2/24/92

To my
associate
and friend
Ken
from Carl

OF HUMAN AGONY

OF HUMAN AGONY

by

Irene and Carl Horowitz

SHENGOLD PUBLISHERS, INC.
New York

ISBN 0-88400-156-3
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 91-068110

Published by Shengold Publishers, Inc.
18 West 45th Street
New York, NY 10036

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

This book was written to honor our parents. It contains the stories of a boy and girl who lived through the horrors of the Holocaust. Though they lived in two different towns, the events they lived through took place at the same time.

To help clarify events, we have headed the sections "Irene's Story" and "Carl's Story."

We dedicate this book to our daughters Alice and Terry.

To Our Children Alice and Terry

I often feel that I would like you to know more about me and the years before you were born, when I was growing up. While your father has talked to you about his life, his family and his experiences during the war, somehow I have never found the opportunity to do this. Thus, I feel that it is important that you learn more about me.

When I was a little girl, I loved to listen to my parents' stories about their pasts, their childhoods, about what their lives were like before I was born. I had no radio or television for the long winter evenings, but I found listening to my parents talk about themselves very absorbing and entertaining. My father, especially, needed very little coaxing to talk about his youth. He liked to tell stories that took him back to the early years of his life.

I think I knew my parents much better than you know me. But although I want you to know me, I find it difficult to speak about myself and lack the confidence to believe that you would want to hear me. Thus I have decided to write down what I remember and let you read it when you are ready.

I was born to Jewish parents in Boryslaw, a small town in Poland. The fact that I was Jewish later shaped my whole life. I was the youngest child. My brother Milo was the oldest, my sister Anna was about two years younger than he, and I came along ten years later. In fact, I owe my life to the fact that a little girl died in my family two years before I was born. My mother took the loss of this child very hard and became depressed, and the doctor advised that she have another child as soon as possible. Thus, I was born.

My childhood was normal; exceptional events were the wedding of my sister Anna, the death of both my grandmothers and of my little cousin who died of diphtheria. I was a happy child, very attached to my mother. I adored my father and I loved my sister and brother. My home felt secure and the future looked bright.

❧ 1 ❧

Escape From the Concentration Camp

On January 10, 1945, while evacuating the Plaszow concentration camp, the Germans ordered the inmates to get ready for a march. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon and it was getting dark. Carl took off his striped prison uniform, slipped on a pair of navy blue pants and a winter jacket; he covered these with his long, striped prison overcoat. The men were ordered to form a column and the gate was opened. They marched out surrounded by guards. Lagerfuhrer Schupke rode along in a car.

By evening they had reached the city of Cracow, with its population watching in silence. As he marched, Carl wondered why the Jews didn't run away en masse. There were relatively few guards and they would not be able to prevent a mass escape, even though some prisoners probably would be killed. But the marchers knew better. The hostile Polish population would not give them shelter, and would probably help the Germans catch the fugitives. The Jews had no place to go. They marched the whole night.

During the procession Carl spotted a parked truck and quickly hid under it. But the driver started the engine. Quickly, Carl jumped back into the column. An old inmate, who could hardly walk, asked Carl to hold him by the arm as they marched. As he did, he realized that, with the old man clinging to him, he would not be able to escape. Fortunately, a horse-drawn carriage was provided for the people who could not walk and the old man was put on the wagon.

Machauf, the head of the electric shop where Carl had worked, knew him well and whispered, "Why don't you run away, you idiot! You were on Christian papers and you have somewhere to go. We don't."

By morning, the group, which consisted of a thousand Jews, was permitted by the Germans to stop at the crossroads for a rest. The prisoners, exhausted from the all-night march, lay down, sighing and moaning on the snow. A young gentile woman approached the group with a basket of rolls for sale. The German guards, tired themselves, didn't object, even though it was forbidden to sell anything to the Jews. When the young woman had sold all her rolls, she picked up her basket

striped overcoat and, putting his arm through hers, walked with her as if they were together.

"What are you doing?" she asked suspiciously.

"I am running away from the concentration camp," he said. "Please check to see if anyone has noticed me."

She looked back. "No," she replied. "No one has noticed anything." She allowed Carl to return with her to her apartment, where she let him wash up and rest.

Later, Carl asked how he could get back to Cracow, while avoiding the highways. The woman pointed to a line of hills running parallel to the road.

"Follow that road through the hills," she said. He thanked her and began to walk alongside of the road. It wound through the edge of the woods, sometimes emerging into the open, sometimes losing itself in the wooded area. It was around 6 o'clock in the morning and daylight was starting to break. It was very cold and there was snow all over. Trying not to appear anxious, Carl walked briskly, without looking around or back; however, his eyes betrayed the tension he felt inside. He continued in the deep snow across hills and between bushes, all the time checking to see that the road was on the left. He was afraid of getting lost in the wooded area. Deeply inhaling the fresh air, Carl concentrated on the road. His destination was his aunt Fela's home in Cracow, where he planned to go directly.

Carl, immediately after his escape from the concentration camp.

Very few people were out walking at such an early hour; on the road, however, German trucks drove by in both directions. Carl had to walk about 15 miles to reach his destination. At one point, he entered a clearing and ran straight into a group of lumberjacks, who were resting on the trunks of the cut trees. His heart began to pound; it required all his strength to avoid running back. The lumberjacks were also surprised. What was this man doing walking alone through the woods at this time of the morning? But Carl walked on, leaving the group behind him. He was afraid; he wanted to run, but this would have given him away. So he restrained himself.

Finally, he breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that no one was behind him.

A river was flowing through the woods, with no way to cross it. Carl was forced back to the road, where he saw a bridge. But there were guards on the bridge, and they were checking the IDs of everyone trying to cross. It was already light; the day had begun.

Carl had to cross the river in order to get to Cracow. But how? He had no identity card—no concentration camp inmate did. As the guards were about to ask for his papers, he spotted a path in the snow leading to the right. As if he'd intended to do so all along, he turned onto this path.

Carl was lost, but he kept walking up the hill. He had no other choice: crossing the bridge would be a death sentence. He came to a clearing on top of a hill. To his right he recognized two large, familiar mounds, the burial mounds of Krakus and Wanda, ancient Polish heroes. To his left, all the way down, was the river Vistula, with the city of Cracow sprawled across it. The river was partially frozen and was filled with huge chunks of ice. They glistened brightly in the morning sun; Carl, in his desperation, walked down towards the river. An open wasteland surrounded him. The biting wind was intense and there was no shelter anywhere in sight.

Continuing to walk in such weather could lead to freezing to death. Carl's only chance was to get to the city; the only way to do so was by crossing the river on foot. There was always the possibility of drowning, as the river was not fully frozen. Carl wasn't sure that the ice was strong enough and would hold his weight. Nonetheless, in a quick, desperate move, he slid down the bank and stepped onto the first chunk of ice. It moved with the weight of his body but remained steady. Gingerly, Carl jumped from one chunk of ice to the next until he had crossed the entire river. He had done it! Now he was safe.

Carl climbed up the bank of the river and walked to the nearest streetcar. He almost fell into the arms of a German officer whom he had known from his job in the Schenker Transport Company. Carl had worked there for three years on Christian papers before he had been denounced as a Jew, arrested and taken to the concentration camp. The German spotted him, but to Carl's surprise and relief the man also pretended not to know him.

This took place during the last days of the German occupation and the Germans were leaving Cracow in a panic, together with the withdrawing army. The German officer was obviously leaving too, as he was holding two suitcases. Carl was obviously the last thing on his mind. They entered the streetcar together and Carl got off at the stop near his

aunt's apartment. Quickly, he walked over to where his Aunt Fela lived and knocked on the door. His cousin Herta cautiously opened it. When she saw Carl, she gasped and they fell into each other's arms. Once inside the house, Carl began to relax. It was hard to believe that he was alive and free, but here he was.

Herta made him tea and gave him something to eat. She had spent the last two years hiding in this apartment, and never leaving it once for fear of the Germans. While living on Christian papers she had run away after being recognized as a Jewess at the Post Office where she worked. Aunt Fela had taken her in. There she had remained hidden from the outside world until the end of the war.

Fela, who was Carl's and Herta's aunt, lived in Cracow under the name Eva Troszynska. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, she had married a Polish officer, Jan Troszynski, who had been drafted into the Polish army as soon as the war began and was killed shortly thereafter in combat.

Fela had stayed in Zakopane, where she had lived with Jan, and no one knew of her Jewish origin. This fact helped her, not only to survive the war with her two children; it also made it possible for her to help save the lives of members of her family and friends. For the past two years she had been living in an apartment on Kremerowska Street together with her friend Ala, a gentile Polish girl. Ala knew that Fela was Jewish but kept her secret to the end of the war.

Carl, exhausted from the previous night's march and escape, lay down on the couch and fell asleep immediately. He was awakened by his aunt's arrival. Fela cried out in joy when she saw him. She had never expected to see Carl alive again; people simply didn't return from concentration camps.

They sat down at the table, while Fela still shook her head in disbelief.

"How did you manage to escape from Plaszow?"

Carl replied simply, "The camp was evacuated and we were forced to march all night; in the morning I seized a chance to escape from the transport without being noticed. I came back to Cracow and directly here."

Fela said, "It is a miracle that you are here with us again."

A few days later the Russians entered Cracow. For the Jews the war was over. The date was January 18th 1945.

For Carl, a new life loomed ahead. He was eager to do something. He had finished high school just before the war had begun. But he had

no profession and didn't know where to start. He wanted a job and a place for himself. Carl was still using the name "Edward Kubec," which he had adopted for his Christian papers during the occupation. Many Jews continued to live as Christians after the war—some for a while, some never going back to their own identities.

One day Fela mentioned to Carl that there was a job in Ligota, near Katowice, at an oil refinery. So he hitchhiked in a military truck to Katowice, from where he walked to Ligota. When he reached the refinery he found that no one was in charge, as the German management had fled, leaving everything up in the air. Carl, who knew nothing about the business, took charge. A few days later, Michael Dichter, a petroleum engineer, arrived. Recognizing his superior experience, Carl became second in charge. They survived on cereals and bread. However, the Germans who had run the refinery before had vacated beautiful, fully furnished apartments. The men took two of them for themselves.

Soon thereafter, Michael brought his wife Anna and her son Wilus from Boryslaw to Ligota. Carl continued to live alone. He worked very hard, devoting all his energy and attention to his job.

At that time, the Russian army was passing through the area in pursuit of the fleeing Germans. They needed oil and fuel for their trucks and got it from the refinery. In gratitude, they gave Carl and Michael canned food from America, since, during that phase of the war, America was sending food supplies to the Russian army.

On April 28, 1945 Hitler committed suicide. On May 8th the Germans surrendered. Carl had the factory sirens sound to hail the news.

The war was over.

In May 1945, Carl met Irene, Michael's sister-in-law. Irene had come to be with her sister after leaving Boryslaw, where she had lived for several months following her liberation by the Russians. She lived with Michael and Anna in Ligota and after the hardships of the war, their apartment seemed like a palace.

Anna had taken Irene to the refinery, where Michael introduced her to Carl. She liked Carl immediately. He was gentle and nice, well-mannered, and spoke softly yet decisively. He looked strong and he was tall and good-looking. Irene thought that he must be a decent man. She felt good in his presence.

When Carl saw Irene as she and Michael entered his office, he thought she was very pretty. She had regular features and a small nose and her face was framed by black hair; her beautiful green eyes were

accentuated by black eyebrows and long eyelashes. Her figure was petite and well-proportioned. Carl liked her from the first moment he saw her. They spoke for a while; Carl knew that he wanted to see more of her.

Both Carl and Irene were survivors, fresh from the horrors of the Holocaust. Each was twenty-two years old, although, according to his Christian papers, Carl was five years older. He told her of his true identity and revealed his name—something he wouldn't have done with anyone else. During the war it could have meant certain death and, even now, the habit of hiding his Jewish name and origin remained.

Carl could hardly believe his ears as he heard himself say, "My name is Carl Horowitz." For almost four years, while he had lived as a Christian during the war, he would never have told his name, even to his closest friend. But now he spoke openly, without hesitation, to this girl after knowing her for less than an hour. True, there was no longer any great danger in being a Jew, but his very existence was based on the "fact" that he was a Christian. Everybody in the refinery knew him as a Christian, and his assumed age, five years older, was suitable for the high position he held.

A few days later, Carl bumped into Irene on the street. They spoke for a while and he experienced the magical feeling of falling in love as he looked at her. For almost four years, while passing as a Christian, it had been an iron rule to avoid getting involved with any girl. As a Jew on Christian papers he might betray himself. It would have been dangerous for the girl as well to be involved with a Jew. However, the war was over now; the emotions welled up in him and his heart yearned for this beautiful girl.

One day, Carl was walking home from a gathering of friends when he passed the house where Irene lived. She stood on the second-floor balcony.

"Why didn't you stay at the party?" she asked.

"Because I was not needed there," he said half-jokingly.

"Then please come and visit with us."

Carl didn't have to be asked twice. In a minute he was on the second floor, having jumped three steps at a time. The two of them stood on the veranda.

"You know," said Irene, "I often stand here and hope that someone from my family will return alive from the war. Wouldn't it be wonderful if my father or your father came back from the concentration camp alive? I hear such miraculous stories of survival and reunion almost every day."

Irene did not yet know that her father had died in the Flossenburg

concentration camp a few days before the liberation. He had lost his eyeglasses and the German supervisor had removed him from his job as an accountant to work in a stone quarry. He didn't survive the brutally hard work.

Carl became a frequent visitor in Anna's house. He and Irene went for walks and he took her to the movies or the theater. They enjoyed being with each other, and spoke of their lives before they met and their experiences during the war. There was so much to talk about, so much in common. They quickly became friends. As there were no other young people in Ligota, Carl and Irene were brought even closer.

One day, as they walked through a park, Irene said, "Carl, I would really like to know about your life before the war. I know so little about you."

"There is nothing much to tell," answered Carl, who felt shy and reserved.

Irene pressed on. "Tell me about your family. What was your mother like? What was her name?"

"Her name was Amalia, but her family called her Malka."

"But that is my Jewish name," Irene exclaimed. "It is Esther Małka."

Carl looked at her strangely. "You bear the names of my mother and my grandmother."

They both were silent.

After a few minutes Irene said, "Will you tell me about them?"

The two sat down on a bench in a beautiful park surrounding a monastery and Carl began to tell his story.

❧ 2 ❧

My Childhood

I was born on August 10, 1923 in Old Zniesienie, a suburb of Lvov, which is a large city in the south-eastern part of Poland. I was the second son of Amalia and Nathan Horowitz. I have two brothers: Leo, two years older than I, and Mark, one year younger. My earliest recollection is of being taken to the hospital with scarlet fever. I remember seeing my parents standing behind a glass wall that separated the visitors from the sick children. I was confused about the expressions for hot and cold. When the nurse served me a hot drink, I complained that it was too cold. She would then serve me a really hot drink that would burn my lips. To her surprise, I still complained that it was too cold. I was only four years old.

Lvov was a beautiful city with a large park in the center. The park was crowned by a tall hill called the High Castle. From there you could see the entire city, with its beautiful churches, museums, the Grand Theater and the Main Railroad Station. In front of the theater was another park with two corsos running parallel to each other on either side. The corsos were lined with elegant stores, hotels and restaurants. It was a

Artist's rendition of Carl's house in Old Zniesienie, as painted by Morris Katz.

Carl's family: seated (from left), Grandmother, Fela, Grandfather.
Standing (from left), Aunt Donna, Uncle Meyer, Aunt Susan and Carl's mother.

meeting place for thousands of young people after school and on holidays. Tourists and local people would stroll on the avenue too, shopping in the elegant stores or simply enjoying the view.

The city was traversed by a chain of hills popularly known as the Kaiserwald. Beyond the hills was a mountain called Devil's Rock, the highest point in the area and the destination of frequent school excursions. Later, during the German occupation, a pogrom of the Jews took place there. It was an ideal location for a pogrom, since it was isolated and far from view.

My family lived on my grandparents' farm in Old Zniesienie. In reality it was a village with peasants tending to their farms and farm animals. However, the city of Lvov incorporated it and erected pillars delineating the city limits that included our village. The village lay in a valley at the foot of Kaiserwald Hills, shaded by hundreds of lilac and other trees. In the spring, when the lilac trees were blooming, the aroma of their flowers was intoxicating, enveloping the whole area.

Our house stood outside the village on top of a hill that dominated the area. My grandfather's farm was spread in parcels over 200 acres of

arable land on a large, flat area separated from the house by railroad tracks. An underpass provided access from the house to the fields. The hill on which the house stood was leveled on the top, with an area of about five acres. Our house, a large colonial-style structure, stood there. It had white-washed walls, red ceramic roof tiles and a veranda with columns at the front entrance. It was quite a picturesque dwelling and artists would occasionally come from the city and paint pictures of it and of the surrounding trees and flowers.

Inside, the house was divided into three parts. The center was occupied by my grandparents; it consisted of an ornate living room called a salon, a bedroom, a kitchen and a foyer. The left wing, consisting of a large bedroom, was occupied by my aunt Donna and her family. She shared the kitchen with my grandmother. The right wing, consisting of a bedroom, kitchen, pantry, foyer and a separate entrance, was occupied by my family. Across our large front yard there was another house for the helpers and their families. There was also a stable, barn and large fruit orchard extending from the top to the back slope of the hill.

The view from our hill was magnificent. The entire city of Lvov, with the High Castle and the park around it, could be seen to the west, along with endless fields to the east and north. To the south was the village and beyond that was the chain of Kaiserwald Hills with Devil's Rock visible far along the horizon in the east. On a clear day one could watch the sunrise and sunset in all their beauty, with an unobstructed view of the majestic passage of the sun from east to west. At night, in clear weather, one could see the stars undimmed by the city lights. To the north, the Great Dipper would point regally with its handle to the west, and the moon, the size of a house, would rise in the east.

In a valley between our house and Kaiserwald Hills lay the village of Old Zniesienie, in which the Ukrainian peasants lived in a row of thatched farmhouses. They were excellent farmers, cultivating small pieces of land, fruit orchards and milking cows. A tall "tserkev" (Greek orthodox church) stood on a hill opposite to ours, dominating the whole area. The villagers were very religious and their priest, the "Pope," was highly revered. He was friendly with my grandfather and the two men met often and discussed the merits and demerits of their respective religions in their free time.

My grandfather was the undisputed head of the family. He was a religious Jew, about seventy years old, with a beard and sideburns in the style of the Emperor Franz Joseph. He was leasing land from a Polish magnate and cultivating it. He was a progressive man and did not wear

the capote (a black coat) and the fur hat of the other religious Jews in the area. He was of medium height and slim build, but he projected an aristocratic mien and bearing. Always neatly dressed in a suit, hat, and carrying a cane, he would not hesitate to give a helping hand to his workers in the fields when necessary. He was respected and well liked by both Christians and Jews. At one time he was even elected an honorary judge for the area.

Every morning, at the break of dawn, my grandfather would take a tour of his land. It was a trip of several miles, because of its wide expanse. He would examine the progress of his crops and check the work of the helpers in the fields. When he returned home at about 11 o'clock, a breakfast prepared by my grandmother was waiting for him. It usually consisted of two hard-boiled eggs, bread and coffee.

My grandfather was a self-educated man. He read the German philosophers, world history and was keenly interested in Jewish affairs.

Carl's grandmother and grandfather.

Carl's mother and father.

In his free time he liked to play chess with me. I usually lost, but when I occasionally won, he would throw me out of the room in frustration. How dare a young boy like me win a chess game against him?!

My grandmother ran the household. She was a gentle woman who never complained about her work. She had no formal education. In the evenings, my grandfather liked to read educational articles to her from his newspaper. He became very annoyed when she would fall asleep during his lecture, tired from the day's work.

I loved to ride horses bareback. During the weekends, my grandfather would send my brothers and me to bring the horses back from grazing in the fields.

"Do not gallop," he would say. "The horses have to rest, too."

Nonetheless, we galloped. One day, my grandfather hid behind the bend in the road. When we were galloping past him, he came to hit me with his cane. He missed and hit the horse instead. The horse panicked and took off at a wild gallop for miles before I was finally able to stop it.

My parents were poor. My father, a short, handsome man with black hair and a mustache, worked as a salesman in a clothing store. My mother took in sewing to supplement his meager income. They were sending three boys to high school, although we had no future in the depressed pre-war Poland, especially as Jews. There were no jobs available and we had no chance of being admitted to college because of discrimination.

My mother was my grandparents' second oldest daughter and was self-educated, very much like my grandfather. Although she had only four grades of grammar school, she was well read in world literature. She read Proust, Balzac and Sinclair and spoke the beautiful, literary Polish

of the educated class. She was not pretty, but she had the most expressive, clever eyes I have ever seen. She was a devoted wife and mother and I knew that she loved us very much, even though she concealed her emotions and seldom showed us her love. She never praised us to others in our presence and discouraged others from doing it. It was considered not proper for the children to hear praise, probably because it might make them conceited. However, this tended to make them less sure of themselves in grown-up life.

I remember her, sitting at the sewing machine, working and singing beautiful Ukrainian folk songs. I can see her worried face before me even today.

My mother always put the needs of her children before her own. She could not afford to repair her own teeth, but sent me to a dentist to fix mine. She sent me to summer camps, while she never took a vacation for herself, even though she was tired from work and could have used some rest. During the war, when there was nothing to eat, she wouldn't hesitate to go hungry and give the last slice of bread to us.

My Aunt Donna was the second youngest daughter of my grandparents. She and her husband Ed had three young children: two boys, Matthew and Sigmund, and a little girl, Lucy. Sigmund, who was called Ziggy, was a beautiful boy with blonde hair and blue eyes. He was very attached to me. When I was home from school, he followed me like a shadow.

Carl's mother with Leo, Mark and Carl

Aunt Donna was a pretty woman, but she was very helpless and somewhat childish. She depended a lot on the guidance of my mother, her older sister, who would sometimes scold her as one would scold a child.

Uncle Ed, Donna's husband, was a simple man without any education or trade; he could not get any work. He and his family were supported by my grandfather. In 1936, Ed

was wounded by a stray bullet during a socialist uprising in Poland. This was another liability in anti-socialist Poland, though it became an asset when the Russian Communists came.

Aunt Susann was my grandparents' oldest daughter. She lived in Vienna with her husband and two children, and would visit us every so often. When she did, she would bring oranges and bananas, which were considered quite a luxury in Poland. Susann would spend the whole night talking to my mother, with whom she was very close.

She was a good-hearted person. Her husband had died young of a heart attack, leaving her penniless with two small children, Oswald and Herta. When the Germans occupied Austria, she was expelled as a Polish Jewess and moved back home with her family. For a while, her children lived with us on the farm, where we had fun playing with them and learning German.

Carl's cousin Oswald.

Aunt Susann had to earn a living and support her family, by herself. This was very difficult before the war. Although it was unusual for a woman to work at that time, she was very capable and was able to provide well for her family in her job as an executive in a designer coat company.

Susann's daughter Herta was very pretty and popular with boys. During the summer vacation they would come to our house to see her and we all had a wonderful time, sitting in the orchard and playing together. One of the boys who liked Herta was an Ukrainian named Gene, our neighbor's son and a friend of my brother Leo. Gene was an extremely handsome boy, with blonde hair and blue eyes. We all spent a lot of time together.

Gene often said to us; "You Jews and we Ukrainians should stick together. Both of us are persecuted by the Poles." How little he knew then! During the war, the Ukrainians did not stick together with the Jews. Instead, they vented their frustrations on them, quenching their fury by killing innocent Jewish victims during the German occupation. Later, when the Russians came, Gene ran away to join the Germans. He joined a Nazi school that trained soldiers to kill the Jews.

Oswald, Aunt Susann's son, was tall, handsome and popular with

the girls. He was good-natured but very wild. He used to have me chaperon on his dates and would introduce me to girls, though I was too young to be interested. However, I appreciated his good intentions. One day, as he was throwing pebbles from the top of the hill, he unwittingly hit a woman passing by. She came up to our house, screaming and threatening. It took a lot of persuasion and some money to finally calm her down.

Herta learned to speak Polish quickly, and was quite fluent. But Oswald had difficulty in learning the new language and spoke with a heavy German accent. Later on, this brought about his demise. His poor Polish betrayed him as being a Jew while he was hiding out posing as a Christian. An inability to speak perfect Polish was a serious stigma.

My grandfather's youngest daughter Fela was his favorite. She was tall and pretty, with golden red hair, and had an excellent figure. She studied pharmacology in Vienna and lived in her sister Susann's house. She came home for vacations and lit up our house with her bubbling personality. I remember her running around the garden, her red hair blowing in the wind. She seemed so pretty and happy; everybody loved her.

Fela brought a phonograph as a gift to her father. Hardly anybody had a phonograph at that time. We all gathered around it and admired the picture of the dog listening to "His Master's Voice," his head cocked to the side. Then Fela placed the record on the turntable, cranked it up and, to our amazement and delight, "My Yiddishe Momme" began to play. Everybody cried, including me.

My mother and Fela were very close. She was good to all of us boys, but her favorite was Leo. I was jealous. On our birthdays she would give us presents. I was a little intimidated by Fela because she always knew what to do and I was so unsure of myself. However, later on, this trait in her personality helped her to survive and help others. If she was fearful, no one ever knew it.

Aunt Eva (Fela)

When Fela returned to Poland from Vienna, she married a Polish doctor who was an officer in the Polish army. When my grandfather learned of this, he ordered my grandmother to light candles for her, as if she were dead. This terrified me: How could my grandfather have

done this? But I learned later that his love for her did not diminish.

As a child I was always ill and my mother doted on me. I wouldn't feel like eating, so she prepared my favorite dishes. This made my brothers jealous, especially my younger brother Mark, who would openly express his resentment. I couldn't understand it at the time. Mark would try to steal my playmates and call me names, which was easy, since I was thin, sickly and pale.

However, that didn't stop me from always getting myself into trouble. One spring, one of our cows ate fresh clover and became very bloated. A veterinary came and, while we were all standing around the moaning cow lying in the yard, he took a sharp tool and pierced the animal's stomach. Gases, mixed with half-digested food erupted, spraying me from top to bottom. Needless to say, I was the object of jokes and ridicule for many years thereafter.

Then there was the young entrepreneur in me. I tried to make some money by collecting medicinal plants from the fields. I would dry them on the roof of the barn and sell them to local drugstores. Once, when it had rained, I grew concerned about my merchandise. I climbed onto the slippery roof to check on it and fell off, almost killing myself. Fortunately, I had fallen into freshly ploughed soil and I had a "soft landing." But this didn't deter me from climbing again. On another occasion, I was climbing a pear tree to pick some fruit when the branch I was sitting on broke, throwing me off the tree. On the way down I brushed against another sharp branch which gashed my thigh. Blood gushed all over my leg, which gave me quite a scare until I realized it was just a superficial wound.

Bottom (from left), Mark and Carl.
Top, Herta and Leo.

I tried to cross the local river and climb the water dam, tearing a new pair of pants in the process. I broke the glass windows many times while playing ball,

and was punished by a beating from my father. (This was the only time that he hit me.) Somehow, accidents stuck to me like glue. However this gave me practice dealing with ticklish situations, which improved my chances of survival during the war. I learned how to defend myself, how to run away, how to hide and, most of all, how to face danger calmly.

I was a poor eater and my mother had to cook the same food for me every day. It was a vegetable soup prepared from fresh peas, carrots, potatoes and cauliflower. For flavor she added a small amount of flour mixed with butter, fried in a frying pan. This was called "einbren" and it gave the soup a delicious taste. Even today I remember the taste of my mother's vegetable soup. I dismissed all other foods with an "I'll eat it later" or by putting them in the bottom shelf of the pantry, where it would be found dried up weeks later. As a result I was small and thin, the smallest boy in our class.

Once, I overheard my mother say to my father that my sickness had left a permanent mark. When I asked her about it, she thought for a while and said, "One of your legs is shorter than the other." I had never noticed this deformity and it didn't occur to me until much later that she had told me a white lie. Years later, when I became ill with TB, her doting, her sending me to summer camps and her constant worrying about my health became clear to me.

Each year, before school started, my mother would take me to the city to buy me a new pair of shoes, larger each time. I loved to go shopping with her. The store, "Bata," was located on the corso in front of the Grand Theater. The salesman would put the shoes on and take me to an X-ray machine to see if they fit. The danger of radiation exposure was not yet known and the procedure was considered something of a novelty. After a successful shoe purchase, we would go to a coffee shop on the corner of the Main Plaza, beneath the City Hall. My mother knew the owner of the shop and I was treated royally to my favorite nougats and iced coffee, while the two ladies would enjoy a friendly conversation.

When the holidays came, I enjoyed helping my mother prepare the food. Passover was my favorite holiday. Several days before, my mother would start preparing the traditional dishes. She prepared "gefilte fish" differently from the way it is done today. She would slice up the carp and carefully remove the meat from inside the slices, leaving the center empty. After removing the bones, she chopped up the meat, mixed it with matzo meal and pepper and then returned it into the empty slices. She would then boil the filled slices ("gefilte" means filled fish in Yiddish) in water with onions, carrots and sugar. The liquid was strained to remove

the onions and chilled until it gelled. The dish was served cold with pieces of challah, the traditional Jewish white bread. On Passover, the gefilte fish was served with matzo (unleavened, flat bread). Eggs were hard boiled, shelled and served in salt water. "Charoset," a mixture of ground nuts, honey, wine and pieces of apple, was also prepared. No holiday could have been complete without chicken soup with "knedlach."

I especially liked to help my mother prepare the Passover torte. She used a lot of eggs, first separating the egg whites from the yolks. She then mixed the egg whites with sugar; my job was to whip up the mixture with a hand beater until a firm white foam was created. It was a lengthy procedure of about half an hour. She then mixed the yolks with sugar and again it was my job to beat this until a firm light yellow cream was created. My mother folded one foam into the other and added ground nuts. She poured this batter into a form and I was rewarded with the remnants of the rich mixture that stuck to the wall of the dish. The form was placed in the oven and baked. We had to walk on our tiptoes not to "scare" the cake. After it was done, the cake was left to cool; then it was cut horizontally in half and filled inside with a fresh mixture of chocolate powder, sugar and butter, which was also applied to the sides and top of the torte. It was my favorite pastry.

On the day before Passover, I, along with my brothers and cousins, had to lie down at noon and rest in order to be able to stay up late into the night. Passover dinner was called a "seder." We were very excited and could hardly wait. As soon as it began to get dark we would look for the first star to appear in the sky, because this heralded the beginning of Passover.

A table with benches around it was set up in a large room in my grandfather's part of the house. The benches were lined with pillows. The whole family participated. The men would rotate in reading the Haggadah and the youngest child had to ask the Four Questions. The Ten Plagues were recited while dipping the small finger in the wine glass and throwing off the droplets of wine. A glass of wine was set aside and the door left slightly open for the prophet Elijah, who would visit each Jewish house late at night, invisible to everybody.

The traditional dishes were served: boiled eggs in salt water to remind us of the tears that the Jews shed in captivity, charoset for the mortar that they used to build the pyramids. Other dishes followed, such as chopped liver, chicken soup and boiled flanken and chicken. These were followed by a compote made by cooking dried prunes, served cold. Meanwhile, one of the grown-ups would hide a piece of matzo, called an

"afikomen," and the children would search for it. The lucky finder would get some money as a reward. By now it would be late and we children had to go to sleep, while the grown-ups stayed up to read the Haggadah.

We were not allowed to eat bread during the entire eight days of Passover and my mother prepared an abundant treasury of Jewish cooking for the occasion. For breakfast she made us a "matzobrei," a pancake made from matzos broken into pieces and soaked in water. The excess water was squeezed out by hand and the matzo was then mixed with eggs, placed on a greased pan and fried. Matzobrei was eaten hot, either with jam or marmalade spread on top or with salt and pepper. I preferred the version with jam. For lunch my mother would make "chremslach," a kind of pancake consisting of fried, mashed potatoes with a white creamy filling. Till today, I don't know what the cream was made of, but it was delicious. For dinner, except on the first and last two seder nights, my mother would often make my favorite potato salad—boiled, mashed potatoes mixed with chopped, boiled eggs and chopped onions. The salad was liberally laced with chicken fat. No one worried about cholesterol, or, to be exact, no one knew about it, and somehow it didn't affect anybody.

I met my first love at a friends' gathering. Her name was Halina. She had a beautiful face and black hair. She looked very much like a girl whom I met and fell in love with years later. We sat at the table and Halina looked straight into my eyes, stretched out her hands and held mine for a minute. We looked at each other without saying a word. I saw Halina several times on the way to school and we talked to each other. Then the war broke out and swallowed her up as it did so many others. I never saw her again.

Leo was two years older than I. In a different way, he was also my mother's favorite son. She would discuss her problems with him, since he was more mature than Mark or I. She could speak to him as an adult. Leo had the ability to make many friends and was always surrounded by a group of young fellows. He was especially close with Gene, the Ukrainian boy.

My younger brother Mark considered himself the "black sheep" of the family and spent most of his free time away from home, playing with gentile friends. He didn't like Jews even then, although he was a Jew himself.

My mother and Aunt Donna used to go shopping for food, especially meat, dairy and vegetables during the summer. Refrigeration didn't exist at that time and perishable items could not be kept too long. During the summer vacations we would sit on the edge of the hill, straining our eyes

and waiting for them. The moment we saw them at a distance, their hands loaded with shopping bags, we would run down the hill to meet them and help them carry the heavy bags home.

Another favorite pastime was to stand at the edge of the hill and watch the trains pass by. Once in a while, a trainload of farm implements would pass. Whoever noticed it would cry, "Carts, carts!" and we would all run to the hillside and watch the procession of hundreds of red-painted wagons go by on the open lorries.

We were poor, but that didn't bother us. We enjoyed a wonderful childhood, a large farm with animals, and the happiness of a family living together. In the summer, as soon as we came home from school, we would take off our shoes and run around barefoot. There was a big garden with vegetables in front of the house and we could pull out scallions or carrots fresh from the ground or pick peas and corn for meals. On the back slope of the hill there was an orchard full of plum, apple and cherry trees and in the fall we would pick the fruit directly from them. During our summer vacations, we loved to sit in the orchard with our friends for hours in the shade of the trees, suntanning or playing all kinds of games.

Our idyllic childhood was interrupted one night by a banging on the door. Uncle Herman, my father's younger brother (who was a bachelor at that time), had gone out that evening to the city. When he returned home later that night, he found his mother, his pregnant sister and her husband brutally hacked to death with an axe by robbers. My paternal grandmother, a widow, owned a grocery store and rumors circulated that she was rich and kept money at home. The murderers, however, hadn't found any money. All three were quickly apprehended and sentenced to ten years, five years and one year in jail, respectively. The sentences were light; after all, they had killed only Jews and Jewish life was cheap already. The year was 1931.

My father took over the store. To my mother's dismay, he gave away merchandise on credit to people who never paid him back. He went bankrupt shortly thereafter. He was unemployed for quite a while, unable to get a job in crisis-ridden pre-war Poland. Finally, my father found a low-paying job as a salesman in a clothing store. Our financial situation deteriorated steadily; I often heard my parents talking at night and asking, "How are we going to manage? How will we be able to pay the children's high school tuition?" They didn't know that I was awake and overheard everything. It affected me very much. It left me insecure and afraid of change for many years afterwards.

My uncle Ed's brother had tuberculosis. It was the type called

"galloping consumption" because of the speed with which it destroyed the patient. Every evening we would receive sad reports from Ed about the progress of his brother's illness and his failing health. At the time, there was no medication for this dreadful disease. When I heard that he had died, I thought about the number of my friends' parents who were sick or dead and thanked God that both of my parents were healthy. Somehow I thought that it was meant to be that way, that my parents would always be alive and well. But I was to find out that even they were not indestructible.

Our helpers' house stood across the big front yard. It was an old dilapidated stone building with a roof made of wooden shingles. Two families lived there. One half of the house was occupied by an older gentile couple. The man was semi-retired and only did occasional work, such as sharpening farm tools. Before he sharpened a scythe, he flattened its cutting edge with a hammer. He hit it slowly and methodically for hours and the ringing sound of the hammer blows could be heard for miles. Even today I can hear the sound of his hammer hitting the metal. He had two daughters, one of whom, Stacha, was very pretty. She had had a love affair with an older, wealthy, married man and had had an illegitimate child with him. This was a major event at the time, since having an illegitimate child was considered a disgrace to the family. The child's father was supporting them and showered them with gifts on every occasion. One of them was a movie projector operated by a battery, as there was no electricity in the area. At that time, a movie projector was quite a sensational object. There were only two films, one with Charlie Chaplin, and the other portraying the life of Jesus Christ. We watched these movies an infinite number of times.

The wealthy man and his wife were childless and when he told her about his illegitimate child, she wanted to adopt it. After a while the child did go to live with them.

The second half of the house was occupied by the family of a retired Jewish milkman who looked very much like "Tevya the Milkman" in the book by Shalom Aleichem. His apartment consisted of one large room with a bare earthen floor made of hard beaten soil. There were several beds standing along the walls for the milkman and his wife, his daughter Dvora and her husband, and their seven children, ranging in age from teenaged daughters to a baby in a cradle. A potbelly stove stood in the middle of the room. It had a set of circular rings on top and it was used for all the household when there was food to cook. The son-in-law was unemployed and there was very little food. The children were

always hungry. My mother often sent food there, which served a double purpose. First, it fed the hungry children; second, I loved to eat with them and my appetite was stimulated by the sight of the children eating heartily. Some of Dvora's children had died prematurely at birth. When this happened, this poor, simple woman would go to the edge of the hill and raise her hands to God, begging him aloud for help.

I was friendly with Dvora's son Gedalia, who was about my age. The other children were girls. When we were small we loved to play with them, but they could not afford to go to high school and we gradually drifted apart. Later Gedalia was sent to Siberia during the Russian occupation for a "progul." Progul was the offense of absenteeism from work without a valid doctor's statement.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war their house was condemned and they had to move. We lost all contact with them. I often wonder what happened to them. Did they survive? Maybe. Poor people usually have a greater ability to survive in hard times. After all, they are used to hardships.

Irene listened to Carl's story without interruption. She knew that he had revealed his deepest thoughts and feelings to her. In her imagination she could actually see the farm, Carl's grandfather and the rest of his family. She had been pulled into the life of a young child and she looked at Carl with different eyes. This young man, who looked so calm and collected, was in reality a deep and emotional person. Every word of his showed his love and devotion for his family. How hard it must be for him now that he is alone, she thought.

Carl was silent now. His thoughts had taken him back to the farm he had loved so much and the life that was gone forever.

Irene looked up at him and said, "You were in high school then. Were you a good student? How far did you have to walk to school? Tell me about yourself when you were growing up. I would like to know more about you."

"OK," Carl answered. "I hope that I won't bore you too much. If you want, I will tell you all about me, but no more today."

They went home, each buried in thought. Irene called Carl the following day and they met after he had finished work. Irene couldn't wait to hear him talk about himself again. He was like a puzzle which was unraveling before her and she was fascinated.

That day, they walked for a while; then Carl said, "I will tell you more about myself."

He was as anxious to talk as she was to hear him.

❧ 3 ❧

Adolescence

The year was 1937 and the anti-Jewish mood in Poland, stimulated by the example of Hitler's Germany, was growing uglier. We Jews loved Poland with all our hearts and considered it our fatherland, but the Polish people didn't want us. We loved the Polish authors and poets, even though their writings were interspersed with anti-Semitic remarks and stories. It hurt us when we read about Jewish "bloodsuckers" and "cowards," but we tried to ignore these remarks as if they didn't exist and continued to admire those writings that were devoid of offending slurs.

Mark (left) and Carl.

"Beat the Jews! Kill the Jews!" A large stone came crashing through our window. We ran in fear to see what had happened. Another large stone came crashing through.

"Down with the Jews!" A crowd of strangers milling in front of our house was yelling obscenities, threatening us with fists and stones. We didn't know these people, they weren't our neighbors. They came from the city and were visibly drunk. We all crouched inside the house, not knowing what to do. We had no telephone and there was no way to call for help. The house was too far from the neighbors and they wouldn't hear us. Besides, we weren't sure if they would come to help.

