

The Life of A Child Survivor From Bialystock, Poland

A True Story

Biography of a Thirteen-Year Old Boy
in the Ghettos and Concentration
Camps During World War II

by

Benjamin Midler

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Many thanks to my wife Esther who patiently supported me through the hard times I had, and the nightmares resulting from what I lived through.

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Photos: Most photos of the Holocaust period are copies of snapshots taken surreptitiously by the Nazis, or ghetto photographers. The pictures were passed from hand to hand and copied. They therefore often lack the clarity found in professional photos. Where a photo appears in this book without a credit, the owner or source could not be traced.

Some were taken during my visit to my hometown of Bialystock in 1993, while attending the memorial dedication for the ghetto fighters who resisted the Nazis in the liquidation of the Ghetto in 1943.

An Adolescent's Perspective

Dedication

A Survivor's Story is dedicated to the memory of my family, who perished in Bialystok, Poland due to World War II. They are:

My father , Elihau Midler

My mother, Gutke Midler

My brother, Arie Midler

My sister, Matilda Midler

My Uncle Schmulke (my mother's brother) and his wife Esther, Cimsztein

My cousins (Schmulke's children): Shulamit, Sara and Rosa,Cimsztein

My Aunt Esther (my mother's sister) and her husband Baruch, Alterlevi

My cousins (Esther's children): Yehuda and Sonja, Alterlevi

My Uncle Leibl (my mother's brother) who died during an Aktion before the ghetto, a Saturday Martyr in 1941, and his wife, Cimsztein

My Aunt Brocha (my mother's sister), Cimsztein

LIFE OF A CHILD SURVIVOR FROM BIALYSTOCK POLAND

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+THE LIFE OF A CHILD SURVIVOR

From Bialystock Poland

PROLOGUE

As one of the survivors of the concentration camps, I must live with this experience that has scarred my peers and I forever. Repeatedly, and often compulsively, we return to our subject without choice. We are captives of History and we write them from our need to document the horror that we lived through.

This is the story of how I escaped from execution squads, concentration camps, and gas chambers. I am one survivor, one among thousands. Why was I chosen to survive? Was I better than the three million Jews who did not survive from Poland? I'm the only one survived from my family and of the families of my mother's side and from my father's side.

Why not all the others? I can still see them all. They are always with me. As a result of the war, I was robbed of my childhood, my family, my secure existence and especially of my identity. I did not have the opportunity to get to know my parents better—after one very insignificant day (to the world) of war I became an orphan. I was humiliated, stripped of my dignity and humanity and made into an animal—devoid of love, devoid of freedom. The war began fifty-seven years ago. I was just a little eleven year old boy in the midst of the years that were supposed to be the best of my life, that were instead spent fighting for my life. I moved from one hellish camp to another, experienced one beating after another, and cried one lonely night after another. I was without guidance, without a shoulder to lean on or to cry on. I was without human kindness. I was ALONE in the world. I was a child, just fifteen years old when I lost my parents.

The concentration camps were a kind of “experiment,” as has often been noted. The goal was to reduce inmates to mindless creatures whose behavior could be predicted and absolutely controlled. The environment was closed, controlled, and completely regulated: a “total” world in the strictest sense of the term. The “negative forces” were pain and death. The “positive forces” were food and life. These forces were pushing and pulling our strings twenty-four hours a day at the deepest level of human needs. And yet, we survivors are proof that the “experiment” did not succeed. The concentration camps are plainly an embodiment of the archetype we call “Hell:” where neither good nor evil prevails in the end.

The SS guards took pleasure in telling us that we had no chance of coming out alive. They emphasized, with particular relish, that the world would not believe what had happened once the war ended. There might be rumors, speculations, but no clear evidence. They thought that people would conclude that evil on such a scale was just not possible.

There are things I had to do, words I had to speak, moments which I had to dissect in order to show the world what I had seen and lived through. I write on behalf of the millions who could no longer speak, but had seen it also. I am the voice of their dead, burnt bodies.

I hope to provide an example to the world that a person can survive to live a productive life even after undergoing such intense, mind-numbing suffering at the hands of others whose humanity I doubt and affirm with this testimony. I affirm that they did exist—that they were in fact human beings who acted like animals to other human beings. But in writing this I hope for a better future, in which these heinous atrocities are not the norm and in which we all find that what is human inside each and every one of us is in fact noble. My indomitable spirit drove me, by my will to survive, and by much courage and resistance. I risked death in the gamble for life.

We survivors persist in our struggle, bearing witness to the tragedy and transmit this message and lesson of the Holocaust. We kindle the flame of remembrance by transmitting our legacy to future generations of our people. And to enlightened gentiles who recognize the Holocaust observance. We are recalling man's inhumanity to man and are painting the very real, moral and religious dilemma abstractly labeled as genocide in the world today.

The holocaust inflicted great losses on the Jewish community. The Nazis in World War II slaughtered six million Jews. The world, however, stood passive and silent during the six long war years. We were perplexed by the nagging question: Where were the protest and intervention of the world? Unfortunately, the question only confirmed our suspicion that nobody really tried to intervene, nobody really bothered to save our brothers and sisters. European Jews fell prey to world politics and were sacrificed on the altar of indifference, expediency, and inhumanity.

We survivors of the Holocaust are getting older and someday we will die. However, the holocaust must not be forgotten. I feel compelled to tell this story for all that died at the hands of the Nazis. The holocaust stories must be told from parent to child, from generation to generation, thus symbolically making it a legacy which all descendants of survivors remain aware of their close ties to each other and

to their Judaic heritage. The process of transmitting the message of the Holocaust can only continue with parents' efforts and with those, on a less personal level, of our schools.

After many internal debates, a lifetime of delays, and with the persistence of my family: wife, three daughters and six grandchildren, I finally got the courage to write down my life story and that of the life of the Jews in Europe. It is not an easy task as it brings back horrifying memories that I have suppressed all my life, wanting to spare my wife and children from the anguish I experienced. It is the only way, on a personal level, that both my living relatives and my descendants will ever be able to understand the events that have shaped my life, and hence the lives of everyone else in the family.

CHAPTER 1: MY CITY, BIALYSTOK

Bialystock was a “Jewish City”, 70% of the population was of Jewish heritage. Throughout its history, the town bubbled with Jewish life, tied to Jewish humanitarian tradition with a deep belief in a better, happier tomorrow. I experienced Jewish life everywhere: on the broad avenues of Senkevicha, Warshawska, to the narrow streets of Surazer. The Yiddish language reined in all Jewish homes. For the most part, Yiddish was heard in the neighborhood streets, not Polish.

The industries of the city were the products of Jewish knowledge. The most common industries were textiles, wood, tanning, and the trade center. They produced rapid and honest hard labor. These honest, hard-working qualities were, without exception, found in the hands of the Jews. The Jewish approach to life was more inspired in my city than in other places.

I was born in Poland in the city of Bialystock. The city of my birth, from what I can remember, was a pleasant and vibrant one. The streets were lit by electric lamps. We had band concerts in the park and horse-drawn trolleys. Turkish baths were popular. On Friday nights, I could smell the aroma of Jewish dinners in the air: Gefilte fish, chicken soup, chopped liver, and fresh baked challa.

. My family consisted of middle-class businessmen who owned a milk dairy that processed and distributed milk and their products to stores and vendors. Our plant was at street level and in the front of the plant was our store. In the store we sold dairy products to retail customers as well. Our living quarters were upstairs. We had a large backyard with a barn for horses.

My father, Elijahu, distributed the milk by horse-drawn carriage. My mother, Guta took care of my brother, sister, and me. However, I haven't been able to recall my siblings' names since my childhood. For many years after the war their entire existence was blocked from my memory.

My father kept a pair of huge horses in his stable. They seemed as strong as lions. Each day, except for Shabbat (Saturday), Father would rise very early, load the empty cans into the truck wagon and drive to pick up the milk at the station where the farmers from the nearby villages would bring their milk. In the summers, I liked to go with my father to keep him company. He would help me climb into the high wagon. While sitting next to my father, he would signal to the horses, using his reins, and yell in Yiddish, “Let's go!” The strong, energetic horses pulled the wagon very quickly and galloped speedily over the road. I took much pleasure riding and listening to my

MY CITY, BIALYSTOK

father's funny stories, and I was glad to help my father in his work.

My mother's family, who were also milk distributors, lived not far from us, and we would visit them often. My father's family lived around 50 kilometers from us in a small town named Sokolky. They were merchants who sold fruit to stores and other vendors. I spent many summers on one of the big farms from which we got our milk. It was at the farms that I was free to roam the fields. I especially enjoyed looking for tasty fruits: strawberries, raspberries, and big, black blueberries from their forests.

The most exhilarating times were when I was allowed to ride their beautiful horses.

I was free and I rode fast. I would often think of that feeling of freedom and speed later, when I was denied my own.

During the year, I attended private school in order to study Hebrew. On Fridays, my mother would prepare the food for the Sabbath and the weekend. I especially remember my mom lighting the Sabbath candles and reciting the prayer. Afterwards, we all went to the "shul" for worship. Our life was very peaceful, happy, and simple.

Our family kept a kosher house. Although we weren't able to attend shul daily, my father would say the morning prayers in the house before leaving for the country to pick up the milk. We were involved in the synagogue and in Jewish life. We would help the young students who were studying the Torah at the Yeshiva by providing housing and tending to their needs. My family believed that being a Jew involves a willingness to help others, regardless of their religious devotion or not.

In Bialystock, the pursuit of life's happiness and the achievement in humanitarian causes was much more extensive than elsewhere. The city produced its great people: many scholars, doctors, and politicians. The environment was a breeding ground for the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe. The city of Bialystok had private Hebrew schools (which I attended), a Hebrew gymnasium, 5 high Schools, and many vocational trade schools. This was the center for the study of the Torah since we had an abundance of Yeshivas and many synagogues. The pride of the city was the impressive "big shul" (temple) with the huge Byzantine style cupola on top.



From left to right: my father Eliahu Midler, my mother Gutke, my brother Arie, and myself, Bencion.



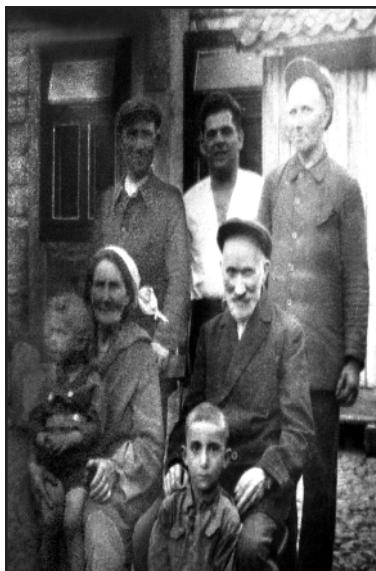
From left to right: Ben Midler, my sister Matilda, and my Brother Arie



From left to right (top row: my uncles Baruch's father, his wife Esther, and uncle Baruch. (Bottom row) I am seated in front of uncle Baruch's Father. Next to me my first cousin Sonja, Yehuda and a friend of the family



My mother (on the left) is holding hands with her sister, Esther.



My Grandparents are seated. I am sitting at their feet; My Uncles are standing Leibl, Baruch and Schmulke.



My uncle Schmulke (mother's brother) and Aunt Esther are pictured with their three children, (left to right): Cousins Shulamit, Sara, and Rosa.



**My mother's three sisters out of 6, (left to right)
Aunt Esther, Aunt Peshi and Aunt Brochi.**

MY CITY, BIALYSTOK

CHAPTER 2: GERMANY INVADED POLAND SEPTEMBER, 1939

Thus, it was in the early hours of September 1, 1939 without any declaration of war that the German Army stormed across Poland's borders, captured many cities including my hometown of Bialystock. It was the birth of the Blitzkrieg. It was the death of freedom. I watched the scattered air raids from our upstairs window. A short while later, we heard more jets. They began diving and dropping bombs. The bombs were exploding and fires were erupting in many parts of the city. Most people had no idea what was happening. No one imagined that this was the beginning of World War II. The attack was totally unexpected. Poland's resistance crumbled against the mechanized might of the German armies. Artillery pounded. Soldiers and civilians died. By the end of the week, the Polish army was nowhere to be found.

We children tried to find shelter behind my mother amongst her assurances that no harm would come to us if we hid beneath the stairs. We were inconsolable. The comfort of our mother seemed insignificant. Polish soldiers shed their uniforms in order to seek safety in civilian clothing. The German army now controlled the sky, and tanks were everywhere, mopping up any Polish resistance that remained.

France and England immediately declared war against Germany. However, it was only an empty declaration; they never tried to help besieged Poland.

On the morning of Friday, September 15, 1939, the second day of the holy Jewish holiday "Rosh Hashanah" (the Jewish New Year), as most of the Jews in Bialystock were praying in their synagogues, news spread that the Nazi Army was at the gates of the city. Panic erupted as Jews fled in all directions to hide from the murderers' onslaught.

By midday, the first platoons of German soldiers appeared in Bialystock. Shortly thereafter, the streets of the city were nearly emptied of people. The Nazi soldiers had scattered all over town with their weapons. Not coming across any passersby, they fired their guns into windows of buildings. The shooting left many dead and wounded; most victims were Jews.

The Germans participated in and inspired a wave of robberies of Jewish homes. A number of Jewish women were shot for refusing to part with their rings. There were rumors that the Nazis would not long remain in power in Bialystock. The radio announced that there was a

Russian and German pact: the Russian Army would occupy all the areas of Poland that once belonged to the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia (including Bialystock). It did not take long until the rumors became reality. During the time of the Nazi occupation, however, several hundred Jews were killed and their property was confiscated.

Hitler was gigantically successful in every conflict he engaged in. He quickly turned his back on those who provided him with assistance. He was armed with a powerful army, armored divisions, mighty air and sea fleets, and great technology.

He was capable of conquering not only Europe, but also the entire world! In his speeches, he raved, "First Europe, then the world!" When President Roosevelt warned him, he responded impudently, "Wait, we'll get around to you too!"

Yes, he was right, he had the means to possibly conquer the world. Perhaps the world powers hadn't calculated just how close to danger they were. The Germans were the first to discover the V-2 nuclear missiles , which Hitler was secretly preparing to use. In Hitler's many speeches, he foolishly and openly boasted that he possessed a secret weapon which would shock the world. The countries that opposed him took his boasting seriously. After a long search, and with the loss of many lives, the Allied forces blew up the hydrogen factory in occupied Norway, where they were "supposedly" manufacturing the the special hard water needed for producing the atomic bomb. God blesses the people that blew up the factory because the atomic bomb was the major weapon Hitler planned to use to take over the world.

Thus, it was victorious America, with the help of nuclear scientists—a good portion of them Jews who had escaped from Hitler's Germany—who created the first Atomic and later Hydrogen bombs.

For the Jews, 1939 was the most calamitous since the beginning of time. For me, it was the year that my childhood ended and my suffering began.

CHAPTER 3: UNDER RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

On September 22, 1939, the Russian Army arrived. People in the streets greeted the soldiers of the Russian army with great warmth, flowers and red flags. The Russians emphasized to us that we would now be able to live in freedom. After the Soviets arrived, their local commandant issued an order rescinding the state of emergency that was in effect since the beginning of the war. The city and its people began to move about and breathe freely.

Tens of thousands of Jewish war refugees descended upon Bialystock from various areas of Poland. By sneaking into a large city, they were able to gain access to the borders near the Soviet Union. They were fortunate to succeed in running away from the German hell. The city soon swelled to 250,000 people, who also included Russian-Soviet officials, commissars, soldiers, and all their families. Housing shortages were abundant. Housing was also lost to factory conversions.

My parents and siblings made grand efforts to accommodate the Jewish refugees who fled from the Nazis: we gave up part of our house to another Jewish family. Part of the dairy plant was also being used for housing. The Jewish community opened scores of public kitchens to provide food for the needy. Many factory owners and artisans employed the new arrivals without permission from the Russian authorities, risking arrest for allowing the displaced persons to work in their shops. Under arrest, all would be sent to Siberia. It was clear, in the first few months of this war, that without the help of Bialystock Jews, many thousands who survived the Holocaust would have perished.

A new economic and social order was formed under the Soviet authority. Some of the changes under the new order made it virtually impossible to obtain necessary commodities. As a result of the poor planning, the goods never arrived on time. People were forced to get up early to stand in lines to order bread and other goods.

In addition, subsequent to the Russian success in normalizing life in Bialystock, the new authorities also carried out a “house cleaning operation”: There was a shortage of housing, so Jewish and Gentile refugees were expelled for refusing Soviet citizenship. Jewish refugees who came from other parts of Poland that were occupied by the Nazis were not considered residents, and many of them refused to be Soviet citizens. Also, all those labeled as “dangerous elements” were deported to Siberia. Those deported were former manufacturers, merchants, and leaders of various political parties active in

Jewish institutions, clergy of all faiths, and former Polish officials. Jewish religious life, however, became difficult due to the fact that most shuls were converted to either living quarters for refugees, staff housing for the Russian Army, or granaries.

Under Soviet supervision by authorities, all factories in the city operated at full capacity. All stores were state operated, children went back to their classes, Jewish newspapers began to publish again, and a Jewish theater was formed, sponsored by the government. In time, life in Bialystock gradually returned to a new level of "normal".

My Bar Mitzvah, 1940 - 1941

Since June of 1940, the year prior to my Bar Mitzvah, I was preparing by studying the Torah. However, this important family tradition could not be shared with many of my family members due to Soviet restrictions on travel to Bialystock; we were too close to the Russian border.

June 1941 was the last time our Grandparents, Uncles, Aunts, and Cousins were together. It was at my Bar Mitzvah. My father was sick, after the three months following my Bar Mitzvah he died shortly thereafter due to complications resulting from pneumonia. Medical care was well below the average in all the European cities.

On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The invasion struck like a bolt of lightening.

Suddenly, the drone of airplanes was heard overhead, and the explosions of bombs detonating were deafening. Some bombs fell on the Soviet military base. Others exploded within Jewish neighborhoods. Large numbers of people were killed or wounded. Panic and confusion consumed the Jews of Bialystock. Chaos erupted between the Soviet military: officers and soldiers quickly loaded their Jeeps with their wives and children, as well as their possessions, and immediately took off for the Russian borders.

With the frenetic departure of the Soviet military, the Jews felt insecure and abandoned. We knew and felt that difficult and tragic times lay ahead. The roads leading out of Bialystock were overflowing with fleeing Jews from Bialystock. Their destination was to the Russian interior—they were pursued overhead by Nazi airplanes. The murderers dropped incendiary bombs and fired upon the runaways with machine guns. Those who managed to return to Bialystock told of many dead or wounded, and of overturned tanks and cars. The remaining Soviet personnel in Bialystock and the surrounding communities were in full retreat, leaving the area in a state of abandonment.

During this time of air raids and the Nazi invasion, I became a man.

CHAPTER 4: THE ARRIVAL OF THE NAZI MURDERERS

On a Friday morning in June 1941, one week after my Bar Mitzvah, the Nazi's entered Bialystock, and Hell on Earth broke loose. Without any provocation, they stormed into the Jewish neighborhoods, threw grenades into Jewish homes, wounding many civilians.

My first encounter with the Nazi murderers was in the first week of their occupation. While passing through, the convoy of the army near our house, came in, beat us, then lined us up at the wall of our back-yard. A soldier cocked his gun and aimed at my family and me. However, at that moment, his convoy began pulling out, and one of the Nazi soldiers called for retreat to the solder who was about to shoot us. At that moment, the angels of God were with us, protecting us, for the soldier did retreat. We were scared to leave our home and now we were even scared inside our home, awaiting what would happen next.

With unbelievable brutality, the Nazis dragged Jewish men from their homes, beat them about their heads, and forced them into the Great Synagogue. The Nazis were armed from head-to-toe and hurled grenades as this house of worship filled with people. The synagogue immediately burst into flames. Crammed with more than 2000 Jews, the Synagogue burned for twenty-four hours until Saturday morning.

Many human tragedies took place in the Synagogue inferno. No longer able to withstand the putrid smoke, a son followed the wishes of his father, and hung him with his belt on a menorah. Some daring young men, not yet overcome with smoke, climbed to a window, knocked out several panes, and jumped to their death.

In addition to the 2000 who died in the Synagogue fire, more than thirty Jewish streets were gutted, accounting for a third of all the Jewish homes in Bialystock. Entire streets and buildings disappeared, replaced by mountains of ash. The first days of Nazi rule were only the beginning of a series of catastrophes that would befall the Jews of Bialystock. The main roads, through which the Nazi war machinery passed on their way to the frontier of fighting, went directly through my city.

The Formation of the Jewish Council (Judenrat)

On Sunday, June 30, three days after the Nazis entered Bialystock, their commandant summoned the Director of the Jewish council, ordering him to form a Judenrat (Jewish council) through which the Nazi authorities could issue all kinds of ordinances and regulations affecting the Jews.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE NAZI MURDERERS

The Gestapo ordered the Judenrat to require every Jew, ten years of age and older, to wear a yellow Star of David sewn into their clothing, three to four inches across, on the left front and back of his upper garment. Any Jew caught without it faced the death penalty. This marker was a physical target on the Jews under siege.



Jews in Ghetto lining up for work. We wore a Yellow Star of David sewn onto our clothing. The name “Jude,” meaning “Jew” in German, was written across each star.

The Nazis forbade all public religious practices. Jews dressed in traditional garb, especially bearded Jews, were singled out for brutal treatment. Public prayers were a forbidden act. Nevertheless, these new laws did not stop the Jews from praying in groups, in hidden rooms of abandoned buildings, with the windows covered up, allowing very little light to shine through. It was very difficult to observe the Jewish religious commandments (*mitzvoth*) under ghetto conditions. It was impossible to keep the Sabbath. People were forced to work on Shabbat as well as on Jewish holidays. The Rabbis permitted the consumption of non-kosher food since preservation of life became more important than abiding by Jewish law. The youth movement and their political organization were forbidden to function. They did, however, organize secretly to plan for future-armed resistance.

The head of the Judenrat was the well-known and respected former director of the Jewish council, Mr. Barash. He was chosen to lead the people of the city. The council contained 24 Jews. Even before the Judenrat went into operation, the Nazis demanded thousand of Jewish men and women to be used for labor.

The Jews had to work under exceedingly difficult conditions, and they were often beaten and tortured. At the same time, they were forced to surrender their valuables: jewelry, fur coats, leather jackets, and other valuables.

Every Nazi order had to be carried out exactly as issued within forty-eight hours, under threat of severe sanctions. Jews were frequently sized in the streets by Gestapo officers for the purpose of assigning them to slave labor. The truth was that these Jews were tortured and robbed of their possessions by the Nazi murderers. Many times, they sectioned off entire streets in the Jewish area of the city in order to confiscate valuables and property that represented many years of hard work and savings. Most of the Jewish citizenry who lost their possessions through Nazi arson and robbery began to feel hunger and poverty. Many men and women sacrificed themselves and voluntarily sought work from the Nazis in order to feed their starving children.

The Evolution of Hitler's Final Solution

I feel empowered to write the following words as a direct result of my experiences and the experiences of my friends. Those who have survived from the ordeal in the concentration camps carry on the stories of survival of the Holocaust.

Hitler had given orders for the final solution by instructing his henchmen to find the most efficient apparatus for the annihilation of the Jews. The particulars of their murder methods were endless: blunt shovels for hacking prisoners to death; live children dumped into ditches of flames; truckloads of Jews taken to forests, forced to dig pits, and then shot into the pits.

After much practice, the German researchers discovered an efficient method for mass killing. They piped carbon monoxide into vans or trucks loaded with victims.

By 1941, other German experts came up with the suggestion of using a pesticide gas called "Zyklon B". The chemicals in Zyklon B produced hydrogen cyanide gas, which was dispersed in the showers.

The Nazis carried out the first mass slaughter of Jews in Bialystock on Thursday, July 3, 1941. At four in the morning, the Nazis dragged men (ranging from age 16 to 60) from their homes. They closed off streets known as the Jewish neighborhood. While many foresaw what was coming, they were able to hide. However, the men who were captured were tortured for 24 hours, then loaded into trucks, driven out of town, never to be seen again. It became known later that they were shot at Peitrasze forests.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE NAZI MURDERERS

Those 200 men who perished on July 3 became known as the “Thursday Martyrs”.

Two days later, on Saturday, July 5, 1941, a second larger blood bath was carried out against the Bialystock Jews. On that day, a band of wild Gestapo officers and other henchmen fanned out into the Jewish neighborhoods. They chased and beat the Jews while ordering them to run. The captured men were loaded into trucks and taken away to an unknown location. Among them was my Uncle Leibl, taken from his home, never to be seen again. This time, several thousands were exterminated: they became known as the “Saturday Martyrs”.

Shortly after the attack, the Nazi commandant told the members of the Jewish council that those who vanished would be returned if the Jews would make a contribution of five kilo of gold, one hundred kilo of silver, and two million Soviet Rubles, and similar valuable items. Under those circumstances, there was no discussion; there was no alternative but compliance.

The Jewish council decided to act immediately by collecting the required sum in the hopes of saving several thousand men. The wives, mothers, and children of the victims gave away all their jewelry, money, valuables, anything they owned in a desperate attempt to help free their loved ones. Everyone gave with generosity and compassion. When the total ransom was collected, a delegation from the Judenrat went to the headquarters of the Nazi commandant.

After a long wait, the commandant announced that the victims would not return—that they had been sent away to labor camps in Germany. The Jewish council received the grim news of the victims’ permanent disappearance. It was decided not to make the news public, not even to tell the families. The entire Jewish community would be allowed to continue hoping for their return. The “Judenrat” was used as a tool for the Gestapo to carry out their orders and many times simply by following their own best interests the Jewish council played right into the hands of the Nazis.

There was a poem written by the Jews in the Bialystock ghetto during their worst oppression. It will always be remembered by survivors as a legacy to the victims of “Black Saturday” who were never seen or heard from again.

Mr. Kaplan composed this poem:

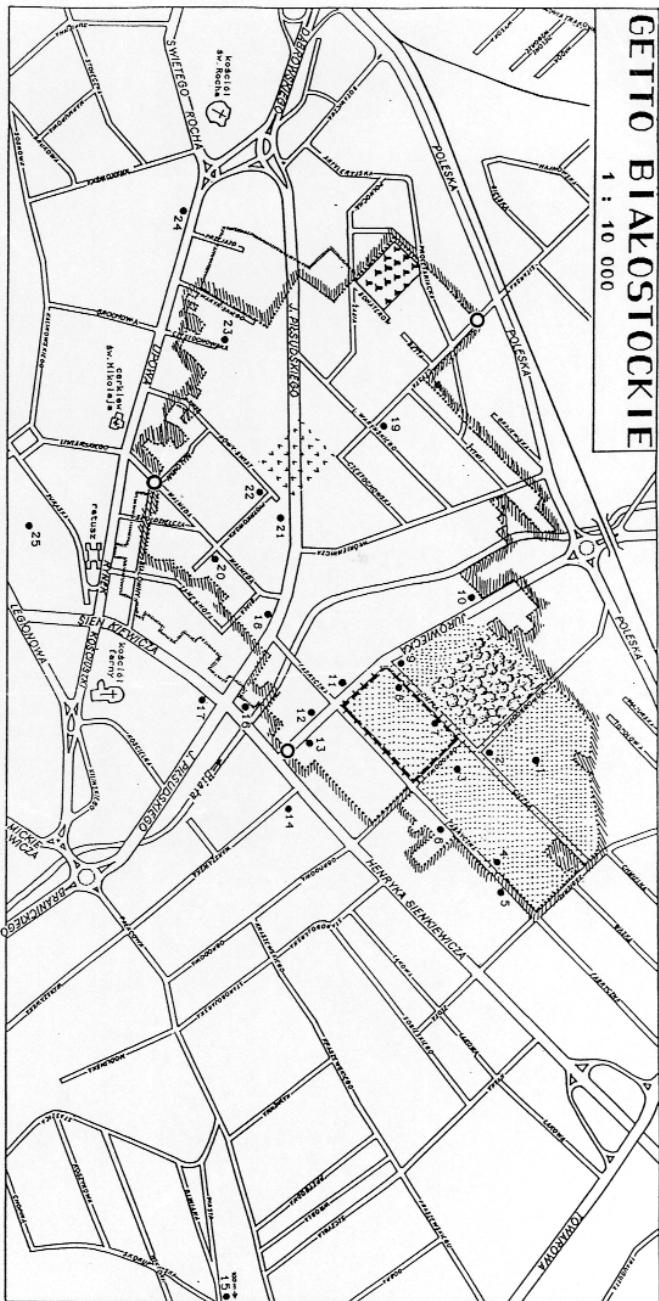
SORELLE, THE SHABBOSDIKE

Sorelle, the victim of Saturday
Is working in the factory
Twisting threads together
fashioning a length of rope.
Alas the somber Ghetto
Lasts too long
And, with a heavy heart,
I feel sorry for her lot.
Her devoted son, Moshelle
Is gone, is no longer.
Since that Saturday,
Since that hour,
Sorelle is in mourning,
Crying day and night.
And now, she sits at her spinning wheel
Bemused in deep thought.
Where is my beloved Son?
Is he alive somewhere?
Perhaps in a concentration camp,
He works hard without rest.
He works hard without rest.
How bleak it must be for him there;
How bitter it is for her here,
Since that Saturday.
Since that hour...

