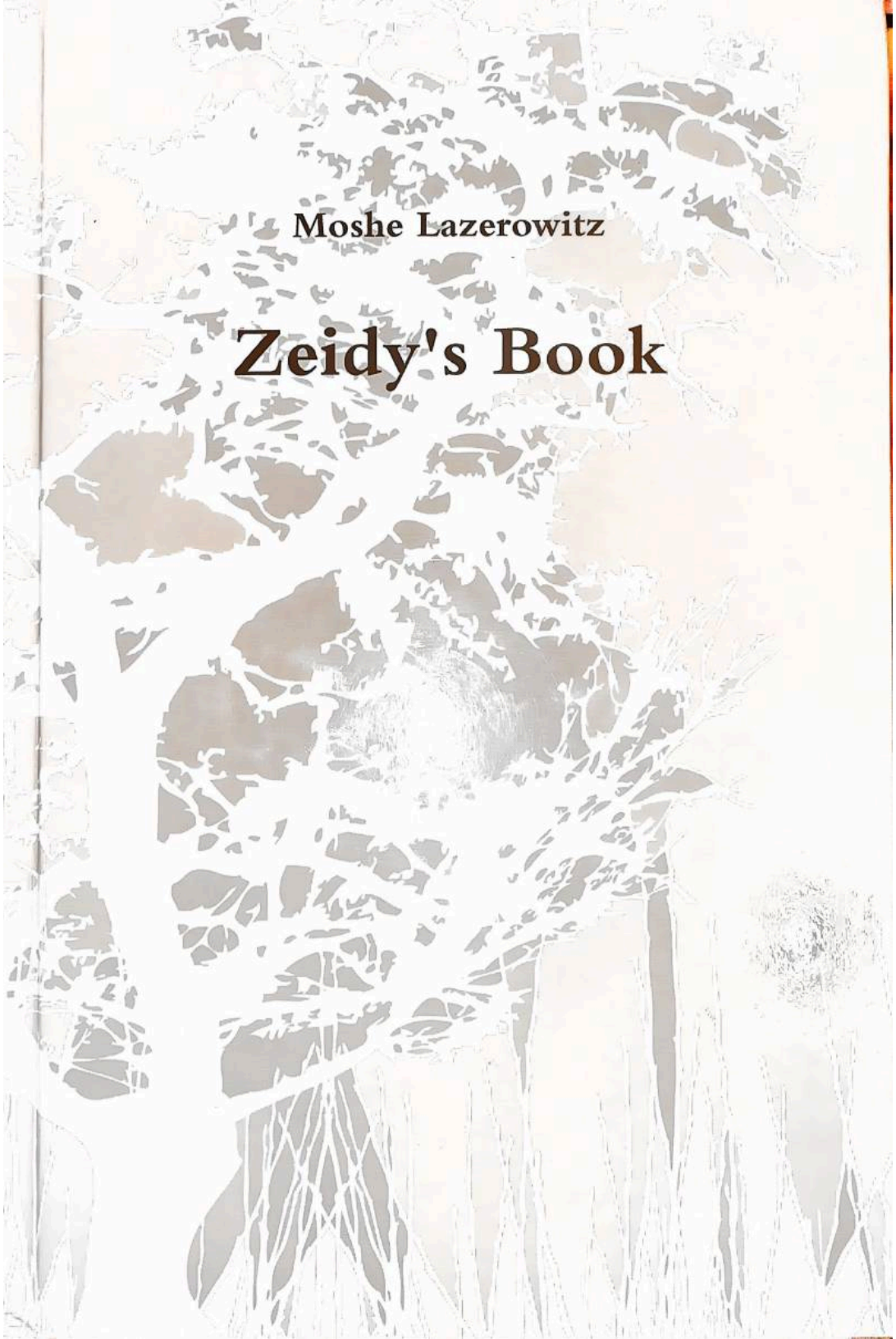
Moshe Lazerowitz

Zeidy's Book



Foreword

I was often asked why I constantly talk about the terrible destruction of our people during the bloody years of Hitler's regime, and regularly mention the indescribably painful experiences of those who miraculously survived the Nazi inferno. "Reliving those times is not good for your health," people tell me. However, I feel that I have an awesome responsibility towards my martyred family, as well as towards the countless kedoshim in general. I, too, could have been among their ashes, which were spewed forth from the monstrous gas chambers, and are scattered across Poland.

No, we may not forget, and we must not allow others to forget what the Nazis did to the Jewish people, amidst the apathy of the general world. We, the generation that witnessed the tragic destruction of our people, must constantly remind, talk and write about it, so that it should never be forgotten. I, too, have undertaken to fulfill this responsibility.

Before I begin to write about the tragic Hitler era and the Second World War, which took place between 1939-1945, I feel that I must first mention the terrible devastation that was brought upon the Jewish people. Over 6 million Jews, from Poland, Lithuania and other European countries, were murdered with unimaginable brutality that is unequaled even by churban Yerushalayim, the crusades, the bloodshed during 1648-49, the Spanish inquisition, the pogroms of Petluren and his gang, and other tragedies that befell our people.

I wish to mention the names of my brothers and sisters, their wives, husbands and children; my uncles, aunts, their children and grandchildren, and some of my friends, who were murdered by the German beasts in various concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Treblinka, may Hashem avenge their blood.

Lots of memoirs were written about the holocaust that ravaged Europe between 1939-1945. Throughout their long and

bitter exile, the Jewish people have written a lot about their trials and tribulations, whether in the *punkosim* of the *kehillas*, in their siddurim, or in their *kinnos* and *peyutim*. Yet, never before was there so much to write as during the horrific Hitler era. The martyrs wrote diaries, chronicles, notes and wills, while they traveled on their last journeys. They inscribed their own epitaphs on the walls of their synagogues and prison cells, and their pain and suffering was included in our nation's poetry. Even more was written, and is still being written, by the survivors of the ghettos and crematoriums, as well as those who heroically fought the enemy, either by hiding out on the Arian side or by joining the partisans. They tried to take revenge on the German murderers and their eager assistants – the Polish anti-Semites and other depraved nations in occupied Europe.

I was born in Sosnowitz, near Katowitz, Poland. My father, R' Aaron Shmuel Lazerowitz, was born in Wodislav near Keltz. My mother, Sarah, was born in Klimentchitz near Wodislav and Djaleshitz, to her father Kalman Potak.

My father had two brothers. One was Lemil, who lived in Pintchev with his wife Leah and their three daughters and sons-in-law, who were all murdered by the Germans in 1942. His second brother was named Moshe, his wife was Zelda Feigel and they had three sons and two daughters. The two oldest, Shlomo and Feivel, were killed with their wives and children during the summer of 1942 in Miechov. The third son, Aaron Chemia, was killed with his wife, children, parents, and his unmarried sister Chava Aidel, during the summer of 1942 in Wodislav. Another sister, Rachel, was killed with her husband Yidel Pik and their children, in Sosnowitz or Auschwitz, during the summer of 1942.

