A Passover in Rome

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Henry Welch and Rose Kryger

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Contents

Preface vii
Aunt Rose Kryger ix

Prologue 1
Introduction 3

ONE
1. Passover in Rome–April 1984 7
2. Good-bye to My Hometown Lodz 12
3. We Become Bezhenikis (The Runaways) 19
4. Pinsk 24
5. Siberia Here We Come 29
6. Nierczuga 37
7. After the Funeral 44
8. We Are Free 51
9. Krasnovodsk 57
10. Good-bye Siberia 62
11. The Worst Winter of Our Lives
    Kolhoz Zhyd Ken Chek 72
12. Spring and Summer—1942 84
13. Leninabad 113
14. Chairuk Dairon 126
15. The War Is Over—We Are Going Home 132
16. Good-bye Forever My Home Town Lodz 139
17. I Find My Sister Sally 145
18. Sister Sally Tells Her Story 150
19. Marktredwitz: A Home of Our Own 161
20. Where Is Home? 170

Epilogue to Part One 177
Glossary 181

TWO: Letters and Stories of Our Family

Letter No. 1
My Paternal Grandparents 185
Letter No. 2
My Maternal Grandparents 189
Letter No. 3
My Aunt Hanna's Moishele 194
Letter No. 4
A True Love Story 199
Letter No. 5
My Aunt Golde 204
Letter No. 6
Our Cousin Youkel 207
Letter No. 7 209
Letter No. 8 211

About the Author 213

Preface

I eventually learned that what is normal is quite different for children of Holocaust survivors. I never touched a single artifact from my family that predated the second World War. I thought that was normal. I never knew grandparents. I thought that was normal. As I was growing up every family that I knew had survived the horror of losing everything. I thought that was normal. Our family had no place it considered home, even when we were living in Montreal. I thought that was normal. Most of the adults I knew while growing up had horrible unspeakable memories locked up that were never discussed. I thought that was normal. As a six or seven year old child I remember telling my mother that I had just made a new friend—a German boy. I was forbidden to ever play with the child again. I did not understand why.

There was no family business, no family "home," no heirlooms. There was no past, but only a present and a future. It was as though there was no history before 1947, the year I was born. It was as though the past was something of a curse, something from which my sister and I should be protected. It was almost as though the knowledge of the past would somehow taint us and haunt us. It reminded me of the fact that Jews released from slavery wandered in the Wilderness for almost two generations and few who had experienced slavery ever experienced a home. The lesson of Passover is that we must retell the story as though we had lived it.

What I learned from my mother, Rose, and later from others in my family (my Uncle Abe and Aunt Sally and my cousin Henry) is that ordinary people performed heroic acts during a terrible era of human history. My mother participated in every important event that touched Jews this century. She was born in Lodz during World War I. She lived in a vibrant Jewish community in Lodz, a beautiful city in Poland. She married Simcha Kryger on June 24, 1939, less than three months before the Nazis invaded Poland. She survived the War and I was born, the third Jewish boy in a community of displaced Jews in Marktredwich, Germany. My family moved to Israel just after Independence. And so, after years of my mother

not telling us her story, in 1984 while visiting my cousin Henry (Zvi) in Rome during Passover, we all encouraged her to tell us her story. This book is about that Passover, her life, and our family's life.

Most are familiar with the terrible events of the Holocaust that took place in Central Europe. However, at the same time, over a million of displaced people were trapped in Russia and suffered slavery, starvation, disease and death. Their story is largely untold. This volume is one family's odyssey as seen through the eyes of two witnesses, an adult and a child. Rose Kryger wrote her story in Yiddish, the language of Jews in Central Europe. Her manuscript, the backbone of this book was translated into English by Dr. Henry Welch. Henry (Zvi), Rose's nephew, who spent the entire War with her, adds the unique insights of a child on an odyssey to freedom. Zvi's observations are in Italic text.

Dr. Meir Kryger, Winnipeg, 1995

Aunt Rose Kryger

A Biographical Note

Rose Kryger was born in Poland in 1913. Weeks after she married, Germany invaded Poland and she was separated from her husband, Sam. Rose escaped from the Nazis to join her husband in Russia. Together they began an eight year odyssey that led to imprisonment in a slave labor camp in the arctic, and then wandering in Central Asia until the war ended. There was nobody left when she returned to her home. In 1948 her family, now with two children, moved to Israel and later in 1953, the family settled in Canada. Sam died in 1967. Rose, who never remarried, was blessed by a loving family. Her pride and joy was her six grandchildren. She died in 1993.

Prologue

Shiva, Montreal, December 1993

At the funeral during the service, the Rabbi, in his eulogy, told the gathered people that Rose, my mother, died with many secrets still locked up. When he said that she had lost a child during the War even some of her best friends were shocked. They did not know. He told us that in another time, she could have been a writer. This had always been her dream.

The burial was at the Lodzer cemetery half an hour north of Montreal. It was cold. My sister, Mary, and I recited the Kaddish. After the service we walked over to where our father, Sam, was buried. Men and women were not buried together in this cemetery. We each put a small rock on his headstone.

The Shiva is a week of mourning. Family and friends come to comfort the bereaved. During the first few days many people came. The last few days few came and it gave my sister and me the opportunity to comfort each other and to clean out the apartment. There were dishes, furniture, clothes, and the magnificent watercolors painted by my father.

During the fourth or fifth day we were cleaning out a drawer and we found the spiral bound blue notebooks and the two audio cassettes. My mother had told me that her story was finished. I had heard her story in bits and pieces over the years but there were still holes. I would finally find out about the sister who died. I opened all the notebooks. The entire text, over two hundred pages were written in Yiddish. This was a language I could understand since it was the language we spoke at home, but I could not read a word.

After the seven days, as is the custom, my sister and I finally left the apartment and walked around the block as is the custom and returned to our lives. I returned to Winnipeg with the only heirloom left by my mother: her handwritten words and her voice.

When I returned home to Winnipeg I listened to the audio tapes. Finally I would hear in my mother's voice the story of my sister who died

in the slave labor camp in Siberia. It was eerie hearing my mother's voice describing events that took place more than 50 years ago. She was describing the events as though they were occurring in the present. It was as though she was talking to me, my sister and someone else. I could not tell who that other person was. When I reached the part on the tape when she described going home with the baby the tape went blank! The entire episode was missing. Erased?

Or was the story so horrible to her that even after 50 years it could not be told. I did not know what to do with the manuscript and the tapes. I knew it was my duty to have them translated. I was stumped.

A year and a half later my daughter had her Bat Mitzvah. My cousin Henry flew in from Rome. He, now about 60 years old, was the oldest member of my family. I suddenly realized that Henry was the third person my mother was talking to on the tape. Henry had spent the entire war with my parents and I knew that he had first hand knowledge of many of the events in the story. Henry was fluent in many languages (Polish, Russian, English, Italian, German, French, Hebrew, Yiddish and a couple of others) and he volunteered to translate. I made copies of the tapes and the manuscript for Henry.

Dr. Meir Kryger, Winnipeg 1995

Introduction

It all started during that Passover in Rome in 1984. My Aunt Rose came to visit with her son, Meir, his wife, Barbara, and their little daughter, Shelly. That first evening, during dinner, my aunt and I were so happy to see each other that we got carried away remembering things from the past. Most people refer to the past as "the good old days," not in our case. To us, the past meant the years of World War II; memories and experiences we shared together and, most of the time, wanted to forget. The other two people that shared those unforgettable years with us, were my mother Ghenia and my Uncle Sam; and both of them had died. The only ones left to remember were my Aunt Rose and me.

All those memories that for years both of us tried to forget had suddenly come alive that evening. A little lamp was turned on in the dusty, cobweb protected part of our memory. We remembered and were telling stories from the past. We jumped from one story to the other and from one place to the other. Memories came back to the light and those past experiences came alive. All those things that belonged to another lifetime or maybe even to somebody else—not me.

Living in Rome for the past 30 years, far away from the rest of my family, I have no opportunity and frankly have no desire to talk or think about that past. My cousin Meir and my sister Frances were born after the war. They never heard those stories before. They were both captivated and fascinated.

It was at this point that both Frances and Meir asked Aunt Rose to write down these stories and leave a living document for the future generations of our family. I agreed with my aunt and reminded her that back in 1942 on the steppes of Kazakhistan, when she lay hallucinating with typhoid fever, she thought she was writing a book. This imaginary book contained her memoirs she was dedicating them to her parents.

"You remember Zhyd Ken Chek," I said. "Well, now is the perfect time for you to do it and to write that famous book of your life."

My Aunt Rose then played a trick on me, she actually had handwritten 240 pages in Yiddish. Her son, Meir, found those pages after her death.

It was up to me now, to translate this manuscript and to add comments of my own to complete her story.

As I was translating her notes, which were not always very clear, I could not help having flashbacks of my own. I was a child in those days, but there are many things that I do remember. I took the liberty of adding comments or facts as I went along. I also included a number of special notes (***) in italics; these are my personal observations, feelings and memories.

I also described some of the places we have been and the way we lived. I took the liberty to describe some of the people that were directly involved in this story. Things and people, the way I saw them and the way I remembered them. I have added descriptions and comments where I thought it would help the reader to understand better the circumstances and the times that are described in this book.

Furthermore, I divided this book into two parts:

Part One, is the story of my Aunt Rose and also partly my own. It starts with the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 and ends in 1948 when Aunt Rose with her family leave for Israel to start a new life.

Part Two is mostly dedicated to family history and stories about our family that Aunt Rose wrote to me in the form of letters. I added stories that I have heard or remembered that could be of interest to our family members.

Part Two of this book, I hope will never end. I hope that the new generation of our family will carry on and add new and fascinating stories to continue the memory of the three sisters Ghenia, Rose and Sally.

A quotation from Tolstoy comes into my mind:

"—and he went on talking about himself without realizing that it was not as interesting to others as it was to himself."

I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of the three sisters Ghenia, Rose and Sally, my father Jacob, my uncles Symcho and Abe, my grandparents the Grzes's, the Glicensteins, the Krygers, the Welchs and the Wilczkowski's and their families that perished in the holocaust.

Dr. Henry Welch,
Rome, November 1996

ONE

1

Passover in Rome–April 1984

We are driving along a rather busy highway; it seems like everybody is going to Rome. My son, Meir, is driving the car. He is being extremely careful, reading every sign to make sure not to make mistakes. He has been living in Geneva with his wife, Barbara, and daughter, Shelly, for one year. He is working and teaching at the University of Geneva Medical School. He invited me, his old mother, to visit them in Europe. So here I am, an old lady sitting in the back of the car and playing with my granddaughter. My son has prepared for me a wonderful surprise. We are going to Rome for *Pesach* to visit my nephew, Zvi, with whom I have spent the tragic years of the Second World War.

I had not seen my nephew, Zvi, for some time now. He has been living in Rome for so long, far away from the rest of our family. Did he change? Will he still remember Siberia, Nierczuga, Zhyd-Ken-Check or Leninabad? I close my eyes and see a parade of places and people marching by. I see that small boy laying next to me on the ground, on that lice-infected straw, with tears running down his cheeks, saying to me: "Please, Rouzia, please don't die, I love you, I need you."

But that was so long ago. I open my eyes and I am back in the car. It is a very warm day for this time of the year. The sun is slowly going down illuminating with a golden spray the surrounding mountains and fields as we drive along. The trees are already in bloom with many different flowers and colors.

My son checks the map and announces that, very shortly, we will reach Rome. After a while it becomes obvious that we have entered this magnificent city—Rome. We drive along wide streets, narrow streets and large avenues. Some of the streets are lined with elegant stores. Old and magnificent buildings surround us everywhere.

We have arrived at my nephew's house and he is waiting for us downstairs. We get out of the car to a warm welcome. Zvi is my older sister Ghenia's son. The greetings are full of joy and laughter. Tears come to my

eyes when he embraces me. I cannot help myself, I cry for joy and happiness. We are going to spend this Passover in Rome together. We have arrived exactly the evening before "*erev Pesach.*"

Zvi immediately informs me that everything has been prepared for tomorrow's *Seder.* We are going to have a *Seder* with the same type of food we had in my parents home in Lodz before the war. With the help of his sister, Frances, they prepared all the special dishes.

We enter the house. It is a magnificent penthouse apartment, full of art, light and warmth. This is not the first time that I visited Zvi in Rome, but the first time in this apartment. I look around and I am impressed; it seems like a dream, but it feels good to be here. My God, I think to myself, life is a real miracle; who would ever dream that 40 years ago, one day we would be in Rome, in a free world, living normal lives. But why am I thinking of that? That past, belongs to another lifetime. Yes, it must have been in another lifetime.

"Rouzia," I hear my name being called. I shake my head to dispel those thoughts and get back to the present. 'Rouzia,' there are very few people that call me by my Polish name anymore. It sounds a little strange to me now, but I like it. I am known as Rose for so many years now, but being called 'Rouzia', makes me feel younger all of a sudden—yes definitely younger.

"Rouzia, come out here on the terrace and see the sunset," I hear Zvi calling me. He stands in the open doorway to the terrace and hands me a drink. The sun is a big gold and orange ball that is already half way below the horizon and sinking quickly, in a minute or so it will be gone. It is beautiful, but soon it will be dark.

But now, I don't mind the darkness, because now I am sure and I know that tomorrow and the day after and the day after that, the sun will come back and it will shine again and warm my heart and my poor old bones.

"Oh, it is beautiful," I hear myself say. It has been a long day, I should be tired after that drive from Geneva, but I am not. I sip my drink. That cold, sparkling white wine tastes great and it relaxes me. I should watch myself, wine gets quickly into my head, but now I feel good; I feel satisfied and I am glad to be here.

I am getting sentimental again; it must be the wine. Whenever I get together with Zvi, I cannot help think of the past. Could it be because he is the only one that is left to remind me of that past? That particular past, that I usually try to forget or make myself forget. I still think it is a miracle.

Again my thoughts are interrupted as we are called to the table. Dinner is ready. I enter the dining room, I look around and smile to myself. Pompeian-red walls, filled with paintings and bronze plates, two large stained-glass windows with strange and colorful figures are framed in white wood. A lighted niche with lots of Roman pieces, jars, figures, bottles and many small half-broken objects, arranged on lighted glass shelves. A large old wrought-iron chandelier with many dimmed lights illuminates the room. An elegantly set table with two lighted candles throw a soft light on the floral center piece and the white china. The wine glasses are half filled with red wine and throw a pink shadow on the tablecloth.

Zvi sits at the head of the table and I sit on his right. There are eight of us at the table. We are served a typical Italian dinner. My niece Frances brings in a large bowl of steaming hot pasta. "I hope you'll like it," says Zvi, "this is called spaghetti alla Amatriciana, a specialty of the house." He spoons out the portions and passes the plates around the table. It smells wonderful. Zvi raises his wine glass and turns to me: "Welcome to Rome, you have no idea how wonderful it is to have you all here. *LeHaim,* salute, to us."

I really enjoy the wine. As I eat this delicious pasta, I think to myself, isn't it funny, I always thought that '*lokshin mit yoech*' (chicken soup with noodles) was the specialty in our family. But that is life; you live, you learn and adopt to the changing times. Yes that's it, you have to grow and never stop learning. Take life as it comes, accept it, learn from it and it will always bring you surprises. Nothing is impossible in life—take my word for it.

I hear an animated conversation going on at the table, we have finished the "primo," our first course, now comes the main course, the vegetables, more wine, the salad, more wine and finally the dessert and more wine. I feel no pain.

"Meir," says Zvi, "it was a great idea to come for *Pesach* here and especially bringing your mother." Zvi comes over to me, gives me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. "You must know," Zvi turns to the others, "this fine lady and I have a lot in common. We have been together through, call it hell, call it World War II, call it another life, whatever. I know it may sound strange to you, but in a way we are like cats, with many lives. We have been kicked, dumped, condemned, shoved, pushed and thrown around so many times, I forgot to count. But fortunately, somehow we managed to land on our feet again, without too many scratches, at least on the outside."

"Aunt Rose," Frances said, "I think you should write down all of

those stories, those experiences, things that happened to you and to our family. We know so little about them."

"Strange," said Meir, "my mother never talks about the past. It is almost as if she is afraid of something. I have tried many times to make her talk, to tell me about the war, but she always found some excuse or another to avoid the subject. She has locked those memories away."

I hear my son say that I have locked those memories away. He is right; I did lock those memories away from my children, from my grandchildren and the rest of the world I live in. It is easier that way.

"Look, Rouzia," says Zvi, "you are now the oldest member of our immediate family that is left."

"I think you should write a book," says Frances. "That way, we will finally know the story of our family."

"Frances is right, mother," echoes Meir, "it is a great idea. I know nothing about my grandparents, I know nothing what happened to you during the war. I have heard many stories of the Holocaust, I know that you have survived the war in Europe and were part of that tragedy. But how? What happened to you and the rest of our family?"

I look at Zvi, at my son Meir, my niece Frances. I look at all the ones at the table as tears come to my eyes. All at once I see everybody through a fog. I think they are right.

"It is about time," says Zvi, "that you write something about us and about all the experiences and the places we have been and lived during the war. There are only the two of us left now. Everybody else is gone. I remember you were very good at telling stories. Remember, it was you that taught me how to write."

Zvi was right. I used to be very good at telling and writing stories. He reminded me that I taught him how to read and write Polish, when he was only 6 years old, and I would also tell him stories about our family. As a matter of fact, a long time ago I promised myself to write about our war experiences. However, believe me, it is easier said than done. How could I explain to them that I was afraid that I was not good enough to express myself the way I would like or the way I should. How could I tell them that I did not remember, or was it that I did not want to remember. However, I promised them that I will give it a try. To encourage me and to refresh my memory, we decided that right after the *Seder* tomorrow we would sit every day for a couple of hours and talk about the past. I wanted Zvi to remind me of certain facts; I wanted us to remember things together with him. But now, I was tired from the trip and wanted to retire to my room.

That night I decided, they were right, it was time I wrote our story. I will start from the time we left my parents home in Lodz at the end of November 1939.

The next day after some sightseeing of this magnificent city, we came home to get ready for the *Seder.* I helped with the preparations together with my niece Frances and my daughter-in-law, Barbara. Zvi was right, they did prepare all the dishes conforming our *Pesach* tradition. The *Seder* platter, with bitter herbs, the burned bone and *khorises*, the hard boiled eggs, the salt water, the *gefilte-fisch* (stuffed-fish Jewish style), the *kneidlach* (matzo ball dumplings) and of course the chicken soup. Everything was done as befitting a traditional Jewish home.

Zvi, Meir and Shmulik, Frances' husband, wearing their fancy *yarmelkes,* did a great job of the first part of the *Hagadah* ceremony. We had even Jennifer, Frances' daughter recite the '*four kashes.*' It was fun and we made it rather fast to get to the actual meal.

'*Pesach*' is the feast of freedom. During the Seder we read the '*Hagadah*' that reminds us of the slavery in Egypt and the exodus led by Moses to freedom. After the meal, the reading of the '*Hagadah*' continues, describing the suffering of the Jewish people and finally a home in the promised land.

That night after the meal, Zvi and I decided to continue the *Seder* and to remember and narrate our own personal '*Hagadah*.'

2

Good-bye to My Hometown Lodz

War broke out September 1, 1939. A black cloud moved in over our heads and over our existence. On the third day of war the German armies marched in without any opposition into Lodz. The Volks Germans that lived in our city, welcomed them with flowers and shouts of *Heil Hitler* and *Sieg Heil.* We quietly looked out of the windows and something in all of us slowly died.

Every day they issued new orders. They even changed the name of our city; it became Litzmanstadt instead of Lodz. Jews had to step down from the sidewalk when a German soldier came along. The atmosphere became oppressive. My parents owned a bakery and so far we had felt no hardship. We were baking even more bread then before the war. The lines to buy our bread were very long. There was never enough for everybody. We would open the store at 6 A.M., but there were already lines in front of the store by 2 A.M.

We had many family members and friends that used to come every day to our house in order to get a loaf of bread, without having to stand in line.

My mother's whole family was forced to leave their comfortable homes in the little villages around Lodz and were moved to the city. All the Jews from Lodz and the surrounding towns and villages were concentrated into one neighborhood in Lodz called Baluty. Eventually this neighborhood became the center of the Lodz Ghetto. Sometime later that part of town was closed off with barbed wire and segregated from the rest of the city. My parents' bakery and their house have always been in that part of town. I was born and raised in what had become the Lodz Ghetto.

Most of my mother's family that had been thrown out of their surrounding villages came to our house. My husband and I had our apartment in the same courtyard that my parents lived in. My husband, Sam, was in the army. I gave up my apartment to the newly arrived family members and moved back with my parents. I remember we used to cook enormous pots

of food for the numerous family members that came to my parent's house. The pots were full of soup and stews that we distributed to our family.

I remember my aunt Sara, my mother's sister, came with her family from Danzig. She used to come to us every day and help with the cooking. She had seven children and six grandchildren. From all that family only one, her youngest son, Yukel, survived the Holocaust. He was 14 years old then and was able to escape with *Aliya Bet* (illegally) to Palestine. He and his wife Lisi live now in a Kibutz in Israel. The remaining of his family as well as many of the other members of our family, perished in the Holocaust. My mother's family was always very close, but now with the war, they became even closer.

The situation in our city continued to deteriorate every day. I used to accompany my father to get the rationed flour for baking the bread. The amount of flour given to us was always less and less every time we went, but the demand for the bread was always bigger and bigger. The lines outside our bakery were getting longer and longer.

Unfortunately, there was never enough bread to satisfy everybody. We gave only one loaf per person so that there could be more to go around. Those poor people were screaming for bread, but after a while there was none left. We knew that some of the bakers used to sell part of their bread on the black market. My parents, may they rest in piece, would never do that. They were far too honest. In fact, they gave away bread to our family and friends without ever being paid.

By mid-November all the Jews had to wear yellow arm bands and the Star of David. This further lowered our morale that was already very low. I was sewing the Star of David on my clothes and those of my parents. Each time I put the needle through the cloth, it was like a stab into my heart. There and then I decided that I would not stay there any longer. I had had enough. I tried to convince my parents to escape with me, but my parents had no intentions of going anywhere. They claimed that it was easier to die in their own beds.

One November day that I will not forget, the Germans hanged three Jews on the *Balucki Rynek,* only one street away from my parents' home. All the Jews were obliged to go there and witness the hanging. Even this did not change my parents' minds. I decided to leave with my older sister, Ghenia, and her 6 year old son, Zvi. My younger sister, Sally, was left behind to take care of our parents.

****Years ago I, the adult Zvi, heard many stories about this escape from Lodz and the Germans. One of the main reasons why my Aunt Rose*

wanted to leave Lodz was to join her husband, my Uncle Sam, in Bialystock, who was in the Polish army when the war broke out. I do not believe that he did any fighting, since Poland capitulated after four days of war, without much opposition. He immediately escaped east to the Russian occupied part of Poland. He could not return to Lodz, because his life was in danger. There was a Volks German neighbor of his that would have arrested him or even killed him if he had ever come back. Why, I never did find out. Poor aunt Rose, everybody felt sorry for her. She has been married less then three months when the war broke out, so it was only natural that she wanted to go and join her husband no matter where he was.

Supposedly, there was a big discussion in the family who should accompany her. It was clear that she would not and could not travel by herself. It had to be one of her sisters, my aunt Sally or my mother and me. My aunt Sally was not married yet and had a number of suitors. She still could not make up her mind who she wanted to marry. Finally, the family decided that my mother and I would accompany my aunt Rose to Bialystok.

*There was also another reason for us to go with her. My father had left Poland in February 1939 and went to Brazil. My mother and I were supposed to follow him as soon as he got himself settled and was ready to receive us. Our trip to Brazil was planned for the end of that year. Unfortunately, the war destroyed all of our lovely plans. There was no way we could get out of Poland officially, much less board a ship to Brazil. Somebody had suggested to my mother, that if we went to Russia now, we could easily reach Rumania from there. From Rumania, via the Black Sea, we could most probably get on a ship to Brazil. Of course, mother and I never made it to Rumania or to Brasil, our destiny had decided otherwise.****

* * *

I left Lodz with my sister, Ghenia, and her six-year-old son on a dark and cold November evening, after that infamous hanging in the Balucki market place. That was the breaking point that made me decide to leave Lodz. I had had enough of the German occupation.

My husband at the time was in Bialystock. He was in the Polish army when the Germans conquered Poland. After Poland capitulated, my husband together with many other disbanded soldiers escaped to the Soviet occupied territories. I received a note from him that he was alive and

wanted me to join him there. Now, we had to find a way to get away from the German occupation.

My parents did not want to escape. They hoped that the war would not last very long and decided to stay in their own home. After all, England and France have promised to protect us! So we left our parents with our youngest sister, Sally.

It was November 28 when we left Lodz from the Warsaw train station. We took off our yellow arm bands and the Star of David and started out into the world, without really knowing exactly where we were going. We knew we had to go to the east. It did not matter how, as long as it was away from the Germans and in the direction of Bialystock. We took the train to Warsaw and arrived there in the middle of the night.

Everything was dark, cold and sad. We hired a "*droszka,*" a horse driven coach, and asked the driver to take us to a place where there were Jews. The driver took us to a house at Sienna Street, 22, where he knew the porter. He woke the porter and asked him to take us to one of the Jewish families that lived in the building. I knocked at the door. A frightened voice answered, absolutely petrified to be awakened so late at night. I explained, begging in Yiddish, that we were two ladies with a small child and we needed a place to stay overnight. We were afraid and as Jews no hotel would take us. These lovely people let us stay in their house overnight.

The next day we continued our voyage east. We took several trains. On our way we met other Jews in exactly the same situation as we were. Everybody was running to the Soviet-held territories and away from the Germans. We heard many stories and ways of how to get there. Every story had a different, better and a safer way to get there.

Finally we followed a group of people who supposedly knew of a small village on the river Bug, where, for a fee, we could be smuggled over the border; illegally of course. We were given the name and directions to reach this particular village and this famous smuggler, who for a fee would take us into Russia. Naturally, we followed the directions to this village.

We found this Polish smuggler who received us very kindly and promised to take us over the border the next day. We agreed on a price and he let us spend the night on the floor in his hut. My sister and Zvi fell quickly asleep. We were dead tired after the long wanderings of the past couple of days.

I could not fall asleep; some deep and disturbing thoughts kept me awake. It was a dark and dreary night. It was snowing and a howling wind could be heard outside. Lying on the floor on freshly spread straw, my

thoughts were wondering into many directions. All of a sudden I heard loud voices spoken in Polish: "You are a crook, a thief. You took us directly into the hands of the German patrol. We lost everything. We barely escaped with our lives. Give us back our money."

The Polish farmer did not give them back the money. I heard screaming and yelling and all of a sudden, it was quiet. I was afraid. What shall we do? Scary thoughts passed my mind. I was terrified to make noises, even to breathe. I did not wake my sister.

In the morning the Polish farmer woke us up—all smiles. He told us to prepare the money, since that night he would smuggle us over the border into Russia. All smiles, I agreed. I asked him where I could buy some food for the journey. He told me to go into the village. In the village I was petrified. I was afraid to be discovered as a Jewess. I was trying to think, but was unable to concentrate and could not think realistically. Nothing seemed real.

All of a sudden I saw a young man. For some unknown reason, don't ask me why, he seemed trustworthy. I approached him and begged him: "Please help me. I am a Jewess and I have to get away from this place, anywhere."

He looked at me with interest and asked, "Where do you want to go?"

I answered, "To Warsaw."

I was confused, I did not know if I should tell him the truth or not; should I tell him that my husband is in Bialystock and that I would rather go to Bialystock. I finally told him the truth. He told me, very kindly, that there is a train leaving from this village directly to Malkini, which is the border town with Russia. It was not far, only a short ride on the train. The only problem was to avoid the German patrols. He offered to buy the train tickets for me.

He took me to the train station and bought tickets for the three of us and also one for himself. I offered him some money for his kindness and asked him: "Do you have to go to Malkini too?"

He told me that he will only accompany us until Malkini and show us a way to avoid the German border patrols. He took me to a small store in the village, where I bought some food for the trip. He walked back with me to the Polish farmer and told him that we have changed our minds, that I do not feel well and have decided to go back home. I gave the smuggler 100 zloty (which was a considerable amount of money at that time), thanked him for his kind hospitality and we left. Needless to say, the smuggler was not very happy.

The young man, whose name I do not remember, came with us by train to Malkini. There he made us get off the train on the opposite side, not where everybody else was getting off. It was a tiny station. We got off in the middle of nowhere. We followed our guide. We crossed some railway tracks and he proceeded to take us to a wooded area. He stopped at the forest and indicated a small trail into the woods. He told us: "Just follow that trail, it will get you directly to no man's land."

According to him this was the only safe way to avoid the German border patrol. I offered him some money, but he shook his head and would not take it.

"Keep it," he said, "you will need it later."

He was doing it just out of kindness from one human being to another. He wished us all the best and hoped that we would reach Bialystock safely.

We started out in the direction he told us to go. The three of us were the only ones that were going that way. We saw from afar, many other people walking with rucksacks and bags; they looked to be in the same situation as we were, escaping from the Germans. However, they were going in a somewhat different direction. I thought to myself, that there must be something wrong. Maybe we should go with all the other people, and so we did—directly into the hands of the German patrol.

We were stopped by the patrol. We were petrified. I think our blood had coagulated just at that moment. They asked us our passports. Fortunately I spoke German quite well and spoke to one of the soldiers. I invented a story about my husband being wounded in a hospital in Bialystock and I was going there in order to bring him home. He must have had pity on us, seeing two women with a child. For some lucky reason, he let us go. He even showed us the direction where to go. We continued walking with our rucksacks on our backs and packages in our hands. Shortly thereafter, we reached no man's land.

We were saved. At least that was what we thought. This 'no man's land' was the territory between the German and the Soviet occupied part of Poland. Unfortunately, a couple of weeks earlier, the Soviets closed the border and were not letting anybody in. The paved road was guarded by Russian soldiers. Ditches, barbed wire and guard posts ran all along the border. The surrounding fields as far as the eye could see, were filled with thousands upon thousands of people. All those people were waiting to enter the Soviet Union.

The day was windy and cold, there was also some snow on the ground. Everybody was sitting on their parcels or bags under the naked

sky, freezing and waiting. All those people were Jews, just like us escaping from the Germans. We were told that it is over two weeks since the Russians had closed the border. They were waiting for orders from Moscow to open the border. When that would be, no one knew.

We met a number of people from Lodz who left two weeks before us. They were still there waiting and freezing. We also met two of our cousins there, Khaim and Leon. The situation looked hopeless. There was practically no place to put our things on the ground, everywhere we looked, there were people. Our cousins made some room for us to put down our bags. I asked some of the people around us how long they were waiting; some were there for two weeks, some two days. I was told that a number of people had died, including some small children.

People looked desperate. At one point we heard strange noises. Children were crying, people were screaming. We saw feathers flying all over the place. Someone had torn a pillow case with a red lining and made it into a Red Flag. People gathered around that flag and were singing the International for the whole world to hear. All around us was noise, singing, crying and despair. I looked around and asked myself: "My God where are you?" I asked that same question so many times in the years to come, but I never got an answer. I am sure that I was not the only one that asked that question. I wonder if anyone ever did get an answer.

As I am telling this story, tears run down my cheeks. My son Meir tells me stop now, he says that I look tired. He is right. It is enough for one day. Tomorrow is another day. We will continue our remembering tomorrow.

I said goodnight to everybody and went to my room. In bed, I turn and twist, but sleep does not come. As I was telling these stories, I started living them all over again. There are so many things that come to my mind, memories, thoughts, feelings that I did not and could not tell them. There were things that I had forced myself to forget and so many things that I did not want to remember. It hurt too much to remember. There was so much to tell, but I have not enough words and I cannot always express myself or describe my real feelings. All the unhappiness, humiliation, torture and death that was brought about by this war.

3

We Become Bezhenikis (The Runaways)

The first *Pesach* day in Rome was a glorious sunny day. We got up and immediately went to a lavish breakfast table. All the delicious Passover specialty dishes were there; the matzebran, onion omelet, and bubele.

Today's plan was sightseeing. We went with two cars, one driven by Shmulik, and the other by my nephew Zvi. They showed us the city. There is no question about it, it is a magnificent city. What surprised me most were the flowers. Everywhere we looked there were magnificent flowers, many trees were in bloom and we were only in April. Coming from Montreal, it came to me as a surprise. The magnificent Spanish Steps were filled with different colored azaleas in enormous flower pots, that looked like a multicolored carpet. I just stood there and gaped.

Tired of roaming around, we sat down in a side-walk cafe and I had my cappuccino, which I like very much. Around lunch time we found ourselves in the Roman Ghetto. There are a number of Roman kosher restaurants. We had lunch at Gigetto's. It is a Yiddish style Roman restaurant, but none of the dishes were what we think of as being typically Yiddish or the type we are used to. The food was excellent, we ate things I have never tasted before, it was all new to me. I never knew that an artichoke Judean style existed; it was deep fried and came out looking like a flower, a beautiful golden rose. Of course I forgot that there were Jews in Rome long before Christ.

After lunch we did some more sightseeing, until we got tired and went home. I rested a little and then got ready for the second *Seder.*

The second *Seder* night, the atmosphere was much more relaxed and we had a lot of fun. This time, I personally made the '*kneidlach.*' I did not want to embarrass Frances and Barbara but their '*kneidlach*' the day before were a little too hard. Everybody was complimenting me on the wonderful '*kneidlach.*'

After the meal I continued my story—my own *Hagadah.* Meir and the others wanted to know more of our past. I smiled and thought to myself;

you young people want to know everything right away. Today, everything has to be fast and easy.

"All right," I said. " I will try and make my story as short as possible. Where did we stop yesterday? Oh yes, now I remember, we reached the 'no man's land' at Malkini."

Malkini was a nightmare. We risked our lives to run away from a hot frying pan and fell directly onto a hot grill. I looked around and told my sister that I had no intentions to remain here and to die here. There was not even a little water to be had. There was not even a place to sit down. We slowly got closer and closer to the border. The road was still blocked by Russian soldiers with guns. We found a little space to put down our bags. My sister Ghenia opened one of the bags to get us something to eat.

Our cousins Khaim and Leon asked little Zvi if he wanted to see a real Russian soldier; which of course he did. They took him by the hand and went as close as possible to the border barrier. All of a sudden the two of them, each grabbed one of Zvi's hands and started to run across the border. There were shouts and shots in the air and the three of them just kept on running. The Russian soldiers were shooting in the air and shouting: "Davai nazat, davai nazat"—(get back, get back).

But the three of them were running and paid no attention to the soldiers. With all that commotion I looked up to see what was happening. I looked at my sister as she grabbed her rucksack and that of little Zvi and she said to me: "Come on let's go."

I grabbed my packages and started to run through the border right after my sister. Both of us are screaming and crying: "My child, my child" and running as if the soldiers were not there. There was chaos. The Russian soldiers were firing their rifles in the air and shouting: "Nazad, nazad."

My sister and I ran right after little Zvi and my cousins. It was not easy with that heavy rucksack on my back. I didn't even think about the Russian soldiers behind us. They could have easily shot us all right there, but they didn't; they didn't even bother to follow us very far. I suppose it was more important for them to watch the border and not let the others do what we did.

I do not know how long we ran, it seemed like forever. At last, we caught up with my cousins and all of us collapsed on the ground laughing hysterically, happy and out of breath. We made it. We still did not realize how all this happened and how dangerous it was. But it worked—we were in the Soviet Union.

* * *

****It took me 50 years to discover who were the two men that had grabbed my hand and ran with me through the border into the Soviet Union. I remember perfectly well that episode. I can see it now as I am writing this story. I see myself running, being picked up in the air by these two men, almost flying. But I never knew whose hands they were.*

On one of my visits to Jerusalem, I was having lunch at my cousin Masha's house and there was also her brother Khaim. I do not remember how it all started that we were talking about Russia, at one point Khaim looks at me and says: "Do you remember how we ran through the border into Russia? You were only a small child," and he smiled.

*I could not believe my ears. Here I was 50 years later, I finally found out that those hands belonged to Khaim and his brother Leon. I was really happy to know that. I had often wondered who those two men were.****

* * *

Exhausted, we sat on the edge of the road and took out something to eat. We still had all the food we bought this morning before leaving Malkini. We continue walking until it started to get dark. Further on, a little off the road, we saw a farmhouse. Again we were lucky; we were offered hospitality by an old Polish farmer and his son. They gave us a room for the night and some hot food for which we paid.

The next day, as we looked out the window at the main road, we saw a continuous flow of people. Thousands upon thousands of people with hopeful and smiling faces were advancing into the Soviet Union. It was a perfect exodus. There were young and old. There were people with rucksacks, suitcases, little wagons filled with bags, women with baby carriages, they were all escaping the Germans hoping to find freedom and safety in the Soviet Union. Orders finally came from Moscow to open the borders and let the people in. I do not know exactly how many, but some mentioned that over a million-and-a-half people migrated into the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1940. There was a saying about escaping the Nazis to reach the Garden of Eden—the haven of the working class.

Early next day the farmer and his son helped us to get to the train station. All trains going in the direction of Russia were over packed with people running away, people like us. It was almost impossible to get on a train,

but thanks to our two Polish farmers; we forced our way into one of the carriages.

The actual train ride to Bialystock was not very long. The only difficulty was to get on that train. There were people everywhere; squeezed together like sardines in a can. Although it was freezing cold, people were riding on the roofs of that train. Everybody pushed and wanted to get on, as if it were the last train to salvation. Finally the train was moving and a couple of hours later we arrived in Bialystock, but to us it felt like we were riding forever.

My husband Sam was waiting for us at the train station. He had expected us for the past two days, since he heard the news that the Russians had opened the border. He went to the station to meet every train that came from the direction of Poland. I cried when I saw him. In the past couple of months, I had, many times, the feeling that I might never see him again. But there he was. There was joy and happiness in our reunion.

My husband was living in a small rooming house. The room he occupied was tiny, but the rooming house itself was cozy. It had a charming living room and a large and pleasant dinning room. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible.

At dinner time, we were surprised to see all that food. We have not seen so much food since the war broke out. Here, there was no war.

It took me less then a day to realize that Bialystock was not the answer to our prayers, as they say. I asked my husband, what and where next. We knew one thing for sure, that we could not stay in Bialystock. We had to go someplace else to find work and a place to live.

Bialystock became unlivable. It was one of the major centers of the incoming runaways from the German occupation. Hundreds of thousands of people were flocking into the city. Everywhere one looked there were people sleeping on the sidewalks and in the parks, not being able to find a roof over their heads. This was December and there was snow and it was cold. And most of these people were hungry and without money.

Even the local people, that were originally very nice to the displaced Jews from Poland, started to complain. The runaways like us were called '*Bezhenikis*' and became known as the boogie-man. If a local child would not eat, or misbehaved, they would threaten him, that a '*bezhenik*' would come and get him. It was obvious that we were not very welcomed there. We became "persona non grata." What do we do and where do we go next?

My husband was telling me that we had the possibility to obtain work and a house if we volunteered to go to the coal mines in Ural Donbas. The

idea alone made me cringe. I had no intentions of going to any coal mine and especially one deep into Russia.

The city was also full of Russian soldiers. Bialystock, being the closest city to the border, had a major military base and housed all the military personnel that were working at the border. The city became a nightmare, no one knew where to go or what to do. Many families with children, out of desperation, did volunteer to go to Donbas and work in the coal mines.

One day as we were having lunch in our boarding house, we found a group of Russian military men sitting at a table across from us. The Russians are very sentimental when it comes to children. They asked the owner who we were. Our landlady explained that we were Jewish *bezhenikis* from Poland. One of the military men got up and came to our table. He asked us if we spoke Yiddish. Naturally we were very happy to hear Yiddish coming from a Russian officer. He introduced himself as Dr. Kaufman and explained that he was a doctor in the Russian army stationed in Pinsk, a small city in Bialorussia not far from Bialystock. He was staying in a hotel nearby, but when in town he came here to eat, since the Yiddish home cooking was more to his liking. He was extremely friendly and offered to help us.

The next day he invited the four of us, my sister, Zvi, my husband and myself to a fancy restaurant in the city. In return he asked us if we could buy for him a *Thalis* and *Tfilin* for his father in Moscow. I was surprised to hear of such a request. The next day we bought for him, on the local black market, a very nice Thalis, Tfilin and a Sidur.

A few days later Dr. Kaufman came back and suggested we come with him to Pinsk. He explained that in Pinsk, he was confiscating houses that belonged to rich and undesirable Polish kulaks that were being relocated and sent to Siberia. It would be his pleasure to let us have one of those houses. Furthermore, there was also a possibility of getting work. We looked at each other, four people living in a tiny room and spending all that money. How long can we still go on living like that without working? It was an offer we could not refuse. We had nothing to lose. We packed the few belongings that we had and off we went with him to Pinsk.

4

Pinsk

We went by train, first class. Red velvet upholstered seats made us feel important; we were not accustomed to such luxury anymore. Dr. Kaufman told us some things about himself. His life must have been rather hard. His mother died when he was little and he grew up in an orphanage. He was lucky to receive a good education, he was a captain in the Red Army and a member of the party. He was privileged. He had a small apartment in Moscow where he lived with his wife and his old father.

