoke a mutiny from the other barracks because there were cases where families were being separated. Why did they take people from the *Gross Shneiderei* factory and not from ours? I assume because we were under the protection of Herr Madritch.

Many years later when I lived in Melbourne, Australia, I met a woman by the name of Dorcha Roth who was one of those taken in that night raid. She told me the story of how they were taken to Skarrzyskoo. This was a concentration camp where ammunition was manufactured. The Germans needed more people there so they came to Plaszow to collect as many people as they required.

In January 1944 we nearly gave up, and then it was almost the end of the month and we were looking forward to the month of February, hoping that the weather would improve. In my thoughts, each day meant that spring was getting closer. On a sunny day, the ground was wet and slippery. It was very dangerous to walk close to the electrical barbed wire fence with which the camp was surrounded. The slightest touch meant certain death. Inevitably, it did happen one day when some of the girls were asked to clean away the weeds from around the fence. They were bending down, it was very easy to slip on this muddy slippery ground, and one of the girls slipped a bit too close to the fence. As she was trying to prevent herself from falling to the ground, she touched the wire and she was immediately electrocuted.

We were shocked, until then we did not think much about the wire, so far it only meant prevention to the outside world and not a life hazard. It was also a miracle that no one else was killed; it was so easy to stretch out a hand and try to help her. With this entire group of girls standing in the same wet ground it would have been disastrous. The electricity was immediately disconnected, and the poor girl was removed from the fence by some of the paramedics. The rest of that day passed in an unusually quiet mood. I am sure each one of us had our own private thoughts; it was not only the bullet that kills, the Germans were sure to provide us with other means of death.

LE MARSELLAISE

Some days in February can already bring a touch of spring. A sunny spring day, after a long dreary winter, lifts the spirit – spring is synonymous with hope. On that particularly pleasant day, a group of young men went out towards the edge of the camp to dig a trench. It was nice to be in the fresh air, the job was not too hard and the young men were in a good mood. Some were humming a tune to themselves, one of them, probably unaware of what he was whistling, he whistled softly the tune of the Marseilles. There was one German soldier watching this group, he listened and suddenly his expression changed. To him this tune meant a tune of revolution, a tune of communism, that was it – he marched the young man to the barrack of the commander.

We knew how much the Germans hated communism and especially at this time when they were driven back by the Russian army and suffered great casualties. To hear anything that could even vaguely remind them of a revolution was more than this German soldier and the Commander could bear. The more that we were excited about the news from the Eastern Front, the more jittery the Germans became.

From the moment this young man was led away, we knew what to expect. In fact, we were holding our breath waiting to hear a shot, and when it did not come we were hoping for a reprieve. No one expected what the next tragedy was going to be. The black news came later in the day - this unfortunate young man was going to be hanged.

My heart still misses a beat when I recall how this news swept throughout all the barracks like wild fire. The *latrina* and the barracks were like buzzing beehives. We thought that by now, we were immune to shock. I do not think there was one person among the twenty-five or thirty thousand of us, men and women alike, whose hearts did not cry for this young man. What was his unpardonable crime? The next day they built the gallows. We saw them on the way to work but we did not see the execution. Another young life and another great potential snuffed out like a candle.

The Commander of our Camp was a brute. Two names of particularly cruel Commanders come to mind, Frank and Ghetter. I cannot remember whether this was one person or two different Commanders, one with a higher rank and the other an assistant. I think that one of them was the Commander for this part of Poland, Krakow and the whole surrounding area, while the other was the Commander of the Plaszow Camp. I have a feeling that Ghetter was the Commander over the Plaszow Concentration Camp. Many stories were told about him, but one poignant incident proved what kind of base, brutal character this animal in human form was. He had men and women to serve him, to look after all his personal needs, and they were treated only according to his moods, sometimes generously and sometimes cruelly.

His personal pageboy was a sweet eighteen-year-old. He was loyal and fulfilled his duties in a pleasant manner, and the Commander was pleased with him. One night the Commander came home in a bad mood and beat the boy up terribly. When his fury had passed, he threw some bread and other pieces of food to the crying boy as one would to a dog, but the boy was too sore and upset to be able to eat even a bite. A few weeks later, the Commander went out to a party in Krakow for the German officers. It could have been New Year's Eve, but whatever the occasion, he came home quite late at night and drunk. Of course, the boy had everything ready and prepared for him, but he noticed that the Commander was more irritable than usual. Soon after his return the Commander had one of those attacks of fury, and without provocation, he pulled out his gun and shot the boy. Next morning he asked his other servants where the boy was, not remembering what he had done the night before. When he was told that he had shot the boy, he answered "*Shade, er war ein gutte yunge." Too bad, he was a good boy.*

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

The closest I ever came been to this Commander was an incident that still puts a shiver through my spine when I think about it. One day, I was asked to deliver a letter from my Group Commander to the General Commander of the Camp. I already knew that the General Commander was a man of many moods. He could, for instance, at one moment offer you a cup of coffee and biscuit, and the next moment, pull out a gun and shoot you,

without any reason or provocation. He was at that time lord and master over life and death over thousands of men and women in the Camp.

With the letter in my hand, I found myself walking slowly towards the Head Office of the General Commander, which was situate at the far end of the Camp. The nearer I got to the Head Office, the slower my steps became, as if trying to gain time. At last I reached the door and knocked softly. His secretary opened the door and I was led into the Commander's office. I must have been shivering like a leaf, but was unaware of it. My heart was beating so loud that the sound of it was like far away bells in my ears. I slowly handed over the envelope, almost withering under his piercing eyes, and wondering what kind of mood this letter would trigger off in him.

In an acute state of fear all reasoning stops – it is not like a sudden fright that passes quickly – it is the deep down fear which makes every second seem like an hour. I was in this state of mind, when I noticed his hand slowing moving towards his gun, and with an ironic smile pointing the gun directly at me. I froze, not a word was spoken – silence – except the growling noise of his huge Alsatian dog sitting in the corner. I do not know how long this took, it could have lasted only a few seconds, but to me the time seemed endless.

I heard a voice asking "How old are you?" "19 years old, sir" I replied. His face took on a more humane expression and still holding his gun towards me, I heard him say "run for your life". That was not the reason that made me run, it was the instinct of survival that dictated my every move. Would there have been the slightest hesitation on my part, he could have changed his mind. Stumbling out of his office, I ran quickly towards our barrack. The extra adrenalin in my blood made me run as I had never run before. It was only afterwards that the full realization came to me of how close I was to death that day. Once again, I felt the protective hand from heaven.

I once heard Rabbi Zev Leff speaking and he mentioned Darwin's theory of evolution. Charles Darwin lived at about the same time as Rabbi Israel Salanter. When Rabbi Salanter heard of this new theory, he said "No wonder Darwin thinks that the human being evolved from animals. The people he knew behaved, morally and socially, more like sophisticated animals than moral human beings." If I were to compare the brutality of this

Commander and all those who participated in destroying our People, they certainly outdid even the cruelest animals.

The experience of looking right into a gun pointed directly at me had left me as weak as a rag doll. I felt drained physically and emotionally. It must have been my first touch of desperation. The remainder of that day and all night I was not interested in anything, I could not be bothered with eating or washing or changing clothes. I remained on my *pritcher*, and my sleep was interrupted with the memory of what had happened during the day. At times, I thought it was a nightmare.

Early next morning I had to get up whether I wanted to or not. I got up, prepared to go to work as usual. My actions were mechanical, I felt slower than usual, so Regina kept urging me on, but my mind seemed to function on another level. In this frame of mind I went to work, sat at my sewing machine, automatically picked up the pieces I had to sew, and did not communicate much with the other girls. All throughout the day I was in a subdued mood. Towards the evening, I felt as if this mood was lifting a bit, as if a heavy blanket was being lifted off my head and shoulders. The following night I slept better, and gradually I was beginning to come back to normal.

A NIGHT IN THE SNOW

February is still very cold in Poland. Except for a few days in between, the rest of the month had a lot of snow in that particular year of 1944. Sometimes the snow kept falling all night, and by the morning, there was more than ten inches of snow in front of the barrack door. Of course it was impossible to open the door so, in addition to the morning rush to get ready quickly so as to be on time at the counting place, we had to shovel away the snow which had piled up overnight.

To avoid the rush every morning, and to avoid being late for the counting place, which was the responsibility of the *Block Eldeste*, she decided to make the girls do night shifts in order to remove the snow. We alternated shifts and on one of those very frosty nights, it was my turn to be outside. Well, that was the longest night in my life.

The first hour was not so bad, the blood circulation kept me reasonably warm. But after that first hour, it seemed as if time stood still. There was only one question on my mind. Will this night **never** be over? Dawn seemed to be years away. It is so true that the concept of time is only relative to what one is doing. I used to complain that the nights were not long enough, that five o'clock in the morning was too early to get up. After a night duty out in the frost, shoveling the snow and counting the minutes and seconds, I did not complain any more. I realized that no matter how bad things seemed to be, yet there was something worse still. Are we able to assess how much suffering a person can endure? Where are the limits? Even a writer of horror stories could not have imagined the indescribable suffering that was yet to come.

Because of those night shifts in the snow, I received some frostbites on my legs. Thinking of it now, I realize what a miracle it was that the wounds did not become infected, considering that they were open sores and there was no hygienic treatment. When I think of the many things that could have gone wrong, the many situations that could have ended in tragedy, I can clearly see the guidance from *HaShem* and the help from heaven that was constantly there. The sores on my legs gradually healed, but it took a long time, and for many years afterwards the scars were still visible.

A VISIT FROM A HIGH RANKING COMMISSION

One particular day, nervousness was felt all over the Camp, the leaders of the Camp were running to and fro. The barracks had to be perfectly clean, the "streets" between the barracks were also swept clean. Even the SS men and regular soldiers, who would usually not come into the inner area of the Camp, came in that day, looking and checking everywhere. It became obvious that some high-ranking Commission was due to arrive. On that day we did not go to work so that meant that both shifts, the night shift and the day shift, were standing together on the Counting Place. We were counted, and then recounted. The Block *Eldeste* kept walking up and down her column, reassuring herself that her numbers were correct, as if her life depended on it. It probably did. Every single person had to be there, even the sick.

In one of the barracks there was a girl about eighteen years old, I used to call her Marilka. She was originally from Krakow but her family came to Tarnow when Krakow became *Yudenrein.* There were her parents, an elder sister and a younger brother. I only knew Marilka because she was a school friend of my cousin, Zunier. Since my uncle lived with us, Marijlka would often come to our home to visit Zunier. She was beautiful with gentle features, shining eyes, a complexion of "peaches and cream" and a face crowned with a mop of curly black hair. I did not know the rest of her family, but I heard from my Uncle that they were fine *Balebatishe* people. In Plaszow, she was by herself because her family had been deported. Between the period when they left Krakow and the time she came to Plaszow, she had contracted a rapidly developing leukemia. Of course, without treatment and medication, her condition deteriorated from day to day.

On the day that everyone was outside at the Counting Place, Marilka had to be carried down by two of her friends. I can still see the picture. She looked like a China doll, with her delicate, drawn features, her white paper thin skin and her eyes so tired looking. I remember feeling very sorry for her, if only her mother could have been there to help her. This was just another family who vanished without a trace. Marilka passed away in Plaszow and is probably buried there somewhere.

I do not ever remember so many people on the Counting Place as on that day when a high-ranking Commission was expected. Suddenly a hush was felt in the air. They had arrived, and instinctively we became stiff and very still, almost holding our breaths. Now who was this high-ranking Commission? Why did they come to look us over? What was behind this special visit? Was it going to bring a change for the better or for the worse? No one knew the answers. As they walked slowly past the columns, we did not dare move a muscle. From the corner of my eye, I saw three figures, two men and a woman. The woman walked in the middle. As they came closer I noticed their expressionless faces. Only the woman's face seemed to show any interest. She was not tall, with hair almost to her shoulders, and a long narrow soft army hat perched on her head. I also noticed three stripes on her hat and on the cuffs of her military jacket, and there was a hard expression on her face and in her eyes. I did not want to look too long so as not to attract her attention.

They finished inspecting the women's section of the Camp and moved over to where the men stood. When they had left our section, we dared to lift our heads and with interest followed what was going on over at the men's side. As they were walking slowly past, they seemed to be looking for something specific. They would stop in front of a man who was well built, young with handsome features, and they would then ask him to stand aside.

They continued looking and then started separating some men. It would always be a young, handsome man, not too thin. I am not sure how long this selection took, but I think that by midday we were allowed to return to our barracks. What a relief it was after all the time we had been standing since five o'clock in the morning.

The group of young men was led away. We thought at that time how lucky they were, maybe they were designated to some good jobs, in some nice comfortable offices. By the evening, a rumour had spread throughout the Camp that the woman was the notorious Elsa Koch. It was only after the War that we found out what had happened to that group of young and healthy men. Elsa Koch collected many such groups of good-looking men from other Camps and in a fiendish, inhuman way she had them all killed. Their skins were then used to make lampshades and other such artifacts. In Jerusalem, there is a museum where those artifacts are on display. I have not yet had the courage to visit the museum. My friends from the States, Ellen and Victor Dorman, on a visit to Jerusalem, went to see this place. When I met them both later that day, they were still crying. During her trial for war crimes, her American friends protected her.

There were often such selections when the Germans needed people for special jobs. On one such occasion, the German Officer asked if there was any one who knew a number of languages. One woman in her mid-thirties stepped forward and said she was a Professor of Languages in Hungary. She was proficient in nine European languages. The German Officer told her that she would be working in a comfortable office, and she was given nice clothes to wear and was driven away.

After the selection by Elsa Koch, we did not envy anyone who was given special treatment. We had good reason to suspect that whatever the

Germans had in mind, it was not for the benefit of the person chosen for that specific job. So it was in the case of this Hungarian Professor. She was indeed given a big office with comfortable conditions. Her special task was to translate into German important documents which the Germans had confiscated in the various countries they occupied. This took about three months. When she completed her work, she was shot. She knew too many secrets.

Wise words of my dear mother came to mind when I heard what had happened to this young woman. My mother used to warn us never to volunteer for anything. Maybe this woman could have survived the war if she had not volunteered for what seemed to be a great opportunity which led to her death.

SPRING IN PLASZOW

Spring was already in the air, the days were becoming markedly longer. In the mornings, we did not have to get dressed in the dark anymore. By the time we went down to the Counting House, it was almost full daylight. I remember back home, before the War, the awakening of spring would bring a sense of renewal. I used to watch the first blade of grass trying to push its tiny pointed head through the snow, and the first tiny buds of the early spring flowers starting to appear on the seemingly dead branches. Spring used to bring with it nostalgia and excitement, nostalgia for the memories of the previous summer spent in Ryglice, and excitement for what the coming summer would be like. There was a definite change in my emotions at springtime. A year in a teenager's life of growing up is quite a long time.

Even in Plaszow the spring air also brought back that feeling of longing – longing for the past or longing for the unknown future, if there would be a future? I wonder if others felt the same, but to me the awakening of nature had somehow awakened me, as if from a long winter sleep.

We did not have a calendar, if we would have had one, it would have told us that it was around mid-March 1944. We certainly did not have a Jewish calendar, but we knew it was approaching the time of Purim. It was exciting even though we had no way of celebrating Purim. I was not aware of what was happening on the men's side of the Camp. They might have had a group

of religious men who either managed to bring with them a *Megila* into the Camp, or if one of them knew the *Megila* by heart, he could write it out on paper and read it to the group to whoever was interested in hearing it. Paper could only be obtained from the office if one had *protektzia*. However, among the girls, there was a very small number of strictly religious girls and no one had a *Megila*. One girl, I remember clearly that her name was Rivka Horowitz and her close friend, whose name I do not remember, would have been capable of reading the *Megila* if they had a copy.

I am happy to report that Rivka Horowitz and her friend survived the War. Rivka married a Rabbi and organized a school for Jewish Studies for girls in Frankfurt after the War. Afterwards they settled in Belgium where she now lives. I do not know where her friend settled. If Rivka ever reads these pages, I would be very happy to make contact. Rivka and her friend were students of the famous Sarah Shenirer in Krakow.

April 1944 marked eight months of our life in Plaszow but it seemed more like eight years. The pre-war past became more distant with every day. The yesterdays disappeared and there were no tomorrows. Only the present counted and the only concern was will there be enough food to help us survive if there would be a tomorrow. Personally, I did not lose my identity and the connection to my roots but, with the home influence and social environment gone and with little life-experience, I often felt bewildered. Yet, I never allowed myself to become attached to a group with ideas completely contrary to my upbringing. It was not a problem of ideology; it was a gradual slipping away from home standards.

The weather became warmer and our coats were not needed very much. At work we noticed a slacking off. There was no urgency to send as many winter army coats as before. The weather was warmer and the German army was pulling back from the Russian front. *Pesach* came and went but I do not have a clear recollection of what we did, and if we managed with or without bread. Did we exchange bread for potatoes or for a bowl of soup? For some reason the *Pesach* in Oederon is more vivid in my memory than the one in Plaszow.

Although the weather was much warmer, the ground was still a bit muddy and slushy, but we did not complain. We were glad that the winter was

behind us. It was such a pleasure to walk in the fresh air, the sun already giving off its gentle warmth. Our trips to the *latrina* became more frequent. We were anxious to hear the latest news on the political front. There were constant reports of meetings on the International scene, but for us it all sounded very hollow. We were still behind the barbed wire.

MY BIRTHDAY

April 28, 1944 was my twentieth birthday. If this day had any special meaning, it was only for me alone. I did not tell anyone. All my friends in the Camp were newly acquainted, they did not know me from home, and the last thing on our minds, under the circumstances, was to remember another person's birthday. I was not disappointed because even at home our family did not make a big fuss on birthdays. My mother would give us a little treat and my father would tease us about being a **whole** year older.

