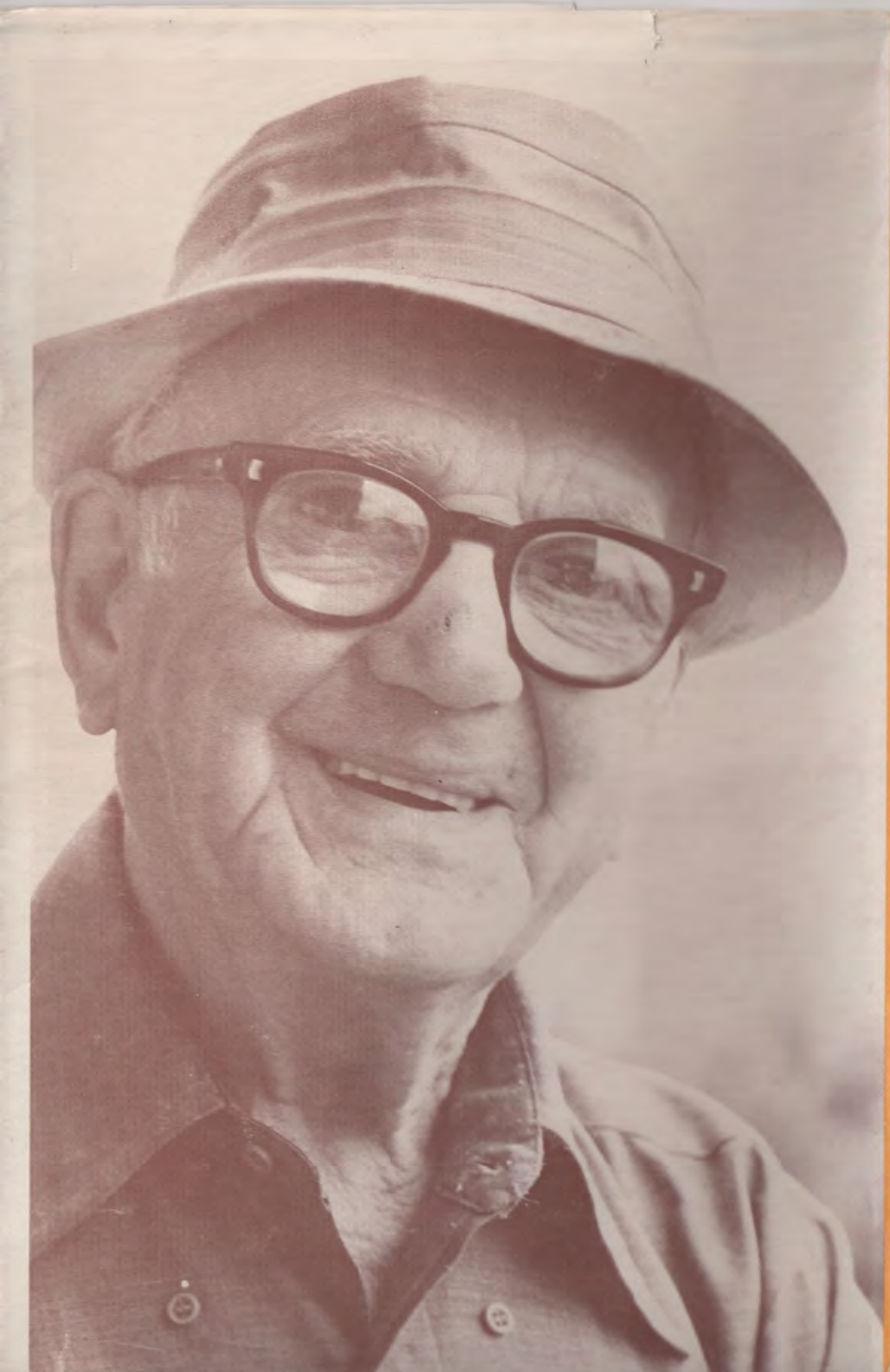

SCHIFF

LOST BORYSLAW
Memories of a Galician Youth

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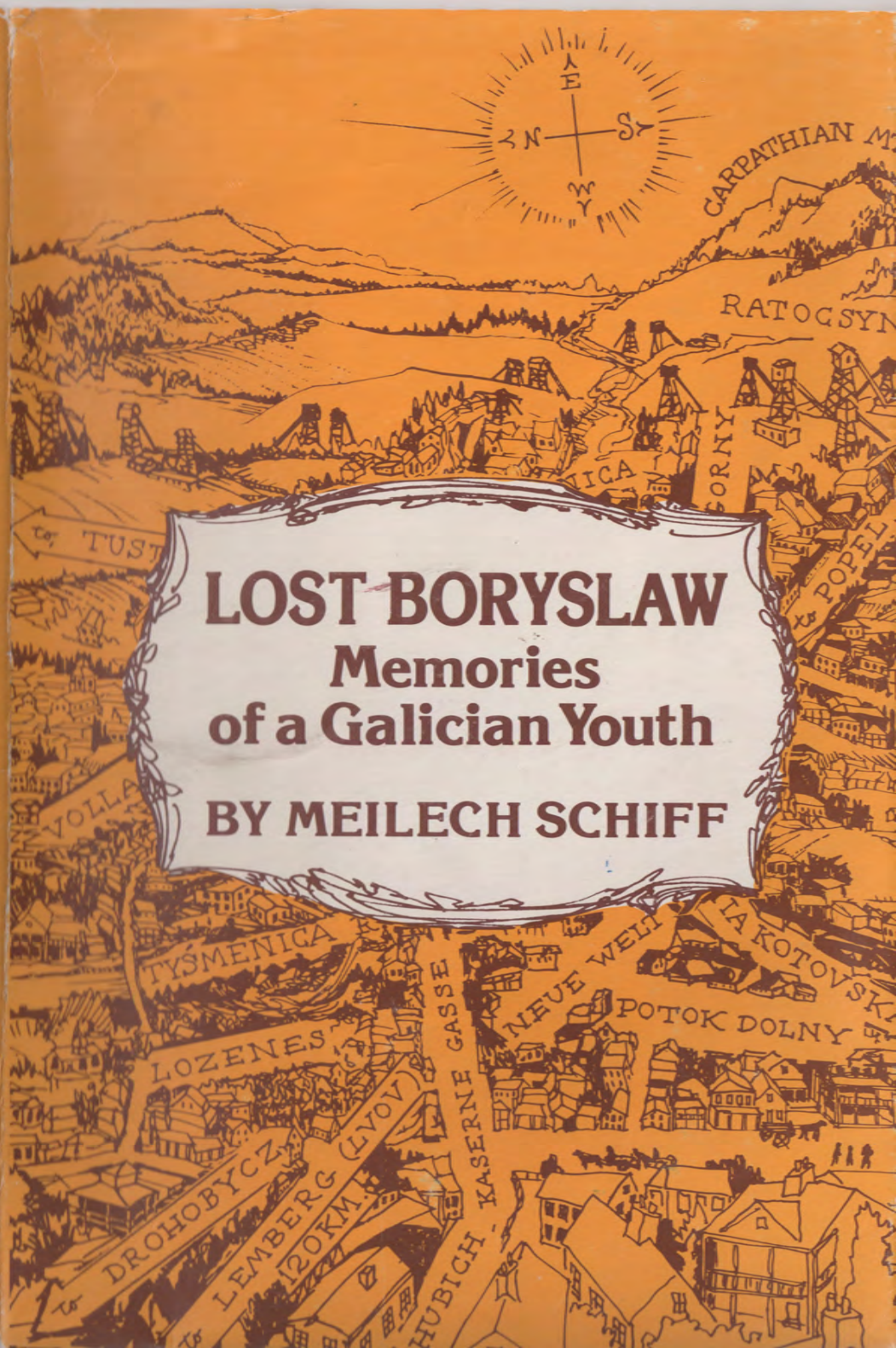

LOST BORYSLAW
Memories of a Galician Youth

BY MEILECH SCHIFF

$5.95

LOST BORYSLAW

Memories of a Galician Youth

by Meilech Schiff

Boryslaw was but a medium-sized town in Polish Galicia famous for its oil mines–not an overly hospitable place for a boy from a poor Jewish family to grow up in. But at the same time it was the center of his universe, and–bad as it was–it was his home, and he knew it well. Now, from a vantage point of some sixty plus years, the town and all of its people are things of which the survivor's dreams and memories are made.

Such is *Lost Boryslaw*–gone but not forgotten in the memory of Meilech Schiff who knew it so well: its orthodox community (with its saints and hypocrites); its shops and factories; its thugs and its loving friends and relatives; its romances and excitement. Here, lovingly re-created with both fondness and pain, is his boyhood home.

Lost Boryslaw is a warm, alive book about a bygone era.

Vantage Press, Inc.
516 West 34th St., New York, N.Y. 10001

About the Author

Meilech Schiff was born on May 25, 1893, in Boryslaw, a town in the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia, the son of a poor Jewish family. As a teenager he was apprenticed to a carpenter, and he learned the trade. During World War I he served in the Austro-Hungarian army, principally as a guard in the prisoner of war camps.

In 1925 Mr. Schiff emigrated to Canada with the help of his sister Mattel (who had emigrated to New York City in 1912), and between the two of them, together with their brothers and sisters as they arrived in the new land, they managed to bring over to America the rest of the family before the beginning of World War II. Mr. Schiff practiced carpentry in his new home, finally opening his own factory for furniture woodwork, from which he is now retired. He and his wife Masha live in Montreal.

Jacket design by Paul Covington
Jacket photo by Barry Harris

Lost Boryslaw

Memories of a Galician Youth

Meilech Schiff

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drawing by Paul Covington

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to Boryslaw's lost

A Note and Acknowledgments

Although the events recounted here are put down as I remember them, the order of presentation is not always the order in which I first recalled them. But the present order does show, I think, the strange way in which the memory works. The only change from fact is that, to try to keep a certain order of dates (in Montreal, not Boryslaw), a summer day in 1973 is made to be a summer day in 1974, and an autumn day in 1974 is made to be an autumn day in 1973. Otherwise I think, I hope my memory has served me honestly.

The following people helped in one way or another in the preparation of this book, and I am deeply grateful to all of them: Simone Auger; Gloria Cohen; Paul Covington; Moishe Glaser; Yankel Lowin; Bart Midwood; Kalman Scheiner; Willy Schiff; Hilda Silverman; Jack Yeager; and Label, Mottel, Itzik, and Masha Schiff.

M.S.

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Part I

I WAS BORN ON May 25, 1893, in the town of Boryslaw, in Austria-Hungary. This I don't remember, but they told me so and I have to take it for granted. They also told me that when I was nine months old my mother stopped breast-feeding me. There was no bottle-feeding in that time, so after a couple of weeks of starvation I felt very sick and the doctor came to see me. He told my mother that if she did not continue to breast-feed me I would die. It shows you that I loved breasts even when I was less than a year old.

That's all until I was five years old. Now I start to remember just like today. I was sitting outside, practically in the muddy street, my feet

under me because I couldn't walk yet. Sitting so, I admired the beautiful mountains surrounding us. I always loved nature, especially the Carpathian Mountains. If they could only talk. . . .

When I was seven years old my mother took me to school to start my first year. When I looked at all the other boys I saw that they were nicely dressed and that they also had a good lunch in their school bags . . . so I asked myself, What a combination? I knew they despised me because I looked like a beggar . . . dirty shirt, torn jacket, bare feet . . . and they wouldn't play with a guy like me, although I was the best scholar in the school. But my poor mother knew that education was important, so she dragged me there, and sometimes with a good beating too! I finished two and a half classes of public school and then I began the *Talmud Torah*. And that was really horrible, with the three rabbis I had.

The first was Reb Kutzy Moishe; Kutzy (Shorty) was a nickname that we boys christened him with. He was the most miserable bastard on earth. All he knew was to walk around with a big stick and bang, bang, bang, whether you deserved it or not. The second rabbi's name was Yankev Hersch, a short, miserable creature. He

didn't hit with a stick; he only pinched you with two fingers and that was really torture. Your arms got black like soot. And here is the third rabbi: Reb Mechel was his name; we called him Michoyle *mit die figlis* (Michoyle the clown). He was a clean-cut man, more learned than the others, but a real dictator. He once beat up my older brother Lipa so that his body was black like crude oil, and when my mother went to complain about that horrible beating, they gave her this answer: *"Mistam hot er zich fardient."* (He probably deserved it.) I looked for revenge, and one time when Reb Mechel went to the toilet, I grabbed a needle and inserted it in his chair. When he returned to sit down, oh boy, did he jump! That was my last day at the *Talmud Torah*. I had to flee through the window because he screamed out, *"Es iz Meilechl's arbet!"* (That's Meilechl's work!) And so I became a boy free of school and the *Talmud Torah*.

When I was eleven years old I started to loiter a little with my best friend Psachye. We had our gang and we carried on a life of real freedom . . . it was great! But it didn't last very long. My dear mother always preached to me: *"Meilech, vos vet zein der tachlis?"* . . . in other words, What's going to become of you? So I

began to work a little; so what was the work? The landlord in whose house we lived needed stones to fill the holes on his grounds, so he paid me one cent to push a wheelbarrow of stones quite a distance. Pushing that wheelbarrow a couple of days made my young skin start to peel and I had to give it up.

At twelve years of age I began to learn carpentry in the same shop where Lipa had already been working for four years. In his fourth year Lipa was already earning his food from his master—the boss, Leizer Brecher. Leizer Brecher's wife, a real Xanthippe, gave Lipa to eat *az men ken geshvollen vern far hunger* (enough to swell one's belly with hunger). But I, *the chutzpahnik* (fresh one), always wanting justice, saw one day that she gave him cornmeal for dinner, and when he tasted it it was very bitter. Lipa quietly took that dinner and stuffed it into all the available holes in the shop. But I yelled out, "What a *Kalipady*!" That was her nickname (it meant a shrew) . . . and she heard it . . . and that was the end of my learning there. She also called a brother of hers to teach me a lesson in behavior, but my good friend Psachye and the rest of the gang lay in wait for him. Oh boy, did he run when he saw us!

After a little rest I began to learn my trade with a new boss. His name was Yankel Gersten, a nice young man with a beautiful wife. It was a nice shop. I enjoyed it. Yankel's father-in-law had a horse named Kuba. I paid more attention to the horse than to learning the trade. I used to ride him and several times he threw me. In the meanwhile the master's wife gave birth to a little girl by the name of Schayva. With time that little girl grew older and I had to play with her. It happened that that little kid liked me very much, so instead of me being in the shop to learn something, I had to hold the baby. I saw there was no end to it, and I wanted to get rid of her in a nice way, they shouldn't accuse me of something. So one day, as I played with her and showed the most love to her, I figured now was the time to get rid of her, so I pinched her with two fingers in the ass and she let out a scream. The poor mother grabbed her, not knowing what had happened. Until today they don't know . . . and I was rid of her . . . and she never would come back to me, for no money! That is psychology; she knew that the pinching wasn't done for love.

So now I was back in the shop and new troubles arose. Oh, yes, in the meantime Lipa had

finished his term in the old place and he came to work at the same place where I was. He was already a *gesell*—I don't know exactly how to call that in English; I would say a full-fledged craftsman, who earns a living. The *lern ying*, the apprentice, has to look up to his superior, the *gesell*, and obey. Now Lipa was a quiet man and a good craftsman, and the other *gesellen* started to kibbitz him and call him all kinds of names. He wouldn't answer back, and I couldn't take it any more, so I answered back to one of them what Lipa had to answer. Just imagine, I, a *lern ying,* had the *chutzpah* to insult a *gesell*, and what a *gesell*: a nice, clean-cut man and a personal friend of the boss; his name was Nichim Reif. After the bitter answer he ran over to me to let me have it, but I wasn't a cripple: before he raised his hand, my fingers were already ringed around his throat and I nearly choked him. The other *gesellen* saved him and then he started to cry for the boss: "Look what that *smarkatch* [snot nose] did to me!" The boss, Yankel Gersten, turned aside and smiled . . . then he said to Nichim, "You shouldn't have let him do it." After this incident Nichim Reif greatly respected Lipa and me, how do you like that?

A couple of months later another incident happened. A *gesell* by the name of Utche Becker called me some kind of dirty name, so I called him back the same name. He didn't wait long. He was holding a chisel in his hand and he threw it at me. It was quite a distance, and the chisel landed on my left arm, a couple of inches away from the heart, and cut through a blood vessel. The blood started to spray like from a fountain. They couldn't stop the bleeding; they had to take me to the hospital, and there I fainted. I was really sick for a couple of days. The *gesell* Becker ran away somewhere into the woods, the police couldn't find him. Finally he was found, brought to court, and the judge sympathized with him more than with me, because I had no right to answer back. He gave him some kind of suspended sentence.

Now I am going back a couple of years to tell some tragic episodes. In our neighborhood in about 1901 they demolished an old house. The contractor, Mendel Spooch was his name, wasn't a skilled workman, so he took apart three walls and left one standing alone with no support. It didn't take long and that wall collapsed, and a lot of kids were playing there and the wall fell on the kids. One girl was killed instantly; one

girl broke a leg in half. My brother Gershon was there and the wall ripped off the skin of his head. They took him to the hospital; he was six years old at the time and he stayed there about five months. They mended the wounds, but he was left bald. Everything was fine, but it didn't last for long. That poor boy got TB. One miserable night in the fall, it was around two o'clock, he woke up. He slept with me in the same bed. He started to vomit blood until the last drop . . . then he collapsed and he died quietly. It isn't for me to describe that tragedy. My mother was crying, we were all crying, but when my poor father started to cry, that was the most heartbreaking of all. In the morning my uncle Mordechai Schmiel came with a little box to take away that poor brother of mine.

A couple of years later my mother gave birth to another boy. His name was Avrum Hersch. From the time he was born he was never out of the cradle. He lay in the cradle quietly, never cried, the little face yellow like wax. When he slept we couldn't make out whether he was sleeping or was dead. My poor mother always bent down to listen if he was still breathing . . . and one day when he was three and a half years old he stopped breathing. He

fell asleep very quietly with no sign of death. Only, when Mother went to give him something to eat, she couldn't wake him up. And that was the end of the short life of another brother of mine whom I loved so much.

In 1902 another brother of mine was born. Oh, it was a terrible birth. My mother got very sick and they had to put about fifteen bloodsuckers, leeches, on her belly . . . that was a cure in that time. I really don't know until today why it was done, but it helped . . . and that little boy whom I watched come into the world in an unsanitary bed, his name was Schiye Wolf. We had a *bris* (circumcision) and I, though only nine years old at the time, had a good drink of ninety-six proof and I enjoyed it. When that *boychik* Schiye Wolf was two years old he got sick with diphtheria. At that time few children survived diphtheria, but my mother didn't give up. She ran to doctors and rabbis and to the *Beis Oilem* (the cemetery) to pray, and she even made a pledge to give up kissing him until *unter der chippe* (until he married). . . . And God helped her and Schiye Wolf came out of his diphtheria alive. And time and years and many separations went by, and finally in 1933, in Montreal, having kept her vow to the end, she kissed Schiye

Wolf *unter der chippe*. And she fainted.

Now I come back to the scene where the wall collapsed. Usher, another brother, was involved. There he was, about two and a half years old, and he was playing as a baby does, and when the wall collapsed people started to run, not looking where or at what. So they trampled Usher and squashed him like a lemon. When the doctor examined him he said his condition was more serious than Gershon's, but Usher did survive that tragedy.

In 1905 Mother gave birth to a little girl, Pessel Gitel, a name after the mother-in-law of Avrum Suniker. Avrum Suniker was Mother's first cousin. I remember like today when Avrum Suniker came to see Mother. He gave her four *kronen* for this great favor. Then in 1907 our *mezinkeh* (youngest) Chana was born. It was a hot stormy day, there was lightning and thunder. We thought the world was coming to an end. About a dozen oil mines caught fire from the lightning.

Time is marching on, and when I look back I want to understand my dear father. That time I couldn't. . . . Always with a sad look, he never smiled or played with his children. Sometimes I accused him and sometimes I went in the corner

and cried because I understood he suffered terribly, worked like a slave at the mines, and came home dirty with crude oil and didn't find a decent meal to eat. Today I realize, how could I expect a man in this position to laugh or to play? He suffered everywhere. At work they took advantage of him on account of his long beard. In the *Beis Medrish* (the synagogue) they threw rags at him. Why? Because he was poor! I remember another miserable episode about my father in Austria. In that time salt was the monopoly of the Kaiser and the *königliche* government . . .and in Boryslaw there were mines with salt water in them that were forbidden to be used. But people were trying to earn a living from anything, in spite of the danger of being caught and prosecuted. My father used to go out at night and bring home the salt water, and Mother boiled the water all night long until it turned to salt. Then we sold the salt to farmers; it was a cheaper and stronger salt than the government's. And one day my father was caught by the inspectors, we called them *finanzen*, and he was tried and got forty-eight hours in prison. I remember poor Mother making him a parcel of food to eat while he served his term, he shouldn't have to eat *treifes* (unkosher food), and

when he left for the jail I kissed his hand. It was a real eternity until he came home.

And now I come to another episode that happened about the same time. Two weeks before *Pesach* (Passover) my father was walking near the house we lived in, and he noticed a purse lying in the mud. He bent down, picked it up, and to his great surprise there were fourteen paper *gilden* in that purse, equivalent to about fourteen dollars. There was real happiness in our house. Just imagine, it was before *Pesach*, and we had no matzohs, no wine, no potatoes—nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing. So it looked, especially to Mother, as though "*Eliohu Hanovi hot es untergevorfen.*" (The prophet Elijah planted the purse there.) . . . At the same time the man who lost the money announced to the police his loss. . .and it didn't take long before two witnesses appeared at the police station to say that they had seen my father on the street bending down to pick up something. So two gendarmes came over and arrested Father. They searched the house and they searched Father. They found no purse, no money, because Mother had already bought everything we needed for *Pesach*. But they put my father on trial just the same and the judgment was four weeks in pris-

on. Then they sent him home until the call came to serve his sentence. But whenever the policeman came to the house to take him, we gave him a bottle of *shnapps,* and he reported back, "Not home." That went on for years and years . . . and my father never served that prison term.

