



ME 1422

Feferman-Wasoff, Mildred: The Processed

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Biography

Mildred (Mania) Feferman-Wasoff was born in Kielce, Poland. The family owned a wholesale store for petroleum products. Since the outbreak of WWII, the family was persecuted, and on 31 March 1941 they were interned at the newly established Kielce ghetto. After the ghetto was liquidated, she was selected to stay in Kielce, but her husband was deported. She was brought to work at Ludwikow (Ludwigshütte). In August 1944 the working camp was closed and the prisoners evacuated to Auschwitz. She was liberated in Malchow, Germany, and came to Sweden. None of her family survived the holocaust. On July 4, 1946, she came to the USA. She remarried and has two children.

Contents

This memoir was originally written by Mildred Feferman-Wasoff in the years of 1945-46 in Polish. She started writing in a Swedish hospital, right after her liberation. In 1979, the memoir was translated into English by the author. It is a detailed account of her experiences of persecution while being an adolescent, starting with 09/01/1939, the outbreak of World War II. After a short introduction of the Jewish community of Kielce, it covers the persecution of Jews in Kielce, the establishment of the Kielce ghetto, and the doomed fate of many inmates. The ghetto was liquidated in August 1942, and she was among 1600 people who were not immediately selected to be deported to a concentration camp or shot. She had falsely pretended to be a corsetiere. She had to work at loading and unloading, then sorting out mountains of clothing usurped by murder and deportations, later she worked for an

organization to support the war, N.V.D. She gives testimony of many atrocities that happened in the camp. Among them the killing of 43 children during May 1943. She was selected to work with her brother Moniek to work at Ludwikow (Ludwigshütte), where wagons for war use were produced. Three children had managed to escape and joined them there. The camp existed until summer 1944. 200 - 300 prisoners lived within the factory. In August 1944 the working camp was closed and the prisoners evacuated to Auschwitz. She then gives a shocking description of life in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In December 1944, she was transferred to Ravensbruck. Her liberation took place in Malchow, Germany. On April 26, 1945, a transport of 1500 women took off to Sweden, thanks to an intervention of Count Bernadotte of Sweden.

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THE PROCESSED
BY
MILDRED (MANIA) FEFERMAN-WASOFF

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FORWARD

On September, 1939 the Jewish Community in Kielce was 71 years old. The Jewish residents of Kielce, (the capital of Kielce province, Wojewodztwo Kieleckie) originally stemmed from Checiny and other neighboring villages within the province of Kielce.

From a small settlement of 947 people in 1873, it grew and developed throughout the years. The traditional prejudices against the Jews always persisted in Kielce and in 1918 a bloody massacre in Theater Polski resulted in the slaughter of many Jews.

The "Minority Treaty", signed by Poland in 1919, guaranteed the Jews equality of status. Although the Jews in Kielce enjoyed religious freedom, they were restricted from participation in any social or civil service, either local or provincial. Practically no Kielce Jew could find employment in local Polish private industry or government work. Only a handful of Jews were allowed to attend the local Polish High Schools (Gymnasia) or the School of Commerce.

Latent hostilities persisted and the Kielce Jews were often subjected to vandalism and physical assault. These obstacles did not stop the Jews to pioneer and to exploit the natural resources in the area, and to create industries and commerce. The marble, lime, tanning and shoe industries, as well as saw mills, down and photography were mostly in Jewish hands. There were also Jewish merchants, tradesmen, doctors, lawyers, real-estate owners and several bankers.

At the outbreak of the war on September 1, 1939, Kielce's Jewish population numbered approximately 26,000. This figure comprised about 25% of the total population of the city.

We had a well established Jewish Municipality (Gmina Zydowska), an Orphanage and an Old-Age Home. The Synagogue was impressive, with many small houses of worship (Shtiblech), a Religious School for boys (Yeshiva) and for girls (Bes-Yaakov).

The secular life flourished. We had established two private High Schools (Gymnasia), numerous private primary and secondary schools, two Jewish libraries, and a Yiddish newspaper "Kielce Leben." There were also numerous Jewish social and sports clubs, such as football, soccer, tennis and skiing.

Almost all of the young Jewish adults were affiliated with some politically-oriented movement. The majority of the youth were Zionists, beginning with the Labor Zionists, Socialist Zionists, Religious Zionists and Revisionists. There were also some communists, who were in "hiding"

We were all deeply planted in Kielce. My total roots were there: My family, my friends, my future and my dreams. But on September 1, 1939, we saw the beginning of the end, the total annihilation of our world, and of our way of life.

These memoirs were written in 1945-46.

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Light. Sun. Morning. I opened my eyes. It was Friday, September 1, 1939, and it looked like another hot day. I lingered in bed awhile, thinking of Heniek. It was fun to be with him as he was always full of ideas as to how best spend time together. It was a hike to the stadium, a ride to Slovik, canoeing in our park's pond or an evening in the movie-house (Kino). Heniek acted as if he were afraid I would find him dull without these extra attractions. Spending time with Heniek enhanced what was otherwise an uneventful summer.

Out of lack of anything else, I reluctantly assisted in the family business, petroleum products "Tluszczy" located downstairs in the building where we lived, on the corner of Nowo-Warszawska, Rynek and Bodzentyńska Street. It was a far cry from my secret aspiration of painting and settling in Palestine. Instead of following my desires, I compromised for the sake of my parents and was trained to be a bookkeeper. I had intended to work in my grandfather's Bank Kredytowy, but by the time I had completed school, it had gone bankrupt. I could find no job.

The family's matchmaker, Mr. Kreps, frequently dropped by our store. Leaning his short, pudgy frame on his cane and fondling his goatie, he would stop my father with the same old story; "Reb Srulke Feferman, believe you me, this time I found the right mate

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(sivig) for your Mania. I swear to you, Reb Srulke, the match was truly made in Heaven!"

Mr. Kreps had already found the right match for my brother, Moniek, a nice girl from Lublin, named Celina Zalzman. Moniek was deeply in love with her. We had traveled to Lublin the week before to celebrate their engagement. For me the trip had broken up the monotony of the long, hot summer.

The clock in the dining room chimed nine times, it was getting late. I had been planning to meet Hela Korman at the Jewish Library, check on the new movies over at Sienkiewicza Street and then go for shoes at Czarny's store. The dance at "Masada" was a day away and Hela and I wanted to look our best.

Now, working on my hair to give it the "page-boy" look, I realized I did not have a blouse to highlight my new hair-do. So I asked my younger sister, Rasele, to lend me her blouse for the day. "Not a chance," she answered with hostility.

We were on the verge of a fight when Moniek, glued to the radio, suddenly let out a shriek. "Oh no, no, for God's sake, it can't be true! Listen to this, Hitler just declared war on Poland!" We froze in stunned disbelief. I looked from Moniek to Rasele. We were children again, running down the stairs together to hide behind our parents and hear that everything was right. But looking around showed us we had no place to hide if necessary.

Father was ghastly pale, his tall frame bent as though it carried a heavy load that suddenly aged him. Mother sat weeping

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and wringing her hands, her face ashen, old. Haskel the porter (treger) and Garshen, the other employee, ran out of the store as if carried by a cyclone. Rasele could not restrain her tears. "What's going to happen to us?" she moaned. "What will we do?" Moniek stood dumbfounded, shaking his head. "No," he kept repeating, "It can't be true, not really, it's impossible! First came Austria, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia and now Poland. Why the whole thing is maddening!"

As shocked as I was, I still found it hard to visualize the reality of war. I was totally unaware of the suffering and destruction it would bring. At this time of my life, I almost welcomed the prospect of some stimulating changes in the dull routine of my life.

"Despite the psychological warfare over the Port of Gdynia and Corridor, Poland is in a disastrous position, completely unprepared to fight." Father was right. Panic and chaos had already set in. Some were frantically searching for gas masks, hoarding food, seeking shelters; others were preparing to leave the city. The mobilization came first, and when Moniek was drafted into the Army, we felt the first hard blow of the war. By Monday, all the city's offices were shut tight, its officials gone, leaving the city paralyzed. The Polish Armament Committee (P.K.U.) was also gone, and there was not a single soldier left.

Historical events followed like lightning. The German tanks and planes were too devastating for the outdated Polish

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Cavalry. Luckily, except for its railroad station at Sienkiewicza Street and Zelazna Street, our city had little bombing with no phosgene gas dropped.

On Tuesday afternoon, the fifth of September, our city was taken over by the Wehrmacht. Hamek Gertler, our neighbor's son, standing on his balcony facing Nowo-Warszawska Street, was the one who began shouting, "They are here, the Germans are here!" Everyone in the building rushed to look out the front windows. We watched endless columns of young, dusty soldiers and mechanized monstrous vehicles passing by our street. Below us, a group of soldiers spread out around the statue of Saint-Tekla in the tiny fenced-in garden, laughing and drinking beer.

"It's scary," Rasele said, "They've painted slogans on their tanks "Warsaw, Paris, London." Will they dare to do it?"

The Germans had had a good start. Within a short time the Polish Army proved impotent and the Air Force obsolete. Krakow fell on September 6th. On September 18th, the Polish Army was vanquished, and Warsaw capitulated a few days later. With the army in chaos, Moniek came home and took his place as a civilian.

The Non-Aggression Treaty between the Germans and the Soviets changed Poland's borders. While the adjustments were made along the demarcation line, it was possible to cross into the territories occupied by the Soviets. All the roads leading out of the city were packed with fleeing soldiers and civilians leaving

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on foot, by ox-cart, by buggies and by cars. It seemed as if everyone in town was joining the exodus.

One day Moniek came home with exciting news; "I may have a chance to get to Russia. A high ranking officer agreed to give me a lift in exchange for gasoline. It will be easy to swim across the San River. Should I go?" Our business was to sell gasoline, and father was never more eager for a deal to go through. "Go, my son," he said with emotion, "Go, and may God take good care of you!"

Mother was in tears when Moniek threw his knapsack over his shoulders and left. I saw him off with mixed feelings and a strong desire to follow him. The urgency of the moment was there, but my emotions were overpowering. I could not tear myself away from my parents. Father, at age forty-eight, had a long history of gastro-intestinal troubles and was not physically fit for hardship. Rasele would not run on her own, and so we did the only thing that was left for us to do, remain and wait.

We did not have to wait very long. The Nazi regime was inaugurated with arrests of prominent Jews. They began with the arrest of Rabbi Rapoport and continued with Dr. Moshe Peltc, Mordhe Fishel Kaminer, his son Yeedel, Citrin, Balsam, Blank, Fishel Hershkowicz, Simhe Binem Goldman, Adas Bugajer, Enoch, Eli Justman, Fishel Kohen, Klugman and many others. These actions

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were repeated over and over again with a deadline set for the ransom. The money and jewelry was always raised within the Jewish Community, and the victims were released.

Next came the confiscation of properties. Our wholesale store, which carried every sort of oil, vaseline, paint and petroleum products, was taken away. We did however, manage to bury several barrels of oil, candles, soap, vaseline and such in the coal bins and storage shacks in the back of our courtyard.

All the larger businesses were taken over by Trustees, (Treuhandler). These were German born, Reichsdeutschen, or Germans born in Poland, Volksdeutschen. The business owners were compelled to conduct the business the same way they did before, without benefits or wages.

The city's first top official, (Stadskomisar) showed up in the streets with a brandishing whip. Soon notices were posted all over the city, and one restriction followed another. Jews were forbidden to use the city park and the railroads. They were compelled to wear a white band with a blue Star of David on their right arms. Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat non-Jews. Radios, electrical appliances, furs, silver and jewelry had to be turned over to the Gestapo. The penalty for disobeying any German order was death.

Entire streets such as Staszycza, Focha, Tadeusza, Mickiewiczza, Sniadeckiego, Sienkiewiczza, were made "Judenrein" (clear of Jews).

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The Jewish proprietors of the buildings located at these streets, Alter Cymerman, Citrin, Kreisman, Haïke Rosenholc, Hemia Kaiser, Frydman, among others, were thrown out of their houses without due compensation.

Food became scarce, prices soaring and the "Black market" was here to stay. A kilo (kilogram) of bread cost four Zlotys, a kilo of potatoes one and a half Zlotys. At dawn long breadlines formed in front of the bakeries owned by Sender Butc, Somer, Jurkewicz, Goldblum, Rosenholc, Ladowski. I was in line with my friends Hela Korman and Basia Borkowska, waiting for bread. The guard, a German soldier, noticed Basia's exotic beauty, her prominent semitic features, pulled her out of the line along with other Jews. "Don't let these Jews take your bread away," he told the Poles. The Poles cheered and applauded.

The Jewish New Year, (Rosh-Hashana) came on September 16, 1939. By then our beautiful Synagogue at Nowo-Warszawska Street had been turned into a depot and jail. The numerous Shtiblech (substitute temples), dark, misty rooms lined with benches and chairs, were packed with worshippers. On Yom-Kippur morning, the Nazis raided a few of these Shtiblech and dragged the men into the Rynek, a large business square and marketplace in the heart of the city. Their beards were sliced off. Bareheaded, and in their

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fringed praying shawls, they were forced to dig ditches. In the midst of the crowd I caught a glimpse of my uncle, Abish Kopf, shoveling dirt. He was barely 5'2" tall and fragile. As a scholar, he never exerted himself physically. Now the sweat was rolling down his face, and the white shawl, (talis), was soiled, drenched and twisted on his back. Uncle Abish's daughters, Andzia, Mania and Dorka, pleaded with the amused guards. "Please," they cried, "Let our father go, can't you see he is collapsing?" All they received was loud laughter. Someone standing close by remarked with bitterness, "If there is a God, let Him strike these Nazis dead." Late that night the Jews were set free.

Each day brought yet another crisis for us. Early in November a new decree was pasted in front of City Hall (Rada Miejska) in Rynek, as well as in other parts of the city. The new decree informed the people that on October 26th, Hans Frank, the Civil Administrator (Generalgouvernor) of Occupied Poland, has ordered all labor compulsory for Jews between 14-60 years of age.

The decree gave way to systematic Jew hunting. There were no exceptions, no age or class distinction. Old Dr. Levenson, old Jankielewski and young Hilel Rabinowicz, (our Rabbi's son) were seized in a street raid and with other Jews ordered to clean gutters, scrub outhouses or to pull wagons. The brown shirted Nazi ruffians, filled with hatred and greed rampaged the streets. When they captured a bearded Jew, they would slice off his beard with a dagger or rip it off, his skin and all!

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From the very start of the war, Dr. Moshe Peltc was representing our Community in its deals with the Gestapo. A distinguished man, Dr. Peltc also had integrity and a dynamic personality. It was not long before he was ordered by the Gestapo to reconstruct the pre-war Jewish Council, the Kehilla, and head the new Council of prominent Jews. They included among others, Noah Laks, Avrom Gotlieb, Fishel Kohen, Hershel Eisenberg, Frydman and Meyer Zloto. The new Council, called Judenrat, controlled every communal structure and required a large administration. Its quarters were located at Leonarda and Wesola Streets, the old place of the Jewish Municipality, (Gmina Zydowska). "We have now our own government," Haim Levy commented, while playing chess with my father. "Let's hope some of its staff of communal elites and inflated opportunists will not run it bureaucratically."

The first winter of the war came early and brought blizzards roaring behind strong winds. We insulated the cracks in the windows with paper, sand and cotton, but the rooms remained cold. Pot-bellied stoves made of iron or tin, fed with turf or saw-dust, were poor substitutes for coal. Kerosene, naphta or carbide lamps replaced the electric lights.

It was no longer fun to stroll down Sienkiewicza Street, our main street, for it was filled with soldiers and prostitutes. Smolinski's caffée house, with its huge glass windows, was no longer a place patronized by the Kahanes, Fryshman, Kupferminc, Freisinger, the Bugajers and some of the others of the Jewish intelligentsia. Instead, the Germans displayed their swastikas,

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shiny boots and women. All the stores, including Etko Rodal's, Rucha Walish's, Bessers, Balicki's, the four Movie-houses (Kino), stood bare and dark. Gone was the attraction they once projected.

Everything had changed. There were no more meetings, dances or lectures in the Zionist Organizations. No more social, religious or charitable activities of any sort. All the clubs, schools and libraries remained shut and the 6 p.m. curfew kept the people indoors.

The war was here to stay and we began to learn to live with it. We also began to know more of the Nazis who ruled our city. When the Chief of the Gestapo, Tomas, walked with his dog, with whip in hand, they both had a predacious look. Hanish and Schafele, both from the Gestapo, were old pros in spreading terror. Hauptmann Geyer was Chief of the Security Police, (Schutz-Polizei, "Schupo"). He and his "Schupo" friends, Wolfschleger and Lieutenant Roy, were corrupt and despicable characters. Wurtz, also from the "Schupo," appeared to have a civilized veneer and mild manner, but was as vicious a killer as the rest of them. Lame, shifty-eyed, Rumpel and Balhorn were the "Schupo's executioners. Their presence spelled instant disaster, death on sight. These notorious perverts, alcoholics, ex-pimps and sadists, were the officials in our city Kielce.