I used to think that being twenty years old was pretty old and yet, I had hardly known what life was all about. I decided that this special day must be different, so I celebrated my birthday in my heart. It was the first of many such "heart" celebrations. On this twentieth birthday, I allowed myself to daydream. My daydream on that day was about when I survived, if I would get married? Would I live in Poland or find some members of my family, uncles, cousins who lived overseas? I vaguely knew of an uncle in America and a cousin in Australia. In my mind, I tried to recollect all the nice couples I knew and from among them to choose one couple that would serve as an example of my future married life.

SHMUEL BECK

Shmuel Beck was my mother's cousin but a younger contemporary of my mother's generation. Shmuel married a lovely young woman, Yochevet, from a small town over the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia. From the time they got married they had a problem since he was a Polish citizen and she was Czechoslovakian. Because of the political situation between the two countries, he, as a Pole, was not allowed to live on the Czechoslovakian side of the border. On the other hand, she had a business and a home in Czechoslovakia and could not leave everything and go and settle in Poland. Every time the police would catch him, they would send

him back to Poland. He had an elderly father in Tarnow who lived with an older unmarried sister, Lea. She used to visit us quite often when I was a child. Each time he was caught, Shmuel would stay with his father and his sister for a while and then he would cross the border illegally trying to hide from the Authorities even in his own house.

This kind of life went on for about five or six years. I think it was in 1938, Austria and Czechoslovakia were already in German hands, when Shmuel and his family at last decided to go and settle in Poland. In the meantime, his father had passed away, so his sister, Lea, did not mind to accommodate them in her apartment.

Shmuel's wife was expecting twins at the time they came to live in Tarnow. I was only fourteen years old when the twins were born and I was asked to help in the hospital room and later at home. If I remember correctly, the twins were a boy and a girl. For the few hours every day I spent with them, I observed what a beautiful relationship this couple had. They would call each other the most affectionate names to express their love. They cared so much for each other. They could not do enough to please each other. Even the most difficult circumstances and conditions did not diminish their inner happiness. The outside world had no influence on their inner lives.

In the daydreams I had on my twentieth birthday in Plaszow, I remembered Shmuel and Yochevet Beck. Unfortunately they all perished, Shmuel, Yochevet, their three children (the twins and a son), and his sister Lea. All of them were deported even before the Ghetto was established.

May 1944 was full of blossoming spring and a preview of summer. Walking to work in the morning, and coming back in the evening was not such a dreaded experience anymore. It was good to stretch one's legs after twelve hours of sitting at the sewing machine. We would also fill our lungs to capacity with fresh air. When at work we could take our lunch outside and find a sunny spot to sit and eat our food.

During those lunch breaks, I would gaze over the electric barbed wire fence and wonder – how did those people, down in that outer suburb of Krakow look at us? Did we appear to them like some kind of caged animals? Did

they feel sorry for us? If they ever did, they never displayed it, not even with a glance.

Looking down I observed the little houses where each family lived, with small gardens in front of the houses, strips of lawn on the sidewalk, so quiet, so neat and so untroubled – a far cry from the kind of life we lived in. As it was lunchtime, a young woman came out of one of the houses with a baby in a stroller and a shopping basket. She stopped by the next house to have a chat with her neighbour. I looked on in amazement, I had not seen such a scene in a long, long time. I whispered to myself, "Is there really a normal world outside where families live together, and where children are playing?" It was like watching an unbelievable movie. **Where** are all our children, parents, neighbours? Those small gardens with their blossoming flowers did not bring happiness to me as they used to. My heart was heavy as if someone had poured lead into it. The sharp contrast to the way we were living in Plaszow and what kind of life there was down below in that quiet suburb, brought back with full force the tragedy we were experiencing. Not that we ever forgot, but the daily dull routine had pushed the awareness of the situation slightly below the level of full consciousness. Some of the girls were sitting around and chatting. I was transfixed and could not take my eyes away from the scene below. Soon we would have to go back to our machines, once more to become robots without freedom of movement or freedom of choice.

That same evening, on our way from work, as we passed the dining barrack we were told to finish the meal, but remain there in the "street", a kind of main street which was paved with the Jewish tombstones. Each group, as they arrived from work was told the same thing, so in a little while we were standing, once more in columns, waiting for some kind of high-ranking German Officers to come. It was evening, the *kapos* (Jewish policemen or orderlies) kept us in line but not as strictly as at the time when Elsa Koch came.

Eventually some officers came, one was of higher rank, and the other two I think were of lower ranks. One of the lower ranking officers shot once into the ground, to frighten us a bit, or we thought someone had stepped out of line. We heard the shot but as no one fell to the ground, we thought it was only into the air. After all the standing was over, we started walking up

towards the barracks where we slept. Suddenly, one of the girls walking near me noticed a sharp pain in her ankle, she looked down and saw blood. She thought a stone had hit her, but in fact, the bullet had hit the ground and bounced back into her ankle piercing the bone. The girl went to the field hospital where she was treated, but because of malnutrition her wound did not heal. She remained in pain and with a limp. I dread to think what happened to her when she arrived in that condition at Auschwitz.

Plaszow, which until then had been considered a Labour Camp, gradually turned into a proper Concentration Camp. Larger groups of people from other Camps were arriving from time to time. They wore those striped pajama type uniforms, their hair was shaven off, and they had this degradingly hungry look in their eyes. Even the way they walked was pitiful to watch. In comparison with them, we seemed to have been better off.

One day a truckload of men was brought into the Camp. The men were standing in the trucks close together because they were chained to each other. The truck sped by, towards the part of the Camp that we called execution hill. Soon we heard many, many shots. We were told later that these were Polish university students. The Germans wanted to get rid of them in case of a rebellion. They were shot one by one and as each one fell, he pulled the next one with him. We did not actually see this execution, but knowing what was going on upset us greatly.

The truth was that we had suffered a great deal at the hands of some of the Polish people, yet at moments like that, we did not think of what they did to us. At that moment, those young men were as much victims of the German murderous machine as we were.

My time in Plaszow brought a flood of memories from Ryglice. During my school years, the month of June was always anticipated with great excitement, it was the end of the school year and the beginning of a nine week long summer vacation. Even though the school year lasted until 28 June, the exams were over and the lessons were spent reading poetry and going on outings into the country. However, nothing was more exciting than the prospect of going to Ryglice, the village where my paternal grandparents lived. There I experienced real country life, it was like going back in time a thousand years.

In June and part of July, the wheat and rye were still in the fields. It was like a sea of golden yellow stalks swaying in the breeze. We loved to run through the narrow walking lanes, sometimes playing hide and seek. The feeling of nature all around us was exhilarating. We did not know at the time that poppies were of a narcotic quality. They grew between the wheat and rye, and now and then we could see a single brilliantly shining red or blue poppy. We would collect them and make a wreath to put on our heads and pretend we were brides.

Now, standing outside our barrack in Plaszow during our lunch break, I gazed into the far horizon. The same sun was shining, the same blue sky, and the same gentle breeze that had swayed the wheat and rye stalks was here, but what a difference between those far away, care free days and the life in Plaszow.

At work lately we were taking it a bit easier, there was no pressure anymore, and every week there was less and less work for us. A rumour started circulating that our factory might close down. What we did not know at the time was that preparations for closing the factory had already begun, and even though we did not leave the Plaszow Concentration Camp until, I think, around mid July, plans were already being made to evacuate us. Rumours came to us via people who managed to come from the Russian side of Eastern Poland that over there the Jews were already free. Many, who were underground or in private bunkers hidden by some Polish families, had their first taste of freedom. Oh, how we hoped that this would soon come to us.

However, the Russians did not progress any further westwards and we had to suffer yet another year before the war ended. Millions of people could have been saved if the war had ended then. However, the world was indifferent to what was happening. Someone from the Jewish underground managed to smuggle out a letter of an eye witness account of the atrocities being committed by the SS. The letter was sent to England and the reply received was “Well written but unbelievable.” That was it and no other reaction.

July 1944 was very hot but we preferred this to the cold of winter. After a long period of malnutrition, our resistance was low and we did not have the energy to drag ourselves up the hill to go to the factory barracks and the walk took us longer. The heat also affected the tempers of our k*apos* who took us to and from work. It was their responsibly that we arrive at work on time so they kept urging us on in a language that was far from proper for the ears of young girls. I had never before heard the names we were called, and I did not know their meanings. When some of the girls started crying I laughed. I knew for sure that those offensive names could not have been meant for me, so I did not listen. I quickened my step because often blows accompanied the unsuitable words from the k*apo's* baton. We could well imagine the base character of a person who happily fulfilled his duties as a k*apo*.

I think it was the third week in July when we were told that we would be leaving Plaszow. As hard as Plaszow seemed to us, with its daily problems and fears, yet, after almost a year we felt settled, a kind of emergency home. Even our nightly return to our *pritchers* for ten long and difficult months had given us a feeling of attachment to this tiny space. "It has been proven that all living things are creatures of habit" so we were told by my mom. When we walk into a restaurant and take a seat at one of the tables, we consider it "our table". Any time we visit that same restaurant, we will go straight to "our table". So now in Plaszow, we felt it was our barrack, our *pritcher* and once again we were being uprooted.

Our deportation from Plaszow was not the final liquidation of the Camp. Only a group of two thousand women, most of whom worked for Madrich, were in this transport. We were not told where we were going, even though I am sure the k*apos* and our Management knew that the destination was Auschwitz. The very sound of this word gave off an echo of a death sentence. On the day of departure from Plaszow we went once more and for the last time to the Counting Place. I was as usual with our group of five women, amongst them Regina and Irena.

Once more we walked to the train wagons, a reminder of the train which took us from Tarnow to Plaszow. However, this time there were no emotional scenes just a feeling of resignation. It was not fear, because we did not know where we were going, it was more like a feeling of

helplessness. I believe that the defense mechanism in our bodies had created a thick shield and we were less able to laugh or cry. From long periods of keeping our emotions under control, they were frozen. Is that why most of the time, even now, I am not able to cry in the presence of another person? I was completely unaware of the state of my stifled emotions. We had become like robots – we just followed orders without questions and without complaints.

As we were climbing into the train wagons, it was very hot. Again they managed to squeeze eighty of us per wagon, with standing room only. With the heat inside the wagon and the sun burning mercilessly from outside, we felt we were going to faint and suffocate. Some started screaming but instead of letting us out, the guards decided to cool the wagons off by pouring water onto the wagons with large fire hoses. Because of the intense heat, a cloud of steam arose from the wagons, but luckily they did not close the doors until the last minute before the train started moving forward. The cold water from outside and the movement of air through the little windows inside made our breathing a little easier. No one spoke and the only sound we heard was that of the turning wheels underneath the wagons.

To alleviate the discomfort of standing all the time, we arranged between ourselves that while some were standing, others could squat down and after a while, we exchanged the positions. The train ride was not very long so when we arrived at Auschwitz it was still daylight.

I am trying to remember now what I was thinking at the moment I was being transferred from one difficult situation to one that might be even worse. In a state of fear and anxiety, I became aware of the hope that had lain dormant in my subconscious during all the time in Plaszow that my mother, sisters and other members of my family were alive. I recalled the deep disappointment in my heart when I arrived in Plaszow and was told that no transport had arrived there from Tarnow. That meant they had been taken elsewhere.

Did I really hope to find them in Auschwitz now? Was it a faint hope against hope or wishful thinking? Later on when I realized what went on in Auschwitz to transports arriving there from all over Europe - the segregations and liquidations – I knew for sure that even if they had arrived

there, by now it was long forgotten history. It was only after the war, I heard that most of the people deported from the Tarnow ghetto in September 1943 were driven to a nearby forest and shot – men, women and children. I did not have the courage or means to search and find out exactly what happened to my family there. To this day I have not met even one member of my family from this deportation. My mind refuses to accept the fact that the thousands of men, women and children of our city have been murdered, annihilated and destroyed. In my mind's eye I can still see them marching out of the ghetto gate, they were, well, maybe even hopeful that their destination was some kind of work place. Now I understand why for many years after the war I was still hoping that one day I would find some survivors. Not knowing how and where they perished, kept my hopes alive.

AUSCHWITZ

We arrived in Auschwitz, or rather Birkenau Concentration Camp in the late afternoon during the last week of July 1944. The heat had subsided somewhat, and it was good to be out of the hot cramped train wagon. As in Plaszow, we had to stand in a column, five girls in a row. We looked around. Opposite the railway tracks there were benches, and between the benches there were neatly and carefully kept small plots of flowerbeds. To welcome us there was a smartly dressed music band of girls. I remember noticing the violin, maybe there were other instruments as well. The girls wore navy blue uniforms, their hair neatly tied up in a ponytail style with a pretty navy blue big bow at the back of their heads. We looked around in bewilderment, this could not be Auschwitz! How deceiving their show was. Very soon, we were to find out what the real picture was. We walked a short distance towards the barracks, but before we could enter the barracks where we were to sleep, we had to go through the most degrading experience we ever had to endure.

I remember so clearly, a huge barrack. As we entered we had to undress, take off absolutely everything. In addition, if one had a purse, a *siddur* (prayer book), a comb or money, everything had to be thrown down onto this huge pile of clothing. People had things that were precious to them but they had no choice but to leave all their belongings behind, as we were urged to go into the next room. That was the room where a number of girls stood ready waiting for us with small hair razor machines in their hands.

We queued up, each one of us. It took about two minutes to have my hair shaved off completely, and there was no time to think as we were pushed further on to a room with showers. The showers were placed high above us, so that three or four girls could stand under one of the showers. We were probably given a small piece of soap and a towel, because our next stop was to march in front of SS officers.

This was the most revolting experience for me. Having been brought up in a religious home where nakedness was never seen nor ever talked about, where modesty was taught from a very young age, and here we were parading naked in front of a number of men. I wished then the earth would open up and swallow me. We were a group of young, reasonably healthy women. I do not remember anyone having to stand aside, we all passed the doctors' examination and so we were sent to the next room, which was the place where we were given clothes consisting of one dress only. The people who were dispatching the clothes, through either indifference or spite, would give a tall person a short dress and a shorter person a long dress. One may ask why we did not exchange the dresses with each other. It was simply because the shorter person with a longer dress felt much more comfortable and would not part with it.

By the time this initiating procedure was finished, we were allowed to enter our sleeping barrack. It was huge, and when you stood in the front, you could not see the other end. Once again, we had those three tiered *pritchers*, rows of them on each side of the barrack as far as the eye could see. In the centre, there was a passage about a metre wide for walking through. If we complained in Plaszow for lack of space because we had only about seventy-five centimetres per person, at least we could turn around without touching the other person. Here we were literally squashed like sardines, not only touching but also actually pressing against each other, so that if during the night one of us wished to turn over, all of us, ten or twelve on this *pritcher*, had to turn around. There was absolutely nothing under us on the bare boards and nothing to cover us. It was still summer, so it did not bother us. I wonder what would have happened if we had stayed over winter.

Next morning we went outside very early, even before daylight. What I saw was a picture that haunted me for years. Every time I think of it a sob

escapes from the very depth of me. All I saw was a sea of shaven heads. We did not recognize each other, we called out the names that were familiar to us and only then we were able to identify each other. The impression, which was deeply imprinted in my memory, was one of a child lost in a strange queer world. I wanted to burst out crying but I could not, there was only a sob, which stayed inside me. Irena was the first one to come to my side and put her arm around my shoulders. I was so grateful to her for this reassuring gesture. Soon the others from our group of five found us, and once again we stood together. Little by little, we began to recognize the other girls, so that the following morning was not so frightening.

The morning started with the familiar routine of standing endlessly to be counted. After about two hours the morning soup arrived. It was a watery mixture of some kind of grain or semolina, which was brought to us in a big bowl and given to the first girl in each row, who drank some of it and passed the bowl on. We were really lucky that our group of five girls was considerate; no one took more than her share. We had no utensils to eat this little bit of watery soup that was to last us until lunchtime. This was far less than we were used to getting in Plaszow, so by mid-morning, I felt cramps in my stomach and later in the day, I had a splitting headache. I kept close to Regina, and I mentioned this to her. How she managed to get some extra bread, I do not know. She must have managed to carry some money past the Commission. In any case, the little she had, she shared with me.

For the remainder of that day we wandered around the enclosed area aimlessly. We were not allowed to go inside the barracks during the day. The midday meal consisted of a thicker soup with some potatoes and bits of meat floating in it. This time we received wooden spatulas instead of a spoon. It only proves how low we had sunk that when someone made a remark, “What if it is human flesh?” we did not even shudder. I still could not shake off that first impression of those many, many shaven heads moving around on thin bodies that could only be compared to many sticks with round objects on top. I used to have nightmares, I could not think of those figures as people, only heads with expressionless faces.

New groups of people were arriving almost daily. One day a large group of Italian Jews arrived. They went through the same initiating procedure as we had. Men and women were put in separate camps separated only by barbed

wire. Next morning after their arrival, they had the same problem as we did with recognizing each other because of the shaven heads. Suddenly we heard them calling out over the fence, "Abramis, Yacobo" and some other Jewish sounding names. The day after their arrival a rumor spread through the camp that there was a segregation, which meant that when whole families were deported together, the younger people were separated from the elders and children.

We were new in the camp and we did not understand what segregation meant but the women who were in the camp much longer than us already knew that segregation meant there would be burning. There in Auschwitz we saw two large chimneys against the evening sky with smoke coming out and spreading towards the horizon. At first, we did not even realize what was going on until the more experienced ones told us. We then realized where the smell was coming from. The smell of burning flesh was unmistakable; it haunts me to this day. If ever I singe my sleeve over the gas flame by accident, my memory goes back to those days in Auschwitz.

We were told that during the time we were there, the Crematoria were not used as frequently as before. During the five weeks while I was in Birkenau, I think it was only twice that this sickening smell filled the air. It was only after the war that I found out how the Germans lured people into the gas chambers. Those gas chambers were made to look like shower rooms. Protruding from the ceiling were several round flat tin heads through which water was supposed to come, but instead of water, gas was pumped through the pipes. Before the people were led into those chambers they were told that they were going to have a shower and they were given soap and towels. They only realized with horror what was happening when the gas descended on them.