Yes, I am still back at seven years of age. It was a beautiful summer day. I was a very active kid; even when I was hungry I used to jump in my bed. Near the bed was a cupboard, and when Mother fixed a shirt or stocking, after she finished she stuck the needle in the side wall of the cupboard. That day, while playing, I climbed on top of the cupboard and then slid down, and as I slid down that needle went right into my leg. It was still half out, so I tried with my fingers to take it out, and the more I tried the more it went in, until I couldn't see it any more. I ran outside and called, "Mamma, I have a needle in my leg!" So Mamma took me to Dr. Ber, *feltcher*; a *feltcher* was a doctor, a barber, a dentist—everything and nothing. That man put me on a table and, with no anaethetic, two big *zhlobes* (slobs) held me down as he started to cut me with a knife and search for the needle. Now, how can I explain this torture? My screaming

was like that of an animal in the slaughterhouse when they have just cut its throat. After butchering up my leg Dr. Ber came out to Mother and shouted at her: "You crazy woman, there isn't any needle in his leg!" Mother took me home, and now I had a double pain—a butchered leg from the knife and a tortured leg from the needle. A needle in the body doesn't stay in one place: it travels, and while travelling, you can imagine the pain it gives you. For six weeks I lay in bed crying and screaming, and there was no stopping that pain for a minute. At the same time the leg was getting swollen like a barrel and black like coal. Finally Mamma called a doctor to have another look at the leg, and when he looked he didn't wait long to give a diagnosis. He ordered, "Rush him to Drohobycz!" This city is one mile from Boryslaw; it had a big hospital and the doctors there were the best in the whole province. So Mamma took me the same day and we travelled to Drohobycz. She had to carry me all the way along, and she was also carrying a baby inside. Just picture the tragic life of that woman!

Now we were at the doctor's office, and this doctor took one look at the leg and said to Mother: "Go right away to the hospital. They'll

put on icepacks the whole night to cut down the swelling, and in the morning we'll have to operate. If we wait any longer we'll have to amputate the leg." So Mamma took me, but instead of going to the hospital she first went to see a rabbi from Drohobycz, Reb Chaim Munya. While she walked with me, along came the doctor in a horse and buggy, and seeing that we were going in a different direction he yelled to Mamma, "Tomorrow they will not accept you at the hospital!" But Mamma went on her way to the rabbi. When we came to the rabbi she told him the whole story, about me and about what the doctor said, that he had to operate. Reb Munya was a very clever man and he said, "If the doctor says he has to operate, you have to listen to him." Now we went back to the hospital, but it was already past closing time. They wouldn't admit us, I suppose, until the next day. But Mother wouldn't go away. She started to cry hysterically, and finally they took us in. The whole night they worked on me until, in the morning, that was a Saturday morning, they took me to the operating room. They gave me an anaesthetic and they told me to count—one, two, three, four, five, six, and at seven I was knocked out. I remember when they woke me up, by hit-

ting me on the cheeks, I looked at my leg and there was a big hole in it. Then they started to bandage it up and they brought me back to my room. A couple of minutes later a man entered and called out, "Mamma, Mamma, here is the needle!" After a couple of weeks in the hospital I came home, and the regular routine went on, struggling and dreaming. . . .

It's amazing how time puts me back always in my early youth and how I see today everything that happened about seventy years ago. I see the misery, the dirt, the sickness, the lice, the fleas, the hunger, the dirty torn clothes. I remember I had a *parch*—in English it's called parched skin sickness. There are two kinds of that *parch*, dry and soft. It's a terrible and shameful sickness. It appears mostly on the head, and Mamma used to cure that with kerosene. Just imagine when that kerosene went into the open wounds the pain I went through. Then Mother would cut away the hair around the wound so that my scalp ended up looking like a stepladder, and the children in school and in the street had a picnic laughing and kibbitzing. And all that didn't stop my parents from producing more and more children. It was God's will, they supposed. They didn't realize

that another child would starve and, the main thing, suffer from our misery and our living conditions. There was only one bedroom for all of us. There were bunk beds. The mattress on the floor we called a strawsack because it was a sack filled with straw. The intimate night life was really shocking and miserable; no shame whatsoever. I can say I saw and heard everything, and what I saw and heard was fantastic for a young child. It all worked on me more than it really was. And to complain about any of this would have been a sin. You mustn't—it's God's will that you're poor, that you'll die of starvation. You had to say grace for everything. My father used to get up in the morning and pray the first thing, not even a glass of warm water in his mouth before. Mother prayed day and night. She used to pray for all the neighborhood, for the sick, for the poor. No complaint to God; it would have been a sin.

I imagine that Mother's strong faith gave her the courage to pull through all that misery. Not only my mother and father believed that misery was God sent. All the poor people believed that, because God said, "Pray and work." To complain, as I said, would have been considered a sin. For the wealthy parasites of that

time the situation was a real paradise. They lived like lords and they also believed it was God's will and they deserved it. I remember I had an Aunt Sarah, my father's sister. She was in our house once when my father came home from work, dirty from top to bottom from the crude oil. There was no warm water to wash with. There was no hot soup to eat. She looked at my father and called out, "There is no God!" Everybody said she was crazy, but the fact was she wasn't crazy, although it wasn't God's fault either. The fault was the parasites', but at that time people believed that everything was God's will, so she protested in that way to God. That was really great for that time for a religious woman to yell out like that. All my life I see her in that pose when she protested, and I really love that woman for her courage.

I still ask myself, How did we survive under those circumstances? Whatever I may describe I still can't give a real picture of all that misery, and I don't think anybody today would believe it anyway. If people today were to read all that, they would say it's fiction. I remember I had the measles, and they went into my eyes and they closed up, and I would yell, "Mamma! I can't see anything!" All she did was lick my eyes with

her tongue, and of course it didn't help. I lost twenty-five per cent of the vision in my left eye. This I found out when I came to Canada and went to see a doctor. He told me that my eye had been damaged when I was a kid and that nothing could now be done because it was too late. All in all I am still a lucky guy that I came out just the way I did. I presume there is something in the species of human beings as well as of animals which makes surviving in any storm possible. That happened in our family: we survived, and I am grateful.

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Here is an episode from Boryslaw which comes from my older sister Mathilda. I don't remember it at all but I'll tell it word for word the way Mathilda described it, and she remembered it bright and fresh as if it happened yesterday.

It was a winter's day. Father didn't have a job and the house was cold. We were then a family of eight: Father, Mother, Lipa, Mathilda, Meilech, Gershon, Usher, and Avrum Hersch, and how does the song go? "*Kein broit iz noch alts nishtoh.*" (There's still no bread in the house.) But a miracle happened. At that time of very

rich people and very poor people, the poor women breast-fed their own children and they also breast-fed the children of rich women just to make a few cents. Most of the rich women tried to avoid breast-feeding; I suppose they were afraid of deforming their boobies! Or perhaps they were afraid their whole figure would be deformed! For money they were able to overcome all these fears. There was always a farm girl who gave birth somewhere, and that farm girl would be hired by the rich woman to be a maid and also to breast-feed the rich woman's baby. And if they were unable to find a farm girl they looked around among the poor Jewish people, and these were not hard to find. And Suraly Reb Usher's—Sarah, daughter of Usher, my mother—was well known as a wet nurse. So that on that winter's day, when a very rich family in Boryslaw by the name of Frelich found out about Mamma, they sent a horse and buggy to the house to pick her up to breast-feed their baby. How Mamma could have had milk in her breasts is hard to understand, because at that time she didn't even have a cup of coffee in her body. And yet she went to breast-feed a stranger's baby. And when Mamma came home we had a real feast. We had bread, meat, milk, and coffee.

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And now I return to the time of the shop, where in the daytime I learned a trade. At night my friend Psachye was a night chauffeur and rode a horse and buggy. I was his back seat driver, and I made a couple of cents every night. I enjoyed it, I liked very much that night life . . . especially when I was with Psachye. At the same time I fixed up our attic as a home for pigeons, with a door for them to go in and a door for them to go out, and whenever I got a few cents I bought some pigeons until finally I had about fifty pair of them. Oh, what enjoyment that was. It was interesting to see them fly away and come back to the same nest; it was interesting to see how they built their nest. They form equal partnerships. Each pair builds a nest, flying away and bringing back straw or hay, and they build it in a very artistic way. A human being wouldn't be able to build that for sure! And when the female lays the eggs, there are always the two of them around. So he warms the eggs one hour, then she sits on them for one hour, and that continues for twenty-four hours steadily for four weeks, until the little ones come out. Then they start to feed them, also fifty fifty. There are no parasites among them. It is a wonderful partnership. You don't see that

life among people. The family life of pigeons is the finest I have seen. There is no bigamy, and if a stranger—that means a lost male—comes in from somewhere and starts to make love to any female in the nest, oh boy! does he get a beating on the spot from the male to whom that female belongs. We can really learn from them how to love. And I loved and suffered. . . . I will be talking more now about love, for slowly, as I was beginning to grow out of my youth and was becoming a young man, I began to flirt a little.

When I finished my term I came to work as a *gesell* in a new factory. The owner's name was Sruel Haberman. At the beginning it was very monotonous among the new *gesellen* I met, but after a couple of weeks I became close friends with a boy in the same shop whose name was Rubin Mager. Poor boy, he was the only son of his parents and he fell on the battlefield sometime in 1915–16. We were very good friends. We went out together. We went on dates together until he was called to the army. We kissed each other good-bye and that was the last time I saw him. And so I lost a good friend and colleague, and time is the best healer of all the pains you go through.

And now I realize, with all the miseries I

went through, how beautiful was that period between fourteen and twenty-one years of age. I was dreaming fantastic dreams. I loved nature. I used to go for long walks all by myself in places where the corn and wheat grew, and I used to stay in the deep woods for hours and smell the beautiful flowers and admire the sunset. And in the evenings there were the bright moon and the stars—this is only for poets to describe! I used to go to the forest with my sweetheart, Brucha. She was the only girl I loved then and suffered for. It was my greatest achievement when I kissed her—there was no desire for sex. I would have been ashamed even to think of it. And my love was even greater because it was a secret love. Her parents, especially her mother, would not allow me to see Brucha, because the father was a rabbi and the mother was a rabbi's daughter, and I was already a progressive boy: though it was a Sabbath violation I walked even on Saturdays with a cane—that was the style in my time.

That reminds me of an incident. One evening I was with Brucha in the hallway of her house, and naturally I hugged and kissed her. All of a sudden her mother opened the door . . . don't ask, I nearly had a heart at-

tack . . . and she asked me right away: "Meilech, why do you come here so often?" My answer was, "Because I like the Rabbi." . . . He really was a beloved, nice man, highly learned. After this incident Brucha and I had to be more careful about seeing each other. Only on Yom Kippur we weren't afraid, because her parents were in *shul* (synagogue) the whole day. I would come to the house and Brucha prepared a very good dinner. The dinner was delicious and we had love for dessert . . . and let me tell you it was an ideal love. We also used to meet in the cemetery in the evening because we were sure nobody would see us there. The dead, they might've heard us, but they didn't care to gossip. We used to sit for hours discussing, looking forward to the future. We used to go to the forest for hours; we enjoyed climbing the hills all around. And the deeper you went into the forest the more you heard the singing and whistling of all kinds of birds and animals. It was wonderful to listen to that orchestra. . . . And this beautiful dream went on for a couple of years. I went to work in the morning, singing and whistling, looking forward to the evening to come home, eat up fast, wash and shave, change clothes, and go outside to walk to Brucha's.

From our house it was about three houses away to where Brucha lived. I walked up and down a couple of times; finally Brucha came out of her house, very nervous. "Meilechniu . . . please, not for long. I told Mamma I was going to see Reisaly." Reisaly Leiner was a dressmaker and a very good neighbor to all of us, and when it was very cold outside we really did spend our time in Reisaly's house. And so that romance went on for a number of years. Later Brucha went to work in a lingerie store, and in the evenings I used to wait for her outside until she came out of the store. I escorted her home, and we had to sneak through different streets each night to do it—the neighbors shouldn't see us: the gossip was terrible. It didn't bother me, but Brucha suffered a lot from it. Her mother the *rebbitzin* (rabbi's wife) wasn't lazy sometimes to give Brucha a good beating, although she was already a girl of eighteen.

When I mentioned Reisaly before I reminded myself of an interesting episode about her. Her parents were fanatically religious. And it happened one time that Reisaly missed her period a couple of days. The mother, Pynie, couldn't wait any longer and told the father, *"Eisik, an umglick hot unz getroffen, Reisaly hot*

nisht s'monatliche!" (Isaac, a tragedy has befallen us, Reisaly has missed her period!) That fanatic Eisik didn't wait long, got wild like an animal, and took a big *kromisly* (that is, a pole on which you carry pails of water at either end) with which he started to beat up poor Reisaly so hard and for so long that she finally got her period. But they paid a high price for that. From that beating Reisaly suffered an inflammation in the bones, and for two months she was very seriously sick. That's just one of hundreds of episodes about that family.

In the meantime I was growing up. I was nearing twenty-one when the year 1914 arrived. Oh, that was a bitter experience, that year! In August 1914, on a beautiful Saturday morning, a policeman came out into the marketplace with a trumpet, blew a fanfare, and called out: "We are at war! All reservists must report within twenty-four hours!" At that time I didn't realize what war meant. And I was very calm because my family wasn't affected immediately. But the war made a quick change in everybody's life, because all the food was rationed at once and a black market began to operate. Here I have to stop, but I'll return after I talk a little about the year 1912.

The year 1912 brings back memories of sadness. It was the year that my sister Mathilda prepared to leave for America. At the beginning we were all enthusiastic about her going. Just imagine, we were going to have a sister in that rich America, so automatically we would get rich! But the time of departure came. Oh, that was like *Tishibov* (a day of mourning) in our house. We all, especially Mother, cried day and night. Please, Mattel, don't go. But she really had a strong character and she went. The circumstances of her life at that time also played a great role. It wasn't for her, so intelligent, so strong, to stick in Boryslaw, especially when she was in love with one of the most intelligent, learned men in the town, Schmiel Katz, who also happened to be unhappily married to another woman. His plan, I understand, was also to go to America, and over there they would join their ideas and their dreams together. And that was the strongest point of Mattel's going to America. And, if I remember correctly, in the fall, in the early morning, we all went to the railway station, and while we were standing talking to Mattel, along came Schmiel Katz. They met with their eyes, they didn't talk, but you could read on their faces that love was talking.

And here was a whistle from the engine and we started to say good-bye one by one. The last one to say good-bye was Schmiel Katz. I can see that picture now. It was the separation of two idealistic people. And here was the last whistle and the train began to move, and I began to cry hysterically. I felt that my heart was beating like with hammers. The train left and we started home. Once home Mamma started to faint without stop, and I couldn't stop crying. For a couple of days I couldn't go to work. But afterwards we quieted down and life returned to normal.

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Here is a letter I wrote to my sister Mattel on the occasion of her eightieth birthday.

March 19, 1971

My dear Sister,

Today you are eighty years young, and the first thing I want to do is to congratulate you on your birthday.

There are so many interesting episodes in your life that I am reminded of. In your life you built yourself an immortal monument. We all remember your heroic leaving of Boryslaw as a young girl of twenty-one,

in spite of the fact that all of us were against it. Mamma fainted, everybody cried, but you were strong enough to overcome all these sentiments. You were able to overcome them because you had a vision. You knew that you could not live any more in the misery that we lived in, to be surrounded for the rest of your life by fear and poverty and superstition. You were just in your blooming age. You had a wonderful boy friend who was, I would say, one of the brilliant intellectuals of Boryslaw, and you left with the naive dream that someday he would join you in America. But that dream did not come true. You came to America a lost sheep and your good friends the Hammermans greeted you and took care of you until you could be on your own. It wasn't long before you started to work in the sweatshops, and the first pay you received you shared with us, and that eased our starving.

You wanted to have some of the family with you, so you sent a ticket to Lipa to come over because you felt closest to him. He was not only your brother but also a close friend. You always had long discus-

sions together. You went to the *Forwärts Ferein* [a socialist club] together. But Lipa did not get to America then and that was a great disappointment for you. And because he did not go then he had to suffer the Great War, and he nearly lost his life.

So time marched on and you kept sending dollar after dollar back to us. When you were already twelve years in America you sent me the ship fare to go to Canada as an immigrant. Here I also have to mention the help of our cousin, Malke Siegel. Gradually we brought the entire family to America, and here comes your great monument. Father and Mother died natural deaths in America. If not for you all of us would have died in a gas chamber. That we escaped this fate is a great miracle. Only you, Mattel, saved the Schiff family. Our children and grandchildren will always remember it was you who saved their lives, and that's the greatest monument a person can have. So happy birthday, Mattel. Always stay as young as you have been until today.

Love,
Meilech

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I return to 1914. I was working at that time in a new place, Bunny Schpeicher's. A very good friend of mine, Schaye Schuster, worked in the same place. He was older than I and he had to go to the army at once. I remember when we went with him to the station, his mother cried and said to us: *"Kinder, behts Gott far Schayen."* (Children, pray to God for Schaye.) And we really did, and Schaye finished the war and came home healthy. All the young men went to war and the town looked like an orphan. The ones who remained home had to join the militia; I was one of them, and a couple of nights a week I was on duty. It was miserable to walk alone in the dark night . . . watching for hoodlums so they wouldn't break into houses or stores. In this situation of war the hoodlums came out like rats after a flood.

At the same time the Russians, our enemies, were advancing, taking city after city in Galicia; and just on *Rosh Hashonah* they arrived in Boryslaw. Overnight we became Russians. All the signs were changed to Russian, and the streets had new names after Russian heroes and poets. And the Cossacks roamed free for forty-eight hours; they could do anything they wanted—that order came from the High

Command! The first thing they did was to rape every woman they could find. But the Jewish girls weren't so easy. They all made themselves look very dirty and ugly. They smeared their faces with soot and put on dirty clothes and they really lost their sexual appeal. Here is an episode I can tell about the Cossacks and sex. There was an old, toothless woman in Boryslaw, Chaye *die Rebbitzen* we called her; she must have been about seventy-five years old. And on that day she also started to smear her scarred face with soot. When someone asked her, "Chaye, why are you doing that? What have you got to be afraid of?" she answered, "What do you think, there are no old Cossacks?"

So we started to acclimatize ourselves to the new life. It was frightening to live under the occupation. There was a steady curfew, there wasn't a night there wouldn't be the killing of a couple of people, and, as time moved on, the fruit of the rapings was found in the latrines.

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Before I tell about my experiences as a soldier in World War I, I want to talk more about life in Boryslaw before the war: characters, episodes, the family, the poverty we lived in.

I remember my father. All his life he was a

strict man. There was never a smile on his face, and it was no wonder. He starved all his life. Never had a special meal. He never played with us children. He didn't mix in bringing up his children. He was an isolated man. Mother was the boss of the house, but she was not a dictator. It was only that Father was a quiet man in all the misery he lived in. But that didn't interfere with his sex life. I remember the nights he slipped out of bed because he and I slept together in one bed. Of course he went to Mother and, as a young boy, probably nine or ten years old, my ears were wide open as a rabbit's and I listened to every word and every move. Of course I didn't understand everything about sex, but the fantasies worked on me . . . and I asked myself, How could that be? As I said, my father's miserable life didn't seem to interfere with his sex life, and that is a puzzle to me. And that Mother didn't reject sex either is also a puzzle, because she had to suffer more than Father. To go through a pregnancy and bring up children in an atmosphere like that! I think Freud could give an answer to this. Why do I talk about my father in this respect? Because I am making a comparison with my own life. When I was in the army, when there was real starvation, my desire for sex was nil. And so it was also later on when

I was in business and had great aggravation from it; the desire for sex was dead. But that didn't stop me from loving as I always do.

But my father's life is a puzzle to me. The poverty we lived in—no matter how well I should describe it I would not be able to convey it all, and even then people today would not believe it. For instance, here is one picture. We lived, a couple of families, in one yard. There was one outside toilet for all of us. At that time in Boryslaw there were only outside toilets, but the middle class families had their own toilet locked, and it was cleaned more often. Our toilet was in a broken shack. The door hung on one hinge. You couldn't lock yourself in. If you had to go to the toilet you went up close to hear if somebody was there, and if you heard *kvetching* (groaning) you knew somebody was there, and if you didn't hear *kvetching* you opened the broken door. Sometimes it turned out that when you opened the door somebody *was* there; whether a man or a woman, nobody was embarrassed. And you went away. To describe that toilet—it is something people won't believe. It is a stinky story, but I have to tell it. I don't remember if that latrine or toilet, whatever you call it, was ever cleaned. Now you can imagine

how the shit piled up. In the winter it wasn't so bad because it froze right away, so there was no smell at all. But when the spring came and the sun started to melt everything and the worms and all kinds of insects came out, the stink was unbearable. You couldn't sit inside unless you blocked your nose.

The reason I tell this story about the toilet is to show again what some people can go through and survive. Of course many of our neighbors died of TB, typhoid fever, and all kinds of diseases; and the Schiff family, except for Gershon and Avrum Hersch, with starvation and with that hygienic toilet, came out alive.