We arrived in Pinsk late at night. We took two *droszkys* and started looking for a hotel. We drove from one hotel to another but there were no rooms. Finally we reached a small hotel, all white, built in brick and wood, near the river. The doctor knocked, but the answer was—no room. At that point the officer got really angry and told the hotel owner, in Russian, that he will break down the door unless he opens it immediately.

The lady owner was frightened and opened the door. She said that she was sorry, but there were no rooms available. However, if we wanted to sleep on the floor and be out of the cold, we could use her parlor. And so we did. We made ourselves comfortable on the floor of that parlor. By now we were accustomed to sleeping on floors and thought nothing of it. As a matter of fact we considered ourselves very fortunate to be inside.

It was December; outside it was cold and snowing. The streets were covered with snow, it was 15°C below zero. Inside that small hotel was warm and even the floor felt comfortable. Dr. Kaufman said goodnight and promised to come and see us the next day.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by a strong and insistent banging on the front door. The owner opened the door and apologized for the noise. A young man came in wearing a beautiful fur coat and without saying a word, he spread some newspapers on the dining room table, placed some more papers under his head, covered himself with his magnificent fur coat and went to sleep. In the morning we found out that this

young man was the son of a very wealthy family from Lodz, whom we knew.

That first morning I got up early. I dressed rather smartly and went to the kitchen to see the owner. It was Friday and the landlady was already preparing for the Sabbath. The smell of cooked fish, meat and fresh baked bread and *khalle* was everywhere. I gave her 100 zlotys and a pair of silk stockings. She smiled and invited all of us to join her family for the Sabbath meal.

We were fortunate; soon a couple of rooms became vacant in this charming, small hotel. There was a room for my sister and Zvi, for our cousins and a small room for my husband and me. It was a small attic room, but we were happy there. We had a roof over our heads and both my sister and my husband were lucky enough to get jobs right away. Our doctor friend would visit us practically every day and always bring with him something special for little Zvi.

All our meals were cooked by our landlady, so I had a lot of time to spend alone with Zvi. It was a very cold winter that year and we avoided leaving the house as much as possible. The window in my attic room looked out onto the Pina river. The river was completely frozen and covered with virgin white snow. All around us everything was white. Sometimes I saw children skate and slide on the frozen river. With time we became very friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Levine, our landlords. Life seemed to drift along slowly. One day, Dr. Kaufman came riding on a wagon drawn by a horse and announced that he finally found a villa for us.

* * *

****The owners of the little hotel that we were staying were not very happy to see my mother and our family go. Maybe because they knew that sooner or later their house and hotel will also be confiscated. It was happening to all the owners of property in the Soviet Union. Before the war, Pinsk belonged to Poland. Now it was part of the Soviet Union. It was part of the territory that has been taken over by the Russians in September 1939; while the Germans occupied all the remaining territories of Poland. The same laws that existed in the Soviet Union started to be applied in these new conquered territories. The natives of that part of the country became automatically Soviet Citizens and we on the other hand were considered foreigners.****

* * *

We placed all of our belongings on the wagon and off we drove to Klinowa Street, 12. Finally we had a place of our own. It was a nice little villa, with a big garden, a little away from the center of town. We considered our living in Pinsk as something provisional. We were hoping that soon the war would be over and we could go back home, to our families—to Lodz. However, having this place to ourselves gave us the impression of more stability and a sense of belonging, at least on the outside.

Our benefactor, Dr. Kaufman, continued to visit us quite often. In time, our little house became rather full. We had plenty of space there and would take in any homeless people that we knew. A couple of friends of my husband's that were wandering around the streets of Pinsk and had no place to go; then some other young men from Lodz that were homeless—we took them all in. Before the winter was over, there were 11 of us in that house. We all seemed to get along as one big family.

My sister and I were the only two women. All the rest of them were young men. More then once the neighbors asked me, which one was my husband! In a way our neighbors looked down at us—after all we were only '*bezhenikis,*' as if that explained everything.

Most of the time I was busy cooking for all those people, since all of them worked, including my sister. I was the only one that stayed home with Zvi. The days went by very slowly, but before we knew, Spring was at the door and everything changed.

Strange rumors circulated in the city. All the *bezenikis* or newcomers from Poland had to register with the local police. They had to choose: to return to Poland or to accept Soviet citizenship. Most of the people we knew registered to go back to Poland, to their families and their homes. Life in Pinsk was all right as long as the Germans occupied Poland, but the minute the war was over, we all wanted to go home. There was a typical saying among the newcomers: "We have no desire to become Russians and land up with the white bears in Siberia." Little did we know then.

All of our group were young and strong and none of us accepted Soviet citizenship. We were afraid to be transferred or obliged to relocated somewhere deep into Russia.

The news from Poland was not good. We had no direct news from our families. All we heard were some terrible hearsay reports, that sounded too atrocious to be credible. We heard that all the Jews were being gathered into the bigger cities and placed into closed ghettos. The reports were very

confusing and terribly disturbing. Some claimed disasters—real hell on earth. We did not know and could not believe all those rumors and those catastrophic reports that were reaching us from Poland.

When Spring came, all of our young men left us. Some decided to go back to Poland, others moved on to other places. There remained only the four of us. My husband, my sister with little Zvi and me. The villa became too big for just the four of us. It was no more fun, the one big family idea was gone. We decided to leave that big house and move, too. My husband and I moved to a little rooming house in the center of town. It was far more convenient since our new lodgings were close to where my husband was working.

My sister and little Zvi went to live with a nice Jewish family in a big house on the outskirts of town. They were very close friends with my sister and they took care of little Zvi, while she was working.

The desire to go back home to my parents and the family was very strong. At the same time, just the idea to go back, was terribly frightening. Especially after the reports that were reaching us from there. Furthermore, by that time I was pregnant. We did not know what to do. At least here in Pinsk we lived fairly well and could easily wait for the end of the war.

There were rumors of everything; no matter how or what we decided or chose, it seemed to be the wrong thing. All those terrible rumors were very frightening and confusing.

Spring was here, the days became warm, the sun brought light and hope into our lives. Everything was in bloom. On the local market we could get all kinds of fresh vegetables and fruit. I was expecting and that made me very happy. I wanted and needed that child very much. I had already started to count the weeks before the baby would come. There was still a lot of uncertainty in the air— always those terrible rumors.

Every time we met some of our newcomer friends, I had the impression that everybody was waiting for something to happen. I also felt that something had to happen, to end this provisional and insecure condition that we were living in. Deep in our hearts we were hoping that soon the war would be over and we could go home. Unfortunately, this was not meant to be.

It was the beginning of summer, the weather was warm and everything seemed to be so peaceful. I gained quite a bit of weight, the pregnancy was going well and I was feeling great.

Until, one warm starry night we were awakened by a strong pounding on the door. It was about 4 A.M. All that uncertainty that we were so afraid

of, was actually happening. At the door stood Russian soldiers and 'NKVD' (KGB) officials. They had our names. They asked if we had any weapons to surrender. They gave us a few minutes to gather our belongings, but insisted that we take only things that we could carry ourselves. Downstairs, an old army truck was waiting for us.

They waited at the door. Though half asleep we packed as fast as we could, we stuffed everything that would fit, into our rucksacks. Before we realized what was happening, we were pushed onto the truck. Supposedly we were being resettled—not arrested. At least this was the reason given to us by the guards. On the truck we met other Jews, just like us—*bezhenikis.*

Psychologically, having been awakened in the middle of the night, one's defenses are rather low and slow. Everybody on that truck was terribly confused and scared. What will happen now, where are they taking us? What will they do to us? There were no answers. The truck took us to the train station in Pinsk.

It was very simple. All the '*bezhenikis,*' or newcomers like us, that did not accept Russian citizenship automatically became undesirables and enemies of the Soviet Union. As such, all of us, the undesirables and enemies, were very quietly moved out of the way and exiled to Siberia—to hard labor camps.

5

Siberia Here We Come

The train station was the gathering point of all the undesirables, the '*bezhenikis,*' the newcomers, some kulaks, some thieves and who knows who else. They were all brought by truck from the city and its surroundings. They were mostly Jews, just like us. We sat there for hours, waiting. Every so often a new group of people was brought over to join the already overfilled platform. We were guarded by armed police and military men. We had to sit in one place and could not move.

Naturally, the same thing happened to my sister Ghenia and her son Zvi. They were also arrested and brought to the station. I looked all over and tried to find them. We were not allowed to move around. The minute someone got up or tried to move, there was immediately a soldier with a gun pointing and shouting: "Siadis—sit down." I knew that my sister and Zvi were somewhere on this platform, but I could not see them or call them.

* * *

****I remember the night we were arrested. Mother and I lived in a charming, big house belonging to a Jewish family on the outskirts of Pinsk. I remember there was a big garden in the back, full of fruit trees. The family we lived with were dear friends of my mother's and we were treated as part of their family. I had my own room after the old grandfather died, leaving me a big four-poster bed, all to myself. I was accustomed to sleeping in the bed with my mother for the last year and at first I was afraid to sleep alone in that room, in this large bed, where only recently the old grandfather died. I remember that I liked that house very much, I felt secure and very much at home. The owner, an older woman, I called grandmother, her son, in his early thirties, I called uncle, and her widowed daughter, I called aunt. The widow had a daughter that was a couple of*

years older than I was, who became like an older sister and a play companion to me.

The banging on the front door in the early hours of the morning woke up the whole house. The NKVD armed police officer came only to get my mother and me. He stood at the door, while another one watched outside, to make sure we did not escape. The grandmother came in to help me dress and pack the few of my belongings into a small rucksack. I was still half asleep and followed instructions like a zombie. My mother was busy packing, while the other two grown ups were packing food and bedding for us to take along.

Outside the gate, a big farmer's wagon pulled by two horses was waiting for us. Everybody in the house was crying as my mother and I were taken by the police officer and marched to that wagon. There was another family already sitting on the wagon. I close my eyes and I can see the picture now. It was dawn and there were dark scattered clouds covering the sky. There was just enough light coming through the clouds to see our new found family, the four people with tears in their eyes, standing at the gate as the wagon was pulling away. No one said a word, as if talking was forbidden. In fact, to talk or to comment in those days could have been very dangerous. That was the last time we saw them. I have no idea what happened to them; most probably they perished as did most of the Jews in that area after Hitler's invasion.

We were taken to the train station together with all the other Jews that did not accept Russian citizenship. We were pushed onto that train platform, where thousands of people just like us were squeezed together; sitting on their packages, waiting. I wonder if these people were afraid or they were already beyond being frightened. Resigned?

*We also wondered what happened to my aunt Rose and uncle Sam. We could not see them, but in a way we knew that they were somewhere here on that platform. I know my mother was worried, because aunt Rose was pregnant. Aunt Rose tended to be also very emotional and nervous. Under these circumstances she was probably frantic. How strange, there were thousands of people on that train platform, but it was quiet. Only from time to time one could hear a child cry, but it would be quickly silenced, as if it knew that crying was forbidden.****

* * *

Finally, after hours of waiting, a smoking locomotive pulling cattle

cars arrived on our track. We were stuffed inside, approximately 40 or more people per car. Inside the freight car was empty; except of a wooden platform built on both sides of the sliding doors to serve as an upper level. That upper level practically doubled the space inside the car and enabled it to accommodate more people. On the upper level, there was a small window on each of the four sides of the car. This small window had iron bars and no glass. I was lucky to get a place near the window.

I spread my things so both my husband and I could lie down. There was not enough head room to stand up, we could only sit and had to bend when going up or down. Only in the center of that freight car, was there enough room to stand erect.

I was pregnant, nervous, uncomfortable and did not feel too well. It was a hot day and there was little air with all those people inside that car. It got even worse when they slammed the doors shut and locked them. I could hardly breathe.

No one complained, no one resisted; strangely enough there was a completely resigned atmosphere. Whatever was done to us, whatever we were told to do—we accepted it. We were stuffed in those cattle cars without realizing what would happen next. Why and where were they taking us? I think we were all too terrified to ask, or maybe being afraid to hear the answer.

I was glad that I had packed some food and a bottle of water. It sure came in handy. When I am nervous I start eating. The people around us kept to themselves. Everyone cuddled up with his family or loved ones. We were all very tired, some tried to sleep. I was also worried about my sister and little Zvi, but my husband assured me: "Don't worry about your sister, she knows how to take care of herself and little Zvi."

I knew he was right, but I still wished they were here with us. I was nervous and they would be a great comfort to me.

Finally, we heard a long whistle and the train lurched forward. We were finally moving. I looked out the little barred window and saw now an empty platform. The only ones there were a few of the armed soldiers, now relaxed, looking as our train was slowly leaving the station.

We traveled for a while, then stopped; some more freight cars were added to our train. We always knew when new cars were hooked up and added to our transport, because our train would lurch forward, then stop, then forward again and stop. Eventually we would start moving again. We also knew when they changed the locomotive, which they did quite often; because the train would lurch only backwards.

As we were heading farther north-east, we were picking up more and more people that were condemned to share our destiny. Sometimes our train would stand still for many hours in the middle of nowhere. Then a train would pass from the opposite direction and we would start moving again. There was only one railway track. Sometimes we would wait a whole day or a whole night before we could move again. There was no rush.

When I saw the film *Doctor Zhivago,* I identified myself in that train; when he was escaping with his family from Moscow. It was just like it, except we could not open the door and could not get out. Our doors were locked; we were escorted by armed guards. We were prisoners.

There were two buckets in the car, one with drinking water and the other for our bodily needs. At least once, but sometimes twice a day, the doors would slide open and the guards would give us some food, hot boiling water for tea and a bucket of fresh drinking water. The food they brought us, consisted mainly in some canned goods and bread, but it was food and we were not starving.

We lost count of the days. We even became accustomed to the rhythm of the train. We did not know where we were being taken. The few names of stations we passed, did not mean anything to us. We never stopped on any major station. We were always routed to some side tracks, where we could see nothing and no one could see us. The soldiers that were bringing us the food and water, never answered our questions. They just smiled and would not say a word.

It is very hard for me to describe the conditions we were in, both mentally and physically. I have difficulty in expressing myself and to convey the feelings and the thoughts that pass through one's mind during such a trip. We had nothing to do but to sit there, mostly in semi-darkness, to think, to imagine and to speculate—where are they taking us—what will they do to us?

After a while, it seemed as if this voyage would never end. There was no rush. If I recall correctly we must have been locked up in those cattle cars for almost a month, before we reached Kotlas.

Kotlas was the end of the line and the end of the railway tracks. This was as far north as the railway was built. This was Siberia. From here on, anywhere north, east or west, was only by foot or boat, along the river 'Severnaia Dvina.'

Our transport train was brought to a stop at a dead end of the railway tracks, alongside of an enormously wide river. The cattle cars were finally

opened and we were ordered out with our belongings. Thousands of people spilled out on the lawn along the river bank. It was a sunny and warm day. It did not look like Siberia at all.

My sister had an accident upon arrival in Kotlas. When the train stopped, my sister put her head out the little window to see what was happening, exactly at the same time a Russian soldier was sliding open the door and hit her head. She was in terrible pain, lying half unconscious on the grass. Little Zvi was running all along the train calling for me and crying: "Rouzia, Rouzia where are you."

He eventually found us farther down that train and we were reunited again.

Kotlas was the gathering place for all the transport trains bringing the condemned prisoners to this part of Siberia. Our train was not the only one there. There were several other transport trains, all loaded with thousands of people like us. These people were gathered in the Ukraine, White-Russia and all along the road, but mostly from the Polish territories now occupied by the Soviet Union. They were practically all Jews that had escaped the Germans to find safety in Russia.

At that moment, all of us were sorry that we did not register to stay and accept Russian citizenship. If we did, we would not be here in Siberia now. Little did we know at the time, that this was really our salvation. The Jews that remained and accepted Russian citizenship, were all massacred by the Germans only a year or so later. After the Germans invaded Russia in 1941, practically none of the Jews survived in those territories.

* * *

****It was a magnificent warm and sunny day when we arrived in Kotlas. It did not look like Siberia at all. After the initial chaos of getting out from the train, it was a pleasure of stretching one's legs and finally to breathe fresh air instead of the stench in those closed cattle cars. But all this exultation and freedom was short–lived. We became conscious that we were after all prisoners. We were surrounded by armed guards that sat some distance away. They seemed relaxed, because they knew that no one would escape. There was nowhere to run, the closest village was hundreds of miles away. Everybody was sitting on their belongings under the open sky and waited for the next move. Everyone wondered where and what will come next. Hours and hours went by; it was supposed to be night, but it never got dark. The white nights of the North were something new to us. It*

was an astonishing sight to see all those thousands and thousands of people around us and yet—all was quiet. The people seemed afraid to talk, or even to think aloud; only from time to time the stillness was broken by the cry of a small child.

There was a resigned sort of look on most of the faces. A helpless look, as if to say—there is nothing we can do, we were condemned and have to resign ourselves to our new destiny. What will be, will be.

The only creatures that were noisy and busy were the mosquitoes. They were enormous. As the sun went down and the "aurora borealis" came up, the mosquitoes started feasting on our blood. I recall that my Uncle Sam was smoking cigarettes one after the other, although he normally never smoked. It was just to keep the mosquitoes away, but I do not think it helped very much.

The Russian soldiers, most of them very young, sat with rifles on their knees some distance away from us and watched. Some had their heads lowered, as if ashamed for being there. I am sure they felt sorry for us. There was a look of "Please forgive us" on their faces.

No one talked aloud and no one moved around, there was nothing to break this mood of utter despair. At the same time there was beauty all around us. The night was not a night. At midnight it seemed more like mid-day. We were spread out along the river bank under the open sky. Close to the river, we could hear the stream of the Severnaia Dvina running to the White Sea.

*The river was very wide, we could see the forest on the other side. The forest looked sinister, unexplored and forbidding. To enter that forest meant to be lost and never to return. There were also some beautiful white birch trees that looked somehow encouraging. I do not know why, but they seemed to transmit some hope. There were also the brilliant rays of the 'Aurora Borealis,' the northern light—that luminous phenomenon, that was stunning and brought a little light into our hearts. Not everything is lost—all cannot be bad. There must be hope, the world is so beautiful and life is far too dear to us to let it all end in a godforsaken prison camp in Siberia.****

* * *

Lying on the ground with my rucksack under my head, my thoughts took me home to my father and mother, my sister and my husband's family. I tried to see their faces, I wondered where they were and what became

of them. We were here in Siberia, I knew that, but they? That white night was never ending, finally it got a little darker and then before we knew, it was day, the sun was shining again.

In the morning we were ordered to board a '*parahod,*' a large river boat. They packed us together like sardines, both inside and outdoors of that boat. Even though it was windy and a little cold; it was better outside, at least it did not smell and we could breathe.

How long we were on that boat I do not remember, but it must have been at least a day and a night. Finally, we docked on a deserted river bank. As we were disembarking, several Russian officers divided this mob of thousands into smaller groups of about 300 people each. Each group was assigned to an armed soldier. The bags and women with small children were loaded onto small rowboats; everybody else was following on foot along a narrow trail along the river bank. We were heading north-east, up a stream of a much smaller river. It was one of the many little branches of the 'Severnaia Dvina.'

Being pregnant, I was very uncomfortable. The movement of the boat made me sea sick. I preferred walking and holding on to my husband's arm. We walked and walked for many days. At night we would rest, mostly in the open, near the river bank. Sometimes, we stopped in a tiny *posielok,* a sort of a post with several peasant huts. The local people were extremely kind to us. They offered us food, mostly consisting of bread and boiled potatoes. They felt sorry for us. They looked at us and cried.

They told us, that once you get here—you never leave. There was a favorite saying, that we heard over and over again: "The way you cannot see your ears, thus you will never see Warsaw again." They knew we were from Poland.

They themselves, or their parents, were originally condemned prisoners and sent to Siberia after the revolution or during the Stalinist purges of the twenties and thirties. They were still here and most probably will never leave.

We were taken to a small labor camp farther up the stream of that river. On a clearing, surrounded by a large unexplored wild forest and a smaller intersecting brook, lay our '*posielok*'—our labor camp. It consisted of six long wooden barracks built to house us prisoners, a large dining room and a small school house. On a little hill close by, stood the commanders little cottage; a small barrack that was the general store, a barrack housing some Russian overseers and a tiny hut without windows—was the camp prison.

All the barracks and the huts were built with big log trees. That was Nierczuga the name of our '*posielok,*' Archangielskaia Oblast, about 800 to a 1000 km from the city of Archangelsk, known as the region of the large and wild forests.

6

Nierczuga

We were assigned our places in the barracks. Each of the barracks contained 32 beds, 16 on each side, with a long table in the middle of the room. On both sides of the table were long benches to sit. Each bed was assigned to two people, a married couple or two singles. My husband and I were assigned a bed somewhere in the middle of the barrack, near a window and next to us on the left was my sister Ghenia with little Zvi in a bed.

Everybody had to work. The main work consisted in chopping down the large trees, clean them from all the branches and bring the clean logs to the river. During the summer months, the trees were thrown into the river. The stream carried the logs about 150 to 200 miles down the river, to a depot at the little town of 'Krasnovodsk.' There our little river joined the large river, the 'Severnaia Dvina.'

It is surprising how a human being can become accustomed to practically everything, if one has to, even the strangest and the most difficult things, soon become a daily routine.

There was a cafeteria type of a dining room that prepared hot meals 3 times a day. We had to pay for the meals. No money—no food. Their specialty, I remember, was 'Uha' a miserable fish soup. It consisted of hot water in which floated a few small fish heads and a few pieces of potato. It tasted vile, but it was hot, which was important and the cheapest thing on the menu, which was even more important. The general store on the hill was the only place on the 'posielok' our camp, where one could buy a little bit of everything. They carried some food and some warm clothing, shoes, boots, etc. But to buy one needed money. However, very soon our money ran out; no money—no food and no warm clothing.

Bread on the other hand was rationed only 300 gr. per person. Only a 'stakhanovietz' (a very able and good worker) would get a ration of 500 gr. Fortunately, both my husband and my sister were 'stakhanovtzy' (plural for stakhanovietz).

* * *

****While I am translating this story, I have some flashbacks on my own. The little pilot light was turned on again in that dusty part of my memory. I start seeing and remembering things. The first episode I remember, that I thought, I will never forget. It is the time I became a sort of hero. I was not quite 7 years old when it happened. It was during the first week we were in the camp. I remember waking early one morning and my mother was not in bed beside me. When I asked where my mother was, I was told that she was arrested during the night and put into jail. She was in that little square hut, without windows on top of the hill.*

For some unknown reason the camp commander, our 'natsalnik' had it with my mother. He decided that my mother was strong enough to do a man's job. He personally assigned the job to my mother. He insisted she work with a horse and pull the trees from the forest to the river. This was a very hard job and was given only to men.

My mother was petrified of a horse—never mind the hard work. Naturally, she refused to do such work. Most women that had children were given work inside the camp. Cleaning or taking care of the common areas like the schoolroom, or work in the restaurant, or the general store. The women that did work in the woods, had usually lighter type of jobs, such as gathering the chopped off branches and putting them away or cleaning up an area. The work with a horse and wagon, pulling logs, was strictly a man's job. The camp commander decided that my mother had to do it—otherwise prison.

I remember walking up the hill to the little windowless hut and cried. "Mammy, mammy, are you there."

My mother was there all right. She told me not to cry, that everything would be all right. I do not remember all the details; but I found myself at the head of a large group of women, all the ladies from our barrack and some more, had gathered on the hill and were marching to the camp commander's cottage. They demanded, that the commander release my mother. In front of the camp commander's cottage, one of the woman gave me a stone to throw into the commander's window, which I did. The camp commander came out and would have given me a good spanking, if it was not for the mob of women behind me, shouting to release my mother.

And so my mother had to get over being scared of a horse. She learned how to harness, feed and take care of her horse, on top of all that, she became a stakhanovietz. She was the only woman to do this job. I remember,

*many times especially in the summer, I would meet her outside of our posielok, as she was returning from work and walk with her to the stables. She would put me on the horse and let me ride it all the way home. Just goes to show you, if you have to, you can do anything and we did.****

* * *

Being pregnant I did not have to work. The summer was warm and sticky. I suffered more because I was pregnant. Zvi and I spent a lot of time together. During the day we used to join some women with children and went into the woods to collect blueberries and mushrooms. We would improvise a little stove by putting some stones around and cooked our measly meals outside.

It was beginning of September. In the middle of the night, that I started to have labor pains. We notified the camp commander. He ordered a local Russian to take me by a rowboat the 18 miles down the river to the first available ambulatory station. No one was allowed to accompany me, not my husband or my sister. I got into the rowboat. I saw my sister Ghenia walking in the shadow of the night along the river bank. She was following the rowboat.

I implored the Russian he should pick up my sister and take her with us. He was afraid. He had strict orders not to take anyone. I cried and I finally persuaded him to take my sister aboard. He begged us not to say anything to any one. If asked, we should say that she walked by herself. If the 'natschalnik' ever found out, he would be severely punished. He was also a condemned prisoner, but a long timer with certain privileges.

This was how my sister without authorization accompanied me to this sort of ambulatory. I barely made it through the door, when I gave birth to a baby girl. The Russian that brought us, returned to the 'posielok' to bring the good news.

I looked around me; this little room called ambulatory station or hospital, consisted of one large barrack room, a sort of poor man's dirty log cabin, made out of rough log trees, with moss growing between them. Thousands of different worms were crawling on the walls and floor. I thought to myself, how in God's name will I ever come out of here alive. There were no doctors, only a midwife and a male nurse. They both were very nice to me.

My joy was great to have my little baby girl. After 24 hours the male nurse told me that I was in trouble. The afterbirth had not come out. He

looked at me and his face was full of pity. Two big tears came to his eyes as he told me that his wife had died in childbirth exactly for the same reason.

It is very difficult for me to describe the situation and my mood at the time. Here I was in this dirty, isolated place and I was conscious of the fact that soon I will have to die. It is a very strange feeling; when terrible things happen to you and you think that you have reached the end of the road; there is a particular fear, an agony, a pain that one cannot describe. Later, when you try to tell or explain it to someone, the pain and the agony are gone and it is not the same. All that happened only a minute ago becomes unimportant and sometimes even meaningless. It becomes another simple story, one more common episode in your life. The reality of those moments is gone.

Today, I try to rationalize and think it is all in my mind. I tell myself, that the only important part of that story is that I am here; I am still alive and can talk about it. However, the truth deep inside of me is different. As I am telling this story, I feel as if I am back there, I am living these episodes all over again.

According to the male nurse I had very little time left to live. I wrote a letter to my husband saying good-bye. I told him that I was dying and he should take care of our little baby and bring her up with the help of my sister Ghenia.

The letter was delivered to the camp commander, who checked all of our incoming mail. I wrote the letter in Polish. The commander had the letter translated and knew the gravity of my situation. He called my husband, handed him the letter and gave him permission to go next day to visit me.

My poor husband was crying and wanted to leave immediately, that night. Fortunately, an elderly woman in our barrack, would not let him go alone by night through the forest. She persuaded him to wait until the morning. She told him, that there was an Almighty God that holds the key to all of our lives.

"Believe me," she said, "miracles do happen and help could come at any moment. Wait until the morning and let them take you by boat."

In the meantime my sister Ghenia made the rounds to all the government officials in that village and made such a fuss, that they finally ordered a doctor to come from the next little town. Believe me, when my sister Ghenia, may she rest in peace, decided to do something or got an idea in her head, a whole regiment would not stop her.

The days that followed the birth of my baby were terrible. It was now the fourth day, all they were telling me was to lie still. I saw my sister's

eyes were swollen from weeping and I knew that soon I will die. That night, it was almost dawning, I was awakened by a strong banging on the door. My sister that was sleeping on the floor next to my bed, got up and opened the door. A young doctor came in. He looked exhausted. He asked where was this very important patient that everybody has been bombarding him with calls of urgency.

He rode over 100 km on a horse through the forest all night to get here. The message he received was of utmost priority and emergency. He examined me and a few minutes later I was saved.

He used a very rudimentary procedure. With his knee he squeezed my stomach and all the afterbirth came out. He was surprised that after 4 days with all that stuff inside me, I was still alive and had no infections. He made sure that everything came out. I was saved.

That morning my husband arrived. The whole village heard about this miraculous cure done by this young doctor that came especially from the Krasnovodsk Hospital, just to see me. To have a doctor here in this village, was already a miracle in itself. All that, I have to thank my sister Ghenia, may she rest in peace.

The young doctor stayed all that day to make sure that everything was in order. Fortunately, there was no fever and no infections. My savior, the doctor, told us that he was of German decent. His parents were condemned to Siberia many years ago, when he was a small boy. Everybody in this area was a condemned prisoner or a family member of a prisoner.

When I recovered, all of our attention was directed to my little baby daughter. Until now I did not even know how my little baby looked. She was a beautiful baby, she had big blue eyes and long black hair. She was tiny and weak, but so sweet. I looked at her and it seemed like another miracle. When we came back to the 'posielok' we were given a small separate room in the barrack reserved only for families with small children.

This one large barrack was separated into small cubicles big enough for a bed, a small table and a crib. The walls were made of thin boards only 6 foot high. In the middle of the barrack, there was a Russian stove, that both heated the place and was used to cook; a luxury we did not have before.

Our little baby daughter was a good child. She was the first baby to be born on the 'posielok.' I even received a gift from the 'natschalnik,' four pieces of cotton material for the baby to be used as diapers. We named the baby Galina in Russian. Her Yiddish name was Basio-Gitel, we called her Gitele in Yiddish and Gucia in Polish. She was named after two grand-

mothers, mine and my husband's. The baby gave us a new life and a new hope. I was happy.

Unfortunately, the day when we came back with the baby to the camp, my sister Ghenia was arrested and put into that jail again. It was the second time that they put her into that windowless little hut on the hill. Zvi was sitting in front of the prison door and cried. He eventually went to the commander's hut and begged to be let into the jail, so he could be with his mother. He cried that he could not be alone and needed his mother. He was almost seven years old. The commander must have been impressed, because he released my sister. However, because she accompanied me to the hospital without permission, she was accused of treason and court-martialed.

She would have been sent to jail or to hard labor prison if it was not for her son Zvi. Having a child, her penalty was reduced to pay 50% of her salary to the State, for the next five years. Furthermore, the commander warned her, that for the smallest transgression in the future, she will be sent away to prison.

In the days that followed, things started to go wrong with the baby. She was tiny and skinny. I did not have enough milk for her and my poor little baby was not gaining any weight. There was no fresh milk available on the 'posielok.' She was a beautiful baby. Unfortunately she did not live very long. Only a mother can know what it means to lose her baby. This baby was our life, our hope.

Zvi loved the baby. He would come every day after school and play with her. He would talk to her and daydream. He was telling her that the war was over and that soon we would return home to grandma and grandpa. He was telling her, that he would hold her hand, take her to grandmother Fradel and say.

"Look 'babisi' (grandma), guess who this is? This is Gucia your granddaughter."

He would daydream with wishful thinking. He would tell her all kinds of stories, stories and feelings he could not tell us. We grown-ups had no time, we had no patience to listen or even to pay attention to him.

The baby was getting worse every day. She did not digest the little milk I had. We found a woman on the 'posielok' that was nursing her baby and paid her to feed our little Gitele too. Nothing helped, she was getting weaker all the time. There was no milk, no doctor and no medicine to be had. Over the next few weeks, I saw her burning out slowly, just like a can-

dle light. It is a terrible feeling for a mother not being able to do anything to save her baby, I felt helpless and useless.

One evening I went over to my sister's barrack to call her, because the baby was getting worse. When we got back to our barrack, we heard this terrible cry of agony coming from our room. We recognized this desperate wail of my husband. The baby had just died in his arms. I went crazy. I took the baby from my husband's arms and started crying and screaming

"She is alive, she is alive, she cannot die, I will not let her." I was in hysterics.

The commander gave my husband the order to make a little box. The child had to be buried the next morning. A friend of ours from the barrack we lived before, an elderly woman, came over and prepared the baby for burial. Next day my husband carrying the little box in his arms, went into the woods to bury our little baby. Only a few very old people followed him. The commander prohibited funerals, the people had to work. Not even my sister Ghenia was allowed to go.

Little Zvi was holding on to my husband's pants and walked with him to the forest, crying. My husband dug the hole and buried our little baby under a big white birch tree. On the bark of the tree he carved out her name and the date. They would not let me come along to the burial—I was too hysterical.

Thus ended the short life of our little Gitele. She lived less than three months. But our love for her has never left our hearts. Day after day for a long time I would go into the woods and look from far at this big white birch tree. For some reason, at first I was afraid to go near it. I just stood there like paralyzed; there was only emptiness in my heart—something was torn away from me forever.

After the death of Gitele, several people told me that the child had something extraordinary about her. She was too beautiful, she almost scared people. There was something about the child that gave people the impression that she would not live very long. I do not know why.

7

After the Funeral

After the funeral, the 'natschalnik,' our camp commander, transferred us back to a general barrack. There I shared a bed with my husband among other 31 couples. It was a different barrack from the one we lived in before the birth of my baby. Here, I was again among strangers. My husband had to go back to work right away.

The days that followed the death of my baby, I stayed in bed. I did not move. Nothing interested me. I was completely destroyed. On the third day the 'natschalnik' came to me and said:

"Raya Mayerovna you must go to work. If you do not work, there will be no bread for you."

I did not answer him. I just stared at him without saying a word. I closed myself to the outside world. I did not want to talk to anyone. I did not hear; I did not see; I was not there; I was not myself.

I was not given my usual 300 g bread ration. It was my family that shared their bread with me. However, the 'natschalnik' had no intentions to let me go without working. He persecuted me. Every day he would come to our barrack and give me the same lecture; he insisted I go to work.

I was in no condition to go to work, either physically or mentally. I was in a complete state of depression; I was a walking zombie. I walked around indifferent to everything, like in a dream. Nothing really mattered any longer. He continued to come every day and threaten me. At first was the story of no bread; then he threatened to put me in jail; then he would put my husband in jail. He accused me of eating my husband's bread.

He quoted the standard Russian saying.

"Kto nie rabotayet–nie kushayet. (Who does not work—does not eat)."

Every day was a new threat. Sometimes he would even call my husband in the middle of the night to his office and threaten him. He made my husband sign a paper, that in case something happened to him, I would be responsible for his death.

The ‘natschalnik’ became extremely nasty to me. Late one night, he barged in with two of his police officers and came straight to us. Yelling they got us out of bed and were searching and throwing around all of our belongings. They claimed that we had weapons and were planning a revolt. They scared all the 64 people in the barrack. The threats and the harassing became unbearable; I had no choice—I went to work.

It was winter, 20 to 30 or more degrees centigrade below zero. I had no boots and no warm clothes. In a pair of simple walking shoes and a light overcoat, I went to work. The commander promised me that if I worked well 8 consecutive days, he would give me a pair of ‘valenki’ (warm boots made out of felt especially to walk in the snow) and a ‘kufaika’ (a quilted coat stuffed with cotton, down or feathers and very warm).

My work consisted in shoveling snow to make a road for the workers. I, together with an elderly Jewish man that was rather sickly and could not do any hard work; we had to follow the chief brigadier. The man who decides where the next place will be to chop down the trees. The Russian brigadier was a big guy. He was dressed warmly in a ‘kufaika,’ a fur hat and a pair of ‘valenki’ that reached his knees. He of course walked through the high snow with ease. We had to follow him and shovel the snow.

I, in my skimpy shoes that I bought in Pinsk for the rainy season, a light coat and a silk scarf around my head that would slip down every few minutes; I was freezing. I worked all that first day and came back frozen and destroyed, more dead then alive. The poor old man that worked with me, was in even worse shape then I was. I worked that way several days. My poor hands were frozen and full of blisters. I did not feel them any longer.

I finally gave up. I caught a bad cold; I could not move, I was sick and stayed in bed. There and then I decided not to go to work anymore. I told both my husband and my sister, that I just did not care, what will happen to me. Let the ‘natschalnik’ send me to jail, let him starve me, let him kill me, but I will not go to work anymore. After a while the ‘natschalnik’ gave up and stopped harassing me.

Now, I had all the time in the world. Although I was weak and very depressed, I did spend a lot of time with Zvi. In the morning he went to school, but in the afternoons, I would teach him Polish. I taught him how to read and write, and all the poetry I could remember. He knew most of “Pan Tadeusz” by Mickiewicz by heart, as well as other Polish poets and writers. I taught him Polish history, anything I could remember I would stuff

into his head. He was a good student. He had a good memory and absorbed it all. He became the most important thing in my life.

It was an extremely cold winter. There were days with over 40 degrees Centigrade below zero. We had to cover our faces when going out and it was difficult to breathe. The days went by, one exactly the same as the other. We woke up in the morning to consume some hot boiling water and a piece of black bread, if there was any. Tea or coffee was only a dream.

Life that winter was very hard. We had no money. With the little my husband was making was barely enough to buy our bread ration and some hot soup. My sister had it even worse, since 50% of her salary were confiscated by the state. Somehow, she always managed to leave the 10 or 15 kopeks for Zvi before she went to work every morning. At least he could eat a soup and a kasha during lunch every day.

Zvi would get into the line for the dining-room hours before it would open. He would be one of the first to be served. The workers in the dining room knew him well and usually gave him much more than what he paid for. We used to take this soup and add to it the kasha and some hot water, to make it more. The three of us, my sister, Zvi and I, would eat it in their barrack.

One very cold day, the 'natschalnik' barges into our barrack and orders me to report immediately to an important doctor that came especially from Arkhangielsk.

"You say you are sick, well, we will see."

I put on the best dress I had and went to meet this doctor, that was receiving in the school room. As it turned out, the doctor was a woman and a very fine human being. She asked me all kinds of questions. At that point, I let it all out. I told her about the death of my baby and the difficulty of giving birth. The impossibility of going out to work without warm cloth. By the time I was through, I had her crying along with me.

She came to check on the hygiene in the various labor camps in this area. She was very taken with my story and felt sorry for me. She gave me a certificate that I was in no condition to work for the time being. Furthermore, she prescribed for me extra food, such as sugar, fat and marmalade, because I was anemic and undernourished. All these items were available in the grocery store on the hill, but we did not have the money to buy it.

During the day our camp was practically empty, except for the children and the very old; everybody else was at work. I was waiting anxiously

for my husband and sister to come home and tell them the good news. All of a sudden the 'natschalnik' burst in and said:

"Well, Raya Meyerovna, tomorrow you will return to work, I have for you the 'valenki' and the warm 'kufaika,' so you have no more excuses."

I showed him the certificate from far away. I did not dare give it to him, I did not trust him. I just told him that I have been excused from work by the doctor. He flew out furious and ran like mad to the doctor. Mine was the only certificate that this lady doctor was able to write. There were no more certificates. I was lucky. After that, the 'natschalnik' stopped harassing me. I was finally free of him.

The days went by. It was extremely cold. All around us, everything was white and frozen. Every morning at six we woke up to a gong, it was still pitch-dark. The 'kipiatok' was ready (hot boiling water to make tea). But who had tea or coffee, all we drank is a cup of hot water to get warm. That gong, I can still hear it in my ears as I am telling you this story.

Every day, the workers went farther and deeper into the forest to chop down the trees. As one area was cleared, they moved to the next. It took the workers longer to go and come back from work. We were told that this winter was especially a cold one. During that winter a number of people died in our camp; especially some of the older people died; the cold, the poor nourishment and the hard work were just too much for them. Their strength failed, they got sick and eventually died. Several small children died that winter as well.

But we survived. When I think back to those days, I really do not remember if we really hoped to ever be free again. Did we truly hope and thought of living in a civilized world again. In that labor camp, we were completely cut off from the outside world. There were no newspapers and no radio. We knew nothing what was happening outside our little camp. Some people in the camp received letters from time to time and even food parcels from their families in Russia. There was no news. All correspondence was opened, checked, censored, with many lines canceled or simply crossed out. No news penetrated our little posielok.

* * *

****As I am transcribing these memoirs, I get some flashbacks of my own from those days. I remember being always hungry. It reminds me of an episode in my aunt's barrack. We were sitting at the long table in the middle of the room and she was teaching me something or other.*

I have to add that in the barrack where my aunt lived, there were a number of people that received food packages from family or friends. Some of these people did not suffer too much, at least not from hunger; they had money, enough food and warm cloth, which most of us did not have.

I remember that particular time, sitting at the table with my aunt. Further down the table and across from us sat a couple eating bread and butter, salami and sprats and all kinds of things that seemed to me divine at the time. I sat there with saliva running from my mouth. I could not concentrate on anything my aunt was teaching me. I must have been looking at them, because they offered me a piece of bread with salami. I was devouring it with my eyes, but I knew, that I had to refuse, my pride would not let me to accept. I thanked them, saying that I had just eaten and I was not hungry. Darn pride.

During all the time on the 'posielok' we received only one package from our landlords in Pinsk. This was the family where my mother and I lived before being shipped to Siberia. I remember there was a jar of boiled butter so it would not spoil, some canned goods, sugar and salamis. It was a holiday. Mother made it last for a long time. She sold some of it for money to buy our basic daily food, like bread and hot soup.

This was the only time we heard from that lovely family in Pinsk. Who knows what happened to them. Most probably they were eliminated by the Germans, as were most of the Jews in that area, after the invasion in 1941.