A few days after the group arrived from Italy, another group of women from Holland arrived. One of my Aunts who lived in Holland might have been amongst that group. These women came straight off the train, still in their own clothes and not yet shaven. For some reason they were marched through our section of the camp, maybe they were on their way to the initiating procedure. One of the women apparently did not follow orders so as a punishment she had to run after the SS officer who was riding a bicycle. In the process of running, she fell on her knees, picked herself up, and had

to run again, then fall down again, continuously, all the way throughout the length of the camp. I do not know what happened to her afterwards.

Day after day, the aimlessness of the routine was repeated. We were woken up early in the morning, washed our hands and faces with water from a tap outside the barrack, lined up and waited two hours for a small portion of watery soup for breakfast. Noon time seemed ages away, the time in between was sometimes spent by washing ourselves under the tap from top to toe, including the dress we wore without taking it off. Then we had to stand for hours in the hot August sun to dry the dress and ourselves.

After about a week of our stay in Birkenau, an order was issued to line up in a single row, like a queue. In front of one of the barracks, a table and two chairs were set up. On the table, there were bottles of ink and something that looked like a large sized writing pen, or a syringe, but with a needlepoint. Two female SS officers came to the table and called out to the first girl in line to step forward. She had to stretch out her left forearm, and a number was tattooed on her arm. There was no sign of hygiene, no cotton wool buds with antiseptics, nothing. The SS women simply went from one person to the next, using the same needle. She was so busy imprinting us with permanent numbers, that she did not even look up to see if we were real people or some kind of rubber dummies.

When my turn came the number was A-21485. She kept pricking the skin of my left forearm deeply enough to make sure that this permanent ink was really sinking in. The pricks were a little painful but not distressing. Droplets of blood appeared above the pricks and when they dried up, they formed a crust. For the lucky ones, the healing continued under the crust until after about a week or ten days, the crust started peeling off. However, there were those girls with whom it did not heal so well and some spots became infected.

One particular girl with very fair skin, unfortunately for her, received a dress with a wide-open neck. The dress almost hung on her shoulders, so the exposed neck and shoulders became sun burnt while standing in the hot August sun. Blisters had formed all over her body and they became worse looking every day with nothing to cure them, not even a little bit of salty water. In addition to this, her arm also became infected from the tattoo, and

she became very desperate. Probably she was also in pain, and must have realized that she would never pass another Doctor's Commission in that condition. So one morning after the so-called breakfast soup, she plucked up courage, or it was the result of desperation. In a matter of seconds she ran for the electrical wires and, of course, she was killed.

From then on we were numbers only, no personal names, no family, and no sense of belonging. What does a name represent? A name has a meaning, a name represents the person to whom it is given, and a family name proves and secures a place for the individual within the family. In the Hebrew literature, we see how a person's name also reflects that individual's inner qualities. Just a small example – David, which can be translated as friend, indeed reflected David's inner capability for true friendship as with Yonatan. On the other hand, there is a name like Naval that perfectly described his character.

What are numbers? They are most useful for some things but a number given to a person as a means of identification strips that person of his individuality. Can he call his friend or brother by that person's number? We looked at our tattooed arms and wondered, if we do survive, who in the outside world would know who we were, and if we did not survive who would ever know what we were?

Days passed, the look of those countless bare shaven heads bothered me very much. I saw them during the day and I saw them in my nightmares. At times I felt like screaming and wanted to run away. One night, it could have been during our third week in Birkenau, I had a dream, once again concerning those heads. We were swimming in a muddy brownish river or pond and in my sleep, I was terrified of all those heads and the dirty brown water almost reaching to my chin. I could not scream and I could not run. The look of those heads, also my own head, had a kind of magnetic hold on me. In the dream, I felt as if someone took hold of my right wrist and the next moment I felt as if I was sitting on a green lawn outside the muddy pond. In the morning I could not understand the dream but it remained very vivid in my mind. I am ashamed to admit now that every time I see a young woman with her hair completely shaved off, as is the custom in some religious groups, I can see that dream all over again.

The section of the Birkenau camp where we lived was called a transit camp. We were waiting for a call for workers from one of the ammunition factories in Germany or elsewhere. Therefore, this camp became the gathering point of deportees from all over Europe. One day a small group of women arrived from the Island of Sardinia, which is part of Italy. After they went through the procedure of shaving etc., they were marched past our barrack, probably towards a barrack at the further end of the camp. I stood there and observed them from the back as they passed by. The shape of their heads was different, with their hair shaven off, one could clearly notice that their heads were narrow and altogether they were all small to medium height, very narrow across the shoulders and thin graceful bodies. I wish I knew what happened to them in the end.

Almost daily, we heard what was happening in other parts of the camp. In one of those incidents, a group of women was sent to sort out the clothing that had been left lying around after segregation - by now everyone knew what that meant. One woman was sorting out some children's clothing when suddenly she noticed a small sweater that she herself had knitted for her little girl. Of course, she understood what had happened to her child, and she became hysterical and fainted. We felt for this woman the terrible grief she was suffering, but only momentarily, our emotions were already like wood.

Did we react when we saw every morning a pile of naked bodies that were stacked up against the barrack wall? They looked just like the wooden logs for winter lying against house walls. They used to shoo us out of the barracks early every morning so that two orderlies could search the *pritchers* for bodies that had not survived the night. A big truck would then come to collect all those naked bodies. Even in death they were disgraced. At least they could have left them in the dresses they wore.

We stood there watching the men work as if we were watching workers doing their regular job of loading logs of wood onto a truck. We stood as if rooted to the ground and watched as the bodies of girls were thrown onto the truck by the men, themselves Jewish, without the slightest feeling of pity. Those girls had still been alive the day before, but did not have the energy to carry on. Even from us, there was not a sound, not a tear or a sigh, we stood and watched expressionless.

The tears that should have accompanied all those nameless bodies, I feel running down my cheeks now. The sigh that should have been the good-bye to those pure souls, escapes from the depth of my heart now. I feel as if I am paying back a long overdue debt.

Another hot day came and went by, there was nothing to do except to walk around from sun to shade and then back into the sun again. We noticed little round patches of flower beds carefully trimmed, surrounded by little stones painted white. Much loving care was being bestowed on those little gardens in front, and all around the barracks, while our girls were dying inside.

Another large transport of people arrived from Hungary. I was told that over six hundred thousand men, women and children were deported during the last six months of 1944, and the beginning of 1945 from Hungary alone. During the time we were in Birkenau we did not actually see the segregations, those were done before the people came into the camps. We only saw the women denuded of everything that was human inwardly and outwardly that arrived into our camp.

Perhaps it was for the best that we did not work there - we would not have had the energy to work on the meager rations of food we received. On the other hand, the hours of the day seemed endless and empty. What did we talk about? Mostly about food, either what we used to have at our homes or trying to guess what we would get at the next meal dispensation.

Not only did trainloads of people come into the camp, but some large groups of girls were also beginning to leave the camp. No one knew where those girls were being taken but we understood that it was for some kind of work in another camp.

Then one Friday morning, I think it was during the first week of September 1944, the girls in our barracks were told that all two thousand of us must line up and prepare for departure. That day will be inscribed forever in my memory. On that Friday morning, before waking up, I had a dream. In my dream, I was back at home, it was late Shabbat afternoon, the whole family was sitting around the table, and it was the time of our traditional *Seudah*

Shlishit (the third meal of the Shabbat day). My father as usual sat at the head of the table, talking to us while he waited for the Shabbat to end, so he could start the evening prayers. I was always a bit impatient in that last hour of Shabbat when the house was in total darkness. In those days, we did not have automatic clocks that could be set at a pre-determined time to switch the light on and off as we wished, therefore we had to wait for the Shabbat to end so we could switch the light on.

In my dream, I was waiting impatiently for the light to go on, I was trying to reach out towards the electric switch, when I heard my father saying very decisively, "*Es is noch nisht der zman"* (it is not the right time yet). He was pulling out of his vest pocket a round watch attached to a chain as if to prove to me that the time to end the Shabbat had not yet arrived. This dream was so real that when I woke up, for a few seconds I did not remember where I was. I was trying to retain this picture of my family, particularly of my father, for as long as I could. However, I would not dare to be the last one left on the *pritcher*, so I quickly jumped down and joined the others outside. The words my father had spoken just stuck in my mind. I kept churning them over repeatedly. I tried to forget them. They did not seem to make sense. I admitted to myself that I did not understand, and left it at that.

After we finished eating what was called "breakfast", it was announced through a loudspeaker, that all the girls who had arrived from Plaszow should form a column near our barrack and prepare for departure, which was to begin later that evening. All that morning we were allowed in and out of our barrack, the air was buzzing with questions – but no answers. Even though we were allowed into the barrack to prepare, the fact was that there was nothing to prepare, there was nothing to do and nothing to pack, and the only thing we did have to do was to stand in rows of five. By the time two thousand girls were lined up the columns were as long as the barrack. The *Block Eldeste*, with the help of a girl who was always at her side, kept counting us time and time again. This went on until midday by which time we had become tired of standing on one spot in the hot sun, so we began to squat on the ground.

During all this time the words of my father that "*Es is noch nisht der zman"* kept coming back to me. By the time we were given our lunchtime soup,

our column became quite disorderly. We were called to order and once again, we had to stand and wait. Our group of five girls became a bit mixed up with the row in front of us and the one behind us, so in the end it was Regina Schwartz, Zuzna Wertheirmer, Giza and a girl, I cannot at the moment remember her name, and myself. Unfortunately, I was moved to another group of five.

As we were standing, it suddenly dawned on me that it was Friday afternoon and by the time we would have to leave to go on the train, it would be evening, which meant it would be Shabbat. Just then it occurred to me that the words my father said to me in my dream made sense. It was not the right time for me to go, it was Shabbat. I had a quick, quiet whisper with all five girls in my line, and they agreed to my suggestion that we should quietly return to the barrack and hide. It was absolutely necessary that all five of us go because if anyone would notice one out of five missing, the block *Eldeste* would most certainly look for and try to find the missing girl. However, if all five left, no one would notice and they were not going to count all the columns over again. Therefore, it was only with the help of heaven that all the girls in my row agreed to my plan and secondly that no one noticed. The other girls did not realize what we were doing, they probably thought that we were going back only for a few minutes. As soon as we were inside the barrack, we crawled under the lowest *pritcher*, which was about twenty-five to thirty centimetres off the floor, just high enough for us to hide without being seen. There we stayed until the evening. When it was dark and we heard that the transport of girls who were waiting to go had left, we crawled out from under the *pritcher* and joined a few stray girls who were left behind.

Next morning fewer of us lined up for the breakfast soup. The five of us who had hidden the day before, now stayed together as there was a special bond between us. It was Shabbat but we were hardly aware of this, as we did not do any work anyway. All the days of the week seemed the same, we lost count of time, except for the fact that the evening air felt cooler. We knew it was the beginning of September and the first sign of autumn.

The Sunday passed uneventfully, standing, walking and counting the hours from one meal to the next. After most of the girls from our barrack had left on Friday, that night and the following few nights, we had more room on the

pritcher and for the first time in five weeks, we did not have to press against each other during the night.

On Monday, very soon after our breakfast soup, there was an announcement over the loudspeaker that one hundred girls were needed. Our group of five quickly discussed between ourselves that if we did not go now, the next transport would again be on Friday. We decided there and then we were going and we stood in line. In a matter of minutes there were far more rows of five behind us, the women in charge counted off the hundred needed, separated us from the others who were also willing to join, and sent them back to the barracks.

Our small group was led in the direction of the barracks that were serving as storehouses for clothing, shoes, towels and other necessities. Although we were not told where we were going, it soon became obvious that something special was happening. We lined up and began to pass the various sections of the storehouses, and as we passed by, we were given a dress to wear, some underwear, shoes, sweaters and even coats and towels. I do not remember exactly whether we received something to cover our heads or gloves or stockings. We received a set of clothing to put on immediately and some to take with us.

After spending those five miserable, endless and anxiety-filled weeks in Auschwitz, we felt as if some kind of a miracle was happening. Even the staff that attended and helped us to arrange our clothes and pack our little *pekelech* were not as rough and indifferent as when we first came. It seemed to me that when we first arrived into the Birkenau camp we stopped being people, we became nameless, shapeless creatures, without hope. Without a tomorrow, we became transients. Why care about someone or something, when tomorrow “he” or “it” might not be there anymore. Now, during this preparation to go into the outside world, we became people again.

Only later when we reached our destination did I understand why the Auschwitz Administration cared that we look more like civilized people. They did not want to shock the population of a small German town who most probably did not know of the horrors that were being committed inside the concentration camps. The Germans did not publicize their atrocities, on

the contrary, they probably hid the facts of their mass destruction machinery. The ones who knew what was going on were the ones who worked and were especially trained to use their most cruel and vicious instincts towards the Jews, probably the way a hunter trains his dogs. In larger cities the Germans most probably knew, to some extent, what was happening to the Jews in Eastern Europe, as more people traveled to and from Eastern Europe and they brought stories of what they saw and heard The small town of Oederan, which was our destination, was one of those places that seemed to know little of what to expect when they asked for more workers for their factory.

OEDERAN

So on this beautiful Monday morning at the beginning of September 1944, our small group walked out of the gates of Auschwitz, clutching our little *pekele* of clothing as if it was our most precious possession, it probably was because the day before we did not have even this. The two SS women who were to accompany us led us towards the train. It is difficult for me to describe my feelings at that moment. I am sure that the other girls felt the same. My heart was pounding with agitation and anxiety, but at the same time with hope. What is the meaning of all this? The extra clothing, the treatment, although not quite so obvious, yet it felt more human. Oh, how different was the walk when you thought there was a purpose in where you were walking and a destination, or at least that was what we hoped.

In comparison with the aimless and useless walking around the Birkenau camp, this walk to a train, like normal people, put a spring into our footsteps. To our great surprise, this time the train was a normal train, not carriages meant for animals. The carriages we had to board had seats and in some of them passengers were already seated. No one urged us on, no one pushed us around, what a great feeling it was to be treated like human beings again. I was so carried away with my thoughts and imagination of freedom that I forgot for a moment that we were after all still prisoners in the hands of the Nazis who were masters of our lives and deaths.

Regina kept nudging me with her pessimistic thoughts. She said, “Even if it will be better for us, think of all those who stayed behind in Auschwitz. You think that the Germans are nice to us, don’t forget what they did to us in the

Tarnow Ghetto, in Plaszow and in Birkenau." Regina had lost all her family in the various deportations from Tarnow. I knew she had parents, brothers and sisters, but what pained her most, was the loss of her married sister with one or two of her babies. Whenever Regina cried, I knew she was crying for her sister and the babies.

So now on the way to Oederan, while I had hopes for a brighter future, Regina cried for the tragic past. Yes, we were very different in nature and personality, yet we needed and complemented each other. After Regina's talk, I felt very guilty for not having the same depth of understanding of the losses I had suffered, or had my subconscious mind refused to believe what had happened to my family, still hoping that we would meet after the war? Such were our thoughts and mixed emotions as we boarded the train.

The wheels started moving slowly. This time we could look out of the windows. From the distance we could see the round-roofed barracks, and the barbed wired camps with their high perched watch towers. An optical illusion gave the impression that the camps were moving away from us, and not that we were moving away from the camps. Physically, we were moving away from what could be called "hell on earth" but in our minds, the camps and our experiences in them never left us. The idea that the camps could move away from us – from within us – was only an illusion. What we had experienced left a permanent scar on us, physically and emotionally. As we grow older, those permanent impressions flash before our eyes at the most unexpected moments and places. One might think that as one grows older those impressions would fade away from our minds, on the contrary, they become more vivid with every passing year.

The train was taking us out of Poland, over the border into Germany. We looked out of the window, the train slowed down as it was passing over a bridge and we could see a small town below, it was early morning. The countryside we passed had all the signs of autumn, which began in September. The trees were beginning to lose their leaves, but the flowers in the front gardens of the little country homes were still beautiful, a sight we had forgotten existed. The land between Poland and Germany was very fruitful, and we were passing many orchards with some of the remainder of summer fruits still on the trees. We could see the colorful peaches, apricots

and plants, also in some places apple and pear trees. How we would have loved to eat some of those fruits which we had not tasted for years.

Oederan was not far away from the larger city of Leipzig in Saxonia. As I looked around, I could not believe it. I was actually on German soil, a strange land, strange language and strange people. A childhood dream suddenly flashed before my eyes. The stories of foreign countries and foreign people used to hold me spellbound. My childhood imagination and fantasies about those faraway countries made me dream and hope that one day I, too, would be able to travel to see all those wonders. Whenever guests or relations would arrive from France, Germany or Holland, I used to watch them as if they were people from another planet. So here, I was in Germany – how very different from the days of my childhood dreams.

This town was quiet, but how did I know what had happened before, how did I know what the people of this town had done to the Jewish community that had probably lived there before the Hitler era. Was the ground we were about to walk on soaked with Jewish blood? All those thoughts were churning through my mind. On the one hand, a certain excitement sprung up inside me, remnants of long dormant dreams, and on the other hand, that terrible fear of the unknown. However, this was not a time for more dreams. It became obvious that we were strange looking. The guards who watched us getting off the train looked amazed. What kind of people were this odd-looking group of girls, with their hair so short, they could have taken us for boys. In the five weeks we were in Birkenau our hair had grown a little, at least to cover the nakedness of our heads. I am sure that they planned the time of our arrival early in the morning so as not to arouse curiosity from the town's population.

At the train station we were counted once again, all one hundred of us were there. One SS woman walked in the front leading us through the streets towards a couple of buildings, there was also one SS woman at the rear to make sure we did not stray away.

