Drohobycz

Drohobycz was the center of the naphtha industry in East Galicia. The Russians had gained control of it at the outbreak of the German-Polish war in 1939. When the Germans invaded Russia in 1941, they occupied Drohobycz, where more than 16,000 Jews lived in comparative comfort. Until the Germans came, the Ukrainians had not indulged in any pogroms because there were so many Jews that it was dangerous for them to invite unnecessary trouble. The Ukrainians who lived in the area welcomed the Germans with great joy; however, the Jews were tense when the district changed hands. During the celebrations, a rumor was started that many imprisoned Ukrainians had been shot by the departing Russians. It later developed that the victims were Zionists, including such leaders as Dr. Nacht and Dr. Adelsberg. But at this time the Ukrainians thought that their own people had been massacred and they started a pogrom against the Jews during which thirty-six innocent human beings were killed.

A few days later the Gestapo came to town and began to persecute the Jews. They were responsible for the arrest

and disappearance of hundreds of Jews who vanished and were never seen again. The entire Jewish population lived in a state of fear. They realized that they were without protection and that their enemies were in complete control of the situation. Women anxiously sat at their windows waiting with great uncertainty for the return of their husbands who had been driven to work by the Germans in the morning. The men, on the other hand, were wracked at the terrible thought that when they came home in the evening, their wives and children would be gone.

The Jewish Council in the town consisted of the following members, among others: Dr. Rosenblatt, Dr. Ruhrberg, Dr. Pomeranz, Dr. Gerstenfeld, Dr. Margulies, Dr. Rudorfer, Dr. Barchatsch and Dr. Bernfeld. Dr. Schmeer and Dr. Frommer, original members of the group, had quit, after a fight with the others. In the beginning, the Council held its sessions in the home of the aged and later, in a Talmud Torah building. Dr. Rosenblatt was Chairman of the Council, and Dr. M. Ruhrberg was his Deputy.

A few days after the establishment of the Council, the Security Police, the Sipo, (actually the Gestapo) proved, by their actions, that they did not take the council seriously. A week after the Council was organized, it sent to the Security Police, forty men to help transport furniture. Soon after the men began to work, they were subjected to beatings by the Security Police, and the Group Leader of the Police, Felix Landau, complained to the Council that some of the men had refused to listen to orders. Landau asked for the names of these men but the Council refused to identify them. He immediately demonstrated his disregard of the Council by executing thirty of them, including Dr. Barchatsch, one of its members.

The chief German officer was Nikolaus Tolle, and Dr. Ruhrberg tried to bribe Tolle in the hope that he could get the German to treat the Jews more kindly. Tolle and his

henchmen gladly accepted the bribes from Dr. Ruhrberg and, as a result, the situation of the Jews did not worsen.

The Jews became aware that in order to survive, they had to bribe the Germans. So long as they had valuables to give up, they thought they could buy some security. Gradually, the Germans demanded of the Jews textiles for suits, coats and dresses; butter, eggs, silverware, coffee, tea, and scores of other items and material goods. This "business" flourished so greatly that the Council established a special purchasing office so that it could comply with the demands of the Nazis. This office was managed by three distinguished Jews in the ghetto, Samuel Rothenberg, Nachum Petranker and Moses Kartin. Nevertheless, security was not assured—and it did not come.

The Council also established workshops for shoemakers, tailors, furriers, and other craftsmen who were forced to work twelve hours a day, so that they could fill the German orders.

Every German who came to the Council knew that he could have anything he asked for, and the members of the Security Police insisted that everything be of the highest and finest quality. Even the gardens of the Germans were cared for by the Jews. Some top officials confiscated villas and the Council supplied them with gardeners who worked with great imagination to create fantastic landscaping marvels.

Hermann Goering had once said that all German industry must be geared for war production and that all other elements of the economy would have to suffer. Now, however, with the help of Jewish labor, the Germans were managing to obtain comforts and luxuries that they would otherwise have to do without. As far as I knew, the Council never disappointed the Germans and carried out every order promptly.

Naturally, the Jews lived in mortal fear and there are

instances I still remember which illustrate what I mean.

There was the case concerning the horsewhip with a silver handle. It had been ordered by the Germans of the Security Police, but no one could make it nor knew where to buy it. Scores of people were sent scurrying about to solve the problem of the horsewhip. The deadline for its delivery passed and when one of the Security Police angrily asked for it, all the Jews were put in deadly fear. They wondered whether the Germans would come into the ghetto and indiscriminately shoot down innocent Jews. They didn't, but the anxiety remained alive.

Another German, to whom crossword puzzles were an obsession, could not solve a particular puzzle as one word eluded him. Every now and again, he would telephone the Council demanding that it supply him with the proper word. Each demand was accompanied by a threat. Once he needed a five-letter word for an extinct tribe; another time he needed a three-letter Turkish word; once he wanted to know a three-letter word for a particular species of antelope. It sounds incredible, but it happened. Because there were many well educated and intelligent men in the Jewish Council, they were able to supply the words he needed. They used maps, dictionaries and many reference books to help him.

One day, he came to us with a query which puzzled the Council. He wanted to know a ten-letter word for "teacher." He demanded a reply in fifteen minutes. At first, the request was not taken too seriously. It was turned over to a group of men who worked in the Judenrat on these problems and then it was forgotten, but after no answer was given within fifteen minutes, the Council members grew uneasy. Dr. Ruhrberg was asked to do something about the matter. He called the German, asking him to wait ten minutes longer. The German told him that if the Jews could not come up with the proper word, he himself would take the conse-

quences. It was quite clear that this meant that Dr. Ruhrberg was in danger, and that the other Council members were in equal peril.

Panic struck. Some officials fled the office; others hid in the loft and in the cellar. This, on top of the failure to supply the horsewhip, led the Jews to believe that they would all be liquidated.

Dr. Ruhrberg rushed about offering gifts, and loaves of bread to anyone who could come up with the proper word. Dozens of men set to work on the problem, but they were unable to think of the correct word. Dr. Ruhrberg slowly sat down in his office to await the German, hoping he could placate him with a substitute gift.

A young girl, who was waiting to talk to Dr. Ruhrberg, overheard the problem and cried out, "Perhaps the word *Schullehrer* (instructor) fits." Hopefully, everyone began to count the letters in the word. If the "ch" or the double "l" could be counted as a single letter, it would fit!

Dr. Ruhrberg immediately telephoned the German and gave him the missing word and anxiously waited to see if it was right for the puzzle. An hour later, it was apparent that the danger was over.

In a few days, the Council managed to find a horsewhip with a silver handle which was owned by a Polish landlord in the Drohobycz area. They bought it from him and a second crisis was avoided.

A major problem to the Jewish Council was the supplying of pornographic literature and pictures which the German police were constantly ordering. As the books the Germans demanded had to be written in the German language, the Jews had to send for them. In addition, they were very expensive. Yet, somehow, no matter how peculiar and outlandish the request, the Council managed to comply with them. Dr. Ruhrberg was ingenious and imaginative. He kept the Jews safe through his ability to come up with

whatever was asked of him.

In spite of all the effort taken to save Jewish lives, there were constant and brutal killings. The case of a man named Fliegner is an illustration in point. He was working in the gardens of the SS man, Felix Landau,* on 12 Jana Street, paying attention to his chores, minding his own business, when Landau saw him. At that moment the German was entertaining his mistress, Trude Segall, and she decided to test her accuracy with a pistol.

She shot at Fliegner a number of times but missed him. Laughing gleefully, Landau grabbed the pistol from her and shot Fliegner through the head.

The next day, when Dr. Ruhrberg asked Landau why he had killed the harmless Jew, the Nazi replied, "Why not? Others are killing thousands of Jews. Can't I shoot at least one?"

Another incident which is etched sharply on my mind is the murder of three teen-age girls, Sternbach, Kupferberg and Zuckerman. The pretty and lively youngsters were used as brick-layers helpers and were joking with one another as they went about their work. A Gestapo officer named Guenther came near them, stood a while and observed them as they labored and then took out a gun and, for no reason at all, shot them dead. One of the girls' father, Kupferberg, was a barber who used to serve Guenther, the Gestapo beast. After shooting the three girls, Guenther went home and sent for Kupferberg because he wanted a shave. When the Jew finished with his task, Guenther looked at him and said, "Kupferberg, a half hour ago, I shot your daughter." Kupferberg fainted.

Such cases can be multiplied again and again. In Boryslav, 700 Jews who had gathered in the woods to pray, were murdered by the Nazis. At Turka-on-Stryi, 300 Jews were

*Landau had received from Hitler the Blutsorden Medal as one of the assassins of the Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Dolfuss.

killed. There, Germans had entered the town, knocked at doors, and asked where Jews lived. When the desired answer was received, they simply proceeded to shoot every Jew in sight.

On one particular day, 1,100 Jews in Stryj were rounded up and jailed. Dr. Ruhrberg and an engineer named Naftali Backenroth, worked heroically to save them. In spite of their efforts, they could help only 250 of them. The remaining 850 were shipped to another area and shot.

In November, 1941 and later in March, August and October of 1942, the Germans took violent action against the Jews in Drohobycz. The representative of the Jewish "Arbeitsamt" at the Drohobycz office was Mr. Liebermann, who was empowered to issue certificates of invalidism to Jews who were too sick to work. At the end of November, 1941, all Jews who were too sick to work, and who possessed such certificates were ordered to report to the Drohobycz office. As a result, more than 300 Jews jammed their way into the office building and courtyard. Suddenly, German trucks filled with Security Police rambled up to the office, forced the Jews into the trucks, drove them to the nearby village of Bronica and executed them.

Four months later, in mid-March, the Jews realized how dangerous the situation had become. The leaders of the Jewish Council were contacted by the Chief of the Drohobycz Security Police, who informed them that farmhands were needed for work in Wolhynia and Podolia. This meant that 1,000 Jews would have to be evacuated from Drohobycz, and prepare for a three-day march to their destination. This to some was an opportunity to improve their situation, for they believed it was better to live in fertile farm areas than in overcrowded ghettos.

The Jewish Council, which was charged with the responsibility of selecting the 1,000 Jews, announced that they would welcome volunteers. Although many signed up to

leave, there weren't enough to fill the quota. As a result, the Council selected dozens of thieves and informers for the trip, thereby doing their duty and ridding the area of undesirable elements.

Weeks passed without a word. After a month of silence, the leaders of the Jewish Council asked the Chief of the Security Police if there was anything wrong with the mail, as none of the Jews had received any letters from those who left. The Chief laughed loudly and heartily, "How stupid can you be? For more than 1,000 years people believed that you Jews are smart. Can't you guess what happened to them?"

In July of 1942, four months after this debacle, the Germans went to work on the children of the area. A special kitchen had been established for them by the Jewish Council. The Gestapo Commissioner, a man named Haeckel, had often assured Dr. Ruhrberg that the Germans would not bother the youngsters when they came to eat. But one day, when hundreds of them were gathered in the kitchen, groups of German Police entered the area, grabbed dozens of helpless, crying children, and threw them on the trucks. Some managed to escape, but unfortunately they were not to be free for long, as the Nazis diabolically hunted them down, managing to kill 150.

During this period, the parents of the children lived in great anxiety, while waiting to see if any had survived. There were heartbreaking scenes in town when the lucky youngsters who lived through this pogrom returned and were recognized and embraced by their parents.

In August and October, the Nazis instituted new pogroms, but the Jews of Drohobycz were luckier than those in the other Galician towns. In other areas, the Germans wiped out one-half of the Jewish population; in Drohobycz "only" one-fourth of the Jews, or 4,000 were butchered.

Dr. Ruhrberg and Naftali Backenroth played a key role in saving Jewish lives at this time.

The Jewish Council had been founded by the Germans not to help the Jews but to serve German interests. Nevertheless, the Council members managed, through their operations, to aid their fellow Jews.

In spite of the fact that the Germans had been poisoned by anti-Semitism, they were willing to deal with the Jews in order to advance their own interests. Even though the various Jewish Council members in separate towns were not permitted to socialize with one another, they managed nonetheless to discover exactly how the Germans had to be handled in order to aid Jewish survival. This period of relative calm existed only through the first half of 1942. After that time, the Jewish Council lost its influence with the Germans and lent itself as an instrument of torture in the hangman's hands.

If someone will read these words eventually, it should be made known that none of the members of the Jewish Council would, under normal conditions, ever be elected as a Jewish representative. In the main, these were wicked, corrupt men who took no cognizance of the bitter situation in which their fellow Jews lived. If, by accident, one or two of them were more sensitive than the others, they changed for the worse within a week or two. If they did anything at all for their fellow Jews, it was not done out of the goodness of their hearts but because of self-interest; they may have wanted to do something to indicate that they really represented the Jews, or they wanted to collect money from the Jews and work out some arrangement of moral credit for themselves, should they survive the war—and some of them were confident that they would survive.

The Jewish Police were more pliable and worse than the

Council. They did nothing to help their fellow Jews, although they did try to save their own relatives. They attempted to hold on to their valuables and bribe their way out of danger. Their record was a disgraceful one.

In the ghettos, Jews were busy making hiding places for themselves and many of them camouflaged entrances to cellars and lofts. They expected the worst to happen.

On November 4, 1942, the Germans went into action, and the Jews scurried into their carefully prepared hiding places. During the first few days, the Germans managed to find only a few dozen Jews. They were so angry and frustrated they thought of bombarding the ghetto with artillery, thus forcing the Jews to leave their hiding places. There was even talk of sending tanks into the ghetto, but it never materialized.

And then, the Jewish Police proposed to carry out the arrests themselves. The Germans gladly agreed and the "November Action" began.

The Jewish Police at first arrested only the older people. It was a cold, wintry month and it was expected that the old folks would not long survive; certainly they would not live through the war. In this fashion, at least the lives of the young people could be saved. Naturally, the old folks felt that they had been betrayed. They were right, but there was nothing anyone could do about it.

The prisoners were moved into a large building called the Komarner Synagogue. The windows were barred and the doors bolted. German police and Ukrainian militia guarded the area, thus the ancient House of Worship had become a prison.

For more than three weeks the Jewish Police rushed

about the Jewish quarter with axes and mattocks, searching for Jews. Doors were smashed, floor planks uprooted and hundreds of elderly Jews were discovered and arrested.

As I write these lines, I don't know how people will think about this event in the future. Will they believe it was especially cruel to single out the old people? But the saddest thing of all is that the Jewish Police were so willing to help the Germans and do all the dirty work.

Then one day, typhoid fever broke out in the Komarner Synagogue. Hundreds of Jews died like flies. This matter was particularly bothersome for the Jewish Police who had to supply a new quota of Jews to replace the dead. The more Jews they brought in, the more deaths there were.

At first, the prisoners had received bread and soup twice daily, which was brought from the Jewish kitchens. Also, the latrines were cleaned regularly. When anyone died, the corpses were immediately transported to the cemetery. But after the outbreak of typhoid, nobody wanted to take the chance of bringing food to the area; the prisoners were no longer led to the latrines and the dead were no longer isolated from them. The dead lay in heaps, in the mud. The stench was horrible and lice and fever abounded. Many of the prisoners went mad. Day and night one heard crying and moaning. Some of those who lost their minds stripped themselves of their clothing and danced wildly in the knee-deep mud.

Edward Galotti, the Chief of the Jewish Police in Drohobycz and the only decent Jewish policeman whom I knew, was in charge of providing the necessary Jewish quota and lost control of the situation. He asked the Gestapo to do something about it but the Germans were not interested in cooperating with him. To them, this was the easiest and cheapest mass liquidation of the Jews. Some of them even enjoyed it and came in droves to the area to see the mad Jews dancing about. The Gestapo man Gildner was cruel

enough to bring his children to see the "spectacle."

After three weeks, the Jewish Council and the Jewish Police decided to run the risk of refusing to cooperate with the Germans any longer. They realized that tanks and grenades were less painful than slow torture. The Germans, violently angry at this turn of events, invaded the ghetto, captured thousands of Jews and placed them in boxcars scheduled to go to Lemberg. Among the thousands of Jews who died in this fashion was Leo Spanndoerfer, who was, for many years, one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Drohobycz.

This same tragedy was repeated in the surrounding communities, as the Germans went wild and massacred all the Jews they could get their hands on.

Thursday, November 19, 1942 was one of the blackest days of this terrible period. One of the Gestapo men, named Huebner, was friendly with Max Reiner, a Jewish druggist's assistant. A month earlier, Reiner had lost his wife, child and parents. It was obvious that Huebner had not been able to help him. Reiner, terribly upset by the tragedy, was no longer seen with Huebner.

The tension between the two men grew in intensity. Then on the morning of November 19, they met in the chemist's shop. They quarrelled. Suddenly Huebner drew his pistol and killed Reiner.

Huebner, aroused and bloodthirsty, quickly called a few Gestapo men to his side and with them invaded the office of the Jewish Council, shooting down everyone in sight. They then proceeded to enter the ghetto and thus began the day which was later called "Bloody Thursday."

The Germans stood at the corners of the Jewish quarter and shot down everyone who happened to come along. At that moment, traffic was heavy in the area and soon there was a heap of corpses piled in each ghetto lane.

In mid-afternoon, their gory work finished, the mass murderers whistled gaily, returned to the Jewish Council offices and demanded that they be served brandy.

