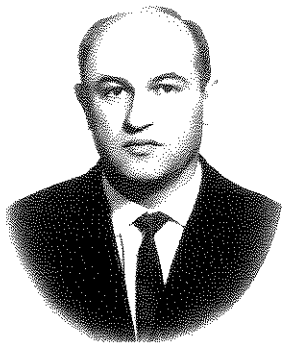


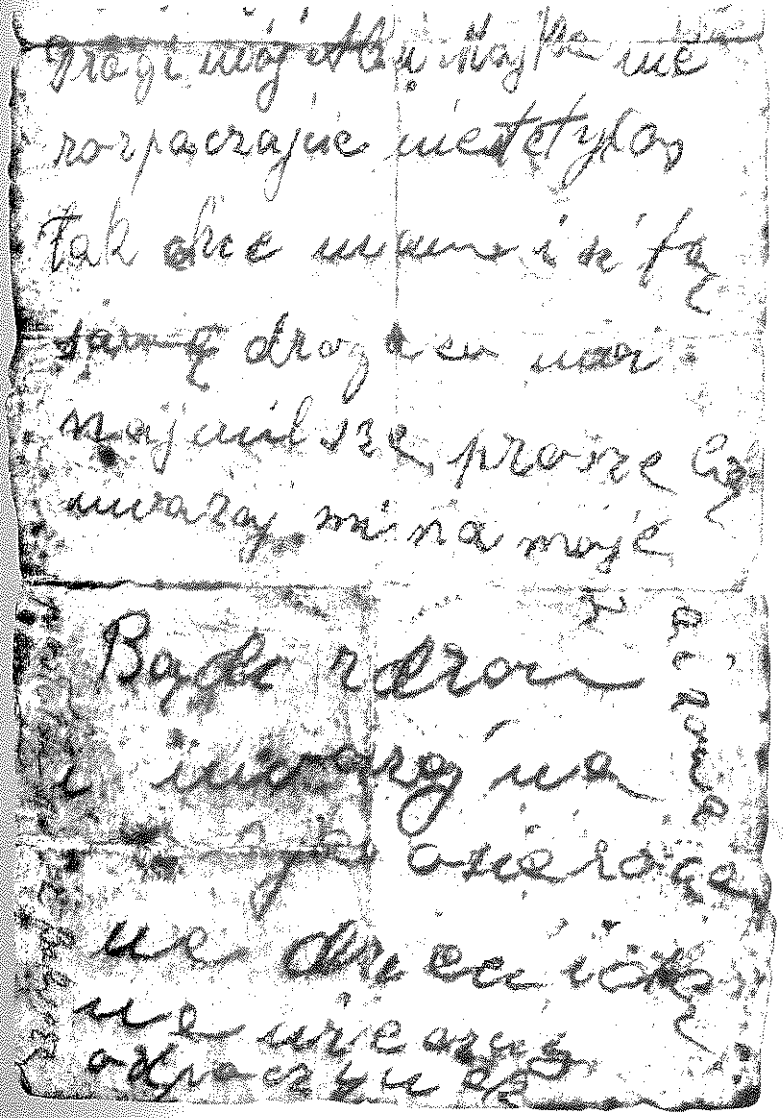
"**That War and Me**" presents the story of a Jewish family's struggle for survival during the Holocaust, one of the darkest periods in human history. Free of excessive emotionalism, in a pragmatic style wich serves to emphasize the horror, Meir Chameides introduces us to the trusting world of a Jewish boy on the eve of World War II and its ensuing tragic destruction.
The fabric of his life slowly unravels before his eyes. Neighbors disappear, never to return again. Family members are slaughtered cruelly and an atmosphere of dread predominates everywhere.

Written from the perspective of a boy, whose maturity was accelerated by the war and its atrocities, a story of escapism, an intense desire for survival, a prolonged stay in the hiding-place, hope, despair, pressures and Liberation unfolds before the eyes of the reader.

"I could not stop thinking... I wondered if someday I would be able to tell about that absurd situation and if I would be believed".

That War and Me

Meir Chameides



THAT WAR AND ME

Meir Chameides

To a very good friend
Maya Rondel-ph
with love and appreciation
Meir

Meir Chameides

THAT WAR AND ME

GROWING UP IN THE
SHADOW OF THE HOLOCAUST

Hebrew edition 2000
English edition 2001

Translated by Shula Neufeld

Dedicated to the memory
Of my mother, Fryda Chameides
And to the memory of the
Numerous victims of the Holocaust

World War II broke out on the first of September 1939. I was an eleven-year-old boy that year. At that age, could I have appreciated the significance of the hour? Doubtfully. My parents' eyes, ostensibly reflecting apprehension and dread, the sirens and air raids, the frenzied shopping and food hoarding, the heartbreaking parting from the enlisted, all generated an overwhelming sense of anxiety within the general public and affected me as well.

Alongside the grave concerns, optimistic opinions were being voiced as well. "At last, the Germans will finally have to deal with the Poles! The latter will surely teach them a thing or two. After all, the Polish cavalry is world renown and the Germans are unlikely to stand up to them." Marshal Ridz-Szmigly was quick to proclaim: "Not only will we not relinquish Gdansk (Danzig) to him (Hitler), even a coat's button we will not offer him!"

Due to the prevailing chaos, confusion and detachment from reality, some of the adults, my parents included, were voicing their ambivalence. "Actually, the Germans are not so bad. After all, we encountered them during World War I as well. In general, they are cultured and

decent. We, the Jews, were treated by them better than we were by the Russians, Poles and Ukrainians."

My parents owned a well-known fabric store, which was considered to be quite successful by our community's normative standards. It was located in the city of Boryslaw which is situated at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. Between one alarm and the next, my father managed to remove some of the merchandise from his store and hid it in the homes of my aunts and paternal grandfather, Feivish the "Shokhet."

Famous for its rich crude oil deposits discovered in the nineteenth century, Boryslaw was in the region of Galitzia, at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is reasonable to assume that the Germans started bombarding the city in the early days of the war due to those oil fields.

In any case, each time we heard the sirens and the roaring engines of the German airplanes (not necessarily in that order), we raced to the basement of our house which served as a bomb shelter. A damp blanket was spread across the entrance to prevent the infiltration of gasses. (What naivety!)

The townspeople were required to help dig trenches, intended to be used as bomb shelters as well. My father had his civilian obligation fulfilled by my cousin Munio. In other words, his services were procured to "represent" my father, to report and dig under his name . . .

I don't remember and it is doubtful whether those ditches were ever used for the purpose they were intended.

The German airplanes dropped bombs, apparently intended for the crude oil production plants. Since they

were located far away from our residential areas, we stopped, after two or three days, running to the shelters. The alarm mechanism did not function properly either. Consequently we, the children,"spent"our time generally watching, in great excitement, the German planes passing above in a fearsome uproar, a noise we quickly learned to recognize. We would watch the low flying planes drop bombs on some targets on the horizon, note the smoke rising in the distance and heard the blast after a few seconds. The announcements we heard on our radio (a very rare item in those days) were mainly in Polish, in coded language we did not understand very well. Hearing the announcer's dramatic voice and the oft repeated word "Nadchodzi," (arriving in Polish), we surmised that the planes of the German enemy were approaching. Where? The front? Which front? Perhaps Warsaw? Who knew?!

As the days passed, the Polish announcements decreased gradually and the radio waves were taken over by other voices, with sharp, decisive and threatening tones, now broadcasted in German. Meanwhile, events were taking place in a dizzying tempo. Polish policemen were arriving from the west. Apparently they were ordered to abandon their cities and retreat eastward. The Polish army units, totally confused, had scattered in absolute disorder. In that environment of anarchy, those policemen were distinctively alien. They were not familiar with the city nor with its residents, yet they found themselves an "occupation." It was the supervision of blacking out windows in the buildings, particularly at the homes of the Jews. What could have been easier or simpler? "After all,

it was well known that the Jews loved the Germans and would do everything in their power to help them! Was that not so?"

An incident with three policemen is etched into my memory. Appearing in our apartment suddenly one evening, they accused us, not more nor less, of signaling the enemy. How was that done? The apartment's windows were indeed darkened as required, but the lights were on indoors. When the entrance door was opened, the light penetrated into the stairway (we lived on the second floor in a building of four stories). There was a large window in the exterior of the building which opened into the lit stairway. Those were the bases for the charge that we were "signaling" the enemy. An accusation of that sort, at such times, was not trivial in the least. My parents suffered through long moments of intense anxiety, attempting to explain the facts, as they were, to the policemen.

The children, namely my sister and I, were paralyzed with fear. We heard, perhaps for the first time in our lives, aggressive, crude and threatening words directed at my father by policemen. It was unlike the usual treatment accorded by the local police, many of whom knew him. Sometimes they would enter the shop, still open after the official closing time. Generally they remarked in a formal, businesslike manner, that closing time had taken place such and such minutes previously and with that the matter was closed. From comments made by my father and the shop's sales team, Alter and Zisio, (my mother's brother), I understood that the policemen's visit was actually a reminder about some holiday which was

approaching. It was prudent not to forget that a fitting gift, rustling appropriately, would be appreciated accordingly.

At any rate, the incident with the "alien" police could have ended badly, had not our Jewish neighbor, probably at my father's request, contacted a local policeman. The latter whispered with the others, took the trouble to explain that they were dealing with "a good Jew, one of our own" and immediately obliged my father to confirm that determination, by offering all of them, not necessarily discretely, a substantial sum of money. Obviously the local policeman's share was not wanting.

Meanwhile the Polish Army collapsed and dispersed as it retreated from the advancing German forces. Some of the Polish soldiers were taken prisoners by the Russians in the east. Some others crossed the border into Romania in the south, however that is another story.

My maternal uncles, Srulik, Hesio and Milo, drafted by the Polish army when the war broke out, showed up one by one, fugitives from army units which had collapsed even before they were prepared for battle. Obviously we were all happy to see them, healthy and in one piece. My mother was happiest than most, or so it seemed to me. She had always been very attached to her three sisters, Ethel, Genia and Chaika (a khalutza who immigrated to Palestine before the outbreak of the war), as well as to her four brothers, the soldiers who had returned and Zisio, who suffered from a speech impediment. It was clear to me that some of the grey, beginning to show through her abundant black hair, was due to her worrying about the recruited brothers.

THE GERMANS ARRIVE

Between one incident and the next, the Germans entered Boryslaw twelve days after the outbreak of the war.

On the morning of one summer day, in an atmosphere fraught with tensions and fears, we suddenly saw, from our apartment's windows, people running toward Dolna Wolanka, a district adjacent to our home. The growing clamor of vehicles was heard as well. I ran out and joined the huge crowd of locals. Standing close to the bend in the road, we watched a long winding line of trucks loaded with German soldiers, tri-bikes and other vehicles carrying soldiers and officers bearing arms. The racing vehicles had to slow at the curve. The German soldiers were watching us as they drove by. The helmeted tri-bike riders wore severe expressions. The sidecar rider had a gun pointed in his hand, threatening prompt action. In contrast, the soldiers packed on the trucks were gay and shouted unfamiliar words in our direction. Within the crowd gathering to watch the Germans, were also bearded Jews with side-locks. They won particular notice from the spirited soldiers. Some went out of their way to express their "caring" with derisive calls, accompanied by motions no less derisive, "caressing" their imagined beards and side-locks. The Jews, in whose "honor" such trouble was taken, affected abashed or embarrassed smiles and tried to melt into the crowd of curious onlookers, which included Ukrainians, probably some Poles and, of course Jews.

With the exception of the religious Jews, distinctive due to their clothes, bearded faces and side-locks, it wasn't always possible to distinguish between the different nationalities. However, the expressions on the faces of those welcoming the arriving German forces, were clear indications exactly as to how each one of them felt. Adjacent to faces expressing worry, fear and discomfort, there hovered many faces covered with wide grins of satisfaction. It was easy to presume that many of those smiling were Ukrainians.

The Poles certainly had no reason to jump for joy. As for the Jews . . .

That initial encounter with the Germans did not bode well. Reactions by some of the non-Jewish spectators to the Germans' mockery of the Jews awakened deep anxieties, very soon proven to be valid.

The Germans' rule in the city of Boryslaw lasted about twelve days, until the arrival of the Red Army's units which followed the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.

The Germans did not spend their time in vain. One day they assembled a group of wealthy eminent Jews and made them stand against the wall. Under threat of immediate executions, the Jewish community was forced to "contribute" sums of money to the Germans. I remember that a gentile acquaintance came to our home beforehand and told my father what was about to happen. The gentile promised that he and several other Ukrainian friends would stand guard in front of our home, "making sure" that the Germans would overlook my father. I do not know if their services were required or not, but the Germans did not get to us that time. However, they did indeed come, in regards to another matter.

It was the night of Rosh Hashanah. My parents had gone to a synagogue and my sister Adela and I stayed at home. We went over to our neighbors the Speichers and spent some time there. Suddenly we heard loud knocking on their door, shouting in German and the sound of many boots stepping on the wooden stairs in the stairway. In the midst of the tumult, we heard our family's name repeatedly, Chameides. The door opened abruptly and forcefully, revealing several German soldiers, accompanied by a Ukrainian citizen and three or four tenants from our building. All of us, the Speichers, my sister and I, froze in terror at the sight of the group.

The Ukrainian, who attempted to serve as an interpreter, directed his words mainly at my sister Adela. She was the senior representative of the family, then only fifteen, older than I by four years. The German soldiers wanted to buy fabric in my parents' shop. We told them that it was a Jewish holy day, the reason for our parents' attending the synagogue and the closing of the shop.

One of the soldiers, obviously ranked as senior among them, sternly demanded, while pointedly exhibiting the gun in his right boot, that the shop be opened at once. My sister, pale as a ghost and paralyzed with fear, somehow found the shop's keys. With the help of the people ushering the Germans, she managed to open the entrance door at the front of the shop. One of the neighbors summoned my parents from the synagogue and they arrived, extremely alarmed. The scene, unfolding at their eyes, shocked them. Adela, their delicate and indulged daughter, who never had any dealings with the shop, was standing shaking in

fear behind the counter, piling rolls of fabric as she faced a group of German soldiers. Instinctively, my mother flew to Adela to protect her from any oncoming danger and my father, with his voice trembling, introduced himself as the shop's owner and offered his services.

The fact that my father spoke to them in the German language, in addition to his attempts to conduct himself in the best manner of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, made no difference to the Germans. In coarse and imperious voices they demanded additional fabrics, in rolls only. Their leader, the most demanding of the lot, was an officer, or perhaps only a sergeant. He drew his gun periodically, waving it at my sister as an inducement, while the others were loading the merchandise on the truck waiting outside. The truck was filled, the store was almost emptied and the German gave instructions to add up the bill, saying that they wanted to pay as was customary, but in German marks, since they did not have sufficient funds in Polish currency. My father was careful to draft the bill with considerably lower rates than usual. It was done in zlotys first and then carefully converted to marks, only after confirming the rate of exchange with the "venerable clients." The tallies were accepted, the bill was presented and, wonder of wonders, the money was paid. The magnitude of the robbery was revealed only after they left the shop. After close inspection, it was discovered that the notes they had offered, with such integrity, were from World War I days, out-of-date and absolutely worthless.

The next morning, my father approached and told a

Ukranian friend, who had connections with the Germans, what had taken place. My father asked the Ukranian for assistance, with advice and, perhaps, also with an appeal to the German authorities. The man's response was an immediate and unequivocal "return home at once and do not dare discuss the matter, otherwise you will be shot on the spot." No doubt, it was the best advice to be hoped for in those days. That was the conclusion reached by all my parents' friends and our family members, after hearing about the incident and the contents of the conversation my father had with his Ukranian friend.

With that the story ended, but not the humiliation, anger and obviously the tangible and most painful monetary loss. The shop was a successful business which my parents had established many years previously. It had supported them in style and, to a large extent, determined their social and economic status in the city. Overnight, it became an emptied shell. As simple as that. Obviously, had we known then what awaited us in the future, via the masters of thievery and murder, the agents of Nazi Germany, perhaps we would not have been as agitated by the ordeals of that Rosh Hashana!

THE RUSSIAN PERIOD: 1939-1941

In accordance with the agreement reached by the USSR and Germany, in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the German army retreated and the Red army entered our city. We saw soldiers and Russian tanks, for the first time, on the morning following Yom Kippur. Just as we

did two weeks previously, as though participating at a repeat performance, we stood at the bend in the road not far from our house and watched the conquering army enter our city. The crowd of the curious, greeting the Russians, was much like the one that had stood watching the German soldiers. This time, as before, the emotions of the spectators were betrayed by the expressions on their faces. However, just as actors on the stage swap roles, so did the faces and expressions change with the people in the crowd.

The ones who had then welcomed the arriving German soldiers with joy, looked considerably less happy now. The Jews, after their brief but "very promising" experience with the Germans, obviously had good reasons to feel relief with the arrival of the Russians.

Some Russian heads were protruding from the openings in the tanks and others were sitting on top. Like their predecessors, they slowed as they passed the curve in the road. However, unlike the former, they stopped occasionally and exchanged friendly words, in a combination of Russian-Polish, with people in the crowd. The Russians' generally smiling faces expressed friendliness. At least, it seemed that way to us. They appeared very young, boys really, neither as self-assured nor as intimidating as the Germans. In answer to queries about burning issues, such as "are there sufficient potatoes in the USSR?" the Russians replied decisively "yest mnogo!" (there are plenty!) There must have been a reason for the interest in the status of food supplies in our new rulers' lands, perhaps due to the war, or to the entirely

unencouraging reports and rumors about food shortages in Russia at that time.

A new era dawned in Borysław, bringing with it a new regime, Communism. Following the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that defined the apportioning of Poland, the city became part of the Ukrainian Republic, along with other communities in the region annexed by the USSR, including Lvov, the most important city in the area.

From the perspective of an eleven-year-old Jewish boy, the changes instituted in the schools by the new rulers were very encouraging. Upon entering the First Grade in a Polish elementary school a few years beforehand, he learned, for the first time in his life, that he was a "Zyd parszywy," a leprous Jew. Later, this boy saw, even experienced, the usual portion of humiliations meted to many Jews, practically every day, by Christian children particularly, but also by the teachers. Now, no more malicious comments were made in class, such as "Yurek, don't sit next to the Jews or you'll catch lice." Or, like the one on "St. Micholai Day," when all the children sat dressed in festive clothes, eagerly awaiting the imminent entrance of "Swiety Mikolaj" with the sack of gifts on his back. Then the teacher's voice would announce, "members of the religion of Moses [Jews] will go outside to the yard where they may build a Balwan, a snowman." All that was said with a sarcastic smile spread over the teacher's delicate and, generally, even pleasant face.

No more. Everyone is equal in a Socialist society. The "Harcerze," (scouts), off-limits to the Jewish child, were replaced by "The Young Pioneers," actively introducing

and implementing the Stalinist Communist doctrine. Within a short number of days I returned home from school with a red kerchief tied around my neck, symbolizing my membership in the Pioneers. My parents, especially my mother, not only did they not display any enthusiasm at the intimidating sight of their cherished son, but were truly upset.

To comprehend the significance of that seemingly minor matter, it is necessary to expound about the prevailing situation. A short period after they arrived, the Russians took steps to "cleanse the proletariat society from parasitic bourgeois elements." One decree, a sample that may characterize the trend, had a direct impact on my parents, actually upon my entire family. The soviet government had issued new identification cards. On my father's card, at the space designated for profession/occupation, was written "shop owner." That version betrayed the grave fact that he was not a member of the working-classes. The status held dangerous implications, such as confiscation of property and banishment to Siberia.

At that time, anticipating worse edicts would have been difficult. Some time later, after the German extermination-machine agents had arrived and we were overcome by loss and despair, we remembered, with considerable envy, our relatives and acquaintances who had been sent to distant Siberia, or drafted to the Red Army. Although they had to endure periods of extreme hardships (quite a few were killed in the war, or died of illness or starvation in Siberian work-camps), nevertheless many did survive the atrocities of war and were alive. The fatalists among

us would say,"behold another proof for man's inability to change, foresee or influence the events determining his fate. Everything is decided above."

As indicated, my parents became alarmed after my father was "awarded" the dangerous identification card. He mobilized his friends and acquaintances, particularly those who had connections with or were members of the new ruling "aristocracy" (it should be noted that many of them were Jews.) Everything in order to reach the one person authorized to change the version written in the card. It seems to me that my parents avoided discussing the subject in front of me. Therefore, I was obviously not cognizant of all the details involved with the episode. Eventually, the ominous certificate was somehow "misplaced" and my father was issued with a perfectly kosher new identification card by the government.

It all took place after a "path" was found to the one in charge of issuing identification cards, in addition to the "path" to the local militia commander, whose job was to certify that the certificate was indeed lost. All those "paths" were obviously "greased" by large sums of money and merchandise still remaining in my parents' former shop.