A few more people were seen in the street by now, as we were passing they gave us sideward glances. It was only a short distance between the train and the factory building, so after a short walk we found ourselves inside a building, which looked like a dormitory. In each room, there were three

storey simple wooden beds, no *pritchers*, and each three-storey structure made three single beds. In addition, each bed had a grey flannel blanket underneath instead of a sheet and one more on the top. I do not remember if there were any pillows. The room I was in had ten such triple storey beds, which meant that thirty girls were allotted to one medium sized room. There was no reason to complain, what we had seemed like sheer luxury in comparison with Plaszow and Auschwitz.

The building was a solid proper building, not a barrack. We were on the first floor, not the ground floor, and the room had three or four large windows, with pipes under them for steam heating in winter. From the windows, we could see a large building which was the main factory. We were segregated from the main building by a small courtyard. Downstairs was a reasonably sized dining room, and before our first meal, each one of us was given a plate, a spoon and a cup and teaspoon.

On that first day in Oederan we did not work. After breakfast we went upstairs to our rooms and we looked at each other in wonder. One of the girls said softly with a smile, "Girls, we are here in the best Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in the world!" We had to agree. If we had come straight from our fine homes, we probably would have cried, but coming from Plaszow and Auschwitz, we knew how to appreciate the present conditions.

Someone asked if there was a cook amongst us. Yes, Hela Engel volunteered, she said she was a professional cook and another girl volunteered as her helper. I am using the description "girls" for all of us as a means of simplifying the issue, actually the ages were from about sixteen years to probably forty-five years and over, some were married, others single. There was a Mrs. Rappaport with her daughter, Betty. Mrs. Rappaport was in her early forties, Betty about sixteen years old. Hela Engel was about forty, her niece Judith about eighteen years old. There were two sisters, Mania Hauser and Fela Rotnick, they were in their mid or late thirties. I think it was Fela who unfortunately lost a child, a beautiful girl of about nine years old. Hanecker Leibowitz was about sixteen years old, Giza was in her mid thirties, Regina (not Schwartz) was twenty-two years old. There was a sweet seventeen year old (I cannot remember her name at present) who used to call herself *mezuzah.* She used to stand in the morning at the door and we all gave her a good-bye kiss before going to

work. Then there was Regina Schwartz and myself, and Gemie Trotner. I hope more names will come back to my mind as I keep on writing.

In the afternoon, the two SS women gave us instructions and rules of what we could or could not do. The following morning we were supposed to start working. I for one thought that being here in Oederan was a miracle, that being in a place where one was treated as a human being, and living in conditions suitable for human beings instead of animals, that *HaShem* was behind us. Indeed, this could only have happened with the help of *HaShem.*

Slowly the meaning of my previous dreams began to emerge. The dream back in Plazow, on a *Yom Kippur* morning, when my father came from *shul* with his *tallis* on, and slammed something on his desk and then left again. From that dream, I derived some strength and hope that I would survive, at least that year. The second dream in Auschwitz, that horrible nightmare of all the hundreds of shaven heads standing or floating in a large pond on a river of brown muddy water, I suddenly felt as if someone had pulled me out and sat me down on a green lawn beside the water. The dream on that Friday morning when I was supposed to be leaving Auschwitz together with the whole group with whom I had arrived from Plaszow, altogether almost two thousand girls and the words of my father *"Es is noch nisht der zman"* that kept nagging at me. Those were the words that prompted me and four other girls to return to the barrack and hide. I can well say now that dream was what saved our lives.

While we were in Oederan, we did not know what had happened to the Plaszow Transport. It was only after the war that we found out from a man who was also there, that they were sent to Stuthoff, a port city which once belonged to Prussia. I think it refers to the City of Gdansk, which now belongs to Poland. This man told us that as the war was ending in the beginning of 1945, the Germans took most of their prisoners, Jews and non-Jews alike, put them in boats, sent them to the sea and blew them up. According to this man's story, as the ship he was in blew apart, he managed to cling to a beam of wood he found floating in the water and this beam kept him afloat. An Ukranian man who was also on the same boat, attached himself to the beam of wood and in the ensuing fight over the beam, the Jewish man, with the help of *HaShem* and with the knife he had in his hand, managed to throw the other man off the beam. He then floated towards the

shore and was rescued. It is now forty-five years since I heard this story. It must be true because I have never met a single person from the Plaszow Transport which, unfortunately, included many of the girls with whom we had worked. As the years go by, I realize more and more that only with the guidance from above did I manage to survive, and this clearly, was a miracle.

In Oederan our mood improved greatly, the feeling of severe oppression and anxiety had somehow lifted off our shoulders, we managed to make a joke and smile. We were still prisoners, there was still only a little food, just enough to survive on, but we were re-discovering our egos.

The first morning in Oederan started with an early morning bell, washing, dressing and a quick breakfast. I think our daily ration of bread in the morning, was the same as before, one-third of a kilogram loaf of bread that was to last us for the next twenty-four hours. The midday meal was quite satisfying, it had many potatoes, and in the evening, there was a soup and a piece of sausage. We were hungry but not starving. Before we went to work, we had to assemble in the small courtyard before one or both of the SS women. This became a useless daily ritual because we could not run away, and even if we could, we probably would not have wanted to do so.

From the small courtyard it took about one minute to get to the main front building which was the factory. It had been used in pre-war times as a cotton-spinning factory, but during the war it was converted into an ammunition factory. There, we were introduced to the various masters that were in charge of running the works. On that first day, they looked at us queerly and most probably wondered if we had any brains in those heads without hair. Most of the workers were elderly men, only about two or three women worked there. Without any pressure or irritation, they explained how we had to work those machines.

To me it seemed simple enough, there were long round iron bars that had to be cut to a specific measurement, then each of the pieces had to be drilled out from one side. The depth of the hole had to be perfect to the last one-tenth of a millimeter, if it was not perfect, it had to be discarded. In a short time, we all learned how to work those machines. The management was pleased with us.

The work was divided into three shifts of eight hours each: from 7 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until 11 o'clock at night, and from 11 o'clock at night until 7 o'clock in the morning. The night shift was the worst, as we had to stand for eight solid hours on the same spot, and the work became monotonous. There was the danger that one could fall asleep while standing, not only would the machine brake suddenly, but a hand or a finger could easily be caught in the machine in the process.

Our arrival in Oederan marked exactly one year from the liquidation of the Tarnow Ghetto, a year that seemed to last into eternity. In September 1943, shortly before *Rosh HaShanah*, we had arrived in Plaszow. Just as in Plaszow we were unable to keep and observe the Holidays, so now in Oederan, in September 1944, we had no possibility of keeping any Holidays We were not even sure which day it was, we only knew it had to be in September, which in the Hebrew calendar is the month of *Tishrei*.

The first two or three weeks passed reasonably smoothly. We were the first group in Oederan, and all of us were Polish-speaking girls. Somehow we managed to figure out when it was *Yom Kippur* eve, and many of us refrained from eating supper, but we carried our portion of bread for later. Once again, just as in Plaszow, it was my turn to work the night shift on *Kol Nidre* night. I held on to my portion of bread, trying to overcome the desire to eat it for as long as possible, but when it came to two o'clock in the morning and the factory was dispatching warm soup to all the workers, to the Germans and to us, at that point I ate the bread and the soup. I felt that I would not be able to stand on my feet for the rest of the night if I did not eat. I felt very guilty after that, and kept thinking to myself, "You know *HaShem* that if I would have been at home with my family I would have fasted and *davened* properly. I am twenty years old, not a child anymore, and responsible for my deeds, please *HaShem* do not count this as a sin against me." Yet, all that night and the day after I felt low, I felt it was weakness on my part not to have tried harder.

After about a month of our stay in Oederan a group of girls from Hungary arrived. They probably had not experienced the harrowing procedures that we had gone through, their hair was not shaven, they did not look starved

and they seemed full of energy. There was a big commotion until they settled in, and at the beginning there was a communication problem. They spoke Hungarian and we spoke Polish, but between us we spoke a bit of broken German. Sometimes it sounded very comical when one of the girls spoke to a German in what she thought was the German language, but actually, she was speaking Yiddish.

Soon we became friendly with one another, but there was always that fine line – the difference in our cultures. Amongst the group of girls from Hungary, there was a woman Doctor and another woman called Ilana whom I had already met in Auschwitz. The Doctor was in her forties, a serious and kind looking woman. If anyone had a high temperature or other aches and pains, and needed a certificate to stay away from work, she attended to this. The Doctor became very friendly with Ilana, whom we knew from Auschwitz. Ilana considered herself to be of direct lineage to the Kingdom of David, and here, as in Auschwitz, she would not eat anything that was not kosher. Of course, she was not going to work on Shabbat, so the Doctor always managed to give her a certificate to enable her to stay away from work on the Shabbat.

There was something about Ilana that we all respected, a kind of a saintly quality. We all felt a certain responsibility towards her as if we were trying to protect her, we could not imagine her ever doing any physical work. Physically she was of small build, dainty and unassuming. She knew many of the prayers by heart, and she was always busy trying to work out what day of the moth it was in the Jewish calendar according to the size of the moon she could see through her window.

I was always watching with interest how the German master mechanic replaced a broken part in a machine. I realized it was quite easy and one day when he was busy on another machine and I needed my machine fixed, I asked him to lend me his tools and I replaced the broken borers myself. He was pleased with the idea that we did not have to wait for him to fix every single machine himself, so after consulting with the Manager of the factory, he asked me if I would agree to fix the other machines as well. I gladly agreed because this meant more freedom of movement. Instead of standing in one place for eight hours and doing monotonous boring work, I was able to move around freely on the whole floor of the factory. However, there was

a catch to the job, my shifts would be corresponding to the twelve-hour shifts of the master mechanics but my reward would be an extra large piece of bread and extra soup. The proposition seemed great and I accepted without hesitation. Once the details were settled, the master mechanic approached one girl on each shift that would be willing to do it, and this was the pattern we followed all the time we worked there.

THE SHARED APPLE

During the time that I was still working at the one machine, there was a German women also working there, a motherly type, who tried to be friendly. She would stop by one of the girls to collect the finished work, which was a box of precisely cut ammunition shells, and she always exchanged a few words with the girl. When it was time to pick up the box from my machine, I was always glad that she came and not someone else. I had the feeling that she wanted to help if she could, so our line of communication was a fleeting smile. She was about sixty years old and had grown up children and grandchildren. Then one day, she threw a small apple into my box amongst the finished shells, and motioned to me discretely to take it. I certainly took it and thanked her. What a treasure this was, we had not tasted an apple for at least three years. I was so excited I had to share it.

Sharing, as we usually understand it such as, "Share with me my Shabbat meal," or "You can use my coat, or dress," is easy. Real sharing means much more. To give away one's last piece of bread, not knowing from where the next meal will come - that is sharing. I had one apple, I brought it into our room, there were a few girls around, and how could I share it? Yet, we did share it, we looked at it and admired it, then I took one bite and passed it on to the next person and so the apple traveled from hand to hand until it disappeared completely. We then sat around on our beds and talked about the food and fruits we used to have at home before the war.

This German woman used other opportunities to drop something into my box, sometimes a small piece of cake or a small sandwich. During the night shift she would let me have her soup, as she preferred to eat the soup she brought from her home in a thermos flask. Therefore, in gratitude I offered to do something for her, I explained that I could sew and knit. Next day she brought me some wool and knitting needles and I promised to knit her a

doll's dress. I could only do it in our room after work. I was busy knitting and feeling good that I was doing something in return for the woman who tried to share some of her food with me. Suddenly one evening Regina Schwartz said to me "You are knitting toys for the German children while our children were put to death!" I was stunned because I did not see it that way. I could have justified it by saying that I did it only for the extra food, which kept hunger and malnutrition away, but I kept quiet. It would have sounded hollow because deep down in my heart I knew she was right, she was still crying over her sister's children.

It so happened that the German woman was forbidden to have too much contact with us, so all this stopped anyway, yet she still shared her night-shift soup with me. Just before Christmas she arranged a collection in her neighbourhood of goodies to eat and warm socks, gloves and scarves. There was enough to distribute to only about twelve girls, it was a nice gesture and we certainly appreciated it.

Shortly after the group of Hungarian girls arrived, an SS men's medical delegation came. By that time there were four hundred of us working in the factory and living in the dormitories. On Sunday, so as not to disturb the working hours, we had to once again strip bare, this degrading shameful experience from Auschwitz had not been forgotten. We could not all fit into one room, and so we were divided into separate rooms. All went well until the doctor stood before a young woman who was obviously pregnant. In her clothes we had not noticed, but now we all stiffened in tense expectation of what was going to happen to her. After a few minutes we were allowed to get dressed. The doctor consulted with his two aides and they decided to take this woman along with them. I wonder to this day what happened to her. It was almost the end of 1944, maybe they sent her to some other camp and she survived. I wish it were true. Soon after this episode we discovered that a very young girl from amongst the Hungarians was really ill, she had a heart condition. Our Jewish lady doctor tried to protect her by hiding this fact from the German authorities but there was little anyone could do for her. Then one night in her sleep she passed quietly away.

After what we had seen in Auschwitz we were immune to shock, but here we were deeply disturbed because the atmosphere in this place was more humane. Our responses to this tragedy touched a sensitive spot in our hearts

and we felt more human, yet no one was able to cry. We were surprised that the Germans working in the factory looked really upset and the woman, who tried to help us, even shed a tear. The Management arranged a funeral and she was escorted by a guard of honour, carried by four of the local workers, and we all looked on sadly from our windows. What we really thought was that at least this young fine Jewish girl was not thrown onto a truck like a piece of wood. It is true that she was buried without proper Jewish religious rites, but perhaps there was a sign, some kind of recognition of who was buried in this particular spot in the cemetery of Oederan, Saronia, Germany. I feel that I should request an organization to find her grave and bring her body to Israel.

As time moved on one more groups of a hundred girls arrived, this time from Prague in Czechoslovakia. We were so surprised that they looked well dressed, well fed and even had some make-up on their faces. They brought their own clothes with them and even some toiletries such as lipstick, nail polish, powder, combs and hairbrushes. They were sophisticated ladies. To us who had gone through ghettos and camps, denied of everything that's human, this group of young healthy and beautified girls was like a breath of fresh air.

We established a friendship with them very quickly because there was not the same language barrier as with the Hungarian girls. The Czechoslovakian language is very similar to Polish, and they also spoke a very good German, What a difference in perception, the same conditions that seemed utter luxury to us, was only a step away from disgusting for them. Of course, they were coming straight from their elegant homes in Prague.

On Sundays we did not work. It was already December 1944, snow was falling steadily and was becoming quite deep. Our two "guardian angels", the two SS women, had a great idea to take us for a walk in the snow to a nearby forest. It was a nice sunny day after a frosty night and as soon as the midday meal was over, we got dressed into all the clothes we possessed, sweaters, coats, and gloves, if anyone was lucky enough to have a pair, and we were ready to go out on that promised walk. Until now we had been closed in for almost four months, either inside the dormitory or inside the factory, we did not even realize how deprived our bodies were of real fresh

air. Our leg muscles were not used to walking any distances. Normally we stood for eight solid hours, then a short walk, then we used to sit on our beds, where there was not much room between the beds to walk around, and there was nothing to do. Now, out in the open the fresh cool air suddenly hit us, after a few minutes we felt as if we were drunk, it was difficult to breathe and difficult to walk. They did not rush us as we plodded along, it was fresh, it was exciting and it was tiring. I think that for the first time in years we felt like playing with the snow.

How it brought back once again my childhood memories of skiing and skating. In front of our house was a sidewalk that had a slight slope, for some of us who could not go, or were not allowed to go to a proper skating rink, this sidewalk in front of our house became our skating strip.

This one and only outing here in Oederan made us realize how much we took fresh air for granted and how important it was. We came back from this walk and felt quite drunk. Many of us fell asleep and could not even eat supper. They never took us out again after that experience.

Sunday morning was washing day, this meant that soon after breakfast we came back to our rooms, took off our dress and underwear, everything had to be washed. We washed the clothes in the trough in cold water, let it drip a bit, and then spread it over the pipe through which heat was coming. While we did all this, we were walking around covered by our grey flannel blanket. By the evening or next morning everything was dry. We had to take turns, as it would have been impossible for all thirty of us to do the washing on the same day.

One evening a week was also shower night. There was a large room with about twelve showerheads protruding from the ceiling, like those we had in Auschwitz. The water was hot and it was a good feeling to have a good shower at least once a week. The rest of the week we washed under a tap with cold water only. Generally we tried to keep ourselves clean.

Food was bearable, we became used to the taste of it and were quite unaware that there was practically no salt in the food. The master told us that there was not enough salt in Germany, so the German people were given salt tablets to implement their diet, but we never received any.

Because of the poor diet, no fruit and no vegetables, which would have given us some natural salt, there were minerals and vitamins lacking in our bodies, our digestive systems became unbalanced, and the body retained too much fluid. In the beginning, it was not so recognizable, we felt a slight swelling under the eyes, but when it disappeared after about an hour from the time of getting up in the morning, we did not take any further notice. However, as the months dragged on this condition became worse and we all used to get up in the morning like blown up balloons, we could hardly open our eyes. When I saw my reflection in the window pane, I hated the look of my swollen face, so I would get up at six o'clock in the morning, or even earlier, wash and get dressed, then walk around so that the swelling would go down. By the time I had to go to work, I looked almost normal. There was another benefit of being early in the washroom, I was by myself and did not have to push to get to the tap. When everybody got up at the same time, there was always a great commotion in the washroom.

There was no point in complaining, we would not want to appear as feeling sick. Even if anyone became sick we tried to keep it quiet, our woman doctor would attend to it and do her best without notifying the Germans. Zuzia Wertheim was in the bed next to me. She was one of a pair of non-identical twins. She was the smaller and weaker of the two but her sister had already been deported quite a long time ago. Zuzia became sick, she had a high temperature for a few days and the doctor allowed her to stay in bed for a whole week. Because she was small and thin we all felt somehow responsible for her wellbeing. During my night shift, I used to receive extra food from the German woman who also worked the same shift, so by the morning I could always save something and bring it back for Zuzia. Then there were times when I had to carry her to the washroom to give her a bit of a wash and change her clothes, and somehow through this contact we became very good friends, a friendship which lasted for many years afterwards.