THE ARRIVAL OF THE NAZI MURDERERS

GETTO BIAŁOSTOCKIE

1 : 10 000



	ghetto August 1943
	ghetto August 1941
	"little ghetto"
	cemetery: Judeutrat garden
	battle site; market
	10. Jurkowicka 25 - old people's home
	11. Jurkowicka - execution site of 71 fighters
	12. Jurkowicka 7 - hospital
	13. Jurkowicka 10 - weapons workshop
	14. Wanczewska 3 - German civilian ghetto admin.
	15. Plaka 29 - Blumenthal archives site
	16. Sienkiewicza 15 - Gestapo
	17. Sienkiewicza 26 - site where Jews were burned alive on June 27, 1941
	18. Kupiecka 32 (Pliszwickiego 32) - Judenrat
	19. Ciepla 2 - weapons workshop
	20. Kupiecka 28 (Malmedy 10) - Execution site of 1700 Jews
	21. Nowy Świat 24 (Pliszwickiego 26) - school
	22. Piastowska 1 - planning branch office
	23. Czartkowska 7 - orphanage
	24. Lipowa 45 - police station
	25. Suraska - synagogue where, on June 27, 1941, 700 Jews were burned alive

Parentheses indicate current address identifications

CHAPTER 5: THE GHETTO

On Friday, August 1, 1941, the Nazis assigned a small area for the Jews to live—a ghetto. This barricaded enclosure was in a very limited space in order to impose even more hardship on its victims. The Jews were given just three days to abandon their homes, where they had lived their entire lives, and move into the ghetto. Most furniture and belongings were left behind, and immediately became Polish property when they took over our old living quarters.

Elderly women and their small children, fatigued and exhausted, dragged their possessions through the streets and transported them on wagons. The Anti-Semitic Polish peasants took advantage of the Jews' calamity: they attacked, beat, and robbed us as we left our apartments.

Try to picture one-third of a large city's population moving through the streets in an endless stream, pushing, wheeling, dragging all their belongings from every part of the city to one small section, crowding one another more and more as they converged. No cars, no horses, no help of any sort was available to us by order of the occupying authorities. Pushcarts were about the only method of conveyance we had, and these were piled high with household goods, furnishing much amusement to the German onlookers who delighted in overturning the carts and seeing us scrambling for our effects. Many of the goods were confiscated arbitrarily without any explanation....

In the ghetto, as some of us had begun to call it, half ironically and in jest, there was appalling chaos. Thousands of people were rushing around at the last minute trying to find a place to stay. Everything was already filled up but still they kept coming. Somehow more room was found.

The narrow, crooked streets of the most dilapidated section of Bialystock were crowded with pushcarts, their owners going from house to house asking the inevitable question: Have you room? The sidewalks were covered with their belongings.

Children wandered, lost and crying, parents ran here and there seeking them, their cries drowned in the tremendous hubbub of sixty thousand uprooted people.

In Bialystock, the creation of the ghetto continued, marked by scenes of chaos and fear as predominantly Jewish streets, into which Jews moved from elsewhere, were suddenly and arbitrarily excluded. People walking around crazy with anxiety, because they don't know where to move. Nobody was sure if the streets being assigned to the ghetto would remain in the ghetto. One of the neighbors in our street, an elderly couple, had committed suicide because of the resettlement

THE GHETTO

decree one observer wrote. Everyone was choked up with anxiety and anger born of helplessness. When friends met, each hastened to ask the standard question: "What do you think? Will we be able to hold out?"

On August 7, 1941 the Bialystocker ghetto was officially declared to be in existence. Jews were forbidden to move outside the boundaries of the ghetto. Within the small area of the ghetto, there weren't enough apartments available for all the Jews of Bialystock; six or seven people were forced to live in each room. Many had no place in which to settle, use of facilities to wash ourselves, nor a designated place to eat or sleep. Entire families had to squeeze into cramped quarters. Formerly "well-to-do" citizens descended into complete poverty.

My mother with my brother, sister and me, my grandmother with her daughter-in-law (Uncle Libel's wife, whose husband perished in the Saturday massacre) and baby all had to move in with my Uncle Schmulke and his family on Wazka 1 Street. Three families lived in our two bedroom apartment: My grandmother with her daughter-in-law and child in one bedroom, my uncle and his family in the other bedroom; I slept in the living room with my mother, brother and sister. My Aunt Esther and Uncle Baruch lived on Polna 2 Street with their two children.

Much shouting, blood curdling screeches and bitter arguments contaminated the air in most households. Little annoyances provoked blows among friends and relatives.

The Jews were required to obtain all the necessary materials to build a fence around the ghetto. A wall surrounded the Ghetto with a wooden fence topped with barbed wire. To gain accesses to the ghetto were three gates. The gates were manned by the Jewish police on the inside of the Ghetto, and guarded by German SS soldiers just outside the gates. It was forbidden for the Jews to live the ghetto. The markets outside the ghetto were closed to the Jews living in the ghetto. The Jews of ghetto Bialystock were in a trap, their means of contact with the outside world, and even with the rest of Bialystock, were being systematically cut off. No radios, telephones, or newspapers.

My cousin, Yehuda, and I looked for ways to smuggle food into the ghetto for our families. From my Uncle's building, we found a way to sneak out from the ghetto through a basement window at the fence. We went to the farmers from which my family had bought milk before the war, in a village named "Chorosc." Yehuda and I were only 13 years old, and we were nearly paralyzed by the fear of getting caught.

We would sneak out of the ghetto at dusk, walk to the farming village and get food: bread, potatoes, milk, and some non-kosher meat. While the consumption of pork is against our religion, I needed to eat meat to survive. If I tried to share the meat with my family, they may have forbidden pork from our trade. I was too young to rationalize the religious dilemma of eating pork, yet I had to balance the consequences of my actions. I hid the meat in a milk can in our barn, and ate it without my family's knowledge. The ominous guilt was overwhelming, yet survival was my one and only goal.

The task of the Judenrat was not only the registration of the Jews for food rationing. Their responsibilities included record-keeping of all residents by age, profession, and to keep an accurate account of the Jewish population. It became the internal administrative function, providing housing, health care, police protection, etc.

Barash head of the Judenrat placed the main emphasis on industrial production, in the hope that its great usefulness would delay and even prevent the ultimate extermination of the Jews, about which he had authentic information most of the ghetto people shared this illusion.

“We will outlive them!”

Their slave labor was used in factories for the production of clothes and other materials to keep the Nazi war machine alive.

The Jewish guards, the “Ordnungsdienst,” wore circular hats with an inscription in German reading “Jewish Law Enforcement Service” These Jewish police carried nightsticks or rubber truncheons. Inside the ghetto, wretched and miserable conditions prevailed.

Each day, thousands of Jewish men and women were taken out of the ghetto and sent to various parts of the city to work. Those who worked outside the ghetto were escorted to and from work by armed German and Lithuanian soldiers.

In return for their work, they received food as the Nazis decided to dispense, but not on a regular basis. The food provided by the Nazis for the ghetto population was minimal. The daily bread portion was 100 mg (3.5 ounces per person). At night, they were returned to the ghetto and locked inside.

Anyone leaving or entering the ghetto was searched by Nazi soldiers: we weren't allowed to bring anything in or out of the ghetto. The guards were especially strict about smuggled food. Nonetheless, food was smuggled in all the time, thanks to Jewish ingenuity. Life in the ghetto produced anguish and uncertainty among the Jews. However, we refused to give up hope.

Posters appeared all over the ghetto stating that all Jews must register immediately so that German authorities could request sufficient food rations to feed the ghetto population. Failing to register would result in no food rations at all. Food shortages became more critical. Months passed, while more and more were dying from hunger, disease, and lack of sanitation. Medical supplies were almost non-existent. Vigorous illegal trading over ghetto fences with the Polish population increased significantly. Eagerly, the Jews traded watches, gold, rings, and anything of value for a loaf of bread, or a chicken.

The Ghetto itself was indescribably constricted and crammed with people. The population was susceptible to epidemics of dysentery and typhus. Many of the cultural Institutions in Bialystock had been eliminated, yet the irrepressible Jews maintained several Schools and underground religious services, as well as various social and health organization.

The water in the ghetto was turned on and off at various intervals, causing further confusion. Severe hunger prevailed, particularly among those who had no jewels to trade. The Judenrat opened two kitchens that provided for the needy at minimal cost. The ghetto also housed an old age home, a school and other informal facilities.

While experiencing hunger, cold, and a lack of sanitation, we began to wonder how long the free world would tolerate this; innocent people were being enslaved and treated like animals. The days, weeks, and months in the ghetto seemed like an eternity to the inmates forced to live in severely congested quarters.

The Liquidation of the Region Surrounding Bialystock.

On November 2, 1942, the surrounding towns around Bialystock were evacuated, containing approximately 150,000 Jews: they were either murdered in their home communities, or sent to Treblinka, a death camp for "final solution". They called this "Aktion". This news left a pall of terror over the Bialystock ghetto; we were pondering our future. What would tomorrow bring?

Everyone sensed a horrible end for all was approaching quickly and inexorably. Nevertheless, a few people, myself included, clung to hope of survival.

As part of the final solution, Jews were taken to the cargo trains that the Nazis arranged. They were famous for their precision, order, and efficiency in running train systems. However, it was not meant for us Jews to be the cargo being transported in their freight cars, without provision for human needs.

There were no food stops, no water stops, no bathroom stops. There were no stops. They were squeezed in like sardines with hardly enough room to stand. Some of the deportees were shipped to Treblinka "Gas Chambers", never to be seen again. We knew that our turn was not too far off and we felt trapped, we had no options. The only comfort left to us was praying to God, hoping that surely He would hear our cries and see our destruction. Our God could not continue to watch His chosen people being destroyed. Surely a miracle would occur soon. Those were our thoughts. My family and I were clinging together for comfort.

From almost a hundred towns, villages and hamlets in the Bialystock region, mass escapes took place. Many of the Jews who fled found shelter with Poles. Poles betrayed some. A few survived most of them hiding in the forests. Many more young people would have tried to escape, but refused to abandon their parents; they knew it would mean the death of the older people, how was it possible to leave behind the helpless little brothers and sisters without support?

During the deportation, a few managed to escape to the nearby forests, where they established a partisan group. This group succeeded in inflicting damages to German rail communication in the Bialystocker region.

There was a young man who had returned of his own accord. It seems that he was frightened of going into the forest and believed that they would pardon him and allow him to go back to work in his trade. He was, undoubtedly, afraid of the Gentiles in the area, as they handed over the roving Jews to the Germans. With his capture, the beastly and vicious tortures began.

The German in charge of the Ukrainian guards broke the boy's hands—first one, than the other, joint by joint and then let him to suffer for an entire day. And than they shoot him.

One of the deportees who fled to the forests and are still living today told us about a one-man act of heroism. He was a very big man physically, a transporter of goods or Carter, who was accustomed to the harsh weather outdoors. He could have escaped off into the woods, but he was together with his wife and other children and didn't want to leave them. His wife, who also knew the truth about where they are taken to, said to him, "Get away, jump, you will survive. What is the use of dying together?" But he said, "No. I will not leave you." In his decision not to leave his wife and child, he showed that very human dignity which the Germans were trying so hard to destroy. To die with dignity was itself a form of resistance.

The tragic news, in grim detail, reached the ghetto about the suffering and extermination of Jews in surrounding communities such as Slonim, Lomza, Bielsk, Tykotin, and other places. Jews who had managed to escape from other liquidated towns brought these reports to us. Of course, the tragic news only brought more pain to our lives.

The people in the Bialystock ghetto hoped that maybe their lives would be spared because the Nazis needed their labor. No one anticipated the rumor that the German command was to "transfer" 1,200 Jews from the ghetto on the pretext of overcrowding and the prevention of epidemics. After many debates in the Judenrat session, it was decided that those who did not work outside the ghetto, and who were poor, would be the first to go. The next group would consist of people living in overcrowded conditions. The remainder would be chosen by name in alphabetical order. Various Jews managed to have their status changed from unemployed to employed, to get a certificate of outside-the- ghetto-to-employment. It is sadly tragic that most of the wives and children of those who perished in the "Saturday Massacre" left without support, and joined the first expulsion from the ghetto.

Our ghetto had a large industrial section, which contained many factories: A Cobbler Plant, a Clothing Factory, a Knitwear Plant, a Felt Factory, Carpentry, a Bedding Goods Plant, and a Wheel Making Shop. We were hoping that our productivity in the industry was needed by Germany to support the war effort, so the remaining Jews would be spared a while longer. After the deportees were transferred to another overcrowded ghetto in Pruzane, we received news that they arrived safely indeed.

Ephraim Barasz, head of the Jewish Council in Bialystock itself, believed that the city could be spared if its factories worked to fulfill the German needs. 'It is imperative', he had told his fellow Council members and the heads of the various ghetto workshops, "that we find means to postpone the danger, or at least reduce its scope."

A DREAM OF THE GOOD TIMES

I dream and remember in the garden
The picnics our people often held
At dawn, or sunset.
Oh! Those were memorable times
When we were hardly ten or twenty.
I dream, and there's longing,
Wishing I could open the door
To those happy times past.

Mother, dear, tell me, why are we here?
What is this place? Why is it so dark here?
Why can't I see a smile on your face?
Why can't I be free?
Just like the bird I see
High in the sky?
Please tell me, why?
Why should this be?
My child, don't be afraid,
Be strong the way you know.
The sun will shine again,
It's not too long now.
I promise that some day
You will be able to go out and play.
Meanwhile, dream about that bird
Which is free in the sky.

Against the backdrop of mass deportations of Jews in the nearby communities, escalating severity of punishments in Bialystock ghetto, liquidation of Jaszynowka and Pruzane, where 4,500 Jews had been sent in the fall of 1941, the young factory workers in the ghetto began to prepare for the armed resistance.

In February 1943, Bialystock learned of the heroic uprising in the Warsaw ghetto on January 19, 1943, against the German police. During the bloodbath that ensued, the Jews there demonstrated rare courage and self-sacrifice, and shattered the myth of Jewish timidity. An underground Polish news;paper declared: "The wondrous bravery of the Warsaw Jews should serve as an example for us Poles.

Psychologically strengthened and inspired, the Jews in the Bialystock ghetto began armed resistance against the Nazis in February 1943, and also gave moral support to the Jewish Partizan movement.

The February Massacre

As the temperature dropped during the month of February, the cold weather continued to take its toll. None of the apartments were heated. The small fires of our wood burning stoves already consumed most anything that would burn. We slept most of the time with our clothes on in order to maintain warmth. The four of us, Mother, Brother, Sister and I, snuggled up together in one bed.

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The Jews in the ghetto began feverishly building hiding places so that it would be difficult for the Nazis to find them in case the ghetto would be liquidated. Our families put all our effort into building a tunnel from our cellar to underneath the garden. We carried and dispersed the dirt far away in order to avoid suspicion. Whenever there was deportation, we hid in our tunnel.

On February 5, 1943, the Gestapo, with the help of Lithuanian soldiers, surrounded the ghetto, cordoned off the streets, and sought out Jews in their hideouts.

Our families went into hiding in our underground bunker. In an average bunker, we could reasonably house twenty to twenty-five people. However, approximately fifty people were jammed into our bunker. It was nearly impossible to breathe. No one moved for fear of making noise. Literally, fifty lives could have been lost if a baby cried or a person coughed. Mothers smothered their babies in desperation. My cousins and I climbed into the attic of the horse barn and hid ourselves between the beams in the corner of the roof.

The Jews in the ghetto didn't know that they could escape liquidation by reporting to work in their assigned factories. When this information reached the hideouts, regular workers took their wives and children to their places of work in the ghetto factories.

Yet, the guards and the Jewish police admitted only those who worked in the factories, sending away their wives and children. The wives and children were then exterminated.

The "Aktion" continued for seven days, from February 5 through the 12, 1943, except for one Sunday, when the Nazi soldiers took their day off. Trucks of soldiers would arrive inside the ghetto to evacuate from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. searching and shooting. Entire buildings would be damaged, roofs torn apart, floors uprooted, halls smashed, streets excavated: no stone was left unturned. Jewish men, women and children were forced to live under these unbearable conditions for one entire week. Nazi soldiers used many different approaches to uncover our hiding places: they promised informers their freedom, and some informers decided to save their own necks at the expense of their brothers. In most cases, they shot the betrayers anyhow.

Until now, we watched others leave the ghetto in transports. We looked out of our hideouts and saw and recognized many of our neighbors, the unfortunate being taken away. We knew that our turn would soon come.

How would we cope with it? Suppose it was true that the people in the previous transports were taken to their death. That meant that we only had still some time to live, maybe just a few days left. How does a

fourteen-year-old boy confront such a dilemma? How does anyone, at any age, deal with his or her own impending murder? How many have ever even had to consider this?

The week of the deportation in February 1943 was accompanied by an act of defiance. In June 1941 Yitzhak Melamed's wife, two children and parents, were murdered by the Germans in the Bialystoker region. When the Germans found his apartment, Melamed threw sulfuric acid into the face of the first German to enter it. A police officer blinded and in pain, started shooting, and by mistake, shot a Gestapo officer in the head. The Gestapo officer died instantly. As a reprisal, the Germans seized and shot a hundred Jews, most of them from the apartment block where Melamed lived. Melamed managed to escape, where upon the Germans announced that unless he was found, five thousand Jews would be shot. This threat was brought to Melamed, who, according to several witnesses' survivors, gave himself up. The Germans hanged him at the entrance to the ghetto, suspended for three days at the gate.

At an orphanage, one of the orphans tried to persuade all the others to commit suicide in order to avoid a painful death in the gas chambers. With only two other orphans to follow him, the three hung themselves at the entrance of the orphanage. When the Nazis came to the entrance and saw the three children dangling by their necks, the soldiers left the premises with bowed heads; even their ruthless hearts were unable to inflict any more damage in this place. Many orphans, nearly 100, escaped immediate extermination as a result of the bravery of three friends.

The streets of the ghetto were scattered with dead bodies. The burial society, Chevra Kadisha, had to recruit several hundred assistants to help bury the dead. It took weeks to bury the dead bodies in the cemetery, Zabia.

The Aftermath Of The February Massacre.

On Saturday, February 13, it became apparent that the Gestapo had reached their quota of 12,000 victims. The "February Aktion" came to an end. People began coming out of their hiding places. Had the carnage continued even one more day, it is doubtful that many that were hiding would have survived. People were now leaving their bunkers to see daylight after a full week of suffering.

The appearance of the streets left everyone in shock: homes were robbed, walls were torn down, and roofs were chopped apart: total disarray, rubble and chaos had ensued. Some families were wiped out. A significant number of suicides by poison were discovered. Most tragi-

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cally, babies and bodies of children were located, smothered by their mothers. In other places, Jews hung themselves. The grief, the wailing, and the sorrow were indescribable.

The realization that the terror had finally ended brought relief and joy to the survivors of the ghetto. People kissed each other and wept. In all, about 2,000 Jews were shot in the week of the ghetto action.

A collective surge of anger developed when it became known that certain Jews had informed against other Jews. The Jewish police knew the identities of the traitors. They arrested them and technically charged them with robbery, punishable by death under Nazi ruling. After the three "robbers" were beaten, they were sent to jail, where they were shot. Finally, we were comprehending the full tragedy of the past few days. Scores of men were running through the town looking for their kin. Smothered children were dragged from shelters. Everywhere there were tears. Police entered the cellars, attics and other places, and collected corpses.

The homes of the evacuees were sealed. At the cemetery, gigantic heaps of dead bodies were buried in mass graves. The crying and wailing could be heard for miles.

On this day, February 13, a light snow had been falling, covering the bloodstained earth. Underneath the whiteness of the snow, there appeared to be a shiny redness. In the afternoon, it rained as if all was being "washed away", as if it *could* be. Our souls were tortured by unanswerable questions: Why are we so brutally punished? How could innocent babies and young children not be allowed to grow up? How much longer will our lives be prolonged: Days? Weeks? People moved about like shadows, mentally and physically shattered. Their gazes reflected extinguished hope. They milled about automatically, like robots, like lunatics.

The hard winter finally ended and the ice and snow began to thaw. Springtime was always beautiful in Poland. The contrast between the cold and the freshness of spring was very dramatic. Birds appeared singing in the branches of the trees. Animals emerged from their winter hideouts, but we had not time to watch and wonder anymore. The animals were still free. We were the ones locked up in a cage.

The pleasant, mild temperature of spring never lasted long and soon the hot summer arrived. Living conditions in the Ghetto continued to deteriorate.

Life in the ghetto was getting worse for those of us remaining. Food was not supplied for rationing; electricity and water were cut off more frequently. We had already used up most of our resources and no relief was in sight. Drinking water and sanitation were the most critical prob-

lems since there was no sewer system. Most of the sewage ran on top of the ground along the sidewalk. Aside the intolerable odor, typhus and other insect-born diseases developed from the sewage problem. As a result, many people became gravely ill. Many elderly and children were dying from shortages of medicine and lack of hospital beds. Still, the Jews did not lose their hope. Many thought their lives would be spared due to the Nazi demand for labor in the factories to support the war effort. With the help of a neighbor friend, my mother arranged for me to get a certificate of work stating my skill as a presser of clothing. I was thus able to work in a Tailor Factory. We hoped that this work would spare my family from deportation.

At that time, we received news that the German Army lost many of their soldiers who were taken captive by the Russian Army in the Stalingrad area. The Russian Army provided strong resistance to the Germans. A month later, at the synagogue, we met a few men who were taken in the February roundup of the ghetto and sent to Treblinka Gas Chambers. Somehow, they had the opportunity to escape from Treblinka camp and return safely to the Bialystock ghetto. It was hard to believe their horror story.

They were taken from the ghetto on the transport train. They rode the train for three days and nights, locked in cattle boxcars, without water, food, or toilet facilities. No stops for human needs. It was so crowded squeezed like sardines; they had only room to stand. The train was highly guarded.

When the train approached Treblinka, the conductor blew the whistle, to signal for the camp guards to open the gates. The signal was also an alert for the SS troops that a new transport was arriving.

When the train came to a halt, it was surrounded by heavy-armed SS troops pointing their guns at the train with their dogs barking at their heels. When the doors of the train cars were unbolted, the SS troops shouted for them to hurry and jump from the boxcars. As a result, many elderly were injured in the fall. The Jews were beaten with the butts of the guns and whipped to run.

The SS guards were shouting to get undressed and get ready for the showers. The people were pushed and shoved with bayonets, squeezed into the shower facility with the doors shut tight behind them. They did not know what fate the showers held, water or death gas, because the Nazis selected young able-bodied Jewish men from every transport to help remove the naked dead bodies from the Gas Chambers and open pits for cremation. The helpers watched helplessly as their own families went through this horrifying ordeal.

At night, as I lay in bed, many scenarios came to my mind that might befall my family and me. Was it possible to live through this? I could not imagine, what would happen to us?

In mid-July, 1943, a rumor circulated that an important Gestapo committee would arrive in the ghetto. They were to decide which ghettos would be liquidated first: Lodz, with its more than 80,000 Jews, or Bialystock, with its 40,000 Jews at that time. The Nazi murderers would surely promptly destroy one of these ghettos. Some members of the Judenrat still clung to the hope that somehow a final tragedy would be averted. The Jewish resistance forces in the ghetto struggled to complete their last preparation for battle. For the next four weeks, the Jews in the ghetto were plunged into deep fear and despair, awaiting the tragic outcome. The waiting, which seemed like an eternity, took its toll on the lives of these unfortunate people.

On Saturday, August 14, 1943, a Gestapo committee inspected the fences and the gates around the ghetto.

Those people who worked outside returned to the ghetto before dusk, informing their families and friends that many empty railroad cars had arrived at the station.

Another clue to the impending catastrophe was that the Germans were requesting the return of their watches from Jewish jewelers, even before they could be repaired, claiming that they had to leave right away. The ghetto Jews well understood the importance of this, since the Nazis had done the same right before the February slaughter.

Preparation for the Bialystocker Ghetto uprising

In the ghetto: The youth were being trained to use weapons. The were preparing for the difficult tasks and battles to come.

In the forest: Negotiations with the Russian partisans regarding the preparation of areas in the forest to absorb escapees from the ghetto. The result was a decision to accept Jews into the partisan units, with no restrictions on their numbers or their rights. With this goal in mind, the "Judenrat" provided financial assistance to the partisans.

The Bialystock "Judenrat" headed by the engineer Barash, generously supported the partisans. It was the only "Judenrat" in Poland to provide support to non -Jewish partisans. The Bialystock "Judenrat" did so with intention of securing reciprocal support from the partisans.

Liquidation of the Bialystock Ghetto.

On August 15, 1943, quiet pervaded the ghetto and some permitted themselves to hope and to persuade each other that their fears were exaggerated. Most went to sleep believing they would awaken to another "normal" day.

I would like to detail the sequence of events that surround the last act of slaughter heaped upon our city, Bialystock. The final liquidation of the Bialystock ghetto took place in August 1943, and was marked by heroic resistance of the ghetto Jews against their monstrous oppressors. Despite Jewish resistance, the ghetto was completely obliterated in just one week.

On August 16, 1943, a Sunday morning, several hundred well-armed Nazis moved into the ghetto. They immediately occupied the factories and the Judenrat building. Notices were in all the streets ordering the Jews of Bialystock, together with their machines and factories, to be transferred to Lublin.

It was in Lublin where we will carry on our work. Orders were issued that all Jews living north of the Judenrat and nearby streets were to report to assigned depots at 9 a.m. for transfer to the railroad station. Those not complying with this deadline would be shot if found in the prohibited areas. We saw the ghetto surrounded by German soldiers with tanks and newly imported Lithuanian, Latvian, and Ukrainian Militia.

It thus became clear that the entire ghetto was targeted for destruction. Approximately 3,000 Nazis participated in liquidating the Bialystock ghetto.

The sudden Nazi attack caught the resistance forces inadequately prepared. The leaders of the Jewish resistance decided to let their people know that we were not going to Lublin, but to Treblinka. These were the shouts ringing through the streets of the Bialystock ghetto:

"Fight for your lives! Avenge!"

"Burn your homes when you leave! Set fire to your households, burn and demolish! Do not let the hangmen inherit our possessions. Deprive our enemy of any benefit!"

"Take weapons in your own hands, and let us try, together, to escape to the forests!"

The resistance also decided to facilitate the burning of the fence around the ghetto and torch all the buildings nearby. Perhaps, in this way, a small number of Jews might be able to escape.

In no time, the Jewish resistance groups were mobilized, arms were distributed and comrades took their assigned posts. Entire streets of the ghetto were in flames, gutted by Jewish resistance. As soon as the Nazis saw that the ghetto streets were burning, they began to fire

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machine guns, and the shooting generated mass confusion and panic. The shouts and cries of the masses could be heard from miles away.

Hundreds of Jews had fallen and were shot and/or trampled. From another side of the ghetto, well-armed Ukrainian and White Russian Nazis came into the streets in tanks. The soldiers were greeted by hand grenades hurled by heroic Jewish resistance fighters. Despite the meager Jewish resistance, the slaughter of the ghetto Jews was carried out with typical efficiency and precision.

Gestapo officers made the rounds of the streets on motorcycles, spraying machine gun fire into everything in sight and hurling grenades.

The Jewish resistance groups concentrated in the four-block area of the ghetto in the streets Ciepla, Kupiecka, Yorvicer, and Fabricna. The young Jewish heroes fought to their death against the Nazis; as soon as one fell, two others took his place. Dedicated Jewish women handed over grenades and bullets to the men. The courageous battle in the Judenrat gardens continued for about one-half day, leaving several scores of Nazi soldiers dead and wounded.

The majority of the ghetto fighters perished in this inhuman and unequal combat, which they had to wage with primitive weapons against such overwhelming military might.

Some of the resistance fighters managed to flee and lived to carry on the fight in other places. While the struggle was taking place in the Judenrat gardens, a group of Nazis entered the ghetto streets with a fire engine to put out the blaze near the ghetto fence. From the windows and attics, other resistance fighters immediately started shooting, causing confusion and panic in the Nazi ranks. Factories were burning, as were haystacks and houses. At the same time, the resistance fighters liquidated the strong German patrols at the ghetto walls. The Germans retreated. The Jews captured German arms. Surprisingly, those German soldiers who fell were encouraging the resistance to continue their battle.

In groups, the resistance stormed the ghetto gates with grenades and bottles of kerosene in hand. However, the Germans had many more soldiers who were better armed, and they quickly took over. Using machine guns and tanks, they repulsed the attack at the ghetto gates. The battle was unequal: 300 poorly armed Jews were fighting 3,000 excellently armed Germans. The fighters ran out of ammunition, and 80 of them hid in a bunker, making preparation to escape from the ghetto by armed force. Unfortunately, the remaining 80 resistance fighters were noticed, and the bunker was suddenly surrounded by a platoon of more than one hundred Nazis.

A desperate life and death struggle ensued. The young Jewish fighters fought bravely, killing a number of Nazis during the battle.

Following a three-hour battle, at this point with only a handful of fighters remaining alive, the Nazi forces succeeded in blasting the shelter with hand grenades and machine guns. During the discovery of their hiding place, the Jewish resistance leader and his friend committed suicide. The resistance fighters fought with heroic determination.

Several hundred Germans and Ukrainians were killed or wounded in these battles. The bitter combat lasted for eight days, and sporadic armed resistance continued for one month.