My grandfather turned to Leo. "Go out through the back window and run to the police for help." The police station was about one mile away. It was early in the morning and Leo had no problem reaching the station house.

"Please help us. We are being attacked by hoodlums," he told the police head.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Leo Horowitz and I live on my grandfather's farm."

"A Jew, aha! We are not going to fight for the Jews," answered the policeman.

"But we are being attacked by a large group of drunken people. They are breaking the windows and they may break into the house. Please help us," pleaded Leo.

"No. We are not going to defend you Jews against Christians, and that's final!"

Meanwhile, the barrage against the house was getting less intense as the attackers gradually sobered up. The few prostitutes who accompanied them were trying to pull them away for other activities. They were more interested in earning money from the hoodlums than in beating up innocent people. The attackers finally left; all our windows had been smashed up. When the police finally arrived, the attackers were gone. Several empty whiskey bottles and some funeral announcements were left on the ground. The police concluded that the crowd had robbed an unguarded house while its inhabitants had gone to a funeral. The robbers had gotten drunk on the stolen money, hired some prostitutes and spent the night with them in the barn. In the morning they attacked our house for fun and to terrorize Jews.

For us it was a foretaste of things to come.

My high school was about three miles from our farm and my brothers

and I had to walk the entire distance. We could not afford to take the streetcar.

Classes started at 8 o'clock in the morning. We were up by 6 to wash and eat a quick breakfast, usually consisting of buttered bread and hot coffee made of chickory. A small amount of freshly ground coffee was sprinkled on top for taste.

Latin was my most boring subject, next to history, but I liked to write essays on literature. Only much later in my life did I realize how useful Latin was in studying science and foreign languages. And today, history is my favorite subject. I read many books on World War I and II, and especially about the Holocaust.

We studied German with a professor Spaeth. He was also Jewish and loved German literature and music. Professor Spaeth liked to lecture about German music: "Beethoven composed nine symphonies, each more beautiful than the previous one. The ninth is the most beautiful and it ends with a chorus singing Goethe's 'Ode To Joy.' Beethoven suffered the worst fate a musician could have by becoming progressively deafer until he couldn't hear anything at all. Yet, he heard the music in his mind and continued to compose even though he could never hear it."

"Wagner was the only composer who was also a true poet. In his opera 'Lohengrin,' the hero enters the stage riding on a boat pulled by a swan. This, Professor Spaeth said, is the most moving and beautiful sight."

Poor Professor Spaeth died of starvation during the German occupation. The Nazis did not care about the Jewish enthusiasts of German culture.

I was fortunate to be able to go to high school, even though my parents could hardly pay the tuition for the three of us. There was no chance of my getting a job after graduation. Leo, who graduated a year before the war broke out, had to work without pay as an apprentice for a watchmaker. Mark was also going to high school by then and my parents strained to the utmost to be able to pay for all of us, knowing there weren't any prospects for our future. Strangely, our high school education did help us survive the war later on. It helped us speak Polish correctly, and thus to blend better with the population while we were hiding out on Christian papers.

Ah, my high school years; they were so bittersweet! They were sweet because it was a distinction to go to "Gymnasium" in Poland before the war. Not everyone could attend and those that did were the object of admiration and the envy of others. I had waited impatiently to finish

grammar school and to be able to go to high school. I would beg my mother for permission to register for the entrance exams and did my utmost to pass them. Finally, when I was able to put on the navy blue uniform of the school, I was the happiest boy in town. It was my brother's uniform, two years old and somewhat worn and faded, but it didn't matter. It was trimmed with light blue lace and on my left arm I wore a blue shield bearing the school number "535" embroidered in silver thread.

But those were bitter years too. When the time came to pay the tuition and my parents could not pay it, we were sent unceremoniously home. We felt humiliated and cried bitterly.

The professors were openly biased and gave much higher grades to the Christian students than to the Jewish ones. At oral exams they would ask the Jewish students more difficult questions. In a way one could not blame them. Out of about 45 students in my class, 15 were Jewish. Out of ten excellent students, nine were Jews and one was Christian.

Also, Jewish students were not accepted by the Boy Scouts. We envied them their status and showy uniforms.

Carl's voice was bitter now.

"We were not allowed to hold any positions in the school's Red Cross even though we had to pay membership fees. It was an advance taste of the behavior of the Red Cross towards the Jews in the concentration camps during the war.

Jews were deemed unsuitable to be soldiers and too cowardly to fight. A favorite Polish joke went roughly as follows: A Polish sergeant sends a Jewish scouting group across a bridge. After a while they come back visibly shaken. "Well, did you go across the bridge?" asked the sergeant. "No," answered one of the Jews, "we couldn't cross it." "Why?" asked the sergeant. "Because there was a dog standing on the bridge."

I had many school friends, but became close with only one. His name was Bert. Bert was very fat, always happy and smiling. He liked to eat. He played the violin and even composed his own music, which I enjoyed listening to. Bert's father was an invalid. He'd lost a leg during World War I while fighting in the Polish Legion in the War of Independence. He lay in the battlefield for three days before he was picked up by the medics. The grateful Polish Government rewarded him by giving him the opportunity of opening a candy store on a busy city corner at a streetcar stop. However, by the late thirties, the economic boycott against Jews, as exemplified by Hitler's Germany, was on the rise in Poland. A

gentile opened a small candy store across the street from Bert's father's store with a big sign: "Buy from your own, not from them." Bert's father's business suffered when most of the gentile Poles stopped buying from him.

I didn't realize that fate was already walking in our classroom, marking almost all of my Jewish friends for death, and that I would never see them again. I did see Bert several times during the war. He had changed beyond recognition from starvation. He was now a shadow of a man. Life for the Jews in Poland before the war was very difficult.

Carl continued as if talking to himself. Irene thought that he had forgotten she was there. She knew these things from her own experience but hadn't heard them verbalized until now. She listened intently. Carl continued.

"The Jews could not get government jobs, and in private industry jobs were very scarce. In spite of this, our childhood was very happy. We had a lot of friends and we felt secure. Yet, we were living in a fool's paradise. We were afraid of the German atrocities we had heard about, but thought that they could not happen to us. What we had heard was grim and cruel, but it had happened so far away, and always to someone else.

The love-hate relationship between the Poles and the Jews had spanned a period of over 1,000 years. To be sure, there had been more hate than love, but the relationship had begun under the most auspicious conditions. Poland was located in central eastern Europe between two large nations, Germany to the west and Russia to the east. There were no natural borders, such as mountains or rivers, to protect the country against its rapacious neighbors. However, during the Middle Ages, these neighbors had been weak and fragmented; Poland was in its glory during the Piast and Jagiello dynasties. There is even a legend that a Jew named Prochownik had been its king for one day. But legends aside, there are Polish coins, dating from the tenth century AD, with Hebrew inscriptions, which indicated that the Jews were involved in minting money for the royal courts. The last of the kings from the Piast dynasty, Casimir the Great, invited the Jews to Poland in the 14th century to build cities in the mostly rural country. The Jews, who were being persecuted in western Europe, accepted the invitation enthusiastically. They built up industry and commerce and created city centers. The king is remembered as "finding Poland made of wood and leaving it made of bricks."

However, the Jews worked for the nobility and this led to trouble. When they collected taxes for the ruling class, they became an object of

hatred. In addition, the church permitted them to lend money for interest and forbade the Christians from doing the same. Thus, the Jews, excluded from many other activities and agriculture, were despised as members of hated professions. They did not assimilate through time, but kept their separate customs and religious practices. This provided an additional incentive for hatred; they were viewed as practitioners of suspicious rites and dark schemes. Despite this, the Jews loved their adoptive country, fighting in the Polish uprisings against their common enemies. Berko Joselewicz was a well-known Jewish fighter. There was a street named after him in my town. The foremost Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, describes most sympathetically, in the poetic epic, "Pan Tadeusz," a Jewish soldier–musician named Yankel; he devotes a whole chapter to "The Yankel's Concert."

There was not one instance of Jewish treason in the entire history of Poland; there were simply no Jewish traitors. The country slowly fell from a position of power to one of weakness and was gradually absorbed by its neighbors during three consecutive partitions during the second half of the 18th century. After the third partition, Poland ceased to exist for almost 150 years; it was divided between Germany, Austria and Russia. In 1918, after the collapse of the Central Powers at the end of World War I, Poland regained its independence thanks to Marshal Joseph Pilsudski, a soldier who led the country to victory. Jews enrolled in his "Legions" and fought alongside with Poles, though often unwanted and victimized by their comrades in arms.

A new Poland was carved out from its neighbors' territories following the Versailles Treaty. It held within its borders more than 3 million Jews along with 30 million Poles. Pilsudski was benevolent towards the Jews. He also knew how to keep his rapacious neighbors in check. He threatened the Germans with an alliance with Russia, and frightened the Russians with a threat to unite with Germany. The result was the conclusion of nonaggression treaties with both countries. But a new leader was rising in Germany; Hitler used the Jews as scapegoats, blaming them for everything from losing the war and for Germany's economic depression.

In 1935 Pilsudski died and a new leader took over. Marshal Smigly Rydz did not have the finesse of his predecessor, and, once again, the country was threatened by its neighbors. Instead of arming and playing one enemy against the other, the government began an anti-Semitic witch hunt patterned on the German example. But while the Germans were arming, the Poles wasted precious time discussing in Parliament such

measures as banning ritual animal slaughter. Further, orders were given to paint fences and buildings, all with the aim of diverting the population's attention from the real danger—the German threat.

Poland was in a state of continuous stagnation and economic crisis. The Jews were willing and able to stimulate industry and commerce, but they were discouraged by the Government's chicanery and high taxes. Meanwhile, the Polish population was encouraged to boycott Jewish stores and businesses. The admission of Jewish students to the universities was drastically limited. Polish university students roamed through the streets of the cities, armed with clubs and razor blades, beating up and maiming Jews in general and Jewish students in particular.

When the war between Germany and Poland broke out on September 1, 1939, the Polish Government fled, leaving the entire population and the army at the mercy of its enemies. The Jews were left in a precarious position, completely unprotected and surrounded by a mostly indifferent and often hostile population."

Carl stopped. He looked at Irene and smiled: "I ran away with myself, please forgive me."

Irene's Story

❧ 4 ❧

My Life

Irene and Carl met frequently now. They always went to the same park and tried to sit on the same bench.

Now Carl said to Irene, "I have told you about myself and my family. How about your story, your family and your life?"

"It is only fair," Irene said. "You know that the events in our lives run parallel to each other. We were only separated by distance."

She smiled and started to reminisce.

I was born in the town of Boryslaw, in southeastern Poland, on September 14, 1923. This small town of 45,000 inhabitants was situated

Irene's grandparents and their children. Irene's mother is shown at the far left.

Irene's mother.

Irene's father.

at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. It was an important center for crude oil mining and had many oil refineries. A high hill called Horodyszcze extended proudly on the horizon and was visible from many parts of the town. This hill was spiked with hundreds of the tall towers used in the process of extracting oil or "liquid gold" from deep below. At night, thousands of light bulbs, which illuminated the towers, flickered all over the hill. It looked like a giant Christmas tree.

The river Tysmienica, which began in the Carpathian Mountains, divided the city into two parts. In the fall, when the heavy rains came, this relatively small river swelled to many times its original size. As a result there were severe floods, which caused considerable damage to property and even loss of lives. I remember the stories told about the flood of 1922, when the raging waters tore the main bridge into pieces and caused mayhem in the center of town. Rivers of water mixed with crude oil destroyed everything around.

Our town was rebuilt after this disaster. A new bridge was built, the streets were paved, and the crude oil that flowed under the elevated sidewalks disappeared. Before the flood, poor people had collected this oil into buckets and mixed it with sawdust. They made balls the size of oranges from this mixture and used them for heating their homes. The rebuilding of the sidewalks brought this to an end. The poor people had to look elsewhere for fuel. The town was rejuvenated.

My family lived in the part of town called Wolanka. Boryslaw, despite its rather small population, was very large in territory. We walked everywhere, as there were no buses in town and practically no one owned a car. The distance from Wolanka to the center of town was quite far, but

no one thought about it. It took us almost an hour to walk to town, but this was our way of life and seemed quite natural.

The official baker of Wolanka was Mr. Hauptman, who baked delicious "challas" and rolls. He had a brick oven to which we carried "tsholent" (a mixture of meat, potatoes, lima beans, derma and water flavored with fragrant spices) every Friday afternoon. This dish had to stay in the oven for 24 hours before it was served for dinner the following day on the Sabbath.

Another important person was Mrs. Safirstein, a poor widow who baked delicious rye breads. No other baker in town could compete with her bread.

Chaye-Sura, the milkwoman, brought milk to our house every morning in two tin cans. The cans were extremely heavy. The poor woman had swollen legs and a bent back, but I never heard her complain about anything.

The village people would bring dairy products to our house. They came in the morning with cans of sour cream and cheesecloths filled with delicious cheeses. They would leave their homes during the wee hours of the morning in order to reach town by 8 or 9 am. They walked very long distances with their heavy loads to sell the food and bring some money home.

Itzikl, the cross-eyed chicken man, would come to us on Thursdays, holding two birds under his arms. He would blow up their rear ends to convince my mother of their superb quality.

After the First World War, many international investors came to Boryslaw from other European countries and even from the USA. They formed corporations and invested in the oil that was in abundance in our town. One could hear foreign languages in the street, such as French, English, German and Dutch. They added considerably to the cultural development of the town.

The Jewish community also played an important role in the town's social, economic and cultural life. The "Jewish House," a two story building, was the center of athletic activity and had excellent instructors. Girls and boys of all ages participated in aerobic exercises, running, jumping, swimming, tennis and soccer. The local soccer club, "Kadima," was proud of its very good ball players. It competed successfully with the Polish club "Strzelec" and out-of-town soccer teams. The members of my family, and especially my father, were enthusiastic fans and very proud of our Jewish athletes. The "Jewish House" was also the center of cultural events. A traveling theater and orchestra came to town annually.

It was this Symphonic Orchestra that presented us with first-class performances of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and others. Here, we also enjoyed stage performances of plays by Ibsen, Gogol, Chekov and by Jewish playwrights such as Perez and Ansky. From the plays of Shalom Aleichem we learned of life in the shtetls.

There were also three movie theaters in Boryslaw. I spent many afternoons and evenings crying my eyes out when Rhett Butler left Scarlet; I also enjoyed Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and many other actors, both Polish and foreign. Through these movies we learned a little about life in richer and more affluent societies. They were like fantasies to me, like a wonderful dream.

At the turn of the century, my great grandfather had been the mayor of Wolanka. I remember a photograph in our family album: he was sitting in a chair surrounded by the members of the city counsel, all of them gentile. He had a beard and wore a "yarmulka." He was a very religious man.

His wife devoted herself to the cause of the poor. She fasted twice a week and prayed for them.

My great grandparents had three daughters, and one of them was my grandmother, Yetti. Yetti married Moses, a rabbinical scholar, at a very young age. She bore ten children, out of which six died in infancy or as toddlers from different sicknesses or accidents. My grandfather Moses died at the age of 40, leaving my grandmother with four daughters, Laura, Rose, Bertha and my mother Toni.

Yetti was very intelligent and energetic. She struggled bravely to support her family. The hard life made her strong and mature. She wanted to be independent and she started her own business, a houseware store. She worked in the store ten hours daily without any help. When she returned home, she ate something and then relaxed with a book or a newspaper. She was an avid reader and used the local library extensively.

My mother was 18 years old when she married my father. He was six years older than she and came from a very poor family. He was two years old when his father had died. My grandmother Bertha married again. She had five children with her second husband. He was a man without any education or profession, a drifter who hopped from job to job and never cared for his family. The children grew up without much guidance or support. My grandmother's second husband died of a heart attack at about 35. He left my grandmother with seven young children and no means to support them. I don't know how she managed; she was not as enterprising as Yetti. I only remember her beautiful, tired face.

always smiling when I came to visit her. Her house was very poor and dilapidated, but when I came to visit she always found something tasty to offer me. I loved this grandmother very much.

My father was pretty much on his own at a very young age. Thanks to his perseverance, hard work and a strong will to make something of himself, he overcame the hardships and became a successful accountant. His employers greatly appreciated his professional skills. He had beautiful handwriting, thanks to courses he had taken in calligraphy. He was the only one in his family who had had a decent education.

When I was born, my mother was 32 and my father was 38 years old. They had two older children—Milo, a son almost 12 years old and Anna, 10 years old. Another little girl had died of scarlet fever about two years before I came. After her death my mother became very depressed and our family doctor suggested that she have another baby as soon as possible. Thus, following the doctor's prescription, I was born. I was told this story many times when I was a little girl; I wonder if I would be speaking today had it not been for my sister's untimely death.

I must admit, however, that I never felt a lack of affection from either parent. Both gave me a lot of love, although they expressed it in different ways. My mother was a central figure in my life. I remember her hustling and bustling around the house. She was rather short. She had a fine-looking face with pretty eyes and beautiful hair. She always dressed neatly and filled the whole house with her presence. She was always doing something. In the morning she cleaned and cooked and shopped. Even though I remember a maid in our house, who helped out with all the chores, my mother was never idle. In her presence I felt secure that all was well.

My mother would take me shopping to the market and I loved to go with her. First, we would go to the butcher. There was no refrigeration at that time, so she had to buy the meat and dairy every day. The butcher knew my mother well; he knew which cuts of meat she liked and he tried to satisfy her. She was a good customer. My father liked to eat well. He was not a big eater, but he liked his food a certain way. My mother adored my father and she always tried to satisfy his wishes. So the meat she bought was the kind my father liked; all of us knew this. Later, when I was older, my mother would send me to the butcher to buy the meat. I already knew which cuts to buy.

From the butcher we would go to the marketplace. There we went from one stand to another, looking for the best fruit and vegetables

Irene.

Irene's sister, Anna.

Brother Milo.

Milo's first wife, Teresa.

available. My mother had her favorite stands and the owners of these stands knew my mother, too. She went to the same stands all the time. She would ask for different items and examine them for quality and freshness. Money was hard to earn when I was growing up. When my mother spent it on food she wanted the very best.

After we came home from shopping it would be time to prepare for dinner. This usually took a few hours. My father would come home from work about 1:30 pm, and Anna and Milo came from school about the same time. My mother was ready to serve dinner when everyone was home. We ate dinner at midday, had a snack in the afternoon, and, around 7:30 pm, we ate supper.

Dinner was the most important meal of the day. It consisted of soup, meat, a starch and vegetables. Sometimes there was an appetizer, and the

meal always ended with desert, which most of the time consisted of cooked fruit. To this day I cherish the memory of those dinners. I have a strong image in my memory of my whole family sitting at the table, my father always at the head of the table, my mother on the opposite end, and Anna, Milo and I on the sides. The mood was usually cheerful; my father saw to that. He had a great sense of humor that he used on every possible occasion. When our whole family was together eating dinner, he always had a story or anecdote to tell us. It was usually a funny and cheerful story, as my father was an optimist and saw the bright side of life. We would listen gladly and laugh when he had finished.

Sometimes Anna and Milo would quarrel when Milo stole food from her plate to annoy her. He also did this to me. Being a child, I would cry out and complain to my parents. They would get angry with Milo and reproach him. He would stop, but not for long. The next day he would again do something irregular. There was always a commotion going on. We were all used to it; it was a part of our lives.

Irene at age five with her mother.

After dinner, when the dishes were done, my mother would change into a different house dress. She would sew on a missing button, mend the socks or embroider. She was always busy. When she had finished, she would read a book or a newspaper. My aunt, my mother's sister, would often come to visit. My mother's family lived very close to us. My mother and my aunt would sit down at the table, drinking tea with lemon and eating cakes. They would discuss various problems or simply talk about the children and their families in general. I liked to sit nearby and listen to what they said. Sometimes my mother would send me away, and then I knew that what they were discussing was too serious for me to hear; this disturbed me. Soon, however, I would forget about it and run out to play with my friends.

My father was a very good-looking man. He always dressed impeccably and demanded that we be very clean and neat. On rainy nights, when all our shoes were muddy from the dirt outside, my father would scrape our shoes and dry them. After scrubbing out all the dirt, he would polish them until they shined like new. I didn't understand this, since we would just be getting them muddy again the next day; but no one in our house left in the morning in dirty shoes.

My father spent a lot of time playing with me when I was little. He taught me how to play cards and dominoes and would spend hours with me. I loved him very much.

Every afternoon my father would go for a walk. He would go to the middle of town, where he would meet different people and talk to them. Sometimes he took me with him and I knew that the conversation was usually about politics or business or the economic situation. Such talks bored me, as I didn't understand anything about the subjects. But my father found a way of compensating me for my patience. He would buy me candy or a special fruit and I was happy. In honesty, just being with my father was a pleasure. He was always in a good mood and full of little jokes and stories.

Our house stood on a slope on a side road that connected the main street with a large open field called "Januszka." During the harsh Polish winters, when the ground was covered with a thick layer of ice and snow, we enjoyed sliding down this hill on sleds. But when faucets in the house froze from the cold, there was no running water. We would have to fill up buckets at a distant pump and bring them back to the house. Often on the way back we would slip on the hill; the precious water would spill, adding more ice to the top layer. Then we would have to go back to the pump for more water. It hurt to fall on the ice; I often felt the

pain from my injured knee or elbow for many days afterwards.

We lived in a two-family house; we occupied the left side and the Hauptman family lived on the right. Our house consisted of three rooms. First, there was a small hallway that led into a very large kitchen. The kitchen led to a large dining room and, finally, the bedroom. All the windows overlooked a large, open field. Our house was very spacious and comfortable.

I began school at the age of six. I remember my first day well. My mother dressed me in white and put a large bow in my hair. I felt very shy that first day of school, but, as I began to feel more sure of myself, I looked around to see who my classmates were. They were all girls. At that time we had separate schools for boys and girls.

I spent seven years in grammar school. After six years it was possible to take an entrance exam to high school, which was what I wanted to do. However, my father had different plans for me. He wanted me to go to a commercial school. It took only three years to graduate from that school but you needed seven years of grammar school to enter it. That's why I went to school for seven years. I cried and begged my father to let me go to Gymnasium with all my friends, but he wouldn't yield to me. However,a year later, when I had finished the seventh year of grammar school, he softened and allowed me to take an entrance exam for the second grade of high school. When I went to take the exam I discovered that I had to be 13 years old. It was two weeks from my thirteenth birthday. I took the exam for the first year of high school and was a year behind my friends and a year older than the rest of my classmates. Today it seems silly, but at the time it was quite traumatic for me. I never quite got over this experience.

During my younger years, when I was in grammar school, I was a good student, diligent and responsible. Most of my teachers liked me, except for my geography teacher, who clearly picked on me. She never smiled and she gave me a complex about geography. To this day I don't like the subject. Most of my time in grammar school was uneventful. I had my friends, whom I saw after school whenever possible. However, my best friends were the ones who lived close to me.

Let me tell you about my cousin Luna. She was my age and, after she was born, her mother, my aunt, was ill for a long time. My mother was breast-feeding me at the time. When Luna was born two months after me, and her mother couldn't breast-feed her, my mother took her in and breast-fed both of us. She had enough milk for two. Later, we played together and became very good friends.

Then there was Gina, who lived close to my house. We were also friends. There were other girls and boys with whom I played ball. There was a very large field near my house. My favorite game resembled baseball, with similar rules but no pitcher. You had to throw your own ball and then hit it with a bat. I loved that game and was good at it. During the summer we played for hours every day.

My best and dearest friend was Lena. She lived down the hill from us and we spent most of our time together as we were growing up. She was a little older than I and was very protective of me. She was always there when I needed her. I spent a lot of time in her house. When we weren't there, we were in my house, but almost always together.

When I was nine years old I became very ill with scarlet fever. My fever was very high and I was hallucinating. My mother spent six weeks practically in bed with me. I had long hair, which she braided for me. I remember her combing it carefully so as not to pull it, because I had headaches all the time. I don't know why she didn't cut it; it would have been much easier for her. When I felt a little better, I got bored, but my mother didn't allow me to read for fear of straining my eyes. (Eyes are affected by scarlet fever.) At that point, my mother brought out two decks of cards and played "war" with me day in and day out. Only a mother can have enough patience to do something like that. I was very happy with the arrangement and stayed in bed recovering. My poor mother tried to take care of the rest of the family, which she completely separated from me because I was more-or-less quarantined. She had placed a big basin filled with disinfecting solution between the room I was in and the rest of the house. Each time she left my room, she would wash her hands in the solution and take off the coat that she wore over her clothes. She did this many times a day. I will say again that only a mother could do what she did. Who else would go back to the sick child and play cards with her for hours and hours? She never showed how tired she was and was always cheerful. My mother must have been very worried about me, having previously lost a child from scarlet fever. Of course, I didn't know these things at the time. Only now, when I look back, can I appreciate her selflessness and sacrifice.

As a result of the scarlet fever, a few years later I was struck by rheumatic fever. The extreme pain in the joints of my legs and hands kept me immobile for a couple of months. There was no medication then for the disease; only time and compresses made of hot mud eventually helped me to function again.

Meanwhile, I couldn't go to school. My mother arranged for the

Irene (in white blouse) with her high school class.

Irene's friend, Lena.

Irene in class.

children from my class to bring me the homework and leave it outside our door. She would do it with me day after day, so I wouldn't lose a year of school.

My friend Lena was the only one I saw during all the months of my illness. She would stand outside by my window, and even though I couldn't really communicate with her, I had the feeling that I was with a

Irene with friends.

From left, Teresa, Milo, Anna and Irene.

friend. It helped me through that difficult time of my life.

Anna and Milo tried to cheer me up, too. They couldn't come into my room but they stood in the other room with the door ajar. They talked and joked with me. It was a big day for me when I finally went back to school.

I was 11 years old when Anna got married. The wedding was at our house. The preparations took many weeks. A wardrobe was made for her, and a seamstress spent a lot of time in our house sewing fancy lingerie, which was later embroidered. These were happy times in our house and I was very excited. I loved the commotion. A few days before the wedding, the bakers came to prepare the cakes. There were several cakes and all of them looked delicious. It was February, and the night before the wedding it began to snow. It snowed all night. My father and Milo got up early in the morning to clear a passage for the guests.

Anna wore a beautiful gown with a long train. I wore a white dress and my mother put a big white bow in my hair. I felt very elegant. The wedding was beautiful. Many people were present. After the ceremony, the young couple changed their clothes and went on a honeymoon, but the party continued for many hours. I remember thinking how much I would like to have a wedding like that when I grew up.

At Anna's wedding, my brother Milo met Teresa, Bronek's cousin.

She was only 16 years old. She was very pretty, with a pleasant disposition. A relationship developed between Teresa and Milo and they started to see each other often. After a few months they became engaged. Soon after, Milo went away to Bologna, Italy, to continue his study of medicine. From that time on, he was only a guest in our home. When he came back for vacation, he lived in Teresa's parents' house in the next town of Drohobycz. Suddenly, with Anna married and Milo engaged, I became the only child at home.

I was 12 years old at the time and in my seventh grade of grammar school. The following year I started high school. My life became much more interesting and challenging in many ways. I was growing into a teenager, interested in boys. I went to parties and met a whole new group of young people from my new school.

I had to wear a uniform now, like all the other students in Gymnasium. It consisted of a navy blue pleated skirt and a top over the skirt with a belt. The collar and sleeves had blue trimming. I was very proud of my uniform; it gave me a certain status. It was an honor to be a student in Gymnasium. Only 350 students attended that school, and the population of my town was 45,000. So, naturally, I felt very honored and special when I walked down the street in my uniform.

I had several teachers now, a different one for every subject. Our curriculum consisted of history, geography, religious studies, Polish language, German or French (we had a choice), natural sciences, Latin, physical education, mathematics, physics and chemistry.

I would leave my house at 7:30 am. and walk to school. Classes began at 8 am and school was over by 1 pm. I was home by 1:30 pm. We had dinner around 2 o'clock and afterwards I would do my homework. This took between 2 and 3 hours. By 5 o'clock I was usually ready to go out and meet my friends, unless my mother had some work for me, such as mending socks and stockings. Sometimes, I begged my mother to let me go out and do the mending in the evening. Knowing how much it meant to me to be with my friends, she usually consented.

In the winter, my friends and I would dress very warmly and go to the ice skating rink. There, we would meet other girls and boys with whom we would skate together and flirt a little. Sometimes we would go skiing. I didn't have my own skis. They were expensive and my parents couldn't afford them. My sister Anna had skis and would occasionally lend them to me. I was not a very good skier. On one occasion, I slipped into a ditch and broke both of Anna's skis. I was terribly upset but Anna didn't make a big deal about it.

The summer was different. The days were much longer and I was allowed to stay out later. I would go with a friend or two to the corso, a

Irene with school friends.

main street where there were many stores. Everyone interested in meeting people went there. We would walk back and forth, meeting the same people over and over again. The boys usually walked in groups of three or four, and so did the girls. As we passed each other we would exchange glances, reserving a special glance for the one he or she liked.

This was how I met my first boyfriend. His name was Lolek and he was very handsome. I fell in love. I was 14 years old. He was almost 18—a big difference in age at that time. He came over and asked me if he could walk me home. I was overjoyed. Controlling my feelings, I agreed. From that day on, we would meet on the corso every day. We would walk back and forth for an hour or two, talking to each other, happy to be together. Then he would walk me home and we would sometimes kiss goodnight if no one was around. Most of the time, however, my father would walk behind us, just far enough away to be inconspicuous and close enough to watch. Then, when I entered the house, he would question me. For a long time he would ask my boyfriend's name and

pretend that he didn't know who he was. When I reminded him that he'd asked me the same question yesterday, he would say, "Do you think that I have nothing else on my mind but the name of your friend?"

Time went on. Between school and my social activities, I would visit Anna often. Anna gave birth to a baby boy. His name was Wilus and he was a beautiful child. I loved to go there and play with him. I was very proud to be an aunt. In Anna's house I felt special. My brother-in-law, Bronek, was a wonderful man. They lived with his mother, who was an exceptional lady, and she made me feel like an adult. She talked to me about various subjects and I always felt welcome. I usually stayed for supper. Anna always prepared very good delicatessen—the kind I didn't eat at home—which was an added pleasure during my visits to her house.

Lena and Irene.

At home, we observed the holidays from a traditional, rather than the religious, point of view. Three were the most important: Passover, Rosh Hashanna (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement).

I loved Passover. It was an eight-day holiday. We didn't go to school on the first two days or the last two days. Passover comes in the spring and the whole house would prepare for the holiday. My mother, with the help of a maid, brought down from the attic dishes and pots that she used only on Passover. The house would be scrubbed from top to bottom and some rooms would even be painted, if necessary. All the curtains in the house were washed, starched and hung up again. Everything looked new and festive.

I would get new shoes and a new dress for Passover; sometimes even a new spring coat. It was a big occasion when I got new clothes, and I felt wonderful. I remember how, when I got my first shoes with higher heels, I thought that everyone was looking at my feet.

When the holiday finally arrived, all the bread was removed from the house and for eight days we ate only matzo. In the evening on the first and second days, there was a holiday dinner. My father read the story of the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, the "Haggadah." My mother was busy in the kitchen preparing the different dishes, such as hard-boiled eggs, boiled carp, charoset (nuts with apple and wine), chicken soup with matzo balls, potato pancakes, meat and desserts. We drank home-made wine. My father made it every year from very large raisins. He took a large jar, tore each raisin in half, and put it into the jar, covered over with sugar. He covered the jar with cheesecloth and put it on top of a closet so the warmer air would reach it. There it would stand for six weeks, fermenting. When my father took the jar down for Passover, it contained the most delicious raisin wine. We drank it at dinner and my father would fill one wine glass to the top for the prophet Elijah. According to my father, he would come during the night and touch it with his lips. The one who finished it in the morning would have a lucky life. During dinner, we drank several glasses of this wine. It was a feast fit for a king; everything was so delicious. It took us hours to finish the meal and afterwards we were so full that we could hardly move. The next morning, I would be the one to get the glass of wine touched by the prophet with a matzo brei (matzo prepared with eggs in a special way). I loved the whole atmosphere of this holiday and the feeling I had at the time stayed with me forever.

The other two holidays, Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur, were of an entirely different nature. Rosh Hashanna, the New Year, was a very big holiday. My parents dressed quite festively and would go to the synagogue in the morning. They came home for dinner, which was very special. We, the children, dressed in our best clothes and enjoyed the holiday.

Yom Kippur was a solemn holiday. Everybody fasted. My parents would spend the whole day in the synagogue and return home only after the shofar (horn) was blown. Only then would we eat something, light at first and then a small dinner. My mother said that it wasn't good for us to eat heavily after fasting all day. On Yom Kippur, I would go to the synagogue with my parents and I would sit with my father. I was still young enough to sit with the men. The women sat upstairs and their balcony was separated by a curtain, so they couldn't see the men. This custom was not followed 100 percent, but in general the curtain was in place. I would go with my father because I had more fun with him. With his jovial disposition, he took matters rather lightly. My mother was a much more serious person. Between the prayers, the men who sat near my father would joke with me and would give me salts to smell. These salts were used a lot

on Yom Kippur to keep people from fainting. Fasting and sitting in the synagogue for a whole day could make you feel light-headed.

Right after Yom Kippur was a lesser holiday, Succoth. A neighbor of ours built a little house (sukkah) in the yard and covered the roof with branches. His family would eat their meals inside the sukkah during the eight days of the holiday. My father knew that I really wanted to eat in the sukkah, so he would make arrangements with our neighbor for me to eat with his family. My mother would bring food for me and I was very happy. I was a young child then.

Because of the economic depression in the 1920s and early 1930s my father lost his job. He wasn't able to find work anywhere else, so he decided to open a hardware store. I don't know why he chose a hardware store, as there was an established one right across the street. My father got a loan from the bank which he had to pay off by a certain time. This was a troubled time for my parents. The store didn't prosper; there was no money to buy more merchandise; and money at home was very scarce. My parents talked all the time about the money problems and would fight a lot. The atmosphere in my house became tense.

My father finally went bankrupt, but the problem of repaying the loan remained. We had to sell our house and move into an apartment. However, even this didn't cover all the payments due to the bank. Every month, when the payments were due, my father would rack his brain trying to figure out where to get the money to cover the loan payments. I saw it all and suffered because of it. I didn't want to see my parents so sad and worried. Luckily, after a couple of years, my father got a very well paying job as manager of an oil company. It was a small company, but the owner lived in Vienna and hired my father to run the place. Thus, my father was able to repay the bank without difficulty, but was left with little money for our household expenses. My mother had to be very careful how she spent the little that was left.

I remember the joy in my house when finally, in May 1939, my father paid the last bank note. Now, with the salary that my father was earning, we could live quite comfortably. Unfortunately, this state of affairs didn't last very long. In September 1939 the Second World War broke out, changing our lives completely and forever.

"It was the same in Lvov," Carl said quietly. "How funny it feels; you are almost describing the situation we were in. The Russians came and made big changes in our lives. They must have affected your lives, too."

"Oh yes," Irene said and continued her story.

❧ 5 ❧

September 1939

I remember September 1939, the early days of the Second World War. I was 16 at the time. My life was that of a rather typical 16-year-old high school girl. I was a good student, content with my family life. I had lots of friends and shared good, worry-free times with them. I had no real problems and could compare that time of my life to that of a 16-year-old American girl. That's how it was until September 1, 1939.

September 1939. That date is burned so traumatically into my mind that, to this day, I sometimes write 1939 instead of the current date. It stands out in my mind, even 50 years later, as the end of my peaceful life and the beginning of the war. WAR!

War means young men joining the army, mothers crying out in fear that their sons or husbands may be killed. War means men facing a future of fighting and being torn away from their homes and families, possibly never to return.

But this war was going to be different from all the other wars. This was not to be a war in which men went to fight and women and children stayed home, waiting for their husbands or fathers to come back to them. This war would never be forgotten.

My father told me stories about the First World War. A picture of him with his arm in a cast hung on the wall in our home. Even though he was wounded in that war, the stories he told us were not horror stories. I understood that the war was rather exciting to him. He enjoyed having a chance to prove his manhood. Although he told us that many men had been killed and many had suffered, the stories did not frighten me.

In 1938 and 1939, some fugitives from Austria and Germany came to their families in Boryslaw. They were running away from Hitler and told us about persecutions. This was beyond our comprehension. We listened to the fugitives, but didn't really believe them. This could never happen to us.

On September 1, 1939, the President of Poland spoke over the radio. He announced that the Germans had attacked several cities by air and had officially declared war against Poland.

The first few days of the war were chaotic. People gathered in small

groups to talk about the news they had heard on the radio. No subject was more urgent. Rumors spread rapidly. The Polish army was retreating and the Germans were drawing closer. Everything was happening so quickly that there was no time to speculate about what would happen next.

The Jewish population was frightened. Tales of the horrors committed by Hitler were told by fugitives from Germany. Young men had packed their backpacks to run away; my brother Milo was among them. Our peaceful life was shattered; there was fear in the air. My mother cried often and my father had no words to comfort her. My own life was uprooted.Until then, my parents had always known what to do and say.

The rumors were bad: In a town near Boryslaw, the Germans had arrested 80 Jewish men, lined them up against the wall and shot them. My fear grew; what would the Germans do to my father and the other men? We heard that, before the men were shot, they were crowded into a synagogue and badly beaten. But before we had time to worry about that, the Germans had entered Boryslaw.

When I think back to that period, what I remember most clearly is the feeling of constant fear. The Germans occupied Boryslaw for only a week and, when they withdrew, the Russians came into town. The Russians and Germans had made a pact to divide up Poland. The southeast would be occupied by Russia (the Ukraine) and the west would be occupied by Germany. According to this, our part of Poland was to be occupied by Russia.

The Russian soldiers entered my town on Yom Kippur, the holiest of the Jewish holidays. We fasted that day, but we had no bread to break the fast with in the evening.

When the Russians entered Boryslaw in tanks and open trucks, the streets were lined with thousands of people. We, the Jews, were ecstatic with joy. We didn't know much about the Russians, but we knew they would not persecute or kill the Jews just for being Jews. That was enough for us. Many men threw themselves in front of the trucks, kissing the wheels out of joy. The Germans had only been in town for a week, but we had gotten a taste of what life would be like under them. But now we were liberated from that future and our fear. God had helped us.

❧ 6 ❧

Russian Occupation

The first weeks of the Russian occupation brought out different feelings in different people. In Boryslaw, where the population was 45,000, one-third was Polish, one-third Ukrainian and one-third Jewish.

While the Jewish people were very happy when the Russians entered, and felt we had been liberated from the Germans by a miracle, the Ukrainians were very upset. Most of them were very nationalistic and hated the Russians, whom they blamed for their loss of independence.

Then there were the Poles. They had never forgiven Russia for dividing Poland, with the help of Germany, in the 18th century. Now they looked on helplessly and waited. Even though Germany had attacked Poland, in the minds of the Poles the Russians were just as much enemies as the Germans.

After a few weeks, we felt that the situation had started to stabilize. The Russians were here to stay and, like it or not, everyone had to accept it. Things returned to "normal"— as normal as they could be when the world was at war. Life in our small town was influenced by the changes that affected everyone.

My father had been a very good bookkeeper. Before the war broke out, he had been managing an oil well for Mr. Nestel, who lived in Austria. Mr. Nestel came to Boryslaw every so often to see how things were going. He trusted my father completely and had found everything satisfactory. Now things were to undergo a change.

The Russians had seized all private businesses from their owners and turned them over to the state. My father got a job working for the city. I remember many occasions when he was worried and apprehensive as to whether the books would balance at the end of the month. It was an absolute rule of the Russian system that the books had to balance to the penny. If they didn't, it meant that the bookkeeper had either stolen something or was sabotaging the regime. There was no other possibility. In either case, the bookkeeper would be sent deep into Russia, often without a trial. My father worried about these things all the time, but he didn't speak about them because he didn't want us to worry. He would

just come home, sometimes very late, after working to balance the books.

To me, my mother was a rock of Gibraltar. She was our security. She made our home run smoothly. I loved her very much and spent most of my time with her. Once, I planned to spend a week in another town visiting my cousins. I had a good time, but I missed my mother so much that I returned home after two days.