Among the victims of these madmen was the noted Polish-Jewish writer, Professor Bruno Schultz. The pride of the Jews of Drohobycz and of all Galicia, Professor Schulz was not only a writer and a poet but a talented painter. Ironically, he had painted portraits of the sweethearts of many of the Germans and had otherwise busied himself with harmless work.

The Germans liked Professor Schulz, but he was unfortunate enough to have been walking through the ghetto at that time to visit his old mother. She lived in a ghetto hideout and he was bringing her some food As he neared the ghetto, Professor Schulz was approached by Guenther, who shot down the Jew. Dr. Ruhrberg, looking down from his window, saw the entire scene and was helpless in the tragic situation.

A few days later, we heard that in Lemberg there had been a similar mass killing. We also learned, when we saw Huebner walking around with a bandage on his hand, that Reiner had stabbed him with a knife before he was shot down.

Despair in the Jewish Quarter

As the murders continued, despair gripped the entire Jewish population, and in the early days of December, we were driven to panic time and again. It began on December 7, 1942, when the entire Jewish Council, including Dr. Ruhrberg, suddenly disappeared. The only exception was Dr. Gerstenfeld. The others had the money they needed in order to help them escape; only Dr. Gerstenfeld, shy and fearful, was unable to obtain enough money to get away. He came to the Council office as usual on the morning of December 8, and found none of his colleagues there. The safe had been ransacked and contained only a torn five zloty note. Dr. Gerstenfeld looked about in shocked amazement. The whole world seemed to have crashed down on him. In a few moments, Gestapo officers rushed into the office and demanded an explanation as to what had happened. Finally they were convinced that he had nothing to do with planning the escape and immediately named him Chairman of the Council, ordering him to appoint new members as soon as possible.

When we heard what had happened, we were all embittered and certain that our final liquidation was at hand. Rumors abounded that we were to be killed immediately.

We heard that we would be tortured. The stories grew more terrible with each telling, but meanwhile we waited.

At Drohobycz there were three groups of workers. The first unit of armament workers, wearing an "R" sign, labored mainly in the naphtha refineries. They had been organized in a group called "Beskiden." The R stood for Ruestungs-arbeiter.

The second group, working for army establishments, wore a "W" sign. The W stood for Wehrmachstbetrieb. The workers were kept busy in sawing mills and municipal workshops.

The third group wore no signs at all. They were on call by the Gestapo and were led by the engineer Backenroth. A fourth group was later established and forced to labor in the ceramic works.

When the rumors began as to who would be murdered and who would not, we understood that the only Jews to be spared would be those bearing the R and W signs. The Beskiden management arranged for housing for its workers. They took over a group of Jewish-owned homes, situated on a section of Jagielonska Street and the Sadigurer Synagogue. This unit of houses was surrounded by a high wall. The workers were placed here and were guarded by the Jewish Police.

R and W workers were considered to be SS property. Money was paid to the SS at a daily rate of five zloties for a man and four zloties for a woman. The laborers were "fed" by the camp administration. The meals were skimpy indeed, consisting of a weekly allotment of soup and bread. The SS was charged for this food at a cost of 1.40 zloties per day. At this rate the net profit to the SS was 3.60 zloties for a man and 2.60 zloties for a woman.

When the workers moved from the ghetto to the barracks, most of them took their families and managed to hide them in lofts or in cellars. In this fashion, each camp barracks

became a ghetto in miniature.

The people who had to remain in the ghetto were now lonelier than ever and in their despair there followed a wave of suicides. If they had enough money to buy it, the victims used potassium cyanide. There was also a market on this poison. Prices rose before an action and declined after the action.

A tube of this poison cost from 800 to 1,000 zloties. Those who could not afford the cyanide, gassed themselves to death. And those who were even too poor to obtain gas, hanged themselves.

Suicide became an obsession and it was discussed frequently and normally by everyone. One could often hear men and women talking in the streets and saying, "Today I will finish it all. I'll kill myself and my family." Nobody tried to talk anybody out of killing himself. Death lived with them constantly. This included the young folks as well as the old people.

Yet there were some men and women who had the courage to live and to think of eventual escape. Two conditions were to be fulfilled for this attitude: one had to have money and look like an Aryan.

There were two outlets for escape: one had to obtain forged papers in order to pass as Aryans or one could hide in the dwellings of non-Jews. A few tried to cross the Carpathian border and enter Hungary. Others attempted to build permanent subterranean hideouts.

Trading for forged Aryan papers became a major activity. Some Jews, who had connections with Catholic priests, were provided with certificates of baptism. Forged papers became an industry and many Jews were able to escape once they had them.

Nevertheless, escape from the ghetto was no guarantee of safety. We later learned that many who had managed to get out were hunted down and murdered on the outside.

When the Reich identity cards were instituted, it became necessary for one to prove in six different ways that he was of Aryan descent. He needed two certificates for his parents and four for his grandparents.

In every town there were extortioners who took the last money from Jews, assuring them that they would help them to escape. But later the extortioners would deliver the Jews to the Gestapo. In this way, they earned money from two sources and became rich in the process.

The Jews who managed to hide in Polish or Ukrainian dwellings suffered even more than those who tried to escape. The Poles and Ukrainians would trick the Jews out of all their money and valuables and then turn them over to the Police. Then, the Jews would be executed either on the spot or in the woods. The Jewish Council would then be ordered to bury the victims in the Jewish cemetery.

The Jews who planned to cross the border into Hungary also had their troubles. Normally, getting across the border would not have been difficult, for the towns of Drohobycz, Sambor and Stryj were only some 80 to 100 kilometers from the border. But the Jews were not familiar with the thick Carpathian forests and were dependent upon guides to lead them. More often than not, the guides betrayed them and the Jews would suddenly find themselves in the middle of the dark woods confronted by armed peasants, who killed them without pity.

Later, the Jews grew wiser and marched in armed groups. In most cases, they were defeated by the peasants who outnumbered them. Those who survived the shootings were marched back to the ghettos, depressed and heartbroken.

On the other hand, even the handful who crossed the border successfully were faced with major obstacles. The Hungarian authorities had forbidden anyone to shelter strangers. As a result, the Jews who managed to reach Hungary stumbled about aimlessly until they were picked

up by Hungarian police who returned them to the German Police, and all of them were shot on the border between Hungary and occupied Poland, called the "General Government."

These experiences led the Jews to trust no one. They learned to rely upon themselves alone. At great expense and under extreme secrecy, many of them managed to build comfortable hiding places with electric or gas lights, water and fresh air supplies, radios and sufficient food stores. The hideouts were well camouflaged.

Although it is not easy for me to write in this condition, I must say a few words about Dr. Maurice Ruhrberg upon whom thousands upon thousands of Jews in Drohobycz and in the area looked upon as their leader from the first day of the German occupation until December, 1942, when he escaped from the ghetto. He was called Maciek, the name his parents and close friends gave him. His father had been Wilhelm Ruhrberg, the chairman of the Jewish community for many years. Maciek was given a good education and, after gaining his degree, was sent to Trieste to study economics, where he earned his doctorate in this specialty. When Maciek returned to Poland and became aware that his degree could not help him earn his livelihood, he studied Law, and although he received his Master of Law degree, he did not get very far in the profession. For years he worked as a legal assistant and even when he went out on his own, he did not do too well. Thus, he disappointed his parents who held great hopes for him.

Thanks to his parents' connections, Maciek got a job as a reporter for the *Chwila*, a Zionist newspaper in Lemberg, but here, too, he did not establish himself as outstanding. He made more money by keeping certain scandalous items out of the newspaper rather than reporting them. He probably would have managed somehow through journalism

and the law had not the German-Russian war exploded in June, 1941. This event changed his life, as well as the lives of millions of others.

From the very outset, Dr. Ruhrberg, who had joined the Jewish Council, knew how to handle the German authorities. He knew how to bribe them, how to juggle presents, giving, first, a certain item to one man, and then, another to a second. He had to keep these gifts secret for one German was not to know what his fellow German was getting. And unlike other Jews who dealt with the Germans, Dr. Ruhrberg spoke to the Nazis with dignity and was always proud, and not humble. He had the aristocratic touch and feeling. He was courteous and affable and he helped the Jewish people whom he wanted to serve. To him, there were two groups of Jews: those of Drohobycz and those outside the area. He was interested only in "his" Jews, and was willing to sacrifice four Jews from outside Drohobycz to save a Drohobycz Jew.

When Dr. Ruhrberg negotiated with the Germans on how many Jews were to be killed, he always attempted to persuade the murderers to take the Jews from outside his area. If he was called upon to intervene on behalf of the Jews, he took money for every little favor he bestowed. If he received no payment, he could be quite indifferent to the destruction of an entire Jewish village.

On the whole, it can be said that he was the right man in the right place at the right time—except that later on he began to believe that he was a great Jewish diplomat or statesman or Prince in Israel. Drunk with his illusory power, he was unable, because of this feeling, to see the realities of the life surounding him. He could no longer realize that the Jews were in grave danger, the gravest in their entire history. He could not believe that the conditions under which the Jews lived might be less than permanent, that this was a temporary condition. He persuaded himself

that life would continue this way forever and that he would always play the role of the great Jewish ruler and that all would have to bow before him.

When he fled Drohobycz, in December, 1942, he acted as though he were an abdicating monarch who was convinced that one day he would be recalled with joy by the populace. He took pompous leave of the Jews, making solemn speeches and leaving the quarter through a lane formed in military fashion by the Jewish Police.

His escape was not a sudden one. He had spoken of it freely with his fellow Jews. He had said that sooner or later the Gestapo killed everyone who bribed them. Still, when he escaped, many Jews were terribly upset and a wave of suicides followed in the ghetto.

Dr. Ruhrberg, his wife and some of his friends, left in an automobile and drove into the Carpathian Mountains in the direction of Maidan, where, between high mountains and thick woods, he had built a hiding place for his family, a comfortable one, with plenty of food. But as soon as his group arrived in the mountains, they were traced there by the Germans and had to flee again. He got to Boryslaw and stayed there for a spell. Then he managed to obtain forged Aryan papers for himself and his wife and drove to Warsaw. He lived there for six months, until his landlord became suspicious and reported him to the police. He was arrested and after three weeks of investigation, he told the Germans all they wanted to know. The Gestapo in Drohobycz was informed of his capture. He and his wife were brought back to Drohobycz and shot in the courtyard of Gestapo headquarters in Drohobycz.

While it must be admitted that Dr. Ruhrberg was egocentric and that he sought power, even as he helped his people, Naftali Backenroth, the second great personality of Drohobycz, was rather a different kind of man.

About this noble man, I will write later.

My Start in Drohobycz

My joy at having escaped from Janover Camp was not to last. As soon as I arrived at the Drohobycz ghetto, I immediately recognized that I was in for a nightmarish experience, for it was the time of the end of the "November Action."

Those who were unemployed—like my brother and myself—had to watch out. When I wanted to meet my relatives who were still alive, I had to sneak to their hideouts under cover of night through the back lanes of the ghetto and take my chances in spite of the curfew. Hiding in these miserable hovels were men who had been rich and influential in former days. They had possessed fine homes and had employed hundreds of workers and craftsmen. Now they were squatting in wretched cellars, in constant danger and fearful of losing their lives.

One day, my brother and I decided to visit a Jewish family in the neighboring village of Rolow where we thought it would be easier for us to work. Although the Security Police had confiscated all the houses and surrounding land in the village, there were still a handful of Jews permitted to live there.

When we managed to reach the Lorberbaums, we discovered that there were three other families, originally from Drohobycz, living with them—the Kamermanns and the Richters and the Teppers.

One of the German policemen, a Volksdeutch named Fleischer, was one of a group in charge of the property confiscated by the Germans, and because he himself came from a poor family, it was not difficult for the Jews to keep him in good humor by constantly offering him presents. Every two or three days he came to the farm, sat down on a bench and said nothing. But the Jews knew what he wanted. Soon they brought him presents, which he took quietly and left.

Kamermann and I became friendly during our brief stay and he confided some of his secrets to me. He told me that he had an old friend in the village, a Ukrainian named Parashtchak, who had built a large cellar under his house and offered to hide the three families there for the duration of the war. Although he made this offer out of the goodness of his heart, and not for the sake of profit, the three families offered him whatever money and valuables they possessed. But this good peasant refused to take anything from them. He said that all the villagers would become his enemies if he suddenly became rich.

Parashtschak had worked day and night to build his cellar hideout and all the members of the three Jewish families pitched in to help him. They expected to move in within the next three weeks, and Kamermann wanted my brother and myself to join him. He stressed that I wouldn't have to give anything to anybody and I felt that it was generous of him. He told me that the cellar was stored with 2,500 pounds of flour and fat, besides other food that had already been brought there. He even managed to bring in soap, toothpaste and matches as well as medicine. But he

set one condition: that I would keep a record of all the events that transpired during the German occupation, so that the world would eventually know what we had lived through.

Now, as I write under most uncomfortable conditions, setting down my experiences on paper, I suspect that the inspiration for putting down my story came from Kamermann.

In order to appreciate the unselfish proposal of Kamermann, it would be necessary for one to have lived through the German persecutions. Naturally, I accepted his offer with great joy. He was so generous that he even refused to accept any money I wanted to give to the peasant. He reminded me that conditions after the war would be uncertain and that as I was not a businessman, I would need the money for myself.

In the face of this pleasant turn, we were terribly shocked when we learned that the peasant was unwilling to allow us to live in the cellar, even though the three families urged him to permit us to live with them. What would it matter to Parashtschak that two more people would join thirteen? Yet he could not be moved. He said that he was willing to help his friends, not strangers.

To tell the truth, I did not like the peasant from the first moment I set sight on him. His eyes were cold and cruel. I had always imagined that a man who wanted to save human lives would have a kindly look. I told Kamermann that I mistrusted the peasant, but he laughed at me and said, "If I can succeed in persuading him to take you in, I'm sure you'll be able to survive the war. He's a very reliable person." He added that the village of Rolow was an ideal hiding place as there were no persecutions or air raids.

Early in December, all Jews working in the villages surrounding Drohobycz were ordered to move into the

Jewish quarter of Drohobycz, and so, with a heavy heart, I prepared to leave Rolow. Before I left, Kamermann assured me that he would talk to Parashtchak again and there would still be a possibility for my brother and me to return to Rolow.

We drove back to Drohobycz during the night. As we traveled, I reflected on the lost opportunity to hide safely for the duration of the war. And as I realized how much more pleasant Rolow was than Drohobycz, I devoutly wished that all would turn out well in the end and that finally I would be accepted by Parashtchak.

Three weeks later the German Police reported to the Jewish Council at Drohobycz that there were several corpses lying in the woods between Rolow and Gaje. When the bodies were brought in—thirteen, including men, women and children—it was discovered that they were the Kamermanns, Richters and Teppers. We also learned that all thirteen had been shot to death by Parashtchak and Fleischer.

It was at this terrible moment that I recalled the wise words of Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk. On the Sabbath before the New Moon, we Jews pray: "Fulfill, O Lord, our heart's wishes for the best." The Rabbi explained why the words "for the best" were used. After all, can a man wish for evil? And he said that man cannot know if his wishes will lead to good or evil, for many wishes lead man to destruction. This is why the words "for the best" are used. It means that God should protect man when he makes a wish and that when he asks for a favor, it should end up well.

I remembered this parable as I stood at the cemetery looking down at the dead face of Kamermann. It had been my greatest wish to remain in Rolow with him, and now he was dead. Even now it is unclear to me why Parashtchak had not wanted my brother and me. Perhaps he did not

think we were worth his bullets. Perhaps he had been afraid to have to deal with an additional two young men.

Upon our return to Drohobycz, we realized that the plight of the Jews had become more desperate than ever. There were regular roundups of victims and the Germans continued to kill Jews with pitiless regularity. The fact that Dr. Ruhrberg and the Council had fled made life even more difficult for those who remained. Attempts to escape became more frequent and many of those who were unable to get away killed themselves.

One particular episode in the wave of suicides was especially shocking. It concerned two families living together in one room. The Hausmanns were old and childless; the Birnbaums, whom I knew from my home town, had two children.

One day I heard moaning and crying from their room. I ran to see what had happened. At the threshold of the room I saw Mrs. Birnbaum and her 11-year-old son Janek lying dead on the sofa. The Hausmanns stood there looking down at them, wailing loudly.

Although I was upset by the scene, I was rather surprised that the Hausmanns mourned so deeply; after all, suicide was so common.

I asked them why they were reacting so strongly to the death of the woman and her son. The Hausmanns said that the Birnbaums had taken the cyanide that they themselves had been planning to use.

"It was *our* poison," I was told. This is why they were so stirred by the deaths. They had saved their money laboriously to buy the poison which was apparently found by Mrs. Birnbaum, who utilized it, so to speak, freely.

I sat down and thought about this miserable situation. Had there ever been a time when people fought with each other for the privilege of committing suicide? Had there ever been an occasion when people stole poison from each other?

The old folks complained to me, "What can we do now with the poison?" At this point, Mr. Elias Birnbaum entered the room. Before seeing the corpses on the sofa, he sympathetically asked why the Hausmanns were crying. When no answer was received, he looked around the room and saw his wife and child. His face turned white and he tip-toed to the sofa and looked at his family, asking, "When did this happen?" Nobody knew. He cried, "Why didn't she say anything about this to me! With what did she kill herself?" The Hausmanns burst into tears again and replied, "With our cyanide! She did it with our poison!"