The year on the 'posielok' was the first time I attended a regular school. There was only one large classroom for all the children in the camp, independently of age, and only one teacher that taught us all. There were about 30 children, from the age of 6 to 14. Mostly, we only learned how to read and write Russian. During the winter, that was very long and the days were short, there was not much playing outside. Most of the time it was just too cold and too dark outside.

The winter seemed never to end, but slowly the days got longer, the extensive snows started to melt, the frozen rivers started having water again and there was spring in the air. In the forest, still partially covered with snow, we found red berries, which we collected and made jam. It helped when spread on the gluey black bread that we received.

In the Spring, every family was given a piece of land to make themselves a vegetable garden. My mother and I worked hard and planted potatoes. Soon the potato plants started blooming and had little white flowers. Every day I went to check our lovely garden. Our plants were taller and bigger than in the other gardens. One morning as usual I came to check

and my beautiful garden was no more. We had no fence and during the night some animals got into our garden and ate all the green tops of the potato plants. Our garden was destroyed. To me it was a real tragedy and I cried a lot. All I found in the ground were a few tiny potatoes and that was all.

Summer was coming and soon the forests were full of blueberries and mushrooms to fill our stomachs. One day a week my mother did not work. On those days, she would pack some bread and water and take two baskets a piece and off we went to the forest to pick blueberries and mushrooms. I was seven and a half years old. At first it was a game for me and I worked diligently picking berries, but after a while I got tired and bored. It was more fun to run around and look for mushrooms.

My mother would explain to me that we needed a lot of berries and mushrooms, so we can sell them and buy for it our bread. Also, we had to save money for a new pair of shoes for me. I grew out of my old shoes, and most of my clothes did not fit any longer, but we had no money to buy anything new.

I remember one of those days off, mother took me along to a special place. Instead of blueberries, someone told her of a place full of raspberries. Raspberries were something special. There were none growing close by and were considered a delicacy. Raspberries could be sold easier and brought in much more money then the blueberries. That day we got up very early, before anybody else. Mother and I joined a Russian guy that took us to this marvelous secret place.

We walked and walked for a long time. I remember it was on the other side of the river. Finally we arrived to a forest clearing. There stood an enormous hill filled with red raspberries. A magic red hill with thousands upon thousands of bushes filled with wonderful sweet red raspberries. I helped mother until I got tired. I filled my stomach with raspberries and then I wanted to go home. Mother went ahead and worked until all four baskets were full of raspberries. That evening mother and I had a real meal in the dining room. Mother sold the raspberries well and there was enough money to buy me a new pair of shoes. We went back to that magic hill only one more time and filled our baskets. After that second time, the raspberries were gone.

Every day mother would leave me enough money to buy myself for lunch a soup and a kasha. I remember I used to take a pot and had the cook put the soup and the kasha together. He usually gave me more than a single portion. I took this pot to my aunt Rose's barrack and we would both eat

from it. Aunt Rose did not have any money to buy food for lunch. If I did not come, she would not eat all day and only in the evening she would prepare some mushrooms and kasha for her and uncle Sam.

*As all the other boys, I went fishing in the small river. Thanks to the shoemaker that lived in our barrack I had a fishing rod. He was a very nice guy; he gave me the string and made me a hook out of a nail and put it all together for me. Some days I was lucky and caught five or six little fish. I made my mother or my aunt cook them on an improvised little stove made outside from stones. That summer I remember well, I became quite independent; I even learned how to swim.****

8

We Are Free

The summer of 1941 changed our lives. First of all, we had more to eat. Between the various berries, mushrooms and some local grown vegetables, we could fill our stomachs.

It happened at the end of summer. One sunny afternoon after work, there was a long sounding gong, that was heard throughout the whole 'posielok.' No one knew exactly what was happening. However, word spread rapidly that everybody had to report to the dining room, which was the biggest place for gatherings. Rumors started immediately and everybody became scared. Any news, we thought, can only be bad news.

When most of the people have gathered, the 'natschalnik' informed us that at 9 AM tomorrow morning, there will be a general meeting and everybody had to attend. He himself was in a dark and nasty mood. This was strange, because usually no matter how nasty he was or how badly he treated people, he had always a smile or a smirk on his face, but not this time.

Rumors immediately spread throughout the labor camp. Some predicted good news, but most were pessimists and predicted bad news. With all those strange rumors, most people got very little sleep that night. The next morning, most of the people were assembled in the dining room. The curiosity was too strong to miss that meeting. There were also a number of people from another labor camp that was about 12 miles up the river from us. Everybody was very nervous, waiting and wondering, why this meeting? What do they want from us now?

Finally, our 'natschalnik' came in with several NKVD officials and very formally introduced them to us. Everybody got up to pay respect to these important government officials. One of them made a speech. He told us that the German fascist armies invaded the Soviet Union by surprise. There was fighting on several fronts at the same time. There was also a war going on with Finland. He told us how lucky we were to be far away from

this terrible war; how good the Russian government has been to us; how they helped and protected us.

Now, he had the great honor to announce, that as of today we were free citizens again. We were free to leave and go anywhere we wanted. However, the country needed us. Anyone who would like to stay on, they would be happy to provide decent housing, better working conditions and a better pay.

Everybody was overwhelmed. We looked at each other and did not believe our ears. It took us a moment or so, before there was an outburst of laughter and happiness mixed with tears. We were free. We were free to leave Siberia; we were free from forced labor. It all seemed like a beautiful dream.

One of the other officials asked for attention. He informed us that anyone who wanted to leave, could do so, but at his risk and his own expense. Unfortunately, because of the war, they could not provide us with any financial help or any organized transportation. We would have to do it all on our own

He suggested we leave the same way we came here. We had to go back down the river to the first little town Krasnovodsk. From there, we had to take the riverboat across the 'Severnaia Dvina' to Kotlas. Kotlas was the first train station, where the railroad tracks started. By train, we were free to go wherever we wanted.

The next day, everyone received a traveling document, a "prepustka," that authorized us to leave Siberia. However, we had to decide where we wanted to go. A "prepustka" had to have a final destination. There was no such thing as free travel in Russia. To travel or even to buy a train ticket, one had to have a "prepustka." This special travel document or authorization was issued by the police or a government office; indicating the name of the person and the final destination.

After Siberia, everybody wanted to go somewhere that was warm. Almost all the people chose Bukhara. It was one of the few names of cities that we knew in central Asia, where the climate would be warm. Most people did not even know where it was, but it sounded good. So Bukhara it was; without realizing how far it was and what to expect.

* * *

****At this point, it is necessary to give some explanations of why we were liberated. In August 1939, Germany and Russia signed a*

non-aggression pact. September 1, the Germans invaded Poland from the West and took over the country, while Russia took over the eastern part of Poland. Germany and Russia were allies, we as Polish citizens were enemies of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, we refused to accept Russian citizenship offered to us in spring of 1940; which only confirmed our guilt. That was the reason, that in early summer that year, we were all packed away to Siberia to hard labor camps; we became automatically enemies of the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, Poland before the war was an ally of England. After its fall in September 1939 a Polish liberation Army in exile was formed in England to fight against the Germans. In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union; all of a sudden, England and Poland became allies of the Soviet Union and all three were fighting their common enemy—the Germans.

*A Polish army was also formed in Russia to fight alongside the Soviet Red Army against the Germans. This is why, in August 1941, as Polish citizens we became, all of a sudden, allies of the Soviet Union and were liberated from Siberia. Many young men that were in Siberia actually joined the Polish Army and fought with the Russians to liberate Poland. One of them was Beniek, a cousin of my uncle Sam.****

* * *

Our next problem was how to get from 'Nierzczuga' to 'Krasnovodsk.' We knew we had to go down the river until we reached Krasnovodsk. The town that was the crossroads between our river and that of the 'Severnaia Dvina.' To walk all that distance by foot and carry our belongings on our backs, was not easy. I am sure we would have done it anyway, if we had to; anything to be free again and to return to civilization.

Fortunately, one of the government officials gave us some help. He offered to teach our men how to build rafts and how to maneuver them. We were to go down the river on these rafts until we reached the little town of Krasnovodsk. It sounded so easy, unfortunately it proved to be otherwise.

Over 100 of our best men were chosen to chop down the trees and to build the rafts. Among them was also my husband, Sam. The expert that was teaching our men to build the rafts was an extremely friendly and helpful Russian guy; the same one that took me a year before to the hospital to have my baby.

All of a sudden everything seemed easy. There was an exhilaration in

the air. Our men never worked so hard in their lives. There was hope again—we were alive and free.

It took our men over 10 days to build the necessary 20 rafts. All of us were assigned specific places on the rafts. Families with children were given the best and safest accommodations. Each of the rafts had at least 3 to 4 strong men that were taught how to maneuver it. On our raft there were several families with children. My husband, Sam, together with three other men were to steer our raft.

Before we left the 'posielok,' I went to visit my baby's grave. I walked into the forest that was now in its full summer beauty and followed the familiar path to that white birch under which my baby was buried. The tree was in full bloom. I took a pocket knife and cut in deeper the name of my little baby.

Sorry, but as I think about it, tears come to my eyes and my throat closes. It is too painful for me to talk about it.

I felt useless; was there anything I could have done and did not do? Was it my fault? I was leaving this place forever. I stood there for a long time and looked at that white birch trunk and the carving. I was looking for the last time at that tree and that small mound of earth, which was hiding a little part of me; that part I was leaving right there in Siberia, under that big, white birch tree—my little Gitele.

It was a glorious sunny day, when all of us ex-prisoners gathered on the river bank and boarded the rafts. All those happy faces expressing the joy of being free, full of hope and life; to all of us, this day was a miracle—it was an exodus to freedom.

How appropriate, this is exactly what we are celebrating today here in Rome—the Passover. The holiday to freedom. I wonder, did the Jews that left Egypt with Moses after years of slavery feel the same? They had a Red Sea to cross, we had our own rivers and deserts to cross—without a Moses. They wandered for 40 years in the desert to reach the promised land; fortunately it took us only 7 years.

The few local Russians that lived on the posielok stood around the river bank as we departed. The 20 rafts, one after the other, got away from the shore and started floating down the river on our way to freedom. The local Russians waved to us and wished us luck; most had tears in their eyes, I felt sorry for them.

Please do not forget that the Russian people are very romantic, sentimental and good hearted. Waving our hands we were saying good-bye not

only to the local Russians, but also to 'Nierczuga' and to 14 months in a Siberian prison labor camp.

Everybody was happy singing as we left our 'posielok.' Goodbye forever 'Nierczuga.' I was so happy, tears came down my cheeks; tears of joy and sorrow, because I was also leaving behind a little part of me. I looked at my husband, who looked so happy and busy maneuvering the raft with one of the oars. My sister Ghenia and little Zvi were close to me, their faces radiated joy and they were singing together with the others a popular Russian song.

We were floating down the river in those rough and rudimentary rafts. It did not take us long to realized that our men were no experts in maneuvering those rafts; especially in a strong current or in a river bend. We began to get uncomfortable. After the initial great exaltations, the people began to be afraid. We all got nervous and scared. This trip was not going to be as simple and easy as we thought.

After less then an hour of floating, the raft right after us lost a couple of their logs. Somehow the logs got loose. No one got hurt, but someone lost their bags. That of course scared everybody; it could have easily happened to us as well. Most of the rafts pulled up to the shore. The people from the broken raft were transferred to the other rafts and we continued on our way. I was very nervous sitting on that raft. I decided, that I would rather walk and feel ground under my feet, rather then sit on that shaky raft. I never learned how to swim. I was not the only one that was afraid. After a long discussion, it was decided that the women and children or whoever could walk, would get off and walk along the river bank.

My sister, little Zvi and I together with most of the young women from our raft got off and walked. It also became much easier for our men to maneuver the raft with less weight and only our measly luggage. We took some food with us and walked along the shore. The going was very slow. In fact, we walked about at the same speed as the rafts floated.

My husband was against us walking, but we insisted. I found being on the raft very uncomfortable. There were too many people in too small an area, too close in contact with each other. After a while I felt claustrophobic. Most important of all, I felt much safer walking then floating on that shaky raft.

We walked and walked; it seemed like it was taking forever to reach Krasnovodsk. The walk was hard on our feet, but light on our hearts; we were free and full of hope again. In the late afternoons, when it started to get dark we would stop and rest for the night. The rafts would dock along

the shore and all of us would gather on the river bank close to our rafts. We made fires to boil some potatoes or water for tea or cook a soup, something hot to put into our stomachs.

Sometimes we reached small villages and found places to spend the night. It was very easy to find places to stay. The local people were extremely hospitable and generous. Most of the villages were inhabited practically by only women, children and old men. All the younger men were in the army, at war fighting. We were offered free food, lodging and the possibility to wash ourselves. They never wanted payment from us. Some of the women recognized us from the year before, when we marched under guard to the labor camps. They were happy for us and very surprised, that somebody actually was set free and could leave Siberia. Early every morning we started again on our way. We walked all day and at night we would rest in somebody's "izba," even if it meant to sleep on the floor, but at least we had a roof over our heads. The nights were getting already too cold and damp to sleep outside under the open sky. Sometimes we would stop earlier if we found a little village or post to spend the night. It took us almost two weeks to reach Krasnovodsk.

The town of Krasnovodsk was situated on the opposite side of the river. There were no bridges, the whole river was filled with logs. These were the logs and trees that came down the river from the different labor camps where we came from. To cross the river, we had to jump from one log to the other very fast. I had real difficulty of doing that. I was the last one to cross. However, I learned many times over and over again, that in life one learns how to cross everything if one has to.

9

Krasnovodsk

It took another day before all the rafts arrived. We met my husband and our luggage at the river bank. It was a remarkable sight to see all those people spread out along the shore of that river. There were thousands of them gathered from all the surrounding camps. In this town, all the workers were also getting their final salaries still due to them. However, the government offices with all their bureaucracy were very slow in processing the payments. In the meantime, everybody was sleeping and freezing in the open along the river bank, waiting for their money. Once paid, everybody would take the 'parahod,' the riverboat to Kotlas. The riverboat had no fixed schedule and no one knew exactly when it would arrive and when it would leave.

My sister and my husband left me and Zvi sitting at the shore with our luggage and they went to town. It was a small town. There was one main street with a number of larger houses, some military buildings and a Hospital; everything was made of wood. There were also a couple of restaurants, if you could call them that; they were dumps, but at that time, they were sheer luxury to us.

Zvi and I were sitting on the riverbank with our few belongings, when my sister came back with a high ranking Russian officer. We picked up our belongings and the Russian officer took us into a Hotel. I even remember the name of that Hotel, 'Dom Kolkhoznika,' (House of the Kolhoznik). Actually, we put our belongings into the officer's room, because there were no other rooms available. This was the only Hotel in town and it was fully occupied by the Russian high ranking officers only.

We were taken to a restaurant where my husband was waiting in the company of several Russian officers. At first I was surprised and scared at the same time. My husband took me by the hand and introduced me to the group.

Krasnovodsk was the transfer point to the Russian–Finnish front. This was the reason for all those military installations. At the time, there was also a war going on between Russia and Finland. Our benefactor was a

young general with many decorations on his chest. The officers were surprised of how much my sister and my husband could eat. They ordered many wonderful dishes that was paradise to my eyes. It has been a long time since I have seen so much food. I tried to refrain myself from eating not to make a bad impression.

The general gave us his room. It was a small room with only one bed. At first he insisted that my sister Ghenia and little Zvi sleep in the bed and he would sleep on the floor. We finally persuaded him, that we would sleep on the floor and he with little Zvi would sleep in the bed.

The weather changed quickly. It was already Fall and it was getting very cold, especially during the night. All the other people that had come with us and the ones from all the other camps around, were sleeping and freezing along the river shore; waiting for the boat to Kotlas.

We spent several days with the general. Finally, his boat arrived and he left for the Finnish front. He helped us a lot, including getting the little money that was due to my sister and my husband; their last salaries from the government. He took us every day to a restaurant and ordered the best of food. He was always surprised of how much we could eat.

At the local town-bazaar, my sister sold her Persian lamb jacket and a couple of long silk nightgowns that she still had from home, and that gave us some extra money to live on.

We knew very little about our benefactor the General. He told us, that he was being sent to the Finnish front; from which he was sure, he would not come back. This was his last short vacation before the actual fighting. He had only a few days left. He had no family. He graduated from the military academy and diplomatic school; he was a very well educated individual. He was also decorated several times; a real big shot. He was extremely kind to us. He bought boots for all four of us, which we needed badly. The few things that we still had, were the ones we brought with us from Lodz or bought in Pinsk. I will never forget this marvelous and generous human being with whom we spent the time in Krasnovodsk, waiting for our 'parahod' to take us to Kotlas.

Our general was also waiting for his riverboat that would take him north to Archangelsk and the Finnish front. Finally, the day came when our general left together with most of the military personnel. We accompanied him to the boat. We were saying good-bye not to a casual acquaintance, but to an old and dear friend. We thanked him for all he did for us. He even prepaid the Hotel room for an extra 3 days, so they would not throw us out from the room. Our boat was supposed to leave two or three days later.

He gave us a card with an address, where we could write to him. We knew him only a few days, but he stayed in our memory forever. I promised myself to keep in touch with him, but I never did. As his ship was leaving, we stood on the shore with tears in our eyes and waved until his image disappeared on the horizon.

* * *

****There are things that I remember personally and things that I remember hearing my mother and my aunt Rose tell about this episode in Krasnovodsk. It all started that first day when my mother and my uncle Sam went to the town-bazaar to sell something and buy some food.*

My mother sold her Persian lamb jacket and a couple of long silk night gowns; one belonged to her and one belonged to my Aunt Rose. The two night gowns became a joke and a conversation piece. Two Russian women actually wore them as evening gowns, at a reception given in the honor of the high ranking officers in Krasnovodsk.

It was my mother that first met the General. There was some infatuation between the two. My mother accompanied the general to several receptions and dances. I remember, because practically every night I was awakened when they came back late to our hotel room. The General slept in bed with me and my mother slept on the floor with my Aunt Rose and Uncle Sam.

The General proposed to my mother and wanted to marry her. He was sure that he will be killed in the war, so she had nothing to worry about. It would be a great advantage to my mother and me, if she married him. The wife of a high ranking officer with a child, had many advantages and privileges in Russia, including a good pension to live on.

My mother refused of course; but I am sure, that later on she was very sorry that she did not accept to become his wife. It was very soon after that we found out, that the families of high ranking officers had many advantages. There were separate and comfortable waiting rooms in train stations; free food in some places and even the accommodations on the trains were better. But by then, it was too late.

*I do not think that we ever heard from him again. Mother was almost sure that he was killed in the war. Deep inside her she was sorry for not having accepted his proposal and collected a good pension. It sure would have made our life much easier in the years to come.****

* * *

Two days after the General left, our riverboat arrived. The boat was mobbed. There were people everywhere. The four of us got on, partly by pushing and partly because we had a child with us, which helped. Fortunately, the trip itself was not a very long one. We were packed like sardines and very uncomfortable; we could hardly breathe. The weather got very cold when we landed in Kotlas. There was already snow in the air.

The nights were especially cold. There was nowhere to go to protect ourselves from the cold. We sat outside of the train station waiting for the convoy that would take us south. Here again were thousands upon thousands of people, gathered from all the surrounding labor-camps of the Archangielskaia Oblast. There were some Polish Christians, but mostly there were Polish Jews liberated just like us.

The one heated waiting room in the train station was reserved only for the military officers and their families. This time we had to suffer the cold as everybody else did.

We were not starving, but for self-preservation we would always buy food whenever and whatever was available. One never knew when we would find food again. In the Kotlas train station, there were only two things available to eat; 'Moroznoie' ice cream and 'holodetz,' a hard gelatinous meat dish made from animal legs. With the cold that surrounded us, we could have lived quite happily without the 'Moroznoie,' but still we bought and ate.

It was a humid cold that penetrated into the depth of our bones. Thanks of having little Zvi with us, a child, we were allowed to sit in the great hall of the train station. It was not heated, but at least we had a roof over our heads and were not outside. There were enough families with children, that eventually the air got warm from our bodies.

* * *

By now, I was tired of talking; it was a long evening. I wanted to go to bed. I said goodnight to everybody. I told them, to remind me where we left off, so we could continue our story tomorrow. I got ready for bed, but how could I sleep. I turn and twist, but sleep does not come. I was telling all these stories and now I started living them all over again. I was stricken with remorse, did I do right? What did I do wrong? Could I have done differently?

There are so many things that come to my mind, memories, thoughts, feelings, that I did not and could not tell them. There are things that I forced myself to forget and many things that I did not want to remember. There is so much to tell. Most of the time, I have not enough words and I cannot always express myself or describe my real feelings. All this unhappiness, sadness, humiliation, torture and death, that was brought about by this war.

10

Good-bye Siberia

In Kotlas we were waiting for a train or convoy to take us south, in the meantime we were freezing. We desperately wanted to leave; it did not matter where, as long as we got out from Siberia. For the time being, there were no trains and no one knew when one will arrive. All we could do is wait. We met a number of people we knew. The longer we waited, the more people were flocking into that Kotlas station.

Finally they put together a convoy of freight cars and we forced our way into one of those cattle cars. Who was stronger, got in first. The important thing was that we were finally in a train. We had no idea where the train would take us and we did not care, as long as it would get us out of Kotlas and Siberia.

Kotlas was the last most northern train station; no matter where the train would go, it would have to be south. It was very cold in that cattle car, but we were happy, we had enough room to lie down and we knew that eventually we would leave.

The freight car was divided into three parts. On the two opposite ends of the car, there was a built-in platform; forming a lower and an upper berth, so that more people could fit into the car. In the center on both sides of the car were the sliding doors. The center section was the only area that was kept free, so that people could stretch and stand up without having to bend. One corner of that area was separated by a curtain, mostly a dirty blanket or sheet; there stood the bucket for the bodily needs. On the opposite side, there stood the bucket with drinking water.

However, when the train was full, there were people sitting even in the middle section of the car. There was practically no room to stretch. It was uncomfortable and sometimes difficult to get to the bucket; one had to crawl over people to get there. It was even more difficult to relieve oneself, having the people so close to that curtain.

We were lucky to be on the upper berth and near a window. On the upper level there were two small windows on each side of the car. The win-

dows had no glass. There were only a couple of iron bars and the opening served to ventilate the car. It was great to be near that window when the weather was warm, to have fresh air; but in the winter it got mighty cold, particularly in Siberia.

Finally the train left the station. It was very cold near that window. I covered the window with a towel to keep the wind out and we stayed very close to each other to keep warm.

Days went by, then weeks went by and we were still in the same train and in the same carriage. We stopped quite often; sometimes on small stations and sometimes in the middle of nowhere. We were stopping to let other trains go by, mostly in the opposite direction. We never knew how long we would stay on a given station. Sometimes, we stopped for a few minutes and sometimes for several hours; other times we would stop for a whole day or a whole night. It all depended when the train from the opposite direction would pass. When the train stopped for a whole night, we had difficulty in sleeping. By now we were accustomed and missed the vibrations and the rhythmic noises of the train wheels.

All stations had plenty of free kipiatok, hot boiling water for tea. This hot boiling water was a lifeline to us, especially when it was very cold outside. On most stations we also found some food, that we could buy. We bought food whenever we found it, because we never knew when or where our next stop would be and if food would be available or not.

Days and weeks went by and we lost completely the track of time. We had no idea what day it was and we really did not care. There was no rush; we had no definite plans or places to go. During this trip, some people left our train and some others got on. We were riding and stopping, stopping and riding.

The many names of cities and places we passed or stopped, meant absolutely nothing to us. We were finally on the great Trans-Siberian railroad tracks going southeast. There were days and sometimes nights we stood still off the main stations, or on some abandoned side tracks. We waited for the train to come from the opposite direction or to let other trains to pass ahead of us. It seemed to me that our train was like us—it was in no hurry and had no schedule to meet. We found out that our train or convoy was actually going to Bukhara. Bukhara was going to be our final destination and this train ride seemed never to end and there was no date when we would finally arrive in Bukhara. As a matter of fact we had no idea where we were and how far we still had to go.

"By the way, you guys, why don't you look at a map, it will give you

an idea of the distances we traveled. From Archangielsk on the White Sea, all the way to Bukhara in Central Asia is a very long way."

As we moved farther south, the weather got warmer. We started to get fruit and other foods that we did not see before. We found watermelons, white melons, peaches, apricots, grapes and different dried fruit.

Our biggest problem was not knowing for how long the train would stop on a particular station. Will there be enough time to run to the center of town and buy the food on the local 'toltshok.' The prices of food in town were much cheaper and the quality of the goods was better. Some people took chances, went to town and hoped for the best. They brought back many different foods, then sold them for double or more to the people on the train.

On most stations, a few minutes after our train arrived, a number of local peddlers came to the train to sell food and many other things, like clothing and souvenirs. Naturally the prices were much higher than the ones on the local market. The majority of the people on the train were afraid to leave the convoy and would buy whatever was available from the peddlers on the station.

This was not the case of my sister Ghenia. She was always the first one off the train and ran to buy things. She carried always a big sack into which she would throw all the things that she found. She would come back with a full sack loaded with food and then sell it to the people on the train at a good profit. This was her way of making a living while we were traveling. There was no other income. She made enough to help even my husband and me with food.

I would not move from the train, except to do my bodily needs for which there was always time on any station. I was afraid to leave the train for any length of time. My husband sometimes went with my sister, but he was too afraid to take chances.

More than once my sister almost missed the train. More than once, we were ready to leave the train with our luggage; but she made it just in time. Several times the train was already moving, while she threw her packages on the moving train and we grabbed her by the hand and pulled her into the car. That one time she got somewhat shook and scared, but only for a day or so. For the next couple of days she did not go very far and would stay close to the station.

"Please don't go today," I would beg her. "What will happen if you miss the train?"

She just looked at me and said. “And what will we eat tomorrow and the day after?”

She made me understand that someone had to bring the food. We had no more money. During the long trip we ate up all of our savings. This was her only way to earn money to go on living and eating. When she needed money, off she went and took chances all over again.

One time, while she was away on a shopping spree, they moved our train from the station to some side tracks. We were very worried that she would not find us—but she did. I personally was very worried every time she went to town to do her shopping. What would we do if she missed the train? How would we ever find her again? There were no regular train schedules. Sometimes, several days would go by before another train would pass in the same direction. Furthermore, the convoy we were on was already paid for all the way to Bukhara and any other train we would have to pay all over again; we did not have that kind of money.

Most of the time we would eat cold and uncooked meals. We always found hot boiling water to make tea on every station. Sometimes, my sister would bring vegetables, some meat and when the train stopped in the middle of nowhere or on some side tracks; we improvised a fire and prepared some soup. These were the only times we had a hot meal.

After about a month or maybe more, we reached Kazakhistan. We started to see Asiatic faces. Also the food was getting better. When we reached Samarkand, we were told that the train would stop for the rest of that day and all that night. The whole convoy was invited to have dinner, a hot meal, in the army barracks. A free dinner was offered to us by the Red army. It was also one of the few full hot meals we had in weeks. We went to the city. This was the first beautiful city that we had a chance to visit. It was over seven weeks since we left Kotlas.

Bukhara

About a week or so later we finally reached our final destination Bukhara. It was a beautiful city. We knew that in Bukhara there were many Jewish people. We have heard of the famous Bukhara Jews. At this point Zvi starts laughing.

“What are you laughing about?” I asked him.

"Don't you remember what happened in Bukhara?" he said.

I look at him surprised and he told me. "As long as I live, I will not forget Bukhara."

He told us the story of what happened in Bukhara. It was November 18, his eighth birthday. We were walking through the toltshok, and he saw a pair of officer pants done for children. He desperately wanted those pants. He cried and did not want to leave the market place. My sister as usual, said no; my husband said nothing. I looked at Zvi crying and my heart was breaking. That poor child has been thrown around all these years from place to place; robbed of his childhood and never complained. I did not have enough money to buy the pants, but I had a last valuable thing that was sewn into a hem of my dress. I tore open the piece of hem and took out a gold bracelet. This bracelet was a present my husband gave me before we were married. Without thinking twice, I sold the bracelet, probably too cheap and I bought Zvi his officer pants for his birthday.

His happiness was difficult to describe. Both my sister and my husband were a little mad, but Zvi and I were happy. Zvi also reminded me of many other stories. I wondered how he remembered all that. His brain worked like a computer, he had everything memorized there.

We strolled around Bukhara and admired that beautiful city. We spoke to several local Jews, a number of them were shoe polishers. Most of them would not talk to us, they were afraid. One young man told us that his grandparents were in Eretz Israel (Palestine). The dream of his life was to go to Palestine. But he knew that his was only a dream and it would remain only a dream.

* * *

****At this point, I have flashbacks of my own. I do not know why my aunt went straight to Turkestan and left out a whole important month of our wanderings in central Asia, in Kirghistan and Uzbekistan. There are many things that I do remember. When I close my eyes, I can still see those places, cities, people and more faces.*

I remember we reached Bukhara, which was our final destination on that train on November 17, 1941. The reason I remember the date was because the next day was my birthday and a very special one.

We left Kotlas approximately mid–September so it took us over 8 weeks to reach Bukhara; always traveling in the same car and the same cattle train.

The reason I remember that birthday, was that Aunt Rose bought me my first pair of long, blue striped pants for my birthday. On the bazaar in Bukhara she sold her last piece of jewelry; a gold bracelet. That day I remember well; I finally got a pair of pants that fit.

I have grown out of everything. Everything I had was too small and it did not fit me any more; but no one really cared about things like clothing. Nobody had much; so as long as one was covered, no matter what one wore was perfectly normal. Maybe, we were better dressed then most of the people around. There were many people with torn and patched up clothes and no one paid much attention to things like that. It was far more important to have something to eat or a place to sleep.

I remember, we walked for a long time with our rucksacks on our backs until we finally found a place to rest against the old city wall. We spread a blanket on the ground and placed the rucksacks under our heads. I close my eyes and I see where we were laying; against that thousand years old city wall of Bukhara. In front of us, there was a park with trees and benches. The park was full with people, every bench and under every tree there were people like us. Most of us were without money, without a roof over their heads, wandering from place to place in search of a home and a day's work.

Bukhara was the Mecca for many refugees. People like us, that were liberated from Siberia and masses of Russian refugees that escaped from the war. The German armies had occupied a large part of western Russia. Many Russians left their homes and escaped farther east. Everybody wanted to be as far away from the war as possible. There were many families with only older people, women and children. Most of the younger men were in the army at war.

One thing was clear, there was no way for us to stay or settle in this town; we had to find another place. The weather was still lovely, it was warm, even though it was mid-November. We joined a group of people and signed up to work in a Kolkhoz in Kirghistan. The money from selling the few valuables we had, was slowly running out; we had to find a way of making a living to survive.

*I do remember that Kolkhoz. There must have been about 20 of us; all Jews liberated from Siberia. Some knew each other and some were new acquaintances. We were given a big house that must have been once a large villa of some rich Kirghistan family. The house was surrounded by a large courtyard. The house was all decorated, both outside and inside with white and blue majolica, with a typical Arab design.****

Kirghistan

****There was a big courtyard with a fancy well in the middle. The well was decorated on the bottom with blue and white majolica; an elaborated rod iron arch held the rope for the bucket to get the water out of the well. The house itself was also decorated on the outside, with blue and white majolica. Especially the doors, windows and the cornice were decorated with the typical Arab Moslem designs. Similar decorations were also inside the house. There were a number of decorated niches to be used as closets.*

I really liked that house. There were a number of rooms that were eventually divided among our group. Only one of them had a bed in which my mother and I slept. The only other thing that I remember, is that everybody was working in the fields, except my mother. She was in charge of preparing the food for all of our group. Except my mother and my Aunt Rose, there were a few more women with their husbands, the rest were all bachelors.

*Unfortunately, we did not stay there very long. If I recall correctly, all of our group liked that place very much. There was plenty of food given to us by the Kolkhoz and as far as I know the work was not too hard.****

* * *

We went by train to this very nice kolkhoz in Kirghistan. The kolkhoz was specialized in growing cotton. Our work was to pick that cotton. There were miles and miles of beautiful cotton fields. The work was not easy. Each group had to come up with a certain minimum quantity of cotton and that was hard work. My husband worked for one day and gave up. He decided this was not for him. He made up his mind to take a chance and was determined to make some real money; he was going to do some business.

In that kolkhoz, they were making beautiful quilt blankets stuffed with cotton and the prices were very cheap. My husband had an idea to buy several of those lovely blankets and take them to the Urals. Up north it was already very cold and he was sure to sell them there at a great profit. One day he boarded the train to Tselabinsk with a big bag filled with blankets. He left us protected in a perfectly nice and safe place and hoped to be back within a week; maximum 10 days.

In the meantime we were picking cotton.

"Zvi, do you remember helping us to pick cotton in that Kolkhoz?" I

asked. Sometimes, Zvi came with us to the fields and helped to pick the cotton, than we made our minimum daily requirement. Although the work was hard, we liked it there. Unfortunately, our good fortune in this kolkhoz did not last very long. About a week or so, after my husband left a couple of NKVD police officers came to our house and made us leave the kolkhoz immediately; without giving us any explanation or reason. I don't know why, maybe because the cotton-picking season was over and they did not need us any longer.

I begged them to let us stay there for at least a few more days until my husband would come back. I even invented a story about my husband went to find his brother and we could not leave without him. Nothing helped. They got us out and took us to the train station. To this day I do not remember the name of that station. We stayed in that station several days until finally my husband returned. In the meantime, we were sleeping on the street, with our heads against some house wall. It did not bother us, we were already accustomed to this kind of life. We were not the only ones to sleep on the streets in the open.

Finally, several days later my husband was back and found us near the station. We were both somewhat shook up from this experience. We could have lost each other forever. We made a promise to each other, never to separate again. That one experience was enough. If I recall correctly, all that business trip my husband made to the Urals, was not even that profitable and very disappointing. We decided no more black market, no more easy profits; all we wanted is to find a place to live and to work and have enough food to eat. A place we could survive until the war would be over. Again we took a train without really knowing where we were going and where we would end up.

* * *

****I remember this train ride. This time we were on a regular passenger train, with compartments for six people. I remember, I got a spanking from my mother, because I was running from one car to another. To me it was a game and she was upset, because she could not find me. This was the first Russian passenger train that I could go from one carriage to the other. Until now, we always rode in cattle cars.*

It was very unusual that my mother should hit me. She rarely did that. I do not know if I was always good, or she was mostly too busy to make a living, to even notice if I was good or bad. Most of the time I was a good

kid. My mother and the circumstances of life taught me far too much responsibility for my age. I was expected to behave as an adult. I had no playmates; I was always among adults.

My mother got herself a very charming boyfriend; a man named Ignatz. Not only was he good for my mother; he was also good to me and took care of me like a father. He would bring me special things to eat and would protect me against my mother's occasional explosions. My mother had always a very short fuse and had little patience with me. Ignatz knew how to calm my mother and treated me like his son. I remember I liked Ignatz very much and I was not too jealous.

*Sometime at the end of December 1941 we reached the city of Turkestan. It started to get cold, especially during the night. I remember that winter very well. It was probably the worst winter of our lives, for all of us.****

* * *

When we reached Turkestan, I was impressed with the beautiful train station and we decided to get off the train. Our hope was to find a place to live and find work any work. Unfortunately, Turkestan, like most larger cities in Central Asia, had the same problems; there were too many displaced people and refugees from all over Russia. Everyone was looking for the same thing—a place to live and a place to work in order to survive.

In the city we found somebody's friend that took us in for the night into his little kibitka—a little Arabic house made from mud and straw. It had one large room where the whole family was living, sleeping and cooking. Everyone slept on the mud floor.

The local people would cover their floors with oriental rugs and carpets on which they slept. We were lucky to sleep on straw that was not very clean; but at least we had a roof over our heads. There were still many people by the thousands, sleeping outside in the streets. It was getting cold in Turkestan and there was no possibility of getting either work or housing.

Our hosts were extremely hospitable people, but we could not impose on them. The next day we went to town, to look around and see if we could find work or something to do. We needed a place to stay and some work to survive in this town. There was nothing in Turkestan. The only thing we found was an offer given to us by the local government, to go and work in a kolkhoz. This offer attracted my attention. They were willing to take some 120 people and offered a place to live, however, they would not guarantee

work for everybody. Some of us will have to find work on their own. We registered and the ‘Predstavitel’-kolhoz representative chose the people. Unfortunately, our small group was chosen among the 128 people.

11

The Worst Winter of Our Lives
Kolhoz Zhyd Ken Chek

We took a train from Turkestan and rode for almost a whole day, heading north. We got off at a small station and from there we continued on camel backs for another 30 km.

We got on the camels with our luggage and proceeded to be shaken up, for the next 30 km. We arrived to our destination the next day. It was very windy and cold. We were assigned to a kibitka (mud hut) for 9 people. It was one large room, with barely enough floor-space for all the 9 people to lie down. The mud floor was covered with straw. There was nothing else in that room. Everyone found a place to sleep on that straw covered floor, but it was crowded, more than in a cowshed.

The uneven walls and the ceiling were sort of covered with a coat of white chalk, with some small light brown patches left unpainted. Many protruding bulges were covered with black dust and dirt. It did not matter. It was more important that we were indoors and protected from the cold and the howling winds, that were roaming outside.

The little mud hut had a little narrow entrance hallway, that served to keep an animal like a goat, a donkey or as a storage room. We kept wood or any other burning material that could be used as fuel for both heating and cooking. From the little long and narrow hallway, one entered the one large room with a single small window. That hallway, was very important, it protected the main room from the winds, when opening the door.

We were in kolkhoz 'Zhyd Ken Chek.' It sounds more Chinese than Russian. We were in the middle of the Kazakhistan Steppes, where the wind runs wild without any obstacles. Outside there were no trees and very scarce vegetation. The highest tree was a small bush not higher than 8 to 10 inches. That little bush dried by the wind, became the only fuel we had to cook, bake and to heat our kibitka. We collected these bushes and stored them in our hallway.

Entering the main room on the left stood a large, round, iron-pot built

into a rectangular mud stove. This enormous iron-pot was similar to a large wok and could not be removed. All our meals were cooked in that pot. Underneath the pot was an opening to make the fire. The pot was embedded about 15 inches from the ground. The walls inside the oven were smooth and were used to bake lepioshki; a pita type of Arab bread. This was the only type of bread they had in the kolhoz.

Our settlement or annex was about a kilometer or so away from the main kolkhoz. This ill-fated settlement consisted of two rows of huts, six in each row. Except the kolkhoz, all around us there was nothing for miles; we were in the middle of nowhere; in the middle of a plain, flat desert. There was nothing green; there were no trees, only a howling wind that went round and round our 12 huts. Strange and scary thoughts came to our minds; did we make a mistake in coming here? It was winter now, we were hoping that spring will be better. Little did we know that most of the people that came with us never got to see that spring.

Next morning we looked around our new settlement and its surroundings. Thinking back, this settlement or annex was most probably built to accommodate seasonal workers. It was far enough from the main kolkhoz, so as not to interfere or bother the local people; yet close enough to work on the farms, when needed.

One of the 12 huts was a much larger one, maybe originally a dining-area or a meeting place. Now this large room housed 45 bachelors. There were no beds, no mattresses, no tables and no chairs—just an empty room; only the floor was covered with straw to sleep on; just like in a stable. They were all young in their twenties, a nice bunch of guys. They all looked much older, mostly unshaved and inexperienced and completely lost in this place.

In our hut, we had a real nice group of people. Most of them came from our home town. There were the four of us; there were two other couples, man and wife and one bachelor our friend, Ignatz. We could not have asked for a better company. In no time, living in such cramped quarters, we all became as one family.

A few miles away there was a small town, with a few decent looking houses and gardens. The inhabitants of that town were a mixture of different races. Although the majority were Khazakh, there were a number of Armenians, Georgians and Russians. Most of the local people were friendly. We soon found out, that for money, there was very little that we could buy. Bread was available, but only if one was working.

However, we could barter. We could exchange clothing or other

goods for food. Unfortunately, we did not have very much left to exchange, but every little thing helped. The next day, I took out from my luggage a pair of bordeaux leather shoes with a matching purse; one of the few things that I still had left from home. I knew that I will never have a chance or need to wear it here.

I went with my husband from house to house, trying to sell my bag and shoes. We came to a rich family. The house was nicely furnished with oriental rugs on the floor. As I showed them my goods, the homeowner grabbed the purse and the shoes from my hands; she loved them. They told us in pidgin Russian, that they had no money and we assured them that we did not want any money; we were only interested in food.

The men of the house, without saying a word, went outside, got his mule and put on it a large sack of potatoes, a sack of flour and a small sack of onions. On top of that some dried fruit, a couple of smoked dried wild ducks and some home baked bread. We looked at all that food and we did not believe our eyes. The only thing they did not have, was salt. We were overjoyed; my shoes and the matching leather bag, brought in a small fortune.

I enjoyed cooking meals that I shared with the rest of the people in our hut. We made an arrangement, that every day another one of the four women would do the cooking. We were very fortunate to have enough food and a roof over our heads. The other members in our group were also going around exchanging clothing or other things for food. Our hut did not go hungry. Most of the others in the settlement did not have enough to eat, to procure food was a big problem.

One day, a young man from our town showed up in our hut; he had nowhere to live, so we made room for him in our hut. Unfortunately, he brought us bad luck. Within a day or two he got terribly sick and our friend Ignatz took him to the little hospital in town. It turned out that he had typhoid fever and infected all of us in the hut. A short time after Ignatz got sick. We took him to the hospital in that little town. I remember I went along and he had a very high fever and was singing all along the way, this Yiddish song.