By the time the Russians came, Anna and Milo had left the house. Wilus was 4 years old. I considered Bronek an authority on everything. He was the person I would go to with my problems. He always had time for me and offered good advice.

Milo and Teresa were married shortly after the Russians had arrived. Teresa was my friend, only four years older than I. Thus, my life was rather simple and happy at that time.

The Russians began to come to Boryslaw; they and their families needed apartments. It had been proclaimed that a family could only occupy a limited amount of space. Anna had a large apartment, consisting of three bedrooms and a kitchen. The family thought it best that we all move in together and relinquish our other homes. That way we could ensure that no strangers would come to live with us and that our family could stay together.

I was very excited by this. We all moved into Anna's apartment. My parents and I occupied one bedroom. A second bedroom was allotted to Anna, Bronek and Wilus. Milo and Teresa moved into the third bedroom. In January 1941, Teresa gave birth to a beautiful boy. She and Milo named him Romus. He had blonde hair, blue eyes and a wonderful disposition. He only cried when he was hungry. All of us doted on Romus and we played with him all the time.

Our house was always filled with people. Neighbors and friends would stop by and the atmosphere was lively and pleasant.

I started going to school again; it had been closed since the outbreak of the war. School had been converted to the Russian system. Ukrainian had become the official language. It was now mandatory to study Russian. The Russians placed a lot of importance on education. They considered youth to be their future. Besides being educated, young people were encouraged to adopt the Communist philosophy. Frequent meetings were held and everything was slanted towards Stalin and his way of thinking. A young Communist party was formed, called Komsomol. One was admitted into Komsomol only if he was considered to be morally and educationally up to par. Of course, everyone tried to get into this party, as it gave them special privileges. However, even though

Irene in a school play.

Irene with friends in folk dance costumes.

I was eligible, I never joined. My father forbade me. I could not know then that, someday soon in the near future, this fact would save me from death.

In the meantime, I enjoyed school very much. The two years spent under the Russian occupation were the happiest of my early education. The Russian system was much more flexible and pleasant than the Polish one. Teachers were more accessible; one could talk to them without feeling intimidated. The Polish teachers had been like gods; they had had complete control. The same teachers were now friendly and accommodating. One could ask questions about their subjects and they were glad to answer. Most of all, they treated all the students equally, no matter who they were. They couldn't be prejudiced in marking the students, because the system wouldn't allow it.

In the classroom, the atmosphere was also more relaxed. I went to school gladly. I even started to enjoy subjects that I hadn't liked before because I hadn't understood them. For example, my math teacher organized an after-school class, in which he took time to explain algebra, geometry and trigonometry in language we could understand. Such afternoons changed my entire outlook on mathematics. The same thing happened with physics and chemistry. I understood what the teacher said, and, if I didn't, I asked questions until I did.

For recreation the school created both a chorus and dance classes. To join a chorus one had to be able to carry a tune. We were tested and about 50 students were chosen. I was one of them.

From that day on the chorus met for practice twice a week. We had an excellent instructor who loved music, and taught us to love it, too. Though he was very patient, he demanded discipline. He also chose the students with the best voices for leading roles.

After a few weeks of practice, our instructor informed us that, at the end of the year, we'd be producing a musical. We worked hard but willingly, and the results were amazing. The musical our leader chose was "The Cossack on the Danube." It was beautiful. Nadia, the leading lady, was a friend of mine. She had gorgeous blonde hair and blue eyes. She sang soprano so beautifully that she captured the hearts of all the teachers and students. The other soloists were very good too. We were very proud of our accomplishment. The chorus traveled to neighboring towns, where we also performed successfully for the local population.

The dance group was another story. Again, only a few would be chosen to participate in mostly folk dances. I was among these as I was a good dancer. After a few days of practice, I noticed one guy who struck

Irene (in the middle) with friends in Ukrainian costumes.

Irene with her partner, Zenek.

me as being especially handsome. Every time I looked in his direction he was looking at me. I found out that he was a Ukrainian from Tustanowice, a suburb of Boryslaw, and that his name was Zenek.

Our lady instructor announced that she would group the class into couples who would perform the dances together. To my surprise and delight, she coupled me with Zenek. We practiced twice a week. The classes were after school hours, since they were considered an extracurricular activity. They lasted for hours but nobody minded. We had great time at these gatherings. We were given very colorful costumes and red boots. We put on several shows, which were successful as well as beautiful.

I was growing very fond of Zenek and I knew that he felt the same way about me. But he was shy and I was seeing Lolek, so our relationship continued on a pleasant, but guarded, level. We loved dancing together and, after the classes, Zenek would walk me home. It was very exciting for me; just being with him was enough. Of course I felt guilty about my feelings for Zenek and I decided to tell Lolek about him. I also said that Lolek would have to decide whether he wanted to go on seeing me. Lolek, being older than I, understood how I felt and told me not to worry. He said that I could see Zenek and him too. I was relieved. This was the only time in my life that I dated two guys at the same time.

My father, however, was not as understanding as Lolek. When he found out that I was dating Zenek, he forbade me to continue. He said that a Jewish girl had no business going out with a Ukrainian. There was to be no discussion; nothing I could say would convince him. However, I cared too much about Zenek to break up with him, so I had to see him clandestinely. My friend Lena helped me out. She still lived in Wolanka. Zenek and I would meet at Lena's house and would walk together to the New Road. There we would walk for hours. Lena tried to leave us alone as much as possible. I felt bad acting behind my father's back, but he had left me no choice.

Time was passing and, as one could well imagine, with all these activities on top of going to school, I was very busy. In school I had excellent grades. When the time came to choose a student committee to help the school management, I was nominated for vice president of the committee and was voted into this position by the students and teachers. This made me very popular, everybody in school got to know me.

In June 1941 we held a large dance party at the end of the school year. It turned out wonderfully and students as well as teachers danced until the wee hours of the morning. At one point, the leader of the band

asked me to dance. I didn't know him, but he looked pleasant enough. As we danced, he was very attentive and paid me many compliments. Later I found out that his name was Koppel. When the dance ended, Zenek and I prepared to go out. He was to walk me home; I was glad since it was very late. We left the school and walked into the street.

Suddenly we heard the shrill sound of a siren. We looked at each other, frightened. A moment later we heard planes above our heads. The sirens sounded once more and stopped. Russian soldiers ran past us quickly. The people in the street looked scared and puzzled. Someone said that this must be war; others shouted that he was crazy—these were only maneuvers, not war.

"Then, why is there shooting at the planes?"

"Probably just shells."

We began to rush towards my house. There were people everywhere. The police tried to break up the groups, telling everybody to go home. When we reached the street where I lived, I said good-bye to Zenek and entered my house. My whole family was in the kitchen. Milo had just come from the clinic. He had also seen the commotion in the street. Some neighbors came in too, and everyone tried to figure out what was happening. It was obvious that nobody knew. I remember looking out of the window and seeing the sky change from black to gray. Dawn was approaching.

The next morning we learned that the Germans had attacked the entire length of the Russian border by land and air. It was June 22, 1941.

Irene's voice broke and she couldn't go on. She and Carl decided to go home. For a few days they didn't go back to their park. It was as if they had to pause between their present, rather carefree, lives and the rest of their story.

By now the two knew each other much better and a certain intimacy had developed in their relationship. However, Irene insisted that they remain only friends. Carl was patient.

7

Russian Occupation

On September 1, 1939, war broke out between Germany and Poland. A few days earlier, Hitler and Stalin had concluded a secret agreement in which they divided Poland into German and Russian spheres of influence. Germany claimed the western part, including Warsaw (the capital), Cracow, Lodz, Posnan and Gdansk. Russia claimed the eastern part, with Lvov and Vilno. It was a cynical pact between the diametrically opposed ideologies of Fascism and Communism. Both sides hated one another and secretly schemed to destroy each other. However, at that moment, it was expeditious for these two rapacious beasts to divide and swallow the lesser power. Poland, unfortunately, was this lesser power. Incapable of forging an alliance with any of her neighbors, and woefully unprepared for war, with outdated, obsolete arms, Poland was no match for the German war juggernaut. The German Air Force mercilessly bombarded unprotected cities, killing and terrorizing the civilian population and creating panic and havoc everywhere. The roads were hopelessly clogged by the fleeing civilian population, making it impossible for the army to move. Meanwhile, Communist Russia was standing in the wings, waiting to see how the fortunes of war would turn. On September 17, seeing that Poland was definitely losing the war, the Russians entered from the east, claiming its part of the quarry. The Poles offered very little resistance. Attacked now from both sides, their fate was sealed. In less than a month, Poland, completely divided and absorbed by Germany and Russia, had ceased to exist.

Our part of town was heavily bombarded by the Germans, owing to the presence of an important industrial area and a railroad station. One day, during especially heavy bombing, my grandmother was killed while running to the air raid shelter in our neighbor's basement. That day stands out vividly in my mind. She had just come back from food shopping and told us about the heavy bombing in the city. A large anti-personnel bomb had been dropped by the Germans on the food market minutes after she had left and she had miraculously escaped death. Many other civilians had been killed.

My whole family gathered in a small ravine at the foot of the hill.

All of a sudden we heard heavy explosions. Planes were coming closer and closer, dropping bombs; the earth shook as if it were experiencing an earthquake. Then, there was a tremendous explosion. The sky turned completely dark, although it was a bright September day. My grandfather, who was hurrying with his wife towards the neighbor's cellar, suddenly lost sight of her. Not too far away, I was tending the horses. When I approached the house, my grandfather was crying aloud. My grandmother was lying peacefully on the ground as if she were asleep. There were no wounds on her body. The smell of freshly overturned soil was in the air. I ran to the city to get a doctor. The city was in a panic, with people running to and fro. A large alcohol distillery was on fire. Banging the doctor's door produced no results. My grandmother was dead; the doctor couldn't help her anyway.

My grandfather was still crying when I came back. My aunt Fela, who was staying with us during the war, was crying too. My grandfather hadn't spoken to her for years because she had married a gentile. Now he went over and held her, saying, "I forgive you, my child."

Fela was pregnant with her second child. Shortly before the war, Fela had divorced her husband Sigmund. They had a little boy, Yurek, but Fela and Sigmund couldn't get along. She had a very generous and giving nature; Sigmund, apparently, was very tight with money. She had wanted to help her family and Sigmund had stopped her. This led to constant fights. Finally, she left him. They got divorced after several years.

One day Fela met a very handsome Polish officer named John. They fell in love. It was 1939, shortly before the war broke out. They got married and she became pregnant with her second child.

When the war began, John was drafted immediately into the Polish Army. He, along with many other Polish officers on the battlefield, was killed a few days later. John died while leading a desperate attack of Polish cavalry against the German tanks. Fela was now a widow. Her first husband, Sigmund, was taken prisoner by the Russians and killed in Katyn.

My grandmother was buried in a Jewish cemetery that was mistakenly bombed by the Germans, almost killing my parents as they were attending the funeral.

Oh, human ignorance! One tries to escape fate, but how? One worries about the obvious things, but the unexpected happens. . . .

One night during the fighting, our whole family ran away from home to avoid possible bombing. Our house stood on a hill above the railroad tracks and it was dangerous to stay there through the night. So we ran as

far as we could, into the fields. That night, the most horrible bombardment occurred all around us. We hardly escaped alive. When we returned to our home in the morning, not a single bomb had fallen there.

After two weeks, the Russians occupied our town and the Germans withdrew. Our life settled into an uneasy quiet. We went back to school. There was no war in our part of the country. Again, always things seemed to happen to somebody else.

My grandfather did not trust the Russians. He called them "Fonny Ganef" (Fonny the Thief). He used to watch the passage of Russian columns through our neighborhood, noticing that the same groups of soldiers would drive through the streets several times.

"They do it on purpose so it will appear that there are more of them," he concluded.

The Russians approached everyone asking, "Tchassy?" (Watches?); they were eager to buy them. Many wore several on their arm and they would show them off by pushing up their sleeve. They said to one another, "Davay makhniom" ("Let's swap"). The Russians bought everything that was not nailed down. They were often seen on the street in galoshes, tied with a string to their bare feet. They bought women's brassieres and wore them on their ears, thinking they were earmuffs. It was obvious that there was a shortage of consumer goods in Russia, but they would hotly deny it. They used to say, "Oo nas vsiogo mnogo" (We have plenty of everything). And, when someone would ask, "Do you have this or that?" the answer was always, "Yes, we produce it in three shifts." Thus, when a man would ask a Russian; "Do you have oranges?" the answer would be, "Yes, and we make them in three shifts."

Shortages of all consumer goods developed immediately. There was very little food and no coal to heat the houses. Yet, anybody who complained or dared to criticize the Communist system was immediately arrested and sent to Siberia without a trial. The family would never be notified about his whereabouts; he would just simply disappear.

Jews greeted the Russian occupation with relief, as the lesser of two evils. They knew that the German occupation would be much worse. Some local Communists, persecuted before the war by anti-Communist Poland, greeted the Russians with enthusiasm, thinking that the Communist Utopia was coming. They were quickly disappointed as the Russians sent them off to Siberia.

Thousands of Jewish small shop owners were dispossessed, and their shops were confiscated and nationalized. The owners themselves were sent to Siberia as "capitalists" or, if they were lucky, they were only

expelled from their apartments and forbidden to live within the city limits. On the other hand, thousands of Jews were employed as clerks and bookkeepers in the now government-owned enterprises. No political power was given to the Jews or, for that matter, anyone else. Control was jealously monopolized by the Russians. The indigenous population, Polish and Ukrainian alike, looked on this with envy. They chose to ignore Jewish suffering under Communism and saw only what they wanted to see. In their eyes, the Jews were all Communists and were getting all the breaks. They had "good jobs," although the salaries were so low that no one could live on them and people were forced to sell their meager possessions to supplement their earnings. Many had to steal items on the job and sell them on the black market in order to feed their families. When they were caught they were sent to Siberia. The non-Jewish population could not forget the "advantages" that the Jews had, although everyone was in the exact same position, as Communism didn't differentiate between the Jews and non-Jews. Non-Jewish neighbors, pretending to give friendly advice to the Jews, would say, "You shouldn't be involved with politics." But the Jews, by and large, stayed out of politics anyway.

The Ukrainians and Poles now hated the Jews vehemently. They could not attack the Jews openly: anti-Semitism was officially forbidden under Communist rule. But one could feel the hatred of the Jews in the air.

"The Communist Jews have everything and we have nothing. Give us 48 hours and a free hand and you will see what we do with these hateful Jews," they would say when there was no one around who would denounce them to the police.

The idealistic Communists, who had suffered before the war under Polish rule, appeared briefly, freed from the jails. But the Russians didn't want them and, after a short while, they were deported to Siberia. The Russians wanted stooges, people who would do their bidding. They didn't need idealists who would point out the shortcomings of the Russian version of Communism. To the Polish Communists, Communism was a lofty idea for improving the lot of the "oppressed" workers and peasants. To the Russians, it was merely a tool to subdue people and nations.

My grandfather was immediately arrested as a "kulak," or large landowner. He was not sent to Siberia because of his advanced age. Maybe, if he had been was sent away, he may have survived the war. Instead, later, he was killed by the Germans. His land was taken away

from him and given to his neighbors. His sowing grain, which he had hidden with a neighbor, was distributed among the peasants. Our beloved orchard was taken from us. One night, we saw a peasant's house burning. We thought that God must be punishing him for taking away our grain, as grain for sowing is critically important item to a farmer. He would rather see his family hungry than part with it. Without it there is no sowing, no hope for the future. Thus, my grandfather suffered greatly when his grain was taken away.

Rumors began to circulate that the Russians would take all the land away from the peasants, including what they had given of my grandfather's, and build a "kolkhoz" or collective farm.

There was very little food and we were always hungry. One night, I tried to steal some apples from the orchard that had belonged to us before the war, but the new owner caught me. He wanted to kill me with an axe, but when he recognized who I was, he said, "The only reason why I will not kill you is that you are Roth's grandson!"

Life under the Russian occupation was very hard for the grownups, but for us children it was easy. The Communist schools were quite a contrast to Polish ones. They were well supplied with everything, lessons were more interesting and the textbooks were better. The teachers were required under penalty to upgrade the level of those students who lagged behind by tutoring them after class. Extracurricular activities in science were encouraged after school hours. School buildings were freshly painted each year. Social gatherings and parties were plentiful and we spent most of our waking hours in school. The grading system was much more equitable than the Polish one. During exams, a student approached the professor's desk, where he would select his question from several rolled up pieces of paper. Then he would go back to his seat and answer the question in writing before handing it back to the professor. This eliminated the unfair practices of the Polish schools before the war. Then the professor could ask a Jewish student more difficult questions at will. Now the answers were graded fairly regardless of the student's religion. In pre-war Poland, the professors had graded the Jewish students lower than their non-Jewish counterparts. A Jewish student, for example, would hardly ever get an "A" in the Polish language no matter how good he was.

Before the war I was an average student, even though I knew my lessons quite well. Under the Russian system, I was the best student in our class.

Then something happened that showed that this system was only a farce. One day, a meeting of all the students was called. A thousand of

us gathered in the main auditorium. About ten strangers in working clothes entered the hall and sat down quietly.

The head of the Communist Party in our school got up and said, "I hear that there are students here who are ridiculing our Party and spreading false rumors about the Soviet Union." He called out the name of a student and asked him to explain why he was against the Soviet Union. The boy got up but was so scared that he could hardly say anything. One of the "workers" quietly sat down next to him. A second boy was called and asked to explain himself. While he was trying to speak, another stranger sat down next to him. This procedure repeated itself several times until the name of my friend Allen was called. Allen, a Jewish student, was an intelligent boy with a sharp and witty tongue. He began to answer resolutely, denying any anti-Communist activity. At that moment, one of the strangers jumped up on a chair and started to beat Allen mercilessly with a club.

"You capitalist pig, you cosmopolitan beast!" he yelled as he beat Allen. Allen fell to the floor, losing his glasses. Now all of the "workers" jumped on the accused boys and began to beat them with clubs. Finally, they chased the boys from the room, shouting and hitting them.

The meeting was over. We were terrified. The sight of adults beating up schoolchildren in public was incomprehensible to us. I picked up the glasses Allen had dropped and brought them to his home. He was so frightened that he refused to see me. Instead, his father took the glasses. A few days later, the accused boys, including Allen, were arrested and sent to Siberia together with their families.

Another serious crime was "progul," or absenteeism from work. The penalty was deportation to Siberia. I remember that my aunt Susann had been late for work twice because we lived on the outskirts of the city. She was in a panic because a third such occurrence was equivalent to being sent to Siberia. Some people, seeing that they were going to be late, would commit a small offense, such as breaking a window in the streetcar, in order to have an excuse. They were fined for a small offense, which was better than being sent to Siberia.

At that time, my aunt Susann and her children were living with us. She and her son Oswald were considered refugees by the Communists as they had run away from the Germans in western Poland. Herta was a minor. The Russians ordered all the refugees who had come from western Poland to register and promised to repatriate them back. However, instead of sending them back to their homes in the west, NKVD, the

secret police, came to their doors at night; the refugees were rounded up, boarded on trains and sent deep inside Soviet Russia. We lived some distance from the street and would listen for their steps every night. Then, one night, it happened. The dogs started to bark, and the police came to arrest aunt Susann and Oswald, who slipped away into the bushes. The police could not find them and left empty-handed.

In the morning my relatives came out of hiding, shivering from cold. They had escaped and were very happy. How little they knew! A much crueler fate awaited them at the hands of the Germans. Had they been arrested by the Russians, they might be alive today. Most of the Jews who were sent to Siberia survived the terrible hardships; but most of those who stayed behind were killed by the Germans. Aunt Susann and my cousin Oswald perished during the German occupation, and Herta, her daughter, survived only through a miracle.

After my grandmother's death, Aunt Donna took over the household work on the farm. My grandfather's house and the garden on top of our hill had been given to her husband Ed by the Russians to reward him for his participation in the socialist uprising before the war. Donna was a good-natured woman. She took good care of our grandfather and of the household. Soon, however, the Russians started to build a collective farm on grandfather's land. They brought in many farm animals, mainly cows and pigs.

I got a ticket from a friend to see an American movie. This was a big event, since American movies were never shown by the Russians. The movie house was packed; everyone was eager to see the film. But instead of showing the movie, a group of Russian party men appeared on stage and began to speak, one after another. The gist of their speeches was that the Western Ukraine, where we lived, should be united with the Soviet Union. A resolution was prepared on our behalf to send a telegram to Comrade Stalin asking him to annex our territory. A vote followed on the question, "Who is for the resolution?" Everyone raised his arm obediently. "Who is against?" Nobody dared to vote; it would be tantamount to deportation. So the resolution was adopted "unanimously." Afterwards, a cheap cowboy movie was shown as our reward for a job well done.

The Russian Communists used this carrot-and-a-stick technique quite often. For instance, a few days before the elections, the empty stores would be filled miraculously with scarce merchandise. Plenty of food, candy and fruit would appear on the shelves. People would stand in endless lines, trying to buy as much as possible for the future. A day after

the elections, all the merchandise would suddenly disappear, and again there were shortages of everything.

We decided to accumulate food for emergencies, but the only thing we could get enough of was bread. We would cut it into slices and dry them to form biscuits. After a few months we had collected a large supply of dried bread. We kept it in a pantry in empty bed pillows, but when the Passover holidays came, someone inadvertently threw out our entire supply during our pre-holiday housecleaning. Later, during the big hunger under the German occupation, we thought with nostalgia about this bread.

The Communist system for delivering supplies was atrocious. I recall a freight car full of large nails to be used for the railroad tracks. It was unloaded directly into the mud. The entire shipment was slowly sinking into the mud and, by the next morning, it had disappeared completely. Tons upon tons of rotting potatoes were unloaded into the open fields in our neighborhood, while only a few miles away, in the city, there was a severe shortage of food. In the winter, wagonloads of watermelons would be left in freight cars on a siding for days until they froze, oozing streams of red-colored water. No one cared as long as he had a legitimate excuse. While people was starving, trains and trains of food, fuel and raw materials were pouring into Hitler's Germany to supply the German war machine. These goods were soon to be used against the Russians themselves.

In June 1941 I graduated from high school. A group picture of all the students was taken for in the local newspaper. Since I was the best student in the graduating class, my picture was taken separately and was to appear on a full page. The next day, when the paper came out, the group picture appeared but mine was not there. The paper had simply forgotten to put it in. Though I was very unhappy about this at the time, it may have saved my life. When the Germans came, they went from house to house with a list of people to be killed. A prominent picture in a Communist newspaper could have meant my death. Fortunately, I had never joined the Communist "komsomol." My grandfather had strongly forbidden me from doing so.

At our graduation party we got hold of some beer. I got drunk quickly, as I had never drunk alcohol before. My school friends escorted me as we sang all the way to my house on the hill. It was late at night and I went straight to bed. The next morning I was awakened by loud detonations. Planes were circling above and anti-aircraft artillery was shooting at them. My father looked out of the window and said that it

must be maneuvers. But it was not. When I went to the city later that day, I found out from a friend that the war between Germany and Russia had started. It was June 22, 1941.

Carl sighed. "Now you know everything about me until the war."

Irene smiled. "It's almost as if we knew each other before."

"How old were you in 1941?" he asked.

"I was almost 18 when the war broke out. I had pictured my birthday quite differently. When it arrived, I didn't even remember that this was the day when I became an adult. There were much more important things going on in my life."

❧ 8 ❧

The War

During the first days of the war the weather was very nice, but the streets of Boryslaw were less lively than usual. There were more uniformed soldiers, especially patrols. We couldn't ignore them, and, although no shooting was heard, the war was going on. The radio was constantly calling for information about spies and enemies of Russia. Petty thieves who had tried to steal flour from the stores were shot. There was no merchandise for sale and the lines of people waiting for food disappeared. Everything was sold out the first day of the war.

The whole population of Boryslaw was concerned with the political situation. The Jews, however, were the most anxious. The Germans were winning territory from the Russians and were getting closer to us. People who had already run away from German-occupied places would tell hair-raising stories. They said that there were special troops who did nothing but terrorize the Jews. They were killing people and throwing the children out of windows. They were taking the Jews' possessions away and destroying what they didn't want.

I remember the long days when my family, our friends and neighbors would talk about the situation, wondering what the future would bring. Our only hope was that the Russian Army would withstand the attacks of the Germans, and that our corner of the country would not fall into their hands.

I was 18 years old at the time and the whole situation seemed unreal to me. I couldn't imagine the horrors the people were describing. I met with my friends and we discussed the war, but deep down we didn't believe that it would last very long. Soon this unpleasant state would be over, and everything would return to normal.

Meanwhile, Jews' panic was mounting. It reached its height, when one day, we discovered that all the Russian civilians had left quietly the night before. In addition, the local Communists had taken some of their possessions and joined the Russians in their flight to the east. The Germans were surely approaching.

Milo was drafted by the Russian Army and put in charge of the local military division. He had graduated from medical school a year before

and had been working in a clinic until his military assignment came through.

Lolek was also drafted by the Russians. Naturally, he was very distressed. I didn't know how to handle the situation. I was officially going out with him and, if matters had progressed normally, I would probably have married him at the appropriate time. Now, the situation had changed. Lolek was going away and no one knew what the future would bring. My parents spoke to both of us about whether we wanted to get engaged. We would be separated for a while and an engagement might give us some sort of security. I didn't know what to say, but Lolek took a definite stand. Thanking my parents for their concern, he looked at me and the confusion in my eyes. "No," he said, "I won't tie Irene down; she is young and she should feel free. When the war is over and I return, we'll decide what to do." He turned to me: "I love you very much and I'll try hard to come back to you."

I felt so sad, I cried. Lolek was going to war. I had no idea what to expect, but I knew that a chapter in my life was coming to an end. I left with him and walked him home. We had so much to say to each other but the words came with difficulty. Lolek tried to reassure me. I wanted to tell him that I'd wait for him; I knew that that was what he wanted to hear. However, the right words didn't come. We held each other for a long time. Then he went into his house. He had to report to his unit almost immediately. That was the last I saw of him. Slowly, I walked to my house. My head was full of thoughts as I cried all the way home.

My mother was heartbroken about Milo's having to leave. No matter how much my father tried to console her by saying that Milo was connected with the local unit and would stay in town, she couldn't accept it. Milo's wife Teresa was also scared that Milo would have to leave. With six-month-old Romus in her arms, she spent all her time by the building where he was stationed.

My mother had been right. The military division remained for only a few short days. Milo came home to say good-bye. Teresa was hysterical. She clung to him with one arm, holding the baby in the other. Milo was crying too. I had to leave the room; it was too painful to watch my parents and Teresa. Inside, I felt sick myself. My world was shattering and I was plain scared. I didn't know what would happen to us and I feared the future. None of us could have suspected that Milo would be better off having left Boryslaw than were those who stayed behind.

I waited for Milo outside, as I wanted to walk him to the place he had to report to. He was very sad when he emerged from the house.

"What will happen to us?" I asked, after we had walked a while in silence.

"Who knows," he answered. "We have to be brave, and we have to survive. After the war, which won't be long, you'll go to college and study medicine. Isn't that what you've always wanted? And, when I come back, we'll work together."

I felt my throat grow tight as I said good-bye. We tried to be casual about this parting. I watched him walk away and wondered if we would ever see each other again.

I had a job in my school's library for the summer, but hardly had a chance to begin. Now, with the war on, I didn't know whether to go to the library or not. There was no one to ask. Yet I didn't want to go home. The atmosphere at home was heavy with sadness and I was not in the best mood myself. I decided to go to the library. No one was around. I opened my file and looked through the papers. Though there was really nothing for me to do, I wanted to be alone and I had succeeded.

I looked through the window. The weather was so beautiful that it almost seemed as if nature was laughing at us. The world was turning as it always did, and nature remained the same; the weather was beautiful in June no matter what happened to people. People did all the evil to themselves anyway; nature was not concerned with them. These thoughts ran through my mind as I stood by the window.

My musings were interrupted by a knock on the door. I was startled for a moment, having forgotten where I was. Then the door opened and Zenek walked in.

"What are you doing here?" I blurted out. He was the last person I expected to see.

"I didn't know where else to go. I didn't expect to find you here. I thought this might be a safe place for me. You see," he paused, "they are looking for me."

I was shocked. "What do you mean? *Who* is looking for you?"

Zenek hesitated, unsure as to whether he should tell me.

I grabbed his arm. "Zenek, tell me what is going on. Surely you won't stop now. Tell me, please."

"It is the NKVD. They are arresting young people. They took a few of my friends." Here he mentioned several names. "The NKVD suspects us of cooperating with the Germans; they consider us the enemies of Communism. I was warned that they wanted me too, although I was not involved in any underground activities. But I cannot take any chances.

When they catch you they don't ask questions, and you don't get a chance to defend yourself."

I stood for a long while without answering him. What could I do? I knew that I wanted to help him, but how? Finally I asked him, "What can I do to help?"

Zenek smiled. "I shouldn't burden you with my problems, you have your own. It is just that everything is happening so fast, one doesn't know what to do. Don't worry about me. I'll be OK. Do you think I can stay here for a while?"

"Of course. Nobody is likely to look for you here. Stay as long as you want to. I have the keys to the library, I could lock you in here."

"No, no. I'd feel trapped if I were locked in. I'll leave when you do."

"Where will you go from here?" I asked. "What will you do at night?"

"I'll hide in the fields and sleep there. It's warm enough to go into the woods and hide out. Don't worry. I'll be all right."

I wished then that I could take Zenek home and let him stay in our house until the danger blew over, but I couldn't because of my father. Suddenly I was struck by a very strange thought. My father was right; Zenek and I were very different. He was running away from the Russians. When the Germans came, he would be liberated. Then, who knew what would happen to me. I was afraid of the Germans and he was waiting for them. What an irony. Only a short time ago we had the same goals and the same dreams. Now we were in different camps. Our lives didn't run parallel anymore. What was he thinking now? Was he aware of my thoughts? I doubted it. But if he was, he wouldn't say anything; he wasn't very talkative.

After a while we left the library and said good-bye to each other. We hesitated to part. We felt that this was an important moment and we wanted to stretch it. Finally we said good-bye. I started on my way home and Zenek went his own way, whatever that was.

Two days later the NKVD (the Russian secret police) left during the night. Their recruits were taken to the railroad station, where trains waited to take them to Russia. A few hundred civilians, carrying whatever they could, were loaded into the trains too. They were trying to persuade others, who had come to see them off, to leave with them before the Germans came. There was room on the train. No one was stopped from getting on. We could have left too. But, like us, most people were afraid of the unknown. They would have had to leave most of their possessions behind. If only we had known what lay ahead!

In our house there was talk of leaving for Russia, but nothing came out of it. We had no one there and no place to go. This meant wandering for God knows how long. Also, Anna's husband Bronek was ill with tuberculosis and could get worse if the trip was rough. We couldn't have known then that none of the hardships we might possibly have endured in Russia could have compared with the terrible years that lay ahead.

We listened to the radio constantly. The communiques were contradictory; some aroused optimism and others pessimism. We were confused. Then, the next day, the NKVD returned. We felt new hope: Surely this meant that the Germans had been turned back. Before the war started, the NKVD had represented terror, but now we were very happy to see them. They gave us a feeling of security. However, that feeling lasted for only a few short days. One morning the news came that the Russians had fled again. This time they had left a small commando that was supposed to set all the large oil wells on fire. They didn't want to leave them for the Germans.

Again, the Jews panicked. We didn't know whom to fear more, the approaching Germans or the mob of civilians. The gentiles would have a free hand for some time between the leaving of the Russians and the entering of the Germans.

It was the tenth or eleventh day of the war. My friends and I were standing near my house. The street was almost empty and unrest was in the air. Here and there a workman passed with a sack of flour on his back. One of them told us that the Soviets were emptying the places where food was stored and giving it out to whomever happened to be around. Mounted police passed us in a hurry. Suddenly there was a terrible noise. We ran back to the house. A few minutes later there was another one. Then, every few minutes, we heard detonations from different parts of town, as well as the sound of broken glass. We felt a slight tremor in the ground and soon saw columns of fire. We all ran into the street. The fire could be seen from all directions. People were running and screaming.

Besides the large oil wells, the Russians had exploded the electric works, the oil reservoirs and other strategic points. To make the matters worse, there was a strong wind, and the houses located near the targets caught on fire from sparks carried by the wind.

It was getting dark. The sight of the fires was ghastly and, at the same time, strangely beautiful. No one slept that night.

The following day the Germans entered the town of Boryslaw. This time the Ukrainians gave them a warm reception. The Poles watched the

entering troops silently. The Jews stayed at home, out of view. We were very frightened. My father kept saying that the Germans wouldn't do anything bad to us.

"Don't worry," he said as he tried to pacify the rest of the family, "I know the Germans, I served with them in the First World War, and they are fair people. If we don't do anything wrong, why should they persecute us?"

My father, the eternal optimist. It was true that he'd known Germans. But those were Germans preceding Hitler's time. In the years between the wars a whole generation had grown up under Hitler. My father didn't know those Germans; he couldn't even imagine what they were like.

These Germans arrived, in impeccable uniforms and shiny boots. There was an aura of superiority about them—they were the new masters. One could feel their power. The next two days were frightening. Neighbors gathered together to discuss the situation, but no one knew what would happen next.

We waited. On the third day after the Germans had entered our town, we sensed that something was about to happen. There was electricity in the air and the town was charged. The gentile population gathered in front of the former location of the NKVD. As we were living right across the street, we watched from our windows. What we saw paralyzed us with fear.

Irene turned to Carl. "Let me stop here. From now on my stories won't be very entertaining. Please, tell me how you and your family felt about the Germans' coming?"

❧ 9 ❧

German Invasion

After a period of relative calm during the so called "phony war," during the winter and spring of 1940, Hitler overran the Low Countries and attacked France in May 1940. France fell in a little more than one month. Nothing seemed to be able to stop the victorious Germans. However, they failed to invade maritime England, having insufficient naval power. Even bombing England didn't bring her to her knees. In the summer of 1941 Hitler turned his attention to the east and the Soviet Union. Communist Russia struck him as being an easy prey.

"We will kick in the door and the whole barn will collapse," he said to his generals, and the huge German Army descended on totally unprepared Russians like a hawk. Stalin had been living under a delusion, thinking that the secret pact he had concluded with the Germans would not be violated.

In the first months of the war—June through November 1941—the Germans occupied all of eastern Poland and huge portions of the Soviet Union. Close behind their victorious armies marched the notorious "Einsatzcommandos" (special task forces), whose mission was to kill the Jews.

During the last days of peace under the Russian occupation, the Ukrainians rebelled against the Russians. When the war broke out, the Ukrainians started to shoot at the passing trains of retreating Russians from the hill where we lived. The Ukrainians were eagerly awaiting the Germans as liberators from the hated Communists. German planes threw down leaflets exhorting the Ukrainians to rise against the Russians and promising them a free country of their own, a promise they never kept. One day, a German plane dropped leaflets in our area. One started to fall near our house and we all ran to get it. Our Ukrainian neighbor, the father of Gene, was quicker and grabbed the leaflet first. We knew that he was eagerly waiting for his son to return with the German Army.

Gene, Leo's friend, did return to Lvov with the Germans, wearing an SS uniform. He secretly met Leo in a deserted place on the hills of Kaiserwald and told him that special troops had been trained to kill the

Jews. He warned him that, if he didn't run away and save his life, he would certainly be killed. But where could Leo run? That was a question Gene could not answer.

The war between Germany and Russia broke out on June 22, 1941, and the Germans entered Lvov by the end of that month. They were the exact opposites of the Russians. While the Russians' uniforms were ill-fitting and wrinkled, theirs were clean, tailored and impeccably pressed. The Russians' caps were worn and shapeless, but the Germans' were perfectly fitted and beautifully shaped. Their boots were polished to a high gloss, whereas the Russians wore clumsy "valinki" boots made out of felt. The Germans stood erect and strutted as if on parade. The Russians marched in such close formation, that one soldier practically walked on top of another. The Germans were always clean-shaven and well groomed, while the Russians' appearance was primitive and untidy. However, aside from their secret police, the Russians, were warm-hearted, friendly and cheerful. On the other hand, the Germans were as cold as ice. Their gaze communicated hatred of the Jews. They were fanatical, obedient tools in Hitler's hands, ready to carry out his orders no matter what. A Jewish girl once asked a German soldier who liked her very much, "What would you do if you got an order to kill me?" He answered without hesitation, "Befehl ist Befehl" (An order is an order).

The Germans, in collaboration with the eager Ukrainian population, organized a pogrom immediately. When they went through the prisons and found the bodies of victims of the Russian secret police, they held innocent Jews responsible; this infuriated the gentile population. Terror fell on our city. German actions against the Jews were unleashed with full force, abetted by local gentiles, mostly Ukrainian, whose bestiality and thirst for Jewish blood were reminiscent of the pogroms of Chmielnicki and his cossacks centuries earlier. They looted and plundered Jewish households. They killed innocent men, women and children. They tore down walls and destroyed furniture in search of hidden valuables. Although it was summer, the air was filled with feather-down drifting like snow in the wind. It had escaped from the bedding that the Germans and their helpers had torn while ransacking the houses.

My friend Bert and a large group of Jewish people were taken to a desolate mountain called Devil's Rock. There, the Germans and their Ukrainian policemen ordered them to pick up large rocks and run with them in a circle. Whoever ran too slowly or fell from exhaustion was shot

on the spot. Then they ordered the Jews to lie on the ground; whoever lifted his head was shot to death immediately. Out of 3,000 people, only about 300 survived. Bert was young and could endure this ordeal, so they finally let him go.

I saw Bert several times during the German occupation. Later, during the great famine in the spring of 1942, he suffered terribly from hunger because of his great weight. He became a shadow of a man, with hollow cheeks and a sad, hungry look in his eyes. Each time I saw him I would give him my lunch, although I was hungry myself. Then one day Bert didn't show up at our meeting place. I never saw him again. He had died of hunger.

It is not true that heavy people live longer in a period of starvation. They suffer more because they are used to eating a lot and thus die sooner.

When the Germans entered our farm, they slaughtered some of our cows for food. As we watched them, they told us proudly that they had arrested 80 Jews in another town for allegedly killing one German. They had ordered the Jews to raise their arms for a whole day and then had shot them all to death. Evidently they didn't know that we were Jewish. In general, the Germans could not tell who was Jewish in Poland. Except for some very religious older Jews who dressed in the traditional "kaftan," with earlocks and beards, the majority of the Jews in our town were fully assimilated and looked and dressed the same way that the gentiles did. But the local non-Jewish population knew their Jewish neighbors well and pointed them out to the Germans at every occasion, thus delivering them into the hands of their killers. Even if they didn't know a person, Poles or Ukrainians could recognize a Jew by the slightest inflection in his pronunciation or behavior.

Our house was left untouched. The peasants held my grandfather in the highest esteem and, during the beginning of the war, no one came to molest us. This did not prevent them from robbing other Jews in the city during the pogrom. They took sacks and axes and, after a whole night of plundering and killing, they returned home with their booty. Gene's father also went to rob the Jews; he returned the next morning with a sackful of watches and jewelry, his clothes and axe covered with blood.

How long had it been since we stood on the edge of the hill and watched the trains, loaded with red wagons, go by? Now my grandfather stood in the same place, watching German trains with big Red Cross signs painted on the roof. The trains, loaded with wounded German soldiers,

would pass slowly in an eerie silence. The Germans must be getting a beating, my grandfather thought. He went back to the house and announced, "The end of the war is near, and the Germans are losing. I saw trains full of wounded men being transported back from the front." Our spirits lifted for a while. We didn't know that the army that moved forward collected the wounded. Those were certainly wounded Germans, because the Russians were left to die on the field. Maybe grandfather knew this but wanted to cheer us up in those horrible, unreal times.