Birnbaum silently sat down. I interjected, "Please don't cry. Birnbaum will get you two portions of cyanide within the next few days."

"From whom will he get it? The chemist fled from the ghetto and now it's impossible to get any."

As we talked, Birnbaum's daughter entered. She had heard about the suicide and rushed into the room where her mother and brother both lay, kissed and embraced them violently, pulled out a knife and tried to kill herself. We wrestled the knife from her grasp, and when she heard that her mother and brother obtained the poison from the Hausmanns, she wanted to kill them. Birnbaum and I had a difficult job on our hands restraining her. That night the Hausmanns slept elsewhere as they were afraid of the girl. And when the Jewish Council undertakers came to take the bodies, the girl tried to prevent them from doing so.

This was the situation in the ghetto during December, the last month of 1942. We had reached the nadir of our despair. Every Jew was now interested only in himself and refused to do anything for his neighbor.

Meanwhile, the Aryans, Ukrainians and Poles, looked forward to stealing whatever possessions we still had. From the neighboring villages, hundreds of peasants came to town expecting to load their carts with everything we would

presumably leave behind if sent to our deaths.

Then suddenly, events took a turn for the better. Late in December of 1942, the Americans landed in Africa and occupied French Morocco and Algiers. The Germans were retreating from all fronts, deserting Libya and withdrawing to Tunisia. The Italians were weakening in Africa and the German armies were being surrounded at Stalingrad. Elsewhere on the Eastern Front, Hitler's armies were tasting defeat after defeat.

One afternoon, Naftali Backenroth rushed into the ghetto crying out in a loud voice that we would be saved; that we could emerge from our hiding places as he had heard from a reliable source that the ghetto would not be liquidated.

Apparently this information had seeped down to him and now to us. Gradually, Jews began to slip in to the ghetto from their hiding places. Also returning were those who had managed to find refuge with peasants. Every day we saw old familiar faces and joyfully embraced friends whom we had thought long dead. The price for poisons dropped as no one was interested in killing himself. We now felt sorry for those Jews who had committed suicide.

On one of these calm days, I visited the family of Israel Wilner. Wilner was married to my cousin Basia, and the family consisted of the Wilners, two children, his mother and two sisters. We had much to talk about and discussed the previous "dark weeks" as though they would never return. In the course of conversation, Wilner pointed to his 8-year-old daughter and said, "Thanks to this girl, we're alive today. If it weren't for her we would all be dead."

Wilner's story was such an interesting one that I shall attempt to retell it, more or less in his own words.

It all happened, he said, early in December, during Chanukah, when we celebrate the great victories of the Maccabees. I began to think of Palestine and started to

wonder why I had never thought of moving there. In the last two decades, we had plenty of chances, and now we are in this foul and rotten Europe living among enemies who are criminals.

Wilner continued his story:

I became fatalistic and said to myself, what will happen, will happen. Yet I could not help thinking how happy we could have been in Palestine. We could have been living and striving for an aim. For thousands of years Jews have been living and working in Europe, thinking themselves safe. We have struggled for our children and the future. We invested our lives in Europe. Why hadn't we returned to our Mother country? There we would have been able to create a safe life for ourselves and a bright future for our children.

Maybe we Jews are different from other people. Perhaps others would have jumped at the opportunity to return to their homeland. Yet when Palestine was opened to all Jews through the Balfour Declaration, we preferred to remain, living among Poles and Ukrainians, thinking of Palestine only when we prayed each morning and evening.

As I tortured myself with these thoughts, I watched my family suffer. Fear and terror embraced us and my mother repeatedly said that she would be better off dead. My wife and sisters tried to convince me that they, too, were a hindrance and wanted to kill themselves. They told me that I alone should try to muddle through, that a man would have a better chance to save himself.

All my properties, my house, my factories, my wealth—inherited from my father and father-in-law—had been taken from me. I did not even have enough money to buy poison.

Then one day, with a plan in mind, I managed to buy some coal. With it, I would heat the oven, and the poisoned fumes would eliminate us. My family joined with me in

this idea and the very next day the oven was heated, the chimney closed and we prepared to die.

We said our farewells, embraced, cried, and lay down on the floor waiting for death to overtake us.

It was silent in the room and all I could hear was our breathing and the beating of hearts. I thought, why did the people of Europe persecute us so? What had we done to deserve this?

I don't remember how long we were lying in the room, when suddenly I heard my little girl. She called to me in her high voice, "Daddy." A shock ran through my body, but I controlled myself and did not answer her. Then she began to cry, "Mommy, Mommy! I don't want to die! I want to live! I'm afraid of death! Mommy! Daddy!"

I broke down, leaped to my feet, ran to the window and opened it wide.

Now what? Who knows? Maybe we can live on. There is hope again in the ghetto.

Seven months later, on June 27, 1943, on the twentieth day of Tamuz, in the year 5603 according to the Jewish calendar, Israel Wilner and his entire family were exterminated in the Beskiden Camp.

At the time Wilner told me this story, life was fairly comfortable in the ghetto. Everyone relaxed. The peasants returned to their villages with empty carts.

At this point, I think I should try to place in perspective the kind of life we led when persecution was less intense and the "Actions" were not being carried out.

I should point out that even when life was comparatively calm, it was not pleasant. The so-called "Robbers' Commission" consisting of German Police, which had already been active in Sambor, introduced itself in our area.

Then it went into action. Day by day, they went systematically from one dwelling to another, taking everything they could lay their hands on. No house or apartment escaped them. First, they took only first-class goods; fine furniture, good carpeting, and high quality men's and women's clothing. On their second trip through, they were less particular; the third and fourth times around, the homes were stripped of everything. By May, 1943, there was nothing more to loot. The dwellings were bare with the exception of old bottles, broken pots, rags and paper.

Jewish property was considered war booty belonging to the German State and so robbing went on without any protesting.

The Jewish homes outside the ghetto were handled in a rather different way. There, the Germans confiscated the best houses, declaring them property of the State. The ordinary dwellings were sold to the local populace at very cheap prices.

This wholesale plundering made life even worse for the Jews, whose only source of income was their personal belongings—and now these were being taken away from them. Those who did fairly well were the few merchants and shopkeepers of the ghetto. There were constant demands for food and clothing and, as a result, they suffered far less than the rest of us.

In the ghetto there was an active "underground" Stock Exchange, with gold, jewels and foreign currency being bought and sold. Life, as you can see, continued along some of its "normal" paths.

I should say that some of these illegal businesses were owned jointly by Jews and non-Jews. From time to time, the non-Jewish partners would betray the Jew and as a result all his property would be taken by the non-Jew. The Jew would be happy to get away with his life and this method of robbery, too, was quite common.

Meanwhile the peasants themselves had looted so heavily

that they were able to undersell the Jews. In addition, the Jewish merchants sometimes gave away their goods before the Robbers' Commission could get their hands on the material.

Outside the ghetto, many Jews, in partnership with non-Jews, began to open shops where they sold old clothes. Naturally, the official owner had to be Aryan. Unofficial Jewish partners continually bought clothes in the ghetto and transported them to the shops in the dead of night. For a brief period this business flourished. Then the Gestapo learned of it. Trucks appeared at the shops and in an hour or so the stores were emptied.

Social organizations were slowly established. There was a sick fund and a tax office, a communal kitchen, a Jewish hospital and other such organizations.

At the kitchen, a plate of soup and 100 grams of bread was issued once every day. There were always long lines of people—many of them previously successful and influential—waiting for the free meager allotments.

The Jewish Hospital was founded by the Jewish Council. When the Gestapo invaded the ghetto, they cruelly drove the sick into the streets and loaded them onto trucks. We never saw them again. But later, during the peaceful period, the Gestapo assured the Jewish Council that they would not again force the patients out of the hospital. In the "November Action" the sick were not driven into the streets; instead, the Germans marched through the wards and shot them in their beds. Nevertheless, the Council kept the hospital going.

Jewish intellectual life was crushed. The German authorities forbade the establishment of Jewish schools and the only way children were taught was for educated Jews to visit their homes and give private lessons. No lectures on Jewish subjects were given, for life had become too hard

and too bitter for the Jews to care about Jewish history, religion and cultural themes.

Until August, 1942, the only Jewish newspaper we saw was the *Gazeta Zydowska,* which was sent on from Warsaw and consisted of four small pages written in Polish. It appeared three times a week and was not as good as pre-war Jewish newspapers, but we were all happy to read it. We followed with special interest the work of Dr. Edmund Weiss and Dr. Hillel Seidman.

Jewish books, which were held in great respect, were torn apart by non-Jews and used as packing paper. When the Jews were forced to move to the ghetto, they were unable to take their books and so the volumes were left behind, and collected by poor folk who sold them for packing paper. You can imagine how many books were destroyed from the fact that the price of packing paper decreased from two zloties to fifteen grosh per pound.

As death lived so closely to us, the young people tried hard to enjoy life. As a result, respect for morality diminished. Jewish women, who felt they might die any day, these same women who had been chaste and proper all their lives, sold themselves in order to survive. During the various Actions, the most beautiful women in the ghetto became mistresses of the German and Ukrainian Policemen. They wanted desperately to live, but sometimes, when their lovers tired of them, they were sent into the streets during an Action or shipped to a collecting point, from whence they were sent to their death.

The men who did not work continually played cards in the ghetto and drank heavily in an effort to conquer their boredom. They, too, wanted to forget the conditions under which they lived.

After November, 1942, 10,000 Jews managed to survive. About 1,000 had escaped into the woods, with 1,500 more working for the Germans. Another 1,500 managed to find

hiding places. This left about 6,000 Jews in the ghetto in Drohobycz.

The streets were usually empty as young people worked and old folks preferred to remain in their homes. Only on Sundays were the streets crowded. The workers received passes to leave the camps in the morning and return in the evening. Later, the Germans abolished this system and issued passes only to the handful of Jewish Council members. From this point on, no workers were allowed to enter the ghetto. On Sundays, they were marched to the bathing area and allowed to wash themselves. The ghetto Jews eagerly looked forward to this day.

During the first months of the German occupation, many babies were still being born, but the birth rate soon decreased radically. As far as I know, only one marriage took place after the "August Action." Strangely enough, the couple was wed at the cemetery. This custom originated during the Middle Ages when plagues were prevalent. It was believed that further disaster would be averted if people were married at a cemetery, thus the couple was married among the graves. The marriage was preformed by Zalel Bartfeld.

The Situation of The Christians

The non-Jews, the so-called Aryans, Ukrainians and Poles, were not much better off than Jews. They participated in the looting that took place and profited at our expense, but the Germans treated them just as harshly as the Jews. Christians were subject to compulsory labor service, from the ages of eighteen to sixty. Younger boys and girls were also put to work and housed in barracks. Those unwilling to work were sent to concentration camps in Germany and if the Ukrainians thought that the Germans would liberate them from the Poles, they were bitterly disappointed.

In addition, the peasants were also exploited. They were ordered to deliver most of their produce to the occupation forces. In the beginning, they were not pressured, but when the deadline came and deliveries were not made, German Police entered their villages, selected ten of the finest homes and set them afire. The local Mayor was forced to make a public statement to the villagers informing them that if they did not meet their quotas within three days, the entire town would be razed.

As a result, the peasants immediately delivered up their cattle, horses and pigs. Each young pig was registered and

the peasant was forced to slaughter it, with half going to the Germans and half remaining with him. The same held true for cattle. The Germans were eager to obtain milk, and, depending upon the number of cows a farmer owned, a milk quota was set for him. The Germans didn't care if the quota was too high and it often happened that a peasant had to buy milk from his neighbor to fill the quota. The milk was carefully examined for its fat content and the Germans punished those who watered it. Deliberately and arrogantly the Germans showed in every possible way that they were conquerors. They avoided any contact with the native population. They rode in railway cars bearing "For Germans Only" signs. On the doors of hotels and cafes there appeared the legend "Jews and Poles Forbidden." Movie houses and theatres were opened three times a week for Germans, twice a week for Poles and one day a week for Ukrainians.

More aggravating than all this, were the shops established for Germans. In the show windows we saw national products which were not available to the natives, but were sold to Germans for trifling sums.

When the Gestapo was not busy persecuting Jews, they kept active executing gypsies and beggars, all of whom were thrown into mass graves—like the Jews.

When Soviet prisoners were brought to our area, there were no Jews among them. They had been separated from the Russians and were shot on sight by their captors. The Germans also brought a large group from the Volga German Republic in Russia, most of whom—originally of German descent—were elderly men and women who had lived in their homeland all their lives, and whose parents and grandparents had been raised on Russian soil on the Volga. By the end of 1942, more than 250 of these Russian-Germans had come to Drohobycz. They had no idea of the meaning of Nazism and were ignorant of the German theory of racial

purity. When they learned what the Germans were doing to Jews, they began to fear for themselves and suspected that they were brought here for liquidation. They were right.

A few weeks later, a large group of Russians—about 150—were led to Bronica and shot. Before the executions took place, brigades of laborers were ordered to dig large pits; it was at this point that we all became panicky, for we now knew that mass murders were about to take place. But this time, they were digging for the Russians.

Meanwhile, I had found jobs for my brother and myself in the Hyrawka Gardens, for inasmuch as my brother was ordered into a special barrack, I lived partially in the Hyrawka and partially in the ghetto. Everyone in the ghetto had a special hiding-place, for without one a Jew was lost. I found one for me and my brother which was the hiding-place of a Mr. Schnall. Before Mr. Schnall permitted us to move in, he checked on us carefully in order to make sure he was not running any risk in taking us in.

On a Sunday in February, panic broke out in the ghetto. When I saw Jews scurrying about looking to hide, I ran to Schnall's hiding-place. There were already many men, women and children there. Schnall permitted the children to hide with him, but only after he made sure that their parents had supplied him with enough drugs. Through past experience, it was known that children often screamed, and in this fashion betrayed others in hiding with them. As the panic broke, more and more people knocked at Schnall's door, but he only allowed those to enter who had prior reservations.

The place filled up, and eventually, I found myself in the cellar with many others, while upstairs scores of people were milling about.

As we sat in the cellar, we suddenly heard loud shrieking

upstairs. We were petrified. After a long wait, some of us pushed our way to the ladder, which led to the main floor. A woman in the upstairs room told us what happened: In order to get to the cellar from the kitchen, we had to crawl through a large baking oven. While I and some others managed to get to the cellar, people had jammed in the oven which collapsed under the pressure of overcrowding. Most of these people now jammed the cellar, which no longer remained a hiding-place. Some Jews now believed they were fair game for the German and Ukrainian Police.

Simultaneously, debates began as to whether we should stay or look for another place. Some argued that the German and Ukrainian Police would not look behind a collapsed oven. Finally we all agreed to leave the cellar. I was the last one out.

When I stepped into the street of the ghetto, I was met by silence. No human being was to be seen. The houses were dark and desolate, with no smoke rising from their chimneys. I saw a frightened cat crawl along the wall but it smelled death and hurried away. The streets were bare; void of the usual bits of paper and rubbish lying about.

I stood there, not knowing where to go. I thought I would follow the others, but it seemed as if they had been swallowed up by the earth. I walked from house to house, knocking on every door, but received no answer.

The echo of my steps pursued me and I was seized with panic. Finally, I reached the building of the Jewish Council. All was desolate . . .

I came to the "Kommandanture" of the Jewish Police which was nearby, hoping to meet a Jewish Policeman. I opened the door and found myself in a darkened room filled with cigarette smoke. Here there were many Jewish Policemen, wearing their blue caps with a Star of Zion. My entrance caused a commotion. What was a civilian doing here before an Action was to take place? They all crowded

around me. Fortunately, I recognized one of the Police, a Mr. Licht. Our eyes met.

"What are you doing here? Why don't you hide yourself?" he asked me.

I told him how I managed to get there, and he replied, "You have to do something. The Action may begin at any moment. The Germans have been drinking for hours and they may strike soon."

I asked him if it was possible for me to hide there until evening. Then, I said, at dark I would slip into my brother's working camp.

He replied that this would not be a good idea as the place was being watched carefully.

"If you have money," one of the Police said, "I can manage to hide you."

My friend assured him that I did. "Where can you hide him and how much will it cost?" Licht asked. Both men moved into a corner and consulted with each other in whispers.

Then they motioned that I should follow them. Licht assured me that they were taking me to a safe place. We went into the street, walked from one lane to another through the Komaner Synagogue. In a few more paces, we entered a garden, and walked through it to a small house. The door was padlocked. One of them stepped forward, opened it and as we entered, we found ourselves in a large narrow passageway. Here I paid the money agreed upon, and we walked into the kitchen. From there, we entered a room which had some wooden beds. The policemen moved one of the beds from the wall. He knocked several times on the floor, speaking in a loud voice to someone I could not see. We heard movement and suddenly two boards of the floor were raised.

A voice called up, "What's going on up there? Can we come out?"

No. I want to know whether you can admit a friend of mine who has no place to hide."

The voice replied, "What do you expect from me? We're suffocating down here, and you're bringing us another one?"