This is one of thousands of episodes which come to my memory, and I am happy that I can tell it exactly as it was. And I shall tell many more episodes from my life. All I hope is that they should come back to me as episodes have been coming back until now. It's the greatest gift for a man to remember the past and then to give over what he remembers in writing.

Boryslaw can never disappear from my mind. With all the misery we lived in I realize how nice it was too. Some people don't want to talk about the past, but for me it's a balm to remember. I recall today how good it was to be a

young boy, especially for me. I was a dreamer all my life. I loved to walk in the dark nights with a girl at my side, and the kisses were sweeter than wine. And now when I write all this I am back in Boryslaw and go through everything. I feel now the same as I felt sixty years ago. It's all in your mind, the only difference is in your body. But even so I enjoy.

Yes, I really feel good when I talk about Boryslaw, the cradle where I was brought up in misery and poverty. Misery and poverty, yet I always want to talk about it. Is it because I was so young at the time? Or do I remember it so well because it was such a miserable youth? I remember one episode as though it happened today, although it happened seventy years ago on a very stormy winter night. My stomach was upset, probably from the lousy food I ate, and I had the runs. I put on my pants and my shoes with the holes in them and I ran outside. Here I pulled my pants down and let go, the wind blowing in my behind. I got the shivers. I finished, ran back to the house, but before I got there I had to go again. And this running repeated itself the whole night. I didn't get pneumonia or even a cold. All I got from that night, I am sure, are the piles which I still have.

Now more than ever I recall the times when Lipa and I used to discuss the misery we lived through. Mathilda remembers a lot too, so we exchange memories. What she remembers I don't and what I remember she doesn't. Usher also used to tell me a lot of episodes. Schiye Wolf (Willy), he already lived in a better time, but he also has very interesting stories to tell us and I am sure that some of them will come to my mind. Willy went to the *Gymnasium* and also to the *Folk Shule*. The principal was a Mr. Gelb, a highly intelligent person. They had an amateur club where they used to perform all kinds of plays. I remember as if it were today when Willy acted in a Hebrew play. He was probably seven or eight years old and he played the lover. I even remember the lines: *Lifti heiteiv tsavuri,/ Simi roshech al roshi.* (Tightly embrace my neck,/ Lay your head against my head.) After he said his lines he fainted a bit. Somebody gave him an evil eye because he said them so well. I will come back later with more episodes about Willy.

Now I want to talk more about my father. When you looked at him he seemed to be a weak man, but it was not so. I remember he used to carry two pails of crude oil on his shoulders

from the oil mine where he worked all the way home. It was a couple of miles from the mine to our house. When I say two pails I don't mean pails like we have here. No, the pails my father carried each contained about ten gallons. After he brought them home my father and I would take a wooden sleigh and go to a nearby sawmill to buy a sack of sawdust for twenty-five cents. We brought that home and then we started to mix the oil and sawdust with our bare hands. We made the mixture into round balls, and that was our heating system. Sometimes when mixing the oil and sawdust there turned up a hidden piece of glass or a nail, and I would cut my finger. When I started to bleed I just wiped off the blood. There was no band-aid to cover the wound and no antibiotic, but no blood poisoning either. In Boryslaw nobody died of blood poisoning. If they died it was of starvation, TB, filth and dirt, or whatever you call it. I attended a lot of funerals in Boryslaw, and when I looked at the corpses they didn't look as if they had died a day or two before; they looked as if they had died years and years before.

Part II

I AM WRITING these memoirs in Montreal, to which I emigrated in 1925. I began writing these reminiscences of Boryslaw about twelve years ago, after I retired. I used to own a small factory which made the wooden frames for sofas and chesterfields—we shipped the frames off to an upholsterer who did the stuffing. When I retired I was seventy years old. My wife Masha, whom I met after I came to Montreal, and I live together in an apartment, now that our three sons are grown. I mention all this because I want to talk a little bit about my age. I mean, what it means to get old overnight. Until about seven or eight years ago I absolutely didn't know the difference age makes. I was around seventy-five. I worked as though I was fifty, but

since I stepped over the eighty mark it's not the same. Last year when I went for a walk in the winter (Montreal has harsh winters), I dressed myself accordingly. I put on overshoes. It was a little hard but not as hard as it is today. I walked a lot more than today. Today it's a big effort for me to put on overshoes, and to walk is getting harder and harder. So what will it be like when I reach eighty-five or ninety? Yesterday's walk was better than today's and tomorrow's walk will probably be harder than today's, and this is the way it is in the winter.

In the summertime I really don't complain of my age because I am outside walking a lot and sitting in the park, and that makes me feel good. I said that in summer I don't complain, and the real truth is that I don't complain in winter either. I don't have to. I am just describing how we old folks feel with all those heavy boots and heavy clothes, and I declare openly that I won't object if all that goes on, as the saying goes, until a hundred and twenty.

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I was speaking of funerals before, and there is one that I will never forget. This was my uncle Mordechai Schmiel's funeral, in 1920. First I want to give you some details about that

holy man. When I say "holy" I am not exaggerating; he was one of the purest, most pious *Chassidim* I ever met in my life. He was a poor man, but he always supported my mother and he was always ready to help. Even his last piece of bread he was ready to share. He died when he was sixty-three years old, and he died in my arms. The last few days of his life I slept in his house, because I was the only one who could help him turn over in his bed. He would cry out to me, "Meilech, you understand my pain!" Finally death released his pain forever; he died on a Friday night, and on Sunday the funeral was held in the *shul* where he was the *shames* (beadle). All the stores were closed and several rabbis delivered eulogies, but the most touching eulogy was given by Yankele Sicherman, his son-in-law. It made stones cry—and that was the end of a great *Chassid*, a great believer, and a great human being. I will always remember my uncle Mordechai Schmiel.

As I recall all the goodness and sadness of Boryslaw I also recall all our superstitions. It was a time when young mothers and infants used to die wholesale. The young mothers died of birth fever. It was pathetic to hear the outcry of the relatives and friends at these tragedies.

My mother and the other women would run to the cemetery to the graves of the great rabbis and plead with them to stop the dying of young mothers and infants. But nothing helped, not dead rabbis nor living rabbis. And so there were wholesale funerals for weeks and months and years until there were more hygienic conditions in the hospitals. Then, gradually, the rate of fatalities fell.

My mother was a very superstitious woman. I remember one evening, when I was about eight years old, she took the basin into which the dirty dishwater collected and carried it outside to empty it in back of the house, near where we piled the garbage. I went along with her. The night was foggy, you could hardly see ahead of you. As my mother approached the dumping spot she put the basin on the ground, stood, and, waving her arms back and forth, called out in a solemn voice, "*Heet zich, heet zich. . . .*" (Beware, beware.) I was terribly frightened. Who could she be talking to? I asked her, "Mamma, is anyone there?" She replied, "It's only the Evil Spirits, child. They like to stay around the garbage, and if I spill water on them they'll be angry and do us harm. Like this they'll leave us alone." And when she was

satisfied that the Evil Spirits had heard her and had left, she emptied the basin water on the ground. (Later my mother told me that once, when a woman she knew forgot to say *heet zich* before dumping water, a hand appeared out of the fog and slapped her.)

I remind myself of another picture of Mordechai Schmiel. When I look back sixty, seventy years I see him walking with his cane, and even the Gentiles stopped and looked at him—not for anti-Semitic purposes, but just out of respect for that holy man. He looked like one of the thirty-six *Tsadikim* concerning whom the legend tells that the world exists on account of them; if one dies he must be replaced right away—otherwise, if there were no replacement the world would collapse. Mordechai Schmiel was a man who lived in his own holy world. He never criticized anybody in Boryslaw, not even the pimps, gangsters, pickpockets, or the Jewish *grobe yungen* (roughnecks—not quite). They all adored Mordechai Schmiel. And why? Because in his goodness he walked in the footsteps of the Baal Shem, the founder of *Chassidism*. He also had a sense of humor, but he didn't use it often, only when it was appropriate. I remember a very humorous remark of Mordechai Schmiel's. A

woman came to his house and said, "Reb Mordechai Schmiel, did you hear the news? Basha Feige's daughter is pregnant." Basha Feige's daughter was about to be, but was not yet, married, and Mordechai Schmiel answered that woman on the spot: "It is not more than right: the future husband wants to know if she can have children; otherwise he shouldn't marry her." And that is why to his funeral came all classes of people: orthodox, underworld, freethinking, Gentile. He gave more charity than he could afford; and whatever he did nobody knew, it was all done quietly. Only at the funeral when they delivered the eulogies did we find out really what kind of a man Mordechai Schmiel was.

I also remember when Uncle Mendel Suniker died; he was my mother's and Mordechai Schmiel's uncle. I was a boy of about fifteen at the time. It was a terrible winter day. Mordechai Schmiel arranged the funeral, and when he sang the *Keil Molei Rachamim* (the prayer for the dead) everybody burst out in a terrible cry--I'm getting goose pimples even now as I write about it. And I shivered as I saw him actually standing in the freshly dug grave and heard him say the *Kaddish* to put his uncle

to eternal rest. And that is a little story about two pious Jews, Mendel Suniker and his nephew Mordechai Schmiel.

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My sister Mathilda now lives in Miami. When she visits we always go back to Boryslaw to reminisce about the misery of our youth, and the more we remember of that misery the more the question comes up: How could Mother have suffered so much and still have reached the age of eighty-nine? It was a miracle, I can't say anything else.

Here is an episode Mathilda reminded me of. It happened about seventy-five years ago. We lived in a house owned by a miserable woman, her name was Rechtchy Hendel, and, as usual, we didn't have the money to pay the rent as we didn't have the money to pay for bread. But Rechtchy Hendel didn't feel our pain. "If you don't pay the rent you'll have to move!" But she didn't send you any notice, as the law required. She was the law, and on a cold winter day she came to the house: "What about the rent?" Mother answered, "My husband isn't working now. Please, the first pay he'll receive will be for the rent." For Rechtchy Hendel that was a poor excuse. All she did was to have the front door of the house

taken off its hinges and to repeat, "You'll have to move!" So what did Mamma do with the children that they shouldn't freeze to death at night? She divided us up among the neighbors and she went to look for a house. I don't remember whether she found one the same day or the next day, but it was enough that we moved away from the witch Rechtchy Hendel. Nothing ever happened to her, however, and all the neighbors remained quiet about that crime.

There are many more such criminal episodes from Boryslaw which I don't remember. Mathilda remembers a lot but she is not always here to help me out. Lipa, who died in June 1971, remembered more that Mattel and I together. He was an open book about Boryslaw. He was a great help whenever I wrote something. He was my editor; he used to correct me and remind me, saying, "That isn't the same person," and, "That didn't happen at that time." He remembered the dates and places of stories just as if they had happened the day before, though the stories went back seventy years. Now that Lipa is gone I'll stick to my scribbling and tell my episodes the way I remember them. And about those I don't remember, especially of Boryslaw—it will be a great loss, because I

think that I am the last of the Mohicans to talk about Boryslaw and to remember the early nineteen hundreds there. When I say that I'm the last I don't mean seriously that I am the only one who knows so much about Boryslaw. There were many before me and there will be many after me to write about Boryslaw. After all, my scribbling has little value and for sure can't be credited as literature, but I enjoy my scribbling all the same.

Of course Boryslaw would need a Sholem Aleichem or a Bashevis Singer to write about it properly, and then Jewish literature would be a lot richer. Here is an episode that goes back about seventy years. We lived on the Neue Welt Street and we had a neighbor by the name of Leib Bear Brutzak. He was a mixture of everything: a carpenter, a toymaker, a comic, a water carrier, and something of a singer, mostly in the *shul*. For *Purim* he used to make some kind of clown out of colored cloth and stuffing, and he would tie the clown to the front of his body and walk like this and like that to give the impression that the clown was carrying *him*. But with all his inventions he hardly made a living, because he had about eight or nine children. His poor wife gave birth every two years. Bread or

no bread, children had to be made, that was the law; there was no way out. . . .

There was also his grownup daughter in the house. She was about eighteen years of age and her name was Eli, named after a boy and she even looked like a boy. That girl always liked to play with me. As a young kid I didn't understand the motive of her playing with me, but when I grew older I began to understand the facts of life. That poor girl never went out with a boy. She was tall, skinny, and had no sexual appeal whatsoever, so it was no wonder that I served as a substitute. She used to grab me and kiss me and I had to kiss her back, and I had to stand on a chair to reach her face. She also used to grab my hands and put them on her breasts; it was only afterwards that I learned what to do in such a situation. And that is the story of Leib Bear Brutzak and his daughter Eli.

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I am in Boryslaw again, walking again those paths where I walked in my youth, about sixty years ago: Unter der Debry, Potok Gorny (Upper), Potok Dolny (Lower), Neue Welt, Herren Gasse, Kaserne Gasse, Tustanovicz, Mraznica, Bania Kotovska, Popel, Hubich, Vollanka, Ratocsyn. Yes, I walked on all those streets and in all those villages. I didn't know then that

sixty years later I would still remember all those streets and villages around Boryslaw. Yes, those were the days. I loved the mountains that surrounded Boryslaw. I loved the real well water in Boryslaw, especially on a Saturday afternoon when we carried some in bottles and went off for a picnic. When I say "we," I mean boys and girls. When you are in the forest among the pine trees, could there be any better place for romance than there?

Talking about the forest, I am reminded of an episode that had to do with the forest. Brucha, my girl friend, had an uncle in America, her father's brother. The uncle was the opposite of his brother the rabbi. He was not only not too observant, he was practically a freethinker. One summer he came to visit his brother Reb Myer. The very first Saturday of his visit he was dying to smoke a cigarette, which of course on the Sabbath was strictly forbidden, so where was he to go? Brucha found a place for him—in the forest, not too far away. Brucha and her uncle went to the forest and there Uncle smoked his cigarettes freely, with no interruption. And that is a short, short episode about Reb Myer Bander, his freethinking brother, and his daughter Brucha.

And here is another episode which just

came to mind. My father was a watchman in Tustanovicz, at an oil firm owned by Suchestov and Schreier, two Jewish millionaires. The director was also a Jew, by the name of Segal. My father was very well liked by the director, and he was always given an extra day of work in order to be able to make a few cents more. And what was that day? Sunday. Nobody was there to check what the watchman did, so my father, a very handy man, helped out in the director's house and in his stable, where he kept a horse and a cow. I used to bring my father lunch every Sunday. I was then about twelve years old. The distance from our house to Tustanovicz was quite long, but what was that to a young boy?

I grabbed the lunch and I ran, and when I got there my father took the food I brought. He would be out in the field watching the cow. He then went back to his regular place at the plant to eat his lunch and he left me to watch the cow. That was a good experience for me, for when the director saw how seriously I took my work he hired me for Sundays to come to watch the cow. My wage was one *krone* a day—equivalent to about twenty-five cents. For me it was a fortune. I went for a few Sundays until I got tired of it. I liked the field and the other "cowboys" I met there, but that was me: I always liked a change.

Father remained on that job until the field closed up because the oil wells got depleted. And Father lost a very good position. Wherever he worked he was well liked, by Jew and Gentile, because he was an honest, quiet, and sincere man.

When I remind myself of these episodes I feel a wonderful satisfaction, and why? Because it makes me feel that I am a young man back in my home town and a dreamer again. . . .

Now I am back to reality. It's November 21, 1973. The first snowstorm of the season. The wind is blowing at about fifty miles an hour, it's miserable to look out through the window. Sometimes I feel that the apartment building I'm in will collapse and that the world will come to an end, and with it all the worries about inflation and everything else. So I return to my stories. If I could only tell all my stories I would really enjoy it, because I don't think there is a greater pleasure in a man's life than to tell his life story. While I am writing I forget my age, I forget that it hurts somewhere; you relive the past and it is wonderful.

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When I was about fourteen years of age I became a member of the *Forwärts Ferein*.

That was a socialist party. Yosel Hagler was president; Yankel Brockner, vice-president; and Lipa Schiff, committee member. On the wall were hanging the pictures of Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle, and everything looked like in a holy temple. I remember the hot discussions that used to go on. Mathilda Schiff and Dr. Berman always went together for walks and always discussed problems like the working class, the revolution, and so on. I remember the lectures too; every so often a delegate from Drohobycz or Lvov used to come to Boryslaw to give lectures on socialism. We also discussed the heroes of that time, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg; the great Russian writers, Tolstoy and Turgeniev and others; and the Jewish writers, Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Avrum Reisin, and Morris Rosenfeld. I remember Chaim Hersch Gelber singing, "*Nit zich mich dort vie mirten greenen,/ Gefinst mich nisht, mein guter shatz.*" (Don't look for me where myrtles grow,/ You won't find me, my dear beloved.) I remember a lecture by Fischel Glaser about what Karl Marx said about religion: "Religion is the opium of the masses." I remember also the song by David Edelstadt: "*O guter freund, ven ich vel shtarben,/ Trogt tsu mein keiver die roite*

Fohn,/ Die freie fohn mit roite farben/ Beshpritst mit blut fun arbets mann." (O good friend, when I die,/ Carry the Red Flag to my grave,/ The flag of freedom whose red colors/ Are splashed with the blood of the working man.) How touching and how idealistic those songs sounded in that time, how full of hope. Of course their achievements were great, but the revolutionaries paid a great price. Those idealists who died for the cause, if they could come back today to see the fruit of their idealism, I am sure they would all return very sadly to their graves.

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I want now to talk about some eccentrics of Boryslaw. It would be an insult to these people if I didn't describe them as they were. After all, in my stories about Boryslaw I mention mostly normal people, and it is well known that every town all over the world has its share of "village idiots." And here are my heroes.

Alter (Old Timer) was a very quiet, backward man. He was not at all dangerous. All his pleasure was that when a girl or a woman of any age passed by, he had to stop her and give her a *tap*, a feel, and then he let her go; and if the woman wouldn't stop but ran away, he would run after her, grab her, give her a *tap*, and let

her go! And I can see this man Alter, just as if he lived today.

The second hero's name is Zelig. He was absolutely out of his mind. Sometimes people were really afraid of him, not because he was dangerous but because of his abnormal actions. His pastime was to lean against a pole or a tree, take his penis out, start to turn it in a circle, and sing a song in the meanwhile. Here is his song, the melody of which I can still sing:

Me'nemt arois a bekeshe
Un me'nemt arois a shtreimel
Un me'nemt arois a hoizen tseig
Un me'leigt es in der erd arein.

(You take a waistcoat out
And you take a beaver hat out
And you take out some trousers cloth
And you bury it all in the ground.)

The song of course makes no sense at all. And Zelig is my second Boryslaw hero.

And here is a third party. I say "party" because they were a family of three: the father, Myer Tzutzak; the mother, Rifka Leah; and their daughter, Hentshele. They really deserve

to be immortalized. Where can I start to describe this trio? I don't know anything about the couple's life when they were young. I don't know how their daughter Hentshele was made and born, because they never had a home of their own; wherever they slept one night they never slept the second night. How did they make a living? They went from house to house begging, while Rifka Leah would sing songs that she made up herself.

Here is one of the songs she sang. It is a plea to God about a pious, handsome Boryslaw Jew whom we all knew, Koppela Vang:

Riboinoi Shel Oilem, helf mir
Az Koppela Vang
Zoll oif mir aroif fallen.

(God Almighty, help me
So that Koppela Vang
Should tumble on top of me.)

And at her husband who always went around flagrantly exposed she would yell: "*Myer Tzutzak, farlirst doch s'geheng! Die hint veln es bei dir oischapen!*" (Myer Tzutzak, you're losing your hanger! The dogs are going to grab it!) She

also used to dance in the middle of the street, or the three of them would join hands and dance and chant liturgical melodies.

I've described only a couple of incidents about this trio because, as I said, I know nothing of the life they led when they were younger. I was reminded recently, though, by my sister Mathilda of a particular night in Boryslaw when Myer Tzutzak and Rifka Leah and Hentshele slept in our house on the floor and, in the morning, we all shared the same breakfast. Neither do I know what became of them after I left Boryslaw fifty years ago. I imagine that Hitler would not have been able to get the parents, they were too old, but Hentshele was young and she probably met the same fate as all the other Jews of Boryslaw.

I remember another character, an outsider but far from an "idiot," called Chaskel. He was a common pickpocket—a very quiet boy, an illiterate, and a nonbeliever. He hated the rich, especially the rich orthodox Jews, because, he always said, they were big crooks under the mask of religion. He never stole from the poor. I remember when his mother died he mourned terribly, but at the cemetery he would not say *Kaddish*. When people asked him, "Chaskel, for

your mother's sake, why don't you say *Kaddish*?" he replied, "It won't heal my wounds, and besides, my mother won't know the difference." That was Chaskel of Boryslaw. He died very young because the police, whenever they caught him picking pockets, would beat the guts out of him. He was in and out of prison his whole life, and in the end in prison he died.

The same Chaskel had a cousin by the name of Hudy Goldman. That girl grew up not only in a very poor home—that's not a shame—but the environment was also miserable, I would say even degenerate. But that girl grew out of there like a rose out of a wild garden. Her intelligence I still value today. She was a dressmaker, but with the money she earned she didn't buy dresses or perfumes or makeup. All she bought were books; and after she read a particular book and studied it thoroughly, she would have long discussions about it with Brucha. She was, as I say, a highly intelligent girl. We were very close friends, but before I left for Canada we had a bitter argument, and I left without saying good-bye to her. That was very stupid of me and I regret it to this day. She remained friendly with my brother Willy, however. She left to live in Vienna while Willy was

away in the army. They kept up a correspondence, though what happened to her in the Second World War I don't know.

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August 13, 1974. Although it is the thirteenth of the month my mood is not affected. On the contrary, I feel wonderful. I was in the park again most of the day. As always, I love nature. All my life I admired the sunshine in the daytime and the moon at night, and the older I become the more I want to inhale the fresh air and to drink in the cold breeze that comes down the mountainside.