My mother had four brothers and four sisters. Yaakov, his wife Shprintza, and their three children, Mottel, Aidel and Tolba with their children, were killed in the summer of 1942 in Wodislav. Her second brother was Zelig, who lived in Gluz by Djaleshitz near Keltz. His wife Keila and their eight children – seven daughters and a son, named Esther, Faigel, Gittel, Rivkah,

Sarah, Yentil, Chava, and Kalman – with their spouses and children were killed in the summer of 1942.

Two of my mother's brothers, Volf and Avraham Potak, lived in Lodz. They were killed in Lodz, along with their children, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and their grandchildren.

My mother's oldest sister, Yentil, was killed with her sons and daughters, their spouses and children. I will mention Shmuel Weisberg, his wife and children, of whom I remember Shaindel and Zalman; and Moshe Weisberg with his wife Chava and their children. Sima and Shaindel immigrated to Israel before the war. Four more of her children were murdered in Sendishev by Keltz in the summer of 1942. Another daughter, Nacheleh, with her husband Asher Friedberg, her sons and daughters with their spouses and children, were killed in Sendishev, 1942.

Another one of my mother's sisters, Udel with her husband Yosef Midlik, lived in Klimentchitz by Wodislav. They were killed, along with their children and grandchildren in Wodislav, 1942.

My mother's other sister, Gittel and her husband Zanvil Leiderman, with their children Nacha, Zalman and Yentil, were killed in Wodislav, 1942.

My cousin Yentil, from the Silberstein family, and her husband Yisroel Schipeg, were killed in Sosnowitz, 1942.

This is part of my close family that perished in the holocaust. My extended family, including cousins and their in-laws, their children and grandchildren, who were killed in various death camps in Poland, number in the hundreds.

I want to mention my friend Avraham Ber Krawitz, who was murdered with his wife and child in Zlotchuv, Galicia. His mother, two sisters with their husbands and children were killed in Sosnowitz, 1942. Another friend of mine, Avraham Shlomo Silberstein, with his mother and her sisters Rachel and Reizel Zonerstein, as well as his brothers, perished on a transport before the liberation in 1945.

We were four children of my late mother. The oldest, Esther, lived with her husband Avraham Chaba in Sosnowitz. Kalman Shlomo, the second brother, his wife Tzurtel from the Pasmantir family, and their two children – Volf, age 11, and Avram'la, age 9 – were killed during the last auszidlung (liquidation) of the Shratzila Ghetto, in Sosnowitz 1943. My oldest brother was Yerachmiel. When war broke out in 1939, he left Sosnowitz with his wife Rivkah (from the Potak family), and their two children - Sarah'la who was born in 1933 and Eliezer Yosef who was born in 1934. They lived with Rivka's father in the village Gluz, near Djalewitz by Keltz. After the Djalewitz and Miechov Jews were killed, he and his family hid among the fields in Gluz. They later went to Navi-Radamsk and there they were either killed or deported to Treblinka.

My father's second wife, Leah (nee Greenblatt), and four of their children - Hendil, 15; Rivkah, 13; Chana, 11; and Gitteleh, 9 – perished either in the Shratzila Ghetto in Sosnowitz, 1943, or in Auschwitz.

28 years have already passed since the end of the war. The young generation is not very familiar with our tragic past, and is unaware of the conditions under which our loved ones were killed by the German beasts and their helpers – the Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and others. In our home we constantly spoke about the holocaust. My wife and I, as well as other relatives who survived the war, mentioned it pretty often. Our children listened; however, their school friends whose parents were American Jews that didn't suffer as we did, were ignorant of and indifferent towards our tragic past and the suffering of our dearest family members.

I decided to recount my experiences during the terrible war years, but I was looking for other survivors who were together with me, in order to be able to recall the events with greater accuracy. I was searching for books that were written by survivors of the same camps, but I didn't come across such memoirs. I was also urged by a fellow townsman from my birthplace, Sosnowitz, to involve American Jews in an attempt to

save the local Jewish cemetery. The German bandits already destroyed some of the tombs, and the rest of the cemetery was in jeopardy of being obliterated.

Additionally, we survivors were urged by journalists to list the names of our martyred family members and publicize them in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, to serve as a monument for those who were killed, as there are no *matzevos* to mark their *kevarim*.

I therefore decided to list, not only my sisters and brothers (we were 10 siblings), my sisters-in-law and brother-in-law and their children, but to mention all of my relatives who perished. May this be a monument for them.

Dear children and family members, if you see an error in these pages, please forgive me. Some memories have faded with time, and I am not a writer. I am simply recounting my own experiences, which might be useful in Yad Vashem, so that Jewish visitors who are unfamiliar with the holocaust should gain a better understanding of what the gentile nations did to us. Non-Jewish visitors, too, will realize the terrible wrong that was committed against us, and will resolve to never let this happen again. The nations will help us fulfill our dream and firmly establish our government in Israel so that the remaining survivors of our harried nation should be able to settle in their homeland after 2,000 years of terrible suffering.

I pray that I should accurately remember at least part of my experiences during the terrible Nazi years, when I suffered together with my fellow Jews – both in my hometown Sosnowitz, as well as when I was later exiled together with many other Jews to the labor camps. I was in Atmut, Ober Ladjisk Schlesian, Auschwitz, Warsaw Ghetto, the death transport from Warsaw to Dachau, in a part of the Dachau camp, Lager 4 in Kaupring Beirin, Lager 7 Landsburge Beirin, and Lager 11 Beirin. In April 1945 we were transported in the direction of Tirol in Austria. We were liberated en route, in Buchberg, by the American army, on May 1, 1945.

Chapter 1

Thursday, August 31, 1939

Sosnowitz, Poland

After the Ribentrop-Molotov pact in the summer of 1939, there was speculation that war is imminent. Some Jews, however, felt that the situation is not so serious. Hitler is merely threatening, they reasoned, so that America and England should pressure Poland into a compromise over Danzig, similar to what has been worked out with Czechoslovakia the year before. Germany was defeated in the Great War, and they are totally unprepared militarily and economically. Rumor even had it that the Germans are being fed with margarine and other cheap products.

Despite these attempts at self-complacency, we were ordered that a bunker must be made on every street, in the cellar of one of the apartment houses. The windows of the cellars were obstructed with bags full of sand to protect them in case of shelling. However, these preparations were done in an apathetic manner, because most people doubted that Germany would start a war. Life went on as usual, with everyone going about their business.

Army reserves were called up to be on the ready, in order to show the Germans that Poland is ready for war and doesn't fear them.