"Wu zenen meine siben, gute, younge yorn—whatever happened to my seven, good, young years."

He was hallucinating. A couple of days later he died.

Within a few days, everyone in our hut was infected and eventually got sick with typhoid fever. I was still on my feet. I cooked for all and took care of them. The winter was a very cold one. It snowed a little bit, but it

was the cold wind that would cut like a knife. The howling wind came blowing through the steppe and would go around and round our hut, producing a symphony of scary and chilling sounds. I just kept the fire burning by putting another little dry bush into the stove.

* * *

****I have many memories and flashbacks of that time. The minute we got into this settlement I got sick. As my mother was saying, may she rest in peace, when it comes—it comes in bunches. I got measles, after the measles I got pneumonia, then a very bad case of diarrhea and finally typhoid fever like everybody else. It was very unusual, because since we left our home in Lodz, I was never sick. Well, I sure made up for it, all at one time in Zhyd Ken Chek.*

When we arrived into our hut, I was already running a high fever. Ignatz carried me in his arms into the hut. They placed some rucksacks and other cloth on the floor and made me a place to lie down; at least, I was protected from the naked floor. There was no doctor. My mother and my aunt nursed me. There was no cow milk. The only milk my mother found for me, was from a camel. There were no drugs or medication; there was nothing they could give me, except some hot soup and camel milk.

Ignatz found work in the little town and every day would bring something for me to eat. I remember when he died. Before leaving to the hospital, he gave all his belongings to my mother and placed a little cotton bag with his valuables under my covers. There was his watch, a ring and some money.

Maybe I was too young to understand exactly what it meant to die, but Ignatz's death did affect me emotionally; I liked that man very much. Both my mother and my Aunt Rose were crying. Ignatz was liked by everybody. My mother took it very hard; she lost the man that loved her and for a short time, was taking care of her and her son; the man that made her feel a woman again.

After Ignatz died, I remember my mother took some of his clothing and exchanged them for two big sacks of flour. She claimed, that as long as we had flour and water we could make pita-bread and 'kloiskes,' which are a type of gnocchi made from flour and water and we would not go hungry. In fact, our main daily food was a soup made of these flour kloiskis in boiling water, without salt.

Salt was something very precious. The Aral sea was not very far and

that was the only source of salt for all that region. Unfortunately, they did not purify that salt, maybe because it was too costly to do or because of the war. All we had was a salt with a great quantity of Potassium in it; it was bitter and it made the food bitter as well. We preferred to eat everything without that salt.

By the time my mother got the typhoid fever, I was feeling better and was helping my aunt. I remember going to collect the dry little bushes in the fields for fuel. There was always a very strong wind blowing. There were days that the wind was too strong for me to go out and collect the little bushes. The wind whistled and danced around our little hut, creating sounds that were nerve racking and very depressing. Sometimes, we had the feeling that the wind would blow away our little kibitka together with us.

After Ignatz died, one by one the other two couples moved out from our kibitka; they were afraid to become infected. Little did they know, that by then, all of us were infected. The straw on which we slept was full of lice and fleas—the perfect transmitter of this disease. We had no proper means to wash ourselves or to change our clothing. Our clothing was also infested with the lice.

*Of the four, my mother was the first to get sick, then my Uncle Sam, then Aunt Rose and finally me. There we were the four of us; lying on that dirty, lice-infected straw, with typhoid fever.****

* * *

That winter Zhyd Ken Chek turned out to be a death trap. From the 128 people that arrived at the end of December 1941, only about 25 survived by the time spring of 1942 made its slow appearance. The four of us were among the survivors.

One night there was a fire in the hut where all the single guys were living. Fires were easy. It was enough a spark from the stove and all that dry straw on the floor was in flames. Most of guys in that hut were already sick with typhoid fever and a few of them were already dead. We helped to move the sick to the other huts. Unfortunately, most of them died that winter anyway from typhoid fever and hunger.

The people that died that winter had to be buried quickly; mostly in common graves; without a name. There was no one to say 'kaddish' after them. Because of the typhoid epidemic, the dead had to be eliminated and buried quickly. They were buried in a hurry in a field close to the settle-

ment. Maybe because of the cold winds during the winter, the graves were not dug deep enough or too many bodies were placed into the same grave. When Spring came, there were hands and legs sticking out from the ground. Those unfortunate, nameless bodies had to be buried all over again in deeper and larger graves.

That ill-fated single men's hut; out of 45 strong, young men, only two or three survived. The rest of them died during the typhoid epidemic. There was no medication, no medical assistance and not enough food. I would go from time to time to visit them and bring whatever food we had to spare.

The tiny hospital that was several miles away, was overfilled with the sick, the sick were everywhere. Bodies were lying on the naked floor, in corridors, in passageways, even in the courtyard—without anyone to assist them. There was practically no hospital personnel or doctors to take care of the sick. They just died lying there on the floor. The dead were gathered once a day and buried in common graves. These pitiful people simply disappeared without a name, without a sign, as if they never existed.

After a while no one bothered to go to the hospital anymore. There was no room except the outside courtyard in the bitter cold and howling wind. It was better to stay in one's hut, at least one was protected from the cold and the wind. The hospital was a couple of miles away and to get there one had to walk in that cold wind, with the possibility of catching pneumonia on top of the typhoid fever.

There was no public transportation; there was no transportation, period. The local inhabitants had only donkeys and camels for their own use. In the little town, there was only one truck that went back and forth once or twice a week to and from the city. To go anywhere, one had to walk.

My sister and my husband were already sick and I was next. I lay on that lice and flea infected straw and hallucinated. Especially, during of the crisis when the body temperature rose to 42 degrees centigrade or maybe even higher. We had no thermometer to measure. Some of the hallucination stories I remember and others I heard later from my sister, Zvi and the couple that took care of us.

* * *

****There were only the four of us left in our hut. After the death of Ignatz, which was one of the first cases, the other two couples became scared and moved out. The four of us were lying sick on the straw covered floor. By now, this straw was old, dirty and full of lice and fleas that feasted*

on our blood and jumped every time we moved. By then, I am sure we were immune to their bites—we did not even feel them any longer.

Starting from the left lay my mother, then me, next to me was Aunt Rose and finally my Uncle Sam.

When Aunt Rose started to feel the oncoming sickness, she sent me to a hut, where she knew of a couple that had survived the typhoid fever, but had practically nothing to eat. She told me to go there and ask them to move in with us, that we had enough food and they could eat as much as they wanted. All they had to do is to take care of us. It meant only to give us a little bit of water and maybe put a cold rag on our heads.

The main problem with that disease was the high fever; it could damage the system, attack the stomach and especially the brain.

After the couple moved in with us, I also lied down between my mother and my aunt Rose. They took care of us for about two weeks. By that time my mother has recovered enough and took over. I wish I could remember all the stories and hallucinations that both my aunt and especially my uncle Sam had during their illness. My uncle Sam on top of hallucinating had also a very fertile imagination.

*I remember only once did a doctor show up in our hut during all that sickness that lasted over a month. He was sent on an inspection visit, to report on the typhoid epidemic. He apologized that he could not help us; he had no medicine; not even an aspirin to give us. He had only a single ampoule of camphor; he could make only one injection and that was all. My mother begged him to give that injection to me. There was nothing for the others. There was not even a pill for the headache. All he could recommend is to drink many liquids, pray and hope for the best.****

* * *

I lay on that floor half hallucinating and fantasizing for several days; until the crisis was over and the temperature dropped.

"Do you remember, Zvi, how I used to talk to you?"

I would say good-bye to the three of you at least 20 times a day; because I was sure that I was dying. After a while my sister would not even bother to listen to me anymore. My husband was completely out of it. He lived in a world all of his own for a long time. His recovery was very slow and very long.

"You, Zvi, were the only one that would listen to me. I would tell you

stories about the family. I wanted you to memorize the names and addresses of my father's family in Chicago."

I was running a very high fever and was hallucinating. I was telling my sister and Zvi, that the only goal of my life was to be able to finish this 'imaginary' book. In my hallucinations, I was writing a book dedicating it to my parents. I prayed to God to give me enough time to live, so I can finish writing this book. I was writing this imaginary book in Polish.

Then I remembered that my parents did not read Polish. They never learned Polish. When they were small they learned Russian, since that part of Poland was under Russian rule. They both knew Yiddish. My father studied in a *heder* (Hebrew school) and received the usual education of a Hassidic Jew—Yiddish and the Torah. I made Zvi promise to read the book to my parents and tell them all about us.

These were terrible times. Every day a few more people died in our settlement. I remember the day I got sick; I went to visit the bachelors' hut with some food. Most of them were already sick. I told them that I was sick too. One of them was a young man from Warsaw; I remember his name was Mietek, he was very sick and cold. I tried to give him courage, saying not to worry, soon spring will be here and it will be warm. He looked at me and said in Polish,

"My dear Rouzia, there will be no more springs for me—this is the end."

Unfortunately, he was right, he did not make it; he was only 24 years old.

There were two guys that were recuperating from the disease. I begged them to look after the others. They had practically nothing to eat. I gave them permission to come to our hut and take some potatoes and flour and make for themselves some hot soup.

From all the food supply that we had; nothing was left. The couple that took care of us during those two weeks, made sure that nothing was left. Not only did they take the food, they also stole some other things as well. They were sure that soon the four of us will be dead anyway.

Finally spring was here. The sun and the warm weather brought new hope. We were still very weak, but alive. It took us a long time to recuperate. Some people had it much worse. It took them several months before they were able to walk properly; one of them was my husband. The disease hit him very badly; it took him several months before he was able to function properly. When he finally started to walk, he had terrible head-aches;

he felt dizzy and could not concentrate. He was practically an invalid, until that summer.

* * *

****There are many stories to tell about that time. Some of the episodes are tragically funny, some pathetic and sad. The first episodes that come to my mind are the hallucinations of my Aunt Rose. Every few minutes she was saying good-bye to the three of us and especially to me. According to her she was dying; and every so often, we would hug and kiss and say good-bye. That went on for a couple of days.*

She was fantasizing out loud, for all of us to hear. One day, she was making her last will. She told me that she and Uncle Sam were going to die and everything that they have belonged only to me. This 'testament' making and saying good-bye forever went on for practically a whole day.

My mother was already feeling a little better. She had gone though the crisis that usually came after 7 to 10 days and it lasted for about 3 to 4 days. Once the crisis was over, there was a good chance that one would survive.

My mother was telling aunt Rose to stop it, to be quiet and to let me be, because I was also at the height of the crisis. Aunt Rose would not and could not stop. She continued to tell her stories and say goodbye, because she was dying. At one point she took off her wedding ring, which was the only valuable thing she still had left and was giving it to me. According to her, this was the end—she was dying. She was giving me her wedding ring, because she did not want that a stranger should steal it from her finger when they threw her into the common grave.

My mother got real mad; and to stop her, she slapped her face at the moment, when Aunt Rose was handing me the ring. The ring fell into the straw on which we were laying. I remember we looked for it all over, even months later, but we never found that ring.

In another one of her hallucinations, my aunt was writing her memoirs, an imaginary book of hers in Polish, that she was dedicating to her parents. She talked and talked and rambled on for days. She was describing all of her sufferings, her wanderings, her misfortunes and how much she missed them. She talked about Bialystock, Pinsk, Siberia and a very long monologue about her poor little dead baby Gitele. She talked about this godforsaken place we were living now. She was asking God, why? Why did he abandon us? Did she really sin that much? But she received no an-

swers. Here in Zhyd Ken Chek, she finally reached the end of the road and was ready to die; but first she prayed to God to let her finish this book.

She made me promise that I will read the book to my grandparents. I was 8 years old; my education consisted in only one year of Russian school in Nierczuga. I could hardly read a little bit of Russian and a little bit of Polish, that my aunt Rose taught me.

It was useless to argue with her. I desperately tried to explain to her that I did not know how to read Polish well enough to read a whole book. She made me promise that I will learn how to read Polish well and read this book to her parents.

Another extraordinary case was my Uncle Sam. He was completely out of it and for a long time. Not only did he hallucinate during the crisis, he continued to fantasize and keep us all awake for quite a while after the fever had left him. He had hallucinations combined with a lot of imagination, mostly political, that kept him talking for days.

There were many different stories, since he remained sick for a long time. The three of us were well and around a long time before uncle Sam could sit up properly. Three months after, he was still recuperating and had difficulty in walking properly. He had continuous headaches and felt dizzy the minute he got up to walk.

During his illness, there must have been at least 3 or 4 days and nights that he was completely out of it. His stories were fanta-political. The most famous of his stories was the time when he caught two Japanese spies. Where, how and what they were doing, was not very clear; but he caught them and he personally delivered them to the Americans.

To compensate for his bravery, President Roosevelt has sent a special plane to get us out from Russia and take the four of us to America. All of that one night he shouted, screamed and carried on, because he had difficulty of getting my mother into the plane. Supposedly, the airplane door was very small. He got my aunt and me into the plane, but had difficulty with my mother. He complained all that night, that my mother's 'tohes' (behind) was too big and he could not push her through that door. There was more screaming and cursing, as the plane was taking off and he was pushing and pushing my mother into that plane.

Thinking about it now, it must have been psychological, because he never did get along with my mother. There was always friction between them. There were many other stories about German spies, Ukrainian spies, but I do not remember them anymore. There was also a series of the other

stories, that had to do with making a lot of money; how to become very rich and how to get out of Russia.

My mother was the first one to get up and take over the situation, as usual. She found ways to get us food. I remember yogurt, buttermilk, camel milk and other things, that we had not seen since she got sick. Our usual flour kloiskes, type of gnocchi, were cooked now in milk or eaten with yogurt. She would get all of that by exchanging clothing; mostly those of Ignatz.

I was next to get up and shortly after me, Aunt Rose. It seems; there were two types of typhoid fever. One was the type that hit the stomach, like my mother and me; the other type was that hit the head with hallucinations and fantasies, like the one that hit Aunt Rose and Uncle Sam.

Another episode that remained ingrained in my mind, was the time when we were recuperating. The fever was gone, but we were still too weak to get up and walk. The minute we tried to get up, we felt dizzy and had to sit down again. We were still on the floor, spread on that straw, that was getting increasingly thinner, and more and more infested with both lice and jumping fleas. Our favorite pastime was to de-lice each other. We sat on that straw and searched for the lice on each other's head. I remember, particularly that game with my Aunt Rose; she would inspect and kill the lice on my head and then I would kill the lice on hers. We did it exactly the same way as the monkeys do.

When we finally were able to get up and move around, we shaved our heads and then washed them with gasoline. This was the only way to get rid of those lice. When spring came and the weather mellowed, we looked for our friends. From the original 9 people in our hut, there were only the four of us left; the others did not make it. We did not even know where or how they were buried.

The only one that had a grave with a name on it, was Ignatz. My mother at the time found a white sheet to wrap him up and helped to bury him in the Kazakh cemetery in Zhyd Ken Chek.

Thinking about it today, what surprises me most, is that all the things that were happening to us and around us, were accepted as something perfectly normal and natural. There were no complains or lamentations. On the other hand, to whom could we or should we complain, God? The important thing was, that we were alive and life had to go on. The next important thing was—what will we eat today and what will we find to eat tomorrow.

One thing I must admit and give all the credit to my mother Ghenia. I do not know how she did it, but she always found means and ways to get

some food for us. No one else could; but somehow, she always managed. There were times when the food was not in the quantities we would have liked or wanted, but we were never starving or gone without food. She made sure that there was always something to put under our teeth.

As long as I can remember, my mother was always saving things for a rainy day. Believe me, we sure had plenty of rainy days, we had deluges, but somehow, from somewhere things would come out. My mother's rainy day bag of savings was never exhausted.

*By the way, I do not remember having had a bath for at least 6 months or more. The only thing we washed was our hands and face. There were no facilities to take a bath. I do not think it mattered very much; it was not that important. I am sure we must have smelled a mile away, but so did every one else and no one noticed or cared. The most important thing at that stage in our lives—was food; food for today and maybe food for tomorrow. The day after tomorrow was already too far away, to even think about it.****

12

Spring and Summer—1942

There was very little to eat. "Do you remember Zvi, the day I took you along to the town *tolchok* (market); I tried to sell something to get food. I remember it was a pink silk undergarment. How that garment survived until then, I do not know. I held it loose in my hand and offered it to anyone that was passing."

We were lucky that day; we got a bread and a few potatoes. I asked the woman to give me an onion and she threw the onion at me.

The problem was always the salt. Refined salt was hard to find. We entered a stolowaia, a type of greasy spoon cafeteria and we bought two plates of soup. They gave us the soup and with it came a piece of bread. We ate the soup and only half of the bread; the remaining bread we took home. I also emptied the little salt and the pepper that remained in the containers that stood on our table. I poured the salt into one pocket of my coat and the pepper into the other pocket. When we came home we had a ball. We made a soup of potatoes and the onion with salt and pepper. There was also a piece of bread for my husband and my sister.

It was really my sister that always managed, to bring things home to eat. She had always something to exchange or to sell and she knew how to bargain. She had thousands of resources, so that every day she produced another little miracle; we would eat and go on living.

One day she came home and told me, "Rouzia, we are going to Turkestan." She managed somehow to obtain 20 kg of flour. Each of us would take 10 kg into a rucksack on our back and go to Turkestan. There we would sell the flour and buy Makhorca (Russian tobacco) instead. Tobacco and cigarettes were the two most desirable things to exchange for food in our kolkhoz and in the nearby little town.

She persuaded me to go with her. Early next morning we left by foot, carrying the 10 kg of flour on our backs. We were trying to catch the evening train to Turkestan. There was 30 km to the station and part of it through the mountains. We walked with all that weight; but when we

reached the part of the road that started to climb to take us over the mountains, I stopped. I felt my back was breaking in half. I could not go any farther. We sat on the ground to rest.

A number of Kazakh farmers went by with camels and mules. I begged for help. Finally one of them had pity on us and stopped. He placed our rucksacks on his camel and we walked along until we reached the train station.

At the station we bought our tickets and were sitting exhausted on a bench, waiting for the train to come. We spoke Polish between us. Next to us sat a man, he was observing us for a while; finally he spoke to us in Polish asking all kinds of questions. I asked him if he was by any chance from the NKVD. He said that he was a representative of the Polish delegation.

* * *

****Very little news penetrated this God forsaken place called Zhyd Ken Chek. We knew nothing of what was happening on the other side of that mountain, that separated us from the rest of the world. We never knew or heard, that in the beginning of 1942 there was a mobilization in Russia of all Polish citizens that wanted to fight against the Germans. This was sponsored and organized by the provisory Polish government in exile formed in England. This Polish army joined the Russian army to fight the Germans from the East. Another Polish army was mobilized in spring 1942, that was being sent to Palestine to fight alongside the British in North Africa and Middle East. Now, England, Russia and the United States were allies against the common enemy—Hitler.****

* * *

He told us that the Polish delegation established in the Soviet Union, was helping its citizens with food and other goods. These goods came from America via the UNRA. They were forming now a Polish army to fight alongside the British against the Germans. He was surprised that two such nice and educated Polish ladies would venture doing contraband in this wilderness and knew nothing about the Polish national efforts.

I got furious. “I am a Polish Jewess,” I told him. “I never received or expect to receive anything from you.”

In fact the only ones receiving any goods at all, were the Polish Cath-

olics, that were registered and went to church. We were Polish Jews and for us there was nothing.

Both my sister and I were light skinned with blue-gray eyes; our hair was shaved and we wore kerchiefs on our heads. It is very possible that he took us for Catholics. I knew, he did not like to hear what I said, but I just did not care. He gave us his name and address in Turkestan and told us to come and see him; he would see what he could do to help us. We never went to see him.

In Turkestan we got an excellent price for our flour and for that money, we bought Makhorca, cigarettes and candies. Going home was much easier; our rucksacks were not as heavy. We were also lucky, as we got off the train, we found a kazakh kolkhoznik that was going our way. He let us ride on one of his camels and we got home much faster. Our purchases gave us enough food and money to go ahead for quite a while. I told my sister, "Never again will I do such a trip."

My sister knew me; there were things I was not good at; things I could not do. However, my sister Ghenia went to Turkestan again with a neighbor from our settlement. Again she brought enough goods for us to live for a while. From then on we had something to exchange for food and that kept us going.

The weather got warmer and nature awakened. Everything began to get green, even around our miserable settlement. After the first rains, even the steppe got green. In spring, even that little town close by became prettier. There were many trees in bloom. Some flower beds decorated the main street. This little town became an oasis in the middle of the bare and empty steppe.

One day I decided to go to the little town by myself. My husband was still lying in the hut recuperating. His feet would not hold him; he still had difficulty in walking properly; he was just too weak.

My sister was doing some laundry. She went to get the water from the well, which was quite a distance from our hut; it was a regular daily expedition that we had to do.

In town as I passed the 'stolovaya' (the greasy spoon place), I had an idea and a wishful thinking. Would it not be wonderful, if I could find work in this place? I decided to enter and asked for the managing director. I told him that I would like to work here in the restaurant. He told me that they had already too many people working there as it was. He looked at me from head to toe and somehow he must have had pity on me. As I was leaving his office a little disappointed, he called me back.

"Do you really want to work?" he said.

I did not believe my ears. "Yes, I will do anything," I heard myself answer.

He told me that they had a big garden in the back of the restaurant and if I really wanted to work, he would try to get me some work in that garden. I asked him, "Can I start work right away?"

He looked at me, hesitated at first, then smiled.

"Come on, let's go," he said.

He took me to a garden that was very close to that restaurant. He introduced me to two young Kazakh guys and told them something in their language.

"They will tell you what to do," he told me in Russian and walked away.

The two guys looked at me; they looked at each other; they raised their shoulders as if to say, it's OK with us; smiling they told me what to do.

They were planting potatoes. They went in a straight line making little holes; my job was to follow them and throw little pieces of potato into the hole and cover it with earth. I really tried to do my best and worked as quickly as I could. The two guys nodded to each other and seemed satisfied with my work. One of them told me so in his broken Russian.

"You good work," he said and smiled.

At lunch time they brought food into the garden for all the workers. There were about 10 or 12 of us. They all lined up to get their food. I did not dare to stand in line with all the other workers. The meal they offered was cheap and good, but I had no money with me. I had a little package of makhorca in my pocket and I was sure that I could have easily sold it for money to my two coworkers; but something inside of me was saying—not to do it.

My two coworkers must have said something to the overseer in their language, because he came over and asked why I did not go to get my lunch. I was very embarrassed and explained that I was sorry but I had no money to pay for it. He smiled and told me in his broken Russian,

"Now you eat—pay, don't worry."

He also gave me a card for 1 kg of bread. The bread was only available to people that worked. They distributed the bread daily after work. I devoured my lunch that consisted of a soup, a precious piece of meat and some bread. I did not eat the bread; I put it into my coat pocket. One of my coworkers asked me why I did not eat my bread. I was a little embarrassed

and told him that I was saving the bread to take it home. I explained that I lived with a sick husband and a sister with a child.

"You eat bread now," they told me. "You work, you eat."

They showed me with their hands that I needed energy to do my work. They told me, that there will be plenty of bread for me to take home. The brigadier spoke Russian better; he told me that there was a saying in the Soviet Union 'Kto rabotayet—kushayet, kto ne rabotayet–ne kushayet.' 'Who works—eats, who does not work—does not eat.'

My two Khazakh coworkers gave me their bread cards, so I could have bread to take home. They told me that their families were baking their own fresh lepioshki—bread every day.

At the end of the day I walked home with 3 kg of bread and not even hungry. I was so happy. All night long I was dreaming about that bread. Next day, my sister gave me some money and when I got to work, I paid for the lunch and the bread that I got the day before. I worked hard several days with the potato planting; then they gave me something else to do. After a while, they needed more people and I got a job for my sister and a few other people from our settlement. I worked well and as time went by, I was getting better and better.

My last job there was to watch over the tobacco fields. I was to make sure that the fields were watered properly and that no one was stealing the tobacco leaves. When a few of the workers came to steal some leaves, I made believe that I was sleeping. I never saw anything.

That garden was a wonder to me. It produced all these magnificent things and everything grew so fast. There were watermelons, yellow melons, tomatoes, all the various vegetables such as onions, carrots and radishes, potatoes and various salads; there was even a large grape vine.

Everybody helped himself. The overseer was half Chinese and half Khazakh. He was good hearted and had a wonderful disposition; he made believe not to see when everybody was taking things home. He claimed, there was enough for everybody. My sister really knew how to take advantage of the situation. I had enough what I got. I was earning some money; I was eating a good lunch at work and even got bread to take home with me. My husband was getting better, but still not ready to work. Summer was here and it was pleasant, but we had no intentions of remaining another winter in this god forsaken place.

There were no newspapers in this little town. There were only a couple of radios, one of which was in the stolovaya, which we did not hear. However, all the programs were in Kazakh and we could not understand it

anyway. From time to time we would hear some Kazakh music coming from the stolovaya. In our settlement there was nothing. Some news reached our little village about the war. We heard that the Germans were not advancing as they did before. On some fronts, they were stopped. Most of the time, the news was mixed with propaganda and it was very difficult to understand the actual situation.

Rumors reached us from Turkestan, that there was a possibility of leaving Russia to Palestine. A new Polish army was formed here in Russia and was being sent to Palestine. There they will join Anders army and fight the Germans alongside the British. There were transports leaving Russia by way of Afghanistan to Palestine. The gathering points were at Turkestan and Yang Yol, close to Tashkent. We did not think twice; we packed the few remaining things we had and my sister arranged to escape by truck directly to Turkestan.

* * *

****It was summer, it was warm and there was no problem of sleeping in the open. We found a place in a park under a big tree, where we spread our belongings. The big tree protected us from the sun during the day and from the humidity at night.*

Right after we arrived in Turkestan we visited the Polish delegation. Unfortunately, we came too late; the last transport for Palestine was leaving the next day.

There was no more room available on that transport. However, they did accept children. That transport was going by way of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria and finally to Palestine. We realized that, being Jews, we had no chance of getting on that train.

My mother had guts. She went to see the local priest and invented a story. She told him that her husband was a Polish officer in England and here she was all alone, a poor women with a small child; could he please help us. The priest was sorry and explained that it was too late; the transport was leaving the next day and there were no more places available. However, he could take the child to Palestine and he strongly advised my mother to send me along. There was a group of priests and nuns that would take care of the children.

My mother came back under the tree and started to pack my rucksack. We could not get out of Russia together; so she decided that at least I should save myself and go to Palestine. In Palestine we had family. Once

out of Russia and in the free world, I could reach my father in Brazil. It all sounded very exciting and adventurous. My mother and Aunt Rose were preparing a small bag with a string, that I could put around my neck. Inside the bag on a sheet of paper they wrote the names and addresses of our family in Palestine, in Chicago and of course my father in Brazil. They also wrote down all the information about me, the names of my parents and grandparents. The transport train was leaving the next day.

My mother was trying very hard to convince me how lucky I was to leave Russia and go to Palestine, to a free world without a war. She assured me that I will never be hungry again. I will have good food and lots of chocolates. Mother received a few bars of American chocolates from the priest and she gave me one. They persuaded me to leave. According to mother, my aunt and uncle, I had to be saved and it was the right and the only thing to do.

Next day, the four of us went to the train with my bag. I was dressed in my only pair of pants and a dirty shirt that barely fit me. The little cotton bag was hanging around my neck with all my identification and the addresses. All I had to do is say goodbye—I was going to Palestine. At the last moment, I changed my mind.

I told my mother that I will not leave her. I did not care if I go hungry, whatever will happen to her—will happen to me. I did not want to separate myself from my mother, my Aunt Rose and my Uncle Sam. All four of us were crying and all four of us were relieved, that this short dream of Palestine was over.

That same day we left for Tashkent. The priest told my mother that there was still a vague possibility that we might be able to get on a transport from Tashkent. There were still some trains leaving from there; it was worth trying. He gave my mother the name of the priest to contact in Tashkent.

In Tashkent my mother presented herself to that Catholic priest whose name she got in Turkestan. She again repeated her story about her husband the Polish officer and she a poor woman alone with a child, etc. Unfortunately, even there we were too late for that last transport. If only we came two weeks earlier, we could have left with that transport to Palestine.

However, the priest gave us his blessing and a large army bag full of American clothing, US army wool blankets, army sweaters including some canned goods, chocolates and American peanut butter. That was the first time I ever tasted peanut butter.

It was also the first time, I discovered, that being a Jew I had some-

thing different from the Christian boys. My mother explained to me that I should never go to pee or do any of my bodily functions together with the other boys or men. She explained that if any one saw that I was circumcised, we would lose all those lovely things that the priest gave us. She also taught me a Catholic prayer in Polish.

At first I was confused and wondered why then I understood, after all, I was almost 9 years old. We did not make it to Palestine; but my mother obtained from the priest a nice bundle of clothing and American canned goods that came in very handy in the days to come.

In Tashkent we were sleeping in a park, like all the other thousands of displaced people. Tashkent was particularly mobbed. There were all the displaced Polish people and refugees from all over Russia. Everybody had the same idea, hoping like us, to get out with the Polish army.

With all that mob in the city, Mother found a sort of cousin, Henry. He was the brother-in-law of her first cousin, Adela. Under the circumstances he was considered a sort of a second cousin. He was there with his new beautiful Russian spouse, Musia. We were sitting on our bags in the park when she brought them to meet us. I remember, they were elegantly dressed and looked so rich. In comparison to us, they looked like millionaires. They took us to a restaurant and offered us a real hot cooked meal. They told mother that they were in Tashkent on business.

Years later I found out that they were black marketers on a big scale. Musia was a lawyer. The story went that Henry was smuggling and doing some fancy black market deals and finally was caught. He was put in jail; he would have stayed in that jail, who knows for how long, if it was not for Musia. She saved his life by getting him out of prison. It must have been love on first sight. They escaped from where they were; they got married and started doing black market all over again, this time together.

Henry had accepted Russian citizenship and they were living somewhere not very far from Tashkent. I was very impressed with them; they looked so rich in their beautiful clothing. Henry was also showing off his beautiful and expensive ring with three diamonds. We only saw them that one afternoon and somehow they quickly disappeared; maybe they were afraid we might ask them for some money or help.

I would like to make it clear that a black market always existed in communist Russia. It was a way of life. Depending on the times, but there were always things and goods that could not be found on the open market. I understand this is true even to this day.

Especially during the war, with very few exceptions, practically ev-

erything one needed or wanted had to be bought on the black market. Items that had to do with food, like butter, meat, canned goods, liquor and especially clothing was available only on the black market. Everything was available on the 'Toltschok'—the local market a type of bazaar. Some of the items were shown, but most of the items were hidden under the table and only shown or sold to known customers. Most of the local farmers brought their goods to sell on the Toltchok ; instead of selling their goods to the stores at extremely low government controlled prices. The farmers sold most of their merchandise to black market dealers or would bring themselves the goods to the market and get much more for it. As a rule, it was the government stores that were suppose to have all those goods to sell; but unfortunately they rarely had very much to sell. When they did get some merchandise, the lines outside the stores were enormous and most of the people never got much anyway.

By the way this was not only true during the war years; it was also true during the sixties and seventies. Everybody was walking around with a shopping bag or a briefcase; just in case they could find something useful to buy in a government store.

Stores that sold foodstuff, vegetables or fruit, never had any packing material or a paper bag. Some used newspapers for wrapping, but most people had always their shopping bags or their briefcases with them and the saleslady would simply throw the stuff in without any wrapping; no matter what it was.

I was in Moscow on business during the summer of 1970. I saw a line with people waiting to buy cherries. I had time to kill, so I got into the line and decided to get some cherries. Everybody had a shopping bag or a briefcase to put the cherries in. When my turn came, the saleslady weighed my half a kilo of cherries and I had nowhere to put them; I had no bag, no newspaper. The saleslady smiled and told me to open my hands and she threw in the cherries. There I stood like an idiot with my hands full of cherries. I gave the cherries to an older woman that stood in line and kept only a few in my hand to eat as I walked along the street.

It was typical, when people saw a line in front of a store, they would automatically get into the line; and only after did they ask "What are they selling?"

During the war years, things were even tougher. Practically everything, never mind the luxuries, were hard or almost impossible to find. However, when one had money, everything was available on the black market. There were the small market dealers that handled food or simple

clothing. The fancy and big black market dealers negotiated in jewels, gold, diamonds, gold coins and hard currency, especially US dollars.

They were there in the forties and all through the eighties; I do not know about the nineties. But I would not be surprised that they are still there today. No matter how hard the times were, there were and always will be people that have money, jewelry and want the better things in life and are ready to pay for them.

During the war years, there was a black market on every level; from a fruit or bread seller, to clothing, to liquor or jewels. Everybody made a living.

*It was in Tashkent that someone told us about Leninabad, a city to live and to find work; and we decided to go there.****

* * *

Yang Yol was a part of Tashkent overrun by thousands of Polish people. All of those people gathered there with the same hope, to escape from Russia. We soon found out that being Jewish, we had practically no chance of being accepted on one of those transports to Palestine. Nothing has changed; the Catholic Poles had no use for the Jews. Some young Jewish men that were strong and single, enlisted into the Anders army and went to Palestine, but very few.

* * *

****Our cousins Khaim and Leon were among the soldiers that went to Palestine. Leon became an officer in the British army and took part in the liberation of Germany in 1945. We found them many years later in Israel. Khaim was the one that, 50 years later in Jerusalem, told me the story of running across the border into Russia; back in November 1939.****

* * *

The whole transport operation was very badly organized and definitely anti-Semitic. My husband and I were approached, and told if we converted to Catholicism, we would have a better chance to leave. I had no intentions of converting, even if I were sure to leave. We realized the next day, that we had no chance to leave. We took our stuff and went to Tashkent.

We finally saw the city that I dreamt about since we left Siberia. In

Tashkent we slept in the park as all the other thousands of people did. We did try to find work and a place to stay, but so did thousands of others. Furthermore, it was impossible to get residency and permission to stay in that city; the Police was very strict.

I do not remember who told us about the city of Leninabad. We had nothing to lose; we took a train and landed in Leninabad. It must have been part of our destiny, which I strongly believe in.

* * *

****I am sure, that if anyone would have approached my mother to convert and assured her a place on that transport to Palestine, she would not hesitate a minute to do it. She would have dragged me to that priest and have him sprinkle us with holy water saying:*

"Jew, Jew, you are no more Jew—you are a Catholic."

This reminds me of a story that my mother never forgot. This family story was told on many occasions. I heard it many times, and every time a little bit different. The moral of the story was always the same; you are—what you are.

I know this is a true story and it comes from Poland. Its original source, I do not know. I will try to repeat it as I remember hearing it in our family.

This is the story of a Jewish couple that converted during the war in order to survive. They were hidden all through the war by this wonderful Catholic priest. He took the Jewish couple in as his domestics into his Parish and treated them as a real father. When the war was over, the priest told them:

"My dear children, you are free now. You can go where ever you want. You can be Jews again."

The couple was very grateful to the priest, for all that he did for them and the chances he took to save them from the Germans during the war. Furthermore, with all the post-war chaos, where would they go? They had no home anymore; their families were dead and everything they had before, was destroyed during the war. Here in the church they were safe and enjoyed a fairly comfortable life. They told the priest:

"Father, you have been so nice to us, we would like to stay right here. Our home is right here with you."

The priest was very happy to hear their decision; he liked that couple very much. He thought for a moment and then told them, "My dear chil-

dren, during the war you were persecuted; it was my duty as a human being, to hide you here and save you; without asking anything in return. Now, you are free. If you want to continue to stay here and live here, you will have to convert and become Catholic."

The couple felt indebted and grateful to the priest that he saved them from the Holocaust. They decided that it was only fair, that they become Catholic. Right after the war everything was so chaotic and uncertain. Where else could they go and what else could they do.

And so, one day they made their decision. They went to the priest and he converted them.

"Jew, Jew you are no more Jew—you are a Catholic."

As time went by, some of the Jews that survived the concentration camps, came back to town and started a Jewish community. The couple saw a re-opened Synagogue; Jewish women busy shopping on Friday for the Sabbath; the market place was full again with the fish, chickens and geese. Deep in their hearts they felt nostalgic, they felt something missing, something that was part of their beings, part of their lives. They both felt it, but were afraid and ashamed to admit it to themselves, never mind to each other.

One day, the husband could not hold it any longer; his conscience was bothering him and he decided to confide in his wife.

"You know," he hesitated, "there was something special in being a Jew."

Before he could finish, his wife started to cry and admitted that she felt exactly the same way. And so, they decided that next week, they would have a real Friday-night-Sabbath; including a meal as they had in their parents' home before the war. On Friday, the wife prepared the gefilte fish, the chopped chicken livers and a beautiful roast goose.

That Friday night, the smell of that roast goose permeated the whole Parish. The priest was surprised to smell cooked meat on a Friday evening in his Parish; he decided to find out from where it was coming. He followed the smell and came in front of the little house where the ex-Jewish couple was living.

He looked through the window and was even more surprised of what he saw. The couple was dressed in their best Sunday clothing; the man had a 'yarmelke' (prayer hat) on his head and a glass of wine in his hand making the Friday night 'Kidush' (benediction); there were lit candles and right in the middle of the table, on a large platter lay a big, crispy roast goose.

The priest barged into the room, both bewildered and confused. "You cannot do that, you cannot eat goose on a Friday." The Jew put his fingers into a glass of water and sprinkling the goose, he said:

*"Goose, Goose, you are no more Goose—you are a Fish."****

Lodz, circa 1880—My Great-grandparents—The Grzes' family with their nine children. Left to right: Iosel, Iser, Aizik, Great-grandmother Sheindel, Haia, Pesel, Great-grandfather Hertzko, Grandfather Meir, Shimon, Max, and Leib.

Lodz, 1926—The three sisters: Rose, Ghenia, and Sally

Lodz, 1931—Ghenia with her husband, Jacob Wilczkowski

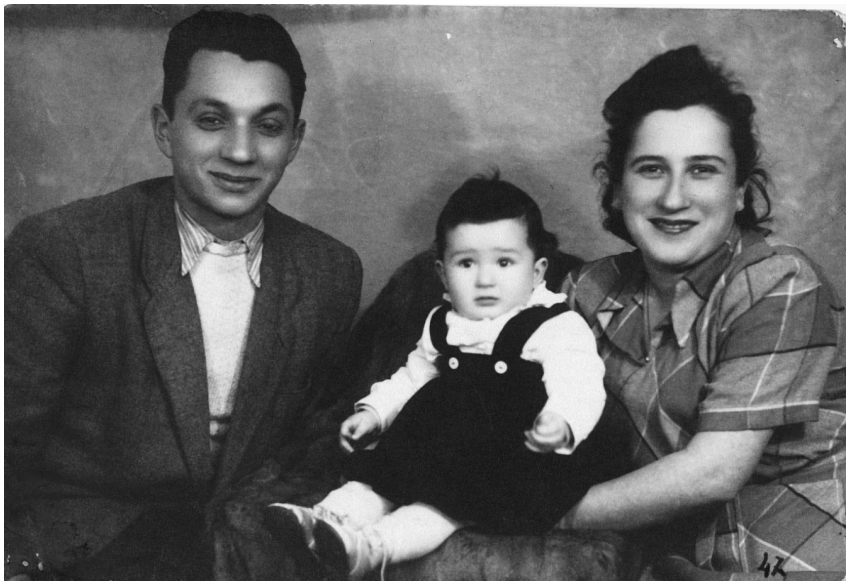
Wisniowa Goura—Summer 1937
Standing from left: Ghenia, Sally, a friend, Grandmother Fradel. Sitting: Rose, Father Jacob, Zvi, and a cousin.

Rose in Lodz, 1938

Lodz—1938
Ghenia and Jacob's son Henry (Zvi)

Weiden, Germany—1946
Ghenia and Sally with their daughters, Frances and Frances

Lichtenfels, Germany—1947
Oscar, Frances, Ghenia and Zvi



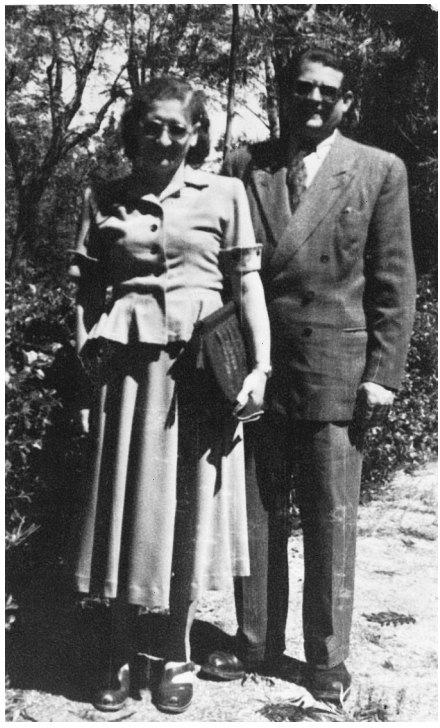
Weiden, Germany—1947
Abe, Frances and Sally

Weiden, Germany—1947
Sally and her daughter
Fran and Zvi

Bad Kissingen, Germany—1948
Ghenia with daughter Frances and Zvi

Marktredwitz, Germany—1948
Rose with daughter Mary and Zvi

Marktredwitz, Germany—1948
Rose and Sam's son, Meir, and daughter, Mary
(Marylka)



Tel Aviv, Israel—June 1949
Rose and Sam Kryger celebrating their tenth wedding anniversary

Rome, 1975—From left to right: Domenico, Sally, Zvi, Rose, and Frances

Passover in Rome, 1984
Sightseeing Meir with daughter Shelly on his back, Jennifer, Rose, Frances Koren, and Barbara Kryger

Rome, 1984—The evening Rose started telling her story, from left to right: Meir, Shmulik, Shelly, Jennifer, Frances, Rose, Domenico, and Zvi.