Fighting Elsewhere in the Ghetto

The death of the leaders did not mean the end of the ghetto uprising. The fighters dispersed throughout the ghetto. Anyone who thought himself strong enough to lead his peers, took initiative and took command. They fought with all their strength and in any way they could. During the day they hid in bunkers. It was easier to attack the Germans, and especially the Ukrainians, under cover of darkness. At night the rebels could carefully approach the fence and observe the activities outside the ghetto, including the movement of the Ukrainians guards. The fighters sought ways to trick the Germans and escape from the ghetto.

Sometimes, during their nighttime promenades, they encountered Ukrainian guards without hesitation, using knives, leaving them dead or seriously wounded. Needles to say, the fighters would take the Ukrainians weapons. The rebels obtained many excellent weapons in such attacks.

. . . The heroic battle of Bialystock was recorded in history and remembered forever by the Bialystock Jews that are still alive today”

Most shocking was the liquidation of the Jewish hospital, which was located on Fabrycna Street in the TOZ building.

On August 20, the Nazis killed more than two hundred patients, as well doctors and nurses, at the Jewish hospital. The seriously ill were loaded onto military wagons, which formed two rows, those who could walk were forced to stand between the wagons. The SS commandant, Fridel, marched into the hospital, accompanied by Ukrainian SS men, shouting:

“Out, quickly! A special train awaits you.”

The special train was a line of wagons, which stood in front of the hospital. The sick people, mostly old men, dressed slowly. The Germans forced them to hurry. In only underwear, they were driven from the hospital. Newborn infants were thrown onto the wagons. The wagons

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departed for the Zabia cemetery where the sick old men, women and children were all killed at the hands of the murderers.

The Jewish firemen got orders from the Nazi Commandeer Fridel to excavate a large number of pits at Zabia cemetery. Many groups of several hundred elderly and ill Jews were brought to the cemetery on wagons. When Fridel arrived, he issued instructions for the Jews to be pushed to the edge of the pits. He fired his gun, thus signaling the other Nazi soldiers to open a barrage of gunfire.

The victims, riddled with bullets, fell into the pit. Those who were still alive were pushed into the massive grave. Dead or alive, the graves were immediately covered with earth.

As it grew dark on the first day of fighting, I snuck out of our hiding place. Without regard for the danger, I crawled on my belly to a neighboring building, rummaging and calling to anyone who might answer, but there was no response. Nobody was left alive. I moved along to the gardens, where bullets were flying in a thick hail. I found myself creeping over dead and half-dead bodies, the latter moaning with their last strength. To my horror, I saw children next to their lifeless mothers, the tots apparently were unnoticed by the Nazis. In some cases, Jews who had succeeded in escaping from the gardens were captured by sadistic Poles, and handed back to the Nazis.

These unfortunates were shot on the spot in the presence of the Poles, who laughed in delight to see the Jews murdered. I somehow managed to sneak back into our tunnel below our home.

Only someone who endured life in the hideouts can begin to describe these moments of desperation, attacked every hour by the Nazis. Many bunkers housed small children, who did not comprehend the danger of crying. All too often, an infant's wail resulted in the liquidation of the entire shelter. Everyone's nerves were on edge, and great fortitude was required to tolerate the tension and suspense.

My family resided not far from where the Jewish resistance was fighting. My Uncle Schmulke with his wife and daughters, my Uncle Libel's wife and infant, Uncle Baruch with his wife, Esther, son Yehuda, daughter Sonia, my mother Guta, my brother and sister, my Grandmother Tcipi, and I. The other tenants and my family were in hiding in the tunnel that we built before the first Jewish deportation of the ghetto in February 1943.

We could hear the gun fighting and the tanks passing close by. The smell of the burning houses nearby was unbearable. We couldn't bear the smoke. We were desperately afraid that our house would soon catch fire.

myself came out of hiding to re-evaluate the situation. Nazi soldiers who were waiting for us in the yard caught us.

When we were discovered and turned out we were put against the wall. We thought that we would be shot, but instead we were driven into the general stream of people on the road heading toward Boyary, the eastern railway station on the outskirts of the town, and to the goods trains. It was horrifying. The stream of people were shepherded by barking dogs and were kicked with rifles by the German. The Ukrainians, ordered by their masters in white gloves, did all their dirty work. Our march was long and tortuous. Finally we reached our destination.

Before, it was I who watched other Jews being dragged out of their homes and deported from the ghetto. Now, it was my turn. It was happening to my family and I. We were driven by a horde of yelling Nazi soldiers and Lithuanian militia. We were forced to walk in columns of five, marching to the sound of whips with rifle butts falling upon us. We marched towards Peitrasze Field, an open field of meadows and rolling hills, about 5 kilometers from the ghetto. I left the rest of my family in the bunker. Their fate is still unknown.

In Memory of My Parents

Memories of Mother and Father	Thoughts go speeding by
Follow my shadow	on my hidden highway
As silently I tread	trying to capture
Walking among the dead.	Yesterday's rapture.
Cord of life never severed	Misty windows
Reaching to the grave	From dry tears
Buried memories in the air	Covering from sight
Coming closer if I dare	Their eternal light
Pictures of the past	Reaching back into yesteryear
Follow me as we drive	Through a haze
With those no longer alive	Reliving our days
Wanting to share	At every turn
The beauty of the road	Events reborn
With one so dear	Scenes come and go
But no longer here	No control of the flow
To touch them	Going in circles
Hear their voices	Never an end
See their smiles	Faces and sound
Feel them near.	Round and round
Driving among dreams	A hundred thoughts a mile
Speeding to their past	Loving them to their last.

CHAPTER 6: THE MASSACRE AT PEITRASZE FIELD.

About 25,000 Jewish men, women and children, some among them elderly, were crowded into a corner of Bialystock called Peitrasze field. The over-crowding and severe heat caused many in the field to faint and some even perished. Ukrainian, Lithuanians, White Russians, and Germans, all armed with machine guns, surrounded this mass of people on three sides.

The soldiers stamped and trampled many people to death. The terrible thirst out in the field cost hundreds their lives. For a few drops of water, many Jews offered to give away their last possessions, only to be disappointed when no water came. From afar, we could see the fires in the ghetto burning out, just as the lives of the Jewish victims were slowly ebbing away.

On the afternoon of the third day, several high-ranking officers of the Gestapo command appeared at Peitrasze field, and demanded that everyone fall into line. The masses, frightened by this demand, refused to obey, and pandemonium broke out. Suddenly, a hail of bullets sprayed the field, increasing the panic. One of the Gestapo officers stopped the shooting and explained that if we failed to line up as ordered, the entire field would be exterminated. The Gestapo officers made their way through the lines of Jews. They had long canes with U-shaped handles. They hooked the handles around our necks to collar the younger and stronger Jews. Of those selected, many resisted for they did not want to leave their wives and children. They were beaten about their heads with the canes and were forced to go with the Gestapo anyway.

In the next four hours, some 3,000 people were removed from Peitrasze field, including several hundred young men and women. My Uncle Baruch, his son Yehuda, and I were among the young, strong, chosen people. We were moved to a remote corner of the field.

The same Nazi officers that separated the young and the strong for labor announced that children up to ten years of age would be removed from the field and assigned to other places. Twelve hundred children were sent back into the ghetto and put in a building opposite the Jewish hospital. The children were evacuated from Bialystock in the final days of August 1943.

Under the supervision of the Gestapo officers, physicians and women volunteers, the children were transported to Theresienstadt Concentration Camp in Czechoslovakia. The plan was to exchange the children for money or for German prisoners held by other countries.

When the plan didn't ensue, they remained there for three months, and then were sent to perish in the Gas Chambers of Auschwitz.

Back At The Ghetto . . .

The Gestapo were determined to remove the factory machines and merchandise from the ghetto as quickly as possible. They increased the number of slave laborers assigned to this work. Subsequently, the Nazis ordered that a fence be constructed around the Jewish hospital building, a sort of " Mini ghetto" where the small group of laborers could stay while their services were required.

Four weeks after the onset of the uprising, almost all of the Jews had been deported. Approximately 400- 500 young men and women, aged 17-25, remained in the ghetto, hiding in various bunkers and abandoned apartments. Scattered in groups of three to five fighters each, they awaited the right time to leave the ghetto. They stockpiled water, knowing that their water supplies might be cut off at any time. Small quantities of food were found in empty apartments. The different groups communicated between themselves, mostly at night

The Little ghetto

The ghetto shrunken considerably, leaving only the "little ghetto" which contained some 800 Jews - skilled workers, employed by the Germans, and their families. They included mechanics, technicians, coachman, porters, and factory "exterminators".

Later it became apparent that the " little ghetto" was an excellent place from which to escape. While goods were being transported to the " Policia " train stations, men and women joined the procession, abandoning the wagons and goods once outside the ghetto and escaping to the forest.

Those who remained in the " little ghetto " were elderly and their families. during the four weeks of its existence approximately 250 men and women escaped to the forest.

The " little ghetto " was destroyed quickly and without warning. Those had not yet implemented their escape plans missed their opportunity.

Leaving Peitrasze Field

The women, children, and elderly, treated like cattle, were loaded into separate railroad cars from the young men. The Nazis loaded 135 to 150 people per freight car. The guards shut the train car doors. At that moment, I still had hope that, with God's will, the car doors would open and a cheerful voice from the outside would call:

"Come out, my good friends! You just had a nightmare.

Wake up to life, love, and laughter."

I was hallucinating, fabricating stories in an attempt to keep my sanity to remain alive. It was mid-August, typically hot and humid, and the air in the boxcars was foul. There was no water, no food, and no

toilets. Some men tried to cut through the floor of the boxcars by using hacksaws. Some of the young men and women tried to jump from the train, but not everybody was successful.



Jews lining up to be loaded into boxcars for shipment/deportation

The trains were heavily guarded by the German and Ukrainian guards. They were stationed at the top and at the sides of the railroad cars. They began shooting at the cars with every suspicious movement.

Those of us nearer the walls and the door of the boxcar were lucky to get fresh air from the outside. We rode all through the night, without any sleep. We were packed like sardines. As daylight approached, those who stood by the wall of the boxcars peaked through the cracks to look for familiar landmarks or railroad station names to call out some clues as to where we were headed. When the train stopped at a small railroad station to take on water for the loco-

THE MASSACRE AT PEITRASZE FIELD

motive, many of us were trying to hold out our hands through the small barbed-wire window to exchange jewelry for some water. The guards took the valuables without bringing any water.

It was the third day since our transport departed from Bialystock. We were tired, dirty, hungry and thirsty. The stench and odor of the railroad cars was sickening. Many dead bodies lay inside. Some of us, including me, began drinking our own urine for lack of fluids. We needed to get out of the congested railroad cars; even death would have been a relief from our suffering. We tried to get some information as to our destination. However, the German guards only reply was "Going to Germany to work": it was the only phrase that kept my sanity.



SS guards patrolling the trains loaded with Jews on their way to the Treblinka gas chambers.

I was able to lie on the floor near the sliding door with my mouth in the door crack to breathe fresh air. I did not even care when others came and sat on top of me.

The train picked up speed and our senses gave way to the rhythmic clatter of the steel wheels. We were already too weak to feel pain or hunger. Weakness was the only sensation that we felt. Some elderly and weak died quietly in our boxcar. In such crowded conditions, it was difficult to tell the dead from the living.

The train slowed down, and on the horizon, we could see lots of lights, of a city or perhaps village. We arrived in a remote area: nothing could be seen around us.

We heard some railroad cars with the women and children and eldthe sign "Treblinka".

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We heard some railroad cars with women and children and elderly getting unhooked from our train. They were pushed over to another side of rail tracks. Near their boxcars, we were able to see the sigh "Treblinka".

Treblinka was an "Extermination Camp". Within its gates, Treblinka contained a killing and burning facility, such as a crematorium and gas chamber. The only purpose for Treblinka camp was to murder innocent Jews. Treblinka, a death camp, became the Jewish destiny, genocide.

CHAPTER 7: THE DEATH CAMPS.

The death camps were Treblinka, Majdanek, Sobobor, Chelmno, Belzec, Birkenau, and Auschwitz. Auschwitz was the administrative center for the death camp system as a whole and also served as a source of slave labor for industries producing war products. The architects of the Death Camps controlled the camps like master planners. They ran the camps with technical expertise, and exercised dictator-like control in order to maximize efficiency. The higher officers of the SS were not involved in the day-to-day madness, but they ruled the entire operation and issued policy directives.

Treblinka and Majdanek camps, in particular, were designed for one thing only: to kill as many people as quickly and efficiently as possible. These camps were often referred to as “Death Factories”. They were so efficient that 20,000 human beings could be processed (to be gassed and cremated to ashes) in one day in any of these camps.

When the trains arrived at the Treblinka camp, the SS had many soldiers stationed around the train, shouting for people to hurry up. If someone did not move fast enough, they were beaten and poked with their bayonets. Loudspeakers directed people to get undressed, to hand over all their valuables and clothing at the appropriate windows. Women and young girls were sent to barbers to have their hair cut off.

Everyone then marched to the building, where loudspeakers instructed them again. They were told not to be afraid, they would be disinfected in order to prevent contagious diseases.

The people somehow felt secure until the doors of the shower area were shut. They packed 500 to 600 persons to one shower room, with hardly enough room to stand. The German guards threw the gas cylinders through holes in the ceiling. The victims were climbing onto each other to run and escape through the doors only to find them closed. Children would cling to their mothers for comfort. There was no help or hope for survival. When the doors were opened, the bodies were tossed out, covered with sweat and urine, their legs smeared with excrement and menstrual blood. The “Canada” (a group that was assigned to work in the Gas Chambers) had to remove the bodies from the building.

We cannot forget the hundreds of thousands of people who perished in these places. Death camps were intended and equipped to be an instrument of genocide with Jews as their primary target. Jews did not obstruct Hitler's war aims, nor were we any threat to the German national security. This was genocide for the sake of genocide.

THE DEATH CAMPS

All the killing centers were geographically remote and were connected by a massive railway system that shipped human cargo from all corners of Europe.

The frenzy and obsessiveness of these murders did not stop even during the last days of the war: Germany was clearly collapsing, and every soldier, train, and artillery was desperately needed to defend their homeland. Trains, which could have been used to transport war supplies and troops to the fighting area, were employed to ship the last large community of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Winning the war seemed less important to the Nazis than exterminating the Jews.



Hungarian Jews arriving to Auschwitz Concentration Camp

CHAPTER 8: ARRIVAL AT MAJDANEK CONCENTRATION CAMP

The train that carried us was rolling into a remote rail-side that would bring us to the loading platform, which now served as the reception depot for the huge concentration camp Majdanek. I arrived at Majdanek in August 1943. Loud voices from outside brought us all to our feet. After about 5 days in such miserable conditions, the boxcar doors were suddenly and rapidly opened by the guards in such a shocking manner that even today, more than 50 years later, I am still overcome by a mixture of emotion when I recall this moment. I felt anger, hatred, hope and misery, and they were all drowning in a sea of hoarse commands of whipping, hitting and kicking by the SS soldiers. They were shouting:

"Out of the boxcars, you cursed lot!"

One of the officers yelled:

"Men to the right! Ladies to the left!"

They made us run to a huge open area, where in the distance, in the middle of the yard, was a huge placard:

"Welcome to Majdanek Labor Camp"

In the center of the compound, SS men with whips and dogs, aided by Ukrainian militia, were pushing us and shouting,

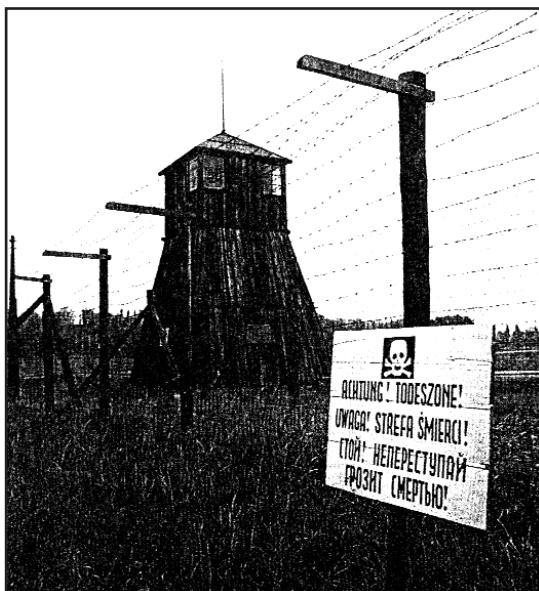
"Get undressed. Surrender all your clothing. Deposit your valuables and money with the cashier.

You will take showers in groups, then working clothes will be distributed."

The camp area was fenced off with double barbed wire, encompassed with high voltage fencing installed with insulators fixed up with slanting crossbars and placed both inside the existing fence and between its two rows of barbed wire.

A chain of eighteen watchtowers stood along the rectangle of its fields, enabling the guards to have every part of the prisoners quarters under control. The towers were equipped with revolving search-lights. In addition, random patrols with dogs made rounds at night.

At the adjoining camp, the prisoners were terrorized by beating and shouting and frightened by the sight of the fresh victims. We were halted in the area in front of the building that housed the baths and gas chambers. First, we were ordered to undress in one of the service barracks nearby, into which tens at a time were driven by the SS. We were deprived of all the property brought into the camp: luggage—including clothing, underwear, shoes, and all personal souvenirs, even those of purely subjective value like letters, photographs or religious objects.



The electrified wire fence surrounding Majdanek, with a guard tower

I looked at the buildings before me. They also had signs posted: The Entlausung (disinfecting barracks). One was for men, the other for women. They were just simple wooden shacks. Was it deception or were they Gas Chambers? We did not know our fate, but we dared not ask our guards. They cut our hair; we were pushed into the showers, sure that our life had come to its end. But, to our surprise, cold water came running from the showers. We were wet and naked, and they drove us to a barrack where we lined up in front of the functionaries who were working on the files, filling in their data. We were given a number to be used as a substitute for names and forenames. Then we ran to receive shabby clothes, all orders were carried out by running. Our clothes consisted of a set of underwear and a striped camp uniform of trousers and a jacket made of light fabric with grayish-blue vertical stripes. The uniforms were so large that I had to tie them with strings. Instead of shoes, we were given clogs to wear. Every morning, afternoon, and evening, we were required to stand in the compound yard for hours in the cold and rain in order to be counted.

Incidentally, I found out that we were not numbered by order of arrival: newcomers received the numbers left vacant by the dead. Such a system made it possible to conceal the real number of camp

inmates at a given time, as well as the total number of how many passed through the camp. For the same reason, deportees destined for immediate extermination were not given any numbers.

It was September, the beginning of autumn. We saw, in the horizon, tall chimneys shooting out black smoke. The smell in the air all around us was the odor of burning flesh.

Six hundred people lived in one barrack. The beds consisted of wooden planks and people slept one beside the next on three levels of bunks. We were without toilets or water. We never knew if our bunkmates would be dead or alive in the morning. We were always hungry. . Those who became sick and could not participate in the morning roll call were sent to the sick barracks and never seen again.

Majdanek camp routine

You get up at 3 a.m. You have to dress quickly, and make the "bed" so that it looks like a matchbox. For the slightest irregularity in bed-making the punishment was 25 lashes, after which it was impossible to lie or sit for a whole month

Everyone had to leave the barracks immediately. Outside it is still dark -or else the moon is shining. People are trembling because of lack of sleep and the cold. In order to warm up a bit, groups often to twenty people stand together, back to back so as to rub against each other.

There was what was called a washroom, where everyone in the camp was supposed to wash - there were only a few faucets - and we were 4,500 people in that section (no. 3). Of course there was neither soap nor towel or even a handkerchief, so that washing was theoretical rather than practical ... In one day, a person there came a lowly person indeed.

At 5 a.m. we used to get half a litre of black, bitter coffee and a small portion of bread. That was all we got for what was called "breakfast." At 6 am. -a head count (Appell in German). We all had to stand at attention, in fives, according to the barracks, of which there were 22 in each section. We stood there until the SS men had satisfied their game-playing instincts by "humorous" orders to take off and put on caps. Then they received their report, and counted us. After the head-count - work.

We went in groups-some to build railway tracks or a road, some to the quarries to carry stones or coal, some to take out manure, or for potato-digging, latrine-cleaning, barracks-or sewer-repairs. All this took place inside the camp enclosure.

ARRIVAL AT MAUDANEK CONCENTRATION CAMP

During work the SS men beat up the prisoners mercilessly, inhumanly and for no reason.

They were like wild beasts and, having found their victim ordered him to present his backside, and beat him with a stick or a whip, usually until the stick broke,

The victims screamed only after the first blows afterwards he fell unconscious and the SS man then kicked at the ribs the face, at the most sensitive parts of a man's body and then, finally convinced that the victim was at the end of his strength, he ordered another Jew to pour one pail of water after the other over the beaten person until he woke and got up.

Another customary SS habit was to kick a Jew with a heavy boot. The Jew was forced to stand to attention, and all the while the SS man kicked him until he broke some bones. People who stood near enough to such a victim, often heard the breaking of the bones. The pain was so terrible that people having undergone that treatment, died in agony.

Apart from the SS men there were other expert hangmen. These were the so-called Capos. The name was an abbreviation for "barracks police." The Capos were German criminals who were also camp inmates. However, although they belonged to "us," they were privileged. They had a special better barracks of their own, they had better food, better, almost normal clothes, they wore special red or green riding pants, high leather boots, and fulfilled the functions of camp guards.

They were worse even than the SS men.

One of them, older than the others and the worst murderer of them all, when he descended on a victim, would not revive him later with water but would choke him to death. Work was actually unproductive, and its purpose was exhaustion and torture

. At 12 noon standing in line, we received half a litre of soup each. Usually it was cabbage soup, or some other watery liquid, without fats, tasteless. That was lunch. It was eaten in all weather under the open sky, never in the barracks. No spoons were allowed, though wooden spoons lay on each bunk probably for show, for Red Cross committees. One had to drink the soup out of the bowl and lick it like a dog.

From 1 p.m. till 6 p.m. there was work again. I must emphasize that if we were lucky we got a 12 o'clock meal.

There were "days of punishment" - when lunch was given together with the evening meal, and it was cold and sour, so that our stomach was empty for a whole day. Afternoon work was the same: blows, and blows again. Until 6 p.m.

At 6 there was the evening headcount. Again we were forced to stand at attention for Counting. Usually we were left standing at attention for an hour or two, while some prisoners were called up for "punishment parade" - they were those who in the Germans' eyes had transgressed in some way during the day, or had not been punctilious in their performance. They were stripped naked publicly, laid out on specially constructed benches, and whipped with 25 or 50 lashes.

The brutal beating and the heart-rending cries - all this the prisoners had to watch and hear.

Under these conditions, many of my friends that arrived with me became ill and disappeared after transfer to the sick barracks.

My Uncle Baruch and his son Yehuda were with me. During the middle of September, we stood longer than usual on the compound grounds for roll call. We were soaking wet from the rain, shivering from the cold. A high-ranking SS officer came over, accompanied by a well-dressed gentleman. Together, they went through the lines, asking everyone for his profession. My Uncle Baruch wanted me to say that I was a car mechanic, like him, so that we would be able to remain together. However, I was afraid to lie, for I did not have mechanical skills. When I was asked for my profession, I told them the truth: a presser.

The SS officer asked me:

"How could a young boy like you be a presser?"

Without hesitation, I answered:

"In the ghetto, I worked as a presser to support my family.

My father was deceased and I was required to provide for my mother, brother and sister."

My quick response pleased him. I was told to go over to the group of tailors. They chose 200 men and women tailors and shoemakers, and separated us from the other inmates. No other inmates were allowed to join our group. That was the last time I saw my Uncle Baruch and my cousin, Yehuda. I followed my instincts, for it kept me alive until now. It was the right choice at that time. We were put on a train that was waiting at the railroad station. The other cars contained the machinery taken from the factories of the Bialystock ghetto.

The 200 tailors and shoemakers were sent to Bliszin. I was among the 200, a presser.

ARRIVAL AT MAJDANEK CONCENTRATION CAMP



Camp Prisoners standing for a headcount on the Appeal Yard.

CHAPTER 9: BLISZIN CONCENTRATION CAMP

For this particular train ride, we were not so overcrowded. The train departed from Majdanek and left for Bliszin. We did not know how long we would be on the train, nor where we were going. The locomotive began blowing black smoke as the train picked up speed. I thought about the fate of my Uncle Baruch, Yehuda, and our friends who I left behind at Majdanek. I could not erase their faces from my memory. The separation was painful. We survived through so much together and received strength from our closeness.

We traveled for two days, again without water or proper sanitation. We arrived in the beginning of September 1943, at a small town called Bliszin.

We walked to the outskirts of the town until we arrived at a camp surrounded with a barbed wire fence. Bliszin was a branch camp of Majdanek. Inside were white buildings that consisted of big warehouses, and next to them, wooden barracks. At Bliszin, the women were kept apart from the men in an adjoining camp, separated by a barbed wire fence.

When we arrived at Bliszin, we found many Jews from surrounding towns, Radom and Kelz. They came from the ghettos to the camp, so they still had some valuables with them. Unlike the Bliszin Jews, we were stripped of everything at Majdanek camp.

The Jews at camp Bliszin who came before us were settled in their assigned jobs. Bliszin was a conglomerate of different workshops (shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, knitting machines, etc.). At first, I was employed in a quarry, then I worked in the other workshops. We were supplying provisions for the German army that was now fighting on the Russian front.

Labor was the basic duty of every prisoner in the concentration camp, and served two basic purposes:

1. It provided systematic destruction of the inmate's physical resistance.
2. It gave the Nazis access to slave labor in order to help the War effort.

Debilitation of prisoners through labor was the aim in the early stages of the camp's existence. The later incentive, profit, became important as the need for manpower for the arms industry grew with German failures at the Eastern Front. Meanwhile, high productivity was demanded. Some others were engaged in pointless tasks, like carrying soil from one heap onto another and back again, digging

and filling ditches. But even those senseless jobs had to be performed with the highest speed, and should anybody fall from exertion, he was regarded as a saboteur.

It was here, for the first time, I was no longer called by name but assigned a number, 2696. It was September 1943, when we arrived at Bliszin labor camp. I was only 15 years old, fighting to stay alive. The barracks were crowded with people.

We barely had heat or food, and we were always hungry. The portions of food were the same as in Majdanek: bitter ersatz coffee (imitation) for breakfast, watery soup with floating turnip slices for lunch, and soup with a slice of bread for supper. I was working in the tailor shop in any department where they needed my assistance.

The chill of autumn was in the air, and the falling leaves reminded me of autumn in my hometown, Bialystock. It was always such a colorful time of the year. My family was always on my mind. I missed them so much. I had no idea where they were, or what fate had befallen them. Who knew how I could find them? We were so helpless. With the winter season approaching, we wondered whether we could survive another bitter winter under these conditions. Temperatures often remained below zero for months.

I was always in search of new ways to get food. One day I asked my two friends if they would help me by lowering me down so I could slide through an open window to the kitchen

pantry in order to grab some raw vegetables. I was caught by a German guard and taken to their leader.

The camp commandant called for all the camp inmates to be present on the camp parade grounds when he announced on the bullhorn that anybody caught stealing food again would be shot. This being the first time anyone was caught, he let me off easy with only fifty lashes on my bare buttocks. For two days, I could not sit down.

Due to our lack of sanitation and water shortages for bathing or general cleanliness, the bodies of the inmates, including my own, were lice-infested. We would put our clothes outside the barracks at night for the frost to kill the lice imbedded in them. Needless to say, when we put the clothes on again, the lice came back to life. Our clothes were also "disinfected" in laundry dryers in order to kill the mites. However, they were unsuccessful. The mites were imbedded in our skin, surviving better than we were. Diarrhea, tuberculosis, and typhoid fever prevailed, and many of the workers in my barrack died.

The sanitary conditions were horrifying. We had insufficient nutrition, labor beyond our endurance, lack of proper clothing, and a variety of harassment inflicted by the camp authorities. We existed under a continuous state of fear and nervous tension that weakened the inmate's physiques and favored the spread of various diseases.

Dysentery was very common among the camp population. Those who suffered from dysentery became severely dehydrated and exhausted. Usually the inmates with dysentery, who were not very fit or debilitated by the intern men, died from it. We lacked water for bathing, and rarely changed underwear. There was a massive epidemic of scabies (microscopic mites that burrow under the skin).

After a few months in the camp, prisoners suffered from a lack of vitamins, which resulted in diminished immunity to infections and suppuration. Scurvy and phlegm were common complaints; boils and abscesses covered entire bodies.

Even a slight indisposition, wound or bruise, which under normal circumstances would have healed without medical attention, here produced grave complications.

The first symptoms of the destruction of the organism through hunger and physical exhaustion were swellings followed by boils on the legs.

I remember when I contracted typhoid fever, and I was very ill with a temperature of 105 degrees. I almost died from the fever and convulsions. With all my strength, I nourished myself by stealing any food I could get a hold of. At night, in the barracks, I even stole bread hidden under the pillows of dead inmates. It is really difficult to say for certain what helped me survive. Perhaps it was my youth. Perhaps I survived because I was so determined to survive this war. Or, maybe I am alive today because I was so strong-willed.

I felt that I needed to survive in order to try to find my family from whom I had been separated since the German soldiers caught me inside our burning house in the ghetto.