On Thursday evening, the 31st of August, we all retired for the night as usual. I was peacefully in bed, when I was suddenly jolted out of my sleep by the distant sound of explosions and machine-gun fire. I went into my brother's room and told him that there is shooting going on.

My brother groggily walked to the window and peered out. "It's thunder," he declared simply, "it is about to rain."

I went back to bed and tried to fall asleep. Suddenly, an alarm sounded. My brother and I ran down to the bunker, which was already full of frightened people. Entire families, with small

children, were huddled together in fright. After a while the alarm was called off. The head of the bunker, a popular and intelligent man named Gutovski, informed us that this was only a safety drill, and there is no real danger. He was pleased with the way the people responded to the alarm, showing readiness in case of real danger.

"I don't believe the Germans will start a war with a country as strong as Poland," he added. "They are a defeated people since the Great War, and they are economically weak. However, we should prepare ourselves and our families in case that madman, Hitler, will decide to fight."

Simcha Viltchik, the president of the Jewish Community, called Gutovski aside and expressed his vexation with him for not informing the people that this is only a drill. "I was terrified! I thought that war had broken out!" he exclaimed with annoyance.

My brother and I went home, and started getting ready to open the store. As I unlocked the store we heard another alarm. People were running through the streets in panic. We crossed the street and entered Paltche Schweitzer's *tzukenia* (cafe), where we knew we would be able to listen to the radio.

The radio announced that today, September 1, 1939, Hitler declared war on Poland. On that Friday morning, we heard that war actually started the previous midnight. By morning there were already countless dead, including many Jews from Sosnowitz. The naive Poles thought that the German spy-planes were from the Polish air force.

Many Schlesians joined the Germans as soon as war broke out; while others were traitors to begin with, spying for Germany even before the fighting started.

As soon as we grasped the gravity of the situation and saw the chaos that engulfed everyone, especially the Jewish youth, I suggested to my brother that he should join his wife and two children, who were staying by his father-in-law for a few weeks. His family was in the vicinity of Gluz and Miechov by Keltz, where he had his own business in partnership with our store.

By now there were no trains available, since they were all being used for transferring troops. We managed to find a bus that will take him to Miechov, for a hefty fee. As I walked my brother to the bus, many Poles hurled insults and curses on us, saying that Hitler will be here soon to slaughter all Jews.

When we arrived at the station I bid my brother farewell, saying, "*fur gezunterheit*," in Yiddish. The Poles shouted at us that we are spies and ought to be arrested for speaking a foreign language.

As the bus drove off, I started walking back to my store. I dismissed the employees and locked the door, planning to visit my stepmother and my six siblings – five sisters and one brother.

My father passed away in 1937, and I took upon myself the responsibility of feeding his household. Under the current circumstances, I was in a quandary as to what to do, since many young men were leaving town, with bundles on their shoulders. I stayed in my father's house for about two hours, pondering the situation. I was afraid to stay in town because of the approaching Hitler gangs, who intended to annihilate us. But I was in no mood to save myself alone. Whatever will happen to my young sisters and brother and their mother, will happen to me, I decided. I made up my mind to stay in Sosnowitz and share the fate of my father's widow and her orphans.

I also had another brother who lived with his wife and two children, and a sister who lived with her husband. I went to see my sister and brother-in-law. We were discussing events with the neighbors, thinking about what should be done. Some said that the Germans will be defeated in no time. One person told us not to worry if the Germans invade our region, which was close to the German border, for they certainly won't harm us and our wives and children. They are a civilized, peaceful people and have nothing against us. After all, we're not dealing with a band of wild Cossacks, but with a highly cultured nation. Others said that they remember the Germans during the Great War, and how decent they treated the civilians, including the Jews. I felt relieved hearing their arguments, thinking that my sister's neighbors might be right.

After a short visit with my sister and brother-in-law and listening to the neighbors' opinions, I returned to my brother and his wife and two boys. His neighbors viewed the matter differently, and were very pessimistic about the situation. They argued that Hitler wrote the book Mein Kampf, founded the S.S. party and Gestapo, and established the camps in Dachau and Buchenwald. Three young men decided to flee, in an effort to move away from the border and the approaching Germans.

It was getting close to Shabbos, and I decided to spend the evening in the vicinity of my store, which was in the center of town, as my family was waiting for news. Next to my store was Wandersman's fruit shop, and some of the neighbors gathered to spend Shabbos in his cellar.

The Friday night prayers were heartrending. We ate the meal despondently, with frequent air raids during the night. We were unaware of what was happening at the front. Shabbos passed quietly; it was obvious that many young men had evacuated before the invader will arrive. Some people speculated that the war will last a few days at the most, and that England will surely come to Poland's aid. When Great Britain and Poland will join forces, Germany will be pulverized in no time. Our trust in England, and the assurance that they will come to our aid, was quite strong at that time.

When night fell I went to my brother's apartment. The windows were darkened so that no light should be seen on the street. The streets were pitch black, and our hearts were heavy. Listlessly, I called on a neighbor and we chatted for a few minutes. The owner of our building, who ran a mill, left Sosnowitz that night, with his family. His son gave me the keys to the building, and we bid each other a tearful farewell. We all sensed that there are tragic days ahead and that it will be especially difficult for us Jews. Most people wore worried expressions, as if they knew what terrors and tortures awaited us.

I went to bed and tried to fall asleep, but sleep eluded me. I tossed and turned for a long time, listening to the sound of distant shooting and cannon fire that pierced the night every now

and then. The shooting became stronger, and the house trembled from the noise.

I woke up early on Sunday morning, September 3, and left for my father's house to see how my stepmother and siblings are doing. I was deeply worried for them and sensed the difficult times that lay ahead.

Suddenly we heard a commotion on the street. I ran down the stairs and saw the Polish army running from the front in chaos, with many dead and wounded being dragged along. Civilians brought food and drink to the tired soldiers to revive them. A Jewish soldier who's sister lived in my father's building came up to visit her. His helmet was dented from German bullets. He told us that the German attack was extremely forceful and that the battlefield they are now fleeing is scattered with countless dead and dying. Many soldiers were taken captive, and the rest fled in panic, after their general ordered them to retreat.

We were all confused and terrified at the same time. All soldiers and police officers disappeared from the city, leaving it totally undefended in the face of the approaching invader. Lots of people - men, women and children - loaded their wagons and fled the city, with no clear direction of where to go. Countless people ran to the only train station that was still running, as it was used for carrying freight. Thousands of people gathered at the station, including my stepmother, her children, and myself. There wasn't enough room for so many families, and the station was crammed to capacity.

Meanwhile, we heard an announcement that all able-bodied men should immediately turn in at the army base in Krakow or Miechov near Keltz. Whoever will evade this order will be considered a deserter, incurring the death penalty during wartime.