Someone falsely reported us to the police for hiding city Jews, unrelated to us, in our home. Our neighbors wouldn't tolerate this. As a result, a group of Ukrainian policemen arrived at our house unexpectedly. They were not the kind of police one would look to for protection, or view with respect. Their function was to harass and arrest innocent people, usually Jews. They instilled fear in everyone. For many years after the war, the sight of police officers curdled my blood. Lux, our dog, who hardly barked at anyone, sensed danger and jumped at the Ukrainian policemen. They shot at him from close range. Lux ran away screaming; fortunately his wound was superficial and he survived. The policemen were drunk and they started to beat us. They hit me several times with a hoe. Then they took me, my younger brother Mark and our father to the police station. We were thrown into a jail cell where many people were sitting on the floor, facing the wall, as ordered by the police. Every few minutes a policeman would take a person from the cell into the yard. Then we heard gunshots, and another person would be taken out to be shot.

After a few hours, Mark and I were taken out. A Ukrainian policeman asked us if we had any weapons. Mark replied, "Yes."

The policeman stiffened. "Where?" he asked.

"In my pants," Mark answered. The policeman took out his gun, and slowly put it to Mark's head. He said, "If you were not so young, I would shoot you." (Mark was 17 years old then.)

"Go home," said the policeman.

"What about our father?" Mark asked.

"He will have to stay in jail for hiding other Jews."

As it happened, my father stayed in jail for several weeks before he was released. Ironically, he was safer there than outside.

One evening, a gentile neighbor warned us that our home was going to be raided that night. She suggested that we leave the house and offered to let us sleep in her garden. It was autumn and cold already; we had to

sleep in an unheated shed. There were no beds, so we slept on the bare floor. Fortunately, our house was not raided that night.

The next morning, our neighbors' son-in-law, who was a policeman, spoke to me. He told me to get a job any place I could find one, since the working Jews would be spared.

"Where can I get a job?" I asked.

"Go to the glass factory. They are hiring people."

I went to the factory and began working as a laborer. Both my brothers got factory jobs, too; this saved us for a while. However, my parents could not get any work. They were too old to be hired for manual labor and, anyway, they didn't have the strength for it. Unfortunately, this was the only work the Jews were allowed to do; they could not work in an office.

10

The First Pogrom

The year was 1941; the day was July 1st. The German patrol entered my town and we had new rulers. The reactions of the population varied according to their origin.

The Ukrainians were very happy. During the two years of Russian occupation, they were considered to be closest to the occupiers because of the similarity in their languages and because the Ukraine was part of Russia. But the Ukrainians didn't want to be a part of Russia, or of Poland, for that matter. They wanted to be independent. Thus, they created an underground that sabotaged the Russians and collaborated with the Germans. Because of this the Russians arrested Ukrainian youths before withdrawing their troops. Now, the Ukrainians rejoiced. They were promised independence after the war if they helped the Germans.

The Poles had mixed feelings that day. The Germans had begun the war against Poland in 1939. They occupied a large part of the country. On the other hand, the Russians hadn't been friends to Poland. Poles had been persecuted just on the suspicion that they might be against Communism. Hence, the Poles waited to see what happened.

And then there were the Jews. We had no illusions about the Germans: We were their primary targets. No one dared to speculate as to how bad it would be for us or what the future would bring. We had heard terrible stories from people who had escaped from the Germans, but they were too horrible to believe. So we chose to hope that if we obeyed their rules, we would somehow manage.

It didn't take long for us to learn otherwise.

Two days later, on July 3rd, everyone in town knew that something was going to happen. The streets had begun to fill with people from surrounding villages, their faces wild and expectant. They carried all kinds of objects, such as hammers and axes. These people stood throughout the town, waiting for something.

The news spread among us with the speed of lightning. There was going to be a pogrom. The Germans gave the Poles and Ukrainians a

free hand to do whatever they wanted with the Jews.

We were panic-stricken. The men were said to be in the greatest danger. Anna convinced Bronek to go to work, hoping that he would be safer there. My father couldn't be convinced to leave the house. He insisted that he had never done anything wrong; he had never been involved in political activities and had no reason to fear the Germans.

"I was in the army with them, in the First World War," he would say. "They are fair people and they wouldn't harm an innocent man."

"But Hitler has changed all that," we pleaded. My mother was beside herself. "They will kill you; please hide in your office." But it was no use. My father wouldn't listen.

I couldn't stand still. I ran from the window to the door and back. None of our Jewish neighbors were to be seen. Everyone was either in hiding or stayed behind closed doors.

Suddenly, we saw one of our neighbors being led out of his house by two men who were carrying lead pipes.

"Daddy, hide!" Anna screamed with fear. "Go to the basement!"

"No," shouted Teresa, "the last room is safer. They will surely look in the basement."

My father had hardly locked the door behind him when two young boys stormed into our house, screaming, "Where are the men?" We stood speechless.

"Where are they? Answer, you bitches, or we'll take you with us."

"They haven't come back from work yet," whispered my mother. She was shaking all over and was pale as a ghost. The two boys ran all over the house, opening every door until they finally tried the one to the room that was locked.

"Aha, what is that?"

We were frozen with fear. They had just begun pounding on the door when it opened and my father appeared. In a quiet, shaky voice, he began to explain that he never harmed anyone, and that his friends, the Ukrainians, would surely agree. The boys began to laugh. Without any explanation, they grabbed my father by the arms, not even allowing him to put on his jacket. It was quite a sight: two wild peasants dragging a white-haired, distinguished-looking man between them like a sack of potatoes. When they had already passed the door, one of them turned and grabbed Anna by the hand. The four of them, two oppressors and two victims, left together.

I seemed to have lost all my feelings; I couldn't scream or cry or talk. I ran out of the house and into the street; there I ran into a Ukrainian

policeman. I looked at his face. He had been my friend at school. Leaning over me, he whispered, "Irene, go home. Lock the doors and don't let anyone in. You people are in trouble." He quickly walked away.

I turned to go back to my house. But before I reached it, two boys, aged 15 or 16, jumped into the hallway behind me and, shouting, demanded pails and rags. I gave them all I could find.

"Here you are," I said.

One of them put his hands on his hips and laughed, "What are you, a princess? Can't you take them down yourself?"

My face turned red. How dare they? No boy had spoken to me that way before. Before I realized what was happening, one of them grabbed a pail and put it on my head.Now they were laughing hysterically.

"Look how pretty she looks now, the damned Jewess."

I felt so humiliated. I tore the pail off my head, straightened up and started to walk down the yard towards the gate of the NKVD building. This was where the gentiles dragged the Jews caught in the pogrom. In the corner of my eye I saw my mother standing in the doorway, her hands clenched together and her face white with fear.

Before I entered the gate of NKVD, I saw Anna. She was walking out of there and was headed towards home. I was so absorbed with myself that I didn't even wonder how she had gotten out of that place.

There was a mob of people in front of the gate. I must have been crazy, because I began to push the people with pails to the right and left so that I could reach the gate. I had only one objective: to get inside and find my father. Suddenly, I was not afraid. I passed the gate, where there were many Germans standing around. I still held the pails in my hands; someone showed me the way to the well, thinking that I needed water.

I stood in the center of a huge yard. All around me were corpses lying on the ground. They were terribly disfigured and their faces were unrecognizable. There was a stench of old blood and infected flesh.

Jewish men were standing near these corpses, each holding a wet rag. They bent over to wash off the blood.

What was this place? Where was I? This was worse than any horror movie. I searched the faces for my father. No one paid any attention to me. I walked on, feeling absolutely numb. It was hard to believe that, only a short while ago, these people were at home, eating with their

families and going about their normal chores. Now, they were eagerly washing rotten bodies. Their eyes alone seemed insane, insane with terrible fear.

Then I saw him: My handsome, immaculate father was kneeling near a corpse. He was naked above the waist, having torn his shirt into pieces that he was using to wash the body near him. I could hardly recognize his face.

When he saw me, he whimpered, "My child, oh my God, how did you get here?"

I wanted to scream, to hold my father and cry on his shoulder. I needed his strength, which he had always given me. I wanted him to tell me that all of this was a bad dream, that in a minute we would awaken and find everything the way it had been before. I wanted to tell him that I loved him, that I was scared to death. But instead, I stood as if hypnotized and stared without expression.

A voice was speaking to me, calling my name. It sounded as if it were coming from far away. I turned. It was the same friend who, a short while ago, had told me to go home and lock the doors.

"Come with me," he whispered. "You can't go near your father. Believe me, I will help him later. He took my arm and led me away. I walked as in a dream, repeating, "Daddy, daddy, I saw my daddy."

This friend Misko took me to a small, cell-like room and pointed to the floor. Corpses were lying there. I recognized two of them: they were people from my school. Puzzled,.I looked at Misko.

"Before they left, the Russians arrested and killed them. They suspected them of sabotage. Now, the Germans are saying that this was the fault of the Jews, and the people are more than willing to believe it. That's why the pogrom is taking place."

A German walked in. He came over to us and asked Misko if I was his sister. "No," he answered, "it is my friend."

"Get her out of here," said the German. "This is no sight for a young girl with such pretty eyes."

"Yes, I will," Misko said. "Come, Irene." He gently pulled me, but I resisted.

"Misko, I will not leave without my father. Please do something for him, I beg of you. I will never forget you for this."

"I can't do anything now, but I will try my best later. Please come with me."

It took all my willpower not to cry. "Thank you, Misko, but I must stay. I must be with my father."

"But Irene, I promise that your father will be all right. We have specific orders not to harm the Jews. Please believe me, he'll be home in a few hours."

"No, you are only saying that because you want me to go. I won't let you take me home without him."

Misko looked at me sadly. "Your mother is at home worrying not only about your father but about you. Won't you spare her at least one worry? You can tell her that you saw your father and that he is well."

His words convinced me. How could I forget my mother?

"All right, take me out. I know that you will do what you can for my father."

He reassured me that he would. He took my arm and we passed through the gate into the street.

In the street the mob had grown even larger. We couldn't pass. "Let us through!" Misko shouted. His voice carried so much authority that the crowd made a passage for us. We had only to cross the street and the yard to reach my house. Misko took me safely across and brought me right to the door.

"Don't open the door to anyone, do you hear? Anyone! I will watch your house; stay inside and bar the doors." And he left.

I knocked on the window. My mother saw me and ran to open the door. We held each other and cried.

In the meantime, our town had become one big hunting ground. The mobs of gentiles were the hunters and the Jews were their prey. They were pulled from their homes, beaten in the streets, chased when they tried to escape, and made fun of in the most perfidious ways. For example, when a few religious Jews were led to the NKVD yard, they were told to dance in the street and perform all kinds of tricks. It was not enough for the torturers to beat their victims; they humiliated them and robbed them of all dignity. Many were beaten to death.

From the safety of our house, which was now being watched by Misko, we couldn't see everything, but we did see people being led by the peasants, pushed around and beaten. And, most of all, we heard the cries for help, the cries of pain and the cries of helplessness.

Anna and Teresa tried to comfort their crying children. They themselves looked like children, lost and forlorn. My mother and I took positions in front of the window that looked out onto the street. From there we could see the mob in front of the gate of the NKVD. We could also see everyone who came out through the gate. We sat hour after hour, observing all that we could. and hoping that we would

see my father leaving that hell. We waited in vain. The day was coming to an end; it was getting darker. The police hour was approaching. The mob started to thin out; after 8 o'clock no one was allowed in the streets. Soon there was hardly anyone to be seen. The gate of the NKVD was closed and a German stood guard in front of it. My father was somewhere behind the gate. Night had come.

We sat in front of the window all night, looking, waiting to see something happen. From time to time we heard a scream, or the sound of steps running in the street, but mostly it was very quiet. It was a very long night.

I begged my mother to lie down, she was so pale. She sat next to me without uttering a word. Her face was taunt, her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes fixed on the window. I don't think that she ever changed her position. I tried to talk to her, to tell her that I was confident that they would let the people out in the morning and my father would come home. Still, she didn't answer. She just sat there staring out of the window.

Anna and Teresa wandered aimlessly from room to room. They also tried to speak to my mother, but had no more success than I. We watched the night turn into day with mixed feelings. We wondered what this day would bring.

As it got lighter, the street began to fill with the same crowd as the day before. Again I saw Jewish men dragged by Ukrainians or Poles into the gate. Some had been brutally beaten; the blood was running down their faces. Some could barely stand, as their legs were caving in under them. Crying women, probably wives and mothers, followed the men. One couldn't tell how old they were—they all looked the same. I realized that the pogrom was continuing. Our hopes that it had ended the previous day had been false.

What we saw from our window was going on all over town. Peasants from neighboring villages joined the people from Boryslaw in plundering Jewish homes, terrorizing the women and killing the men without mercy. They used lead pipes, axes and hammers—anything they could get hold of to express their outrageous hatred towards the Jews. Many of them killed neighbors whom they had befriended all their lives. People turned into bloodthirsty beasts in search of prey. The more helpless the victim, the better. There was no pity. All human feelings were wiped out, there was only the killer and the victim.

The Jews barricaded their homes the best they could. If there was time, or if they were warned, they fled to take refuge in empty sheds, deserted oil wells or the fields. Some stayed at home and were spared

because it was too difficult to break down their doors. Others were easier to get to. Some gentiles took this opportunity to carry out a personal grudge. One of my friend's family was completely wiped out in this first pogrom because a boy from that family had had a bad fight with his gentile friend. Because two boys had had a fight, about ten people from the Jewish boy's family died that day.

Time seemed to crawl as we watched the street. One hour seemed endless. I thought this was the end of all of us. They wouldn't stop until they had gotten every Jew.

Our big clock struck 12. It was noon. The sun shone brightly, as it can only shine in July.

I looked at my mother. Funny, I had never noticed that she looked old.

Suddenly I noticed two young men turning from the street into our yard. Before I had a chance to panic, I recognized them. It was Misko and my good friend Zenek. I ran to the door, pushed away the iron lock and let them in. They were immediately surrounded by all of us. We started to shoot questions at them, all of us speaking together. Misko asked if my father had returned. We told him that he hadn't. He turned to Zenek: "Stay here; I will go across the street to see if I can find him among the corpses."

We waited breathlessly for 5, 10, 15 minutes.Misko returned. "Sorry," he said, "they wouldn't let me near the Jewish corpses." He looked down, avoiding our faces.

My mother sat down lifelessly. Anna was crying and I just stood there. Zenek came over to me. He took my hand; his face showed concern.

"Irene, you look awful. Take hold of yourself. Don't lose hope."

I looked at him. I saw a spot on his face, that was growing larger and larger. The spot began to spin faster and faster, my legs got weak and gave way under me. I felt myself falling into a blessed darkness.

When I opened my eyes, my mother was bending over me. Zenek was standing next to her. I smelled of alcohol, as my mother was wetting my temples with it. She gave me some water to drink, but it tasted bitter and was hard to swallow.

Zenek bent over me and said that the pogrom was coming to an end. The order had been given to stop the killing. I heard him, but I didn't know what he meant and I didn't care. Then I remembered my father. I jumped up from the bed.

"He is dead, I have no father," I cried, breaking down. I had tried to

stay calm all this time but now my composure left me. I cried uncontrollably till I couldn't cry anymore; then I just lay on the bed staring at the ceiling.

"Look," Anna screamed, "they are letting them out. There is Morgenstern!"

Morgenstern had been my German professor. Yesterday I had seen him standing next to my father, washing corpses. I ran to the window but he had gone. And then I saw my father. He was swaying a little. I rubbed my eyes. Yes, it was he. His upper body was covered with bloodstains; his head was tied with a bloody cloth.

We ran to meet him by the door, crying and laughing together. He was home! We touched him, held him and kissed him. A terrible stench of dead bodies enveloped him but we didn't care.

My father stood there, tears running down his face. His eyes expressed the love he felt for us.

"I thought I would never see any of you again," he cried.

❧ 11 ❧

Summer 1941

After the pogrom our lives changed completely. We could never relax; we were never sure what the next minute might bring. My father spent the next four weeks in bed. His left side had been badly burned by the acids that had been used to stop the odor of the bodies. He told us that, at the end of the day, the Germans had piled all the corpses in the basement, and the Jews had been forced there too. As there had been no room to sit or stand, the Jews had to lie on top of the corpses. This was how he had gotten burned. Now my father had to lie on one side, and found it too painful to walk. He suffered greatly but with courage. After all, he had come home, while many others had been less fortunate.

Over 250 Jews died in that pogrom; some died later from the wounds they had received.

The Germans posted signs informing the Jews that the repressions against them had come to a halt; life would return to normal. The bandits responsible for the killing and plundering had been executed, they said. The Jewish population could conduct their business as usual.

This was easier said than done. The shock of the pogrom had left a deep impression on us. Fear and uncertainty had crept into our minds and stayed there. When, a few days later, there was an order for all Jews to turn in their radios, we were relieved that nothing worse was required. We began to accept that we were inferior to other citizens.

The Germans had begun the process of dehumanizing the Jews of Boryslaw. It was not easy to return to one's normal life and activities. But that was what we had to do. We had no choice.

Meantime, food became scarce. The bread rations given to us were inadequate. We were using up whatever we had in the house. The day came when my mother ran out of ideas as to on how to prepare a meal for our family. Luckily, the peasants from the villages near Boryslaw began to come into town with food products such as milk, cheese, flour, and potatoes. However, they wouldn't sell them for money, which was worthless by then. What they wanted was clothing, linens, and shoes. Household objects were used to obtain food. We gave the peasants whatever they wanted and got our everyday necessities in return. The

Poles and Ukrainians could go to the villages and therefore had greater bargaining power. But the Jews were not allowed to leave town; they had to wait for the peasants to come to them.

In the summer of 1941, my mother had all kinds of goods to exchange; Because of that, we had a reasonable amount of food. I remember when we got grain that had to be converted to flour. This would be used for bread. Everyone in the house had to contribute to the grinding of the grain. It was extremely tedious, as the grain had to be ground with a coffee grinder, the only appliance we had to do the job. It took many hours of grinding to produce enough flour for one loaf of bread. But at least we had bread.

Shortly after the first pogrom, Mr. and Mrs. Unter, Teresa's parents, and her brother Mike had moved in with us. Now, there were eleven people living in the apartment—three families, with nine adults and two children. We all used one kitchen to prepare our meals. We would take turns eating. The evenings were also spent in the kitchen. which became the center of the house.

In town a committee was formed to represent the Jewish population of Boryslaw and deal with the Germans.

The Germans issued an order that all Jews had to wear white armbands with a blue Star of David. Thus a Jew could be spotted from far away. We had to wear the armband all the time; to be caught without it was punishable by death. I remember how busy we were sewing those armbands and embroidering the Star of David on them. And I remember how I felt going out onto the street for the first time wearing the armband. It was humiliating. I remember the look of contempt and superiority in the eyes of the gentiles. Why had this happened to us? We were no different from other people. We hadn't asked to be born Jewish. We had had no choice in the matter. This new development was very hard to accept.

Now my friends looked at me strangely. The very people who, a while ago, had laughed, sung and danced with me had suddenly changed. Some were embarrassed; others showed pity. And then there were those who turned away when they saw me. Yes, it was hard, wearing a Star of David on my arm. I was only 18 years old.

The Germans knew exactly what they were doing when they ordered us to wear these armbands. It was the beginning of their campaign to dehumanize the Jews. The campaign was to continue for three years, until they were able to do what they wanted with us.

Shortly after this order, the Jews were required to bring all their furs

and jewelry to the Jewish committee. We couldn't even own a fur collar; everything had to be surrendered. Even at this early stage of the German occupation, there was fear in every Jew's heart.

My father owned a very fine, fur-lined coat. It had taken him years to save up to buy it. My friend Zenek, who would often visit us at that time, also owned a fur-lined jacket, but in much worse condition. Zenek suggested to my father that he give up his own coat and take my father's for himself. He would give us flour and other food to make up the difference in value. It would have meant so much to us to have that food. At first, my father agreed, but then the fear that someone might recognize his coat on Zenek made him change his mind.

So my father and I went to the Jewish committee to give up his coat and a seal-skin coat of my mother's. We stood in line to surrender what had belonged to us. We no longer had a right to own anything. In time, I found that we didn't even have the right to live.

The summer of 1941 was beautiful, but heavy clouds were gathering over our lives.

The Jewish committee (Judenrat) had to supply the Germans with Jewish workers. A census of the Jews was taken. The committee decided who would go to work, and where. We were sent to different jobs on different occasions. I was sent to clean the home of a German family several times. Then I was sent to a dressmaker to sew clothes for the wives of the Germans.

Anna's first husband, Bronek.

Summer was coming to an end. In the evenings we gathered in the kitchen. There were endless discussions about the war and our lives under the Germans. Sometimes, a neighbor would come under cover of darkness and spend the evening talking with us. It was dangerous for him to return home, although he lived very close. He would cling to the sides of the houses, avoiding light and holding his breath until he had reached his house. We all had to learn how to live half-normally to evade the rules.

On those evenings, my brother-in-law Bronek made our lives bearable. He had a terrific sense of humor, and didn't hesitate to use it on every occasion. Bronek was an exceptionally handsome man; to this day, I have never met anyone who could compare with him. He also had a very kind disposition and a gentleness that made it extremely easy to be with him. He was a clever man. He didn't speak much, but when he said something, it made sense. I loved him very much. I had been 11 years old when Anna married Bronek. From the very beginning he treated me with respect and affection and I knew he was my friend. I would go to him for advice or when I needed something, like a costume for a party. He always helped me. He was truly one of a kind.

Everyone liked Bronek, and neighbors or friends often came to our house to talk to him or seek his advice. Bronek had TB. He had contracted it just before the outbreak of the war. He went to special sanatoriums for treatment and his illness was arrested. But he had to take good care of himself and eat properly to stay well. He never complained; you would never know that he was so ill if not for his cough. He coughed a lot and was careful not to come too near to his son, because his illness was contagious.

Everyone considered Anna to be very lucky when she married Bronek. Many girls liked him. When he got sick, people said that the jealousy of other women had brought this misfortune on Anna.

The Germans didn't allow people to have radios. The gentiles, however, had kept theirs illegally. Thus we were able to find out what was happening in the world. They were not allowed to listen, of course, but their homes were not subject to invasions by the police as ours were at any time, so they took chances. They didn't fear the Germans the way we did.

During the days, only my mother and Teresa's parents stayed home. Even Mike, Teresa's brother, who was blind from an operation he had had on his brain as a child, had a job in a brush factory. He could make brushes without using his eyes. The rest of us usually went to work or would stand in line to get some food. There were long lines in every store. It took hours to get half a pound of bread, a pound of flour, or a few ounces of sugar.

One day a man named Koppel came to our house. I had met him briefly at our last school dance before the outbreak of the war. He had been the leader of the band. I had danced with him at the party and then forgotten that he existed.

Koppel.

Koppel said that he was in the neighborhood and wanted to see how our family was managing in these difficult times. My mother invited him to sit down and soon Teresa and Anna joined in a lively conversation about our situation. I didn't take part; something about Koppel seemed strange. Although he had said that he'd come to visit my family, I had the feeling he was really interested in me. He looked at me all the time and I was embarrassed. I didn't care for the man, so I left and went to visit a friend.

This was the beginning of a relationship between Koppel, my family and myself. From that day on, he came to our house often, many times with food supplies that were very difficult to get. He had gentile friends whom he paid to bring him the food. In some strange way, he influenced people to do things for him that they wouldn't do for others. He also had money and this helped, too.

Thus, Koppel became a frequent visitor. I tried to avoid him as much as possible. However, in view of the help he was giving us, it was hard for me to ignore him completely. I often found an excuse to leave the house when he arrived.

One day, Koppel asked if I could spare him a few minutes. I could only say "yes." We sat down at the table and he started to tell me about his brother in Israel and the hotel that he owned there. He also told me his dream, which was to go there after the war and live in Israel. I was very interested in everything he said. He was a fascinating person. He knew so much about the world and he painted the future so brilliantly that I just sat there, listening. His stories transported me to a different world—a world of beauty and hope; a world where the future looked bright.

I suppose that I needed that hope at that time, since the present looked

grim and there was nothing to look forward to. The next time Koppel came to our house he brought a violin with him. I didn't want to leave as I usually did when I saw him coming. He asked if I would like to hear him play the violin. I thought it would be very nice to hear some music for a change.

Koppel played "Zigeuner Weisen" by Kalman. I listened, spellbound. He played it beautifully, with tremendous feeling. My eyes filled with tears. Koppel looked at me and smiled. He had tried hard to get my attention and had finally succeeded. From that time on our relationship became one of friendship and trust. I recognized a certain power about him and I began to look at him with different eyes. I talked to him often now and he always had interesting stories to tell. He opened my eyes to many things I had never thought about before. He pointed out various qualities in people and I started to look for them. He told me about the worthwhile things in life and I believed what he said. I had never met anyone like him; he opened a new world to me. He treated me with a lot of respect, and even though I knew that he liked me as a woman, he didn't make advances to confirm my feelings.

At the beginning of the war, my mother had been able to exchange clothes, linens, dishes or pots for food. After a while our supplies had dwindled. We no longer had any clothes to give away. But worst of all was the fact that the peasants didn't want to deal with Jews anymore. They believed that the Jews were inferior and they were more than happy to add to our problems by avoiding doing business with us.

❧ 12 ❧

November 1941

One night in November, a knock on the window woke me up. The knock came again and again. My parents were awakened too and all of us ran to the window. Standing outside was my cousin Ana, her face covered with tears. We opened the door and she ran in.

Ana was hysterical: "Please help me, it is mamma," she cried. She has fallen and is lying in the street."

Two or three people ran out with Ana. A little while later, they returned with my aunt Laura. They carried her with great difficulty. Laura was a very large woman. She was unconscious. The family lay her on the bed, trying to revive her without success. We needed a doctor.

"I'll run over to Dr. Teicher," I said. The doctor lived three or four blocks away. It was 2 o'clock in the morning. I grabbed my coat and ran out of the house. It was pitch black outside. The guard at the Reiterzug (German mounted police), who stood at the gate, stopped me and asked where I was going. We lived across the street from the Reiterzug and he had seen me often before. When I told him, he said, "It is after police hours; you could be shot. I can't let you go."

I begged him to release me and promised to be careful.

"At least take off your Star of David," he said. But I was afraid. I ran as fast as I could to get the doctor. The street was empty and I was very frightened. I had never liked the darkness, even under the best of circumstances.

I don't know why I had volunteered to go. It must have been panic. Also, I knew that someone would have to do it, and I was afraid that my father or my mother would go. It was better that I went. I was young and I could run.

I came to the gate of the doctor's house and ran in. I had to go through a huge garden before I reached his house. Shadows seemed to be reaching out for me from between the trees. My teeth were clattering from fear.

Finally, I reached the house and rang the doorbell. There was no answer. I rang again and again, without results. I began to knock harder and harder, but the only sound I heard was my own hard breathing. I gave up and started to run back.

When I reached the gate, three Ukrainian policemen were walking through it into the garden. They didn't stop me despite my Star of David. They must have seen me—I had gone right past them. They simply ignored me and went on.

I ran through the street, past the same guard. He didn't stop me this time and I ran into my house. I could hardly breathe. I took one look at my family and knew that my aunt was dead.

Slowly we found out what had happened. My cousin told us that the police had come to take away my aunt's husband, who was confined to a wheelchair. My aunt had begged them not to take him, but to no avail. She had run after him and Ana had followed. When they reached the street level of our house, my aunt collapsed and fell to the ground. The police went on with my uncle. Ana stayed with her mother.

My cousin Ana survived the war. When we recalled this incident, it seemed that Ana's mother had died to save her life that November night. My uncle had been killed; Ana would have perished too.

The following day I was supposed to work, as assigned by the Jewish committee. I had to leave very early. We knew that something was wrong but we didn't know what. My father decided to go with me to the committee; he refused to let me go alone.

13

The Second Pogrom

It was still dark and bitter cold out when my father and I left the house. There was no one on the street. We had walked for a few minutes when I noticed a Ukrainian policeman across the street. My father had already seen him. The policeman came over to us and asked where we were going. My father explained that I had to report to work and thus we were going to the Judenrat to assemble. The policeman told us to follow him. We didn't understand, but we obeyed him.

"Where is he taking us?" I whispered to my father.

"I don't know."

All of a sudden the policeman stopped. He looked at us with an odd expression on his face. He seemed to hesitate, and then he said, "Go home and hurry." He walked away in the opposite direction.

We didn't know what to make of this; what should we do? I wanted to rush home, but my father was afraid something would happen if I didn't show up for work. So we continued to the Judenrat. There I would be assigned to a group and sent to work.

There was a mob of people in front of the Judenrat. We saw immediately that something was wrong. Women were crying and men looked scared. When we asked what was going on, we were told that many people had been taken from their homes during the night.

Things began to connect in our minds. My aunt and cousin had also been taken from their home.

My father pulled me inside the building and we went to the office I had to report to. It was large, and many people like me were reporting for work. They seemed agitated. Obviously, something terrible was happening, but no one knew what.

Then a man ran in from the street, shouting, "The Germans are grabbing all the Jews in the street and taking them away. I got away from them."

Those who were waiting to go to work became panicky: "What should we do? How can we work if the Germans are arresting Jews? We will be caught." All of them were shouting together. One couldn't hear what they were saying. The men, who worked in the office, had been

confused at first, but had regained their composure and were trying to calm the crowd. They asked them to form a line and go to work as if nothing had happened. One of them hit a man who didn't want to get onto line.

"Don't hit me!" he screamed. "We have been beaten enough without your help."

"Nothing will happen to you," shouted one of the office men. "You are going to work."

People, confused, formed lines for work, no matter where they were to be sent.

My father knew someone in the office and asked him what we should do. The man said that he would send us with the group going to the Reiterzug. The Reiterzug occupied the buildings across from our house. We would go with that group, and then, when we reached our house, we would try to detach ourselves and go home. My father agreed and pulled me onto that line.

We began to walk to the door. Suddenly, I had a terrible attack of fear. I grabbed my father's arm and said that I was afraid and didn't want to go.

My father was undecided; he looked at me and said, "OK, we won't go."

We left the column and stood in the corner. We had stood there for a while when the phone rang. The man who answered it went pale.

"Everyone?" he asked. "What about the ones who were needed for the Reiterzug? "My God, all the people." He hung up and sank into the chair. He noticed us standing by the wall and motioned us to come closer. "I am so glad you didn't go with the Reiterzug group; they took everyone away." His face was ashen. His job hadn't been easy that day.

Most of the people in the office hadn't heard what had happened. They were gathered into groups and sent to various places of work.

The door was flung open and four Ukrainian policemen, armed with clubs, entered the room. Hitting people to the left and the right, they chased them into the street. My father and I ran into a small room. Through a little window we saw about 100 people being chased into the street. A few of them ran away as they were being escorted through the streets, but most of them were never heard from again.

My father and I slipped through to the staircase and went to the attic. It was a long night, so quiet that we could hear our hearts beating. Once in a while we heard a shrill scream coming from the street. Someone had been beaten or killed.

Finally, it was dawn. The sky was filled with dark clouds. There was nothing to do but wait.

Around 8 o'clock in the morning, we heard my name being whispered by someone in the street. I was very scared and didn't move. Then my name was called again. I looked out of a window and saw our neighbor, a young man who had converted to Christianity shortly before the war. His name was Max. So far, he felt safe as a Christian.

I didn't know whether to react or not. Then he called again and I knew that I had to answer or he would attract attention. I opened the window and he saw me. He said that someone had told my mother I had been taken away by the Germans, and that she was in despair. He asked me to come home with him; we would travel through the back roads.

I looked at my father. He looked so pitiful. "I don't know what to do," he said. "I don't know whether you will be better off staying here or going home. It is very dangerous to be on the street, but who knows what will happen here? You must decide for yourself. I will stay here; I don't think I could make it."

I went down stairs and onto the street. Max and I walked quite a stretch. I took off my Star of David; wearing it now would have been insane. On the other hand, being caught without it would lead to my being shot on the spot. But this was not the time to think about that. I had to take the risk; I had to go to my mother.

We passed the Ukrainian police and entered the back road. We didn't know that we had chosen the worst route of all. A crowd of people stood at the entrance of the home of a very well-known man. He had resisted arrest and had been shot to death. As we passed the house, the police were removing his body.

We walked through the crowd as though we were simply curious. I still don't know why no one recognized me, as I had recognized some people in the crowd. Perhaps the fear had changed my face.

Once we had passed, the rest of the way went smoothly. Ten minutes later, I walked into my mother's apartment. When she saw me, she screamed. She touched my face again and again. "You are here, you are alive!" We cried together.

❧ 14 ❧

The Ghetto

From the winter of 1941/42, we lived in the ghetto. We had been ordered to move there from our house on the hill by an order from the German authorities. We left our home with fear and trepidation, not knowing what fate awaited us. In our house in Old Zniesienie, we had lived among neighbors who knew us and respected our grandfather; they wouldn't have allowed anyone to harm us. We had been able to get some food by trading our meager possessions with our gentile neighbors. The area had been open and there was some freedom of movement around our house.

Our situation was much worse in the ghetto. It was located in the so-called New Zniesienie, across the railroad tracks from the Old Zniesienie, and was fully enclosed. Anyone wanting to leave the area had to pass through one of the checkpoints. The ghetto could easily be closed for pogroms from which no one could escape. The houses were small and large numbers of Jews were crammed into them; the average was one family per room. Farmers were not allowed to enter under extreme penalties and a severe food shortage existed from the beginning.

Before we moved to the ghetto, a neighbor whom we knew quite well came to the house. "Look," he said, "sooner or later the Germans will take everything away from you. But if you leave your possessions with me, I will keep them and return them to you after the war." There wasn't much left in our apartment. We had already traded away almost everything for food. Our neighbor looked around. "You have the grandfather's clock and. . . yes, a sewing machine. Give them to me," he almost demanded. We agreed and he went to get someone to help him. Soon he returned with a helper and a small handcart; they quickly took the two pieces away. Later, I would meet the same neighbor under quite different circumstances.

Actually, the Germans created two ghettos: the Big Ghetto in the slum area and the Small Ghetto, where we lived. By comparison, we were fortunate. We moved our meager belongings through a distant, little-known underpass across the railroad tracks. We were unmolested: no one noticed us crossing the tracks. Our three families (aunt Donna with her

husband and three small children, aunt Susann with Herta and Oswald and our family) occupied three tiny apartments that our grandfather was able to rent from his Polish friend. Our grandfather stayed with us.

In the Big Ghetto the situation was much worse. There were 150,000 Jews in Lvov; most of them had to pass through one of several checkpoints with their belongings in order to comply with the orders to relocate. A real inferno developed. Many Jews were arrested at the checkpoints for no reason at all and sent to death camps, leaving ownerless, horse-driven wagons and handcarts loaded with their belongings. These fell prey to hundreds of marauding hoodlums, who stole them outright. Small children wandered aimlessly through the streets, crying and looking for their parents, while their mothers were being taken to the death camps. Ultimately these orphans were taken away too and killed by the Germans. Infants were torn from their mothers' arms and their little heads smashed against the walls in full view of their parents. As the Germans would say, "Bullets are too good for them. A bullet costs one Pfennig [penny] and the Jewish life isn't worth that much." I saw a German soldier shooting at a little boy who was hiding under a bed. He didn't even bother to check his victim afterwards. The boy was wounded only superficially, but he pretended to be dead and temporarily escaped death.

The Germans ordered the Jews to organize a "Judenrat" (Jewish committee) to perform the dirty work of delivering quotas for the extermination. Rather than comply, the head of the Jewish committee committed suicide. The infuriated Germans hanged 12 prominent members of the Jewish community in a public square and left their bodies hanging for several days. They then ordered the Jews to create a new Jewish committee and a Jewish "Hilfspolizei" (Auxiliary Police). The latter's job was to round up Jews for deportation to the places of execution. Each policeman had to deliver a certain number of victims every day. If he didn't, members of his own family were taken instead.

We had a small bedroom and kitchen for our entire family. Grandfather lived with us. Next door, Aunt Donna had another small room for her family. Aunt Susann, with her son and daughter, occupied the third room. There was very little food and we were always hungry. We'd have two pounds of bread to last for a week for a family of five—nothing else. We were eating cooked weeds and animal feed when we could get it. We developed chronic diarrhea, so that we couldn't retain anything we ate.

My mother gave us all her food and hardly ate anything herself. "I ate already," she would say when we'd come home from work without having eaten all day. But her hollow cheeks told us otherwise.

I was working in a glass factory undergoing repair after having been bombed at the beginning of the German–Russian war. My hands constantly bled from cuts that wouldn't heal in the freezing weather. One day, the plant manager sent me on an errand to the city. In a few minutes I'd been caught by the Germans and placed under guard with a group of other Jews. A large pogrom was in progress and I'd been under completely unaware of it. A truck with a large, tightly-sealed back door was brought in. A senior officer in a black uniform arrived and again examined each of us and checked our papers. He motioned to me with a stick and told me to go home. As I hurried away, I heard the shouts of the Germans pushing and beating the rest of the Jews and forcing them into the van. It was then closed tight and the engine was started. Later I learned that the people inside had been gassed to death by exhaust fumes directed into the van.

One day, my grandfather went to see a friend and he never returned home. I ran to look for him and spotted a large gathering of people. The Germans were holding a group of old Jews, and my grandfather was among them. They ordered the Jews to march from our suburb to the center of the city, a distance of about three miles. I followed all the way as if hypnotized. The Germans prodded the Jews to march briskly, although it was difficult for the old people to walk fast. The Christian population stood on the sidewalks, watching the procession with a mixture of excitement and fascination.

I could not take my eyes off the group. I thought that this was how it must have looked when Jesus walked to his crucifixion. My grandfather couldn't walk anymore and was placed on a horse-drawn wagon with other old Jews who were too weak to walk. The group arrived at the gate of a school building, where they were imprisoned. Several people ran away in the confusion that ensued. But my poor, beloved grandfather was lying semiconscious on the wagon and couldn't move anymore. He died of a heart attack shortly afterwards. Death had been merciful to him and spared him further horrors. All the other arrested Jews were executed.

One night we were suddenly awakened by the sound of heavy boots and banging on the door. The Germans, in full military gear, entered our house and took away my mother. I was crying aloud, not knowing what to do. Leo was on his knees, begging them to let her go, but to no avail. In the morning, I ran to the city to look for her. I was stopped several times by the Germans and warned not to go any further. I had to return home.

Uncle Ed saw that all three of us brothers were desperate. He came over

to our room and kept repeating, "I am sure she'll come back. You'll see."

The next day our mother did come back. She had seen the executions being carried out before her in the Janowska Road death camp and had told a German officer that her three sons were working for the defense industry. He had let her go. She told us what had happened in the camp. First, people were ordered to surrender all their money and jewelry. Then they had to undress completely and were killed with machine guns. She would not tell us what else she had seen, but we knew it had been terrible. The pogrom continued throughout all of August 1942.

I remember walking down the streets of the ghetto in those days. I could do so because I had an "Ausweiss" (identity papers) stating that I was working for the German defense industry. Groups of Jewish men, women and children would stand or sit at collection points in empty lots and on street corners, moaning and crying. Each group was watched by a soldier with a machine gun. The Jews were being rounded up to be transported to an unknown destination. I thought that this was how it must have looked during the Inquisition in Spain or during the Jews' enslavement by Egypt. We later found out that those people had been sent to the Belzec death camp and killed.

One day I was walking along a street in the ghetto when I suddenly saw a group of Jewish policemen coming towards me. In the middle of the group walked a German official in uniform holding a whip in his hand. I guessed that he was an important person of high military rank. The German motioned to me to come closer. There was a puddle of rainwater between us and I hesitated for a moment as to whether I should go through the water or around it. "Jump, jump!" prompted the Jewish policemen, so I jumped through the water and stood before the German. "Ausweiss!" he barked. I handed it to him. He examined it, his hands shaking and his face visibly distorted with hatred and fury. He returned the document. "Verschwinde!" (disappear), he barked again. As I rushed, I felt a piercing pain in my head. The German had hit me full force with his whip.

The pogrom lasted for almost all of August 1942. At night the moon was bright; dogs howled as if they smelled death in the air. The days were sunny and beautiful. We wished that it would rain and the Germans would stop the pogrom. They wouldn't want to wet their neatly ironed uniforms. But the rain didn't come. Every day and night the Germans combed the Jews' houses, checking their documents and taking away people who didn't have the proper work papers. Older people and children were taken away with no questions asked. Many gentiles collaborated with the Germans in rounding up the Jews.