We were always curious to know what the purpose of the work we were doing was; we could not understand how those empty shells were used. Once when I was fixing a machine I asked one of the masters how it worked? He explained that the empty shells, which we were producing, were sent to another town where a factory was producing gunpowder. It was soon after this conversation that two SS men arrived at our factory, they

held a short discussion with the manager. Apparently they came with a request that our manager would allow twenty girls to go with them to this other place where the girls' job would be to fill the empty shells with gunpowder. Indeed twenty girls were chosen and asked to prepare for departure. They were told that they would work in another factory and they had no choice but to follow instructions. We found out somehow, I cannot remember who told me this, but we were told that all those people who worked with gun powder became yellow. Even though the Germans gave them lots of milk to drink to ease the effect of the poison, nevertheless most of the girls sustained permanent damage to their lungs and liver.

It was winter, January 1945, and we were still cut off from the outside world, with no radio or newspaper. We were sure that there were political and military activities going on but none of the actual daily news ever reached us. The Germans were not talking about their losses on the Eastern Front but through the large windows of the factory building, which were facing the railway lines, we could see trainloads of German soldiers sick and wounded returning from the front. The mood of the German masters was subdued as they spoke to each other in undertones. The German woman, who always had a smile and a friendly word for us, was now serious, although not unkind. We also heard that some parts of Germany were bombed. We became busy spinning our dreams of what we would do when the war was over.

On Sunday afternoons there was not much to do. Amongst the group that came from Prague was a young woman who was originally from Vienna. At the time when the Jews were expelled from Vienna she and her family went to live in Prague. From Prague she was deported to our camp Oederan. By profession, she was a dancer, more of a mime dancer, so one Sunday afternoon, we asked her to dance for us. She called the dance "Mother and Child" and she rolled up a blanket – that was the child. She picked up the "baby" held it close to her chest, pretending to whisper something softly, she walked on her tiptoes from one corner of the room as if someone was following her, and she kept looking over her shoulder with a terrified expression on her face. Her body, supple and graceful, gave the impression as if it was tense. We watched in such silence, you could hear us breathing. The next movements were as if she was trying to hide the baby, she put it behind her, turned round as if she was pretending that the "baby" was not

there, in case the invisible pursuer was coming closer. Then the expression on her face changed as if a new idea had just occurred, she pushed the "baby" further into a corner, and moved herself away another two steps as if to make the distance between them wider. All that time her movements displayed a great inner conflict, she kept looking towards the "baby" and then quickly over her shoulder to see if anyone was coming. With each movement, the distance between her and the "baby" grew larger. She would come running back, give the "baby" a kiss and a hug, then run away again. After each such contact with the "baby" her body would shake with an inner cry, her movements becoming more frantic. Towards the end of her act, one could not see the "baby" anymore, only the mother kneeling with her head on the floor with an expression of total resignation.

We sat there motionless, we understood so much of what this talented dancer was portraying. All of us, who had witnessed separations and deportations, and knew the conflict of leaving behind, or going with a child, felt that she must have experienced this, to be able to express it so well.

Other Sunday afternoons were spent exchanging memories of childhood experiences, school, home, romances. Judith Engel suggested once that she could make a séance. Somehow she managed to obtain a piece of cardboard, coloured pencils and scissors. She made a clocklike structure, instead of numbers there were letters, instead of two clock hands there was one serving as an indicator, and the middle-storey bed took the place of a table. All of us stood around with our hands touching the large circle. I am not sure whether we had to be silent or whether we had to chant something. Of course, most of us took it as a joke, we did not believe in it, we were doing it just for the fun. The ones who did believe in it tried to persuade us that the indictor moved to some letters, which in the end was supposed to have spelt somebody's name. The only benefit was that it kept our minds occupied for a few hours on a boring Sunday afternoon.

Time moved on, January and February of 1945 passed slowly with its usual routine. Except for some pangs of hunger we did not suffer physically, and a glimmer of hope crept in when we heard the dull thunder of bombing going on far away, which could have been in Berlin. At the beginning of March 1945, our Ilana tried desperately to work out when it would be *Purim* and from then on, we could mark off the days and arrive at the proper date of

Pesach. The only way we could do this was by watching the moon. Ilana had a brilliant idea, on the week of her night shift she would pretend that she had fainted, we would ask permission to carry her out into the courtyard. We needed *HaShem's* cooperation, with the help from heaven that the sky would not be cloudy, so while Ilana would sit outside in a chair recovering, she would also observe the moon and decide when it would be the middle of the month, with the moon at its fullest. She made her calculations and we brought her back inside. From that day on, we the *frumer* (more observant) girls were excited that we had participated in Ilana's calculations. I actually remember a few of us sitting around Ilana while she spoke about the laws of the *Megila* reading. Even if Ilana remembered some sections of the *Megila* by heart, I think she said that we would not be able to recite them because it would have to be actually read.

There was something in the air that kept us excited. The bombing was heard closer to our area, during the night there were sirens and we had to stop all work and the staff and all of us who were on the night shift, had to go to a cellar shelter. We did not mind, it gave us a wonderful chance to rest up, we could sit and even fall asleep while the planes were flying above us. Occasionally the masters told us very quietly, "Don't worry the war will soon be over." We were grateful for that bit of news.

I do not remember too many details about *Pesach* in April 1945, but I do remember clearly that a few of us who tried to keep *Pesach*, at least symbolically, decided not to eat bread. Ilana told us that we were not allowed to save the bread for later, so on the first two days we exchanged the bread for a potato. On the evening that we thought was the *Seder* night, a small group of us sat around and Ilana told us about the laws of *Pesach* and the *Seder*. This small group was a mixture of girls from three countries, most of them came from the Hungarian group, two or three from the Polish group, and one whom I remember clearly, was from the Czechoslovakian group. I think her name was Bertha, she was a fine girl of about twenty-seven years old, and she came from Theresienstadt where she left her elderly mother. I really liked her, we became friendly, I would have liked to continue that friendship, but when we arrived in Theresienstadt, Bertha rejoined her mother and they went back to their home in Prague. After that we lost contact.

By the end of the third day of *Pesach*, I felt my strength going, the small bowl of soup and a potato was not enough to sustain me. Later in the evening when I had to walk up the steps to my room, I could not lift my legs, I looked up and wondered how I was going to make it to the top. With both my hands I lifted up one leg and put it up on one step, and then I did the same thing with the other leg. After what seemed to me a very long time, I reached the top and fell on my bed with sheer exhaustion. I fell asleep right away, and next morning I knew I had to start eating my bread. I had a feeling that Bertha continued without eating bread, she was not at the same stage of malnutrition that we were. Ilana certainly managed with the help from the kitchen. I do not know what happened with the others

Each day brought more news. There was no use hiding the fact that the Germans were losing, in fact they had already lost the war. We did not know how long it would take for the final collapse. The bombing went on more frequently and louder, it sounded so close that our window panes rattled but actually the bombs were aimed at Leipzig which was quite a distance away. The German masters whispered into our ears, "The Americans are coming, the Russians are coming, and we heard it on the radio. Will you remember that we were good to you?" The master who used to lend me his tools once said to me, "If you come back I will teach you engineering." He was in his sixties, an age that seemed terribly old to me at the time. Even if I ever did go back I am sure he would not be there, besides the last thing on my mind at that time was to go back to that place of affliction.

HOPE

The more the Germans became nervous, the more exuberant we became, but we did not show it. Only between us, we exchanged remarks of hope. Hope had always been with us, without it the will to carry on would have been non-existent, but until now we kept our feeling of hope inside us, each according to her own personality. Some of us were by nature optimistic, while others tended to be a bit pessimistic. Now hope became a real word, we all shared it, we had the courage to discuss it. Each one of us had a very special dream.

I remember one of the girls, I think her name was Ety, and she was about eighteen or nineteen years old. I remember her looks, she was tall, slim and graceful, and was obsessively clean, even in those circumstances. Our hair had grown about two to two and a half inches and she kept brushing her hair constantly. Her story was that her father had left the family, and gone to America to find a new life there with the intention of bringing all the family over as soon as possible. She always told this story on a pessimistic note. She would say, "**If** I survive the war, the next day I am going to America to find my father." Now that the hope for survival was becoming a reality, we heard her say, "I am going to my father." She did survive and we saw her later in Theresienstadt where she was frantically making inquiries how soon she could go to the States. From Theresienstadt she went to Germany to wait for her papers to be processed. Unfortunately, after all she had been through in the camps, by the time she was ready to go, news came through that her father had suffered a heart attack and passed away. We identified so much with her, we understood because each one of us carried this kind of dream within us, the dream of hope mixed with fear of what the future would bring us.

Another one of the girls, who used to call herself *Mezuza*, had a story with a happy ending, ב"ה. Her sister, whom she was longing to see, was waiting for her in Israel. She left Theresienstadt soon after liberation and found a group of young Jewish Russian soldiers who had deserted the army. They had borrowed civilian clothes, and went around asking who wanted to go to Israel (at that time called Palestine). Our friend was the first one to volunteer. The group hitchhiked over the border into France, and on the shores of Marseilles they waited for the first boat to sail to the Holy Land. Later I heard that she married the leader of that group and I am sure they lived on a kibbutz in Israel.

April 1945 in Oederan became quite feverish, the production we were working on did not matter anymore. We kept on working, the usual routine continued until the last week in April. It could have been the twenty-fourth or the twenty-fifth of April when we were told that we were leaving Oederan. For the five hundred of us, those eight months in Oederan with a regular routine and, what we thought, reasonable treatment, had given us a false sense of security. We thought it was going to be the same at the end of the war although we could not imagine how things would develop. Would

there be transference of power? When we were told that we were leaving Oederan, we received the news with mixed feelings but it did not dampen our excitement. We were allowed to take whatever we possessed, mainly clothes, and we could also take a blanket each. On the day of our departure, we received a hot meal and by the afternoon, we were ready. Before we started walking out of the building for the last time, we walked past the kitchen window, were given our normal ration of bread, some sausage, some cheese, not much, but enough for the next twenty-four hours.

It was a short walk to the railway station, under the guard of six SS women, each one of them was carrying an overnight bag. We reached the station, and lo and behold, those open animal carriages stood there waiting for us. Once again we felt as if we were stripped of all our dignity which we had somehow managed to re-establish in Oederan. I think there were six or seven of those carriages, one SS woman was assigned to each one of the wagons. We climbed in, Regina and I were together and we found a place near the wall of the wagon. It was easier; at least we could lean against it. Also here we were seventy to seventy-five girls per wagon. We assumed the same positions as we did in the wagons to Auschwitz. Remembering this, we were glad at least that it was not as hot as the last time. The wagons stood there for hours without moving, it became late and dark, the evening stretched into the night, yet still no movement. Some of us were standing and some squatting, we realized that we would probably spend the night there, with only the stars and the moon above us. We started nibbling at our food, a temptation we could hardly resist.

It was quite a while after midnight when we heard a commotion and we stood up on our tiptoes to see what was happening. The news jumped over from wagon to wagon that at last our engine was arriving to pull our train to some other destination. We felt the motion of the train moving very slowly, it did not matter, at least we were moving. The train moved at a snail's pace for a few hours. The sun peaked out from the horizon, and in the grayish dawn, we discerned the outline of the countryside. We looked around, no one was there, we were traveling along an unused railway line and we had no idea where we were being taken.

At mid morning, the engine was uncoupled from the wagons and we were left there in the middle of the field. We noticed that some of the SS women

had disappeared during the night. They had changed into civilian clothes and in the darkness of the night, they ran away. If we had the courage, we could have run away as well but we did not have the strength and we did not know the country side. Besides, we might have run into the hands of the German police. We looked so different with our short hair, clothes marked with a cross painted on the back with fluorescent paint that shone in the dark and, of course, the tattoo on our arms. All these things would have given us away. Not knowing what the next moment would bring, staying together as a group in the wagons seemed the more sensible thing to do.

The day dragged on, we ran out of food and began to feel hungry. Some plucked up enough courage to jump off the train since the doors of the wagons were actually open. The girl who got out spotted some vegetables growing in a field. She dug up a few small beetroots but there was no water to wash off the dirt, so she cleaned them on the wet ground. Back in the wagon, she shared the beetroots and it was amazing that even just the motion of chewing something can stop hunger pangs. It was now almost twenty-four hours since we had left Oederan. The sun was slowly setting once more and we felt that we would also this night spend in the open, with only the stars looking down on us. It was a miracle that it did not rain, yet the air was cool and damp.

In the dark we really looked funny, some stood wrapped in their blankets. They looked like men in *Taleisim* (prayer shawls). Suddenly, in our wagon, we heard a scream and someone crying loudly. She kept calling in Yiddish "*Mein Tatte*, *Mein Tatte*", her mind had just snapped, she did not know where she was, did not recognize any of the other girls, it was quite frightening. After a while, we managed to pacify her and she fell asleep. In the morning, she felt better and was able to tell us that during the night, when she watched the standing figures with the blankets over their heads swaying back and forth, she thought it was her father who was long dead.

Again, in the early hours of the morning, an engine arrived and pulled us slowly further along the unused railway line and we covered a few more kilometers. This time we stopped not far away from a small forest and closer to civilization. We heard the planes buzzing above us as they flew over. Maybe the Germans were hoping we would be bombarded, but ב"ה

nothing happened to us. In the meantime we noticed that all our SS women had disappeared and we certainly were not sorry about that.

Once more our wagons were uncoupled from the engine and we were abandoned on the railway line. We looked out the wagon to see where we were and a plane flew past quite low. Then suddenly I saw a sight that I will never forget. The sky was full of flying mushrooms. It was too far to see what those mushrooms falling over the forest were. Finally we understood these were American parachutists descending onto German soil. We knew things were happening quickly, and that they were close by, yet we stood there abandoned.

At this stage we were already more than thirty-six hours without food and felt desperately hungry. We could not think of anything else except food. I heard a girl say, "All I want in my life is to have a full loaf of bread to myself," to which an older and wiser girl replied, "Hunger you will soon forget, try to remember other things."

Later that day when we thought we were completely abandoned, we felt a jolt as a locomotive coupled onto our wagons and we felt the slow tug and movement forwards, this time a bit quicker than before. About two hours later, we found ourselves in the middle of a very busy railway junction. This was the border town of Gleinitz, between Germany and Czechoslovakia. There were trains everywhere, some moving and some standing empty. Now the Germans left us for good, they took their locomotive and went back into Germany. We were not their responsibility anymore.

There was chaos everywhere, the war was over but the Germans did not officially capitulate for another ten days. In Gleinitz we stood only a few hours until another train arrived. The workers at this junction joined our train to the one that was traveling to Theresienstadt. The distance was not great, but I lost count of how many hours we were standing, squatting, waiting and agonizing until later that evening when we at last arrived in Theresienstadt.

THERESIENSTADT

It was the 28th of April 1945, my twenty-first birthday, when we arrived in Theresienstadt. There was a group of men and women, all Jewish, who waited to help us down from the wagons. We were stiff and could hardly walk, some were so weak they had to be carried down. The people were very friendly and tried to assure us that we were out of danger. They led us into a large hall and we sat down on benches and on the floor. They brought us lots of bread, lumps of sugar and hot coffee. How can I ever describe the relief we felt? The first emergencies were to still our hunger, to attend to the ones who needed medical help, and we badly needed a hot shower. Those helpful people, who were most probably from the Theresienstadt administration, arranged everything.

The following morning we received accommodation in some barracks, but no *pritchers*, only single beds and blankets. We were given food and at lunchtime we received good nutritious soup. We felt we were people again and it was so good to feel that someone cared about us. After six years of living in fear, witnessing indifference at best, maltreatment and worst, experiencing kindness, warmth and sympathy was so greatly appreciated. If not for the fact that our emotions were still frozen, we would all have been crying, not out of pain, but out of gratitude.

In Theresienstadt the Germans had established a kind of "Master-lager", a camp which served as a show case. Whenever representatives from the International Red Cross wanted information, they came to Theresienstadt, where they were shown around. A small number of old people lived there and conditions were not very bad so the visiting delegations assumed that all other camps looked the same. It was only after the capitulation of Germany, when the Russians entered the camps from the east and the Americans came from the west, that they saw, scenes so horrific that one, who did not see them himself, could not even imagine anything like it had ever happened in all of human existence.

A day or two after our arrival from Oederan, we recovered enough to be able to go outside the barracks to walk along the streets with a sense of freedom. No more guards, no more SS men or SS women. The war was not yet officially over but we already felt that the yoke of the Nazi oppression had lifted off our shoulders.

Columns of people kept pouring in from other camps all the time, mornings and afternoons. Some were in wagons the way we had arrived. Some came marching in – in what later became known as the death marches because in those, anyone who could not keep up with the rest of the group, were either shot or left to die by the roadside. Even in the worst of horror movies one does not see what we witnessed here. We saw thousands of walking skeletons, with heads shaven, wearing striped pajamas hanging down from their thin emaciated bodies, with eyes set in deep hollows, looking so sad as if every spark of life had gone out of them. The way they walked, their mechanical movements without a will or purpose, appeared as if they had no idea where they were going or why. We had no idea how long they had been marching. Mrs. J. Becker, herself a survivor and on one of those death marches, described how there were piles of bodies on each side of the road of all those who did not have the energy to keep on walking. The new arrivals were taken care of by the people of Theresienstadt. They were washed, changed and fed, and many of them had to be hospitalized. An epidemic of typhoid broke out, and many passed away after the liberation.

What brought most of us out to stand on the sidewalks with our heads craned above everybody else, was not simple curiosity, it was that fervent hope that maybe from amongst the thousands, one of them would be a brother or sister. And indeed the screams of joy and sorrow when someone recognized a member of his family, the cry of joy when someone found a dear one, and the sorrow when it was realized what pitiful condition they were in. The local hospital could not cope with the influx of people so close to death. They had to use buildings that were once army quarters, and even those were overfilled.