One of the first victims of their bloody grip was Luzer Kaner, whose father was once the owner of a fine jewelry store at Długa Street. Led by informers, the Gestapo arrested Luzer, accusing him of hiding jewelry. With his bones smashed and eyes

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blinded, Luzer died of the inflicted injuries.

Like vultures, the Nazis would attack their prey without warning. In January they raided our house and what a close call it was! Rasele came up pale, breathless, her eyes wide with fear. "Geyer is in the building," she stammered. "What if he comes up?" Immediately we moved the heavy mirrored closet, (Garderoba) and father squeezed behind it into the concealed space which we shared with our neighbor, Zaharia Gertler. Looking out the window, mother nervously paced around the room. Rasele was near the door, paralyzed with fear.

Banging hard on the door with his boots, Geyer barged inside, followed by Wurtz, Wolfschleger and a few soldiers. They honey-combed the rooms, ripped open the mattresses, emptied the drawers and tore the clothes from the closet. Geyer raged through the rooms shouting: "Detestible Jews" (Verfluchte Juden), where did you hide your jewelry and money? (Wo hast Du dass Schmuck und Geld versteckt) He grabbed mother by her arm and pushed her against the wall, banging her head repeatedly. "We turned over everything when the law called for it," mother replied in utter horror. "You are lying," screamed Wolfschleger in fury, slapping mother's face. Watching it, I cursed my helplessness. "Goddamned parasites" (Gott Verdammte Schmarotzers), they bellowed on their way out, taking along the tapestry (makata) mother had brought back from Krynica. Our jewelry lay cemented inside the bricks of the tiled, cold wall oven.

Violation of privacy of Jewish homes were as common as the

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continued street raids (oblawy). At the latest street raid, the Gestapo seized a group of Jewish males and sent them to Buchenwald in Germany. My cousin Yozek Zloto, a fine young man, was among them.

In addition to the Nazi trouble, we were threatened with a new menace, "typhus." Many cases appeared in the city and the Germans declared a contagious area (Seuchengebiet). Houses and streets were sealed off, such as: Przedmiescie and Staro-Warszawska which were densely populated by Jews. This isolation lasted three months. Haim Moszenberg, Zelda Rabinowicz and Lichtenstine were among the first victims of the disease.

Despite it all, people who fled to Russia at the start of the war were coming back home. Mother walked around with puffed eyes, misery written all over her face. "Where is my boy, Moishele? (Moniek), she cried. In bitterness she would blame my father. He would sigh, infinitely sad and say, "I wish none of us were here." Father became closer with our neighbors, Gutman, Duvyd Kohen, Beinvol, the Gertler brothers, Zaharia and Avrum, Avrum's son-in-law Eli Justman, old Zlotogorski and Bialobroda. They spent a great deal of time analyzing the contents of the newspapers, the Krakauer Zeitung and the Warschauer Zeitung. But so far they found no indication of a quick peace.

These men were merchants, who were left with some means to combat the threat of hunger. How would the majority of our Jews manage? they asked each other. The peddler, the tradesman and

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storekeeper who are deprived of their livelihood and already hungry. What about the Orphanage, the Old-Age Home, and other charities? None of us will last long if the war drags on, was their usual conclusion.

The depressed atmosphere in our house persisted through the long winter. It seemed to reflect the general gloomy mood within the Jewish Community. Then spring arrived and soon changed into summer and the war was still with us. But life went on. Babies were born; Bar-Mitzwahs and weddings were celebrated but with vigilance. In fact, despite the uncertainty of tomorrow or perhaps because of it, a boom of quick weddings took place.

In September 1940, my uncle Motek Zloto celebrated the Bar-Mitzwah of his older son, Calek. Although teaching was strictly forbidden, individual secular and religious tutoring was widely extended. With drapes drawn, doors locked, Calek would read the Torah and Haftorah in front of his proud family. For a brief moment the war was forgotten. It was there, in uncle Motek's house that I first met Yumek Korngold. Our first impressions of each other were molded in the course of that afternoon. "L'haim, to life and to a quick peace!" toasted uncle Motek.

The next time I saw Yumek, I tried to be witty and charming. But at critical moments I was inclined to choke up and to become shy. Each time we met, the clouds of war faded away and gave way to bright sunshine. Yumek began to give my life a new meaning and a new dimension. We began to share our hopes, uncertainties, pleasures and fears. Our friendship rapidly blossomed

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into love. Mother and father were elated when we told them of our contemplated wedding plans.

On December 31, 1940, Adolph the hunchback, brought up the canopy, the Hupah. Adolph was an integral part of the canopy and a permanent fixture at weddings. His cap tilted, Adolph looked around our house and winked with his good eye. A disappointed expression set in his wry, ageless face when he asked, "Nu, and this is called a wedding?" (a "Hasene").

A short ceremony was performed by Rabbi Rapoport, who was in a great hurry to make a few more calls before curfew time. Due to the 6 p.m. curfew, we spent our wedding night in the company of fourteen people. Yumek's widowed mother was sighing and crying endlessly and he was sitting at her bedside comforting her. "Mama," he said, "I'm not going away, I'll take care of you the same as before." His four brothers tried to intervene. "Mama," Yumek is married, let them be happy."

Mr. Beinvol, a widower from the ground floor, was gracious enough to offer us his own room without charge. Despite a road crowded with perils, we felt positive and happy about our future. The war was bound to end and we would try to build a good life, perhaps in Palestine. Ham Leiser, Mr. Beinvol's youngest son, often became impatient. "Can you imagine," he asked, "waking up to a carefree day, without raids, arrests or threat of hunger and typhus?"

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Although we often dreamed of it, our daily struggles allowed little space for fantasies. Mother came down with typhus, luckily a mild case. We were seized with fear. Mrs. Gutman, who lived one floor above us, suggested that we indulge in raw onions and vodka. It was supposed to build up an immunity to typhus, she maintained. "I know where mamishe had contacted the disease," declared Rasele. "It's from Hirsh Velvu, while she brought food down to his place."

Hirsh Velvu, the charcoal peddler, lived with his wife and eight young children in the rear of our courtyard. They were starving in their frigid place, right next to the wooden shacks and the outhouse. One of his boys had just died of typhus.

Hirsh Velvu's lot was shared by thousands of other Jews. These deeply impoverished people did perish in great numbers from hunger, disease and cold. Many of the Jews were proud people, who could not swallow charity and died quietly and bravely. They never revealed to others their deplorable, dismal condition. Father was shocked when this happened to his own, close friends. He called all the dying Jews "Martyrs for the glorification of God, Kiddush-Hashem."

In the middle of that winter of 1940-41, amid raids and arrests, Moniek and Celina arrived unexpectedly. Mother was filled with joy, her wildest dream came true. Moniek lost weight, hardened somewhat and matured.

"Three times I attempted to cross the frozen San River,"

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said Moniek, "Before I finally made it. We were married in Lublin but decided to come back here." He looked fondly at his bride and continued: "Celina was quite an actress as she romanced the conductor of the train into believing her tale of misplaced papers. You see, we had no travel passes, no identification papers, "Kennkarte" and of course, we had no arm bands on. But here we are, so let's drink to our good fortune." (Each Jew was identified by his/her arm band with the Star of David. Each Jew was compelled to have a "Kennkarte" with his/her photograph stamped Jew, "Jude.")

The next few days, Moniek was surrounded by the uncles, aunts and cousins, (40 on mother's side) anxious to hear what he had to say. Uncle Leib Mendel Zloto was more curious than the rest. His daughter, Renia and her new husband, Elek Elbirt, were still in the Soviet Union. "It was tough in Russia," Moniek said, "I tried my hands at farming, construction and carpentry. Most of the time I went hungry and when I was forced to become a Soviet citizen, I decided to get going."

If father had any doubts in regard to Moniek's decision, he kept it to himself. He knew that mother would never have forgiven him for uttering a negative remark. Happy days followed, and the war was forgotten for a while. At 20, Celina was an extremely attractive girl, Blond, nicely build, with mischievous hazel eyes and a pert nose. She was outgoing with intention to enjoy life. Her motto was: "We have but one life to live, so let's live it!" She and Moniek set up housekeeping in a small

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place near us. "I must catch up on culinary art or I may loose my husband!" Celina said often smilingly, with her lips curling upwards exposing her strong, white teeth.

Hershel Gertler, our next door neighbor, was first violinist with the Symphonic Orchestra in Lodz. "Please," Celina would plead with him, "give us a bit of soul warming music!" When Hershel did not respond, she would whistle a Jazztune, grab Hershel and tap dance to her own music. Hershel played Lisht, Grieg, Bach, Rimsky-Korsakow and we all enjoyed the illusion of a normal life.

One day in February, Celina burst into our house in a state of panic. "Moniek was arrested," she said gasping for her breath. "He is jailed in the Synagogue." We ran to the Judenrat, pleaded with the "big men" there; we then picked up some nurses uniforms at the Jewish dispensary on Nowo-Warszawska Street, right opposite the Synagogue and went to see Moniek. The beautiful Temple was stripped of its holy relics and a soldier with a machine-gun occupied its pulpit. The mosaic floor was covered with captured men lying on loose straw. Seeing us, Moniek simulated pain and when we attended him, he whispered "We are to be shipped away tomorrow!"

Frantically, Celina and I ran to the "Mahers," the disreputable, corrupt characters who turned informers and who knew how and who to bribe in the Gestapo. Despite their promises, Moniek was put on a train for deportation.

Celina then daringly removed her white band with the Jewish

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Star of David and calmly declared; "I shall follow Moniek, but don't you worry, I'll get along fine without Polish papers. She added, "You also know that there is nothing more we can do here." Fortunately, the train stopped in Lublin, Celina's home town. There, aided by her well-to-do parents, she succeeded in bribing Moniek's freedom. Once again, they came home. With the exception of a few other prisoners who were released, among them Genek Gutman and Boguchwal, the remaining ones were sent to Dachau, Germany.

Although life in those days did hardly resemble the pre-war times, we still had contact with the Poles and the world. Then, with spring, on the Eve of Passover, April 1, 1941, came the ghetto. The sealed, fenced-in ghetto was a living echo of medieval times. It completely severed us from the world.

The entrance to the ghetto was guarded by German and Jewish sentries. The streets were sliced in half. Beginning with one side of Nowo-Warszawska Street, the ghetto extended to the right side of Staro-Warszawska, Zagnajska, Jasna, Stolarska and Okrzeja. Behind them ran a network of tiny, neglected streets with dilapidated dwellings.

The Judenrat was relocated to Przedmiescie Street, across the street from the Synagogue, and remained the hub and nucleus of the Jewish Community. By then, Dr. Peltc was replaced by Herman Levy. Rumors had it, that Levy was instrumental in Dr. Peltc's downfall and to his deportation to Auschwitz. According to some sources, Dr. Peltc had refused to cooperate with the Gestapo.

BEGINNING OF THE WAR - Enter Ghetto

Along with the ghetto came the powerful Jewish Police. (Judische Ordnungs Dienst and Gehulfe Dienst.) They had two Komisariats, called Kommandaturs. The first Komisariat was located next to the Judenrat's quarters and was headed by Singer. The second was on Okrzeja Street and was led by Schlesinger. Both Singer and Schlesinger were refugees from Vienna. There were about 120 policemen in uniform, with Adas Bugajer and Zelinger as officers.

The hospital which was situated across the street from the Synagogue was incorporated into the ghetto. A little bridge connected one side of Saint-Wojciecha Street and part of Bodzentynska Street to the rest of the ghetto.

In the spring of 1941, the Jewish population of our city reached 28,000. This increase, despite an extremely high mortality rate, was due to the influx of refugees from various vicinities. Many came from Vienna. The forming of the ghetto created chaos and panic within the Jewish Community. Everyone was frantic to get a place to live before the set deadline. People with money and influence looked for the choicest apartments within the designated area. Thousands besieged the Judenrat, weeping and pleading for a place.

In the crowd I chanced to meet my friend Hil Alpert. Hil was a gifted mathematician who had done tutoring all through the war and knew many influential people in the Judenrat. He had already been assigned to a cottage which was to be shared with another family. "We may as well move in with people we know,"

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he said to me, "That is, if it's alright with you." It was fine with me, and I hoped that my family would also like the idea.

Of course, they did. It was not easy getting a horse-drawn buggy to transport our essential belongings to the new place. The streets were crowded with endless processions of men, women and children with bedrolls around their necks, carrying sacks and bags on their backs, pushing wheelbarrows and loaded pushcarts.

And so we moved to our new location, Dabrowska Street, a known hang-out for thieves and prostitutes. A few scattered wood and brick bungalows ran along a narrow, unpaved road. Our new habitation consisted of one room, which we partitioned off to give privacy to the three couples. Rasele slept in the tiny kitchen. While we did step on each other's toes, mother would remind us: "Stop complaining, at least it's all in the family. Others have it worse!"

Hil Alpert, his parents, two brothers and a sister occupied the front of the cottage. They were even-tempered, slow-moving folks and easy to get along with. Mother, who was rather impulsive and excitable, was impressed by their congenial disposition. "How do you people stay so calm and relaxed?" she would ask Hil's father. He would shrug his shoulders, pause at each word and say, "What's the sense of getting all burned up? Does it help anyone to yell or to worry?"

The compensation for our cramped quarters was the small garden with its vegetable patch and its few fruit trees. It became

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our little island of joy. There, each morning, my cousins, Mania and Dorka Kopf, conducted classes for first and second grade children. Teaching was forbidden but it was a joy to teach and watch children learn so fast, to see them play and listen to their carefree laughter.

In the ghetto people soon forgot how to laugh. The rations continued to be inadequate to live on and the majority of Jews were deteriorating fast. Each day, the Judenrat distributed soup to the growing lines of starving people. More and more people, emaciated and swollen from hunger, would run into the streets with outstretched hands, crying and begging: "Nur a shtikele broit!" (just a small piece of bread). Ravaged by hunger, some people would turn over the garbage heaps and eat grass.

The crowded ghetto became an ideal breeding ground for disease. Typhus was with us from the start of the war, but in the ghetto it grew to epidemic proportions. Everyone knew Shmil Zelig Trombecki, the "Bryzyve," and Shie Ham Shmelke's son, both from the Burial Society, (Hevra Kedisha). Their driver, Wavshyk Zylberstein, would ride through the ghetto's streets, sitting straight and tall in his black coach. Theirs was the only business that was doing well -- and promising to do even better.

Early in the summer of 1941, the Gestapo rounded up the so called "communists". They came at night and arrested Noah Treister, Stasiek Golembiowski, Hamu Posluszny, Artek Baum, Haim

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Josef Laks, and Dr. Shmeterling, and deported them to Auschwitz. Mark Rosenberg was arrested in the street and shot on the spot. Another day, the Gestapo sought out those who had fled to Russia at the start of the war and then returned. Among them were: Hirsh Meir Moshkowitz, Flannenbaum, Gottlib and Kener-Rodal; they were all sent to Auschwitz. Dr. Schatc was dragged out of his bed and shot on his steps. Then came the arrests of two policemen, Mordkowitz and Mangel. No significant reason was given for their death. On a fine day, the Gestapo seized Mrs. Blauweis-Katc and Balcia Chmielewska and Balcia's husband. The women, both top dressmakers were put to work in "Handesvertrieb," sewing for the Gestapo women. The three were later shot. Sala Kleinman, who also worked sewing for the Gestapo, was sent to Auschwitz. Her husband and child were left behind.

Arrests, hunger and the raging diseases had not touched us so far. We still could supplement our rations with food from the black market. However, its exorbitant prices, in addition to the excessive taxes and high rent imposed upon us by the Judenrat, eventually exhausted our resources. (The merchandise saved from our store.) By the fall of 1941, we were trading in our clothes, linens and jewelry for food.

Although Moniek and Yumek worked outside the ghetto, they would not engage in trading. Like many of our Kielce Jews, they became "productive." They worked for the German industries, H.K.P.,

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without wages, gratuitous. As skilled workers with working papers, (Arbeitsbescheinigungs) they were free from arrests.

I then decided to try my hand at trading. On rainy days I would strip off my Jewish arm band with the Star of David and sneak out of the ghetto. I used a side hole which was temporarily unguarded and luck was with me. Once outside, I walked straight to the Polish homes I knew and did my trading there. Having light blond hair and blue eyes, I passed easily as a Pole, yet it was quite risky. The Polish spies were awarded a bag of sugar for delivering a Jew to the Gestapo. And spies were everywhere, a dime a dozen.