Winnipeg, Canada, 1987
The Kryger family—Shelly, Barbara, Steven, Meir, Rose, and Michael

13

Leninabad

Our first impression of Leninabad was good. In fact, we liked it right away; it appeared to be a real nice city. The first thing we did after arrival was to register with the NKVD; our papers were in order and we got permission to stay. We looked for a place to live. Not that we were afraid to sleep on the street, we have done it so many times lately, that it almost became a habit.

We went into a Tschaihana (local Asian tea room) with all of our baggage and we ordered some tea. The tea was served with dried, sweet apricots instead of sugar; they called those dried apricots Uruk. The owner of that Tschaihana looked at us with all that baggage and told us that he had a kibitka, a small house to rent; would we be interested. This was a sign sent from heaven; we found the right place to settle. We immediately paid a month rent and moved in. Our belongings were getting smaller and smaller all the time. All we did until now was sell or barter for food and never buy anything new; except the stuff my sister got in Tashkent from the priest.

When we did get some money, we saved every penny for a rainy day; but lately we did not see too much sunshine, financially speaking of course. We learned to be content with little, as long as we had some bread, some soup and a roof over our heads we were satisfied. That first night in our new little house, we slept on the bare cement floor; there were no furniture.

* * *

****I remember that little house. It was somewhat distant from the center of town, in a strictly Tadzik neighborhood. It was a very long and narrow street almost an alley; curving from time to time. It had many small houses on both sides of the street. From the street one saw only a tall wall about 6 feet high on both sides. Every so often there was a little gate with a number on it. Every house had a courtyard, some big some small. Some had inside gardens, grape vines, wells and some large houses. We had a*

*small courtyard and a small house consisting of only two rooms. Both rooms had large windows that looked onto the courtyard. In the courtyard there was a large terrace covered with grape vines that protected the house from the sun during the day. There was also a typical, brick oven built in the courtyard; it resembled a barbecue oven, on which one could cook, roast or bake the local 'lepioshka' (pita bread). There was no well; we had to bring the water from some distance. It was quiet, very charming and very private.****

* * *

We got some second-hand furnishings, consisting in a couple of beds a table and some chairs. The kitchen stove was outside. So far everything seemed to go well. There was a Polish Delegation in town, where we registered right away as residents. In the Polish Delegation they told us that there were several possibilities of finding some work. They told my husband that a factory producing all kinds of canned foods, from meats to jams, was looking for workers.

My husband went to the factory and was immediately hired as a butcher. His work consisted in carving meat. The meat for canning had to be de-boned from whole animals like sheep, goats or beef. There was no pork, the local population was Moslem. The pay was according to the number of pieces of meat one could carve clean from the bones. The more pieces carved—the more one earned. My husband was very fast and good at this work. He became a stakhanovietz; over his working table there was a red flag indicating his special status. He got a good salary, that was paid every week. For the first time in a long while, we lived quite nicely on his salary. The factory he worked in produced all these goods especially for the army. We were satisfied; we finally found an anchor to start a new life.

However, this time my sister was having difficulty in finding work. Her morale was very low. She was even thinking of leaving, but I could not even think of letting her go away with the child. I begged my husband to see if he could help and get her a job in that factory.

One day my husband came home all excited; he found work for my sister. He talked to his supervisor and told him that he would have to leave unless he found a job for his sister-in-law. My husband explained that she had a child and was in desperate need to work.

The supervisor told him to bring her along and if she knew how to work well, he would hire her. My sister learned very fast to do the work

they wanted and had no problems of being hired; especially after having given several American sweaters and wool blankets to the people that hired her. These were the things my sister got in Tashkent from the priest and they came in handy now.

Leninabad brought us luck. We had work, we had plenty to eat, we had a house to live in and even earned some money. Until now, all we did is sell our things in order to survive. Here for the first time we could also buy some things for ourselves. We started to live like normal human beings again.

I never stopped thinking about our families that remained at home in Poland. There was no direct news. The few reports that were reaching us were not too good. At the time we still had no idea what was really happening in Poland. We hoped that one day this war would end and we would be able to return to the free world, back to our homes, to our parents and loved ones.

I did not work, but I used to go to the toltshok (local market) and sell any meat or rib bones that my husband and my sister received as premiums. That was perfectly legal to do and gave us some extra income. As the war continued, practically all the men were being taken to the army. Practically all the refugees and displaced people that accepted Russian citizenship, have been mobilized into the Red army. We refused Russian citizenship until now and decided to continue without it. We received a stateless document a kind of "Laissez-Passer." My husband was lucky not to be taken to the army; the reason was also that he was a stakhanovetz and was needed in the factory.

After a few months, we moved closer to the center of town; we got a new apartment. Now, we lived in the modern part of town, that was also the center. We shared this apartment with a Russian woman that worked together with my sister and husband in the factory. She had a 7-year-old daughter living with her. Her husband was in the army fighting on the German front. She let us have a nice large room and the use of the kitchen; in return I would watch her 7-year-old daughter when she came back from school.

I had plenty of free time. The children both Zvi and the little girl Maya went to school every morning and came back in the afternoon. I started to think of having a baby of my own. I really desired a baby of my own. I was not getting any younger; my husband was earning a nice salary and our situation looked pretty much stable. Both my husband and I wanted a family. Shortly thereafter, I became pregnant and we were both overjoyed.

Our Russian neighbor received a letter from her husband. He was wounded in the war and was in a hospital somewhere far away in the Urals. She left everything, packed her clothing, took her daughter and went to join her husband. Now, we remained the only inhabitants of that apartment, it was very comfortable and we could not have asked for better; we even had running water in the kitchen, which was a rarity in Leninabad.

I befriended a Jewish family from Bukhara. He was a shoemaker but the family kept a few cows for extra income. I used to buy milk from them every day and in exchange sell them meat or other goods that my husband would bring home from the factory. We became very good friends. They had six children, but only two of them were still living with them; the other four were married and lived on their own. All of their children had studied and were well educated. They treated me like one of their daughters. Practically every Friday we would go to their house. They were Jewish, but their traditions and religious rites were Sephardic and different from ours. They lived and behaved like the local Tadziks or Uzbeks. The floor of their house was covered completely with oriental rugs. There was no table or chairs; we sat and ate on the floor. We also became very friendly with their married children.

I was pregnant and very happy. My Bukhara friends were a great help to me and gave me moral support. The news from the war was getting better. The Red army was advancing. We were hoping that the war would soon end and we could return home.

* * *

****We arrived in Leninabad in the early fall of 1942. Leninabad was a fairly large city. It had over 200,000 inhabitants, mostly consisting of the local Tadzhik population. They are a Moslem group with the same background of the Uzbeks. Leninabad was the second largest city in the state of Tadzhikistan; today the name of that city has been changed to Hodzent. The capital then was Stalinabad, today it is called Dushambe. There was a large part of the city that was very old; consisting mainly of small, narrow streets and alleys, filled with small one story houses where the local population was living. Some of the houses had large courtyards and gardens.*

The new part of the city was added after the Russians took over that part of the country, sometimes in the 1920s. The new part became the actual center of the city. The focal point in any of these towns was its town-market, called the 'Toltshok,' and that was the real heart of the city.

Leninabad was built on the shore of the river Sir Daria and the beginning of the Pamir mountains. It was basically a very old and pretty city; with an interesting history of which I know nothing.

In the city, there lived a fairly large Polish-Jewish community. Most of them were displaced people; refugees from Poland like us. The community was very well organized. There was a Polish school and an orphanage for the Polish children; all managed by Polish speaking personnel. In that school, Polish was the main language and Russian was taught as the second language. There were over 200 children in that school of which 90% were Jewish. By now, I was 9 years old; but all of my education consisted of one year in Russian school in Siberia. I spoke Polish well; since we spoke Polish at home. The first time I went to that school to register, they gave me an examination to determine into which grade to place me. They also told me to write a composition at home. Many of the children my age spoke Polish badly; they had heavy accents, since their language at home was Yiddish or Russian. However, they were better prepared in other subjects of which I knew nothing.

I wrote my composition with the help of my aunt Rose in Polish; for my oral examination, they asked me if I knew any poems. I quickly recited a piece from Pan Tadeusz by Mickiewicz, a milestone in classical Polish poetry. I knew some parts of it by heart, that aunt Rose taught me. Before I knew, I was assigned to grade 3. My biggest problem was all the other subjects of which I knew nothing, particularly arithmetic.

All the kids in my class were at least two to three years older than I was. They also lost years of study because of the war. I quickly caught up with all the studies, except arithmetic and that problem remained until my University days.

Finally, I was attending a regular school. I made friends with other boys; I was a child again. I was a child up to a point. Practically every afternoon I had to make some errands for my mother. Mother used to bring home meat and other goods and I had to deliver them the next day. We had a number of customers, mainly rich Jewish families, that could afford to buy everything on the black market. Every day after school, I would deliver packages that my mother prepared. I had a job to do.

Some afternoons, I had to meet my mother at the factory, which was very far away and there were no buses. There was no public transportation; everywhere in town we went by foot. My dear mother, may she rest in peace, had always special things for me to do. There were always things to

deliver or things to pick-up. My mother made sure that I was kept busy after school, I never had very much free time.

I remember one particular time that I felt very bad and resentful. That one afternoon the whole school was going to a Circus. I have never seen a circus. I was waiting for that event for a whole month and looked forward to see a circus. It was a rare occasion to have a Circus in town. Nothing doing, that afternoon my mother insisted I meet her at the factory and then make an urgent delivery.

*I never got to see that Circus performance. I cried all the way to the factory and back; but I did what mother wanted. That circus must have been very important to me, because I still remember my resentment, as if it were today.****

* * *

Finally, I was in my seventh month of pregnancy. I would spend the late mornings with my Bukhara friends until Zvi would come home from school. It was late November and it started to get cooler, specially in the mornings and in the evenings. That particular morning I remember, I went to see my doctor. I felt good and everything seemed to be under control. My sister and my husband were at work. That afternoon, I was home alone with Zvi listening to the radio. When the news came on, I turned the volume higher, to hear better. I heard a female voice announcing that today the Germans have liquidated the Lodz Ghetto. There was no more Ghetto in Lodz. They mentioned numbers; thousands of people have been deported to concentration camps and their death.

There was a terrible buzz in my ears. My head started to turn and I felt dizzy. I saw something coming at me; I do not know what it was; than a dark cloud surrounded me and I was blinded. In my mind I saw my parents being dragged away. I could not see their faces, but I knew that my mother was crying. She was holding on to my father's arm; there was desperation and fear in their expressions; then their images disappeared. I heard like an echo Zvi asking me what happened. I did not know how to explain it to him, I did not know what to say.

All of a sudden I started having labor pains. Zvi must have read in my eyes and face both the grief and the pain; he saw me crying. Looking at me, he started to cry too. He did not know what to do. He came over and took my hand; I squeezed it to release some pressure and with my other hand I held my stomach.

My sister came home from work, took one look at me and said. "Come, I will take you to the hospital."

"No, it's nothing, in a minute I'll be all right," I said.

"I am only in the seventh month." I did not tell her the news I heard over the radio.

In the morning, my sister took me to the hospital. They checked me and took me right away into the delivery room. I had a very difficult delivery; I was in labor for many hours. Finally, I gave birth to a tiny baby girl. My doctor knew all about my first baby, this time everything went fine. When I saw my baby, my happiness was so great, that I forgot completely all the labor pains and the suffering, that I went though only a few minutes ago. I looked at my baby's face like into a brilliant sun. This was November 28, 1943.

I could hardly believe my eyes; an hour after I gave birth, they brought me to eat a big plate with cabbage soup and a piece of black bread. OK, it was good food and I was hungry.

They had very strict rules in that hospital and would not allow my sister to enter the room. Fortunately, the room I was recovering was on the ground floor and I could show my sister the baby through the window. Soon all of our friends knew that I gave birth to a 2 months premature baby girl.

My husband arrived all radiant and happy—it was a new life also for us. That Saturday, we gave the child the name 'Malcah.' In Polish we called her Marylka.

My Bukhara friends organized a real "Kiddush" in a small shul. This was very unusual, since all shuls, synagogues, churches and mosques were officially closed. Religious group prayers were forbidden in the Soviet Union. Call it fortune or destiny, that day the local authorities gave permission to reopen that particular small shul for the Bukhara Jews. We had a double celebration, for my little Malcah and the re-opening of the Bukhara Jewish Synagogue. The baby was so sweet and for a 7 months baby she was rather big. We brought the baby home and everything seemed perfect; both my husband and I were really happy.

Unfortunately, good things do not last forever. Shortly after the birth of the baby, my husband lost his job. The Red army was advancing and the factory where my husband was working was being moved somewhere near Moscow. They wanted to take us along, but we did not want to go. We had it too good here. We also enjoyed this mild climate. We decided to stay. Both my husband and my sister were again without work.

We lost our comfortable, modern apartment. My sister and Zvi moved away to live on their own. My husband, the baby and I moved into a small room in the old Tadzik neighborhood, that was all we could afford.

Our dear Bukhara friend Avraham Ben Iosef, the shoemaker, told my husband not to worry; he would teach him how to become a shoemaker. According to him, to be a shoemaker these days paid more than to be a doctor.

It did not take too long before my husband learned the trade. He would repair and also make new shoes. His specialty became boots that he would make together with the other shoemakers. At least he started to make some money. By himself he made women's sandals that paid good money.

My sister had no financial problems. She was doing very well on her own. She had all kinds of deals going constantly, but we never discussed them. Living apart, I did not see Zvi or my sister very often anymore. There was also another problem. My husband had a fight with my sister and they did not speak to each other. This was the reason they moved away. My sister would visit me, when she knew that my husband was not around. She would come alone or with Zvi, loaded with food and cloth for me and the baby.

One day a Russian guy came into our house and told my husband a story of a magnificent opportunity not to be missed. He came from a small village not too far from Leninabad, that had several gold mines, tungsten and other precious metal mines. There were several hundred people living there already and they desperately needed a shoemaker. According to him, there was a lot of money to be made in shoemaking. Because of the mines, there was a lot of money circulating in that little village and some of the people became very rich.

Although our Bukhara friends were not very happy about it, my husband decided to move there. He wanted to go by himself and prepare everything before I and the baby would join him there.

The worst part was to separate myself from my sister and Zvi. My doctor was against my going away. I personally did not feel too good. My husband insisted to go to that gold mine and try his luck. He went there by himself. He worked there during the week and came to visit us every Sunday. The place was not very far; only a couple of hours drive by truck in the mountains. There was no public transportation; one had to hitch-hike to get there. The only vehicles were trucks; rarely did one see a passenger car. One usually lost more time waiting for a truck then the actual ride.

Unfortunately, after the birth of my child, I got sick and as time went by I was getting worse and worse. My husband had to return to the city and work again with our friend the shoemaker. With all the help I was getting from my doctor, I was getting worse from day to day.

In the beginning my baby was growing and developing rather well, but when I got sick, the child got sick too. It got to the point that I had to be hospitalized. The doctors diagnosed that I had a very strange disease; some kind of an Asiatic sickness, called 'Shpru.' Our lives become a nightmare. I was in one hospital and my baby was hospitalized in a children's hospital.

Little Zvi went to live in the orphanage; my sister got a new house on her own and our family broke up completely.

During that illness I lost a tremendous amount of weight; I became a walking skeleton. I was so weak that I could hardly walk. The doctors only shook their heads and said nothing—they did not know. I looked like a walking corpse. Everybody gave up on me; according to the doctors, I had no chance. I myself did not believe that I would come out alive from that hospital.

My poor husband worked day and night trying to make ends meet. He tried to make enough money to buy some of the medication on the black market for both the baby and me. There was practically no medication or drugs available in the hospitals. He was running from one hospital to the other and could hardly concentrate on his work.

Zvi came to visit me in the hospital. When he looked at me, he started to cry.

"Please, please Rouzia," he would cry, "you must get well for Marylka and for me."

I do not know which or whose God helped me, but slowly I got better. After a couple of months in that Hospital, the doctors told me that the worst part was over; soon I could go home. My little daughter was in the Children's Hospital; they decided to transfer me there, to be with my baby and to take care of her.

The Children's Hospital was not too far away. All the way there, I was crying until I saw my little baby again. I stayed in that Children's Hospital with my baby for the next three or four weeks. We were both recuperating and getting slowly better. We were lucky. In the Children's Hospital we had a Jewish lady doctor, that took care of us better than a mother. Her name was Noma Salomonovna Heifetz. Most of the doctors in the hospitals were women; all the men were at war. My husband, to thank Dr. Heifetz and the staff, made sandals for all the female doctors in the hospi-

tal. As the old proverb says, when you oil, the road gets smoother. We did get very good care in that hospital.

When I got out of the hospital, we were completely broke. My poor husband has also gone through hell. I felt sorry for him; especially when I saw the way he worked and the way he looked. During all my illness, I did not want to see anybody. The only ones I saw was my sister, my husband and Zvi.

Once at home, I realized how difficult it has been for my husband. It was very difficult to make a living. We had practically no money to buy the absolute minimum in order to survive. My sister Ghenia came to our help as usual.

As a shoemaker in this town, my husband was not able to make a living anymore; he had no work. We decided to move to 'Chairuk Dairon,' that little village with the gold mines. It was only a short trip by truck in the nearby mountains of Pamir. There, my husband worked during the day in the gold mine and after work as a shoemaker at home.

* * *

****I remember very well when Aunt Rose came home from the hospital with the newborn baby, Marylka. I was in the house talking to a customer who came to pick up some meat that mother had left for him. I tried to get rid of the customer before greeting my aunt and the baby, which I did a minute or so later. Uncle Sam was furious with me and would not let me see the baby. According to him, I was supposed to leave the customer and run immediately to greet my aunt and see the baby. I cried that whole morning, because I could not see the baby. When my uncle went out, my aunt called me to see the baby.*

Right after the baby was born, things started to go wrong. My uncle and my mother lost their jobs. I do not know the details, but my mother had a fight with my Uncle Sam and we moved out. We shared provisory rooms with another woman, that had also a son a year or so older then me. Her son and I were in the same class at school. However, this was for a very short time. My mother was doing all kinds of businesses; I never knew what, but she always managed to make enough money to live comfortably. The problem was that she was traveling quite a bit and there was no one to look after me. Mother and I decided that I would go to live in the orphanage. Since I had no father, I was considered half an orphan and they accepted me.

In the orphanage I slept in a room with 30 other kids. We slept two kids in a single bed; with our heads on the opposite sides of the bed. We received three meals a day and did not suffer any hunger. I knew all the children in the orphanage, because we all went to the same Polish school.

My mother rented a little house of her own with a small courtyard very close to the orphanage. When Aunt Rose got sick and was hospitalized, my mother took the baby to her house and took care of her. She paid a woman that came every morning to take care of the baby. I would come in the afternoons to sit with the baby. My mother made arrangements with the orphanage, so I could baby-sit every afternoon. My mother did the rest of the time.

The word got around that Aunt Rose had a very strange Asiatic disease and most probably would not make it. According to some of the doctors, it was a matter of days and she would die. Mother and Uncle Sam did not know what to do with the baby. Without a mother and a desperate father; they even thought to let the baby starve. This is when my mother took baby Marylka to her house. Uncle Sam was having great difficulty to make a living and was in no condition to take care of a small baby. All he was thinking was how to save his wife and make enough money to pay for some food. After a while the baby got sick; my mother had no choice, but to take the baby to the hospital.

I remember visiting my aunt several times during her illness. She looked like a walking skeleton. I remember crying a lot, each time I went there. When the baby was in the hospital, I would see my mother only once or twice a week, but I did go to see my Aunt Rose.

When Aunt Rose finally got out of the hospital with the baby, they lived in a most depressing small room in the old Tadzik section of town. I remember feeling very sad, when I saw the conditions they were living in. It was a small dirty room without a window; there was only a door that opened into a courtyard. The courtyard had several similar rooms, that were full with poor people and children. The courtyard was impregnated with strange smells, of cooking, dirt, garbage but mostly of poverty.

The room they lived in had a dirt floor; there were no furniture; they slept on a dirty mattress spread on the floor; there was no table and no chairs. Marylka was 8 months old, but was too weak to even sit down. She was tiny and skinny. Everything about this place was depressing; I felt like crying.

I remember seeing them several times in that awful room where they lived, before they moved to Chairuk Dairon; that famous gold mine. Every time I came, I brought some food; a fresh lepioshka-bread, some uruk and

yogurt. I had always money in those days. Mother always left me enough pocket money.

Mother was paying me for her lack of attention and love. When she was not in town, she would leave the money for me with a friend of hers, Esther. Every time I visited my aunt, I left sad and depressed. I would give all the money I had to the baby, because I knew that my aunt, although she needed it badly, would not take it from me.

Although it was very sad, I liked to visit them and play with Marylka. The little girl adored me. After a while, they left town and I did not see them for a long time. Then I saw them practically every day during my summer school vacation of 1945.

Sometime in 1944 my mother got into a very profitable business. She opened a number of kiosks selling ice cold soft drinks with different flavored sauces. She opened an extra three kiosks in that gold mine village of Chairuk Dairon; that by summer 1945 became a very rich little village. My mother was the only one in the village that had ice; it was brought especially for her every day from the city. By the summer of 1945 my mother was a rich woman, but she also worked very hard. She rented a big and comfortable house in that village and still kept a small apartment in the city. She had help, but it was her that ran the business. In the mornings she would work in the kiosk on the market place, that was full of people and business was good. In the evenings she would work in the kiosk near the dance floor and the cinema, that was again mobbed with thirsty people. There were three and sometimes four of us in that kiosk serving ice water with the various sauces. The most popular was a red almond flavored sauce that I can still taste today. The little town became very prosperous because of the mines. People earned good salaries, but there was very little they could spend it on. This is why my mother's drinks did so well.

I was also put to work during the day, selling the iced drinks in the third kiosk, that stood at the entrance of the village where the trucks stopped.

There was not too much business. Only from time to time, there were people when the trucks arrived or they were leaving. This place was considered a sort of bus stop. I sat in that kiosk, read books and wrote poetry.

There were no buses and no public transportation. To go to the city, one had to hitch a ride on one of the trucks that were going back and forth during the day; bringing and taking things to and from the city. All the trucks would pick up people, mostly to sit on top. The people usually gave

the driver a few rubles for the ride; it was a standard and accepted thing to do.

*Every day that summer I would go to visit my aunt and of course little Marylka. I always brought things to eat for them and especially sweets for Marylka. I know that my mother did not talk to Uncle Sam, but I know that my mother and my Aunt Rose never stopped seeing each other and always behaved like sisters. I also know that my mother used to help Aunt Rose financially, but it was not easy. My Aunt Rose was a very proud person.****

14

Chairuk Dairon

We lived again in a kibitke; a small mud hut in which there was hardly enough room to turn around. But that was all we could afford. Our little baby Marylka was the focal point and the most important thing in our lives. Our living conditions were very difficult; it was the baby that gave us the strength and a new hope to go on. She made living worthwhile, it was enough to see her smile and we were happy.

I remember Zvi came to visit us once. He never mentioned that he had run away without saying a word in the orphanage or to his mother. The police were looking for him all over for the past 3 days. Finally, his mother told the police that maybe he was with us in Chairuk Dairon. There were no telephones available in Chairuk Dairon; there was barely electricity and not for everybody; most houses still had gasoline lamps or candles. The police came from Leninabad to look for him. They found him 3 days later in our house. He did not want to go back; he wanted to stay with us. The police took him back to the orphanage.

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****It was November 1944 and I was just 11 years old. My mother was living in a very nice apartment. It was located on one of the main streets in Leninabad. After a while Oscar moved in. Oscar became officially my mother's second husband a year or so later. I did not like Oscar and I did not approve of him living in our house. Although, physically I lived in the orphanage, but I considered my mother's home, also my home. I lived in the orphanage because it was more convenient for both my mother and me. My mother was often away, traveling on business; she also had a busy social life and there was no one to take care of me. I lived in the orphanage, they took care of me, they fed me and made sure I did my homework and I had friends to be with and play with.*

I would go to my mother's house whenever I wanted or whenever my

mother was there. Oscar to me was a total stranger. Furthermore, he made no effort whatsoever to be pleasant, or be accepted. He was just the opposite. He was an egotist, arrogant and full of himself. His presence in the house was oppressive to me; he acted like the owner and master of the house. I am sure he resented me. When my mother was not there, he would boss me around, telling me to do various chores for him. It was not as much what he said, it was the way he said it that made me resent him and rebel.

What triggered my escape that day was his arrogant demand that I go to bring him a bucket of water, because he wanted to wash himself. There was no running water in the house. Water had to be brought to the house in buckets from a public fountain that was a couple of blocs away. Many times I brought water for the house and thought nothing of it. That particular day, maybe it was the way he said it; but the water was the breaking point. My mother was not home. When he ordered me to fetch a bucket of water for him, I told him he was not my father to give me orders and if he wanted water he could go and fetch it himself. He wanted to hit me for my insolence, but I ran away.

I was desperate, I did not know what to do, or where to go; my whole world seemed had just collapsed. I had no home anymore. At that moment, I felt like a complete orphan. I desperately needed someone I could talk to. I needed badly a friendly and encouraging word; some love and comprehension from someone—but there was no one. I remember walking the streets for a while and crying. Then I decided to run away to my aunt Rose, to uncle Sam and Marylka; they will understand, they loved me.

This is how I happen to arrive to my aunt's house in Chairuk Dairon. I never told them what happened and the reason I ran away. They were very surprised, when after 3 days the police came looking for me. To my aunt and uncle, I invented a story about a school holiday and that I missed them and wanted to see them. They never knew the real reason.

When I got back, my mother was furious. She decided to teach me a lesson. First, she wanted to know why I ran away and second, why I was so insolent and rude to Oscar.

That time I finally exploded. I told her that I did not like Oscar. I did not want him around here; he had no business to be here; that I had a father living in Brazil and I will not take any orders from that arrogant bastard. That was one of the few times that I really rebelled and made my mother cry. I wanted to tell her so many other things, that I loved her and needed her, but I did not know how to express myself and those words were never said.

I wanted so very much that my mother should give me a hug or hold me; tell me a kind word, that she loved me and that she cared. She did none of that. All she managed to tell me between tears was, that when the war will be over, I will be able to go and live with my father in Brazil. I think this was the only time I ever talked to my mother so openly on that subject. My mother, may she rest in peace, was a great and extremely generous woman; she gave everything, but she did not know how to give love to her children.

*From that time on and for all the 40 years thereafter, Oscar and I tolerated each other. Through the years, most of the time we did not even speak to each other. Only much later, after my mother died, he got old and remained all alone; I felt sorry for him. Whenever I would come to Chicago, I would visit him for a couple of hours or go with him to lunch. He was very happy to see me then. He was still living in the same apartment all alone. Nothing had changed inside that apartment since my mother died; except it was now dirty and unkempt. He had no friends and did not get along with the rest of the family either. His own daughter, Frances, had difficulty getting along with him. He lived alone and died alone. At the age of 83, he was found in his bed, two days after he died. They had to break down the door to get into the apartment. We did give him a funeral as part of the family. He is buried in Chicago next to my mother.****

* * *

Our life in this little village was difficult, we lived from hand to mouth and from day to day; all we could do was wait and hope for a better tomorrow. We did not have much, but at least there was enough bread and also something to put into the pot to make a soup. From time to time my husband would go to the city to sell some of his sandals and bring back many different things; specially dried fruit, honey cake, fresh fruit and fresh vegetables, that were in abundance and cheap in the city, and practically none or very expensive in our village. Every time he came back from the city, it was like a holiday.

In spring 1945 my sister rented a big house in Chairuk Dairon. She set up three kiosks selling ice cold soft drinks. She was doing extremely well, especially during the summer months. That summer of 1945 after the school was out, also Zvi came to Chairuk. He lived with his mother during the summer vacation months and helped in the business. He would come every day to play with Marylka and she adored him. Due to the illness

Marylka was slow in developing physically. She was small, skinny, rickety and as a result a late walker, but her mind was as sharp as a razor, she was intelligent and smart.

The news was good; the war was over, but not yet for us. For us nothing has changed. I wrote letters everywhere. To Poland, to America, trying to find out if anyone survived. We finally heard about all the atrocities of the concentration camps and the death camps and the mass killings of the Jews of Europe. However, we never realized the extent of the Holocaust. We were still hoping that there were survivors and that someone from our family was still alive. I left our names and addresses with the Polish delegation in Leninabad and wrote all the letters, giving my return address care of them.

The day they announced that the war was over, everybody went crazy. People danced on the streets embracing and kissing each other for happiness, yet somehow we were afraid to believe it. It was too good to be true. The world was free again. These were the slogans and everybody was applauding. Even little Marylka was clapping her hands and singing: 'Paci, paci kichelech,' a Yiddish song for babies to clap their hands. For us and our daily life nothing has changed. However, there was an exaltation in the air. We knew now, that very soon the day will come and we will leave this place and go back to our home—to Lodz.

After the war was over, a few people did not wait for an official permission to leave; they packed up their belongings and left illegally. To travel in Russia by train, from one city to another, one required a special permission; a traveling document issued by the Police Headquarters. For us to go home, we had to travel over 10,000 km, practically across half of the Asian and European continents to return to Poland. There was no way we could leave illegally with a small child; with no money and not knowing what to expect.

The summer came and we became increasingly anxious to know what will happen next. When could we leave. I wrote again several letters, but had no answers. I even wrote to our friend the general from Siberia; he wrote back a very warm and loving letter and even sent us a package full of expensive canned goods. He survived and was very happy that the war was finally over.

Some time in August 1945, we received a notice from the Polish delegation in Leninabad that there was a letter for us from Lodz. My sister left immediately to Leninabad to find out what it was all about. Everybody was extremely anxious and curious, since this was the first letter to arrive in

Leninabad from Poland after the war. Until now, the only news we had was from the radio or newspapers. This time it was a letter from our younger sister Sally. We were sitting on needles and waiting until my sister Ghenia got back. She had swollen eyes from crying as she handed me the letter.

I took the letter with trembling hands and read it. Our sister Sally had survived the ghetto and Auschwitz. She told us to sit for an hour shiva for our parents. She described in a few words how and when our parents died. They were lucky, they both died a normal death in the ghetto and in their own beds. They were both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Lodz. All the rest of our family in that age group, all of our aunts and uncles, finished their lives in a death camp or in the crematoriums of Auschwitz.

She wrote us that it was by coincidence that she met some Polish-Jewish soldiers in Lodz, that came with the Red army. She casually mentioned that she had two sisters in Russia and told them our names. It so happened that one of them knew us, and knew that we were in Leninabad. He suggested that she write to the Polish Delegation in Leninabad. He told her that we were alive and well. She wrote that letter without really hoping that it would ever reach us.

The letter arrived by military mail. She told me the story many years later. She wrote the letter to us, but did not know how to send it to Russia. The regular post office did not function properly yet. She stopped a Russian officer on the street and asked him, how she could send that letter. He took the letter from her and promised to send it. Here it was, without an address; just mine and my sister's names, Leninabad–Russia and it reached us.

The whole city of Leninabad and Chairuk Dairon knew about that letter. Anyone that knew us, and even those that did not, from the Jewish community came to find out about the letter. This letter touched all of us very deeply. There was a pain in my heart that is very hard for me to describe. My sister and I sat shiva for our parents and for the rest of our family that perished in the holocaust.

After the letter from our sister Sally arrived, my sister Ghenia decided to leave. She had no intentions to wait until the Russians were going to make up their minds and give us permission to leave. She was going to get permissions of her own now and not wait. She decided she was going home and, as usual, no one could stop her. It was beginning of September when my sister, Zvi and Oscar left to go back to Lodz. There was no way for us with a little baby to leave without proper means, without money, without documents.

My sister Ghenia and Zvi came to say good-bye. Marylka was holding on to Zvi and cried.

"Please don't leave me." She was almost two years old. She was quite precocious, she knew exactly that they were leaving and we were staying. They left mid-September 1945.

* * *

****After the letter arrived from my aunt Sally, my mother had only one thing in mind, to get out. She went to Stalinabad, the capital of Tadzhikistan to which we belonged and got for us special travel documents to Lwow, an ex-Polish city on the border with Poland. How much she paid and how she got those special permissions to travel, only she knew. But she got them. We left Leninabad mid-September 1945 in secret; nobody was supposed to know that we were leaving. I remember that it was mid September, because I had just started school and about a week later we left. I was not even supposed to say good-bye to my friends at the orphanage or at school.*

We did go to say good-bye to my Aunt Rose, Marylka and Uncle Sam. All of us cried. My mother even said good-bye to my Uncle Sam, although she has not spoken to him for almost two years. It was very sad to say good-bye. I was not very happy to go, because Oscar was going with us. I almost preferred to stay, but I had no choice, I was almost 12 years old. It was good-bye Leninabad forever and I was very sad to leave. I had made many very good friends in the orphanage. There, I had unforgettable and wonderful experiences, sometimes lonely, sad and happy memories, but I cherish them all still today and I will never forget.

*The two and a half years I spent in the orphanage was a very important part of my life. First of all, I was a child among children. Before that, I spent all of my time only with grown ups. Here I attended a regular school and learned how to study. That Polish school in Leninabad was my learning foundation for the future, the desire to learn and the importance to get a higher education.****

15

The War Is Over—We Are Going Home

Sometime in November we had a surprise visit from a cousin of my husband's, Beniek. He was an officer in the Polish army and came especially to Leninabad to see us. He met my sister Sally in Lodz and she told him, where we were. It was a joy to see him and of course he had many sad stories to tell us about the holocaust. A few days later he returned to Poland.

In December 1945, an official order was issued by the local government. All the people holding Russian passports, that were not originally from Tadzhikistan, had to report to the local police and register. All of them received travel documents and were free to go wherever they wanted. We had a terrible problem; we had stateless passports and could not obtain permission or travel documents to leave.

All the other Jews in Leninabad were leaving. Special train convoys were being organized to take them back to the once Polish territories; today part of Russia. We are the only Jewish family in Chairuk Dairon that was stuck. We packed our things and went to Leninabad. In the city, we found a number of families that were in the same position as we were. When we came back to Leninabad, there was absolutely no problem to find rooms to live. Most of the refugees and the displaced people have already left the city and there was plenty of rooms available and much cheaper than before.

We felt trapped; we were desperate; everybody was leaving or left already and we were stuck. We shared our kibitke with another Jewish couple; at least we were not alone. My Bukhara friends were happy to see us and gave us all the moral support they could. The city streets were practically empty. Even the local Tadzhik population was sorry that so many of the people left. Only a few days before the city was booming and was full of people and life; now the city looked empty and sad. For the next 8 weeks we lived in continuous apprehension, we felt hopeless, frantic and worried what will be our future.

Finally, one day we received a notice to report immediately to the

NKVD. We became petrified; to be called in front of the NKVD meant only trouble. Will they ship us again to Siberia or some Gulag? We were really scared. The other families that were in the same position as us were also summoned to come at exactly the same time.

When all of us were there, an official from the NKVD made us a nice speech. The Polish government in exile from England has requested that we be allowed to go back to Poland. We were considered real Polish patriots, because we have not accepted the Russian citizenship throughout all these years. We were given official travel documents and a date to leave.

It is difficult to describe our happiness; we were finally free; we were going home. It did not take us very long to pack, we owned practically nothing. Finally the day arrived for us to leave. We said good-bye to our dear Bukhara friends. They could not accompany us to the train station; it was too dangerous for them to be seen with foreigners. We left Leninabad. This time we rode in a regular passenger train. They gave us food. The train stopped on many stations and on each station more Polish people joined the train; most of them Jewish.

Weeks went by and we were still riding on that train. It seemed as if this journey would never end. It was extremely tiring and difficult to live in a train like this; but the idea of going home and live again in a free world, made it all so much more bearable.

Marylka was the star in our train compartment. She was two years old and spoke both Polish and Russian. She spoke to everybody; she was telling stories about going to Lodz to meet her Aunt Sally.

We found out that, Luba, my husband's older sister, had survived the concentration camp and was living in Stockholm. We have not heard anything from my sisters Sally or from my sister Ghenia; so we decided to go Home—to Lodz.

When we arrived in Poland, which we considered our homeland, we were very disappointed. The welcome was certainly not a pleasant one. Right after we crossed the Polish border, I overheard a conversation between a Polish policeman and a railroad worker; one was saying to the other:

"We are sending to Russia coal and they send us back Jews. Why don't they keep the Jews, we do not want them here."

Needless to say, I was disillusioned, furious and very depressed. After what happened during this war; after six million Jews were put to death, one would think that even the most heartless of men would be a little more considerate, more understanding and less hateful. I realized that nothing

has changed; they were the same way before the war and remained anti-Semitic after the war. Anti-Semitism must be a classical hereditary Polish and Ukrainian disease and no vaccine has yet been found to cure it—even today.

Both my husband and I were disgusted. We decided not to remain in Poland for a minute longer than we absolutely had to. At the train station in Lodz, we were met by my husband's sister, Luba, her husband and our cousin, Beniek, the Polish officer.

It was the same train station, from which six and a half years earlier I left my home. I could not help myself, I was crying. I do not know if I cried from happiness to be back, or I cried because there was no more home. Luba took us to her house. She lived rather comfortably in a nice apartment on the first floor. That apartment once belonged to a Jewish family.

We were going up the stairs to the apartment, but my little Marylka refused to go up the stairs; she was afraid, she has never seen a hallway with steps before. My husband took her in his arms and brought her upstairs. In the apartment, the child stood still without saying a word and looked around. She looked into the dining room and saw a table and chairs; she has never seen anything like that. The last few years we lived the Asian way; we ate on the floor or on the bed where we slept. She looked surprised and stupefied; everything was new and strange to her.

We were very happy to be reunited with our family. We sat and talked about our experiences, but mostly about those that survived and those that did not make it. There were memories upon memories; each one of us had too many of his own and most of them were far too depressing, sad and painful to talk about or even to remember.

I sometimes felt silly and self-conscious to talk about my sufferings and my war experiences. I knew that other people had their own experiences and most probably much worse than mine. I tried to make my story as short as possible and not too painful.

I heard the most terrifying stories and the most atrocious experiences that were told in a completely normal voice. There were no tears or hesitations, as if it were the most natural occurrence; as if these stories were something unimportant, a gossip, something that happened a long time ago to somebody else and not to them.

I heard people telling stories of their concentration camp experiences, as if what happened to them did not touch them personally; as if it happened to somebody else. Thinking back today, I do not know if the shock was too great right after the war, or was it that all of us did not want to real-

ize, or were afraid to face reality of what really happened to us and what we went through. Or was it all too painful to admit, that these things actually did happen to us. Most of us wanted to make believe that it did not happen, that it was only a bad dream and wanted to forget. On the outside, we were perfectly normal people. Inside each survivor, there is a personal story; a pain and very sensitive scars that remained hidden; these scars are there and will remain with us forever—until we die.

Marylka received all kinds of toys, that she has never seen before. She sat on the floor the way she was accustomed and played. One day, she saw a door open to another room and she went in to look. She came running back to me and said in Russian, "Mama, I don't want to stay in this kibitke anymore."

"Why?" I asked her. "What happened?"

She looked around, that no one should hear her and told me, "Mama, there is another baby girl in that room and . . ." she stammered, "and she is pretty and, and . . . no one will love me here, and, and . . . I want to go back to 'Batiushka Stalin," and she started to cry.

I did not understand what she was talking about. I went with her to the other room. There was a big mirror from ceiling to the floor and she saw herself reflected in that mirror. This was the first time she had seen herself in a mirror. The only mirror she knew was a small hand mirror. I took her by the hand and stood in front of the mirror and explained it to her. First she touched me, then she touched herself, then the mirror and finally she started to laugh. She was very happy and she found herself very pretty. Marylka was a very likable child; it was easy for her to conquer anyone and everybody loved her.

I really felt sorry for Luba. Luba and her husband Leon were deported to Auschwitz together with their 13 year old son. In Auschwitz they were separated. They never found out what happened to their son. It is a well-known fact that in Auschwitz most children and older people were automatically gassed and then finished in the crematoriums. However, there was a rumor that some young boys were saved for wild sexual and medical experimental purposes.

Poor Luba refused to accept the fact that her son ended his 13 years in the ovens of Auschwitz. She walked around with the picture of her son and contacted anyone that she thought could help her, to trace or to find her son. She contacted the Red Cross, the Jewish community centers all over Europe, hoping that maybe somehow her son had survived. Unfortunately,

she never found him. He must have perished with the rest of 6 million Jews.

The first day in Lodz, I left my daughter with Luba in the apartment. My husband, our cousin Beniek, the Polish officer and I went to look of what remained of our homes. Only God knows how I felt coming back to a place where I was born and raised and find complete desolation. On the place where stood my parents' house, our bakery and store, there was only a pile of debris and rubble.