In those days, similar incidents also happened to various family friends and acquaintances.

One ordeal caused my family, my mother in particular, many sleepless nights as well as a great deal of suffering and anxiety. It involved my aunt Genia, my mother's sister. She was working as a cashier in a grocery store, a branch of the "Mishtorg" cooperative. Occasionally,

the records and registers were analyzed. The authorities regarded any cash discrepancies, whether in excess or shortage, as criminal offenses. One of the audits disclosed an insignificant surplus in my aunt's register.

Thus, several months after my father was extricated from a serious predicament, honorably reestablished "within the family of nations working for the advancement and preservation of the Socialist Society," my aunt Genia was arrested for "injuring the property of the working people." Shortly thereafter she stood trial, was found guilty and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

Accordingly, my aunt Genia was suddenly removed from her family, without exactly understanding the whys and wherefores. A young woman in her early thirties, married and a mother of two children, her universe about to be destroyed.

My mother was beside herself with sorrow. With the exception of her sister Chaika who lived in Palestine, her three sisters and four brothers lived nearby in Boryslaw. Naturally, they were all extremely attached to each other.

My paternal grandfather, Feivish, my father's three sisters and brother, all lived in Boryslaw as well. My father's youngest brother, Itche, lived at a relative distance, at the other end of the city. Consequently, his ties with the family had always been weaker. Another brother, Michael (Mechel), lived in Lvov. My maternal grandfather died before the war. Since both my grandmothers died before I was born, I did not have the good fortune to know them.

It was understood that my father was the patron of

the family and my mother the "emissary." Her role was to "mobilize" him when necessary. My parents were considered to be wealthy and, indeed, their financial situation was comfortable, unlike the rest of the family members. They, like others, had to struggle with daily living problems, although they did earn their living quite respectably. As it seems to me, my father was the one they approached when someone in the family had any problems, financial, health or other. My mother was in the thick of things, especially when it involved her sisters and brothers. Obviously, after my aunt Genia's arrest, my father worked tirelessly on her behalf. (Incidentally, during the searches conducted in her home as part of the legal proceedings against her, considerable quantities of rolls of fabric, hidden there by my father, were found. The fabrics in fact constituted some of the shop's merchandise, dispersed and hidden in the homes of the aunts and uncles at the outbreak of the war.)

It was quite probable that Genia would be sent to Siberia. If that were to happen, God forbid, who knew if she would ever see her children and family again! Of course, everyone appealed to Avrum, my father. As I remember, the recruited contacts found a judge who, "detecting" irregularities in the various testimonies, effectuated Genia's release. The judge and the prosecutor, as well, were both rewarded with an extremely tangible appreciation.

Time passed. My father was working as a supplier for the local "cooperative" of grocery stores. His job was to

deliver assorted provisions, usually on a truck, primarily from the city of Lvov. The cooperative's director, a Russian, was fond of my father and joined him frequently on those drives. On their way back on the abundantly loaded truck, the Russian made sure to unload several cases of champagne, caviar and other such items at his own home. According to my father, the Russian usually returned drunk from his business appointments with food distributers in the various cities. Encouraged by the drunken boss, my father would also unload several cases at our home. We, the children, were usually already asleep in our beds when he returned, late at night, after an absence of a day or two. It was a joyous occasion for us to awaken and see all the delicacies piled up around us and, especially, to taste them.

With the passing of time, my parents somehow learned to adapt to life under the Communist regime. As for me, a child of twelve, the quality of life seemed to be quite acceptable under the circumstances. Obviously my parents, particularly my mother, were not as satisfied. The nationalization of the shop, the change in status, the need to grapple with various and usually unexpected problems, were causes for virtually constant worries.

The common apprehension was, "well, today perhaps the situation is not so terrible, but what can we expect in the future?" The fear was not groundless, as it turned out. The fate of Jewish residents in the western Polish territories, captured by the Germans, proved to be a tragic example. Fleeing from the Germans, the Jews arrived in the eastern regions controlled by the Russians. Surviving

many ordeals, the Jews were beginning to acclimate in their new environment, usually with the help of relatives or friends. Suddenly, without any prior notice, the recent arrivals were gathered in the middle of the night, piled unto trucks with all their belongings and conveyed to an unknown destination. Later it was ascertained that they were brought to Siberia or some other godforsaken places. Had they remained, no doubt they would have sampled, along with the rest of the local Jewry, the taste of the German conquest with all its horrors. Very few of them would have managed to survive.

Like other children my age, I spent most of my time in those days studying and participating in various clubs, such as music, sports and mathematics. I was fascinated then with the latter subject, due perhaps to the mathematics teacher who motivated me, always glorifying my achievements in front of the other students. In addition to those activities, I spent many hours skiing on winter days, when the snow covered the slopes and roads in the region. It was a very respectable sport in our city, albeit not so popular among the Jews. However, I was tirelessly absorbed in skiing and often returned home in the dark, short of breath and with reddened cheeks. Since winter sports were among the highly encouraged activities in school, I found myself competing in ski races with students from various schools in the city, racing in tracks in the city or its outskirts. Perhaps due to skiing, winter days from the Russian period provide me with the most pleasant memories of that time.

Another portion of my free time was dedicated to

playing the mandolin, which my father brought me from one of his trips. Basically, I learned to play it by myself, but I also had some help from a boy named Antler, older than I by a few years, who was privy to the secrets of playing the instrument. He was a frequent visitor at our neighbors', the Speichers, whose apartment was next to ours. Nusiek and Dolek, their two sons, were Antler's good friends and, along with a few other boys their age, formed a close-knit group. While still a child of eight or nine, I used to trail them when they went to play volleyball, hoping they would condescend to include me in the game. However, they were generally not too thrilled to do so. I was barely allowed to carry the ball from our building to the playing field and back. Antler was also the first to provide me with detailed information regarding the facts of life, the anatomical differences as well as the physiological and biological processes of the two sexes, each on their own and both together.

My membership in the "Pioneer Organization" required participation in various clubs, sports and lectures on assorted topics, whose common denominator was the constant trickling into our brains, the brains of children, the advantages of Communism over other systems, obviously all flawed. They particularly emphasized and glorified the accomplishments of "Batko" (father) Stalin, whose brave and wise leadership accomplished the creation of heaven on earth, the USSR. A paradise, lately expanded to include regions, not so long ago part of that bourgeois country, the oppressor of the working-classes, Poland. Indeed, at the present time we were part of the

Ukraine Republic, in a district called Western Ukraine. Nowadays, looking back, those days may seem absurd, perhaps somehow grotesque. However, matters were seen very differently through the eyes of a boy-child my age. Compared to my parents, I was living in a different world. Their sleep was robbed by worries, difficulties with caprices by the new regime, lack of security and fears of an uncertain future. My inner world was influenced by tempting and imaginative slogans, strewn lavishly about by teachers in the schools, instructors and lecturers in the youth groups, all under the sponsorship of . . .

The circumstances only served to goad and spur my natural inclination to rebel. The visible "irritating" expression was the red Pioneer's tie which I often wore. My arguments with my parents, as I expressed "my own decided opinions" on important topics, frustrated and upset them repeatedly. The Ringler family lived one floor below us. The head of the family, a typesetter, was an active Communist. For his own reasons, he used to incite me against my parents. He would encourage my "advanced ideas" as he called them, in particular anything having to do with religion. That enlightened neighbor, knowing that both my mother and father were observant Jews, drew great pleasure, so it seemed to me, from my refusal to follow their customs and my flagrant dissociation from religious beliefs. He even provided me with material for my battles, such as: "Tell your father that when the cow says moo . . . the calf also says moo . . . but I am not a calf!" He lent me a book in Russian to bolster my views on Atheism, "A Bible for Believers and

Nonbelievers." It was a parody on the Bible, replete with versions and commentaries full of venom and derision of the original texts.

With the advent of my thirteenth birthday, I was expected to prepare for my Bar Mitzvah. As customary, the ceremony was to take place in the synagogue where my parents, my paternal grandfather, family members and many acquaintances prayed. Clearly, I was expected to learn how to wrap phylacteries and study the blessings as well as the weekly portion. My announcing that I wanted no part of it, caused great mortification for my parents as well as for the entire family. "Who would imagine that the son of Avraham Chameides, the grandson of Feivish Chameides the 'Shokhet,' would refuse to wrap phylacteries! Such a thing was unheard of!" A singular storm was raging. My paternal grandfather, who was to prepare me for my "duties," was a calm Jew whose demeanor commanded respect. I do not remember him ever raising his voice. Whereas he was always affectionate and forgiving toward me, on that occasion, hearing about my refusal, he was struck dumb and paled from agitation. All the devices employed, bitter arguments, threats, persuasions, none were fruitful. Words such as, "how can you do this to us? How are we to look in people's eyes? You are sending us to our graves!" were perfectly useless. Matters continued so, until the day of my Bar Mitzvah was at hand. My father came to me and said, "look, next week, on Thursday, is the date of the Bar Mitzvah. At least come to the synagogue and be present for the reading of the weekly portion. At least do it for

your grandfather, if not for your father and mother!" With that, I relented. Since I was there, I wrapped, actually they wrapped me, with the phylacteries. I recited the blessings as required and with that the episode was over. "World War III" was averted. We resumed our routines.

My sister Adela also felt like a fish in water during that period. At seventeen, she was a young woman in full bloom, attractive and fine. Her high-school studies did not cause her undue stress and she thoroughly enjoyed a vibrant and active social life. I believe that despite the circumstances, most of the Jewish boys and girls in our city of Boryslaw were not perturbed by the USSR's control over our regions. The sense of inferiority and lack of confidence, which I and, I presume, most of the Jewish youth felt during the "Polish" period, subsided. Generally, with time, the Jews in our city grew accustomed to the regime with the new regulations and their lives proceeded comfortably.

In the spring of 1941, the "friendship" between the two partners of the Molotov-Ribentrop accords began to crumble. Hitler had decided it was time for the next move in his plan for establishing the "Thousand Years' Reich" over Europe and perhaps over the entire world. The soviet newspapers, until then sympathetic to Germany (though it may now sound as a jest), were suddenly changing their tune. More and more articles were denouncing Nazi Germany and Hitler for their aggression and militancy. Words of praise were being sung about the quest for peace by nations of the USSR, concurrent with bragging about the incredible might of the Red Army. Once again, reports

were circulating that in Polish territories controlled by the German army, persecutions and acts of cruelty were being perpetrated against the Jews. The anxieties and alarm were on the rise again. However, the "strategists" among the Jews of Boryslaw still held the notion that Hitler would not dare engage in a new front against the giant in the east. Yankel Alter, a salesman in my parents' shop when it was still operating, numbered among those believers as well. Hitler thought otherwise.

Events were unfolding quickly. Tensions were rising. Frenzied food stockpiling began again and men of age were being drafted by the army. My maternal uncles, Srulek, Hesio and Milo, who only two years earlier were drafted by the Polish army, were drafted again. This time, like many others, they were wearing Red Army uniforms. Disorder and confusion predominated everywhere.

Hitler did not delay. On the twenty-second of June 1941, before we could assimilate what was happening and without any prior notice, numerous cities in the USSR were being bombed. Concurrently, the German armored forces were launching an attack on the Red Army. Thus began a bloody struggle that claimed the lives of millions of human beings throughout the ensuing four years.

As early as the initial days of the war, it was apparent that the Red Army was unable to withstand the well-oiled German army machine, galloping unimpeded onward. The Red Army was in full retreat. Many soldiers were slain and many more were taken as captives. The flight was occurring in our city as well. Young Jews and those not so young, who once held positions with the

various institutions of the Soviet regimes, converged on the earthbound trains which were packed with soldiers. Among the soldiers traveling east were the uncles, Srulek, Hesio and Milo, lately drafted. Our cousins, the brothers Munio and Leibek (Arieh), managed to escape. Years later we learned that, with the exception of Srulek, they all survived. He died of severe dysentery in the Ural Mountains region in 1944.

The Russian boss, who had befriended my father when they worked together, tried to persuade my father to take his family, which included my mother, sister and me and join him in flight from the advancing Germans. A day or two before the Germans entered Boryslaw, the man obtained a truck with a driver and proposed that we board it immediately and flee together to the east, to Russia. My mother promptly vetoed the notion. My father as well was not certain that it was the right thing to do. The mood was oppressive. No one was deluded and it was clear that difficult times were ahead for us, the Jews. However, who would have thought, even in one's darkest dreams, of the enormity of the disaster, the magnitude of the atrocities and torments which were about to be inflicted on us by the deranged executioner Hitler and his disciples.

Meanwhile the Russians did everything they could to "clean-up" the area before they left. As early as the next day, loud explosive noises were heard in the city. Thick smoke, rising on the horizon, was seen in every direction. As they were retreating, the Russian soldiers were apparently blasting various plants. Those hit were the "Elektrownia," a plant supplying the city's electrical

needs, some of the oil fields and their towers spread about the outskirts of the city, in addition to other plants and institutions of value to the military.

THE GERMAN PERIOD: THE HOLOCAUST

The Germans entered Boryslaw on the first of July 1941. On that same day, bodies were discovered in the cellars of the Soviet militia building. They were corpses of prisoners, horribly tortured prior to being murdered by the Russians before they left. Accusing fingers were immediately being pointed at the Jews.

The next day, with the active encouragement by the German authorities, a large mob was gathering. Coming from neighboring Ukrainian villages, there were many Gypsies, local Ukrainians as well as Poles among them. They all came for one purpose. To beat up the Jews. Many of them were pulled from their homes and brought to the police station, being clobbered cruelly all the way. They were hit with stones, wood rods with protruding nails which were prepared in advance, metal pipes and anything that came to hand. Many were bludgeoned to death before arriving at the station. Those who remained alive, yet battered and bleeding, were forced to wash the corpses of the prisoners the Russians had left behind. That horrific scene took place in the courtyard of the police station. Many Jews, including women, children and old people were murdered by the savage mob. In addition, there were other victims, those killed by the Germans who were shooting at the humiliated and terrified people.

Only a single day had passed since the city of Boryslaw was taken by the celebrated German army. By the end of that heinous pogrom, the count of Jewish corpses was about three hundred.

In the early morning hours, the wretched of our section of the city were proceeding on their "Via Dolorosa" down the street where we lived, the main road of Wolanka. Still asleep in our beds, we were suddenly alarmed by blood curdling shrieking outside. The shrieks, which at first seemed to be coming from afar, were quickly getting louder. Between the intermingling sounds it was possible to hear petrifying agonized cries of "Tatte, Mamme," weeping, pleading, running feet, countered by inflammatory shouts, with one repeated word "zhid!" (Jew).

For long moments we were all paralyzed, my sister Adela, my parents and I. We did not move, did not even dare approach the bedroom window to see what was happening in the street. After a while my father jumped from bed, pale as a ghost. He ran toward the entrance door, my mother following. A thick and heavy wood beam was lying in the corner of the room, previously prepared in case it would be necessary to block the door. My father and mother lifted the heavy beam and placed it across the width of the door, which had iron hooks installed on both its sides for that purpose.

The shouting continued. Suddenly we thought we heard a familiar voice among the agonizing cries. I moved quickly to the window and peeked carefully at the street, to the accompaniment of my mother's petrified screaming,

"don't get close to the window or you will be seen." I could only see a small section of the road where the piteous victims were being led. I could not positively identify their faces, since the groups of those being led as well as the ones leading were moving by fast, in quick strides and even in a run. The ones who were led were oozing blood and their clothes were ripped. They were trying, to the best of their ability, to protect their bent heads with their arms from their persecutors, who were galloping after them with assorted objects in their hands.

My entire body was trembling. My father also came over to the window, watched the goings on for a few moments and mumbled over and over "Shema Israel." Mama clasped Adela and both of them, standing by the door, were listening tensely to proceedings in the stairway. Any stirring from that direction shook my mother, prompting her to signal us in fear, shush . . . while quietly repeating "Shema Israel."

The ordeal lasted through eternally long hours. Eventually the intervals between one group and the next started to lengthen, the shouting waned and silence prevailed in the afternoon hours. However, the tension did not subside. Alarm remained, frozen in the air. "Now what? Is it over? Maybe we should open the door and see about the neighbors, the Speichers? Perhaps we should go carefully to Pani Sajdakowa, the tenant above us? She would probably want to help us and maybe, if it would be necessary, we could hide in her apartment." Actually, it was quite strange that we did not hear from her during the entire day. Pani Sajdakowa, as we called her, was

Polish. A woman who was not young, living alone for many years in a small apartment on the top floor of our building. Our relationship was a very warm one. Despite her inclination for excessive chatter, or perhaps due to it, she was involved in almost all the goings on in our home as well as in others.

However, my parents did not dare open our apartment's entrance door as yet. We assumed that when things would calm down, our neighbors, particularly those who were not Jewish, would come to tell us what was happening. From time to time footsteps were heard through the door, ascending or descending the stairs. Here and there we detected recognizable voices. Suddenly, there was knocking at the door, accompanied by a strong clear voice, "it is I, Mietek, don't be afraid, everything is all right, you can open the door."

My parents did not rush to respond after hearing Mietek, a typical small-time crook who did not inspire trust. A Pole in his thirties, he lived above us, across from Sajdakowa's apartment. Then we heard Pani Sajdakowa's voice through the door: "Mr. Chameides, you can all come out, everything has quieted now. Mietek and I as well as other tenants stood guard all day at the front of the building and did not allow anyone to approach."

We opened the door. The Speichers, overwhelmed, appeared as well. We all listened, in shock, to Sajdakowa and the others, hearing numerous names of neighbors and friends who had been butchered. Our young relative Salka Chameides, a woman in her twenties, was one of them. Her father, Moshe Chameides, was my father's cousin.

Sajdakowa described how Salka was murdered and we could not stop weeping bitterly nor recover from the shock that overcame us. Her father had been beaten cruelly as he was trying to prevent a band of Gypsies from dragging her out of their home and hacking her to death with their axes.

Throughout that entire terrible day, we were tormented by worry and dread over the fate of our extended family members. My father had not yet managed to run out and find out about his own father, sisters and their families and my mother's sisters, when the news arrived that they were all well. We learned that the murderers did break into my grandfather's home, but they did not hurt him or the other family members.

How did it happen? Well, at a certain point several Ukrainians armed with sticks broke in. They found a tall, lean man, with a long white beard and side-locks on his head, facing them. His three petrified grandchildren, my aunt Reizel's children, Leah, Mundzio and Yankele, were clutching at his legs. The Ukrainians stopped, watched them at length, turned around and left without saying a word. No one doubted the veracity of the story, since it came from Feivish the "Shokhet". Accordingly, since a logical explanation could not be found, the accepted inference was that it was due to Divine Intervention.

My mother, my sister and I as well, waited with baited breaths for my father's return, while he was running between our relatives. Fear was still in the air and his absence did nothing to improve our feelings. Therefore,

when there was knocking at our door, we were alerted at once.

It was our pal Mietek again. My mother opened the door and could not hide her consternation, replaced by real anxiety, when we noticed the other man with him. They both reeked of alcohol.

"Pani Chameidesowa, there are reports that the pogrom is about to break out again. I am willing to hide Adelka in my apartment for as long as it will be necessary. My friend and I will guard her and will not allow anyone to come near her. You should give her clothing and food for a few days and do not worry, nothing bad will happen to her."

As he said those words, Mietek extended his hand to Adela in an inviting motion and a soothing smile. We were absolutely stunned. My mother froze and Adela paled. However, my mother quickly recovered her senses.

"Mietek, we thank you for your help throughout the day. We will never forget what you have done for us. You may be sure that my husband will compensate you as much as we can. He should be returning at any moment and then I will tell him about your generous offer. Until then, forgive me, but I want to lock the door before the pogrom starts again."

She managed to push him out and locked the door behind him before he could even react. Their dialogue continued for some time and meanwhile my father returned. Sajdakowa appeared again, realized immediately what was transpiring, rebuked Mietek harshly (he was afraid of her!), reassured us and denied Mietek's

disclosures about plans for additional riots."It must be Mietek's fabrication," she maintained. We listened to my father's news and with that collapsed on our beds, exhausted and wrung out from the horrors of the day.

When I awakened the next day, I continued lying on my bed for some time with my eyes shut. I refused to open them. I wanted to believe that the ordeals of the previous day belonged to some nightmare which I might have dreamed. However, the comprehension that the dream was the actual reality, whether I opened my eyes or not, penetrated my consciousness very quickly.