Trading for food started with the war and was widespread. In order to buy food, people would sell anything they had. The streets which were populated by Jews were teeming with men, women, children and the middle men (mayklers). These mayklers were entrusted to do the selling for the owners. Everything was sellable. In the ghetto, trading in the streets still continued but at a much slower pace. The sources were simply drying up, exhausted. Of course, our Polish neighbors were the recipients of all the Jewish goods, for a fraction of their actual cost.

Food was generally smuggled into the ghetto through the following passages: Concealed doors leading to the Polish side; windows facing the outside; or unguarded spots in the ghetto's

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fences. All the smuggling, in or out, went through the watchful eyes of the Jewish militia. Naturally, they collected their profit from each transaction. All these enterprises were very dangerous and for many ended in jail, tortures and death.

One of the many smugglers was Leibke, the 11-year old son of Pinie, the cobbler, since their shanty was down on our Dombrowska Street, I knew Leibke well. He was fast, efficient, alert and daring. At dawn, Leibke would glide through a hole in the fences and disappear on the Polish side. Leibke came back with pockets and socks stuffed with butter, cheese and sometimes eggs. Leibke's family did not starve any more, Leibke knew how to make money. One day he made one false step and the Gestapo's bloody paws murdered Leibke. His was not an isolated case. Many of these young, daredevil smugglers, starved children were caught and brutally shot.

I still continued my trading outside the ghetto. After each venture, mother would cry with terror. "For God's sake, don't go out any more! Isn't there enough sorrow with uncle Motek and Andzia dead?" Motek Zloto and Andzia Kopf were seized on the Polish side and like many other Kielce Jews, were murdered by the Gestapo.

The fall of France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Norway did not inspire much hope for a quick end to the war. Father would say, "If these nations cannot withstand the Nazis, what could we

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possibly do without any weapons in such a hostile country?" When America entered the war in December of 1941, we rejoiced, but father. He grew obsolete, indifferent. He cut himself off the world by immersing himself in the Holy Books.

Mother remained the tower of strength, radiating warmth and cheerfulness. Her ingenious nature enable her to continue sharing our meals of potato soup with our cousins. We were rapidly heading downhill. The last of the jewelry was cemented into the kitchen wall and covered with plaster and paint. "It's for the real emergency," mother would say, and I wondered how much worse could it get?

It was becoming grimmer each day. All through spring and early in the summer of 1942, rumors about mysterious mass deportations reached our ghetto. In June, 1942, Moniek sent a Polish friend, Jan Chyla to Lublin, Celina's home town, to get some information about her family. Jan Chyla brought back shocking news. "Your wife Celina's entire family has been deported along with all the Jews of Lublin to an unspecified place. Some say to Majdanek Lubelski, but they are not certain."

Then other rumors gripped the ghetto, displacing others with rapidity. "In Warsaw," one said, "The Preses of the Judenrat committed suicide, and they are deporting Jews by the thousands!" "In Czestochowa," another said, that "There were mass killings." and so on and on.

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To begin with, we did not trust rumors that originated from the Poles; the general feeling was, "We know they dislike us. Jews. What they want is to undermine our morale." Furthermore, although the rumors were alarming they were still a distant away and so did not threaten our ghetto. We had perils hitting closer to home. Rumpel and Balhorn, aided by the demoralized informers, terrorized the ghetto. The slightest incitement was sufficient ground to be arrested and killed.

It was August 1942, when an avalanche of new rumors came down again and infiltrated into our ghetto. This time however, the rumors concerned our own ghetto and predicted its imminent liquidation. It brought on a general feeling of panic, hysteria and chaos. The rumors did not indicate as to how it would be carried out, since there were different versions about it: Each Jew had to contribute to the German industries, such as their war machine; in coal mines, in factories, construction, farming and work shops, All Jews were to be moved away. Each version was equally frightening and terrifying.

We were sitting in our garden, racking our brains in search of a way out of the trap. We neither had enough money nor the right connections to obtain false documents. None of our Polish friends offered any help to hide us. To escape without documents was sheer suicide. Even with false papers, a Jewish male

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was easily identified by his circumcision. The Polish spies, (szpicle) would spot a Jew easier than the Gestapo and they were on each corner. No other country in Occupied Europe was as eager to implement the "final solution" and exterminate the Jews as in Poland.

Feeling helpless, we experienced a shocking sensation of utter futility.

It was a balmy evening on August 21, when my cousin Kopek Zloto and his wife Sonia, came by. Excitedly he asked, "Did you hear the latest? The railroad workers at Terby were detained over night, adding extra rails for more cars to arrive." Then Yumek calmly announced, "The Gestapo," he said, "had passed strict orders to clean up the big lot at Jasna Street. The wheat had to be cut down in a hurry." A rather reserved man, Yumek hated sensationalism, and above all, he hated to worry us. "It may turn out to be a hoax, just a scare."

Hil Alpert, our neighbor, joined us later. "I am just back from the Judenrat^{he said} and I've never seen an atmosphere more charged. Levy was at the Gestapo, and Schindler was about to burst. Hilek Lewartowski told me of printing loads of counterfeit working papers." Hil, a rather phlegmatic and stoical man, looked alarmed. It was a rare occurrence for him, for he wasn't a man of emotions. Hil exclaimed, "It seems to me that there is a plausible foundation, serious enough to worry about."

LIQUIDATION OF THE GHETTO

That Wednesday night, the entire ghetto was gripped with a premonition of a giant storm coming our way. All night the alarmed people clustered the streets, wondering what to do. At dawn on Thursday, August 22, the first thunder struck: Platoons of armed Ukrainians and S.S. men surrounded the ghetto! At first, we did not realize the full impact of the shattering news. Raids, arrests and murder were our daily diet, which we lived with. Swiftly, Jewish policemen were running, frantically instructing people: "Pack up in a hurry, take your essentials and get ready!" One of them, Rudek Proszowski, looking very confused, made it clearer, "Get ready, we are all to be deported to Labor Camps, everyone will be leaving soon, hurry!"

The earth beneath me was trembling, yet my feet, as if nailed to the ground, would not move. Was it really happening to all of us? In bewilderment, I watched my mother busily packing the knapsacks for each of us; I admired her calm and stamina. She squeezed in a sweater, a pair of shoes, underwear, soap, a toothbrush and a piece of jewelry. *Shaking*, she said, "You will need it all!" Then softly she added, "God will protect us wherever we go." Despite the hot August weather, each of us put on triple layers of clothes and our heavy winter shoes. The winter coats were laying ready to carry on our way out.

Noon came and nothing happened. Right opposite our house, across the narrow road, there was an abandoned lot through which

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one had a good view of Nowy-Swiat Street. Something began to stir there. Several horse-drawn buggies pulled by, followed by the limping Rumpel and Balhorn, the infamous executioners from the "Schupo." Dressed in white, they were running back and forth, joined by more soldiers. More buggies kept arriving with people, hands and legs hanging down the sides. The streets remained deserted with a sort of silence that preceds a storm. The sounds of the horses hoofs and the wooden wheels banging against the cobbled stones, froze our blood.

Late that afternoon, the shocking nightmare became a tragic reality. News traveled from house to house, that the liquidation of the ghetto had already begun. It started at dawn of the same day, Thursday, August 22, 1942. The Rounding-Up-Project, called the first "Action," was carried out by the Gestapo, S.S. formation, Annihilation Squads and regiments of armed Ukrainians.

A selected number of streets were systematically cut off, such as Okrzeja, Zagajska, Jasna, and part of Star-Warszawska. Each house, corner, each crevice and hole were honey-combed for hidden Jews.

We were sitting in the garden praying for time to stand still, trying desperately to hold on to each precious second that ticked away. But time was moving fast. All through the night, we were in the little garden with our immediate neighbors, the Alpert, waiting. The tension became unbearable, overwhelming.

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We watched the sky lighten up gradually, the roofs and trees become clearer. The ominous dawn was drawing nearer. Celiņa sighed. "Any minute now," she said, "And they will be here for us." The sun appeared and they still did not come for us.

But that Friday, August 23, at dawn, they did carry out the second "Action," cutting off another chunk of the ghetto. It included, the rest of Staro-Waszawska, Silniczna, Kožia, part of Przedmiescie and Nowo-Warszawska. By then we had more information regarding the deportation. All the Jews were deported, except the skilled workers with working papers, the Judenrat 's staff, the militia men and the doctors, as well as their families.

In view of these facts, it was clear to us that except for Yumek and Moniek, we were sure to be deported. Yet, we still did not know where to and for how long. My mind refused to grasp and register all that was taking place. Too much was happening. Grandma was gone, all my uncles, aunts and cousins were deported, left without a word. And so were my friends and thousands of others. My little world was falling apart, just like a house of cards.

On the Eve of Sabbath, mother covered the table with a white tablecloth and said her prayers over the Sabbath candles. Despite the impending disaster hanging over our heads, a group of men from the neighboring cottages did not fail to show up in our garden. All through the summer evenings they would gather a "minyan,"

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the quorum of ten men necessary for public worship, and conduct services in our garden. Across the street, Rosenholtz the baker, ran out looking up and challenging God. His wife was dying from typhoid fever.

Saturday came. The streets were quiet. The buggies stopped coming to Passek's place, and it looked as if death took a holiday. We had no food in the house and no way of getting it. Since Thursday, August 22, every regulative structure in the ghetto had collapsed. The ghetto came to a standstill. The bakeries were shut, the rations were not being distributed and the Judenrat stopped functioning.

In the streets hungry people were scouting for food. Yumek and Moniek went digging into the vegetable patches of those who were already deported and found a few onions and cabbage leaves. Celina and I walked over to the Judenrat and found a few curious men wandering through the empty rooms. "Look," Celina pointing to some papers said, "They are made out to your cousins, Rozka and Regina Zloto, incompleated, fictional "working papers." Piles of these papers were scattered on top of the desks and on the floor. They came too late.

On the way home, Celina and I stopped near a group of people surrounding an old man. "Did you hear what they have done to all the hospital patients?" he asked. "All the sick and the crippled were given lethal injections of benzine. They have all been killed." Kalman Shaino, a man in the crowd, whom I knew,

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shouted, "Listen to me folks, we are all marked to die, we are already dead bodies walking around." He was waving his arms and cried, "Let's do something; can't you see that they have it all figured out, step by step, all carefully calculated to deceive us and to trick us into being killed? Listen!" he screamed, "Let's do something, the end of our world is right here, now!"

The crowd swelled. Someone asked, "Do what, with what?" Shloimele "baker" was shouting to the crowd, "I betcha Preses Levy can find out from the Gestapo where each transport of the deported are going. Why doesn't he tell us?"

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Walking home through Nowy-Swiat Street, Celina and I joined another cluster of people. Meyer Feigenbaum, a young man whom I knew, was standing in the middle of the crowd and in a shaking voice said, "Yes, I was caught with a whole crew of young Jews to do the burying of the killed Jews. We had to dump forty Jews into a hole filled with lime. There are piles of the dead. Rumpel and Balhorn and their pals forced us to remove the gold teeth and the nylon stocking of the dead. They passed strict orders to go easy with the stockings, so as not to tear the nylons." Then another man in the crowd added, "we did the burying at the Nadlesnictwo¹¹⁰, the area behind the little bridge of Planty and Przedmiescie Street, at Passek's place."

My head was spinning. I felt nauseous and could barely make it home. Basia Borkowska came over to say good-bye. She had cut her long black hair and her lovely face was drawn with red puffed eyes. Like the rest of us, she, too, had on layers of clothes and her heavy winter boots. "Tell me please," she asked, "Is it true, that the deportation is a real thing or am I dreaming? I think, I too, am losing my mind." She was sobing. "My brother Jacob, you know, went berserk and tried to cut his veins." We embraced and cried together. She asked "Where are we going? Will we ever meet again?" I never doubted it. We surely will, I replied, and no matter what, we shall stay in touch. No deportation was going to end our lifelong friendship.

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Sunday arrived. We were sitting in the garden and for the millionth time I asked myself, What was going to become of my family? While caressing Celina with his arm, Moniek was reflecting, "It's funny," he said, "I have never felt a stronger awareness of life than now. I always thought of life as something to be taken for granted; now I see it as a treasure to be cherished." Rasele said quietly, "I hope we'll be sent to the same place of work. I'd hate to be separated. You know me, I'm not too brave and I can't make it alone!"

Father looked sallow and pale. In a shaky voice charged with emotions, he said, "The war will end some day, but remember, wherever you'll go, keep up your faith and spirit! The Jewish day", he added trembling, "Begins at night, to symbolize the faith even in darkness; you'll see, light will prevail and a fine tomorrow will dawn upon us!" Yumek was holding my hand and I felt warm and secure near him. "The war has taken a better turn," he said, "Hitler's setbacks in Russia and the replacing of the Field Marshalls and top generals are indeed a good omen."

We sat there in the darkness, watching the fireflies, their tiny dots of light come and go. That night, August 25, 1942, was warm, with a gentle breeze rustling through the leaves. The stars came out as if nothing unusual was happening. The crickets were chirping, the frogs croaking and the air was scented with the sweet fragrance of maciejki. One wondered why the universe, like the rest of the world, was oblivious to our suffering? We knew by

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then that our turn in the last third "Action" was inevitable and imminent. And nothing, absolutely nothing was going to stop it.

Dawn came and with it came a commotion that grew louder by the minute. We were soon surrounded by madly barking hounds, hordes of S.S. men and armed Ukrainians. With their fingers on the machine guns, they ordered us out in the street. "Hurry, los, hurry! March ten in line and make it quick, los! Get moving, (Eilen Sie sich), faster, faster (schneller)!" I felt my vertebrae was about to fly off in splinters like parts of a busted clock.

Down on the street, Pinie the cobbler was slow in leaving his house. His small children were frightened and reluctant to move; Pinie had to drag them out. Pinie obstructed the march and was shot on sight. The lame, young Gutman was shot; the Henshiner Rabbi Goldberg fell down, shot. Fela Braun, Sladowski, Mrs. Konigsberg; the Hmelnike Rabbi Goldman, old Zlotogorski, so many shot; God, a crying baby in its mother's arms shot! People were falling down, some I knew, some I did not. Fragments of brains were flying in front of me while they did their killings with utter calmness and placidity.

We were marching quickly through the deserted streets. Though it was early, the sun came out brilliant and hot. With the winter coats on our arms and the heavy knapsacks on our backs, the sweat was rolling down our bodies in streams.

Beside us walked young, tall Germans, their foraging caps

DEPORTATION - THIRD ACTION

tilted on one side and their sleeves rolled up. In one hand they carried a gun, in the other a rubber whip. The dreadful insignia "S.D." Special Service (Sonder Dienst) on their arms, made me shudder with terror. These S.D. men had a reputation for being trained in the art of exterminating Jews. "Hurry, get moving." The hounds on our side would not stop barking and the shots were piercing my eardrums. "Los, Eilen Sie sich, los!" Half running and panting heavily, we approached Okrzeja Street. Freight cars were standing on the railroad tracks at Herby, and adjacent to them lay the open lot at Jasna Street.

"Beware" (Achtung), the S.D. men screamed and stopped short. "Hold (Halt), stop right here!" In front of us, forming a semi-circle, stood the Chief of the Gestapo, Tomas, his adjutants Hanish and Balhorn beside him, all poised to shoot. Next to them was "Shupo's" Hauptmann Geyer, Schafele, Tomschitz, Wurtz, Wolf-schleger, Roy, Rumpel. They stood there with their legs apart, in shimmering boots and spotless uniforms, holding in their hands whips and guns. To the side and to the back of them stood a platoon of heavily armed Ukrainians and S.S. units. They filled the horizon as far as one's eyes could see.

So this is it, I thought to myself. These self-appointed judges were going to decide the destiny of our lives. Through a haze I could hear from a distance, To the right, to the left, Rechts, Links! Children to the left, old people to the left.

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Right, left! Thousands of hammers were pounding into my brain:
This is your life, don't just stand there, do something!

A pregnant mother, leading her little boy, was shot and fell on top of him. Then another one .. and another .. "Rechts, links, to the right, to the left!" People were falling down in front of the wooden sheds and near the outhouses. The dead were lying pushed against a fence, their glassy eyes staring at the sky. Shooting, shooting, God, will it ever stop? The blazing sun, a white ball on fire, had also turned against us, it had never burned ^{any} hotter. The Germans removed their jackets in order to work faster.

Each person faced the "judges" for an inspection. The people who worked in plants or shops that were essential to the German industry and the ones from the Judenrat, walked quickly with some confidence. They possessed immunity papers, the "Arbeitsbescheinigungs". They were sure to walk to the "right." The people without papers, walked slowly, numbed and indifferent.