During my illness, I would hide in the barracks, underneath some old clothes, and lay very quietly while everyone went to work. After the barracks were vacated, an SS officer would enter the barracks to look for the inmates absent from work detail, and transferred the sick to the hospital. I was afraid to be transferred to the sick barracks, for none of the sick patients ever recovered. There was not medication or any nourishing food. The sick were taken out daily to the nearby forest, which was the camp cemetery.

Eventually, I went to work and began feeling better every day. I survived typhoid fever. I survived the mites. And, I would survive more.

Transfer Out Of Bliszin.

The camp was transferred to the command of the SS. Life in the camp was getting worse. We had to stand longer hours on the parade yard to be counted. We had to do our work while running. The punishment for any provocation was to be shot.

In the summer of 1944, we received news of the defeat of the German army on the Russian front. We had more hope of surviving.

However, to our disappointment, the war did not end soon enough. Many of us got weaker and did not make it. During the summer of 1944, we were called to the parade yard to be counted, only we found ourselves waiting to be transferred to another camp. We were not given a chance to return to our barracks to collect the few possessions we had. We were told everything we needed would be provided at our camp destination.

We were issued clothes with stripes, and they were too large for me. Once again, I had to roll several times, the cuffs of my pants and the sleeves of my jacket.

The camp commander blew a whistle and everyone lined up in formation and marched toward the waiting train, as directed. On the way, we received a portion of bread for the journey. I hoped that the new camp would be better.

In the summer of 1944, while boarding the train from Bliszin in transit to another camp, we found the dismantled barracks from Majdanek. On one of the walls was a scribbled message: "All the 18,000 Jews that remained in Majdanek were killed on November 3 1943". With pain and sorrow we had to keep moving.

We boarded the train, and once again, all the doors of the cars slammed shut. This time we were only one hundred people to a car. It was summer and the heat and humidity were unbearable. We were not provided any water or sanitation, as before. And despite the hundred fewer bodies, we barely had enough room to sit. It was impossible to stretch our legs or to go to sleep while sitting on the floor of the boxcar. The rhythmic motion of the train allowed me to daydream for quite awhile. I recalled the times in Bialystock when I wanted to ride the trains more often. Now I felt that in a short time I had had too many miserable train rides.

I estimate that it was on the third day that our transport went through the railroad station of Krakow. The train began to slow its speed. It felt as if the train would slow to a halt in seconds, but instead it kept moving at a monotonous pace. Then, we saw the train embark on a remote rail track.

Through the cracks in the door, we could see a barbed wire fence, surrounded with guard towers. From the inside of our boxcar, there was shoving and pushing in order to obtain a better view. The train finally came to a complete halt. Many soldiers arrived on the scene. They took their positions every two feet from the last. The SS officer gave the order to open all the doors. All the doors opened simultaneously, and we heard shouting, "*Raus Alle!*" The German phrase for "Out Everyone!" We had to jump from the boxcar, which was approximately three feet off the ground. Many of us fell as we jumped; our legs were weak from sitting too long. When I approached the doorway, I jumped as far as I could. I sprawled on the ground, knees bruised and hands scraped, and scrambled to my feet. The train was completely unloaded in just a few minutes. All along the railroad track, yet another headcount was taken.

BLISZIN CONCENTRATION CAMP

CHAPTER 10: AUSCHWITZ - BIRKNAU CONCENTRATION CAMP, 1944



Rail Entrance at Auschwitz Birkenau.

A non-commissioned SS officer came to meet us at the station with a truncheon in his hand. He gave the order: "Men to the left! Women to the right! Form groups of five" We tried to dodge the soldiers' rifle butts, while dogs snarled and lunged at prisoners along the edges of the crowd. We were surrounded not only with SS soldiers, but also by a group of inmates working in the maintenance of the gas chambers and the crematorium detail called "Sonderkommando".

The Sonderkommando were a special detachment of mostly Jewish prisoners who herded the victims into the gas chambers and helped them undress. The SS doctors and other SS men did the actual killing by introducing the gas into the Chambers. Later, the Sonderkommando had to extract gold teeth and remove rings from bodies before burning the now dead prisoners in the ovens. After the prisoners were gassed and the bodies robbed of any possessions, the Sonderkommando loaded the corpses onto old carts and took them to crematoriums or burned them on pyres. They sorted the possessions of the dead in the warehouse area and sent them to Germany. Women's hair was used for submarine mattresses; clothing and children's toys were distributed in Germany. The Sonderkommando were isolated from the main camp. Eventually they too were killed in order to eliminate the witnesses of the crime

It wasn't until later that I learned who they were: these trustees whom the SS used to aid the extermination process were nicknamed "Canada" by the prisoners.

They wore armbands around their left arms and appeared to be very well fed. I recognized one of the trustees and yelled his name,

"Yakob! What is happening?" I said.

He replied to us in a very low, sad voice, so as not to be noticed by the SS guards as being shoved into formation by the bayonet bearing SS troops,

"I am sorry to see you here!"

He pointed to his right, with his arm arched in a 45-degree angle toward the sky.

"Do you see these smoking chimneys? This is the Crematorium where most of us are going to be killed today in the gas chamber. I am very sorry that I have to be the one to tell you this."

The terror that struck me was like a large mountain suddenly landing on my shoulders. I became speechless from the realization that I may only have minutes to live. I raised my eyes toward the smoking chimneys and had to allow myself to believe what I saw. The smoke was heavy and fire was visibly erupting with the smoke. There was absolutely no chance of escape. I felt only helplessness and disbelief. This was the closest I had ever been to death. It was right here before me.

The empty train had just departed on its way to bring a new transport. We marched in the direction of the chimneys. An SS officer stood on a platform wearing a white gown over his uniform. I found out later that this was the well-known doctor, Dr. Joseph Mengele. It was for Dr. Mengele to decide which of us would die, and which of us were considered qualified for work. Our transport was lucky this time, we were all dressed in camp uniforms, and they marched us toward the gates of the camp "Birknau".

There were three main camps spread over twenty square miles. An electrified barbed-wire fence surrounded the camps, twelve feet high. There was a floodlight every one hundred yards, and a machine gun every four hundred yards. Just outside the fence, a quarter of a mile away, was a sign stating:

"NO ESCAPE. BLEAK BULLDOZED AND BLASTED FLATLAND"

Guard towers were positioned every one hundred feet. A second barbed-wire fence stood just thirty feet inside, and was manned by SS guards and German shepherds, who patrolled the space between both fences.

Approximately forty feet inside the first fence was a single string of barbed wire. This was the death zone. Anyone who crossed that wire was subjected to live fire from the guards at the towers.



The electrified wire fenced surrounding Birkenau and its guard towers. Many people electrocuted themselves on the fence in order to end their lives before the Nazis did.

There were 6,900 guards under the SS. Among them were 850 Polish and Ukrainian fascists, 500 German professional criminals, murderers and perverts, 250 dogs, and shamefully, hundreds of Jewish betrayers, waiting to suppress and kill a quarter of a million Jewish prisoners *daily*.

The camp system was designed to kill Jews, either immediately upon arrival or after utilizing their labor. Their survival chances increased somewhat if they arrived at the camp late in the war due to the increased need for labor, especially those with special skills that were needed to support the armaments industry. But, for most of the millions, that kingdom of death was like an industrial machine designed to produce corpses. By day and night, the freight cars belched their hapless cargoes so that the executioners were hard put to reduce the inmate population.

An orchestra was playing music when they marched us into the camp. A placard was hanging in front of the band "Arbeit Macht Frei!"

The translation is "Work Makes Us Free". We passed the gates leading to the Crematorium. I was no more than fifty feet from the curve, and I could plainly see the crematorium and gas chamber buildings in the distance. All the buildings were wooden barracks in Birkenau concentration camp. I saw prisoners with striped uniforms walking around and doing some sort of detail jobs. Some were pushing wheelbarrows and others were pushing wagons. Upon arrival at the camp, we were led into one of the wooden barracks that was used for a bathhouse and a barbershop.

We were ordered to undress and to surrender everything in our possession. In order to stress the immediacy of this command, the officer dispensed a powerful slap to my friend. We all undressed as quickly as we could. One of my friends held his belt in his hand. It had cost him a blow to the head.

One of the work detail men came over and ordered us to keep our mouths open. They asked each of us if we were hiding any jewels. After the inspection was over, we had our heads shaved, and they lead us into the shower room. I looked with suspicion at the shower-heads, expecting them to emit gas at any moment. Once again, to our relief, water came out of the showerheads.

There was only one latrine for every 10 to 20 barracks. We were permitted to use the latrine in certain hours of the day. The latrine consisted of a deep ditch with planks thrown across it at certain intervals. We stood in line to get into the building with the latrine, knee-deep in human excrement. We squatted on the planks like birds perched on a telephone wire. We were so close together that we could not help soiling one another. While waiting for our turns, we often soiled our ragged clothes, which were never changed or removed. Our body odor seemed near toxic, noxious levels, adding to the horror of our existence.

Many camp-mates with diarrhea relieved themselves in soup bowls, then hid them under the mattress of straw to avoid the punishment for doing so. The punishment varied:

Twenty-five strokes on the bare bottom,
Kneeling all night long on sharp gravel, or
Holding up bricks for many hours.

This punishment often ended in the death of the "guilty."

Water was in permanent shortage. Latrines were submerged in their own filth. Diarrhea rife and mud were everywhere. It took great effort to simply stay clean.

And yet, it was not so important to be clean at Auschwitz-Birkenau, it was too impossible. It seemed as if they had condemned us to die

in our own filth, to drown in mud, or in our own excrement. They wished to abuse us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface every vestige of humanity. The willed us to return us to the level of wild animals, to fill us with horror and contempt toward our fellow inmates and ourselves. Yet it was vitally important for us inmates to keep our bodies clean.

Everyone at "Selection" time had to strip naked and parade for Dr. Mengele. The doctor stood with his immaculate white gloves on, and pointed his thumb: sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left. Anyone with spots on their body, or a thin Muselmann, was directed to the right: to death. All others were directed to the left, and were allowed to rot a little longer.

The longer we stayed in the camp, the more we gained in experience. Our instincts became sharpened, our vigilance developed, and our reactions quickened. We acquired a greater capacity for adapting ourselves to the inhumane conditions.

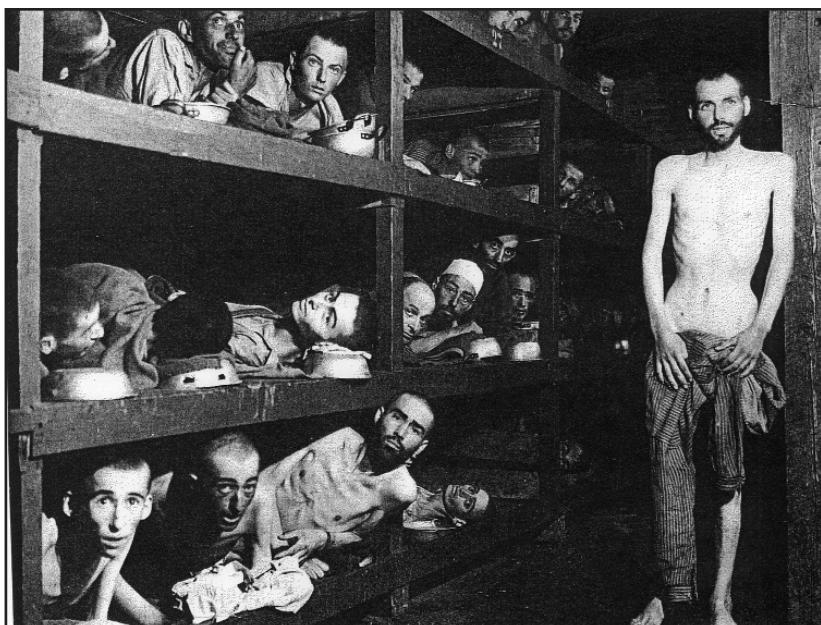
BIRKNAU: Provisions And Branding.

After the shower was over, we were chased out of the shower room, naked, to the outside of the building where long tables were set up bearing mountains of prison clothing. As we ran, passing the tables, the clothes were thrown at us. We received striped uniforms composed of pants, jackets and caps, which were either too big or too small. The shoes were made of sheepskin with heavy wooden soles, but no shoelaces. As I walked, the shoes would rub my ankles like two razor blades. The absence of shoestrings and belts did not help our depressed situation. After receiving our clothing, we stood in line to receive our tattoos: we each received a permanent number on our left forearms with a tool resembling a fountain pen. My number, which is still on my arm today, is **B-2433**. From this point on, we were called by number only. Our names were obliterated with our identities. The German plan was to reduce the Jews to the level of heartless, brainless and soul-less robots.

In our desperation to stay alive, we let them think we became exactly what they wanted. Nevertheless, the fact that we were human beings, just like them, could not be changed.

We were taken to wooden barracks, inside each one was a single room, nearly filled with bunks. The bunks were along both walls, three tiers high. They resembled bunk racks, crude wooden shelves, not separate beds as you would imagine.

Each level was one long bed where hundreds of men lay close to one another. In the center, the whole length of the building, was something like a long chimney, it was a kind of heater.



That's the way people lived in the camp barracks.

Every barrack had an elderly who was responsible for the cleanliness of the barrack. On top of the bunks were pallets of straws and a thin blanket. We were told that our bunks had to be in perfect order at all times when not in use. We were awakening at 5 in the morning to have our bunks made. However, there wasn't enough straws in the pallet to make a square, and the thin blanket didn't cover the shame of the mattress.

The concentration camps made Hell a way of life on Earth. It took a great machine to reduce us to beasts, when we tried all along to fight within ourselves not to become beasts. I often asked myself, "Why did I survive when others didn't?" I know now that I survived to be a witness to the atrocities that took place. My purpose is to tell others in the hope that history should not repeat itself. I lived through Hitler's inferno in order to survive and rebuild my life. That is a tremendous victory in itself. It makes other survivors and I aware of life's imminent value.

You may be wondering why we walked like meek sheep into the slaughterhouses. Why we did not fight back.

These questions were asked by many Jews of the younger generation and by many non-Jewish people across the world. There were always attempts to resist, beginning with the ghettos of Bialystock and Warsaw.

The attempts to escape were easily put down, and viewing the escapees deaths nourished little hope for more confrontations.

Camp prisoners who worked in the commandos removing the gassed bodies from the crematoriums felt helpless, as they had reached the human capacity for endurance and strength in their daily lives and could not muster up the extra strength needed to plan a rebellion. The commandos were able to regain their sense of worth as human beings with no help or encouragement from outside forces.

They organized their own system of underground resistance. They too suffered setbacks as members were killed in revolts:

There was an Auschwitz Sonderkommando, who blew up one of the main crematoriums before the SS troops gunned him down.

Also in Treblinka camp, the prisoners organized themselves by securing arms under very tight surveillance. They would move together. Their aim was to blow up the camp, to rise and fight against the impossible odds so that just one among them would survive in absolute obligation “to tell the world” that the name “Treblinka” had come to signify death. Their attempt to revolt didn’t stand a chance of succeeding.

However, it symbolized their will to survive so that the killing would be stopped and the crimes are made known.

Some prisoners tried to burn down their camp and release prisoners in large numbers, in order to insure their survival of at least a few. Nothing less than an absolute struggle, transcending personal hope, became the one road to victory.

Very few of the participants in the Treblinka revolt survived.

But they fought for their lives.

The Jews allowed themselves to be led to the slaughterhouse like sheep. In the world of concentration camps, all people behaved identically. The Nazis planned our behavior, and counted on our response, assuring the submission of the condemned.

Victims allowed themselves to be led to the gallows without protest. If they protested, they would repudiate and abandon themselves to the point where they ceased to affirm their identity. There is nothing more terrible than a procession of humans, going to their death like robots. They did it because they had faith in humanity. We

did not really think that other humans, equal to us, were capable of committing such heinous crimes.

It was also serial behavior that the Nazi technicians elicited when they proceeded to make the first selection. All men who wanted to survive pondered the situation: if they refused to work, there would be others to do the work in my place. I will die for no reason. Thus, indeed, Germans had enormous human resources at their disposal and was such that we could not consist exclusively of heroes.

Foreseeing the submission of his peers, each man resigned himself to submit too. The Jews were plunged into confusion similar to the one that causes panics. There was no way to coordinate their behavior.

They did try to control their behavior at first: the technicians organized eliminatory ordeals—races on all fours (hands and feet) and belly races. The first three-quarters of all prisoners would be spared. The last quarter would be taken to the crematorium. For a moment, nobody moved: the whips landed everywhere. Then, people realized, if they refused to move they would be killed. A few decided to start moving, then immediately the rest would follow.

BIRKNAU: Our Daily Routine

At 7 am in the morning, we were given a weak bowl of tea, which was to be shared between two people. We were also given a thin slice of bread with a drop of jam. We were forbidden to return to the barracks after breakfast. At midday, we were given a ladle of soup, usually a watery mixture of kale or some pootherb in summer, and in winter, a coarse variety of carrots or turnips, frostbitten and rotten, without a trace of fat.

Sometimes we were given thick pulp or flour and oats, nick-named by the prisoners, "Spit out Soup". For supper, we were given some soup again, with a 1/8-inch slice of bread, mixed with sawdust. After the distribution was over, the men would push each other to try to get seconds of the soup. The pushing only got them hit on the head by the guards. The daily food was also deficient in many constituents essential to life. Hunger dogged the prisoners continuously, not allowing us to think about anything else; it was the reason for our debilitation and the source of numerous illnesses.

During the first few days, they tried to teach us how to behave: to take off our hats, to march in a formation of columns of five across, in a harmonious movement. The instructions themselves were not difficult to perform. However, the cultural variety of our group made the harmony of movement difficult to attain. It was challenging at best

when we had to fall into formation, and while marching, our pants would drop down to our knees because we had no belts to keep them up.

Roll calls were assemblies, in the course of which the functionaries would check to make certain the actual numbers of prisoners was the same as the figure on the files. This simple formality had in all been changed into a most horrifying trial. This was especially so in the case of evening roll call. The prisoners, on their last legs were returning from work, lined-up in five's, standing at attention in the assembly area, regardless of bad weather. The SS never hurried with the counting.

Roll call usually lasted approximately two hours. If a prisoner escaped, fainted or died in some corner of the block, all the others would be kept standing until he was found.

The officers took a head count three times a day. At times we waited in the hot sun for long periods of time as punishment for one reason or another. I witnessed many collapsing bodies, which were promptly removed to the gas chambers and crematorium. I stood motionless.

The slightest movement of a limb or head would certainly invite physical punishment to the offender. As I stood perfectly still, the only movement was from within my brain.

I was facing the crematorium chimneys and the hot sun beat down directly onto my head, cooking my body. I tried to keep my mind working, hoping that doing so would prevent me from becoming unconscious, and falling to the ground.

There was enough smoke and fire coming out of the chimneys to keep any one's mind fully occupied. The flames ceaselessly erupted, providing an ever-present reminder of the purpose of this place that the world forgot.

The punishment for a prisoner that stole food or tried to escape was public execution by hanging on the gallows, flogging or deprivation of food. Besides individual punishment, collective sanction was applied to the whole block, or work commando to which the offender belonged. They consisted of long periods of standing at attention on the assembly area, even in harsh weather or rain.

The vast majority of prisoners were in their final stages of exhaustion. They were performing labor beyond their physical capability, carried out under constant stress, combined with hunger and insupportable lack of sanitation. These provided, in themselves, an efficient means of extermination. In the accordance with the SS intention, the camp conditions were so inhumane that they induced an unrelenting

feeling of insecurity and terror. They aimed at changing the prisoners into hunted animals, devoid of any human dignity, with everything dead except the thought of satisfying the most primitive instinct, to survive.

The prisoner's mental attitude greatly effected his chances of survival. The willpower to hang on would be strengthened through the news from the eastern front. Every good news item was received with enthusiasm. This information spread among the prisoners from electricians workshops where the SS had their radio-sets repaired, or by women prisoners who cleaned the SS staff quarters.

Every morning when I got up for the head count, I looked at the sun rising. Each time I felt that I was watching the sunrise for the last time.

I lived each day as if it were my last. Unwillingly, I would turn my head toward the flaming chimneys of the crematorium and say to myself,

"Thank you god for giving me this extra day to live." I knew that if my turn came to go to the gas chambers, it wouldn't be until that evening, when the sick and wounded were weeded out.

I felt almost certain that I would not die today. I was not too certain about tomorrow. My approach to survival was quite simple: in order to achieve survival, I was prepared to do anything, including hard labor. I learned to do any job, as I was told, small or large.

BIRKNAU: Work Assignments

I longed to be reunited with my parents somehow. It was this hope and dream of my family that kept me strong, both physically and emotionally.

Our first work assignment was to clean the yard, which was covered with tiny pebbles, like gravel. We had to pick them up, and pile them up in the far corner of the yard. When the yard was nearly clean, we were ordered to move the pebbles to the opposite side of the yard.

After two weeks, I was chosen to a work detail. I was assigned to dig ditches and to lay drainpipes, which would dry up the swamp that existed in the fields surrounding the concentration camp. While performing this task, we had to dig deep in the ground at times. While digging, the wet soil was falling on our heads due to the rains at that time, thus converting the earth under our feet into heavy clay. This clay made it difficult for us to move, and the rains soaked us to the bone. Whenever any of us, shivering from the cold and rain, tried to climb up, the capo (foreman) was waiting there to give us a whipping. At the end of the day, we marched back to the camp, soaked and

exhausted. At the entrance of the camp were the orchestra playing marching songs. We were to march with our head up, not to show any sign of weakness.



Newly shorn women lined up in Concentration camp for work

BIRKNAU: The Result Of Prolonged Malnutrition.

As the days passed, we grew weaker and thinner from lack of nutrition. Every morning, we would find a few among us who died quietly while sleeping. At times, when I was asleep next to someone who died during the night, I was not aware of the situation until morning. It wasn't a great shock any more to wake up next to a dead body; it was such a frequent occurrence that we became accustomed to it. Many of the very weak and frail, whose turn in the gas chamber had not yet come, just gave up hope. They knew too well that their days were numbered.

Some died in their sleep, while others, unable to endure more suffering and degradation ran to the electrified fence and grabbed the barbed wire to electrocute themselves. It was not unusual to wake up in the morning and see charred bodies still holding onto the barbed wire fence. The electricity would be shut off while our own working crews removed the dead.

Birknau concentration camp, like other camps, treated their sick and the injured in a specially designed barrack. The doctors, mostly Polish and Ukrainian, were under the supervision of an SS officer doctor. The untreated sick were taken out to the gas chambers every few days.

We all talked and dreamed about food. We would stop at nothing when food was involved. We were driven by nightmares of hunger.

We would steal a rotten turnip from the wagons being unloaded, despite the knowledge of the punishment if we got caught: we would be beaten or shot to death.

BIRKNAU: Crematorium

The following is a brief description of the events that took place at the Birkenau concentration camp Crematorium, which were told to me by my friend Yakob. Yakob was one of the commandos (groups) working at the gas chamber facilities.

His description, in detail, and my observation is notched in my mind forever. All transports would arrive by train from all over Europe. After unloading the human cargo, they would march the Jews through the crematorium gates, then close the gates behind the new inmates. Several hundred people at a time were packed into a large room with signs all over stating "Bath House", or "This Way to Bath". Everyone was forced to undress rapidly. A few minutes later, another door opened and everyone was shoved inside. Simulated showerheads were installed in the ceiling to further deceive them. The condemned people were packed in until the door would hardly close.

The doors shut tight and poisonous gas was injected into the gas chamber. Minutes later, another door opened at the opposite side of the room and the dead were removed for burning later. While the first group would be gassed, a second group would be undressing. It was like an assembly line.

One of the jobs of the commandos was to remove the clothing from the room rapidly, so as not to delay the use of the dressing room. The clothing was removed to a large warehouse, where later it was sorted and searched for valuables. The bodies were searched in the most intimate places. Rings and gold teeth were removed. The ovens were going at full capacity, twenty-four hours a day. Nevertheless, a backlog of bodies was accumulating. Outside the Crematorium was a very large ditch filled with human fat. We were told the Nazis used it for making soap. There were large pits filled with bodies that the ovens could not handle; they would be burned in the ditch.

All these things which I heard and saw were unbelievable. My mind just could not comprehend it all. The commando group was working sixteen hours a day. If a commando became hurt or sick, he was removed from the ranks and never seen again. As one might imagine, there was an abundant supply of stronger replacements available.

BIRKNAU: "SELECTION".

All the prisoners at the camps were kept so busy. We had 3 head counts, work, and meals. We had no time to ponder our past or con-

ecture about our future. The only thing that mattered was the present. We tried to stay alive, one day at a time, one hour at a time. We knew in our hearts that our days were numbered.

Dr. Mengele would come every two weeks to make a "selection". My time came on Dr. Mengele's third visit. We were examined for malnutrition. From the hard work, we were called "muselmen" because our body bones pushed against our thin flesh. We formed a line of naked men and boys.

One-by-one we stopped in front of Dr. Mengele, who sat stiffly erect on a straight wooden chair. His cold greenish eyes stared at each one of us.

He pointed to the number tattooed on our shrunken wrists. An assistant wrote down the numbers in a book. The ones whose numbers were listed were shoved towards a waiting truck to be taken to the crematoriums.

When my turn came, I ran, keeping my body tall, and turned my head and stared into Mengele's eyes. I did not give him a chance to look at my number. I was spared this time.

There were a lot of young boys in the camp. They were also going through selections. They were told to take off their clothes. Dr. Mengele was not only looking for healthy boys/men; he also put up a board with a measurement chart. Anyone shorter than four and a half feet (135-cm) was taken to the gas chamber. I was present at this "selection". I passed the height test, being taller than 135 cm., but I was very concerned since I had no idea how tall I had grown.

At Auschwitz, doctors in the camps did many experiments with children involving growth research.

They also performed many experiments with women, using chemical injections resulting in infertility. Dr. Mengele convinced the higher authorities of his hypotheses with the utility of the prisoners in experimentation on behalf of the "Master Race." In their "experiments," they tried to artificially create children with Aryan features, blond hair and blue eyes. In this particular experiment, the Doctor used inseminations to produce twins; the experiment was called "The Science of Twins."

The doctors were given the freedom to perform a wide range of insane experiments. They experimented with the following, but this list is not all inclusive of the atrocities they performed:

- Sterilization
- How long people could survive on salt water
- Hot and cold immersion
- Freezing

- Innumerable tests to calculate the rate of human death under a variety of causes:
 - Injected with poison
 - Subjected to deadly diseases
 - Complex and impossible forms of bone and skin grafts
 - Demented attempts to redesign the genetic system and reshape human anatomy.

All these experiments were administered without the benefit of pain killers or sanitary safeguards. It became a lunatic lampoon of the entire concept of healing and medicine by pseudo-surgeons. It is catalogued. It was German Madness. Their records were fastidious.

Dr. Mengele's assistant was Dr. Gehbert. Dr. Gehbert's specialty was experiments in Obstetrics and Gynecology. The women were subjected to various operations, particularly on the female reproductive organs. The ovaries and uteri would be removed. On some, external organs, such as the clitoris, were amputated.

Some would be artificially inseminated with a variety of semen. However, as the pregnancies progressed, the women would be cut open for examination, or to see how and when abortion could be performed. These abortions were even executed during the ninth month.

The rate of success was nearly zeroed for these poor women, subjected to such inhumane treatment. The women usually died after enduring such terrible pain from the butchery.

Dr. Mengele and his assistant doctors did various experiments with twins. He exchanged blood and parts of their bodies and tested their reactions. Other experiments involved neurological tests: he punctured the spinal cords of many individuals without medication for pain in order to test their endurance for pain. Many savage experiments were also done on deceased inmates. During autopsies, various organs were removed, preserved in alcohol, and shipped to German laboratories. Their main objective was to test the possibility of changing genetic patterns through chemical intervention.

Some of my friends who had been with me since our deportation from the Bialystock ghetto were taken to a nearby concentration camp named "Buna".

There were factories owned by I.G. Farber industries: they produced gas substitutes and rubber products. Other factories included Krupp and Siemens, Germany's largest electrical manufacturers. There was also a good deal of Defense work done near "Buna". The SS had the exclusive right to sell its slave labor to the private industry.

CHAPTER 11: THE RUSSIAN INVASION, BIRKNAU ABANDONED

Meanwhile, rumors of Russian victories came more often, with stories of great bombing raids on German cities. They must have been true, but nothing seemed to change for us. In the last few days, we heard noises of big guns roaming the air. One morning, when we came out for our roll call, we saw regular soldiers by the gate. They got off their trucks, stood with rifles and machine guns. I told my friend Mordechai, "Something is going to happen."

Then, one morning in late September, the loudspeakers blared, "*Appel! Appel!*" We ran to the center of the camp and lined up in columns of five to be counted. We found ourselves standing for hours without any explanation. After four hours, the camp commander announced "This camp is being evacuated". We received a double portion of bread for the journey. We returned to our barracks. It was cold on this night, our last at Birknau. I thought, how much longer were our lives to be dragged out from one "last night" to another? I did not sleep at all. Through the frosted windows bursts of red lights could be seen. Cannon shots split the nighttime silence. How close were the Russians? There were whispers between us. With luck, the Russians would be at Birknau before our evacuation. Hope was never diminished. Someone shouted: "Try to sleep, gather your strength for the unknown journey."