And I am back in Boryslaw. As it is only a few weeks away from the High Holidays I will describe the way my parents prepared themselves, shivering, for those days. I don't know why they were afraid. Was it because of the great sins they committed during the previous year? Yes, Father had to knock with his fist on his heart and pray *Al Chait* (My Sin), because he didn't have enough bread to quiet his hunger; *Al Chait*, because he didn't have a decent piece of meat to eat; *Al Chait*, because he never got a glass of milk or an orange; *Al Chait*, because he worked sometimes two or three shifts without a break, and that meant twenty-four or thirty-six

hours in a row, and only a morsel of bread to eat for the entire time, and not even something warm to drink; *Al Chait*, because he came home from work his body beat because of the crude oil and the gas, and there was not even a hot bath waiting for him so that he could wash up properly; *Al Chait*, because he didn't have a proper mattress to sleep on; *Al Chait*, because he slept on straw covered only with a black *shmata*—a sack, or whatever you want to call it; *Al Chait*, because he never had a decent suit to put on; *Al Chait*, because they threw rocks at him in *shul*—because he was poor; *Al Chait*, because Shimaly Eres and all the other big shots looked at him despisingly; *Al Chait*, because he refused to fetch the Komarno *Rebbe* a pail of water in the *shvitz* (the steambath). There were so many other sins such as these that my father committed, and that was the reason he had to knock *Al Chait* so many times.

But when he came to Canada he had to give up all those *Al Chaits*, because he now had an orange to munch on, a glass of milk to drink, a good mattress on which to sleep, and a nice suit and a white shirt to wear. And at *shul* they no longer threw rocks at him; they looked on him with respect. And he didn't have to work

twenty-four hours a day. He now had a good piece of meat to eat and more than enough bread. For the last few years of his life there was compensation for what he had gone through before. It's only too bad that those years didn't last a little longer.

And my mother also had to knock at her heart with her fist clenched: *Al Chait*, because she gave birth every two years; *Al Chait*, if she didn't become pregnant; *Al Chait,* because she breast-fed not only her own child, she also helped breast-feed a poor neighbor's child because the neighbor didn't have enough milk in her breasts; *Al Chait*, because Mother had too much milk in her breasts, because of the water she drank instead of milk; *Al Chait*, because she had to worry how to feed a family of nine when there wasn't enough food for three; *Al Chait*, because she never had a decent dress to put on; *Al Chait*, because she froze in the winter since she didn't have a winter coat; *Al Chait*, because she had to beg the grocery man for more credit in order to prepare for the Sabbath; *Al Chait*, because she bought a *grashel* instead of good meat—that is, a bunch of intestines from an ox or cow, full of shit, and Mamma cleaned them for hours and hours, and in the end they still

smelled; *Al Chait*, because we ate the *grashel*; *Al Chait*, because nothing happened to us; *Al Chait*, because she went to care for a friend who was lying sick with typhus; *Al Chait*, because she wasn't afraid that typhus was extremely contagious; *Al Chait*, because whenever a member of the family got sick she made *neider* (a vow) to fast Mondays and Thursdays. And those are only a small part of all the *Al Chaits* she committed.

But when she came to Canada she didn't have those *Al Chaits*, because she wasn't pregnant and she didn't breast-feed and she had milk enough. She now had a nice clean bed and a good mattress. She joined a women's charitable organization and all the women looked up to her. She delivered speeches to her group. And she was alert until the last moment of her life. Except for the suffering of her last few months she should have lived a few more years and enjoyed a little more her children and grandchildren.

So no wonder they were shivering so much, my parents. They had hoped that in the year to come they wouldn't have to knock so much and say so many *Al Chaits*! But nothing helped. As long as they remained in Boryslaw they knocked

Al Chait without end. . . . And that's the end of a miserable story.

Another episode about our poverty just came to my mind. It's one that's very painful to talk about. It happened that my mother had a cousin by the name of Reb Myer Chamaides, nicknamed Shoichet. He was a *shoichet,* a ritual slaughterer; a *mohel*, a circumciser; and a *chazin*, a cantor. He had a wife, Chave Ruchyl, and they had five daughters and three sons. I remember some of their names but not all. Of course it's important to know their names so that I could characterize each one of them separately; but when you put them all together—they were snobs. They looked upon poor relatives such as we as though we were contaminated. Instead of entering into the situation of the poor relative and offering to help—not necessarily with food; moral help would do—they showed contempt. They were very religious but they certainly didn't follow the principle about charity to the poor that religion teaches.

As Myer Shoichet was a *shoichet* he was privileged: after slaughtering an ox or a cow, it was his right to get as part of his payment some part of the animal, and it was the butcher's obligation to give him whatever part he asked for.

And so there was no shortage of meat in the Chamaides house. Also, the practice was at that time to eat a lot of fat, and my mother used to send me to Myer Shoichet often to beg with these well-rehearsed words: *"Die Mamme hot gebehten ihr zolt ihr geben a bissel fets oif Shabbes."* (Mother begs you to give her a little fat for the Sabbath.)

When I entered Myer Shoichet's house I found the atmosphere beautiful. The rooms looked bright and clean. There were bookshelves with many, many books—Polish books, German books, and, of course, the Holy Books (the last ones were kept separate from the others). And from the kitchen there came the wonderful smell of something good cooking. I inhaled the delicious smell as I stood near the front door—for I was almost never invited actually to enter the house; I just remained at the door. The family would pass by me with not a word said, just as though they didn't see me. I looked up to them, they were privileged people, and they deserved their wealth, and it was God's will. I believed that wholeheartedly. I wasn't even offered a cup of coffee or a piece of the fresh bread that had just come out of the oven. Only the mother, Chave Ruchyl, who weighed about three

hundred pounds, looked after me, and she rushed very fast to get rid of me as soon as possible. She prepared a parcel of fat, chicken legs, calf lungs and liver, and other kinds of bits, and when I brought that home we had a real feast.

How shameful this recollection is to me is hard to describe. We didn't suffer only from the poverty we lived in, we suffered because people despised us because of our poverty; because our poverty was, we thought, not the fault of the society we lived in—it was God's own punishment, and we probably deserved it. And those who ruled and exploited the masses—they too were only carrying out God's will. Coming back to Reb Myer Shoichet, he was considered one among the great pious Jews of Boryslaw. When he said *Kol Nidre* the whole synagogue shivered. He had a wonderful feeling for expressing and explaining the *Kol Nidre* prayer. But when it came to some simple thing like doing a favor for a relative—for Mordechai Schmiel's son-in-law Yankele Sicherman, who had studied to be a *shoichet* and upon completion of his studies had gone to Reb Myer Shoichet to ask for his signature showing that he was now a full-fledged ritual slaughterer—that great pious Jew refused to help, though it was a matter of life and

bread. I remember the impression that refusal made on Mordechai Schmiel. He didn't say much but you could read the disappointment, the suffering on his face. Myer Shoichet and Mordechai Schmiel did not speak again to each other until toward the end of their lives. And Reb Yankele Sicherman became a *shoichet* without the help of his relative, the pious Jew Reb Myer Shoichet.

One of Myer Shoichet's daughters was named Yocheved and, I remember very well, Yocheved fell in love with a Jewish boy, but a communist. It had to be a very secret love because for a *shoichet's* daughter to go out with an atheistic communist was a scandalous thing for the family. And once Reb Myer found out that Yocheved was seeing a communist boy friend he called her to him and shouted at her: "You'll marry that boy over my dead body!" And that is exactly what happened. She and her boy friend were married after Reb Myer died. But what happened to them afterwards was the same as what happened to all the other Jews who remained in Boryslaw until the outbreak of the Second World War. They were exterminated by the Germans.

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Today I'm not going to talk about rabbis, *shochtim*, circumcisions—though that's what I really should talk about, since I come from a pious and devout family. But why don't I want to talk more about those things? Because, I think you can understand, I gradually grew out of sympathy with the clergy. I couldn't digest their way of life. They were as hypocritical as the rest of us, and they didn't seem closer to God to me just because they obeyed every ritual practice. No, my story today will be about the brothels, the underworld, the gangsters of Boryslaw. Yes, there was Jewish low life in Boryslaw, although most people refused to talk about it. Here are the names of some of the characters I knew.

Zishe Leipundig was about fifty-five or sixty years old and a widower when I first met him in about 1908. He was, I remember, a very orderly man—clean shaven, but with the long sideburns that were the fashion at the time. He was the owner of a brothel in the Lozenes (the Swamp), a very poor Jewish neighborhood. The house was a plain one with a red light outside, and the more pious Jews tried to avoid living near it. Brothels at the time, under Kaiser Franz Joseph of Austria, were legal, and the girls had to go for

medical examinations twice a week. Zishe's was a small establishment—there were maybe eight to ten girls, Jewish, Polish, Czech, and they worked like hell seven nights a week. The price for a visit was one *krone*, about twenty-five cents, but when you consider that an average wage at that time was about ten *kronen*, it was still a pretty expensive proposition for a working man to go there. Zishe's clientele was almost all Jewish—married men and unmarried men. But the brothel was still a very rough place, and I remember many fights and beatings going on there all the time.

When I knew him Zishe was already semi-retired. Already he didn't mix in the business. He had two sons, Yoineh and Moishe, who had inherited his throne. Yoineh was the inside man, married, and a financier besides. Moishe, the outside man, used to travel to Lemberg (Lvov) and Krakow to bring home new merchandise, live merchandise. People like to change. They want to change their bed partners as often as they change their suits. Yoineh was a family man, Moishe was a gigolo. Moishe was a friendly man, well dressed. Women paid a lot of money to sleep the night with him—I'm sorry, I mean to be *awake* the night with him.

The old man Zishe sat in the house and told stories about his younger years, stories about picking up girls and about getting girls for his establishment. He talked about girls, girls, girls all the time, in a terrible hoarse voice. He was always coughing, sneezing, wheezing, but this did not keep him from smoking and from taking with every breakfast a glass of pure spirits—alcohol, ninety-six proof; and when I say a glass, I don't mean a *glazele*. After drinking the alcohol he would take a huge raw onion, salt and pepper it, and eat all of it with a piece of bread. He was a really colorful character, very friendly to me, and I liked him.

A second brothel owner was Alter Yasinitzer. His establishment was in the Neue Welt, also a very poor Jewish section of Boryslaw. Our own house was close by. Alter's business was bigger than Zishe's—he had maybe twelve girls working for him—but he also ran a much quieter place, no fighting, no noise.

Alter was also already old when I knew him. He wore a long white beard, like a pious Jew. Seeing the way he was dressed and the way he lived, I think it would have fitted him better to be the *shames* of a *shul* instead of a brothel keeper. He prayed every day, he went every

Saturday to *shul*, while the others, like Zishe, went only on *Rosh Hashonah* and *Yom Kippur*. His wife was an ordinary *Yiddene* (housewife) who seemed to accept her strange lot in life. Noontimes I often used to hear Alter call out to her as she was sitting outside in the yard: *"Koorvah, gei breng die meidlech essen!"* (Go get the girls something to eat, you whore!) That made me break up laughing. And his wife went to do as she was told, an obedient woman helping her husband in his work.

But Alter didn't live long after I got to know him. When he died the undertakers, who belonged to a very religious organization, refused to help arrange an orthodox funeral for a brothel keeper, so he was packed in and buried, one and two. The pimps were the pallbearers and his son Schmiel said *Kaddish* and took over the business.

Schmiel was a very quiet man. He had a family, and one of the boys was my age. This son was a barber and he played the mandolin. He was a really nice intelligent boy. He couldn't stand his father's business, and he left Boryslaw for America at the age of eighteen. That was in 1912 or 1913. Then, in 1914 the war broke out, and when America entered the war the boy en-

listed. He was sent to France and it didn't take long before a bullet finished off his young life. His father collected ten thousand dollars for him on an American insurance policy.

The third brothel owner was named Itzik Hersch Koch. He was also a family man and he had a daughter, I remember. His brothel was, I would say, a better class establishment than the other two. It was situated on Vollanka Street, in a better section of town. And the business was much more confidentially carried on than in the other places. Married men used to go there, very orthodox Jews. There was always a doorman. Naturally the prices were higher here than at the other places—two *kronen* and up.

Itzik Hersch did not go to his establishment every day. He had a couple of pimps who took care of the house for him. But he kept a sweetheart at the house who belonged only to him. She wasn't allowed to go with any other man, and she helped run the place by collecting the money from the clients. Itzik Hersch himself would show up two or three times a week to take the money and to see his girl friend. Except for what we already knew, nobody would have said he was a brothel keeper. He looked like a middle class business man.

So much for the brothel owners. Now I want to introduce some gangsters and pimps whom I also knew. They all belong, I think, to the same class, but they all had different characters. Here are their names: Herman Taus, Dudzie Hauser, Leib Holky, Leib Finkler, Hersch Yashky.

Herman Taus was a roughneck besides being a pimp. His whore was Manya, a tall, stout, Polish girl. Every cent she made he took away from her, and sometimes he gave her a good beating too. Herman Taus was also a thief. He didn't care whom he stole from—rich and poor were the same. He used to attack workers on pay day as they were on their way to the tavern. He would hit them over the head with a siphon bottle and take their money. And Taus the black sheep was the only one of these Jewish thieves who also stole from Jews. He was often caught by the police and he spent his time in and out of jail.

Dudzie Hauser was a clean-cut boy, but he was a pimp all right. He had his girl and she was a very beautiful girl. Her name was Manchoo. She lived not far from us. She used to go out in the evening to pick up customers, and Dudzie watched her so that she wouldn't be cheated or beaten up by a drunkard. But if that

did happen I didn't envy the man who did it: either he landed in the hospital or in the morgue. Dudzie owned a pair of deadly brass knuckles, and I know for a fact that he killed more than one man who abused Manchoo. But he was never arrested and he never went to jail.

Leib Holky and Leib Finkler and Hersch Yashky belonged in the same category. (Hersch Yashky, by the way, was Reisaly Leiner's brother.) They were real gangsters. They were involved in a couple of killings, but somehow no one could ever pin the crimes on them. One night a gendarme, with his gun at his side, was found with a sack over his head near Zishe Leipundig's brothel. Though no one was ever arrested, people suspected that Leib Holky, Leib Finkler, and Hersch Yashky did the job. And the reason given was that the gendarme had asked for an increase in his pay-off, which they did not want to give. The anti-Semites in the town also shivered because of these three. If a *Goy* dared to call someone "dirty Jew" or "lousy Jew," these three took care of him so that he would never want to use those words again. Besides, we Jews were fairly well protected by the government. Kaiser Franz Joseph was very sympathetic to Jews. It was like a paradise until the

Poles took over in 1918. Then a *gehenem,* a hell, for the Jews began. The Poles really took bitter "revenge" upon us, and the emigration from our area began. We had to run wherever we could—Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, Canada.

Back to the gangsters. Leib Finkler, I remember, later got caught by the police and was sent to prison. While working at the post office he had attempted a robbery but he was quickly stopped and arrested. He spent three years at hard labor in a horrible prison and returned to Boryslaw a sick man. But then he was lucky enough to marry a very sweet girl—in fact, my brother Lipa's ex-sweetheart Chana Schpitalnik—and he lived quietly the rest of his life. (Leib Finkler, by the way, was my close friend Psachye's brother, and for that reason my mother never wanted me to associate with Psachye.)

And now I want to describe a different kind of pimp I knew. This type was not a gangster, just someone involved with a prostitute. There were two of this type whom I knew: Luzor Neigut and Liabe, whose family name I have forgotten.

Luzor came from a very orthodox family. He

was very intelligent and he knew the Talmud well. His father was a great Talmudist, a very pious Jew. He also had two sisters and two brothers, all very respectable and all scandalized by Luzor. For Luzor just didn't like to work, and so, while still a nice young boy, he found himself a whore for a sweetheart—Genky was her name—and she made a living for him. Luzor lived next door to us. He was even too lazy to pick himself up to go to the store, so he used to send me there to buy tobacco for him. But he would always give me a big tip when I went. He also had a fine voice, and he used to sing dirty songs in Yiddish for me.

Liabe was not really a pimp—he saw his whore for love and he took no money from her. He was a butcher and he was outwardly very religious. He had a devout wife and good children. As a devout woman his wife wore a wig, but that didn't stop Liabe from having a whore for a sweetheart. Every Saturday after *shul* he came to see his *koorvah*, who lived in a private home near us on the Neue Welt. On these occasions my mother used to say, *"Es iz a shande far die Goyim."* (We are shamed in the eyes of the Gentiles.) This because he used to come to see her in his Sabbath orthodox garb, that is, a

shtreimel, a beaver hat, and a *bekeshe*, a waistcoat. But at least, as far as I know, he never took his whore's money.

And how did I as a boy of fifteen or sixteen year old come to know all about whorehouses and pimps? Well, as I mentioned earlier in these memoirs, my friend Psachye used to drive a horse and buggy—at night only, because there was an easier dollar to be made at night work. Night work consisted mostly of picking up call girls and driving them to the hotel rooms of rich men, and for this work there was usually good tipping. As I also liked night life, I went with Psachye to pick up and deliver the goods. When we stopped at a brothel and waited for the girl, my young eyes took in everything. Also, the men—especially Zishe Leipundig—enjoyed talking to me, and I enjoyed listening to them. The others described here I came to know because we lived in a neighborhood of pimps and gangsters—in the lower depths of the town. And that's the college I went through in my youth. Isn't that worth something? Whoever reads this will find out that in Boryslaw there were three brothels and so many pimps and gangsters—and all Jewish.

Part III

THE HOUSE WHERE we lived was next door to a neighbor's, their name was Smotrichky. Their real name was Smotrick, I think, though I am not sure; anyway we called them and knew them as Smotrichky. They were very low class people. They had about three or four daughters, and one was worse than the other. They ran in the streets after boys without any shame whatever. You could see them on every corner. You could see them in the fields. Their tastes were international: Jew or Gentile, it made no difference to them. But the youngest beat them all: she used to flirt with me and make all kinds of propositions to me. At the time I was a boy ten or eleven years old, and I felt like puking at the language she used.

As time went on this youngest girl advanced very nicely. She reached the ripe age of sixteen or seventeen and then she joined the world of prostitution. But she didn't stick to Boryslaw. She went to Budapest, and there she started to make a lot of money. She succeeded so well that she used to return to Boryslaw twice a year to visit her parents, and when she arrived at their house she was dressed like a princess. Her Panama hat was, I think, the only one seen in Boryslaw. She was very proud of herself, coming as she did from such a poor home and being able now to dress so well and to travel and to bring home beautiful presents for family and friends. That was a great achievement for a girl like that. And she wasn't the only girl in Boryslaw to go into prostitution. Prostitution was and still is a great problem for the poor classes. And I know that many other poor girls struggled with all their might not to fall into that miserable profession, knowing if they fell how hard it would be to get out of it.

After that tale about prostitution, here is another miserable tale so unbelievable that people will say it's not true. When I was an apprentice there were two other boys learning the trade with me. These boys liked to do all kinds

of *shtik* (pranks) and they liked to kibbitz a lot. As there was no inside toilet at that time we all used to go outside behind a fence to urinate. And there on the ground was an apple and everybody pissed on that apple. One afternoon, at about the time that my mother used to bring me a piece of fruit (a fruit that wasn't so fresh, that was always a bit rotten because that was all that Mamma could afford to buy), the boys took the apple on which everybody had pissed for a couple of days, washed it up, and gave it to me, calling, "Here, Meilech, your mamma has brought you an apple." Believe it or not I ate that apple, and nothing happened to me. The boys told me the story after I had finished eating it. Of course it was easy for me to have mistaken that apple because Mamma always bought bargains and the bargains could sometimes be rotten. Another reason was that I was always hungry. But I still feel that those boys were sadistically inclined.

Here is another pissy story. When I was six or seven years old we had a neighbor by the name of Moldover. The Moldovers had two boys who were much older than I was. Naturally all boys look for thrills, and what did these two boys find? A kid like Meilech to have fun with.

They came to me with a plan. "You lie down and we'll cover you with an orange crate, and you'll see all kinds of magic." Who, at my age, is not anxious to see magic? So I followed their instructions and here was their wonderful magic. When I was covered and trapped by the orange crate the Moldover boys, together with some other boys who arrived from nowhere, all started to piss on me, and I danced inside the crate like a bear, yelling and screaming, until they were through and they ran away. I threw off the box and I got up, but pee was dripping off me and I couldn't stand the smell. I started to cry and I ran home. Mother undressed me, then she washed me up and down, then she taught me the lesson I should have known: Why did I listen to those bums? She went over to the Moldovers to complain about the incident, and Mr. Moldover promised Mother that the boys would get their just punishment. I am sure they were punished, but that didn't take away the shame and the pain that I had gone through.

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More characters. In my early youth, as I've already mentioned, we had as neighbors Eisik Leiner, a pious Jew, his wife Pynie, and their

daughters Reisaly and Gitele. Their son, Hersch Yashky, was the underworld character I described earlier. The daughters were dressmakers. They worked mainly at night, at least until midnight and sometimes later. Lipa and I used to visit them to keep them company. Mostly we took shifts. When Lipa finished his shift (he didn't like to stay up too late) I took over. I always was a night bird. There was also another girl present whose name was Mindel Rintzler. She also enjoyed spending time with us. In fact many girls would visit at the Leiners' at night, because their parents were certain that nothing shameful could happen to them in such a religious household. God help us if it is necessary, but the fact remains that beneath the roof of that pious house we all hugged and kissed the night away, because the night is made for that and neither religion nor religious fanaticism can hold desire back for long.