We heard stories of how on the trains there were incidents when a piece of bread could have meant life or death but the stronger ones took advantage of the weaker ones. When portions of bread were dispatched late in the afternoon, the few in each wagon who still had some energy took charge of the bread, and instead of dispatching it immediately, waited until the morning so there were more pieces of bread available for themselves from those who did not manage to survive the night. Who knows how many could have been saved if they had received their bread before the night before. Cruelty has many faces.

THERE IS A TOMORROW

For those of us who were well enough, the first few days in Theresienstadt were days of dreaming. We had to adjust to the reality of what freedom really meant. Physically, it was a sense of freedom of knowing that one could cross the street without fear of being shot. Mentally, the freedom meant we could start planning.

The most difficult adjustment was on the emotional level. Each one carried in his heart that deep-seated fear about whom of the family had survived and who did not make it but until we knew for sure, we did not voice this fear. It was yet too early to do anything except wait for further developments. It was on the 8th of May 1945 after six terrible years, that the war officially ended. Germany capitulated and Russian tanks started rolling into Theresienstadt. The Russian women as well as the medical and paramedic staff in the Russian army became immediately involved with the many sick people lying in the hospitals. The Russian doctors and nurses contributed their hours off when the typhoid epidemic broke out. They worked around the clock and we owe them a lot for the efforts they made trying to help us.

When the Russian army arrived, many Jews who had hidden in the forests and bunkers, and also some who had non-Jewish documents came forward from among them. We were surprised to see so many Jewish men in the Russian army.

Theresienstadt took on a festive atmosphere, someone provided station wagons with record players and loudspeakers in the streets where people spontaneously started dancing.

Europe was in chaos, people were traveling in all directions. If one said that one wanted to try and find one's family, they could travel free on buses and trains. This in fact encouraged us to try to move out into the world, and try out our newly found freedom. Therefore, a group of six of us that still more or less stayed together, decided to go to Prague for the day. It was a beautiful spring morning at the end of May or the beginning of June. When we arrived in Prague, we were surprised to see a normal city. There were normal people around doing regular things. Stores were open, restaurants

were busy. It felt like we were in some kind of movie. It was great; we could actually go wherever we wanted to.

Prague had always been a beautiful city and, fortunately, it had been spared the scars of war. The buildings were old and I had the impression of elegance in the way the people dressed and behaved. Someone directed us to a bridge where on the one side of the bridge there was a very large cross with a figure on it. On the three points of the cross, there were words fashioned out of iron that said *Kodesh* (קדש) three times. It was a most surprising sign. The legend has it that once upon a time a Jew walked over the bridge and when he saw the cross, he spat three times. Just at that moment a Catholic Priest passed by and saw this. In his rage he saw a way to punish the Jew, he made him put up a sign with the three words קדש.

The trip to Prague was a real revelation, at least for me. I felt I could start thinking in terms of what a normal life was like, how one makes decisions, and is free to arrange one's own life. For girls like myself who, before the war, were still dependent on our parents, during the war there was certainly no possibility to exercise one's independence. Now we felt too inexperienced to start planning any course of action. We were floating along with the current rather than swimming.

After the first few days of festivity and excitement over liberation came the anti-climax. What now, I thought. The barrack happened to be empty, everyone was out in the streets celebrating as I sat on my bed thinking. "Is this how I imagined the end of the war would be like?" I suddenly felt as if I was in a vacuum, the immediate past I did not care to remember, it was too painful. My mind had not yet adjusted to thinking of home, the family, the children, a kind of blank space was in my head. I could not visually recall the faces of my mother or sisters, grandparents or friends. Is that what Jacob said about Josef when he said הוא איננו because he did not know what had really happened? Because of that state of mind, I did not feel the urge to go back to Tarnow.

During the three months in Theresienstadt I was living on two levels. On one level I functioned as everyone else, taking it easy, walking, joking, and meeting all kinds of people. On another level, I felt hollow inside. It was not worry, concern or anxiety, it was emptiness. The feeling of being a

loose, detached leaf came back to me, the same way I felt when I was separated from my family in the Tarnow ghetto. I suddenly realized that I had stopped thinking in terms of "we". From now on it was "I" who will have to confirm my life. This "I" felt very alone. How, when and where am I going to find out if anyone of my family had survived? I felt very immature. I now knew that there was a future for me but the future frightened me. To go back to Tarnow at this stage seemed to me an enormous undertaking. I was not ready for it yet.

Our small group stayed together. We needed each other's support. In our section of the barracks, I could arrange a little private corner. To make a distinction between the weekday and Shabbat I would put on the table a sheet which I took out the day before, washed it, let it dry, and this served as a table cloth. The other girls participated in washing the floor of our small corner. We obtained two candles, to give us the feeling of Shabbat. There was no need to keep house because we received food from the general kitchen. We had plenty of food and even fresh water for Shabbat.

Sometimes I would stop and listen to how other people were planning their next move. It was usually the ones who were thirty years old or the ones who had the urge to go out into the world and start their lives all over again. These people left Theresienstadt soon after the liberation. For the ones who remained, committees were set up. I am sure that organizations and Rabbis came from other countries to help arrange the resettlement program.

The Rabbis had two main functions. They provided anyone who wanted them, with a *sidur*, *talis* and *tefilin*. They also offered any couple who wished to get married, the opportunity to be married legally according to Jewish Law.

The next big question was "What was our next goal?" Thinking in retrospect, I have a feeling that many of the organizers came to implore us to go to Palestine (Israel). That became the general trend, and so in the time that we were in Theresienstadt we were gently persuaded that, what was soon to become our independent homeland, was the only place to go.

The organizers, in conjunction with the Allied armies, arranged transportation for all of us who wanted to leave Theresienstadt. A train was

put at our disposal even though the conditions were quite primitive. We really did not mind that so much because now we were free people. No one forced us to go. We were going willingly. Secondly, we were not packed seventy to eighty people per wagon. Most of us had recovered somewhat from malnutrition. Many of the people who were on this train were the ones who, only three months prior, were walking skeletons. The mood on the train was jovial with joking, singing, some playing cards and people starting to form friendships. How different all this was now. Before in the camps, friendships developed out of necessity. Now friends chose each other on the basis of background, religion, education and compatibility.

It was the month of August when we left Theresienstadt. As the wheels started moving our spirits soared, instead of foreboding, there was hope – hope of a new life in a new country. The little insecurity we felt we did not allow to mar the present mood. We traveled for a number of hours headed for Munich. On the way we passed the same countryside which used to be called Sedeten Gan, this was the very same fertile land we had passed on the way to Theresienstadt. How we had wished at that time to taste the luscious fruit hanging from the trees. Now as free people we could do it. Some men would jump off the train when it stopped to help themselves to handfuls (and pocketfuls) of this fruit that they then shared with all of us in the wagon.

It was already evening when we arrived in Munich, the very same city that had been the centre of planning and enforcement of the destruction of the Jews for the whole of Europe. These were not a few simple minded, crazy people, but as Rabbi Zalman Posner from Nashville said in his lecture on Faith after Auschwitz, the people who implemented the holocaust were college graduates. Eli Wiesel had been quoted as saying hat the people who planned the holocaust were imbeciles, that Himmler was an imbecile. But according to Rabbi Hecht, amongst the fourteen people present at a conference in Venice, Germany, where the agenda was finding a solution to the Jewish problem, nine had PhD. degrees. Thus out of the fourteen people present at a meeting to plan the Jewish destruction, nine had the highest level of education. The same Germany that before the First World War was an example in the field of education in all branches, and with a high standard of living – had produced such monsters.

Now, in August 1945 we, the survivors let the Germans know that we were back, alive and well. Even though they had tried so hard to destroy us, like Haman before them, they did not succeed. Most of us ran out of the wagons onto the platform and danced the Horah. Then we sang the Israeli national anthem, the Hatikvah, the song of hope.

After a short stay on the Munich railway platform, the train took us another approximately sixty kilometers to a small town called Landsberg/Am Lech. Landsberg's claim to fame was the jail in which Hitler was imprisoned and there, supposedly, he wrote the book "Mein Kampf" which brought him popularity with the working class. Then gradually his influence spread to the student body and to the public.

LANDSBERG / AM LECH

Our arrival in Landsberg must have made quite a stir with the local population of this small town. Many of the local residents had run away, most probably before the capitulation of Germany, leaving their homes and other possessions behind. I wonder what kind of invasion they were expecting. The whole trainload of people who arrived from Theresienstadt was allocated rooms in army buildings as well as in some private apartments. In each of the rooms, there were those narrow army beds, closets, a table and chairs. The rooms we were given were long and narrow with four or five beds on the first floor. We rushed for those rooms as soon as we saw them. I remember four names – Itkie, Genia, Zuzia and I. I have a feeling that there was another person but I cannot think of her name at present. This ex-army camp was called a DP camp (displaced persons). The UNRRA took over the administration of the camp. They organized a generous kitchen, and there was plenty of food to eat. Interestingly enough, no one knew at that time that the sweet condensed milk was not healthy, it was full of sugar. They used to give it to us by the liter. We realized after a short while that we were all putting on a lot of weight so after a while we stopped receiving it. From the JOINT, I think, we received weekly packages which contained a few necessities and a few luxuries. Necessities were soap, jam, vegemite (we thought it was some kind of ointment); luxuries were chocolate and cigarettes. For women there were things like lipstick and for men some shaving gear. It was fun receiving those

packages because we could then sell what we did not use and in return buy something more suitable.

A hospital and dental service were immediately established. UNRRA also tried to arrange some social entertainment. They organized a club, a musical band and artists, and they would arrange dances. We could come and go wherever we wanted, we could explore the countryside or travel to Munich. The Landsberg DP camp became the center of absorption for people who came from various places, mostly from Eastern Poland and Russia.

We looked in amazement when whole families arrived. I remember the first time I saw a family, a young couple with two little children and an old mother. I suddenly realized that I had not witnessed a scene like that for years. Regina and I looked at each other as if to say, "There **are** children in the world, there **are** older people." I did not want to mention the word "children" to Regina, I remembered how she had suffered at the loss of her sister's children. More and more people kept arriving, some newly married couples, some couples who survived the war together and some who found each other after the war.

The DP camp was about fifteen to twenty minutes walk from the center of the town. To get into the town we had to walk over a bridge and beneath that bridge was the river Lech. A very interesting characteristic of this river was its colour, it was a deep green, a real dark bottle green, a most unusual colour that I had ever before seen anywhere else. The town itself was a typical country German town, the houses along the street were one or two storeys high, with lovely well kept little gardens, in the back and front.

The town's people were obliging but we never knew what they felt in their hearts. At a train station, we once overheard a German say, "I thought that they had killed all the Jews, yet look how many have returned." It proved that the deeply inherent hatred towards the Jews did not diminish even with the fall of Nazism, the difference was that now they were able to put on an act of politeness.

Many people decided to move out of the camp area and rented houses from the town's people. Many of those who returned from hiding were able to re-establish themselves with the savings they retained. They opened small

businesses. Adjustment to normal life came quicker and easier to those people. It was much more difficult for the survivors from the camps, the return to normal life took much longer.

In the camp area, life was bustling with activities. ORT organized classes such as electrical engineering, motor mechanics, and driving courses for men. For women there were classes in knitting, clothes designing, teaching, nursing and dental nursing. There were also classes in English and Hebrew for everyone.

Aka Gemainder who came from Krakow, became a dental nurse. She works at this profession to this day in Haifa. As for me, since I already started learning clothes designing before the war, it was only natural to follow it up, therefore I used the opportunity that ORT offered and enrolled in a course in designing. The problem was that the particular course in which I was interested, was not given in Landsberg but in Munich. This meant a daily train trip of two hours each way. After a while, I found a place in Munich where I could stay during the week and returned to Landsberg for the weekends.

I enjoyed the course immensely, I felt I was doing something worthwhile for the future. While I was in Munich, there was another course available for designing given by professional German designers, so both the Instructress of the course in Ort and I enrolled in this special course. It was really fun. In the morning, as soon as our class was over, Balka Hartman, my Teacher and I ran together to catch a bus for the afternoon class. By her being a teacher and a co-student at the same time, we became very good friends. Balka Hartman eventually went to live in Israel. It would be interesting if now, after forty-five years, we could re-establish contact.

During the first few months in Landsberg I went through the process of adjusting to living in a near normal society. I felt I needed re-orientation and guidance. The process of introspection and observation that started back in Plaszow in the working barracks, but which was interrupted during the most harrowing experiences in Auschwitz and in Oederan, only now began to re-awaken. Here in the DP Camp in Landsberg we met so many different kinds of people. There was such a “mish-mash” of cultures, backgrounds, and people from all lifestyles, education and religious levels.

There were certain types I never knew existed and I looked at some of them as if they were from another planet.

People were so desperate for company and because of this desire to be with someone, many unsuitable marriages ensued. Most vulnerable were young girls, alone and the only survivors of an entire family. What they needed was guidance, not husbands, at that stage. They were unable to evaluate the importance of choosing a person closer to their age, background and character. Many of those girls married men twice their age only because of some momentary kindness shown them. I could bring many such examples of marriages of such widely diverse social and intellectual levels of incompatibility.

We had freedom of movement, we could go wherever we wished and we had freedom of choice. There was no one to dictate our lives, but freedom in itself is not a cure for everything. To use freedom properly one needs wisdom. Freedom without wise guidance turns into chaos especially for the individual, as in our case in the post-concentration camp period. The entire social structure showed signs of imbalance and abnormality. UNRRA, JOINT and ORT tried their best, but to re-establish a proper social structure takes much longer to evolve.

I was observing this social whirlpool around me thinking, I grew up in a reliable and steady society, and in an environment where most of the people were religious. As a child I always thought that everyone, except the non-Jews, was religious. A few individuals in our neighbourhood were not so religious, but that did not count. In a courtyard next to our building was a branch of the organization, HaShomer-HaTzair, but I was never allowed to watch their activities, yet here in Landsberg I found myself in the midst of such people. In my mind, I began a slow process of elimination and I distanced myself from people whose influence upset me. It was not a conscious premeditated move, I think it was instinct. I was not fully aware of it, but more and more the thoughts of home, my mother and sisters, were occupying my mind, and with this returned the longing for my home atmosphere, for the kind of social environment I grew up in and felt comfortable with. It was clear that at that stage I had not yet found my emotional equilibrium.

Amongst the many, we found nice people; one of them was David Schlesinger who originally came from Krakow. David was quite a few years older than the girls in our group. He was nice, well spoken and good looking, in other words – a gentleman. Whenever David was amongst us we felt good, we were impressed with the way he looked after an elderly man with whom he shared a room, he was kind. Once there was a group of us sitting around recounting our different experiences, when David started describing in detail how he worked in a salt mine for twelve to fourteen hours a day in a crouched squatting position, because the shaft underground was not wide enough for a man to stand up. When, after such a day's work, they were brought up to the surface, the men could not straighten out their backs or stretch out their arms and legs, and it was torture. In addition, others had eaten the food that had been prepared for them when they came up.

We all had our stories, but for some reason this story touched me deeply and I began to cry. As the tears ran down my cheeks, I suddenly realized that this was the first time I was able to cry since I was separated from my family back in the Tarnow ghetto. There were also tears in the eyes of the other listeners. We all became aware of a change in us and the subject switched to the meaning and expression of crying. Our frozen emotions were slowly thawing. It was one more step towards the normalization of our emotions. We were able to care for another person on a deeper level. It was our empathy with David for what he had suffered that melted the ice around our hearts.

We all liked David, so when he told us of his decision to return to Poland we were sorry, but we were happy for him that he was planning his future and we wished him well. His return to Poland was only temporary. His real destination was America so as soon as his papers were processed, he immigrated to the States and settled in New York where he married, had three sons and worked as a furrier. We lost touch for about twenty years, then, by some coincidence, we found each other's addresses and renewed contact. We continued a regular correspondence over the years until the present time. I met David in New York in 1976.

Amongst the "older ones", probably none older than between forty to fifty years, we met people who before the war had already worked in their

professions, a small number as doctors, dentists and pharmacists. The bulk of the Landsberg DP camp's population was of an age that did not have a chance for education before the war and it was difficult for them to start at a low level when they felt they were already adults. Some tried to cover their ignorance with overbearing rough, loud and offensive behaviour. There was a rumour that in one of the offices sat a man who had just learned to sign his name, he needed a secretary to read to him whatever needed to be signed, as he could not read himself. However, many young people did decide to start a career and enrolled at high schools and universities. The new German Government allowed the students to complete their course without any charge and they were also given a stipend for living expenses.

The first in our group to be serious about marriage was Genia. She met Yakob back in Theresienstadt and they came together to Landsberg. I think it was October 1945 when this exciting event took place, it was the first proper chuppa wedding in Landsberg. Amongst the survivors, there was a Rabbi who conducted the ceremony. There was no need for invitations, everybody just came. I do not remember what we ate, but I do remember that there was a lot of singing and dancing. The apartment (one room) of Genia and Yakob became a central meeting place, they were very hospitable and the little they had, they always shared.

Their first child was born in Landsberg, and in due time they immigrated to Israel where they lived in Hod HaSharon near Petach Tikvah. Our friendship continues to this day and their hospitality remains the same. At about the time Genia and Yakob married, Itka, Zuzia and I became friendly with some young men who lived on the ground floor of our building. We used to meet together in the large dining room of the communal kitchen, and when passing in the street we would stop for a chat. In the course of conversations, we found out a lot about one another's backgrounds. From amongst the men who lived downstairs, there were two brothers, Moshe and Bezalel Hirschfeld, who came from a very religious family, and were the ones with whom our group became friendly. Once, on passing our room, they noticed the candles on the table. They were so impressed that they told us they had not seen Shabbat candles since they had left home in Yaslo, Poland years before. We heard that *shuls* and*Shtieblech* were being organized but we, as girls, did not go to *shul*.