The day passed slowly, and the sun was beginning to set. I left the station and went back home, with my stepmother and the children. We were tired and broken, both physically and emotionally. I packed a few items for myself, intending to take them along with me to the army. The gathering-point was at the Warsaw-wiener station, the main station in the city. I bid farewell

to the children and their mother, as well as my sister, brother-in-law, brother and sister-in-law. In my father's building there were many young men who were heading for the army, and their good-byes to their parents and siblings was heartrending. The crying must have pierced the heavens. Many of these young men were the breadwinners of their families; some of them husbands that left behind wives and children.

We took our valises and went to the station, where a Polish *parutchnik* (lieutenant) was standing with an aid that was holding a lantern, as it was already dark. He ordered us to form into groups. I could tell by his accent that he is a Schlesian. A middle-aged man whom I knew well, told me that he heard that Czenskow and its vicinity has already been captured. Upper Schlesian, near Katowitz, has already been taken and is almost completely surrounded by the Germans. The way to Keltz and Kavel has been cut off. He also didn't like the so-called Polish *parutchnik* (lieutenant), whom he strongly suspected of being a traitor, trying to lure all able-bodied men out of the city. We also heard that the German planes are bombing the roads that were taken by the civilian and military evacuees.

I was deep in thought, and my friends with whom I planned to go together, asked me what I'm thinking.

"I'm staying home," I told them. Several of my friends decided to do the same. I unlocked my store and we went in together, planning to sleep there. I sent word to my family that I'm in the store, because I was afraid to go home. We settled ourselves on the floor, on textiles and coats that I spread out. We didn't dare light a candle, and whispered quietly about what the future holds. Most of us were very pessimistic, especially as we heard the sounds of shooting. While lying on the ground we could hear the booming noise of cannon fire. We reassured ourselves that we did the right thing by staying, for the route we planned to take would have been extremely dangerous, since the Germans were shooting the railroads from their planes.

The night passed, and Monday, September 4, arrived. We looked out through the window, which was covered with a white curtain. We could see through it and observe what was going on

outside, but it was impossible to look into the store from the street, since the store was dark.

We saw many people evacuating on foot, carrying knapsacks on their shoulders. Some couples pushed their little babies in strollers, while other families were traveling by horse and buggy, with no clear destination in mind. All the people wanted was to get away from Hitler and his armies.

My thirteen-year-old sister came to the store, looking happy and excited. She told us that the radio announced that the Polish military conquered Glawitz in Lower Schlesian, which was a German city. I opened the back door of the store, which led into a courtyard where a few dozen Jewish families lived. Some of them were very intelligent, with a strong understanding of diplomacy. When I told them that the Polish military entered Glawitz, they waved it away as non-sense. One of them said that there is no police in town, the Poles are stealing and robbing one another, and nobody is here to take charge of the situation. The city is open to Hitler, and we are in desperate need of heavenly mercy.

I glanced at the clock, and saw that it is almost noon. I went to see my brother, a walk that took me twenty minutes. On the way back I stepped into my father's house, where I had something to eat. I told my family that I'm going to Esther, my late sister and her husband. As I went down the stairs, I was overcome by fatigue. I went back to the store and sat down, resting my head on a table that stood in the center. I fell asleep, being tired after several sleepless nights.

The deafening sound of explosions startled me out of my sleep. I heard the shooting of machine-guns, and the rumbling of tanks and motorcycles. I groggily went to the window and immediately realized that this is the German army, because of the swastikas that were all over. I saw them shooting into store-windows, so I dropped to the floor and started slithering my way into the next room, where I found the back door. The door was bolted with iron rods. I wanted to open it, but my hands didn't obey me. They were shaking badly. I heard glass shattering, and the Germans screaming "hold!" I knew that every minute wasted

here puts my life in danger. With tremendous effort I unscrewed the door and went down to the bunker. I knocked on the door, but nobody answered. Finally, when I told them that I'm Lazerowitz, they allowed me to enter.

What I saw in the bunker is simply indescribable. Several hundred people – men, women and children – were in the coal-cellar, covered with soot. The air was unbearably stuffy and hot. The men and women were frightened, and the children were crying. The adults were doing everything possible to sooth the children, so that their cries shouldn't be heard outside, giving away our hiding place.

The bunker consisted of several rooms, all crammed with people. After several hours of waiting there, my thirteen-year-old sister approached me. She hugged me and cried, saying that when I left home I had told them that I was going to my oldest sister and brother-in-law. The Germans entered town from that neighborhood, and dragged out all the men and shot them. She risked her life to follow me in order to warn me.

This was the first piece of news we heard about what the German murderers were doing to the Jews. My sister was crying bitterly about what the Germans were doing to us, but I understood that she was also crying with relief that I am alive.

Chapter 2

Monday, September 4, 1939

Sosnowitz, Poland

A while later we heard the Germans break into the courtyard where we were hiding. The people in the cellar panicked. Fathers, mothers, and their children hugged each other tearfully, ready to die together. Frum and secular Jews grasped each other like brothers, to die together, while chanting the prayers of "Shema Yisroel" and "Hashem hu Huelokim." I believe that our prayers helped us through the crisis as the Germans were searching the houses, since they didn't find anyone. They didn't notice the entrance to the cellar, and thought that the Jewish residents must have evacuated before their arrival. Thankfully, they left the courtyard.

On Tuesday morning, September 5, 1939, we heard an announcement from the first German troops, that all Jewish men must immediately turn themselves in at the magistrate. Whoever will be caught at home will be shot on the spot. We also found out that upon entering town they shot several hundred Jews. We discussed our options, and we came to the conclusion that we have no choice. The men said goodbye to their wives and children with heartrending sobs, shedding bitter tears. I said goodbye to my younger sister, and I gave her the keys to the store and the apartment, as well as the money that I was carrying. I gave her some instructions as to how to go about during such difficult times.

We left the cellar, physically and emotionally broken, not knowing if we are walking on our final way. Upon leaving the courtyard gate we saw many German murderers with pointing machine guns. They ordered us to raise our hands, and during the entire walk they beat us until we were bleeding. They screamed and cursed, ordering us to run. Several Jews couldn't catch their breaths. Whoever fell to the ground while running was kicked with their heavy boots. They also shot some of the people.

In the magistrate building we were squeezed together to an unbearable degree. We lacked air to breathe, and there was no place to sit. We had no food and water until evening. Later we saw how several military jeeps arrived, out of which helmet-wearing soldiers emerged, carrying machine guns. They ordered us out of the building, beating us and viciously screaming "schnell, schnell". We ran to the place indicated, and we were ordered to line up in rows of five. Thousands of Jews were there, and they started marching us along like cattle to the slaughter. Heavily armed soldiers marched at both sides, followed by military jeeps, loaded with soldiers and machine guns.