The line in front of me was getting shorter and thinner and I was nearing the "judges." "Ihre Beruf, Beschäftigung?" - (your occupation) they asked the woman in front of me. She shouted: "Selbständige Corsetnäherin!" and when my turn came I automatically repeated the same: "Self employed corsetiere!" and I too, went -- "to the right!" Dear Mom, make it please! Dad -- Dear God help us all! Rasele, Celina, Yumek, run, don't let them gun you down!

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Suddenly I was left with strange faces. I tried to squeeze through the inferno of the crowd, to get to my family, but they were gone and out of my sight.

Through the foggy mist, in the unbearable heat of the scorching sun, I heard satanic laughter and saw babies flying. They were being used for shooting targets and I saw a few infants crash against the fences. The S.S. men danced like demons and all hell erupted. They were firing and killing, yelling and barking, crying and screaming. These men had unleashed the reigns of their most demonic instincts and descended into barbarism.

In a haze of semi-consciousness, I heard orders being issued: "Get in line, march to the Synagogue! Get out, get into the tents, barracks!" Night came and another day arrived. Again, I stood in line and faced the same "judges" for yet another selection. They were again sifting through the crowd, processing and scrutinizing each person. "Rechts, Links, to the right, to the left!" Their rubber whips were cracking, cutting cheeks and heads. People were being set aside.

A group of Jewish militia men and their Commander Schindler were accused of a minor misdemeanor. They were lined up to be shot. After incoherent yelling and cursing by the Gestapo's Tomas, Hauptmann Geyer and Wolfschleger, only Shindler and Mydlarz were shot. Mydlarz's bride, Rozka, stood petrified and watched her husband die instantly, ^{his} brains scattered in the cobbled stones.

Again an order was issued: "March to Targowa Street,"

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and like zombies we formed a column and walked. "Get inside," somebody shouted. "For heavens sake, put on some lights. The carbide lamps, where are they?" I was slumped on my knapsack, lost in my sorrow, when I felt a strong arm grab me. My brother Moniek was in front of me, looking frantic and bewildered. We held on to each other without words, then we automatically began our search through the crowd in hope to find our family. We prayed for a miracle. Maybe they have been napping behind their knapsacks, worn out. We were searching over and again, but to no avail. Our family was gone, deported. Where to? Were they at least together? Would my dear father last?

A man I vaguely knew came over to me and said, "I was standing next to your husband, Yumek, when he was deported in spite of his working papers. You see, the quota of the processed, selected people exceeded the limit, so the surplus was cut off. He was among them." Moniek was brushing my arm, but I did not feel anything, not even sorrow.

After the selections, there were about 1600 of us who remained behind. Our group were composed of the Preses of the Judenrat, militia men and doctors with their families intact. There were also skilled workers with working papers and a few without papers. We were counted, assigned rations and living quarters at Jasna and Okręja Street, once a part of the ghetto.

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The Jews working in Hasag and H.K.P. were separated from us and barracked inside the places they worked.

Schindler was shot and Spiegel took his place as Commander of the militia. A refugee from Vienna, Spiegel was power hungry, egotistical, a German "boot licker" and an informer. His efficiency set things in motion. A wooden fence was hurriedly put up to isolate us from the Poles. No sooner did we put down our knapsacks, when Spiegel declared, "I want it understood, that if anything goes wrong, my head is at stake and I love my head."

Immediately Spiegel sent men to clean up the ghetto. A few days later, the women also joined the men in the ghetto. Since I remained as a corsetiere, without working papers, I was among the first women picked by the militia to work. We walked under armed guards through the empty streets of the ghetto. A dead silence hung in the air, thick with decay and buzzing flies.

The fateful lot at Jasna Street, the staging area "(Umschlagplatz)" and the main scene of the bloody "Actions," looked like a battlefield. Near the wooden sheds, outhouses and against the fences were pools of dried blood, covered with a locust of flies. Blood stained coats and knapsacks, hats, single shoes, prayer books, shattered eye-glasses and children's toys, lay scattered over the streets.

Nobody uttered a word, not a sound. Some of the women began vomiting, some stood agape, glassy-eyed, frozen masks instead

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of faces. We had become empty shells without human emotions. The German guard turned to us and said, "You women will do the sorting of the clothing!" In the following weeks, we worked at loading and unloading, then sorting out the mountains of clothing usurped by murder and deportations. People in our camp were estimating that about 1500 had fallen at these "Actions."

In the process of work, I learned a new trade, namely how to "organize," which was synonymous to steal. At first I found it revolting, repulsive, immoral and degrading. As I would watch a girl crawl beneath the piles of clothing and come out dressed in doubles, I promised myself, "never, never will I do it!"

I did not live up to my pledge. Moniek, prone to infections, had his old kidney troubles flaring up again. We needed money to buy drugs and to improve his diet. My ring and Moniek's watch were traded for white flour and then our coats were sold also. I was ready for "organizing." "First, put aside the clothes you want to take," Sala Szlamowicz advised me with authority. "But be careful and quick and I'll keep you covered."

The stench inside the piles of clothes made my stomach heave and I had to struggle to keep from vomiting. The fleas were crawling into my nostrils, eyes and ears. When I emerged dressed in triple slips, bras and panties, my heart was at my throat. "You'll do," Sala was whispering. She was a stocky, dark girl with

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eyes that never stood still.

One day Wurtz, the guard, caught Gretchen, a pretty Viennese girl, stuffing something inside her bust and had her arrested. Two days later, Gretchen was shot. From then on, we were more careful. On cool days we would go to work in just a dress and return fully dressed, in underwear, sweater, dress and coat. No more doubles.

When the Holy Days arrived, we worked as usual. My heart was craving for the festive spirit, the traditional atmosphere of praying and blessings. Would it ever return? Where was my family celebrating it? On a farm or in a factory? On Yom-Kippur Eve, Gertler and his three sons, the Eisenbergs, Moishe Grinspan, Moishe Levin, Srul Wakszlak, Meyer Feigenbaum, Jakubowski, the Golembiowski brothers, Zemel, the Mayerkewicz brothers, joined by others, conducted services on the empty lot within our camp. Some wrapped in their prayer shawls, were singing "Kol-Nidre" in a highly emotional state. Some of the women were lamenting.

It was at this time when two teenage boys from our town, Yosele Wasser and Moishe Mydlo, sneaked into our camp and startled us with a bizarre story. "We escaped from Tremblinka by being buried in a truck full of loot." They told the people. "All our Kielce Jews were deported to Tremblinka and all of them are dead. Believe us, we were there, in Tremblinka, with our Kielce Jews. Theirs was a trip without return, we know it. We saw there people being gassed and burned to ashes! No one will ever come

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back, never again."

The enormity of their shocking and terrifying story was preposterous, inconceivable to comprehend and impossible to believe. Spiegel was enraged with their tales but we, the people in camp, felt sorry for the boys. Poor boys, was the general reaction, their minds must've been twisted from fright to fabricate tales of such unspeakable horror. How could they kill all of our people? Total extermination? Why, it's impossible, just impossible.

And so it was discarded as a figment of the boys imagination. Still the disturbing facts remained. There had not been a single word of the Kielce Jews since their deportation. Why on earth were they so silent? Why hadn't one of them managed to send a word? Again the people attributed it to many logical obstacles. After all, this was a war against the Jews and subject to many restrictions.

Time passed on. Late in October 1942, I was sent to work for N.V.D. (National Org. To Help The War). I was joined there by Sonia Urbeitel-Zloto, my cousin by marriage, and Janka Stabholz-Goldfarb. Our task was to sort out and alter men's garments which had been looted from the ghetto. They were to be sent to the brave soldiers fighting for Germany. Instead, the choice garments wound up in the private trunks of Herr Zimmerman, the head of the Organization.

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Every night before leaving our shop in the basement, we would wrap a new man's shirt or underwear tightly around our waistlines. We were very careful about not looking awkward when the German guard escorted us back to camp. Late that night the Poles would come to the fences and we traded our "Chuhy" (a war-time surname for stolen, "organized" clothes) for food or money.

Things were quiet during the sorting period. Once it ended, sewing became necessary and our troubles began. The three brand new, electric sewing machines looked aliened and complicated. Sonia was the first to come out with the truth. "I have never done any sewing," she admitted, "I never had need for it." I then asked Janka, "How about you?" "You must be kidding," she said with her characteristic grimace of a spoiled child, "I've never handled a needle, let alone an electric sewing machine."

My mother used to have a Singer sewing machine with a foot pedal, and I did do some sewing, hardly enough to meet the requirements. It took some time to figure out how the machines were operated. "Let me try to do the cutting," Janka volunteered. She was fast with the scissors and would cut a garment to fit no one but a midget. Yet, as hard as we tried, we just could not produce a garment of professional stature.

When Herr Zimmerman would come down to check on us, we would be busy with a million things. Because the three of us were young and pretty, Herr Zimmerman instructed his maid to bring food down to us. Frau Zimmerman was not that considerate.

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"Du Kannst ja nur fressen!" (all you can do is eat) "Schweine, Dreck!" (pigs, shit) she would rage and throw things at us. Frau Zimmerman was middle aged, a tall, thin woman with bleached hair and wrinkled skin. "Fäule, verfluchte Juden!" (lazy, damned Jews) was her remark to whatever we did.

Before long, we were used as her housemaids. But we did not live up to her expectations and wound up in the brick yards. Sonia was soon transferred elsewhere and Janka and I were left, wondering what we could possibly steal (organize) there. We pushed the heavy loaded-down wheelbarrows and sweated excessively. Both of us were overweight.

Janka was twenty, with light, wheat colored hair and a fine, creamy complexion. She lived with her parents, both doctors, and her husband, Mietek Goldfarb, who was considerably older than she. Mietek was a tall, thin, mustached gentleman with impeccable manners. While pushing the heavy wheelbarrows, she would stop for a breath and talk, "In the one year we've been married, Mietek has been a gem of a husband."

It brought painful memories. "Cheer-up!" Janka would say with courage, "You will hear from your folks soon." So far no one was heard from. We were puzzled and in complete darkness about our families. Where were they? How were they getting along? Rumors persisted that they were all dead, while other rumors denied it. There was nothing concrete to hold on to or to believe

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in. Like a long, black shadow, the worries over their fate loomed and dominated our lives.

Life in camp consisted solely of lines. Morning lines to work, evening lines back to camp and lines for rations. Moniek and Jodidio (whose deported bride, Guta Erlich, was my close friend) and I, shared a tiny, rat-infested room, which had been used to store coal. The only window facing the Polish side, was permanently sealed off to prevent trading with the Poles. A carbide lamp exposed the chronically wet walls and sagging floor. Moniek and Jodidio brought sacks of sawdust back from their jobs; this served as fuel for the small tin stove with its outstretched pipes. It flared red hot long enough to have our meal cooked. When midnight came, we shuddered from the cold.

One night we heard weak moans coming from the room next to ours. As it turned out, Lola was having labor pains. For months, threatened by doom, (pregnant women were shot) Lola had bravely concealed her condition. Thus, when the pains came, she was courageous enough to keep as quiet as possible. Her husband, David Tauman, stood next to her bed, grasping a tiny, wooden box in his hand. When the baby arrived, he smothered the infant's first cry, placed its dead body into the box and walked out with it. Mania Rosenkranc, David's sister, standing at Lola's bedside, let out a sigh of relief, "Thank God," she said, "it's all over."

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Mania too, had just recovered from the same ordeal. Her baby was delivered during the last week in August while the "Actions" and deportations, were taking place. Poor Mania had been standing in line with the others, hemorrhaging internally and awaiting death! Overpowering discipline and the will to live kept her from collapsing. Mania's husband, Hilek, ran frantically begging the Gestapo to have mercy. Fortunately, Hilek was an engineer whose skills were needed by the Gestapo. Thus, instead of gunning her down, the Gestapo let Mania rest.

In December we heard from our cousins, Jakob and Moniek Zloto, who lived in Warsaw on false documents. Rosenberg, a tall, young dare-devil, was commuting as a Pole and luck was with him. He brought us good news. "Jakob," he told us, "is in hiding with his wife, Rozka and with Pawel Tauman. But Moniek is parading as a German officer in uniform and with a dog! Your false papers, cousin Moniek said, will be with you shortly, have your money ready!"

Moniek and I walked around with new hopes. The money we derived from selling the stolen "organized" stuff, we carefully hid in our straw mattress. Things looked promising until we returned from work one day and found our room ransacked. The window facing the Polish side had been broken into and all of our possessions, along with our hopes of escaping, were gone. After the robbery, Jodidio, who shared our room, turned bitter, he too lost all he had. Moniek walked around as if in a trance. Some-

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times he would console himself, "The robbery may have been a blessing in disguise and who knows, we may have been caught with the false papers and killed." I nevertheless, felt cheated of a chance to be free again!

A number of people did get a chance and began fleeing our camp. Some were lucky enough to get out, others were not. Hershel Goldberg, his son-in-law Wierzbinski and their friend Starkman were awaiting their false papers. They paid their Polish friends in advance and were promised a prompt delivery of the documents. Instead, the Poles instantly delivered "their Jews," to the Gestapo. Mundek Eisenberg was also set to join his wife, Rutka Isacs, already out on the Polish side. Again the Gestapo came, arrested Mundek, his brother Yakob and thier uncle, Hershel Eisenberg.

Still, there were people who had succeeded in escaping to Warsaw on false documents. Among them were: the Gdanskis, the Lapas, the Czajkowski sisters, Hela and Regina, Dorka Szydłowska, Berel Goldberg, Natka Wlodaver, Pesia Fried, Aba Urbach, the Jurkowski brothers and sister, Kaiser, and Calel Goldberg.

Like a boiling kettle, our camp was always steaming with news. One morning the Gestapo arrived in armed trucks and arrested the ex-Preeses of the Judenrat, Herman Levy, his wife, two sons and their wives. ^{The Szmulewicz brothers, close friends} ~~The~~ ^{were also arrested.} of Olek Levy and Joel Wolf Manela, / The seized people were soon

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seen driven towards the old Jewish cemetery at Pakosh. The next day, gruesome tales were spread by the Polish residents near Pakosh. "The arrested Jews," they said, "displayed courage and fortitude, but were all machine-gunned." Swiftly, as if by wireless, the shocking details of their death reached our camp.

A week later Herman Kopel and his wife Lola, were arrested for selling their typewriter to a Polish "friend". They too, were taken to the cemetery and brutally shot. Dobroszycki, a policeman, and his wife, were the next victims of the bloody terror. They too were arrested and shot.

In the early spring, on the Jewish festival of Purim, the Gestapo struck again. A column of armed trucks (Specialwagons) arrived in camp and all the doctors and their families were ordered to get inside it. Only Dr. Reiter, his wife and their little girl, were left behind. To avert any sort of resistance, the Gestapo used their old trick of deceiving and gave the doctors an excuse for the necessary "resettlement." Numb with panic, the doctors and their families entered the trucks, filled with armed soldiers. Except for Dr. Levenson, the gynecologist, all the seized people were young and full of life.

Again the Poles watched the 36 arrested Jews ride towards the Jewish cemetery and again the details of the newly committed atrocities, filtered into our camp. All the doctors and their families were killed in cold blood, then dumped in a common grave.

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The rope around our necks was getting tighter. Everyone in camp wondered, how were we going to escape the premeditated, calculated butchery? Everyone in camp agreed on one and only solution: Join the partisans! But, the partisans were killing our boys who ran into the woods and robbed them of their guns. "Those goddamned Home Army (Armja Krajowa), Polish bloody bastards," the men would explode with impotent rage. "Why, it is obvious, that they have instructions from their superiors to kill the Jews."

As ill-luck would have it, typhus was another killer, raging in our camp. Among the many victims was Zaharia Gertler and my cousin, 15-year old Leibeke Berlinski.

This atmosphere of constant perils around us, created a desperately carefree attitude. Damn it all, was the general reaction. Hell with the old ethics and values. All that counts now, brother, is vodka! So drink the whiskey brother, and drown your sorrows in it!

When I first met Shmul Bialistok, it amazed me to see how much of vodka he could consume. Shmul was an outgoing man who enjoyed to share his drinks with others. With his friendly offer, "Come-on, let's have a Schnapps," he made friends fast. Although some would have refused his offer, they hesitated and so drank the vodka to avoid offending him. Shmul was the foreman (Gruppenfuhrer) of the Jewish workers in Ludwikow and could do one a favor.

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One night while having a chat with Moniek, Shmul watched him choke on his dry cough and asked, "How would you like to share my place? I have two large, sunny rooms and one can be yours for the asking." Afraid he would change his mind, we jumped at his offer and we moved in immediately.