The house behind, where my husband and I lived after we were married, was still there. Somebody lived in our apartment. I knocked and excused myself to the Polish woman that opened the door. I explained that I used to live there before the war, that I did not want the apartment back; I did not want to disturb; all I wanted is to take a look, if I may.

She let us in and I looked around. Most of the furniture there I recognized; I bought it when I was getting married. For a moment, I had a vision, I had the impression that all of my close relatives were talking to me. I was seeing my mother's family, my aunts that stayed in the apartment right after the war broke out in 1939. I was like in a trance. My husband dragged me out of there. I walked around the courtyard, where I spent all of my childhood and my youth.

As I was walking in the courtyard, it felt like walking over dead bodies. Again, my husband dragged me away from there and insisted we go back to his sister's apartment. I did not want to go yet. I wanted to see for the last time the rubble that used to be my home; because I knew that I will never again set foot or see this place again. I closed my eyes and tried to remember as it was once. I saw the house; I saw our living room the night I left home; I saw the figures of my mother and father, then everything got foggy as my eyes filled with tears.

I raised my head to look the other way and I was surprised to see a big field growing potatoes. Once that field contained many lovely houses and was part of the Lodz ghetto. All around, everything was destroyed. My childhood, my youth, my life's memories were no more; everything was gone forever. It looked as if nothing ever existed there before, what I remembered was only a dream.

The hope and dreams I had during the past six years of war—was to return home and embrace my loved ones. There were no home and no loved ones anymore. These were only empty dreams. Dreams of a life that has been destroyed forever. I had no place to call home anymore.

We went to the house where my husband's family used to live; where

he and his sisters and brother were born and raised. Unfortunately, his brother Benzion with his family did not make it through the war. Downstairs in the building there was a grocery store. We knew the owners of that store quite well; now this store belonged to the once poor Polish janitor. When the janitor saw us, his only comment was,

"Oh, you also survived?"

It was said with a nasty, ironic smirk. That was enough for me.

We came back to Luba's apartment both depressed and morally destroyed. I thought that I was prepared, before coming back to Lodz to face certain facts. I knew it would be difficult; that nothing would be as it used to be. However, I was not prepared for the cruel reality that I saw that day. I told my husband that I did not want to stay in this city any longer.

He tried to calm me, telling me that many Jews were coming back to start a new life there. The Jewish community was becoming organized and Jews were living there comfortably and doing business again. After all, this was our home town; we were born and raised there; why not give it a try; there were wonderful business opportunities. My heart told me—NO.

We went to register with the Jewish Community in Lodz. We found our names on the list of dispersed people; we were being searched for by our families in the United States and in Palestine. There were also two letters for us. One letter was from the Red Cross in Stockholm, from my husband's youngest sister Nouma; she survived the war in a concentration camp and was taken after the war by the Red Cross to Sweden.

The other letter was from my sister Sally; she wrote it before she left Lodz. She informed us that she was leaving for Germany and she hoped that we would do the same. She also left us detailed information, where to find the graves of our parents in the Jewish cemetery.

Next day accompanied by our cousin Beniek, we went to the Jewish cemetery. Luba came with us. She had already made a double memorial stone for both of her parents. My father-in-law died in the ghetto; he was all swollen from hunger before he died. My mother-in-law was deported to Auschwitz and went up in smoke in the crematorium, hopefully to a better life.

I had no problem finding my parents' graves, even though they had no memorial stones. The directions given by my sister were very accurate. I felt it was my duty and I made memorial stones for my parents; may they rest in peace. I had pictures taken at the graves and sent copies to my father's brother and sister in Chicago.

All through the war, I was dreaming to go home—to Lodz. Now I

could hardly wait to get out. We decided to go to Germany. By now, both of my sisters, Sally and Ghenia were there. Most of the Polish Jews that survived the holocaust came back to Poland; to their home towns to look for their loved ones. Everyone, deep in his heart, was hoping that someone from their family would survive. Unfortunately, in most cases they found no one.

Many had the idea of coming back to Poland and find a home. Unfortunately, the majority realized in no time that there was no future for them in that country; all that was left in that country was hate and bad memories. Jews were not welcomed before the war and it seems even more so after the war. They became 'persona non grata' in that country.

Very disappointed and disillusioned, everybody was escaping; especially to Germany. Germany became the Mecca. It was controlled by the Allies; particularly by the Americans and British. UNRA and other American associations were helping the survivors to find temporary accommodation in DP camps. Furthermore, from Germany there was a better possibility to immigrate to the United States, to South America, to Palestine or any other part of the world and forget Eastern Europe and especially Poland.

I contacted several Jewish organizations that were helping Jews to get out of Poland. There seemed to be a mass exodus. It was far more difficult than I thought. The only way to get out of Poland was crossing illegally a couple of borders.

With a small child, it became even more difficult to undertake such a trip. Eventually, we were accepted by the Jewish Help Organization to leave with a small group to Germany. We left Lodz in the middle of the night. We were not suppose to take too much luggage with us, only what we could carry ourselves.

A few days before we left, there was the famous pogrom in Kielce. Several hundred Jews were massacred by a group of Polish anti-Semites, just for the fun of it. The government did not react; they were not even embarrassed. Whoever did it was never found. The whole thing was quickly forgotten. If I had any doubts before, after what happened in Kielce, I could hardly wait to get out from this country. In Poland, the earth is impregnated with Jewish blood; starting with Auschwitz, Majdanek, Sobibor and the many different Ghettos, etc.

16

Good-bye Forever My Home Town Lodz

This time I was leaving Lodz for good and I didn't care if I saw Lodz or Poland ever again—and I never did. Before we left Lodz, we bought a few things for ourselves and for the child. It was summer and we decided to buy a pair of white shoes for Marylka. The child was ecstatic; she has never been to a shoe store before. When she tried on a pair of white shoes and although they were too big, she refused to take them off. There was no way to persuade her to try another pair. She was afraid that we would not buy the shoes for her. She left the store wearing the bigger size white shoes.

We were ready to leave and convinced our cousin Beniek and his wife Nadzia to come with us.

"Zvi, do you remember them? They are the ones that lived in Baltimore."

We took a night train. After riding for several hours, we reached a small station near the Czechoslovakian border. On the station when we got off the train, there were a couple of people from the Jewish organization waiting for us. From there on, we had to walk. There were quite a few miles of walking to cross the border into Czechoslovakia.

When we got out from the village and reached a forest, Beniek threw away his Polish officers uniform and changed into a regular suit. It was very dark and quiet. It was in the middle of the night and we were tired and half asleep. We walked on a narrow country path full of stones, which made the crossing even more difficult. It was a long walk; we took turns to carry little Marylka in our arms and she was getting heavier with each mile. We were also a little scared about crossing illegally the border. We were told to be quiet and not to smoke. We must have walked a long time; when it started to get light, we were in Czechoslovakia. We never knew exactly when we crossed the border, but were relieved that with the first rays of the sun, we are out of Poland forever.

Our guides took us to a small train station. Shortly thereafter we boarded a train. We reached Prague and from there we took a train to Vi-

enna. To cross the border from Czechoslovakia into Austria was no problem. We took a regular train. In Vienna we were taken into a DP camp that was located inside a Rothschild palace. The camp was overfilled with an agglomeration of lost Jewish people from all over Europe; all survivors from the holocaust.

There were many single people; some newly formed couples and a large number of orphans, children underage without parents or family. These children have somehow survived and their parents and families have perished in the various concentration camps in Poland or in Russia. Now they were all alone and lost, not knowing what to do or where to go. Everybody in that camp wanted the same thing, to find a place called—home.

Fortunately, the Jewish organizations with the help of the UNRA, Hias and organizers sent from Palestine offered the necessary help. The orphans were offered provisory homes in newly organized orphanages and schools. They were given a possibility of learning a trade and a chance to start a new life. Most of them eventually landed in Israel.

We were informed that most of the survivors of the holocaust were settling in the American Sector, in the southern part of Germany. We stayed only a few days in Vienna and visited the city. This magnificent city looked sad. It had a nostalgic and depressing post war atmosphere; everything seemed gray, even the Pratter was deserted and looked abandoned.

I was very disappointed. I always imagined Vienna as the beautiful, grand and glamorous lady of the Strauss waltzes; the happy Operettas, the magnificent Baroque architecture and the immortal music of Mozart and Beethoven. But that Vienna I did not see that summer of 1946. Maybe it was me, my mood or my mind, that was someplace else and refused to see any beauty, even if there was beauty.

We continued our voyage to Germany by train. Our child behaved beautifully; she never cried, she smiled at everybody. Thanks to her, we had special treatment wherever we went. It was easier for us to get on a train and got better places to sit; we even got better rooms in the hotels we were staying, because of the child.

The train out of Vienna was very slow; by the time we reached Landsberg, we were exhausted. Landsberg was a provisory DP camp in Southern Germany, half way between Munich and the Austrian border. This camp was especially organized to receive the displaced survivors coming from Austria. There was a mass migration from Eastern Europe to West Germany. There were thousand upon thousands of people like us. All the Jews that came illegally from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Ru-

mania, the Baltic States, Russia and who knows from where else; they were all brought to Landsberg first.

Landsberg was a kind of a registration and transit camp, organized and maintained by the UNRA. From there the people would be resettled into other DP camps spread throughout the American Sector of Germany. Most of the DP camps were organized in ex-military barracks or military schools and became little independent satellites with their own management and their own social organizations.

There were also several Jewish groups that helped to maintain and organize medical and social facilities. There were Jewish schools, synagogues, entertainment and a rich social life to pick up the morale and give some joy and hope to these poor and displaced people.

The Landsberg camp was situated in a beautiful Bavarian valley surrounded by the Alps. Thousands of military tents have been mounted to accommodate the crowds that were pouring in every day from Austria. The camp was overrun with Jewish people from all over. At least a dozen different languages could be heard in that camp. Yiddish became Esperanto, it was the most common and universal language that most of these people could understand, speak or communicate. It was summer and the weather was good. We were assigned a place in a tent like everybody else. We received plenty of food, including American cigarettes and chocolates.

No one knew what to do or where to go. We were told to wait. The camp management would give us instructions and we would be assigned and given permanent accommodations in one of the DP camps in Southern Germany.

In that camp we met several people we knew. One day, I was sitting with Marylka outside our tent, when a woman stopped just in front of us, she looked at me and said, “Is your name Grzes?”

I was very surprised to hear my maiden name. I looked at her and said, “Yes.”

“I thought I recognized you,” she said.

She told me that she had survived the concentration camp together with my sister Sally and knew that my sister lived in a small town called Weiden. According to her, it was not too far from Landsberg. I could hardly wait. I left my husband and the child in the camp and decided to go to Weiden in search of my sister.

I inquired how to get to Weiden, but in the camp no one knew. I went to the train station. There, things were even more chaotic and I could not get the right information. They suggested I take a train to Munich, which

was not too far away. In Munich I would get the correct information as well as the train to Weiden.

After approximately an hour's ride, I arrived in Munich. The Munich train station was badly damaged. A good part of the city that I saw from the train was also badly destroyed from the allied bombardments; especially the part around the train station and the railroad tracks. It did not make much of an impression on me. I was used to see the destruction and the devastation produced by the war. Furthermore, this was Germany—they wanted this war. They made all of Europe suffer for 6 long years. They were responsible not only for the 6 million murdered Jews, but also for the millions of Russians, Gypsies, Poles, Czechoslovakians, Yugoslavians, Greeks, Scandinavians, French, Dutch, British, Americans and millions of their own German soldiers. I could not feel sorry for them at all.

In the Munich train station, I bought the train ticket to Weiden and asked when the next train was leaving. In all my excitement and without realizing or knowing, I got on a local instead of an express train. The train was slow and it took me forever to reach Regensburg. There I was told to change trains for Weiden. The train ride was terrible. I rode on that train all afternoon and into the night. Every few minutes the train would stop on a station; I thought I will never get to Weiden. With the express train it would have taken only three hours; of course I didn't know any better. By the time I reached Regensburg it was late at night and I had missed the last connection to Weiden. I had to wait 6 hours, practically all night, to get the first available morning train to Weiden.

Well, I did not have much of a choice. I sat in that train station and waited. I got hungry and felt dirty, I did not have a real bath since we left Vienna and that was over a week ago.

I stepped out from the train station and saw a young German selling fresh bread-rolls. I had no more money with me, but I did have a few packages of American cigarettes; that I got in the DP camp in Landsberg. In those days American cigarettes were worth more than money. They were only available on the black market and very expensive. When I gave the young man a package of cigarettes, he was absolutely delighted and offered me as many rolls as I wanted. I took a few bread-rolls, they were still warm and I devoured them. I found a faucet with running water in the bathroom. I washed my hands and face and even drank some water from the palm of my hand. The hunger was gone, my thirst was quenched and I was satisfied. I dried myself with the little handkerchief that I carried with me. One learns to be content with very little; when one has to. Let's face it, I

had a very good and long lesson during this war. I learned to appreciate many little things that I never dreamed existed. I learned to accept and live under conditions that I never thought possible. Life is a good teacher; I don't know who, but I am sure that someone has said it before, and believe me—it is true.

I was too excited to sleep; the thought of meeting my sister after almost seven years, kept me awake. So many strange thoughts kept running through my mind. Even if I did not want to think of the past, I could not help it; I kept seeing my sister and my parents that night I left them in 1939.

I was also afraid to miss my train; so I just sat there in the station with my eyes half closed and waited. Finally at 6 o'clock in the morning, I boarded the train for Weiden. It was a terrible local train with broken windows and although it was summer, it was cold. I was cold and dead tired, I have not slept all night. The rhythmic sound and the shaking of the train encouraged me to close my eyes and have sporadic naps until the next station. When the train started to slow down and was putting on the brakes, it changed the monotonous sound and its rhythm; I would jump awake to make sure that it was not Weiden. Being a local train, the conductor would pass along the cars and call out the names of the next station.

During those short naps, I tried to imagine how it would be to see my younger sister again. How would she look? Will I recognize her? Will she recognize me? I tried to imagine her face, but I could not; now all I saw was a foggy image. I tried to imagine the three of us sisters back home, before the war in our parents' house, but I could not. It all seemed far, too far away, like in another lifetime.

* * *

****Just a note to fill in some of the missing chronological parts in the story. My mother, Oscar and I left Leninabad in September 1945. After a long voyage in trains and many difficulties and problems, we reached Lodz about 2 months later in November of that year. In Lodz my mother found my uncle Michael, my father's younger brother, who immediately let us have his apartment. I remember my mother was always running around in the city, always very nervous, always terribly upset. We did not stay in Lodz very long; maximum I think a couple of weeks. I personally have only vague memories of that short stay in Lodz. Maybe there are memories that I would rather not remember.*

The dream and hope of coming back home after 6 years of war be-

came a nightmare. What was suppose to be joy, became a tragedy. The city my mother called "home," where she was born and raised, became now a repelling and scary place. She could hardly wait to get out.

Mother found out that her sister Sally was now living in Germany, somewhere near Munich. We smuggled through the German border via Stetin to Berlin, to Frankfurt to Munich and finally landed in a DP camp in Bamberg, end of December 1945.

*In Munich, my mother found out that her sister Sally was living in Weiden. She went to Weiden alone to see her sister. She came back a couple of days later, just in time to be moved to Bamberg. What exactly happened in Weiden and why we did not move there, I do not know and now, we will never know. The people involved are all dead. My impression is that my Aunt Sally was not ready to accept Oscar. Shortly after we settled in Bamberg, my uncle Abe, Sally's husband, came by car to pick me up and took me to Weiden. For the next three years I had two homes, with my mother and with my Aunt Sally in Weiden.****

17

I Find My Sister Sally

About 8 o'clock in the morning I reached Weiden. All excited, I got off the train and started in the direction of the city. I saw three men standing near the station exit and I overheard them speak Polish. They must have been waiting for someone to arrive on the same train. I could tell they were Jewish. I walked over, excused myself and asked them in Polish if they could tell me where I could find the Jewish Community Center. They asked me whom I was looking for and I told them the name of my sister and brother-in-law. The men looked at me and one of them said, come I will take you to your sister.

One man tried to be pleasant and start a conversation. He asked me where I came from and where I survived the war. I was in no mood to talk to strangers. I excused myself and told him that I was very tired and preferred not to talk. I was too tired and too nervous to even think straight. There were too many thoughts going through my mind and all of them at the same time. All of a sudden I got a little scared or maybe it was anxiety. I was very nervous. Finally, I was going to see my younger sister Sally again.

It was not too far to walk. The man brought me to a very attractive building and I rang the bell. An elderly woman opened the downstairs door and I asked if she could tell me where my sister lived. She told me to go up one floor. The man that brought me there said goodbye and went away.

I went up one floor and rang the bell. Through the glass door I recognized my sister holding a small child in her arms. She ran away into a room to put the baby into the crib and came back crying spasmodically, holding her hands against her face. All that time I was still standing on the other side of that glass door. She finally opened the door. We fell into each other's arms and she cried from happiness. I was like a stone; I could not produce a single tear. We held each other embraced for a long time. In that short embrace, I saw years of suffering that flew by before my eyes. I chased away those thoughts. I did not want to think about the past now. I

held Sally's hand and went to see the baby. I looked at the baby from a distance. She was a beautiful, chubby baby girl with a full head of curly black hair. The baby looked a perfect combination between Sally and her husband Abe. I did not want to come too close to the baby, because I was dirty from all that travel. Sally picked up the baby and told me that her name was 'Fradel'; she was named after our mother; may she rest in peace.

I took off my shoes and finally got comfortable. It had been a long trip and I was tired. I was in such a hurry to leave the camp, that I took nothing with me; not even a tooth brush. I took a bath and my sister gave me some of her clean clothes to wear. After the bath and in clean clothes, I felt much better. Now that I was clean I took the baby in my arms. My sister from time to time would look at me and start crying again. To her it was a miracle, that all three of us sisters have survived.

Every so often, she would take my hand into hers and start crying; almost not believing that it was me. She told me that our sister, Ghenia, was living in Bamberg and had also a baby girl named 'Fradel.' Zvi was living here with her and was presently away with her husband on a business trip, but they should be back today. I was very tired and after lunch I decided to take a nap.

While I was sleeping, my sister called the DP camp in Landsberg and had my husband called to the phone. She told him that I arrived safely and that as soon as her husband Abe will come home, they will come to pick them up with the car. She also called our sister, Genia, in Bamberg to tell her that I have arrived.

When I got up, the baby was already sleeping and we started to talk. We did not know where to start and what to tell first. We jumped from one subject to another and from one story to another. We tried to understand and to get to know each other again.

Finally in the evening, Zvi and my brother-in-law Abe, arrived. Again the happiness to see each other was great. Zvi was holding on to me and cried for happiness. It's been over 10 months since we saw each other in Russia. Abe wanted to go right away to pick up my husband and the baby. But he was also tired from the trip and we decided to wait until the next day.

Now that my husband knew that I was here with my sister, they could wait. That first night no one could really sleep from all the excitement. We talked and talked, trying to release some of that pressure and tension that remained from all the excitement of seeing each other again. There were too many stories to tell and in those seven years of war too much happened

to all of us. It would take us a long time to catch up and to get to know each other again. Those war year experiences not only changed us as individuals, but also changed completely our conception of life.

We went to sleep, but the sleep did not come to us. Zvi was sleeping in the same room with me, and from time to time he would ask me, "Rouzia, are you asleep?" and we would talk some more.

After a while I did not answer him and eventually, we both fell asleep.

Early next morning, we left by car to pick up my husband and the baby. My husband was ready with the few measly belongings that we had. Zvi and Marylka could not be separated; she clung to him all the time. It was more than 10 months since she saw him; but she recognized him right away. We left the next day. We stopped on our way in a Hotel and I gave the baby a real bath for the first time since we left Vienna.

Sally with the baby in her arms was standing at the door waiting for us. Marylka looked at my sister and asked:

"Are you my aunt Sally?"

Marylka immediately decided that she liked her aunt Sally and loved the small baby. Marylka looked around the house; everything she saw—she liked. She went from room to room and admired everything, but did not touch anything, as if everything was too precious or forbidden. Finally, she came over and whispered into my ear in Russian, like a secret, so that the others should not hear or understand.

"You know, Mama, the kibitkes here are much, much more beautiful, than those we had in Leninabad."

My sister Genia came right away from Bamberg with her little baby girl to see us. Now we were happy; all three sisters were together again. All three of us survived.

My sister Ghenia had the baby from her second husband Oscar, whom she met in Leninabad. Ghenia's baby girl was also named after our mother 'Fradel' and was exactly one month younger than Sally's baby. The family reunion was wonderful.

My husband and I were hoping to be able to stay and settle in Weiden. Unfortunately, we could not get permission to stay there. There were some particular laws, that did not allow additional dispersed people to be registered and become residents in Weiden. We did not know what to do. After a couple of weeks had gone by, I became very nervous. I did not like to impose on my sister and continue staying in her house. We had to find a place to live.

Marylka was two and a half years old and very happy in Weiden. My

sister bought her a big doll, which Marylka dressed and undressed all day. My sister asked her if she ever had a doll before. Marylka laughed and told her that she had once a doll, but not as beautiful as this one. She also told her, that her mother said, that the doll looked exactly like the one she used to have before the war, before the Lodz ghetto. My sister was surprised and she asked her.

"What do you know about the ghetto?"

Marylka answered.

"Don't you know that in the ghetto Hitler killed all the Jews?" And she continued to list the names of her two grandmothers and grandfathers that were dead. She was two and a half going on thirty. She understood and knew more than she needed or was necessary.

One day she asked, "Aunt Sally, when I go home can I take with me this doll?"

My sister asked her, "Where is your home?" She got very sad, thought for a while; there were tears in her eyes as she answered.

"We have no home."

The child felt and knew perfectly well that my husband and I had problems and we were worried. She heard us talk. Whenever we wanted she should not understand, we would speak Yiddish. She did not understand Yiddish, only Polish and Russian, but she understood that we were worried. Once she saw me crying, she came over to me and said, "Mama, maybe we should go back to papa Stalin. After all, we have already beautiful clothes and I have a beautiful doll"; she thought for a moment and then continued. "But it is so far away," and started to cry. "I do not want to go back, please, please mama. Let's not go back."

I calmed her down and told her that we will never go back to Russia.

* * *

****There are a couple of episodes that I remember from that time. When we came to Landsberg to pick up Uncle Sam and Marylka, I found several children from my orphanage in Leninabad. I remember this girl Hava, she was my age and sort of my girlfriend in the orphanage. I had always a special feeling for her and was pleasantly surprised to find her in this camp. She was thirteen and was alone with her younger sister. They were orphans and were now part of a large orphan group of Jewish children, that was being taken care of by some Jewish help organization. She was telling me that the children she was with were from many different*

countries. They were all orphans that survived in Russia, some were hidden with Christian families, some survived in concentration camps or hidden in Ghettos or bunkers. She told me many sad stories of the children that were with her. She was hoping to go to Palestine. I gave Hava some money and my address in Weiden, but I never heard from her.

*There was another thing that stayed in my mind that year. I was going to be 13. No one in my family said anything. There was a man in the Jewish Community Center in Weiden, I am not sure, but I think his name was Weingarten. He gave me a present for my Bar Mitzvah, a Thalis and Tfilin and taught me how to use them and how to pray. I would go to his house every morning and pray with him. It did not last very long, because I had to leave Weiden. I remember it felt good to pray. I kept that little bag with the Thalis and Tfilin for many years. Although, I never used that Thalis and Tfilin again, but to me they became a symbol. This little bag traveled with me half the world, maybe to remind me that I never had a Bar Mitzvah and that no one cared if I had one or not. In my heart, that short time that I prayed in Weiden—was my personal Bar Mitzvah. I decided to be a man and a Jew all by myself. I left that little bag in my mother's home in Chicago in the sixties when I moved to Europe. When she died in 1967, I looked all over for it in the apartment, but could not find it. I was really sorry to have misplaced it.****

18

Sister Sally Tells Her Story

Days go by and we are still living with my sister. One evening when everybody went to bed, my sister and I were sitting alone in the kitchen and talking about old times. Until now, Sally was very reluctant to talk about her personal experiences in the Ghetto or Auschwitz. She avoided to go into details and would immediately change the subject when asked a direct question. She refused in a way to talk about herself, especially she avoided to talk about Auschwitz. According to her it was something that everybody knew about and it was useless to repeat the same story all over again.

That particular evening she must have been in a special nostalgic mood. She began telling me her story and what actually happened, after we left Lodz in November 1939. As I am telling you this story, I can almost hear her voice now.

"After you left, we kept the bakery only for a very short time. It was taken away from us and given to some big shot in the Ghetto, who was part of a group of Jewish informers, who collaborated with the Germans. Believe it or not, there were also Jewish scoundrels. There were also Jews that did not think twice to walk on dead bodies as long as they themselves could live better or get some profit from it.

"According to some, the apartment we were living in was considered too big for us. I had just married Abe and there were only the four of us, our parents, Abe and I. We decided to take in my in-laws, Abe's father, mother and a younger sister. Sometimes later, the situation in the Ghetto got very bad, food became scarce and my in-laws decided to register for work; they called to be relocated. They were deported together with their youngest daughter and we never heard from them again. Now, we know that they finished in Auschwitz and gone up in smoke with the rest of them.

"As you know, our house was on one of the main streets in the Ghetto and it became very desirable to some big shot. They confiscated our house. They gave us a small attic room in a dirty, back alley.

"Our father suffered very much when they took away from him his

bakery; he was really heartbroken. He went to work for somebody else, but he was always melancholy and depressed. You remember our father, he used to be just the opposite; he was always the optimist with a smile on his face.

"One day at work, Father got a piece of wood under his nail. At first, he thought nothing of it and continued to work. You know how many times in the past, he would get wood splinters in his hands and nothing happened. This time was different. By the third day, he got an infection, it was blood poisoning, but there was no help available and a few days later he died. It was 11 days after Shavuot (Pentecost). We made him a big funeral, this was in late spring of 1941. According to the Rabbi of our congregation, our father must have been a Tzadik; if he died in his own bed in the Ghetto.

"After his death our mother lost all desire to live. It was only after I gave birth to a baby girl, that our mother revived. She had a reason to live again and was happy to take care of her little granddaughter. We named the baby after our father, Marian. Our mother took care of the baby while Abe and I worked in the 'Metal resort,' a factory producing many different metal products. The baby was the only thing that kept our mother alive. We did everything we humanly could to keep the family together and alive.

"Unfortunately, when the baby was about one year old, she got sick and died within a couple of days. There was no medicine, no medical help and not enough food, and there was nothing I could do."

Suddenly she stopped talking. She could not go on; something was stuck in her throat; she practically choked on the last words as she repeated.

"And there was nothing I could do."

I saw only tears roll down her face. How well I understood her; her little baby girl Marian. The same thing that happened to me about the same time in Siberia, my little Gitele; but I could not even cry. My eyes were dry. I looked at my sister and I remembered that white birch tree in Siberia.

"And there was nothing I could do." Was still ringing in my ears. It sounded so familiar, how well I knew this feeling.

After a while my sister swallowed her saliva and continued. "A few days after the baby's death, the Police started gathering all the small children they could find. They packed them on a big truck and send them away; never to be seen or heard of again. Our mother was standing in the street and looking as they were loading all these small children on the truck. Some of them were already big and understood what was happening. They were crying, some tried to escape, but were quickly caught by the Po-

lice. Her heart was going out to those children and all she could do—is cry too. Shortly after Marian's death our mother got very sick. She let herself go; she did not want to live any longer. Marian, our little daughter, had kept her alive. Now that the baby was dead, our mother had no more reason to live. She let herself slowly die, like a last piece of a burning candle.

"At first, when they took away our home and moved us to that tiny attic room our mother went around with your postcards in her pocket, the ones you sent from Pinsk. I used to give her courage and told her, 'You'll see, one of these days the war will be over and they will come back.'

"Halivai, from your lips to God's ears," she would say.

"She died during Hanukkah, on the night of the third candle in 1942. She just fell asleep like a little child.

"There were very few people at her funeral. There was a great hunger in the ghetto. To go to the funeral, people would have to give up the little soup that they received at work; which in most cases was the only daily food that they had.

"Abe and I were left alone. We both worked and lived from day to day. Every day people were dying of hunger. The food rations were getting smaller and smaller every day. There were also frequent raids on the streets; whoever was caught, was sent away to the extermination camps. With time, the Germans demanded always more and more people from the Ghetto to be delivered for a deportation transport. The Police had to deliver a certain number of people. The first ones to be caught were children and old people.

"Sometimes, we were afraid to even go out. At times we knew that they were rounding up people for a transport and we would stay at home. It is very difficult for me to even describe the mood and the situation that has created itself in the ghetto. I don't have the right words to explain or to describe the circumstances and the conditions under which we lived. There was a constant fear, anxiety, despair and hunger.

"You know, your brother-in-law, Benzion, was caught in one of these raids and sent to the extermination camps. His wife Mania, remained in the ghetto with the child. Do you remember, the child was born the day the war broke out; a special day to remember, September 1, 1939. The child was eventually taken away from her and sent away with all the other children. These children kept the ovens in Auschwitz burning. After they took away her child, Mania went crazy and got very sick. I helped her as much as I could, but how much help could one give in those days. I don't want to re-

member all these details. There are too many of them and it is just too painful.

"Abe and I worked at the 'metal resort' and there we were protected, but every week there were fewer and fewer workers left. Transports in long freight cars were leaving the ghetto every week. There were tragedies, accompanied by screams, shouting, weeping and despair.

"By that time, we already knew that the transports were going to the concentration camps where the possibility of survival was practically nil. Yet, we did nothing to stop it. Everyone thought only of himself and how to protect his own skin. The very few that tried to rebel, were immediately shot. So what alternative did we have? To become immediately dead heroes?

"The saying goes, as long as we are alive—there is hope and we have a chance. Believe me during those years death has looked into my eyes many a time and I thought this was the end. That saying is right: as long as there is life—there is still hope, I am.

"We were part of the last transport to leave the Lodz ghetto. Together with us, there were also all the Jewish big shots from the ghetto. They told us that we are being relocated to Germany to work in factories. The big shots were convinced that in their case this was true. How naïve can one get; they still believed in miracles, after all that they have seen; or was it plain fear to face the truth, they were afraid and would not admit it even to themselves.

"I was pregnant and they did not want me. They did not want a pregnant woman with them on that train. They knew that a pregnant woman was a hazard.

"The few that remained in the 'metal resort' were being evacuated with that last transport. The whole ghetto was being liquidated. This time the whole ghetto was surrounded by German Police and soldiers. Abe and I found a hiding place in the ruins of an old abandoned building. We were hiding already a few days. Abe would not leave me alone, even for a minute. We could not go back to our house. Here I was with a big belly, in the beginning of the eighth month of pregnancy.

"The last transport leaving the ghetto did not want me. I was afraid to remain alone with Abe in this hiding place. How could I give birth to a baby in those conditions? We were sitting in a tiny, dark, stuffy and humid cellar; there was practically no light and very little air to breathe. I would need someone, a woman to help me during the delivery. We did not know

what to do. We were afraid to be alone and decided to join the others. Somehow, we made it into the last freight car.

"We were transported, without food, without water—just like cattle to the slaughter. We arrived in Auschwitz. I am sure that you have heard enough stories about that. The women were immediately separated from the men. They shaved my head. As you know there were two lines. So far I was lucky; I was sent to the line with the young women; we were all standing there naked and I was there with my big protruding belly. The women in my line chased me away; they did not want a pregnant woman with them. A pregnant woman was an automatic death sentence. I felt dizzy, I knew that I will faint any minute. I sat on the ground and cried.

"From somewhere a woman dressed in a white doctor's coat materialized before me. She picked me up from the ground and said to me in Polish, 'Come with me!'

"I followed her into a barrack that looked to be a hospital. She gave me some water and something to eat. Then she looked at my belly and said:

"Do you want to live? If you do, they will take it away from you." Pointing with her head at my belly.

"I just looked at her with my mouth open without saying a word. I know that I shook my head to say—yes. Was I in shock? Did I know what I was doing? Did I have much of a choice?

"I was used for some experiments. They gave me many injections. They did . . . I am sorry, I do not want to. I cannot . . . I do not want to talk about it." She stopped for a while, lowered her head, bit her lower lip, took a deep breath and slowly continued. "The woman was a Polish doctor assisting and helping the famous Dr. Mengele, may his name be excluded from humanity. One experiment they did on me, that I am certain of, was to accelerate labor pains and give a premature birth and that was done by Mengele himself. I gave birth to a baby boy. I saw the baby as they took it away; to make some more experiments and a biopsy. The smoke from the chimneys was high and I knew where my little baby was going to end. He came to the world with a big cry, I did not blame him. He wanted God to hear him or maybe, he did not want to go up in smoke with the rest of them.

"I am sorry, but I do not want to talk about it. I am sorry, because I did not want to even think about it anymore. It is gone forever."

At that point she broke down and cried. It was a desperate cry, a cry that broke your heart. She half lowered her head, while tears were running down her cheeks. I looked at her and admired her courage. She wiped her

eyes with her hand. I handed her a handkerchief, she took it from me and started to pull it, tearing it, than she wiped her eyes and slowly continued.

"This Polish lady doctor saved my life. She brought me something to wear and transferred me immediately to a regular barrack. On the third day after I gave birth, she made sure that I was transferred into a working barrack, before they made the next selection; otherwise, I would have been taken with all the rest of the sick women to the gas chambers and crematoriums.

"It's useless to tell you the conditions under which we were living; if you could call it living—but no one wants to die. Sometimes, we wished we could to die, but there was always an unconscious desire, over which we had no control, that told us not to give up and to go on. And that something unconscious, that kept us going through the most terrible of sufferings.

"Across from our camp, separated by a double row of chicken wires, was a male camp with Frenchmen. They were prisoners of war and they were treated better, not the way we were. They did not suffer too much hunger; they were receiving packages with food from the Red Cross. Occasionally, they would throw us pieces of bread and cheese, which we devoured. We were starving; but there was no Red Cross for us—Jews.

"They made us work very long hours, with the little, meager food that we got, we had hardly the strength to walk. My feet would barely carry me. At night we lay on those wooden boards squeezed together like sardines in a can, one close to the other to keep warm. It was winter and bitter cold.

"We heard no news. We knew nothing about the war. We were treated like animals and I am afraid we almost felt like animals. We kept on going with an animal strength not a human one.

"One day, we were told that we have to be evacuated. The German guards made us march all day and part of the night. There was no food and no water. We dragged our feet without really feeling them anymore. We were at the end of our strength, but we had to go on, we had no choice. Who stopped, was automatically shot on the spot. So many young women fell exhausted, some fainted and could not get up; they were shot. In the beginning we helped the other women to walk and picked them up when they fell. After a while, all of us were too weak to even help ourselves. We were marching without food or water for the past 3 days.

"On the fourth day, they made us walk even at night. That night, as we walked through a forest, I finally gave up. I could not walk or move any

longer. I got behind a tree and dropped on the ground. I could not go on, that was the end. I was waiting for that shot.

"I saw the rest of the poor women were walking; then I saw them less and less. I lay there quiet and the only noise was the pounding of my heart. I must have fallen asleep. When I woke up it was daylight.

"I looked around me, there was no one there. As I got up, I saw other four women, they did the same thing I did. There were five of us now; at least I was not alone. We started to walk very slowly, resting from time to time on the ground. Then we heard airplanes passing over our heads. We became scared and started to run.

"We came to a clearing and there we saw a small village. The village looked abandoned; there was not a soul around. There were several lovely houses, surrounded by gardens at the edge of that village. We ran into the first house we found. It was a beautifully furnished house and not a soul inside. It was abandoned in a hurry, because we found dirty dishes still on the kitchen table.

"Our first thought was food. We found plenty of food ready for us in the kitchen. We also found clothes. We took what we wanted. Although we were scared, we were also completely exhausted. We could not resist the real beds in the bedrooms. We just fell into those beds and slept. We must have slept and slept for a long time. We have not slept in a real bed for years. We did not believe our luck; we would pinch each other to make sure we were not dreaming. The next day we ate again and again, as if there was no tomorrow. I was particularly hungry for bread; I also drank an enormous amount of water.

"We were afraid to stay in that house. We were a little bit rested and decided to leave. In a bedroom upstairs, I found a dress and a white overcoat. I took a whole loaf of bread and some Swiss cheese that I found in a well-furnished pantry and I was ready to go. The other four women did more or less the same. Each one of us found something to wear, took some bread and we started to walk. We were walking, but I don't think we knew where we were going.

"We did not get very far, when we heard the noise of moving vehicles. We hid in the forest, but could see the road. Soon we saw the Russian tanks coming. We come out of our hiding and one of the tanks stopped when they saw us. The soldiers spoke to us in Russian, but we did not understand them. They must have recognized us, by our shaved heads and the hungry, cadaverous look in our eyes. One of the soldiers came over and spoke to us in Yiddish. He told us that we are free.

"The girls laughed and kissed each other. I just stood there, like made from stone. I had no feelings at that moment. The soldiers took us with them to a village, where they have set up their military headquarters. They were not surprised to see us. They have seen enough, more than any human eyes could believe possible; they have liberated Auschwitz and some of the other death camps.

"They asked us, where we come from originally. It so happened, that all five of us were from Lodz or close by. They told us that Lodz was liberated and we were free to go home.

"The Russians kept us and fed us in that little village for several days. We got some of our strength back. They accompanied us to the nearest little town with a train station. There we boarded a dilapidated and broken train going east. Eventually, after a long and tiresome trip, changing trains several times—we reached Lodz.

"Lodz was full of Russian soldiers. There were soldiers everywhere. There was a post war chaos. Then very slowly some of the life in the city started to normalize. There were some 800 Jews that survived in the ghetto. A large part of the original ghetto was destroyed by the Germans.

"These 800 people survived hidden in bunkers, cellars and in the strangest hiding places. They were hiding among the ruins of the old buildings, that were raised to the ground by the Germans, when they liquidated the Lodz ghetto.

"In Lodz, I found a few friends that took me in. This was the time when I met that Polish soldier that told me you were alive and well. I wrote you that letter to Leninabad, but frankly, I did not believe that you would get it. All I wrote on that envelope was your and Ghenia's names—Leninabad–Russia; and you actually got that letter. Miracles do happen, look at me—I am alive.

"Slowly, every day more people returned to Lodz. As the concentration camps were liberated, the people came back to look for their families and loved ones; always hoping that someone they knew survived.

"We were lucky, my husband Abe came back soon after me. We did not want to stay in Lodz. We suffered too much in that city. There were too many bad memories for us in Lodz. We left Poland and after many adventures; we wound up here in Weiden."

By now, both my sister and I were really tired, we went to bed.

There was so much more to tell, but now I am also exhausted. Goodnight.

* * *

****I am in Germany as I am writing the story of my Aunt Sally. It is a strange feeling to be in the country that was responsible for all that suffering. It does not seem possible that a nation like the Germans did what they did. I have very mixed feelings and my emotions are in turmoil. Is it right to blame a whole nation for the deeds of a few thousand miserable murderers? Is it right to blame the post-war German generation for what their fathers and grandfathers did? Some say yes. I do not know. I do not have the answer. One thing I do know, I can forgive—but never forget.*

I have some German friends and I feel very comfortable with them. Is it right that I should blame them for what happened over 50 years ago? I cannot answer that question. One thing I know, I am having difficulty in sleeping this time in Germany. I lay in bed and twist and turn as strange images pass before my eyes. The kind of images I tried so hard to forget. For years now, I try to make believe that all those things during the war, never really happened to me; they happened to somebody else; those memories belong to someone else and not me; that I personally was not involved. I do not like and I do not want that people should feel sorry for me.

I remember when I first came to America; people would ask me, where I came from. I would have to go into a long story explaining what happened to me during the war. Always, I would get this condescending look and the standard phrase. "Oh you poor thing."

Well, I did not like to be the 'poor thing,' that people pity and feel sorry for. I do not think there is anything about me to feel sorry. I simply closed that part of my life; if any one asked me, where are you from, I say, "Chicago."

How simple, no one felt sorry for me anymore. They were convinced that I had a perfectly normal life; most probably brought up in a comfortable northern suburb of Chicago; went through college, got a couple of degrees and I am a perfectly normal Joe.

I have been using this strategy for over 40 years and strangely enough it works. It works in everyday business circles and in most casual friendships.

Since I have been writing this book, translating my aunt Rose's memoirs and writing my aunt Sally's story, all of a sudden the past has caught up with me. I am reliving a past that I have suppressed the same way as I have changed my name. Not because I was ashamed of it, there is nothing as a child, a boy, adolescent or young man that I have to be ashamed of.

Thinking back, there is no reason I should feel sorry for myself. My background, my wanderings throughout the world, the good and the bad experiences made me what I am. There is nothing about me that needs patronizing or feeling sorry.

I know there are many people that survived the war and went through many hardships and sufferings and have never accepted the present. They still live in the past. They are convinced that the world owes them a living. They are very upset, when one reminds them that the war has been over for many years and now it is time to face reality. To live a normal life as everybody else, to live the present and hope for the future.