We noticed groups of Jewish women lining the sidewalks, crying and sobbing with extreme sadness. These were the mothers and wives of the people being marched on the road. It looked like a funeral for us, although we were still alive for the time being.

An acquaintance of mine named Kalman Aurbach walked at my side. He was a very pious Jew. He turned to me and asked for a siddur. I asked what he needs a siddur for, to which he replied that he doesn't know the viduy (final confession) by heart. I told him that I am not as pessimistic, and I don't believe we should already say viduy.

We were taken to a large building on First May Street, which used to be a factory, belonging to a German named Shein. We were shoved into a large chamber. The S.S. lined up in two rows and ordered us to run between them, while they beat us with their bayonets from both sides. Blood was gushing from us, until the place looked like a butcher shop. Several people collapsed, and the rest of us ran with our last bit of strength. Finally, after this horrendous ordeal, we collapsed on the ground, bleeding, with parched lips, and totally drained. We were broken physically and emotionally, not knowing what else was in store for us. We were laying in total despair, with broken spirits.

I had second thoughts about my decision to turn myself in. I thought to myself that I could have remained hidden in a coal cellar, and save myself all this trouble. Who knows what

they will still do to us? Most of us believed that they will murder us.

We Jews resorted to our age-old weapon – prayer. We cried to Hashem, and even secular and assimilated Jews joined in. Several Jewish doctors were there, as well as other professionals, and they all cried along. Our suffering united us. Frum and secular Jews, rich and poor, assimilated Jews and Jews that were part of the secular intelligentsia, were all united with the thought that we are suffering only for being Jewish. I thought to myself that all surviving Jews will stay close to one another like brothers and sisters. No longer will there be competition between different Jewish classes. We will all be united in our distrust to the nations among whom we live. A cultured people such as the Germans, were transformed into ruthless murderers and sadistic beasts!

My thoughts were preoccupied with visions of a better world, without egoism, without so many different parties and factions, and without fights between Jews.

The nations despise us, yet they benefit from our people, and we pay a very high price for our sacrifices for improving the world. I beseech Hashem that the Jewish nation should be the only one to benefit from its people's talents and skills, in the areas of science, religion, trade, medicine, and engineering, which were so far contributed to the gentile nations among whom we live. We made them civilized and now we are getting our reward.

With these thoughts I fell asleep on the cement floor of the factory-camp. I was so exhausted and wounded that the people next to me had to wake me up.

We were ordered to line up with German precision. It was on Wednesday, September 6th, and several SS officers entered the factory. They ordered all people above 30 years of age to stand apart. To the group of people that were under thirty years old, an officer announced that whoever shot at the German military should come up. No one replied, and they announced that anyone that knows about someone that shot at the German military should reveal that person's identity. When no reply was

forthcoming, they said that every tenth among us will be killed, because some of us shot at German soldiers.

They started counting, and ordered every tenth person to step out of line and stand with his face to the wall. We were terrified during the counting, and everybody with human emotions can surely imagine what we felt during such a frightful moment, when the person that counts will determine whether we shall live or die.

I was also the tenth, and was ordered to stand against the wall.

It happened to be a sunny day and the desire to live was burning in me. It is impossible to describe the feelings I had at that moment. We said viduy and prayed the final tefillos.

Suddenly a high-ranking officer walked in. we didn't see him, but we heard him ask who the people that are standing against the wall are. The soldiers who were conducting the counting explained that we shot at German soldiers. The officer declared that too many people were taken out of line, as only ten of their soldiers were shot. He motioned several of us to return to the line, and I was among them.

We were taken into a nearby hall where our hair was shaved off. We couldn't understand the meaning of this. I was of the opinion that they will not shoot us, because they shaved us off.

Meanwhile they were torturing Moshe Meirin. They ordered him to stand against the wall, in order to be shot. His unflinching stance earned him the admiration of the Gestapo chief, and they immediately put him in charge of the Jewish *cultus gemeinde*. They instructed him what to tell the Jews – that they should cooperate with the German conquerors. Moshe Meirin started to deliver orders in the name of the Gestapo.

At first, all people that had stores were released, so that they should open up their stores. Later they released those who owned factories, warehouses or were skilled workers.

I also emerged into the sunny outside. While I walked home, I encountered several acquaintances, but nobody

recognized me. My sisters and stepmother didn't either recognize me. My appearance had totally changed, and I had partly turned gray. They all cried about how bad I looked.

I went home to my father's house, with my stepmother and sisters, and went to bed. I told my sister to call our employees and open the store. This was on orders of the Gestapo. The customers were the Schlesian Germans, traitors to Poland. German soldiers also bought, for prices that they offered to pay, which was a half or a quarter of the item's worth. We were afraid to refuse, and were forced to sell the items. In truth it was stolen, not bought. But what could we do? At least they weren't robbing us openly, we tried to reassure ourselves. It happened more than once that a storekeeper protested the "sale" of an item, demanding a higher price, and was arrested, tried, and killed. I remember one name – Goldberg, a grocery owner – who's son, a young man of about twenty, paid with his life.

After several days the Germans announced that all stores must be closed. The owners must relinquish the merchandise that was in stock, in other words – their entire property, and submit a complete list of everything they own to the Jewish *cultus gemeinde*, which will act on behalf of the German government. Everything included on the list was considered German property, and if any of the listed merchandise will be missing, the owner will incur the death penalty.

I was sick in bed on Friday night. We gathered to pray at a neighbor's house on Friday night and on Shabbos morning. We also made plans to gather for the first Selichos prayers at the same neighbor's house.

On Shabbos evening a military wagon passed the shul, and several S.S. hooligans threw in some firebombs. I was in bed when it happened. I got dressed right away and told the children and their mother to drop to the floor, as I did. Several minutes later the entire shul was in flames. The leaping tongues were threatening to reach our apartment, and we were in danger of being burned alive, as our house was right text to the shul.

The two youngest children were already undressed for bed. I urged everyone to escape from the apartment, telling them

that our lives are in danger. I grabbed the two little children, dressed only in their underwear, and hurried out. The smoke was choking us. We were on the third floor, and while running down the stairs I was afraid that the wooden staircase of the lower floors were already burning. Barely alive, I saved the children and their mother.

There was a loud commotion in the courtyard from the people who lived there, a total of over sixty families. I took my family to the front gate, but we couldn't go out. A curfew was in effect for us Jews, and anyone caught outside after 7:00 o'clock was instantly shot.

We now had two choices: either to remain in the courtyard and perish in the fire, which was already reaching our house, or we could risk going out, a violation for which we might be shot on the spot. I decided to go to my apartment, which was two blocks away on Spulna Street. I told the other neighbors that we have nothing to lose, and all of us went quickly to my street. We passed the fire station, and I informed them that there is a fire on Dekerto Street. They immediately hurried off to control the fire.