For some time rumors were circulating, that a possible liquidation of our camp would take place. Late in March, and continuing throughout April and the first part of May 1943, a few hundred of our men were transferred to munition factories in Skarżysko, Starachowice and Blizyn. Spiegel, who was motivated by his own interests, never picked the inflated opportunists who fed his ego. He either transferred those who were a threat to him, or the young boys and the quiet, "little" men.

Then on a clear, warm day on May 29, 1943, armed Ukrainians surrounded our camp and ordered us to line up in a lot within the camp. Once again we faced the same beasts from the Gestapo and "Schupo." They were reinforced by formations of the killing squads (Einsatzgruppen).

First they forcibly separated the 43 children from their terror stricken parents. The children's age ranged from three to ten years old, yet they were matured way beyond their age. In utter desperation, the children's parents weeping, pleaded with Geyer and his companions, "Have mercy, please, don't take our children away from us!" In sheer agony, they knelt in front of

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their tormentors. A few of the older children stepped forward and they too begged, "We are big and strong, we too can work. Please, please, don't take us away!"

Panic, fright, vexation, pain and anguish were etched in their small faces. Despite the children's heartbreaking cries, and screams for help, they were locked up in a house near us. Soldiers with automatic weapons in their hands were placed to guard the child-prisoners.

We were divided into groups according to the type of work we did. This time, those lucky in demand were the workers from Ludwikow and Henrykow. Shmul Bialistok, the foreman of the Jewish workers there, gained instant prominence.

Moniek and I were placed in a group to be sent away. I wondered how Shmul will act. I should have swallowed by intense dislike for him but accepted the "new code of morals" as a way to survive. "Herr Hauptmann!" I heard Shmul addressing Geyer, "Please, let me wife stay with me." Quickly, without hesitation, he pulled me over to his side. He then ran again, pulled out my brother and lied again, stating that my brother was a highly qualified tool maker who knew his trade inside out. We remained there, while the rest were sent to munition factories, in Pionki.

Out of seven hundred remaining, half went to Henrykow, the twin factory branch. Moniek and I were among the other half

ENTER LUDWIKOW and HENRYKOW

and went to Ludwikow. Both plants produced wagons for war use and were situated close to each other. Otto Glattstein, a strapping, muscular refugee from Vienna, headed the Jewish militia in Ludwikow. Spiegel performed the same in Henrykow. Otto lined us up and reported to the head watchman, "Herr Mack, there are three hundred and fifty of us!" Herr Mack, a moon-faced, heavy-set and pompous man, looked us over and said, "You will stay in the hayloft, till the new barrack is completed." Holding the leash of his German shepherd, he watched us climb up the ladder into the dust and hay to our new living quarters.

The next day, the Polish workers brought spine-chilling news to the plant. All the children were murdered the day of their arrest. The residents in the area of the Jewish cemetery at Pakosh have found their fresh graves. The battered little bodies were hardly covered, a sickening evidence of the committed crimes.

Two days later, the Jewish militia brought three petrified boys into our camp. The children, Shlomo Zablocky, Warski and Zyto, who were part of the 43 children in the little house, buried themselves in a dark hole in its attic. Though they heard men cleaning the house and speaking Yiddish, they were afraid to crawl out in the open. The children remained safe with us.

A week later we had our first casualty. Shmiel Blumenfeld, working at the ramp, had severely injured his legs. Herr Mack ordered Renia Konigsberg, the nurse among us, to give Blumenfeld a lethal shot. With trembling hands, Renia put him to "sleep." Eli,

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Blumenfeld's fourteen year old son, watched the mercy killing and collapsed. At night our men formed a "minyan" and recited a prayer for the dead man.

One night the Gestapo raided our hayloft, picked up all the husky, handsome males and lined them up against the wall. It looked as if they were about to be shot. Panic set in. Fortunately, it was just one of the Gestapo's sadistic games, and the men were sent to unload the wagons.

The new barrack smelled of fresh cut pine. It was large and airy with two rows of doubledeckers. They twenty married couples occupied one corner to insure some privacy. Balbina Koltacz and Berel Shulman took over the kitchen and turned horse meat, kasha and lentils into tasty meals. Balbina was a small woman with a big, warm smile. "Come-on boys," she would say with compassion, "Have an extra portion and stay fit. We are going to survive this way, you know."

Both working plants had identical living conditions, with Herr Hertch as its main director. Though a member of the Storm Troops (Sturm Abteilung) Hertch was a liberal of the old school. Hertch was the first German official to treat us as humans. He tried to convince his superiors, that the well fed worker was more productive, and thus, we were never hungry or cold.

Hertch respected Bialystok enormously and I wondered which of Shmul's qualities have contributed to it. Shmul Bialistock

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was conscientious, a simple man, tall, wiry and happy-go-lucky. He could be easily influenced, he possessed a heart of gold and was well liked in camp. Shmul hated worries, and was always ready for a laugh. "Think positive, brother, always positive." His obvious attention toward me had a negative affect, making me quite miserable. Moniek and I were deeply indebted to him for his help and pledged to remember it, but Shmul expected more.

Though life in camp was regimented, it was not completely disastrous. A number of desperate Jews from various hide-outs, would sneak in to our camp. One of them, a young girl, whose pregnancy was too obvious and beyond help, was arrested and shot. Dr. Reiter did perform abortions. It was done in the middle of the night, in his dimly lit partitioned off corner of the barrack.

Dr. Reiter, the only doctor alive, would attend the sick without reporting it. Since the list of the inmates had to be checked and counted, Shmul and Otto would bribe Herr Mack with tobacco and compliments. This pleased his ego. Herr Mack and his dog craved flattery, thus, major crises were prevented by catering to their vanities.

August 1943 marked the first year of deportation. It was a year of torturous, puzzling silence and bizarre rumors. What really happened to our families? We were beginning to believe that something was terribly wrong. But what was it? Though

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their silence brought the people closer together, a black cloud hung over our heads, marring our lives.

In camp, we inmates, formed a committee which sent money to our people in Pionki through friendly Poles. We were also informed that the Gestapo murdered Rubinek, Silber, Lacks, Hershel Gertler, Lederman and Szlamowicz. Mark Manela, Jonas Chmielewski and Leibke Rosenberg, who sneaked in to our camp from Pionki, were seized and sent to Grosshosen in Germany. Itchele Enoch and Haim Bialobroda who fled Pionki, were arrested in our camp and returned to Pionki for execution. The Frydman brothers, Motek and David, were gunned down while fleeing Pionki. Heniek Mincberg was caught in the woods and his body dismembered, mutilated by the Poles. Death was on a rampage, thinning our lines.

Winter came bringing heavy snows and icy weather. Yet our barrack was warm and friendly. When evening came, everyone cooked either close to their beds, or outside the barracks on improvised grills. The cooking was done on single burners which were made out of tin and lit by wood alcohol. Cooking was forbidden, yet Herr Mack did not notice the burners or smell the frying. Sometimes Rachmil Luft would sing, "Dos stadtele brent, briders, es brent!" while others would clean their beds and their clothes.

Suddenly the relaxed atmosphere came to an abrupt end. Herr Mack was replaced by a new watchman, Herr Grumprich. The new

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head watchman had narrowly slit eyes which gave him a porcine appearance. Like a trained dog, he sensed the loopholes and did not waste time in correcting them. He and the Gestapo would appear from out of nowhere and like worms, would burrow into each crack and crevice of the barracks. They found Frydman's young wife pregnant and shot her. The sick had to be reported. The rations were cut; the cooking stopped and the outside passes minimized.

One freezing night, Grumprich lined us up outside. Waving a gun in his crippled hand, (the three middle fingers of his right hand were not functioning) he made us lie face down in the snow. With an echoing rage, he would trample back and forth on our backs and swear under his breath. Above, the sentries were looking down at the scene, ready to shoot anyone who dared get up.

Right outside our plant, stood a little Polish grocery, a place where our boys would sneak, away from work, to buy a roll or an apple. One day the watchman laid ambush for his prey and called the Gestapo. Motek Gertler escaped the trap, while Artur Hytler, Haskel Holcman, Weinreich and Frydman were arrested, and a few days later, shot.

In Henrykow, another tragedy occurred. Yankele Zylberberg, the sanitation man, pleaded with Spiegel, the Jewish Commander there, not to use the highly flammable chemical for disinfection. "It is dangerous," Yankele warned Spiegel, "It must not be used."

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Spiegel ignored him and a fire started in the plant for which Yankele was blamed. Spiegel did not try to defend Yankele when Fuss, the S.S. man, had Yankele arrested for sabotage.

The next day Essig, the Gestapo man, had ordered Otto Cynadler and Feinmesser, two Jewish militia men, to perform Yankele's hanging. They refused, but were threatened with their lives. On the platform, Yankele called out loud: "Remember brothers, avenge!" He then embraced Otto and told him, "I forgive you, it is not your fault!" Within minutes he was dead and buried in the back of the barrack.

A few weeks later, three young Zajonczkowski brothers and their friend Sevek Shwarcberg (Plato), fled the camp. Heniek Jasny and Tishler, followed their footsteps. Spiegel notified the Gestapo, who formed a posse equipped with hounds. They caught up with the boys, killing Jasny, Tishler and one of the brothers.

Again in grave silence and with sublime courage, the other three boys were executed. For 24 hours, the three limp bodies hung from the scaffold in order to convey a message of warning to the daring. A platoon of soldiers with their fingers on automatic weapons, never left the scene. The boys were buried near the barrack.

The next victim was Pinkusewicz. He was sick and could not go to work at the plant. So Gimsa, the Polish director, notified Herr Grumprich, who in turn called the Gestapo. Pinkusewicz

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was seized and shot. Herr Hertch was away. Upon his return, he had the sadistic watchman replaced. The new man was a skinny, short fellow with a monocle dangling from his breast pocket.

In July 1944, rumors were spread by the Polish workers that Italy had collapsed. There was talk of Allied success in pushing the Germans back. But the most exciting were the rumors of the rapidly approaching Russians. While the Poles cursed the hated "goddamned Bolsheviks," we, the Jews, welcomed anyone who would set us free. Soon other rumors had it that our camp was about to be liquidated. The air became charged like electricity.

The general feeling was, now or never. People began to be missed at the Zehlappels, fleeing into the woods. Many of our men were purchasing guns from the Poles, which were outdated, ancient weapons. Armed with one of these pistols, Broniek Zelinger and Zelig Wasser quietly slipped out of camp.

It was then that a possibility of escape manifested for my brother. It took the form of a one-sided affair. Helena Konat, a young Polish assembly worker at the plant, fell in love with Moniek and offered him help. Moniek felt uneasy about it when he told me about it. Helena knew that Moniek loved Celina, nevertheless she was willing to hide out my brother in her home, till the war was over. Under no circumstances would Helena's family jeopardize their lives to help me.

I was then, to leave for the woods as it was originally planned. On a sunny morning in July 1944, I saw Moniek leave

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the plant Ludwikow. Obtaining a pass, he headed straight to Helena's house at Bodzentynska Street. That night Helena appeared at the camp's gate and nodded to me, assuring me that Moniek was safe. Though I was lonely and scared without my brother, I was overwhelmed with joy that he was safe. Besides, soon I, too, would be out. But my plans were changed when Shmul returned to the barrack after a talk with Hertch. Shmul was smiling and more cheerful than ever.

"Listen, everyone," he said with excitement, "Listen what Hertch has just confided in me. He assured me, we will be safe, we are to be sent to munition factories in Gleiwitz. Germany, ^{he} He says, needs laborers and we are the right element. It's a sure thing, I can bet my life on it." Shmul had a way of making everything look positive. This time however, his optimism was justified, for we trusted Hertch. He was good to us, he was a man of his word.

It was then, that a few of our men who fled into the woods were killed again by the partisans. Among others were Strawczynski, Aisig Zylberberg and Kreisman. The Poles brought the victims guns back to the plant and tried to sell it again to the Jews.

I began having second thoughts about fleeing camp. Then, like a storm without warning, Moniek suddenly appeared in camp. I was flabbergasted to hear him say, "Look, it did not make sense

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for me to be hidden there without you, we will have to make it together." There was no "but," nor "maybe," this was his final decision.

Within a few days, both plants were shipping all their materials, finished wagons and all, deep into Germany. This again confirmed the rumors of the approaching Russians. Tension mounted in camp. Frantically, we searched for a safe hideout. Three adolescent boys, Przygorski, Zylberberg and Hamek Gertler, dug a small tunnel in the cellar of the Werkschutze, in our plant, and secured with food, hid inside. Motek Gertler, Hamek's older brother and Motek Twerski, tried to join them, but were caught and brought to Hertch. Again Hertch proved to be the old liberal, by covering up for the two boys. (The three boys in the cellar however, were caught later and shot.) Julek Finkelman, who was stuck in a hole, left his hideout for the safety of our camp.

My knees were weak and my stomach was twisting when the final counting ended. We were escorted by armed guards to the plant's loading platform and its railroad tracks. It was August 1944, and there I was, facing yet another' crossroad. Like cattle, we were squeezed into open freight cars and soon the train was racing towards an unknown destination. I watched the sleeping towns, tranquil villages and rivers; all peaceful and still in the warm summer night. Engraved in my mind were days and nights of another August, in 1942 when our families were separated. When

our lifelines were severed and when all our foundations collapsed, burying beneath it everything that gave meaning to life.

"Stop worrying!" Moniek kept saying, "With the Russians in our footsteps, freedom can't be too far away." Moishe Levin added, "They will not harm us now, they need our skills and manpower." Shmul sitting opposite me on his knapsack replied, "Why, of course, no need to worry. Hertch has never deceived us, why would he do it now?" Young Vovek Manela asked in a timid way, "Hertch is a S.S. man, isn't he? As I see it the only true good German is a dead one!" "You said a mouthful," agreed Srul Cymerman, "Only a dead German can be trusted."

We watched each passing road sign and station carefully. "It does not look to me like the road to Gleiwitz," Hershel Opatowski remarked. "You are damn right, it does not," Spiegel agreed with alarm in his voice. "We should have traveled in another direction." He was more frantic than the rest, his clothes were stuffed with a fortune accumulated in dirty deals. Everyone was terrified with the unexpected news. The married couples, gripped by the fear of a possible separation, clung tightly to each other.

Suddenly, the train stopped. There was no station, only railroad tracks. A tremor ran down my back, and I grew rigid. My heart began to pound against my chest like a steel hammer. "Looks kind of spooky," Ziuta Kugelmas said shaking. "Where are the munition factories," asked Yankele Golembiowski.

OUT OF LUDWIKOW -- HENRYKOW

In the dark, we were greeted by an orchestra playing soft music. "Get out!" (Herausgehen) We had arrived at the ramp and were standing on the sidings. Men in striped outfits and round, brimless caps came near us. "Shalom!" one greeted us, "Where are you from? This is Birkenau, Auschwitz, you know, you must've heard about it." Someone asked him, "Is it true about people being gassed here and burned to ashes?" The man in the stripes answered, "We are absolutely forbidden to talk about it."

ENTER BIRKENAU -- AUSCHWITZ

All at once a foul and nauseating odor in the air penetrated our nostrils, overpowering us with the impact of an exploding bomb. Like a bolt of lightning with a blinding flash, the strong odor of burned bodies brought the sudden realization of a terrifying fact: People were being burned. Thus, all the rumors that had circulated for the past two years and, everything J. Wasser and M. Mydlo told of, was true! People did burn, our families had been burned, and we were brought there to be burned also! The instinct of preservation stirred in me. I did not want to die, yet I did not care to live. My head felt strange, light and cold.

I was squeezing my brother's hand with all of my strength. Armed S.S. men came over and tore us apart. When we tried to hold on despite them, they brutally kicked us away. Escorted by soldiers, we were led to a building and ordered to deposit our clothes and knapsacks in one pile and discard our jewelry into another. Men in striped outfits, led by a man with a sign on his arm "Capo," quickly began sorting out our clothes. (We learned later, they belonged to the "élite" kommando "Canada," which handled the gold and diamonds

We were then pushed into a room by the S.S. women, where they X-rayed our vaginas, rectums, tongues and teeth for hidden diamonds. In desperation Sala Krel and Sala Zagajski swallowed their diamonds, that were hidden under their tongues. Next we were handed a cake of soap and herded into the Washroom (Zauna), the chamber of horror, which according to the rumors, was the fatal

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gassing place. Death seemed to lurk from behind the sign on its door: (Reinlichkeit is Gesundheit) Cleanliness is good health. Inside the chamber, nothing looked suspicious; the shower heads were attached to the ceiling with vents next to it; yet I felt my heart stop and a violent sickness arose in my stomach. When the massive doors were shut tight behind us, we began to scream. Panicky and shocked out of my wits, I said my last prayer, Shma-Israel, the Vida and waited numbly for death. Instead, a small stream of cold water came down from the ceiling. It was an unexpected impact which shook my numbed body; I felt the saliva pouring slowly into my mouth from my knotted glands.