I saw a group of young Polish hoodlums who had found an old Jew hiding in a basement. The German soldier wouldn't go down there to look for Jews because he didn't want to dirty his uniform. The boys had gone to the basement and had asked the unfortunate man for money; otherwise they would denounce him to the Germans. He gave them all the money he had to buy himself out. Then the youths went and denounced him to the Germans anyway. They had gotten their pound of flesh. Couldn't they have left him alone?

The next day I passed the old cinema where we had gone to see movies before the war. A whole company of German soldiers was stationed in and around the building. One of the Germans called me over: "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" "A Jew," I answered. I couldn't have lied, since I had the Star of David on my arm. The German looked at me for a while, almost with compassion, and said, "Go home and hide somewhere. Tell the others, too. That's all I can tell you." I ran home and warned everyone about an impending pogrom.

My mother and aunt Donna, along with her little daughter Lucy, hid in a cornfield. After a while, some Christian neighbors who had seen Donna's two boys going to their hiding place reported them. The Germans came and took them away. The boys managed to escape; till this day, I don't know what happened to them. My mother could have escaped, too, but she decided to stay with her helpless sister. They both went to their death with little Lucy.

When I found out what had happened, I ran to the place where the Jews were being collected for transport. Thousands of people were surrounded by Germans with police dogs, awaiting their fate. I could not find my mother or my aunt in the huge crowd. I never saw them again. They were all sent to Belzec death camp and killed.

Aunt Donna's husband Ed was taken to the Janowska Road death camp during this pogrom. He was seen working there for a while. He never returned. My father was also taken away, but he returned. He told us that he had seen our mother. She had pushed him away and whispered, "Go home, the boys need you."

Unnoticed by the Germans, he escaped. My mother looked back at him and smiled to give him courage, even though she knew that she was on her way to a certain death.

Now we were without a mother. Terrified and hungry, continuously hunted by the Germans and hounded by hostile neighbors, we developed terrible cases of diarrhea and could not retain our food. Our eyes were wild and full of fear. Our fate was inevitable: We were doomed.

15

Winter 1941

The winter arrived in full force. It seemed that nature was also merciless. We saved as many of our food supplies as we could. Every day my mother would rack her brain trying to think of what she could make for dinner. I call it dinner, but a plate of soup would have been a feast. Anna, Teresa and I would run around town, trying to find something in the food stores. We stood on lines for hours. Often, after standing on line for a long time, we would be told that there was no more food and we would have to go home with nothing.

I don't know how we survived that winter. We were all a lot thinner when spring came. Nor did spring bring any relief. It was the worst of my life. There was no more food in the stores and none by exchange. There was simply nothing.

Koppel still visited every few days and tried to bring whatever he could spare from the food he'd managed to get.

Zenek also tried to help. He lived with his parents, so he could take a little food from his house, hoping it wouldn't be missed by them. They didn't know that he was in love with a Jewish girl and wanted to help her family through this period of hunger. Thus, he would bring flour or barley or sugar—whatever he could take from his parents' supplies without being noticed.

With all this, food was still very scarce. However, others were much worse off than we. When I walked in the street, there were people all around who were swollen from hunger, wearing ragged clothes and begging for food. There were thousands of them. Those people had even less than we had and were dying of hunger.

My father's brother Schmil had a wife and four children. He had always been poor before the war. He had accepted odd jobs and tried to feed his family on the little that he made. The children were poorly dressed and my mother tried to help them as much as she could. Now, matters were even worse. Schmil's children would come running to us and we fed them with whatever we had. But we didn't have much ourselves and therefore couldn't send anything home with them. They lived quite far away and our contact with them was infrequent. One day,

the oldest boy came running to us; he said that his family was suffering from hunger and begged us to help them. My parents scraped up some bread and flour and my father went to his brother. When he returned, we saw that he was crying. He and my mother went into another room and spoke in agitated voices. Later on, I found out that my father had found his family sick with typhoid fever and starving from hunger. His frustration was terrible but there was no way to help them. We were trapped in a situation that had no way out.

My uncle and his wife died shortly afterwards and we lost track of the children. We learned later that they had been taken away to concentration camps.

The situation got worse when typhoid fever broke out among the Jews. Now, nobody wanted to have anything to do with the unfortunate ones for fear of contracting the disease. The sickness was spread by lice. Hunger, poor housing conditions and great poverty resulted in an indifference to personal hygiene. Lice would thrive under such circumstances and we became paranoid about lice.

Sick and starving people lay in the streets. It became so commonplace that no one noticed them anymore. They just lay there till they died; then their bodies were removed by a special commando from the Jewish committee.

Everyone was hungry. Many died of starvation that spring of 1942. It was the worst spring of my life.

There was no food in our house either, no food at all. My mother had been rather plump, but that spring she was wearing my clothes, having exchanged all of hers for food.

I used to go to the field to gather a certain grass my mother would cook to make soup. She mixed a little flour with water and added it to the grass. She, herself, didn't eat even that. She gave it to my father and me when dinnertime came, assuring us that she had already eaten. I watched her grow thinner by the day. Sometimes, Zenek would bring us a loaf of bread or potatoes—whatever he could steal from his house—but it was not enough. We were starving.

We were saved by an order from the Germans to give food rations to the Jews. The Germans gave the food to the Jewish committee, which distributed it to the people. We began to receive rations for each person every week. For example, the 11 people in our apartment got two pounds of bread and maybe another half a pound per week. We also got a little flour, some sugar and some grains. Altogether, it was not very much, but it was enough to keep us from starving.

Our confidence in the future was shattering quickly. We were oppressed to the point of complete helplessness. We knew that our lives weren't worth a thing. If someone killed a Jew, he would not be prosecuted. We felt like animals in hunting season.

There was, however, one bright light that reminded us that all was not bad with the world. One German in Boryslaw held a high position in the Oil Company Trust. His name was Mr. Beitz. He would travel through Boryslaw in a carriage; I saw him many times. Mr. Beitz was impeccably dressed and wore a black hat; he was very good-looking. He must have been about 30 years old.

Some Jewish people worked for him. Their job was considered important and they were protected by wearing a circle with an "R" on it (for Ruestung, or Armament) on the front of their clothing. This protection was life-saving. Mr. Beitz gave some people permission to wear his "R" even though they didn't work for him; he did it just to help them.

Later on, Mr. Beitz did other things to help the Jews. When a group of people was rounded up to be sent to the concentration camp, Mr. Beitz would go to the railroad station with a list and would call out people by name. They would then be released. I knew about this because my father was saved in this way. Unfortunately, there was just so much Mr. Beitz could do.

In my heart and the hearts of the people I knew, he would always remain a shining light in the darkness of oppression—a man with a heart and human feelings.

Life went on. People went about their business. Young people fell in love; some were getting married. Children were born and old people died. The summer of 1942 brought the biggest disaster of all: August 1942.

❧ 16 ❧

The Third Pogrom, August 1942

There was a stillness in the air like the quiet before a storm.

The summer was very hot. August arrived. More and more people were dying of hunger. The war continued and showed no signs of ending. In fact it, looked as if it would go on forever. The Germans were on the move; the English and Americans hadn't acted yet.

It looked pretty hopeless for the Jews. Persecution became routine and there was no place to run to. On the seventh of August, Koppel brought us terrible news: A pogrom was planned for any day now. He told us not to waste any time and to go into hiding.

I knew that I could go to Basia Tabaczynska. Anna had a hiding place for herself and her family. Teresa knew someone who wanted to take her and the baby in. My father would go to his place of work and stay there. Only my mother and Teresa's mother and brother were left without a designated hiding place.

We lived across from the German police (Reiterzug) and some of them were friendly to us. We asked them for help and they agreed to hide my mother as well as Teresa's mother and Mike.

There was no time to waste. I wanted to see my mother safe before I left, but she had to wait till evening to go to the place where the Germans lived. I was uncomfortable about going away and leaving her, but I was reassured that she would go into hiding as soon as it got dark. It was the safest place; after all, who would dare search the German police?

I said good-bye to my mother and father. My mother stood on the steps of our house, waving to me and smiling reassuringly. Everyone urged me to leave and, hesitantly, I did. When I turned back, my mother was still standing on the stairs watching me go.

I couldn't take my mother with me. The T. family could only accommodate so many people and they were all arranged for. My heart beat fast. I was scared to leave my mother, and yet I was scared to stay. I told myself that she would be safer than any of us. I wanted to believe it.

We came to the T. house. Four people who had come to hide were there already, including me. The mood was somber. Somehow we knew

that this pogrom would be different from the others. There was something unusual in the mood of the town. It was too quiet. And then it began.

We learned very soon that the Germans had organized the Jewish police to escort them from one Jewish home to another. Everyone who didn't have a work card was being taken away. The news came in a steady stream. Members of the T. family would go to town to find out what was going on there and would bring home the latest news. They saw a lot of activity on the streets. Jewish policemen were leading people to gathering places. Germans were escorting Jews in the direction of the railroad station. Everything was done in an orderly way, planned to the last detail.

At night the pogrom would stop, but at dawn it resumed again. The four of us hid in a crawl space in the attic and stayed there all the time, since there was a rumor that the Germans were searching gentile homes for hidden Jews. I was glad my mother was in a safe place; I feared more for my own safety than for hers. I hoped that Anna and Teresa would be safe. There was no way to find out anything about them.

Anna went into her hiding place with Wilus, her son. On the second day of the pogrom, the Germans ordered a pause. Anna, who didn't know what was happening with her husband Bronek, decided to run home. When she came to the house, he was there. He had tried to hide where he worked, but he couldn't and came home. Anna didn't know what to do. Should she go back to her son or stay home with Bronek? The decision was made for her. The pogrom began again and she couldn't return to the hiding place. From inside the house they heard Germans breaking the window in one of our rooms. They also heard German voices saying that the house belonged to them. Later we found out that the Reiterzug was watching our house and wouldn't let anyone enter it. If only we had known that before the pogrom began.

Anna and Bronek hid in the basement until the next day, without any food or water. They were afraid that, at any moment, someone would enter the house and find them.

After three days of waiting in fear, the pogrom ended. I was exhausted. I couldn't wait to go home to my family. We left the T. house and each of us went his own way.

I entered my house. It was very quiet. I looked around and knew immediately that something was wrong. "Where is mom?" I asked. There was no answer. I looked at my father, then at Anna, and back at my father. He was crying. "But how could it be?" I screamed. "She was with the Germans." I broke down. "No," I cried, "not my mom, Oh please God not my mom" I begged. My father held me tight; his body shook all over.

He was sobbing helplessly. I wanted it to be a dream. I pinched myself, hoping to wake up. But it was no dream. My wonderful mother was gone. She had become the first victim in our family. Teresa's mother and brother had been taken together with her.

Later I was told that the Germans couldn't take my mom and, at the last moment before the pogrom started, she had gone into hiding in a neighbor's house. On the third day of the pogrom, almost at the end, another neighbor pointed out the hiding place to the Germans, who took away everyone who was there—about eight people, including my mother. It is hard to talk about this episode. I suffered greatly over the loss of my mother and it took me a long time to come to terms with what happened. My mother was my idol; to this day I lead my life by her standards.

Six thousand people were sent to the death camps in the August 1942 pogrom. This was more than one-third of the entire Jewish population of Boryslaw before the war. Some families ceased to exist. There wasn't a family left that hadn't been touched by the loss of some of its members. The Jewish police that had been used to help the Germans round up the Jews was also disposed of by being shot in Boryslaw or by being taken to the death camps.

The Jews were in mourning. We weren't allowed the luxury of mourning our loved ones. We had to eat, which meant that we had to stand on bread lines if we wanted to survive. Ironically, we wanted to survive very much. Whoever was left tried desperately to survive. The will to live had grown even stronger than before.

The summer ended. Fall came, and with it a new disaster. The Germans decided that it was time to form a Jewish ghetto where Jews would be assembled in a group that was easy to surround when necessary.

❧ 17 ❧

The Ghetto

We moved to the ghetto in the middle of October 1942. It was formed in three parts of the poorest sections of town. We were assigned to Potok. The ghetto was surrounded by gates, and a river separated it from the rest of town. Its apartments and houses were very small and shabby. People were squeezed into tiny spaces. There were nine people in our apartment in one room and a kitchen. There were no spaces between the beds. We had a table, some chairs and one couch.

Food was very hard to get. Rations were very small and one had to leave the ghetto to get them. We were hungry most of the time.

Each morning, the young people were escorted to work in town, and they returned in the evening. Old people, most women and all the children stayed behind.

What I recall most vividly from that time is the feeling of constant fear. No one knew what the next minute would bring. At times our doors would suddenly be flung open and Germans would walk into our homes brandishing guns and clubs. They would look around, kick the chairs over, shout a lot and walk out. We didn't know why they had come in the first place. Now I realize that their purpose was simply to terrorize us. It was like a game. Sometimes one of them would shoot an old or sick person at random. Jewish life was not worth very much to them.

I had been in the ghetto for about two weeks when we were alerted about an impending raid or pogrom. My family had prepared for such an eventuality: We had made arrangements with gentile families who were willing to hide us until the pogrom was over. We paid them whatever we could for their help.

As soon as we found out about the coming pogrom, we went to our respective hiding places. Anna, Bronek and Wilus went to one home; Teresa and baby Romus went to another; and I went to my friend Basia's house. There I met Koppel, his sister-in-law Emma and her sister Mania. Koppel arranged a hiding place for all of us.

Koppel was active in helping others during the German occupation.

He had some money and used it to save people. At the end of the war there were seven people who had survived because of him, including me.

Anna's family stayed with Mr. Turow. The three of them stayed in a barn filled with hay. Mr. Turow brought them a few cooked potatoes and some apples. In exchange, Anna gave him two of Bronek's suits.

My father was taken to the gathering place for people who were destined to be shot. He wore an "R" in the lapel of his suit. This was a sign that he worked for the Ruestung, or the army. Mr. Beitz, who was in charge of that part of the army came to look for people who worked for him and called out their names. My father was on the list and, thanks to Mr. Beitz, was saved from death.

At Mr. Tabaczynski's house, we waited for the evening, as it was unsafe to be out during the day. Someone might see us and denounce us. So, when darkness fell, we started out. It was a long and tedious walk. Mr. Rucinski's house was several kilometers away and Emma had difficulty walking because of a bad heart. It took us hours to get to the house and we arrived during the night. The Rucinski family consisted of a couple and their daughter Cesia. They were expecting us. Koppel had sent a message to inform them that we were coming. Mr. Rucinski had built a second wall in his house for emergency hiding.

The pogrom lasted four days. For the first two days we stayed in the room. On the third day, Cesia brought us the news that the Germans were all around, searching for Jews. We entered the emergency hiding place and stayed there all day. We had just enough space to stand upright, one next to the other, squashed like sardines. At night we went out to use the facilities—in this case, a pail. Afterwards, Mr. Rucinski would empty it out. At dawn, we would return to the hiding place. When the Germans came to the house, Cesia was outside, pretending to clean shoes. Seeing a young, pretty girl, they approached her and started to joke. When they asked if she was hiding Jews, she said, "Please come in. You are welcome to search for yourselves." They fell for her bluff. That day the pogrom ended and in the evening we left Mr. Rucinski's house, grateful for their help. Later on, Cesia gave me her birth certificate to use if necessary. I never did use it but I will always be grateful to her for her generous compassion.

Now we were back at the ghetto. Guards had been placed at the gates and no one could leave without a permit. I had been back for two weeks

when, one morning, a young man riding a bike sped through the ghetto shouting, "There's going to be a raid! There's going to be a raid!" I think he worked for the German police and had somehow found out what was going to happen that day. He was trying to warn as many people as possible. We panicked. My father shouted that we should get out before the Germans surrounded us. It was 8 o'clock in the morning. Anna grabbed Wilus and left. I was still in my nightgown, but there was no time to dress. I slipped my coat over my nightgown, put on my shoes and ran. I couldn't go through the gates where the guards were. The only way out was to run down the hill that led to the river.

Sometimes, when the heavy rains came, the river would swell to an enormous size and become very deep and dangerous. The water supplying this river came down from the mountains. When the river flooded, the water would uproot small houses and barns. One could actually see the barns with animals inside speeding downstream. It was scary to watch. On this November morning, the river was shallow, peaceful and tame. So I ran down the hill and into the river. I saw Anna and Wilus running to the left. They were going to hide in a gentile home. Not everyone was lucky enough to have a place to run to. Most people had no place to go and were forced to stay in the ghetto. I ran towards the house of my friend, Basia Tabaczynska, and her family.

As I crossed the river, a woman stopped me and whispered, "They are catching your people, don't go this way." She must have seen the fear in my eyes and realized who I was. I stopped. What would I do if I couldn't go to Tabaczynski's house? I knew I couldn't continue. It would take me about 15 minutes to get there, even if I ran very fast. I would have to walk through a busy street of the town, where the Germans were in full swing. I looked around. There was a small side street nearby. I turned into it and on my right I saw a house and an outhouse. I rushed into the outhouse. Perhaps 10 minutes passed. I was still catching my breath when I heard a knock on the door. A voice asked, "How long will you be in there? Who's that?" What could I do? I opened the door.

A man stood outside. He looked at me, puzzled. "Who are you?" he asked. I didn't answer; there were tears in my eyes. "My God," he said, "you are a Jew." For a moment he just stood there; then he said, "You can't stay here, the outhouse is in constant use." He showed me a little shed in the back of the house and said, "Go in there."

I ran to the shed, Its door was open and I closed it loosely behind me. There was no lock. The shed was filled with wire shavings, which made

a lot of noise when I stepped on them. However, there was no spot free of the shavings, so I had to stand on them. The area I was in was small, maybe 8 ft x 6 ft. The walls were made of wood, with large spaces between the planks. They were large enough for me to see what was going on outside. What I saw stopped the blood in my veins. Jewish women and children were being chased by the militia, who were beating them with clubs to make them run faster. Some of them were bleeding. There was screaming all around. I was so close to the street that I got frightened that someone would see me between the planks, and I tried to step back. The wire shavings made so much noise that I could not move at all. I stood in the shed till 6 o'clock in the evening. I couldn't change my position; my whole body felt numb. I had to go to the bathroom and was forced to go where I stood. I was petrified, hungry and thirsty.

It was getting dark. I waited a while longer and then carefully moved towards the door of the shed. I looked out. No one was outside, so I walked out. I felt weak, my legs were caving in from standing so long in the same position, and I was freezing cold. I knew that I had to pull myself together before I walked into the street. Thank God, it was dimly lit. People were quickly walking everywhere; no one looked at me. I thought that it would be best if I went through a small street near a movie theater that led into a road that would take me to Mr. Tabaczynski. Little did I know that the Germans had decided to use this movie theater as a gathering place for the Jews they had caught that day. Turning into that street was like walking into a lion's den. But once I entered that street, there was no going back without attracting attention. I had to continue. So, looking like a ghost after a whole day of standing in the shed, my eyes wild with fear and my hair disheveled, I went straight towards the movie theater. I had to walk past its doors in order to get to the new road that would lead me out from this hell.

Hundreds of people were standing around to see what would happen to the Jews. The Germans and the Ukrainian militia were all over the place. I moved slowly, stifling my impulse to run. Finally, I reached the point that connected to the new road. I was safe. Once on the new road I started to run. It was very dark. There were no lights at all. I stumbled a few times and, fell to the ground, but I got up and ran as fast as I could.

Suddenly I saw a man coming from the opposite side. He was clearly drunk. He grabbed me and held me tight. "Hey," he blurted out, "let's have fun, eh?" I fought him with all my might. He was stronger than I

but, being drunk, he swayed. As he did, I moved out of his reach and started to run. He cursed loudly and went on his way.

I ran all the way to the Tabaczynski's house. I was exhausted, but I couldn't stop. Finally, I saw it. With my last strength I rang the bell. Mrs. Tabaczynski opened the door. "Irene!" she cried. I fainted.

When I came to, I was inside the house, lying on a couch. The family was gathered around me. I told them what had happened and they listened compassionately. They told me I would stay with them for a few days, then they would try to find a permanent hiding place. It was too dangerous to return to the ghetto.

I stayed with the family for five days. On the fifth day a man came to the house. His name was Mr. Pushman. He worked at the electric power plant where Mr. T. was the chief engineer. Mr. T. had spoken to him about me and he had agreed to take me in and keep me in his home until the war had ended.

I bid a tearful good-bye to the family that had done so much for me. Then I left with Mr. Pushman to begin a new chapter in my life.

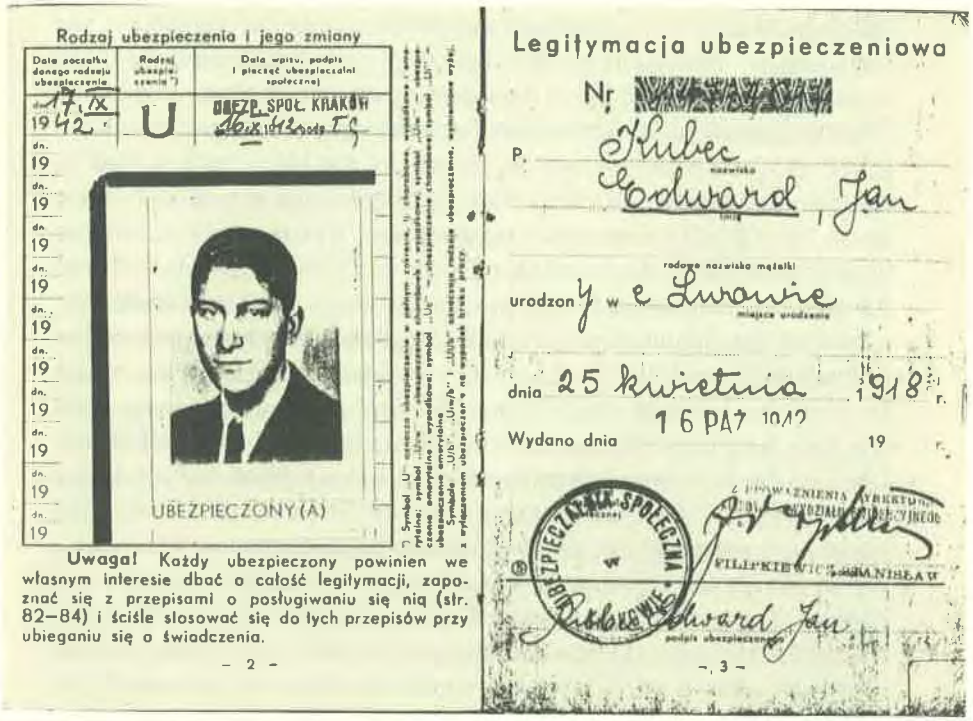
❧ 18 ❧

On Christian Papers

I was awakened at 6 o'clock in the morning by a knocking on the window. A boy shouted, "Carl, someone wants to see you!" I dressed quickly and left the house. A Polish fellow named Kapitan was standing there. I knew him well. When I had been a little boy, my mother used to tell me, "Carl, when you see Kapitan walking towards you, go to the other side of the street. He hates Jews."

Kapitan was working in the glass factory. During the German occupation I had worked in the same place and I had loved to stand near him in my free time and watch the beautiful objects he shaped from the hot glass.

One day Kapitan called me over and said, "Why don't you run away?



You don't look like a Jew. You'll be killed here by the Germans if you don't do something."

"I can't run away. I don't have a Christian birth certificate," I answered.

And now Kapitan was standing on the street corner waiting for me.

"Here is a Christian birth certificate with a Polish name, Edward Kubec, and a birth date that will make you five years older, so that the Germans won't draft you to the 'Baudienst' (work battalions). Take it," he said, "run away and save your life."

Aunt Eva, who was living in Zakopane as a gentile, heard about the horrible things happening in her home town, Lvov. She boarded a train and went to Lvov at terrible risk to her life. Someone on the street could have recognized her as a Jewess and denounced her to the Germans. That would have meant certain death. She saw her sister Susann, who was hiding in the big ghetto, and learned the horrible truth. Almost her entire family had been killed, including her father, two sisters and a niece. She also met clandestinely with Leo and gave him forged traveling papers for the three of us and our father.

On September 1, 1942, Leo and I left the ghetto. In our pockets were Polish birth certificates that had been given to us by our neighbors. We aimed for the Main Railroad Station through little frequented side roads across the Kaiserwald Hills. Fortunately, no one noticed us and the Ukrainian guards at the ghetto gate let us through, thinking that we were going to work. Once we got to the top of the hill, I took a look at Zniesienie, lying below in the valley. I had a feeling I would never see it again. The Old Zniesienie was lying at our feet, with the early sun casting long shadows from the hundreds of trees. At its further point, on top of the hill, was our house; further out was a string of railroad tracks that separated the old and new sectors of Zniesienie. A bridge spanned the railroad tracks and the checkpoint. On the other side of the tracks was a large accumulation of small houses that formed New Zniesienie. This was now the ghetto. We had left the ghetto to live as Christians. Leo and I headed for Zakopane, where my aunt Eva lived. Mark and my father went to Warsaw. With our mother gone, there was no reason to stay. She could have gone with us. She had had the appearance and diction of a Polish gentile and could easily have lived among the Christians as one of them. Some of them had even offered to hide her. But they could not accommodate my aunt Donna because she had three small children who could easily be recognized. Thus my mother had chosen to go to her death along with her helpless sister.

We boarded the train and went to Zakopane. Aunt Eva was waiting for us at the railway station. She lived with two little children as the widow of a Polish officer. No one knew of her Jewish past since she had come to Zakopane as a Christian before the war. We stayed with her for a few days and then went to Cracow, equipped with forged documents aunt Eva had stolen from the German Forestry office where she worked.

Shortly afterwards, Herta arrived. She aroused the suspicion of the Gestapo almost immediately and was called for an interrogation the following day. The night before she went, she had a dream. She stood before a large lake full of dirty water that she had to cross, but didn't know how. Our grandfather appeared and took her by her arm, saying, "Come my child, I'll take you across." He led her safely to the other side. When she awoke, she felt reassured, believing that a divine being was watching over her. She went to the Gestapo headquarters accompanied by aunt Eva. After four hours of intensive interrogation, she walked out free. She had never admitted to being a Jewess.

Eva also brought her sister Susann, Herta's mother, and Susann's son Oswald (Herta's brother) out of the ghetto. Aunt Susann and Oswald went to Cracow and lived with a Polish family. Oswald spoke Polish with a heavy German accent and immediately aroused suspicions among the neighbors that he was a Jew. In actuality, his accent was due to the fact that he had been born and raised in Vienna. But Polish hoodlums were on the lookout for people who spoke with just the slightest accent. This meant that they were Jewish. A janitor for whom Oswald was working denounced him to the German police. Oswald was arrested and beaten mercilessly. What infuriated the Germans most was that he was an Austrian who had run away to Poland. They conveniently forgot that he had been expelled from Austria by the Nazis after the Anschluss for being the son of a Polish Jewess. Oswald was beaten and tortured. Aunt Susann was arrested on the same day and both of them were executed.

Herta was working in the Post Office; that day, the German postmaster ordered her not to leave the office for lunch. He had apparently, gotten a telephone call from the Gestapo telling him to hold her until they could arrest her. Sensing something wrong, she asked for permission to go to the bathroom. Permission was given and she walked out of the office. But instead of going to the bathroom, she left of the building without her overcoat, even though it was winter and bitter cold. She escaped arrest. Now she was an orphan, alone in the world. In one day Herta had lost her mother and brother. She was 18 years old. From then

on she was afraid to walk on the street or work and spent the rest of the war in Eva's apartment in Cracow.

One day, while on Christian papers, I was standing in a hallway during a storm when two gentiles walked in. They looked at me and one of them said, "He looks like a Jew." I looked straight in his eyes and smiled, pretending not to be concerned though my heart was pounding wildly. I didn't move and waited until they left. Such an accusation could be deadly dangerous. Mark had once been stopped in Warsaw by gentiles who said to him, "You are a Jew!" He had looked straight at them and said calmly, "No, I'm not." "Then let's see," they said. They pulled him into a hallway, pulled down his pants and found that he was circumcised. Only Jews were circumcised in Poland. They took away his clothes and shoes and left him half-naked on a cold autumn day. He was fortunate that they didn't take him to the Gestapo.

Leo and I took a room with a Polish family and found jobs for ourselves. I worked as a clerk in a German transportation company called Schenker. I was using my assumed Polish name of Edward Kubec and no one knew that I was Jewish. My terrified expression slowly disappeared and my hunger abated as I began to eat better, joining the rest of the non-Jewish population.

Leo was working as a carpenter for a company building a bridge over the river. In a short while he got such severe rheumatism that he couldn't walk. He stopped one day in the middle of the street, unable to move, and it took him a while for the pain to subside so that he could walk again. We were petrified: Any unusual behavior, like standing in the middle of the street, could attract attention; this was the last thing we wanted. He had to stop doing this kind of work.

I went to my boss and asked if he had any job openings at Schenker. He told me they were hiring people to accompany convoys of goods being transported by trains to Germany. Leo applied for the job and was hired. His work permitted him to travel to Germany, where he eventually met his future wife Hilda. He was now traveling constantly, escorting trains to Germany. The Germans were plundering Polish industry and agriculture; they were shipping back everything that was not nailed down.

Meanwhile I continued to live and work as a gentile in Cracow. Every Sunday morning, my landlady used to wake me, saying, "Time for church, Eddie!" I went obediently. I sat in a pew and listened to the mass. A hidden choir of nuns sang beautifully. They were not allowed to see the parishioners and vice versa. Then, the priest would deliver a sermon. He would preach about the usual things: marital infidelity, dishonesty,

cheating and the like. I used to think to myself, Doesn't he know that people are dying, being robbed and denounced to the Germans, maybe even by some of his parishioners? Couldn't he say that robbing and denouncing innocent people to murderers is a mortal sin? He didn't have to mention the Jews by name. That could cause his arrest by the Germans. But to condemn the killing of others would have been enough and the parishioners would know what he had in mind. Yet he never did.

When Easter came, my landlady said, "You must go to confession, Eddie!" Confession was a part of the holiday. I knew the Polish Christian customs, holidays and prayers quite well, even better then some of the Christians did. I had grown up amongst them, played with them and even gone to church before the war. I especially liked the funerals. They were so elaborate and ornate, with their procedures and prayers, not like Jewish funerals, which were simple, sad and unadorned.

I had never gone to confession in my life and I didn't know how to act. What would happen if I told the priest that I was Jewish? Wouldn't he report me to the German police? After a prolonged walk around the block, I returned home. "Have you gone to confession yet?" asked my landlady.

"Yes, I have," I answered briefly, hoping she wouldn't ask for any details. She didn't. I later learned that the privacy of confession was sacred and strictly observed; the priest would never have denounced me to the Germans.

There was a married couple working at Schenker's. The husband, a handsome, middle aged man, was said to have been a judge before the war. His wife was a delicate young woman. I didn't get a chance to know them. They avoided me, but I had a feeling that they were Jewish, posing as Christians to save their lives. Jews sensed other Jews on Christian papers. But we had an unwritten understanding not to get involved with strangers so as not to arouse suspicion nor get too close in case of an arrest. One day that man died. A funeral was arranged. We walked behind the horse-drawn hearse from the church to the cemetery, as was the custom. His wife walked next to me. What an irony, I thought: a Jew being buried as a Christian in a Christian cemetery. I wondered what his wife must have thought.

I never had any proof that those people had been Jewish. Maybe they weren't. Maybe the whole story was just a figment of my imagination. I know that the woman survived the war, though I never saw her after.

Occasionally I would go to the theater in Cracow. It was a good theater that showed first-rate operettas, such as "Die Fledermaus" by

Strauss. Once, as I was approaching the entrance, I saw a German soldier with a machine gun standing there. It was too late to turn around, as he had already seen me. I decided to proceed and passed the soldier. I got a ticket on the third balcony and sat down. Presently, a man walked onto the stage, turned towards the audience and said: "Mr. General Governor, ladies and gentlemen! We shall now sing the national anthem." I looked in the direction he was addressing. Right in front of me, down on the second balcony, sat a man in uniform who was surrounded by more Germans in uniform. He was short and fat. I recognized him immediately. He was the Governor General Hans Frank, the head of the Polish province occupied by the Germans and renamed the "General Government." He was known among the Poles as the "Butcher of Poland."

The audience stood up and raised their right arms in the Nazi salute. I just stood there. Fortunately, no one noticed me. When they had finished singing and sat down, I walked down from my seat and quickly left the theater. I never went there again.

In the Schenker company, there was a fellow who liked to draw pictures of people. I became friendly with him. He decided to draw a picture of my face. The office workers stood around in a circle during lunchtime, watching as he worked. When he finished, one of the workers exclaimed, "He looks like a Jew!" They all laughed. Fortunately, it was in jest and the incident ended right there.

Generally, I found the people of Cracow to be much kinder to the Jews who were hiding there than the people of my hometown, Lvov. For example, a young woman from the Lvov area came to visit with her brother, who was sharing a room with me. She took one look at me and said, "He is a Jew!" She started telling everybody. Her brother, who liked me very much, finally said to her, "If you say that once more,I'll kill you myself!" This was not an empty threat. Her brother was a former sergeant in the Polish army and rumor had it that he belonged to the Polish underground and carried a gun. She never mentioned anything about my being Jewish again.

In Cracow, on the other hand, the daughter of my landlady worked for the Gestapo, but she never denounced me. I am sure that she must have heard rumors about my being Jewish. In Lvov, hoodlums had stood at the Main Railroad Station and accused every traveler of being a Jew.

In the capital city of Warsaw, the Jews faced another type of persecutor, blackmailers. They were popularly called "Shmaltzovniki" because they took bribes from Jews who were hiding out as Christians for not denouncing them to the Gestapo. A client from Warsaw came to

Schenker one day. He wore high riding boots and britches. He took one look at me and started a friendly conversation. He asked me to go to lunch with him. Afterwards we went for a walk in the park. He said that he was hiding a terrible secret and that, if I had a secret too, I should tell him and feel much relieved. I sensed something wrong and I told him nothing.

Later, my aunt Eva explained that in Warsaw there were blackmailers hunting for Jews and that he was probably one of them. Fortunately, I never saw the man again.

I remember what a beautiful city Lvov was. We had been so proud of it before the war. It was famous for its radio programs, which presented excellent satires of the living conditions and politics before the war. The Lvovian accent was imitated everywhere. Anyone who could say, "I am from Lvov" was looked upon with admiration and envy. How much did Lvov's population change and how low did they stoop during the war? Out of a Jewish population of 150,000 before the war, only about 1,000 survived. And this was in a large measure due to the enthusiastic help given the Germans by the Polish and Ukrainian populations who hunted down and denounced the Jews. There was no city in Poland as bloodthirsty towards the Jews as Lvov. True, Warsaw had its blackmailers and some Jews were denounced in Cracow. But those individuals were looked upon with scorn even by the rest of the Christian population. In Lvov, on the other hand, everyone was against the Jews, robbing them, killing and denouncing them to the Germans for no reason or profit. They did it just for fun, out of meanness and envy.

But envy of what? The Jews of Lvov were poor. Ninety-nine percent of them could hardly make a living. Their gentile neighbors were much better off socially and financially.

The Cracow gentile population was the most benign by comparison. I am sure that some of my office co-workers and neighbors must have thought at times that I was Jewish. But no one of them ever reported me to the German authorities and that, in large measure, helped me survive the war. However, for the deaths of my mother, my aunt Donna and her family and many, many others I must blame not only the Germans, but also the non-Jewish population of Lvov.

For instance, one day I was riding a streetcar when a man approached me and said, "I know you, you are Jewish." I recognized him instantly. He was the neighbor who had come to our house and asked my parents to give him our possessions for safekeeping; we had given him our grandfather's clock and sewing machine.

I answered calmly, "No, I am not Jewish and I don't know you."

"Yes," he said, "I know you. Your name is Carl Horowitz and you are from Lvov. I was your neighbor. I knew your parents too."

I did not answer.

The man said, "Let's go to the Gestapo!" He grabbed my hand firmly and, when the car stopped, he pulled me out and we started to walk. Seeing that he was serious I pulled out my hand and started to run.

"A Jew, catch him, catch the Jew!" he hollered, running after me, trying to catch me. A group of teenage boys joined him in the pursuit. "A Jew, catch the Jew!" they all hollered. It was winter and I wore a heavy overcoat, which prevented me from running fast. I ran into the nearest hallway of a large apartment house and then down into the basement. A woman was sitting there peeling potatoes. She looked at me. A minute later I heard voices in the hallway. It was my neighbor from Lvov. He was now leading the chase. He shouted excitedly, "You go upstairs, you look in the basement, Hey, is anybody down there?"

The woman answered calmly, "Yes, there is a man." Seeing that my hiding place was betrayed, I ran up to the back yard, climbed up a garbage container and from there a fence separating the back yard from the next house. I jumped to the other side and walked calmly through the hallway of the next house unnoticed, and from there to the street. My whole body was shaking, but I controlled my emotions and walked away slowly, losing my pursuers. It took me several days to calm down afterwards.

19

The Pushmans

It was a long walk to Mr. Pushman's house. He lived in Truskawiec, about 8 to 9 kilometers from where we had started out. We arrived late in the evening. He opened the door and I entered a house I was not to leave for the next 15 months. I met the family. There was Mrs. Pushman, a woman with a kind and smiling face. She was not pretty, but her eyes were warm. The oldest son, Zbyszek, looked at me curiously; he was a nice-looking young man, about 19 years old. The older daughter, Irene, was a pretty blonde girl with an open face. She had long braids and was about my height, and I took a liking to her immediately. The younger daughter, Hala, was 12 years old. She was holding a year-old baby in her arms—her little brother. Hala had dark hair and dark eyes. She was rather slight for her age but she held her brother firmly.

Mrs. Pushman took me to the back room and showed me where I would sleep. I was to share a bed with her daughter Irene. I was exhausted and I went to bed very soon after my arrival. My life in the back room of the Pushman house had begun.

The next morning, after I had gotten up and dressed, Mrs. P. came into the room with a slice of bread and a deep dish filled with honey. "This will be your breakfast every morning," she said. I looked at the dish and said: "I've never eaten so much honey at once." "You will now," she answered. "It is very healthy and will keep you strong." She told me that they had 16 beehives in the garden and that Mr. P. took care of them. Later, I had many opportunities to watch him through the window, caring for the bees with real affection. He would put a mask on his face when it was time to work with the beehives. There were thousands of bees in the hives and when he opened them they would come out in swarms. They could really bite. Mr. Pushman's hands were bitten all the time. He would say that this was good for arthritis. But no matter how much his wife begged him to put on gloves, he didn't want to. I think that being bitten up by the bees gave him a feeling of kinship with them. He loved them and he loved working with them. All I had to do was ask him one question and he would sit down and talk about the lives of the bees, about their habits and about how clean and beautiful they were. I listened

attentively. I was amazed—I had never thought about bees before. They had just been a nuisance and one had to be careful not to be bitten. Their bite was painful, but Mr. Pushman was not afraid. He claimed they didn't hurt him. I suppose he loved them so much that he didn't feel the pain their bites inflicted. Those bees produced so much honey that the whole family was richly supplied with this wonderful nectar.

I ate a plate of honey every morning for the next 15 months and I firmly believe that this helped me survive later on during the times when I had no food at all.

The Pushmans were very kind. They all tried to take care of me. I stayed in the back room all the time. Very seldom, when the doors were locked for the night and the windows covered, I ventured into the kitchen or the front room.

Mrs. Pushman used to go food hunting every morning. She would go to Drohobycz, the next town, to the market for food for the family. It wasn't an easy task, but she was very good at it and never came back empty-handed. The food consisted mostly of soup, potatoes or dumplings, some vegetables and sometimes a piece of meat. Her dumplings were the best I ever ate. On rare occasions, when she was able to get some butter, she would give it to me first, claiming that I needed it more than anyone else because I didn't get any sunlight. Imagine! With four children in the house, she gave the butter to me. What a great heart she had. She was a simple woman, but she was good and compassionate. I was never hungry there.

The younger daughter, Hala, took care of me most of the time. With her mother out and her older sister working, she looked after the household, the baby and me. Sometimes she even cooked a meal. She was a very mature 12-year-old. We became good friends.