Luckily, we didn't encounter any Germans on the way. I unlocked my apartment and the apartment of the owner of the building, for they left the keys in my possession. We put the children to sleep in the beds, and the adults stretched out on the floor. Several people felt sick. They suffered stomach cramps from fear. I also suffered the entire night, unable to fall asleep.

The next morning, Sunday, the 10th of September 1939, I took several jars of cherries, plums, and similar fruits that my sister-in-law prepared for the winter, and poured it into cups for the people to eat and revive themselves with before leaving. Our moods lifted somewhat, and we gave each other our best wishes before departing for home, one at a time.

Later that same day we heard that in Bendin, a town located next to Sosnowitz, the S.S. also firebombed the shul and the surrounding Jewish houses got caught in the flames. Not a single Jew was allowed to escape the fire, and the Jews in the surrounding houses all perished in the flames. Whoever tried to

escape was shot to death. Fortunately, our houses were spared, for when the neighbors came along with me to stay in my apartment we passed the fire station and we told them about the fire. They ran to the scene and were successful in saving the surrounding houses.

The awful fire in Bendin, in which so many families perished, saddened us terribly. It also filled us with terror about the future, showing us of what the "herren volk" is capable of doing, and what they have in store for us.

The days and nights passed in trepidation. We went about our lives in fear. Frum Jews who wore long beards shaved them off. Relatives and friends didn't recognize each other. This was done to avoid attracting attention as Jews. Jewish-looking hats were exchanged for Polish-style bent-down caps.

Erev Rosh Hashanah arrived. It was a truly sad day for us, because the people who were singled out as "tenths" several days before (with whom I was originally together, as I wrote earlier, but part of us were freed and the others were imprisoned) were shot on Erev Rosh Hashanah. They had to dig their own graves.

On Rosh Hashanah we gathered in a private house, being careful that no German or Pole should find out that Jews are gathering there to pray. The tefillos and sobs could have pierced the heavens.

Meanwhile, some of the people that evacuated when war broke out started to return. Unfortunately, many of these families returned in fewer numbers than they left. The German airplanes flew low over the roadways and machine-gunned innocent civilians. Many died on the roads, and returned as smaller families. One family lost a father; another family lost a mother, and several lost children. We heard that the Germans burned down entire villages, attacking them with firebombs. Many people lost their minds from fear and suffering, upon seeing their loved-ones perish from the bombs and bullets. Some Jews traveled by horse and buggy, and were shot on the way.

Not far from Sosnowitz is the village of Czemyashitz. The village lies next to a large river, spanned by a bridge that is

connected to the road leading to Sosnowitz. The Germans nabbed all Jews that passed the area and threw them into the river. Those who tried to save themselves by swimming were shot in the river. Many Jews drowned there.

The despair and sadness of the returnees could be well imagined. They suffered terribly, lacking food and water as they traveled with innocent children.

We also heard terrible news from Warsaw, where many perished in the German bombings, and many more died when the city fell into Nazi hands. England wasn't helping us, and the other democratic countries remained silent, having no courage to fight the Germans as they deserved. This encouraged the Germans and their fuhrer to torture the innocent civilians of occupied Poland, especially the Jews. It also encouraged them to declare war on France, Holland, Belgium and other small European countries.

Several weeks passed under German rule, and they already confiscated all Jewish stores property. They looted bank accounts, and the middle and lower classes started to suffer from hunger. Stores were closed, all skilled workers stopped their productions, and people were unemployed.

I returned to my brother's apartment. One son-in-law of the building's owner had returned, and later another son-in-law returned from where he had evacuated to. The family owned a mill and they had some flour that was not yet registered. I purchased two sacks of flour, weighing 200 kilograms.

We started to suffer from hunger. They instituted food-cards with which we were able to procure small quantities of food, and in order to receive it we had to stand on line for several long hours. Usually, the longest lines were at the bakery, as many people waited for bread. Upon arriving next in line at the bakery, they would announce that there is nothing left, and the fathers or mothers went home empty-handed to their hungry children.

One particular day the lines were especially long and German soldiers stood guard to control the situation with German precision. A young man slipped out of line and managed to get a

loaf of bread. He was very hungry, and started eating the loaf. The German stopped him and shot him on the spot. The bread was splattered with his blood. This happened a few weeks after his marriage.

The Germans put their own nationals in charge of the large stores, referring to them as *treihendler*. They confiscated all Jewish stores and factories. The mill in my building was also transferred to a Schlesian German. Several days later he came into my apartment and told me that by tomorrow at nine the apartment should be empty, because he needs it for an office. I tried begging him to let me stay, explaining that it is impossible to move out on such short notice. I must have time to look for another apartment. He screamed at me, until I finally hired some movers and transferred the furniture and housewares to a small room that the owner's son-in-law gave me. The room was used for davening, but I moved in there for the meantime.

Spulna Street was a quiet street, and only five families lived in our building. Jews were permitted to remain outside until seven in the evening. It happened more than once that I went with several Jews to a nearby house, which had a Polish *strutz* (janitor) that was friendly with us. It didn't occur to us to beware of him, for we knew him for many years and his livelihood came from Jews.

One day the German police came and asked for the three Jews that lived in our building. They took one of them, a neighbor of mine named Kaiser. The other person's name was Bornstein, and he wasn't home then. I wasn't either home. They made Mrs. Bornstein responsible that we should turn in to the police within two hours. We were found and told that the police took Kaiser, and his wife and daughter are crying. Bornstein's wife was also crying, and I was thinking what to do. I was afraid that they will avenge themselves on my family and my brother and sisters will suffer. I decided to turn myself in with Bornstein. We had no idea what they want from us. We bid our families farewell, and Bornstein said goodbye to his wife and child. We left with heavy hearts, aiming to arrive on time, as we were ordered.

We entered police headquarters and gave our names. They immediately started to interrogate us, accusing us of arranging secret meetings.

I told them that we were never under suspicion. We are not members of any party, but simple workers. I urged them to check our records. I was born and raised in Sosnowitz and was always an honest citizen.

They locked us up, and after a short while they opened the door. Someone told us that we were sentenced to death and will soon be shot. Bornstein started crying that he has a wife and child, and they should take pity on us. We were only once at that neighbor's house.

They took us into another room, which had bloodstains all over. They told us to lie down and started beating us murderously all over our bodies. They kept on beating us for a long time, without relenting. Blood was gushing from all over us. As they were beating us I thought to myself that they probably wouldn't kill us.

After nearly killing us, they opened the door and threw us out, giving each of us a few vicious kicks with their heavy boots for good measure. They warned us that if it will ever happen again we will never return home.

We stood outside, severely beaten with bloody wounds. Our eyes were black and blue and we had bruises all over our heads. Despite all this we felt relieved, for we feared that we would never merit leaving this place alive.