Trembling with chills, I was rushed out with the others and again lined up. A woman with a cannister poured some burning stuff over our bodies and clipped our hair. We were thrown some rags and wooden clogs. Afterwards, they lined us up again and marched us outside. The morning light stretched across endless rows of uniform barracks, encircled with barbed wire and high towers. In front, a sign: "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Brings Freedom), greeted our transport. The camp was guarded by the units of "Totenkopfverbände" (Death Head Units). We were in Birkenau, the transient place for all incoming transports on their way to the crematorium.

Escorted by the armed guards, the women were marched to the Family Lager B-2b. bordered on one side with Lager A for men and on the other side, with Lager C for Gypsies, all divided by high

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voltage fences. There a young, blond Czech inmate, Sally, took over and led us to a barrack #20, of which she was the "Blockälteste" (Supervisor), in Lager jargon: a Blokowa. Sally's first encounter with us turned out to be typical of her personality. "Walk, don't crawl, you dirty Polish swines!" she growled at us in her throaty voice, using a distorted conglomeration of German, Czech, Hungarian and Polish words. "You think you're safe now? Hah, don't you worry, girlies, I'll help you burn sooner than you think!" We walked into a nightmarish bedlam of shrieking, weeping, vomiting, children's cries mixed with hysterical laughter and laments. Since it was unventilated, the air in the block had a sickening stench. Every kind of human odor had polluted its misty interior.

The block looked like a stable for horses. The tiny openings below the ceiling did not let in air or light. Three tiered bunks were built along both sides of the dank, long walls. The crush of collapsing bunks added to the deafening turmoil. On one side, there was a door leading to a room which turned out to be Sally's luxurious quarters.

Swinging her club, Sally turned to the 86 Kielce women in our group, "You there, Polish bitches, get on your beds and make them fast!" She pointed at two tripple deckers, our new living space. Twelve girls were squeezed onto one bunk, half to lay in the headside and half in the footside. The loose straw and

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the shredded army blankets were contaminated with all kinds of vermin: louse, flea, bed-bug, roach, etc. It was impossible to stand, to move, or sit. I lay squashed between Janka and Cecylia Skorecka. Tall and bony, Cecylia had a sharp wit that matched her tongue. "Move over!" she grumbled, "You are not exactly in Hotel Polski, you know!" Next to her lay tiny Dzidzia, a slim, auburn haired girl with the delicate features of a Dresden doll. She looked small and forlorn. Literally on top of her, was the plump, short Andzia Uszerowicz. Next to her was slim, quiet Mania Liberman and alongside of her, the hot-tempered Sala Szlamowicz.

At the footside were Matele Rosenwald and Pola Winiarz, both small and easy mannered; next to them were Balbina Kolatacz and Dorka Enoch, two sensible girls. Then the two sisters, Eva Munstug and Bronia Klienbergl. Both were slim and rather introverted, but with long limbs. In fact, things would not have been so bad, had it not been for the extremities. The arms and legs were positively a nuisance and in the way.

Large iron kettles were brought in by the female inmates, the Esskommando (Unit working in the kitchen), who distributed bitter, lukewarm "Ersatz" (imitation) "coffee" to us. No sooner did we finish the "coffee," when Sally and a staff of inmates began chasing everyone out of the Block. "It is cleaning time, out!" Sally was enraged and foamed at the mouth. "Out!" Her stick would land at random on the fleeing women, shapeless, staggering

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forms, spilling out into the narrow strips between the Blocks.

After a while someone in our group said, "Looks like we will be stuck here for a while, so we might as well find the outhouse." The outhouse (Latrine) was guarded by "seasoned" inmates, who formed a human chain blocking its entrance. Hordes of women jammed the front and I felt as if I was floating in the middle of the sea, being carried by waves. When I finally made it inside, I had to resort to my elbows to find a spot.

At noon the Esskommando came near our Block with large kettles of watery soup. It consisted of potato peels with slices of turnip and cabbage. Sally watched the distribution, ran around cursing profanely and lashing out with her club. Hardly anyone in our group ate the soup. The shocking experiences of the last day had not fully registered with me. My head was spinning and when I closed my eyes, my mind played tricks on me. I saw mother, Rasele, Yumek, Celina. I heard father's voice: "Keep up your faith and spirit!" and Moniek's words: "Endure it, please!"

Hours passed but we were not allowed to enter the Block, the helpers were still cleaning it. Then the Lager-siren signaled the evening roll-call and we formed lines right between the Blocks. The "seasoned" inmates pushed us out of the front lines and Sally screamed in her distorted slang. It took her a long time to count us, then she handed the list to the Lager-Capo, who turned it over to the S.S. women ("Aufseherki"). Finally they distributed the daily

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rations to the inmate in the front line, who handed it out to the five girls in back of her. The ration consisted of ten ounces of stale, coarse, black bread, one ounce of margarine and one square packet of jelly per person. There, I realized what had made the "seasoned" inmates push us out of the front line, they would be left with extra crumbs.

Again the Lager-siren screeched: Locked in the Block! "(Blocksperra)" again I climbed onto my bunk. Extreme weariness took over and we began squeezing, twisting and tossing around to find the right position which would enable us to fall asleep. The girls on the bed groaned, grunted and pleaded: "Take you knee off me! Your elbow is piercing my stomach! Heck, you are choking me!" Once more Sally put in her appearance. Dressed in a lovely negligee and high-heeled slippers, she ran up and down the Block, with a club in her hand, raging in a fury, "Quiet, you bitches, I swear I will make mince out of you, so you burn quicker!" Before drifting into sleep, I heard Janka's warning, "We better hide our bread, or they will steal it."

Outside, the Lager-siren signaled, Quiet time! "(Lager-Ruhe)" and the turmoil was slowly dying down. For a short spell it was peaceful, except for the shots outside that sounded menacingly near and clear. We knew that dawn was breaking when the piercing whistle of the messenger "(Lauferka)" disrupted the stillness and signaled the beginning of the new day. People in the bunks began to stir and Sally, fully dressed, would run up

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and down the Block screaming, "It's Roll-call (Zehllappel) time! Out everyone, out!" and the daily routine began once again.

Desperately craving to wash off the filthy, itchy feeling after the night on the berth, and despite warnings (it was against rules), a few girls set out to find the Washrooms. I again had to swim through a sea of thousands of women pushing in every direction. There, again the "seasoned" inmates had the upper hand. The Wash-room was a large, dark wooden shed, full of women battling to get under the icy showers. There was no soap and nothing to dry with. A chunk of the clay floor served as a cleaning agent.

A few days later, we had our left arms tatoed, and I became number A-16355. Next I had to attach a yellow and red triangle to my sleeve, which identified my "crime" of being a Polish Jewess. The Gypsies had a black triangle; the homosexual non-Jew a pink triangle and the political non-Jew carried a red, white and black triangle. Our backs were penciled with red X-ses.

Janka with a solemn expression on her face, announced in a formal, official tone, "I hereby declare your civil status established. As of now you cease to have a name and became a number." And so we were branded and incorporated as inmates in Birkenau, Auschwitz.

Each day we would learn more about Lager-life. Behind the barbed wires of Lager C., flowed a sea of men, emaciation written on their faces. "Watch out," they shouted when we neared

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their fences. "Stay away or they will shoot! You must be new, you look too good! How far are the Russians?" They were eager to talk. "They say, the furnaces work in two shifts, but can't swallow all the transports. Too many are coming. We just got new loads of Hungarians, tens of thousands of them" Then they warned us again, "Watch out for the guards, don't come any closer!"

When we left the men, Lola Kreisman, a lovely red-headed girl, said grinning, "Well, girls, at least we know now the reason for our temporary stay of execution." Fela Perla, one of our girls with the "down-to-earth" attitude, told her soberly, "Come on, we are alive and alive we can have hope!"

As each day passed, I grew adjusted to the lice eating my flesh, to the tiring roll-calls and to the unhuman sleeping conditions. But I could not cope with hunger. When noon came, my intestines turned inside out, driving me insane and blocking all my thinking abilities. I would watch with envy when girls attacked the soup kettles, battled for a potato or dared to stay in line twice for a double. "(Zulage, repeté)"

Those were risky ventures. Mania Liberman, a soft spoken girl, was captured by the female guard (Aufseherka). As punishment, Mania was emptying holes filled with urine mixed with mud, using her coffee cup. When she tried to relieve the agony of her sore back, she was whipped till she collapsed. Matele Rosenwald, a frail girl, was standing a whole day facing a wall. Her hands were up

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and a carrot was inserted in her mouth. There was a variety of punishments. ('Strafe') Some knelt for days on rough pebbles, with hands up. Some had pebbles inserted in their mouth with hands up until they fainted; others had to push wagons loaded with stones.

The "Strafe" was frightening, but for the first time in my life I was thinking with my stomach. My mind would forever visualize images of food, of what I would like most to eat. The mere thought of food made me mentally massage my salivary glands. One night I woke up with excruciating hunger pains. They were drilling, twisting and sticking like million pins in my intestines. My rations were gone and I had to wait another twelve hours for the next meal at noon. No, I said to myself determinedly, I will not wait, no matter what.

It was pitch dark in the Block, I climbed down from my upper bunk and felt my way towards the exit, where the waste pails full of excrement were standing. Outside, the reflectors of the watchtowers were rotating the area, lighting up the Lager and the fine drizzle. I laid flat on my stomach on the marshy, swampy, wet ground and waited for the beam to turn away. I knew exactly where the kitchen's garbage was piled up and was crawling towards it. Watch out for the footsteps, -my brain signaled as I cautiously moved forth. The muddy ground was slippery beneath me, but I kept moving. Feeling my way with the palms of my hands, I touched

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a warm body. "That way," I heard the body whisper. "Can't you hear the footsteps?" My heart was beating wildly. Distant whimpering of a child and then moaning and weak cries for help cut the stillness. I must have passed the Morgue Block, I thought. A flash of light again came my way and I lay still. It was raining hard when I reached the garbage heaps. The kitchen was lit, the nightshift was at work. There was no guard around.

I snatched a bunch of rotten cabbage leaves and potato peels, stuffed them in my bosom, and headed back towards the Block. I was not more than 1,000 yards away when a gun discharged and froze my blood. The guard must have stepped on a crawling girl, I said to myself silently. Trembling with shock I felt my body for a possible wound. I lay motionless, afraid to move, until the "Lauferka" signaled the morning roll-call. She was running through the Lager-street, blowing her sharp whistle over and over again. When the masses of women began pouring out in the darkness, I dared to pull myself up and joined the crowd.

Days turned into weeks and hunger began showing its marks in our group. Bones cut through the waxy skin, the cheeks became hollow, and the eyes hid behind bags. We learned to distinguish a typhoid louse from a harmless one. It was no longer revolting to collect lice by the handful and kill them. Due to gained experience in Lager-life, the daring girls managed to "organize" a repeté, a potato or knife. They would carry the pails of excrement; they would sweep Blocks and the street with tiny rags, crawling

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on their knees. Then Genia Gutman, a bright girl with a sense for business, outfoxed the "seasoned" Hungarian inmates and found work in the kitchen. It was not an easy feat, but it was the only source to "organize" food, the inmates' ^{and} foremost dream.

Tecia Grinberg wound up as a clerk "Schreiberka".

Tecia was a young, energetic woman with bright, dark eyes and fine features. She would display presence of mind no matter what the situation, and she had a way of handling people. Boldly and brazenly she offered her services to Sally. "Why don't you let me help you?" she asked calmly, to which Sally retorted, "Why, you contemptible Polish swine! Get out of my way or I'll kill you!" Tecia would not give up, and before long she efficiently handled the list of the 1,300 inmates of our Block.

Tecia also handled Sally shrewdly and made it possible for Sala Feder and Mania Rosenkrantz to become Sally's dressmaker and housekeeper, which meant extra food. Both Sala and Mania were very pretty girls, alert and perceptive. They in turn, helped Regina Proszowska-Minc to sing for Sally. Regina was once a music teacher with a trained soprano voice. Ever since Regina had lost her 6-year old daughter in the mass murder of our children in 1943, her mind had been blank. She was totally unaware of her surroundings and had to be guided like a baby.

Eventually a few more of our girls managed to get an extra soup. Sala Krell, Bronia Gola-Gurewicz, Sala Rabsztein, Pola

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Goldlist, Franka Honigman and I cleaned the Blocks as stubowas (helpers). When an inspection was to take place, we would switch all the shredded blankets to brand new ones. However, no sooner did the commission leave than we would reverse the procedure. The competition in securing work was tough and soon our jobs were taken by stronger fighting inmates.

Little by little our hunger pains became duller; in fact, eating brought on nausea. Hunger began to bring out the animal instinct in some of the inmates, It turned them into vultures even so among close relatives and friends. No sooner did one collapse than her bread-bag (boitel) was swiftly snatched away. For a mere soup, the unscrupulous male Capo (Supervisor) would sexually exploit the very young girls or boys picked from each transport of doomed people that were arriving in Auschwitz. These Capos were ruthless and exercised their power with an iron grip.

The hunger was eased only after the distribution of the daily rations, at the evening Zehlappel. Then we would climb onto the bunks and begin the ritual of eating, allowing one girl at a time to move her elbows for lack of space. Janka would untie her bread-bag with shaking hands and say with her characteristic grin, "Girls, let us laugh a bit, since it is the only effective weapon we have left!" She would start chewing on a crumb found inside the bag and continue: "Every meal must be organized like a grand opera." With great care she would take out her ration and spread it on her knees, then would mimick: "Good food is enjoyed with

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nose, ears, and fingers as well as the taste buds in your mouth. Remember, girls, add color and shape, it's as important as the aroma!" Balbina would visualize and sigh aloud, "God, to stretch my body in a hot bath and wipe it with a clean towel."

The resourceful Sala Szlamowicz "organized" a knife, and each of us would wait in turn, to have her ration sliced. We would cut the ten ounces of bread into ten squares, so it would last longer. Curiously enough, Sala's bread-bag always had a potato and only God knew how she got it.

In the middle of September we were moved over to Block #22. Our new Blokowa, Aranka, a Czech inmate, was not as vulgar or explosive as Sally and brought back some dignity to the inmates.

Routinely, rain or shine, we spent the days standing idle in the strips between the Blocks, full of pot holes and rocks. All around us were throngs of women thrust upon each other. In the mingling, squeezing and pushing crowd, every language was heard, reminiscent of the Fall of Babel. They came from Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, Greece, Germany, Belgium, Holland and France. All the women were grotesque looking, many with children clinging to their sides or in their arms. There were women with decayed arms and legs, bare gums and breasts eaten away by pus.

Across from us, limp human forms were hanging down like rag dolls on barbed wires or stretched on the ground. Some were dead, some were alive. The Western European Jews were less hardened

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than we from the East. Prior to the war, we had to endure extreme hardship in our daily lives and so became more conditioned. We did not perish as easily as they did.

One day, standing outside as usual, Leah Fried-Goldberg, the "Rebetzin," said;-"Girls, do you know what? Today is the Jewish New-Year (Rosh-Hashana). God sent us here for a purpose; we have sinned and must repent." She pointed at the masses of the Western European women and added, "Look at them, I bet they hardly know their religion, let alone pray in a "Shul" (Temple). Leah was a slight woman of thirty, dark and plain looking. She was married to a Rabbi, contracted for her by her rich father, Moishe Simhe Fried.

I looked at her agitated face and remembered all the pious praying and atoning my father did throughout his life. Did it help him? Was he alive? I watched the flames coming out of the crematorias and I felt anger building up inside me. Does it really help? Leah interrupted, "Our sacrifice is required as a testimony to the Allmighty God. Girls, let's pray together and put our trust in God, I will lead." Cecylia cut in, "Religion," she said, is not an act that can be performed by proxy. Each of us can do it by their selfs. Bronia Kleinberg sighed. "I wish," she said, "I could feel the way Leah does. It would probably lighten my sorrows."

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The smoke and flames were hitting the skies and the air stank sickeningly with burned flesh and bones. The leaping flames would often take up human forms of familiar faces. Were they all burned by now? Did they suffer? How much longer till we go up in flames? There was nothing one could do about it. The eighty-six women in our Kielce group clung tight to each other and a close kinship grew between us. We tried to ignore the scenes and blot it out by simple talk.