They talked for a few more moments and then I was shoved down through the opening. The man beneath had no choice but to let me climb down. I could see that the cellar was indeed very small.

There were a dozen people seated on benches against the wall, and on the floor were women holding their sleeping children. The planks were slammed down again, and I stood in the darkness, daring not to move, fearing that I might hurt someone.

There was utter silence in the darkened room. I realized that they were angry, as I had been forced upon them. Obviously, the man who brought me here was in control and they could not turn him down. My eyes slowly accustomed themselves to the darkness. I sat down on the floor.

It was hot in the cellar and I noted that there was little air. I thought for a moment that we would all suffocate.

Towards five o'clock in the morning, we heard the first shots. At first they were faint, but soon they became stronger and more frequent. We could also hear the rattling of machine guns.

The Action has begun. The mothers are ordered to make sure that their children do not cry. We are careful not to utter a sound, or cough, or clear our throats.

A short time has passed and there is rattling at the upstairs door. We hear some blows and the door is broken open. There are heavy steps overhead that come closer and closer. Beds are moved aside. Wardrobes are toppled and fall with a loud crash. We crouch and hold our breath, hearts beating rapidly. In a few minutes the steps seem to withdraw and after a while—silence. We begin to relax and move about.

Twenty minutes later, we again hear heavy steps in the room above; this time not only are the beds moved, but floor boards are pulled up. We are frozen with fear, thinking that we will be discovered. But the sounds retreat and soon another group comes, then a fourth and a fifth. They arrive regularly, every twenty minutes. This lasts for hours and, finally, the firing stops. The search has gone on for seven hours and we are still safe. Perhaps we are destined to live.

But at 2 P. M., the shooting resumes. The Action is again in progress. I figure it will last about four hours, and once more we will be able to breathe fresh air.

I think how lucky it is that America was discovered, because there, six million Jews are safe, and do not have to face the dangers we are experiencing. How irrational history is! Yet these thoughts are only passing comfort and do not really help those of us who are trapped here.

At four P. M. another group enters the house and systematically begins the search. They are more careful than the others in looking for an entrance to the cellar. They move the beds away and thump at the boards, listening for a hollow sound. We sit in absolute silence. Will they overlook the two boards that can betray us? No, they do not miss up. They have noticed a hollow sound. They knock several times, seemingly convinced there is an opening. They proceed to chop with axes, but the wood is well-bolted from the inside and does not give way.

They shout, "Open! Open up!"

The axes are again chopping and the chinks become wider and wider as rays of light filter through our hiding place.

The boards give way and daylight explodes. We have been discovered! We are lost!

We hear a German ask, "Is anyone down there?"

A Ukrainian replies, "It's full of Jews."

We hear someone leave the house. In a few minutes reinforcements arrive and we are ordered up.

We do not move. Suddenly, a shot is fired into our hiding-place. The noise shocks us into activity. We jump up from our seats. Children begin to scream. One man lies dead in the cellar, his brains blown out. A young woman, apparently the dead man's daughter, pulls at him and cries, "Father, father, come, we must go up." But of course, the dead man does not hear her anguished cries.

Slowly, we all climb up the ladder. Four Nazi Policemen and a group of Ukrainian militia are armed with guns, ready to fire.

I look about me and for the first time see the people with whom I have spent the last twenty-four hours. Faces are flushed and bloody. A woman carrying a child tries to open a window to escape. A shot is fired and she falls back into the room. She tries to rise again, but a second bullet kills her. Another woman picks up the weeping child.

After the Germans batter a few more women and children, we are all marched into the street. It is a nice winter day, with a light blue mist floating over the ghetto. The sun is sinking and its rays are especially attractive to us who have been trapped in a dark cellar. How good it would have been if we were free!

There are Police at every corner, ready to shoot at will, should we make a false step. Every once in a while a German shoots a Jew, but meanwhile we are kept marching. As we leave the ghetto, there are joyful crowds of Poles and Ukrainians watching us being herded to what everyone thinks is our death.

We finally arrive at the prison of the court of justice. Here, a Gestapo group leader named Gabriel takes charge and we are divided into two groups: Women and children are locked into one cell, men into another.

In the Shadow of Death

The cell which I was thrust into, was nearly filled. There was not a single bench, chair or bed. The walls of the cell held many inscriptions, the names of those unfortunates who had passed through on their way to execution. There were rows upon rows of names with dates of imprisonment and probable execution.

I speculated on why a man so close to death should bother to engrave his name on a prison wall. Man refuses to believe that he will be obliterated from the world, his memory defaced. Great men are fortunate. They leave their great works behind; symphonies, novels, huge buildings and great victories in war. But the average man cannot look forward to such major accomplishments. And the men who passed through this prison had to content themselves with their names on a wall, knowing that they would never have a tombstone. The writer hopes those who come after him will see his name and think of him for a moment.

In addition to names, angry sentences were also scratched in Yiddish on the wall. One read: "Murderers! Our blood will not be silent!" Another said: "Amalek! Bitter will

be your end!" Other phrases were less angry, more resigned: "Lord, that you may do ill, we see best ourselves. But do not forget the criminals of the Gestapo and the Ukrainian Militia!"

As we look about us we recognize friends and relatives. The men are busy embracing one another, weeping bitterly.

Sitting in a corner reading, is Rabbi Wolf Nussenbaum, the spiritual leader of Drohobycz, author of many books and dean of the Yeshiva in Lublin. The rabbi's face is furrowed with grief and he looks as though he himself is responsible for the misery in the cell. For more than thirty years, he taught Jews ethics and morality, asking them to believe in God. And now? He looks as though he wants to hide. Rabbi Nussenbaum rises, draws his prayer belt tight and turns his face to the wall in silent prayer. Some of us who are close by, ask him respectfully, "May we pray together?"

"Of course," the rabbi says. "I haven't invited anyone to join me because of the great bitterness I sense in this cell."

A voice cries out, "We want to pray. Is anyone against that?"

A reply is heard. "Why should we oppose prayer? We've prayed all our lives and will be faithful to the Lord until our last breath."

We all rise and the rabbi recites the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. We join in the silent prayer, the "Shmone Esre." Although pious Jews throughout the world recite this prayer three times a day, it sounds so strange in this cell. Even the words seem to have different meanings. Why should we pray now? What does it mean to pray for a "good year?" In our minds, we are practically dead. As we recite, we sigh and groan. Finally, the silent prayer becomes a single, united cry. We no longer repeat the words of the Hebrew text. Instead we ask, "Oh Lord, what do you want from us? How have we sinned that such persecution should be visited upon us? Oh Lord, we have renounced the joys of life, according to your doctrine. What have we done to deserve this fate?"

Our lamenting is heard throughout, and soon the entire prison resounds with the cries.

A German slides open a panel at the door and calls out, "Be silent, you damn Jewish pigs! If you don't shut up, we'll beat you all."

We struggle to control ourselves. We try to sleep to forget we are in prison, facing death.

The next morning, Polish guards provide us with water and we pool our money, bribing them to bring us bread and cigarettes. They tell us that within the last twenty-four hours, more than 1,000 Jews have been arrested and imprisoned. We are told that the Germans will not bother to transport us and that we will be killed in the Bronica forests, near Drohobycz. They say it might happen in two days.

Before we shall be killed, the guards will take us to the prison office, where we will be searched all over and all our possessions, except clothing, taken away. The following day, we will be driven to the execution area.

Meanwhile the Polish guards are anxious to do favors in order to get our money before the Germans confiscate it. They unlock cell doors and allow prisoners to visit with one another to make their farewells. I wander from cell to cell, looking for friends and relatives. We embrace, telling each other that we hope to die without too much pain. We dread the idea of being wounded and tossed into graves while still alive. There are rumors that living men and women are thrown into mass graves, covered by earth.

We arrange for messages to be delivered to friends and relatives on the outside. I write a farewell note to my brother: "As you're the last surviving member of our family, I hope you manage to live through the war and through this hell. I'm now prepared for the worst. In my mind,

I've been dead since I first arrived in Janover Camp and consider the last few months as having lived on borrowed time. I try to give myself courage by convincing myself that I'm already an old man and my time has come. Man cannot live forever. I've suffered much, but this agonizing experience will soon pass. When you hear of the executions, you will know that I'm dead. Try to save yourself, as in living, you will be avenging the entire family against these Nazi criminals. And, if God is willing to spare you, settle in a Jewish community, marry a Jewish woman, and if you will be blessed with children, name them after those who have been killed, so that in this fashion, we will all live on. I assure you that my last thoughts are for you."

I feel better, knowing that my brother shall read these final words. I am ready to die.

As the first group is led to the prison office, we try to destroy everything of value, still in our possession. Gold and jewelry are flung into toilets, papers destroyed. It is not surprising to learn that the men assigned to cleaning the toilets, dig through the filth to salvage what they can.

We are led to the office. Gestapo authorities order us to empty our pockets, throwing everything into a large box. They warn us that we will be searched afterwards and if anything is found, they will cut out our tongues, pierce our eyes, and sever our limbs. We are convinced that they mean what they say, for we have heard of such atrocities.

We clean out our pockets, throwing everything into the box, but we are searched only superficially and then led to another cell. Here, we are under strict surveillance. Every once in a while, a prisoner timidly asks for water. But the only response is cursing. They say we will be shot, surely an item of news which no longer surprises us. Yet we are still terribly afraid. How man clings to life!

I wonder if death will come as hard to the others as it will to me. Do I feel this way because I am still young?

But a glance at other faces convinces me that they, too, are suffering at the thought of death, regardless of age.

The old rabbi rises and begins to talk to us. He attempts to offer consolation. He tells of the vanity of life on earth and that we are at the beginning of a new, more glorious life.

"For thirty years I have been leading you in the ways of God. I have been guiding you on matters of morality, manners and grace. I assure you that these teachings will be valuable to you in the hours ahead."

He looks at the heartbroken, beaten men who are listening to him in silence. Suddenly, his voice breaks and his eyes flash. He raises his arms and cries out in a loud voice, "Damned be the Amalek of today who is aiming to destroy the ancient house of Israel! May he be cursed for the murders of innocent men, harmless women and children! All traces and signs of him shall be wiped out by God for all generations."

He assures us that we will be saints and martyrs who possess a divine idea that our enemies cannot fathom. He asks us to rise and repeat the words of the Vidui, the prayer of death. He recites each word methodically and we repeat after him: "Oshamnu, Bogadnu, Gozalnu."

"We have done wrong

"We were faithless

"We have robbed . . ."

As we recite, a Polish guard opens the sliding panel and watches us. From the other cell, the women entreat us to write down the words of the Vidui as they wish to recite it. The Pole cooperates and passes through paper and pencil and soon the women join us.

The rabbi's speech and the recitation of the Vidui calm us and we now wait for our final moments.

Outside, we hear automobile engines and once more we become excited. The women begin to scream, a guard fires a shot and there is silence once more. Heavy steps are heard

in the corridor. Later on, our cell is flung open and the Germans drive us out through two lines of police into the open courtyard.

The day of doom has come.

They are beating us with whips and we hold our hands over our heads to escape the blows.

We reach the trucks bruised and beaten. We enter, and lie down on the floor. The vehicles begin moving.

The Execution

The truck is filled with Jews, some of whom are lying on top of me, while I am lying on others. Their weight crushes me and I can scarcely breathe. Finally the truck stops and we are in Bronica.

We are ordered out and I see about me a large clearing in the middle of the thick forest. The trees are laden with icicles which remind me of frozen tears. At the edge of the clearing there are two long, deep trenches. The first group is sent twenty paces from them and told to undress. Soon they are stark naked and trembling in the cold. They are herded to the trenches over which the Germans have placed long planks on which four or five people can stand. Machine gunners at the other end, are preparing to do their work.

The first five on the plank are shot. The bodies fall directly into the trench. Then five more are sent to the plank and the guns spit death again.

The entire area is surrounded by armed guards so we know that death is inevitable no matter what.

The children are not shot. Instead, they are taken from their mothers and thrown directly into the trenches, to be

buried alive. The first trench is filled with corpses. Some are still alive and twitching convulsively. But it does not make any difference, for dirt is being tossed into the mass grave.

The machine guns continue their rhythm of death.

Now my group prepares for death. I am ordered to take a man who was killed by a German bullet from the truck and remove his clothing. I am terrified. I work as though in a nightmare.

I finish and begin to undress. I get one shoe off, but the lace on the other is knotted. As I try to loosen it, I lose my balance and fall on the huge heap of clothing which has accumulated. As I struggle with my clothes, I find myself buried in the heap. I creep deeper into what is suddenly a hiding-place. There is shooting around me, but as I crouch in the clothing, the noise becomes duller. I do not think at all. I act instinctively, like an animal. Now the shooting and crying have ceased; the noise of the truck engines has died away.

Finally, the clothes covering me are being taken away and the weight on my body grows lighter. Should I creep out now or wait until I am discovered? Or should I try to make believe I am dead.

In a moment I will be discovered. I decide to act. I throw off the few remaining pieces of clothing which cover me and rise as though I were a diver emerging from the depths of the sea. I look around me. The guards are busy looking for valuables but when they see me, they begin to beat me.

The trenches are now filled with earth. More than 1,000 Jews are buried here, and it is a miracle that I am still alive.

One of the guards snarls, "Come on! Get busy and dig a grave for yourself."

They are not allowed to leave a corpse lying about and so I am ordered to work on my own grave. I dig a hole

alongside the trenches and when I am dead, will be "squeezed in" more or less with the others.

I shovel the icy yellow earth which soon will cover me. Meanwhile, most of the guards are rummaging through heaps of clothing looking for valuables. One of them discovers gold coins, and the two guards standing over me are distracted by the find.

I do not know what comes over me, but I leap at the guard closest to me and hit him with a shovel. He falls back, his gun dropping from his hands. In desperation I sprint toward the woods. The guards are aware of what has happened. They scream and order me to stop, but now I am fleeing for my life. I continue running.

As I rush through the woods, the guards chase me. I leap over fallen trees, drag my legs over marshy ground. I stumble and rise again, running through the snow and gray fog.

They will not give up their chase, for I am the only living witness to what has happened.

My heart is pounding; I am dizzy and spears jab at my lungs, but I am determined that I shall not be caught.

Suddenly, I see a clearing in the distance and think that I am getting out of the woods. I am wrong; it is a ravine packed with snow. I try to jump over it. I fall short, land in the snow and find myself sinking.

I am trapped. I can hardly catch my breath and am becoming giddy. I am afraid that I will die here.

I pick up a handful of snow and put it to my temples and then to my mouth. I feel better. Perhaps I shall survive, to tell the world what I saw in the woods of Bronica near Drohobycz, in the twentieth century, in the advanced scientific age of the airplane and radio.

I recall the story of a girl who escaped from a situation similar to mine months earlier, and who staggered back into the ghetto, naked, and stark raving mad. I wonder if

the same fate shall befall me, for I cannot ever forget what I have seen: The crying, shrieking, struggling and killing.

I am cold. I am in the ravine for hours. I realize that I am wearing only a pair of trousers, one stocking and one shoe. But I know that I cannot die here. I begin to move my arms and legs, and I feel circulation returning.

I pull myself out of the ravine by the roots of a large tree.

It is night; the sky is full of stars and a light wind is blowing. I walk around the ravine and reach the woods again. I stop.

Where shall I go? If I go to Drohobycz, it is possible that the Jewish Council has been informed of my escape and will seize me. I could try to return to Sambor, but I have not eaten for five days and feel I cannot survive the long walk.

I decide to walk through the woods again, back towards Drohobycz. They did not know my name. The woods are clear of snow and all is quiet. I listen for movement and make sure not to step on dry branches. I pick up a heavy stick to defend myself.

After an hour, I am back at the clearing where the executions took place. Is it possible that it can be so peaceful after what happened hours ago? The graves are covered and I feel a deep sense of guilt. I am alive while one-thousand Jews lie dead. They have been killed only because they are Jews. I am a Jew. Yet my life has been spared.

As I look at the graves, I remember those who are buried here . . . I recall the hairdresser in the cell who used to tell us how prosperous he was and how happy he was with his wife. I remember the coachman who used to talk about the joyous Sabbaths he had with his wife and children after a long week's labor. I vividly remember the pretty young girl of nineteen who embraced her father just before their

death, and was glad to die with him.

I can see them all and grieve as I think back on these innocents who died needlessly and cruelly. I am tormented that I alone have survived even for a moment.

I walk on and on until I reach the narrow lanes of the ghetto. It is night. I sit down near the house where I had been staying. I have no doubt that our enemies will destroy us. I used to think that a people who survived Egypt, Persia, Babylonia and Rome would live forever.

Dawn rises. I walk toward the house and knock. I hear the voice of my cousin Chuma. I answer. She lets me in and I see people I know well: Cyla, Chuma and Rose.

They managed to survive in a hiding-place that Backenroth got for them. I wash and go to bed. I am cold and cannot overcome the feeling that the bed is colder than the ravine in which I was trapped. I ask what day it is: Friday. I remember the pleasant and happy Fridays in my parents' home and then my mind falters. Nightmares crowd my memory and I fall into a faint.

I open my eyes. My brother is sleeping in the next bed. I wake him, "Why are you sleeping now? It's daytime."

My brother smiles and replies, "During the nights, I was busy tending you."