The Death March Out of Birknau

As the Eastern front collapsed, camp after camp was evacuated. Prisoners were driven into the winter dawn in endless columns. Vicious SS men guarded the prisoners. Whole camp populations were forced to walk across the frozen wasteland from Poland into Germany. Some marched for weeks without food or shoes. Those who fell behind or stopped, for any purpose, were shot. At night, many froze to death in their sleep. This last extreme measure pushed survivors to the limits of their endurance. Here, more than anywhere, each prisoner was determined not to be dragged down now. Survivors helped each other to keep going, with all their reserves of strength; we dragged people along for the remainder of that endless march. We were no longer resembling the definition of "human," or "animals." We were putrefying corpses moving on two legs.

At my camp, on the morning of the next day, everyone grabbed their thin blankets. The Capos were shouting: "Form up, quickly!" In just a few minutes, we were all lined up in rows of five. Every barrack

was separate. It began to snow without cessation, endlessly. Hundreds of soldiers, accompanied by dogs, rose up from the darkness. The gates of the camp opened. The first barracks began to march. We waited for our turn. It was very cold and the snow was relentless. An icy wind blew in violent gusts. Nevertheless, we marched without faltering. The SS soldiers made us increase our pace by yelling, "Faster you swines!" We were no longer marching, we were almost running.

The SS soldiers, with weapons in hand, received orders to fire on anyone who could not keep up. They rode along side us in trucks, and took shifts running with us.

They had their own provisions in their trucks. The SS soldiers were fed and relatively refreshed when their running shift began. If anyone of us stopped for even a second, he was shot on the spot. The officers' fingers were always on the gun trigger; they didn't deprive themselves of this pleasure. The day turned into pitch darkness, and every now and then, an explosion rang into the night. I kept talking to myself: 'Don't think! Don't stop! Run!' Men were collapsing near me, into the dirty snow. We were walking along side farm roads. Anyone who stepped out of their line, whether to relieve himself, or try to fetch vegetables from the fields, was shot on sight. The bodies were left on the side of the road. We walked all night, dragging our feet, as the snow became thicker.

The weakest people, the sickest ones, began to stumble. We tried to help each other but many fell in the snow. Those who could not go on were shot on sight. The German soldiers never left anyone alive. Hours passed and more people were shot and left behind. A man in the row behind me fell against my back.

I turned and saw him sprawled on his stomach. A guard raised his rifle and shot him. The people behind him had to keep walking, stepping over his body. We stopped before the break of daylight. The guards yelled, "Sit down!" I took off my blanket, put one end on the snow and pulled the rest of the blanket around me. It was easy to think about giving up. My only hope was that maybe the war would come to an end.

After a brief rest, the guards then shouted, "Get up! Get up!" They were running along the road while yelling and poking at people with their rifles. I grabbed snow from the ground and rubbed it over my face in order to stay awake. One of my friends lay wrapped in his blanket. I put my foot against his back and pushed while shouting, "Get up quick! The guards are coming!" There was no response; he was dead. People coughed, spit, and stamped their feet in the snow

to keep themselves warm. Others relieved themselves where they stood. The Nazis treated us like animals. The guards shouted at us to get into rows of five. Slowly, the lines began to move again. The snow had stopped, but gray clouds hid the sun and a cold wind blew into our faces. The people in front of us packed the snow on the road down, so it was easier to walk. I looked down at the ground, forcing myself to keep going. I took one painful, freezing step at a time.

We stopped again at about noon the next day. We had not yet received any food or water. We put handfuls of snow into our mouths, a little at a time. There was nothing else to drink. I still had my bread, which I saved from the double portion that we received when we left Birkenau. We moved on. Our feet were sore, our bodies ached. We stopped only a few minutes at a time. Then, moving by barely lifting our feet, the only sound we heard was snow crackling under our wooden shoes.

Transport By Rail, Again

Just before dark we arrived at a railroad station. A train with empty cattle cars stood waiting. The guards yelled at us to get into the train.

Snow had blown into the cars, leaving only small bits of the floor uncovered. Cow manure lay thick in the bare spots and must have been under all the snow. We were barely alive. The freight cars were still packed to capacity with prisoners. After the transport was completely loaded, the doors slid shut. They were locked and sealed, as if carrying precious cargo. These sealed doors would not be reopened under any circumstances until we reached our destination.

The train rattled through the dark for several hours. It sometimes whistled and slowed down while it passed a train station, then picked up speed again. We were already too weak, both mentally and physically, to care. We knew from experience than an existence worse than death was awaiting us for the next several days. We were without food, water, or sanitation facilities. Not one of us knew where we were going or why. The train traveled very slowly for several hours. It might have been going through mountains. We were gasping for air in the packed cars. We didn't care about our ultimate destination; we were fighting for every breath. This time, we felt that none of us would be alive when the doors to our train cars would open.

Our train was slowing down. It came to a halt at a remote sidetrack, waiting for more important trains to pass. We saw trains passing us up, filled with wounded German soldiers returning from the Russian front. Some of the trains, headed in the opposite direction, were loaded with army hardware. We had been sitting there, motionless,

for six hours. The two tiny windows did not provide enough air for us to breathe. At least when we were in motion, the cooler air from the outside would sweep in through the cracks and provide some relief for us. The air was still; we were without relief.

The train began moving again and the cool air from the outside let us breathe easier. We traveled for two full days. On the third day, before dark, our train eased itself slowly into a very large railroad station. Many trains were passing us up. As our train proceeded to a side spur, through a crack in the door, someone saw a sign on the platform of the station. The sign read "Berlin". We all became very excited when we realized that we were inside Germany.

The train came to a halt, and then it continued to move very slowly, switching tracks for almost an hour. We finally came to a halt at the most remote track of the Berlin railroad station. We felt a jerk as the locomotive disconnected and abandoned us on a sidetrack.

Allied Bombing Of Berlin Train Station.

It wasn't long after we stopped, during the night, that we heard explosions. Through the cracks in the cars we saw many fires erupting all around the railroad station. German soldiers were running around in confusion. Firemen attempted to put out the fires. Within a short time, which seemed like an eternity, the bombing had stopped and everything around us was burning. Shells were still exploding from the burning ammunition trains. The danger had not yet passed for us. We might still have been hit by the exploding shells, or from the fire spreading from the burning trains on the adjoining track. By some miracle, our train was spared from the bombs, and from the surrounding fires. We realized that the Allied forces were bombing the railroad station.

At first, we were frightened. We were also aware that we were locked in a train that might ignite at any time. This was not the way we would have chosen to die. I felt that since death was just around the corner at any moment, I would rather die from an Allied bomb explosion than at the hands of the Germans. The next morning, our locomotive wasn't seen. We presumed that our locomotive was sent to remove some of the burned train cars in order to clear the main track. At nightfall, a black smoking, puffing locomotive hooked our train with a big jolt. We began moving again. In the morning, we arrived at another railroad station, "Oraninburg".

CHAPTER 12: ORANINBURG CONCENTRATION CAMP

It was raining as we were allowed to disembark from the train. We were ordered to march two miles to our camp. We could barely walk after the last hike and train ride in the cramped boxcars. The short distance to Oraninburg seemed like an eternity. We collected raindrops in our folded hands for hydration. The rain, soaking our bodies, was refreshing. Some of us could no longer walk, and were left in the cars. The rest of us proceeded to the main gates of the camp.

As we passed through the main gate, we found ourselves inside a fenced camp with modern barracks, well-paved roads, and sidewalks. It looked like a well-organized army base. There was a lot of activity: army trucks zooming by, spraying us as they drove in the drenched streets. We were led down the main street in columns of five.

We reached a large, empty hangar, which was to be our home. Each prisoner was assigned to a small spot on the concrete floor of the hangar, which was covered with thin straw mats. Immediately, we were put to work on garbage detail and street cleaning. Some of our work also consisted of digging ditches and carrying bricks and sacks of sand or cement on our backs.

Head count was at 5 am every morning. We were allowed less than six minutes to get dressed and out the door of the barracks. We slept with our clothes on due to the cold. In the morning, we received imitation coffee. At lunchtime, we received a bowl of watery soup. At dinnertime, we received a ration of moldy bread with a bowl of watery, tasteless soup. This became our routine.

The sounds of siren warnings signaling the imminent air raids were becoming more frequent. We were rushed to our hangar during the warnings. After the “all clear” siren was sounded, we were allowed back to our work.

I heard a few anti-aircraft batteries open fire at the overhead flying planes. I did not recall them ever hitting our base. The warnings and sirens lasted just a couple of weeks.

Every day, the routine was the same. The bombers would drop their load someplace else. However, on one particular Sunday, the scenario changed: Allied planes approached Oraninburg, as usual. As the sirens sounded their warning, the anti-aircraft batteries opened fire at the overhead planes. The allies began dropping their load of bombs at a corner of our camp where the young pine forest was recently planted. Beneath the ground of the pine forest was a

modern, well-camouflaged Messerschmitt plane factory. Bombs exploded nearby and there was total chaos among the Germans. Their airplane factory was destroyed, including all the planes below. The airfield was also damaged in the same raid. The damage was a total destruction of the entire facility. We took great pleasure in knowing that the Allies knew where the airplane factory was located: not at the obvious hangars where the prisoners slept, but beneath the ground under a pine forest. Not a single prisoner was hurt.

Departure From Oraninburg

After the destruction of the factory, there was no reason to keep us at Oraninburg. We were shipped out on yet another train to Sachenhausen. Homeless and weakened by German oppression, our bodies and minds reflected the heavy toll of years of inhumane captivity. The end of the war and/or freedom was nowhere in sight. We had been on the road, shuttled from ghettos to concentration camps, one after another. We had forgotten what our homes felt like or where they were. We had forgotten where we belonged.

We lived for more than two years in concentration camps without our personal possessions.

We had nothing to hold onto; this created the illusion of being lost in space. The fear of death was no longer threatening. We accepted the fact that at least in death, our souls would be at peace.

We had no information regarding the details of the war. We were isolated from any news sources. We heard rumors, but nothing was official. The rumor was circulating that the German casualties were heavy on the Russian front. But, we did not see any shortages of SS officers guarding our camps.

We were rounded up again and told to gather our belongings. We marched the two miles back to the railroad station where our transport train was waiting. The train had the look and smell of death. "Where to this time?" was the thought rummaging through my mind. Most of us did not have the strength to climb to the freight car. Our bodies looked like skeletons with bones showing through all over. Without exception, we all resembled skeletons covered with skin. Most of us were suffering from dysentery, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and other chronic diseases.

CHAPTER 13: SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP

The SS guards relaxed their alertness. They carried their rifles recklessly over their shoulders. There was no need for them to show concern for it was evident that we were in no condition to escape. This time, they even permitted us to help each other to board the train. For this particular journey, we were not as crowded in the boxcars than in the past; there were fewer of us. The doors locked shut behind us. We heard the locomotive whistle and we were on our way again.

The next day, our train arrived at Sachenhausen, just a short distance from Oraninburg. We were unloaded at Sachenhausen, but we didn't stay there long. I do not recall anything about that camp. I suppose that nothing significant happened there to make an imprint on my mind.

My next memory was leaving Sachenhausen by train to another location. It was Autumn, 1944, and a chill filled the air as a hard winter would surely be advancing. Sometime during the night, we were awakened, and ordered outside for another head count. We were told that we were about to depart from here to a more permanent camp. The empty train, with open doors, eased into position at a loading platform that was the same height as the open doors. It was much easier to load the train this time. We were given extra rations of bread for the trip as we entered the boxcars. All the doors slid shut behind us, and were bolted and sealed. I heard the locomotive hook up to our train. We headed southwest, deeper into Germany. We were more certain now that we would never return to our hometown in Poland.

Reflections While Departing Sachenhausen

While looking at the beautiful German countryside during our journey, it was hard to imagine that normal life existed in the small villages and large cities. We, who were never likely to return home, wondered if any one would even be at home to greet us. We saw people walking and dogs roaming around the village streets. I wished that I could walk free and breathe the fresh country air that was available to everyone but us. I asked my friends, "How long can this war last?" The end of the war was not in sight.

Our slow-moving train headed deeper in the Southern direction, further into Germany. Again we passed through the lushest region in Germany. There were villages with narrow country roads, lined with

SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP

adorning tall, green trees and old, lovingly cared for homes. The movement of the residents reflected a slow, peaceful way of life. It was unbelievable to us victims that such atrocities could go on in such a peaceful land. The further south we headed, the more beautiful the countryside became. For a moment, I was able to wipe the pain and suffering from my mind. Like a tranquilizer, the beauty of the landscape dulled my senses. For the first time, I felt no pain. I tried thinking pleasant thoughts in order to occupy my mind.

Later that night, the train stopped and the locomotive was disconnected. We were left motionless on a sidetrack. We spent the night, quietly locked up in the boxcars. We had arrived at a labor camp that did not have crematoriums or gas chambers. This concentration camp was near the village of Ohrdruf, on the foothills of the Alps Mountains.



Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower (Center) toured the Ohrdruf Camp. He then ordered German Civilian and nearby soldiers who were not at the front to view the horrors

CHAPTER 14: OHRDRUF CONCENTRATION CAMP

The camp itself was in the foothills of the Alps Mountains at the outskirts of a small town. We marched to the camp from the train station. At Ohrdruf, we were many prisoners of different nationalities and most of us were from Russia, France, Germany, Poland, Hungary and Belgium. Among us, there was German prisoners who broke the law: murderers, rapists and those who also spoke out against the Nazi government. The Jews were a minority here. We were all at Ohrdruf to provide free, forced labor.

Our assignment was to dig deep tunnels in the mountains. We carried out rocks and moved heavy boulders from morning until late at night. Many prisoners died everyday from the strenuous labor and the lack of food. They brought all the dead prisoners to Barracks Number 10. In the barracks, dentists and selected prisoners removed gold teeth from the corpses. They were to salvage anything useable for profit from the dead bodies. After their inspection, they piled the dead, ravaged bodies onto a wagon platform. They were burned in an empty lot a few miles down the road.

At night we had to relieve ourselves in the bathroom facilities that were located outside the barracks. We walked past the wagons loaded with dead bodies; their hands would hang down onto the side of the platform. This scene was breaking our already desperately low moral. After the war it became known that the Germans built a factory at Ohrdruf for the V2 rockets. It was from Ohrdruf that they fired on the British Islands.

In January of 1945, two Russian prisoners and a friend of mine Shamai Kizelshtein, from my town of Bialystock, tried to run away. The three prisoners ran some sixty kilometers from our camp toward the Swiss border. However, they didn't get very far. The German soldiers found them hiding in a barn at a nearby farm. They beat them up and brought them back to Ohrdruf.

The camp commandant called for all the camp prisoners to come to the compound ground to watch the punishment for prisoners who tried to escape. Two hanging posts were erected in the middle of the camp compound. The two Russian prisoners were dragged to the hanging posts and hung while all the camp inmates watched. My friend, Shamai, was spared from the hanging. Nevertheless, he did not escape punishment: he received 50 lashes on his bare buttocks, then his beaten skeleton of a body was left lying in the snow.

OHRDRUF CONCENTRATION CAMP

We were cautious not to care for him until nightfall for fear of receiving punishment ourselves.

Under the cover of darkness, we brought him back to the barracks and somehow succeeded in reviving him. For 3 days we covered for him at work and nourished him back to health.

In February of 1945, while we were standing on the campground to be counted, the camp commander announced that two Barracks and myself among them are transferred to another camps. We were given a portion of bread for the journey and were transported by truck to the railroad station.

We boarded the same cargo trains that delivered us, under the same conditions, hardly enough room to stand. To the prisoners, our destination was unknown.

In the 3 months prior to the end of the war, I was in 2 additional Concentration camps: Kopenick and Babilberg, both were near Berlin, the Capitol of Germany. I was with Prisoners of war: Russian, British, French, and German political prisoners. Our main job was to clear the roadways and remove the ruins of the Allied bombing.

Our morale was much higher after seeing the results of the Allied bombing. Our hope was much stronger that maybe we would be among the survivors. Food was still on everybody's mind.. The POWs helped us cope by relating the latest news about the Allied advancement on all the fronts.

There is a song what spread like wildfire in the ghettos, and camps, and among the Jewish partisans, becoming the song of hope, and battle hymn of oppressed Jewry. Itself inspired by the struggle in the ghettos; the song inspired tens of thousands of Jews to fight if they could, and if they could not fight, to survive:

*“Never say that you have reached the very end.
Through leaden skies a bitter future may portend.
And the hour for which we have yearned will yet arrive.
And our marching step will thunder:
We will Survive!”*

Eyewitness story of Lt. Bob Cleary in his finding in Ohrdruf German death camp at liberation

Directing a platoon down a road outside the village of Ohrdruf, Germany, near the end of World War II, Lt. Bob Cleary had no idea he was leading his men down the road to hell. His army platoon stopped before a gate guarded by two German soldiers. A machine gunner killed one guard and the other fled. Then the troops

walked through the gate, becoming one of the first U.S. Army platoons to set foot in a death camp in Germany, and Cleary among the first U.S. Army officers to liberate a Nazi camp. Inside, they found a huge ditch, maybe 40 feet long and 10 feet deep, filled with corpses that had been covered with lime to hasten decomposition. An earthmover parked nearby. Not far away more bodies were stacked like cordwood, eight or 10 feet high, abandoned before they could be buried."

"There's nothing else that I can remember in my lifetime that remains as vivid and as horrible as that," Cleary, 81, recalled from his home in Rancho Santa Fe, where he has lived since 1971. The Soviet Army had liberated other concentration camps before that, including Lublin in July 1944 and Auschwitz in January 1945. But the discovery at Ohrdruf on April 4, 1945, and a visit eight days later by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower focused the world's eyes on Nazi atrocities as never before. Ohrdruf was a sub camp of nearby Buchenwald and part of the Nazis' elaborate apparatus of work and extermination camps. In March 1945, it held 10,000 inmates most of them Jews whose chief task was to dig underground tunnels and caverns or a proposed headquarters for Adolph Hitler, should the Nazi leader decide to evacuate Berlin. "You just can't believe how bad this place was," said Cleary.

"We went inside one of the barracks and they had four tiers. 'You just can't believe how bad this place was' up and down of bunks and these guys were most of them lying in the bunks. Nobody hardly came out to see because they were too weak to move." One of my guys gave (an inmate) a candy bar and it wasn't two minutes later that he threw up; there was no way he could handle food. Cleary said that until that day he and most of the world knew literally nothing about the death camps, despite the Soviet Army's earlier discoveries.

He said the Nazis were killing and starving Ohrdruf's inmates in an attempt to conceal evidence of their atrocities, but the Allies were moving too fast for the Nazis to complete the task. Cleary radioed his headquarters about his discovery, and soon other soldiers arrived to take care of the inmates, allowing Cleary and his platoon of 30 soldiers to resume its mission. He said he was in the camp less than three hours. Ohrdruf, which was famous as the town where Johann Sebastian Bach attended school and wrote music, became a symbol of infamy on April 12, 1945, when Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, visited the camp with Patton and Gen. Omar Bradley.

On April 15, Eisenhower wrote to Gen. George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff, about his visit. "The things I saw beggar

OHRDRUF CONCENTRATION CAMP

description," he wrote. 'The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were ... overpowering." Anticipating denials that were to come, Eisenhower added: "I made the visit deliberately in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda/ "

There were thousands of camps and sub camps in Germany, said Peter Black, a senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. But Ohrdruf, he said, "gained a certain notoriety that some of the sub camps liberated earlier ... didn't appear to have ... because of the bodies and the condition of the prisoners, and Eisenhower's visit."

Black noted, for example, that the first large image that greets visitors to the Holocaust Museum today is a photo of bodies stacked at Ohrdruf. Black said that of Ohrdruf's 10,000 inmates in March 1945, 6,000 were Jews. The Nazis forced the inmates to walk to Buchenwald as the Americans advanced, and 10 percent of them died during the trek. He said those inmates the Americans found were left behind because they were "dead, dying or no longer strong enough to walk." Cleary, who will turn 82 this week, said that the hell he and his platoon stepped into at Ohrdruf will never leave him, but he had to turn the page. "Sure it was horrible and sure it was unbelievable and you realize how cruel they were toward other humans. But you get over it,"

CHAPTER 15: WE ARE FREE!

During the night of May 5, 1945, we heard a great deal of gunfire exchange. Early the next morning, as every morning, we went to the main campground to be counted. We found ourselves without a trace of supervision, not one German soldier. Our happiness was indescribable! We cried tears of happiness, hugged each other, and then we ran through the streets without any knowledge as to where we were headed.

We were a group of twenty hungry and exhausted men: Russian, French and Jews - all dressed in gray and blue striped concentration camp uniforms. Many of us turned our striped uniforms inside out so that the stripes would be less prominent. We were still afraid of being found and captured again for we were uninformed of our freedom. Nevertheless, we ran toward the town and went into the first big building down the road. We barreled through the corridor and we found ourselves in a kitchen, lined with big pots and kettles. We flung all the cabinet doors open and discovered shelves full of utensils, plates and empty boxes. However, in the last closet, there were burlap sacks which had been torn open and were bulging with food. We pounced on the sacks like hungry wolves, grabbing fistfuls of sugar and oatmeal and stuffing them into our mouths. We could not stop; we gorged ourselves until we could barely breathe. Then we rested and ate, ate and rested until we finally could hold no more.



US Troops discovered many mass graves of Jews who had been murdered or died of starvation. This photo was taken after Liberation.

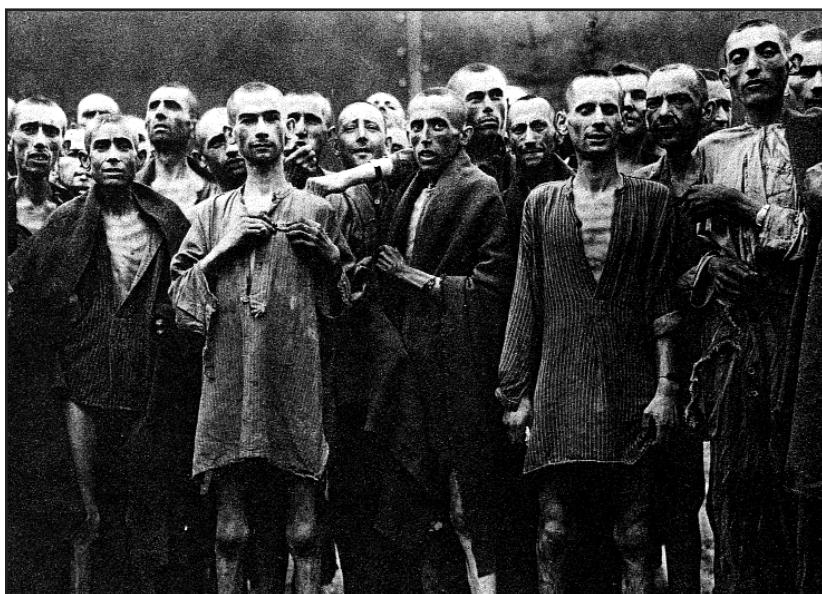
WE ARE FREE!

One of our men was standing by the window and he suddenly began shouting that he saw vehicles, which didn't look German. We came to look, crawling to the window to peak out: A long column of tanks moved slowly down the road below us. They were marked with white stars. We stared at each other in disbelief. Was it true? We ran down the stairs to meet our Russian liberators. For the first time in a long while I prayed that I was freed from the kingdom of the dead, and I began thanking God for helping me survive. I was free, but I didn't have a living soul to rejoice with, no one that belonged with me. We were free to go home, but we had nothing to go back to.

We had no future and no past. We were truly displaced persons, and we all suffered overwhelming feelings of guilt that we were lucky enough to somehow survive. Why did we live while others died all around us? In my mind's eye, I always see my family, alive.

To resist the dehumanizing, brutalizing force of evil, to refuse to be abased to the level of animals, to live through the torment, to outlive the tormentors, these too were resistance. Merely to give witness by one's own testimony was, in the end, to contribute to a moral victory.

Simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit.



Survivors of Nazi Concentration camps

My Journey To Find My Family

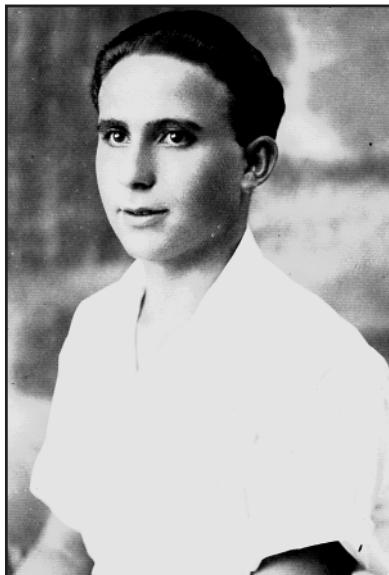
Many survivors continued their pilgrimage of despair by looking for other survivors. They slept on highways and in railroad stations, waiting for trains or another horse drawn carriage to come along. We were always driven by the hope that perhaps someone might still be alive. We were asking each other about surviving family members during our journey: we helped each other to find, a wife, a mother, a brother, a sister, children, alive. Or, someone might know if they had died. The desire to find someone was stronger than hunger, thirst, and fatigue.

The first thing that came to my mind was, "Where should I go to look for my family?" The logical answer was to go to my hometown of Bialystock. If somebody survived, that would be the place where they would be headed also. I found two other men traveling in the same direction as me, east of the capitol of Warsaw. God guided me. I was mentally and physically depleted.

We went to the railroad station in the Russian zone. At that time, Berlin was occupied by Russian, American, French, and British forces. We found out that only the Russians were traveling past my hometown of Bialystock.

My traveling friends and I smuggled ourselves into the Russian zone in order to catch a train going our way. At the railroad station, we found trains loaded with goods that were being shipped to Russia. On the platform of the railroad station we met a Jewish-Russian officer. We introduced ourselves and we told him, that we were Jewish survivors, and we needed his help to reach our towns in the eastern part of Poland. We wanted to go immediately, but he informed us that the date of their departure was to be in one week, at the end of May.

The Jewish officer was in charge of the commissary of his battalion. They were dismantling factory machinery and shipping everything they could find to their homeland of Russia. During the Russian occupation in the years 1941-43, I went to school and learned the



**Photo of myself after Liberation,
17 years old**

Russian language. Luckily, my knowledge of Russian came in handy because I was able to communicate with the officers:

"Yes, we were on our way home — to the country with the most notable Anti-Semites in the world. We were going home to the zoological anti-Semites, who wanted a "pure" Poland, without Jews"! We were returning to Poland because we were unfortunate enough to be born there and wanted to find our families that might have survived.

Who knew? When we passed the German border, we were again on Polish soil that had been soaked with Jewish blood: every stone, every corner had a sad story to tell.

The train was traveling at full speed; the Russian officer and the soldiers under his command treated us well.

After we passed the city of Warsaw, we encountered a group from the Polish army, known as a military, anti-Semitic group. They were stopping trains, forcibly removing Jewish passengers and shooting them.

Our train was stopped, but the Russian soldiers refused the inspection, thus we proceeded without incident.

My Short Visit To Russia.

Our friend, the Jewish officer, came over to us to discuss the train inspection. He suggested that it would be advisable not to stop in Bialystock at this time, but to proceed with his "company" to his destination on the Russian side of the Polish/Russian border to a town called Brest-Litovsk. He enlisted us to help him unload the train's goods and afterward he would help us return to Poland, when we felt we could travel in safety. My friends and I were confused because we wanted to go home, but we felt we were in great danger. We agreed to take the Jewish-Russian officer's advice, and we arrived in Brest-Litovsk after one week. We supervised the unloading of the train cars, and then the Jewish officer put us in charge of the distribution of goods to the platoon departments.

We lived on the army base and were assigned to one of the army commissary departments. In all, we were about 20 survivors: some from the Latvia region. After two months of living in Russia, we were beginning to get irritable and lonesome for our families, we continually wondered about whom might have survived. We returned to the Jewish officer for his help, but we found he really had very little authority—after all we were in Communist Russia. It was difficult to make connections with people in command, but we finally connected with the staff of the interior ministry in charge of the border. With great difficulty, I received a vacation pass to visit my hometown for two weeks.

At the end of the month, September 1945, I passed the border from Russia to Poland. After three and a half months in Russia, I left all of my new Jewish friends behind; they were not as lucky as I was in getting a vacation pass to their homeland.

The Visit To My Home Town Of Bialystock, Poland

I traveled on an army train from Brest-Litovsk to Bialystock and arrived late in the afternoon. It did not seem like the same city I departed just a few short years ago. Everything in Bialystock had changed: when I left, the city was full of Jews, and now my city was devoid of Jews, for they had perished in the Holocaust. I boarded a bus from the train station to my house. On the bus, young Poles who saw me exclaimed,

“You Jews are still alive?”

“Didn’t Hitler kill you?”

“Why did you return, you damn Jews”?

This was my warm reception I received from my homeland. When I reached my former home, I found only ruins. Where were the remains of our sacred sisters and brothers who were murdered so horribly because they were Jews? I didn’t even know if they were buried, or where I might find their remains. More than fifty family members disappeared without a trace. That was definitely not enough for the damned Poles. And even upon my arrival, they were continuing their heinous slaughter by killing the Jews who miraculously survived and returned home to Bialystock.

I instantly sensed that my life was in danger, yet I needed to stay in Bialystock to see if any of my family was still alive. Where was I to go now? A man passed by who looked Jewish. I asked him, in Yiddish, if he knew who could tell me if my family was alive? He looked at me as if he was seeing a ghost; he answered me in Polish, warning me not to speak Yiddish because it would place me in serious danger. This frightened me even more. I knew that if more Jews had returned to Bialystock, they would be centralizing in the area that used to be “the Jewish Section”.