The girls often wondered, -"Does the world know about the furnaces?" Zosia Tenenbaum, a petite girl with sharp eyes, liked a good argument and a good conversation. "Damn right, the world knows," Zosia, known as Zorina, would shout in her thin, pitched voice. "The Nazis were right in saying that the Allies want us dead."

It looked indeed, as if the whole world was united to kill and to eliminate the Jews. Yet, a few of our girls still kept their hopes high. "You will see, we will survive," Balbina insisted, "And the world will be a better place to live in, with justice for all." Even though the words were meaningless to many, the talks gave us a psychological stimulous, a moral booster to keep us sane.

We certainly needed it. We all looked alike, tragically comical, grotesque. Each one of us wore oversized wooden clogs,

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lined with straw. A dangling cup, spoon and soup bowl, were roped to the dress. The soup bowl served dual purposes, to eat from and to urinate in. The bread-bag, boitel, was hidden under the dress. Our clipped hair was covered by a babushka, torn off the dress. To relieve the itching of the skin plagued by vermin, we would shrug and scratch and it looked as if everyone was afflicted with a nervous tick.

Our features being slightly swollen were somewhat changed. The skin was burned, cracked and peeling. The ankles were swollen. The near-sighted girls, like Kryisia Strum, who were deprived of their glasses, walked like in a trance. Marysia Bugajer had rags protruding from her ears, sensitive to drafts. A few of our girls had a wild look, and a few others looked mopish, dejected and dull. In no time, Aus³chwitz had transformed us into strange looking creatures.

Early in October, our group was taken outside Birkenau with other inmates. Led by a Capo, (kommando leader), our unit had to break up stones, dig ditches, work on lawns. One day while carrying stones to men building a road, Niusia Silber, a willowy brunette, confronted her husband Lolek and fainted. Lolek, in his twenties looked haggard, thin. Recovering from the initial shock, he came closer. While the S.S. guard and the Capo watched closely, Lolek was whispering, trying to read our thoughts. "Some of our men," he said, "Went to Buna, some to Trzebiny or to coal mines in Upper Silesia. Spiegel was clubbed by our men. Girls, the

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the end is near, the Russians are a skip away. They say, they can hear us talk!"

We left with elevated spirits, instilled with hopes and rosy prospects. However, no sooner did we reach our "F.K.L.", Female Concentration Camp (Frauen Konzentration Lager), that our high hopes disintegrated into the air. The Lager-siren was **blasting**, imposing a "Blocksperra." Normally, we were locked up in the Blocks with each arrival of new transports of people, when food was unloaded in camp or when Dr. Mengele visited the Lager-street.

This time, the inmates were whispering the dreaded news: Mengele has arrived! As always it traveled with the speed of lightning and spread like brushfire, creating panic, terror and a mad rush among the inmates. Dr. Mengele, the "Angel of Death," was doing his selection again, right there, on the street.

Mengele was tall, dark, with extremely handsome features. One wondered if he wasn't really a "freak" of nature. How could a beast of his capacity still be perceived as human. Every inmate in Auschwitz had heard the rumors of Mengele's bizarre experiments performed on the inmates. Rumors had it that he was partial to twins, dissecting parts of their bodies without anaesthetic.

My first impulse was to check my body for any sign of deterioration, sores, (Kretze) or varicose veins. Before each selection, Weber-Proszowska's teeth began to chatter and she would

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repeat, "It's no use, he'll surely get me this time." She was in her early forties, about the oldest in our group, which mostly ranged between the ages of twenty to thirty-five. With shaking hands she would try to cover her graying hair with her babushka but could never make it and had to be helped. Proszowska had acquired a nervous tremor in 1943, when her daughter perished with the other children.

Ruhele Albirt, close to forty, would also show her panic. She would wring her hands and cry, "God help me, woe to me, my varicose veins will kill me, woe to me." Her daughter, Celinka, who was twelve years old, was her sole strength and protection. Luck stayed with our group and so far, none of us had been added to the statistics of burned Jews.

November marked three months of our life in Auschwitz. The days were becoming colder, and one could feel frost in the air. During the long Zehlapfels, the rain and winds were gusting and slashing without mercy. There were the usual mistakes in counting the inmates, and a re-counting had to follow, when the number did not tally. We had to stand wearily, unsteadily, shoulders bent and aching until the task was completed. It was forbidden to stand back to back, "distance must be maintained." (Abstand muss sein).

Women collapsed like flies. The exhausted women would be left on the muddy grounds then dragged to the Morgue Block,

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even though they were still alive. They would then be thrown on top of the other corpses.

The last few weeks the Lager-street was buzzing with rumors that the Special Unit (Sonderkommando) men had attempted to destroy the crematorias they were in charge of. They succeeded in blowing up crematorium III, but were caught and killed. We knew that the "Sonderkommando" men received adequate food and clothes in return for gassing and burning the people. Though their attempt ended in failure, our optimists found a good omen in it: Something must be brewing, they decided.

Our group of girls acquired the look of the typical "Musulmanka," (all bones) a kind of a new specie that evolved in our Lager-world. The girls were listless, each being withdrawn to her little world. The psychological stimulus which ^{we} normally derived from our daily talks, has disappeared. We were too cold to converse. Each one had a dejected, dull expression which stared glazingly into emptiness.

Early in December the Allied bombing came near us and we were locked up in the Blocks. The bombing was a short-lived episode. Later we learned that the nearby Buna was their target. Buna held Farber's plants of artificial rubber and gasoline. Was Moniek there? Will I ever see him again, or the rest of my family, I asked myself over and over again.

The bombing did not come back. But the process of eliminating the physically unfit continued at a feverish tempo. In Lager C,

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the women hid to avoid the selections but were found and shot. In Lager A, the Blocks were empty, its inmates were sent to the gas-chambers. The Blocks were dismantled quickly, and the inmates, led by a Capo, had to pile the wooden boards and burn them with blankets and straw.

One dreary day in December 1944, while we were working with a Kommando, carrying stones and shivering from the biting cold, Aranka, our Blokowa, suddenly came running. Enormously agitated, panting for her breath, she called the Capo. "You better hurry up, hurry to the F.K.L.!" she yelled, "There is a selection there!"

A chill ran through my spine. I knew each selection meant an impending disaster. We rushed back and the first thing that caught my eye, was Dr. Mengele's Red Cross car, parked in the middle of Lager-street. Inmates were already lined up naked, facing Mengele and his sinister looking companions. A dead silence hung in the air as each woman, stark naked, passed their review. Mengele ordered: "Take your clothes under your right arm, your left arm up!" Pointing his index finger, Mengele roared, "To the right, to the left, Rechts, Links!" A pregnant woman was marked with a red pencil, a red cross on her chest, most likely she was to be experimented on. "Rechts, Links!"

I kept pinching my cheeks to induce color. When my turn came, my heart was pounding wildly. Simultaneously, my brain was

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sending messages: Stand straight, walk strong, look fit! Mengele's index finger was blurry, and the scrutinizing inspection was paralyzing my senses. Then I heard a whisper, It's O.K. now, I let out my breath and tried to relax.

Sala Zagaiska-Erlich was in her early forties and once a member of the most prominent Jewish family in our city. Distressed, we watched her walk to the doomed line, bent and bewildered. Then came Fela Zyto, a slight woman in her late thirties. Helplessly we saw her walk away, carrying the death sentence on her slumped shoulders. Proszowska passed the selection by the skin of her teeth, and we let out a sigh of relief.

Celinka Albirt, twelve, though tall for her age, was almost transparent. When her turn came, her mother watched in horror as Mengele's index finger pointed her towards the doomed line, Links! "No, no!" Ruhele screamed, "You can't take her!" In utter desperation, the mother ran after her daughter and forced her way into the same line. Repeatedly she was pushed back by the soldiers, their bayonets drawn with blades pointing at her body. When the Lager-siren signaled the end of the selection, I felt drained, dizzy and nauseous. In front of me Stefa Sonchhof was sighing, "What's the sense of prolonging our misery, we are doomed anyway!" Dorka Dalisman was moaning in her childish voice, "I wish they had picked me too, I can't take it any more!"

We returned to the Block. The next day we stood on the Lager-street in lines waiting for the ~~counting~~ counting. When it

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was finished, one of the armed guards handed over the list of the inmates to the Blokowa . "This was the final roll-call here," Aranka declared and turned over the list to Tecia Grinberg, who still held on to her position as clerk (Schreiberka). "You will be leaving soon." Someone asked her, "Why would they bother to move us to another place?" I could not care less where we would be going. My main worry was to rub away the numbness of my body.

Among us, thousands of inmates crowded the narrow strips. Suddenly a miracle occurred. One of our women spotted Celinka carrying the iron kettle with a group of inmates. She was alive! Instantly, we created a chaos to divert her guards by pushing, jostling, fighting and yelling. In confusion, the Blokows tried to bring order, using their clubs. In the meantime, Celinka was back safely among our girls. She was shaking, petrified. The condemned women she was with, were carrying the huge kettle into the Death Block. Celinka had cheated death once before at the mass murder of all our children in May 1943. Elevated on a few knapsacks, she squeezed between her parents and passed as an adult.

The armed guards had us march towards the railroad sidings. We squeezed into the open freight cars, then the men bolted its heavy doors and gave a sign for the train to move forward. The wooden ramp was wheeled away from both sides and the train jerked forward, then stopped, throwing us against each other. There must have been a hundred women in my car, hovering together for warmth.

OUT OF AUCHWITZ

The sun went down and the cold, icy wind carried the stench of burning bodies far beyond Birkenau. Our train was moving slowly, and the familiar panorama of Auschwitz was moving with it. The Lager Street, the sentry-boxes, the Death Block for the condemned, the Morgue Block, the Kretze-Block, the Revir (dispensary without drugs), The barbed wires, the gas-chambers and crematorias; the Capos and Sally's and the new specie, the Musulmen. They all grew smaller and smaller and then disappeared from sight.

With the increased speed of the train, the foul odor of burning bodies became fainter and the air cleaner. People, towns, woods, fields and rivers did not seem real as we passed them by. It was impossible to conceive that life had continued as normally as before. As if genocide had never existed and as if inhuman atrocities had never been committed. It all seemed unreal, indeed, as if we had come to a different planet. Or were we real?

The sudden shriek of the air-raid siren brought the train to a full stop. The guards, wrapped in furs, unbolted the doors for us to go down and to relieve ourselves. My body felt stiff as I climbed down the train. Like the rest of the women I jumped up and down to revive circulation, rubbed my skin with snow and pinched my body. Soon the train moved on again, jolting up and down. There was no food or water in the car and the snow kept falling gently, covering us like a blanket.

We huddled closely and tried to sleep. "I hope I never

OUT OF AUSCHWITZ

wake up," moaned Estusia Moshkowicz, holding on to her younger sister, Ziuta Kugelmas. The guards were conversing. One was complaining about the slow delivery of the mail and the other was waiting for a furlough to go home for Christmas. Janka was pressing her back against mine, sighing. The guards were still talking about Christmas, and Bronia Gola-Gurewicz groaned. "It must be Hanukah now, it comes Christmas time."

I closed my eyes and I remembered ... The Festival of Lights, Hanukah. The time of little colored candles, of crisp and crunchy "latkes," of skating and sledging down Kapitulna Street. As was in the past tradition, we were all gathered at Grandfather Zloto for the family dinner. The rooms were brightly lit, and filled with the aroma of roasted goose and fried "latkes." The dining room table was heavy with all sorts of food. Nobody could outdo grandmother (babishi) with her pastries, they were truly delicious. Uncle Moishe, the youngest of grandmother's ten children, was clowning and mimicking, imitating Charlie Chaplin. We, the twenty three grandchildren, laughed. Uncle Motek was telling his funny stories and cracking jokes. "Go on, eat," he was kidding, "They say rich foods are like destiny, they too shape our ends." And again we were laughing, eating and laughing, until someone opened the door of the train.

A voice was calling: "Get out, raus, out, out!" It was dark and bitter cold and the shouting came nearer: "Out, heraus, out fast!" By using their rifles, the guards were trying to return

OUT OF AUSCHWITZ

us to reality. The men pushed us down the ramp and some girls were whimpering and wailing. The guards were yelling: "Straighten out, in lines, fast!" and we dragged our bodies into lines and began to trudge once again.

A road sign read: Village of Ravensbruck, Brandenburg. In front of barbed wires was another sign: Work brings freedom (Arbeit Macht Frei), which was authentic to the sign in Auschwitz. We were escorted into large, bare tents. As we sniffed the air inside, some girls suddenly began screaming, "It's gas, they are going to gas us, they are going to kill us, let's run!" It looked like a stampede, until a few voices stopped the hysteria. "It can't be gas, the tent has openings. It's the disinfectant that smells that strong."

There was neither food nor water and we were tormented by thirst. Any small puddle of urination mixed with snow, was promptly licked by the women. The icy winds were blowing through the holes in the tent, but I was oblivious to it and fell asleep. At dawn we were given synthetic coffee and ordered to line up for the delousing process. Again my hair was clipped, and a solution of lysol was poured over the intimate parts of the body. After the delousing, we formed a line for fresh dresses, distributed by the S.S. women and inmates.

I thought that I was hallucinating when I saw my cousin, Andzia Strosberg, standing next to the S.S. women. It had been eight years since she and her family had left our native Kielce

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and resettled in Brussels, Belgium. Andzia noticed my waving arms and asked me, "Are you in the tents? I'll find you later!" She threw a warm, long coat, a long wool dress, and wool underwear in my direction. Andzia did the same for many other girls in our group. Later, Andzia and her younger sister came to our Block, carrying precious bread, sugar, warm socks, and wool kerchiefs. As "seasoned" inmates, they managed to "organize." "Girls," Andzia said, "Don't give up now, don't let anything get your hopes down, the Allies are winning! One loses track of time here, but it must have been nearly two years that we are here. Remember, carry on!"

"Carry on," was easier said than implemented. The routine of life in Ravensbrück was a carbon copy of the one in Auschwitz. Our Block was enormous, with twelve to fourteen girls per bunk with the continuous foul odor. Ravensbrück was a village, which in December 1944, was extremely overcrowded. Yet, people were finding lost relatives and friends who were thought to have been dead a long time ago.

Still, it was impossible to "organize" (steal) food. Some of our girls attempted to attack and immobilize the Stubowas carrying the huge kettles of soup, but they were no match against the overpowering Russian inmates. These females knew how to fight. Watching them, Zosia Tennenbaum said, "Look at that pack of wolves, they have graduated the school all right!"

One day a few officers drove into the middle of a crowd of women and tossed them a turnip. A furious fight ensued among

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the women. Like ferocious beasts they battled for the pieces of the crushed turnip. The officers sat in their car watching the amusing spectacle and laughed heartily. When they tired of the show, they ordered a Blocksperra. (Locked in the Blocks.)

By then, my stomach had shrunk to the point where food did not matter anymore. All I cared for was to be left alone with my diarrhea (Durchfall), chills and fever. Most of us were plagued with the same disease. Since the Latrine was forever jammed with crowds of women, we relieved ourselves right on the bed.

Somehow I still managed to drag myself off the bed for the roll-call. Whoever failed to show up at these Zehlpappeln, was either put on the Blokowa's list to fill the contingent to be gassed, or was transferred to the Revir with the same fatal ending.

One day, Guta Zylberstein, stiff from the biting cold, followed other girls, equally desperate who dared to use pieces of the bed blanket to keep warm. Guta was caught wrapped in the piece, but though it was a close call, it was not a fatal one. Luckily, she was beaten up by the Blokowa, not by the S.S. women.

We stayed on our bunks for four weeks in a vegetative state with nobody working. The girls were wondering: Was it all worthwhile? Would the destruction of human values and trampling of human souls never end?

The season's inmates were telling of beastly, blood-curdling crimes going on in camp all the time. Many of the women were closely related to the victims. Girls, they said, were picked

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and forced into prostitution, to submit to any whim of any soldier. Girls were used as guinea pigs for many diabolical experiments. Girls were sterilized and maimed and a great many of these striking, young girls have never returned to the blocks. Though these gruesome activities were kept in concealment, the awareness of them leaked out and was widely spread throughout camp.

Nothing could really shock us anymore. Life in Auschwitz provided us with a shockproof veneer, harder than rocks. It was Marysia Bugajer who came out with a statement, which made a whole lot of sense. "With all the tales of hell," she said, "we may be closer to the truth than anyone else knows. This world of ours, is simply hell of another existence."

One dark morning, after the routine of counting, we were ordered to get into a building and to undress. "Put your clothes under your right arm and left arm up!" I had heard it before, yet my muscles did not grow rigid, nor did my pulse skip its beats. The girls standing next to me were both naked and apathetic as if they too, had come to a state of complete indifference.