UNCLE CHASKEL BERGLAS

Ever since the liberation, I knew that I had to find out the address of my uncle, a younger brother of my father, the only survivor of his generation. I vaguely remembered that he lived in New York. During my daydream hours in the camps, I tried to visualize how I would ever meet my uncle, if I survived the war. Uncle Chaskel was one of nine children, six sons and three daughters, of whom my father was the eldest. As a child I did not know him, he had left Poland before I was born, but I knew of him from letters and photos. My earliest recollection of Uncle Chaskel was when I first met him in 1935 or 36, when he was living in Holland with his wife, Sheva and 2 daughters, and they came to visit his parents in Ryglice, and to visit us in Tarnow. He particularly wanted to spend some time with my father, his eldest brother, since my father was ill in bed and they did not know if they would see each other again. Also since my father was the eldest in the family, he was born in 1895, he was an example for his brothers and sisters and they respected him greatly. In fact, he was responsible for bringing secular education into his family.

For reasons I do not know, my grandparents had decided to settle in the small village of Ryglice, possibly even before they had any family. At that time and also shortly after the turn of the century, the education system in Poland was not well developed, especially in rural communities where most of the population was illiterate. The towns did have some schools but education was not compulsory.

The accepted pattern that my grandparents followed was for religious Jews to send the girls to school and the boys to a *cheder* where they learnt only Jewish studies. There were two main reasons why sons were not sent to school. First was a real fear that the boys would be attacked verbally and physically by their non-Jewish co-students, and even if not attacked, they would be ridiculed for their dress, manners and speech. In most cases the Jewish boys spoke a poor Polish and were laughed at for incorrect grammar and pronunciation. The reason for this was not lack of intelligence, rather the home atmosphere where only Yiddish was spoken. Above all, however, was the fear that the boys would be influenced by the secular education and the non Jewish boys and then they would neglect Torah study and their religious traditions.

When my father reached his mid teens, he must have realized the importance of knowing the language of the land and he decided to teach himself. He borrowed books from a non-Jewish neighbour, hid in the attic behind some piles of straw and letter by letter, word by word he overcame the difficulties and acquired the skills of reading and writing Polish. Once he achieved this, he persuaded his father to hire tutors for all his younger brothers even though his father was opposed to learning Polish. My father told us how his father once caught him reading a Polish book and he tore it up and burned it.

My father had inborn intelligence and a natural quest for learning. His yearning for continued education was frustrated by the outbreak of the First World War therefore he always urged us to use every opportunity to learn and study as he had urged his younger siblings.

Now in Landsberg 1945 I was searching for a way to contact my uncle Chaskel, whom I remembered from that visit to my father ten years ago in Tarnow. An opportunity presented itself when we met a young American soldier. He was Jewish, and mentioned that he was going back to the States for a short while. He was willing to take some names for people who wanted to contact relatives. Apparently, this young soldier gave the list of names to the Red Cross or some other organization and they, in turn, broadcasted the names over the radio several times a day. My Uncle heard his name mentioned and immediately tried to contact me. It is difficult for me now to describe the joy and the feeling of relief I felt. At last, I had found someone to whom I could claim I belonged. There was someone there far away, there was a family I could call **my family** and they wanted me. There is **nothing** more precious to a human being than the feeling **of being wanted,** it is more important than riches, knowing one is wanted is a source of happiness. Most of the unhappiness in the world stems from a person feeling unwanted.

My first letter from America came to the UNRRA office, with my name and UNRRA Office, Landsberg DP Camp, Germany on the envelope. Someone in the office asked, waving the letter, “Does anyone know who Mala Berglas is?” Well someone in the office did know me, and suddenly all of

Landsberg knew that I had received a letter. Soon after, a small package of clothing arrived.

The letter from my Uncle was written in Yiddish and I had difficulty reading it. I spoke Yiddish reasonably well but not so with reading. Our good friends from downstairs, Moshe and Bezalel Hirschfeld came to the rescue. Moshe read the letter once, then a second time, until I could feel what the letter contained. My Uncle expressed joy at the knowledge that I had survived and was anxious to know more – were there any other survivors of all the brothers, a sister and their children, how about his parents, what happened to them? I sensed from the contents of the letter that my Uncle had a premonition that the news might not be good. He asked for more details, I was able to tell him only about Tarnow, the terrible truth about Ryglice we both found out later.

Uncle Chaskel and Tante Sheva were such warmhearted, kind people, nothing was too much for them if they thought they could help. Not only did they want to help with arranging an *affidavit* for my entry to the States, but they also took care of family from Belgium. Uncle Chaskel had a sister, Chaya who, with her husband Moshe and four daughters managed to leave Germany and settle in Belgium, hoping it was safe. However, when the Germans overran Belgium the Jewish population was in great danger. Tante Chaya with Uncle Moshe and their children were hiding out, and for a while all seemed well until one day Tante Chaya went out shopping. Unfortunately it was a time that the Germans were stopping people in the streets and if they happened to be Jewish, they were deported. When Tante Chaya was deported, Uncle Moshe was left in charge of the girls, Judith, Margo, Zita and Rita, who were all very young at the time. After the war Uncle Chaskel, together with Tante Sheva, did not spare any effort to bring the family over to the States, and continued helping them with settling into their new country.

Their boundless love for any member of the family who survived, was shown in the case of Marilyn. Uncle Chaskel's younger sister, Sarah, married and lived in Holland before the war and the two of them had a close relationship. At the beginning of the war when the Germans marched into Holland, Uncle Chaskel, Tante Sheva and their two daughters, Betty and Margo, were lucky enough to be able to go to the United States of America.

Sister Sarah together with her husband, Naftali, and their baby girl, Marilyn, remained in Holland. The Germans started to deport Jews in Holland as well so Sarah and Naftali decided to deposit their baby with a non-Jewish family for safety in case something happened to them. Unfortunately, like many others, they did not return and Baby Marilyn could have stayed there with this family never knowing who her real parents were. But this non-Jewish couple were really Righteous Gentiles. They contacted Uncle Chaskel, most probably according to the wishes of little Marilyn's parents, and they were ready to hand over the child even though they loved her very much. Uncle Chaskel and Tante Sheva never hesitated to adopt Marilyn as one of their own, and she became their third daughter.

This was the kind of family I felt I would like to join. The letters I received from Uncle Chaskel I treasured for a long time. The correspondence from Landsberg to New York did not run so smoothly, I had a problem with writing letters in Yiddish, I knew I had to reply. Now I really became dependent on Moshe's skill and good will in helping me in this predicament. Indeed, Moshe was very willing to spend as much time as was necessary to translate my ideas from Polish to Yiddish. It was hilarious how we managed to communicate in those two languages without even noticing the difference. Of course, I had to explain to my Uncle why it was necessary to ask my friend to write for me – this he understood. Moshe also used this opportunity to enclose a letter of his own with the request that my Uncle look up the name of his family in the telephone book and notify them of his and his brother's survival.

Occasionally we discussed our respective families and we never really felt quite alone. There was always either Itka or Zuzia around and the theme of home and family was rather general, a kind of reminiscence of how "it used to be." It was amazing how through this general talk, we garnered insight into someone's background and in what kind of atmosphere one grew up. Moshe used to tell us how the Hirschfeld brothers, all six of them, were known for their good singing voices. On Friday evenings during and after the Shabbos meal, people would stand under their window to listen to them sing.

As I listened to the description of a Shabbos table with the boys singing and the two sisters, Miriam and Chaya probably serving the meal, my mind

wondered off to my own home. Around the table was my family, at the head sat my maternal grandfather and my father, the rest of the family were all "girls", grandmother, mother and the four of us, all sisters – there were no brothers. We were trained to sit quietly while the men sang *zmiros* and spoke *divrei Torah.*

I guess that subconsciously I was comparing the two households. On a conscious level I was still making plans to go to the States and allow myself to be influenced by my Uncle's opinion in such serious matters as marriage. I did not yet feel confident that my judgment would be correct. I needed the advice of another person. I once confided this idea to Moshe when we happened to be walking by ourselves, to which he replied, "I am older, ask me." It was said half to himself. I looked into his eyes, so blue and so deep one could see almost into his heart. I did not continue and he did not pressure me to continue the subject – we left it at that.

Autumn was setting in and the freedom of summer was ending. I was still attending the course in Munich, Itka was already working as a dental nurse and Zuzia still could not make up her mind what she intended to do. Before the war she used to work in her brother's law office. However, when she found out after the war that her brother had not survived Buchenwald, she felt that it would be too painful for her to continue working in the same kind of job as before. Yet in emergencies she did help out, her skill in typing and a slight knowledge of English were in demand. Zuzia was intelligent and sharp, she had a quick wit and made friends easily. While doing part-time relief work at the local Police Station (all Jewish) she met Monick Bartkomski, a young handsome policeman, and it was the beginning of an interesting romance.

Whenever there was a free day, the whole group made a trip to Munich or some other place just for the fun of it. Later in the afternoon on our return, we would occupy a section of the carriage on the train and sing all the way back to Landsberg. Naturally it was Moshe doing the singing and Bezalel occasionally joining in.

I became friends with Moshe and his brother because I was attracted to their descriptions of the kind of family from which they came. Our backgrounds were very similar even though we came from different towns. His family

was all Bobover Chassidim, to whom I already had previous sympathy. When he described the Shabbos table and the zemiros they sang, it reminded me of my own family. Although I had no one to advise me, I felt in my heart that this was the right kind of person for me and that my father would have approved. It was *min hashamayim.* So I decided that if he asked me to marry him, I would accept.

I also knew that I needed his maturity. He was ten years older than me. He explained to me, somewhat apologetically, why he had not married earlier even before the war. He felt he could not leave his widowed mother alone with two unmarried daughters so he sacrificed himself by waiting until his sisters get married. He was a mature, gentle, and understanding man. He taught me many things about life that I did not know, but above all, he taught me to believe in myself. The most beautiful compliment he gave me once, which I will remember forever, he said, "King Solomon said that only one in a thousand women is worthwhile. How come I am so lucky as to get the one in a thousand?"

STARTING A NEW LIFE

We were liberated in May, 1945. During the *yomim tovim,* Moshe davened in front of the *tzibbur* and I was very proud. Soon after, we went for a walk in the rain, like the song by Frank Sinatra *singing in the Rain.* We were walking and talking and he asked me to marry him. We became engaged and I was very happy. We told all our friends. He wanted to buy me a diamond ring so we went looking in the shops. Each time he would see a ring he would say, "If I could afford it, I would buy you this one." It just made us happy to talk about all the things we would like to do if we could afford it. On the first of January, called *Sylvester Night,* we made an official announcement of our engagement. We had an older friend who wrote us a proper *tenaim.*

We decided to get married in the spring and on the Shabbos after *Shavuos* was Moshe's *aufruf.* We got married on the Tuesday after Shavuos, I think. We had a proper Jewish wedding with a Rabbi and some friends came in to play some instruments. People were very happy and they prepared everything. It was in a tent and everything was so simple.

We went to Australia about a year or two later, in June of 1948 when we received our papers. It was easier to get papers for Australia than for America because everyone wanted to go to America. I was already pregnant. Our sponsors were Mr. and Mrs. Kalman and Basha Buxton, cousins of my mother. We found them through the Red Cross and they agreed to sponsor Moshe's brother Bezalel as well. We were not going to leave him behind. They were very kind to us and helped us adjust to life in our new country.

Our son, Baruch, was born in Melbourne three weeks after we arrived. The Gabbai of the nearby *shul* arranged the *brit* and later on the *pidyon haben.* We immediately were accepted into this small community. The *gabbai's* son, Avraham Jedwab, even lent us some money to buy a small sewing machine and I began to work at home. My husband found a job soon after and we saved up for another machine and then established a small sewing factory in our apartment. Then we moved to a larger apartment in the suburbs of Moonee Ponds.

As soon as we moved there, Moshe wrote to the local papers announcing the opening of a *minyan* on Shabbos morning. This brought *frum* people from within walking distance and so our little *shul* was started. Then Mr. Kafka, who had a large house, donated two rooms, one for men and one for women. Moshe also arranged a *heder* for the little boys by hiring an Israeli teacher for the community.

By that time, Baruch was already 3 years old and thanking *Hashem Yisbarac,* a little girl was born to us. Her name was Golda Rivka and we called her Glenda. Once a couple came to us about some sewing and they mentioned that they had a son in a Yeshiva in America. Moshe exclaimed in wonder, "Can you imagine what it means to send a boy to Yeshiva all the way to another country so far away! Back in Poland to send a son to a neighbouring town was a big deal." His reaction remained with me even though Baruch was only 4 years old at the time.

Moshe and I had shared the experience of being in the *Shoah*, each in our own way, but we did not talk about it a lot. After the war, we heard about so many other atrocities that we ourselves did not experience or even know about. I was surprised that the stories and our own memories did not affect

us at the time as much as I would have expected. I guess we were so busy adjusting to a new life and perhaps we were too young to fully understand. Today these things move me so much emotionally that I try not to think about them because then I can't sleep.

I never talked to the children about my experiences. Later on, when Glenda started reading books about the Holocaust, I was glad. It is different to read about things that happened to other people than to read about the experiences of your own parents. She never asked about it and it was only much later that we talked about it at all. Someone once told me that I was lucky that my children did not have the symptoms and the hang-ups of second generation Holocaust survivors. My daughter also thanked me for this.

Unfortunately, Moshe became very ill and he needed heart surgery. He told me before we were married that his heart was not strong. He had rheumatic fever as a child and that affected his heart. Later the hard work and conditions of the Camps made it worse. We were so new and naïve that we did not know what to do. We had no connections and no one to advise us about the best doctors. Moshe underwent the surgery but it was not successful. A few days later, he passed away on May, 15, 1954 when Baruch was only 5 and Glenda was 2. It was a bit of a shock to my system to realize that once again I was alone. One of our neighbours suggested that I put the children in an Orphan's home but I would not hear of it. No one can take this responsibility from me.

I continued with our small factory with the help of my brother-in-law, Bezalel. He also became a father figure to the children even though they knew he was an uncle not their Daddy. I found a very nice lady, Mrs. White, to look after Glenda while I worked. So the home atmosphere seemed normal as far as the children could understand.

As the children grew, there came a time when I had to move them to a proper *Talmud Torah* in Carlton. Classes were held on Sunday mornings and in the afternoons, so every day after school, Baruch and Glenda took the bus to the Hebrew classes. One of the teachers was Mr.A.S.Yelen, the one whose parents had sent him to Yeshiva in America. The other teachers were Mr. Yaffe and Mr. David Stone. We are friends with them to this day.

Meanwhile many changes took place in Australia. The markets became flooded with cheap imports from China and many, like me, had to close their factories. Changes also took place in the family. My brother-in-law married and then a friend introduced me to a single man, Harry Gliksztein, who was four years older than me. He seemed nice and he was very kind to my children so in July 1960 I re-married.

When Baruch became a *bar mitzvah*, we made a nice celebration at home. The children called my husband by his first name. Harry was their friend but not their Daddy. He took Baruch to *shul* after his *bar mitzvah* to recite *kaddish*. When Baruch turned 15, his Talmud Torah teacher suggested that we send Baruch to a Yeshiva. At first I hesitated but then I remembered his father's reaction more than 12 years earlier. I knew in my heart that if his father were alive, he would have sent him. Mr. Yelen arranged the entrance exam. He was accepted to the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio and he made all the arrangements for his trip.

So in January 1964, my 15 year old son, who was small for his age, and whose heart must have been pounding in him with fear and worry about going to a far away country where he did not know anybody, bravely set off for America. A small group of friends and relatives saw him off at the airport. As the plane lifted off, my chest felt empty. "Where is my heart," I thought. My emotional reaction was stronger than I had anticipated. I lost balance and could not walk a straight line. After receiving his first letter, I felt better.

In those days, phone communication was not easy. The first time I called him was on his birthday six months later and we could only talk through the operator. When he heard my voice, we both cried and the operator said, "Go on and talk." From the day he left, I wrote to him daily to reassure him that he was still part of the family and that his books and papers were still on his desk undisturbed.

Four years later my "aged" son came back for a visit but I had to promise him that he could return to the Yeshiva. I sent him a two-way ticket and he came home for *Pesach*. However, because he had to cross the date line and would miss a day of counting the *sefira*, he had to stay until after *Shavuos*.

So he stayed for nine weeks and it was wonderful. We were able to re-establish our closeness. He had left as a little boy and now he was a tall, skinny young man with a little beard and a black hat, a real Yeshiva boy.

He walked into the house, silently looked around to see if everything was the way he left it. That first day he was silent all day. He only started talking the following day. He spent the whole time at home learning. When he went back, the Rosh Yeshiva tested him and he told me that it was the first time that a boy actually spent his vacation so involved in learning. He stayed on at the Yeshiva and a few years later he was married and he continued on at the Yeshiva. Only a few years ago, he took a position as a Rabbi in Cleveland. When he called to tell me that he was engaged, he said, "Now I won't be lonely any more." It was then I realized how hard this had been for him. They waited for ten years till they had children, *Baruch Hashem*.

Glenda finished school in Melbourne as an optometrist. She decided to go to America. She stayed with our cousin there and she went to Stern College to supplement her Jewish studies. She started getting involved in *shidduchim* there but it did not work out for her. I asked her to come home after two and a half years, if only for a visit. After she got back, she met a young man whom she had known from her school days at the University, David Steiner. He was studying engineering and they hit it off. *Baruch Hashem*, it was *min hashamayim.* She never went back to America, even though she had left her books and personal belongings there. They got married and they moved to Israel, initially just for a year or two. They were happy there and decided to stay.

I was always self conscious that I hadn't learned a lot in my life. My education was cut short by the war and then I became busy with family life and making a living. When my children were grown and left home, however, I started to sit in on classes at a seminary for Girls. I wanted so much to learn Torah and I attended classes every day. Soon, the Principal asked me to become the *eim bayis* for the school. I agreed on condition that the girls would accept me. I continued there for nine years, all the time sitting in on classes and helping the girls. After a while, I learned on my own from *seforim* I got for myself in translation. I even learned with the girls to give speeches and I later gave *shiurim* in Yiddish when I came to Israel.