Brucha also would come on some evenings, but she couldn't stay very long as she had to be home at the set time announced by her mother. Reisaly wasn't the kissing type, but Gitele more than made up for it. Mindel Rintzler was pathetic, and I don't mean that in a nasty way. After the first kiss she threw her head sideways and

nearly fainted, poor girl. If only she had lived in this time of the pill, she wouldn't have had to faint.

I am back now with the old friend of my youth, Psachye. He really was my best and most sincere friend. He was my bodyguard. The gang shivered when Psachye was around, and without Psachye I would have been beaten up every day at every corner. He was a strong boy and yet he would never use his strength when it wasn't necessary. But when it came to defending any of his friends, especially me, he showed no mercy.

He had a heart of gold. When I was with Psachye I would never be hungry. I got everything from him, even once a warm coat for the winter. When he had had a new one made I got the old one, which was still good enough for me. Yes, he had a soul of gold. I remember once we found a little black dog in the street and we both adopted him. Together Psachye and I played with the little dog, together we walked him, and together we fed him. We also chose a name for him and the name was Bobic. In the daytime all three of us were together but at night Bobic slept at Psachye's, because my mother would not allow a dog in her house: it wasn't considered nice for religious people to

keep a dog in the house. And one day, as we walked along the street, a horse and buggy came upon us all of a sudden and ran over little Bobic. We grabbed the fatally wounded doggie, ran for water, washed the wound, but nothing helped. Bobic was dead. Psachye became hysterical. I couldn't control him because I was also in a state of shock. We finally buried the little doggie near the river and that was it.

Yes, as I talk about Psachye the softy, who broke down when his dog died, I also want to talk about Psachye the hero. This story goes back to the First World War, in 1915. All of us young boys were being called up to defend the Kaiser and the Fatherland, and naturally Psachye, who was such a strong boy, was selected right away to be sent to the front lines—the battlefront. With my flat feet they didn't select me that soon; I went later, as I shall soon describe. Anyway, at that time we were not such big patriots. Nobody wanted to die—and for what? For the monarchic ambitions of the Kaisers? So each of us tried a different way to avoid being sent to the battlefield. The simplest way was to get syphilis, which was a miserable disease in those days, but some preferred even syphilis to going to the battlefield. Some boys injected a poison into their leg and the leg be-

came horribly swollen; the doctors were puzzled and didn't know how to cure that condition. There were also many deserters but that was a very dangerous choice, because if you were caught you would be immediately court-martialed, and that usually meant death by a firing squad.

Psachye played a different role from all of them. He played dumb. The important thing is that he succeeded. He stopped talking. He grew a beard. He began to look like a retarded child. The doctors, the psychiatrists, and the officers knew that he was tricking them but they couldn't prove it. That's how strong he was. Twenty-four hours a day he was watched directly or from a hidden spot, but nothing doing. His mother came to see him, I came to see him—and there was not a sign of a normal person! After a few months he was released from the army as a sick, abnormal man. But even at home he had to be careful and keep on acting crazy, because there was always a watching eye on him. But he carried out his act like a real hero. His lovely sweetheart watched over him like a mother until the war ended in 1918. And Psachye married his lovely sweetheart and they lived together very happily.

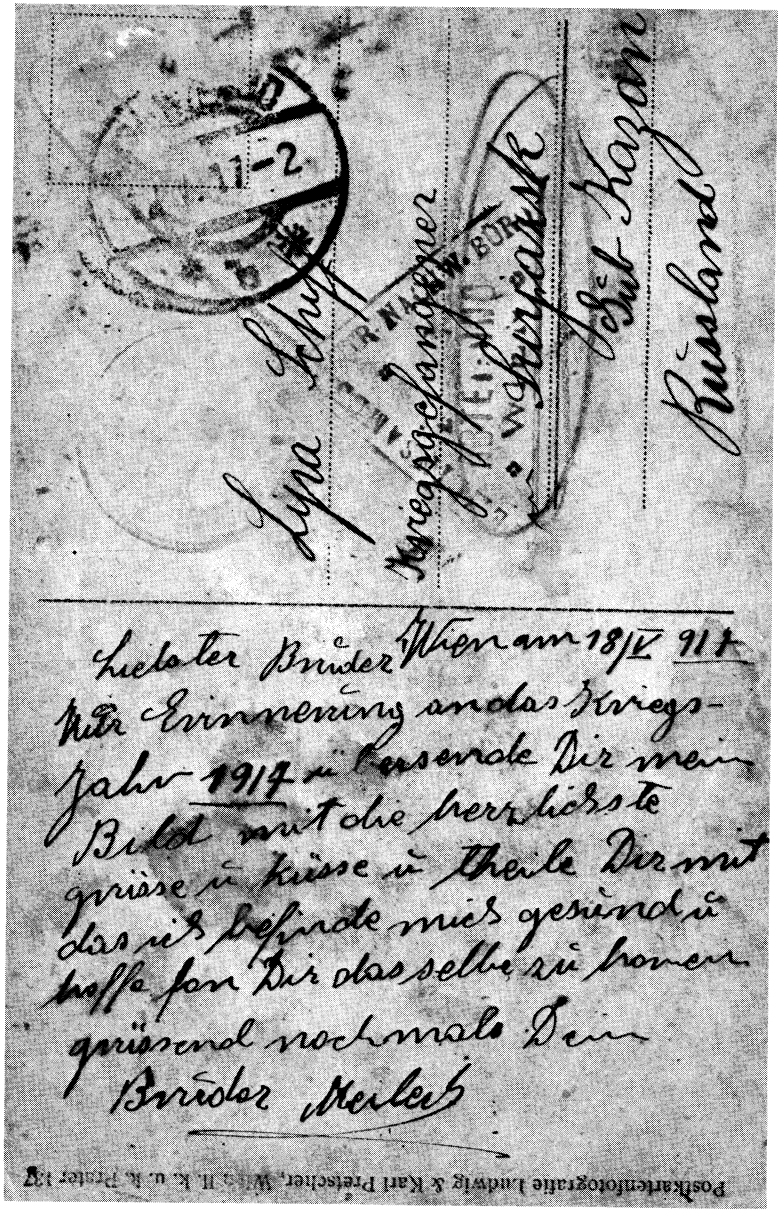
I visited them from time to time until I left

Meilech
Landzut, 1915

Mathilda
New York, 1913

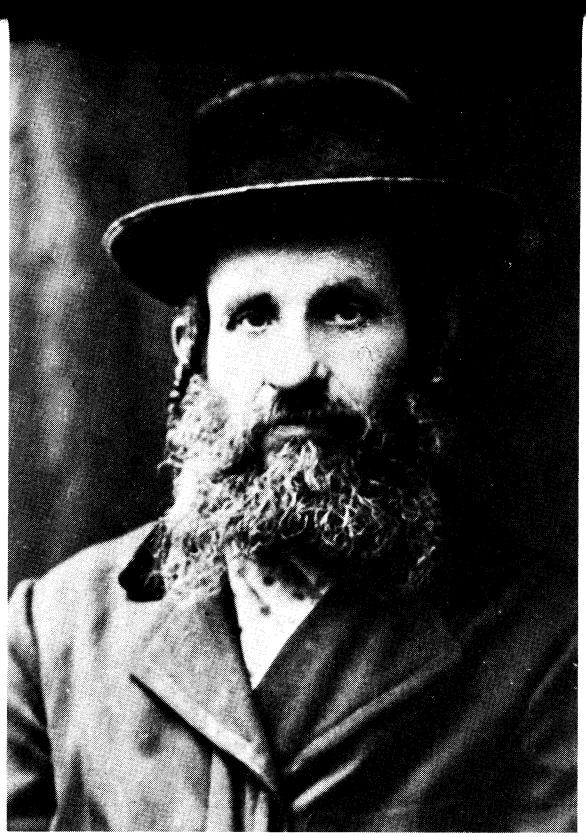
Meilech
Mauthausen, 1916

Meilech (right) and Gevanter
Vienna, 1916

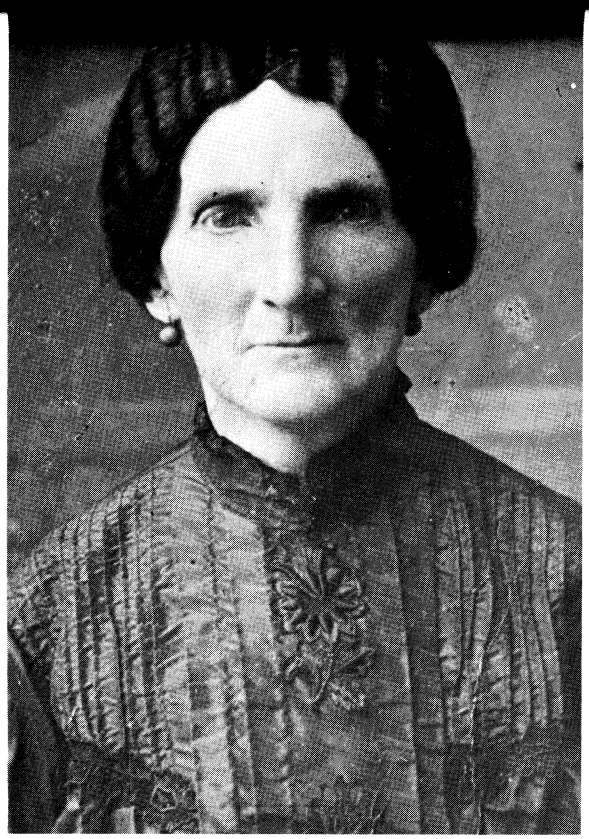


a post card from Meilech in Vienna to Lipa, a prisoner of war, in Kazan, Russia
(the photograph on the previous page is on the picture side)
Vienna, 18 May 1917

a family photograph sent to Mathilda in New York
standing from the left: Lipa, Genya his wife, Chana, Meilech, Usher
seated from the left: Pessel, Mother, Father, Schiye Wolf
Boryslaw, circa 1920



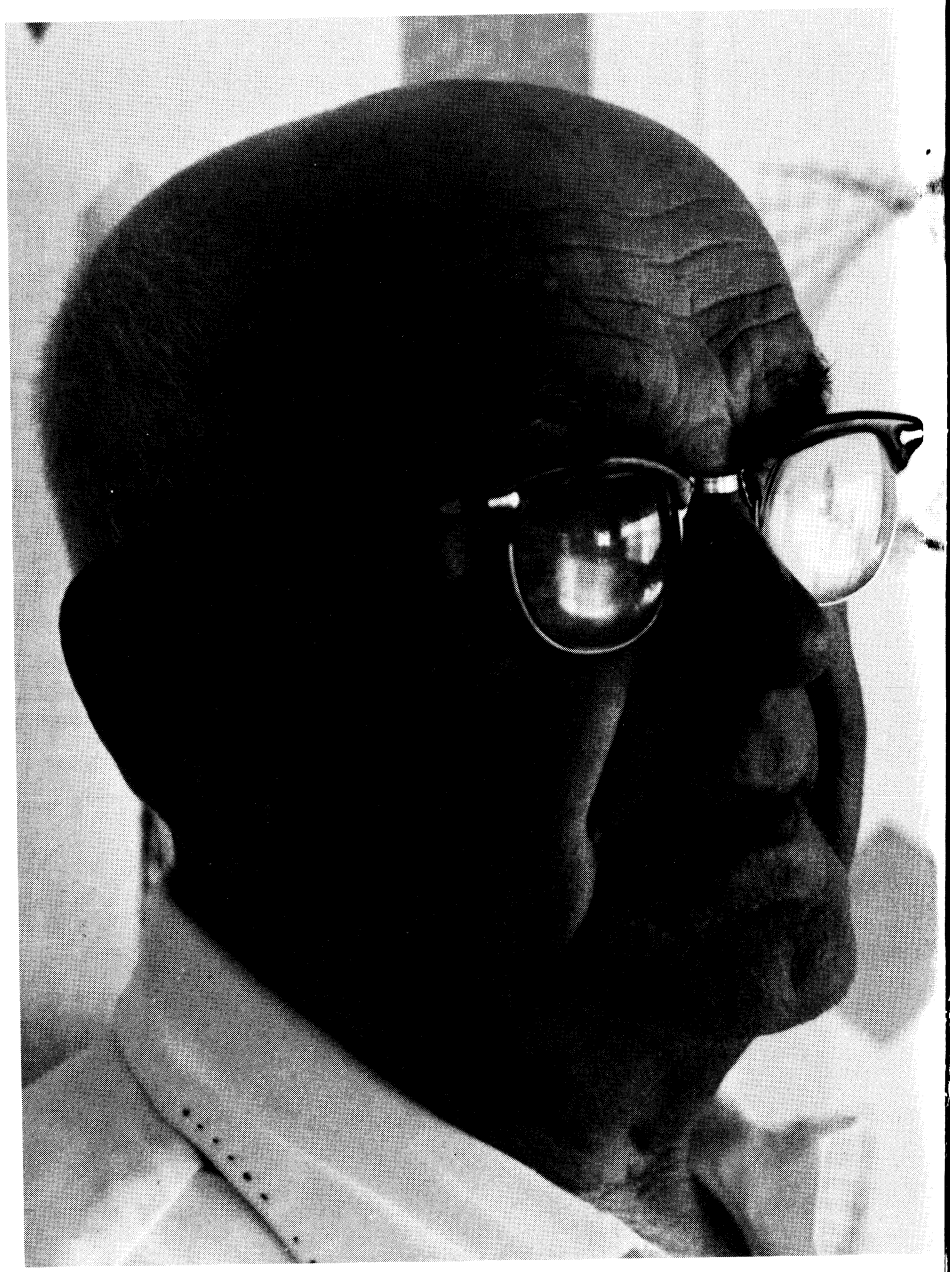
the truly pious Uncle Mordechai Schmiel
Boryslaw, circa 1918



Aunt Malke, Mordechai Schmiel's wife
Boryslaw, circa 1918

Meilech (right), on the way to Canada, and Schiye Wolf
Bielsk, 27 July 1925

Meilech and Mathilda, reunion after thirteen years
Montreal, 14 November 1925



Meilech
Montreal, 1965

Boryslaw in 1925. I said good-bye to them then and I never heard from them again. My youthful friend Psachye, I don't know if you are alive or if any of your children are alive. But wherever you are, Psachye, I want you to know that I didn't forget you. And maybe someday my story will fall into your hands or the hands of your relatives.

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As I sit and write March is biting like a wild animal. The wind is blowing at thirty miles an hour, so with the cold temperature it's equivalent to about twenty degrees below zero. It's really worse than it has been the whole winter. The only thing to do is to sit and wait until the rest of March disappears and we have spring weather and I can go out more. Meanwhile I remember my early youth.

Although you are shabbily dressed and you are always hungry for a good meal, it doesn't matter—you still want to enjoy life. You want to be in the company of girls and the only way to achieve your goal is to join a dance club, and so I did. There was a dancemaster by the name of Wolf Singer. He lived in a two room house, old and crooked. One room was the dance hall and it had a crooked floor. The windows were always

shut and people always smoked and a cigarette never left the mouth of the dancemaster himself, although he suffered from bronchitis. At this Wolf Singer's I started to take dance lessons. I don't remember the price of the lessons, but I do remember that every Saturday night there was a ball there and it cost ten cents to enter. There was a bar, and you could buy a drink and a cookie if you had the few cents. And the dance went on all night, way past midnight until the early morning.

We danced the mazurka, the polka, the Wiener waltzes, the lancer quadrille, and we finished with the *Bialy Mazur*. We sang, *Nie pojde do domu asz rano asz rano/Asz bedzie bialy dzien*. The translation is, I will not go home till the morning, and so on, and so on. It was beautiful. And the later it got the more we boys and girls got romantic. We forgot our misery, our life of poverty, we delighted in each other, we hugged and kissed. The dimness of the kerosene lamp was a big help because nobody saw what the next couple was doing. A couple of the girls hummed beautiful and sad tunes.

After the romantic night I escorted my girl home. I say "my girl" but it was just the girl I danced with the most during the night. It was around five o'clock in the morning. It was the

early stages of winter. It wasn't so cold. Maybe it was, but when you are young you can absorb any weather. I escorted the girl right to the door and we stayed there awhile, hugging and kissing. And so ended a beautiful romantic evening.

Later on, when I was already a big *facet* (that is, a real man), I joined a nicer and more modern dance hall. Psachye was already there, and wherever Psachye went I went. It was a nice hall. It had a beautiful hardwood floor spread with a white feathery powder—that made it easier to dance. Motty Kusher was the dancemaster. He had a different approach to teaching. *"Eins, tsvei, drei, yetst geht gut!"* (One, two, three, that's fine!) Or he used to sing, *"Kakerik un pisherik"* (Little shitter and little pisser), and *Tur Damay* (Turn Your Partner), and, *"Eins, tsvei, drei, morgen breng drei kronen"* (One, two three, bring three *kronen* tomorrow), and so on, and so on. It was a lively place but mixed with sadness. A lot of times you noticed a girl sitting alone in a corner, crying hysterically. Why? Because her boy friend had danced more with another girl than with her. I could write so much about that young life and that young time. All I require is that my memory serve me and that the dance music wake me up.

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About sixty-five years ago, when I was an apprentice to Yankel Gersten, there lived, on the same street as my work, two couples, both middle aged. The first couple were the Blochs. Hertzbear Bloch was a millionaire of oil mines. He had a hunchback. He used to dress in the latest style but he couldn't hide his hunchback. He was religious. He went to *shul* every Saturday. And he gave so much charity that the whole town talked about and praised the Bloch family. His wife was a plain *Yiddishe mamme*. It would have fitted her more to be a rabbi's wife than Hertzbear Bloch's, for, even though he was deformed, he didn't like his wife too much. Wherever he went he went without her. He was always on the go, naturally—as a big millionaire he had to travel a lot. And his wife lived in their beautiful home like a nun in a cloister.

The second couple were the Lichtenshteins. Isaac Leib Lichtenshtein was not a millionaire. He was the director of an oil mine. He also had a small percentage in it. But the Lichtenshteins were more aristocratic than the Blochs. Mrs. Lichtenshtein was just the opposite of Mrs. Bloch. She was a real *krassavitse*, a real beauty, a Jewish brunette—tall, handsome, sexy,

lively—everything that a man would look for. Mr. Lichtenshtein on the other hand was a very quiet type and not at all romantic, as I now understand. All he knew was that his wife was required to go to bed with him in order to reproduce.

But Mrs. Lichtenshtein expected more than that from life, and she looked for the opportunity for a little romance. It didn't matter, it could be a hunchback, and Hertzbear Bloch wasn't a stranger; they were all neighbors. And as they also all belonged to high society, it wasn't difficult for Hertzbear Bloch to get to know Mrs. Lichtenshtein. And though they were all religious people, love made them forget the commandment, Thou shalt not commit adultery. In time, after Mr. Lichtenshtein left with his horse and buggy for his office in the morning, I began to see Mr. Bloch enter the Lichtenshtein house. And it seemed that so long as he was a good romantic lover Mrs. Lichtenshtein was not bothered by Mr. Bloch's deformity. And little by little the whole town soon knew about their romance.

Mrs. Bloch suffered quietly. But Mr. Lichtenshtein didn't seem to be bothered too much by what was going on. He wasn't the type to make a fuss or to divorce his wife. Divorce at

that time was very shameful and he had a very nice family, so I guess he suffered in a quiet way also. He didn't show any feeling on the outside and he went on with his life as though nothing had happened. And the romance went on and on, until one nice summer day Mr. Lichtenshtein went to the office in his horse and buggy and on the way the horse got wild and ran into a telephone pole, and Isaac Leib Lichtenshtein was killed instantly. A few months after that Mrs. Bloch also died. I do not know the cause of her death, but it could have been a broken heart; she was in her late fifties at the time. And now Hertzbear Bloch and Mrs. Lichtenshtein were free to get married, and they did. They moved to Vienna and they lived happily ever after, as the story goes.

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Memory is like a well: the deeper you dig the more water you get out. Boryslaw, sixty-eight years ago. I see this clearly as though it were happening today. My mother always wanted her children to be something: a tailor, a shoemaker, a carpenter, anything, just so we could make a reliable living. With me it was decided that I learn carpentry. Not that I had any

feeling for it, but because Lipa was a carpenter so I wanted to be one too. Lipa had the feeling, the urge to be a carpenter, and that's why he really was a first class craftsman; and I, I was and still am a plain carpenter, nothing to brag about. Lipa loved his trade, I hated it. With me, to get me to do anything Mamma had to use force. I was a night bird and several times I ran away from the house. One night I slept in the marketplace, rotten vegetables under my head instead of a pillow, my body covered with a sack. That was my stormy young life. Yet Mamma never stopped worrying about me, yet she couldn't do too much either. So she went to her brother Mordechai Schmiel for advice, and they decided that since my uncle had a good friend, a Sadigerer *Chassid* who had a carpentry shop, they would ask him if he would take me on as an apprentice. So my uncle Mordechai Schmiel and I went to the home of his friend Yehuda Glaser where I was introduced as a nice young boy, and would Reb Glaser take me in to teach me the trade? Reb Glaser didn't hesitate for a moment; so long as I was Mordechai Schmiel's nephew he didn't need to ask any questions. I was automatically kosher, and it was agreed that I would work for Reb Glaser for

four years. The first two years I would work for free and the next two years I would be paid my board. And so they shook hands and they drank a *l'chaim* (a toast) and the contract was made.