We washed off our blood and with our last bit of strength we managed to get home. I immediately went to bed and sent for a doctor. He gave me some shots to prevent infection from my open wounds, as I was running a fever. I couldn't move in bed because of the terrible pain that I had. I put compresses and creams on the wounds.

Meanwhile my oldest brother and partner, Yerachmiel z"l, came to Sosnowitz. His home was gone, and he was told that I could be found in the room where we used to daven. When he saw my condition we both cried bitterly. Then we sat silently,

unable to find our voices. A while later I told him the entire story of what has transpired since he left Sosnowitz to join his wife and children on that fateful Friday, the 1st of September, when war broke out.

He was still wearing a beard. My second brother, Kalman Shlomo z"l, and my oldest sister Esther, and her husband, also came. All of us together begged him to shave off his beard, because it was dangerous to appear Jewish to the Germans on first sight.

We discussed recent events and what has been happening since the Germans invaded Poland. My brother Yerachmiel told us that a hundred Jews evacuated to the *Pulvark*. They were helped with food and with everything they needed. Since it was in the summer, some of them slept outside. The Pulvark stood on a side-road, and no Germans were seen in that area. It is a quiet place, with plenty of food. A third of the property belonged to the three of us. We bought it in 1931 from our uncle – my late mother's brother – for fifty thousand s. It also belonged to my brother's father-in-law. His wife was our cousin. The four of us, the oldest children in the family, were orphaned of our mother z"l when she passed away (at the end of 1917 or 1918). I was the youngest. My sister Esther and my brothers Yerachmiel and Kalman Shlomo were married and had children. Yerachmiel's wife was Rivkah. Their oldest was a girl named Sara'la and their second child was a boy named Eliezer Yosef. Kalman Shlomo's wife was Tzurtil z"l, and they had two boys – Zev and Avrum'la. My sister Esther's husband was Avram Chaba z"l.

The four of us discussed the situation, how every day brings with itself new laws against the Jews. We were forbidden to trade and our property was confiscated. A large number of Jews did illegal business and there were many arrests with harsh sentences.

Since I was the youngest, it was decided that I should remain in Sosnowitz to take care of our late father's house and of our stepmother and the six children. I will rent an apartment and collect the furniture that was scattered in several closets, and also keep an eye on the store.

The store sold fine coats and better clothing in center of town. Obtaining the lease, the installation of mirrors and several minor furnishings, as well as the annual rent, cost us 22 thousand Polish zlotys, in 1931. This was a small fortune - for the empty store on sixteen Mandjeavski Street. The merchandise and the raw materials, which we gave to the designers in the small shop on Kavalska Street where we employed ten people, was also worth a lot of money.

Many Jews were optimistic that the war will not last too long and everything will go back to normal. Those who died cannot be made alive, but those who will survive will return to working and trading. We must save our money and not take our suffering too seriously. My oldest brother Yerachmiel should return to his wife and children in the remote village.

Chapter 3

In those days it was extremely dangerous to travel by train. Jews would be beaten up by Germans or Poles, or even thrown off moving trains. Several Jews who had to travel in the same direction. towards Miechov at Keltz, hired Poles who came from there to acquire coals from Dombrowa. Each Jew went along with one of the Poles, covered in coal soot so as not to appear like a passenger, and they traveled on byways where the Germans weren't found too often. The Polish peasants were well compensated for undertaking such trips. My brother also returned with this traveling method to his wife and children in Gluzi, a village near Miechov which is not too far from Krakow, in the Keltz region, 6 kilometers from Djolowitz.

Days passed with constant news updates from the German newspaper that was available each morning. The paper was called "Local Anzeiger." Our region was annexed to the German Reich. Krakow became the capital of occupied Poland, and the governor of occupied Poland was General Frank.

One Thursday evening in January 1940, an automobile carrying a group of Gestapo police drove up to the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde. Several Jews who passed by informed the others of this, and we all understood that a new decree against the Jews must be coming. Thursday night, I heard a knock on my door. At first the knocking wasn't so loud, and since I slept deeply I didn't hear it, but the knocking became more intense. I woke up, quickly oriented myself and understood that they were coming to get me. I threw on my robe and slippers and took my other clothes in my hand, while they were still knocking on the door. Stealthily, I opened a corner window that faced the back of the house. I slid out towards the field and hid between the trees until Friday morning. After curfew hours I went over to my stepmother and the children. One of my little sisters came over and told me that they came looking for me several times during the night. This was done by the Jewish police, which was

established by the Cultus Gemeinde under the authority of the Gestapo.

They had drawn lots and put together a list of 500 unmarried young men, who were taken in the middle of the night from their beds – those who were found. I was hiding out at the home of my friend who was sent off to the army at the outbreak of the war. His wife went to her parents, taking along her child, and I hid in their home on Friday and Shabbos. I continued to hear that they were looking for me, so on Sunday I went through the fields until I reached Dombrowa Gurniche. I had a contact family there and they found me a Pole with a horse-driven wagon who took me to Miechov by using the byways. Once in Miechov, I hired another peasant who took me to the village where my brother and his family stayed. My brother and his entire family were very happy to see me. It was relatively calm there, and they had all of their needs. Through letters I learned that the people who were collected on that fateful Thursday night were sent away, yet no one knows to where. Until this day no one knows where those young men had disappeared.

After a while of staying with them, I bade farewell to my brother and his family and returned to Sosnowitz. There, as in every town, the situation was pretty awful. People were caught and sent to work, people were arrested, beaten, and a large part of the population suffered hunger. I so wished to remain in the village, which was like a small paradise compared to the towns. But it was my duty to care for my stepmother and her children, my sisters and brothers, as well as to oversee the warehouse and the furniture that was scattered between several closets, along with the closed store. All of this made me stay in Sosnowitz.

After some time passed, the people who lived next to the store told me one day that the window and door of the store were open to the side of the courtyard. I went inside and was aghast by the sight that met my eyes. More than half of the merchandise had disappeared! It was terrible! It wasn't just the financial loss that bothered me, but the fact that the merchandise was registered with the Germans. In the German books there was an exact record of the amount of merchandise in the store, signed by me. Taking from the merchandise was a crime punishable by death.

The first thing I did was tell the people that if they will be asked about me they should say that they had not seen me in a while. I sent my little sister to the Cultus Gemeinde; some of the leaders there knew me. They advised us to inform the police. My sister went to the police and reported the break-in. There were many break-ins by Poles in those days. The German police arrived and asked where I was. The neighbors said that I have not been home for a while. They searched the place, and also my father's house, as well as the place where I lived. They took finger-prints of everyone and wrote up a report. I traveled to Alkosh where I had a friend, a frum Yid named Leibish Yeger. He took me to the Chenchiner Rebbe zt"l, who listened to everything I told him, blessed me and said: "*Es vet ousgein tzu abisel gelt* - it will only affect some money, which you will have to pay, and everything will be forgotten." He told me to stay for the week in Alkosh. A week later I went home and met with a trustworthy person from the Cultus Gemeinde. He found the papers I had signed reporting on the amount of merchandise in the store. After destroying the old papers he wrote up a new report which included the amount of merchandise that was left. The entire incident quieted down and a heavy stone was lifted off my chest.