*Some of these people never forget and never forgive. They like to torture themselves and make their friends and relatives uncomfortable as well. There are some that make others feel almost guilty, because they did not go through the same ordeals as they did. Some spend their lives being very unhappy; they cannot help feeling terribly sorry for themselves.****

* * *

We went to bed. But how could I sleep. My sister's tales ring in my ears and blind my mind. My own survival and sufferings during this war, seemed nothing in comparison to what she has been through. It is true, my life was not exactly a pleasure trip. I also had my share of suffering and that was more than enough for one lifetime.

I was also thinking of my mother, may she rest in peace. I remembered how she cried when we left home. I wondered, did she realize, did she know then, that we were saying good-bye forever? My father, may he rest in peace, was wishing us luck, in a very particular way, as if he knew, that we will never see each other again. That night, I slept with my nightmares and dreamed about my nightmares.

Marylka woke me very early in the morning; she was hungry and wanted breakfast.

Talking about coincidences in life; life is wonderful and full of surprises. While I was away looking for my sister in Weiden, our cousin Beniek found his younger brother, Carl, who survived the concentration camps and was living in small town called Marktredwitz. A day or two after we went to Weiden, Beniek and his wife Nadzia, went to Marktredwitz to join their brother Carl. We had no idea where they went. However, they knew that we were in Weiden with my sister.

It was the week of Rosh Hashanah. My sister and I were preparing

food for the holidays. My husband and I were not in a celebrating mood. We were worrying about our future. Although my sister and brother-in-law were wonderful to us, we felt that we were intruding and were taking advantage of their hospitality. We needed and wanted a home of our own.

We received a surprise phone call from our cousin Carl, that changed completely our mood and our future life. It was the Jewish New Year and it was right that we start a new life.

My husband's cousin Carl lived in Marktredwitz, which was less than an hour by train from Weiden and he was coming to Weiden to see us.

We were very happy to see him. He turned out to be an extremely gentle and generous person. We explained to him our difficulty in getting residency in Weiden and we did not know where to go or what to do. He looked at my husband and asked, "Simho, do you feel like playing football?"

We all started to laugh. My husband smiling answered him. "I suppose, I still could play, why?"

"OK. Get your stuff together, I am taking you back to Marktredwitz with me."

He proceeded to explain, that in the small town where he lived, they had formed a sports club and they were desperately looking for football players. He remembered that my husband before the war, was a fair football player, so why not now? He told us not to worry.

He arranged for us a small apartment in the Jewish Community building. It was not a palace, but it would do for the time being. He registered us with the UNRA to get the DP status and the weekly food supply. He came to pick us up with a friend that had a car and take us home to Marktredwitz.

My sister asked us to stay at least for the holidays. Our older sister Ghenia was also coming for the holidays with her husband and her little daughter. We wanted to spend the holidays with my family. Carl understood and promised to come right after Rosh Hashanah to pick us up.

It was the first time that the three of us sisters with our respective families were together. It was the Jewish New Year and we were going to start a new life.

After the Rosh Hashanah holiday as promised, Carl came to Weiden to get us. I told Marylka that we were going to have a home of our own. Carl took Marylka in his arms, we said good-bye to everybody and wished them a Hatima Tova and off we went by car to Marktredwitz.

19

Marktredwitz: A Home of Our Own

Marktredwitz was a small, very pretty town in the Bavarian Fichtel mountains; full of gardens, some very attractive streets and friendly stores. Carl took us into a Hotel that was occupied now by the Jewish Community Center. There were several Jewish families that lived there. We got a warm reception from the people that welcomed us to their city.

They gave us a typical Hotel room on the third floor. It was a large and nicely decorated room with a double bed; a large wardrobe; a table with 4 chairs and a small bed for the child. The kitchen facilities and a big bathroom we shared with our cousin Ben and his wife Nadzia, that lived next door.

Marylka carrying her big doll, walked back and forth between the rooms and talked to her doll and to herself. I am sure that she understood that this was finally a place of our own. I was very grateful to have this place. I was sick and tired of traveling around and living out of a suitcase and always in somebody else's home.

It was almost a year since we left Leninabad and we have been living out of a suitcase ever since. We have not had a place of our own or a day without being surrounded by somebody. We have been in constant movement. We have had no privacy—no home.

I found many groceries and food in the kitchen that Carl prepared for us, that made us even more welcomed. We had only one room, but it was all ours—it was home.

My husband found right away work in the local UNRA office and of course played soccer for the local team. He played the doorkeeper. There were soccer games every Sunday during the season. Marylka and I would accompany him sometimes to the games, specially when they played in the nearby towns. If the game was played far away, we would stay home.

The first few days we had no kitchen utensils and I had to borrow everything from our cousins. Now that we were living so close together, we also got to know each other better. It was nice to have some family close

by. With time, I bought my own kitchen utensils and all the necessary household goods.

I became very friendly with a local German woman, that had a small department store; there I practically found everything from a needle to a fur coat. We became quite good friends. She herself was a Christian but her husband was Jewish. Both of them were extremely friendly to all the 40 Jewish families that lived in our town.

I had a very special relationship with her. She treated me like a daughter. They used to invite us quite often to their house, mostly on Sundays, when their business was closed. She used to tell me about herself. They had no children of their own and treated Marylka as if she were their granddaughter.

My friends Mr. and Mrs. H, as I will call them, had their own sad story to tell. They were originally from Berlin. He came from a very rich Jewish family and she was a Christian. Neither of their families approved of their relationship. They eloped and got married. In her family, they were all Nazis. When Hitler came to power, her father and brother became SS men.

They escaped from Berlin and started a new life in Marktredwitz. However, her family found them and denounced them as Jews. They were both sent to the concentration camps. From his family no one survived and she did not care to contact or to know if anyone from her family was alive or not.

She was like a mother to me. When I became pregnant with my son, she was the first person to know. I told her that I was afraid, because I had nothing for the baby; not even a diaper. She told me not to worry, that every child is born with its own destiny and that everything will turn out to be all right.

We lived quite comfortably in Marktredwitz. Every beginning is difficult, but with time we were doing all right. My husband was not a great businessperson and was not fit to make big speculations on the black market, which was the only profitable thing to do at the time. However, between his work with the UNRA and a little work on the side, we did all right. My daughter Marylka behaved like a real princess. She was still the only small child in our community. She was a real ‘yiente’ (talker, busy body) and made immediately friends with everybody. She had a full head of long, blond hair and everybody in our community called her ‘goldene kop’—gold head. Her third birthday November 28, 1946, we celebrated with a big party in the hall of our Community Center. This was the first

birthday party she ever had. With the help of my cousin Nadzia, we prepared a lot of food and Marylka's first birthday cake with candles.

After the war, it was time to form new families. Most of the survivors that have lost their families, wives or spouses in the Holocaust, were slowly remarrying and started new families and new lives. As the old cliché saying goes: 'and life must to go on. The single survivors had finally a chance to create for themselves a new family of their own.

The years 1946 through 1950 were very prolific for the Jewish population. It was the re-start of a new life, a new family and a new generation.

Eventually, in our little town of Marktredwitz, several of the young couples had children. At first, when the new babies were born in our community, Marylka suffered very much. She was no more the only child to be admired and pampered anymore. Our cousin, Carl, that was still single, met a lovely girl and brought her to our town and got married. Obviously, Marylka being very possessive, did not like the bride; she was jealous, she told us, that now Carl will not love her any more.

We prepared a lovely wedding for Carl and his bride Sally. Just for the record, Carl with his wife and their three daughters and his brother Ben with Nadzia and their two daughters, live now in Baltimore. (Since the time Aunt Rose wrote that story, both Carl and Ben have passed away, their wives and some of their children are still living in Baltimore.)

After those dark and terrible years of the war, our life in Marktredwitz became a joy. We had a very comfortable and enjoyable life, surrounded by lovely friends and family. From time to time I visited my sisters and they would visit me. I could not have asked for better.

Our Jewish community in Marktredwitz was growing nicely; practically every month there was a birth of a new baby. We had a big restaurant room in our community building and we used it to make celebrations; any occasion was good enough to celebrate, especially the birth of a new baby. We even brought a "Moil" (the man that does circumcision) from Regensburg to perform the "Brit Mila" (ceremony of circumcision); every time a baby boy was born. We enjoyed our life in that little town; we were happy. It was a pleasure to be alive again.

It was spring. In the middle of the Passover holidays, on April 11, 1947, I gave birth to my son Meir. Meir was baby number three to be born in our Marktredwitz community after the war. I was extremely happy to have a baby boy. Please do not forget that I came from a home of only three daughters and no male heir. I was very happy to give birth to a son.

My sisters prepared everything for the Brith Mila. The whole Jewish

community of Marktredwitz, including Mr. & Mrs. H were there. When I came back from the hospital with the baby, we were given a bigger apartment; we had now two rooms and a kitchen. Mrs. H. had prepared and bought everything that was necessary for the baby.

With the help of the American UNRA and the German government, we lived comfortably. However, we never forgot Germany was the country of our persecution. It was the country that brought about this terrible war and the murder of six million of our people. It was this country and its people that brought about the Holocaust. We lived among people that only yesterday were nazis. The same nazis that only a year ago have sent our families and loved ones to the crematoriums and death camps.

No matter how good and comfortable we lived here in Germany, we wanted to get out. To go anywhere—away from Germany. The favorite place and the dream of many was the golden land—the United States of America. I think that everybody registered with the U.S. Embassy to immigrate to the States. However, the Polish immigration quota to the United States was very small in proportion to the number of people that wanted to go there.

After the war, there were too many Polish Christians and Polish Jews that wanted to settle in America, but not enough visas were being granted to Polish born people. The waiting line to immigrate to America was very long. It would have taken us several years in order to get a visa. There was no way for us to go to America in the very near future and I refused to stay in Germany, if I did not have to.

Now, we were happy parents of two lovely children. We named our son, Meir, after my father. When I first came home from the hospital with Meir, it was obvious that my daughter would be jealous. She was going around and telling everybody, that only she was her daddy's daughter and the new baby was not. The new baby was only her mother's baby. A few days later, her jealousy was gone; she loved the baby and would not let people even look at him.

Zvi would to come and visit us from time to time. However, I felt that he was neglecting his studies. The only regular studies he did were only in Leninabad. I encouraged him to continue his studies. I found out that in Regensburg there was a Hebrew boarding school and the Director of that school was a former teacher of mine from the Gymnasium (High school) in Lodz.

At first, I thought I will write to Prof. Auerbach in Regensburg; then I decided to take Zvi and go personally to Regensburg to see him. I left the

two children with my sister Sally in Weiden and we took a train to Regensburg. We found the Hebrew school. The official spoken language in that school was Yiddish. Upstairs, in the same building, there were several bedrooms converted into a boarding school. The out of town students lived there from Monday through Friday. Every weekend the students went home to their families that lived in the surrounding little towns. It was a seminar type of school and very highly quoted.

The students that were part of the boarding school were personally chosen by Prof. Auerbach. They were expected to be above average, have a good scholastic background and be motivated in order to be accepted.

Prof. Auerbach remembered me from Lodz. We had a lovely time remembering the good old times, when we were younger. I asked the professor for help, but after he talked to Zvi for about 15 minutes, he accepted him immediately. Zvi became a model student. I know his mother and my sister Sally were not very happy about it, but it was the best for Zvi.

Regensburg was not too far from Weiden and only an hour more to Marktredwitz on the same train. Every week-end he would to go to Weiden and sometimes to his mother in Bamberg.

Now, I am tired of talking. I looked at Zvi and asked him to tell me the truth.

"Was I right to send you to Regensburg?"

He smiled and told me that he could not have asked for better. He remembered this school very well.

I was very tired and suggested to stop for the day. Tomorrow was another day and another story.

* * *

****I do remember that school with great pleasure. There were about 50 students in that school, but only about 10 of us lived in the boarding house. There were 4 bedrooms, two for the girls and two for the boys. If I recall correctly there were 4 boys and 6 girls. The studies were very intensive. Professor Auerbach tried to get out of us as much as he could. The reason I read and write Yiddish today is mostly thanks to that school. After all, the Yiddish I learned in Regensburg has come in handy. Today I can translate Aunt Rose's memoirs and pay back for the efforts she made to make me study. I stayed in that school only until the end of that school year, that was June 1947.*

There I got my base for both Yiddish and Hebrew. The other subjects were less important. However, there was another important thing that I remember. Professor Auerbach loved opera and at least once a month he took some of us to see an opera. We would sit in the cheapest seats all the way up on the fifth or sixth floor, with the pigeons, in that magnificent Regensburg opera house. The stage looked tiny and miles away, but it was magic. There are three operas that I remember seeing there, Rigoletto, Fledermaus and Zauberflote. This was my first exposure to Opera, which I continued to appreciate and loved for the rest of my life. Every Friday afternoon we used to leave for the weekend and returned to school on Sunday night. I usually went to Weiden; there I had my room in aunt Sally's house. There I was at home with aunt Sally, uncle Abe and little Fanny—today big Frances. In Weiden I also had a few Jewish friends more or less my age.

In spring 1947 my mother greatly improved her financial position. She found a governess for little Fanny; this is how we called my sister in Germany. Mother was busy doing business. What exactly she did I do not know; but there was some kind of factory producing shirts and other clothing. Mother lived rather fancy; had a car with a chauffeur and moved to a lovely baby-blue painted villa in Lichtenfels; a small town 30 km from Bamberg.

That summer was very important to me. First I attended a Zionist Seminar in Munchberg, where I was trained to become a 'madrikh' or a Zionist youth leader. This experience became very useful many years later when I lived in Rio de Janeiro and again after that in Montreal during my University days, it helped to earn my living.

At the age of 14, I was the youngest at the Seminar; all the others were anywhere from 18 to 25. We were taught by Israeli teachers, that came from Palestine to organize and teach Jewish youth in the spirit and love for our own homeland—Israel.

This was a unique experience for me. For the first time I heard and learned what it meant to be a Jew. A Jew before the war and what it could mean to be a Jew tomorrow. I learned Jewish history and the history of Zionism.

For the first time I learned that there was nothing to be ashamed of—to be a Jew. We can be proud to be Jews. We are people as good as anyone else, or maybe even better. There is no reason to hide or to be ashamed of being a Jew.

I learned our sad history. I understood the importance for the Jewish people to have a proper homeland; especially after the holocaust. Where

else could the millions of displaced people and the survivors of the holocaust go? It became important for every Jew in the world, no matter where he was, that there be a Jewish State. A place that every Jew could call home. It was enough to be the scapegoat for others.

Maybe today these ideas are old fashioned and definitely out of date; they are far too melodramatic and surely misunderstood; but back in 1947 and 1948 these ideas and ideals were extremely important to millions of European Jews and especially to the survivors of the holocaust.

I was very much taken by the pioneer spirit of Israel. All these patriotic thoughts and feelings I expressed in writing poetry. I also had an audience; every Friday evening at the Oneg Shabbath (Friday night celebration), I would recite my patriotic poems in front of the 80 seminar participants. I was very young and very much influenced by the historical post-war times that we were living in. The pioneer spirit and the creation of the State of Israel, were very important to me. In fact, right after the creation of the State of Israel, I left with a youth group to Israel and lived in a Kibutz.

Now back to the more or less chronological order of things. That August I spent with my mother in Bad Kissingen, a fancy summer resort in Franconia. By now, mother was doing financially very well. She rented a large suite in a Hotel and an extra room for me. My sister Fanny was a little over a year old and lived with her governess Annie in a private house not far from the Hotel. Annie would bring little Fanny every day for a few hours to our Hotel; when mother was not busy getting mud-bath, sulfur-bath, massages, etc.

I was almost 14 years old and everybody in the family insisted that it was time I learned a trade; which of course I refused. Someone suggested I become a dental technician, a goldsmith, a dress cutter, a tailor, etc. I had no intentions of learning a trade. I told everybody that I intended to study and go to the University.

I have to regress for a moment and explain the situation and the times in which we were living, back in 1947. In post war Germany with the Allied occupation, there was a big black market going on for practically everything. Only the people that were part of that black market or were in very specialized type of business, did well. The local population still lived on bread cards and coupons to buy the bare necessities.

It was obvious that this situation and the black market were not going to last forever; that eventually, the post war chaos was going to end and all those profitable businesses would also end. Everybody was planning and

was eager to leave Germany. Everybody was aware, that this fancy post-war life was not going to last forever. The people that were realistic, were planning for the future. To immigrate to the United States, Canada or any other desirable country, it was easier for people with a trade. Most countries accepted emigrants only if they had a specific trade. If one had a trade, one could always find a job, without a trade, life would be a constant struggle.

Eventually, it all came true. Within two years, we all emigrated to Israel, some to the United States and the life of leisure and easy money was gone forever. People that had a trade or a profession were able to settle in their new country much better and start a new life easier and much faster.

An episode occurred that summer that changed my life and something, that I will never forget. I overheard a conversation between my mother and several members of our family. They were all sure that I was fast asleep in the next room and did not hear them. They told my mother in so many words, that unless I learned a trade, I would grow up a no good bum. I was helping my uncle Abe to do some black market business and supposedly I was very good at it. I was also doing some risky business, without being afraid. So it was easy for them to come to a conclusion. Black market and easy money at 14, what can you expect at 21?

My poor mother was crying, saying that she had no influence over me. I did not like Oscar and did not get along with him. For the smallest interference from Oscar, I would pack up and leave my mother and go to live in Weiden with uncle Abe and aunt Sally.

It was at that point, that I made up my mind and made a promise to myself; no matter where, how or which way—I will study. I will attend a University; I will get a University degree.

I remember back then, when I told people or my family that I was planning to go the University; everybody laughed at me. They said I was a dreamer. Except my aunt Rose. My mother was a practical woman; as long as I worked, she never disapproved of my studying. I know that down deep she was actually proud of me, although she would never say it or show it.

The next day, my mother brought up the subject about learning a trade. That day we made a pact. If I did not want to learn a trade, she will give me the opportunity to study, if that was what I wanted. However, I will have to go back and live with her in Lichtenfels; I will have a full time private tutor, every day, six days a week. I will get ready to enter the Real Gymnasium (senior high school in Germany), but no more running away to Weiden and no more black market deals; and so it was until I left to Israel.

My weekends were free. Every Friday afternoon I would take a train to Bamberg. There in the Ulanen Kaserme was a large Jewish DP camp. There I had made many friends my age and would participate in a very busy Jewish social life. Sunday evenings I would return to Lichtenfels to my books and study. Some week-ends I would go to Weissenburg to visit my uncles, my father's three brothers Leon, Michael and Arthur.

*In 1948 my father came all the way from Brazil with the idea to take me back with him to Brazil. I did not go with my father, but that is another story. Shortly after my father went back to Brazil I left with a youth group to Israel to live in a Kibutz.****

20

Where Is Home?

The days in Rome went by much too fast. There was still so much to see and so much to do, and most important of all, we enjoyed being together. My son Meir, his wife Barbara, my niece Frances and her husband Samuel enjoyed our daily reunions and the stories that Zvi and I would narrate. All of them wanted to know more about our past and they were encouraging me to tell my stories. Maybe someday, I hope one of them will write about it these wonderful Passover days in Rome. In the meantime, let me continue where I left off in Marktredwitz.

Life in Marktredwitz was very pleasant. After all the difficult and destitute war years, we finally found a little bit of peace and joy. Life just floated without friction and without worries. We thought only of new ways and means to entertain and keep ourselves busy. We founded a Zionist group in our town and organized many different social functions to entertain and keep our small community united. I was part of the committee that organized dances and receptions to collect money for the Jewish cause. We organized conferences, lectures and visits from important people and collected money for Israel. We were very proud and surprised at the amount of money, that we were able to collect and to contribute for the Jewish cause. All that social life kept us rather busy and very gratified.

I decided to earn some extra money and together with another woman, we opened a restaurant. The building in which we were living was once a regular Hotel. There was a fairly large restaurant room and a full kitchen, that we took over for our Jewish Restaurant. Our Restaurant did quite well, particularly on weekends.

Everything was going well. We never had it so good. It was only me. I had a big problem; I did not like the idea of living and being in Germany. There seems to be always something in life that we have to complain about. We are never completely happy with what we have, even if it is more then enough. There is always something we are looking for, some-

thing missing and in most cases we do not even know what it is, that is missing. Many times we cannot help it, we cannot leave things as they are—we need a change. I had no patience. I was terribly frustrated. I was not ready and could not face a normal life and especially in Germany. I still felt that everything there was provisory; I wanted and needed stability and that I could not find in Germany.

When I was taking my children for a walk, I could not help thinking and feeling that we were walking on a ground that was impregnated with the blood of 6 million Jews. Although the Germans were polite and tried to be pleasant to us; but for some reason, I always imagined that they wore a mask; that behind that mask was a real face that I did not trust. Maybe I was paranoid about it, but I was seeing Jewish blood on every German's hands. I am sure I am exaggerating, but I could not help myself.

Our community center decided to build a monument for the 6 million Jews that perished during the war. Many important people came to the unveiling of that monument. There were many Jewish personalities and German politicians; they all came to honor the dead—including President Adenauer.

I thought to myself, *God Almighty why here*? *What meaning will this monument have in this country. For whom*? The idea was grandiose; it was meant to remind all people, present and future, that what happened—should not happen 'EVER AGAIN.'

After the unveiling of the monument, the representatives from all the German parties came to the reception that we have organized in our Community Center. We prepared a fancy buffet with plenty of food and drinks for anyone that wanted to come.

Unfortunately, only two days later, we found the monument broken in pieces and on the ground there was a large Hakenkreutz (Nazi swastika) painted in blood red paint. It was a very sad day for our community. The local German Police made a lot of investigations; naturally the culprits have never been found. The city paid to redo the monument, but I did not bother to go to the second unveiling. To me it was a big joke. The 'never again'—was right here again.

All the 40 Jewish families in our town have registered to immigrate somewhere. Everybody wanted to leave Germany, but for the time being no one was leaving. The truth was, that there was no place to go. No one really wanted the Jews; at least this was my feeling. I personally, did not want to stay in Germany and raise my children in a land that gave me the

feeling that I am walking over the corpses of my family. Maybe I am exaggerating, I am sure I did, but I could not help it.

I wanted to leave. Although financially speaking we lived very well, but I was not happy in Germany. Most people were telling me, where did I want to go; where else will I have such comfortable life and they were right; but I did not care—I wanted out.

* * *

****Unfortunately, there was nowhere to go. Most of Europe had suffered and there was a lot of destruction and misery left after those devastating years of the war. Every country in Europe was licking its own wounds and was trying to find its new identity, its freedom to build a normal life again.*

Palestine, where most Jews wanted to go, was closed to us. The British, forced by the Arab world, closed all the doors to the Jews. There was a blockade across the whole Palestine coast. All the boats with Jewish survivors, that tried to land in Palestine were caught by the British and taken to a new concentration camp established in Cyprus. The British and the Arabs did not want us.

There were very few exceptions of 'Aaliya Bet.' Small groups of young people were smuggled into Palestine during the night. In small fishing boats they would land on some deserted beach and were helped by the local Haganah or some other Jewish patriotic group.

Legally, for the time being, there was nowhere to go. South America was very difficult to immigrate. Only a small number of people, that had close relatives in South America were able to go there and even then, it took a long time before they would grant an immigration visa to a Jew. Most of the South American countries preferred the Nazis, especially Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, etc.

United States was the favorite place to immigrate, but it was very difficult to obtain a visa. There were long waiting lists with millions of displaced people from all over Europe that wanted to immigrate to the United States. They called the United States the 'Goldene milikhe'—the golden land. The United States had for each country an immigration quota and only a limited number of visas would be granted for each of the countries. The Polish quota that included Polish Jews and non Jews was very small in comparison to the enormous number of people that had registered to go there. It would take many years before any one of us could immigrate to the

United States. It was very frustrating and discouraging, it seemed like nothing has changed. No one wanted to let us in during the war; and no one wanted us now, after the war either—nobody really wanted the Jews.

All of eastern Europe was occupied by the Russian dictatorial Communist regime, which was known to be very anti-Semitic. This was why practically all the Jews escaped from Poland back in 1946. The few Jews that remained were officially thrown out of Poland several years later, as undesirables.

Many young people and especially Zionists would leave illegally with Aliya Bet: They forced the British blockade onto the shores of Palestine; but only a few made it. Most of them finished in the British concentration camps on Cyprus. I had friends on that famous ship Exodus, that was taken to Cyprus and its people placed into a concentration camp. It made world news and shamed the British as being another Hitler regime. British politics at the time were very pro-Arab and very much anti-Semitic.

Most of the survived Jews sat in Germany and waited. The big immigration started after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. Eventually by 1951, all the Jews that lived in the DP camps in Western Germany had left. The majority went to Israel and some to the United States. The few Jews that remained in Germany were mostly native born German Jews. ***

* * *

The Jews in Marktredwitz enjoyed their lives there and were in no hurry to leave. A few more Jewish families with children have moved into our city. We organized a kindergarten for the children, taught them a little Yiddish and a little Hebrew, just to keep up the tradition. The greatest event of them all was the foundation of the State of Israel. The big miracle came true—finally we had a state; a piece of land to call—a home of our own. The festivities and the joy were hard to describe. To most of us—it was a miracle.

My uncle Max from Chicago, my father's younger brother, wanted to bring over to the States all the family members that survived the holocaust. My father was one of 11 children. All the brothers and sisters had married and had children and grandchildren of their own. From all that very large family only a few survived. Our Uncle Max encouraged us to stay in Germany and wait, that eventually he would send affidavits for all of us to come to Chicago. That was one choice to leave Germany, that I liked.

My husband's two sisters moved to France. His sister Luba's husband

had a brother and sister who lived in France for many years before the war. They wanted us to move to France and be close to them.

I also found my first cousin, Rose, in Lille, from my mother's side of the family, who survived in France. So that France became another possibility for us to move.

The third possibility was Israel. There, we had cousins from my mother's side of the family. This also meant going home to a Jewish State. Finally in 1948 we had a choice of places to go. We were torn between France, United States and Israel.

I remembered a promise that I made to myself in Leninabad when I was so terribly sick. It was when I was in one hospital and my little baby girl was in another hospital. When everything was so desperate and looked hopeless—I made a promise to myself. If I survive and come out alive from Russia, the only place for me will be Palestine. Now I wanted to keep that promise.

Furthermore, what made me finally decide to go to Israel were two incidents, that happened after the war. I remembered that Russian soldier who came back from the front and called us 'Zhyd.' The way he pronounced it and the way he said it; had all the connotation and expression of that inborn hate that I refused to live with. I also remembered that Polish police officer and the railway worker on the Russian–Polish border, calling us "Zhyd" with disgust and they did not want us. I had enough being called "Zhyd or Verpfluchte Jude." I had enough of being insulted and abused; I wanted to be free from that kind of contempt; I wanted to be me, whatever I am—a Jew.

Both of my sisters tried to persuade me not to go. But we decided to go and were the first ones to leave. Marylka was 5 and Meir was one and a half years old. Some of the people in our town thought we were crazy to leave. However, they did give us a nice farewell party in the Community Center. It was a little sad to leave all those lovely friends and family; but I was happy; we were finally leaving Germany.

Now I was tired, I have talked too much. I sat on the sofa in Zvi's apartment and a sadness came over me. The party was over; tomorrow we were leaving Rome. Zvi came over and kissed me on the cheek saying:

"You know, I was thinking; why don't you continue these stories by writing me a weekly letter. Each letter can be an episode of your life. Like a Telenovella they do on television, another *Dallas.* I will reply by asking questions or explanations. First of all, it will give you something to do; sec-

ond and most important, it will give us a family history book, what do you say? It will also give you more time to think and remember. There is nothing wrong in remembering. Let the new generation in our family know their past and let us leave them a massage. Tradition?"

I promised that I would think about it.

* * *

****The last night in Rome with Aunt Rose was a mixture of feelings. It had been a great holiday and a wonderful experience to relive a part of my life all over again. By talking and remembering, many things came to light. Facts, happenings and thoughts, I did not see or know before. It made me think. I dug deep into the cobweb protected part of my memory and remembered things that I thought I forgot; things that I made myself forget and did not want to remember. Some of those memories were not too pleasant. Some of them, I did not want to admit that they even happened or existed. Although so many years went by, there are still things I would rather not to think about; they hurt too much. There are things, it was better to forget completely; they could be too embarrassing to me and to my loved ones. So I decided to let sleeping dogs—sleep.****

* * *

Next morning we left early. My niece Frances with her family came to say good-bye. I hate saying good-byes. It is an old, call it superstition of mine—never say good-bye. I would rather say—see you soon.

Tears came to my eyes when I embraced Zvi and my niece Frances. I quickly got in the back of the car and said to my son, "Meir, let's go."

We were leaving, but I felt that Zvi and Frances and the others were standing there and waving their hand; but I did not look back. Good-bye Rome—hello new adventures.

I sat in the back of the car with my granddaughter Shelley and made plans for the remaining of my European trip. First I had to go to visit my husband's Sister Luba and her husband in Menton on the French Riviera. Then I would fly to Brussels to visit their two daughters in Antwerp. Finally I would go to Lille to visit my cousin Rose. Rose's mother and my mother were sisters. Rose and I were first cousins and we practically grew

up together in Lodz. I do hope that God will give me enough energy and health to do all that.

My granddaughter Shelley is fast asleep. I sit in the back of the car with my eyes half closed and think back of the days spent in Rome. All those memories that Zvi and I have swept from under that hard crust, that we created and produced in self-defense for so many years. It was good.

That evening we were back in my son's home in Geneva. Everybody was tired from that long car trip. As I was saying goodnight to retire to my room, my son Meir came over, gave me a hug and said:

"Ma, it's great to have you here."

It was a marvelous trip. I did everything as planned and was very happy that I did. It was the last time that I saw Luba and her husband. Shortly thereafter, they both died. It was also the last time I saw my cousin Rose and her husband Max in Lille; they also passed away.

It was a long trip and I was glad to return to my own home in Montreal. My daughter picked me up at the airport with a big bouquet of flowers. I love to travel, but there is no place like home if you have one.

Epilogue to Part One

The text of the book and Rose Kryger's story ends in 1948. Here are some additional notes of what happened after:

Rose with her family, Sam, Marylka and Meir moved to Israel in 1948. They tried very hard to make a new start—it just did not work. Rose loved Israel and was very sad to leave. In 1953, she left with her family to join her sister Genia in Montreal. In Montreal, Rose and Sam worked very hard to make a new start. Life was not easy, but they managed to educate their son and daughter and finally make a real home and to grow new roots for their children and for their children's children.

Sam died of a stroke in 1967 in Baltimore. Rose never remarried. She lived alone and remained a good mother and a very happy grandmother until she died. She was blessed with a loving family that was always there when she needed them. Her pride and joy were her 6 grandchildren.

In June 1993 Rose had major surgery to treat a tumor in her bladder. It was a rare type of bladder tumor that was usually associated with exposure to parasites only seen in exotic parts of Africa or Asia. The week before surgery, her youngest sister Sally died. Rose could not attend the funeral or sit Shiva. On the last candle of Hanukkah in 1993, Rose died.

Sister Ghenia, left her rich and comfortable life in Germany and followed her son Zvi to Israel in 1949. She tried to start a new life, working very hard, but the conditions in Israel at the time were very difficult and she lost everything that she brought with her from Germany. She left Israel in 1952 to start a new life in Montreal with her husband Oscar and daughter Frances. In 1953 she brought over from Israel her sister Rose with her family to Montreal as well.

In 1955, Ghenia moved with her family to Chicago to join her youngest sister Sally and a large family of uncles, aunts and many cousins. There she started a new life all over again. It was always her that worked, it was always she that decided, where, how and what to do next. She built up a very successful delicatessen business working 7 days a week, from

morning to night. She worked practically until the day she died. Unfortunately she did not have the time to enjoy the fruits of her work or to know her grandchildren. In 1967 Ghenia died of cancer at the age of 56.

Her husband Oscar died in Chicago 22 years later. Her daughter Frances, recently widowed, lives in Israel with her two daughters, Jennifer and Danielle.

Sister Sally with her family waited in Germany until 1950, when they finally were able to reach Chicago. There, they started a new life. Both she and her husband Abe worked hard, but they built for themselves and their children, a very comfortable life. Sally died in Chicago in 1993 of cancer. Her husband Abe, a wonderful and loving man, adored his wife from the day they met in 1938 until the day he died a few months after his wife in 1994. The last years of their lives, they had a very comfortable and good life. They were very close to their daughter and son with their families and were especially proud of their four grandchildren.

They left behind their daughter Frances and son Robert with their respective families. They all live in the Chicago area.

Zvi went to Israel by himself in 1948 with a youth group to join a kibbutz. He realized that he would not be able to continue his education in Israel. In 1950 he left to join his father in Rio de Janeiro. In 1953 he went to Montreal to attend the University. In 1956 he moved to Chicago where he obtained three University degrees. After several years of working in medical research, he eventually moved to Italy and started his own successful medical equipment manufacturing and research company. His Aunt Rose was right about him—he could be educated.

The part below of this epilogue was written by my cousin, Dr. Meir Kryger, that will end this part of the book:

"These people suffered greatly during and after the war. In their lives they had suffered through starvation, death, and torture. The suffering did not end in 1945. Holocaust survivors remember and cannot sleep. We must respect them and what they went through. When we hear their stories it must be as though we had lived through their experiences so that we can move on and celebrate life and freedom.

"Rose and Sam were both heroic people. Like many Holocaust survivors they did not like to speak of their past. They were never rich but they

left their families a precious legacy; a sense that they were all a part of history.

"This part of the book, I would like to end with a poem written by me, Meir, Rose's son. This poem was first written in 1967 when my aunt Ghenia died a thousand miles away in Chicago. The poem remained lost for 26 years; I found it in Rose's home during Shiva. I modified the poem in honor of my mother."

A Thousand Miles Away a Heart Is Beating

®PRIVATE
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, "Why?"
The hospital is old.
The voices on the intercom are not familiar.
The telephone in the hall rings unanswered
As unseen wheels roll to the elevator.
Moving is hard. Eating is hard. Smiling is hard.
Everything is hard
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, "Why?"
A new century.
A crying child,
Born in a city that can't decide
Its language, its future,
Just before a Great War that changed everything.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, "Why?"
A marriage followed in weeks
by a Greater more Terrible War that changed everything.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, "Why?"
A crying child is born then died
In a vast place that was not its home.
Never to be mentioned again.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, "Why?"
The heart of Archangel where trees were cut
Is colder than ice.
A crying child is born too soon

In a vast place that was not its home.
Named after a queen.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, “Why?”
The stinking fog
Of the Terrible War that ended too late
Lifts and shows a gray world.
There is nothing left.
Parents gone.
Home gone.
Past gone
Future gone.
Remaining kin blown like seeds over a scorched world.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, “Why?”
A crying child is born in the enemy’s camp
In a vast place that was not its home.
Beckoned to a Promised Land that only promised War.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, “Why?”
Another promised land
That broke its word.
A husband and a sister gone in the week that changed everything.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, “Why?”
A healer who forgot what to do,
A sister who died a week before
The surgical knife cut and changed everything.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
It is asking, “Why?”
The memories grow then fade.
The anger which grows then fades,
When surrounded by love, changes everything.
A thousand miles away a heart is beating.
Peace.
A thousand miles away.

Glossary

Aliya	Immigration to Israel (Hebrew)
Aliya Bet	Illegal immigration to Israel (Hebrew)
Balabuste	A good house keeper
Batiushka Stalin	Little father Stalin. After the war he was considered the saviour and father
Bezenik	Displaced person, runaway
Bezenikis	(plural)
Bubele	Pancake
Gefilte fish	Fish balls, traditional for Friday night
Hagadah	Book of Prayer for Passover
Hatima Tova	Greeting for Yom Kipur (to be inscribed for good fortune in the book of Life)
Heder	Study room or school for children
Iente	Gossipy woman, busybody
Ihis	Lineage, family background
Iscor	Mass said for the dead (remembrance prayer for the dead)
Izba	Farmers wooden hut (Russian)
Kapures	To make a sacrifice
Kashruth	To keep kosher (Hebrew)
Khupa	The wedding canopy
Kibitke	Small mud hut (Russian)
Kidush	Benediction over wine (Hebrew)
Kadish	Prayer for the dead (Hebrew)
Kazakh	Inhabitant of Kazakhistan
Khala	Bread especially for Sabbath
Kneidlakh	Matzo balls
Kolkhoz	Russian collective farm
Kolkhoznik	Member of the Kolkhoz
Kulak	Property owner (Russian)
Mehateiniste	Mother-in-law in a nice way
Matza	Unleavened bread for Passover
Matzebran	Matza omelet
Madrich	Teacher, youth leader

Moil	Man that does the circumcision
Nahes	Satisfaction, pride
NKVD	KGB
Oneg Shabat	Friday night celebration
Parahod	Riverboat (Russian)
Pesach	Passover
Posielok	Tiny village–camp (Russian)
Prepustka	Permit (especially to travel inside Russia)
Rabeinu shel olam	Our God in Heaven
Seder	The traditional Passover meal
Shadhan	Matchmaker
Shavuot	Pentacost
Sheitl	Wig used by all religious married women
Shiva	The seven day mourning period after a death
Shoihet	Kosher butcher
Shul	School and house of prayer (Yiddish)
Sidur	Prayer book (Hebrew)
Stakhanovietz	A recognized especially good worker
Talmut Tora	Hebrew school, in old days higher education
Tadzhik	Inhabitant of Tadzhikistan
Tales	Prayer shawl
Tfilin	Philacteries
Toltshok	The market place (Russian)
Yarmelke	Prayer hat
Zhyd	Jew said with contempt (Polish and Russian)

TWO

Letters and Stories of Our Family

Rome, June 1997

Special Note

This part of the book is dedicated to the family history of the three sisters—Ghenia, Rose and Sally Grzes and their families. It is a record written by my Aunt Rose in the form of letters addressed to me.

There are also two stories, that I have written and a part of the family stories. This part is meant to give a more comprehensive history of our family that is spread all over this world; I will try to collect other stories and add as I go along.

This second part of the book, I hope will not end here. I hope that my cousins, my nieces and their children will continue to keep up and contribute to the history of this very special family in the future.

Henry Welch
Rome, May 1997

Letter No. 1
My Paternal Grandparents

Montreal, June 1984

Dear Henry,

Thank you so much for your letter. It was great to hear from you again. You have created a big problem for me. You are asking too many questions and it will take me forever to reply. I believe the best way to do it, is to start from the beginning; or at least the beginning that I know.

I will try to tell you the story, where we come from. I am sure, that through the years, you have heard many stories. Stories told by your mother, your Aunt Sally and even me; but the actual and complete story, I am sure you have never heard.

Let me tell you first about my father's parents; my grandparents and your great grandparents.

DZIALOSZYCE between 1850 and 1860
(Poland, at the time occupied by Austria)

My grandmother Sheindel Gotlieb married Herzko Grzes. It was an arranged marriage by a 'shadhan' and it turned out to be a perfect match. My grandmother Sheindel was a very pretty girl. Her father was a goldsmith, and she came from a rather well to do family.

My grandfather Herzko, after whom you were named, was the son of the only local baker. According to stories, the Grzes family was well-known and fairly well-off in that small village. Grandfather Herzko was a well-educated man; he attended the Yeshiva and was supposedly quite a brain. According to tradition in those days, when a girl married a learned and educated young man, the father-in-law would support them and keep them for several years in his home. They lived in the house of the bride, while the young man would study the 'Torah' and eventually grow up and go on his own. This is exactly what Herzko and Sheindel did.

Within a year, grandmother Sheindel gave birth to a daughter called Haia. A year later she had a pair of twins; two boys, one of which was my father Meir, your grandfather and his twin brother Shmil.

It was my grandmother Sheindel that told me all these stories. Sheindel and Herzko did not want to stay and live in that dirty, mud covered little village. No wonder, according to grandmother Sheindel, there was nothing likable in that mud-growing village. At the time Poland was divided into three parts. This particular village for some political reason was handed over by the Russians to the Germans and the Germans gave it to the Austrians. No one really cared to develop or improve the life in that hole of a village.

Eventually, my grandfather Herzko became also a baker, but with Torah. Dzialoszyce was too small of a village to support another bakery. And so, they decided to look for greener pastures. They heard that Lodz was a fast growing city, and they decided to move there. They took a horse and a covered wagon; packed a few belongings and some food for the road; they placed their three children on the wagon and off they went to Lodz.

They had money. They still had all of my grandmother Sheindel's dowry, which consisted of a large number of Russian and Austrian 24 carat gold coins. The gold pieces were sewn into the clothing they were wearing.

The road to Lodz was long and difficult. First of all there were no paved roads. There was a mud trail and when it rained, one walked in the mud up to one's ankles. The poor horse could not pull all that weight by himself in that mud; they had get down and push the wagon too. They traveled very slowly. It took them several weeks; going from village to village until they reached Lodz.

Lodz in those days was growing very fast. The city attracted many people from all the surrounding small towns and villages. They all came to the city to look for work and fortune. Lodz became the center of the new industrial age. There were several large mills and factories producing yarn and different type of cloth. The mills and looms were mushrooming all over the city. Lodz became in later years the Manchester of Poland and supposedly number two in Europe in the production of wool cloth and other materials.

My grandfather had no intentions of working for somebody else. First he looked around and after he got to know the city; he bought himself a bakery on the Nowomiejska street. In my days, I remember this place as being a very large shopping hall. My grandfather worked very hard, while grandma Sheindel was busy having and raising her 11 children. After the

initial three children, who they brought with them from Dzialoszyce; she had eight more children in Lodz. I close my eyes and I can see my grandmother Sheindel when she was already an old lady. She wore a 'sheitel' and her head was always covered with a beautiful silk scarf. She lived across the street from us. She had a nice and comfortable room and lived all by herself; after having had 11 children. I liked my grandmother Sheindel very much.