Indeed, it was reality. Incomprehensible, fraught with blood curdling horrors, but it was there, with us. The pogrom we survived was only the first martin which this time, uncommonly for martins, did not exactly appear as the harbinger of spring. From then on, the situation continued to deteriorate. One edict after another were proclaimed against the Jews. Every Jew had to wear a ribbon with the symbol of the Star-of-David on his arm. It was forbidden to be outdoors at night. The Jews were required to "donate" silver and valuables for the German army's military causes. The Jews were compelled to supply manpower for various jobs, some in the city, but most in more distant regions. Living there under conditions of starvation, forced to perform arduous and exhaustive labors, they suffered beatings and humiliations at the hands of the German soldiers. The Jews repaired roads and bridges destroyed, or damaged, during the Russian retreat. The Germans frequently amused themselves by forcing one of the Jews to jump off

the bridge into the stream that flowed underneath. The water was shallow and the fall resulted either with death of the wretched or with fatal injuries. It was done to the accompaniment of sounds of hilarity by the German soldiers and their Ukrainian assistants.

The Jewish council, the "Judenrat," was appointed by German authorities. The members and the chairman were selected during the initial days of the German occupation of the city. The Germans set the quotas and it was the responsibility of the Judenrat to supply the manpower. Zisio, my maternal uncle, was shipped with one of the early groups to work in a region about twenty kilometers away from Boryslaw. Successfully running away from the makeshift camp in which they were kept, he returned after a week's time. Since he had a speech impediment, we had difficulties understanding the details of his story, especially his descriptions of the horrors, which he delivered in his faltering way. However, his pallid and unshaven face, the torn clothes hanging on his shrunken body and especially the wild look in his fearful and shocked eyes spoke louder than a thousand words.

Like many other Jews in Boryslaw, my father was also taken to perform various "black" labors for the Germans. Those jobs included repairing roads, hauling rocks, digging and the like. Luckily for us, they were done in the city or its vicinity and consequently my father returned home every day. Indeed, he returned very tired and with filthy clothes after an exhausting work day which started early in the morning and ended late at night. However, he was with us, healthy and well.

The German death machine did not rest for a moment. Nusiek, one of our neighbors' sons, was taken from his home to the police station in Drohobycz for an "investigation" by the Ukrainian militiamen. He was the Speichers' eldest son, a young man about to complete his high school studies. He was tortured in the cellars of the police and two days later executed in the forest next to the city, along with a group of other youths. It was a week later before his family heard about the fate of their son. During that entire time they did all they could to discover the "grounds" for his arrest, repeatedly begging "perhaps it would be possible to visit him . . ." In their distress, they also approached the parents of a Ukrainian youth who had joined the militia, a schoolmate of Nusiek. They promised they would help. Indeed, the next day a young man wearing the militia uniform arrived at the Speichers' home. He was clean shaven, polished, his whole demeanor radiating authority. Mrs. Speicher, alone at home at that moment, was alarmed at the sight of the uniformed man. However, the policeman took the trouble to calm her, introduced himself by name and then she recognized him. Indeed, he was Nusiek's friend, the son of the Ukrainians whom she had visited with her husband on the previous day.

"Nusiek is fine, he sends you his regards, you should send him clothes, food and perhaps money and jewelry as well. It should help him to get better treatment and there is a chance that it will also hasten his release."

Nusiek's mother, crying with anxiety and distress, gathered all sorts of good things. Collecting as much

as she could, she begged the policeman to be so kind and bring those items to her son who was surely suffering from cold and hunger. She handed him money and jewelry as well, thanking him and his parents countless times.

"But why did they arrest him?" she asked. "You know him. He never hurt anybody."

"Calm yourself, someone probably accused him of being in the service of the Communists, but you have no cause for alarm, they will probably release him within a few days."

The Speichers learned later, that the conversation had taken place two days after Nusiek was executed. An acquaintance, another Ukrainian, informed Mr. Speicher senior that the man responsible for the arrest and death of their son was none other than that same militiaman, who came to cheat and rob them while affecting friendship. He murdered and took possession too . . .

Jewish blood became a free-for-all. Frequently, the body of a Jew who was shot would be found in the roads or field paths used by pedestrians. The members of "Khevreh Kadisha" in the city would collect the corpses and bring them to the Jewish cemetery for a quiet and unassuming burial. It was not always possible for the families to attend.

One morning, the body of grandfather Feivish's assistant, Chaim the kosher-butcher, was found in a path not far from our house. They had shot him in the head. He had been walking home in the evening, wearing a long black Capote, a khassidic hat on his head with a yarmulke showing underneath. The German policeman passing by

did not require great imagination or an overdeveloped sense of perception to determine that he had bumped into a "filthy Jew." The German pulled out his gun and shot the man on the spot. On the following day one of the Jews, a maintenance man in the German police station, heard the policeman bragging to his fellow police about his act of heroism. Cheered by sounds of hilarity from his amused listeners, he described the subhuman and menacing sight of Chaim the butcher with his crooked nose, bulging eyes, curling side-locks and filthy long beard.

At this stage, the Jews were already afraid to leave their homes. We feared an encounter with a soldier or a German policeman and, more than that, we feared running into a Ukrainian police-militiaman. I had to be very cautious when going out to run an essential errand, such as getting water. It had to be drawn from the public tap installed on the side of the road, not far from our house. I would inspect the street properly, from both directions, attempting to detect approaching danger in time. On more than one occasion, I witnessed the Ukrainian policemen's cruelty to the Jews. Once, a bicycle-riding policeman arrived and stopped near a young Jewish man about to fill up his pails. Without getting off his bike, the Ukrainian started kicking the youth, shouting all the time "lice-ridden Jew! Get off the sidewalk! Jews and cattle don't walk on sidewalks."

Jews were forbidden to enter shops or other public places and were certainly forbidden to travel on trains. Under the supervision of the Judenrat, we were allotted food rations which provided no prospect for ensuring our survival. If anyone could cope, one way or another,

it meant that their wallets made it possible or they had connections with Polish or Ukrainian farmers. However, that was not the case with everyone. During the fall and winter of 1941-1942, many starved to death. More and more Jewish men and women of all ages were seen rummaging through garbage cans, foraging for potato peels. Their swollen faces, the swelling under their eyes in particular, were indications of their suffering from starvation and of their imminent death.

From that aspect, our situation was relatively bearable. My father's many friends and acquaintances helped him "arrange" swap deals with Ukrainians from nearby villages. In exchange for fabric for a suit or a dress, we would get a sack of potatoes, or of wheat and so forth. The most popular dish in those days was "tzer," porridge prepared by cooking wheat flour in water. We produced the coarse flour by grinding wheat in the grinder which, in better days, was used by my mother to grind meat.

At that time my parents were still able to provide some help to other family members whose circumstances were worse. My mother's sisters and their families always took precedence with her. She was aware of their distress and a great deal of her time was dedicated for preparing food baskets for them. Similarly, my father cared for his own father as well as for his sisters, Reizel and Sheindel, who lived in their father's home with their husbands and children.

In that general gloomy atmosphere, my parents were especially worried about my grandfather's deteriorating health. By nature a silent man, somewhat of an introvert,

he did not complain often. However, my father, who came to see him frequently, bringing along baskets full of groceries for him and the sisters' families, always returned extremely depressed from those visits. When I overheard his conversations with my mother, I felt, more than understood, that my grandfather's condition was not a passing cold, as it originally seemed. My daily assignment was the delivery of chicken soup, which Mama had prepared especially for my grandfather. Obtaining fowl and making it kosher were not simple matters in those days, but my father's extended connections, prompted by appropriate sums of monetary incentives, proved themselves again. I myself had not tasted meat for months and the aroma of steamy soup escaping from the pot, albeit covered and encased in thick towels, stimulated my senses throughout the length of the distance from our home to my grandfather's. My attention, however, focused primarily on an entirely different problem.

My grandfather's house was in a sector called Visipi, at a distance of about five or ten minutes' walk from our place. My parents had assumed that a thirteen-year-old boy was not obligated to wear the ribbon with the Star-of-David on his right arm. My facial features as well as my light hair would not have betrayed me, if I ran into a German policeman or a Ukrainian. However, I discovered very quickly that there were other imminent dangers outdoors, primarily from Polish boys of about my age. For them, a "Jew boy" passing on "their turf," carefully grasping both pot handles and fearfully casting glances in all directions, must have promised to be a source

of great amusement. The first time I went, I accomplished my mission without any problems. I was not bothered by the boys, although a few of them had certainly recognized me, but possibly preferred not to accost me.

Upon reaching my grandfather's home, I immediately noticed the changes in him. Since I had not seen him for a long time, I noticed that, though he had always been slender, he had shrunk even more. His clothes were hanging on him. He was apathetic, had difficulty speaking and tasted the food with reluctance. It was also painful to watch my aunts and the children pressing close, their eyes staring at the pot and its contents with hypnotized gazes which betrayed their emotions. There were times when things were otherwise in that home. It was joyous and cheerful then. I loved coming there to enjoy the "goodies" with which my aunts would ply me. In particular, I relished the homemade Vishniak stored in large jugs of five or ten liters. We also loved to "fish" for apples, submerged in a sauerkraut-filled barrel. I was vanquished by the flavor of those apples, pickled in sauerkraut for several months. However, all of that already belonged in the past. I returned home in a run.

On the next day, the way to my grandfather's house looked totally different. That time the "shkotzim" (dastards) did not let me pass undisturbed. They were there, not far from my grandfather's, as if waiting for me. When they detected me, they burst out with obscenities and shouts of "beat up the Jew." At first I stopped in alarm, hesitated and did not know how to respond. Should I face them or try ignoring them and continue on my way?

Perhaps I should return home? Finally, the stones which they directed at me and the few that actually hit me, helped me decide. I rallied, lowered my head and started running madly toward my grandfather's home, holding the pot with both hands as tightly as I could, hoping that something would remain in it. The element of surprise, which obviously worked, coupled with my speedy dash, brought me to Grandfather's without any real damage wrought upon the contents of the pot. After making certain that the "field was clear," I returned home in a run.

My grandfather's condition became worse. He suffered from abdominal pains and was running a high fever. The only Jewish doctor who agreed to come and examine him was a gynecologist. My father requested my sister Adela and me to accompany him on a visit to my grandfather one evening. It was clear then, that it might be the last time we would see him alive. He was lying in his bed with his eyes shut, mumbling incoherently. It was painfully apparent that he was oblivious to us. My father pulled me by the arm toward my grandfather's bed. Trying to get him to speak, my father took my grandfather's hand and put it on my head, saying, "Tatte, that is Manek, bless him."

My grandfather died that same night. Two days later, early in the morning, the Germans entered the synagogue where he usually prayed. The Rabbi and all the men present, wearing prayer shawls and phylacteries, were loaded on a truck. They were brought to the forest adjacent to the city and were all shot there. First they were forced to dig, with their own hands, their own graves. Had he

not been taken by his Maker before that heinous act, my grandfather's fate would probably have been the same as the fate of the wretched who were in the synagogue that morning. In a somewhat absurd way, we found comfort in the thought, that when he died in his sickbed, my grandfather was spared a far more cruel and degrading death.

The murder of Jews, of groups or individuals, continued. People would suddenly disappear. Their families, helpless and crazed with worry, did not always know what happened to their loved ones. Days would go by before it was learned that they were murdered in the streets, or brought to the adjacent forest and shot. The Germans seldom provided the representatives of the Jewish community with an "explanation." In those circumstances, the usual version was "refusal to obey some emergency guidelines which were punishable by death" or "sent to a work-camp in the east."

In the meanwhile, more Jews were dying from hunger. We were bestowed, in regularity, with news about the death of acquaintances and friends, who, very often due to mortification, had concealed their sufferings until their deaths. There were other incidents as well. There was a family living in our building, one floor below us. Apparently, one of their daughters was suffering from retardation or some emotional disturbance. They had arrived only recently and occupied an apartment which had been vacant for some time. I did not know them and never saw the girl. Actually, I was not even aware of her existence until shrieks and screechings, sounding

as though an animal was being tortured, started issuing out of the apartment. The poor girl was screaming and crying from pain. Not only was she hungry for food, but was also being beaten by family members who became uncontrollable when trying to subdue and silence her. Her blood curdling wails accompanied our days and nights, almost without pause, for quite a while. Then, they slowly waned and, finally, stopped completely. A day later people came to collect the body.

As a supplement to the Germans, the Ukrainians and starvation, an epidemic of typhus was sweeping our city. It claimed many victims among the Jews.

Incidents of gathering the Jews, snatching and sending them to "work-camps" persisted. At this stage the Germans were enabled by the "Judenrat," who drafted the lists of names, and by the "Ordnungsdienst," Jewish police assistants who assembled and delivered the people to the German authorities. The Jews believed that if they performed various jobs and tasks to help the Germans in the city, the danger of being sent to work-camps would be reduced. Any setting which was supposed to be of value to the authorities had many Jews vying for jobs. In particular, they tried to "fit" into jobs connected to the plants which produced crude oil, the city of Boryslaw's literal commercial symbol. The value of oil for the German war effort may have carried weight with the Germans.

My sister Adela also started working. She was a secretary in an engineering firm in the city, not far from our home. The owner of the firm, a Jew, now one of

the employees, was working under the supervision of a Polish engineer. My father tried to get a job for me too, with similar conditions. I was approximately fourteen-years-old and finding an occupation for me, which the authorities would consider vital, was not easy. Eventually I found myself "working" for a dentist as a trainee. The dentist, himself a Jew, had a dental laboratory where other dentists, Aryans, sent their work. The reasoning was, that perhaps my work at the dentist's would make me indispensable as well, since the Aryan dentists had German patients. At least, that was what my parents wanted to believe. Were there any other options? I began working. I attended very seriously to the various chores my employer assigned to me. In addition to cleaning the clinic, they included melting gold teeth to lumps, later used as raw material for new crowns, preparing plaster paste in rubber vials for taking molds of patients' teeth, handing the dentist the various tools and implements he utilized on the job and disinfecting them. After a while, a desire developed within me to try molding teeth. However, following several not-so-successful attempts, as well as a blatant lack of support on the part of the boss, I gave up on the plan.

On the whole, I considered my work at the dentist's to be a positive change. With the exception of Saturdays, I was there every day of the week until four o'clock in the afternoon. The obligation of reporting each morning for "recreation" at the clinic helped me repress, in small measure, thoughts about the horrible reality in which we were living, a never ceasing torment. The dentist's

daughter Cyla, a year younger than I, was another factor which helped to keep my mind off the happenings in our bleak world. She was a mischievous girl, full of life and laughter. Wherever I was, her two braids, adorned with ribbons, were somehow always around. It seems to me that my daily presence there added some color and interest to the girl's dull and gray days. Sometimes, when the dentist's German patients encountered her, they would take a handful of candies out of their pockets and offer her some. A candy! Sweets! It was positively in the realm of dreams. Cyla would run directly to me, thoroughly excited, hand me a candy or two and whisper, "the German gave it to me, put it in your pocket so no one will see!"

Cyla and her family disappeared, like so many others. Sometimes I wonder if anyone has remained who remembers them? Someone who knew them at all?

Meanwhile, the numbers of edicts were mounting. One day, agents of the Judenrat, escorted by an "Ordnungsdienst" (Jewish policeman), appeared in our home, demanding that we immediately submit all furs of any sort. They were to be delivered to the German authorities, to benefit the German army preparing for another cold winter's stay in the eastern front. The death penalty was meted to anyone who did not surrender all the furs he had. There was no leniency, even over one item. Indeed, over the next days we heard about instances of executions or disappearances of numerous Jews who had been discovered with furs. They were exposed either due

to informants, or following a visit by a German policeman, or a Ukrainian, who came to find bargains.

The murders, abductions and transporting of Jews to unknown destinations, without any explanations, continued. For those of us who, despite all the indications, still refused to acknowledge the writing on the wall, along came the ordeals which removed any doubts regarding the German beast's designs for our absolute annihilation. Our initial introduction to the term "Aktion" happened during the months of July and August of 1942. It was coined to describe an organized operation for gathering Jews, to transport them to extermination-camps, or to execute them at one of the forests or another deserted spot in the vicinity of the city. Special divisions under the command of the SS, assisted by German policemen and local Ukrainians, were employed to carry out the "Aktions." When demands by the authorities for lists of Jews for "transfer" were not met with sufficient speed by the Judenrat, the Germans carried out the operation with the help of the Ukrainians and, sometimes, even with the help of the Jewish police. Accordingly, in early August of 1942, Germans broke into the homes of the Jews in the city, gathered hundreds and thousands and consolidated them near the train station. To convey the impression that it was over, the "Aktion" was stopped for one day. Many of the Jews, who did manage to run away from their homes and hide, fell for the ruse and returned. The "Aktion" was resumed on the following day. When it was over, about five thousand Jewish men, women and children of all ages were loaded on the train and taken to an unknown destination.

The weather was rainy, unusual for that season. In the early afternoon hours, I returned home from "work" at the dental clinic. I sensed the atmosphere of disaster as soon as I entered. It was reflected in my mother and father's worried eyes. On his way home from work, he met Jewish friends as well as Polish acquaintances who told him that the "Einzatz-groupen" men were seen riding on their vehicles in the city streets. They were special SS units responsible for administering the "Aktions" in Nazi occupied territories. Skull symbols were emblazoned on the front of their caps and they wore black uniforms. Supplementing this terrorizing sight, which in itself was sufficient to cause alarm, stories were told about their cruelty to the Jews during the "Aktions." Those aroused absolute dread.

My father did not hesitate for long. In the midst of the meal my mother had prepared (as usual for those days, a plate of "tzer"), he decided that we had to leave immediately and run to the Zlockis'. They were a Polish family, living at the edge of the city about a kilometer away from our home. Their small house was situated at a small distance from other houses in the area. Zlocki, once a customer in my parents' shop, liked my father very much and was a devoted friend. Exhibiting real concern for our family, he had been preparing a hiding-place for us in his home. He had invested a great deal of thought in designing the shelter and labored on it many months. He dug, underneath the kitchen, a large room-shaped pit and cut an opening through the wooden floor to be used as the entry. The cut-out piece of wood was designed to

fit exactly the opening in the floor. A carpet was placed on the floor over the covered opening and the kitchen table was positioned directly over the entrance to the pit. It was a simple, but efficient, job of camouflaging which should have covered any sign of the hiding-place. It was reasonable to assume that a stranger, entering the home and the kitchen, would have difficulty noticing anything suspicious.

The soil removed from the pit was spread in the garden and Zlocki even took the trouble to plant plants, thereby saving the neighbors some needless speculations. The entire project was carried out with his wife's assistance in addition to frequent deliberations and consultations with my father. The hiding-place was ready sometime before the third "Aktion."

We left the plates with the "tzer" and took some clothing, blankets and essential daily utensils. We locked the entrance door to our apartment from within and fitted the wooden beam across it, to prevent a break-in. The adjacent shop was connected to our apartment with a hidden door. We passed through the hidden door into the shop and left quickly. Careful to keep distances between each one of us, we marched, in tandem, in a fast tempo. My father walked first, from time to time glancing to his left, then to his right and behind to make sure we were all following. We arrived at the Zlockis' home in ten minutes. They welcomed us and tried to reassure us as well. My parents, my sister Adela, her fiancé Chymek and I, descended to the cellar without delay. By the lights of the candles my mother had conscientiously brought,

each of us settled in his place, listening fearfully to what was happening above. Mama sat crying, quietly, so she would not be heard by a stranger, if one happened to enter the house. She could not stop agonizing over the fates of her sisters Ethel and Genia and their families. My father's attempts to reassure her did not help. He also, in fact all of us, were worried over the fates of his and Mama's numerous relatives.

Suddenly, the silence above was shattered. We heard horses stamping, shouting in German, gun shots and sounds of people running. We froze in fear. Everything sounded so close. We tried to imagine what was going on outside. One of my speculations was that Jews who were trying to escape from their German persecutors had hidden in the Zlockis' yard. On the following day, when things had calmed somewhat and the cover to our shelter was raised, we were told what actually happened. A German policeman, riding on a horse, was chasing a Jewish man and woman. He fired in their direction, overtook them and, threatening with his gun, led them to the assembly place. It was reasonable to assume that, had he caught them in the yard of the house in which we were hiding, he and his aides would have definitely conducted a search throughout the place. Who knows how things would have ended.

Meanwhile it seemed that the "Aktion" was over, as the German authorities informed the Judenrat. Those were news that Mr. Zlocki heard from Jewish acquaintances in the city and he hurried home to announce them. Obviously he was anxious to be rid of us. We all knew that those

caught hiding Jews in their homes, shared the same fate as of those they tried saving. My father was able to convince Zlocki to let us remain for another day and if everything would be in order, we would return to our home.

The day passed quietly, without any unusual incidents. Occasionally we climbed up a ladder into the kitchen, got washed in turn and even enjoyed the luxury of using the toilet. However, in the evening hours we were sequestered in the pit, suffering from the cold and damp air, but most of all from the need to relieve ourselves in front of the others. Somehow we managed to pass the night and I even succeeded dozing off before morning. I awakened to the sound of my parents' whispering and increasing noises outside. I quickly gathered that the "Aktion" was on again. This time, the Germans and their deputies spread out more thoroughly. They did not overlook any Jewish homes or possible workplaces. They also took the trouble to announce, over the loudspeakers, that any Aryan caught hiding Jews, will be shot on the spot. It was all reported to us by Zbigniew Zlocki, our savior. We continued sitting in silence, each one in his own corner, absorbed in fatiguing thoughts.