And on the following Sunday morning I started to work. But the engagement didn't last very long. The boss had a son. He was an only son and he was very conceited. Everybody had to serve him and obey him. In me he found the real boy to command. In the beginning I listened to him. I shined his shoes; I went to get him cigarettes; every five minutes, "Meilech, do this, Meilech, do that." He wanted me to be his real *feifen deckel* (his whistle-call servant—his slave, I'd call it). And I was not born for that. One nice morning after arriving at work, the degenerate boy called me over with a whole program of things I was to do for him. I listened and then I said to him, "I came here to learn carpentry and not to be a message boy." And I closed the door behind me and I left that place for good and I went home to give Mamma the news. "Mamma," I told her, "today I have already finished my four years," and I explained to her why. She mostly agreed with me, because she knew what was right and what was wrong.

And so I was a free loafer again, but not

for long, because Mamma started worrying again about my loafing around. And it was then that I landed first at Leizer Brecher's with the Xanthippe of a wife, and then at Yankel Gersten's, both of whom I have already mentioned. At Gersten's I finished my term, although I actually carried on two professions. In the daytime I was a carpenter and at night I was a horse and buggy driver with Psachye. As a carpenter I was already a *gesell*, and that meant that I could take a job and earn money. That really was an achievement. From then on I could be more independent. I could have a better suit to wear; I would be able to take a girl to a dance or take her out for an ice cream. Going to an ice cream parlor was the style in my time. On what I earned I certainly couldn't have afforded any entertainment much more expensive, even if it existed, which in Boryslaw it didn't.

I then got another job at Leizer Brecher's place, and that is a story in itself. It happened one day that Leizer Brecher had to flee Boryslaw to America because business was not so good and he had fallen into deep debt. And so he and his wife and two daughters and two sons left in the quiet, for a lot of reasons. One son remained behind to complete the orders that

were left. I had been hired with some other boys to help finish the orders, and one of these boys, Sruel Kalman Ehrenshenk, a neighbor's son, became my very good friend.

Sruel Kalman and I worked together, singing and enjoying. And then one day all of a sudden he was stricken with galloping TB, and in six weeks' time he was dead. He was only sixteen years old and the only son of his parents. It was a very great tragedy for his parents and a very great loss for all his friends—for me especially, because we had been brought up on the same street from early youth. Yes, he died in the spring. It was on the second day of Passover that we brought Sruel Kalman to his eternal rest. I was one of the pallbearers. At the gravesite Leib Pasternak, an intellectual revolutionary, delivered the eulogy. He condemned the capitalist class, the parasites, the exploiters, because, he said, Sruel Kalman was a victim of the ruling class. He finished with these words: "The day is near when the proletariat will take over from you parasites, and the working class will be free."... Free, yes, they became free, and how many of those free workers were slaughterd like flies by the new rulers? Millions. Pasternak and Wiesenfeld became the

leaders of the Communist Party in Galicia, Poland, after the First World War but, since Poland was extremely reactionary at that time, they, as well as Alter and Ehrlich, the two great leaders of the Socialist Party of Poland, the *Bund*, had to flee to the Soviet Union. And in time, probably because they dared a little too much criticism of him, Stalin had them all—Pasternak and Wiesenfeld and Alter and Ehrlich—shot like dogs.

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I never dreamed years ago that I would one day sixty years later be able to describe some Boryslaw characters in their real image. When I was a young boy I looked at some of these characters as Godsends. Later I saw them differently. Here is the cream of the community leaders, Leizer Getzeles. He was the president of the cemetery. He was also the *gabbe* (trustee) of the *shul*. He was a very mean man, everyone shivered from his look. My uncle Mordechai Schmiel suffered because of him plentily. He was also at Passover the divider of the matzohs at the distribution of matzohs to the poor (*Mo'es Chittin*), and whoever had pull with him got a couple of pounds more. To him it was not a question of who had more children, who was

needier; he didn't give a damn about that. It was a question of who you knew. He was a terrible despot. But in my time I looked up to him, because we lived by his mercy.

There were many others in Boryslaw like Leizer Getzeles. The hypocrisy of these people is hard to describe. They were all very religious; they prayed three times daily. But when it came to helping the poor people they looked at us as though we were as repulsive as beetles.

Another member of this clique of hypocrites was a man by the name of Urin Itzik Freedlander. He had a red, fullflushed face, a big belly, he weighed about three hundred pounds—so how could he understand the pain of starving people? Another of this kind was Sruel Lipschitz. He was the head of the *Talmud Torah*. When a mother came to the school to complain about a particular rabbi and how cruel he was to the children, he refused even to investigate the matter. All he said was, "The rabbi is right." There was also a Moishe Chaim Hirsch. He was God's policeman. When he saw my sister Mathilda walking with a cane on Saturday he wanted to lynch her. And Yidel Schister. He was our neighbor. He drank Mother's blood. Whenever he saw her he would ask her loudly,

in front of anyone, "Suraly, how come Reb Usher's *einikl* [grandchild] walks on *Shabbes mit a shteken* [on the Sabbath with a cane]?" They were a miserable bunch of hypocrites. You had to be careful every step you took. And God forbid if you ever dared to go to a *Goyishen* restaurant, especially on a Saturday. They were ready to string you up.

Here is an episode about my father. He never had a decent meal to eat—not because my mother didn't know how to cook, but because she had neither the facilities to cook nor the money to buy the proper ingredients. Anyway, how could she be an elegant cook in the situation of poverty in which we lived? But human beings like some variety in their meals, and once in a blue moon my father would ask my mother to prepare *pirogen* (mashed potatoes wrapped in dough and fried—a delicacy) for him, he liked them very much. *Pirogen* were not at all expensive to prepare, but when the neighbors nearby learned that my father had the audacity to love *pirogen* they had something to laugh about. The laughter of the neighbors didn't bother me too much, but when I heard that some of the relatives laughed about it too and that they were even a little cynical about my

father's tastes, I was deeply hurt. All I know is that their laughter and cynicism were not proper, and I didn't like it at all. Maybe someday, if these lines are ever read by those people, they will understand what I mean. We see today the way people like variety in their food every now and then. Only in Boryslaw they made a fuss over nothing.

I remember another delicacy my mother used to make—*bulbis mit anbren*, a kind of potato soup. The *anbren* is a big chunk of animal fat that is melted in a frying pan. A cup of flour is then added and the mixture is allowed to fry until it gets good and browned. Then you mix the potato soup into it. You also throw in a chopped onion, and that is, or *was*, a real delicacy. And whenever my mother made *bulbis mit anbren* there never was enough. Some of us might have wanted a second helping because we were still hungry, but there was never any left after the first.

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Now it's the week of *Chanukah,* and I am reminded of our old home and the way my father used to light the *Chanukah* lights. We didn't have a *menorah* (candelabra), we didn't have candles in all colors. Instead of a *menorah*

Mamma cut a potato into two halves, dug out a bit on the insides, and poured some oil into each. Then she took out some cotton stuffing from an old coat and rolled it into two wicks. And we dipped them into the potato halves filled with oil, one end sticking out. Then Father lit the so-called *Chanukah* candles and made the prayer. We all stood by seriously, watching the way those candles burned. And we began to sing *Chanukah* songs, even though the house was freezing cold and the wooden floor was wet from the melting snow which everybody had brought in on their boots. It was supposed to be a happy holiday but our house always had a sadness about it. And everything fitted the sadness—the hunger, the cold, the kerosene lamp flickering like a person in agony before dying.

But in spite of all the misery in our house, when it came to a holiday it was *gottlich Gottish* (godly Godlike). *Purim* in the old country was a real feast. We used to masquerade too. Young boys would put masks on their faces and go into people's houses and sing songs, and for that they got a few cents. The songs were about the biblical characters: Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, Mother Rachel, Jacob and his twelve sons, Joseph and his brethren, Joseph and Pharaoh's

daughter, and many more. And of course we also sang the *Purim* story, about Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus and Mordechai and Haman. And just for *Purim* my mother taught me these two songs in rhyme. One went:

Heint iz Purim un morgen iz ois
Git mir a gratzer un varft mich arois.

(Today is *Purim* and tomorrow is out
Give me a penny and throw me out.)

The second song was about a sick neighbor who was lying on his death bed, ill with TB:

Yehuda Leib zoll lang leben
Er geht shoin die por kronen geben.

The nearest rhyming translation I can give is:

Yehuda Leib should live very long
He's about to give a few *kronen* for our song.

(Of course the name, Yehuda Leib, was changed to fit the case.) I was also busy that day as a delivery boy, because the tradition is to exchange gifts on *Purim* day. All in all I made a nice few

cents and that was enough to buy me a pair of cheap pants for *Pesach*.

Before *Pesach* there was the special collection taken up for the poor, the *Mo'es Chittin*. The tradition exists all over the Jewish world. In Boryslaw the collector and divider of the *Mo'es Chittin* was the famous Leizer Getzeles. Oh, the agony that the poor people had to go through as they stood before the grand inquisitor Leizer Getzeles. Before he would give them anything he tortured them with all kinds of questions, just like a bloodsucker. And the distribution was unfair anyway. Only the people who had some influence with Leizer Getzeles got nearly enough for their needs; the rest had to settle for less. Leizer even favored a few "privileged" people by having the *Mo'es Chittin* delivered to their homes so that nobody would know that they were taking charity.

I want to describe for a bit Mamma's *Pesach* preparations—how hard she worked to bring in the *Pesach* to the house. First she started with the *shmaltz*, the fat. At *Chanukah* time she bought a goose at the market, because in the winter the geese are fat. Then we had the goose slaughtered, and Mamma melted the fat and we had *shmaltz*. We then put the *shmaltz* in the

attic to keep cold, because there was no icebox in our house. Then between *Purim* and *Pesach* the cleaning commenced. Mamma used to whitewash the house all by herself; in Yiddish we called that "*kalichen*." And two weeks before *Pesach* Mamma made borscht, but not the way they make it today. Mamma used to buy about twenty pounds of beets which she cleaned and cut into small pieces. She then put the pieces in a wooden barrel, added water, and left the barrel standing in a corner of the house for two weeks. And for *Pesach* we had borscht that was better than any wine, and Mamma gave borscht to all the neighbors, and throughout *Pesach* all we heard up and down the street was that Suraly Reb Usher's' borscht was better than wine.

The *Pesach* wine, made from raisins, was also delicious. Father also went to the market and brought home a sack of potatoes, because at *Pesach* we ate mostly potatoes with borscht, and of course *latkes* (pancakes)! The taste of the *latkes* is still in my mouth. . . . The Seder nights were the greatest nights I ever experienced in my parents' home. I will always remember those days with Mother and Father. The atmosphere was special. They were the greatest holidays be-

cause Mamma had worked so hard in preparation, and that's why the enjoyment was so great. Years later my parents came to Montreal and celebrated the *Pesach* holidays with their children and grandchildren, and I recall the way my father, during the Seder, reclined on a pillow, as was the tradition. We kibbitzed a bit and he smiled, and I see it all as if it were happening now, though thirty-three years have already passed since my father celebrated his last Seders.

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I think of all the misery we went through living in a house that consisted of one room really, and that room was our dining room, our bedroom, and our kitchen. The toilet was in the yard. We were then a family of parents and seven children; two young brothers were dead. Already we were sleeping two and three to a bunk bed. I am reminded of a poem by Avrum Reisin:

A gezind zalbe acht
Un betten nor tsvei
Un kumt ohn die nacht
Vie shlofen dan zei?

Drei mitn tatten
Un drei mit der mammen
Hentlech un fislech
Geflochten tsuzamen

Un kumt ohn die nacht
Me'darf machen die betten
Dan hoibt ohn die mutter
Dem toit oif zich behten

Zie meint mit an emes
Es iz nisht kein vunder
Oich eng iz in keiver
Doch ligt men bazunder.

(A family of eight
And beds only two
When night comes
Just what do they do?

Three sleep with Father
And three sleep with Mother
Their hands and feet
Twisted together

When night comes
And it's time for bed
Mother then begins
To wish she were dead

She means it truly
And no wonder shown
The grave is also narrow
Yet each lies alone.)

That poem is very much our story.

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To write of the past you have to have courage and patience and, above all, you have to remember exactly what happened and not to make a fool of yourself, because everybody can scribble and tell stories that are mostly fiction or fantasies. I only tell what I remember. There is a lot that I don't remember. Here is a story that Lipa reminded me of. It was the winter of 1914–15, when we were first occupied by the Russians. There was a shortage of food, and Lipa and I took two bags of salt which Mother had cooked overnight and we walked to the neighboring villages in order to exchange the salt for onions, potatoes, garlic, cabbage, and so on. While we were walking along the way to

Popel, the nearest farm town to Boryslaw, along came, from the other direction, two Cossacks loaded down with ammunition belts. When I saw them I thought to myself, This is the end, and I whispered to Lipa, "Look who's coming." We started to sweat, we were dying. The Cossacks were upon us and we met face to face. We stopped. One of the Cossacks yelled out, "*Yevrei*," (Yid), "what are you carrying in those bags?" We told them and they proceeded to inspect the bags with their sabers. They stuck their sabers in the bags instead of in our heads and they let us go. Just imagine, two Cossacks meet two Jews on a lonely road—they could have killed us very easily, and it was often done. This outcome is hard for me to explain. If I were an orthodox Jew I would say, They weren't two Cossacks, they were two angels.

I want to say something about my brother Lipa. I could write hundreds of pages about him. From the time he was a baby six months old he suffered, and yet he advanced in life. As a craftsman he was always among the best. His fellow workmen did not much like him because he was a better worker than they were. He really excelled in his trade. I remember he once made a pair of cupboards for Rabbi Bander, Brucha's father, of solid oak, the hardest lumber

of all. He had no power machinery to work with. Everything was done by hand. Lipa bought the rough boards and he planed them by hand. He scraped and planed and sanded them until they were very smooth. Then he built the cupboards and he stained them a beautiful mahogany shade. Everything was done by hand. In a tiny simple shack he worked, and he brought out of there two wonderful cupboards!

He was a sick man all his life and yet a fast worker. Whatever he worked on he was tops: on buildings, on furniture, on ships. He worked on the interiors of new trolleys and buses. They all wanted Lipa Schiff to work for them, not for his good looks or for his personality or for his intelligence, but only because he was a first class craftsman and a first class worker and a perfectionist. I remember one story Lipa told me. He worked once in a place with Hyman Freedman, a friend who was also a very good craftsman. Hyman Freedman was much taller and stronger than Lipa. They were both doing similar work, working separately at their benches, and it turned out that Lipa was always far ahead of Hyman Freedman. Hyman Freedman would then call out, "*Kleiniker, vie loifstu?*" (Little one, where're you running?)

Yes, Lipa was gifted. He enjoyed his work

in the shop and around the house, but altogether he was a tragic figure. I don't remember Lipa ever going to a movie; I don't remember Lipa ever having a party in his house or going to somebody else's party. And the last ten years of his life were really torturous after a prostate operation that was not successful. He couldn't remain in company long because it was difficult for him to sit. Most of the time he wanted to be alone. And during this time he lost his wife Genya whom he loved so much. That was a great shock to him and he remained alone in his house. Now he was the cook, the house cleaner, and his own nurse. Finally he sold the house and became a boarder in a roominghouse. There the real inferno began--he went from one roominghouse to another, and one was worse than the other. I remember one day he called me up and told me that if he didn't get a decent place to live he would do something desperate. And the family worked very hard to get him into a decent nursing home. Of course his suffering went there with him, but at least he had a very clean room, adequate food, doctors and nurses to take care of him, and the regular visits of relatives. And Lipa, all alone now, got accustomed to his new way of life. He read a lot,

he wrote letters, and he also wrote out in the most beautiful calligraphy some well known prayers in the Hebrew liturgy and gave them as gifts to the family. He died suddenly and all alone in June 1971. I shall always remember him.

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This incident happened just after the war. I was home already and I had brought with me some pieces of clothing for the family, because clothes at that time were just as scarce as food. It was a cold winter night and we were all fast asleep. We didn't realize that the window was open. Only in the morning when we awoke and felt very cold did we notice the open window. We began to shiver, but there was not a pair of pants or a dress to put on in the whole house. A man by the name of Potashnick had done a job on us. And we couldn't do a thing about it because he and the Polish police were on the best of terms. I also had a friend at the police station, his name was Shimik, but he could do nothing for us. In the meantime some kind neighbors brought us some clothes to wear. We later noticed that the same Potashnik was desperate enough to wear Mamma's sweater in the open. He was a real underworld person.

I remember another incident involving my mother that happened about this time. Right after the First World War Boryslaw looked like a cemetery. Many of the young boys did not come back; they were buried somewhere in unknown graves. And the town was swept by all kinds of epidemics: Spanish grippe and typhus. And a neighbor of ours came down with typhus. Her name was Rose Glaser, and she was a widow with three small children. Well, everybody knew how contagious typhus was and everybody stayed away from that woman, but not my mother. She went to see her every day, washed her all over, combed her hair, cleaned up the house, and took care of the children. And that kept on until Mrs. Glaser recovered.

Whenever a child was sick my mother was there. Whenever a relative or friend or neighbor was on the death bed my mother was there. And she would run to the *shul* and they opened the Holy Ark for her and she would pray with a cry for the sick person. And from the *shul* my mother would run to the cemetery to the graves of the great rabbis, and she'd start to plead with them that they should help. In some cases it helped, in many it didn't; but my mother believed fullheartedly that she had accomplished a

mission. I remember that she would go out of her way to help the neighborhood children who were mistreated by their stepmothers. She also had had a stepmother and she always used to talk about her.

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Montreal, 1942. A very cold, stormy winter day. My father left for *shul* very early in the morning though a big snowstorm was blowing at the time. My father fell into a deep snowdrift and he couldn't move. It was a couple of hours before the police came and dragged him up and brought him home. He was very nearly frozen. The doctor said that if pneumonia did not set in for forty-eight hours he might survive. But my father did get pneumonia the next day and he died the day after that.

We arranged the funeral. The weather was terrible. There was a very bitter, stormy wind. It broke trees. Children didn't go to school. The funeral was postponed a day but even the next day the weather was terrible. People could not leave their houses. But the funeral had to be attended to. The rabbi gave an order that only the men should go to the cemetery. Of the women only Mathilda went with us. When we came to the gates of the cemetery the hearse

could not go any further because of the heavy snow. So we took the casket out and put it on a sleigh, and slowly we sleighed my father to the gravesite, and we slid my father down into a grave full of snow. We sons said *Kaddish* and my sister Mathilda said these words: "Father had a stormy life and a stormy death."

It is winter, 1956-57. My mother had always been a sick woman but these last couple of months she suffered terribly and was bedridden often. At the same time the bar mitzvah day of my son Itzik (named after my father) was approaching, and whenever I came to see my mother she would say to me, "I pray to God to let me live until after the bar mitzvah." Her belief was very strong. And here we were preparing a big bar mitzvah celebration and here I saw my mother fading away. The day of the bar mitzvah arrived, January 12, 1957. We brought Mother to the services and to the reception. It was unbelievable. She sat in her chair like a ghost. All the guests looked at her wondering how she could live. But she seemed to enjoy the *simcha* (celebration) all the same. We took pictures and she blessed her grandson with a few clever words. After the party Mother went home and she lay down in her bed and six

weeks later she died. She suffered. She was in agony but she never lost her senses until the last minutes. Until the last minutes she was even sharp and alert, and she said good-bye to all who were present.

My mother was a lady, every inch of her. She was illiterate and yet she was wise. She was very religious and yet she was progressive. She understood the new world and she never criticized her children for abandoning the old traditions. I will always treasure the memory of my beloved mother.

Part IV

IN THE SPRING of 1915 the Austrian and German armies went on the offensive, and they drove the Russians completely out of Galicia. Finally we were free. It was a really jubilant time; we danced in the streets with our army! But it didn't take long before a proclamation was sent out: Men between nineteen and fifty-five must report at once to the nearest depot! So, another dark day in our house, I should say another *Tishibov*. Lipa and I had to go to the army and only God knew if we would ever return alive. And Mamma prepared for us whatever she could under the circumstances in clothes and food. We had to march a couple of days to the closest railway station because the stations in the surrounding area had been de-

molished by the Russian bombs. The Russians bombed them before they retreated . . . it was a strategy to hold back the enemy. And so we marched through the Carpathian Mountains. The sun melted the snow and ice, and on the road we saw the bodies of men and horses lying all mixed together. . . . It was a horrible picture.

A cholera epidemic broke out. Lipa got sick, I didn't. The only cure for cholera at that time was alcohol and it was very hard to get. On the road I stopped at a restaurant and asked the owner if he could get me some, and he said no. But as I left I took the back door by mistake, and to my surprise I saw in the corridor a wooden case with bottles of alcohol in it. Without asking any questions I grabbed a bottle and ran back to Lipa who was lying sick with fever. I began to massage him and I gave him a little bit to drink, and you could see his condition improve immediately. Later on Lipa told me he thought that alcohol saved his life.

In the meantime we reached our destination, the railroad station at Torky. It was on the border between Galicia and Hungary. Now just those who were sick would travel on from here by horse and buggy; the rest of us would walk. And we walked. We were on the road to Hun-

gary. At one station Lipa and I separated—he went with one regiment and I went with another. Lipa was sent to Krakow and from there it went quickly: about six weeks of training and out he went to the battlefield. And he wasn't at the front very long when the Russians launched an attack on his platoon. Practically all of the men in the platoon were killed, but Lipa was taken prisoner. He was taken to Kazan, in Russia. In the meantime the rumor travelled very fast that Lipa had been killed in action. The time until we heard from the Red Cross that he was only captured was an eternity.