In the evenings, after Mr. P had returned from work and we had eaten dinner, all three children would come to my room to keep me company. I knew that Zbyszek, the oldest, liked me, but he was very shy and a gentleman. The children used to talk for hours. They talked about their experiences and I would tell them mine. After a while, when we knew each other better, I told them about the books I had read or the movies I had seen. When I ran out of ideas, I made up stories. I would think out a story during the day and tell it to them in the evening. Even now, I can see their intent faces. At those moments I would forget about the war and the Germans. I would venture into a world of imagination and get lost there for a moment before remembering hard reality.

I never went close to the window out of fear that someone might see

me. I looked at the road outside from the inside of the room and longed for the day when I would be able to walk in the street without fear of being recognized as a Jew. I longed for my family—my father, Anna, the children Wilus and Romus, and Teresa. I loved them dearly and I worried about them all the time. I knew that Anna had gone into permanent hiding with Wilus. Teresa was still in the labor camp created after the liquidation of the ghetto in 1943. Romus had been given to a gentile family. Teresa hoped to save him this way since children couldn't survive in the labor camp.

After I had left the ghetto, there were several pogroms in which people were taken into the nearby woods and shot. The third pogrom (when 5,000 people were taken away) and the pogrom after that reduced the Jewish population to a small fragment of what it had been.

Anna spent some of the time in hiding and some in the ghetto, where Bronek still lived with my father. It was during one of her visits to the ghetto, in May 1943, that its liquidation began. Bronek built a hiding place in the wall of the apartment. He built a second wall with a small opening at the bottom. It was barely large enough to crawl into. That's where Anna and a lot of other people hid at the news of a new pogrom.

The Germans would go from house to house, pulling out people and taking them away. They also came to our apartment. Anna heard them ripping out the floor and hitting the walls. They kicked furniture around and, luckily, kicked a small couch against the opening of the second wall. When night came, Bronek, who had found a small opening in the fence around the ghetto, took Anna there and she escaped through it. Three Polish women saw her and they reported her to the Germans who were watching the ghetto. They started to shoot at her, but she ran away.

The liquidation lasted three days. Whoever could went into permanent hiding, either among gentiles or in the woods. The people in the woods built bunkers where a number of families or friends hid together. The rest of the Jewish population was put into a large building that became a labor camp. My father, Bronek and Teresa went to the labor camp. Teresa found a family who was willing to take Romus in. They had seven other children; he was the eighth.

From time to time Mr. P. brought me letters from my father and Anna. I longed for them but when I read them, my longing became even deeper, and I cried bitterly. These letters were delivered by some kind people to Mr. Tabaczynski, who in turn would give them to Mr. Pushman.

In June, Anna wrote me that she had to change her hideout. Her landlady became scared and told her to leave. She had no choice. She had gone to our father's place of work. When he saw her and Wilus he

almost passed out. What was he going to do with them? There was a little shed nearby, so he took them there. Anna and Wilus stayed there through the night. During the night Anna heard two watchmen speaking. They were saying that they knew someone was in the shed. The next day they expected to find them.

Our father came in the morning and took them to a woman who was part German. After a few days someone denounced her for hiding Jews. They were only saved because the brother of the woman was a Gestapo man and he assured the police that no one was in his sister's apartment. After this incident, however, Anna and Wilus had to leave again.

Governor Frank was supposed to come to Boryslaw that day. The security was very heavy because many people were in the streets wanting to see him.

Anna and Wilus went to the house of someone who'd been recommended by the previous woman. They managed to get there without being recognized. They stayed there for two weeks. Then the brother of the previous woman came to ask for money. He said that if he didn't get it he would take them to the police. Anna and Wilus were outcasts again. My father must have been out of his wits. He found another place and they went there as soon as it got dark.

The new place was in the attic, a tiny room that had become their home for the moment. I couldn't believe what I read. My sister wrote that Bronek had come to be with them. His tuberculosis had started to act up again and he didn't feel well. Anna was worried that Wilus might catch the disease from his father, being so young and undernourished; however, there was no choice. She slept on a small couch together with Bronek and Wilus slept on a wooden shelf attached to the table. She wrote me that Wilus was trying to learn to read by combining the letters of the alphabet.

In one respect Anna was lucky. She could see our father. He would come to visit them once in a while. He had to be extremely careful so that no one saw him enter the house. Once he brought Anna a roll with butter and a cup of coffee. She had mentioned on one of his previous visits that this was what she dreamed of having once more before she died.

My father wanted to come and see me. Unfortunately, Mr. Pushman would not agree to it. The only contact I had with my father was by letter. I tried to convince Mr. Pushman to bring my father once, but to no avail. He felt it would be too dangerous.

Sometimes Mr. Pushman would come in to see me after he had come

home from work and would tell me what was happening in the world, as well as about the status of the war.

As time went on, I read many books. A Jewish doctor had given his whole library to Mr. Pushman, asking him to safekeep it until the end of the war. Thus, my supply of books was plentiful. I also knitted sweaters for the whole family. I got the wool from ripping up old shawls and sweaters. This was how I spent my time, until one day. . . .

Koppel was the only one who knew where I was. He knew Mr. Pushman through Mr. Tabaczynski. Once in a while he would come to see how things were going with me. He was visiting when the following incident occurred: I was in the kitchen with Hala and Mrs. Pushman, who wanted to show me how they made the dumplings I loved so much. The door to the outside was usually locked, but this time somebody must have forgotten. Before we realized what was happening, the door opened and someone walked in. I jumped and ran to the back of the house. Even as I ran, I knew it was too late; whoever had come into the kitchen must have caught a glimpse of me.

It turned out to be George, Mr. Pushman's lifelong friend. He would visit often and stay for hours. I reached the back room and sat down. My legs were shaking. I was pale as a ghost and my heart was pounding so loud that I was afraid they would hear it in the kitchen.

Koppel looked at me and paled. He also realized that I had escaped too late. He remained on the couch. No sound could be made while someone was in the house. We sat there looking at each other without being able to speak. We knew what this unfortunate incident meant.

I tried to collect my thoughts. I would have to leave Pushman's house. How would I manage to do it? I hadn't walked for 15 months and my legs were weak. It was winter and the snow was deep. The other hiding place that Koppel had prepared was 8 miles away. How would I walk so far with the curfew and Germans all around? Someone might recognize me, as so many people knew me. What would happen? I felt fear, like a cold hand, taking hold of my heart, and I started to pray to God with all the intensity of a desperate, lost girl who hopes that by the magic of her prayer she will undo what has already happened.

The front door slammed. George left. I heard the hurried voices of Mrs. Pushman and Hala as they came into the room.

"He didn't say anything," said Mrs. Pushman. "Maybe he didn't see Irene, but with him you never know."

"No, we can't take that chance; we have to leave tomorrow." Koppel

rubbed his forehead hard, as if this would ease the thoughts that were filling his head.

"We have to wait until evening. We can't leave during the day."

How will we go through a whole day? I thought.

On the next day the hours passed very slowly. Every outside sound was like thunder. Dinner was forgotten. Mrs. Pushman and Hala walked from the door to the window and back, afraid that, any moment they would spot the uniform of a policeman. It was a long day.

At around 5 o'clock, it started to get dark. Koppel and I got ready for the long walk. We said our good-byes. Everybody remained calm on the outside, trying to be brave. I stepped out the door. I was to leave first and Koppel would follow shortly after. We arranged to meet a few hundred yards away so that no one would see us leaving the house together.

I was terrified, imagining, that any second, someone would come over and tell me that he knew I was a Jewess. Fortunately, the road was empty. There wasn't a soul around for as far as I could see. In the houses I passed the lights were already coming on. It was growing darker. I slowed down. Koppel was supposed to catch up with me in a few minutes. What if he got caught? A cold sweat was running down my spine. What would I do then? I didn't know my way. I would never make it on my own. I would have to go to the police and give myself up. No, I thought, there was always time for that. I would walk until I found my way out.

I heard steps behind me but was afraid to look back. They came closer and there was Koppel, next to me. Thank God!

❧ 20 ❧

The Walk

I had put my hand through Koppel's arm, which gave me confidence and also made it easier for me to walk. There was no need for words. Each of us was a prisoner of his own thoughts, which were a mixture of fear and confusion. The walking wasn't bad. We followed a path in the snow. From the distance we heard the sound of voices.

"Let's get off the road," Koppel said. "There's only one path." We hid behind a tree and waited. The voices were getting close. A group of skiers, boys and girls my age, passed, calling out and laughing loud. My heart beat fast. Would I ever be able to walk again without fear of being seen?

It grew quiet again and we resumed our walk. As time passed, we entered the forest and the path grew more difficult to walk on. More snow was on the ground and parts of the road were slippery.

I began feeling tired. "Koppel, how far are we from town?"

"Not far. Soon you will see the lights of the city."

Then I slipped and fell. When I got up I was missing a shoe and my leg was wet. We found the shoe and continued on. It was bitter cold now and completely dark. My wet foot started to hurt, but I tried not to think about it.

"Talk to me, please," I said.

"Everything is all right. We'll be at Ed's house soon. He'll give us something warm to eat and we'll spend the night there. Tomorrow we'll go to the other place."

Ed was one of the contacts who had arranged things for Koppel that he, as a Jew, couldn't manage himself. He was well compensated for this. However, Ed wasn't expecting us, as there hadn't been time to let him know that we were coming. Did he have company? He might not even be at home.

"Is it far yet?"

"No, a few more minutes and we'll be there."

The church clock struck. It was 8 o'clock, the curfew hour.

We finally reached Ed's house. Koppel tapped lightly on the door. There was no answer. Then a louder tap but still no answer. We knocked

again and again, and each time we did, we knew it was hopeless. The door would not open.

It was after 8 o'clock. Even gentiles could be shot at this hour if found on the street. What could we do? We were so frantic that we forgot to be quiet. We knocked loudly on the door and called Ed's name over and over. I don't know how long we had been doing this before we realized our danger.

"We're lost," Koppel cried. "We can't stay here." We'll freeze to death or someone will see us. Go to Basia, she doesn't live too far away. Sneak through the back road; you have a better chance going alone. Maybe no one will see you in the dark. Go, run!"

I had never seen Koppel like this. He was frantic.

"And you, what about you?"

"Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. I'll do something."

"I can't do it. I don't care if I die here. I can't go alone. Don't make me. I'm scared to death."

Koppel was silent; then. . . . "OK, we'll take a chance. There's really no choice. We'll go to Max (our second hiding place). I must warn you, though, it is a long way even in the summer." His voice was low and weary. Suddenly he looked much older. "Let's go."

We left Ed's house. I didn't feel the cold anymore. Fear made me numb. I thought that this must be how deer felt when they were surrounded by hunters.

We kept walking as time passed. There was no one in sight. Everyone was settled at home for the night.

It got harder for me to walk. I saw spots before my eyes. We had walked for three hours and I was very tired.

"We are halfway there and are doing fine. We'll be walking in the fields. It will be a little harder from now on."

Fields. I would never make it. I can't go on, I thought. My legs were shaking beneath me. I started to stumble. The snow was up to my knees now and my feet felt as if they were being pricked by a thousand needles.

"How much further, Koppel?"

"Hold on to me, hold on tight just a little more."

I fell and couldn't get up. Koppel helped me to my feet. "Are you sure we're going right?" I asked. "We're surrounded by snow. How do you know we're not going in circles?"

"We're going right. There are towers here someplace. Where the hell are they?" We continued to walk.

"There they are," Koppel sighed with relief. "Everything will be all right!"

The wind was howling and passed right through us. We passed more towers and walking became harder every minute. We stopped; for a minute Koppel thought that he had lost his way. Then we continued. I was breathing hard and Koppel coughed repeatedly. He was having trouble breathing, too. I began to sway. Koppel caught me by the arms but couldn't hold me up. I was lying in the snow now.

"Please," he begged, "I cannot carry you. You must take hold of yourself or we are both dead."

"Leave me, go by yourself. Find the house. I can't make it."

He grabbed my arm and pulled me up, nearly falling himself.

"Let's sit down for a while," I sobbed, "and then we'll go."

Koppel didn't seem to hear me. He kept pulling me along by the hand. It seemed hopeless. There was nothing but snow around us. We walked and walked for what seemed like forever. Suddenly, Koppel cried out with joy. In the distance there was a row of houses with their lights on.

"This is it. Behind those houses is Max's place. We've made it!"

We walked faster now, encouraged by the nearness of our goal. Then Koppel slipped and fell. I tried to help him up, but he was too heavy. Now I was the one begging him to get up.

"We are near. Please try."

His voice was a whisper. "Something is wrong, I can't breathe." And he fainted.

I knelt down next to him and rubbed his wrists and forehead with snow. "God," I prayed, "please help us. We are almost there, don't let us die."

Koppel moved and opened his eyes. I helped him to his feet, but he fell again. It was no use.

"I'll go and get help," I said.

"No, you don't know which house it is."

"I don't care. I have to get help."

"OK," he said, knowing of no better way. "I think the house has a green shade in the kitchen."

I started to run. I wasn't tired anymore. I checked to make sure how to return. I kept falling, but it didn't matter. I had to get help or Koppel would die.

I reached the first house and looked frantically for the green shade

in the kitchen. No, it was blue. The next house? Was this shade green? Yes, I thought so.

I began to knock. there were steps and then a low voice; asking, "Who is there?"

"This is Irene; please open the door. Hurry!"

The door opened and a man said, "Who are you?" Then he looked at me and he knew. "Oh my God, is that you, Irene? Where is Koppel?"

I couldn't make a sound. I pointed to the mass of snow behind me.

There was a commotion in the house and two men ran in the direction in which Koppel lay. I heard them call him; the voices seemed so far away. I fell to the ground.

I came to in a warm kitchen; the first thing I felt was hunger. As I opened my eyes, I saw a smiling face. A voice said, "Koppel, come here. She's all right."

❧ 21 ❧

On Christian Papers, Continued

My father lived in Warsaw on Christian papers. One day he was arrested by the Polish police, who had collaborated with the Germans. They took everything away from him, but let him go free. He wrote an urgent letter asking me to come to Warsaw immediately.

I arrived in Warsaw at the time of the ghetto uprising; as I approached the city, I could see the ghetto burning. Black smoke enveloped the city. Machine gun fire crackled continuously. The entire Jewish population of the ghetto was being annihilated.

There were about 350000 Jews in Warsaw at the outbreak of the German–Polish war in September 1939. The Jews had been singled out immediately for "special treatment." Crowded into a walled-in ghetto and deprived of adequate food and medical supplies, the Jews suffered terribly. The mortality rate from malnutrition and disease was very high; hundreds of people died every day. The Jewish leaders invited the Polish underground courier, Jan Karski, to the Ghetto to see firsthand what the situation was and report it to the Allies. Karski visited the Ghetto in secret and, on his next clandestine mission to England and the United States, reported the hopeless situation of the Jews to the heads of those governments. But he received evasive answers to the pleas for help he conveyed from the desperate Jews. Ziegelboim, the Jewish representative in England, committed suicide as a protest against the Allies' indifference to the Jewish tragedy.

In 1942, the Germans, emboldened by their military successes in the east, began carrying out the total destruction of the Warsaw Jews along the same lines that they had done so in the east. They asked the Judenrat (the Jewish committee) to deliver a daily quota of Jews, presumably for work in the conquered territories in the east. But some Polish railroad workers noticed that certain freight cars with specific numbers painted on them and transporting the Jews were coming back empty after only a few hours. Clearly, these Jews were not being transported to the east but to somewhere much closer. Additional reports were received that they were being transported to the death camp in Treblinka. Those findings were reported to the Jewish leaders in the Ghetto. It was now clear to

everyone that the Jews were being killed in the death camp and not being sent to work in the east.

Meanwhile, the Germans were increasing the daily quotas of Jews to be delivered by the Judenrat for deportation. First, they demanded 6,000 per day, then 8,000 and finally. The head of the Jewish committee, Czerniakow, committed suicide. A note found on his desk said only, "Ten thousand. . ."

By that time more than 300,000 Jews had been deported to the death camp and killed; only 50,000 Jews remained in Warsaw. Inspired by their youthful leader Mordechai Anielewicz, the Jews organized for their defense and last stand. They turned to the Polish underground with a plea for arms. The Polish underground, which was amply equipped with arms stolen from the Germans, gave them a few pistols and several rounds of ammunition. The latter did not fit the pistols, yet the Jews were asked for an outrageous sum of money.

When the unsuspecting Germans entered the ghetto to pick up the next day's quota in March 1943, they were greeted by a barrage of home-made grenades and Molotov cocktails and withdrew quickly. They brought in reinforcements but these, too, were repulsed. From that point on a bloody battle ensued between German troops that were vastly superior in arms and the Jewish defenders. The Germans set fire to each house and the Jews fought to their last breath, ending their lives by jumping from the roofs of burning buildings. The unequal battle lasted for more than a month—as long as the whole French Army had fought against the Germans and longer than the Polish Army could defend itself.

The gentile population outside the walls of the Ghetto went apathetically about their daily business. Desperate requests for help, transmitted by the Jews to the Polish population through appeals and leaflets, were ignored. The Poles were calm and oblivious to the terrible tragedy taking place before their eyes. Little did they know that soon the same fate would befall them. And yet they should have known, since the Germans were their mortal enemies too. The burning Ghetto still remains vividly before my eyes to this day.

A year later, the Polish population of Warsaw rose against the Germans, who were, by then, fleeing the city before the onslaught of the victorious Red Army. On Stalin's orders, the Russian Army stopped dead in its tracks before the city on the opposite side of the Vistula. The Germans returned and a fierce, bloody battle ensued between the Polish insurgents and the vindictive Germans. The Poles fought desperately. As the Russian Army sat and watched and the rest of the world held its

breath, the Germans destroyed the city house by house with its weapons and bombs.

The Bible says that God asked Abraham if there were ten just men in Sodom. When Abraham answered that there were not, he destroyed the city with fire and brimstone.

My father was now in great danger and we had to do something about it. After a discussion, both of us decided that the best thing for him would be to leave Warsaw and return with me to Cracow. My father rented a room and we agreed to meet in a deserted place every few days so as not to arouse the suspicions of passers-by. This arrangement lasted for a few months; then, one day, my father did not show up at our meeting place. When Leo and I went to his room, we were told by the landlord that he had been arrested by the Germans as a Jew hiding on Christian papers. He had been taken to the concentration camp in Plaszow near Cracow.

The cruelties committed by the Germans against the Jews were terrible. While living as a gentile, I often went by streetcar to the vicinity of the ghetto in Cracow; an irresistible force drew me there. I could see what was happening through the barbed wire fence separating the ghetto from the rest of the town. The Germans went into every house, dragging out Jewish people, looking for hiding places and tearing down the walls of the apartments in search of hidden valuables. The poor Jewish people ran to and fro like hunted animals, wild-eyed, helpless and defenseless. I watched as if mesmerized, unable to tear my eyes away.

One day, in the summer of 1944, I was walking home. It was already getting dark and the stars were visible in the sky. Would I survive? I asked myself, looking into the sky as though expecting an answer to come from there. I boarded a streetcar. In a minute the car was stopped, surrounded by the German police, and all the passengers arrested. I was taken to the police station together with a group of gentiles. When night fell, the Germans loaded us on covered trucks, with the Ukrainian police holding machine guns and sitting in the back to prevent anyone from escaping. The Ukrainians ordered us to be absolutely quiet. We were driven out of town and finally the trucks stopped. We were unloaded in front of a freshly dug ditch. The police placed machine guns in front of us. I was sure this was the end of my life. I breathed deeply and looked up. The moon was full and the night was peaceful and clear. After about 10 minutes we were sent to barracks in the Plaszow concentration camp.

On the next day, we found ourselves in a fenced-in compound that had been set aside for gentiles, surrounded by dozens of barracks filled by thousands of Jewish prisoners. They all wore striped, dirty white-and-

blue, pajama-like uniforms. The Jews threw some bread to our compound.

"I'll walk in through the door and come out through the chimney," one of them shouted as a bitter joke to us. Unfortunately this was not a joke. By then, it was already known to everyone, that the Jews were being gassed and cremated.

A Jewish prisoner who was probably working in the camp kitchen took a pail of soup and handed it to the Poles through the barbed wire fence. The Poles were hungry and they started pulling the pail in different directions until it fell to the floor. It overturned and no one got anything to eat.

Night fell and I dozed off on a wooden cot. Loud noises awoke me. I left the barrack. Dawn was beginning. In the twilight, hundreds upon hundreds of Jews were standing outdoors in rectangular formations, twelve abreast, with German guards and police dogs rushing to round up those who were trying to escape. The picture was unreal. The rectangles of people moved into railroad cars one after another, obediently, slowly, almost mechanically. That day, upon orders of the Gestapo, the population of the camp was reduced from 20,000 to 2,000 Jews. The Germans sent them to Auschwitz to be gassed.

The next day I was released, together with other Poles who had their documents in order. It seemed that we were arrested as a precautionary measure against a possible rebellion. An uprising had started in Warsaw a few days earlier and the Germans were afraid that the same thing would happen in Cracow.

At my job at Schenker's there was a pretty young woman working at the switchboard. I sensed that she was Jewish, too, but we avoided admitting it to each other out of fear of being betrayed under torture, should one of us ever be arrested by the Germans. The young woman talked to me often. She had a daughter and no husband. There was also an older lady working there, an invalid, limping with one club foot. She was Oriental looking and she claimed to be an Arab. She avoided everyone. One day the older lady disappeared and a few days later the young woman was arrested as a Jewess. I never saw her again. Much later I found out that the older lady had been Jewish herself and had denounced the young woman as a Jewess under interrogation. She had done this to save her own life. The Germans had promised to let her go free if she denounced another Jew. Later, she also denounced me to the Germans. The Germans had obviously used her as bait.

The outcome of the war had already been decided by 1944. The

Germans were losing. One day, while sitting with a group of co-workers in the office, discussing current events, one of the managers, a highly respected and admired Pole, said, "The one good thing that the Germans accomplished was cleaning up Poland and killing all the Jews."

No one objected to his statement. I was shocked to hear a man of his intelligence would say such a terrible, heartless thing.

One fall day, while I was in the office, two policemen in civilian clothes walked in. One of them, a Pole, pointed at me.

"You are a Jew," he said.

I denied it. They took me to the bathroom, told me to undress and saw that I was circumcised. No more evidence was needed. The policemen brought me to my room and took all my belongings. The Polish policeman took away my coat and sweater, though it was already cold. "You won't need them anymore. You'll be made into soap," he said. There were rumors going around at that time that the Germans used the fat left over after killing and burning the Jews for making soap.

The German policeman was kinder: "Where are your parents?" he asked.

"My mother was taken to Belzec in August 1942 and my father was arrested in Cracow in 1943 on Christian papers."

"Would you like to know who denounced you?" asked the German. I didn't answer.

"It was the 'Arab' woman. We told her we would let her go free if she gave us a name of another Jew."

I was taken to the Montelupi prison in Cracow and kept there for 10 days, wondering whether I would live or not. There was very little hope for me because Jews caught on Christian papers were routinely executed. Yet I clung to hope. One night, while lying on the cell floor, I had a dream. My mother appeared in front of me and said, "Don't worry, my son, I will save you and you will survive the war." Until today I am not sure whether it was a dream or not. I believed very strongly that my mother would help me. From that moment on I was not afraid anymore. I was sure that I would survive somehow and I did everything possible to escape death.

The warden asked me what my religion was and I replied that I was a Christian. I was placed in a cell together with other Christians. My inmates didn't know that I was Jewish.

Several times, the guards made us shower. We had to undress completely. I was very apprehensive. I thought that the inmates would notice that I was circumcised. But these people didn't suspect that I was

Jewish. They had their own troubles. They were in jail for anti-German activities and were tortured often by the Germans to obtain the names of their comrades. At any rate, no one noticed that I was Jewish and I remained safe.

Each night, the Polish prisoners were interrogated by the German police, who wanted to get information from them. They were taken from our cell one at a time, and a while later we would hear the screams of pain of a tortured man. The Germans didn't care to conceal these sounds from the rest of the prisoners. Hearing the sounds of those tortured people curdled the blood of even the most courageous of us. Afterwards, the victim would be thrown back into the cell. With wild eyes he would look into the emptiness, his testicles crushed.

Jewish people were sentenced to death without a trial.

When my name was finally called, I was taken to the yard together with eleven other Jews. Among the people there were a doctor, his wife and a daughter, a chemist, a seamstress, a legless Gypsy on a home-made cart and others. A German soldier with a machine gun over his shoulder came over and asked everyone what his or her occupation was. "I am a clerk," I said. He looked at me a little longer and didn't say a word. I knew I had given the wrong answer. The Germans did not need Jewish clerks. If they needed anyone at all, it was laborers. I remembered this from the ghetto.

We were taken to the concentration camp in Plaszow where I had recently been as a Pole. A Nazi officer came to our truck.

"What is your occupation?" he asked the first person on the truck.

"I am a doctor."

"Come down," said the German.

He asked the next person the same question.

"A seamstress."

"Come down."

"A chemist."

"Come down."

The German looked inside the truck. I was standing deep inside because the guards had pushed me all the way back during the trip, fearing that I might escape.

"What is your occupation?" the German asked. "I am a carpenter," I answered without hesitation.

A carpenter was more desirable in the concentration camp, I thought. Later, I found out that carpenters were urgently needed at the time.

"Come down," came the order.

He ignored the rest of the people on the truck. The legless Gypsy begged, "Please let me go down, I whistle beautifully."

"No!"

The Gypsy started to whistle.

"No, no!" the German repeated, ending the discussion.

The doctor now turned to the German: "I have a wife and a daughter on the truck, could they come with me?"

"No."

"Then I want to stay with them," said the doctor.

The German shrugged his shoulders. "Then go back." And he pointed to the truck. The doctor climbed up without saying a word. The chemist, the seamstress and myself were taken to the camp office to be registered. As we walked out of the office, we saw a big fire burning on top of the hill. The bodies of the remaining nine people were being burned.

First, the victims had been told to undress; then they were machine-gunned to death; finally, their bodies were doused with gasoline and burned. The doctor, his wife and daughter died embracing one another.

22

The Well

The well was about 20 yards from the house. It was the only source of water and was therefore used several times a day. A pail hung on a hook on the side of the well and, when water was needed, it was lowered by a crane into the water, filled and pulled up. The water in the well was about 20 feet below ground level. The part of the well that was above the ground had been built up by rocks.

On the side of the well, about 4 feet below the ground, Max and Zavek had removed several rocks and dug out a hiding place. The hole beneath the ground was about 8 feet wide, 6 feet long and 4 feet high. They flattened the walls and the ceiling so that the soil wouldn't fall down. The hole was connected to the well itself where Max and Zavek had removed some rocks from its side about 4 feet down from the ground. In order to get into the hiding place, you had to lower yourself into the well by holding on at the top and searching out with your feet the opening to the hole. Then, holding onto the rocks at the side, you slowly slid into the opening. It was not a very safe thing to do, but that alone gave us a feeling of security. One wrong move and you could wind up on the bottom of the well in the water, which was quite deep. I remember that once, while we were in the hiding place, the pail that served as a toilet broke from the rope while being pulled up for cleaning; it fell into the well. It took several days to empty the well and clean it out. That was a major disaster. If it had been a human who had fallen in, he would have surely drowned.

Before entering the hiding place, you had to crawl through a small opening; this was later divided from the larger area with a drape and converted into a bathroom by adding a pail with a lid. The drape gave the bathroom user some privacy. In the main area, four people could sit comfortably. If you were short, you were lucky because you could stretch out when you lay down. Standing up was impossible. This was to become my home for the next five months.

For the first few weeks after my arrival at Max's house I stayed in the house for two reasons. First, I became very ill after the long walk in the snow; second, the room in the well had not yet been finished.

The day after I arrived at Max's house, I developed a high fever, a

bad cough and severe pains in my back and chest. I think it was pneumonia, but I don't know for sure, since a doctor couldn't be called in to treat me. The cough was so bad that in order to muffle its sound, I had to cover my head with a pillow. One day, a neighbor came to the house while I was in the next room. I had an attack of coughing and Zavek and Moshko almost choked me to death trying to cover me with all the pillows they could find. After that incident it was decided that we must leave the house and go underground. It was too dangerous to stay.

But first, I would like to describe the people in Max's house. There was, of course, Max, who owned the house. He was a ruddy, good-natured man, especially when he'd had a few drinks. Then his face took on a glow, his nose got shiny and a big smile would lighten up his face.

Then there was Sophie, the most important person in the house. She was a Jewish teacher whom Max had met by chance. He had fallen in love and offered her his home to hide out from the Germans. It was a great chance for Sophie to save herself and her brother Zavek, who came along with her. We had to be very careful not to anger Sophie, because then she would stay away from Max and this made him very angry. Of course, under those circumstances, we were the scapegoats and he would threaten to throw us out. Although this threat was never carried out, we were always afraid that it would be. After all, we were completely dependent on him.

Max had two children, a 14 year old boy named Ted and an 8-year-old girl, Hela. Ted was wild and very demanding and everyone tried to keep him happy. When he was unhappy, he would run from the house saying he was going to the police to denounce us. He never did, but we were frightened every time he made a threat and we would hold our breaths until he came home. Hela was a sweet girl who never gave anyone trouble, but she was only 8 years old and we worried that, while at school or with friends, she might say something that would betray our presence in her home.

Max's wife had died some years before, and he had taken care of his children the best that he could until Sophie and Zavek came to live with him. From then on, his life was much easier. Sophie and Zavek took care of everything and Max would come home from work to a clean, warm house and a cooked dinner. Everything had been fine as long as Sophie's money lasted. But there wasn't much of it and, after a short time, Max had a problem feeding a family of five.

That's when he met Koppel, who was always looking for a safe hiding place for someone. When he saw Max's house he was impressed.

It was far from town and removed from other houses, with grounds around it. It was an ideal place to hide. He decided to use it for himself and his friend Moshko when the time came to run away from the labor camp. He started giving Max money to reserve the room for the two of them until they were ready to run away. It was a good arrangement and everyone was happy. Koppel had a place prepared for himself and Max now had means of support for his family. Sophie and Zavek were happy because nothing had changed and the money was coming in. That was the situation until the night when Koppel and I arrived.

We came in from the cold winter night, half frozen and completely exhausted after a seven hour walk in the snow. The house was warm and we warmed our insides with food and whiskey. I felt terribly safe and happy. I had thought we would never make it. But we had and a new chapter of my life had begun.

❧ 23 ❧

In the Well

When I try to recall the first two months I spent in Max's house, I realize that the days flowed into each other. I cannot separate them. Everything was so different from the Pushman home, where the atmosphere was friendly and peaceful. Now, I was bewildered.

During my first month I had a fever and a cough from which I didn't completely recover until much later. I felt weak and useless. I was the youngest person hiding in Max's house.

Sophie and Zawek were in charge, and I was afraid of them. I never opposed them, even though I rarely agreed with them. Koppel seemed so sure of himself that I always listened to him. He was my authority. The only one I felt free with was Moshko, Koppel's friend. I knew that he liked me. He was very kind and we had frequent conversations. Moshko was a teacher, intelligent and knowledgeable.

Things did not always go smoothly at Max's house. In fact, there were many fights. Sophie and Zawek wanted to have their way in almost everything, and knowing that they had Max's support, they often abused the rest of us. It wasn't easy being cooped up together all the time. It led to fights that they always won. If they didn't, they would threaten to leave. Of course, these were empty threats. They had no place to go. However, we were worried that, in their stupidity, they might put us all in danger. And so, we always gave in.

In the meantime, it was getting harder for Max to supply enough food for eight people. He was able to get sacks of potatoes, so we ate them three times a day. Luckily, I loved potatoes.

In the beginning of April, when the snow began to melt, the men would leave several nights in a row to prepare the hiding place in the well. The ground was still damp in the hole. They put sand on top of the soil and laid featherbeds on it. At the end of April we moved down into the well and stayed there until the end of the war. After two days, Sophie and Zawek returned to the house. Max said that he needed their help. Koppel, Moshko and I remained.

It was pitch dark in our bunker. There was no difference between day and night. A small kerosene lamp gave us light. We slept when we

wanted. Our food was lowered in a pail by Max when he came home from work. It was very meager. At first it was better, but as time progressed there was less and less. Finally, we were getting one slice of bread a day and one potato per person. We were hungry all the time. We spent most of our waking hours reading or writing down our experiences. The air in the bunker was very warm and damp. Very soon the bedding became damp too, but this was all we had and we had to bear it if we wanted to survive the war. Every few days Max allowed us to come to the house at night to wash up and change our clothes.

I was getting thinner all the time. The cough was persistent and wouldn't stop. I needed nourishment and good living conditions. To make matters worse, we were invaded by lice. They lived in the seams of our clothing. All of us were constantly being bitten. We used to kill them by the hundreds, but they multiplied so quickly that it was useless. We had to get used to them.

On April 14, 1944, when Max came home from work, he called me out of the bunker. He told me that the Germans had sent a transport of people from the labor camp to a concentration camp. He had seen my father in the group. I was devastated. My father had been in hiding. How did he get to the labor camp? Later I found out that, on the night before the people were taken away, my father had gone there to exchange some money for food. Now he was gone; I would probably never see him again.

I cried a lot from that day on. I had tried to be brave before this happened, but after my father was taken away I couldn't be hopeful anymore. I didn't feel well and I started to give up on life. Moshko saw the state I was in and asked if he could help. I told him that all I had left was Anna; if anything happened to her, I'd be left without a family and I'd lose the will to live. Moshko saw that I was very depressed. He asked, "Would it help if you saw Anna?"

I looked at him. He was serious. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'll bring her here for a few days," he said.

"You would do that for me?"

"Yes," he said, "I would."

It was May 2, 1944 when Moshko left our bunker and started out on the walk back to Boryslaw. It was a very long evening for me. Around midnight we heard a sound of planes over our heads. Almost simultaneously, we heard Max's voice at the well opening. He softly called our names.

"There is an air raid; you can come out. The Germans will run underground and you'll be safe."

We climbed out of the well. What a wonderful feeling to be out in the open air. The night was beautiful and we breathed deeply. After a while, the sirens sounded the end of the raid and we went back to the well.

Moshko returned with Anna and Wilus at around 1 o'clock in the morning. He brought them down into the well and Anna and I fell into each other's arms. I hugged my beloved Wilus. We spent the rest of the night talking.

I hadn't seen Anna for one and a half years. She told me about the time we'd spent separated from each other. She was in hiding with Bronek and Wilus. Bronek's TB was getting progressively worse. The terrible living conditions and lack of food had aggravated his illness. His lungs had deteriorated badly and he had become very thin, without any strength. The three of them occupied a tiny room in the attic of the apartment where they were hiding; they slept on the floor. Anna said that Wilus had wanted to come along because he felt more secure with her than with Bronek because of his illness.

When Anna and Wilus had removed their overcoats, I had noticed little bags around their necks. I asked what they were.

"Oh," Anna said, "this is morphine. Dad gave it to us to swallow if we were ever taken by the Germans. He begged us not to take it immediately but to wait till the last possible moment, when all hope was gone."

I cried, imagining how my father must have felt giving deadly poison to his daughter and grandson. He must have thought that it would be better for them to die by their own hands than at the hands of the Germans.

Finally, exhausted but happy to be together, we fell asleep. We were awakened by Max's voice. His whisper was very agitated.

"I know that Irene's sister and her son are here. I want them out!"

We froze. How did he know? We had never asked his permission to bring Anna; he would never have consented. We had thought that Anna would stay for two days, return to her place, and that Max would never know. We had taken a chance, but there had been no other way.

Max whispered, "Anna's husband is dead. A bomb fell on the house where they were hiding. Get that woman and her son out of here now!"

Koppel turned to us. "Stay here. Moshko, remain with them. I'll go and talk to Max."

Anna was hysterical. She felt guilty for having left Bronek alone. Moshko and I had a hard time trying to quiet her. We tried to convince her that her presence wouldn't have helped, and that she and Wilus would have been found. It was a miracle that they had left that night.

Koppel came back, looking drawn. He said, "All I could accomplish was to arrange for Moshko and me to give up our places for Anna and Wilus. We will have to go to the labor camp."

I was very upset. "You'll be taking a terrible risk. We can't let you do that."

"I don't know what else we can do," Koppel said sadly. "Don't worry, we'll be careful. We'll run away before the camp is liquidated."

There was no easy solution to this situation. Koppel and Moshko had a better chance than Anna and Wilus. They had work cards that at least for the moment, protected them. For Anna and Wilus to go back to the camp could mean certain death. Thus, Koppel and Moshko went to the labor camp.

On June 22, 1944, a second transport was taken from the labor camp to the concentration camp, and Teresa was among them. This news was heartbreaking for Anna and me; we loved Teresa very much. She had placed her son Romek with a gentile family who was willing to hide his identity until the end of the war.

Anna told me that on Romus' second birthday she had gone to see him with Koppel. He had been so beautiful with his blonde hair and blue

Milo's son, Romus.

eyes. When he had seen her he sat down on her knees and didn't want to move throughout her entire visit. He had looked intently into her face, trying to place her. Finally, he had cried, "Aunt Anna!" As she was leaving he had begun to cry. He called after her until she had disappeared from view.

Unfortunately, a gentile woman had seen Teresa visit that family. Putting two and two together, she had gone to the police to denounce the baby for being Jewish. Romus was taken to the police. He ran from one person to the other, not knowing or understanding what was happening. He was taken to the slaughterhouse and shot with the others. Romus was two and a half years old.

I cried uncontrollably when Anna told me this story. I cry for Romus to this day. My beautiful, blonde and blue-eyed nephew who lived for only two and a half years. Why, oh why?

After Romus had been killed, Teresa lost her will to live. She wrote to me that her life has no meaning anymore. She wouldn't be able to face Milo when he came back from Russia. My words of comfort were futile. She was clearly very depressed. And now she was gone. We found out after the war that she had been taken to Stutthoff, where she had died with other women, shot by the Germans and drowned in the sea.

On July 21, 1944, Koppel and Moshko returned to the well. They had found out that there would be another transport. We knew that the Russians were near and that the Germans were withdrawing.

"A few more days," Koppel said, "and it will all be over." I listened to his words, but I didn't really believe him. After all this time it was hard to accept that this nightmare would ever come to an end.

Max no longer minded that there were so many people in the well. He also believed that the end was near. Even Sophie and Zawek came down to us so as not to jeopardize the last days before the liberation. We were practically sitting on each other.

Every day we waited for the news. Finally, on August 8, 1944, Max came to the opening of the well and called out loudly, "It is over! The Russians are here. You can come out now!" We all went into the house, which grew crowded. I don't remember feeling happy. I looked into the mirror, thinking, "Is this me?" I looked so different that I wanted to cry out in pain. Anna and Wilus were my entire family now.

Between Anna and myself, we had one dress left. We had traded everything else for food. Anna stayed in Max's house while I put on the dress and started the long walk back to Boryslaw.

❧ 24 ❧

Concentration Camp

I was taken to the concentration camp office by the camp commandant, Schupke, to be registered together with the two other people whose lives had been spared. The commandant asked me for the whereabouts of my father. I told him that he had been arrested in Cracow and taken to Plaszow. He ordered a clerk to check the files. He said that my father had been in Plaszow until August 1944 and had then been sent to another concentration camp in Grossrosen, Germany. When I asked the clerk about my mother, who had been arrested in Lvov in August 1942, he didn't answer. He probably knew that the Jews had been taken at that time to the death camp and killed; there was no sense of looking for her name in the files.

I was given a striped suit with a big bull's eye target painted on the back. It was reserved for people taken from the Christian side or, as it was popularly called, Aryan papers. This was evidently done to make me conspicuously visible to the camp guards should I try to escape.

For the first two days I was the center of attention, people offered me whatever food they could spare. Someone gave me a metal mess kit for food and a teaspoon.

"Eat your soup with a small spoon," he said. "It will last longer that way." On the second day my hair was shaved. I was given a cot on top of a three-bunk wooden bed in a barrack filled with about 300 prisoners. In the evening, a young girl came over and invited me to go to the women's barrack where she was staying. While all the women watched and giggled discreetly, the girl began to embrace me, expecting me to kiss her and reciprocate her advances. But I was too shocked from my recent experiences, as well as too inexperienced. I disappointed her and her audience. I saw this girl several times later. She worked in the laundry and offered to wash my shirts. But I was not interested in starting a love affair.