The "Aktion" lasted all day and apparently did not end until the next morning. My father decided to leave the pit, to try and check out the situation for himself. We were under tremendous duress until his return, two or three hours later. The "Aktion" was indeed over, but his facial expression alarmed us. Deep lines had been suddenly carved into his pleasant face. My mother quickly asked about her sisters and other family members, but he did not

respond promptly. However, his tearful eyes and broken voice said it all.

We left the pit and started walking toward our home. On the way, we passed houses that had been recently full of life. Now, only gales of horror were blowing through them. Some of those homes had been occupied by members of my mother and father's families. She could not stop crying and calling out the names of her sisters, their husbands and children. With every few minutes, she would stagger from exhaustion. It continued for a long time, despite all our efforts to support and soothe her. No one could have calmed us either. Finally we arrived at our home, crushed, depressed and utterly exhausted.

The apartment had been invaded. According to accounts by our Aryan neighbors, the Germans came to get us but could not break down the entrance door to our apartment. The Ukrainian militiamen called to assist, the Jewish policemen summoned by the Germans, all stood powerless by the door, braced from within by a wooden beam. Finally they brought a tall ladder from some place, positioned it in the yard and climbed up to the kitchen's window. It opened easily, a Jewish policeman entered through it into the apartment, removed the wooden beam and opened the door from the inside. Various items were stolen from the place at that time. The police had allowed Mrs. Speicher and her daughter Adela, a girl my age, to enter the empty apartment. The two, who were very hungry, lustily emptied the "tzer" off the plates we had left on the table during our escape two days previously. Pani Sajdakowa,

who witnessed the proceedings, as did the other Aryan neighbors, reported it all to us in great detail.

We sat weeping and shocked, envisioning the bitter sights and ordeals of our family members and numerous neighbors. In the evening, the door suddenly opened. My uncle Zisio, my mother's brother, entered into our home. I don't know how and where he managed to find shelter and escape the Germans. He was the only one from my mother's entire family to have survived. My father's youngest brother Itche and his son Mundek survived as well. They had been living in Potok, another section of Boryslaw. At the time we did not know what happened to my father's eldest brother Michael and his family, who lived in the city of Lvov. There was also no information regarding Tama, my father's younger sister. A short time before the war, she had married a Jew who lived in a far away village and all communication with them had been disrupted.

During that third "Aktion," as referred to in the city of Boryslaw, about five thousand Jews, men and women, the elderly and children of all ages were taken. They were led to an unknown destination from which they did not return. Eventually, we were told they had all been brought to Belzetz, where they were viciously murdered.

Of Mama's family, her eldest sister Ethel and daughter Rachula were slain, as was Genia, the younger sister, along with her husband and two small children. From my father's family, many perished as well. The eldest sister Reizel with her husband and three children, my ten-year-old cousin Leah, her brother Mundzio who was

not yet eight and Yankele the little brother whose life was terminated at the age of five. My father's youngest sister Shaindel, her husband and two-year-old baby were also among the victims of the third "Aktion."

Sajdakowa had told us that the Jews from the area of Visipi were brought to a main street in Wolanka, approximately across our building. She was able to watch events from the window of her apartment, located on the top floor of our building and facing the street. The truck on which they loaded the Jews was parked in the street, across her window. It is difficult to illustrate in writing the atrocities that Sajdakowa described. The shrieking of the battered people who refused to climb on the truck, the shouting of the mothers who were searching for their children on the overcrowded truck, the barking of the dogs trained by the Germans "to keep order". She took her time to describe, in minute detail, how my little cousin Mundzio attempted to escape. He was already on the truck and, in a desperate attempt of flight, jumped off at a certain moment. However, before he managed to get far, a dog caught up with him. It had been sent by its master, a German policeman. Mundzio escaped the dog's teeth only due to its master orders to just knock the child down. He was immediately returned to the truck, already packed to the brim. It drove to the train station, where the five thousand victims were assembled and loaded on a train. As we later found out, the destination was the Belzetz extermination-camp.

When we were still in the hiding-place, we had heard about another such "Aktion." It was carried out in the city

of Sambor, where my future brother-in-law Chymek's parents and brother lived, about thirty kilometers away from our city. The horrid news, that his father had been shot in the street, had arrived from there. Hearing about it, Chymek curled up on the bed and cried. The next day he left for Sambor.

We had not yet recovered from the atrocity (would we ever?) and another decree was inflicted on us. We were ordered to evacuate our apartment and promptly move to a ghetto called "Dzielnica," zone in Polish. Two such zones were delineated in our city of Borysław, one in Potok and the other in Wolanka, near our place of residence. My family was assigned a small apartment which we had to share with another family, the Toksers. They included elderly parents, two sons and a married daughter, a mother to a three-year-old daughter. The woman's husband had been conscripted by the Red army. The living conditions were difficult and most uncomfortable. My family had a room and a kitchen with an exit into an U-shaped interior court, surrounded by other apartments. The neighboring apartments were overcrowded as well. The Hirsches were one of the families living there. I was quite friendly with their young son Yuzek, who was about my age. It was the same with our parents. Due to their business dealings, my father and Mr. Hirsch had been fast friends prior to the war.

I met Junia there as well, a girl my age I had known prior to the outbreak of World War II, at the Zionist Youth Group. We were both eleven then and liked each other. I did not know her family, nor did I know her surname.

I mention her since I was amazed at her appearance and mature behavior, which, to me, did not seem to correspond to her age. (She was only fourteen, just as I was.) Compared to her, I had obviously still remained a child, despite the horror predominating my life during the holocaust.

The persecutions continued. Incidents of gathering the Jews, murdering or transporting them to extermination-camps were carried out at a growing rate. My mother and sister Adela were staying at Zbigniew (Zbyshek) Zlocki and his wife's home, usually upstairs, prepared to descend at any moment below into the hiding-place. During periods of relative calm, my mother would come to the Ghetto to be with us, my father and me, to cook, wash our clothes and take care of the household. Her visits took place mostly on weekends, lasting until the early hours of Sunday morning when she would return to the hiding-place. Sometimes Adela also joined her on those visits.

My father started working for the "Nafta" company at that time. It had merged with the "Beskiden Gesellschaft" company which the Germans had established in our city. The company dealt in crude oil production and was headed by a German civilian. With the aid of a Pole, who held an important position in the company and worked under the German, my father managed to get employment. The position furnished him with a certificate considered to guarantee some protection against being taken to a concentration camp, since its possessor was deemed essential for the military's industry. The possessor

of the certificate also wore a patch with an "R" (Rustung) on his chest, certifying his indispensability.

My father worked in the warehouse along with several other Jews. The Polish foreman treated his Jewish workers with compassion and my father dared to ask for permission to bring his son to work as well. The foreman agreed and so I became a nonprofessional worker, leaving with my father each morning at 7:00 A.M. for work at the Nafta warehouse. It was imperative that I not stay at home in Dzielnica, where danger existed that the Germans could take and shoot me or send me to an extermination camp. Meanwhile, my father managed to obtain the coveted certificate and patch with the "R" for me as well. I had to become older by two years for that. Consequently, in exchange for a sum payment, my papers were falsified and I became sixteen years old, the minimum age for working.

I assisted at all sorts of jobs, such as cleaning the offices, taking inventory, running various errands and more in the company's warehouses. However, there were also more grueling days, like those when we had to unload trucks heaped with cement sacks. Although the Jewish laborers tried to divert the heavy ones away from me, it was not always possible.

In such ways we existed between one "Aktion" to the next. Ever since the third "Aktion," when all her sisters were taken to an unknown destination from which there was no return, my mother had been in the throes of a deep depression. We tried persuading her that it was not at all certain that all were killed, that we should not lose hope.

Periodically, it was reported that some of the Jews who had been transported were seen working in the fields. They were supposedly recognized by someone who happened to be traveling on a train. Those conveying the information to the families usually indicated that, by-the-way, they were prepared to deliver a packet of clothing or anything of value to the one they had identified. Accordingly, one day Pani Sajdakowa came to visit. Along with the news she brought about the losses the Germans had suffered on the eastern front and the Russians' advance, she started telling us about an acquaintance of hers who often traveled on the train. According to her, on one of his trips, the man saw a group of Jews working in a wheat field. Among them, he "positively" identified several Jews from Borysław. She was certain that his description of one of the women matched my aunt Genia's appearance. Upon her request, the man agreed to deliver a package of food or anything else we might want to send to Genia. Perhaps all Sajdakowa wished to do was to sustain my mother, but at that stage we were no longer deluded.

During the month of October, in the fall of 1942, the fourth "Aktion" started. It lasted several days. We heard about it while we were at work. Approximately at noon, the local warehouse supervisor and the foreman approached and told us about it. Following the foreman's suggestion, with the supervisor's silent consent, my father, several Jewish workmen and I climbed to the second floor of the office building. It was used for storing an assortment of lumber, office furniture, drums wrapped with cables, various tools as well as blankets made from jute fabric.

Sitting on the floor, behind a tall stack of blankets, we thought about what was taking place. We knew that Mama and Adela had left the house before us that morning. We knew that they went to the shelter, but we did not know if they arrived, or if they might have been intercepted on the way . . .

While we were in the midst of a deliberation, Mr. Stanitz arrived. He was a Ukrainian foreman who always lectured us about his Communist opinions. He arrived now, he declared, because he felt the need to help us, the victims of Fascism. He suggested that we slip out one after the other and hide under a storehouse for building materials, located at a distance of about one hundred meters from the office building where we were staying. My father hesitated. He did not trust Stanitz, perhaps due to his touting his Communist views. Finally, when he reminded us that on that day, the German commissioner from the main office usually came to conduct inspections and he could also check upstairs, we were convinced. Actually, we had no other choice.

We went without having the slightest idea about the capacity of that hiding place, would there be room for us all? Leaving one after the other, with a minute's interval, we moved quickly to the next building. We walked quickly, but did not run. I was walking behind my father. I believe Wilf was walking behind me. He was the owner of a bookshop in Dolna Wolanka, near Tustanowice.

I was assaulted by stomach cramps before I actually left the building. They were generated, no doubt, by fear

and tension. It could not have been from overeating, since very little food had entered my mouth that day. Midway, somewhere near a huge, round, metallic-color painted container used for crude oil storage, I had to lower my pants and underwear and, moved my bowels. It was midday, yet I totally ignored any activity in the surrounding area. Anyone passing by could have seen me without difficulties, even from afar. Indeed a man did pass by, noticed me and affixed a stare filled with wonder at the strange scene which happened his way. I pretended indifference and carried on. With my blond hair, I did not have a typical Jewish appearance. However, the man, obviously a Pole, stopped short and said in Polish, "do you know how many German horse-riding policemen are around, not far from here? Run quickly!" Having said that, he smiled and hurried away. I waited several moments until he was far away, so he would not see in which direction I was heading, raised my pants and bolted toward the storehouse for building materials.

I maneuvered inside through a very low and narrow opening, where my father was impatiently waiting for me. Seconds later Wilf crawled in as well. We covered the opening from the inside with a metal board Stanitz had brought earlier. Only then did I begin to have a look around. In addition to my father, Wilf and me, there were three others in the hiding-place. The storehouse under which we were lying was a one story rectangular building, twelve meters long by seven meters wide. The floor was constructed of thick wooden slats supported by columns. In fact, the entire building was supported by

brick columns which rose about seventy centimeters off the ground. In that space between the ground and the floor, the six of us hid for a period of three days. The ground was damp, but we were forced to lie down. When we wanted to change positions, we turned over from side to side and sometimes were forced to lean our heads on our neighbors' bodies. I was next to my father most of the time. It was a very cold autumn and the proximity helped to conserve the heat of our bodies in the frigid temperatures.

In order to relieve ourselves, we had to crawl as far away as possible under the floor and were forced to void in varied and strange positions. If one tried to actually sit on the ground, he had to bend over. One of the Jews with us was suffering terribly from a stomach ulcer, which induced him to belch continually. We had to maintain silence, since people in the storehouse or in its vicinity could hear us. The poor man constituted danger to us all, to himself as well. Stanitz, who was listening and aware of our situation, came once or twice to warn us not to generate "superfluous" noises. The only thing we could do was to cover the mouth of the sufferer with a kerchief, to partially muffle the noises he made. I don't remember his name, but I do remember that he had been an accountant at the warehouse office.

No food came into our mouths throughout that entire time. Light snow began falling on the second day of our stay there. We could see the snow flakes through the slots in the framework covering the space between the floor and the ground from the exterior. We were very

hungry and, our warm clothes and crowded conditions notwithstanding, we suffered from the bitter cold. We did not remove our shoes due to the chill. My feet were throbbing terribly inside my shoes. When I tried removing them, with my father's help, it became obvious that my feet were swollen and it was impossible to extract them from the shoes. I experienced some relief when the shoelaces were removed.

Stanitz, our patron, had disappeared. We had no idea what was happening on the outside. Our torment from hunger intensified and my father and I were haunted by worries over Mama and Adela. We had already been lying there four days, hungry, thirsty, freezing and in pain. My father and another Jew started analyzing the situation in which we were entangled. They decided that going out to see what was happening could not be avoided and, in any case, we had to get some food before we starved to death. My father was concerned about my worsening feet. He hoped to get to a doctor, an acquaintance, who might help me without actually seeing me, after hearing a description regarding my condition.

Suddenly we heard the sound of the entrance cover being moved. We froze in fear for a long moment and then saw Stanitz's face in the opening. "Well, are you all right?" he asked and, without waiting for a reply, he continued, "they say that the "Aktion" is over, Jews can be seen returning to their homes. I suggest that you do not go out as yet. It's better to wait and make sure that everything is really over. Meanwhile, I brought you something to eat." He gave us a bag with pears and two

loaves of bread. I don't remember the bread very well, but those sweet and juicy pears that I ate with relish, after four days of fasting, are hard for me to forget. They tasted absolutely heavenly.

Stanitz returned before evening, announced that everything seemed calm and he thought it was safe to leave and return home. I crawled with difficulty and was actually dragged out by my father. My heels and ankles were swollen and each step was terribly painful. The way home was never-ending. We finally arrived. I managed to remove my shoes and felt immediate relief. I laid in bed and, with my eyes closed, waited for my father who ran out to check on Mama and my sister. Various scenarios, all of them harrowing, ruminated in my brain. Time crawled at a maddening pace, until I finally heard footsteps approaching and my parents' voices near the entrance door. What a relief!

Mama and my sister did manage to leave the house and reached the shelter at the Zlocki's home prior to the start of the "Aktion." Zlocki kept them informed about what was happening. They had both been concerned about us, as we were worried about them. Mama did not stop, even for a moment, crying and praying for our safety. Yes, we were together again, but for how long?

On that occasion the Germans garnered fifteen hundred Jews from Boryslaw, who were caught and sent to extermination-camps.

With the passing of time, the potential for survival decreased. A number of Jews built bunkers to hide in the forests near the city. At about that time, the person

who headed the Judenrat disappeared. In all probability, he also found a hiding place with the Christians. A new player appeared on the slaughter-field, Walek Eisenshtein the Jew, appointed by the Germans to head the Jewish police. The man took control of the Judenrat and served the Germans with devotion and actually with passion. Many feared him more than they feared the Germans.

During one of those difficult days we received, via a non-Jewish messenger, a letter from Chymek. In his letter, which he addressed to my parents and Adela, my future brother-in-law requested their permission for Adela to join him and his family in Sambor. His mother and younger brother were already hiding with an Aryan family in a village about thirty-five kilometers away from Boryslaw. The fifth "Aktion," which started at that time, lasted several weeks. German and Ukrainian policemen, with the help of several policemen led by Eisenshtein, removed Jews from apartments and hiding places in the Ghetto and led them to the "Colosseum" cinema-hall in the city. There the Jews underwent "Selection." Those who were considered fit for work were brought to the work-camp, previously used by the cavalry. The remaining Jews, the sick, the elderly and the children, were sent to extermination-camps. Most were sent to Belzetz and some to the Yanovski camp in the city of Lvov. My uncle Zisio, Mama's brother, also numbered among the latter. Shortly after arriving at the camp, he was hanged to death by the Germans. In that manner the last member of my mother's family, who remained in Boryslaw and did not run with the Red Army before the Germans came, was taken from us.

We received bad news about my father's family as well. His brother Itzi, with his son Mundek, were caught and imprisoned in a work-camp. They were the remnants of an extensive family. My other paternal uncle, Mechel (Michael) who had lived in Lvov, was murdered in the camp at Yanovski, along with his wife and son Milek. We heard about it after we were liberated by the Russians.

Early in 1943, rumors were spreading about renewed Red Army attacks in the region of the city of Stalingrad and about the devastating defeats which had become the norm for the German armies in the eastern front. Those events persuaded my parents to yield to Chymek's request and allow Adela to join him and his family in Sambor.

One wintery evening, early in the month of February in 1943, we were sitting by the kitchen stove in our Ghetto apartment. Outside, above the background din of rain and winds, was an unidentifiable noise. After a few seconds, we realized that someone was rapping on the kitchen window overlooking the interior yard. Our initial reaction was panic, then we noticed Chymek's familiar face through the window. I don't know how, but he managed to obtain a vehicle, a truck, with a Ukrainian driver. He had come to take Adela with him to Sambor. Her leaving added to our worries, particularly for Mama who was still yearning for her sisters and was very depressed. She and Adela corresponded as much as possible under those circumstances, Chymek managing to deliver letters once or twice through a Ukrainian who also agreed to take a letter back to Adela. They used coded words, fearing that precise wording would endanger them if the letters

fell into wrong hands. For example, they settled that the word "Junia" would mean the"hiding-place." In one such letter from Mama to Adela, written in Polish of course, my mother wrote the following:

Beloved Delus,

We received your note and I read it with great joy. At the moment it is calm here. There were guests in Borysław but thank God the atmosphere has eased. We live with the constant hope that all will be well. The matter concerning Junia has not been taken care of yet. B.D., (Beloved Delus), I gather that you are not doing poorly, but it would be better not to call too much attention to yourself, we all miss you very much. My B.D., never wait for my answer, since you know very well that I love to delay my response. I beg you not to mind it and please don't make us wait long for your letters, since I am very anxious and in any case it is very boring without you, since I am alone at home until Father and Manek return from work.

Be calm about us. May God protect you and us. I am very happy that you have met Chymek's relatives, but it's too bad that the times are inauspicious. B.A., (Beloved Adela), have you seen Chymek's mother yet? In conclusion, I beg you to respond to my letter as soon as possible. I send you all regards and kiss you infinite times, your Mama who is living in hope and yearning to see you as soon as possible.

Regards to Chymek's mother and the whole family.

Also to the Neger family and to Mrs. R. Tonke. My heartfelt appreciation for her supplemental words. I am delighted that you are together and are happy and that all is well with you, but you must always remember the war and be careful.

Mama

List od Mamy

Kochana Deluś-
Kartkę twoją otzymaliśmy którą czytałam z wielką radością. U nas narazie spokój. Byli gości w Borysławiu ale Bogu Dzięki powietze łagodne..żyjemy tą nadzieją że będzie dobrze. Sprawa Dziuni nie jest jeszcze załatwiona. K.D. rozumię że tobie źle nie jest ale lepiej by było z tobą się mniej afiszować, wszyscy tęsknimy bardzo za tobą.Moja kochana D. nie czekaj nigdy na odpowiedź bo wiesz dobrze ja lubię zwlekać z odpisaniem, bardzo Cię proszę nie zwasz na to i niedaj długo czekać na pismo, bo się bardzo niepokoję, w każdym razie nudzi mi się bardzo bez ciebie,ponieważ być w domu dopóki k. Tata i Manek przychodzą z roboty.
Co do nas bądź spokojna,oby P.B. czuwał nad tobą i nad nami. Bardzo mnie cieszy że poznalaś krewnych Chymka ale niestety nie w porę.K.D.czy z matką Chymka już się widziałaś? Kończę tych parę słów i proszę Ciebie jaknajszybciej odpisać na mój list.
Pozdrawiam i całuję was niezliczone razy Wasza Mama która żyje tą nadzieją aby was jaknajprędziej zobaczyć.

P.S. Osobne pozdrowienie dla Matki, Brata i całej Rodziny Chymka oraz dla Państwa Negerów i dla P.Tońki R.: Za dopisek P.Tońce R. serdecznie dziękuję. Jestem bardzo zadwolona że jesteście razem i wogóle że Wam dobrze i wesoło ale zawsze trzeba pamiętać o wojnie i mnieć się na baczności. Moc Pozdrowień dla P.Tońki R.
Mama

Operations for reducing the population at the Ghetto were continuing. We would hear about Zonderkommando divisions arriving in the area, which always portended bad news. Those accounts appeared in my mother's letters to Adela under the coded words "guests in Borysław," meaning "the murderers have arrived."