I do not know what he is talking about and remember the girl who went mad. Am I losing my mind?

He explains, however, that I have been sleeping for two days. I had a high fever and everyone felt that if I slept long enough I would recover from my terrible experience.

It is evident that my escape must be kept strictly secret. I am visited by my cousins, who rejoice at my escape. Among my visitors is Schnall, who had been so anxious about me, that my relatives took him into their confidence, telling him that I was alive. He informs me that he is planning to build another hiding-place and wants me and my brother to join him. I learn from him that there has been another

survivor from the massacre which I escaped. She is a 19-year-old girl named Amalia Stock, whose parents had been killed earlier, and was now being hidden by her married sister. When her truck came to Bronica, she managed to hide under a pile of clothing and was still there when it left the execution area. The truck then drove to a Jewish labor camp. When the clothes were unloaded by the Jews working there, she was recognized at once and aided in her escape. Within an hour she was back in the ghetto with her sister. She saw one thing that I missed. Photographers taking pictures of the murders.

Amalia visits me several times and is confident that she will outlive the war. Alas, she died in Bronica four months later when the ghetto was liquidated.

In thinking back on these terrible experiences, I realize I have been unable to describe in adequate detail the horrors through which we all passed. But I am convinced that the crimes committed were so enormous, that no one could do justice to these events. Words, no matter who uses them, and regardless of artistic power, cannot convey to the reader the reality as we lived through it. Only those who were *there*, can describe it all, even if inadequately.

Interval

There is no doubt that nature, with the passage of time, assuages pain and cauterizes wounds. It is one of the marvels of nature. Otherwise, man would not be able to endure the agonies through which he must pass. The weeks move along and eventually man turns back to life. What has happened is over and done with, he thinks. Life must go on.

In the same fashion, my own life continued. One evening, I visited the house of Rabbi Wolf Nussenbaum in an attempt to retrieve a manuscript he had left behind, containing Talmudic problems in which he exhibited his deep scholarship.

I found the manuscript lying on the floor in a pile of books and papers. I feel that part of him is still alive, even though I vividly remember him dying in the mass killings at Bronica.

Within the ghetto itself, Jews tried hard to reorganize their lives, making all sorts of plans, even if some of them were unrealistic. Youngsters returned to the woods, looking for partisans while older folk worked tirelessly in an effort to make permanent hiding-places out of their temporary ones.

At this time, the Germans liquidated the Jewish post office, which served as a communications center for all Jews in every ghetto. Now, all the ghettos were totally separated from one another. Jews were no longer allowed to phone other Jews, or wire or write. If a Jew wanted to contact a fellow Jew in another town, he would usually get in touch with two Christians, one of whom would have to deliver the message to a second Christian, who, in turn, would transfer the letter to the addressee.

I received a letter from my brother-in-law, Moses Mandelbaum, in the Sambor ghetto, who was planning to cross the Carpathian Mountains into Hungary. He had a good chance to escape to Hungary, and from there, emigrate to Palestine. The group leader had successfully guided one unit from Sambor to Hungary. My brother-in-law, in divulging this information to me, indicated that my brother and I could join up for a similar trip after his group left. This new opportunity excited me greatly and I sent a message to my brother in the camp asking that he meet me.

I told him what Mandelbaum had written and we decided to take a chance and return to Sambor. We told Schnall of our plan and asked him to reserve a spot for us in his new hide-out should we fail. He agreed, and we left Drohobycz at dawn, passed through the town and across the woods until we reached the ghetto of Sambor two days later.

The Last Days of the Sambor Ghetto

The Sambor ghetto was a small one, consisting of one main street, called Mnishcha Lane, which was about eighty meters long. A few smaller lanes branched into it. The entire area—called the "Bleich"—was surrounded by barbed wire. There was a large synagogue on the bleaching ground of the town, which was not part of the ghetto, for the entrance to the synagogue led to a street outside the ghetto proper.

The Jewish cemetery, however, was part of the ghetto and a most "popular" place. Not only were people being buried daily, but the living often took refuge there, sitting on the grass, talking in the mellow Spring evenings and dreaming of a time when life would return to normalcy. A second synagogue, a very small one, served as a hospital.

There were about 3,000 people in the ghetto, a large part of them natives of Sambor, the other from nearby towns, Stary, Sambor, Felshtyn, Turka, etc.

The Germans had two aims in mind when they established the ghetto. To begin with, they herded all the Jews into one area so when they went into an Action, they could

be assured no one would escape. Secondly, it was easier to starve the Jews to death within the ghetto. So long as food held out, the Jews could live. Once supplies were used up, they would perish en masse. The Germans miscalculated to an extent, for the Jews did not die with the speed anticipated. Weeks followed weeks and they managed to stay alive.

How did this happen?

In the beginning, supplies were used up quickly, but after a while, some of the young men managed to obtain food from the outside, by escaping the ghetto through sewers. In addition, the local peasants were willing to trade with the Jews and openly bartered with them near the barbed wire border.

In some respects, life in Sambor was more comfortable than life in Drohobycz. In Drohobycz, German Police and militia marched about, plundering, stealing and killing. In Sambor, on the other hand, there was only one higher Gestapo representative and a few German policemen. The Gestapo agent, a man named Wiesner, was later killed by fellow Germans when he went mad.

Many rabbis were at Sambor, including: Rabbi Pinchas Twersky of Ostile, Rabbi Simcha Rubin-Horowitz of Sandowa Wysnia, and the Rabbis of Komarno, Dembice, Zagorz, Teschin, Bikowsk, Rabbi Mieses of Sambor, Rabbi Kalman Jolles, and the renowned scholar Rabbi Jakob Turkel. They were all later wiped out by the Germans.

Meanwhile, they lived in peace and were highly honored by the Jewish inhabitants. They gave the ghetto stature and made life seemingly pleasant. The Jews in Sambor managed to obtain fowl from the local farmers, but it was impossible to get any other kind of meat. We also obtained vegetables, for it was impossible to grow them in the ghetto.

After the establishment of the ghetto, a number of Jews who had been converted to Christianity were sent there.

At the outbreak of the German-Russian war, in 1941 and during the German occupation, a number of them attempted to escape the fate of being a Jew through baptism. They failed.

During the first months after the war between Russia and Germany, the converts were left alone. But later they received the same treatment meted out to all of us. In Sambor, for example, the converts had only to be registered; in other areas, they were forced to wear Jewish armbands. Wealthy converts managed to avoid trouble by selling their homes and shops, hiding out with Christian relatives in larger towns. Life became unbearable for those that were sent to the ghetto. They were disappointed that the Germans treated them like the other Jews; furthermore, they were afraid that the Jews from the ghetto would take revenge on them for having converted. What would happen to them in the ghetto?

Their fears, so far as the Jews were concerned, were unfounded. They were accepted as fellow Jews and no one took special pains to punish them. With each passing day they lost their fear and, in time, became accustomed to life in the ghetto. In the evenings, however, they stood at the barbed wire enclosure and talked with the Christian members of their families who remained on the outside.

The thousands of Jews in the ghetto of Sambor got along well with one another. They shared what they had, they worried together in times of trouble, and were happy when there was good news for others.

And then, on a Sunday in mid-April, 1943, hundreds of German Policemen led by Wiesner entered the ghetto. Within two hours, a thousand Jews were trapped and brought to the town prison. Two days later, Ukrainian workmen entered the ghetto cemetery to dig a huge pit thirty meters long and three meters deep. On Wednesday, the prisoners were brought to the area, and ordered to strip

naked. They were forced to lie down in the pit alongside one another, facing down. Those who refused, were ordered to stand aside. About sixty people were lying in the grave forming one layer. A policeman walked along the grave and shot everyone in the head. Behind him walked a second policeman making sure no one was alive.

Then a second layer of Jews covered the corpses and they, too, were killed in the same fashion. This process was repeated a third and fourth time.

The Germans then went to work on those who had refused to enter the pit. They cut off their hands and feet, threw them in the communal grave and while still alive, covered them with earth.

In a few hours, a thousand Jews had been liquidated.

From that day forward, hundreds of Jews went to the mass grave to mourn their dead friends and relatives, for all were affected by what happened.

Now the ghetto Jews experienced fear again. In each house a guard remained awake throughout the night, so that every precaution against the Germans might be taken.

It was during this period of terror that my brother and I entered the Sambor ghetto. When we arrived, the entire ghetto knew about the newcomers. Hundreds of them surrounded us and asked all sorts of questions. We became aware that they had been completely cut off from any sort of communication and were most eager to learn what was happening on the outside.

Mandelbaum was anxiously waiting for us and we learned that we had arrived the week he was planning to leave for Hungary with his group.

It did not take long to find out the plans for the Hungary undertaking. Mandelbaum's group included five men, three women and a 12-year-old boy. Some of them already had their families in Hungary and the group leader, who was

believed to be reliable, wanted $1,000 for guiding the group to Munkacz.

When we met the group leader, we were all deeply impressed by him. Stefan was a slender man with a swarthy face, sparkling eyes and a happy manner. He was neither Polish nor Ukrainian, but probably descended from the Turks. A Baptist by religion and a smuggler by profession, he regaled us with many stories of his "professional" life. During the Russian occupation, from 1939 to 1941, his smuggling was fairly active, but now that the Germans were in control, he was far busier. Two or three times a week he crossed the border to Hungary and generally returned with huge quantities of Hungarian cigarettes.

He was not keen on smuggling Jews into Hungary, as he would be placed into a forced labor camp if caught. It was less dangerous smuggling contraband goods from one country to another. He was willing to help Jews in escaping only because he felt an obligation to a Jew named Weiss who had once done him a favor. On his most recent trip to Hungary, he had taken Weiss' oldest son. This particular trip was to include his wife and two children, with Weiss himself scheduled to leave on the following trip. It was, thanks to Weiss, that this attempt was being made.

On May 6, at midnight, we accompanied the group to the ghetto fence. Stefan signaled and the group followed him out of the ghetto. They were soon swallowed up in the darkness and we prayed they would arrive safely in Budapest.

We were scheduled to follow in eleven days. Meanwhile we were busy with preparations. Rabbi Pinchus Twersky, "The Ostyller Rabbi," and his two sons were leaving with us. The Rabbi had just recovered from a bout with typhoid and we were to carry him on a stretcher across the Carpathians.

But things do not always work out according to plan.

Nine days after Mandelbaum and his group left, one of the sons of Rabbi Twersky came to tell me terrible news. He said that a militia man just entered the ghetto and reported that a group of people, on their way to Hungary, had been captured and brought to the Sambor prison. The description of the group fitted Mandelbaum and his cohorts. They were to be shot in a few hours.

I ran to the headquarters of the Jewish Council and told the story to Dr. Schneidscher, who went to talk the matter over with the Gestapo. We stood at the ghetto gate, anxiously waiting for news. Within an hour Schneidscher returned, followed by a group of people. I recognized Mandelbaum. As they came closer, I saw that there were only five in the group. The others had been shot.

"We had bad luck," Mandelbaum said. "But we nearly reached Hungary."

He was happy to be alive, but said, "We'll try again next week."

When we were comfortably settled in our room, Mandelbaum told me what had happened.

Stefan proved to be a good man. He was well versed in forestry and knew every inch of the area. For days he led the group through thick shrubbery, over hedges, ditches, and virgin forests untouched by man. Even as the paths became steeper and the mountains higher, Stefan remained confident in his ability to reach Hungary. He was undisturbed by the German Police patrols in the forest and indifferent to the barking of dogs. The group marched by day and rested at night.

On the evening of the third day, they reached a gorge and it appeared that they would soon be safe. They slept here. The next morning, however, heavy fog encircled them. For the first time, Stefan seemed worried. He asked the group to pack their belongings and follow him to the top of the mountain. Here too, there was an inpenetrable gray

vapor. Stefan wanted to wait until the fog lifted, but the group, having great confidence in him, pushed him on. They marched for several hours through the fog and finally Stefan announced that they were lost. They waited for two days and two nights, cold and uncomfortable, hoping that they would find their way to Hungary. On the third day, they decided to move on. Stefan told them to walk on while he went back to find someone to help him. A few hours passed and he returned with a young peasant, a cousin of his. Everyone was relieved; they would be safe. In a couple of hours they expected to reach a village where the peasant and his father lived. When they came to the home of the peasant, they doffed their wet clothing, ate, drank and hid in a loft.

The next morning they were awakened by noise. They looked into the courtyard, and saw that the house was surrounded by the entire village population. There were cries of "Jews! Jews!"

They had been betrayed; but no one knew who was responsible. It was impossible to escape, as they heard that militia men had been informed of their presence.

The farmers rushed at them with scythes, robbing them of all valuables. Soon Ukrainian militia arrived from a neighboring village. The group said that they had discovered the farmhouse by accident and had taken shelter there. Having no valuables, the group could not bribe them and the Ukrainians paid no attention to their constant pleas. They delivered them to the Germans in Sianke.

When they arrived in Sianke, they were led to the cellar of the building from which the border police operated. That evening, Gestapo agents beat them and later killed three.

The next morning the survivors were manacled and transported to Sambor.

This was the story as Mandelbaum told it.

A few days later, Weiss himself came to the ghetto, and helped organize two new groups. The first included those who had failed in their attempt. Stefan was again willing to guide us and both groups planned to leave on the night of May 22.

We had heard that the Allies ended the fighting in North Africa and we thought the war would soon end. On Thursday, May 20, we spent a pleasant evening in the ghetto. The May weather was lovely and we were all very hopeful. But we did not know that scores of Gestapo agents had come to town, planning an Action against us the next day.

Early Friday morning, we were awakened by Mrs. Karp, a widow in whose home we were staying. She called our attention to the noise in the streets. One of our house guards cried out, warning that an Action was to take place.

We dressed hastily and went to hide in the apartment of a Mr. Sommer. In the street, hundreds of men, women and children were pushing against each other in an attempt to find their prepared hide-outs. Our lives depended on the speed with which we could find our hiding-places. People moved rapidly and, as a result, families were separated. Men lost their wives, children their parents.

The German police entered, looking for prey. We reached our hiding-place as the door was shutting. The cellar of the house in which we hid was well camouflaged, and no matter how intensively the Germans looked for us, they did not find us. But they had done such a thorough job in demolishing the house, that when we finally emerged after the Germans had left, we found it to be unrecognizable. Nevertheless, we had reason to feel satisfied, for others were less fortunate. The Germans had discovered more than twenty hide-outs and had imprisoned some seven-hundred Jews.

We went to the headquarters of the Jewish Council, where we found hundreds of Jews asking Dr. Schneidscher

to help their relatives who had been jailed. He was kept busy, compiling an endless list of those imprisoned.

Late that evening, Dr. Schneidscher reviewed the completed list. Weiss told me that his daughter was missing and he pleaded with me to help him find her. I asked Dr. Schneidscher to find out about the girl.

At midnight, when Dr. Schneidscher returned, we learned that not a single prisoner had been freed. The Germans had fooled him. They had thrown him out, promising nothing.

For hours we walked around the ghetto, restless and nervous. Eventually we returned to our quarters and went to bed. Of the thirty persons who were living in this house, only six had escaped. Mrs. Karp and her three children had also been taken prisoner. My brother, brother-in-law, three men and myself were the remaining survivors.

The sound of shots awoke me. My brother was still asleep, but my brother-in-law's bed was empty. I looked out the window and saw the Gestapo arresting Jews. Three of them were approaching our house. They knocked. We stood stock-still. They did not force their way in, but smashed into the next room and dragged the three young men into the street. The youngsters tried to tear themselves away, but two of them were shot and killed and the third recaptured. The Police had not gone into our room as it was padlocked from the outside, and they assumed it empty. I later learned that my brother-in-law, after leaving the room, had padlocked it.

Gradually the shooting ceased and the streets became quiet. About eighty people had been shot. The Germans had taken most of the dead with them. We heard that some corpses were lying near the ghetto fence and when I got there, I found my friend Aaron Orlander among them. We were later told that they panicked and tried to flee the ghetto, assuming that all the Jews were to be liquidated.

They had been caught and shot. Weiss and his wife also disappeared and I never saw them again.

That same day, 750 Jewish prisoners were driven in box cars to Lemberg. The last car was loaded with corpses. I later talked with a Jewish Policeman who had helped fill the cars with Jews. He told me that he had talked with Rabbi Twersky of Ostylle who had said that the ways of God were inscrutable. The Lord had helped him recover from typhoid and was now handing him over to the bitterest enemies of the Jewish people. But the rabbi said, we are all subject to God's will and must not question his ways.

During the next few days, an unbearable stench pervaded the ghetto. The gutter canal had been totally blocked by corpses and water was pouring out of the gutter, overflowing the streets. People were standing about, trying to identify the decomposed bodies. While looking on, I saw a young girl, wearing horribly soiled clothing, turn up in the ghetto to find her parents. She had lived for five days in the sewers, and was fortunate to find her parents still alive.

Death lurked over the ghetto. Jews tried in every which fashion to save themselves. Some of the young men managed to obtain guns and fled to the woods. Others talked of escaping but did little more than discuss the possibilities. The peasants they contacted told them frankly that their days were numbered. Falling prey to the atmosphere, my brother and I heard the flapping of death's wings over our heads.