I took another bus to Kupiecka Street and I stopped not far from the building where my Uncle Baruch’s parents lived.

I arrived at dusk and there were lights on in a nearby apartment building. I knocked on a door and spoke my greeting in Polish. The apartment’s occupants immediately switched off the lights and were suddenly silent. I was not amazed or surprised. I tried again. The second time I spoke in Yiddish, and knocked on another apartment door,

Again the lights were switched off. By this time I became very frightened. Where was I to go? Where did I belong? To whom should I turn for anything?

While walking, I was contemplating my future when I heard music and lots of merry-making. I was drawn toward the music. I stood on the other side of the street while groups of people were walking toward me; I mustered up some courage to ask one person from the group if they could help me to get information in order to find my family. Two of the younger men took me aside and whispered that I should not hang around because a wedding was in progress. In Polish weddings there was always the possibility of a fight or two breaking out. Then they confided in me that they were also Jewish. They advised me that living in Bialystock was dangerous and that I should leave as soon as possible.

I took their suggestion and left Bialystock, but my heart was filled with sadness. I was too frightened to pass the ruins of my house before departing, the house where I lived with my Uncle Schmulke in the Ghetto on Wazka street. It was late at night and I was fearful of what I might find, or not find. My fear was paralyzing me, but I had to move ahead and merely be thankful that I was still alive. It was of no use to try to relive the past. But my memories of separation came flooding back: we were separated before the deportation from the Ghetto. Part of my family was left in the bunker when the Nazis smoked us out by putting up fires in the surrounding areas.

Perhaps my family remained buried underground the same night I left my beloved city. The city that was once the center of Jewishness was now a ghost town.

I was heartbroken, disappointed, and frustrated, that I did not find a fragment of my large family that nurtured me. My parents, brother, sister, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins were lost forever.

Bialystock was almost cut-off from the rest of the country because the road from Bialystock to Warsaw was dangerous. Near the Czyzew- Zarembi Station, the trains were stopped by Polish/Fascist scoundrels. The fascists removed Jews and Russian civilians, and shot them at the station. The trains between Warsaw and Bialystock were occupied by a special carload of soldiers who were not always capable of protecting the lives of the (Jewish) passengers. Such an incident occurred two days prior to my arrival when many Jews were removed and killed. Among the dead were three members of the Gordonya Kibbutz of Bialystock.

It was some Polish Idealists from among both the educated and the working classes, who risked their lives to save Jews, and with

boundless self-sacrifice. The names of these people will forever remain engraved in our memories.

But Polish Fascism and its ally, Anti-Semitism, had conquered the majority of the Polish people. It is they whom we blame for the fact that Poland has not taken an equal place alongside Western European countries in rescuing Jews. The blind folly of Poland's anti-Semites, who have learned nothing, has been responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of Jews who could have been saved despite the Germans.

The guilt is theirs for not having saved tens of thousands of Jewish children who could have been taken in by Polish families or institutions. The fault is entirely theirs that Poland has given asylum to less than one percent of the Jewish victims of Hitler's persecutions.

Newspapers reported that from the beginning of 1945 to the time in which these events took place, more than 350 Jews had been murdered by Polish thugs. Unfortunately, it added, anti-Semitism is still prevalent in spite of the Government efforts to counteract it. As a result of the war, this anti-Semitism, always present in the Polish society, had been greatly aggravated by German propaganda.

Since the end of the war, ritual murder accusations had been made against Jews in Krakow, and in many other cities. My safest alternative was to travel to the city of Lodz, a bigger city, where many Jews gathered. Lodz was home to the "Bricha," an Israeli Organization who was secretly working to save Jews and help them escape from Poland to Israel. There were many gatherings of Jews, and many Jewish youth were organizing in Kibbutzim in order to immigrate to Israel.

I left Bialystock, traveling without difficulty by train. I was dressed in the uniform of a Russian soldier. When arriving by train in Lodz, I looked up the offices of the Jewish Agency, where I was then directed to one of the offices of the Jewish organization called the Bricha (to smuggle). I could not understand what my future had to do with smuggling, but I went anyway to see what they had to say.

In the office I met a man who asked me many questions: how I survived, where my family was, and where was I interested in going, etc. After my visit to Bialystock, my hometown and a vibrant city full of Jewish life before the War, and now seeing the resulting emptiness, I knew that I had to leave Poland. We all had to leave Europe, our former home that had now become one big Jewish graveyard. I shook my head. "Where do the Jews go after they leave Poland"? I asked. He said, " You mean where the Bricha takes them?" We managed to distribute them to various DP camps for displaced persons.

The UNRRA (the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency) managed those camps. There many of them waited until we could get them to Palestine. Some wanted to be reunited with their families in America, Australia, England, or other countries. Most hoped to go to Eretz Israel. I asked him "Could you arrange for people to go to Eretz Israel?" Now I was really interested. "Why, is that where you want to go?" More than anything, In my hometown Bialystock I was going to a Jewish School where they taught the Hebrew language and about the Pioneers of Eretz Israel. At that time I did not remember the names of my mothers' sisters or brothers who immigrated before I was born to America and Argentina. The man in charge explained to me that the British were allowing only a very small number of Jews to enter Palestine—only those who could get affidavits from their families. The majority of the survivors, unfortunately, will have to try to get to Eretz Israel on illegal ships. We call this route "Aliyah Bet".

I was told to wait—that I would be taken to one of the houses managed by the children's Kibbutzim of the "Hechalutz" Dror organization. After my arriving to the designated area where the children's Kibbutz was, there I would be briefed, then would be housed in different cities in different countries, for periods of time, until our time would come to board a ship on our journey to Eretz Israel.

CHAPTER 16: JEWISH AS DISPLACED PERSONS (DP) IN CAMPS.

After Germany surrendered in May 1945, the Allied forces faced the staggering problem of relocating displaced and dislocated persons (DP's). By September 1945, there remained nearly 1.5 million dislocated and displaced persons. Among them were 100,000 Jews who had been liberated by the Allied armies.

Before 1945, the fate of the Jews was unsettled due to the British mandate on Palestine (Israel). British authority occupied Palestine. The military presence was established in order to separate Jews and Arabs, but the political arena was turbulent at best. The British Government decided that the gate of Palestine would remain closed, allowing only a small quota of Jews to be granted entry. The Arabs of the Middle East were far too important for the Empire's interest. Also, other countries were limiting the immigration of Holocaust survivors. The American and the British military authority set-up DP camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy. The DP camps could not remain in existence indefinitely because conditions were not acceptable and were expensive to maintain.

By 1946, due to the arrival of refugees from Eastern Europe, the displaced Jews swelled to 250,000. They had been living in Russian labor camps during World War II. Few Jews wished to return to their homes in Eastern Europe. It was after a tragic pogrom on July 4, 1946 in the Polish City of Kielc. This pogrom was caused by an eight year old Polish boy from Kielc, who had disappeared from his home. Two days later he returned, claiming that he had been kept in a cellar by two Jews who had wanted to kill him, and that only a miracle had enabled him to escape. In fact, he had been to the home of a family friend in a nearby village. The friend had taught him what to say after his return. A crowd of Poles, aroused by rumors of Jews abducting Christian children for ritual purposes, attacked the building of the Jewish Committee in Kielc.

Almost all the Jews who were inside the building were shot, stoned to death, or killed with axes and blunt instruments. Elsewhere in Kielc, Jews were murdered in their homes, or dragged into the streets and killed by the mob. Forty two Jews were killed in Kielc that day, following the Kielc program, 100,000 Polish Jews, more than half the survivors fled from Poland, seeking new homes in Palestine, Western Europe, Britain and the United States, Latin America and Australia. Thousands of Jews fled to the American zone of Germany. The Jews were initially from Poland, and later Romania and other Eastern European countries. The Bricha helped them all to relocate.

JEWISH DISPLACED PERSONS (DP) IN CAMPS

Some of the Jewish DP camps were established on the sites of former extermination camps. By May of 1947, there were approximately 60 of these camps. There were also numerous Jewish children centers, hospitals, and agricultural training centers (hachsharot). The trainees were preparing Jewish survivors for eventual immigration to Palestine.

These tragic ironies only underscored the incredible dilemma of the Jewish DP's. It seemed as if they were living in one vast Jewish cemetery with no hope of leaving its confines.

However, despair was never an issue in the camps despite blocked immigration, overcrowded housing, and the continuous anti-Semitism that surrounded them. The Jewish DP's resolved to create a new beginning. There was support from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNR) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, among others. The Jewish camps became centers of Jewish cultural life.

From nothing grew secular schools. Their curriculum was based on the highly successful Tarbut (culture) schools in pre-war Poland. The school curriculum included Hebrew, Jewish history, Palestinian geography, Zionist history, and other Jewish-related subjects. Political parties were also formed in the camps, mirroring the various Zionist philosophies. Religious life was also maintained. In every camp were synagogues and other Jewish facilities.

Where there was unemployment in the DP camps, the UNRRA helped Jews, and supplements were provided to some extent by the JDC. The DP camps provided temporary refuge.

Zionist groups worked in Europe to assist Jews to immigrate to Palestine or to get to DP camps in the American Zone of Germany and Austria. Other countries would admit only a very limited number of survivors. Only a small number of people were able to immigrate to America, which also had quotas that classified applicant by "country of origin." In addition, US immigration required an affidavit from a relative in America, who had to verify income with an appropriate financial statement so that the prospective immigrant would not become a burden to the US government. These restrictions left many Jews stranded in DP camps in Germany and Austria while waiting for immigration to their homeland.

Jews living in Israel banded together to save the survivors of the concentration camps. The US felt an obligation to care for the survivors. Mr. Harry Truman, President of the United States, sent an experienced delegate to assist refugees. The delegate was to inquire and advise Truman regarding the condition of the German DP camps.



A group of 47 Jewish children of Bialystock vicinity who were redeemed from Gentile hands with funds supplied by the Bialystock Relief in United States.

The delegate's recommendation was that the refugees desired to immigrate to Palestine. He recommended that 100,000 Jews be allowed to immigrate as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, in 1946, the British established a blockade around the shores of Palestine so than any ships carrying immigrants to the Palestinian shore were boarded by the British Navy and towed to Cyprus. The British had established their permanence in the Middle East. At the same time, Palestinian Arabs wanted to end Jewish immigration and establish an independent Arab state. The Palestinian Jews wanted a Jewish state by partitioning the mandated area of Palestine. Due to the abundance of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, clinging to the hope of immigrating to Israel and establishing a Jewish state, British oil interests and its pre-eminent influence in the Middle East was greatly endangered.

JEWISH DISPLACED PERSONS (DP) IN CAMPS

CHAPTER 17: MY LONG JOURNEY TO ISRAEL.

The Bricha organized a group of forty children, including myself, and moved us to Wroclav where we continued to study. Many Jews lived in Wroclav; some came out of hiding and were living with their wives and children. Every Friday night, the kibbutz celebrated Shabbat with Israeli dances. Many of the Jewish youth living in Wroclav attended the dances.

It is noteworthy that the local population of Wroclav persisted in their anti-Semitic ways. There was no point in staying where it was so difficult to live freely. The only hope for survival lay in the Jewish homeland, in Palestine. In January 1946, the "Bricha" organized us and began our move to Israel.

We traveled along a road that took us through different countries. We were without any legal documents like identification papers, visas, traveling papers, etc., so the Bricha counselors forged papers that claimed our Greek citizenship on our return home. The documents allowed us to travel from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and on to Italy. In Italy we were taken to a big farm in the vicinity of Modena, not far from Milan. On the farm we kept up with our studies and learned to farm. The Bricha counselors continued to prepare us for life in Israel.

On one summer day on the last days of May 1946, Bricha counselors came to our farm in the vicinity of Modena instructed us that the day had come to get prepared for our sailing journey to Eretz Israel. My body was weary, but I felt too agitated with thoughts of the past and of the future to rest. In the late afternoon we were told to leave our entire luggage behind and to carry only pictures, documents, and just a few pieces of clothing with us. We were loaded into trucks again, making only one brief rest stop; the trucks drove through the night. Shortly after we were driven to a pier, where we waited for our turn to board the ship. Then a man speaking Hebrew had come around to the back of the truck.

"Okay Children." Lets move quickly and quietly, please, he said. We did as we were told, hurrying up the ship's gangplank. I didn't know much about boats, but even I could tell this was not a passenger ship.

We all moved together down the narrow and already stuffy hallways, down steps and into one of the storage holds that had been converted into dormitories. That was a freight ship that the Israeli authorities purchased in Europe and had converted into a passenger

ship. Each of the ship decks was divided into several “floors” with rows of wooden bunks. Each bunk was six-foot long and one- and-a-half feet wide. The bunks were so narrow that turning over in your sleep was impossible. The arrangements were done to get as many people as possible into Eretz Israel. This was my first experience on a ship and the first time I had been in a situation like this. We sailed through the Mediterranean Sea towards the shores of Eretz Israel.

We were at sea only a few hours when huge waves enveloped our small carrier and tossed it like a ball, spilling water into it. It became dangerous to walk below, where our bunks were.

I laid at the edge of my bed and held onto a metal rail to prevent myself from falling into the water, which had flooded the floors below. Many of us were seasick and throwing up, and the rest of us could hardly stand up, the stench of vomit hung in the heavy uncivil air below deck. It was about midnight on the 20th day of our voyage when I heard the sound of a plane flying overhead. It could only have been a British airplane, flying fairly low. “We have been spotted,” said one of the crew shipmates. “Yes, so it seems,” I said wondering, what would happen next? I was hoping that we still would have a chance to slip undetected into the Haifa harbor and the safety of the crowds lining the dock.

It was in the early morning hours. The glow in the east had become steadily bright and more distinct; and abruptly, as though an electrical switch had been thrown, we could make out hundreds of twinkling, individual lights. For an instant all that could be heard was the sound of the water crashing along the sides of our advancing ship. Everyone stood gaping calmly at the sight of those lights, for a moment unable to voice their emotions. Suddenly there was a spontaneously cry. “Haifa! Haifa!” Immediately people began leaping into the air, hugging one another laughing, crying. It was a short lasting momentum of happiness.

It was shortly after that the first British frigate was spotted, then a second frigate appeared along the horizon. Doggedly our ship plowed forward, trying to get as close to shore as possible before the frigates surrounded us completely. But our ship was only a leaky old cargo boat. The frigates were engineered for modern warfare and it did not take long us to be forced to a halt.

In Captivity in Cyprus, Under British Authority

The British tried to stop illegal immigration to Israel. Ships would arrive daily on the shores of Palestine, only to be taken back to detention camps in Cyprus.

In the end of June 1946, I was on one of the first ships that were

intercepted by the British Navy. We saw the Haifa shore of Palestine but could not comprehend the reason we were refused entry to our homeland. We had to face a mighty enemy, the British fleet. The British, who fought so bravely against the Germans during the war, were now pitting their strength against the surviving victims of their former enemy. Didn't their politicians realize that we had no place to go but back to the land of our ancestors? Hadn't the Balfour Declaration of the British during the First World War given the Jewish people the right to settle in Palestine?

The British frigates announced over loudspeakers their intent to board us. We had been intercepted and were not allowed to enter Palestine, as our numbers exceeded the monthly quota of 1500 Jews that could enter Palestine.

A few moments of silence and then we heard the voice of our captain speaking over the loudspeaker "The people on board this ship are Jewish survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. They wish to return to the land of their ancestors. There are many children on this ship who are sick; most are orphans. They wish to rejoin their people. Let us come home." But when the British decided to stay within the letter of the law, we stood no chance.

In a way it reminded me of the Nazis on one of their police actions. First came the tear gas, burning our eyes and throats, making it almost impossible to breathe.

Then they boarded our ship from all directions, leaving us no front to protect. We put up a struggle; we chained ourselves to each other. We were completely outmatched, but fought nevertheless. Six of our Youth Aliyah children died from blows to the head and chest by British rifle butts. Still others found themselves sailing overboard pitched into the sea by the invading sailors. I don't know how many drowned, or were pulled back on board to safety. Our entire struggle was in vain; in the end we were beaten down. With the British at the controls of our ship and under British escort we continued on to the port of Haifa. As the port neared, there was virtual silence on board our ship. The captain of our ship raised the Jewish flag, as the ship completed the maneuvers alongside the dock. A mixture of song and lamentation it took me only an instant to recognize the Hatikvah, the national anthem of Israel. I was moved to the depths of my soul and my eyes filled with tears as I hoarsely joined in singing its plaintive lyrics. As the English stood quietly by, hundreds of voices continued to sing.

We were only in Eretz Israel long enough to be transferred to the military prison ships that brought us to the island of Cyprus. I still remember the name of the camp. It was called Carcolas. It was near the city

MY LONG JOURNEY TO ISRAEL

of Famagusta. No matter what the British called it, although it was not a Nazi camp, it was a concentration camp and it was a prison. We slept in tents that were surrounded by a wire fence. The British army kept a close guard in order to preventing us from escaping.

The Israelis were in charge of our daily lives inside the camp. They brought teachers in order for us to learn the Hebrew language and they brought counselors in order to prepare us for the lifestyle and culture in Israel.

In secret, we had Israeli personnel from the underground army, the "Palmach," teaching us how to use their guns. Our group of forty stuck together. We were all young and enjoyed each other's company. On Friday evenings, our counselors arranged a special dinner for us. It was on Fridays that we sang our Israeli songs and danced late into the night.

During my stay in the Cypriot camps, I asked around often if anybody had any facts regarding the whereabouts of my family. It took a long time to find any information, but finally, during another conversation, a fellow survivor told me that he found his relatives in Argentina. The shock was like a thunderbolt when he jogged my memory. I forgot that my Aunt Peshi and her husband, Aaron Dubniewski immigrated to Argentina in 1935. I gave my fellow survivor all my personal information and asked him to send it on to his relatives, so they could contact my family. And thus we lived in the Cyprus camps and waited for correspondence.

We survivors of the Holocaust, who barely escaped from death's door, were hoping to get to our homeland. Instead, we were repeatedly intercepted and sent to Cyprus camps. The world had done nothing during the Holocaust to protest Nazi extermination of the Jews. And now, we were further detained from reaching our homeland.

Every Jew in the Diaspora had a hope for a land of their own, and despite so many obstacles that hope never diminished. For two thousand years the Jews dreamed and struggled to make true their fervent prayer: "Next year in Jerusalem."

CHAPTER 18: MY ARRIVAL & LIFE IN ISRAEL

After living in the Cyprus camps for six long and anxious months, I finally received permission to enter Israel. Upon my arrival, however, I was detained another three months in Atlit and Kiriat Samuel. These were also detention camps for more paperwork and processing so that I could enter my homeland.

Nevertheless, while living in Atlit, I located my Uncle Baruch's two brothers, Zalman and Yehuda. Those brothers survived also, and were living in Israel. They immigrated to Israel in 1934 and 1935.

After the war, I became a dreamer. I had no personal ambition. Nor did I have any desire to accomplish something for myself. My plans were to live on a kibbutz (community living) and help build a Jewish homeland in Israel.

In March of 1947, 2 other teenagers and I were assigned to a Kibbutz in Ein-Harod. After spending one day in the kibbutz, I figured out that I did not prefer to live in a commune where people were sharing clothes and everything they owned. I knew this type of life was not for me. I had been deprived of owning anything for too long. My conscience finally spoke to me, and I was ready to listen: Ben, what will you accomplish here? When are you going to learn a trade in order to take care of yourself?

Early the next morning, one of my friends and I boarded a bus to the Sochnut (Jewish immigration) office in Tel Aviv. The immigration officials immediately began badgering us about our demands to learn a trade. I was continually fighting for a better quality of life. No one could fight for me. I was still alone at 19 years old. They were aggressive and wanted to make sure our intentions were honest. They want-



**Concentration camp survivors
arriving in Israel Haifa, circa 1946
(Central Archives, Jerusalem)**

ed hard-working Israelites. After many debates and arguments, the Sochnut sent us to Aliat-Hanoar, an organization for the immigration of teenagers from the Holocaust. We were assigned to an agricultural school in Magdiel.

Life In Magdiel, Agriculture School

I did not find the trade school that I was looking for. Nonetheless, I was among teenagers. We came from many different countries. Since we were all survivors, we had an instant kinship. In Magdiel, we attended four hours of school followed by four hours of farming. Our work consisted of raising chickens, milking cows, working the horses, tending the orchards of fruit (oranges, grapefruits and lemons), and sowing the corn, wheat and a variety of vegetables. On Saturdays, during my free time, I worked in the orange orchard of our fruit teacher's yard.

I made friends easily and my studies were not difficult because I spoke Hebrew better than most of the other teenagers. (I had been speaking Hebrew in the schools in Bialystock because I went to the Jewish school there).

They were aware of how undernourished we were from the Holocaust and how our hunger for food was insatiable. We were fed plenty. We ate in a large dining room; each group was seated according to their age.

Magdiel's superintendent understood how to deal with teenagers who were also survivors. He helped us to be teenagers again. He allowed us to play again, to be rowdy occasionally, and exert our independence. The counselors were very patient and sympathetic. They helped us to cross the threshold from fighting for survival to living the life of a teenager. They could not take the place of our parents, but they taught us how to cope with life.

On Friday evenings, we all dressed in our best clothes for Shabbat dinner. The Superintendent said Kiddush, the blessing over the wine, and always gave a short speech. He often spoke about being thankful that we were alive and together, and that we were to do our best to live productive lives. Afterwards, we attended folk dances in the auditorium. During one of the dances, I made friends with a girl named Malka. She was younger than me.

We went out on dates occasionally, I had a crush on one of the girls, but we were not going steady. However, I was far too serious to engage in the activities of most other teenagers.

The school employed many people in different departments: kitchen, housekeeping, and laundry. Mrs. Katzelstein, a laundry employee, was very kind to me. She often invited me to her house for

dinner since her husband immigrated to Israel from the same area of Poland that I came from.

During the second semester of my first year, we were assigned to field trips in order to learn the land of Israel. Our guide was from the Palmach (Jewish underground army). His name was Arik Sharon. He taught us how to hold, carry and shoot guns.

Finally I received a letter from my Aunt Peshi and Uncle Aaron from Argentina. They were very happy to find me alive and well. They sent me addresses of my other aunts and uncles who were living in America. Finally, I felt not so alone. I did have a family with whom to correspond.

On July 1947, the Bricha made a daring move: they sent a large ship of 4,500 men, women and children to Israel from France. The British had been keeping track of the ship from the moment it left. During the voyage, British destroyers joined with reconnaissance planes and buzzed the ship at low altitudes. Meanwhile, British destroyers were commanded to stop the ship at all costs before reaching the shores of Palestine. The name of the ship was EXODUS.

It was clear to the people on the Exodus that they were confronting the British. While still outside territorial waters, the British attacked and seized the Exodus and sailed her toward the shore of Haifa. The British sailed on the battered ship with the Jews, whose spirit remained unbroken.

The British could not endanger more lives than the three lost during the battle. However, the torture for the Exodus refugees did not end in Haifa.

The British transferred the refugees to three prison ships by the shores of Haifa. The British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, was vehemently opposed to Jewish immigration and also opposed to an independent Jewish State in Palestine. Bevin gave orders to return the refugees to France. The French Government would not accept them unless they disembarked voluntarily, which they refused. "We will disembark only in Eretz Israel," they sang over and over again.

Finally, the British ordered the ships to sail to British-controlled Hamburg, in occupied West Germany. In Hamburg, the British forcibly pulled the refugees off the ship. Many were beaten and could no longer stand on their feet. The shocking treatment reinforced the resolve of Jews everywhere to fight the British however they could. Besieged Bevin finally announced his willingness to relinquish the British mandate over Palestine. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who lost their lives on the Exodus. They forced an end to the blockade. The Exodus brought the immigration problem before the world.

British Mandate Ordered To End

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations voted and approved an end to the British Mandate in Palestine by the required two-thirds majority. "The British Mandate over Palestine will terminate as soon as possible and in any event no later than August 1, 1948."

The news swept through Eretz Israel like wild fire. In Tel Aviv, people left their homes in pajamas to shout the good news. "We have a state!" Thousands of Jews filled the streets and squares in the heat of the City to rejoice. Young men and women began dancing the Hora. Others climbed atop buses, chanting: "Jewish State! Free immigration!" As if by some act of magic, blue and white flags appeared from nowhere and young Jews ran through the streets waving them jubilantly. Older people stood in groups, singing the national anthem, "Hatikvah". Tears of joy ran down everyone's faces, "Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov!" They congratulated each other.

"The state has been born!" That night, for the first time, the Jews of Israel realized their dream had come true, they lived in a Jewish nation, like any other nation. The Jewish community of Israel finally became a sovereign state with the approval and recognition of most other nations. The excitement, relief and joy swept through the Jewish communities of the entire world. A miracle had occurred.

Arabs cut the celebration short the next day. On November 30, Arabs took the initiative and attacked Jewish vehicles on the road in the center of the country. From Jaffa, the large and powerful Arab port city, they began sniping at south Tel-Aviv. It was clear to all that the Arabs were determined to reject the Partition Plan and would try to prevent it by force.

Ben Gurion was willing to reach an accord with the Arabs. He realized that we didn't get all that we wanted, and the territory of the State of Israel had been cut back.

In one of Ben-Gurion's speeches on December 3, to the Central Committee of his party, Mapai (the workers party).

"The wonder has arisen and has come into being; the nations of the world have resolved to re-establish the State of Israel. The Jewish people have always believed in this phenomenon and have waited two thousand years for it to come. This belief itself is one of the unprecedented historic wonders of the world. We know no other people that have been exiled from their land and dispersed among the nations, hated, humiliated, and oppressed without respite for hundreds of years. Nonetheless, they have persevered in their special

existence and persisted in their belief that the day would come when they would restore their independence in their own state."

Meanwhile Ben-Gurion was willing to accept the internationalization of Jerusalem. The Jews would have a state in Eretz Israel, granted to them by the UN. The important victory was to gain a country of our own, however small it might be. The situation changed dramatically once the Soviet-Union lent their support. Jews had access to Czechoslovakian arms in order to stabilize the British presence in the Middle East. Thus the war of 1948 erupted.

CHAPTER 19: ISRAEL WAR OF 1948

From the Agricultural School at Magdiel, on March 1948, with all my heart, I volunteered with my classmates to the Palmach, the backbone of the army. We were sent to a camp in the vicinity of Tel Aviv where we were given brief lessons in the use of weapons. After a few days we were on our way to escort a convoy of trucks. We were transporting bare necessities for the Jewish citizens of Jerusalem.

At that time, the British were still in control of Palestine. We were forced to hide our weapons. The British absolved themselves of any responsibility for Jewish vehicles driving between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: so armed Arab gangs fired indiscriminately on the traffic, ambushing Jewish trucks and buses and inflicting casualties. Hostile Arab villages sat atop the hills of the winding road called Bab El Wad. The most distressing passage was through the village of Castel, which sat atop a high point where an ancient Roman fortress once stood. Castel was in Arab hands and it controlled access to Jerusalem.

We assembled in a convoy of one hundred trucks. Jerusalem, at that time, had only two weeks of food on hand. We were providing food and supplies in case of a prolonged siege on Jerusalem. Our convoy had to fight off Arab gangs that were attacking us from rocky slopes on the hills of Jerusalem. We had many casualties.

Finally we arrived in Jerusalem. We were lucky, one convoy before us en route to Jerusalem was destroyed. Today, anyone driving to Jerusalem can encounter the rusting wrecks along the road in Shaar Hagai, Bab El Wad. They are the remnants of the Jewish vehicles burned by the Arabs during the siege of 1948.

All the supplies had to be rationed. The precautions were well founded, as soon as the British evacuated on May 15, the Arabs disconnected the water supply to Jerusalem. It was also decided to cut back on the use of electricity.

Bus services were reduced and the use of private cars prohibited due to the gasoline shortage. The city gradually became a ghost town. Jerusalem, once the lively British capital of Palestine, an international meeting place for the whole Middle East and a major tourist attraction, became a shadow of its former self.

The firing of machine guns and mortars were a daily occurrence; the residents of Jerusalem had long grown accustomed. Artillery shells continued to rain the city for weeks, one shell every two minutes. The Jews had nothing with which to return fire.

An invention by a young engineer came to the rescue; it was affectionately given his name - the "Davidka." It was a simple six- inch pipe from which he had made a mortar that fired shells containing nails and scrap metal. When one of the shells exploded, it made a horrifying noise. The noise scared the Arabs so much that they called it "the Jews atomic bomb."

A few such Davidkas operated in Jerusalem, and to this day there is a special memorial erected in honor of the vital role played by the Davidkas in one of the Jerusalem's central squares. The situation in Jerusalem was dangerous and the morale was low. People couldn't sleep, there was little food left, everything was rationed. There was enough bread for only two more weeks.

Jerusalem at that time was cut off from the other parts of Israel. Ben Gurion ordered the launching of "Operation Nachshon" to cut through to Jerusalem. It proved to be one of the most difficult and crucial battles of the War of Independence, and it decided the fate of Jerusalem a month and a half before the birth of the State of Israel. Fifteen hundred Jewish fighters were sent in a convoy to open the roads to Jerusalem. The battle took place on the rocky hills leading to Jerusalem.