It was during the wintery days of mid-February 1943. My mother had been staying in the hiding-place most of the time. She decided to take a chance and spend the weekend with us, in the Ghetto. She intended returning early Sunday morning. Indeed, that morning we rose early from our beds. My father and I parted from Mama, who was about to leave for her shelter. Shortly after he and I arrived at work, the news spread that an "Aktion" had started. Although we were all equipped with the "R" patch which was supposed to offer some protection, it was decided not to take a chance. My father, the Jews with whom we worked and I, climbed to the second floor of the storehouse. We hid again, sitting behind stacks of felt rolls piled in the corner. My father and I feared the worst. What if Mama was caught?

About an hour later Stanic arrived and related, "they are collecting Jews and bringing them to the 'Colosseum' cinema-hall." He also said, "I saw Jews wearing the 'R' patch wandering around the city, they are not being touched". However, he immediately advised us not to rely on that and to try not to be conspicuous. We decided to stay in the hiding-place until it was over. Throughout the entire time, my father tried reassuring me, saying he was sure that "Mama must have reached the shelter even

before the 'Aktion' had begun and everything will be all right." However, his worried face and whisperings with his friend, Mr. Wilf, told otherwise. After an hour or two, my father went downstairs "to speak with the supervisor," or so my father told me. Returning after a few minutes, he said "I am going to see about Mama, you wait here until I return." Before leaving, he asked Wilf and the others to watch over me.

My father returned before evening, exhausted, with deep lines of worry etched in his forehead. "They got Mama. She did leave with us this morning, but returned home because she forgot her muff." He also told me they had hidden in it a large sum of money in dollar bills, which was probably her reason for taking a chance and returning. When she arrived, policemen were already in the house and they noticed her immediately. They arrested and led her, along with a group of other Jews, to the "Colosseum" cinema-hall. My father ran there directly and, despite the obvious danger, he tried to induce and bribe one of the Jewish policemen in charge of the captives. They had been compressed into the hall without food or drink. (By the way, the policeman knew our family very well.) He was only willing to pass sandwiches and drinks to Mama. My father managed to get those from his Aryan friends, who lived not far from the cinema building. The Jewish policeman also brought my father a letter my mother had written on a small piece of paper. In return for those services, my father was obliged to pay both him and his companion policeman. My father continued imploring them to release Mama. The policeman claimed

that the Germans had counted everyone and made clear to the chief of the Jewish policemen's group, that if even one of the six hundred Jews was missing, both he and his deputies would be executed. Finally, he threatened to arrest my father as well, if he did not leave immediately. My father was forced to go, but was resolved to resume his attempts to have Mama released on the following day.

We spent the night on the floor in the storehouse. It was frigidly cold. We covered up with torn felt pieces scattered on the floors. Early in the morning, my father ran to the cinema building and returned after two or three hours. The expression on his face did not augur well. He related that he was next to the cinema building and was noticed by a German policeman who, while pointing at my father, started shouting at the Jewish policeman "how could you let him leave?" The policeman, an acquaintance of my father's, was quick to explain that "he has an 'R' and was trying to have his wife released. I told him that if he did not get lost right away I would take him in too." Meanwhile, he was signaling my father to get away. My father retreated and the Jewish policeman managed to call after him in Polish, "I'll try to free her before they start taking them out." My father tried to lend me hope that all would be well, saying he was certain Mama would manage to get out of there safely. Obviously I wanted to believe it with all my heart, but my misgivings foretold otherwise.

A while passed and Stanic reappeared, telling that he met a friend who lived not far from the municipal slaughterhouse. The man said that he saw, through the

window in his house, a group of people digging pits in the ground. Later, shooting was heard. Shooting with short time intervals. Stanic left and returned with more news. The Germans were transferring the Jews aboard trucks from the "Colosseum" to the slaughterhouse vicinity and shooting them, one by one. The Jewish policemen, ordered to escort them, were also being slaughtered.

Father kept repeating his own version again and again, stressing, to me, his certainty that Mama was already in her usual hiding-place. I sensed that he was just as miserable as I was, yet he felt that he had to reassure me. Therefore, I tried to cooperate and pretended to be convinced. The shootings continued throughout the day and each time we were shaken again. After all, the distance between the ones being slaughtered and our work place was only several hundred meters. At the end of the day, when the shootings finally stopped, Stanic returned. This time he was sent by the supervisor of the storehouse, to inform us that we could not remain in the storehouse during the night. According to him, the non-Jewish workers had made all sorts of adverse comments regarding our being there and they could endanger both us and the supervisor as well. Besides, Stanic added, the "Aktion" was over and he believed that we could all return safely to our homes.

We went to the Ghetto. Not a word was exchanged on the way home. We avoided looking each other in the eyes. Both of us realized the horrid truth. When we arrived, it was already dark. Absolute silence predominated in the interior court of the building. Usually, voices of the many people living in the apartments surrounding the

courtyard could be heard there. This time it was still. The stillness and frigid cold of a graveyard. The kitchen door which opened to the yard stood wide open. We entered and my father started searching for matches, to light the stove. Suddenly we heard footsteps. A German soldier in uniform appeared, with a steel helmet on his head and armed with a gun. My father and I were both petrified. The soldier turned to my father and asked in German, "what are you looking for here?" My father, who thought it was our end, just as I did, recovered and said with a quivering voice, "my son and I returned from work, we are both 'essential' and have been issued the letter 'R'. We returned hungry and cold. I wanted to light the stove to make tea." The German directed a lengthy look at us, removed a box of matches from his pocket and, without adding a word, lit the stove. Then he threw the box on the table, turned and left. Several moments later my father put on a coat and said, "I am going to check on Mama." Clearly, the words were said to reassure me. I did not have the strength to argue with him. I only said, if so, I would join him since I was afraid to remain by myself. Finally he decided to wait until the following morning.

I don't believe I fell asleep that night. I was also unable to stop the persistent tears overflowing from my eyes. At dawn, the Toksers, with whom we had been sharing the apartment, appeared. They managed to escape before the "Aktion" and had been staying with gentile acquaintances. They were aware of the tragedy which had befallen us. The tears of old man Tokser and his wife, their hugs

and caresses removed any doubt. Mama's fate was now absolutely clear.

In the ensuing discussion, the Tokser's young son raised the possibility of hiding in the "Sokol" building. During the conversation, my father took out Mama's last letter from the "Colosseum." I read it for the first time and we cried together. It was written in Polish.

My Dearest Abramku,

Forgive me for the idiotic way I have managed everything without leaving you any money. I will forward the muff to you through someone.

My dearest A. and Meiku don't despair. Unfortunately, this is the bidding of fate. I must follow the way those most dear to me have gone. I beg you to watch over my beloved children, check and see about Dela if you still have her and kiss her thousands of times for me, be well and guard my orphaned children, I am heading for my eternal rest.

Mama and wife,
Fryda

Drogi mój Abramku

Przebacz mi że tak idiotycznie postępowałam wogóle ze wszystkiem żadne pieniądze nie zostawiając, wydam ci zarękawkę ale przez kogoś. Drogi mój Ab. i Majku nie rozpaczajcie niestety los tak chce mam iść tą samą drogą co moje najmilsze, proszę Cię uważaj na moje ukochane dzieci dowiedz się co do Deli czy ją jeszcze macie i pocałuj ją odemnie tysiące razy

Bądź zdrów i uważaj na moje osierocone dzieci, idę na wieczny odpoczynek
Mama i żona
Fryda

During the five preceding "Aktions," the fate of the victims had not been particularly clear to me. Was there a chance they had remained alive? If not, what happened to them during their last moments? How did they meet their deaths? This time, all speculations were superfluous. Everything was clear. The people were taken off the trucks, ordered to strip and were shot in the backs of their heads as they were standing at the edge of the pit, or on a wooden board connecting the sides of the pit. About six hundred Jews from Boryslaw were murdered in cold blood that day.

We remained alone, my father and I. We did not hear from Adela. Those days, my main occupation was scrutinizing any newspaper I could find for activities on the war front, particularly the eastern front which was beginning to move closer to us. It had been three weeks since the Germans suffered their defeat in Stalingrad. The Red Army advanced to the city of Charkov. When I checked the map for the distance between Stalingrad and Charkov, I discovered that it was equal to the distance between Charkov and Western Ukraine. The logical conclusion was that we would be liberated in about three weeks. It is needless to note that we were not exactly experts when it came to comprehending the rudiments of war. Nevertheless, the instinct for survival

and the suspicion that the liquidation of the Ghetto was imminent, convinced my father to seriously consider the Toksers' suggestion to move and hide in the "Sokol" building.

The "Sokol" building had two levels and was used, during better days, as a gymnasium for students in the adjacent high school. There were several rooms on the second floor, one used as a library and another as an office. Stairs led from the gymnasium to the second floor and the hallway, which in turn led to the library and an additional room. Halfway down the hallway, a hinged door in the ceiling opened upward into the attic. A ladder was needed to reach that opening. The metal roof was an "A" frame and slanted down to the outer edge of the attic's floor. Although it seemed to end where it joined the floor, the roof actually extended farther out to the exterior wall of the building. At the edge of the floor, two unfastened planks exposed an open space. Another ladder was needed to reach the bottom of that space.

The entire building was maintained and managed by a young couple, Mietek and Dina. The parents of a three-year-old daughter, the husband was Polish and his wife a Ukrainian. Milek Tokser negotiated with them, to allow his five family members as well as my father and me, to hide in the place until the anticipated liberation by the advancing Red Army forces. My father proposed remuneration of one hundred dollars a month. Dina had the final say, persuading Mietek to take the offer. He wavered, due to concerns that if we were discovered, he and his family would be executed along with us.

My father related the essence of the discussion to me. I went to see the hiding-place myself the next day. When I saw it, I almost burst into tears. "How would it be possible to endure it for three weeks?" As it turned out, it was possible to endure it for a much longer period of time. We proceeded to hide there for the duration of about eighteen months! We lived in an interminable nightmare, until August of 1944, when the city of Boryslaw was overtaken by the Russians.

We collected clothes, blankets, sheets and mattresses, in addition to rolls of fabrics, men and women's clothing that had remained from my parents' shop, cooking utensils and all the candles and matches we could accumulate. We moved that whole cargo to the hiding-place, helped by Dina and Mietek. Our companions to the hiding-place, the Toksers, did the same. Several forays were necessary to bring all the goods to the "Sokol" building and then into the actual hiding-place. The open space was large enough to contain us, seven human beings, all adults except for me. Standing upright was possible only on one side, next to the building's interior wall. We spread seven mattresses, one next to the other, on the rectangular clay floor.

My place was next to and along the wooden wall, which was perpendicular to the interior wall. My father was next to me. Next to him was Mr. Tokser the elder, then Mrs. Tokser, the youngest son Milek, his older brother and Lusia, the daughter. She found a temporary home for her own three-year-old daughter with an Aryan couple, who agreed to take care of her for remuneration. The

Toksers had decided not to bring her to "Sokol," fearing that her crying would expose us all. Mietek and Dina's apartment was on the first floor, near the entrance of the building. The gymnasium was used exclusively by the Germans. Officials and "folksdeutche" would gather there for various celebrations, to commemorate certain days, such as Hitler's birthday, to watch plays and performances and to hear refrains from Viennese operettas. If a stranger wanted to enter the building, he had to ring or rap at the front door. Although we were alert and attentive to any unusual noise, Dina and Mietek, as an added precaution, made sure to get our attention by making noises as well. Obviously, we made special efforts to remain quiet during those instances. Fortunately, those disturbances were not too frequent. We generally left the hiding-place and stretched out in one of the rooms on the second floor. We used it as a washroom (when it was feasible) and, following a prolonged stay in the hiding-place, as a lounge. Sometimes we prepared our meals there and even managed to take the time to eat them there as well.

To reduce the danger of a surprise visit of any sort, we asked Dina to get us two rabbits. The commotion and noises they would generate in the room would obscure our voices. Dina, who came from a nearby Ukrainian village, was able to obtain an adult gray female rabbit and a not-so-perfect mate. The white red-eyed angora rabbit was deficient in both size and age. A rather long period of time passed until he finally matured and began comprehending his duties. Then, the room filled up with

baby bunnies and we had to be very careful not to step on them. I had to forfeit (temporarily) the use of the rocking chair, a source of great pleasure, for fear of squashing the tiny bunnies that were darting about.

Dina was in charge of supplying our food needs. Due to her connections to the farm, she was able to buy us potatoes and wheat, delivered in a wagon by one of her relatives. Payments were made with fabrics or clothes we had brought with us to the hiding-place. The purchase and delivery of the food were executed very carefully. It was bought in small quantities and delivered only when it was dark. Every precaution was taken not to arouse any undue attention.

The process of converting wheat grains to baked bread necessitated certain knowledge and proper utensils which we did not have. My job was to grind the wheat and, for lack of other alternatives, I used the domestic meat-grinder found in Dina's kitchen. After grinding a certain amount of wheat I sifted it through a sieve. The coarse particles were ground and sifted again. Ultimately, there was always some residue unfit to produce flour. I learned quite quickly how to prepare the dough, pour it into the pan and place it into the kitchen's built-in baking oven. One also had to leave over some dough to use for the next batch, for letting the dough rise for the loaves to be baked during the next few days.

I did have additional occupations. Since Dina did not excel in writing, I wrote her letters to her family as well as to other people with whom she kept in touch. She and her husband were not the only ones who knew about

us. Maria, Dina's relative and a farm girl like her, also lived in "Sokol." She was a young and comely young woman, living alone in a one-room apartment, with a separate entrance, on the other side of the building. We heard about her sometime after we were settled in the hiding-place. Dina, swearing and crossing herself many times, tried to persuade all of us that Maria was even more trustworthy than her own husband Mietek and that she would be of more benefit. Maria outdid herself by swearing upon the head of Dina and Mietek's little girl that she, Maria, would never betray us and would do all that she could to watch and help us. We acquiesced. Did we have a choice? We only made certain there was no access to the gymnasium from Maria's apartment and thereby, none to our hiding-place.

Maria roused our concerns primarily due to her tireless preoccupation with men. As far as we were concerned, she entertained them far too often. According to what I heard from her, those visits included excessive drinking. We distrusted her inclination to chatter and our fears increased when her visitors included more and more German soldiers. However, Maria was in seventh heaven and did not cease to praise her visitors and particularly, the Germans.

Maria also had problems with reading and writing. Consequently, I wrote her letters and read aloud the ones she received, usually from her circle of admirers. The correspondence was conducted generally in Polish, sometimes in German. Somehow, I was able to read, understand and translate the German letters into Polish,

but I definitely could not write in German. On those occasions I needed my father's help. Maria was grateful for my help, but was critical of my handwriting, which was far, I must admit, from being neat. At the completion of every such project I was the recipient of a gift, considered invaluable at those times, such as chocolate, candies brought to her by her German visitors and at times, a slice of cake she would bring from the farm. However, my main preoccupation in the hiding-place was, without doubt, reading books. As a young boy I was addicted to reading and the library, next to the rabbits' room on the second floor, was filled with books on various subjects. The predominant language was Polish, but there were also some books in Russian, German and French. A library, available for my own personal use under those circumstances, seemed to me, as absurd as it may sound, to be a gift from heaven.

The books were categorized, as was customary in a library, but I could not find the catalogue and decided to begin reading in ascending numbers. Book number one, in Polish, was "The Count of Monte Cristo." I was thirteen in 1941, when the period of Nazi rule began in Boryslaw. When it was over, in 1944, I was sixteen years old. The breach from schooling was absolute and reading those books in the hiding-place at "Sokol" made up, in small measure, for the loss of critical school years. I would sprawl comfortably on the rocking chair in the rabbits' room, (our name for the room that, in better days, served as an office), absorbed in the book in my hands, careful

not to squash a baby bunny who may have darted under my chair.

The space in the hiding-place was connected to another, a long and narrow one. From the gymnasium, it was possible to discern what seemed to be two balconies, along both sides of the hall under the ceiling. They were sealed and had only two round openings at the bottom, probably intended for air circulation. Near the opening, farthest away from the place we used as a "bedroom" where we spent most of our time, stood a pail, the receptacle for our excretions. It was emptied daily, either by Dina or by us, under her direction and surveillance.

We could see a large portion of the stage through the opening. To see, yet not to be seen. When the Germans assembled in the hall, I would sit on the pail and watch that portion of the stage where some functionary delivered an address, or lectured. In addition to being able to hear what was being said on the stage, I could hear the audience's reactions as well. Those would be, when the speaker reported triumphs by the German army on one front or another, tumultuous applause. The applause and vocal responses increased in volume, whenever one "accursed Jew" or another was mentioned. I could not always hear, or perhaps understand, every word said. However, I have no doubt that, among the various disclosures brought to the attention of the listeners, they "exposed the facts" regarding President Roosevelt of the United States and the bloodthirsty Churchill. "According to well-investigated facts, like many other officials responsible for the war, the genealogy of those two is actually that of the inferior

Jewish race." Now and then I was "privileged" to watch and hear vocalists and musicians performing operetta selections. Sometimes, forgetting where I was, I would sing along, "sotto voce," the familiar operetta arias by Strauss and Lehar. On Hitler's birthday an orchestra played and the crowd sang along. Toasts were made in honor of the Fuhrer and glasses of wine and schnaps were raised. I could not stop thinking, "how would the lords of the universe down there below react, if they knew that literally at those moments a 'Jew-boy' was sitting above them, watching at a distance not more than seven meters?" Not only sitting, but at those exact moments actually occupied with far more productive matters than those below. I wondered if someday I would be able to tell about that absurd situation and if I would be believed.

We came to the hiding-place during March, when it was no longer winter, but not yet spring. It was very cold and the metal roof did not offer any insulation. Neither did the exterior wall which was made of grooved wooden planks. I, who slept next to it, suffered from a cold most of the time. It did not help to wear many layers of clothing. The infrequent consumption of hot food had definitely influenced our moods as well. The hot summer days were agonizing as well. One of the topics preoccupying us was, "which is better, summer or winter?" One thing was prevalent in all seasons. Bedbugs. They tormented us all the time, in the heat and in the cold. Due to my proximity to the wooden wall, I became the favorite of those disagreeable insects. When I leaned with my back against the wall, they would come out from the cracks

in hordes and chased me away immediately. Declaring war, we used the means at our disposal, heating oil or smoke. We would wrap cotton on a metal rod, dip it in heating oil and light it. Then we guided the resultant smoke carefully into the channels in the wood. While we were able to alleviate, to some extent, the problem of the pesky insects, we were never totally rid of them.

We cut a finger-sized hole in the metal roof, to peek at the sky and get some light. There were periods of time when we could not leave the hiding-place to stretch our bones in the rabbits' room, or in the library. The only means for watching the skies and the moving clouds, or following the penetrating rays of the sun as they traveled on the shelter's floor and walls, were through that hole in the roof. In case of rain, a cone-shaped wooden plug, which I had carved, was always in state of readiness.

The need for keeping quiet, especially during the night hours, presented another problem. What was to be done about snoring? We all snored sometimes during our sleep, but the snoring by Tokser the elder was particularly disturbing to us all. His snores were tremendously loud and would wake us all. Since we feared that they would be heard outside as well, we had to take turns keeping watch over him. We had to shake his body and rouse him every time his snores would begin rising in an endless crescendo. Actually, only those who were sleeping next to him could try to awaken him. The others could not reach him, without climbing over the sleepers lying next to them. To solve that problem, I suggested we tie one end of a cord to his arm and the other end would be held

by the guard on duty. The suggestion did not meet with great approval and we continued to deal with the problem in the old way.

Dina's husband, Mietek, was assigned to supply us with newspapers in Polish and German. During that period, they were our source of support and hope. Although they were subjective, controlled by German propaganda and certainly not intended to present objective information, they could not entirely disguise the facts attesting to the defeats and retreats of the German army. Those, however, were occurring at a very slow rate, contrary to what we had "planned" several months beforehand, when we entered the hiding-place. Mietek was sufficiently cautious not to purchase the newspapers by himself and had Maria do it. She had hinted to the dealer that the German paper was intended for her friends, the German soldiers who continued visiting her. Nevertheless, we tried not to overdo buying papers.

The above activities could not divert our minds from proceedings on the outside. We heard from our watchers about the gradual reduction of the Ghetto and finally, about its liquidation. The Jews were massacred methodically, in groups of tens or hundreds, near the slaughterhouse. Others, supposedly "relocated," were actually sent to extermination-camps at Belzetz, Majdanek and also Auschwitz. At this point in time, the only Jews remaining were those holding positions in oil production and other jobs the authorities deemed indispensable. Those Jews were confined to a work-camp in the city of Boryslaw, adjacent to Mraznica. The camp had been used by cavalry

divisions prior to the war. The Jews were led daily, under guard, from the camp to work and back. Often, brutal "Selections" were conducted among the camp dwellers as well. No one knew what the day may bring.