On Thursday, May 27, 1943, my brother and I walked to the ghetto fence, crept under it in the darkness, and managed to reach the railroad tracks. We followed the rails all night long and at daybreak, reached the Jewish quarter of Drohobycz.

My brother went to the camp where he had previously been working, while I wandered into the ghetto.

The Last Days of the Drohobycz Ghetto

The Jews in Drohobycz, like those at Sambor, were in the throes of despair. They were convinced that the ghetto would soon be liquidated, but they faced this without panic because there now were many opportunities to evade the Germans. The young folk had gone into the woods and the older people built substantial hiding-places for themselves. Those who had influence and connections left the ghetto and the Jewish Council had lost its potency.

The only influential Jew remaining in the ghetto was Backenroth, who insisted on staying with his people until the end. Dr. Gerstenfeld, who previously headed the Council, was thrown out by the Germans. He was succeeded by an engineer named Borgmann, who could do nothing to ease the problems of the Jews.

Backenroth, who was most familiar with the Nazi methods of destruction, warned the remaining Jews in the ghetto that liquidation would soon come. He knew that Jewish

craftsmen usually were permitted to live, even when mass murders were perpetrated. Now, however, even some craftsmen had been imprisoned. This was a sure sign that the ghetto was to be wiped out. When these men were jailed, panic prevailed and Jews went to hide in their prepared hovels.

I went to see Schnall to remind him of his promise to me. There were now eighteen people prepared to hide with him. For days, I had been gathering up food, giving it to Schnall. He suggested that we come and hide now, rather than wait for another Action. We knew that we would not be attacked unexpectedly as we managed to bribe the militia men. After one final day of heavy preparation, we entered the hide-out feeling rather confident that we would be able to remain here for the duration of the war.

As we entered, we recited the Psalms and invoked God's blessing that we might survive and see Israel prosper once again.

The hide-out was the same cellar from which we had fled some months before. Since that time, many alterations were made. The floor was now covered with wooden boards with beds for all. In the middle of the room there was a table and two armchairs, with a radio set in one corner. We had electric lights, a gas stove, and running water. In addition, there was a second, well-cemented room, where food was stored. Fresh air circulated from the fireplace.

Thus, all of us—eleven men, five women, and two children—expected to remain in this cellar until the end of the war. My brother had to come here through the canal. We had enough food, we calculated for a full year. Yet the feeling that we were trapped like moles upset us . . . We ate meals silently, leaving the table as quickly as possible and lay down on our beds to think. We observed the Sabbath just as we had on the outside; praying and eating special meals, but nevertheless, our lives were not normal.

There was occasional shooting overhead and periodically we heard footsteps above us. In spite of the shooting and activity overhead, we were convinced that this time we would not be found.

For days we waited to hear from a man on the outside whom we trusted. But he did not come. On the following Monday he still had not contacted us and we assumed that the entire ghetto had been liquidated.

On Tuesday, the lights suddenly went out. We thought at first that it was a short circuit and lighted our Sabbath candles. Then one of the women announced that we no longer had running water. We were petrified. Had the Gestapo suspected that we were hiding under this house? Had the supply lines leading to the Jewish quarters been cut? Had the house above us been destroyed? How could we live without water, electricity or gas?

Finally we calmed down and began to analyze the situation. Some thought we could hold out for weeks, while others talked of committing suicide. I proposed that we sneak out through the canal. One other man, Jonas Fischer, was willing to take the chance. The others were content to hope that help would soon be forthcoming. Nevertheless, the two of us decided to go ahead. The others wrote letters to their relatives asking us to deliver them.

On Thursday night, Fischer and I entered the canal. He assured me that we would have no problems, as he had a map of the area with him. We crept along and from time to time Fischer studied the map, with the aid of his pocket searchlight. We moved silently for a long time. Then he whispered that we were in the Listopada Lane and would soon be leaving the canal. He was right. We stopped and Fischer cautiously lifted a sewer cover and crept out. I followed him.

It was pitch black, but we continued walking until we reached a field. We sat down, took off our wet clothes,

putting on dry apparel which we had in our rucksacks.

Suddenly two men appeared in the darkness. We rose and approached them slowly. I asked, in Hebrew, "Amcho? Are you Jews?"

They were the Schachter brothers from Rolow. Behind them was a child and the wife of one of the men. They said their experience was similiar to ours; only their food had run out. They had not eaten for four days and now they were on their way to Rolow in the hope that a peasant they knew would put them up. When they learned that we were trying to enter my brother's camp, they asked us to take the woman and child until they could find out how they would be treated by the peasant.

We agreed, and together we went into the field, slept for a while and, at dawn, all of us reached the camp of Zuckerberg, the so called " Hyrawka-Lumber-Camp."

The Camp

The surrounding land we came to, once belonged to a Jew named Zuckerberg and was now the property of a Ukrainian named Kunicia, who worked for the German army. The place was originally a lumber camp, situated behind the new Jewish cemetery, three kilometers from the town. The Jews working here were supposed to wear the "W" sign, being controlled by the SS. But very few Jews wore this sign and about a dozen others, wore no insignia whatsoever. Kunicia had to pay five zloties daily for "W" Jews, but as the SS did not know of the existence of the others, no payment was made for them. The Ukrainian foreman assured the Jews that if the Nazis wanted them, he would insist that they were needed to fulfill the obligations he had to the German army. And so this handful of Jews felt relatively safe.

There was a second group in this camp, relatives of the workers, who were living in cellar hide-outs or barracks. In addition, there were about one-hundred Ukrainians working here.

Each worker had his own bed in the barracks, which was inspected by a Jew named Jungermann. There were two Policemen, Kammermann and Hallemann, whose job was to guard the workers, making sure they did not escape. It was an easy chore for the guards as the workers were

grateful for the opportunity to be employed here, living in safety.

The Police led the men to work 6:30 in the morning. The workers were given soup twice a day and bread once a week.

The entire camp was surrounded by a high wooden fence which had two entrances from the street, one leading to the barracks, the other to the camp itself. Leaving the area was forbidden under penalty of death.

When we reached the camp, we crept under the big wooden gate and cautiously walked to the barracks. The doors were locked and the windows camouflaged. We entered a nearby stable, waiting for a chance to get into the barracks. Before long, the barracks door creaked open and a man came out. I approached, telling him my brother's name and asking where my brother slept. The Jew pointed to a window on the ground floor, indicating that my brother was there.

I tapped on the window. The camouflaged paper covering was lifted and I saw my brother's face. He was so excited to see me that he leaped out of the window, dressed in his nightgown. He took me and Fischer to his room. The Schachter brothers and their family stayed behind in the stable.

All the Jews crowded around us and began to tell us their story:

On June 8, 1943, from Friday night to Saturday, German Police and Ukrainian militia entered the Jewish quarter with machine guns and grenades. When the grenades exploded, the houses began to burn. Those who fled their dwellings were arrested and driven to the local prison. The wounded were shot dead on the spot.

Murder and terror prevailed in the ghetto until Saturday evening. That afternoon the Gestapo liquidated the Jewish quarter af Sambor and Stryj. The following morning, the Germans posted large announcements informing the Christian population that the area had now been cleared of Jews. Aryans were ordered to deliver any Jews they were hiding. Only Jews wearing the R and W signs were permitted to continue working in the camps.

When Jews hiding out heard of the destruction of the ghetto, they became panic-stricken, left their hide-outs and ran aimlessly to the woods or tried to find their relatives in various camps. Tired and weak, many of them were caught like birds in passage. From the prisons they were marched to death at Bronica.

Because the Gestapo needed Jewish Police for burial detail, the Germans allowed them freedom of movement in camps where workers were sheltered. On Monday, following the week-end of slaughter, the Jewish Police were marched to the cemetery and told to dig a long deep ditch for the corpses that would be brought there for burial. Then, one of the Nazi Security Police, in a dramatic speech, said that Europe was now free of Jewish domination and the Germans would remember the Jewish Police for services rendered.

Then the brutal irony of the situation became clear. The German spokesman said he did not like the Jews to feel they were unappreciated. As a symbol of German generosity, the Jewish Policemen were to be killed, but not buried in alien woods. Instead, they would be buried here, on native soil, among their fellow believers. They would not suffer the humiliation of being buried alive. Each was to receive two bullets in the head, thus dying immediately and having their agony cut short.

As he spoke, the German signaled for his men to proceed with the executions. Realizing that they were about to die, the Jewish Policemen did an unheard of thing: They fought back. They rushed their executioners and tried to wrest their rifles and pistols from them. The fighting became violent and many Security Police were wounded. The

temporary rebellion, however, did not halt the massacre. Except for one Jew all the Jewish Policemen were murdered.

On Tuesday, the Germans demonstrated their thoroughness in eliminating Jews. They cut off electric and gas supplies in every house of the ghetto and turned on the water taps to drown those who were in cellar hide-outs. When they were forced into the open, they discovered that they soon were to be killed by their tormentors.

After liquidation of the ghetto, the only Jews still alive were those in camps. When a Jew was found in town, he was subsequently handed over to the Police and shot.

This was the story we heard from the survivors.

The camp in which we found ourselves contained a few dozen Jews who had managed to escape the ghetto. Many were here illegally and had no security whatever. At any moment they might be found out. Jungermann was responsible for all inmates. If any of them were found, he would have been put to death. Although he was not an evil man, he was very nervous, for he himself had hidden his parents, wife and child in the camp. A few times a day he went to the hiding-place to see his one-year-old child named Mendele.

The two hiding-places were already overcrowded with more than one-hundred people. Where would the new refugees go? Jungermann ran desperately from one hiding-place to another pleading with Jews to leave the camp. He told them about the woods nearby where they could hide, at least during the day. But no one left. He began to insult the fugitives and in response they shouted he should send his own relatives to the woods. Jungermann became hysterical and soon the yelling and quarrelling became violent. Some of the more reasonable people tried to calm the others. What was the sense of fighting among themselves, they

asked. Wasn't it enough that their arch enemies were trying to wipe them out?

Eventually, all calmed down and it was decided that a third hiding-place would be built under the camp barracks. Until complete, the overflow could hide in the nearby woods to evade the Gestapo. I was among those who sneaked to the woods, returning to camp at night. I learned, when I returned, that friends had interceded for me, managing to get me a job. There was a shop for tailors, a second one for shoemakers and a third for brush makers. Saul Barsam, the foreman of the brush maker shop, was a close relative of mine and it was he who helped place me with the brush makers.

Meanwhile, the Schachter brothers decided to leave for the home of their peasant friend. They bribed the camp chief and were permitted to leave the woman and child for a few days. If they were lucky, they would be able to send the peasant to bring the woman and child to them.

I met the young son of Schnall and told him of the difficulties under which his parents were living in the hide-out. They could not survive much longer without water, electricity or gas. He decided to bring his parents to the camp.

Although we worked laboriously during the day, we worked equally hard at night to build the new hiding-place under the barracks. Within a few days, it was ready and those who hid there felt safe for the time being. But their feeling of security was short-lived. Three days later, they were discovered and rounded up.

I especially remember one particular Saturday. Because the Jews recalled the pleasant Sabbaths before this nightmare began, they were restless on Saturdays. On these days, they were nervous and showed no interest in work. Quite often in the SS camps, Jews were shot on Saturdays because "They did not want to work."

The camp had a new director, a Russian named Moska-

lenko, who was ignorant of the special meaning of Saturday for Jews. During the week, he drove the Jews hard, but soon learned that he could not get them to do work on the Sabbath. So he kept away from us on Saturdays and we were able to sit around quietly, reflecting on our past lives.

On this particular Saturday, we were sitting around talking, when a young Ukrainian broke into our room and yelled. "The Gestapo is here. You'd better get out quickly!"

Some of us rushed to the window to see what was happening, but others sat quietly in their places, thinking that the youngster merely wanted to frighten them. However, he was not joking. In the spacious courtyard, we saw German Policemen and Ukrainian militia armed with machine guns. Panic! Some attempted to tear up planks from the floor to hide under; others scampered up the loft.

An armed German Policeman approached our room and cried, "All Jews, out! Roll call!"

We followed the order, assembled in the courtyard and fell into two ranks. The roll call was read by an SS man named Minkus. Looking at his bloodshot eyes and his puffy face, we realized he was drunk. All work had ceased; all machines were quiet, and even the Ukrainian workers left their shops to watch.

After roll call it was discovered that four men were missing. Minkus snarled at the director that if the four men were not found, he would be taken away. The frightened director ordered the Ukrainian workers to search for the missing Jews and in a few moments three of them were found. A while later, the fourth was discovered. Now every Jew was accounted for. Some eighty of them, listed as "W's" were lined up, as well as twenty others who had no sign but were registered. They were separated from the rest.

Minkus, staggering drunk, with a pistol in each hand, ordered the director to recite aloud the names of the "W's". When their names were called, they were to fall in a separate group. The work went slowly and Minkus was impatient. Finally he grabbed the list, reading off the names himself. As both hands were occupied, he could not hold the list until he put one pistol between his teeth. Because he was drunk, he could not read or pronounce the names, especially as the gun in his mouth made it impossible for him to talk. He went into a frenzy, threw away the list and ordered the director to pick it up and finish reading it. Meanwhile, however, the list was so badly torn that the director was unable to read the names. He rushed to the office for another copy and hurried out, reading nervously because Minkus kept waving his pistols at him.

When the name of a co-worker of mine was called, he hurried to the group where he belonged. Quickly, I followed him. My brother, whose name had already been called, was standing near me.

The director finished the list and the twenty men still remained in a segregated group. Before Minkus had an opportunity to issue any orders concerning this group, the director pointed out that if these men were taken from him, it would be impossible for the camp to fulfill its commitments to the German army. Minkus stared at him uncomprehendingly and finally began to understand the meaning of what the director said. He suddenly jumped among the twenty men and pushed some of them into our group. The rest were led through the factory gate and we watched them until they disappeared. We stood silently, looking trance-like at the gate without realizing quite what was happening. Soon, however, we awoke to reality and those who had relatives hiding in camp asked the director for permission to return to the barracks, fearing that they had been discovered.

We were marched from the gate of the lumber yard across the street to the barracks. As we neared the barracks' entrance we saw a group of people surrounded by

Police. The hiding-places had been found! The Jewish Police ordered us to stop, but those who saw relatives in the group, pleaded that we be allowed to continue walking. The Police permitted us another twenty steps, and as we got closer there were cries of despair from those who saw their wives and children, parents, brothers or sisters.

About sixty persons were huddled together. I saw the Schachter woman and child and a Hebrew teacher named Feingold, who, with great feeling, used to recite for us the poetry of Bialik by heart. As Feingold stood there, I was convinced that even at this miserable moment, he was remembering and reciting to himself the lines of Bialik's poem, "To The Slaughter."

We were forced to march on and soon lost sight of the group. We assumed that after a few days they would be transported to some unknown place or to Bronica to be shot. We entered the camp silently and dispersed to our rooms with heavy hearts and morbid thoughts.

A few moments later, we heard loud cries in the courtyard. We ran out. What had happened? The Jews were being driven to the nearby woods. We heard shouting voices ordering them about. Many of us climbed the high camp fence to get a closer look at what was happening. We saw the people taking off their clothes, mothers undressing their children and daughters their old parents. Silence. Not even the babies cried as their parents undressed them. The Police loaded their rifles and soon the naked Jews were crying to us. Hearing their laments, some of the Jews on the fence, relatives of the victims, jumped down and ran toward the woods. But they did not get very far.

The executions proceeded slowly at the outset, but moved more quickly as the victims offered no resistance, seemingly wanting their lives to end. One girl, about fourteen, refused to line up in front of the tree. She was shoved to the ground and trampled upon. Then she was shot. Feingold, then

walked to the tree, and was killed. I felt that as he died, he was reciting these lines of Bialik: "The sun was shining and the slaughterer slaughtered . . ."

We were ordered, after the executions, to dig a deep pit in which to lay the dead in rows of three. If we were not quick and had we been sloppy in placing the corpses the way the Germans ordered, we would be shot the following day.

A few days later a group of orphaned ghetto children, ranging from nine to twelve years of age, entered the camp. The group consisted of about twenty children from the ghetto of Drohobycz. Their parents had been killed, their neighbors were gone and they could not expect protection from Jews who were themselves in constant danger.

Life in the woods had hardened these children and made them independent. They had a fierce desire to live and it was amazing how well organized they were. Their leader, an 11-year-old boy named Janek, had popped up from nowhere and made himself their spokesman and guide. It was believed that he and his parents had been loaded into a box car for execution and that he had jumped out of the train while his parents traveled on to their fate. Janek had wandered through villages and towns, across fields, and through woods looking for a group to which to attach himself. He reached Drohobycz, but did not intend to stay there. His dream was to cross the border into a country where there were no Germans. But at Drohobycz, he met this group of children, and became their leader. When the children traded with the townfolk and ghetto dwellers, he was the middle man. They always had to watch out, for the Germans were on the lookout for them. They vanished like ghosts, but always reappeared when they were needed.

They had disappeared into the woods on a Thursday, the day before the liquidation of the ghetto. A few days later,

they found out that the ghetto had been wiped out, that the Jews were gone.

This news broke their hearts. Where were they to go? What were they to do? How long could they continue to hide in the woods?