I was transferred to Landzut, a city in Galicia not far from Lizensk, where *Rebbe* Elimeilech, the famous *Chassidic* rabbi in the song by the same name, and the ancestor after whom I'm named, is buried. Landzut had a very orthodox Jewish community. It was also the residence of Count Potozki, who owned a magnificent estate there. I used to walk many times on the grounds beside his mansion. It was really beautiful. And it was here that I got my military training. And that meant of course that as soon as you knew how to handle a rifle, out you went to the battlefield, to serve as *kanonen fleish*—that's

what they used to call it: cannon meat. But they couldn't get me so easily. I always tried to avoid going to battle and I succeeded. I will soon explain how.

After being in the army about three or four months I was given leave for a couple of days. When I got home I found that my father had turned gray! He hadn't been when I left home. . . . A couple more months in Landzut and I was transferred to Krakow, and from Krakow to Vienna. Here I began to really like the army. Although I experienced real hunger I always found some remedy or other to keep me from starving. Once I even took the blankets from my bunk bed in the barracks and sold them for bread, and that was very dangerous! But when you are hungry you do not consider what is dangerous and what is not. And I adjusted very well in Vienna, under the circumstances. I met many Jewish people there who had fled from Galicia and Bukovina at the time of the invasion; and after five o'clock, when I finished working or training, I had these people to spend my time with until the nine o'clock curfew. I played chess and dominoes, and there was even occasionally someone to flirt with too.

The war continued full speed. Every day

another unit went to the battlefield. Me they sent to work in a factory because I was a carpenter, and that was my luck. But even if they had picked me for a number one soldier I would always have had something to complain about: I have flat feet, I don't see too well, I cough a lot—it must be my lungs, and so on. Altogether I was not a bad *markirant*—that was the name given to those soldiers who tried to avoid being sent to the front. I also had another source of protection. I became friendly with the lieutenant, Lieutenant Ulman was his name, who was in charge of the factory; and whenever they wanted to take me he said no. He needed me very much, he said, and do you want to know what that "very much" was for? He sent me every day to his mother; she always had something to fix around the house. And when I went she always gave me something to eat too, and that was a real life saver in times of such hunger. We used to get only one pound of bread per week, and usually I finished that in one day; the rest of the days I only dreamed of bread.

In the meantime my brother Usher was also picked for the army! We all worried for him because of his innocent nature. But where did he land? In Vienna. I was now very busy. I was an

"old" soldier by this time and, as I knew all the rules and regulations, I tried to help Usher as much as was in my power, although he was with a different regiment stationed about twenty miles away from mine. But as soon as he arrived at his station I was notified and, before very long, I was at his barracks. It was pathetic to see him, so alone and so worried in his uniform three sizes too big for him. His things were all over the place and he really didn't know what was going on around him. I tried to organize things as much as I could. He was very nervous. I quieted him down. I also brought him something to eat. A couple of days later I brought him a valise that I had made him. But in the meantime all his property had disappeared—stolen. I solved this problem for him too, and he now had a new valise and new things.

I remember one evening Usher came over to see me to make a thousand complaints: The boys are so-and-so and the boys are so. That was natural; old soldiers always heckled a new recruit. But if you used common sense none of it should bother you, and they'd get tired of heckling. But if you showed any sign that you were upset by it, then you had it. And Usher couldn't take it.

He had come to ask me to do something to help. Meanwhile it was getting late, so I took him to the street car and we travelled back to his barracks. We arrived around eleven o'clock at night, two hours after curfew. According to regulations, Usher would have to be taken to jail overnight and in the morning he would have to stand trial for the great crime of being late. The sentence was usually eight days in jail. But when we came to the gate I showed the guard my pass. He asked me who the other soldier was and I told him, "Oh, that's my brother, and I've kept him out a little too long. Is there any way you could let him in without reporting it?" And as I talked I gave the guard a tin of conserved meat that I had with me. Everything turned out fine. Usher returned to his barracks and I to mine. Yes, I had by this time a steady pass to be out any night—and with no time limit. I could even come back in the morning if I wanted to. As for Usher, he didn't remain much longer in Vienna; he was transferred to Graz, another town in Austria. We had cousins there who looked after him very well. I also visited once and we all had a good time together.

The war got worse every day. A great battle was taking place on the Isonzo front, in Italy,

and thousands of Austrian soldiers were drowned in the Piave River. The most ferocious fighting was going on there, and that's where I was picked to go. At the last minute before departure, as I waited in line to board the train (an unsigned death certificate already in my pocket), along came my good Lieutenant Ulman and ordered me to fall out. He screamed at the other officers, "How dare you take this man without letting me know!" And he yelled again, *"Dieser Mann ist unentbährlich!"* That meant, This man is irreplaceable! . . . When I think of that incident today I find it so tragic and comic. A country was bleeding to death. Each man could have helped on the battlefield. Even to help bring the wounded soldiers back to the hospital tents would still have been better than to repair tables and chairs for the lieutenant's mother! And that's why I was so *unentbährlich*! And yet I was spared possible death at the front. So I was once again back to my regular routine—writing letters to Brucha, poste restante, and getting replies from her, sending presents and getting presents in return. Life went on nicely. I visited the historic monuments in the area too. Meanwhile Mother received some money from the government because

she now had three sons in the army. And as Schiye Wolf was growing older and had already completed public school, she wrote asking what should be done with him. Should someone teach him a trade or should he go to the *Gymnasium*? My reply was: only *Gymnasium*.

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When you are in the army you are a lost sheep. You quit the warm atmosphere of home for the cold military life. But eventually you adjust; you have no alternative. Now you look again to make a connection with a friend. You want to talk, to give out what's pressing inside of you—the experiences you've gone through since you left home. You want to cry; you want to laugh; you want somebody to share all those feelings with you. I walked around for months all by myself before I found such a friend. His name was Gevanter. He came from the countryside near Boryslaw, from a town in the Carpathian Mountains called Moyden, about thirty miles away. Moyden was a little village whose population was almost all farmers, mostly Ukrainians and very few Jews. It was a wonderful, healthful spot with very tall mountains all around and, on their slopes, very large ever-

green trees. And so Gevanter and I became very close friends, close like brothers; I would even say closer than brothers—you don't usually open your heart that much to a brother. We slept in the same barracks, one near the other, and we talked. He was the first to talk about his intimate life. He was a naive boy, two years younger than I was. He had never before been to the big city. All of his eighteen years of life he had spent in Moyden, working in the family mill and playing with the *shiksas* (Gentile girls). His family consisted of himself, his old widowed mother, and two sisters, one married and one single. He was having a love affair with a *shiksa* when he was called up and, he told me, if his mother had ever found out about it she would have collapsed with a heart attack. Gevanter loved that girl very much. He would spend hours describing her beauty to me—the cheeks red like cherries, the bosom shaped like in a man's dream, the legs long and shapely, the skin milk white. And while he talked about her and you listened, you saw that he was the happiest boy on earth. Of course I told him about my love affair with Brucha, but mine wasn't half so complicated. Gevanter and I became closer and closer. Even when we went to the la-

trine we sat side by side talking about love and friendship. And in spite of the fact that bread was so scarce it was rationed, he received regularly parcels from home with all sorts of bread in them, from the mill; and whenever he received such a parcel he shared it with me.

One morning I learned the good news that I would be getting a thirty day furlough. People who lived in the oil mines area were given many furloughs (to help out at home), and Borys-law was near one of the largest oil mines in the country. Before I left, Gevanter asked me if I would do him a favor and go to see his mother and sisters to give them personal regards. Of course I said yes—how could I refuse a friend like him? He started to cry and he kissed me. He helped me pack my bag and I was on my way.

In wartime it took about three days and two nights to make the trip from Vienna to Borys-law, and after the long journey I finally arrived among my people and friends. The Germans have a song: *"In der Heimat, in der Heimat,/ Da gibt's ein wieder, wieder sehen."* (Home! Home!/ Again, again to return.) That song says everything.

And one beautiful morning, after spending

some time with my family and with Brucha, I packed my rucksack on my shoulders and went on my way to Moyden—yes, by foot, for there was neither train nor horse and buggy connection to that town from Boryslaw. I started out in the morning and I arrived in the evening. I stopped in the villages along the way. The farmers treated me like a hero. Just imagine, a soldier with a bayonet at his side. The farmers offered me bread fresh from the oven and milk fresh from the cow. It was a beautiful route I took. As I walked I saw farmers and young girls working in the fields, and the young girls, as they worked, were singing beautiful Ukrainian folk songs. Whenever I rested in a field the farmers and the girls surrounded me and we all began to sing. How wonderful it is when you are young!

Finally I arrived at my friend's home. The old mother and the two sisters hugged and kissed me, crying all the while. A beautiful dairy supper was prepared and we all sat at the table eating and talking. The main subject of conversation was their son and brother. How is he? How is he? I told them about the good and the bad things. The fact is I didn't say too much about the bad things. On the other hand they cer-

tainly understood that life in the army was not a picnic, especially in wartime. But I described things to them as gently as possible.

After supper the married sister, whose husband was also off at war, took me for a walk in the village. It was a beautiful moonlit night. We walked until midnight. We walked past a church where a midnight mass was in progress; we went inside to listen to the choir, which sang beautifully. When we arrived back home the mother and the younger sister were already asleep. The married sister escorted me to my room upstairs. And she sat down at my bedside—not for a few minutes but until sunrise the next morning. All night long she cried and was hysterical. Why should a young woman be deprived of a man? Where was the justice? I tried in every way I could to make her understand that we were at war and that there was no alternative. But she was a young woman and it was torture for her to fight her nature. For me the situation was just as torturous as it was for her, but I certainly couldn't think of going to bed with her. How could I face her mother in the morning? And after such a crime how could I ever face her brother again? But now when I think of it, would it really have been a crime?

My answer today is no. But as it happened the way it did I am not sorry.

We went downstairs in the morning as though nothing had happened, and, of course, nothing had. We ate breakfast together. Mother and sisters had already prepared a package for their boy, a package of all kinds of breads and cookies. I said good-bye to them all. The married sister I kissed and hugged warmly.

I spent a few more days home with my family. When it was time to say good-bye I felt miserable. It was heartbreaking to have to leave my old folks, my young sisters, and my brother. But the Kaiser was calling to defend the Fatherland and I had to go. I arrived back in Vienna and gave Gevanter his parcel. He was very happy. I told him all about his family. It was not too much longer that we remained together. He was sent to the front lines and I never heard from him again.

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The way I was suited to be a soldier first class, I could not remain in Vienna much longer myself. But my good Lieutenant Ulman sent me for a check-up, and I was found unfit for the battlefield because of my flat feet. (I had also suffered from rickets as a child, with the poor

diet we had, and that's why I couldn't walk until after I was five years old.) I was then transferred to Mauthausen, Hitler's World War II crematorium. It was a beautiful place in Ober Oestreich surrounded by very tall mountains. The people, mostly farmers, were wonderful, friendly people. And here were located our prisoner of war camps. They were mostly Italian prisoners, they were here in the thousands, and we had to watch them. There were also all kinds of factories in the vicinity, requiring the work of carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, and so on. At the beginning I was a regular soldier. I washed the floors, I peeled potatoes, and I stole a little from here and there when I got a chance. And I also regularly went on guard duty, twenty-four hours at a time. That meant you patrolled for two hours and then you rested for two hours in a special barracks, and you repeated that routine until the twenty-four hours were over. I used to be on guard duty on winter nights when it was twenty, thirty degrees below zero up in the high mountains.

Also in the vicinity was a national cemetery with beautiful tombstones dating back to the eighteenth century. High-ranking officers had been buried here, and I used to walk past each

grave and read the epitaphs. They were fascinating. I wish I could remember all those poems.

After a couple of months I was transferred to the carpentry factory where I helped to supervise a couple of hundred Italian cabinetmakers to see that they remained disciplined and that they did their work properly. I found the work very interesting. On Sundays it was permitted for the prisoners to stroll outside the camp for a few hours—not by themselves of course, but six men to a soldier. On one particular Sunday I took six men from the factory and we marched for miles and miles. I was not allowed to take them into a restaurant or beer hall, but how could I resist when they began to beg and cry nearly, "Please, just one glass of beer . . . "? So I took my six men to a tavern, and one glass of beer soon became two, and three, and more . . . and one man got so drunk that he couldn't walk any more! The other men began to beat him up because this drunk had put us all in danger—they wouldn't be able to go for walks any more, and I would probably get six months in prison. By a miracle I brought the men safely back to camp, and nobody there noticed just what shape they were in.

Yet another story from Mauthausen. It was a wonderful midsummer night, 1916. I was on duty at a munitions dump and as I marched up and down, my eyes alert to any unusual movement, a Gypsy girl suddenly appeared out of nowhere and approached me singing a lilting tune. Of course it was forbidden under severe punishment to talk to Gypsies in this situation, and I should have shut her up. But how could I do that to this beautiful woman with dark eyes and a shapely body? Not only that, but when you're young you do not think of the danger involved; the call of the flesh is stronger than concrete and you do not consider consequences. And it did not take long. I put aside my rifle and without rabbi or priest we became man and wife. But following the little "wedding" ceremony the Gypsy girl refused to leave me alone, and I began to panic. I had to get rid of her, so I signalled my superior officer by firing a rifle shot in the air. When the officer came running she began to tell him the whole story. But the officer would not believe that a soldier on duty would dare do such a thing. Imagine the irony, how that officer was fooled! And he pulled away the poor Gypsy girl. . . . After the incident I cooled off a bit. I began to realize what a

dangerous thing I had done. Had I been caught I would have been tried immediately before a war tribunal, and the verdict certainly would have been death before a firing squad within twenty-four hours or a sentence to rot away in prison for life.

I remember I also met at this time a young, attractive German woman with whom I made a certain arrangement. Now, being a soldier you had to look after your own property. Your clothes, your shirts especially—everything had to be nice and clean; and your pants, although they were actually made of paper (there was such a shortage of cloth), still had to be nicely pressed. Otherwise the lice would eat you up, or if the corporal ever found a louse on your clothes you'd be taken away to quarantine for fourteen days and go through real torture. I was careful to avoid that torture. I provided my German woman with bread and ham (the army had more food now), and she provided me with clean shirts and pressed pants and love and sex. I think it was a fair exchange.

Shortly afterward I was transferred to another prison camp in the village of Marchtrenk, which was also in Ober Oestreich. The camp here was for Russian prisoners—and here

there were no factories, no shops; only a prison camp. All we had to do was to watch the prisoners. One evening while I was on duty—it was between twelve and two in the morning and it was pouring terribly—I heard all of a sudden something fall on my side of the fence. I rushed out of my booth and to my shock I saw an escaped prisoner standing before me. Right away he knelt down and begged me not to shoot him—the order was to shoot runaways on the spot. I would have been a hero if I had shot him . . . but I didn't. All I did was shoot in the air, and my superior came and took him away. Later it was announced to the entire camp that *Artillerist* M. Schiff had caught a prisoner in the act of escaping. What heroism, wasn't it?

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After another few monotonous months in Marchtrenk my mother begged to see me. I also wanted to see her and the family again, but to obtain a furlough was impossible. I gave my mother the idea to make an application to the High Command in Vienna claiming that my father was very ill and that he needed to undergo a very dangerous operation and that he wanted to see me before he died. The application of course had to be signed by a doctor, and that

was arranged. And before long an order from Vienna came granting me a month's furlough. The news made me indescribably happy. I began to prepare for the long journey home. I bought presents, whatever I could find, for the whole family—mostly clothing, for that was very scarce in time of war. I bought a sweater for Mother, shoes for Father—something for everybody. My valise was stuffed with all kinds of valuable goods in the middle of that bloody war! I boarded the train and we moved on. It was an incredible joy for me to leave my cold, dull barracks and to journey home to see my parents. Every so often the train stopped for food for the passengers. We all left the train and, each soldier with a special dish, we stood in the food line in the station. And in one station, by the time my turn came, my train had already left . . . with all my baggage aboard! I ran to the stationmaster. He said, "It's war! I can't promise you anything but I'll try." And the way he tried, the same way I got my belongings. I never saw them again. I travelled on in a second train. The way I felt, I wanted to go back to my barracks rather than to arrive home empty handed. That's the way it was, joy was always mixed with sadness.

I finally arrived in Boryslaw. The city looked dead, miserable. Houses were demolished, stores were empty. People walked around looking like ghosts. This one had lost a father, that one a son, a brother . . . it was pathetic. At home, although we were all alive, the atmosphere was like in a morgue. Everybody was hungry, naked. My homecoming did bring a little joy, though. Mother wept, Father smiled—I can still see them. It was great. And so I spent the couple of weeks in Boryslaw. I also saw Brucha from time to time, and we were happy. Along came also, home on leave, Itchy Katz, a very good friend and schoolmate of mine. He was a finished *maturist*, that is, he had completed eight classes of *Gymnasium,* and so he had been made an officer. We spent a few beautiful days together, and it was the last time. When he returned to his regiment he was sent to the front, and a bullet cut off his young life. His mother received a nice citation. . . . It's not for me to describe the tragedies of war!

After furlough I returned to Marchtrenk. In the barracks one day I read a new order from the High Command that all soldiers who had any experience working in the oil mines could

make an application to be sent to work there—because for lack of men the oil mines were idle, and oil of course was essential to the war effort. I didn't wait a second. I wrote to my mother to make the application, and a month later I got home again, this time as an oil mines worker. The work didn't have to be exactly in the oil mines—anything you did, so long as it was for the oil mines industry, was all right. The people they mainly needed then were plumbers and carpenters, and so I went to work for the widow Rose Glaser, the same woman my mother cared for when she got typhus. Her husband, Shoul Shimon, had died in the war leaving her with three children, and so she tried to carry on his factory. Actually I had worked there before the war when Shoul Shimon was alive, and when I returned Rose was very pleased. It was a small carpentry shop. In the beginning she and I went out to see all the old customers to notify them that Shoul Shimon Glaser's shop, though he was dead, was "still in operation. We want you to remember the name—Shoul Shimon Glaser. Anything you need in the way of carpentry we can make. We now have a crew of excellent craftsmen, and we'll do the work for a reasonable price." (Shoul Shimon Glaser, by the way,

was Yehuda Glaser's nephew, the same Yehuda Glaser whom I apprenticed with but quit because of his son the pest. Yehuda's first cousin, Yoel Bear Glaser, was the father of Fischel Glaser, whom I used to meet at the *Forwärts Ferein,* and of Schiya Glaser, who married my sister Mattel in New York in September 1925.)

At the start things went fairly well. We got many orders in. I also used to go out to the various places to take the measurements of the doors and windows that we made, and I liked that. And at home things improved economically somewhat. There was now a little more bread to eat. And from time to time we received a post card from Lipa from Kazan. Also Mattel wrote often from New York, and we would frequently find a couple of dollars in the envelope along with her letter. Life continued this way for a couple of months until our side lost another battle and yet another battle, and finally we lost the war.

All the armies—the Russian, the German, and the Austrian—revolted. The Russian Czar was arrested by the Mensheviks. Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany escaped to Holland, the Austrian Kaiser to Sweden. Revolution around the globe: The Bolsheviks under Lenin and the Men-

sheviks under Kerensky fought to decide who should lead their country to a better life. Finally the Bolsheviks triumphed. . .and the Czar and his family were captured and shot. In Germany democratic elections were held, and the leftwingers were the majority. Rose Luxemburg and Karl Liebnecht were the leaders—Germany was really going left! But the fascists did not sleep. One night after a successful workers' rally, after everybody had gone home, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were kidnapped. The following morning they were found dead in a nearby river; they had been shot before they were thrown in. What a great loss for humanity, and especially for the German people. Later on the fascists would assassinate another patriot—Walter Rathenau, the Jewish minister of finance in the new German Parliament, an economic genius. He was found with a bullet in his head. Hitlerism, though we could not see it at the time, was not far off.

Austria was torn to pieces. Hungary became independent, Czechoslovakia free, Poland free—they had all earlier belonged to one empire—Austria. Also, half of Galicia became Ukrainian, half Polish, and a civil war began. One day the Poles were in, one day the Ukrainians. That was

a terrible experience. And who suffered the most? The Jews. Every day brought more killing and more destruction and more rape, and many of the victims were Jews. When the Poles took over they beat the Jews, when the Ukrainians took over they beat the Jews, there was no difference. I remember one day, this was under the Ukrainians, I left the house in a pair of new shoes that I had brought back from the army when I was released, and two Ukrainian soldiers came over to me. They were drunk like beasts. They put their bayonets to my head and yelled at me in Ukrainian: *"Jidze, wekin Cherwiki!"* That means, "Jew, take off your shoes!" I saw that they meant it and that there was nothing else to do. I sat on the sidewalk and took off my shoes and I gave them to those drunken anti-Semites, and I was happy that their bayonets didn't drill me through the head! I was saved again. And the Polish army was no better when they took over. There was an infamous army under the leadership of a General Haller, nicknamed the Hallerchikis. General Haller was a beastly anti-Semite. His army had full permission to do whatever they wanted to Jews. Their favorite hobby was to rip the beards off old Jews and then throw these pathetic men out through

the window of a fast-moving train. This misery continued until the Poles took Galicia over completely. A Polish republic was established with Pilsudsky as Prime Minister and Narutowich as President.

Pilsudsky had been, I would say, a nationalistic socialist when Crown Poland had been a part of czarist Russia. He had been an underground fighter for the mother country too, and he had spent much of his life in a czarist prison. He was a true Polish patriot. Narutowich had been in America, but when Poland was still under occupation he returned to his fatherland. He was a true intellectual, a truly liberal man. But soon after he was elected President a rabid fascist shot him dead while he was visiting a museum in Warsaw. The assassin was caught and he freely confessed. He said that he killed Narutowich because he was too good to the Jews—perhaps, the assassin speculated, Narutowich was a Jew himself! And while in his death cell awaiting execution this fascist wrote a testament in which he urged the extermination of all Jews. The Jew converted to Christianity, he wrote, was much more dangerous to Poland than the true Jew. He compared the converted Jew to a rotten tooth—neglect a rotten

tooth and all your teeth will be rotten soon. . . .