Other prisoners had sexual relationships almost freely. No one was getting married; many had already lost their spouses. They knew they were going to die anyway and they wanted as much pleasure as possible under the circumstances. Although staying in the women's barracks was

not allowed, love was blooming. People were falling in love and having relations whenever they could at night. It was dangerous for a woman to become pregnant, but then again there was not too much danger of its happening. Because of malnutrition, almost all the women had stopped menstruating.

Pregnant women were killed because they couldn't work. Newborn children were killed immediately upon birth.

I found the Jewish people in the concentration camp very compassionate. In the fall, when I was loading railroad cars, one of the prisoners took me to the shoemakers' shop. There they made me a pair of working shoes to replace my walking shoes, which had fallen apart. I never had shoes that good before or after. Then, without asking, someone in management moved me, after a few weeks, to the electrical repair shop, where the work was much easier. Even though I was working outdoors in the winter repairing the electric fence around the camp, I would go into the barrack once in a while for tools and supplies and warm myself under this pretense.

Many of the Jews in the Plaszow concentration camp were from Cracow, as the camp had been created when the Cracow ghetto was being liquidated. The Jews had simply been transferred from the city to the camp.

The Jews from Cracow helped each other as much as they could. For example, a bookkeeper was put in the camp and the clerk in the registration office listed him as a tailor. He was placed in the dressmakers' barrack and put to work. The man went indignantly to the office and complained, "I am a bookkeeper, not a tailor. Why did you place me in the dressmakers' shop?"

"Because the Germans don't need bookkeepers. If I had listed you as one they would have liquidated you," was the clerk's answer.

Plaszow concentration camp was located on hilly terrain outside the city of Cracow, on the site of a Jewish cemetery. The Germans ordered the prisoners to use its monuments as sidewalks, desecrating the graves. The camp held about 2,000 prisoners at that time; 95% were Jews. The remaining 5% were Polish political prisoners. They had it much better than the Jews. The Red Cross declared them military prisoners and they were supplied with additional provisions, such as marmalade and smoked sausages. The Red Cross ignored the Jews completely, as if they didn't exist. Even today, many years after the war, I refuse to give donations to them. The image of Polish prisoners receiving and eating additional food while we starved always enters to my mind when I'm asked to give to the Red Cross.

The perimeter of the camp was surrounded by a double fence made of electric high-voltage and barbed wire. Outside the fence, there were minefields and additional coils of barbed wire, covering a large area cleared of trees and bushes for better visibility. Every few hundred feet, there were watchtowers with soldiers manning machine guns. At night, the whole perimeter of the camp was brightly lit with powerful, blinding electric floodlights. German soldiers with police dogs would walk continuously around the camp. Escape was almost impossible.

In back of the camp, on top of a hill, there was an execution area, popularly known as "Chujowa Gorka" (Khuyova Ghurka—Prick's Hill). Here, executions were carried out for the slightest infractions of camp rules or as mass punishment of prisoners for the "crime" of one of them. Thus, when a boy condemned to die pulled out the German's bayonet and stabbed him in the throat, a selection was made and 500 innocent Jews were executed as retribution. In the Germans' mind, one German life was equivalent to the life of 500 Jews. The condemned Jews were ordered to undress completely and were then mowed down with a machine gun by a German soldier. Their bodies were then doused with gasoline and ignited. No traces of their bodies were left.

The camp was run by a high Nazi officer who had absolute authority over the lives of the prisoners. The next in charge was a German Head Kapo, a former criminal and murderer who carried out the corporal punishments ordered by the Lagerfuehrer (camp commandant). A beating was meted out for the slightest transgression and most of the time for no reason at all. The prisoner was taken to the basement of the building, ordered to bare his back and the Head Kapo started to beat him slowly with a whip with a metal ball at its end. After each strike he pulled the end of the whip slowly across the back of his victim. The prisoner had to count the lashes. Fifteen was the average, and it left the back of the man a bloody pulp. Twenty five usually ended with the death of the victim.

The prisoners were housed in tens of wooden barracks, each with about 300 prisoners in three tiers of wooden cots without mattresses. The barracks were unheated; the washroom had cold water only and the latrines were unheated too, which was especially hard in the winter.

The working day began at 5 o'clock in the morning, with the barrack elders beating up everyone who didn't move quickly enough. The prisoners washed with ice-cold water, dressed in their striped blue and gray uniforms and lined up for breakfast, which consisted of black coffee substitute and a slice of black bread. They would then rush to the "Appell Platz" (roll-call grounds), where they were then counted. If the count agreed with the records, they were assigned to various tasks as the need dictated. If a prisoner was missing, the roll-call on the Appell Platz continued until the missing person was found. If the person was dead, he or she was dragged from the barrack and laid down on the ground. If the prisoner was not found, the rest had to stand in place, sometimes for the entire day. Some people fainted from exhaustion; in the winter many got frostbite.

Once a girl hid in a truck under a pile of garbage and ran away. The prisoners had to stand for three days and nights until she was apprehended and brought back. She was flogged publicly, her hair was shaven and she was confined to the barracks. She was lucky not to have been executed, as death was the usual punishment for trying to escape from the camp.

The workday lasted 10 hours, with a short break for the main meal. This consisted of one ladle of watery soup. The work consisted of loading and unloading railroad freight cars, building or demolishing barracks or whatever else was decided by the Germans. For example, during the last months of the war, tens of thousands of shovels were manufactured; the Germans needed them immediately in order to dig anti-tank ditches.

Groups of people were assigned to special work in the barracks. Among these were such as electricians, shoemakers, tailors, and carpenters. They were lucky because they usually worked inside the barracks and avoided the cold outdoors. After 10 hours of work, the prisoners were marched again to the Appell Platz and counted. People who had died from hunger or exhaustion during work hours had to be carried in on the backs of their co-workers. No one was released until the count agreed with the total number of prisoners on record. Afterwards, they were lined up to receive a ladle of black, unsweetened coffee substitute and a slice of black bread.

The work week lasted six and a half days, including Saturday and half a day on Sunday. However, more often than not, the prisoners were summoned on Sunday afternoon to carry out "important" heavy work. At 9 o'clock in the evening, the light from a single electric bulb in the barrack was turned off and everyone had to go to sleep.

In the electric barrack where I worked, there was a beautiful young woman named Irene Horowitz. She was married, but a German Kapo fell in love with her. There were many Kapos in the concentration camp; they had been recruited from among German criminals. The Kapos were the elite and held supervisory positions. Thus, they had the power of life and death over the Jewish prisoners. The Kapo who fell in love with Irene

was called "Orphan" because he had killed both his parents. He was tall, blonde and very handsome. He beat up Irene's husband and the poor man complained to the camp commandant. Schupke called in the Kapo and accused him of Rassenschande (racial defilement)—a sexual relation between an Aryan and a Jewess. He grabbed the Kapo by his hair and banged his head against the wall. He forbade him to see Irene ever again, but the Kapo would meet her clandestinely in our electric barrack.

One day, I was punished together with Irene's husband. I had been caught buying a loaf of bread from Polish people working in the camp. I got fifteen lashes on my back and had to count each stroke of the whip. The pain was terrible but I was able to withstand it. But Irene's husband fainted after the second lash. He was unconscious during the rest of the punishment. The next day the Kapo came to our barrack and told Irene how bravely I had taken my punishment, while her husband had fainted. It struck me as a pretty low tactic to try to gain a girl's love by denigrating her husband.

Sometimes I wonder what became of the beautiful Irene, her husband and the German Kapo? Probably Irene and her husband died during the long march from Plaszow to Auschwitz and Mauthhausen in the last months of the war.

More people were brought in from the Aryan side and many of them were executed on top of Chujowa Ghurka hill, which was opposite our barrack. One such group included a distant aunt and her two grown-up daughters. I could see what happened through the holes in the wall of the electric barrack. The German camp commandant allowed the two pretty young girls to leave the truck, but excluded their mother, thus condemning her to death. One of the girls knelt down and kissed the German's feet, begging him to spare her mother's life. Her flaming red hair covered his boots. Finally, he relented and allowed her mother to leave the truck. All three of them survived the war.

Once I was sent to repair an electric chandelier in the house of a German in the concentration camp. I left immediately. The wife and daughter of a prominent Jewish architect were working as servants in the kitchen. The architect, named Gruenberg, was in charge of the construction of barracks in the camp. The Germans had hanged him several times; each time they had cut off the rope at the last minute in order to force him to work harder.

I began working on the electric wiring. From the next room I could hear the voices of a German and a woman. It was early in the morning and they had probably spent the night together. Now, the German was

entertaining his companion by playing the piano. He played the same melody in different tempos and with different interpretations, as it would be played by assorted people, e.g., a priest, a young girl and an old man. He was very entertaining.

I could not fix the lamp; I had to go to the shop to get some parts and tools. I returned with an experienced electrician, who located the problem and fixed the lamp. When we walked out, he said, "You were pretty lucky. The last time I came here to fix the wiring, the German put a gun to my head and said, 'If you don't fix it in 15 minutes, I'll shoot you!' "

Because our barrack faced the place of execution, we could watch what took place. We stared as if hypnotized, even though there was a death penalty for watching. The women would scream hysterically, yet they kept on watching.

The penalties for the slightest breach of the camp's rules were severe. Once, I was caught with an extra loaf of bread and I received fifteen lashes with a rubber truncheon. I had to bend down and count each blow. My back turned completely black and I was in terrible pain for many days. I had to sleep on my stomach, since lying on my back was too painful. Another time I was caught taking a civilian overcoat from a pile of old clothing. I was locked up in a solitary cell in the basement for the night. The cell was so small that I had to stand. There was not enough space to go to the bathroom. I didn't sleep all night.

One day a selection was made of people who would be sent to their death in Auschwitz. Older people, those who were sick and youngsters were motioned to one side by the German commandant; healthy men and women were sent to the other side. I was included with the old and sick because I had come from Aryan papers and had the target painted on my back. As such, I would be the first to go in any selection. A young boy in the condemned group threw himself to the floor and begged the German to spare his life. The commandant motioned at his helpers. They grabbed the poor boy, beat him up and pushed him back into our group. Then Commandant Schupke was called away to the telephone. Evidently he was given an order to keep a few more people for work. When he came back, he walked over to our group and made a second selection. This time I was put into the group that was destined to live, but the young boy who had begged for his life was left in the group destined to die. A Jew was not even allowed to beg for his life.

Until this day I feel great warmth and love for my fellow Jews in the concentration camp. Beaten, tortured, starved and torn from their loved

ones, they did not lose their humanity and compassion for others. They sang beautiful songs whenever possible. They helped each other and they helped me.

I became friendly with a Jew from Cracow named Liebling. At night, after 10 to 12 hours of hard work, he would tell me stories about the concentration camp before I had come there. He worked as a messenger in the camp and was permitted to have a bicycle. Thus, he was able to see many things. He described the previous camp commandant Goetz, who would often call a prisoner over and tell him to turn around and then shoot him in the back of his head. The Jews had had to call his dog "Mister Rolf." At an order from Goetz, the dog would jump at a prisoner and tear his flesh out. Another German, while sitting in front of his house on the veranda, would shoot at the prisoners at random, just for practice.

Liebling also told me about hangings in the camp. Several group hangings had been performed, and usually three or four prisoners were hanged at one time. They were hanged by their feet, upside down. After a few hours, all their blood had moved into their heads which became enormously swollen. They suffered terribly and they begged to be killed. It took about three days for them to die.

Liebling took me to the place of execution. The gallows stood there menacingly.

I was told how the Jewish prisoners had been used by the Germans to disarm unexploded bombs. They themselves were too afraid to do this. Whenever an unexploded bomb was found after an air raid in the city, they would bring in the Jews. And those so-called "subhumans" and "cowards" would handle the bomb without fear; without a moment's hesitation, they unscrewed the detonators, while the "heroic Germans" stood and watched it in awe from a safe distance. However, this did not change their attitude towards the Jews.

I got friendly with a young, Hassidic Jew who sang beautiful Jewish songs in the evenings. I remember those songs today. I also recall a radio repairman who would call me over to his repair shop to listen to forbidden foreign transmissions from the Allies. Once, a message by General Eisenhower was read to the German people. It said that anyone accused of harming or killing prisoners would be tried as a war criminal after the war. We started to hope that maybe, somehow we would survive.

It had become now obvious to everyone that the Germans were losing the war. The soldiers knew it and their leaders knew it too. The German fronts were collapsing rapidly and were in urgent need of soldiers and supplies. Gasoline for German planes and tanks was in short supply. Yet

the railroad trains were given first priority in hauling thousands of Jews to the death camps, and the first priority for the gasoline was to burn Jewish bodies. Thousands of able-bodied German soldiers were guarding the concentration and death camps rather than being sent to fight on the front. There was no logical explanation for this. The Germans were losing the war to enemies from whom they could expect no mercy. Yet, they were frantically involved in transporting and killing defenseless Jews who had no bearing on the outcome of the war.

I was determined to stay alive although the inmates had told me from the beginning that no one survived concentration camp. One day, a truck brought civilian clothing that we were ordered to sort. I stole a pair of navy blue pants and a civilian winter jacket. I hid them in my cot under the blanket. I was caught and sentenced to one night in solitary, but to my astonishment the civilian clothes were not confiscated.

A Day in the Concentration Camp.

"Aufstehen, aufstehen, schnell, schnell!" (Get up fast) screamed the Kapo men bursting into the barrack. They were swinging their nightsticks, landing them on the heads of those who did not move quickly enough. There were 300 prisoners sleeping in the barrack. They jumped down hurriedly onto the cold floor. Then they rushed to wash with ice-cold water. They dressed quickly and ran to the kitchen. It was 5 o'clock in the morning and completely dark outside. The prisoners lined up for a slice of black bread and a cup of fake black coffee. The winter was now in full swing, with snow falling heavily. It wouldn't melt in this part of Poland until spring.

After eating quickly, they rushed to the Appellplatz (roll call grounds) and lined up before the Nazi officers. The Germans were walking back and forth. They were dressed warmly in their impeccably ironed uniforms and shining boots, while the inmates wore flimsy, dirty prison clothes. Some of them were wearing wooden clogs. The air was cold and large snowflakes were falling, illuminated by the blinding floodlights. The Kapo men counted the inmates several times, occasionally hitting those who did not fall properly in line.

The prisoners, insufficiently dressed for this weather, were shivering in the cold as they stood immobile until the count was completed. The number of inmates had to agree with the number on the books, and the prisoners had to stand for a long time until the job was done.

Next, working columns were formed for different tasks. The more fortunate ones were marched off to work in the city. There they could

trade with the Poles and get some food, although at exorbitant prices, when the Germans were not looking.

Carl was working in the electrical barrack and marched off with his group. As a prisoner caught on Christian papers, he presented a security risk and was not allowed to work outside the camp. Even if he worked outside, he had nothing to trade.

Once in the electrical barrack he was assigned to work with a group of electricians stringing up electrical wire fencing along a small area inside the camp. The area was known as SS Kaserne. It was being prepared for a smaller camp, as the Germans were evacuating most of their "precious" Jewish subhumans deep into Germany, away from the approaching Russians.

The wind was howling and the snow falling heavily, blinding them in their work. Their bare hands were becoming numb from frost. They were cold and hungry. At 12 o'clock a field kitchen arrived and each prisoner was given a ladle of hot watery soup. After 15 minutes of rest they were ordered to go back to work. Work continued till 6 o'clock, when it got dark. The prisoners were marched back to the Appellplatz. A second roll call was carried out; the prisoners stood for a period that seemed endless. Finally, they were dismissed when the body count agreed with the register. Several unfortunate inmates who had been singled out for the slightest disobedience during the day were marched off to the basement to get their punishment. It consisted of beating with a whip or a night standing in an unheated solitary cell. The others were dismissed and could go to the kitchen, where they again got a slice of bread and black, unsweetened coffee substitute.

They could now go to the barracks to rest, but this usually was an illusion. A few minutes later a drunken Kapo stormed in and started to swing his whip to the left and right, hitting anyone in his way. Half an hour later the prisoners were chased from the barracks while being beaten with nightsticks. They had to carry out the "urgent" work of loading railroad freight cars with heavy sections of sheds to be shipped to Germany. The loading area was brightly lit with floodlights and the Kapos used their nightsticks generously to squeeze the remaining strength from the tired bodies of the inmates. Finally, totally exhausted, they marched back to their barracks at 9 o'clock just in time to undress and go to bed.

Carl lay on his cot on the top tier of the bed but he could not sleep. He was tired and cold. He was also very hungry. Suddenly, someone tapped him gently on the shoulder. "Come with me," hissed a voice in

the dark. He slid down from his cot and put the striped coat over his shoulders. He walked quietly behind the man. They walked along the walls to the next barrack, trying to be as quiet as possible. When they entered the adjoining barrack a man was waiting for them in the dark. "My name is Liebhaber," he introduced himself, "and I have a message for you."

Carl recognized him. He was the head of the engineering barracks, respected and liked by everyone. "We have a Polish courier who brings messages from the outside and he smuggled in a small package for you," he said. He handed the package to Carl. Carl took it eagerly and opened it. Inside there was a piece of paper wrapped around a small golden coin. Carl smoothed out the wrinkled paper. On it was a letter written by his aunt Eva. Someone had told her that Carl was alive and in the concentration camp. She sent him words of encouragement and hope. The coin was to help him buy some food.

Carl thanked Liebhaber for the package and returned to his barrack the same way he had come. He climbed the cots to his bed. He was excited and happy; thoughts raced through his mind. Tomorrow, he would try to buy a loaf of bread from the passing Polish workers. Maybe he would even be able to get a piece of meat. He had seen other inmates trading with the Poles. True, the Poles charged exorbitant prices and took advantage of the helpless Jews, but it was better than nothing. He could already taste the food in his mouth.

Carl wondered how his aunt had found a way to send this package. She had risked danger by sending help to a Jew.

This in itself was a crime punishable by death. Yet, she had not abandoned or forgotten him. How could he ever repay her for this? He was very grateful. He lay on his cot with his eyes wide open in the darkness and could not fall asleep. He remembered how aunt Eva had helped him and his brothers to run away from the ghetto. She had helped many people save their lives. What a courageous and remarkable woman!

Finally on January 10, 1945, the Russian offensive started and we were ordered to prepare to evacuate the camp. Never mind that the war was being lost! The Germans were taking their priceless cargo, the "worthless" Jews, with them.

We marched all night; in the morning I was able to escape from the transport and I returned to my aunt's apartment in Cracow. A few days later the city was liberated by the Russians.

Leo came out of hiding a few days later. Since my arrest, he had been staying with his future wife Hilda, a German girl who had fallen in love with him had and stood by him even after he had told her he was Jewish. Her own parents had thrown her out of the house for going out with a foreigner.

Someone had told Leo that all the prisoners in Plaszow had been killed. He had thought he would have to look for my body among the dead.

A few days later, there was a knock on the door. There, on crutches, stood my younger brother Mark. He told us that he had taken part in the Polish uprising in Warsaw in August 1944 as a Christian and had been wounded. A bullet had passed through his ankle, crushing it. A comrade-in-arms had carried him out of the city through the sewers; he'd entered a hospital where he had been recuperating before the war had ended, and was now able to drag himself to us.

Thus we three brothers survived the war and were reunited. But our parents never came back.

25

After the War

The day was sunny and hot. I walked on the main road, never forgetting that I was free and didn't have to worry about being recognized as a Jewess. Yet I jumped with fear several times, when I saw a man or heard approaching steps. My brain had not yet accepted that I was free. Deep down I was still not certain that the Germans would not come back.

I felt the sun burning my face. I wasn't used to its powerful rays. My mind wandered. I should have been happy, but I wasn't. I was thinking of my home and my parents, I knew I would never again feel my mother's hands on my face nor hear my father's voice. I was an orphan. I had always felt sorry for orphans, but I had never understood what it really meant to be one. Now I knew. It meant loneliness and confusion. I couldn't think about what had happened to my parents—it was much too painful. I walked as if in a dream.

Once more I was headed for the Tabaczynski house. I didn't know where else to go. I needed a dress to send to Anna, so that she and Wilus could leave Max's house. I was hoping that my friend Basia would give me one.

Irene, just after the war.

My legs hurt. I was very skinny and I hadn't walked in a long time. My entire body felt weak. I walked for a long time. Finally, I saw the outskirts of Boryslaw. I was encouraged by the familiarity of the surroundings. I looked for faces I knew and found none. People were going about their business. I met several Russian soldiers and this made me feel much easier.

Finally I reached the T. house, where I was received very

warmly. What a relief! Yes, it was really true: I was free after three years and two months of constant fear, hiding out like a hounded animal. I had lost most of my family. In time I would get over everything that had happened to me. I would live a normal life, perhaps, but my family would never return to me.

Basia gave me one of her dresses and I immediately ran to where Max worked, to hand the dress over to him so that he could take it to Anna.

The next day, Anna and Wilus came to Boryslaw. Anna had met a cousin of ours, Ana, and she and Wilus moved in with her. Ana lived with another young Jewish woman who had survived in the woods. Anna and Wilus had a bed without any covers in Ana's room. Luckily it was August and it was warm enough to do without them.

I was luckier. Mrs. T. offered me a room in her house with a sofa and bedding. She wanted me there. She knew that the Russians would take some of her rooms and put other people in them.

Wilus was 9 years old. After three years in hiding, he could hardly walk. His legs were like sticks and he had to use a cane to get around. His voice was also severely affected. He could only whisper.

Food was still a big problem. It was hard to get. It was even harder when you had nothing to exchange for it. Somehow Anna got a job in a cafeteria and was able to bring some soup home for Wilus. I helped Mrs. T. clean and cook and earned my keep that way.

Over time, I met some of my Jewish friends. Each had his own story to tell. Most of them, like me, had lost their parents. We, the survivors, clung together. We met every day and talked constantly about what had happened or what we would do in the future.

About 250 people survived the German occupation in Boryslaw. Later, around 600 Jews came back from Russia. These were the people who had run away with the Russians or had been drafted into the army. Anna and I were hoping to get a word from Milo, but so far we heard nothing. Some people also came back from the concentration camps. Altogether, about 800 people out of the original 15,000 from Boryslaw survived the war.

Summer ended and October came. One day a school friend of Anna's, Michael, came to see her. He had spent the war in Russia, and his wife and child had been killed by the Germans. When Michael found out that Anna was alive, he came to see her. Both of them were lonely and lost. After a while he asked her to marry him. Anna told me that he was a good man. She said her feelings were dead and asked me what to

do. I looked at her; Bronek was vivid in my mind. I felt my eyes fill with tears and I turned away so that Anna would not see.

Winter was approaching and Anna and Wilus didn't even have coats or decent shoes. I said, "Anna, Michael has a good job; he will be able to support you and Wilus. You have to do what is right for you. Time will take care of the rest." In the meantime Anna had started to bake rolls to support herself and Wilus. She sold them to a neighborhood store and earned some money that way. It was a pitiful life, but it was better than what she had had before the liberation. Of course, there was hope for the future. A couple of months passed. Some people registered to go to the western part of Poland, which had been occupied by the Germans during the war and had now become socialist. We heard that jobs were easier to get there and that there was more food.

One day in January, Anna and Michael came to me and told me that they had decided to go west. They asked me to go with them.

I was startled. I knew that if I didn't join them, I'd be left in Boryslaw alone, without a family. Yet I couldn't agree to go with them; it was too sudden. They intended to leave in a few days.

Then there was Koppel. He was writing a book about what had happened in Boryslaw during the German occupation and he wanted me to write down my experiences. The first material I gave him was good, but after a while I couldn't concentrate. Koppel was consumed by the desire to write this book. He had material he had collected during the occupation, often endangering his own life. He had stayed in the labor camp while Jewish people were being taken away, in order to be a living witness to what was happening. Luckily, he had not been caught. However, he felt so strongly about the book that he wouldn't accept any excuses from the people he wanted to write for him. As I was one of the chosen ones, he wanted me to stay home and write constantly. It was a bad time for me. On the one hand, I felt that I owed my life, plus Anna's and Wilus's, to Koppel; on the other hand, I simply couldn't write at that time.

I had been in hiding for almost two years. I was 21 years old and everything in me cried out to live and have some pleasure in my life. Writing was the furthest thing from my mind; my brain was simply empty. I threw page after page into the garbage. Koppel couldn't understand it. His attitude towards me changed completely. He blamed me for not writing enough and he showed it with his behavior. He started to humiliate me in front of other people, as if this would force me to write. He did the same with Moshko. However, Moshko had the same problem

I had. I think that, subconsciously, we wanted to get away from our recent tragedy and go on with our lives.

I suffered greatly from Koppel's behavior. I tried to speak to him, plead with him and explain why I couldn't write, but to no avail. He didn't even want to listen. Finally, things got so bad between us that we didn't even talk to each other. I knew that Koppel was going out with different women and I suffered because of that. I also felt very guilty for letting him down. I knew how much the book meant to him.

Now Anna was leaving and I would be left alone. However, I couldn't go with her; I wasn't ready to leave Koppel.

Our parting was tearful. I promised Anna that I would leave soon and come to her. Meanwhile, she and Michael didn't know themselves where they were going or what they would do.

I took over baking the rolls. Mrs. T. allowed me to use her kitchen after 10 PM. I usually baked the rolls till 3 AM and went to sleep. I had to be up early to deliver the rolls to the store before 7 AM.

I was constantly losing weight and a persistent cough was racking my body. I went to a doctor, my brother's friend. He became alarmed when he saw me. He examined me and said that he was worried that I would get consumption. I found out later that he sent word to Anna urging her to do something about me.

And then something happened. I was in the house working when a young man came running in and told me that Koppel had been in a factory explosion and was hurt. I dropped everything and ran. I found him lying on a couch in a friend's house, his face and hands burnt by the explosion. I knelt down by the couch. Everything I had experienced over the last months was forgotten. I thought only of Koppel and I felt pain and compassion for him. I didn't even notice that there was another woman sitting next to him. When I looked into his eyes, they were cold and hard. I stepped back. Only then did I see the other woman. Koppel said, "I'm all right, don't worry. I think it would be best if you went to your sister in Poland. I don't think you'll be much help here."

I couldn't believe my own ears. "What are you saying, Koppel? I can't leave you now; you need someone to nurse you back to health. I can do that if you let me."

"No," he said, "I don't need you. There are many people who will help me here. You are only in my way. I really want you to go away. You will help me most by doing that."

I turned away and walked towards the door, all the time hoping that he would stop me, that he didn't mean what he had said. I reached the door and nothing happened. I walked out into the street in a daze. I couldn't accept what had just happened.

Anna and Michael.

Three months had passed since Anna's departure. I was terribly lonely. I knew that Anna and Michael were settled in Ligota, a small town near Katowice. Anna wrote begging me to come to them. She said that they had a nice apartment. Michael had a good job as a director of an oil refinery. They had all the food they needed. "Just come," she wrote, "and you will see for yourself."

The day after Koppel's accident I met Anna's friend Cesia. She told me that she wanted to leave Boryslaw and go to Poland. I went with her to register. We were told that the train would leave in a week. Now that my mind was made up; I couldn't wait for the day of the departure.

The day finally came. They put us on open freight cars. We had a difficult trip that took several days. We reached Katowice. Ligota, where Anna lived, was about 4 miles away. We walked that distance and in about 2 hours we reached Anna's apartment. We rang the bell and Anna opened the door. She looked at us, opened her arms to Cesia and greeted her warmly. I just stood there. I couldn't believe what had happened. My sister, who had seen me only four months ago, didn't recognize me. How I must have changed! She looked at me again and opened her eyes wide. This time she knew me. She screamed and pulled me into the apartment.

The first few days I only ate and slept. Anna gave me some of her clothes to wear. She and Michael had a beautiful apartment and lived well. Thank God, things had turned around for Anna. Wilus looked well, too. He was happy to see me.

After a few days Anna took me to the refinery where Michael worked. She told me that there was only one young man in Ligota. "If

you want to go out," she said, "you'd better meet him. His name is Edward Kubec."

When we entered the refinery, Michael took me around to show me the whole place and then took me to his office. He introduced me to some people who worked there. After a while he knocked on a door. A voice said, "enter." Behind a desk, a young man got up from his seat and came to greet us. "I am Edward Kubec," he said. "I am pleased to meet you." We looked into each others eyes. I felt a sudden warmth.

"My name is Irene," I answered, "and I am pleased to meet you too." It was May 21, 1945.

Anna's son, Wilus.

❧ 26 ❧

After the War

After the war, I met one of the survivors of the Jewish prisoners who had marched from Plaszow to Auschwitz in January 1945. This was the group from which I had run away. Here is the story he told me.

The group of 1,000 Jews, guarded by the Germans, continued to march to Auschwitz. The end of the war was near in this part of the country and the Russian Army was in hot pursuit of the Germans. The Jews arrived in Auschwitz after three days of walking all day and sleeping in the snow at night. When they arrived, the Germans had already liquidated and closed the death camp. They loaded the prisoners onto open freight trains and sent them from one concentration camp to another. The concentration camps were closed however, and did not accept them. The prisoners had to remain on the open lorries day and night, without food or shelter in the freezing winter.

Every day the train would stop in the open field; the Germans ordered those still alive to unload the dead and frozen people and leave them in heaps along the railroad tracks. Finally the train arrived in Mauthhausen concentration camp. After a few days, the Germans transferred what remained of the original 1,000 prisoners to a concentration camp in Ebensee. They were on the road for a month, from the middle of January to the middle of February. When the war ended in May 1945 and the Americans liberated them only a few remained.

Someone gave me the address of the Polish policeman who, together with a German, had arrested me. Then he took away my sweater and winter coat and said, "You won't need them anymore. The Germans will make soap out of you."

After the war, I went to his apartment and asked for his whereabouts. His wife told me that members of the Polish underground had killed him on the street for collaborating with the Germans.

"If you don't believe me," she said, "go to the police station and find out for yourself."

I went to the police station. When I asked the police officer about the man, he said, "Yes, the A.K. (Polish underground) shot and killed him on the street for denouncing and arresting innocent people. We have his clothes. Would you like to see them?"

Why not, I thought. "Yes, I would," I replied.

The police officer brought a bundle of clothes and showed it to me. To my surprise I recognized my overcoat and sweater, now with bullet holes in front and in back, covered with dried-up blood. They had killed him in my clothes!

"These are my clothes!" I exclaimed. Hearing that, the police officer asked, "Would you like to have them?"

Indeed, I needed the clothes. It was winter and I had no overcoat.

"Yes," I said.

I discarded the winter coat a long time ago, but I still have the sweater. I was able to wash out the blood stains but the bullet holes are still there, one in the front and one in the back.

I also went back to the Schenker company. I expected my co- workers to greet me with joy and congratulate me on my escape. No such thing happened. People greeted me coldly and avoided my eyes. After all, now they knew that I was Jewish. Even though the Nazi era was over, the Poles did not welcome their Jews back with open arms. I was not "one of them" anymore.

The company's new manager called me into his office. He was a highly respected Polish professional, now working in place of the German director, who had fled with the Germans.

"Ed," he said, "we do not have enough work; we have to lay you off."

So this was the new Polish order. They did not need Jews anymore. What about the high socialist ideals of equality and brotherhood? Clearly, those ideals did not extend to the Jews.

I walked out of the office. The "Arab" woman was standing there. I walked over to her. "Did you denounce me to the Gestapo?" I asked.

"No, Eddie, I didn't do it. I swear I didn't do it!"

She started to cry. I saw that nothing good would come from insisting on my accusation. Anyway, I knew the truth from the German police officer. Maybe he had just been trying to provoke me so I would denounce other people. Fortunately, the Germans did not torture me after my arrest, because no one knows how he would behave under torture until it happens to him.

One day, Leo and I were walking on the road to a small village, Swoszowice, near Cracow, where aunt Eva had put her two small children and a maid. She had done this to keep them from the danger of any fighting that might occur between the Russians and the retreating Germans in the last days of war. Meanwhile, there had been very little fighting in Cracow, but the Russians had surrounded the little village

where my cousins were. They directed a heavy artillery barrage against the German battalion trapped there. We stood outside the village, unable to enter it. Suddenly, a young Russian soldier came over. To our surprise, we recognized Salek, the son of our neighbors and Mark's schoolmate. We embraced each other and Salek told us his story.

During the terrible pogrom in August 1942, Germans had come to their house and taken him, his six brothers and sisters and his mother to the transport to the death camp. His father had remained, but he did not want to live anymore without his family. He set fire to the house and burned to death inside.

Young Salek managed to run away while on the road to the death camp and joined the partisans. The Russians drafted him into the Red Army after they liberated him.

He was now in the artillery, he said. After each bombardment and barrage of the German positions, he would go to look at the dead German bodies and say to himself, "This is for my family."

Meanwhile, the Germans had retreated and we were able to enter the village. We found Eva's children, scared but safe. They had spent three days under a horrible bombardment in a basement.

It was winter now. The war front passed over Cracow and the Russians ran deep into Germany on the heels of the fleeing Germans. I still retained my *nom de guèrre* of Edward Kubec. Aunt Eva told me that there was an opening for a job in an oil refinery in Ligota. I hitchhiked to Katovice and then walked on foot to Ligota, where the oil refinery stood.

I started work there under my assumed name. No one knew that I was Jewish. The habit of hiding as a Christian, which I had practiced for more than three years, persisted. I wouldn't tell anyone that I was Jewish.

One day, as I was sitting in my office, there was a knock on the door. Michael Dichter, the director of the refinery, walked in with a young and very pretty girl. He introduced her to me. She was his wife's sister. Her name was Irene Mandel and she was Jewish. She was thin and pale and the tragic past under the Germans was clearly visible in her beautiful green eyes. An irresistible force drew me to her. She was beautiful and I fell in love the first moment I saw her. I said, "My name is Edward Kubec. I am pleased to meet you." I looked at her and somehow I felt that I could trust and confide in her. I hesitated for a moment and then I said: "That is my assumed name. I am Jewish and my real name is Carl Horowitz."

Carl turned to Irene and said, "That girl was you, Irene, and I love you."

❧ 27 ❧

Ligota

Carl and Irene saw each other frequently. Carl became a frequent visitor in Anna's house. He and Irene would go for long walks and to the movies or the theater. They enjoyed being with each other. They had so much to talk about and so much in common. They became friends. There were no other young people in Ligota and this brought them even closer together.

Anna and Michael liked Carl, too. To them, he was a nice, cultured young man suitable for keeping Irene company. When Carl came to their house they made him feel welcome and they always had a lot to talk about.

One evening, while Carl was home, his telephone rang. It was Michael. His voice was agitated. "Carl, the Russians are banging on our front door," he said. "I am with three women here and they are frightened. I called the police and they didn't come. Please go to the police for help and bring them here. Please hurry!"

Irene.

Carl didn't lose any time. He got into the car and went to the police station. He knew the chief of police well. The latter took a few men and they all rushed to Michael's house. When they arrived, there was a group of Russian soldiers who were obviously drunk. They were banging on the door and demanding to be let in. When they saw the police, they quickly went away. It was against the

law for the Russian soldiers to harass the Polish civilian population.

After they had left, Michael came to the front door and opened it cautiously. He sighed with relief when he saw Carl with the police.

The police left, reassured that the danger was over, and Carl went up to Michael's apartment. He was carrying a gun and was still holding it in his hand when he entered the apartment. Anna and Irene were standing in the middle of the room. They were pale and frightened. They had heard the stories going around town that Russian soldiers were breaking into apartments and raping women.

Irene saw Carl walk in with the gun. There was a smile on his face. What a relief it was to see this tall young man, so strong and reassuring. Suddenly all her fears disappeared and the thought ran through her mind that, with this man near her, she would never have to be afraid again.

Anna made coffee and served some cookies; they sat and talked late into the night.

A couple of months later it was Irene's birthday and Anna decided to make a party for her. She invited a number of people. Among them, she asked a couple of young men who had shown an interest in Irene and had tried to go out with her. Carl wanted to do something special to attract Irene's attention. He thought that bringing flowers would be nice, but he wanted to do more. He went to the flower shop and ordered 100 red roses to be sent to Anna's house for Irene. When the flower delivery came and the messenger brought in the first two bouquets, Anna tipped him and wanted to close the door. "Please wait," said the messenger, "I have more flowers for you." It took a few trips back to the car to deliver all the roses. Irene and Anna roared with laughter. They filled up every available vase. The house smelled divine.

Another young man modestly sent a dozen white roses.

When Irene put on her new blue lace dress for the party, she thought that a white rose would look nice at her waist. The evening came and guests started to arrive. When Carl walked in and Irene greeted him at the door, he looked at her and immediately noticed the white rose. He smiled, "I suppose that I didn't send roses of the right color."

Irene was embarrassed. How stupid of me, she thought. How could I have been so insensitive? She picked a red rose out of one of the vases and replaced the white rose with the red one. "I am sorry," she said, "I love the roses you sent me."

The party became very lively and everyone had a good time. Irene wanted to see Carl drunk. She thought that a few drinks would loosen him up and that he would reveal his true character under the influence of

alcohol. His manners were rather reserved at all times, almost too perfect. So she filled his glass with vodka time and time again, and while Carl drank all the vodka he still behaved in the most gentlemanly manner. Irene felt clearly drawn to him but controlled her emotions. She wasn't ready for a new relationship yet.

Before Irene came to Ligota, she had almost been engaged to Koppel. He was the man who had saved her life. He had also saved Anna's and Wilus's lives. Irene had loved Koppel and had meant to marry him. However, when the war ended and things got back to normal, the relationship soured. Koppel used his charm on other women. He was always in the company of others. Irene suffered because of it but he told her that he could do whatever he wanted to.

"What about me?" she asked.

"You can also do whatever you want. I don't care."

Irene couldn't understand how Koppel could have changed so much in such a short period of time. He had been so adoring and considerate and had done whatever he could for her and her family during the war. She couldn't believe the change in him; she thought it was a passing fancy.

Months went by. Anna met Michael and left Boryslaw for Poland. She begged Irene to join them. She saw how Irene suffered and how she was getting thinner and weaker. But Irene felt obligated to stay near Koppel. Yet, as time went by and his attitude got worse, she began to hesitate. After Koppel's accident she decided to leave for Poland.

Irene saw Koppel before she left. When he realized she was going away, he tried to change the impression he had left her with. He said that he was sorry that he had behaved so rudely. "I have to stay here a little while yet," he told her, "and then I will come to you and we will get married."

Today she was 22 years old. The more time passed, the more she realized how wrong she and Koppel were for each other. She needed a steady and secure relationship. He enjoyed flirtations and liked to surround himself with women. There was something else that bothered Irene. She still felt that she owed her life and especially Anna's and Wilus's lives, to Koppel. But now she knew that she didn't want the kind of life Koppel had to offer. Yet she owed him so much. That was why she wasn't ready for a new relationship yet.

Carl knew her story. She had been honest with him. She had told him everything there was to tell. She also told him that she had to marry Koppel and therefore she didn't see a future for herself and Carl. But they

still spent a lot of time together. They would go to a beautiful park surrounding a local monastery. They were usually accompanied by Irene's friends, as she was trying to match Carl up with one of them, Janka. Irene's cousin Ana was with them also and Carl liked her very much because she was so clever. However, he was not interested in any of them. One day, when they were alone together, he took Irene around and kissed her. She did not resist, but told him, "I don't want you to get hurt, but I love someone else. I am going to marry him as soon as he comes here ."

"I am willing to take my chances," Carl replied.

They had known each other about two months when Carl asked Irene to marry him. He told her that he loved her. Irene was reluctant. It was too soon. She needed more time. She said, "I cannot marry you. The man I told you about is coming soon and I will marry him. We should not see each other any more. Please, don't come here again."

They didn't see each other for a couple of weeks. Then, one day, Carl got a telephone call from Irene. "Carl, I lent you a book a while ago and would like to have it back. Could you bring it to me?" They started to go out again. One day, Irene said to Carl, "You should enroll in college."

Carl protested, "I have a good position in the oil refinery and I make a good living."

"I know, but you have no qualifications and you should learn a profession. If you go to college, I will go to school, too. I will study medicine," Irene replied.