Grandfather Hertzko was a good baker and also a good businessman and made a good living for his family. When the children grew up, one by one they helped in the bakery. They were a fairly well to do family in comparison to all the other Jewish population in the city. All the boys studied in the 'heder' and got an above average education considering the times. There were 9 sons and 2 daughters to take care of. As my grandma used to say, "It was nothing to laugh about."

The first to leave home was my Aunt Haia. She was the oldest. She married a very learned young man, who knew nothing about earning a living. As long as my grandfather lived, the young couple lived in their house.

When grandfather Herzko died, the brothers bought for Haia a small store selling bakery goods. She stayed and worked in that store until the war broke out in 1939. She had 12 children. How she managed to run a store and have all these 12 children at the same time, I do not know.

I remember, when the war broke out; she had twenty odd grandchildren and still going strong. She ended her life with most of her family in an extermination death camp. From such a big family only two of her children survived the war, they live in Sydney, Australia.

I never knew my grandfather Herzko, he died before I was born. After his death, my father Meir became the head of the family. All nine brothers knew the bakery business; however, some of them chose other trades and went their own way.

My father's twin brother Schmil became a weaver, which was a very good trade in Lodz. He married a lovely girl from Litomiersk, a little town not too far from Lodz. He had also a large family, but most of them perished in the holocaust, except two daughters in Toronto and one in Israel.

Another brother decided to study and became a teacher. Father's younger sister Pesel, that you knew from Chicago, stayed with her mother at home and helped with the household. She eventually married uncle Aron and they moved to Chicago. They had a son Harry and daughter Esther, whom you know from Chicago.

As soon as the younger brothers could manage the paternal bakery, my father left home and bought a bakery of his own.

My father's bakery was located in the new section of town called Wilko—wolf in Polish. They called it Wilko, because it was near a forest and supposedly, there were still wolfs roaming around. Later, that part of town became known as Baluty and was mostly inhabited by Jews.

Baluty was soon filled with poor Jews that flocked into the city from all the surrounding provinces to find work in the mills and the large factories.

My father's bakery was doing very well. Soon 'shadhunim' (matchmakers) were offering him all kinds of wonderful matches. In particular, one flour merchant from Podembice who was selling flour to my father; proposed to him a match to a nice girl from Podembice.

It was normal for the small town merchants to go to the city to sell their goods and in return bring back merchandise from the city and sell it in their small villages.

That is enough for one time. As I grow older, I get tired more easily, but I promise to write soon again. Please do drop me a line, you know how much I enjoy receiving mail, especially from you.

Your loving aunt,
Rouzka

Letter No. 2
My Maternal Grandparents

Montreal, July 1984

Dear Henry,

As promised, today I will tell you the story of my mother's parents. Without special introduction, I will tell you the story as I was told and as I remember it:

PODEMBICE around the year 1850–1860
(A small village near Lodz)

My mother's parents, my grandfather, Meir-Hersch Glicenstein, and my grandmother, Gitel Gelbart, were married and had 8 children. They owned a big mill, producing flour, kasha etc., and lived a rather comfortable life in Podembice. Podembice was a tiny village not too far from Lodz. It had a small market place and a big church right in the middle of the village. If you came in a horse driven carriage, the horse would be in the village and the carriage out of the village, this gives you an idea how big this village was.

There was a merchant in Podembice that came often to Lodz to sell flour and kasha. He told my grandmother Gitel, that he knew of a perfect match for her daughter Fradel; my mother. My mother at the time must have been a real beauty; even many years later, she was still a very good-looking woman. She was not too tall; she had beautiful black curly hair and big black eyes. After her marriage, she always wore a perfectly groomed 'sheitl'—a wig. She was a very refined, good hearted and extremely clever woman. It is too bad, that I did not inherit her traits. She was fairly well-educated for a woman of her time; she knew German, Russian and of course, Yiddish. She knew Polish, but did not speak it very well. She was born and raised at a time when Poland was divided. At one time

they belonged to Germany, then to Russia, then again to Germany and finally it became Poland.

The shadhan, the flour salesman was telling my grandmother Gitel all kinds of wonderful things about my father Meir. My grandma Gitel, even without having seen the future groom, she already decided that she liked him. A young man from a very good family that had a business of his own was a real catch. She asked the shadhan, "So, how does the cat cross the river?"

It was the shadhan that made all the arrangements. My grandfather Herzko was already dead. One Friday afternoon, my grandmother Sheindel took my father and his brother-in-law; his sister, Haya's husband and they went to Podembice to meet the future bride. My grandmother Sheindel stayed at my grandmother Gitel's house; while my father and his brother-in-law stayed at the shadhan's house. I am sure, there were no Hotels in Podembice.

My mother was very nervous, she desperately tried to make a good impression on her future mother-in-law. She had already seen the groom from far away and without even exchanging a word with him—she liked him. He was a handsome, broad-shouldered and tall man with blond hair and blue eyes. According to grandmother Sheindel it was love on first sight. That Sabbath morning they all went to shul—the synagogue. The custom in a small town was to honor the guest, especially one that came from a large city; they gave him a 'liya,' the honor to be called to the Torah. Furthermore, according to my grandmother Sheindel, my father had to meet and have a long talk with the local Rabbi, that was naturally related to the Glicenstein family.

My grandmother Gitel was happy and she thanked God, that he had found such a wonderful young man for her daughter Fradel. My mother, according to grandmother Sheindel was all red in her face and very nervous all that week-end—she was in love. But who ever talked of love in those days, it would have been sacrilegious to even think of such a thing. The important thing was that the couple liked each other; but it was even more important that the two mothers got along. They were the ones that had to be satisfied and approve.

That Saturday night, they made plans for the next meeting. This time it was the bride that was invited to come to Lodz, during the Sucoth holidays. As was the custom, it was my grandmother Gitel who accompanied my mother to the house of the future in-laws. A young lady from a good family would never travel alone. They were received by my grandmother

Sheindel with great honors. The two 'mehateinistes' (mothers-in-law) decided the wedding date and immediately arranged to give an engagement party and make it all official. The bride received a gold watch as an engagement present and the groom received from my grandmother Gitel a gold pocket watch with a long and heavy gold chain.

When the groom went to Podembice the next time to visit, they made the engagement official and gave a reception in the 'shul.' Supposedly, it was quite a feast and the whole village participated.

My grandmother Gitel had a large family, several brothers and sisters, their children and grandchildren. The wedding itself was also in Podembice. My grandmother Sheindel with all of her 11 children, plus their children, including her daughter-in-law Rose Kaminski, invaded that small town. They were all guests in the homes of the local family. The wedding itself was held in the courtyard of the shul. The wedding went on for two days and all of them stayed in Podembice. On the third day with a long procession of horse driven carriages, the newly weds returned to Lodz. They were accompanied by family and friends. In my parents' carriage there was also my mother's dowry.

The newlyweds had a lovely apartment waiting for them including a business; my father's bakery. My mother came to the wedding with a dowry as becoming a bride from a rich family. My mother had a beautiful reversible fur cloak, on one side mink and on the other side a green wool material. They used to call that cloak "Retonda." My mother was quite an elegant lady at that time. According to my grandmother Sheindel, my mother would never leave the house without a hat and gloves.

My mother had 5 sisters and 2 brothers. With time all of them were married, except one sister that remained an old maid. Some people in the family were jealous of my mother, because she was lucky and had a very devoted husband. My father adored my mother and they were very close to each other.

My father's youngest brother Max disappeared one day from home. No one heard from him for a couple of years until a postcard came from Chicago. My grandma Sheindel was very upset about that. Supposedly, it was considered a shame when a young man leaves home without being married and disappears without a word. No one in the family would talk about him. I was already a big girl, when grandmother told me one day that she had a son in America. Max left Lodz before the first World War. After the first World War he brought over to Chicago one of his brothers with a wife and his sister Pesel with her husband Aron.

Uncle Max came to visit Poland when my sister Ghenia got married back in 1931. All of my father's brothers and sisters were married and had children of their own.

My grandmother Sheindel had a very happy old age. Although she lived alone until the day she died, she was always surrounded by a loving family. She had many grandchildren and great grandchildren. I used to visit her quite often. I loved the stories she used to tell me. She got old and died without being a problem to anyone. Shortly before she died, she got sick for two days and than died in her sleep. She left behind her a nice generation of people. Unfortunately, Hitler, may his name be damned forever, saw to it that the majority would not survive the holocaust. I personally took the death of my grandmother Sheindel quite badly; I really loved that old lady.

Shortly after my parent's wedding, my grandmother Gitel left the mill to her oldest son, Berl. By that time, uncle Berl had already several children of his own. He lived in his parents home and worked the mill until the Second World War. By the way, my uncle Berl was the father of our cousins Mordhai and Zvi Glicenstein that you know from Israel.

My mother's sister Sara married a nice young man from the same village and they lived together with my grandmother Gitel. My mother's youngest sister Sheindel remained an old maid. She lived with an uncle of hers, my grandmother Gitel's brother. The brother was a widower; he eventually remarried Sheindel's a girlfriend who was at least 30 years younger than he was. This new wife gave him several children. My aunt Sheindel remained with them until they were all sent to their death in Auschwitz in 1943.

When my grandmother Gitel died, she had quite a funeral. Most of us grandchildren were already big. Our grandmother Gitel behaved and acted like a grand Dame. She ruled and conducted herself almost like a princess. In her late years, she would visit all of her children from time to time and never forgot to bring a gift for each of the grandchildren. Every one of the grandchildren received the same present. I remember one year in particular, when she brought a pair of gold earrings for every granddaughter and a silver wine chalice for each of the grandsons.

By the time we girls got older, all of us had a number of pieces of jewelry from our grandmother. The boys had a collection of silver wine chalices. Unfortunately she did not live long enough to see her grandchildren get married. She died in the late nineteen twenties. After her death, most of

the girls that were born in the family were named after her "Gitel." The name Gitel was repeated many times over; but none of them survived the holocaust. The boys on the other hand were named after the grandfather. There were many Mayer Hersh's. The same was true on my father's side of the family, there were many Sheindels and Hertzkos.

Now, you know something about your great grandparents. I know that I mixed in a lot of other little stories and I was going back and forth, but my memories just worked that way. The pen just scribbled all by itself. When I will have another one of those good days, I will write you another family story.

Take care of yourself.
Your loving aunt,
Rouzka

Letter No. 3
My Aunt Hanna's Moishele

Montreal, August 1984

My dear nephew,

Thank you so much for your lovely letter. You have no idea how much joy your letters give me. They make me feel good. There is also the anticipation, that I will have to dip into my bowl of recollections and write you another story of our family. This time, I will write you an episode that remained in my memory for so many years. I will tell you the story of my cousin Moishele.

My Aunt Hanna's Moishele

"My aunt Hanna was my mother's oldest sister. She became a widow at a very young age and was left with four children. The oldest boy, Moishele was 12, Hayele 9, Ruchele 6 and a baby boy in the crib. My parents had three girls and no son. As a matter of fact, my mother did give birth to 3 baby boys and all three of them never got beyond the age of one when they died. But that is another story."

*Note: ***My mother Ghenia told me this story. She being the oldest of the three sisters, remembered the birth of two baby boys and supposedly there was one boy born before her. The story goes, that before my grandfather Meir married grandmother Fradel; he was sort of engaged or promised to marry a young girl from Lodz. After having seen my grandmother Fradel, he broke the promise and married my grandmother.*

Supposedly, the rejected young lady from Lodz was heartbroken and cursed my grandfather Meir; he should never have a 'kaddish'—prayer for the dead; meaning that he should never have a male son; an heir that could say kaddish after him, when he died. It was very important for a Jew to have

a male heir; to carry on the family name and also someone to say 'kaddish' after he died. Girls were not allowed to say kaddish, at least then.

*After the third baby boy died, grandfather Meir went to visit his ex-fiancee to ask forgiveness. Supposedly, by then, the young lady was married and had children of her own. She forgave him; but no boy was born. It could have been of course a case of Thalasemia, which we know now is very common among Polish Jews with hundreds of years of intermarriages. My grandparents desperately wanted a baby boy, but after the third, I suppose they gave up, instead they had a third daughter Sally. By the way, there was a 6 year difference between aunt Rouzia and aunt Sally and according to my mother, there were two boys born during that period.****

"When aunt Hanna became a widow and had difficulty in raising four children, my parents offered to take in Moishele to live with us. They brought aunt Hanna with the four children to Lodz and helped her to get herself settled. Moishele came to live with us. My parents adored him. We, the three sisters loved him like a brother. My father made him attend a private school and the boy turned out to be brilliant.

Later when he became older, he would get up together with my father very early in the morning and help in the bakery. But my father did not want him to become a baker. He sent him to a private school to get a higher education. He graduated with honors and became an accountant. He worked in one of the big factories as an accountant and slowly worked his way up to become the controller and eventually the general manager.

Moishele was an extremely handsome man. I think, he was the most handsome and good-looking man, I ever saw. He was respected and very liked by his bosses and made quite a career. He loved my parents, as if they were his own. He was a very generous person; he took care of his widowed mother and his sisters.

When the time came for him to get married; my parents decided to do something about it. Since he was such a handsome man; well educated and generous; my mother wanted to make sure that he should marry well and into a good family. My mother was busy thinking whom she could find, that would be good enough for her Moishele.

My mother had a rich cousin in Lodz, that had three daughters of marriageable age, why not one of them."

*Note: ***This part of the story was told to me by my mother Ghenia. My aunt Rose does not mention it.*

"And so one day, they made arrangements for Moishele to see the future bride. He would see her, without actually meeting her and would not be compromised in case he did not like her. After having seen her, he could decide if he wanted to meet her and her parents officially. He was told to walk in front of her house at a certain hour and the bride was going to be in the window; so he could see her. The bride to be, lived on the ground floor and the windows were low enough, so he could easily see her, when he walked by.

In those days this was a rather common way of showing off a bride or a bridegroom without a compromise on either side. This gave the young couple an opportunity to see each other; before their parents met and made the dowry and marriage arrangements. In most cases, the marriages were arranged by the parents through a matchmaker and the young couple, had nothing to say; they would see each other for the first time under the 'khupa'—the wedding canopy.

To make a long story short, Moishele walked back and forth several times in front of the window and he saw a beautiful young maiden. He liked what he saw. On top of that, his mother and my mother and father decided that it was a good match and so Moishele agreed to marry that pretty young lady.

*She was beautiful, she came from a very good and wealthy family with a nice dowry, so it looked like a perfect match. Unfortunately, on his wedding day under the khupa he found the beautiful maiden's older sister; who was rather homely. When he raised her veil to offer her a sip of the wine, he saw her face; but by then, it was too late—they were married; they were husband and wife. They played the Jacob and Lea bit on him."****

"His mother and my parents convinced him that whatever happened was for the best. The poor guy accepted his lot and made the best of it. However, I knew and everyone else knew that this match was not exactly made in heaven. Nevertheless, he respected and treated her very well, but as the old song goes:

"I can give you anything but love. . . ."

She was homely; but she was well educated, good natured and a very understanding person. She was also a real 'balabuste,' an excellent housekeeper. She gave him only one daughter. They named her Gitel after his and mine famous grandmother. He adored and worshipped his daughter.

Gitel was growing up a very beautiful and talented girl, just like her father. When the war broke out Gitel was 14 years old. They lived in a magnificent apartment in the best neighborhood in Lodz; but he and his wife were never really happy.

All three of us sisters were very close to Moishele and his wife. We loved Moishele like a real brother. With all his wealth he remained a very humble and simple man. He had a special respect and love for my parents. He was supporting his mother, two sisters and a smaller brother.

When I grew up and became an adult, Moishele and I became good friends and quite often we would have long talks. Only once did he confess to me that his married life was not what he expected. He made me promise that I would never marry a man unless I really loved him.

"Life is too short," he would to say. "Do not marry just because your mother and father want you to. It is better to stay an old maid. Do not marry just to keep your parents happy or for the shame of remaining an old maid."

I asked him many questions about his married life and his life as a whole; but his good manners and the type of person he was, he refused to comment. He never said a bad word about his wife or any one else for that matter.

Because of his daughter, that he loved dearly, he accepted his family situation. Otherwise, I am sure he would have organized his life differently. I can see Moishele now, as he used to be, always elegant, well-groomed and always with that handsome smile on his face.

His only younger brother was sickly and shortly before the war, died. His sister Hayele married a very nice man from Bencin. Moishele helped the young couple to start a small business of their own. They worked very hard and became fairly well to do. They took their mother Hanna and their younger sister Rochele to live with them. They had a son named Sewek. The war destroyed everything. All of them finished their lives in Auschwitz.

I remember before I left Lodz in 1939, I tried to persuade Moishele to come along with us and get away from the Germans. He told me that he could never leave his old mother alone and the rest of his family especially his daughter Gitel. I tried to persuade him to take his mother and the rest of the family along; so maybe my own parents would also come with us; but he would not listen. Unfortunately, his destiny decided otherwise. As you know, I am a great believer in destiny and you cannot fight it. Moishele together with all of his family perished in the Holocaust. No one from my aunt Hanna's family survived. Whenever I go to Iscor, I remember them.

There were other 9 family members that disappeared together with my aunt Hanna."

As you know my mother Fradel had five sisters and two brothers and there are many more stories to tell. But, now you will have to forgive me, but that is all I can write at one time. I am going to stop here. In my next letter I will tell you about somebody else. We had once a very large family and lovely family. Unfortunately, there was a holocaust. Stay healthy.

Your loving aunt,
Rouzia

Letter No. 4
A True Love Story

Montreal, September 1984

My dear nephew,

You are complaining that I do not write often enough. But don't forget that it is much easier for you to read than for me to write. Anyhow, I will try my best today. I will tell you the story of my aunt Reizl. It is very possible that I was named after the same great grandmother.

My aunt Reizl was another one of my mother's sisters. She married a nice young man and settled in Alexandrow; a small town near Lodz. I remember, it would take a little over an hour to get there by streetcar. They lived quite comfortably and had no financial problems. They owned several looms and produced some very special wool materials; that were very well known in Lodz. They had two sons and 4 daughters. My uncle Iskol, may he rest in peace, died very young and left behind him my aunt Reizl, a young widow with 6 children.

Moishele lived with us and was about to get married. My father, may he rest in peace, told my mother.

"Maybe this time we should take in a girl with us."

My mother, may she rest in peace, made immediately arrangements to take in the oldest of my aunt Reizl's daughters; her name was Ester-Sheindel. Our cousin Esther-Sheindel was an unusually pretty girl. When she walked down the street, heads would turn to look at her. She had a unique kind of beauty. My parents sent her to learn a trade. When she finally started to work, she would saved every penny she made. She lived with us and became one more sister to us.

Now I will tell you a true love story. The story of Esther-Sheindel and Vigdor.

"My parents were very friendly with another couple, who lived down the street from us. They would see each other socially very often. Her name was also Fradel and the two Fradels were practically inseparable. My mother's friend Fradel was a little nouveau-rich and loved to show off her possessions. They had several stores in the city and were considered rich.

They had a large family, 6 sons and 3 daughters. We, the three sisters, were very friendly with their children. They used to come often to our house and we would visit them.

One of their sons, Vigdor fell madly in love with Esther-Sheindel. They started seeing each other secretly and were madly in love. My mother was the only one that knew about it; because Esther-Sheindel would confide everything to my mother.

About the same time, one of Vigdor's sisters was dating a very nice and intelligent young man. They were very much in love. Her parents did not approve of him, because he was poor and would not allow their daughter to marry him. The young couple were both idealists and in love. They did not care if they got a dowry from her parents or if her mama approved or not. They went to a Rabbi and got married without saying a word to anyone. That same day, they ran away to Palestine. They both belonged to a Zionist organization, who helped them to get away.

Her parents were terribly upset; they even refused to acknowledge their existence. To them that daughter was like dead. My parents did not like the idea either, that a young girl, just because the parents did not approve of her young man, should elope without saying a word to anyone. I can appreciate and understand my parents' feelings; after all, my parents had three daughters of their own too. In fact, they preferred to say nothing.

Fradel used to tell my mother, that when a letter came from Palestine from her daughter, she would read it, but never mention a word to her husband about it. My mother was upset and told her several times, that she was making a big mistake; things like that one should share with one's husband. But Fradel was too impressed with herself and her money to bother and listen to others. She was proud, arrogant and could not understand how a daughter of hers could leave a perfectly beautiful and rich home and elope with a poor pauper. She felt insulted, her pride was hurt and she refused to have anything to do with that daughter or even to hear from her.

As a matter of fact, I met that couple may years later in Israel. They were a very happy couple and had a wonderful life together. They had two grown up and married children and several grandchildren. They were already old, but still very much in love."

Now back to Esther-Sheindel and Vigdor.

"My mother was not very happy, that Esther-Sheindel was so terribly in love with Vigdor, but what could she do. People started to talk, that it was not nice, that two young people were seeing each other without a chaperon and they were not even engaged. In those days, such things were not

done in good families. There were always some busybodies that could not mind their own business.

My mother was a very clever woman and so, she decided to have a little talk with her friend Fradel and tell her about Esther-Sheindel and her son Vigdor. One Sabbath evening, they came to our house; my mother received them as usual. While my mother was serving tea, my father opened the conversation by saying, "As you probably know, Vigdor and Esther-Sheindel have been seeing each other for some time now. Supposedly they are in love. I think it would be a good idea if we made an engagement party for them, what do you think?"

Vigdor's father just sat there. He was surprised, but said nothing. Fradel his wife stood up and without saying a word, picked up her embroidered shawl, threw it around her shoulders and with her nose in the air marched out from the room. On the doorstep she turned around and called to her husband.

"Come on, we are going."

Her husband got up, gave my father his hand and said,

"Don't worry Meir, she will calm down." And with that he followed his wife out of the house. My mother, may she rest in peace, had no hair on her tongue and told her friend as she was leaving.

"Listen my dear friend, if the girl's father would be alive, he would not have allowed Esther-Sheindel to marry your son. Her 'ikhis'—(her lineage, her family background) is as good as mine."

My mother's best friend stormed out of the house and never came again.

We children knew nothing about that and wondered what happened to the two Fradels. They used to be the best of friends, like sisters and now they do not even talk to each other.

Vigdor and Esther-Sheindel loved each other and had no intentions to break up their relationship. Vigdor moved out from his parents home. He lived for a while with my mother's youngest sister, until he was called to the army. Two years later, after he finished his military duty in the Polish army; he came back to Lodz and lived with one of his married brothers.

It was my aunt Sara together with my mother that finally gave an engagement party for the young couple. Vigdor went to his parents to invite them to the party, but they did not come. All of his brothers and sisters attended the engagement party.

Fortunately, Esther-Sheindel had saved every penny she ever made. During all these years, that she worked, she saved and never spent a cent.

She lived with us and whatever she needed, she got from my parents. After the engagement party, the young couple got themselves an apartment in Lodz; they furnished it nicely and were ready to get married.

When my aunt Reizl came to Lodz and heard the story about her daughter not being good enough for Vigdor's parents, not only was she amazed, she became furious.

"How dare this ignorant, nouveau-rich woman say a thing like that?"

She, Reizl, a daughter of the great Gitel and Meir Hersh Glicenstein and her dead husband a renowned, respected and learned man; Vigdor's parents should be honored and proud, that their son could marry her daughter Esther-Sheindel.

Anyway, with the help of my parents, the young couple have set a date for the wedding. Two weeks before the wedding my mother accompanied by her cousin Rabbi Shimon, decided to go and see Vigdor's parents.

Rabbi Shimon was not only a very clever man, he was also a very respected and known personality in our community. I went along with them. My mother was extremely nervous when she rang the bell. Vigdor's father opened the door; his wife Fradel was standing a few steps behind him. My mother standing in the doorway said to them:

"I came to invite you to your son's wedding. Do as you please," And in a very composed way, my mother continued to tell them what she had on her mind.

Vigdor's mother broke down and started to cry. They invited my mother to come in and sit down, but she refused. However, before leaving she told them that she expected to see them at the wedding; not as much for their Vigdor's sake but for their own and with that she turned around and left.

Rabbi Shimon had a nice talk with Vigdor's father. What exactly he told him, I do not know. When we got home, my mother was very upset. All that happened on a Sunday. That evening, my mother called Esther-Sheindel and Vigdor and told them. "I did all I could to bring peace to the families. You will have a wedding as planned."

An hour or so later there was a knock on the door. Our Polish maid opened the door and brought to the parlor a distinguished looking gentleman who asked to talk to my father. The man explained, that he was sent by Vigdor's parents. He told my father, that they were happy to accept the invitation to the wedding. However, they had a big request, they would very much appreciate if their son Vigdor, would honor them to come back home to their house and live with them until the wedding. They also decided to

make a "beshiting," a kind of a shower, for the young couple and my parents should invite as many people as they want.

The next Sabbath morning the groom was called to the Torah in the Synagogue. That same afternoon Vigdor's parents gave a grandiose reception in their home. My mother could not hold back the tears of happiness and thanked God that everything turned out for the best.

The shower for Esther-Sheindel and Vigdor was very special. My mother with all of her 5 sisters were there. They sat together at the head table and there was pride and happiness over their faces.

The wedding itself was celebrated in our house. It was a magnificent happening—love has triumphed. Especially, we the younger generation of cousins were very taken and impressed by this romantic, true love story.

My parents gave away Esther-Sheindel. It was my father and mother that took her under the 'khupa'—the wedding canopy. As it turned out Esther-Sheindel became the best and the favorite daughter-in-law, that Vigdor's parents had.

The young couple did very well for themselves. They had two lovely children a son and a daughter. When the war broke out, it was Esther-Sheindel that took her in-laws into her house; when they were thrown out of theirs by the Germans. Unfortunately, the war took its price. From the whole large Vigdor's family, parents, brothers, sisters and their children; only Vigdor and his son survived the Holocaust. I did not see them after the war. I heard that Vigdor died in Australia, where he lived after the war with his son's family.

From the family of our Aunt Reizl, no one survived except the son of Esther-Sheindel in Australia. Before the war, all of Aunt Reizl's children were married and had children of their own. From her family, more than 19 members went up in smoke in the chimneys of Auschwitz.

I know this was a wonderful love story; too bad, that all had to finish so tragically. Was it the destiny of our generation? Was that the price that our generation had to pay; to bring respect and dignity to the Jewish people and the establishment of the State of Israel?

Let us hope, that the world and all of us have learned our lesson. Let us hope, that our future generations will never experience and never have to face another holocaust. Only in that case—I hope that history will not repeat itself.

Please write soon.

Your loving aunt,
Reizl

Letter No. 5
My Aunt Golde

Montreal, October 1984

My dear nephew,

I am so glad that you loved the story of Esther-Sheindel and Vigdor. Now you know who are the cousins in Australia. You are right, it does make a difference when you know how they are related to us.

This time, I will tell you the story of my Aunt Golde. She was the mother of our cousin Rose from Lille, whom you know very well.

My Aunt Golda was an older sister of my mother's. She married a learned and very religious young man from Litomiersk. He came from a very Hassidic and rich family. They settled in Konstantinow, a small town not too far from Lodz. My uncle Jankel (after whom Jacque, Rose's son is named) was a very religious and kind man. He made a beautiful home for his wife Golda and their two daughters and a son. Up to the First World War they were very rich. After the war in 1918, they were robbed of all their riches by the retreating German army.

After they lost everything, my Uncle Jankel became very sick and heartbroken. A few years later he died; leaving his young widow with three children. All three of the children were well educated. Adela, the oldest daughter graduated from a private Gymnasium (high school) in Lodz, with outstanding marks.

Unfortunately, the financial situation in their house was not what it used to be. Many times on Fridays Adela stayed for the weekend in our house. In my mother's family everybody was very close, which was unusual for big families. We loved Adela, she was a very beautiful and highly intelligent girl.

The shadhans started visiting the family and offering all kinds of matrimonial matches. Especially in a small town where she lived, everybody in the Jewish community knew everybody else. The shadhan proposed for Adela a very rich gentleman, a magnificent catch. She was only 17, just out of school and he was quite a few years older. Everybody was telling her

what a magnificent catch he was. He came from a very fine and rich family; she could not have asked for a better match.

Adela did not like him and did not want him. He was a very distinguished and elegant gentleman; every time he came to our house; he would bring her a gift; flowers and boxes of chocolate. Everybody was praising him; what a magnificent catch he was, but Adela wanted nothing to do with him.

Somehow, they persuaded her to get engaged to him. She received magnificent presents. She was being treated like a princess. But Adela continued to say—NO.

The whole family was very upset, when she sent back all the presents and refused to marry the man. Several years went by and Adela was still not married, she was not yet an old maid, but she was single. Rumors started to go around among the superstitious women and all those busybodies. They claimed that the reason Adela was still single was because the man she was engaged to never forgave her for having rejected him. That was something to think about in those days.

Her younger brother Baruch Meyer Hersh was named after two grandfathers; my mother's father Mayer Hersh and his father's grandfather Baruch. He became a very religious and learned Hassid and was a follower of the famous Gere Rebbe. Supposedly, he was a brilliant student and a great talmudist. There in the court of the Gere Rebbe a shadhan fixed him up with a rich daughter of a Gere hassid. He married and became quite famous for his knowledge and wisdom, After he finished his studies with the Gere Rebbe, he became the head of a Yeshiva in Warsaw. They spoke of him as a Zadik. This was confirmed to me by our cousin Masha from Jerusalem. She and her mother met him in Warsaw shortly before the war, a few days before Masha left for Palestine.

Baruch Mayer Hersh married his wife without ever having seen her. The first time they saw each other was under the 'khupa.' How difficult it is to understand nowadays such marriages. Supposedly, they were very happy and had 4 children before the war broke out in 1939. Strangely enough, with all those arranged marriages, there were practically no divorces. I wonder why?

Adela finally fell in love with a nice and very well-educated young man from a good family. They got married about 1930. She married the older brother of Henry Widawski, that you know. Adela had only one daughter named Gitel, after our grandmother. Her younger sister Rose whom you know, was a stunning red head. She married Max and went to

live in Lille, where they lived a very comfortable life. As you know, both Rose and Max died in Lille not too long ago.

Rose and Max had one son Jacque, who is a doctor and married to Evelyn, who is also a doctor. They have two children Bruno and Veronique, but of course you know them.

My Aunt Golda died just before the war broke out in 1939. Adela with her husband and daughter Gitel escaped to Russia; the same time we did. They lived in Lwow (Lemberg) at the same time when we lived in Pinsk. Adela's husband had an important job with the Russian government. They accepted Russian citizenship and remained in Lwow, when we were sent away to Siberia. Adela suffered when she heart, that we were in Siberia. She tried to help us. She wrote us several letters while we were in Siberia. She and her family remained in Lwow when the Germans invaded Russia. We never heard from them again. They ended their lives in 1941, like most of the Jews in that part of the country.

The Germans forced the men to dig a big and long common grave, somewhere outside the city. Then, they forced all the Jews to undress and naked lined them all up in front of the grave. All of them, men, women and children stood naked in front of that grave, while the SS with the help of the Ukrainian collaborators shot them. They fell directly into that grave. The corpses were covered with quick lime and then with earth.

From my Aunt Golda's family the only one to survive was Rose with her family in France. They saved themselves in Southern France being hidden by a French farmer for almost three years. Rose and Jacque in one place and Max in another.

I know it is very sad to read these stories, but it is even harder for me to write them. Do you realize how much it hurts to remember all this. I close my eyes and a crowd of images passes in front of me. I see faces and more faces; then I see just images, human images with bleary faces of loved ones that are no more. But as you always say, life must go on.

I know that I jump from one subject to another and sometimes, there is no continuity. But my mind wanders and my memories come out that way. You know, one story leads to another. It must be old age. Please forgive your old aunt, that loves you.

Reizl.

Letter No. 6
Our Cousin Youkel

Miami, February 1985

My dear Zvi,

It is very boring in Miami now. Montreal is having a lot of snow and a very cold winter this year. I am much better off being here in the Florida sun. I feel a little guilty, because I have not written to you for some time. Today, I feel ambitious and decided to sit down and answer some of your questions. The next on my list is Youkel.

You want to know about Youkel and Lisi from Israel. I know that you know them and you wonder how we are related. To start with, Youkel's mother Sara was my mother's younger sister. That makes him my first cousin and your second cousin. His parents wandered all over Poland and Germany until finally they settled in Danzig. Youkel was the youngest of 7 children. He was a Zionist and at the age of 14, he left home and illegally with 'Aliya Bet,' reached Palestine; just before the war in 1939.

He together with a small group of other young people became the founders of a kibbutz. There he married Lisi and remained a kibutznik all of his life. He was the perfect Zionist pioneer; a kibutznik, a Palmahnik, the classical type that gave Israel the spirit of solidarity, chutzpah and the meaning of a homeland. He was proud to be an Israeli. He loved his country and fought for it; since the days of the Palmach; before the State of Israel was officially declared.

*Note: ***Youkel died in 1986 at the age of 62. I happened to be in Israel a year later, in September when my niece Danielle was born. There was a special memorial in his honor, one year after his death. The ceremony was held in the Kibbutz where he lived and was one of its founders. The memorial was to honor this great Kibutznik, a spirit of Israel.*

Naturally all of our small remaining Israeli family were there, about 20 of us. I went there with my brother-in-law Shmuel and my niece Jennifer. My sister Frances was still in the maternity ward with Danielle; who was born two days before.

I had several surprises that evening. When we arrived in the Kibbutz, there were special signs indicating where the memorial ceremony, for Youkel was going to take place.

*We reached an open area that looked like a Roman amphitheater. There were over 200 people already present. It was a beautiful summer night with a full moon and special lighting illuminated the small podium with a microphone for the speakers. We came in a few minutes before the ceremony started. I remember going over to greet my cousins Lisi, Masha, her daughters Nira and Lea and several others of our family. As I walked between the aisles I heard whispering behind my back. I did not pay much attention to it. Later on, I found out the reason. Supposedly, I resemble Youkel so much, that when I came in, some people thought to have seen a ghost or a younger brother of Youkel's. The ceremony itself was quite impressive. There were a dozen or so speakers; each one of them told a story about their friend Youkel. A couple of our family members told stories about "Our cousin Youkel; Our uncle Youkel; My friend Youkel; Youkel the Halutz; Youkel the Palmachnik; Youkel the Soldier; Youkel the spirit of Israel." There were many other speeches and poems that were presented in his memory. There was also a small quartet orchestra with a famous Israeli violinist, that played some of Youkel's favorite Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn. Needless to say, I was very impressed and very proud to look like one of my great cousins that was Youkel.****

Youkel's father Sucher, may he rest in peace, was a dreamer. All his life he was running from place to place in search of a fortune, that he never found. When the war broke out in 1939, he with his wife Sara and their 7 children came to Lodz. Youkel was the only one that survived from all his family. All the rest of them, brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, children and grandchildren were lost and perished in the Holocaust.

I am sorry, but here in Miami, I do not have much of an inspiration to write any more. But I promise that I will write soon again. It is a beautiful sunny day and it is a pity to stay indoors. I am going out to sit in the sun and warm my old bones after the cold I had in Montreal. Give my best regards to Frances and her family. Take care of yourself.

Your loving aunt
Rouzka

P.S. If I do not write regularly to you, is no reason why you should not write regularly to me.

Letter No. 7

Miami, February 1985

Dear Henry,

It is raining today in Miami Beach, so I decided to sit down and write you a long overdue letter. Today, I decided to tell you something about my mother's two brothers, Shimon and the oldest Berl.

Masha, Khaim and Leon that live in Jerusalem are the children of my uncle Shimon. If you recall, both Khaim and Leon were with us for a short time in Russia. They were the lucky ones; they left Russia to Palestine back in 1942 with the Anders army via Afghanistan, Syria etc.

Masha was smart. She was an ardent Zionist and obtained a certificate from the Zionist organization and left Poland shortly before the war to Palestine. In Palestine she married Herman; they have two daughters, Nira and Lea. They all live in Jerusalem now.

Leon married and had two children. Khaim was never married and stayed very close to his sister Masha and her family. But the rest of course you know yourself.

(Missing Masha's story)

Now let me tell you a few words about Zvi and Mordechai, whom you know from Israel. They were the sons of my uncle Berl, the oldest of my mother's brothers. Uncle Berl took over the mill in Podembice and lived in his parents' house until the war broke out in 1939.

Both Mordechai and Zvi were Zionists. First Zvi and then Mordechai left to Palestine before the war. You know of course Mordechai and his wife Rachel, they both passed away.

Zvi and his wife Cila and their two daughters Ora and Hanna. Zvi has passed away, but the rest of the family, live in Israel. Uncle Berl and all of his family that remained in Lodz, were lost in the Holocaust.

Note: P.S. Cousin Mordechai died in Israel in the fall of 1996 at a wonderful age of 90. He lived alone and was quite independent until the day he died. He was being helped by his niece Ora; his brother Zvi's daughter.

Believe me, I wish I could write you things that are more pleasant. No matter what story I tell you about our family's past, I finish talking about death and counting the people in our family that perished in the Holocaust. Unfortunately, the holocaust played a major role in the lives of our family. No matter how or where I turn, eventually I am faced with the reality—there was a holocaust.

Now, back to the living. Why don't you come over for a few days to Miami. The weather in February is lovely. Please let me hear from you. With a big hug.

Your aunt,
Reizl.

Letter No. 8

Montreal, March 25,1985

Dear Henry,

It is 12 midnight, I just received a phone call from Meir, that Barbara had given birth to a baby boy. I would have called you too, but it would have been too late or too early in Rome. I am extremely happy. It is the first male Kryger in our family. 'MAZEL TOV.' Meir is asking me, how he should name the new born baby boy. They like the names Michael Allan, so I tell him to give him also a Jewish name like Moshe Avraham.

They are getting ready for the Brit Mila. Meir asked me if I will come. Can you imagine that? I would have gone to that Brit Mila, even if it were in Africa. I would not miss such an occasion for anything in the world. I was on the phone with my daughter Mary for hours. She knows, that when I am happy—I cry. Mary and I are making plans to go to Winnipeg for the Brit Mila. Meir gave Mary the 'quatershaft'—to be the godmother, and she is very happy about it.

I am continuing this letter, that I started a week ago and never finished. As you know, we were in Winnipeg that whole week, attending the Brit Mila. My happiness is hard to describe. It was a wonderful, traditional Jewish Brit Mila, just as it should be. Barbara's parents were there too. We spent several wonderful days together. It was beginning April but in Winnipeg there is still snow on the ground and real cold.

Now, I am home again. I am going to spend Pesach this year, here in Montreal with Mary and her family. Mary just bought a beautiful and expensive new set of dishes, specially for the Seder. You know my daughter, she gets carried away from time to time.

I wish you a happy Pesach and I want you to know, that I never forgot this wonderful Pesach I spent in your house in Rome. It was really a special occasion.

You know, I gave a lot of thoughts about the things we said, the stories we told, the places and people we remembered. It was in a way a catharsis. I cannot tell you if it was good or bad for me. But, one thing I do

know—I had a lot of nightmares right after. Do we always have to remember?

Please drop me a line, even a postcard from one of those strange and far away places is fine. Please give my best regards to Frances and her family. Shalom and Yom Tov. Your loving aunt,

Reizl

*Note: ***There were 10 pages missing from the original text. In those 10 pages, were the description and the names of the nine Grzes brothers and their two sisters. There must have been also some stories of that part of the family. There are still some cousins left in Chicago and I will try to dig up some stories from them.*

On my last visit in Chicago, my cousin Motek Grzes gave me this wonderful picture of my great grandparents Grzes with nine of their children, that was taken around 1880 in Lodz. This picture is shown in this book and it is the oldest document that we have from our family. This picture survived in Chicago with our great uncle Max, that settled in Chicago before the First World War.

Henry Welch

About the Author

Born in Lodz, Poland, Henry Welch is a Holocaust survivor. In the first thirty years of his life, the author did not live in the same city or country for more than three years. He considers himself a true citizen of the world, having lived in Poland, Russia, Germany, Brazil, Canada, and the United States.

In order to live and put himself through school, Mr. Welch tried every possible career from those of a photographer, an actor, a language arts teacher, and a short-order cook to a clerk, a travel agent, and a salesman at a delicatessen as well as an art gallery. The author went on to obtain three university degrees, including postgraduate work in biochemistry and clinical investigation at the University of Chicago.

After some time spent working in biochemical research and international marketing, Mr. Welch settled in Rome. He created his own com-

pany, and together with other scientists there, the author developed an innovative automatic blood analyzer. He spent the next twenty-five years heading a very successful company producing automatic chemical analyzers for clinical laboratories that have been used all over the world.

The owner of several international patents, Mr. Welch has lectured in several European universities and at technical seminars and meetings. He speaks nine different languages. The author says that he has lived a very rich and florid life. Even the sad and traumatic experiences of his youth and the Holocaust have contributed to making him the person he is today. He still says, "Life has been good to me." Now semi-retired, Mr. Welch continues to live in Rome. He participates in some consulting in clinical chemistry and automation as well as international marketing, a field in which he is well known and considered an expert. The author is listed in *Who's Who in Italy*.