Now the road to Jerusalem was opened, and a convoy of 200 trucks of food reached Jerusalem. It arrived on a Sabbath, when Orthodox Jews pray and don't work. Nevertheless, even the Orthodox Jews left their synagogues to help unload.

Ben Gurion said they should "open the road to Jerusalem and its hundred thousand Jews, who are surrounded by heavily populated Arab villages. Weapons and reinforcements must be sent there." The Haganah, at this stage, possessed not a single tank. Ben Gurion's low numbers of forces were using rifles and submachine guns.

The State Of Israel Is Born

On Friday May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion leader of the Palestinian Jewish Community proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, in a short but emotional ceremony at the Tel Aviv museum. Yet the moment the State of Israel was proclaimed, its gates were opened to every Jew wishing to return.

That resolution is known as *The Law of Return*.

The young state without means or resources, opened its gates to hundreds of thousands of Jews from around the world who hurried back to it during its first years. The establishment of the Jewish State fired the imagination and the hopes of Jews all over the world. Jews arrived penniless from Europe. In Iraq and Egypt, and all Arab coun-

tries, Jews were second class citizens; the war with Israel further worsened their plight.

The early days of the establishment of the State of Israel were crucial for the existence of the country. During this period, the state's economy seemed to hover on the edge of total collapse, as the country struggled to absorb hundreds of thousands of immigrants at the same time. The law of return made it clear that any Jew could enter Israel on the simple statement of his Jewishness. However, housing shortages were abundant due to the waves of immigrants pouring in.

Between May 1948 and the end of 1951, Israel's Jewish population more than doubled, from 650,000 to 1,324,000.

They came from all over Europe and the Middle East. Entire Jewish communities were transplanted from Arab countries. All the newcomers had to be housed, fed, clothed and trained to become economically independent members of society.

The mixture of different cultures created a new type of Jew: physically, ideologically, and even spiritually different from his immediate forebears.

Yet the Israelis did not suggest a halt or a limit to immigration. The Israelis took everything in stride with food rationing and higher taxes in order to absorb the high tide of immigrants. There wasn't enough housing around the major cities of Tel-Aviv, Haifa or Jerusalem, so they built transit villages, consisting of rows of huts and tents. The Kibbutzim (the collective settlements) absorbed thousands of immigrants.

Transforming the immigrants into productive citizens was achieved through well-organized programs through the Army and in intensive orientation courses for everyone in the Hebrew language. Hadassah (American Women's Organization) assumed responsibility to help settle children who survived the Holocaust and orphaned children through a Youth Aliyah. Hadassah settled them in kibbutzim and youth villages. They provided for their education and training, and tended to their psychological and physical needs.

While my friends and I survived through much already, we were now able to take control and fight back. We had survival instincts, but we had to learn to defend ourselves in our new, hostile environment.

The Spirit Of Israel Is Triumphant

It is the spirit of the Israelis that has made success possible, a spirit they have translated into richly imaginative action and great deeds of bravery, but principally into dogged determination and the preparedness for self sacrifice.

To an extent that is hard to conceive. It is a spirit that derives from the unassailable belief that we have the right to Eretz Israel.

With all the fights for survival, there was a feeling of confidence, a totally illogical feeling that at the end of it all, we would defeat the Arabs. There was a spirit of assurance that the Jews would eventually surmount the obstacles and win the war.

The importance of this unique spirit was highlighted by Ben-Gurion in a speech a month or so later. At the height of the war he termed the spirit, “Israel’s secret weapon” which is perhaps the greatest of all which promises chances of victory.

“This secret weapon is in the hands that are present here and in the hands of those who are not here: the spirit that will eventually decide the battle in which we are involved. But this spirit alone is not enough, without faith, without discipline and without the armed forces and equipment artillery, and planes.”

On June 11, 1948, a cease-fire was declared. The Israelis were extremely fortunate to receive reinforcement from some highly qualified volunteers: pilots from US, Great Britain, South Africa, and France, among other countries, who had acquired their combat experience during World War II. Most were Jews, but there were non-Jews who decided to come to Palestine to help the Jews with their struggle.

Our platoon, or better to say what was left of us, received a “rest” during this cease-fire: Four of my friends from the group, including myself were sent to a camp, west of Jerusalem, to learn the use of 82 mm cannons that were received from Eastern Europe. After the completion of the course, we were sent back to our Brigade. We felt more secure with having some heavier equipment to defend ourselves.

During the cease-fire, new recruits were given intensive training, and new weapons were mastered. With acquiring larger quantities of European and American equipment at its disposal, the Haganah, the Israeli army was transformed into a modern fighting force.

On the Negev front, a Palmach brigade had to their disposal a few armored cars carrying infantrymen, and a few light tanks. Other units had machine guns mounted on their jeeps and fought hard to create a territorial continuity between this enormous desert region and the center of Israel.

In December 1948, the Israeli army achieved success on all the fronts.

In January 1949, a permanent cease-fire was declared with the intention of a secure permanent peace for Palestine. To that end, as a first step, the armistice agreement was drawn on the basis of existing military lines:

The Negev would remain in Israel, except for the narrow coastal strip Gaza, occupied by the Egyptian army, with Jordan; the Arab Legion would keep the Old City of Jerusalem, and the West Bank of Palestine.

In February of 1949, an Armistice agreement was signed with Egypt, to that effect. In the following month negotiations with Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria lead to an armistice agreement.

The Israeli government saw a need for instant population, for inhabiting the vulnerable empty spaces in the land, to create new border settlements, girding the exposed frontiers. And to create a modernized economy comparable to a Western standard of living.

It cleared the way for Jewish DP's to Immigrate to Israel. All DP camps in Europe were closed, followed by Jews from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The communist regimes in Eastern Europe from Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary allowed a sizable amount of Jews to leave for Israel.

Waves of Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries, Yemen, Tunis, Morocco, were followed by a massive airlift of Jews from Iraq. The Arab governments subjected their nations' Jewish citizens to organized persecution. Jewish homes were searched, often pillaged. Hundreds of Jews were arrested, and imprisoned under charges of treason.

The Jewish communities there faced economic ruin, freezing their bank accounts, blocking the liquidation of Jewish property. Jews from Syria and Lebanon reached Israeli soil after losing all their possessions.

The majority of Jews in Egypt were newcomers from other European countries. The Egyptian Jews kept their consular status and were living a prosperous life until the war in Palestine. Egyptian nationalism was rising against any minority, and Egypt's economic life had changed dramatically. Regarding Egyptian Jews, of course, local resentment was exacerbated by the Palestine issue. Following the birth of Israel, Egyptian nationality was required to practice medicine, or to carry on in business. Homes and businesses had to be disposed of on a distress basis: where if they were not succeeding, they were reverted to the State.

Some Jews holding foreign nationalities managed to flee to Europe where many of them proceeded to Israel. My wife, Esther, was born and raised in Cairo, but held French citizenship. Her family was able to leave for Italy, and from there they proceeded to Israel.

CHAPTER 20: LIFE IN ISRAEL 1951 THROUGH 1959

Israel, just recently born, wasn't equipped to provide shelter for this avalanche of refugees. Many of the newcomers proceeded on their own to take over Arab dwellings in Haifa, Jaffa, Ramle and Lodd, where the Arabs lived before they fled to the neighboring countries of Lebanon and Jordan and Syria. Israel imported thousands of prefabricated huts from Europe, and in the meantime a national construction company built inexpensive homes of precast cement blocks manufactured on the spot. All these efforts were not enough to accommodate all the immigrants.

Dove Joseph, Minister of Absorption and Finance, saw the threat of inflation, and launched a tight uncompromising program of rationing and cost and wage controls. The supply of food to consumers was lowered to the bare minimum. Food was rationed, small portions of meat and two eggs a week were the standard fare. Virtually all-essential consumer goods were rationed at set prices.

Israel has what most of the nations on earth do not: A nucleus of idealists who renew themselves with each generation and who are willing to sacrifice themselves in order to ensure the state's existence and security. This nucleus is vital for the existence of the state, which will probably continue to pay a heavy price for its continued existence. There is a high price for a Jewish State: the military cemeteries on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, Kiriat Shaul in Tel Aviv, or on Galilee, one sees neatly arranged graves of war heroes, of all ages, from different ethnic backgrounds, and of different ranks.



Myself after the War of Independence in Israel 1950

My life in the army was spent guarding the borders of the newborn country. Every couple of weeks, we were sent to different locations. The army taught us the use of newly acquired arms. New Brigades were formed and many of my friends were sent to the tanks unit. Due to my hearing problem, I was transferred to the MP, military police.

I was always in touch with the Magdiel graduates. With the end of my army duty approaching, my mind was occupied with organizing a party for a group of graduates from Magdiel's agriculture school. I talked with other people who were interested in forming a Moshav, a cooperative, to build farms located on or near the sites of abandoned Arab villages. I got in touch with many prospective candidates.

The Moshav

We chose a Board, which consisted of those who had the paramount knowledge of farming. The Board put in an application to the Agriculture Moshav agency to receive assigned land for our Moshav cooperative. After a short waiting period we got a positive response: we were favored since we had recently completed our army duty and had participated in the war for Independence.

We were given the land surrounding the army camp of Beith Naballa, four kilometers from Lodd Airport. The army barracks were our temporary living quarters. I was responsible for the work schedule and for screening new applicants to our Moshav.

We remodeled the army barracks, dividing the areas into suitable apartments. In the beginning we did all the work together. The women took care of the cooking and serving of food for all the members and the men were cultivating the land that was given to us. When our houses were built, the land was parceled out to each farmer.

To every new Moshav settlement, a counselor from the old existing Moshavim was assigned to guide the new Moshav farmers, to lead them to a productive life in their Moshav. We were very fortunate to have one of the known farmers Mr. Mekler from Nahalal Moshav as a Counselor. After a few months we were invited to his Moshav to see a film about their history and learn from the achievements of their settlement.

In the entry to Mr. Mekler's Moshav was an Agriculture School for girls. The girls were also invited to see Moshav Nahalal settlement movie.

Mr. Mekler was the matchmaker for many of the members of our new Moshav Beith Naballa. At the movie, I met my wife-to-be, my friend in life for years to come, Esther.

Esther and I had a long, yet unusual conversation after the movie:

Esther's knowledge of Hebrew was limited then, as she just relocated from Cairo. I got to like her and we stayed in contact. I wrote letters to her in Hebrew and her friend helped her write back to me. After Esther left the Nahalal Agriculture School, I visited her when she was living with her Mother, Luna, and her family. Esther's not knowing the Hebrew Language didn't matter, we were surely in love. She was 24 and I was 22.

Esther came down on weekends to our Moshav, when she was free from her work at the Histadrut cafeteria. And we visited Tel Aviv, Jaffa, where we went to the only amusement park there. One of my friends from Magdiel Agriculture School, Israel Zalcberg, dated Esther's sister Rachel.

Our Wedding And Life On The Moshav

After a six-month courtship, I asked Esther to marry me. Israel Zalcberg, my friend from Magdiel School, asked me if I would like to have a double wedding. He was to marry Esther's sister Rachel, who was 16. Esther's family agreed to our arrangement.

The wedding took place on January 16, 1951, at the Moshav Beith Naballa meeting hall. I brought extra tables and chairs from an adjoining settlement on the day of the wedding. We invited our immediate families and some friends from our Agriculture school Magdiel. My Uncle's brother, Yehuda Alterlevi, was the only relative present from my family.



Myself after the War of Independence in Israel 1950

My marriage gave me more strength. I wanted to build a new family and I had the will and courage to teach my children not to be fearful of life, and always to succeed to the best of their ability. I wanted to show them how to live life with a positive attitude, despite so many obstacles.

Israel, Rachel, Esther and I had adjoining apartments, when we moved into our first homes on the Moshav. Later, we were next door to each other again at our new Moshav. The houses were built from

tiny cement blocks that consisted of two rooms without bathrooms or a kitchen: the kitchen was a shack built next to the house.

Money was advanced by the Jewish Agriculture Agency, with the guidance of the old members of the Moshavim, who would teach us when to plant, and how to market the produce by Tnuva, an arm of the Histadrut. The Agriculture land Agency devised a regulation that each Moshav family was to be given the following:

- one cow
- fifty lying hens
- ten to fifteen acres of land, with irrigation facilities provided to encourage mixed farming
- One horse in partnership for two families.
- Supplementary employment to help with immediate income until the crops was ready for market.
- Money for the first planting to be used for seed, fertilizer, and tractor services.

Despite the Agriculture agency's help with economic and moral assurances, many farmers found personal hardship living off the land. Many Arabs were infiltrating through the canyons during the night, over the armistice lines, stealing whatever they could, including our livestock. Many farmers gave up and moved back to the city.

On September 26, 1951, our daughter Tova was born. We named her after my mother, Gutke (Tova in Hebrew), meaning "good" in English. At that time there were not many cars or ambulances available. When Esther went into labor, we had to wake up our truck driver to take her to the hospital in Rehovot, one-hour drive away.

Back at the Moshav, Arabs infiltrators, under the cover of darkness, stole irrigation pipes from our fields. One of our Moshav members put a grenade under a pipe in an effort to stop the thieves. Tragically, the wet ground gave way while our friend tried to disarm the grenade, and he died trying to defend his land.

We slept with a gun beside us. We would shoot at any noise that came from the canyon. Unfortunately, our newborn daughter, Tova, would wake up from the shooting exchange, and noise made her scared to sleep. She was crying all the time, for her first year of her life.

It was also very difficult raising a child on the front line of so much danger. Our daughter Tova was having nightmares from the shooting going on in the Moshav.

To supplement our income, I took on the added responsibility of becoming the buyer for the Moshav. I managed the grocery store and

handled all the shipping and marketing of our products to the Tnuva market.

I soon realized that I liked managing better than farming, so I took the job permanently, and left my career as a farmer behind.

On Friday nights we took rides with Tova, by horse-drawn carriage. We went to see a movie in an outdoor movie theater at the new immigrant camp, three miles from our Moshav. That was the only recreation we had because most of the time we were busy with our farm.

Once, my wife Esther went to visit her mother in Haifa, as she occasionally did. But the winter nights were very cold, and I had just ordered two hundred chicks that needed to stay warm. So I covered the walls of the house with sheets of metal, and put wood sods on the cement floor. I brought in an incubator for a week in order to make the chicks stronger so they might withstand the cold nights.

We also raised ducks and turkeys on our land. In one year I saved enough money for a down payment on a condominium: my wife, Esther was homesick for her family, who lived a two-and-a-half hour drive away from our Moshav.

Life In Haifa

Soon after we moved to Kiriat-Haim B, a northern suburb of Haifa, and we had another daughter, Nurit, meaning wild flower in Hebrew. She was born October 3, 1954. We raised our daughters to the best of our ability. I worked for Tnuva in the milk-receiving department. We were happy living a simple life despite our limited income. Working at Tnuva was a cheerful reminder of my life in Poland. I enjoyed my work at the dairy and was promoted to manager of the butter production department. Nevertheless, the cost of living was high and we barely had enough money for necessities. We bought almost everything on credit. For thirty days a year, all men had to serve in the army reserve, which cut my salary back to 80%.

My wife stayed home with the children and did all the housework, which also consisted of washing clothes by hand (we had no washers or dryers). After a lot of time, we bought a gas cooking plate with two burners. My wife's sisters and their husbands and children would come visit us often. We would usually go to the beach on Saturdays and enjoy each other's company. Life remained drab, only no longer grim.

I stayed in touch with my newfound family in Argentina, my Aunt Peshi, Uncle Aaron and their children. The Aunts and Uncles from the US asked us to come and live with them. They sent us all the necessary papers, but I wasn't eager to immigrate to the United States.

However, my wife wanted me to have some family and find some comfort, and we thought we could make a better life for our children with more opportunities in America. Life in Israel, at that time, was always one confrontation after another with the Arabs. So, we registered with the American counsel. The consulate informed me that there would be a long wait since I was born in Poland. In the meantime, I continued correspondence with my relatives in both Argentina and the US.

It was very hard for my US and Argentine relatives to understand how I was the only survivor of the entire family.

My mother, brother, sister, grandmother, Uncle Schmulke, Uncle Leibl, Aunt Esther, Aunt Brocha and all their families perished in the Holocaust. My relatives in Chicago, Aunt Tillie and Uncle Ben sent us a refrigerator. I received pictures of my family from my Aunt Peshi and Uncle Aaron. That was when I saw myself as an innocent child in the photos next to a young boy, my brother, and a younger girl...it was my sister Matilda, but I had blocked having a sister from my memory. I cannot, to this day, even remember her.

I found out from my Argentine relative's correspondence that I had two more uncles from my mother's side that were living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was full of hope that maybe someday I would be able to see them.

My daughters, Tova and Nurit were growing up. Tova started school, and Nurit was going to Kindergarten. In 1957, Nurit became very ill. She wasn't eating much, but the doctors assured us that nothing was wrong with her. After a few weeks, we took Nurit to the emergency room. She was breathing heavy, her fingers and toes were turning blue, and she was unable to keep her eyes open. We were very frightened. After a thorough examination, we found out that she had an asthma attack, and was treated immediately. Since then, we kept a close watch on her so we wouldn't come close to losing her again.

I received a letter from the American Consulate, in Tel Aviv, informing me to come down to their office to fill out some forms for immigration to America. I was debating the issue since I found great difficulty in leaving my homeland, especially after I fought so hard for its independence. In hindsight, as I grow older and wiser, I realize that God helps those who try to help themselves. The welfare of my family comes first.

So, with my wife's encouragement and a heavy heart, we made plans to live in America, enjoy life a little, and see the part of my family who were still alive in Chicago.

I filled out the forms thinking that when it was time to leave for the USA, we would still have time to change our minds.

It was summer, 1958 when I received a letter from the American Consulate to have a physical examination by their doctors for immigration to America.



My daughters Tova and Nurit, Esther and I before immigration to United States, 1959

I was very troubled, undecided, and apprehensive about moving to a country that spoke a language that I did not speak. I did not have a solid profession, and we had two small children. How would I provide for my family? My wife Esther was so encouraging, she insisted that we were still young, in our early thirties, and the kids were young, and that it would be easier to move now. If it didn't work out, we could always return to Israel.

After many trips to the American Consulate, they informed me that it would only be a few more weeks until we received the visas to immigrate.

I put our condominium up for sale. It was ironic, but an American couple was interested in our condo. We agreed on a price, and they needed the apartment in two weeks. It turned out that the US gave priority of immigration to Polish citizens persecuted by their own country, under communist government. However, the American Consulate in Israel informed me that my entry visa was postponed because the Polish quota was full. We now had no apartment and no visas.

We moved in for the time being with Yaffa Esther's Sister. We lived with them for six months until we received our visas.

CHAPTER 21: IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA

At my work, Tnuva, (Dairy) they thought I was going to the US for a visit; the Israeli government and the Israeli citizens made it difficult for people that left Israel permanently. We traveled to America by boat. The passenger ship was one of the finest, the Zim lines, on the ship "Jerusalem." We paid for the boat tickets with our last pennies, with the money from the sale of the condo. We had a wonderful trip and even the food was superb. We felt that we were finally going to reach our goal: to be reunited with my family.

The trip on the ship Jerusalem lasted two weeks. We were seasick only when we passed from the Mediterranean Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. Otherwise, the trip was more comfortable than expected. It was very emotional when we passed the Statue of Liberty in New York. We were overcome by the symbolism for freedom and liberty that the lovely woman in the statue held up with her torch. My daughters, Tova and Nurit, still remember the impact and symbolism, even though were only seven and five years old at the time.

My Aunt Tillie and Uncle Ben arranged for one of their relatives to pick us up at the dock. They waited for us in New York, then took us to the railroad station. We were appalled that the area surrounding the station was scattered with debris and the station looked so old and unkempt. We were concerned that everywhere in America would be the same.

The train trip from New York to Chicago took another 24 hours. Aunt Tillie and Uncle Ben were waiting for us at the station. We brought with us only four suitcases, three with clothing for us and gifts for my Chicago family, and one suitcase was full of books, the majority of which were the Hebrew encyclopedia.

Settling in to an American Way of Life.

The day we arrived in Chicago was a Friday afternoon, June 30, 1959. Aunt Tillie and Uncle Ben took us to their apartment on 51 N. Long Avenue. They gave us a room in their apartment. In the evening, after dinner, the rest of the family came over to meet us: My mothers' other sisters, Aunt Celia, Aunt Sofia and their husbands and children. Aunt Tillie's son, Louie, and his wife, Lilian, also joined us.

We talked all evening as they asked many questions about the lives of those perished members of my family. They couldn't believe that I was their sister's son, their nephew, and how did I manage to survive? They tested me for names and habits of their close family members.

Aunt Tillie and Uncle Ben and their son, Louie, owned a grocery store on Roosevelt Road. I was anxious to see their store, but we spent all Saturday visiting with each other. Meanwhile, my Aunt Tillie and Esther took Tova and Nurit shopping at the department stores.

On Sunday, I went to my uncles store, and I kept myself busy working. When we all returned home, I asked them to hire me—it was difficult for me to sit around and not work. They hired me.

I went to work on Monday. My children and I were very eager to learn English. I found myself a school that taught English to immigrants in the evenings. The teachers were extremely kind, understanding and patient with us. Besides learning English, they taught us about the meaning of being an American. We were exposed to American music, sports and the latest clothing styles. The school helped assimilate us.

After a month of living with my Aunt Tillie, we were anxious to move into an apartment of our own. We found one down the street from my Aunt, 58 N. Long Avenue.

Under these conditions, and far from my wife's family in Israel, Esther became very unhappy. As yet, she hadn't made any friends, and my Aunt was very impatient with her. We still had limited knowledge of English and Esther did not speak Yiddish, which was how my new relatives and I conversed. I thought I would find great joy in being reunited with my family, but it was of short duration.

We enrolled Tova and Nurit in a public school, Robert Emmett Elementary. They put Tova back a year because she didn't speak English yet. We were fortunate that a neighbor who was a retired schoolteacher, Mrs. Johnson, helped them. She was so wonderfully patient with the kid's schoolwork, and she took them out many times to downtown Chicago to visit the museums and soak up the vast culture of the beautiful city.

After a short while living in America, my relatives were less interested in us than of our arrival.

They looked down on us and saw us as foreigners, aliens. they called us "greeners". We spoke with an accent, we dressed differently, and we identified ourselves overtly with our faith.

It seemed that American Jews were not ready to commit themselves emotionally to the degree that we survivors were. The survivors realized that Jews could disappear into the fabric of Christian society. This realization effected the degree to which we integrated into American life and culture. We loved America and were proud to share its vision of a free and open society. We were also self-conscious about our accents, which to this day remains with us. And, we

were unfamiliar with the American way of life. We were an easy target for hostility from other groups and we so often bore the brunt of Anti-Semitism.

My Aunt Peshi and Uncle Aaron came for a visit to America from Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was somehow able to meet them occasionally.

My relationship with my relatives cooled off after I decided to change jobs in order to better provide for my family. There was no future at the grocery store.

I secured a job at Twin Oaks Dairy, owned and operated by milk vendors. I began my career in the coolers, loading products to the trailers for daily shipping to the dairy branches. I earned much more at the dairy than the grocery store; also I had health insurance. Nevertheless, I often went back to help at the grocery store during those first six months of my new job. The clerk that replaced me could not keep up with the workload.

At the dairy, I worked in all different departments over my 18-year career, and finally became a Production Manager. In the first years while working in the dairy I found a second job unloading semi-trailers in the early morning. I worked two jobs over eight years. I also worked on Saturdays at the trailer terminal to clean the outside of the trailers and milk tankers. Esther was very supportive. She took care of the children and the house. They only saw me on Sundays, but we spent the entire day together.

My daughter, Ellen Tsipi, was born on April 27, 1961. Ellen was named after my father Elijah and the middle name Tsipi after my Grandmother Tsipi. We lived in a wonderful area for small children. We had stores nearby and were surrounded by many parks. In our leisure time, we strolled along and spent our free time, often, at Columbus Park. On weekends, we went on picnics and swam on the shore of Lake Michigan, at Foster Avenue Beach or Montrose Avenue Beach. After a couple more years, I bought a car, a Chevrolet Nova, and then we managed to explore the surrounding areas of Chicago.

After a while, more cousins from Argentina immigrated. Today, they are still residing in Chicago.

Friends from Moshav Kfar Truman in Israel, Israel Feldman & his family immigrated to Gary Indiana and Esther's friend's brother from Cairo Nissim Levy moved to Chicago.

With the arrival of our new friends, we did not feel lonely anymore. We went to the World's Fair in 1964. Eventually we moved to a larger apartment and then bought a townhouse in Lincolnwood, a very middle class neighborhood with exceptional schools. Even Esther after awhile learned how to drive.

Every Saturday, Esther and the three girls would shop at the big downtown department stores, Marshall Fields, Saks Fifth Avenue, Carson Pirie Scott, etc. The children made friends easily and were good students. It was very important to me that they had a solid education. I did not ever talk about the holocaust with them unless they asked a direct question, and usually, I did not go into much detail. I repressed many memories in order to live a productive life. Even now, there are many things I can't remember.

In 1978, with the help of Tova's husband who was in the Auto Parts business, we bought one of his Auto Parts stores. I owned and managed that store until 1984, when Esther and I retired to San Diego, California. I was suffering from severe asthma attacks in Chicago due to the cold and windy weather. I worked part-time for a few years in San Diego, and then retired for good. We own a small home and are continuously striving for happiness. Our three daughters are grown now, all married, and they have provided me with six grandchildren, 5 boys and 1 girl! They are all little miracles.

My fate was not in my hands during the war, but after the war, I had to make the best of my life and seize control. I was only a child when the war began, chosen by accident to witness one of the world's most terrible centuries. I achieved success through hard work, determination, skill, intelligence and commitment. I was willing to take risks. We put all our energy in caring for our families and took great interest in our children. We were often overprotective, which came from our concern for their well being.

As a whole, most children of survivors have done very well in life. As adults, children of survivors view their parents with sympathy and understanding, but not with pity.

The story of the survivors is one of courage and strength from a group of people who are living proof of the indomitable will of human beings to survive, and of our tremendous capacity for hope. It is not a story of remarkable people, but of how remarkable people can be.

Today, we survivors have American friends, but feel more comfortable in our own circle of friends, survivors and Israeli immigrants. We belong to a survivor's organization; every city has its own group. While residing now in San Diego, we get together once a month, on Sunday evening's, and recall memories from hometowns where we interacted with one another. We have a shared history and culture that we wish to perpetuate. Every year, we have a picnic for all our families.

My children make it a priority to attend our annual survivor's picnic. It won't be long before we won't have these times together, and they want to share these moments with me.

They realize that we survivors place so much pride in our children, it is a miracle that they exist as it is a miracle that we have survived. They are proud to join me and meet my friends and listen to the tales that other survivors remember about me in the camps. My friends always tell my children they don't know how I survived, that I tested the limits of the SS guards, and had such a strong will to live.

I looked for ways to rebuild my life. I made up my mind never to look back, only forward. I taught my girls to look forward also, to learn from my example, and they still remember my words. My three girls are some of the most positive people I know. Despite my living with some physical problems that also come with age and surviving years of malnutrition, I have done well. I have chronic bronchitis, asthma and have survived prostate cancer. Emotionally, I have always found it difficult to trust others and to reveal my feelings to anyone.

For me, laughter doesn't come easily. I have learned to trust my instincts and try to make things work. I deplore wasting food, no doubt left over from years of deprivation.

We have been back to visit Israel a few times. We have sent our children, and now our children are taking our grandchildren to visit Israel.

I went to Europe and Israel in 1991 for a vacation. In Israel, I met a friend from the concentration camps, Shamai Kizelshtain and his wife Hanna. (Shamai is a survivor from one of the camps that we were in together. I hadn't seen him for 48 years). I still feel sad leaving Israel. When I am in Israel, I feel at home. It is the only country in the world that I feel belongs to me. Despite the fact that I have become very Americanized, we think of Israel as our ancestral home.

CHAPTER 22: MEMORIAL DEDICATION IN BIALYSTOCK

August 1993, I attended the dedication of the memorial in Bialystock recognizing 50 years of Ghetto destruction. The memorial is erected in the memory of the resistance fighters who were killed in the ghetto uprising. I made a speech and left soon afterward because I was surrounded by too many painful memories. What remained of Bialystock was a tragic memory of what was once so vibrant.

The city has grown, huge houses line the streets, packed closely, and with no style. The old cemetery from the early 1900 was now a park. The streets have been renamed. Everywhere, I was surrounded by so much sorrow. Only one thing touched me deeply, tears poured from my face: I went to the cemetery on Zabia street where a stone monument stood, engraved in Polish: **HERE RESTS THE ASHES OF 3,500 MURDERED JEWS.** The cemetery was gone, only the tiny stone monument remained.



My friend Shamai his wife Hanna and myself at the Memorial of the Jewish Zabia Cemetery in Bialystock. But no headstones remain seen.