There were Jews who managed to hide with Aryan families, usually Polish. Other Jews were able to build bunkers in the forest near their workplaces. The Germans, aided by dogs, Ukrainian policemen and sometimes by the Ordnungsdienst (Jewish policemen), would go "hunting," as they termed it. Now and then they would locate several bunkers. The occupants would be executed or, after being badly beaten, taken to the work-camp. My father, who occasionally left the "Sokol" building to get some food, managed to make contact with Jews who were on their way to work or back. He learned that his brother Itche and his son Mundek were at the work camp as well. The next time he went out, my father joined the returning workers and entered the camp with them. Inspections were not rigid when entering and leaving and it was possible to infiltrate into and out of the camp. My father returned after meeting Itche and told us about the latter's request, to allow him and his son to join us in the hiding-place at "Sokol." The younger Tokser's immediate reaction was a definitive "no." He said, "we could barely include you and Manek. Dina and Mietek agreed to hide our family and did not want to hear about additional people. We convinced them that you would pay them large sums of money and now you claim that the money is dwindling. There is no chance that they would keep us if we ask to bring in other people. In any case, the food we manage

to obtain is insufficient, so how could we feed additional people."

Generally, our relations with the Toksers were on good terms. We had reached both an understanding and acceptance regarding each person's role during our stay in the hiding-place. The underlying formula for those good terms was probably due to our common goal, survival at all costs. Our temperaments were an additional factor. The members of both families were not inherent agitators. On the contrary, they were all accommodating and considerate. Milek, the Toksers' younger son, was both the tone setter and intermediary between us and Dina. He had tremendous influence over her and she trusted him implicitly. Most of the disagreements which flared between my father and Milek, our good relationship notwithstanding, were finally settled by Dina, who supported the latter's positions. That was the case, for example, over the dispute regarding the inclusion of my uncle Itche and his son. As a matter of fact, whatever arguments did take place were usually among the Tokser family members. Between my father and me, differences of opinions occurred only over various incidental matters. To conclude, we were all blessed with good partners.

The Toksers had another son who was married. He had been drafted by the Russian army and his wife, who remained behind, was sent to the work-camp. Tokser continued his arguments by contending that "we couldn't bring her to the hiding-place for the same reasons." Every time my father returned from one of his expeditions to obtain food, the argument resumed. At a certain point Dina

appeared and made it clear that Mietek was pressing her to get rid of us. During several recent incidents, Jews who were hiding with Christians had been discovered, most likely due to informants. The Jews were executed, as were the Christians who had been hiding them. Mietek became agitated by those accounts and did not stop talking about the danger they were undertaking. With that, the argument over Itche and Mundzio's inclusion was decided. It took several bottles of vodka and new trousers to partially placate Mietek. However, the arguments between him and Dina did not stop completely. At some point she warned him that if he got rid of us, she was determined to take their child and leave him."You are forcing me to capitulate, but it is you, Dina, who will be responsible for everything that will happen, not only to us but also to the child." For the moment, the issue was resolved. However, the tension under which we were constantly living was mounting. We were alerted by every stir, sounds of conversation or footsteps heard in the building, or outside.

About eight months had passed since we entered the hiding-place. I did not go out of the "Sokol" building, even once, during that entire period. Our initial estimates about the continuing swift advance by the Red Army, as it had done with and after overtaking Stalingrad, did not come to fruition. The advance was slow, far too slow for many of the Jews who did not survive. We continued to follow the action on the various fronts, especially the one relatively nearest us, the Russian front. Maria was an additional source of information. Her visitors, the German

soldiers, were finding it difficult to hide their dejection in her presence as well as their fears of being sent to the advancing front.

Due to our inhuman conditions and utter lack of hygiene, perhaps also due to malnutrition, a terribly tormenting infected sore developed on my buttocks. The various usual home-remedies, provided by Dina and Maria, did not help. When my temperature rose to a dangerous level, my father decided to act. He planned to leave the hiding-place and verify whether Dr. Winicki, a Polish doctor, our family's physician prior to the outbreak of the war, would consent to help me. Maria, one of his patients, told us that he had a private practice at the clinic in his home. The only question was whether he would be prepared to see me. My father decided to approach his Polish friend, who was also a friend of the doctor's, to verify whether he would be willing to endanger himself by treating a Jew. The doctor agreed to see us, although, according to the mediating friend, not without some effort on his part.

The appointment was set for a late evening hour at the clinic. It was dangerous to go there. The doctor lived at quite a distance from our hiding-place. It was impossible to avoid high-risk streets where running into a German or Ukrainian policeman was very probable. We deliberated over the matter. In addition, the Toksers, putting it mildly, were entirely unhappy with the idea. However, my condition did not leave us any choice and my father decided that we would go.

It was a very cold night. My enjoyment of my first

outing in a long time was limited. Every step was excruciating and I was freezing. We finally reached the doctor's home, without any incidents on the way, after a half an hour's walk. He examined and treated me, first explaining to my father, in great length, how extensive was the danger of undertaking the doctoring of a Jew! (Without a doubt, there was much truth to that). In addition to medication to reduce my fever, I was given ointment with bandages. The doctor requested payment in dollars or gold coins and the matter was concluded. We returned to "Sokol" the way we came. The visit to the doctor must have helped, since I was thoroughly cured in a matter of days.

Another month passed. The Christian family, with whom Lusia's little girl was placed, sent a message to the Toksers. The Toksers' daughter-in-law passed it to my father on one of his expeditions. It was a notice containing the following decisive words: "If you do not take the child away in one week, we will have to turn her over to the police." The Toksers, following a difficult debate conducted amongst themselves, decided not to take the terrible threat too seriously. They would try contacting the Christians who were hiding the girl. According to Milek, "they have no intention of handing the child over, they love her as though she was their own daughter. They are trying to press for more money. This is not their first attempt to squeeze us. I'll go and speak to them today." He returned from the visit late at night, relating that the very frightened couple was insistent that he take the girl right away. Assuming he had come for her, they had begun to

pack her things as soon as they saw him enter their home. He left, following an attempt at persuasion, unsuccessful, as it turned out. He expressed his hopes and entreaties that they agree to wait at least two more weeks, until he could find another hiding place for the child. Several days later, the "Papa"(they taught her to call them Mama and Papa) brought the girl to the city's Ukrainian police station and handed her over. That same day she was shot in the head by Nemetz, the German commander of the Ukrainian militia. I found it very difficult to look at the mother's pain-filled eyes.

We were not afforded with ample time to mourn that incomprehensible tragedy. The angel of death, represented by the most zealous agents on earth, did not rest. Not a day passed without the murder of Jews in bunkers in the forest, in the work-camp, or simply at an encounter in the street. All the Jews of the city were terrorized by a number of particularly bloodthirsty German policemen. Names such as Mitas, Pel, Nemetz and Vipert, the city's chief of Police, terrified the Jews. An encounter, with any one of them, was a meeting with death. Nemetz, the homosexual, sent young boys to their deaths after subjecting them to brutal sexual molestation.

In early 1944 we had to cope with increasing food shortages. The money which enabled us to buy wheat grain and, sometimes, even luxuries such as eggs and milk, was dwindling. The supplies of fabric and clothing that we exchanged for food, were being depleted as well. Mrs. Tokser, the matriarch, knew how to sew. She offered to fashion men's shirts and even began training me as

her assistant. The shirts were cut from sheets and pillow cases we still had in our possession. Babcia (grandma), as I called her, would cut the fabric and prepare all the segments, including the sleeves and collar. My job was to sew, using a double stitch, the folds in the cuffs and collar. "You, Maneczku, have good young eyes. The double stitch in the collar, which should be precise and spaced equally, I can't do as it should be done since my eyes are no longer what they once were," she said. At the same time, she remarked that in her youth she was obviously in much better shape, including, by the way, how pretty she was. At first, my work lagged behind hers. A huge pile of cut sleeves and collars, waiting to be double-stitched, was lying on my mattress which also served as a worktable. The shirt production, which was gradually improved and perfected, guaranteed, for the time being, food provisions in some sort of regularity.

A year had passed since Mama was murdered. The date, according to the Jewish calendar, was the twelfth of the month of Adar Aleph. My father and I, wishing to recite the"Kaddish," went to the work-camp where we thought we would easily find the necessary "Minyan." We walked through fields, in silence, alert to any noise around. Before crossing a street we would stop, straining to hear. While my father knew the way quite well, the area was entirely unfamiliar to me. The locality was far from our residence and there had been no reason for me to be there in the past. After a walk of about three-quarters of an hour (to me it seemed at least three hours), we arrived without an incident. We entered the camp through

a breach in the fence. My father knew the place quite well. He had to visit it a number of times during the past year.

The work-camp of "Limanowska" in Boryslaw was run by the assisting Jewish police. The Jewish "occupants" of the camp were employed in labors connected to the production of crude oil, found in the vicinity of the forest-encircled city, as well as various others labors. Groups of Jews, leaving the camp for their shift early in the morning, returned in the evening. Other groups would leave for night shifts which started at six P.M., returning at six A.M. the following morning. A Ukrainian policeman was in charge at the gate entrance. The inspections, when entering or leaving the camp, were not particularly strict. The Poles and Ukrainians in charge at the workplaces were locals who, in many instances, treated the Jewish laborers with sympathy and understanding. The absences of one or two Jews, taking advantage of an opportunity to prepare a hiding place in the forest, were ignored. They would remain in the forest, continuing to work on the "bunker" through the night. My father managed to meet acquaintances under those circumstances, received information and messages as well as delivered them to the Jews in the camp. He entered the camp at "Limanowska" with a group returning from work and became familiar with the breaches in the fence, where it was possible to enter and exit the camp. Those conditions prevailed between one "Aktion" and the next. During the "Aktion," which always happened suddenly, the camp would be locked and surrounded by policemen and Gestapo. The

camp inmates, ordered to report to an "Apell" (roll-call), would then have to face "Selection."

We entered the lodging barracks and were instantly surrounded by groups of Jews. They all knew my father and were aware that we were in hiding, although supposedly not where. My uncle Iziew was the only one, we hoped, who knew the full details. They observed me and I felt that I looked strange and even aberrant. With my scrawny body, pale face, long-wildly growing hair and clothes sized too small, I was an oddity even among them.

After my father explained the purpose for our arrival, everyone started with the evening prayers. There were others there who had lost their loved ones during the sixth "Aktion" at the slaughterhouse, but they had not been aware of the Jewish date. We all recited the "Kaddish" together. Then we went up to Iziew and Mundzio's "living" area. It was a long and narrow hall, with two levels of bunks set up along its length, each bunk adjoining the next.

"Avrum, every day we survive here is a miracle. There are rumors that our camp will be liquidated. We will all be sent to an extermination camp. You are the only one who could save us."

"Itche, I explained why you can't come with us. Why didn't you contact Zlocki? I believe he will take you in. If you can, go and talk with him as soon as tomorrow."

I needed to use the toilet. After receiving directions how to reach it without calling attention to myself, I went down the stairs. I noticed a couple, standing below in a

dark corner at the bottom of the stairwell. A youth and a maiden, positioned very close and very preoccupied with each other. At first glance I did not recognize my cousin Mundzio, standing there with an unfamiliar girl. It was very dim and a long time had passed since we last met. He recognized me first.

"Manek, what are you doing here? Did your father come too?"

After responding in the affirmative and explaining the purpose for our arrival, I added "how are you? You don't look bad and are even, so it seems to me, enjoying life."

Mundzio, two years older than I, smiled and said "if you are still staying at the hiding-place, I am ready to take your place immediately. Meet my friend, Nusia. She is part of the deal if you agree to swap, but first get a haircut so she won't be afraid of you."

The dialogue became somewhat more serious. He told me about the climate of fear and the "Selections" which he feared most of all, due to a slight imperfection in his leg that he had since his childhood. He dragged his leg, slightly, but just enough to attract the attention of one of the bloodthirsty German policemen. I told him I would return shortly and continued on my way. A long room with a row of holes in the concrete floor near the wall was used for toilets. A few moments later, while I was still poised above one of the holes, a Jewish Ordnungsdienst entered. He was a young man with brown hair and flushed face, wearing shining boots and riding-breeches. He challenged me with a stern tone while unfastening his buttons.

"Who are you, where did you come from, what is your name?"

I took a deep breath, controlled my voice and replied, "my name is Chameides, I came to find a "Minyan" to say "Kaddish" for my mother."

He looked at me for a while and said, "are you from Wolanka, is your father called Avraham?"

I answered affirmatively. I did not alter my position at all throughout the entire exchange.

"I know your father. Now get lost and I had better not see you here again."

When I returned to the dwelling area, I told my father, who was already worried over my prolonged absence, about the recent incident. My uncle reacted, "it must have been Heimberg, we should recite the 'Gomel' blessing that it ended this way." Heimberg, the deputy commander of the Jewish police, was notorious for his cruelty. In trying to gratify the Germans, at times he surpassed them with brutality. Knowing the man, my father was more agitated and alarmed than I was. Without any farther delay, we parted from everyone and returned to "Sokol."

After that last visit, I realized the extent of the danger my father was facing on his frequent expeditions to the work-camp. Consequently, every time he meant to leave I had vehement arguments with him and begged him not to do it. At times he yielded to my entreaties, which were reinforced by the Toksers' objections, who for obvious reasons were afraid of what would face us all if he were caught. However, the need for getting food generally took precedence over all other factors. With the holiday of

Passover approaching, my father decided to sneak into the camp to get some matzo. Some religious Jews had still remained there, including even ultra-orthodox who persevered, as much as was possible, in observing the mitzvot. My father returned, shaken and agitated, late in the evening. Under his coat he was hugging, close to his chest, a lump of dough wrapped in newspaper. In one of the rooms in the camp, an oven had been prepared and koshered for baking matzo. As they were kneading the dough, someone ran in shouting, "they are shutting the gates and trucks have arrived," unmistakable indications that disaster was about to occur. My father grabbed a chunk of dough, wrapped it with newspaper, stuck it under his coat and ran quickly toward the breach in the fence, through which he had entered the camp a little while beforehand. He managed to get away and walked quickly to the "Sokol" building.

On the following day we heard what had taken place at the work-camp. Many hundreds of Jews were collected and transferred to the Plaszow extermination-camp, near the city of Cracow. My uncle Iziew and his son Mundek were among them. Hearing that, my father almost fainted. Consequently he stopped going to the work-camp, but sometimes he did go to meet Jews at their workplaces, for obtaining information. He would also visit Polish acquaintances in their homes, usually bringing back with him one or two loafs of bread.

The situation was deteriorating in every way. It was becoming more difficult and complicated to obtain food. The farmers of nearby villages must have had their fill

of the shirts we sewed and the other clothes we had provided. Actually, by that time the stockpiles of fabrics, clothes and items we had brought with us into the hiding-place, more than a year beforehand, were thoroughly depleted. Dina did much to help and so did Maria. Generally we had to make do with two slices of bread per day. On days my father went to "visit" friends, we celebrated. However, those times had become infrequent. The news arriving from the outside world were depressing. We constantly heard about bunkers being exposed in the forests. A new term was added to the lexicon of murderers of Jews, "Banderowcy." Those were bands of Ukrainian nationalists who were gathering in the forests and preparing for a confrontation with the Red Army. In the meanwhile, they were spending their time hunting for bunkers of Jews, seizing their possessions and murdering them.

One morning we suddenly heard German-speaking voices accompanied by heavy footsteps. The sounds were coming from the hallway leading to the attic. Alerted, we immediately awakened old Mr. Tokser who was sleeping and snoring. (The poor man was absolutely exhausted from lack of sleep since, due to his loud snoring, we did not let him sleep much at night. Sometimes he would even fall asleep in the middle of a conversation.) The noises were now coming from the attic, directly at the entrance to the hiding-place. It was covered, as usual, with two planks coated with clay. That was it, we thought, the end had come. Someone must have informed about us. Old Mr. Tokser who, like the rest of us, was as white as a

ghost, began murmuring "Shema Israel." An animated discussion was ensuing in the attic, lasting long minutes which seemed like eternity. We could not get the exact meaning of the words, except for the fact that they were searching for something. Finally we heard them retreating, descending the ladder from the attic to the hallway. We presumed they left. We sat huddled for long moments, immobilized and locked up within ourselves. Suddenly we heard steps again. The wooden plank at the entrance was removed and Dina's voice was heard. "Everything is fine, do not be afraid, those were German soldiers looking for a telephone line presumed to be in this vicinity. There is a problem with a telephone down below, but they could not find anything and have left. However, keep quiet just in case, they might return yet." What a relief! I went out immediately and kissed Dina. The soldiers searching for the telephone line left without returning.

In conversations with my father, I often asked and wondered about my sister Adela. "Is she still alive? What is happening to her?" "Who can know? I can't stop thinking about her, even for a moment." "May it be well." Entirely by chance, I overheard a portion of a conversation between my father and Milek and gathered that they were talking about Adela. At that point my father could no longer avoid telling me the harsh truth. "About a year ago I met Mina (Adela's friend). She was present in Sambor during an "Aktion" and heard that Adela was shot by a German soldier. I didn't want to tell you, especially since she only heard about it and did not actually witness it. Now only the two of us have remained."

We both cried that evening. I was unable to stop crying that entire night.

Activity on the eastern war front was sluggish. It had been a long time since we detected in the German papers any mention, even a hint, about any Russian advance. Time passed. Hunger controlled all our senses and occupied us at every moment. Sometimes, after consuming a slice of bread, I would ask my father, "do you think that someday I may eat as much bread as I want?"

The month of July arrived. Maria, Dina and Mietek repeated rumors which lent us hope. Something was beginning to stir on the eastern front and deliverance may be imminent. Following a consultation with Mietek and Dina, it was decided to build a shelter under the wooden floor in the hall. There were fears that the Russian planes would try to bomb the Germans, thereby hitting the "Sokol" building. If that were to happen, the location of our hiding-place would afford us little protection. In the hall area, where the chairs were usually positioned, a section of the parquet floor was taken apart. The large opening enabled us to reach the ground under the floor. Mietek brought digging tools that same evening and we started digging. Luckily, the ground was not too hard. The excavated earth was brought outside in pails and spread in the yard by Mietek and Dina. We worked mostly at nights, to the light of candles. When we stopped, usually at daybreak, the opening would be covered with the cutaway parquet section and the chairs repositioned in their usual locations. The deeper we dug, the more difficult it became.

Most of the work was done while kneeling. A month later we had a shelter, actually an "L" shaped pit, adequately long and wide to harbor us when necessary. Though the shelter was not sufficiently deep to provide a comfortable standing space, we did leave protrusions on the walls of the pit for sitting upon.

Groups of the Jews who still remained in the work-camp in the city were being transferred, most to Plaszow and some to Auschwitz. We heard about a desperate attempt by a Jew, in the work-camp in Boryslaw, to shoot one of the German soldiers. The attempt was foiled and the Jew was killed on the spot. By the end of July 1944, the work-camp was liquidated. No Jews remained in Boryslaw, except for those staying in various and odd hiding places such as "Sokol," or in bunkers in the forests. Of the latter, only a few were armed with pistols, meager protection against Bandera's gangs. We heard that, approximately at that period, there was an impressive advance by the Red Army. Mietek and Dina told us, "Lvov is in our hands!" We were skeptical. Nevertheless, it did indeed happen. Though starved and exhausted, we became hysterical with joy. The distance between Lvov and Boryslaw is about eighty kilometers. We calculated that the Russian tanks could cover the ground in three hours, which meant that on that same day, or the next at the very least, the Russians should be arriving.

On the following days and especially at nights, the roar of airplanes was heard in the skies. There were bomb blasts as well, perhaps the sounds of shells exploding somewhere far away. When we heard explosions nearby,

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we decided to inhabit the shelter created exactly for those circumstances. However, after staying there two days and nights, we concluded that it would be worth our while to relinquish it. We preferred to watch the fabulous displays seen through the window of the rabbits' room. The heavens were lit by spotlights, apparently activated by anti-aircraft divisions of the Wehrmacht. Background music for the spectacular show was provided by the roaring planes and exploding shells. One night we also witnessed parachuting soldiers (Russians, by all counts). At that moment we knew. The nightmare was about to end.