To add to their misery, the weather was terrible. It rained day and night, and subsequently, the youngsters were unable to find decent shelter. They were drenched, and their clothes, or more accurately, their rags, were uncomfortable.

Out of desperation, they emerged from the woods and wandered about. Finally, they saw the high chimney near our camp and were attracted to it. They guessed correctly that this was a working area and that some Jews might be here.

This is how they found us—about two weeks after the liquidation of the ghetto. Their joy was enormous and we too, wept with pleasure, for it had been a long time since we had seen young Jewish children. We made them welcome, shared our food, and immediately began to think about what we could do to help. We suggested that we could build a hiding-place for them. But they were unwilling to hide here, although agreeable to build a hide-out in the nearby woods.

We established a committee to concentrate on the welfare of the children.

And we did a good job. Every few days, a delegation of children would come to us, and we would supply them with their needs. They did not like to remain in camp too long, for they enjoyed the freedom of the woods and were wary of the camp. But, in the course of time, the kids became bored with the woods and visited more often. We learned from them that all ghettos in the area had been liquidated. The ghettos of Tarnopol and Stanislaw had been liquidated

and a week later, we heard that Lemberg's ghetto was wiped out.

The children were not the only visitors we had. Others, who had found refuge in the woods, came to us and asked for food, which we were glad to let them have. One visitor was a 16-year-old girl, who came every other day for bread and milk for her group. She was a sad girl, always downcast, without hope or faith. She would enter the camp through an opening in the high fence, accept the rations and vanish quickly into the woods. Her sorrow was so heavy, that some of us tried to pump optimism into her, but we failed. Her face remained pale, her eyes dark, her grief deep. The only time I remember her smiling was when we told her that the Allies had invaded Italy.

Rumors prevailed and the Germans sometimes deliberately started false ones, knowing we would become upset upon learning they were untrue. We did realize, however, that when the invasion began, it was no lie. We informed the girl of this news and she uttered a gasp of joy. She thanked us, ran quickly to the woods to pass along the news, and we were pleased that at least now she had something to be happy about.

And then, it happened.

A few days later, Kammermann, the Jewish Policeman, approached us and asked if we would volunteer to join a group that was burying a Jewish woman who had been shot not far from the camp. We were given spades and marched to the area designated. We soon came to a potato field and saw, lying on the ground, a young girl, dead, covered with dried blood, bullet wounds in her head and bosom. It was our young girl. Her bread and empty milk pitcher were nearby.

Kammermann told us that he had been ordered to have the girl buried where she died. We dug a grave in a corner of the field near an old willow tree. As we laid her in the

grave, we wept unashamedly. We were literally unable to cover her with the earth, and then one of the men climbed into the grave and covered her face with a cloth. Then we filled the grave.

But the Jews, even dead, did not rest easily. That same day, the owner of the field came to us and asked that the dead girl be removed, for he did not want a corpse on his ground. We tried to convince him that she could not bother him and that the grave would not interfere with his farming. We even offered to pay him for the privilege of burying her there. But he refused to listen. Within twenty-four hours he returned with a note from the Germans ordering us to remove the body. We carried her to the woods near the mass pits, dug a separate grave and laid her to her final rest.

Meanwhile, we received fewer and fewer visits from the Jews in the woods. The Germans were combing the area and were gradually killing off refugees. At about this time, Janek came to us, asking if we knew the whereabouts of some of his group who had disappeared. He was left with only four, but felt that the others still lived. We talked a while and then he left. None of the missing children ever showed up and I met Janek himself only one time more.

Although we no longer had the children to think about, we became attached to a "substitute," a little 4-year-old girl named Rachele Kupferberg, who had been left with Gentile foster parents, apparently unwilling to keep her any longer. The child was found crying in the middle of our courtyard, with a note on her dress, "Rachele Kupferberg, 4-years-old." We did not know what to do with her for she was too young to place in a hide-out. We decided to put her in an "upstairs" area of one of the barracks and here the Jews played with her, remembering the days when they enjoyed themselves with their children.

Not a day passed without some special event. One afternoon, the Ukrainian workers rushed to the fence, smiling maliciously as though waiting for something evil to happen. We were curious and expected the worst. Had the Gestapo come for us? We looked out the window and saw an elderly peasant on the road, carrying a child. A German Policeman and two Ukrainian militiamen followed behind, together with a young peasant woman who was weeping copious tears. We soon learned what had happened.

The young woman, married, had borne this child to a Jew a year ago. The Gestapo heard of the case, ascertained that the child was illegitimate, of Jewish blood and therefore to be destroyed. The elderly peasant was the child's grandfather. The woman cried that she no longer was involved with the child's father and begged that her infant be spared. We were told the next day that the child was shot by the Germans in the Jewish cemetery.

Hyrawka

Near our camp was an agricultural area which had once served as a camp where Jews planted flowers and vegetables and had, in the course of this work, managed to remain in this area, without being transferred. Once, 350 Jewish boys and girls were employed; the area was called Hyrawka. Now, only ten Jewish workers remained. The agricultural center had been specifically established to keep the Jews constantly busy. Its director was a Mr. Millbusch. He was a liberal German who had been responsible for the project, giving the Jews the entire area, stretching from a brewery to the new Jewish cemetery of Drohobycz. The actual leadership was under two Jews: Altman and Dr. Reitman. Altman was bad, but Reitman was evil and worse.

When the Jews took over, they found two ancient brewing houses with deep cellars. One of the houses was converted to a store and the other to a sort of barn for cattle. In six months, the area had been so wonderfully developed and organized that they reflected well on Jewish abilities.

There were dozens of plants, vegetables and herbs being grown successfully in the most modern manner. Horses, cattle and sheep breeding was going on apace. Rabbits were raised and bee hives flourished. The Jews also established workshops—for glaziers, locksmiths, plumbers and brush makers. There was a pottery shop for pots and vases. Day and night, the 350 Jews worked hard and showed the world that, given the opportunity, they could do as well

as any people on earth.

From time to time, the Germans visited the area and brought guests with them, making the center a show place. Foreign journalists came here, too, and if anyone reads my words later, it would be interesting for him to learn how the workers were repaid for their efforts by the Germans.

I cannot recall the exact date—it was probably in April, 1943—but Mellbusch, who was the only non-Jewish employee of the project, issued a special order, imposed upon by the Security Police: All Jews were to be moved to the pottery and ceramic works for brick making and ordered to abandon the gardening and cattle chores.

The youngsters reacted violently. The boys were sadly reluctant to leave their fields and the girls hugged the animals, for they had become attached to them.

Their crying aroused the passing Ukrainians and Poles who stopped to look and wondered why there was so much excitement. They could not understand that these Jews had taken pride in their work. Now that they were being shifted, they felt even more useless than those who waited for death in the ghettos. Some of the youngsters threatened suicide but were talked out of it by Luki Schiller. Schiller was born to a Jew who had converted to Christianity, and was himself a Christian. He was considered Jewish by the Germans and was forced to wear an armband.

Schiller was a grandson of Dr. Feuerstein and thus a member of the Feuerstein and Gartenberg families, the Galician "Rothschilds," who had done so much for the town of Drohobycz.

He was the only one of the group who did not complain about the shift. The ten Jews who remained in the agricultural fields were to leave after they had trained their replacements. This small unit was near us and part of us, so far as we were concerned. We used to talk together, discuss our situation and exchange gossip.

The Liquidation of the "W" Camps

As the day begins to dawn, we rise from our beds and hear the cries of "Roll-Call! Roll-Call!" We are tired and have the impression that we have only recently gone to bed. Have we heard these ominous words or did we dream them? But they have been part of no dream; they are real.

We hear heavy footsteps coming close to our room. A German appears at the door and calls out, "Roll-Call!" We dress quickly and fall out and see that the entire camp is surrounded by German Police, Ukrainian militiamen and police dogs. We were counted, (82) and led to the court prison, together with the ten others from the "Hyrawka Garden." My brother and I are placed in cell Number 2. It is overcrowded and I can hardly move about. The entire prison is jammed, for all W camps seem to have been dissolved and hundreds of Jews are here.

One of the two Jewish Police, brought here with us, climbs up on the shoulders of a comrade and scratches the following on the cell wall: "I, Bernhard Hallemann, was

taken here today, Tueday, on the 20th of July, 1943, the 17th of Tammuz 5703 in the Jewish era. The day of my execution will probably be the 22nd or 23rd of July."

Although many prisoners engraved such inscriptions on the walls, this one remains clear in my mind because of two errors. The writer did not die on the 22nd or 23rd, but on the 20th, the day of his capture. And he was not shot.

On the afternoon of the day we were imprisoned, we were ordered to fall out of our cells into the corridor. Here, Hallemann met a Ukrainian militiamen with whom he had served as a cop. The Ukrainian secretly handed Hallemann a badge of the Ukrainian secret police and when we were driven back to our cells, Hallemann was not among us. The guards had mistaken him for a Ukrainian and he would have been able to escape if he had the courage to walk out of the prison. Instead, he was full of fear and dawdled about. The Germans picked him up, after he acted suspicious, and then they beat him. The same day he died of the beating.

Hallemann was whipped to death, but other inmates were beaten regularly, although they were not killed. Now and again, some Jews tried to escape, difficult though it was. When they were recaptured, the beatings were given. Still, this was to be expected.

Meanwhile, I was able to reflect on the well-known thought that the old are more afraid of death than the young. For the past five months, I had been living with older people; in this cell, I was among youngsters. When I moved about with the older folks, I heard lamenting and wailing. Now, I listened mainly to merry young men singing Jewish folk songs. The handful of old people squatted in corners and wept. The young prisoners managed to get together some money to bribe the wardens and get brandy, food and cigarettes. They ate heartily and drank joyously and toasted themselves and hoped they could live in Palestine, a free Jewish Homeland. They called for the defeat and

death of Hitler. These lucky, or unlucky, depending on how one looked at it, men whose fiancees were also in jail, managed to bribe wardens to allow them a few minutes with their girls. Their meetings were brave and touching.

Once, in the prison hall, I saw a young couple talking together. He was about 22 and she 20. They were attractive and healthy. They assured each other they had no fear of the future, and they maintained a courageous front. But suddenly, as they looked into one another's eyes, tears flowed and they as much said—without words—what they really felt. The warden gave them five minutes and then sent them back to the cells. As they returned, they called out to each other, "Goodbye, may we meet in a better world."

They never saw each other again.

I, too, bribed the wardens and visited the various cells, hoping to find some friends. In one of them, I met Janek, the boy who had led the children in the forest. He had been caught and jailed and he told me of a dream of his. His mother had come to him in that dream. She was dressed in white and her face was pale. She had reproached him for having jumped out of the box car and leaving her alone. He had asked her to forgive him. As he told me the substance of this dream, I looked at him. He was tired, broken in spirit and hungry. Sitting beside him were other youngsters, originally from his group. They were even more beaten than he and could hardly lift their heads.

One of the men in our cell, Romek Miodownik, had a revolver with three bullets and planned to shoot two Germans and then himself when the time for his execution would come. He was an intelligent young man in his twenties and did not relish the lamenting of the old people and the grim humor of the youngsters. He was not afraid of death, but he did become angry at the thought that Jews should die in so mean and miserable a manner.

"Will mankind ever overcome its shame that it has permitted millions and millions of people to die? And will it ever understand how this happened without the victims offering any resistance?" he cried. "What will history think of us? What will the Jewish historians of the future say of us? We die like sheep! We do not fight!"

The others tried to calm him and, at the same time, to give excuses for their behavior. "How can we stand against the might of a people that has beaten Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia and Greece?" one man called out. "How can we fight effectively against any enemy that has attacked mighty Russia?"

Another said, "Why don't the Russian prisoners resist? Why didn't the 12,000 Polish officers of Katyn resist? They have been trained to fight—and look at them. What can we do—who don't know how to use weapons, what can our wives and children do?"

But Miodownik remained unconvinced. He believed in Jewish heroism and courage. He had faith in the spirit of the Hasmoneans and Bar Kochba.

On a Thursday afternoon, the killings began. The Germans started with cell number 1, and ten people were led into the prison office. An hour later, our turn was to come. Miodownik was among the first ten. Five minutes later, the sharp report of a pistol sounded; then we waited for a second and a third, according to his plan. But we heard no further shots. We were later told that a Ukrainian, standing next to Miodownik, had noticed that he had moved toward his pistol and had grabbed Miodownik's hand. The first bullet was deflected and that was that.

When our cell door was opened, we thought our time had come. But instead a German officer, holding a slip of paper in his hand, called out five names. My brother and I were on this list. We were the only two from the cell on the list. We were ordered to step into the corridor and we

waited until the German found the other men on the list. They were Moses Backenroth, Saul Barsam, and a Dr. Spiro from Warsaw who, in the last few years had lived in Drohobycz.

Slowly and gradually, we learned that the five of us had been selected as good workers and were to report to an establishment where workers were badly needed. The man who ran the place had good Gestapo connections, and, as a result, could obtain men like us when he needed them.

But Dr. Spiro refused to report for work.

"What do you mean, you won't go?" the prison director said. "Tomorrow, everybody here will be executed, and you will be alive."

"I want to be executed and will not leave," Dr. Spiro said.

His action puzzled and amazed the director, who went into a huddle with a Gestapo man and told him what was happening.

The German took the same tack. "Why don't you want to leave this prison?" he asked. "You will be liberated if you do."

Dr. Spiro replied, "I don't believe that. Perhaps my death will be delayed three or four weeks. But I don't need these extra weeks to prolong my misery. This way, everything will be finished in twelve or fourteen hours. I am not interested in this extra time."

"You are right, Jew," the German said. We, in any case, went along with the director, as he ordered, and we wondered uneasily whether Dr. Spiro was right in what he said.

We were taken to the Beskiden Camp and as we went we saw that the streets which had been full of Jews, were empty. In the camp we met with Backenroth, the engineer and other Jews who told us that Dr. Ruhrberg, the former Vice President of the Jewish Council of Drohobycz, and his wife, were here in Drohobycz. They were shot that same day.

Why There Was No Resistance

Why didn't we resist? What crushed us was the fact that we were opposed by an implacable foe in possession of modern weapons. The automatic machine guns, tanks, and airplanes were so overwhelming that Hitler was able to carry out his devilish plan of annihilation.

I feel that if we had pistols and rifles, we might have fought our way to freedom. Even if we had been destroyed, we would have managed to take thousands of Germans with us. We would have defended our wives and children, our mothers and fathers, to our last breath.

But the machine guns, which spewed hundreds of bullets a minute, the huge tanks, and fighter planes, made any uprising impossible from its inception.

We were not alone in our helplessness. The nations of Europe, conquered by Hitler, were equally weak. Could we accomplish what all the peoples of Europe could not? We, the ghetto Jews? After all, we had been raised not to fight but to live by the spirit, according to the Lord's word.

Moreover, the Germans acted against us in isolated fash-

ion. They picked us off, group by group, ghetto by ghetto, Jew by Jew. As one group was liquidated, another was permitted to live. Then the survivors were destroyed. In this way, the Germans always had Jews working for them while others were being killed off.

Added to all this was the sad realization that the Ukrainians and Poles among whom we lived, were eager to cooperate with the Germans in wiping us out. Their animal instincts were aroused. Even those Poles who would not persecute the Jews were glad to be rid of us because our doctors, lawyers, engineers and businessmen represented competition to them. They sat by contentedly as we were being massacred.

We could not hope to receive weapons from them; on the contrary, when they discovered we had guns, we were denounced and turned over to the German authorities.

When our young men asked the Polish partisans to join with them in acts of sabotage, the Poles said they were unwilling to join with Jews. They felt that they had a chance to outlive the war while the Jews would all be killed before peace came.

In the meantime, we were convinced, after the German catastrophe at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942, that the war would soon come to a close. We felt that only a short time remained for us to suffer. We were confident that the German war machine must soon break down.

As I reflect on my optimism that the war would soon be ending, I wonder why I was so hopeful. I can only guess, at this point, that Dr. Freud has explained the psychological attitude I adopted. If a man wants desperately enough to see something happen, he is unwilling to recognize the obstacles that stand in his path. I overlooked all the signs which opposed my view. I was unable to see clearly that the German breakdown would be delayed.

Naftali Backenroth

Naftali Backenroth was a well educated man who had studied agriculture, chemistry, geology and engineering. At the age of 23, he had been appointed a lecturer at a polytechnical school in France and in 1929 had worked on a plan to connect the Mediterranean with the Red Sea by canal. He had won a prize for his plan, although, of course, nothing came of it. He was an attractive-looking man, who moved swiftly and purposefully. He was popular in Drohobycz and liked. He was involved in studies of the naphtha works in Drohobycz when war came in 1939. When the Germans came in 1941, they ordered Jewish intellectuals to clean the prison latrines, the barracks and other municipal buildings. Backenroth was one of those doing this dirty work. His co-workers were doctors, lawyers, professors and engineers. They did not relish the chores given them but Backenroth was unlike them. He said, "Let us get on with the work and finish it as soon as possible."