"But how will we support ourselves without money?" exclaimed Carl.

"We will manage somehow," she answered with confidence.

Carl left his position as vice-president in the oil refinery and applied to the university in Katowice. But the chemical faculty was full and he couldn't get in. Wroclaw was in the new territory that Poland had taken from Germany after the war; there was still room at the university.

They travelled to Wroclaw and registered for admission to the first semester. Carl started to study chemistry. Irene registered at the medical faculty. She had always wanted to study medicine. However, while the Polytechnic was ready and classes had started, the medical school was not open yet and the applicants had to wait.

Carl remained in Wroclaw and Irene returned to Katowice. They agreed that Carl would telegraph Irene when the medical school was about to open. A few weeks went by. Carl felt almost a physical pain from being separated from Irene. Finally, he sent a telegram asking her to come to Wroclaw.

❧ 28 ❧

Good-Bye Poland!

Carl boarded a streetcar to catch his last class of the day at the Polytechnic Institute. His morning classes had ended early, so he had gone home for lunch and to work on a paper that was almost due. Now he was returning to school. It was January 1946; at 4 o'clock it was already getting dark.

Carl held onto the strap and looked out the window. It was dreary outside. Suddenly, he jumped up. He thought he had seen Irene in a streetcar coming from the opposite direction. Then he ran to the door and jumped out at the next stop. He took the next car going back toward the house. He ran all the way home. When he entered his house, he was breathless. He ran up the steps to his apartment. There, he saw a figure in the darkness. Irene looked up at him and a smile brightened her face. "Thank God," she said. "I thought I'd have to sit here for hours."

Carl opened the door and they went in. After they had looked at each other, Irene said, "I am here to marry you, if you'll still have me."

"If I'll have you? I love you!" Carl cried, overjoyed. "But I'm not prepared. I don't even know if I can get wedding bands here."

"I thought of that. I bought them in Katowice before I left. I took a chance. I knew you wouldn't be able to get them that quickly," she said.

Carl was so happy, he laughed.

It was Friday evening. Irene spent the weekend with friends and, on Monday morning, she and Carl were married by the Justice of the Peace. Two friends served as witnesses, as no one from what was left of their families was there. Anna and Michael tried to come, but a minor car accident prevented them from arriving in time.

Irene and Carl were married on January 9, 1946. Carl still used the name of Edward Kubec; with that name he married Irene.

After the ceremony, the newlyweds and their witnesses went to a wedding breakfast at the hotel Monopol in Wroclaw. It was a modest celebration, since Wroclaw was being restored very slowly after the hardships of the war; food, among other things, was still rather limited. But to Irene and Carl it didn't matter. They were married and ready to start their lives together.

Irene and Carl just after their marriage in Poland under Carl's Polish name, Kubec.

No one even thought about a honeymoon. For a moment, Irene remembered the time of Anna's marriage. She remembered the big commotion at home. There were cooks, bakers and seamstresses who had made Anna's beautiful slips and nightgowns, embroidered so delicately. She remembered the wedding and all the guests. She herself had been 11 years old at the time; she made a little speech inviting all the people present to her own wedding. Afterwards, Anna had gone with Bronek on their honeymoon. Irene had thought she would have everything that Anna had had.

Now, 10 years later, times were very different. Irene's parents had been killed by the Germans; her home didn't exist anymore; and a big wedding and honeymoon were things of the past. But Irene was married to the man she loved and she was happy. Carl was happy too. They just wanted to be together.

Carl continued to go to his classes and Irene used this time for cleaning the apartment, shopping for food or cooking dinner. She didn't know how to cook, but she experimented. The food she prepared was usually less than good, but Carl never complained. He ate what she gave him and was satisfied. In the evenings they went for walks about town. On these walks they encountered various people.

There were quite a few Jewish survivors in Wroclaw and they clung to each other. Every one was talking about leaving Poland. The transports of Jews who were leaving Poland were pretending to be Czechs returning back to Czechoslovakia. Though it was illegal to do so, one couldn't leave Poland legally at that time.

Some Jews were uneasy living in Poland. They were still afraid of tomorrow, remembering yesterday. Others were more optimistic, especially the Jews who had returned from Russia and who hadn't lived through the German occupation. Irene and Carl listened to all their stories, but, at home, they didn't discuss such things. The first two weeks after their marriage were spent in a state of bliss.

They lived in Carl's apartment, which was furnished with everything one could need. Carl had gotten it from the city authorities. The apartment had been left by a German family that had fled to Germany. There was even a mandolin, and the young couple spent hours trying to play it and sing together.

They had their first argument. Carl couldn't remember what had caused it, but it must have been insignificant. When dinnertime came, Irene put a plate in front of him and said, "This is your meal. Eat it." Carl looked at the plate: there were a few grains of cereal floating in hot water.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's soup," she replied curtly.

Carl started to laugh, but he ate the unspecified stuff obediently. Then they both had a good laugh and quickly made up.

The Medical School had not opened and it didn't look as if it would very soon. Irene felt bad; she wanted to start school. She was 22 years old and felt she had lost enough time because of the war. Now there was nothing for her to do in Wroclaw. Carl was getting progressively busier with school; she had nothing to do but wait.

People were saying that, in Germany, the schools were open and that the Germans were helping young Jewish people to get into the universities. Also, the Americans had started a university in Munich called UNRRA, which admitted all refugees who had finished high school.

It was very exciting to hear these things and one day Irene mentioned to Carl that she thought it would be good to explore the possibility of leaving Poland and going to Germany. Polish anti-Semitism was still strongly felt by the Jews. Some Poles looked at the Jews who had survived with surprise. Many of them would ask, "How did you stay alive? We thought that Hitler had killed all the Jews." It wasn't pleasant listening to such remarks. They almost made one feel guilty about having dared to survive. Irene was very sensitive to this hostile climate. She felt insecure and was uneasy in the presence of Polish people.

But when she spoke to Carl about leaving Poland, he was indignant, even angry: "First you made me quit a perfectly good job to go back to school, and now that I've started school, you want to leave." This was true. She was the one who had convinced him to leave his job in the refinery to go to school. At home in Boryslaw, her parents had placed great importance on higher education.

"I know," she said to Carl, "and I'm sorry. But I don't feel secure here. I'm afraid to walk through the streets alone. I don't know if I can go on like this. Please understand."

Carl looked at her. He hadn't known that she felt that way.

Irene said, "Leo and Hilda are in Germany." Leo, Carl's brother, had left with Hilda and their newborn son for Germany several weeks before.

"We can manage, Carl. If they could leave with a little baby, we can go too. I am sure it will be all right."

They talked about it a lot. One day, Carl came home and told Irene that he had met someone who could arrange for them to leave Poland on a Czech transport. They would go to Prague first and then to Vienna, where they would stay for a few days. Then they would cross the Austrian

border in trucks into Germany. The man wanted money to arrange everything. The bad part was that the transport was leaving in a few days; there was hardly time for anything.

They decided to go. Luckily, they would be leaving from Katowice, so they would be able to see Anna, Michael and Wilus and say good-bye to them. That was the most difficult part for Irene. Ever since she was a child, she had been very attached to Anna. As she grew older, their closeness grew; they were friends as well as sisters. They had gone through many hardships together and were the only ones in the family who had survived the German occupation. It would be very hard for Irene to leave Anna. She realized that if she left Poland she might be separated from her sister for a very long time, perhaps forever.

Irene hoped that she and Carl could persuade Anna and Michael to leave too. But deep down she knew that she was deluding herself. Michael and Anna were in a very good situation. For them to leave would be very difficult. She and Carl were just starting out and had nothing to lose. So they packed their few belongings and took a bus back to Katowice.

Anna and Michael were shocked by their decision. Michael was very angry and shouted, "You crazy kids, where do you think you are going? Do you think that the world is waiting for you? You'll be wandering all over the world. You can't stay in Germany. Where will you go from there?"

But Irene and Carl were young and didn't think too much ahead. Besides, they saw that others were leaving and felt confident that they would manage somehow. Irene had made up her mind to go and Carl supported her decision.

And so, in spite of Michael's anger and Anna's pleading, they went ahead with their plans. Carl had some money; after an exchange, it amounted to 50 dollars. This was a beginning.

After a tearful good-bye, they went to the assembly area for people who were leaving on that transport. They were given Czech papers and were told not to speak when they reached the Polish–Czech border so as not to betray their Polish identity.

Thus Carl and Irene started their journey from Poland to a new world.

29

The Trip

They were very excited and anxious. They had made a quick decision and now they weren't sure if it was the right decision. But it was too late to go back. All the arrangements had been made. They had said good bye to their family. Now there was no turning back.

They were taken in trucks to the railroad station. The transport was leaving in the late evening. At night there were fewer inspectors checking the identities of the passengers and, in the dark, it was easier to hide one's face. Also, the people who were taking the transport out of Poland had prearranged everything with the guards. They had simply bribed them to leave the transport alone.

Irene and Carl boarded the train with many other people. After a while, the train started to move towards the Polish border. They rode all night. In the early morning the train reached the border. Several officials boarded, some Polish and some Czech. Everyone presented his papers. Irene's heart was beating wildly. Carl seemed calm and collected. He had experience, she thought; Three years on Christian papers had taught him how to behave in the presence of police without betraying his inner feelings.

Everything went smoothly. The officials left, seemingly satisfied. The doors of the train were closed and everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

The train was moving again, this time without interruption. Finally, it stopped in Bratislava. Carl and Irene were on Czech soil; they were safe. In Bratislava they changed trains and, after standing for a few hours, started out for Vienna, Austria.

Irene said, "My parents loved Vienna. They lived there for several years before I was born. Anna and Milo lived there too. They were little children at the time. My father was stationed in Blumau, near Vienna, and would come to visit my mother, Anna and Milo on weekends. My parents used to talk about it. They even spoke German to the last. They must have had very good experiences in Vienna. They thought it was a beautiful city. I can't wait to see it. I feel that I almost know it."

Irene rambled on and on, while Carl looked at her with amusement. He liked to see her excited and full of life. He was also interested in what she said. After all, they were married, but he had never met her parents.

She had never known his parents either. How sad it was. He would have loved to introduce her to his mother; he was sure that she would have liked Irene. But he would never be able to do that now.

The trip to Vienna took many hours and they arrived at Vienna's Main Railroad Station late at night. Trucks were waiting at the station; the people were transported to what had been, before the war, Rothschild's Hospital. It was now converted to a DP (displaced persons) camp. It was a huge building with many rooms. Carl and Irene were taken to a large room with many beds and were shown the two bunks which they were to occupy.

They were very tired. After washing up a little in a common washroom, they lay down on their bunks and fell asleep almost instantly.

The next day they were up very early. There were many people in the room and the noises had awakened them. Being in these surroundings was strange, but this was not the time to reflect. Everyone was urged to go to the dining room for breakfast. Carl dressed very quickly. Irene, still tired from the trip, rushed to keep up with the rest of the people.

In the dining room they joined a line that was forming in front of a large table. Several men and women behind the table ladled food onto everyone's plates. Once you got the food, you would sit down at tables with benches and eat your breakfast. Carl ate his portion with a hearty appetite and went for a second helping. You could have as much food as you could eat.

After breakfast, Irene and Carl began to look around. The people were very friendly and soon they were engaged in conversation with other refugees. They were approached by an older couple who were clearly religious. They were from Lithuania and wanted to go to Israel. They questioned the young pair about their origins and, before they knew it, they were telling the older couple all about themselves, their parents and what had happened to them. The older couple listened intently. When they heard that Irene and Carl had recently been married, they asked if they had had a religious ceremony.

"No, we didn't know a rabbi in Wroclaw, where we got married. Besides, we never even thought of it," answered Carl.

The older couple looked at the two of them. "What do you think your parents would say if they were here?"

Carl answered, "My parents and my grandfather would have wanted us to have a religious ceremony, but we can't do it now. We wouldn't even know how to go about it."

"True, it would be difficult under these circumstances," the older man spoke. "But you owe it to the memory of your parents to arrange for

a Jewish ceremony as soon as possible. When you get to Germany and settle down, take care of it. I would like you to promise us that. Your promise to us will be a promise to your parents."

Irene and Carl were shaken by this speech. They looked at each other, Irene with tears in her eyes.

"We will do it," Carl said very quietly. "I promise you that."

After lunch, Carl suggested that they go for a walk and see some of beautiful Vienna, the city they had heard so much about at home. They were happy and in a playful mood. They had no worries at the moment. Their room and board were provided for and they were told that in a few days they would be taken to Germany. They didn't know what would happen there, but at the moment they weren't thinking about it. They had a few days to spend in Vienna and they were going to take full advantage of them.

They took a streetcar and rode around the city, getting off to look at a structure or a park. Irene wanted to see the Vienna Opera House, where her mother, who had been a music lover, had spent many hours. Irene remembered the arias that her mother had sung while cooking dinner or housecleaning.

The opera house was most impressive and Irene started to sing an aria from "Tosca," which she remembered from home. They walked for a few hours, absorbed in the sights and in each other. It was wonderful and life was full of promise.

The three days in Vienna passed very quickly; once more, people were assembled to be loaded on trucks that were to take them through the Austro–German border to Germany. Again, this was illegal. There were no legal visas of admission into Germany; everything was done with falsified papers. However, the authorities knew about it and looked the other way. These were displaced persons and Germany felt responsible for the situation in which they found themselves.

The trucks were not covered and although the ride took only about an hour, Irene felt the cold air go through her; she was freezing. They crossed the border to Germany at Ainring. Now they were on German territory. They were given back their belongings and a guide took them to a DP camp in Ainring. The walk was pretty long; it was a very cold day in February. Finally, they arrived at the camp. Unlike in Vienna, Irene and Carl were taken to a room where there were only about ten beds. They put their suitcases under the beds and, exhausted, took off their coats and rested.

That night Irene developed a high fever. She started to cough badly. Carl was lost. He went to the manager of the camp and asked for help.

Someone gave Irene aspirin. She had a very bad night. The next day the fever rose and she felt even worse. Carl sat next to her, bringing her water and trying to help her in any way he could. On the third day, when she didn't respond to him, he got scared. The room they were in was very hot; the steam heat was on all the time. Irene kept throwing her bedding off and was very uncomfortable. She was burning hot. Carl went again to the manager and insisted that they do something to help Irene. He felt she was getting worse because of the draft. The windows were being opened all the time by the other people in the room. Irene was lying in a hot room with a draft from the windows and he was afraid she might catch pneumonia.

Carl made a big commotion and the manager started to look for a different place for them. The following day he came to Carl and told him that he would have him and Irene transferred to a nearby town, Traunstein. There, the living conditions would be better. This was all he could do at the moment. He told Carl that, in Traunstein, there would be a doctor who might be able to help Irene.

They were transferred the same day. Carl wrapped Irene in a blanket. She couldn't even get dressed. In Traunstein they were brought to a villa. There were several rooms there and one of them was given to Carl. He carried Irene in there and lay her down on the bed. Now they had some privacy, but the room, unlike the other one, was very cold. Carl went down to the main office, where he asked for more blankets for Irene. He covered her with all of them. Her fever persisted; now she was shivering all over her body. She looked very pale and thin. Carl tried to feed her some soup but to no avail. she couldn't eat. Her throat was inflamed and a constant cough racked her body.

Carl spent the night by her bed. She was half asleep and half awake. He put compresses on her head and tried to keep her lips moist. He didn't know what else to do. He asked for a doctor but was told that he must bring Irene to his office. But he had no means of bringing her there.

The next morning the fever broke. Carl was ecstatic—she had made it, she would get well! But it took a long time for Irene to return to health. Although the fever went down, the cough lingered on. She would cough so hard that, at the end of the spasm, she was thoroughly exhausted and drenched with perspiration. Irene cried out from the pain in her chest. Carl finally took her to the doctor, who gave her cough medicine and told her to breathe in hot steam. He said that she had a very bad infection in her lungs and sinuses. The infection in the lungs got better but the sinuses had to be treated with an infrared lamp.

30

In Germany

A curious incident occurred while Irene and Carl were in Traunstein. A Nazi doctor who lived there became acquainted with the Jewish refugees. He was attending to their medical needs and became very friendly with them. After a while, the Jews circulated a petition among themselves. They planned to take it to the American authorities and ask them to denazify the doctor. The petition stated that the doctor was taking good care of them. When the leader of the group saw the petition, he tore it into pieces. "How could you do such a thing!" he hollered. "How do you know if he was innocent during the war? Maybe he conducted experiments on the Jews in the concentration camp. How could you forget so quickly what the Nazis did to us!"

Jewish people forgave their tormentors so quickly. They are always ready to offer the other cheek. No wonder Jesus was a Jew.

Food was still rationed and Irene and Carl walked around hungry. Somewhere, Carl was able to get two dozen small eggs. Irene cooked two for each of them. After they had eaten, Irene asked, "Should I make some more?" "Of course," Carl answered eagerly. This pattern was repeated several times until they had eaten all 24 eggs! Contrary to common belief, they didn't ruin their stomachs.

As soon as Irene had recovered somewhat from her illness, Carl went to Munich to find out about the possibility of enrolling at the university. The beautiful city of Munich had been partially destroyed during the war, especially in its center. The university was closed, but the United Nations was operating a so called UNRRA university in the Deutsches Museum and Carl enrolled there in the department of Chemical Engineering. The School of Medicine hadn't opened yet. Carl started to commute each week between Munich and Traunstein, about a three-hour train ride. During the school week he stayed in the Deutsches Museum, which had dormitories for the students, and on weekends he returned to Irene in Traunstein. The university provided free food for the students.

The UNRRA university was open to all DPs (Displaced Persons) and it accepted, besides Jews, other nationalities. Anti-Semitism among the Ukrainians, Poles and Russians was still very strong in spite of the fact

that they were all studying together. But since when was there a reason for anti-Semitism?

After about a year, the German University and the Polytechnic Institute opened and Irene was able to go to Munich to enroll in Medicine. She and Carl succeeded, after a long search, in finding a tiny room, assigned to them by the authorities. The lady who owned the apartment didn't like it. She had been ordered by the authorities to sublet the room because there was a shortage of apartments, and she made the life of the couple very difficult. Fortunately, the owner of the house, Mrs, Heidler, who lived on the upper floor, took a great liking to Irene and did what she could to make their life a little easier. Irene reminded her of her own daughter, who had died young. She invited the young couple for dinner. They were hungry, since food was still very scarce. Her husband lit a fire in the fireplace, placed salt herrings in the flue duct and made delicious smoked herrings from an inedible salted fish. Mrs Heidler opened cans of preserved goose meat that she had saved since 1939, before the war had started. For dessert she served Bohnenkaffe, a real coffee. What a meal for young, hungry people!

The UNRRA university had now closed, along with the student cafeteria. Irene and Carl had to depend on ration cards, which were barely enough to live on. They occasionally got a small amount of rations from the Jewish Committee, and occasionally a package from Carl's aunt in the United States. Fortunately, Carl didn't smoke, so they could trade his portion of cigarettes for a piece of butter or other food. American cigarettes were in great demand among the Germans. A friend of theirs would walk five miles on foot to get an extra cigarette from them.

Hungry and frustrated, the Jewish students decided to go on a hunger strike. Organized by Carl's close friend Orchon, they marched on the Jewish Committee, tore out all the telephones and staged a hunger strike. Most of the Jewish DPs were in camps and were fed by various organizations. These camps, however, were far from the city and the students couldn't commute that far to school. They had no means of support and no money. As a result, they were starving. After a full day's negotiations, the Jewish Committee promised to open a student cafeteria with free meals and to issue additional food rations. They were overjoyed by their success.

Carl's aunt Eva came to Munich to visit. She lived with her husband Olek and their children Yurek and Joanna in Lindenfels. Lindenfels was a DP camp in the British zone near Frankfurt. She stayed with Irene and Carl for a few days. Seeing how frail Irene was, she invited them to stay with her. There, she and her husband Olek took good care of them,

supplying plenty of food and tender loving care. Eva would bring food, which was plentiful, from their dining room in the camp, and Olek would make them artificial halva by mixing peanut butter with nuts and sugar. The people in their camp were preparing to go to Palestine (Israel didn't exist yet). Eva suggested that Irene and Carl go with them. But Carl's mind was set firmly on his studies; he was afraid that he would not be able to continue them in Palestine. After two weeks of excellent care, Carl and Irene had to return to Munich. Irene was feeling much better. She had become very fond of Eva and the feeling was obviously reciprocated. This was the first time that these women had had a chance to know each other better and Carl was very happy that they liked each other. Eva, his mother's sister, was the only person who could replace his mother. How he wished he could have introduced Irene to his mother! How proud he would have been to bring such a lovely and warm-hearted bride home! He was sure his mother would have loved her, too. He was grateful to Eva for the attention and care she had given him and Irene. She was very close to his heart.

The couple went to the Jewish Committee to arrange a religious wedding, as they had promised the elderly couple on their way from Poland. They stood before the rabbi holding hands. Another couple was getting married too.

"Do you have two witnesses?" asked the rabbi.

"No," answered Carl. He didn't know about this requirement. "What should I do?"

"Go out to the street and ask any two people to be your witnesses," said the rabbi. Carl obediently went outside and started to stop the passers-by, asking them, "Do you want to be a witness to my wedding?" Some of them looked at him with pity and walked away, thinking that the poor man was crazy; others just ignored him. Finally, he was successful and he brought two strangers to the wedding room.

The rabbi placed the two couples before him and started to read the ktuba (the wedding contract). After a few moments, Irene realized that the rabbi was using the wrong names. "Rabbi," she exclaimed, "you are reading the wrong ktuba!"

"Where, how?" asked the rabbi, who started to examine the pieces of paper. "Oh, yes," he corrected himself and started to read the right document.

That was their second wedding. The first wedding had been performed using Carl's Christian name, so it didn't count. There were no parents or relatives. Most of them were dead, killed by the Germans.

There were no flowers, no music and no reception after the wedding. But Irene and Carl were happy. They had fulfilled a vow they had made and they felt that their parents would be satisfied.

In spite of their poverty and continuous hunger, the young couple had a lot of fun. They had many friends. A Jewish Student Union had been organized; there they met a multitude of Jewish boys and girls from all the countries of Eastern Europe. They wondered at how greatly these people differed in language, habits and education, and yet had one thing in common that bonded them together in a hostile German nation. They were all Jews. "Am Chu?" (His nation?) was the question they asked to ascertain if the other person was a Jew.

Irene was still sickly and prone to frequent infections and illnesses. A doctor advised her to have her tonsils removed. Carl had an entrance examination that day and could not be in the hospital during the operation. When he finally got there, it was all over and Irene was crying bitterly.

"Where were you!" she exclaimed. "Why did you leave me alone!"

Carl lamely tried to explain. "This was the only time the entrance examinations were given and if I didn't take them now, I would lose a semester."

Gradually, Irene calmed down. She said with pride, "The doctor asked me what my occupation was. When I told him I was a student taking up medicine, he told me to be the nurse at my own operation and hand him the instruments." There was a the sound of a future doctor in her voice.

After Irene recovered, she went to register for school. The head of the Admissions Committee told her that she would have to pass the entrance examination. When she asked him when the test would take place, the man said, "Now." She had no time to prepare. She passed all the tests except Latin. Carl promised that he would help her prepare; she was given time to study and was conditionally admitted. After a while, she took the Latin test again. A few days later a letter arrived: she had passed, but now Carl had to take the Latin test. It was an error, but Irene would joke that Carl had prepared her so badly that they had concluded that he didn't know Latin.

They saw many good shows. Among others, they went to the theater to see "Death in the Appletree" and to the opera house to see "The Land of Smiles." They had to walk five miles after the shows because the streetcars did not run at night. They were not afraid to walk at night. Although there were no muggings, occasionally Jews were lured into dark streets by frustrated Germans and killed.

They often gathered with friends, but there was very little to eat or drink. One evening, however, they were able to get a bottle of whiskey; they shared it and everyone got drunk. When the bottle was finished, no more alcohol was available. One of the students kept insisting, "I want more whiskey, I want more whiskey!" The others tried to calm him down, but he kept insisting. Finally, someone went to another room. He returned with a bottle full of yellowish liquid. "Here is your whiskey," he said. The man took the bottle, put it up to his mouth and took a healthy swig from it. Immediately, he started to spit and curse. Someone had filled the bottle with urine. Today, the student who drank it is a successful doctor in the United States.

The chemical laboratory was located in the basement of the chemistry department. The upper floors had been damaged by bombing. While working there, Carl would listen to the war stories told by students who were former German soldiers. "We would take back our land from the Poles and the others," said one of them, to the enthusiastic approval of his listeners, "if we only had the opportunity." But one of them was more realistic and said, "No, not now; in 10 or 20 years, maybe."

Carl and his friend Morris were sitting in the classroom during a lecture on organic chemistry. The professor, Dr. Goldschmidt, a Nobel prize laureate, was a Jew. He had escaped to England shortly before the war and had now returned to Germany and his old position as the Head of the Organic Chemistry department. He was lecturing about the physical properties of various fats. Among others, he mentioned human fat and its melting and boiling points. There were two German girls in the row behind Carl. One of them said to the other, "He is probably talking about the Jewish fat that was made into soap in the concentration camps." They both started to laugh. Carl turned around in horror. "My parents were killed in a concentration camp!" he exclaimed. The girls stopped laughing and a silence fell in the classroom. Carl walked over to the professor, who was looking at the students questioningly, not knowing what had happened. Carl repeated the incident to the professor; his friend Morris asked that the girls be punished. The professor asked the two students to come to his office that evening after classes.

When Carl came in the evening, there were two Jewish students waiting for him in front of the professor's office. "What have you done, Carl? The professor is very angry," they hollered. "He's already given us a piece of his mind!"

Carl knocked at the door and entered the professor's office, followed by his two friends. The professor was sitting at his desk. He came straight

to the point. "What you did today was wrong. We came back to Germany to heal the wounds and what you did will open them again. We should be building normal relations with the Germans, not destroying them. Besides," he added with sarcasm, "the Jews didn't behave properly during the war either. In Belgium, for example, there were Jews who denounced other Jews to the Gestapo. I saw it myself."

Carl felt emotions welling up in his chest and his words poured out like a river. He spoke about his parents' and family being killed, about little children's heads being smashed against the wall by German soldiers, about elderly people being denounced by teenagers, about people being hanged by their feet. The Germans did not kill the Jews on orders alone; they did it with zeal and enthusiasm.

Professor Goldschmidt didn't say a word. He was listening, with his head leaning on his hand. A few days later, the two girls were suspended from the university for a year.

It was the old Germany again. First, the Germans had come to Poland and destroyed their lives. Now they had returned to Germany and the old horrors loomed over them and haunted them again, as real as ever.

Carl became a kind of negative celebrity at the university. Negative, because he had denounced the girls for what they had said, and the German students and professors were not happy about it. But he had done what he thought was right and didn't regret it. For many days afterwards, everyone's eyes were following him at school; students whispered to each other, looking and pointing at him.

The time was approaching for Irene and Carl to go to the United States. They had applied for a visa in the American Consulate a while ago and were now being called for an interview. To their surprise, they found that they were not legally married. Their first marriage was under a different name and the second marriage was a religious one, which was not recognized by the authorities. They had to go to the Justice of the Peace to get married properly. When the official ceremony began, the clerk asked Irene to sign the papers. She signed "Irene Horowitz."

"No," said the clerk, "you must sign your maiden name."

"Does that mean that I was living with Carl illegitimately for two years as an unmarried woman?"

"Yes," answered the official.

They had to make a difficult decision. Should they continue their studies in Germany or interrupt them for an unknown future in a new, albeit promising, country? Carl wanted to complete his studies, but Irene

Irene and Carl after their marriage with the name Horowitz.

was for going to the United States. In a way, the decision was made for them, but it created new problems.

A commission came to Munich with a number of scholarships for Jewish students. Both Irene and Carl applied and passed the qualifying examinations. However, Irene was awarded the scholarship to study medicine in Basel, Switzerland, while Carl won a scholarship to study chemistry in South Dakota. Members of the commission, evidently, hadn't realized that they were married. Besides, no scholarships for Medicine were given in the United States. At that time, Irene had completed half of her studies, the so-called "Physicum." With her usual selflessness, she said firmly, "We will both go to the United States and you will continue your studies. It is more important for a man to have a profession."

It must have cost her a lot to give up her dream of becoming a doctor.

ç 31 ❧

Good-Bye Europe

Carl and Irene arrived in Bremenhafen by train, together with a whole group of emigrants who had received entry visas for the United States. They were the remnants of the concentration camps and the survivors of the gas chambers, Jewish partisans from the forests and refugees from Russia. But there were also other refugees. The entire exiled government of Carpatho-Ukraine was there. When the Germans dismembered Czechoslovakia, they created an independent country that, according to them, lasted only one day. It was annexed the next day by Hungary.

The city of Bremen had been totally destroyed; there was not a single house standing above the ground. The city's inhabitants were living in basements and underground dugouts. There weren't even piles of rubble visible. Everything had literally been leveled to the ground.

Our group of emigrants was placed in an American transit camp, where they were supposed to wait for the next available boat to the United States. There was a delay because of the Christmas and New Year's holidays and the group had to wait more than a month. Meanwhile, they tried to fill the time as best they could.

The food was atrocious even by the post-war standards. It consisted monotonously of the previous day's boiled potatoes or farina, served three times a day, day in and day out. Finally, Carl went back to Munich by train to buy some food on the black market. Irene's brother Milo had just sent them 30 dollars, and the money came in very handy. After buying some sardines, butter and fresh fruit, plus a silver tea set as a gift for his aunt and uncle, who had sent them the tickets for the voyage, Carl was left with 18 dollars. That was their entire wealth when they arrived in the United States. Carl hurried back with the supplies to Bremen.

Irene developed a bad toothache. The dentist had to pull her tooth. In doing so, he left a splinter in her gum, which developed into an infection. She was in constant pain. Meanwhile, Carl had gone to a hospital to have a cyst on his forehead removed. Fearing that Irene would worry, he hadn't told her, hoping that it would only take a couple of hours. Now Irene was really worried. She stood at the camp's gate and forgot

her toothache. She expected Carl to be brought in dead, killed by marauders.

The camp management tried as hard as they could with their limited means to ease the waiting time for the refugees. On New Year's Eve, a costume party was held. Carl and Irene went hunting for costumes in the destroyed city. Miraculously, they found a store renting all kinds of outfits. Irene tried on a Spanish senorita's, silk outfit, with a shawl around the shoulders and a hat with a large rim. She looked beautiful in it. Carl couldn't find anything suitable for himself, so Irene had no partner for the party.

At the end of the party, the master of ceremonies announced a contest for the most original costume. There were many costumes, among them a cowboy and a member of the Russian aristocracy. The master of ceremonies asked the contestants to form couples and dance while he walked from one to another. When he held his baton over the head of the couple, the viewers expressed their approval by applause. Irene had no partner, since Carl had no costume, so she paired up with the young blonde woman in the Russian green velvet gown and fur hat. They were a pair no one could take his eyes off. Eventually, two couples were left: Irene and Nicola, and the one with the young man in the cowboy outfit. The "cowboy" was twirling his toy gun and shooting piercing looks at the audience, as if trying to coerce them into applauding him most. But when the master of ceremonies held the baton over Irene–Nicola, a thunder of applause arose. The pretty young women won first prize by acclaim. The exiled government of Carpatho–Ukraine was most enthusiastic in their applause.

The prize consisted of two Hershey bars and two packages of American cigarettes. But the sight of these two girls standing together, holding each other in half-embrace and facing the audience was something one could not forget.

Finally the boat arrived. Its name was "Marine Tiger" and it was a converted Navy Victory ship. When Carl and Irene boarded it, they were taken to a lavishly set-up dining room with food they hadn't seen for years. The crew warned people not to eat too much, or they would suffer from seasickness. But to no avail. People, denied good food for years, ate their fill. When the boat pulled out of port, the refugees stood on the deck and watched the land gradually disappear. Irene and Carl watched too. They didn't know if they would ever see Europe again. They were leaving the unknown graves of their parents, relatives and friends. Europe had been cruel to them. There was nothing to be sorry about in leaving,

yet they watched the land disappear with mixed feelings and sadness. On the next day, the ship started to rock, and most of the passengers got violently seasick. The dining room was empty at mealtime. Nobody could eat anymore. People lay on their cots, throwing up and moaning. Irene and Carl were not seasick. They enjoyed the trip immensely and didn't miss a meal. They became acquainted with a group of young people, among whom was Nicola, the girl who had won, together with Irene, the contest in Bremen. Nicola was a Lithuanian Jewess who spoke literary Yiddish and the couple was enchanted by the beauty of the Jewish language. After having been told for so many years that Yiddish was jargon and a caricature of German, they themselves had believed that it was true.

It was winter and there was a danger of icebergs, so the captain decided to turn south. The weather grew warm and the sea became calm, People were lying shirtless on the deck, sunning themselves. Irene and Carl wished that the trip would never end. An uncertain future awaited them in the new country, but here there were no worries or problems, only fun.

One evening, as the sun was setting, a beautiful display of colors appeared on the water. They were told by the sailors that this happened only once every few years. Irene and Carl considered this a good portent.

Finally, land appeared, followed by a long procession of small houses along the Brooklyn shore. Then, to the left, they saw the Statue of Liberty, majestic and silent. Everyone stood and watched it in awe.

Statue of Liberty—Arrival in the USA.

Epilogue

My mother died in Belzec, a death camp. Everyone who was taken away in the August 1942 pogrom was sent to this camp and no one ever returned. To my knowledge, no one ever saw the inside of the camp. It was liquidated not long after the pogroms of 1942.

My father was transported to the Plaszow concentration camp in April 1944. Some time later he was sent to Flossenburg, a concentration camp in Germany. After the war I met a man from Boryslaw who told me what had happened to him.

Because my father was an experienced bookkeeper, he got a job in the camp's office. He worked there for a while, but one day, to his misfortune, my father lost his eyeglasses. He was 58 years old and he couldn't work without them. But there were no glasses to be gotten. The Germans removed my father from the office and put him to work at the quarry. He had never worked as a laborer and, apparently, he was not strong enough to endure the hardships of this work. My father became very weak. His resistance was lowered and he contracted dysentery. He died shortly afterwards.

In 1946, Carl went to Flossenburg, where he found my father's name in the files. My father couldn't endure physical hardship. He paid for the loss of his eyeglasses with his life.

My brother Milo joined the Polish Army while in Russia. In 1942 he went with the Anders' Army through Persia to Israel. He stayed there throughout the war. Anna and I received a letter from him in 1945. We wrote to him about the fate of our family. We also informed him about Teresa's and Romus' deaths. Milo took the news hard. He was working in a hospital in Tel Aviv. A while later he met and married an Israeli girl.

He is now living in New York with his wife. He has never had another child. He moved to the United States in 1953 in order to be near me. We hadn't seen each other for 12 years.

Anna lives near me. She emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1968. Michael passed away in 1982.

I feel very lucky to have had my brother and sister survive the war.

After all, how many people were fortunate enough to find their loved ones alive and well after the war?

I once went to a rabbi to establish a Jahrzeit (an anniversary of my parents' death). He asked, "How often do you think about your parents?"

"Every night," I said.

"Then you don't really need a date to remember them," he replied.

But I wanted a date. And now, every year, my husband Carl and I observe the Jahrzeit of our parents on the same days. We don't know the exact dates of our parents' deaths and we have no graves to visit. But we live with their memory in our hearts, and a part of them lives in us.

I end this book with mixed feelings. I am relieved that it is finished. Yet I feel that a large part of me went into these pages and I will miss the evenings that took me back in time. Good or bad, this was my life.

Carl's Story.

Epilogue

I am sitting, more than 40 years after the war, in our house in New York. I am a businessman surrounded by luxuries. A stereo is playing Bach's English Suite. It is a beautiful piece of music. I wonder, how could a nation that gave birth to Bach, Handel, Goethe and Schiller have produced Hitler? And what crime did Jewish children commit to deserve such horrible deaths?

My parents were poor. They never exploited anyone and they loved German culture. Why were they killed? How could a country with such a culture stoop so low to become a nation of the worst kind of murderers? And why, even now, do I love German music and poetry? I should hate everything German after what they did to my mother, my family, my nation.

I live in New York with my wife Irene, also a Holocaust survivor. She also has a terrible story to tell.

I remember being in the Plaszow concentration camp and looking down from the hill at the gentiles walking freely on the other side of the barbed wire fence. How I wished I could walk freely among them. During the big pogrom in August 1942, if the Germans had let us go to the North Pole, we would have been happy to do so. I never dreamt in my wildest dreams that I would ever walk as a free man, let alone in New York.

People ask us today; "Why didn't you defend yourselves?" By use of constant terror, hunger and starvation, the Germans dehumanized us. We went without food for days, weeks and months. Not even a slice of bread was available in the ghetto.

The Germans who participated in the executions were amazed that the Jews went to their deaths with dignity and in silence. The Jews could not defend themselves with their bare hands against machine guns, with a hostile population stabbing them in the back.

A soldier charging an enemy with a machine gun is called a "hero." What do you call an innocent, unarmed man quietly facing soldiers with machine guns? What do you call a woman voluntarily going, along with her helpless sister, to death with a smile on her face to give encouragement to others?

A prominent rabbi once asked a question at a meeting of his congregation in New Jersey: "If the situation had been reversed and you had been the gentiles, would you had saved your persecuted neighbors?" Most people agreed that they probably would not have. I was not present at that meeting, but I would like to answer that question. Yes, maybe we wouldn't had helped, but we wouldn't had collaborated with the murderers, as our non-Jewish neighbors did. We wouldn't had led them to the hiding places of the oppressed.

We Jews were guests in Poland. The Polish King Casimir the Great invited the Jews to Poland in the Middle Ages to help build up Poland's commerce and industry. During the war, the Germans were Poland's mortal enemies. They beat the Poles on the battlefield at the beginning of the Second World War. They executed many innocent Poles. Yet the Poles denounced the Jews to their own enemy. We were guests in their house, but they betrayed us. Where was the famous Polish hospitality?

I have always wanted to go back to my home town. I wanted to see Lvov and Zniesienie. I wanted to walk once more on the unpaved road to my home. I remember every pebble and blade of grass on that road. I realize that my loved ones are no longer alive and that even our house might not be standing there.

In writing this book I got my trip to Lvov. But I got much more than I was bargaining for. Not only did I see our house and the hill on which it stood, but I also saw my parents. I felt my mother's steady, clever gaze on me. I played chess with my grandfather and I saw the rest of my family who had perished. And my heart cried out to heaven, Why, why were they killed? What crimes did they commit to deserve such a fate. All their lives they worked hard and never harmed anyone. Why, why. . . ?

May their souls rest in peace.

Today I have created a temple in my heart, a temple of our suffering. I watch it jealously. It belongs to me and in a way I am proud of it. I feel offended when someone today compares his life to a concentration camp or his neighborhood to a ghetto. How dare they! Don't they realize that the worst life today is heaven compared to life in a ghetto or a concentration camp? We were starved, crucified and killed every single day, every single moment of our existence. We were treated worse than animals, worse than criminals, although we hadn't committed any crime.

In 1990, the President of the United States, George Bush, suggested that the Jews forgive the Germans for what they had done to them. He said this at a time of euphoria over the German unification movement. East Germany had declared that it was sorry for what it had done to

Jewish men, women and children during the war. Would President Bush forgive it if someone had killed his parents and children? How come, for 2,000 years, the Jews have not been forgiven for the killing of Jesus Christ, a crime they did not commit in the first place? No one blames the real perpetrators, the Romans and their descendants. The Jews *never* killed Jesus Christ. Crucifixion was *not* the Jewish method of execution. After the Jewish uprising in the years 70–71, the road from the Mediterranean to Jerusalem was lined with thousands of Jews crucified by the Romans.

We want the world to know and remember what happened to us. We want the world to know more than the cold statistic of 6 million innocent Jews killed by the Germans during the Second World War. We want the world to feel the pain of a mother whose little baby is torn away from her and his little head smashed against the wall. We want the future world to feel the torture of people buried alive and of people beaten to death. We want future generations to think about people standing in a gas chamber and choking to death from poisonous fumes.

Maybe then, and only then, will this inhumanity of man to man be avoided in the future.