The Russians finally arrived in Boryslaw on the seventh of August 1944, about two weeks after overtaking Lvov. The shelling stopped and silence predominated, then bursts of shots were heard in the distance. Mietek appeared, announcing that the Germans were retreating, the Russians were on the outskirts of the city and will be arriving shortly. We waited, warily, listening for any sound, for some sign that deliverance was indeed at hand. Not entirely certain about the veracity of Mietek's account, we were still afraid to show ourselves. After about two hours of watchful anticipation, I distinguished Russian-speaking voices just outside the wooden wall. I called out excitedly, "the Russians are here, they are entering the house. Let's go outside." Everyone joined me in joyous cries and we pressed, together, through the entrance to the hiding-place. In a matter of scant few moments, the covering was removed, we stood above the opening and hurried to the ladder used to climb up

and down from the corridor. We heard footsteps on the stairs leading from the hall to the corridor. The first to appear was a Red Army sergeant, who saw a strange group of exultant wild people in front of him, yelling "Mi Yevreye!" (We are Jews). Alarmed, he aimed his gun in our direction. After we managed to clarify that we had been hiding from the Germans, he shouted at us "why are you not with the partisans?" It was difficult to explain that the only partisan groups in the area were Bandera's bands, who fought the Russians.

Luckily, among the soldiers following him, there was one, whose appearance did not leave any doubt regarding his Jewish derivation. He was noticed by all of us and old Mr. Tokser immediately shouted at him "Shema Israel! Ints Zemer Yiden" (we are Jews). The Jewish soldier clad in the Red Army uniform exchanged several words with us, in Yiddisb. There was no need to explain too much to him. He told us that he came from a Ukrainian town in the eastern region of Ukraine. His entire family was decimated by the Nazi murderers. He also explained our situation to the Russian sergeant. The latter said "Kharasho, nu davai," emphasizing his words by motioning with his hand "all right, go then." We did not walk, we ran, right after we hugged him and the Jewish soldier and thanked them for our liberation. We parted from Mietek, Dina and the Toksers and left for our house in Wolanka.

It was dusk. We passed a number of people who, at our sight, crossed themselves in fear. With my ashen face, long hair and emaciated body in tight clothing, I resembled a walking cadaver. When we arrived at our house, we met

one of the tenants. We recognized him immediately, but he, initially alarmed at our sight, recognized us only after my father spoke to him. When he realized that we were heading to our apartment, he mentioned that there was another tenant living there, one who did not know us. "Mr. Chameides, if he causes you any problems, I'll come with other neighbors and we will help you to evict him." Indeed, when we opened the door to our apartment, a large man was confronting us. His appearance, to put it mildly, was unpleasant.

He informed us, at once, that he had received the apartment from the authorities two years previously. As he was saying, "my family and I have nowhere to go, you go back to the place you came from," he tried to shove us out. My father did not yield. Meanwhile, the neighbors were gathering. Everyone knew us, greeted us and expressed their sorrow over Mama and Adela. They intervened in the dispute and explained to the man, "look, not only is he the owner of this apartment, he owns the entire building." My father added, "if you don't leave immediately, I will go to get the Russian police. They will surely want to know exactly why you got the apartment from the German authorities, in return for which services?" The man went to another room to consult with his wife and my father still managed to call after him, "my furniture and any other items you found in the apartment, you are to leave here."

The man returned with his wife, "I'll go to my brother in Tustanowice. He has a wagon and will help me move."

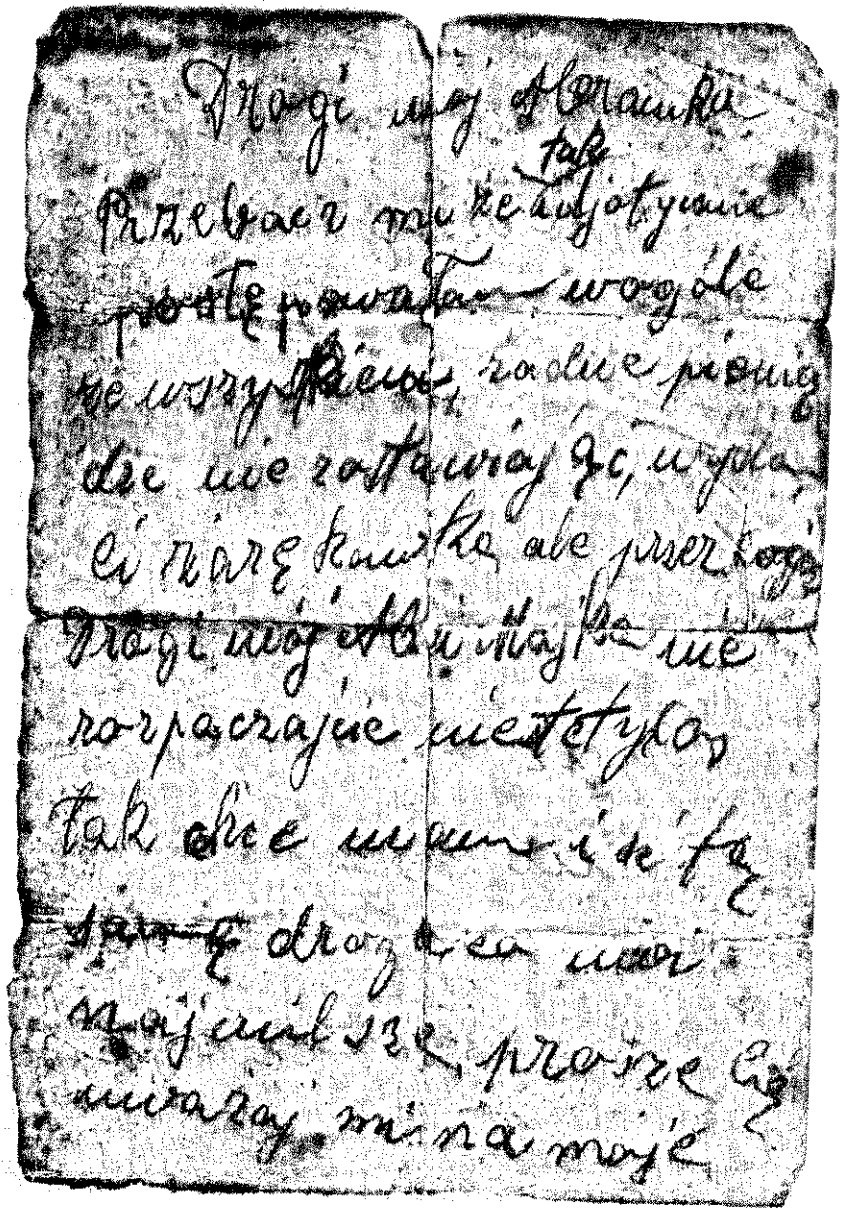
We waited two additional hours until the apartment

The Chameides Family
Avraham, Fryda, Adela and Manek

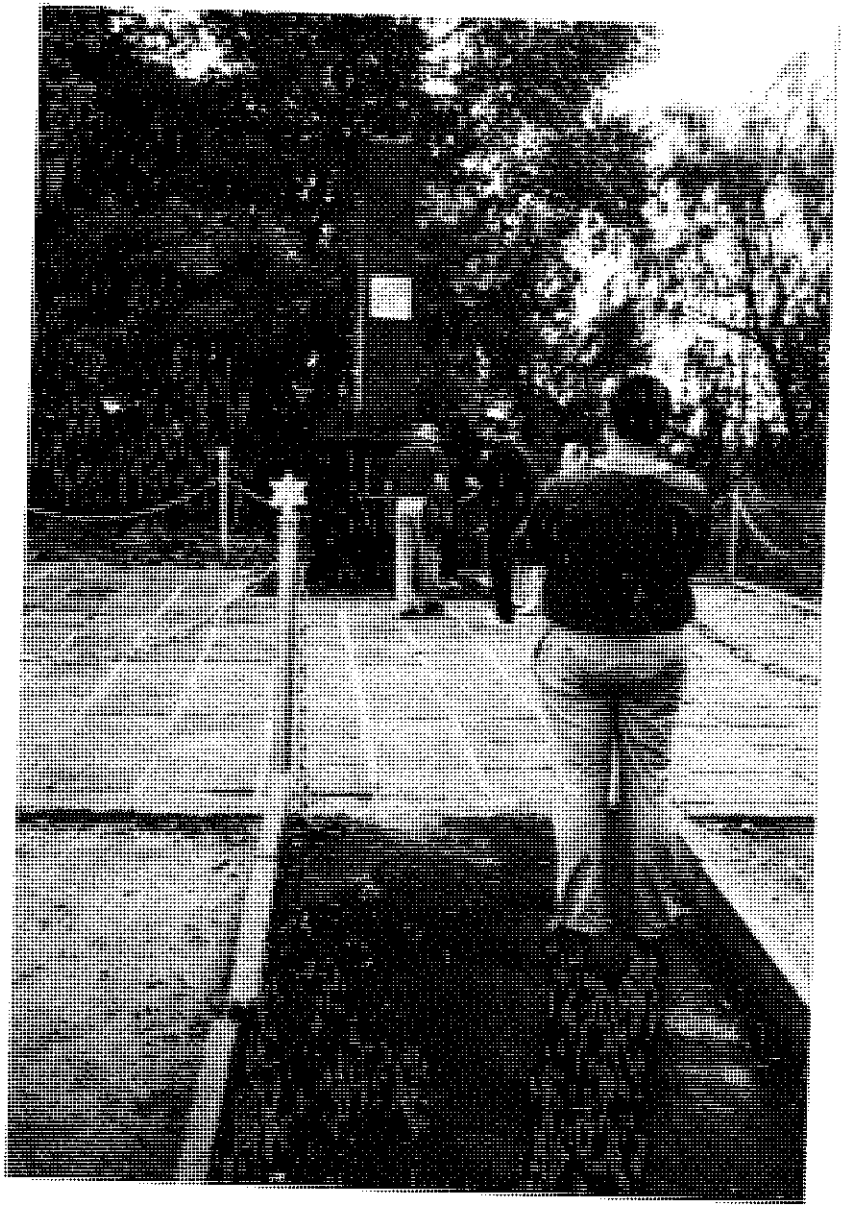
My parents' shop - 1937

The shop - 1993

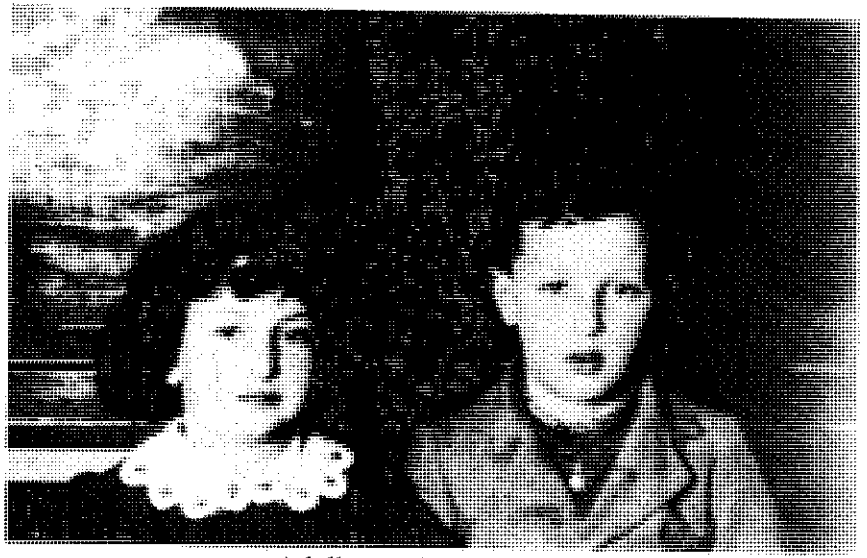
My mother, Fryda Chameides, in 1942



My mother's last letter (from the "Colosseum," February 17, 1943)

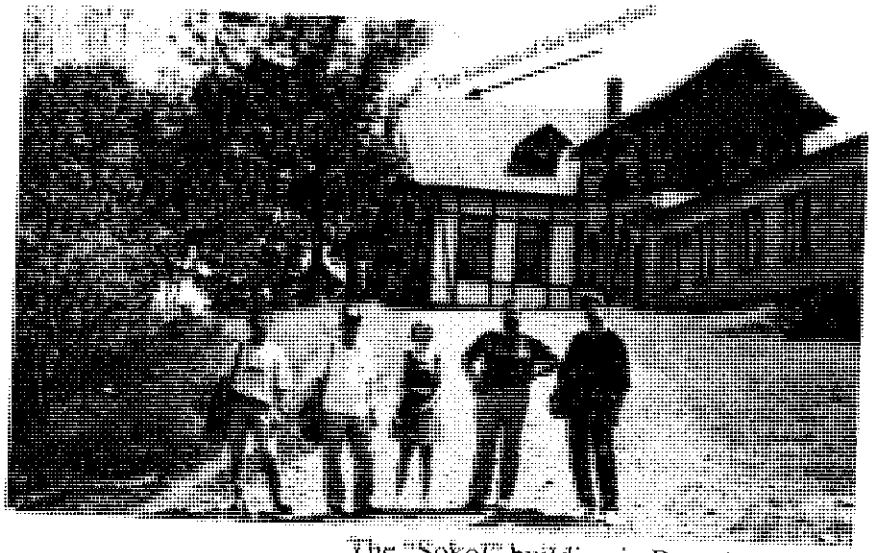


The mass grave of Boryslaw's Jews near the slaughterhouse



Adelka Speicher and Manek Chameides - 1936

Adela Chameides - 1942



The "Sokol" building in Boryslaw - 1993

Mira and Michael Chameides in the "Sokol" hiding-place - 1993

was emptied. We entered our home, my father and I. Our furniture, most of which was purchased just before the outbreak of the war, was just as I remembered. Especially my parents' bedroom. My father hugged me and both of us broke into incessant crying.

We were thoroughly exhausted and depleted. Collapsing on the bed, we fell asleep at once. No one snored.

BACK TO LIFE

Prior to the outbreak of World War II, about fifteen thousand Jews were living in the city of Boryslaw. On the seventh of August 1944, when the city was overtaken by the Red Army, only about two hundred Jews remained. A few others who survived, were those drafted by the Red Army in the beginning of the war in 1941. Some others managed to escape to the USSR before the arrival of the Germans. In addition, a small number of Jews survived the concentration-camps.

Late one evening, about two days following Liberation, loud knocking on the apartment door roused me from my sleep. Someone's voice was calling "Chameides." The question "who is it?" was answered with "it is I, Oberlander. I bring regards from Adela, open the door!" Even before opening it, doubts were passing through my father's mind. "How could this be, Oberlander died a long time ago." Could Adela be alive?

As the man continued speaking through the door, we both recognized his voice. It belonged to a tenant who

once lived in an apartment on the floor above us. A long time had passed since he was taken by the Germans during one of the "Aktions" and brought to the camp at Yanowski.

Oberlander entered and continued telling his story. "I ran away from the camp with the help of a Ukrainian policeman and hid in the forest about two weeks, until the Russians entered Lvov." He added that when he was in the camp, his job was to extract gold teeth from the murdered bodies and search for valuables in their belongings. While on the job, he managed to accumulate some gold for himself as well. He hid it in a clay pot he found in the forest, not far from the camp. With the gold, he bribed the Ukrainian policeman who helped him to get away. When the region was taken over by the Red Army, he traveled to Lvov. There, in a meeting place for the Jews who had survived, he met Adela and Chymek. Deciding to return to Boryslaw, he discovered that my father and I were alive and had actually returned to our apartment. He immediately ran over to announce that he had met Adela in Lvov.

According to him, Adela was planning to arrive in Boryslaw sometime in the next few days. Our joy was boundless. However, it was marred when Oberlander told us about Mama's brother, Zisio. He, also brought to the camp at Yanowski, was already extremely weakened and unable to work. They executed him by hanging. It had taken place several months previously.

Two days later Adela and Chymek arrived in Boryslaw. She was very thin and in poor health. She had married

Chymek sometime after arriving in Sambor, in February 1943. She knew that reports had spread about her death. Another young Jewish woman, resembling Adela, was the one killed by a German policeman in the Sambor cemetery. Witnesses in the area, watching from a distance, thought that it was Adela.

Mama's death had affected Adela acutely. They had a very special relationship, actually arousing my jealousy in the past. We sat and cried for many hours. We remembered, by name, each of the many family members who were murdered, as well as friends and colleagues.

Chymek's mother and his younger brother had survived. They had been hiding, together with Adela and Chymek, with a farming family in a village near the city of Sambor. In the following days, news began arriving about relatives who had been in Russia. My uncle Milo, Mama's younger brother, wrote a detailed letter in which he disclosed that uncle Hesio was alive, but his eldest brother Srul had died in Russia due to illness. Cousins Munio and Arieh (Leibek), the sons of Mama's sister Aunt Ethel, had joined the Polish army. That army was founded in Russia and consisted of refugees who volunteered to serve under the command of General Anders. They were brought to Teheran, Iran and from there to Iraq. On their way to vacation in Palestine, they decided to discard their uniforms and to remain in the city of Ramat-Gan. Mama's youngest sister, Chaika, who had made Aliya to the land of Israel prior to the outbreak of war, died there in childbirth. With the exception of my father, my sister and

me, all my family members who had been living under Nazi rule were annihilated.

Herewith is the terrible list: My mother, Fryda; her eldest sister Ethel with her daughter Rachula; the younger sister Genia with her husband and two toddlers; her brother Zisio; Hesio's wife Masza and their baby daughter. My father's eldest brother Michael (Mechel), his wife and son Milek; the younger brother Izio, his wife and son Mundek; his sister Reizel, her husband Bernard and their three children, Leah, Mundzio and Yankele; his sister Shaindel with her husband and their two-year-old baby; his youngest sister Tema with her husband and their infant. My paternal grandfather, Uri Feivish, though he died of natural causes, there can be no doubt regarding the irrefutable role the Nazi regime played in precipitating his untimely death.

The death toll in our family numbered twenty-eight human beings.

Dina and Mietek, the guards of the "Sokol Building" to whom we owed our survival, were divorced. A short time later, Dina married a Jew who returned from Russia. They immigrated to the United States, where fortune smiled upon them. We maintained contact with her through correspondence. Mietek vanished without a trace. So did Maria. The Zlockis, who had hidden us in their house through several "Aktions," moved to Poland, I believe to the city of Walbrzych. Max Heimberg, who headed the collaborating Jewish Police, was arrested after Liberation. He was the man I had encountered at the Boryslaw

work-camp, when I went there to recite the "Kaddish," a year after my mother died. He stood trial at the Polish court in Warsaw and was executed by hanging. Several German policemen of Austrian origins, responsible for the murder of multitudes of Jews, were brought to trial in the Austrian courts. According to my information, many of them were sentenced to ludicrous prison terms.

The euphoria which followed Liberation faded and we were trying to carry on with our lives. I resumed my studies, interrupted more than three years beforehand. My father began working for a cooperative of grocery stores. We remained in Boryslaw until December of 1944. I spent that time period primarily on studies. I also befriended some Polish boys and girls. Very few of the Jewish children had remained.

I tried returning to a life of routine, but the burden of the not-too-distant past was always with me and, particularly, within me.

For some reason, of all the ordeals branded in my mind from that period, one in particular was the hanging of the Ukrainian nationalists, the Bandera gang members. At the beginning of class, at ten o'clock in the morning one day, all studies were interrupted. All the students in the school were instructed to march in tandem to the city's public square. We were to witness the executions of the Bandera gang members who were caught in the city's environs. They were brought in an open pick-up truck which was backed up to a hanging post. Each one, in turn, was forced to stand on the truck as the rope was wrapped around his neck. At the conclusion of the reading of the verdict,

the signal was given and the vehicle moved forward. The shout "Long live Ukraine," the last words of one of the condemned men, was cut midway. Although I did not doubt that justice was done, I felt that administering the death sentences in the coerced presence of hundreds of children, many of them younger than I, was in poor judgment.

Adela and Chymek, deciding to migrate to Poland, moved to Pszemysl. Sometime later, we decided to do the same. The river San, flowing through the city of Pszemysl, constituted the boundary between Poland and the USSR. Hidden on a truck, underneath potato sacks, we managed to cross the border into the western "Polish" section of Pszemysl. After remaining there several weeks, we moved to the city of Krakow, following Adela and Chymek who arrived there sometime earlier. We all lived together in a relatively comfortable apartment. I began studying with private tutors, with whose help I was accepted and matriculated at the Jan Sobieski highschool in Krakow. I was the only Jew in class.

With the surrender of Germany on the eighth of May 1945, the war in Europe was over. I was seventeen years old and most of my time was dedicated to my studies. I befriended several boys and girls about my age, attended cultural events and began living anew. My social life was quite satisfactory during that time.

Our apartment in Krakow was a central meeting place for many Jews from Boryslaw who had survived the extermination-camps. They came, each one with his own horrific story. Most were starving, their bodies emaciated

and their clothes in tatters. Sometimes there was a gaze of insanity in their eyes. Several were carrying in their hands, or over their shoulders, a sack with slices of dried bread (according to them, to be prepared for the next trouble). Among the arrivals was my uncle Hesio, who had been in Russia, as well as my uncle Milo, who also managed to find us after a while.