Facing us in the limelights were the S.S. men and women. My focus was centered on their shiny medals, the well-fed faces, and the warm, spotless uniforms. Their orders sounded clear, articulate, and familiar: "To the right, to the left!" Finally it stopped and we were ordered to march in lines toward the railroad tracks. Someone in our group called out, "Ella Rosenberg ~~was~~

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has been left behind, lucky girl." Again we were counted, then climbed the wooden ramp into the waiting closed freight cars.

The train moved slowly. It was a wooden train with no windows. It looked like a prison on wheels. I leaned back in a corner with Janka next to me, feeling the backs of two other women pressing against me. The train clanked on and on. There was no food or water in the car. The waste pails overflowed, and we sat drenched in our own excrement. Every time I breathed, my stomach would rebel, and finally, I was vomiting; then a violent cramp twisted my stomach and I felt my own body letting go.

The air coming in through the narrow cracks in the boards of the train became too thick to breath, ~~and~~ Wild scratching and fighting broke out among the women, ^{who were} screaming and mauling each other. Soon we were piled up in a blood-splattered pyramid with the strongest on top.

How long had we been traveling? It seemed like an eternity, but was probably just a day, or even less. It was night when the doors were finally unbolted and shouts came from far away. "He-raus!" "Raus!" "Raus!" (out) There were many unconscious and hurt persons in the car. "Heraus!" came closer. "Raus!" But nobody moved. The guards poked us with their rifles, without getting a response. They then dragged each one down the ramps and I landed on the snow. The pure air and icy winds cleared my senses, but my body was still swaying. Each woman paired up with the "Lager-sister" she preferred

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to stay with.

Before long we followed the soldiers in the darkness. Dawn was approaching the winter sky, and we could see the outlines of scattered sawmills against the horizon. On a billboard was a big sign: "Malchow, Mecklenburg Kreise." "Damn them, the bastards!" one girl was swearing, "They deprive us of sightseeing, too, we travel only in the dark!"

The soldiers stopped in front of a dense curtain of birch and pine. Inside there, stood barracks encircled with barbed wire, and sentry men looked down with their guns. "I'll be," Anka Wald was grunting. "Straight from the frying pan into the fire." We were reported to the Kommandant of the camp, who checked the list and counted our transport. My body felt wretched with fatigue, each muscle and bone was sore and aching. I was craving for rest. Finally, we were sent to the Barracks. My Block was small and clean with windows, three tiered beds, one per women, and cold showers. Each of us was given a clean blanket, bowl, spoon and a piece of soap made of clay. It looked like a good beginning.

The next day, however, began with the usual Zehlappel. The S.S. Women, (the Aufseherki) were commanding in a familiar way: "Hands on the shoulders!" (Hände on den Schultern) "Hold your beaks!" (Halten Deine Schnabeln) "Distance must be maintained." (Abstand muss sein). Cracking her whip at random, a tall uniformed woman stepped forward and asked us who had had experience with Lager jobs. "Step-out!" Genia Gutman went to the kitchen; Cecylia Skorecka, Sala Feder and Matele Rosenwald went to the

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sewing-room (Nahestube). Mania Rosenkranc , the Wasser sisters, Niusia Silber, Franka Honigman and Rozka Mydlarz went to the Laundry-room (Washstube). Marysia Bugajer took over the drying of the laundry, Fela Perla went to the clothing (Bekleidigungskammer) and Tecia Grinberg went to the Office as a clerk (Schreiberka). Sala Krel, Sala Celcer and I became helpers in the Block (stubowas). The rest of the transport joined thousands of other inmates in the munition factories, which were buried deep in the woods. They worked in shifts packing powder into boxes.

We met instant hostility from the "seasoned" Czech and Hungarian inmates. "Polish smart allecks" they snorted with hate, "Trying to take over." Opposite our bunks slept Rosette and her friend Klara, both half Jewish. They were recent deportees from their native Hungary and strongly objected to our company, the "Polish invasion." Rosette was a heavy set girl, very emotional. "Why must I, Rosette," she cried, "Be so degraded to stand these inferiors, Herr Jesus, why?" Mania, Fela, Tecia or Renia Konigsberg, also in our Block, tried to bring peace. "Rosette, be a sport," they would plead, "The war will be over soon and we will be out of here in no time." But Rosette remained insufferable and irrational.

Hilda and Berta, teenage sisters from Czechoslovakia, were also sharing our Block. Berta was tall, with a husky voice, a brisk stride, crewcut hair and lean body. She presented a very masculine appearance and we nicknamed her "Bernard." From the very beginning, it became evident to us that Berta was having

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an "affair" with Else. Else, the Capo of the camp's kitchen and thus God-Almighty, was a pure German, as well as a pure prostitute. The triangle on Else's arm identified her crime and explained her incarceration.

Each night Else and Berta would carry on as if they were in the privacy of their own bedroom. This sort of relationship was forbidden in camp. Each night Else, with her pock-marked face, would sneak in sly and cat-like, carrying a treasure under her dress, such as bread, sugar, margarine or even cake, to bribe the room-mates. Else would throw some of the precious food to the starved spectators and add in her vulgar way: "Gorge it down, girls, hope all of you choke on it, but keep your mouths shut." Occasionally Else would tell Berta about the war, information she picked up from the S.S. staff in Lager. "Germany, you know, is burning! Those goddamned English and Americans bomb us day and night." These words would invigorate our hopes like a magic wand. Our optimists beamed: "The planes will come to rescue us! Wait and see. They will be here soon!"

Time dragged on. Hunger and cold were the same, invariably ravaging and devastating, but the planes did not come. My stomach pains left me incapacitated for days and thanks to Mania Rosenkranc I was transferred to the Laundry. There, I had access to the hot water and a hot stove. It was useless to ask for help in the dispensary. It was filled above capacity with women who were down with typhus, tuberculosis, frozen limbs and with ulcerous sores (Kretze). The Kretze, like leprosy, caused the decay of

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flesh, which untreated spread like fire. There were no medications available, absolutely none.

In the meantime new transports of women were arriving daily. There were no more trains left, so they walked for miles on foot in the snow and icy drifts and perished by the thousands. The women that reached us were frostbitten and laid down in any available spot.

We all felt the "squeeze" in camp. The soups were more diluted with water and hunger was intensified. A few of our Kielce girls, who worked in the Laundry or with clothing, did manage to "organize" (steal), by trading with the kitchen's staff. They shared the food with many other girls. But the women from the new transports were not successful in their trading. There was no market for their diamonds. They could not buy soup or potato.

All the women, including our Kielce group, walked around frail, lame, bent, with swollen legs, plagued with diarrhea, head-colds, coughing and aching. Zosia Rotenberg-Recht, once a vigorous girl, gave up her fight to survive. Too sick to trudge the six miles to work, she collapsed from pneumonia and was taken back to Ravensbrück. Due to ^{severe} bladder infections, we could not control the urine so that in the factory the women were punished, beaten for accidental urinating. The ulcerous sores (Kretze) were escalating our deterioration. A small pimple on my right leg spread to a mass of ugly, smelly pus.

Even the hard-core confirmed optimists, such as Tecia, Balbina, Sala F., Fela, Mania R., Guta and Dorka Enoch walked

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around bleary-eyed, despondent and disillusioned. While our durability had worn out dangerously thin, there was no improvement in sight.

The counting of the inmates, Zehlappels, continued in the same deplorable way. Any romantic, emotional discord between the Kommandants, was usually vented on the inmates. One bleak, grey morning I was standing in line, listening to the wind howl. Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain near my left ear; the world whirled and turned black. When I came too, two girls were helping me up.

In February 1945, a new pair of Kommandants arrived in camp. The new Frau Danz, the Oberfuhrerin, brought along quite a reputation. Rumors had it that her specialty in Auschwitz was to maim children before their death. She certainly looked her beastly part.

Early in March, the sun was melting away the snow. Crocuses began to sprout forward. The bright sunshine could not warm me anymore. I was tired of living, My stomach pains and nausea persisted and I could hold down no food. In a semi-conscious state I sat near the hot stove in the Laundry room. My mind was wandering and playing tricks on me. Faces and scenes from back home, were intermingled with the faces of the girls in the Laundry room. The Laundry room was lice infested and smelled of pus and decay. The girls bent over the washboards, worked in slow motion, thoroughly exhausted and drained of energy.

Suddenly we were stirred out of lethargy. In the middle of March 1945, the Lager-siren would wail alarmingly and we were

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locked up in the Blocks. Then the Blocksperra was imposed permanently. The bombing of the air-planes followed, making the earth tremble and the sky orange with fire. Each air-raid ignited a new sparkle of hope.

Soon it became evident that the fighting was intensified near us. We had waited for it a long, long time. Strangely, as if by a sudden miracle, a magic revivification had taken place. With exhilaration, we daringly ran outside to catch the shower of falling shrapnels. It was like Manna from Heaven! When the planes came lower, we would dance and scream in ecstasy and hysteria, running with outstretched arms. "Go, get them, smash them to pieces, and don't ever let go!"

Many wooden sawmills in the area around our camp, were set afire. The Augustinian Convent, which was also near our camp was not touched. Our camp was not bombed either. The shrapnels would whiz by and only occasionally would they hit someone in camp. Like wilted plants that were given the right nourishment, our optimistic courage came back to life.

Those of us who worked closely with the S.S. women, or in the camp's office, eavesdropped attentively. We digested and analyzed each loose comment which was passed by the Germans. And strange things were happening.

In the sewing-room, Cecylia was ordered to make up in a hurry a civilian, business suit for the Kommandant. Cecylia, who was a fine designer and dressmaker, had never done tailoring

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for men.

Helenka, a shallow minded girl from Silesia, was Frau Danz's privileged pet. At first Helenka was reluctant to tell us of her unusual experience with the Oberfuhrerin. It turned out that Frau Danz was in a confused state and in a great hurry. Helenka was ordered to get Frau Danz's wardrobe cleaned and ready to pack. Sure enough, a few days later, Frau Danz disappeared.

It seemed like something unprecedented was brewing in the air. The spring weather came to stay and the bombing in the woods continued to rage. It was obvious that our friends from the planes were aiming at the munition factories buried in the woods.

One day the office girls came back with news that exploded like a bombshell. Tecia, Rosa and Selma could hardly control their excitement, when they told the grouped women: "The Kommandant has ordered to make up a list of Polish women and he wants it in a hurry!"

Now, what would that indicate? We wondered in suspicion. They did not need a list of specified ethnics to murder inmates. They did their killings freely. Could it be the list was needed for a different purpose? Many of these ill-looking, wasted away and wretched women, actually began to live in hope. Zorina had her doubts. "No sense raising false hopes," she told the gathered women. "Have you forgotten the Nazi genius at deceiving?" I agreed with her. "What is the matter with you, black crows?" The hard-die optimists shouted, "Can't you see the coming miracle in front

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of you?" The mounting excitement reached its climax when, a few days later, the office girls dropped the biggest news bomb ever. "Girls, listen!" they exclaimed, "Men from the Red Cross have arrived with loads of boxes to be distributed among us!"

Naturally, the entire Lager turned into a bee-hive, buzzing all sorts of fabulous stories that grew by the minute and took up fantastic dimensions. I still distrusted the whole excitement. I had never believed that the Nazis would leave a single witness to tell of their macabre atrocities.

Our office girls placed the Kielce and Radom group to head the required listing of the inmates. Then a new avalanche of news came sliding down on us, smashing its weight all over the other events. It was more perplexing and more suspicious than anything ever heard before! A long line of buses with Swedish and Red Cross Flags were waiting for us right in front of the Lager's entrance!

It was incredulous to look at the buses, they were a miraculous sight from a fantastic fairy-tale. Yet, grave danger was lurking from behind its glimmering facades. A great many of us were convinced that in the eleventh hour of the war, the accursed Nazis were going to kill us.

Then in the middle of the day, we were called for a Roll-call, Zehllappel. To our puzzling amazement, the Kommandant had the Polish women form a separate line. We were sorted out according to our general physical fitness and the tatoo numbers on our left arms. Each of us was frantic, covering up their ulcerous sores.

TO FREEDOM

My boots, which I had received in exchange for my bread, trading in my rations, concealed my decayed right leg completely.

A column of one thousand Polish women was then led towards the front gate. The Kielce and Radom group (Jewish inmates) were leading the transport. In the last minute, another five hundred of inmates were added to our transport. We were still in a discord. A group of women insisted on leaving the Lager. A great number of women were undecided and frightened and ran back. I, among other skeptics, suggested we wait and see. The optimists stood their ground and gained the upper hand. The girls reasoned with logic, that there was no threat to our lives and that they will not kill us now, not with the Swedish and Red Cross around. We must take the chance and go out!

My heart was racing wildly when I stepped outside the camp. Facing us were men in off-white overalls. They stood there with outstretched arms, full of chocolate, cigarettes and sardines, smiling broadly and warmly. "Welcome to the free world!" They greeted us in German and in French. We stood there, our heels dug in the ground, eyeing the men with suspicion. Though they had no machine guns or any other weapons, no one of us moved.

"Dear girls," they pleaded, "Do not be afraid, do not hesitate to come-on closer! Please, believe us, we are your friends! Trust us, please, we are here to help you!" We still would not move an inch. They talked in a gentle way, like to frightened children. Compassionately, in soft voices, they assured

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us of our safety, our immediate trip to Sweden, to freedom!

Thanks to the intervention of Count Bernadotte of Sweden, we were about to leave Germany for freedom. The war was still on, but we were free people, free, at last, free to leave, really, completely, unreservedly free!

Standing there on that momentous, glorious day, on April 26, 1945, I heard my mother's soothing voice: "You are young, you will see the end of the war." Yes, and there I was about to embrace freedom again. The first and foremost question that raced through my mind was: Was there anyone left of my family to share my freedom with? I had dreamt many, many times of this moment, yet my ecstasy was soberly tempered by pervading fears. Would I be alone in an estranged world? Will I be able to function again as a normal human being? Will it be a better world to live in?

The foreign men in off-white overalls were still pleading with us. Their pure human kindness was flowing generously, it was a dazzling sight to us. Their simple words generated warmth in which all our suspicions melted away. These men were not lying.

Suddenly an extraordinary elation charged my heart and soul and for the first time I felt a breath of hope. Of course, there was someone from my family waiting for me, somewhere, someone had to be around.

For the first time since the shocking days of August 1942, our pent up emotions broke loose and we began crying. Then in ecstasy we hugged and kissed each other and ran laughing to the waiting buses. The white buses were gleaming like a rainbow in

TO FREEDOM

the crystal-clear April sunshine. After six years of waiting,
at long last, help had arrived.

A F T E R W O R D

On April 26, 1945, with the war still raging in its final fury, I was in the first transport of 1,500 women to leave our Lager in Malchow, Germany, on our way to freedom.

The planes were trailing us all the way north, coming down low and spitting fire right on top of us. We ran out of the buses and hid in the hills, ditches, streams or under trees. In the process of running, many of us perished.

Our first stop was in Lübeck, where we were treated with hot milk by the Red Cross. The next night we arrived in Krushof, Denmark, and were welcomed there with tears and food. From the station in Padborgu, we boarded a train to Copenhagen, where everyone became violently sick, due to eating.

From Copenhagen we left for Sweden aboard the boat "Malmo". The boat was ultra-luxurious and its staff treated us in style that of a fairytale, royally. When asked at the borders for our names and birth dates, we answered in unison: "We were born on April 28, 1945."

In the town of Malmo, we were greeted by a moving ceremony, led by the Crown Prince of Sweden. Next we were quarantined in the Sports Palace in Idrottshallen. There, in Idrottshallen, I began putting down on paper all the fresh memories of the war, using the stationary of the "Statens Utlänningskommision" in Saltsjöbo. I continued writing in the various hospitals that I was being treated in.

A F T E R W O R D

None of my family survived. They all perished in the gas-chambers in Tremblinka. Survivors from our city, Alek Weicberg and Srul Wakszlak had witnessed the death of my brother Moniek. He was suffocated inside a closed freight train, somewhere in Germany, around January 1945. My cousins, Yakob and Moniek Zloto, were exposed in Warsaw and murdered by the Gestapo.

After the war, a handful, about 200 survivors of the Lagers, hide-outs and from the Soviet Union, returned to Kielce. On July 4, 1946, on Planty Street, a bloody massacre greeted the "home-coming Jews." The pogrom was carried out by the Polish Nationalists and a few Communists, leaving forty two of the Jews dead and many others wounded.

On April 9, 1946, I came to the United States. I have remarried and have two daughters. At their insistence I have translated my memoirs from Polish some twenty-nine years later. I hope that after reading it, my children and all the children will try in their own way to contribute to democratic freedom, that they may have a better world in which to live.

The Holocaust must not be repeated! Never again!