COMING HOME

We visited Glenda and her family several times in Israel and she urged us to come before we got too much older. I thought to myself, *Moshe Rabbeinu* wanted so much to enter the land and he could not and here I had the opportunity to do so and didn't. So when my husband retired, we packed up and moved to Israel.

We arrived to Israel in 1986 and, once again, tried to establish a new life in a new country. I had the best intentions to attend an Ulpan and I did for 3 months enjoying it very much. However, it was a time when my daughter, Glenda, had little children and a new baby B"H. I felt that it was more important that I help her rather than continue learning Hebrew.

After adjusting to new conditions, organizing my house, and minding the children, I decided to learn Ivrit by listening. At the same time, I became interested in joining classes in *Tanakh* and *Tefilla* at the Israel Center. On Monday morning, I started with a *shiur* by Rabbi Zev Leff on *Tefilla* followed by *shiurim* on the deeper meaning of *Humash* and *Pirkei Avot.* The benefits and joy of learning are indescribable and I continued this for 5 years. Later, I began to attend a *shiur* in Bayit Vegan in the home of Rabbi Yakov Katz. We were learning *Derech Hashem* by *Ramchal* and the lessons from this book changed my life and my approach to the ways of *Hashem.*

Suddenly, tragedy struck again and my husband became very ill. He passed away in 1988, only 2 years after our arrival in Israel. It was a shock because it all happened so quickly. This time I did not feel so alone because B"H my daughter, her husband and their children were helping me greatly. With *Hashem's* I continued my life. The desire for learning did not diminish but emotionally there was a kind of emptiness.

I took a job suggested to me by a friend from Melbourne, Mrs. Tilda Shilo. She and I kept an elderly lady company in a senior home. One of the things

we did with her was to tell her stories from the *Humash* and we also played music for her from tapes.

I also started going to the *Kotel* every morning. I liked to go to the first *minyan* with a group of ladies of various ages. We would meet at 4 a.m. I drove and on the way, I would pick up the young ladies that were waiting at Meah Shearim and other places. I was able to do this for almost 14 years until I couldn't physically keep it up. Now, we have a reunion there of these women every month on *Rosh Hodesh*.

Living in Israel gave me the opportunity to be near my daughter and her family and to watch my grandchildren grow. It also allowed me to continue learning *Torah* which enriched my life and helped me grow closer to *Hashem* to whom I feel so much gratitude.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank *Hashem Yisborach* for sending me three lovely women who helped me to realize my dream of writing a trilogy of my life. It was back in the early 1990's when Mrs. Joan Lavie kindly suggested to me that I should write my experiences during the war.

I started writing and then once a week we met for an hour. During that time, Jo was listening to what I wrote during the week and she made positive remarks which encouraged me. This gave me the confidence to continue. Those meetings went on for a whole year. I am so grateful to Jo for the time and patience she generously granted me.

Suddenly, however, I lost confidence and was not able to continue writing. It was only many years later in 2010, I was persuaded to try again but I needed help. I contacted Yad Sarah and was told that there are volunteers to help people like me to write their stories.

It was Mrs. Sarah Goodman with her skill on the computer who typed out my many hand-written pages. As I was told by Mrs. Esther Krauss, the typing involved a lot of hard work and Sarah did it with *mesirut nefesh*. I am

so thankful to Sarah for this *chessed*. How can I express my appreciation for her dedication and effort?

Last, but not least, is Mrs. Esther Krauss who very kindly and expertly edited the book. It was Esther's guidance that enabled me to continue to bring back the memories of how I rebuilt my life after the war. With the help of the Almighty, there were decisions to make about marriage, immigration to Australia, raising a family, and, after many years, arriving in Israel and making *aliyah*. How can I ever thank Esther for the many hours of patience and, above all, for her friendship?

Malka Glickstein
2010

Malka with children, Baruch and Glenda 2010

I would like to add a few thoughts to these pages of my mother's memoirs. My dear mother, to whom I owe all that I am, has put in writing what she calls her 3 lives. It was her optimism and positivity, with tremendous help from Heaven, that allowed her to survive the terrible war years and those

same qualities served her well in the years of rebuilding with their many difficulties. The fact that my brother and I grew up normal and emotionally healthy despite it all is only due to my mother's strength of character and positive outlook.

It was only when I was already an adult that I looked back and realized that my mother was only a teenager when her whole family was murdered and she then suffered alone through the concentration camps, married and then struggled in a new country. A very few years after that, her beloved husband died and she became a very young widow with two small children and no money. How did she have the strength after that to build a normal home and then to agree to send my brother away to Yeshiva knowing she would not see him for a long time? When I, too, left for New York, returned and married my husband in Melbourne, she gave us her blessings to go to Israel for a couple of years. Of course she would have preferred we stay in Melbourne but she didn't say a word. Putting herself first is something totally alien to my mother. Worrying for another person's needs, whether for her family or others, is what comes naturally to her.

Having my mother live nearby in Ramot has been a blessing for us and for her. She became the *savta* of the neighborhood and has made many friends among the families here.

For my children, *Buba* is a role model of *emuna* and *bitachon*, perseverance, hard work, caring and giving. If one of the children has a big test or other significant event they will call and ask, "*Buba*, please *daven* for me."

May *Hashem* bless my mother with many more healthy and productive years and much *nachas.*

Glenda Steiner

Malka with some of Glenda's grandchildren
after she came to Jerusalem 1987

Malka with first great-grandchild
Shlomo Steiner 2004

Heshy (Harry) Gliksztein, Malka's second husband,
Australia 1986

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Dear Mr. Hirshfeld,

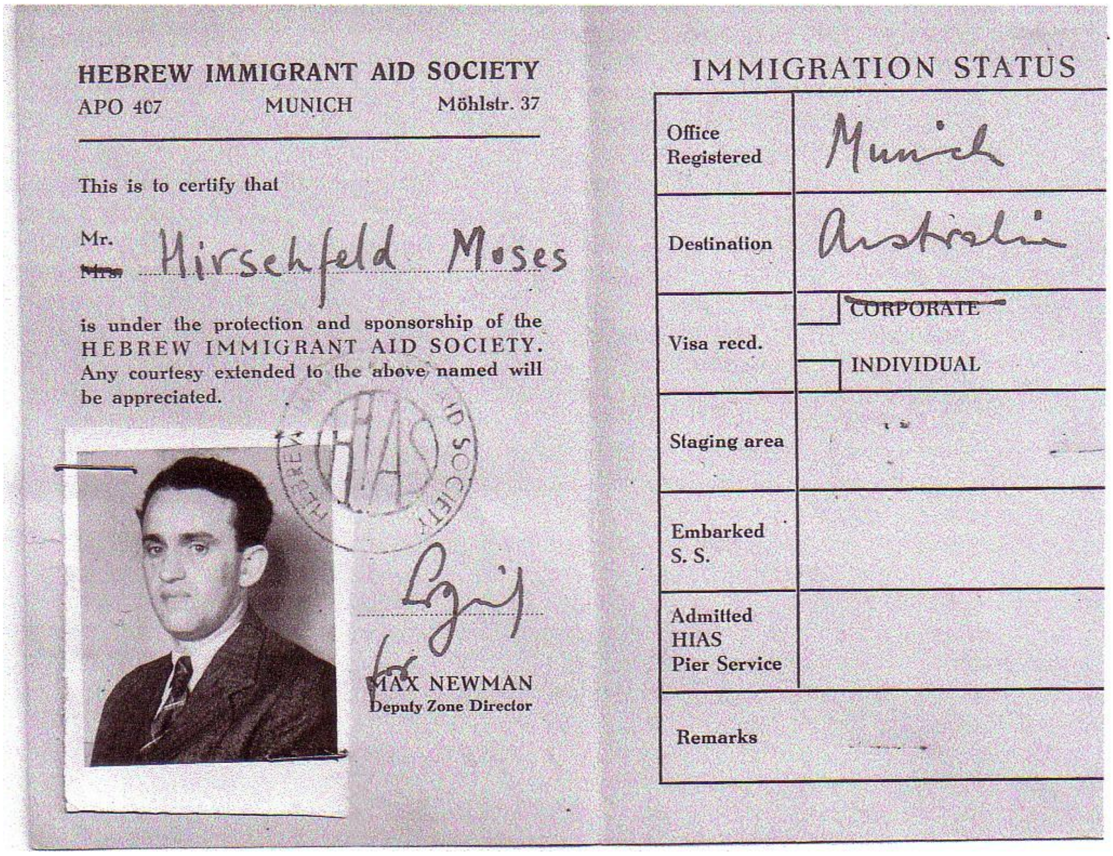
Towards the end of the z'man your dear son came to us for an exam in the entire Masechta of Baba Basra. He was outstanding and showed that he is definitely destined to become one of the select Gedolei Yisroel of the coming generation.

G-d bless him and grant you endless nachas from him. He has returned from New York and looks very well, Boruch Hashem.

Sincerely yours
Mordecai Gif

Letter about Baruch Hirshfeld from Rabbi Mordechai Gifter
Rosh Yeshiva,Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland 1968

Tenaim hand written by friend of Malka and Moshe



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This is to certify that

Mr. ~~Mrs.~~ Hirschfeld Moses

is under the protection and sponsorship of the HEBREW IMMIGRANT AID SOCIETY. Any courtesy extended to the above named will be appreciated.

for MAX NEWMAN
Deputy Zone Director

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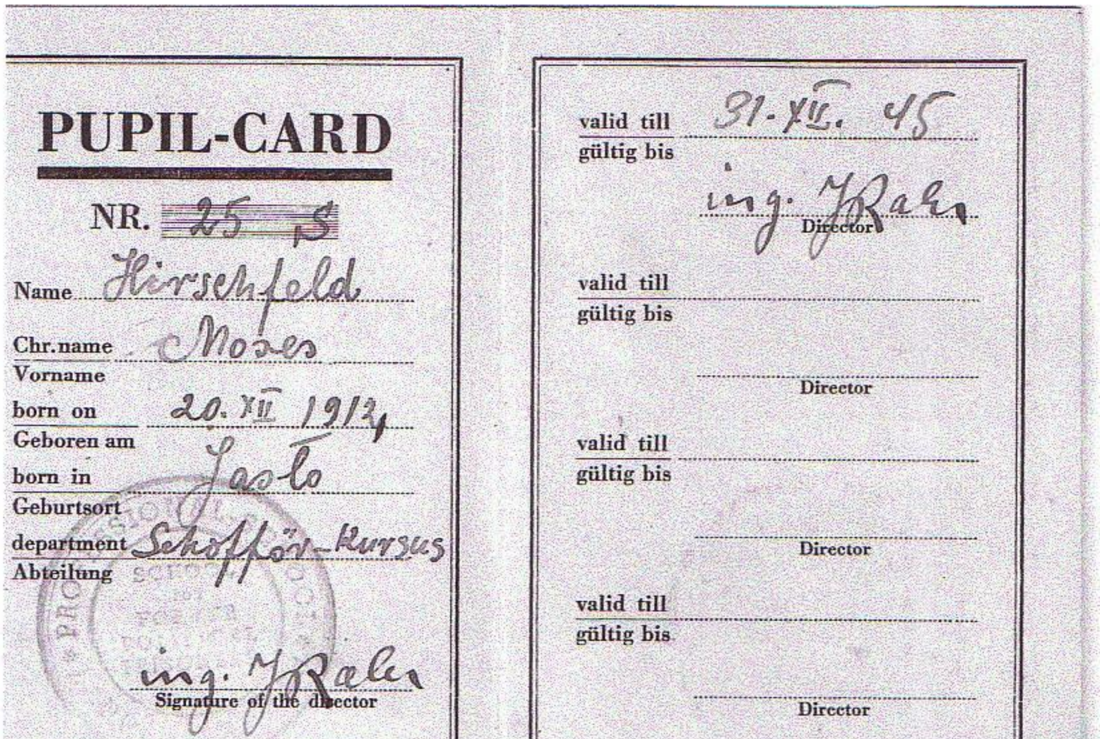
Embarked S. S.	
Admitted HIAS Pier Service	
Remarks	



PUPIL-CARD

NR. 25 S

Name Hirschfeld
Chr.name / Vorname Moses
born on / Geboren am 20. XII 1912
born in / Geburtsort Jaslo
department / Abteilung Schoffőr-Kursus

ing. [illegible]
Signature of the director

valid till / gültig bis	31. XII. 45
Director	ing. [illegible]
valid till / gültig bis	
Director	
valid till / gültig bis	
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Moshe's ID card from HIAS

OVERNMENT
lleriekaserne
a. Lech

2660

MILITARY GOVERNMENT

Bescheinigung.

Der Lager-Kommandant bescheinigt hiermit auf Grund der vorgelegten Urkunden und der vorgenommenen Feststellungen, daß

Berglas Hala

geboren am 2.2.IV.1918 in Tarnow

letzter Wohnsitz Tarnów

während der deutschen Verwaltung vor der Besetzung dieses Gebietes politischer Häftling gewesen ist.

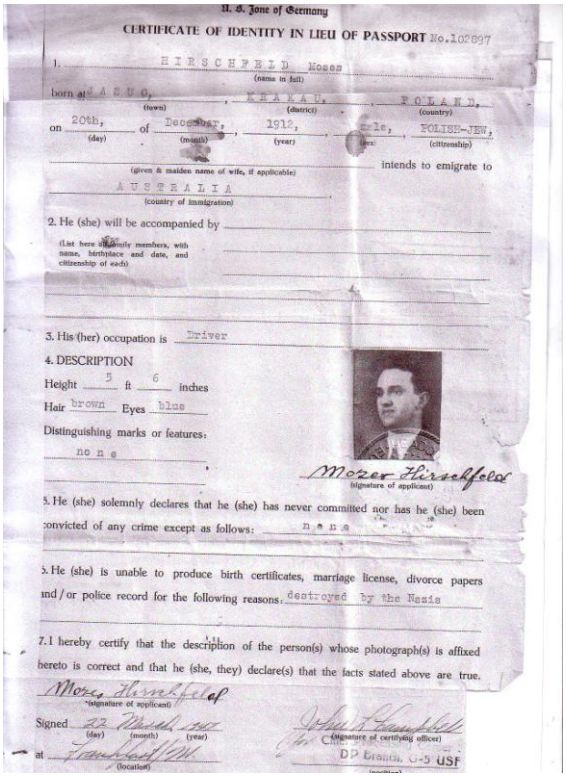
Er kam hierher vom Konzentrationslager

Auschwitz

Häftlings-Nr. A-21685 Siedzice

Dieser Schein gilt als Personalausweis.

Malka's ID as refugee from Auschwitz



U. S. Zone of Germany

CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY IN LIEU OF PASSPORT No. 102897

1. HIRSCHFELD Moses
(name in full)

born at SANOK, KRAKAU, POLAND,
(town) (district) (country)

on 20th, of December, 1912, male, POLISH-JEW,
(day) (month) (year) (sex) (citizenship)

(given & maiden name of wife, if applicable) intends to emigrate to

AUSTRALIA
(country of immigration)

2. He (she) will be accompanied by
(List here all family members, with name, birthplace and date, and citizenship of each)

3. His (her) occupation is Driver

4. DESCRIPTION
Height 5 ft 6 inches
Hair brown Eyes blue
Distinguishing marks or features:
none

Moses Hirschfeld
(signature of applicant)

5. He (she) solemnly declares that he (she) has never committed nor has he (she) been convicted of any crime except as follows: none

6. He (she) is unable to produce birth certificates, marriage license, divorce papers and/or police record for the following reasons: destroyed by the Nazis

7. I hereby certify that the description of the person(s) whose photograph(s) is affixed hereto is correct and that he (she, they) declare(s) that the facts stated above are true.

Moses Hirschfeld
(signature of applicant)

Signed 22 March 1947
(day) (month) (year)

at Frankfurt/M
(location)

(signature of certifying officer)

DP Branch, G-5 USF

Moshe's ID in lieu of Passport

Sending Baruch Hirshfeld back to Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland, USA 1968

Moshe's *matzevah*, Melbourne, Australia 1954

Malka, Moshe and brother, Bezalel Hirshfeld
Landsberg 1948

די מתפללים פון מוני־פאנדסער מנין

ווילן עפנטלעך אויסדריקן זייער הארציקן דאנק
מר. און מרס. מ. הירשפעלד, ווי אויך מר. בצלאל הירשפעלד
פאר העלפן ארגאניזירן און אפגעבן זייער פריוואטע וואוינונג אויף
אדורכצופירן רעגולערע שבתדיקע און יום־טובדיקע מנינים.
צייטווייליקער קאמיטעט פון „מוני־פאנדסער מנין״

בײ דער געלעגנהייט ווערט אויך באקאנט געמאכט, אז מיר האבן זיך
איבערגעטראגן אין א נייעם לאקאל אויף
41 MARIBYRNONG ROAD, MOONEE PONDS.
וואו עס וועלן ווייטער פארקומען די מנינים יעדן שבת 10.30 פרי, צו
וועלכע מיר לאדן פריינטלעך איין די איינוואוינער פון דער ארומיקער געגנט.

Printed expression of gratitude to Moshe and Bezalel for
organizing and housing the shul in their home
Moonee Ponds, Australia c.1950

Malka and Moshe Hirshfeld , Landsberg 1946

Malka Berglas engagement picture, Landsberg, Germany 1946

Rachel Levi (right), paternal grandmother, Aunt Chaya (left) with her two children, Aunt Sarah (second from right)
Wiesbaden, Germany 1930's

Mindl Berglas, paternal Aunt killed
in Ryglice Massacre 1944

Reb Avraham Chaim Levi, paternal grandfather, killed in the Ryglice Massacre, Poland 1944

Malka, (left) with sisters, Hannah (middle) and Basha
Tarnow, Poland 1936

Rachel Levi (2d left), Uncles Simcha (left), David (2d right)
Aunt Mindl (right)