Soon after, a new President was elected—it was Paderewski, I think. Poland was on its feet again. A free Parliament was elected with representation from all the classes, from the clergy to the atheists. But the anti-Semites continued to be a powerful influence in the country. Boycotts of Jewish businesses and manufacturing enterprises were organized. At colleges and universities and professional schools Jewish students faced a severe *numerus clausus*—a quota system. In short, it was a frightening time for our people.

But at home we had something to be thankful for. After three years of captivity in a foreign country Lipa was returned to Galicia. He was being kept temporarily in a camp not far from Boryslaw, and he sent us a post card asking Mother to come to see him. Mother went, taking Schiye Wolf along with her, and the reunion was a happy, tearful one.

And slowly we adapted to regular civilian life. I went to work in the carpentry factory of an oil mine. My good friend Schaye Schuster, the first of my friends to go off to the war, also worked there—the fact is Schaye was there first, and he tried the job out for me before I took it.

We were very happy to be working together. We were very close friends. He used to tell me all the adventures that he lived through during the war. I do not think we kept any secrets from each other. We used to go for long walks and talk for hours and hours. And he would also tell me all about his love affairs. Schaye was very intelligent, very well read. He eventually married a country girl. I don't think she was able to sign her name, but sexy she was—beautiful figure, red cheeks just like apples from a tree—and he had a wonderful family life. I visited them from time to time until I left for Canada. And the end of my good friend Schaye was like the end of the other Jews of Boryslaw.

While we worked together and talked I had only one love story to tell Schaye and that was my love for Brucha. And here my heartbreak began. I lost Brucha. She became engaged to a salesman from Lemberg and I really began to suffer. I began to drink. I stopped eating. I walked around like a ghost. Sometimes I completely lost my mind and I seriously contemplated suicide. My good friend Schaye tried very hard to ease my suffering. He would read me grieving love poems by all the great poets. One, in German, I still remember:

Darum prüfe wer sich auf ewig bindet
Damit Herz mit Herz gleich sich findet
Der Wahn is kurz, die Reue ist lang! . . .

(Thus if bind yourself forever you would
Be certain that heart with heart accords
Ecstasy is brief, regret is long! . . .)

The poem goes on and on. Of course the poem, and Schaye—he spent a lot of time with me—helped, but I suffered terribly. And I still fought hard not to lose Brucha. And one day a thought came to me how to help break her engagement. My friend Schaye would write Brucha an anonymous letter. The letter said to Brucha that the sender knows "your fiancé very well. I also know of the fine family you come from. It is therefore my duty to warn you to stay away from this man because he is venereally ill. I could tell you a lot more things about his past, but I think that's enough." This letter I sent in a double envelope to a friend of mine who lived in Lemberg. The inside envelope Schaye had addressed to Brucha, and I asked my Lemberg friend to send Brucha this letter by registered mail. So I am certain she received the letter, but it didn't help. She married that man—I was

even at the wedding—and they moved to Lemberg. After two years of marriage she gave birth to a little boy and she came to Boryslaw for a visit. By this time Lipa and I had our own carpentry shop, and she came to see me. It was really heartbreaking the way she cried when she talked. She was terribly disappointed. If not for the child, she said, she would leave her husband immediately. As for me I was ready to take her back to me, even with the child. But it did not work out that way. This was a puzzle to me, and that was the last time I ever saw her. Later I heard that they moved to Berlin. And I confess now after a half century has gone by that I suffered terribly. For a long time I wasn't able to go out with any other girl. Even when I went sometimes to a wedding or a ball and danced a bit, I felt ice cold. No one else appealed to me. None was as nice, as clever as Brucha. I am sure there were nice and intelligent girls in Boryslaw. But love didn't see any nicer. And to describe the feeling of what could not be . . . only the one who has felt it knows it.

Part V

TODAY IS DECEMBER 17, 1974. My cold started about two days ago. It wasn't so bad in the beginning but today it's making me miserable: a runny nose, a blockage of the ears, a splitting headache, and pains all over my body. Of course Masha, my wife and nurse, takes excellent care of me, and why not? Would she get another kibbitzer so soon? Well, the cold is bothering me a great deal. I woke up in the middle of last night coughing and sweating terribly. Until I cleared my throat it took a few hours, but when I got relief I felt much better. I'm just like an old house when the roof is leaking: you patch it up in one place and it starts to leak in another. But it's still good so long as you can patch it up.

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Just after Brucha there was another girl in my life. It was Hudy Goldman, Chaskel the pickpocket's cousin, a redhead, short and plump. She was highly intelligent, as I mentioned earlier, and very well read. We had long passionate talks together, and she had a wonderful sense of humor. And don't laugh, I'm not boasting—that girl loved me deeply. But I could not respond. We spent a lot of time together; it was just after the war, when it was considered very "modern" to live in a free love relationship with a woman, and Hudy very sincerely wanted us to live that way. But I couldn't. I wasn't over Brucha yet. Hudy knew that whole story and she understood.

Meanwhile Willy was called to the Polish army. He was first sent to Stryj. We had cousins there whose name was Nass. I went to Stryj with Willy and we were able to find them. They tried to care for him as much as possible under the circumstances.

The brutal struggle to make a living continued. Fear of the anti-Semites was a daily emotion. The political situation was oppressive. It was a terrible time. I remember once, it was the first of May, Usher, who was by now a confirmed and fervent communist, was caught dis-

tributing Party leaflets and he was arrested. The following day, very early in the morning, he was handcuffed to a couple of criminals and transported to Sambor, about a two hour drive from Boryslaw. He was jailed there, I don't remember for how long. He was then tried for the terrible crime of being a communist, but I suppose that they did not have enough evidence to convict him and he was freed. But his name was already on a blacklist. The police watched his every step. They came and searched our house several times. And one day, as he was on the way to work, he was arrested again and nobody came to tell us where or why. He was kept in a cellar in the police station and he was not even allowed to call anybody. It happened that a friend of mine passed by the police station the next day, and Usher managed to get his attention by knocking on the little cellar window. Right away the friend came to tell our already very worried family where Usher was. I ran immediately to the home of the chief of police. I introduced myself as Usher Schiff's brother. "How can he be a communist?" I asked him. "I'm sure he doesn't even know what politics means at all." As I spoke I looked around the room and I saw that the chief of police was in need of a

washtable—that is, a kind of stand with a hole in the center in which you can fit a small washbasin. I told the chief, "I've got a carpentry shop. Let me make you a washtable." That evening Usher was released from jail. The following day the chief of police came to the shop to see whether I was already working on his table.

Life continued. Lipa got engaged to an attractive girl from a fine family and there was great joy in our house. But before long Lipa broke the engagement. The reason was that Lipa could not bear the foul odor coming from her mouth—it really was a sickness of that kind. It was very pathetic because we all loved that poor girl very much. Yes, I almost forgot to mention here: Lipa had also had that love affair with Chana, Schaye Schpitalnik's daughter, who eventually married Leib Finkler, Psachye's brother. Chana was a real Jewish beauty, black-haired, sweet looking. If I recall, theirs was an undeclared love. But while Lipa was away, a prisoner of war, she married Leib Finkler, the degenerate person I've already talked about, and she had a miserable life with him. But some months after the broken engagement Lipa got engaged again—her name was Genya Goldman. She was an elegant, beautiful, aristocratic looking woman. In Boryslaw they used to call her *die Opteikerin* (the pharmacist's wife, a flattering nickname)—what an honor! And not to exaggerate, she was a really sexy woman. When she walked in the street everyone admired her elegance and her coquetry. Lipa was very happy. They got married. We had *nachis*—family pride. After they were married a year Genya gave birth to a little boy, but he lived only a couple of hours. I still remember the day when Lipa took that infant and placed him in a kind of parcel and brought him to the cemetery. . . . A year later Genya gave birth to another little boy, Herman, and all was well again.

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I was already around thirty years old, and given the general situation—in the country, in my work, in my personal life—I began to think seriously of emigrating. I naturally thought of going to America, for all the good reasons and also because Mattel was there. But it was not so easy. Since the end of the war America had imposed a quota—from each foreign country only a limited number of immigrants were taken in each year, and it took years until you got your next. I went to the American consulate in Warsaw to get my quota number, and I began to

wait. I waited and waited but with no results. So I decided to emigrate to Argentina. I already had a number of friends who had gone there, and I figured that that was the second best place to go. And anyway, if your goal was to leave Poland in a hurry, as mine was, it really didn't matter very much where you went. My mind was made up and I prepared to take out the appropriate papers. . . . Meanwhile a cousin of ours, Malke Siegel, who lived in Montreal, Canada, visited Europe and came to see her relatives in Boryslaw. When we met she asked me what my future plans were. When I told her that I was just about on my way to Argentina she immediately objected. "Don't go there; it's too far from everywhere. When I get back to Montreal I will send you the papers that will allow you to come to Canada." When I recall this episode today I bow my head for this God sent woman. And if I were religious I would pray for her soul. She was the life saver of all our family. And time passed and Malke Siegel returned to Montreal and she kept her word. She also got in touch with Mathilda in New York and told her the whole story. And a couple of weeks later I received a permit to enter Canada.

And so I prepared to leave Boryslaw, my

home town. With all the misery and the unhappiness that I lived through in that Boryslaw, I still loved it so much. Every dirty little store, every street, all my friends—everything was so dear to me. And yet—I was happy to leave. I was off to a new world—I had a future, and everybody envied me. Just imagine, going to Canada—me! But I was very sentimental too. Call me *kvatch* (weakling), but though I didn't show anything my heart beat sadly when I looked at my poor parents. They had suffered so much in their lives and now, in their old age, a son was leaving them, and God only knew if they would ever see him again. Naturally I felt the same way. Would I ever see my parents again?

But this does not stop you. You have to go on with your plans. The first thing I did was to apply for a passport. I stood before a clerk, an ignoramus for sure. He started to question me: "Who are you? What is your profession? What is your religion?" I answered all his questions, but when I replied, "Jewish," he nearly collapsed. "Oh," he said, "you're the Christ killer." I couldn't stand this, and I replied, "Really now, how can a plain man like me be the killer of a god?" That shut his mouth up and he processed

the rest of my application quickly. I was busy for a couple of months like that, going through all kinds of red tape. It was not easy to get out of Poland at that time, although they didn't want you particularly to stay either! But they knew why you wanted to leave, they knew that you were going to lead a much better life, socially and economically, elsewhere, and they used all their sadistic methods just to make your last months in the country more difficult. But finally I got all my papers in order and I was ready to leave.

Yes, a couple of days after I had received my Canadian permit, I received a letter from Mattel containing a ticket for boat passage to Montreal. She enclosed a couple of extra dollars for me too. We owe her a lot for all that she did for us.

The day of departure approached. I packed my things. I said good-bye to a different friend every day. One of my girl friends cracked a joke: "Maybe you'll stash me in your valise and take me with you?" I on the other hand looked at my poor mother and father and it was no joke. They were old. Lipa was married. Willy was in the army. Usher gave them as much trouble as *nachis*—they lived in the fear that he could be arrested any minute of any day. And that left

my parents with just the two young girls, Pessel and Chana. . . .

It was a beautiful, middle of July day. Though it was still early in the morning the sun was already shining brightly. And Genya's brother-in-law came along with two horses and a buggy to take me to the station. He worked as a chauffeur in an oil mine and he was able to do me this favor. Everybody got on the buggy and off we went. It was a one kilometer trip to the station, but it seemed to me that only a second had passed and we were there. I began to say good-bye to each person separately. Everybody cried. I tried to choke back my tears in order to show my heroism and in order not to hurt Mother and Father so much. But it did not help. I burst out in a terrible cry and that made me feel much better. The engine whistle blew and I entered the coach, and slowly the train began to move. I can still see them all waving good-bye. . . .

Alone on the train, I began to cry uncontrollably. By coincidence an old schoolmate was travelling on this same train to Lemberg. He came over to me and asked, "What is it, Meilech? Has someone died in the family?" "No," I said, "I'm leaving for Canada for good and I'll never

see my parents again!" "You should be happy that you're leaving Poland," he said, "you'll never hear anyone say *'Parszywy Jydic,'* lousy Jew, any more. I wish I could be in your shoes." And he really comforted me with his logical words.

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My first stop was Willy's army base to say good-bye to him. He was then stationed in Bielsk. When I arrived I walked to the barracks. It was a long walk, and when I got to the gate the soldier on duty would not let me in. He wouldn't talk to me either because while on duty he was not permitted to. I was distraught and tired. Just then another soldier emerged from the barracks and I asked him whether he knew Willy Din. (That was Willy's legal name in independent Poland. "Din" was Father's mother's family name. None of the orthodox Jewish marriages were recognized by Polish law, and the orthodox Jews did not bother to obtain official marriage certificates. "Schiff" is my mother's family name. In the eyes of the law, Polish and Austrian, we were all illegitimate children.) The soldier said yes and he ran to get him. Willy was then working in an office, where he had more privileges than a regular soldier.

He immediately took me into the barracks and introduced me to his officers. I washed and shaved and had lunch, and then we went out on the town—Willy had gotten a pass to be with me until my departure.

We walked. It was a bright, beautiful day and we talked about the future. We were concerned about our parents: *"Mir vern tseshpreit 'al arba kanfis ha'aretz.' Vos veln zei ton?"* (We're spreading to the four corners of the earth. What will become of them?) It was a very serious talk. We also had fun. We went to the nearest woods, the Tziganer (Gypsy) Wald. There was a midway there, and many restaurants. We had a beer and ate. We had our picture taken. In the evening we went back to Willy's barracks. I was provided with a bunk and I spent the night. In the morning, after breakfast with the rest of the soldiers, Willy accompanied me to the station. It was really heartbreaking, our leavetaking. We fell upon each other's shoulders and we wept out loud. When I got on the train we still talked through the window. The train began to move, and Willy ran alongside it until we pulled out of the station. I wonder, where did we all get the strength to live through these dramas?

The train took me to Warsaw, and from Warsaw another train took me to Weherswa, a depot on the border between Poland and Germany. There was a quarantine station there, and all of us immigrants were shaved—our entire bodies—and then we showered. I remember they smeared our bodies with a really stinking soap—I can still smell it. Our clothes were disinfected in special ovens.

After a few days we were taken to Danzig. From there a small ship took us to Hull, England, and from there we went by train to Liverpool. Liverpool looked to me like a very poor city, and I saw a lot of black people for the first time in my life. And after a few days our ship, the *Athena*, departed for Canada.

I had a really good time on board. My appetite was great—I never saw such meals in my life, and I ate like a horse. Most of the other passengers were seasick, but not me. I comforted them. I looked after my girl friends. I had everything I wanted on board, even romance. When I recall those eight days on the ship I swell with remembered pleasure. Every night I'd be out on the deck walking all around the ship—naturally with an escort. I loved it especially when the moon was out. How romantic

it was to be surrounded by ocean under a big moon and millions of stars. The ship was a different world—there were no worries there whatever. And we were going to a new world, a world we had always dreamed of.

The prospect of arrival was exciting too. Every day we came nearer our destination. My imagination worked overtime. Just imagine, I hadn't seen any of my family for over two weeks, and soon I'd be seeing my sister whom I hadn't seen for over thirteen years. I was sure she'd be at the station waiting for me because she knew exactly when I would arrive. And the Siegels, of course they would be there when I arrived—after all, it had been arranged that I would stay with them for a while. Oh, the warm welcome I'd have when I landed!

The *Athena* docked at Quebec City and we went on by train to Montreal. Most of the passengers were met by friends or relatives—most, but not me. I looked around. Maybe I had overlooked them, or they didn't recognize me. After all, the Siegels didn't know me that well, and even Mattel might not recognize me so soon—a person changes in thirteen years. But soon everybody else was gone and I remained on the platform alone like a stray lamb. No Siegels, no

Mattel! I was surrounded by my luggage and everybody was looking at me. They talked to me and I didn't know what. I looked to them, I'm sure, like a creature from another world—and I was. I am really dumb. I don't know what to do. Finally I took out the address of Mr. Siegel and showed it to my inquisitors. They got me a taxi. The driver took my luggage and out we went. He brought me to the address, and I got out and rang the bell. No answer. I paid the driver and I stayed around and waited. Nothing. What was I to do? People were again staring at me. A policeman passed by and looked at me suspiciously. On the house door beside the Siegels' I noticed a name plate with the name "Freedman" on it. They had to be Jewish people, I figured. I rang the bell, and at the elderly couple who appeared I began to throw questions in Yiddish in my heavy Galician accent. They hardly understood me because they were Litvaks, and besides, they had left the old country about fifty or sixty years before. But we talked so long until they got my story straight. Then they gave me the bitterly disappointing news. The Siegels had left for Saratoga a couple of days earlier for a month's vacation and they had left the key to their house with the Freedmans their neighbors.

Imagine—I had to be a prophet to know that they had left the key for me there! But what would I do all alone in the house? "We will take you to the Streans, who are family friends," they said, "and Mrs. Strean will take care of you."

I don't know. My behavior may sound childish, but you can't change character. Some people would have taken these things as they came, very calmly, but I couldn't. When we arrived at the Streans' I was very warmly welcomed, but I still broke out in a hysterical cry. The good Mr. and Mrs. Strean calmed me down. "You don't have to worry, you're at home," they said. They showed me the washroom and I washed up. We sat down at the table and had a very good meal. Mr. Strean then accompanied me to the station to pick up my heavy baggage.

Night fell and Mrs. Strean took me back to the Siegels' house. She showed me how to use the electricity and how to set the water heater, and she said, "You'll have all your meals with us until the Siegels return. Come by in the morning for breakfast."

I was alone again. I paced around the house, this way and that, like an animal in a cage, and finally I went to bed. I did not sleep. I went over again in my mind the entire journey from the

time I started out from Boryslaw two and a half weeks before—every incident, every detail—until I arrived, all over again, in Montreal. All of a sudden the telephone rang. For a moment I was afraid to pick it up—what could I say when I didn't even speak the language? The telephone rang and rang. I picked up the receiver. "Hello?" "Hello, Meilech," I heard, "it's Mattel! *Herst mich?* Do you hear me?" How can I hear? All I heard was crying and all I answered with was crying.

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After a month in Montreal I started to work full time as a carpenter in an upholstery shop. That first week I worked eighty hours. I was paid nineteen cents an hour, so I made about fifteen dollars and change. I paid five dollars to the Siegels for my room and board, five dollars I sent to my parents, and five dollars I put in the bank. For the change I bought myself some cigarettes.

I was soon earning relatively good wages for the time, and Mattel and I began to think of bringing the whole family over from the old country. First Mattel and I saved the money—that was what the bank account was for—to bring over Usher. The same chief of police for whom

I'd made the washtable had told me that Usher was a dangerous man to Poland, and Mattel and I felt we should get him out quickly, before he got into any more trouble. In America Usher remained a fervent communist idealist for the rest of his life. After years of economic struggle he opened and ran a very successful stationery shop in Montreal, and he insisted on closing it the day of Ho Chi Minh's funeral—maybe the only person in Montreal with that idea. He died after a lengthy and painful illness in April 1971.

Then Mattel and Usher and I saved the money to bring over Lipa and his family. Then we all saved the money to bring over Willy, who arrived in Montreal on a dark day for American justice—the day Sacco and Vanzetti were electrocuted. Now the majority of the family, five of us, were in America, and four remained in Boryslaw. And it wasn't long before we collected the money to bring over Father, Mother, Pessel, and Chana, together. The year was 1931. Oh, what a joy it was to be all reunited again! When I had left Boryslaw a few years before I thought I had said good-bye to my parents forever. . . .

And in spite of the Depression, America meant hope for us. For us children—marriage,

children of our own, some prosperity; for Mother and Father—some comfort and security and *nachis* and respect in their old age. But it was only years later, with the outbreak of a new war, that we all realized with a shiver the fate that we had escaped without knowing by leaving when we did.

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This is January 18, 1975. It is a real winter day, five degrees below zero, and the wind is blowing at fifteen miles an hour. Altogether it comes out to about fifteen degrees below zero. Now I am under house arrest, sentenced by the weather, and to occupy my time there is so much to do. I can read, write letters, watch TV, talk on the telephone, and of course write about the past.

Like last night, I dreamed I was in Borys-law and I met all the celebrities there: Eisik and Pynie Leiner, Reisaly and Gitele Leiner, Reb Myer Bander, the *Rebbitzin* and Brucha and Feige (her sister) Bander, Hersch (her brother) Bander, Eisik Shamus, Sruel Eli Brunengraber, Leitchy Brunengraber (what a good woman that was!), Yankel Gersten, Sruel Haberman, Rubin Mager, Yosel Mager, Psachye and his lovely wife, Moishe Aron the gravedigger and his son

the *machornik* (pimp)... ...ltz and his family, the Bloch fami... ...Freedlander, Leizer Getzeles, Her... ...Leib Holky, Zishe Leipundig, Mois... ...Itzik Hersch Koch, Schmiel Yasin... ...Schuster and his lovely wife with t... ...cheeks, Rifka Leah and Myer Tsu... ...eir daughter Hentshele, Koppela V... ...ntzer family—our close friends Aral... ...indel Pantzer, and Avrum Leizer an... ...l Schloimy and Yankel Pantzer—all of ... ...I was with them last night. I walked wit... ...n. I had conversations with them. It was a ...derful dream.

When I woke from my dream I was happy. I knew that none of these people were alive today. Some of them died a natural death and the rest were exterminated by the Nazis. And a handful of people saved themselves through emigration. I was one of them. As for those who did not make it, I have tried to remember them. All that is left for me now is to leave a tear on their unknown graves.