Adela was in her last stages of pregnancy. The two of us were alone at home when her labor pains commenced. Hence, I became the fortunate aide to the midwife who birthed my sister's eldest daughter, Fryda.

Our goal was to make Aliya. My father, like many others in Boryslaw, had been, before the outbreak of the war, an active participant in the Zionist Movement. I had heard a great deal about it as a child. When we were still in the "Sokol" hiding-place, we would divert ourselves with the thought that if we managed to survive that hell, we would make every effort to reach the land of Israel. Anti-Semitism did not decrease in Poland and it was obvious to us that we did not belong there. As if we were in need of additional persuasion, along came the pogrom in the city of Kielce, reminding us that we were unwanted there. We managed to reach Germany in the summer of 1946, after a train ride of approximately five days, fraught with ordeals and quite a few adventures on the way. We reached the Bergen-Belsen displaced-persons camp, located not far from the infamous Bergen-Belsen extermination-camp. We stayed at the displaced-persons camp for more than a year, until it became feasible for us to make Aliya.

The camp was run by UNRWA, where many representatives from various Zionist Organizations and agents from the Land of Israel, then Palestine, were operating. My father and I were assigned a one-room-flat, in a building which once housed the staff of the extermination-camp. UNRWA dispensed food provisions in regularity and a school was organized, in which children and adolescents were provided with high-school grade education. In addition, vocational education courses were offered in various fields.

In 1947, following a long wait, my father received an Aliya certificate. It granted immigration to Palestine, which was then governed under the Mandate. His health had deteriorated during our stay in Germany. He was hospitalized after developing an acute ulcer, later he was sent to a health clinic in Bad-Kissingen where he had a relapse and hemorrhaged. He was hospitalized again and recuperated after approximately ten days. I stayed with him throughout the entire time. My father, always full of vitality, changed as a result of his illness and was never the same again. Indeed, the ordeals of the Holocaust had left their mark on him.

We returned to Bergen-Belsen. Uncle Hesio met Ella there and we celebrated their nuptials a short time later.

Approximately another month passed and we parted from my father who was sailing for Palestine. I joined a group of young people planning to reach the land with Aliya Bet (illegal immigration). We were first brought to a deserted German farm in the region of the city of

Hanover, for "hakhshara," agricultural training. We stayed there several weeks and experimented with a variety of agricultural activities. As per instructions by the agencies' representatives who managed Aliya Bet, one clear day we were placed on trucks and brought south toward Italy. We were directed to wait at some distance from the border. After staying two days at a nearby farm, we were instructed to return to Bergen-Belsen. The explanation offered was that there were problems at the border's crossing point used by the organization.

My sister and her husband were still in the apartment at Bergen-Belsen and I lived with them after my return. Most of the friends I had made were gone. Some had left for Israel, others to the United States. I felt alone. I concentrated all my energies on obtaining the coveted certificate for immigration to Israel. Finally, on the twenty-fifth of August 1947, I was disembarking from the Greek ship "Alexandria" at the port of Haifa. Sometime later my sister Adela and her family made Aliya as well. My uncle Hesio with his wife Ella also came with them. Later, my uncle Milek arrived as well.

That chapter in my life ended.
A new era had began.

EPILOGUE

In 1992 I went on a journey of "Roots" to Boryslaw, today a city in western Ukraine. I joined a group of five city natives. My desire to visit my native Boryslaw, from which I parted forty-eight years beforehand, at the end of 1944, was formed a long time ago. I had spent my mischievous and fairly joyous childhood years there. Indeed, those memories were eroded and obscured considerably by the shadow of the terrible Holocaust, beset upon us when I was on the verge of adolescence.

When I was born, Boryslaw belonged to Poland. The situation changed at the onset of World War II, when the city became a part of the USSR. Following Hitler's decision to attack the USSR in June of 1941, the city was overtaken by the German army. The occupation lasted until August 1944. The outcome of Nazi Germany's policy, the annihilation of the Jewish people, was the obliteration of the city's Jewish community. Numbering about fifteen thousand people prior to the outbreak of the war, it disappeared entirely. The sole testimony to

the existence of a thriving, economically and culturally developed community, are the graves. Mass-graves, spread about the various city sections and its vicinity.

I visited my mother's burial place, near the municipal slaughterhouse where the Nazis murdered her, where her body was buried in a mass-grave along with six hundred other Jews. The place was concealed by a thicket and it was difficult to locate it, even with the aide of some local Jews who accompanied us. It was hard to approach it. Finally, we noticed a terribly neglected gravestone. We read, with extreme difficulty, the dedication on the plaque attached to the stone. We kindled memorial candles near the gravestone and I, interrupted often by bitter sobs, recited the Kaddish. We visited additional mass-graves in the city, the forests and fields in the vicinity. Neglect and disregard were blatant everywhere.

Later that evening, we were sitting at our lodgings in Truskavetz, deliberating over steps necessary for the undertaking of the repair and maintenance of the grave sites. Returning to Israel, we met with Mr. Zvi Heilig, then serving as chairman of the organization of Natives of Drohobycz-Boryslaw and their Environs. After describing the neglect predominating at the grave sites of our loved ones, it was proposed to approach the city's former residents with an appeal of a one-time cash contribution, for the repair and maintenance of the sites at the mass-graves. The appeal was met with an outstanding response. Contact was made with municipal institutions in the city. Local people were located, who were willing, in return for appropriate remuneration, to perform the necessary

repair jobs and subsequently to maintain and preserve the sites.

In the summer of 1993, a journey of "Roots" to Drohobycz and Boryslaw was organized. Jews from the United States, Australia, Germany, France, Sweden and of course, Israel, declared their desire to participate in the tour.

My children, Uri, Michael and daughter Mira, all natives of Israel, always demonstrated fervent interest in their parents' experiences, before they had immigrated to Israel and particularly during the Holocaust. My wife Yehudit, a survivor of the Holocaust as well, was born in Hungary in the city of Tokai, famous for its wines. In her youth, her fate was to endure all phases of purgatory, as did most of Hungary's Jews during the Holocaust. My father, of blessed memory, who died in 1984, lived with my family until his last day. The children, Uri the firstborn son (born in 1953), Michael (born in 1959) and Mira (Born in 1962), were very attached to "Grandpa Chameides." They were entranced by his numerous stories and witticisms, borrowed directly from Droyanov's "Book of Wit and Sallies."

Returning from my first journey of "Roots" to Boryslaw, I recounted my experiences to my wife and children and they viewed the video tape. Everything they had heard and seen awakened within them a strong desire to see, with their own eyes, the city and its environs, my parents' house which remained intact and the hiding-place where my father and I stayed for a very long period of time. When I mentioned the planned journey of "Roots,"

everyone expressed their desire to participate. My uncle Milo and cousin Jonah (Hesio's son) also decided to join. In mid-August 1993 we flew with "El-Al" to Warsaw. Uri, who lived in Milano, Italy, had arrived about an hour before we did and welcomed us with a video camera in his hands, activated as soon as we left customs at the Warsaw airport. The arrangements, made by a tour firm in Israel, included sleeping accommodations at the "Forum" hotel. Thus, after the hugging and kissing during the emotional family reunion, we engaged a taxi and proceeded to the hotel.

Although the hour was late, we strolled in the proximity of the hotel for about a half an hour and then went to sleep. We had to rise early the next morning and continue on our flight to Lvov in Ukraine. The flight from Warsaw to Lvov was unnerving. We were aboard a creaking, groaning, loud and shaky old airplane and it seemed that at any moment it would fall apart. The passengers' sarcastic comments lightened the mood somewhat and diverted our thoughts to other, not so dismal, venues.

We flew at a low altitude in pleasant weather and clear skies. On the approach to the Lvov airport, we were captivated by the sight of endless green expanses underneath us. Our experiences at the local passenger lobby, where we were delayed and forced to wait, were far less felicitous. There were no restaurants in sight and reaching the restrooms required a convoluted road plan. We observed gang members, working the local black market, who pestered us and other passengers with offers for exchanging dollar bills for local Ukrainian

currency. Finally, the bus which was to take us to Borysław arrived. We drove by the cities of Sambor, Drohobycz and Borysław and alighted at the "Beskid" hotel in Truskawiec, a vacation town. The hotel is located on the main thoroughfare which leads to Borysław. Remembering my stay there the previous year, I was pleasantly surprised by its appearance. The rooms were adequate as well.

We went sightseeing in the town. The site, a famous health spa in its time, was unique for the healing waters of the "Naftusia." I had told my children about Truskawiec which was near Borysław, about the "Naftusia" and the odor of sulfur emanating from it. We walked along extensive boulevards of apple trees. We strolled through the ancient park, abounding with romantic paths strewn with statues and benches. We arrived at the cabin used by the convalescing patients of the "Naftusia" and entered the hall. There were numerous taps along the walls and special china cups were provided for drinking the water. To avoid having tooth contact with the water, the cups were made with elongated, pointed rims. The "Naftusia," its advantageous features notwithstanding, was apparently not very beneficial for teeth.

The next day we took a taxi to Borysław, the object of our visit. On the way to our initial destination, the mass-grave near the slaughterhouse, we stopped at the house where I spent my childhood. The building stands on the main street in Wolanka, Borysław. The facade, where my parents' shop was located, faced Generala-Zielinskiego

Street (number 109). The shop once contained clothes, furs and fabrics. At the other end of the building's frontage, once a butcher's shop was located. It belonged to the Speichers, our neighbors who co-owned the building with my parents. The facade of "our" shop was hardly changed. The only differences were the signs, above the entrance and along the two windows on the sides of the shop's entrance.

Today, the sign reads "chlieb," "bread" in Ukrainian. The facadé of the Speichers' butcher-shop had been enclosed. Entering the shop where they were selling bread, we saw that the area, occupied in the distant past by the butcher-shop, had been merged with the bread-shop. Another room included in the expanded bread-shop was once a bedroom in our apartment, located next to the shop. The entrance to the apartment was in the back of the building, on the second floor. We knocked on the door for a very long time, without results. Finally, the tenant from the first-floor appeared, explaining that the tenants were out and the only person present in the apartment was their son, who slept most of the time. To wake him up, it was necessary to yell his name very loudly. We did so accordingly and, finally, the door was opened.

We all entered. I explained to the boy who we were and he remembered me from my visit of the previous year. My children, recollecting some of my childhood and Holocaust stories, were interested and even identified some details in the apartment. They noted the large kitchen stove attached to the wall, used for cooking and baking. It was fueled by wood and solid pellets of crude oil

and sawdust. My sister Adela likes to tell my children a story connected to that stove. On wintery evenings, we, the children, would sit on the stove to warm our bodies before entering our cold beds. The fire would have been out already, but the stove had still retained its warmth. However, once it transpired that the stove was not extinguished at the usual time. Ignorant of that fact, I climbed on a chair, raised my nightshirt and sat on top of the stove. The shrieks which instantly rose from my throat reached the heavens, generating tremendous tumult. My parents, the neighbors and, ultimately, the summoned doctor, treated my buttocks until daylight, when I finally calmed down. "Your father was then only four-years-old," I would defend myself to my children.

The hooks on the sides of the entrance doors were still there. They were used for the solid wooden post placed across the door, preventing it from being opened externally. We descended to the yard and from there to the cellar. As a child I was forced to spend long hours of retrospection there, my "reward" for naughty and somewhat incorrigible behavior. During the initial days of World War II, the cellar was expected to protect us from the German planes' bombardments.

We concluded our tour of the house.

We went from there to the mass-grave near the municipal slaughterhouse. I attempted to describe the course of the ordeal to my children, Uri, Michael and Mira, as well as to my uncle Milo and cousin Yona. At the present time, the site seemed to be preserved and maintained, entirely different from what I had seen

on my previous visit. Now it was possible to see, from the nearby main road, the asphalt path which led to a monument installed on a paved surface. Along the path and around the monument there were several posts about a meter high, crowned with a Star-of-David. A plaque, installed on the top of the monument, is inscribed in Hebrew:

> Passerby . . . stop!
> Honor the thousands of Jews
> Children, women and infants,
> Murdered and buried here
> By the Nazis
> During World War II, in the years of 1943-1944

We returned to the center of the city. I led the group to a building which, until the arrival of the Germans in 1941, had been used as a cinema-hall, the "Colosseum." It was the place where the Germans concentrated the Jews during some of the "Aktions," before they were sent to the Valley of Slaughter. My mother, too, had been there, before she was conducted to her death.

A group of women, crowding in one of the neighboring houses' yard, was watching us curiously. I asked one of them, who seemed to be the oldest of the bunch, "how long have you lived in Boryslaw?"

"Many years," she replied.

"Were you living here when the Germans murdered the Jews?"

"Yes, the Germans murdered them all."

Today, the former cinema-hall is used as a dance club.

We continued in the direction of the "Sokol" building, where the Toksers, my father and I hid. The building remains exactly as I remember it. The man who opened the entrance door retreated in alarm when he saw the group. It took me several moments to explain the purpose of our arrival. The man, claiming to be in charge of the place, reacted with absolute disbelief. "There is no area connecting to the attic which could be used as a hiding place. If there were, I would know about it. No one knows the building as I do." As I offered my apologies if in error, I ran up the stairs leading to the second floor and suggested that he should simply follow me. In about ten seconds we reached the passageway on the second floor. I pointed to the covered opening in the ceiling.

"Can you bring us a ladder?" I asked.

A ladder was delivered a moment later. I climbed first and pushed in the cover which opened on its hinges. I climbed into the attic, the others followed behind. I showed everyone the opening to the hiding-place. The plank at the edge of the attic floor had been moved aside. Perhaps we had left it there forty-nine years ago, on the day of Liberation. I stuck my head in and illumined the hiding-place area with the flashlights we had brought. It looked to me as if nothing had been altered since those days.

The ladder we used to climb in and out stood in its spot, just as it did during those dark days.

I was unable to climb down there.

Mira, Uri, Michael and Yona entered the hiding-place

and photographed it with a video camera. I watched them with my head in the opening. "Father, where were you lying? Where was grandfather? Where is the hole you made in the roof to see the skies? From where could you view the Germans down in the hall?" Following our descent from the attic, I was asked myriads of questions regarding our routines in the hiding-place, in the rabbits' room, the library and more.

We left "Sokol" and continued on to Wysypy. Many of my parents' family members had been living in that section. We attempted to find some sign or mention of the houses which belonged to my grandfather, my many aunts and uncles. We asked the people living there, but came up with nothing. Everything vanished as though it had never existed.

My uncle Hesio, of blessed memory, once worked at a carpentry shop belonging to Speicher, a relation of our neighbors, the Speichers. The building which housed the shop had survived. We went to see and show the place toYona, Hesio's son. Subsequently we went to visit the school I had attended. The boys' school was totally neglected. The girls' school (at the time, boys and girls were segregated) was in ruins down to its foundations. We continued meandering here and there, searching for other sites, structures or familiar places from my childhood days. We passed the Catholic church on the way leading from my former house to the school I attended. I remembered and told my children how Mania, our housemaid, would take me to the church. On those occasions she taught me to genuflect and recite the "Pater

Noster." When my mother heard about those visits, she was definitely displeased.

The entire following day was dedicated to memorial ceremonies at the numerous mass-graves in Drohobycz, Boryslaw and the surrounding areas. The first ceremony took place at the forest of Bronitza, near Drohobycz, where tens of thousands of Jews from Drohobycz and Boryslaw were murdered by the Germans and their assistants. That section of the forest was marked with a large number of mass-graves, with only few meters separating one from the other. Huge cement blocks were poured on top of each grave. A monument was installed at the entrance of the site, with an inscription which relates the gruesome tale. Many local residents, Jews and Christians alike, participated in the commemoration. In addition, there were Jews who had arrived from many places in the world. A "Baal-Tefilah" and a cantor also arrived from Israel.

The mayor of Drohobycz, the chairman of the Organization of Natives of Drohobycz, Boryslaw and their Environs and the local priest, were among those addressing the audience. Beniek Sharoni, a member of kibbutz Tel-Itzkhak as well as a native of Drohobycz, whose family perished in the Holocaust, made a particularly moving speech. He spoke both in Polish and in Hebrew. It was raining. The heavens, as he put it, were crying along with us as we all stood crying in the pouring rain.

After reciting Psalms verses, chanting "El mole rakhamim" and reciting the Kaddish, we continued on

to Boryslaw, to the mass-grave near the slaughterhouse. The format of the ceremony was similar to the one at Bronitza. We continued on our course to other death sites in the city's vicinity. A ceremony was also conducted at the monument erected at the old Boryslaw Jewish cemetery, where today there is a bus-station. We returned to the "Beskid" hotel by evening, drenched to our bones, extremely tired and no less depressed.

On the following day we engaged a driver with a taxi and toured the city's surroundings. I wanted to see and show the impressive forests encircling the city from all directions and the few crude oil deposits still remaining. The numerous drilling towers, once typifying the city's landscape, were no longer there. Here and there we saw, on the sides of the road leading to Mraznica and Schodnitca, some oil rigs shaped like a grasshopper. Obviously they replaced the tall oil drilling towers, engraved on my mind in my childhood. We stopped by one of the operating oil rigs and I spoke with the operators, who explained the differences between the two methods, the towers and the current oil rigs.

We left the car and entered the forest. We walked in the pleasant weather, down paths with raspberries-covered bushes growing on the sides. We picked large quantities of the fruit. In appearance, aroma and flavor they were delightful, "just like then."

"This is the raspberry about which I have told you," I said to my children. "You remember the episode. I was an eight-year-old boy, on his way to the forest to pick raspberries. The quantities of fruit around me seemed to

be boundless. Quickly filling the paper bag I had brought, I took off my new sailor's hat and filled it with the juicy raspberries. On the way home, I noticed the changing color of the hat, becoming raspberry-red. I decided to remove the fruit and wash the hat in the waters of a brook flowing nearby. Sitting on a rock, I emptied the contents of the hat directly into my mouth. Next, I tried washing the hat, but without success. After drying it for a while, I finally put it on and marched home quickly, hoping not to run into my mother. However, my luck had run out. The rag on my head, drenched in blood-like liquid, the rivulets of raspberry juice streaming down my forehead and face, occasioned great alarm. Without going into details, the matter did not end happily. Not to mention the stomachaches and diarrhea, from which I suffered for some time following that escapade."

It was my uncle Milo who voiced the emotions we felt at the end of that visit to Boryslaw. We were about to board the bus and depart, when he said "Good bye, never to meet again."

We were on our way to the Lvov airport for our flight to Warsaw. We toured the city of Lvov, stopping at several central locations in the city, currently the capital of western Ukraine. Most of our time there was spent at the ancient Jewish cemetery. Michael (Mechel), my father's eldest brother, had lived in Lvov. As far as I know, Mechel perished at the Yanovski death-camp, along with his wife and son Milek. My son Michael was named for my uncle. I wandered at length among the numerous tombstones. With the aide of local Jews I met in the cemetery, I

searched for any mention of my family's name, but to no avail.

We arrived at the airport in the afternoon. After long, draining hours of waiting and customs inspections, we boarded the airplane (this time a Polish aircraft, modern and relatively comfortable) and flew to Warsaw.

I decided to remain in Poland for two or three additional days, to stop at Auschwitz and the city of Krakow. My daughter Mira and my uncle joined me. We parted from Uri, who returned to Italy and from Michael and Yona, who were flying to Israel. We engaged a car with a driver and left on our way in the morning. We arrived in Krakow around noon. I had fond memories of the city and my stay there during the 1945-1946 years. While driving through, I told Mira about my adolescence and studies in Krakow. We left the city and drove to Auschwitz and Birkenau, where, as it is well known, thousands of Hungary's Jews were brought to be annihilated, in 1944. My wife Yehudit and her family were brought there as well. As soon as they arrived in Birkenau, the mother and two of her little girls were separated from Yehudit and Sarah, her eldest sister. The father, also separated from them, was grouped with the men. The mother and the two little sisters were sent directly to the gas chambers. Yehudit, then a thirteen-year-old, managed to survive the women's camp, along with her sister. After the war ended, they were reunited in Germany with their father, who survived as well.

We entered several cabins whose appearance and contents conformed with Yehudit's description. My

daughter Mira, extremely tense and agitated, attempted to identify the cabin (block) where her mother had been. I don't believe we met with success. Probably they have undergone some changes since then.

We went through Auschwitz as well. We saw the various killing apparatuses, including the hanging posts. Suffused with feelings of disgust and horror, we left that horrid place and drove back, again through Krakow, to Warsaw.

We took advantage of the remaining two days in Warsaw to tour the city and both banks of the Vistula (Wisla) river which crosses the city. We wandered primarily around the former Jewish quarter and the Ghetto area.

With that our voyage of "Roots" ended. We returned to Israel, this time aboard a Polish aircraft belonging to "Lot" airlines.