Bialystocker Jews wrote poems about their city:

I Long For You Bialystock,

by Charles Scheinman

Bialystock, O Bialystock!
I long for you so much.
Here, in the tumult of the day
And in the quiet of the night.
I am transformed,
In my dreams - for home
with reminiscences
Replete with thoughts.
The streets: Surazer, Neishtadt,
Nikolayewski, Piaskes, The Nova;
And, who among our landsleit
Does not, somehow, remember
Our majestic town clocks
In the center of the city!
The forest - Zwerinwc
That extends so far,
Where we laughed in the sunshine
And dreamt under the moon and stars.
Or, remember, in the garden,
The picnics of joy and plenty
Our people often held, at dawn,
Or sunset...Oh! Those memorable times
Trying to capture yesterday's rapture.
Misty windows from dry tears
Covered from sight
Their eternal light.
Reaching back unto yesteryear
Through a haze reliving our days.
At every turn events reborn
Scenes come and go
No control of the flow
Going in circles never an end.
Faces and sounds found and round
Driving among dreams
A hundred thoughts a mile
Speedily to their past
Loving them to last.

I arrived in Bialystock on the Friday before the dedication, which was scheduled for Monday, August 15. Unfortunately, I found the city so depressing, that I left on a 7-hour train and bus ride to calm my nerves. I fled to the mountains of Zakopane. On the walls of the train's bathroom was graffiti writing, "Poland is for the Poles." It was incredible that 50 years after the Holocaust; so much hatred still exists. Even during the speeches from rabbis, dignitaries, bishops, people from surrounding streets whispered, "Are still so many Jews alive today?"



Left: The famous landmark, the Clark Tower of Bialystock in the center of town. **Above:** A reminder stone of the great Bialystocker synagogue used to be in this spot, but it was burned down in 1941.

On the day of the dedication, I met a group of Israelis and Jews from all over the world: Australia, France, other parts of Europe, and from the United States. The president of the Bialystock organization was from New York. We were taken by bus to the official ceremony at the Branicki Palace. The mayor of the city of Bialystock and dignitaries from the University of Bialystock, the bishop from the Catholic Church, and a few high ranking officers from the army were present. The president of the Bialystock organization, Sazar, and the president of the Israeli group gave speeches honoring the martyrs of the uprising. We were shown a documentary film about Bialystock before the Second World War.

We were then taken by bus to the unveiling ceremony; the restored memorial honoring the uprising of the Martyrs who fought the Nazis in the destruction of Bialystock's ghetto. Many people gave speech

MEMORIAL DEDICATION IN BIALYSTOCK

es honoring their fallen brothers. The Army posted an honorary guard, the children from local schools brought wreaths of flowers, and many local groups did the same. Bialystock's mayor spoke then the President of the Bialystock Organization from the USA. then the president of the Israeli group, Mr. Flicker. The Bishop and a Rabbi from Israel prayed for the dead.



Dedication of the Holocaust Monument in Bialystock, Poland. 1993



At the Monument, I helped to carry the banner marking the tragedy.

At the memorial's dedication, I gave a speech in English, since I could no longer remember Polish. I then translated to Hebrew since most people came from Israel. I spoke about reminding the world about the Holocaust, and how we should continue to educate our communities. Fifty years later, the memories and the mood are as heavy as lead when we recall those calamitous days.

*IN MEMORY HONORING OUR MARTYRS WHO RESISTED
AND DIED IN THE LIQUIDATION OF GHETTO BIALYSTOCK*

I am honored to be here today addressing this very small crowd of distinguished survivors of our beautiful city, Bialystock. Coming here brought me happy memories. I recall my childhood days from learning at Ekstein Hebrew school on Kupiecka street, finding a community center of Jewish life that produced outstanding people: scholars, writers, actors, and doctors.

We know the history of the uprising and the destruction of the ghetto to that happened fifty years ago.

We gather here to honor our martyrs of the heroic and brave resistance of our Jewish youth, and the ultimate destruction of its great Jewish Community through the process of liquidating the ghetto, whose memory remains precious to us.

We are here survivors and mourners, but the memory of our beloved Bialystock and its sacred martyrs has not been obliterated from our minds, our hearts and the hearts of every Jew who knows of our heroic youth and the courage of their struggle and resistance, their valor and their tragic inevitable defeat, how they died in the ghettos or were shipped off to the concentration camps. It has fallen on our shoulders to keep the flame ignited by the bravery and dignity of those extraordinary fighters.

Therefore, our monument is the memory of our hometown and landsleit, who through annihilation and death have entrusted to us the heritage of life. They're last will and testament, bidding us to continue the links in Bialystock's golden chain in every community throughout the big world.

Honored by their name, revered be their memory.

We are obligated to carry on the torch of keeping their memory alive to our children and our grandchildren. And they should pass on this memory to the fourth and fifth and sixth generations, so we should never let the world forget what happened in the Holocaust...

We can never free ourselves from the feeling of revenge. Today, fifty years later, the memories and mood are as heavy as lead when

MEMORIAL DEDICATION IN BIALYSTOCK

we recall those murderous days. We suffered silently, we must forget. But we can not forget even if we want to. We won't be released from the true facts about our tragedy, about our pain or from the torture we lived through. The places in which my childhood and the adolescence of many others had been stripped away from us have remained sacred for all Bialystock Jews who lived here. In our hearts and souls, we carry an eternal monument for our martyrs in belief that such tragedies will never be repeated again.

The Israeli group carried banners, and the Israeli flag was next to the Polish flag. This was the first time that I saw Polish people honoring the Israeli flag. It was overwhelming. The ceremony ended with our singing the national anthems of both countries.

In the evening, we went to the Forum Theater where there was a recital of Jewish musical performers from the Jewish Theater in Warsaw.

After my visit to Bialystock, I had plans to visit Auschwitz, a former concentration camp. I was so broken-hearted from my visit to Bialystock, I didn't know if I could endure the camp visit. I confided my thoughts to Shamai, and a young couple overheard. They offered to accompany me to visit Auschwitz.

Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau After 50 Years.



The entrance to Auschwitz, when visited in 1993



Birknau in the distance, 1993.

From the outside, Auschwitz could be Disneyland: An ice cream vendor does a brisk business. A girl at the souvenir stand tries to interest you in a ten-postcard assortment. Tour guides lead flocks of visitors through the parking lot. The dining area appears full.

Inside, I was immediately shocked. Bold lettering on a stone wall informs the reader in a dozen languages that Auschwitz is now a monument to the martyrdom and struggle of the Polish people and other nations. While Poles well understood this message with nods of sympathy, it leaves Jewish families grinding their teeth.

The makers of the memorial disregarded our claim to a special monument in the camp which we believed we deserved not because our suffering was greater than anyone else's, but because we were made to suffer in the camps for the singular reason that we were Jewish.

Further along, thousands of pairs of eyeglasses lay in a huge display area. In another, masses of human hair, shorn from the heads of the gas chamber victims, whose dead bodies were then placed in piles 10 feet high. In another location lies a mountain of suitcases, packed by people who were told they were to be relocated. Names, printed large, stare out at you: Stein, Goldblatt, and even a Frank from Holland. The Jewish tragedy at Auschwitz is entirely understated. All the text accompanying the exhibit universalizes the tragedy. Tour guides do not take you to a building in the museum area dedicated to the war against Jews. Nor do they tour the real killing ground, Birknau, usually on the itinerary if you were a resident.

Birknau was and is a separate complex, located just down the road from Auschwitz and five times its size. Most of the killing occurred at

Birkenau. At peak efficiency, 24,000 were murdered daily, 90% Jews. Today at Birkenau, only fireplace chimneys of the barracks are left standing, except for 5 remaining barracks, which were resurrected to make the movie *War and Remembrance*.

In Poland, less than 50,000 of the 3.1 million Jews survived the war: the Final Solution nearly succeeded. After departing Auschwitz-Birkenau, I traveled to Krakow and Warsaw and found the same results, only a handful of Jewish families lived in these Polish cities. They are too scared to go out at night.

As survivors of the Holocaust grow older, revisionist historians deny the genocide. The Holocaust may finally become a fragment of Hollywood's imagination since there are very few Jews living in Poland today. It is ironic, however, that the Poles are now earning their livelihood from Jewish blood by attracting Jewish tourists.

The Tour Continues: Krakow And Warsaw.

I continued to tour Poland after my visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau in order to determine the existence of Jews or Jewish life in Poland's big cities.

Krakow, where there had been a very large Jewish community since the 1600's, housed only a handful of remaining Jewish families. In Krakow, I found a small synagogue. Near the cemetery, were older visitors and tourists browsing around? On the same street where there was once a synagogue, there was now a museum.

I traveled to Poland's capital, Warsaw, the next day. I found a handful of older Jews in a small synagogue that is still in existence. I went to the only Jewish kosher restaurant, with real Jewish food: gefilte fish, pickled brisket, etc., under Rabbinical supervision. However, a non-Jewish couple owns the restaurant. In Warsaw, I visited the Jewish museum, where I spoke to some Jews. They informed me not to go out a night because it is not safe. I didn't shop in Poland.

I was glad that I made the trip. I was happy to see, once again, where I spent my youth, where I was raised. I saw the bitterness and hatred first-hand. I was even more profound in my hatred for the Poles.

Hitler did not succeed in removing the Jews from Poland, the Poles did it. There were three million Jews residing in Poland in 1930. Only about five thousand are still remaining.

When I walk through Poland or Germany, I am reminded of contempt, hatred, murder, of children killed, of mothers burned alive, of Jews asphyxiated.

People urged me to put the past behind me and forget the horrors of the Holocaust. But I can not; the horrors always creep up on me.

CHAPTER 23: THE MEANING OF ISRAEL

We've had enough of extermination camps, of expulsions, of pogroms. Should I return again to Poland or Germany, every stone, every tree there would remind me of contempt, of hatred, of murder, of children killed, of mothers burned alive, of human beings asphyxiated. Conversely, when I travel to Israel, everywhere is a reminder of hard labor and glory, of prophets and psalmists, of loyalty and holiness. Jews go to Israel for renewal, for the experience of resurrection. The existence of Israel reborn makes life endurable.

For Jews, the Holocaust means far more than the extermination of six million of their brethren; it is the darkest side of man's nature and raises frightening questions about a God who permitted evil of such magnitude.

For a long time after the war, the Holocaust lay in my subconscious, growing like a cancer. Yet I was somehow unable to face its magnitude. The wounds were still painful. We were stunned in unresponsiveness. To realize you are a survivor is a shock.

During all these years, Israel has provided a counterweight to the tedium of the disaster. As a partial redemption of the Holocaust, Israel assumed a symbolic as well as a real role in the continuity of the Jewish people. If Israel ceased to exist, not only would the Jewish State be lost, but Hitler would have won his victory. Israel was the mark that Hitler had not won. Israel is a place where, despite the Holocaust, Jewish people are still alive and practicing their faith.

In Israel, where the psychological impact of the Holocaust was the greatest, the same emotions were expressed: Never again, not ever again would there be Jewish casualties or victims who would not resist their oppressors. In America, I was isolated by relatives who had no conception of the magnitude of the horror or the adjustment I had to make to be normal.

CHAPTER 24: CONCLUSION.

In the last ten years, since my retirement, I traveled to many different countries abroad, and every time I come back here, I feel relief and a deeper understanding of how fortunate we really are to be in the best country in the world, America. Not everything is perfect and democratic, but we are far ahead of most other countries in the world.

As a survivor, representing the hearts of many survivors, America means more to us than people born into it. We take nothing for granted. We measure success by the opportunities given to our children: to educate them and watch their happiness as their marriages and children carry on their full lives. We don't measure our success by dollars.

I believe it was my destiny to survive, to come back from the ashes and to be the link from the past that would begin life again. It is my fate that I will pass my values onto future generations. I asked myself when I was liberated, why was I chosen to survive.

My goal is to remain faithful to the religion into which I was born and to my upbringing. My values and willpower gave me the strength to survive. I know that I am living the kind of life that my parents would have wanted for me. Despite the deep scars left from bearing witness to a Holocaust, I have the capacity to give and experience pleasure and joy from family and friends. I derive insurmountable happiness from watching my loved ones grow. We all deal with the past differently, based on how nurturing our families were when we were small children.

Survivors' children, including my own, were raised with a unique set of circumstances: they knew we derived happiness from participating in their childhood, we wanted them to enjoy carefree, guilt-free lives, and we tried to provide for them the type of childhood that we never had. Concurrently, we expected our children to be obedient, diligent and respectful. We want them to continue our mission as teachers and witnesses of the Holocaust.

As survivors, we are obsessed with the continuity of Judaism. This is the last stage of resistance and it is how we measure success. The children must marry within the faith and raise their children in a Jewish home. I could not bear if one of my own children married a non-Jew.

The resurgence of Nazism in the world haunts me. Whether silent or outspoken, survivors are torn between remembering and forgetting, between shielding their children from their unhappy history and warning them that the world is a dangerous place.

America is the best place to live in the world. It is a beautiful country with a democratic government and one of the few places in the world where one can feel freedom. America is truly the land of opportunity. With hard work, almost anyone can succeed in America, as long as you rely only on yourself.

My Major Accomplishments

If I had to list only three major accomplishments to this world, they would be:

1. Rebuild. The ability to put aside my hatred and desire for revenge against the Nazis enabled me to look ahead, and helped me lay the foundation for raising a family. I cannot forgive the Germans for forcing me to spend my childhood in concentration camps, or for watching my entire family gassed and burned. But I can educate the next generations as insurance that it will not happen again.
2. My successful marriage to Esther for over 44 years. She has been my best and most trusted friend. She has a lot of patience, for coping with a survivor is not an easy task. She never asked me for anything I couldn't give her. She has definitely been family oriented, serving as a moral guide for all of us to follow. Her nature is a giving one, and she has given her heart to those she loves.
3. Raising my three daughters, of whom Esther and I are very proud. Our daughters are married and successful, productive members of society. They keep semi-kosher homes and keep our grandchildren going to Hebrew schools. They are helping to close the circle from the horror of the Holocaust.

Life plays many tricks. One would think that the hardest adjustment was being liberated, obtaining freedom after many years of captivity. However, it is now that the children are grown that the full weight and enormity of the Holocaust starts down on us. I finally have the time to reflect on the deaths of our loved ones: it was for no good reason. It would have been wonderful for them to share our happiness, our children and our grandchildren. I miss them terribly.

It is difficult to understand why so much Anti-Semitism exists in the world. We gave the world the idea of Socialism, justice and fairness; we gave the world the Christian religion, the concept of one God, the Ten Commandments.

Do we deserve the hatred and brutal anti-Semitism, which swallowed up six million of us? I am living proof of the horror of the Holocaust. Living through the Holocaust has changed my life forever.

We were not prosecuted for what we did, rather because of what we were: "Jews".

As Jews, we were destined to die; we could not change or alter the status. The only questions that remained were: where? How? The Nazis intended the destruction of Jewish life to be total and permanent. Jews were to have been removed from history and memory. "We seek to encourage a universal understanding of all that happened in that period. Nearly 11 million people of many races, religion and nationalities were murdered by the Nazis. Among the victims were gypsies, Jehovah's witnesses, political dissidents, homosexuals and the mentally and physically disabled.

It has been 50 years since the great tragedy of the Holocaust. Yet what will happen after the survivors pass away with time? Will people deny that it ever happened because there is no one remaining that witnessed the horror? For this reason, I leave with you my written words.

*"The memory of the Holocaust is a legacy
And responsibility for all humanity".*

The Holocaust was real.
I am one of the survivors and this was my story.

THE LIFE OF A CHILD SURVIVOR FROM BIALYSTOCK POLAND

Selected Poems

We must never forget what was
Done to us there
We must cherish our freedom with
Each breath of air;
We must stand up for those who are
Weaker than we
We must honor their yearnings to
Also be free.

We must speak against evil without
Any fear
We must challenge the tyrants,
Both far and near;
We must care for each other when
Things aren't so good
We must stand in the place where
They would have stood.

We must make them feel proud of
The lives that we live
As we pass on to our children the
Things they would give;
Compassion and justice and
Tolerance, too
The myriad things that go into a Jew.

And when the witness generation
Comes to an end
When the time comes for us to
Round the last bend;
We will know in our hearts, with
Our final sigh
Those beloved six million never will die.

They reside with our children, and
Their children, too
They'll reside in the heart of the
Last living Jew.

My Journey In The Past

By Dina Szklarek (*dedicated to those who survived the Holocaust*)

Each day I walk the streets
Of the old Poland which my family and forefathers had come from.
The streets are of cobblestones so thick and smooth.
It is a sad moment to be here.
No familiar people or faces.
Where are those people who danced, played, and followed?
Their parents' traditions?
Are they hidden beneath those cobblestones?
Voices come to greet me and tell me stories of long ago,
The ways people lived in poverty and famine.
But they had a strong fire of love burning within them,
A fire so good that it was said to always defeat evil.
Once again I ask with a frightened voice:
Tell me please, where are those homes that you lived in?
Where are the streets where you played?
Where are the people you cherished with all your heart and soul?
A cold wind blows across by body and moves my fragile bones.
I see many people running, hiding, struggling for their lives.
Why is this happening?
My family is leaving me all alone.
They walk in to a train, which will release them to happiness.
A voice says, "Do not cry but live your dreams."
As I lie on that cold street I say:
I am a Jew and shall live in harmony
And cherish all the people I meet, no matter what race they are from.

*(Dina Szklarek, 12, is the granddaughter of
Holocaust survivors in Los Angeles)*

SELECTION, by Caitlin O'Brien

Hoping they are healthy enough.
Hoping they can pass the test.
Stripping down until they are naked.
Running before the officers,
Faster, faster.
Hoping he's fast enough
Finally he's done.
Did he pass? Yes.
Next his friend will go.
Running as fast as he can.
Is it good enough? No
That is the last time anyone will see him.

OUR PRAYER, By Benjamin Grossman

Please G-d, do us liberate
From their stupidity and hate.
Rivers flow with our blood and tears —
It's a plague of thousands
Of years.

Ignorance — stupidity — hate —
Oh, what a cruel, cruel fate!
Unconstrained hat, brutal, unjust —
Isn't this the origin of the holocaust?

Please dear Lord, deliver us, please do.
Afflictions we have quite a few.
Why can't humanity live in peace?
Where injustice and hate shall
Forever cease?

NEVER TO FORGET, By Pesach Szmusz

Many years since you have gone from me, my mother
Not through sickness and not through any accident.
A murderer hand cut your life down,
Poisoned you with gas and burnt you after.
I see you in ghetto; it is Friday afternoon,
You are not cooking for Sabbath, no food left,
From rotten potatoes, you made Friday night meal
With dry black bread and we were thankful for that.
You are lighting the Sabbath candles; they are very small,
Your head is covered with a scarf; your eyes are wet.
You are saying the Sabbath blessing, I hear every word
You are talking to the creator, to the G-d of Israel,
My G-d from the patriarchs, from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
From Sarah and Rivka, from Rachel and Leah, save my family;
Keep us together, my young four children and their father.
But the G-d of Israel, did not hear your request,
From all the family — only I have survived,
All of you are gone, left me alone,
To remember you all and to say "Kadish" for you.
There is not a sign of you left and not a grave,
The ashes from you all are gone with the wind.
How can I carry so much pain and sadness in me,
In my sleepless nights, in my depressing days,
You are always with me, you don't go away.
My G-d of Israel — I have for you a question,
With what have I sinned, more than all of them,
They are gone and left me with no peace.
I come out from Maidanek, from Bliszin and Auschwitz,
Then to Buchenwald and I was liberated in Dachau,
Now, many years later, I am still not liberated,
And till my last day, I will never be free:
I cannot forget — I will never forget
Those terrible years, this terrible time.
The greatest tragedy in the history of mankind
A third of our people, have the Nazis killed
And the world knew, watched and were silent . . .

NO ONE CARED, by Lisa Green (a 9th grader)

Darkness hovered over the emaciated boy
As he cried out from the depths of his soul.
Loneliness had overwhelmed him,
He had drowned in despair.
The happiness and joy he once knew had been
Snatched, and in its place came
A worthless life of pain.
And no one really cared.
No one really cared for him or the millions that died.
All too often we forget that behind the
Large numbers lie real people
Just like this lonely boy.
He had his own family,
His own unique personality.
He possessed real feelings -
Love, joy, anxiety, sadness, and anger.
And he had dreams,
Dreams of a future and a family of his own.
But he would never live to see these dreams fulfilled
Because no one cared.

EPILOGUE

History repeats itself again And we are silent:

The Bosnian conflict

All of these events that I chronicled I personally lived through. All of these things I suffered through alone, without the help of others both in my own country and from the outside, in the West. Often times we would ask ourselves: "Why isn't Roosevelt or Churchill helping us, why are we made to suffer the terrible atrocities of the Nazis alone?" And we comforted ourselves by answering that perhaps they didn't know the full extent of the terror and evil that the Nazis brought to these death campsatrocities, and we all made it our personal mission to tell others, including both the innocent outside world around us and future generations, of the entirety of what the Germans did to us. Once the world knew what was happening to us, we surmised to each other, surely they will not forsake us and they will do everything in their power to defeat the Germans and liberate us.

Yet history has proven us wrong. For it seems that Roosevelt early in the War knew what the Nazis were doing to the Jews and he did nothing. Even when he could have helped us, when the Allied forces were involved in bombing raids only a few miles from Auschwitz and a few other camps and could easily have sent a few planes over to bomb the crematoriums and the railways, thereby shutting the camps down and possibly even helping some of the prisoners to escape, he did nothing. On the ground, the troops waited for the right time for them to liberate the camps, they cared nothing that for every day they tarried, more Jews died. If we had known this throughout our struggle, perhaps we wouldn't have had the strength to continue, knowing all the while that silence is consent and that the Allied forces in their passive inaction were in fact inflicting pain and humiliation on us all over again—this time on our psyche.

We believed that the Germans were the realization of evil in civilization, in mankind, and that opposite the Germans there existed a race of people, a group of nations, who were fighting not only against German physical and political aggression, but against the heinous nature of the Nazi regime. Yet the complicity of the German common people and the apathy of the outside Western world to the horrors perpetuated by the Nazi regime affirm the opposite: that the conflict and the death and destruction the Nazis left in their path were not particular to that regime or nation—that the Allied forces in allowing these atrocities to be committed affirmed that what happened to us was not an isolated occurrence. We are unique, however, in the

respect that we are still living to bear witness to these horrible crimes—to help the world in not designating them to the cold, neglected world of academia, but instead to keep the memory of this catastrophe, our catastrophe, alive.

We took upon ourselves a *raison d'être* that was the only hope that was left to us: that in reminding the world of what had happened, a genocide of this magnitude would never again come to place.

Yet under our very eyes a genocide whose magnitude we have yet to fully behold has occurred—and many of the same governments who were shocked to behold the full horror of the holocaust in 1945 after years of inaction now do not attempt to stop or even curb what is now happening in Bosnia. At least back in 1945 we could say that even if Roosevelt and Churchill knew at least a large part of what was happening in the death camps, that knowledge was not carried down to the American and British people, and therefore the blame would entirely rest on the shoulders of the military and political leaders, not on the common masses who presumably would have forced their leaders into action upon learning of the terrible things occurring across the Atlantic.

And now? The conflict in Bosnia is one of the most heavily media-covered in history, and developments in Bosnia every day are reported in the New York Times, to such an extent that in one memo from one of the editors of the Times to another editor it was suggested that perhaps less attention in the paper should be devoted to Bosnia, as people have stopped taking an interest in a conflict which has been covered so completely that it has taken on a mundane quality. Every day the newspapers talk about how Serb soldiers torture, mutilate, rape and kill Bosnian Muslims and Croats, every day we read of how the Serbs take Muslim men out of their native villages, line them up, and shoot them in an effort to clean the entire area of impure nationalities. And we also hear, though to a lesser degree, the retaliations of the Bosnian Muslims, who turn against the Serbian persecutors with equal ferocity and violence.

How is this conflict any different from the one, which I suffered through, an event through which a good majority of my family did not live through? They too wanted to ensure the pure nature of their race by making the world free of Jews and other impure nationalities. And in doing so they lined up Jews and Gypsies and shot them into pits or they forced them into gas chambers to be suffocated and later burned their bodies to cover up the evidence before the advancing Allies. When the world heard of these actions, the likes of which had not been seen before in recent history, the entire world came togeth-

er and cried out for the sake of humanity, for the sake of the blood of the murdered that cried up from the ground. And now today, when not only the U.S. Government but the American people and citizens of every country around the world see and hear of these atrocities the day after they happen, still they do not do anything to bring about the cessation of these atrocities.

The U.S. government, myopically afraid of bringing about another Vietnam to the American people, an event which surely would cost them their political futures, limits itself to laying sanctions upon Rodivan Karadzic and his cronies, trying them in absence and then not following up on the verdict given by the court, as they did with Karadzic who even after he was sentenced was allowed to stay in power where he now remains.

In Iraq, we leapt to our feet to oust Saddam Hussein, a man of Karadzic's political power but who is no better a humanitarian than Karadzic himself is. Proving that the Western governments of today are no better than their predecessors in 1945, the only reason the West reacted so strongly to Hussein and the Iraqi menace is because the oil reserves of the world were threatened by this madman who could have caused an oil crisis the likes of which we haven't seen since the OPEC crisis of the late 1970's.

We did not care about Hussein's murdering of hundreds of thousands of Kurdish nationals in his country years before the conflict with Kuwait, but once the oil fields of Kuwait were threatened we jumped in there and, by the sheer convenience of it all, decided perhaps we should also protect these persecuted peoples too. Hussein is still in power and the Kurds are still under his dominion, but as long as our own self-interest is accounted for the peoples of America and the West do not protest. Naturally I am simplifying this, of course, but the similarity between the involvement of American forces only when investments in Britain and France were threatened during WWII and the involvement of the U.S. military in Iraq only when oil supplies were threatened is a strong one; a similarity that bespeaks of the selfish nature of the human spirit itself.

What have I done to bring about the end of the conflict in Bosnia, you might ask? How have I tried to stop the killing of thousands of innocents in Bosnia, just like we dreamed in the camps night after night of Americans and European nationals crying out in protest after hearing of the atrocities that are taking place on the other side of the continent, and the eventual involvement and our liberation at the hands of the Allied soldiers. Surely the Bosnian Muslims are dreaming the same of us, hoping that we will come to their rescue before

they and all of their family are slaughtered in an effort to exterminate their entire race.

Granted I am too old to volunteer to fight in Bosnia, but I am not too old nor too forgetful to write letters to the President and Congress or even perhaps to attempt to influence the beliefs and understanding of those around me by telling them of my own experiences and making the parallel I have just made in this letter, hopefully convincing them to fight and to end the horrible conflict that rages still in the Balkans. And yet, I have not.

I have not even begun to understand how I could let myself remain so complicitous, so apathetic, so unwilling to accept the role I was given, the reason for which I was saved from certain death: to tell the world as I have done in this manuscript of what happened to me in order to ensure that when the next potential for genocide comes about, we will remember the lessons of the Holocaust and stop it before it starts. Well, the next conflict is here, in the world today, and the world, myself included, has done nothing to validate the existence of civilization itself, a civilization which slugs off responsibility to the shoulders of the next person while other human beings are being slaughtered every day on the other side of the continent, far away from us, but not too far to still assault our consciences.

Letter from the Author's Daughter, Ellen:

Dear Dad,

As the editor of *The Life of a Child Survivor From Bialystock Poland*, I feel honored to have been chosen to add my share to a wonderful book. The hours you spent remembering in order to write must have been painful and difficult, as it was for me to stay motivated to continue editing.

It was a challenge for me to read and understand what happened to you for the first time, since the Holocaust was rarely a subject that we discussed within the family. I often remember asking questions about the number, B-2433, branded onto your left forearm, only to receive answers that were vague and inconsequential, as if it was "some tattoo" you got as a teenager. Nonetheless, these atrocities happened to you, my father: not to someone in the newspaper, not to a distant acquaintance, not to some other relative, but to my dad, the man who still had strength left over to nurture me through my wonderful childhood. And many memories of guilt overwhelmed me then and now for taking advantage of freedom that I felt was due to me as an American child.

I prepare this manuscript in hopes that it will certainly reach your grandchildren, but may also to be used to educate many people in the world about the horror of the Holocaust. I also learned many of life's other lessons from you and from your memoirs:

- a.) A strong will to live and search beyond today's problems.
- b.) Positive attitudes prevail.
- c.) Nurturing families pass on nurturing skills.
- d.) Kindness and generosity can exist despite abuse, malnutrition and terror.
- e.) Immigration isn't a bad word.
- f.) Hard work and dedication can pay off.
- g.) Never rely on anyone but yourself.
- h.) Never look back. Keep moving ahead.
- i.) Children are our future, cherish them.
- j.) Life is short, enjoy it.

As your children, we have tried to please you by carrying on our lives in a traditional Jewish household, providing you with as many grandchildren as we could bear. We learned our value system from you, and, in turn, we also expect a great deal from our own children.

The three of us, your daughters (Tova, Nurit and Ellen) met in

Phoenix over one year ago to discuss the issues we dealt with as a survivor's offspring. We are also obsessed with our children and their welfare, we trust very few people, and we value family as #1. We detest feeling helpless or showing weakness. The three of us married Jewish men because it was the right thing to do as Jewish women, but we also knew it would have killed our father had we married out of the religion.

We are educating our children in the Jewish religion, and feel a heavy responsibility to teach them about the Holocaust, as they become old enough to accept the truth with some level of maturity. We all plan on using your memoirs to teach our children and their classmates about the Holocaust, and to share part of our history. While my sisters and I are three very different people, we share our value system handed down from you, which shaped and molded us, and taught us about trust and honor.

If it weren't for your strong will to survive, under any circumstances, we would not be here. Hopefully, we can carry on your words forever.

Love always,