The Germans noticed that he was a hard worker and when they discovered he was an agricultural student, he was sent to work in the garden of a Gestapo officer. In this fashion, he made contact with the Gestapo and soon was able to do some favors for his fellow Jews. At about that time, Jews were disappearing in a black motor car and nobody knew where they were being driven. It was Backenroth who found out they were being imprisoned in the

cellar of the Gestapo building, to be shot the following day. Backenroth managed to get some of them saved. As more and more Germans came to live in Drohobycz and took over apartments and houses in which to live, Backenroth had more and more work to do, and the Germans were very pleased with the way in which he laid out and took care of their gardens. He became popular with them too, and gained a measure of influence over them.

Backenroth was an honest man and a serious one. He did not especially care about his own comfort and the Germans as well as the Jews respected him. When he saved Jews, he did not ask for any gifts or thanks. Even those who tried to give him money or presents soon learned that he would not accept a thing from them.

Then Backenroth, in the midst of mounting trouble and misery, made a startling proposal to the Germans. He offered to organize a Jewish work group to complete projects which would be of permanent value, even after the Germans left the country. He proposed to build hot-houses movie houses, riding schools, social clubs and gardens. When the Gestapo agreed, Backenroth obtained 700 workers and 100 administrative officers. He involved nearly 25 percent of all the Jews and established workshops where children could learn various skills. Until March, 1943, all the people working with Backenroth were relatively secure and under no persecution. Living conditions were not bad and the food was adequate. While Jews elsewhere—since mid-1942—were badly off, in Drohobycz, under Backenroth, life was semi-decent. He was so successful in his management that the property of the village Jews—outside of Drohobycz—was handled by the Jews in the village. The village Jews were allowed to remain on their property and they had to produce a good harvest, but at least they were permitted to keep part of it, and Backenroth saw to it that some was distributed among the Jewish workers in Drohobycz. Under

his care, the village Jews also felt safer and gradually, all the Jews in the vicinity came to Backenroth with their problems. He helped everyone and was soon a leader, an important leader, among them.

Meanwhile, in his own house, there was misery and poverty. He did not take advantage of his leadership to improve the lot of his own family. They had dry bread and black ersatz coffee. He was convinced that his family had to live like the Jews who were worse off. In order for me to describe every noble thing he did would take an entire book. But for the future historians of this era, I should like to tell this story, which I heard from Dr. Isidor Friedmann, who is in the hide-out with me.

In the winter of 1941-1942, Dr. Friedmann was passing through Mickiewicza Street to go to work in the library of the Jesuit monastery from Chyrow, where he was helping assort the books with Professor Bruno Schulz. He saw a column of trucks loaded with machine guns and manned by Gestapo men. The Gestapo crew was drunk and Backenroth was standing there talking with them, asking them and pleading with them not to undertake the Action they were planning against the Jews in Turka-on-the-Stryj. The Gestapo men were laughing and paying no attention to Backenroth, until one of them said something about "Martel cognac, but only genuine Martel cognac." Obviously, for the first time, the Germans wanted something from the Jew. Backenroth asked them to wait and not act. He would bring them what they wanted. He disappeared for a while and then came back with two bottles of the genuine pre-war cognac they wanted. That day, 300 Jews were killed in Turka and not 500 as planned, and Backenroth was able to say that 200 were saved—100 Jews for each bottle of the cognac. That was our value at this period!

When the time came for the liquidation of the ghetto, everyone watched out for himself and those who had the

contacts and influence, managed to escape. The Jews had no leaders left, for all had gone—all except Backenroth. Alone, with his family, he stayed in the ghetto. When the ghetto was wiped out, he was caught by Gestapo men who did not know him, and he was imprisoned. When the Drohobycz Gestapo heard of his capture, they came to release him. He refused their offer. He said he would leave only if 100 Jews were let out with him. The Gestapo acceded to his wishes and freed 100 Jews together with him.

When the liquidation came, the Jews finally lost all hope of survival. Morale broke down and defeatism set in. Even Backenroth lost his courage and he became pathetic, listless, and beaten.

I remember one incident of this period. It was the last time I saw Backenroth, Thursday, July 22, 1943, when I was brought, with others, to Beskiden Camp. The Germans had been killing Jews here and the survivors were depressed and dejected. Backenroth stood in the center of a crowd of Jews and close to him was a Mrs. Nadel, who pleaded with him to help save her two children who were in prison. Backenroth simply stood there, listening to her, but not responding. Was he overcome by the helplessness of the situation? Was he now completely powerless? In any event, Backenroth merely remained standing, resigned to whatever fate would come. Finally, Mr. Nadel, who had been standing there silently himself, said, in a trembling voice, "Sir, at least save one child."

These words, somehow, touched Backenroth. He pulled himself together, ran to the gate, disappeared and an hour later returned with two children. He allowed them to enter the gate into the camp and then he disappeared. The children came to their parents and wept with joy.* That very day, when Backenroth made his final saving gesture, was the day before the 20th of Tammuz, the day of the death of Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism.

Beskiden, Cellar and Liberation

There were about 200 Jewish families, totalling about 700 Jews in Beskiden. All the Jews worked in the naphtha refineries and workshops. They worked all day and returned to the camp in the evening. The camp was a small ghetto, for both women and men labored here and everyone was grim. Every Jew had at least one relative in jail, and executions were taking place regularly. My brother and I remained here, working in the naphtha refineries. The days and weeks passed in great danger. One particular day, my brother and I were working at the refinery in Derezyce and we saw a worker from Schodnica passing by, a Pole named Stanislaus Nendza. We asked him if he could find a place for us. At first, Nendza refused to help us, but he did tell us that he had built a hiding-place under a stable, with his friend Francizek Janiewski, where he had already hidden three Jews. He had no objection to hiding another two Jews he knew, but first he wanted to talk it over with his neighbor and his wife. Two days later, we met Nendza again and he told us he had discussed the matter with the

three hidden Jews and his own people and he invited us to join him. He wanted a sum of money which we were able to pay. The entire negotiation, which was so significant to us, took only ten minutes.

On a Sunday, we crept out of the camp and walked toward Schodnica. We walked all night until we reached the Carpathian Mountains, where we hid in a ravine during the day. The following evening we continued our march until we reached Nendza's house, which was situated in a naphtha pit. We entered quickly and saw a comfortable home, with fine furniture, a child's cradle, pictures on the walls and a cat. We had been unaccustomed to such comforts. When everyone was assured that all was safe, we were led to a stable with a hiding place beneath it. Part of the stable was partitioned off for a pig sty. Our host drove out a pig, pushed away the straw, lifted a board and opened a trap. We saw an opening just large enough for one person to creep through. Nendza told us to go down. One by one we did so. The opening was shut again and the plank covered us. We heard the straw being replaced and the pig being driven back into the sty. A candle was lit. There was some light now and we could see where we were. It was here where we were to live.

Among the Jews who lived here during this period, I knew only Esther Backenroth. The others were Dr. Friedmann and Mrs. Luisa Mahler, the widow of Dr. Mahler.

Life was difficult for all of them. They knew they were passing time helplessly and implacably only because they could check off the days on the calendar. Otherwise, life stopped. All they did was wait . . . wait. The summer passed . . . and then autumn . . . and winter. Soon spring would come and their only evidence of it would be the calendar.

If they forgot to strike a day off the calendar, that day did not exist. There were no lights at all and they could

only imagine the loveliness of the sky outside and overhead. During this year, they could see neither sky nor sun; neither the moon nor the stars, the snow nor the rain, the blossoms nor the fruit.

Their lives were monotonous but the days rolled on. One day resembled the one before—and the one after. Each day was like drops of rain, falling . . . falling. Once, every day had brought its own excitement. The people had suffered pain and fear of death . . . and had experienced hope, too. Here, in this cellar, there was peace of a sort. The inmates respected one another and kept telling one another that the day would come when they would be truly safe and would be permitted to emerge from the darkness.

Yet even as they hid here, some exciting things had been happening on the outside.

Two Jewish girls, who had hidden in Schodnica, had been discovered. No one had looked for them. They had been found through mere chance. Two firemen had noticed that smoke was coming from a chimney in one of the houses in town. They feared a fire and broke into the house. They discovered that an oven had been heated to make bread, but the men were not satisfied with what they saw. They investigated further and pulled out the two girls hiding in the room. That very day, the peasant woman and the two girls were executed.

This in itself was a frightening tale, but a little while later, another event took place. A small group of young Jews, twenty in all, had armed themselves and pushed their way through the woods. Just as they were approaching Schodnica, the Germans saw them. There was a battle in the woods between the Jewish partisans and the Germans. Although many of the Jews managed to escape, scores of Germans were killed and wounded. The Jews who were caught were savagely tortured and murdered before the eyes of the villagers.

These activities led the natives to talk about the Jews and the Ukrainians decided to search all the houses which they suspected might be hiding Jews. The Jews lived now in utter fear. For in their landlord's house there lived a Ukrainian militia man named Dublynicz and he had begun to notice something odd about the stable. The landlords suspected that he had seen them bringing pots of food to the stable.

Days of terrible anxiety passed. The Jews prayed that their landlords would not lose their nerve, that they would hold out. At about this time, an aunt of the landlord's came to visit and took their child away. She felt that if her niece was willing to take a chance with the Jews their child should not be made to suffer if they were caught.

The Carpathian Mountain chain stretches like a protective rampart across Middle Europe. The icy Eastern winds from Siberia go no further than the Carpathians and in the stable and in the cellar the winter was extremely severe. The huge, ancient trees cracked in the forest and the snow was very deep. The world seemed to be devoured by the ice giant. The stable was covered with snow, but inside it was quite warm. The cold air was fresher than the summer air. The Jews could live with a feeling of security now and thus they remained: dead to the world above them. They knew they could not emerge until the war ended and they speculated on the progress of the fighting and felt that the end would soon approach.

In mid-winter there was more trouble. Transmission straps in the workshops of the naphtha pits had been stolen. The Germans decided to search the homes of all the men who worked there, and as Janiewski, one of the landlords, was a technician at the pits, it appeared that the hideout would soon be found.

It must be said that the people who were hiding the Jews, while frightened, never considered abandoning them. When

the Jews offered to go into the woods, the landlords rejected their offer, saying that the cold air in the woods would kill them. The Jews could not but help appreciate the good fellowship of their landlords. At the outset of the adventure, it is possible that the landlords had helped the Jews for monetary gain. But now they all were, so to speak, a single community. The Jews never heard the landlords complain about them and they always tried to perk up the spirits of the Jews. Still, when the search began, the landlords fled to the woods, leaving their wives behind.

The Jews hidden in the stable were seldom visited by the women, who came every third day with the necessary supplies. In the interim, the Jews wondered and worried and prayed. Finally, the searchers came closer and closer. The police started to search the house and cellar of Janiewski. By this time, the two men who had gone into the woods had been captured and jailed. They had also been released because of their good behavior and clean records and also because one of the women had thought quickly. She had taken a can of gasoline to the police, gave it up and said that the man had run away because they knew it was against the law for them to hoard the gasoline. The police accepted the excuse and so this danger vanished.

Meanwhile, during this tense period, one of the women in the cellar, Mrs. Mahler, had become seriously ill. She grew terribly weak and was unable to rise from her bed. She had to be fed and washed by Esther Backenroth. The only food available was carrot juice which had been warmed over in a small tin pot held over a candle. Gradualy, Mrs. Mahler grew weaker and weaker and one day was unable to talk at all.

When I left the cellar after one of my trips there, I asked a doctor in Boryslaw about Mrs. Mahler's symptoms as I understood them. He told me that there were no hopes for her recovery. So what was to be done with her?

The landlords already were planning on her burial and were thinking as to how to go about it. Then a strange thing happened. After a week, the sick woman asked for a glass of milk. There was no milk, so we gave her more carrot juice. Within an hour she wanted more. In the evening, when the landlords came, the Jews asked them for a little milk, and when they brought it, Mrs. Mahler drank it eagerly and began to talk. Two weeks later, she arose and began washing herself. A fortnight after that, she recovered —thanks to Esther Backenroth's self-sacrificing nursing.

A few quiet weeks followed. The cellar inhabitants read books and newspapers, played chess and cards, solved mathematical problems and crossword puzzles and did bodily exercises to keep in decent physicial trim. They were, however, running out of money so they gradually gave their hosts all the clothing they had, except the clothes they wore. They were also compelled to break their gold teeth and bridges in their mouths in the hope that they—plus the clothes—could be sold, should they need money before they were freed.

In the first week of life in the cellar, we experienced our first surprise. A four-day period elapsed before the landlords showed up. Had something happened to them? Had they themselves escaped? Would we now starve? Everyone listened for noises wondering whether the Angel of Death had passed by. And then, one day, we heard shots and screams . . . and then there was silence again. What was going on? God, what was happening? Imaginations ran rampant. And then, finally, after four days, one of the landlords came down and reported on what had happened.

A boy had arrived in Schodnica, a 10-year-old named Noah Feuerberg. With the sure instinct of a carrion, a Volks-German named Beck had sensed that the boy was Jewish. The German walked up to the youngster as the boy came to

Schodnica and had grabbed him. The lad defended himself but Beck overcame him and dragged him to our landlord's house and demanded that he be kept there until the police arrived. Normally, Nendza would have allowed the boy to escape, but he was afraid that if the area were searched, the Jews hiding there would be discovered. Nendza therefore said nothing. He fed the boy who, for a moment, forgot he was in peril and sat back relaxed. Meanwhile, however, the police were on their way to the house. When Beck arrived with the police, he charged the landlords with treating the Jewish child too well. The Germans shot and killed the boy behind our stable and ordered the landlords to dig his grave. Thus the boy became a silent neighbor, lying in the ground near his Jewish brothers who, for the moment, were still alive.

The Feuerberg boy's life story, brief though it was, had its own special interest. He was not the natural son of the shoemaker, Don Feuerberg, for Feuerberg had no children. But years earlier, a poor wandering woman from Lublin had passed through the town with a small boy and the woman had stopped at Feuerberg's and asked for permission to rest awhile. He, of course, granted her wish, and then suddenly the woman vanished, leaving the child behind. No one ever saw her again and Feuerberg raised the boy, naming him Noah and taught him that he was a Jew. The happy years of his childhood culminated in the Nazi terror and all the Jews he knew were killed. He was driven from Schodnica to the ghetto of Boryslaw and he managed to escape and drift back to Schodnica—where he met his fate. Thus, our silent neighbor was one whose history we all knew, and we mourned his passing. Somehow, we felt that he had died on our behalf, and we could not banish the thought of him; nor could we drive the sound of his weeping from our minds.

Trouble, however, was not yet over. A few days later, water flooded the area. It occurred in the morning when

everyone woke up and realized that the waters were rising in the hideout, due to the overflowing of the nearby river which was thawing out. Each day, water had to be scooped out, for hours on end. The biggest water breakthrough left the hiding area half inundated. The bedstead on the floor was now useless and even the upper section of the bed was wet. If one of the landlords had not been around, all the hiding Jews would have been drowned, for he opened the trap door and helped out in the crisis. The water finally receded and this danger was beaten back. My brother and I then decided to return to Beskiden in Boryslaw and return to this area only during the very hot days. We also planned to hide here when life on the outside turned very dangerous: when there would be shootings planned and other types of persecution.

Now it is August, 1944. There are no terrorists walking the streets any longer, or combing the woods or searching out Jews, because there are none left. From time to time, trucks rumble through the streets in the direction of the Carpathians, but they are no longer loaded with Jews and no longer roll to the execution areas. At first only a few trucks roll westward, but then they come from all directions, full of German soldiers. By day and night, artillery thunders, deep in the Carpathians. We hear that Brody has fallen, Tarnopol captured. Now Lemberg has been taken. A chain of happy events. Our hearts beat swiftly.

The once-mighty German army is being beaten to its knees. This is the army that was to establish a thousand-year Nazi-Reich. Now they are war-tired, whipped, minus leaders. The world will soon be free again. Will we live to see it? Millions of Jews have prayed for this day. They were, many of them, hoping to live long enough to see the end of Hitlerism. Yet with all this mounting excitement, we realize how terribly alone we are. To whom do we now

belong? Where are we to go?

When these German armies had proudly moved toward the East, Jewish life was flowering in the towns of Poland. It was a rich, happy country, fertile and peaceful, full of hard-working Jews, proud Jewish communities which were cultural Jewish centers that made Jews everywhere aware of the beauty and value of the Jewish heritage. But now? What was left? Out of the cellars there emerged a few poor, half-starved, ragged, broken-down human beings—a wretched remainder of a once-flourishing proud and happy people.

How terribly lonely we are! How ardently we had awaited this day of victory. We felt, most deeply and honestly, that we would be utterly grateful to get out of our underground hideaway. But now, what?

We are confronted by a collapsing civilization. The smoky ruins of the liquidated ghettos stand out against Europe's violated sky. The ruins look back at us and tell us that our wives and children, mothers and fathers, friends and relatives—all, all have perished and Judaism has practically ceased to exist.

We tell ourselves, "What do we want here? We are miserable remnants of a great people. Look at us now! Vanish! Disappear!"

Now it is Tuesday, August 8, 1944, 7 A.M. Benek, the 16-year-old son of Janiewski, opens the trap door and cries down to us, "You are liberated! The Allied troops are marching in!"

We remain at the bedsteads. It seems one waits for the other to make the first move. Then the two landlords break into loud cries and our lethargy vanishes. With tears of joy, they are entering the stable. They realize that we are saved and their long watch is over.

Slowly, we climb upwards, to the earth, to the sun, to the sky.