Several weeks later a new decree was issued against the Jews - that we all must wear a white armband on our left arms. It had to be ten centimeters wide, and in the center it had a blue Star of David. Disobeying this command was a capital offense punishable by death. They also added on a new name to each of us. All men received the name Yisroel in addition to their regular names, and all women received the name Sarah. As the days went by they made life more and more difficult for the Jews. They forbade Jews from walking on a number of streets. The Jews who lived on those streets were forced to move out, and we had to go around those streets to reach the other side of town. A way that took me ten minutes by using certain streets, now took a full hour because I had to go around through the fields.

There is so much to tell, so much to convey, but I am not able to write everything down. For now, my goal is to describe my personal experiences during the tragic Nazi days as a memoir

for my children, and so that they should learn from this never to trust the nations among whom we live.

At that time they liquidated the smaller stores. A German-guarded truck traveled around town. They first notified the owner to be in the store, and they counted all of the merchandise to ensure that nothing was missing from what has been registered in September 1939. Then they took everything onto the truck and drove off with it. They left me with an empty store without any means for earning a living. In between, they banned Jews from traveling by tram or streetcar to the nearby towns of Bendin, Dombrowa, Chelodz, or the small localities with which the Jews were previously connected through business and employment. The Jews from those locations were now cut off from Sosnowitz, among them close families who were now cut off from each other. The Germans also demanded from the Cultus Gemeinde to supply them with young Jewish men who should work for them in town, or be sent off to work elsewhere. The Germans would frequently do the job by themselves and grab Jews off the street, or they would block off several streets in the center of town where Jews lived and pull Jews out of their homes, sometimes in the middle of the night. They would take husbands from their wives and fathers from their little children. They would even take boys from the age of fifteen and older; the parents were left heartbroken seeing how their sons are taken away with beatings, heavy blows and curses. Most of these boys helped out their families during those critical times by earning some money, illegally, in order to relieve the terrible hunger at home.

The Cultus Gemeinde established in the name of the Gestapo large shops and workstations for tailors and shoemakers in Sosnowitz, Bendin, and Dombrowa. The machines were confiscated from the tailors who now worked in the German shops. Some unskilled men were also employed there, meaning that a privileged few useful Jews were not being sent away. Like the shops in all of these towns, the Sosnowitz tailor shop belonged to a German named Held. The German who represented the shop in Bendin/Dombrowa was named Rosner. The German in charge of the Sosnowitz shoemaker shop was named Brown. Some people from Sosnowitz had to work in Bendin or

Dombrowa, and some people from Bendin had to work in Sosnowitz. They also founded factories that produced various supplies such as construction wood and clothing. The Germans designated a separate car on the train for Jews; we were not supposed to travel together with Arians.

One day, a man named Kazoshos came over to me. Up to 1939 he had been a collector in Katowitz. I had already arranged for myself a new apartment, and my brother's furniture and housewares were already there, so I was able to invite him in. He told me that he is part of the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde. Since the Germans were permitting Jews to use the tram, he came to suggest that I designate a section of my store as a place to sell weekly passenger cards for the thousands of people who had to travel this route. He explained that I will be employed, and I will therefore be considered a useful Jew. He also offered to hire a capable person from my family to serve as conductor of the tram. To compensate for my work, I will receive half of the rent [for the store]. In those days, all rent was paid to the Cultus Gemeinde and they delivered it to the Germans. Jews no longer had any say over their personal possessions; everything had been confiscated.

I agreed to accept his offer. We designated part of the store as an office, and he told me how to sell the weekly cards for the different routes, and how to punch the cards, etc. I was somewhat happy with this arrangement, because I was able to keep my store open and earn something at the side. Some of my acquaintances would come into the store and close transactions in the next room, exchanging jewelry or other valuables. No one suspected that illegal transactions were being conducted inside the store, not even the Germans or their informers. A large sign on the storefront proclaimed in German: "Sale of streetcar cards for Jews." Those who came to purchase streetcar cards would come through the front door and those who came to sell their valuables came in from the courtyard through the back door. This meant that I was somewhat protected from evil eyes.

From time to time the Germans would fall upon a few homes, round up the families and deport them. I went around worrying about the children and their mother, my sister and her husband and my brother and his family, until I hit upon an idea.

The front of my store was built with bricks, and the back of the store was built with wood. The front and back were not of the same height; the front had a lower ceiling. On top of the courtyard ceiling, on the first floor, there was a block of stores with a wide balcony, and this balcony covered the back part of my store. Between the ceiling of the back of the store and the balcony there was a space of over 2 meters in height. In 1938 a law was issued that all wood structures must be rebuilt with bricks. I added an outside brick wall up to the balcony, creating a closed-off space between the ceiling and the balcony. The ceiling was made of wood in the back of the store, so I thought that this may be an ideal hiding place. I called in a fine Jew, a carpenter, and told him that I have a job for him, but first he must give me a *tekuas kaf* (promissory hand-shake). He gave me his hand and promised by everything holy that no one will know of my secret. I then showed him the space between the ceiling and the balcony. He cut out of the ceiling a three-quarter square meter opening. Once inside the empty space, we estimated that there would be room for about 50 people. He made a ladder; he built it so well that it was impossible to see anything from the outside. We put up benches and blankets for sleeping, and it became a good hiding place to be used during a future *akzia*.

One day in 1940 the Cultus Gemeinde received an order that within 24 hours they must deliver a large amount of gold. (I do not remember the exact weight of gold that was required.) If the gold will not be supplied on time, they were warned, then all Jews will be deported from town. The women took off the rings from their fingers and their gold necklaces. The men gave away their gold watches and chains that they received as gifts from their in-laws during their engagement, and their wives gave away the gifts they received as brides, so that we should be redeemed and remain in our homes with our children.

In the interim, the Cultus Gemeinde managed to employ in the name of the German officials a number of skilled Jewish workers such as tailors, shoemakers, and other tradesmen who provided services for the German military or civilians. This was not a matter of earning wages, but to be somewhat safe from

deportation. In this manner, several workstations were established in various towns.

Meanwhile, several capable young men, some who I knew and some who I didn't, were looking for employment at the tramway. I tried to help them through my partner Kazoshoz, asking him to employ them. Every few days he added on some more people, because the Jewish warehouses that operated under the Germans became bigger, so more people needed to travel and more streetcars were brought in. All along, everything flowed with German precision. I sold the weekly cards to the places where the Jews worked, and Kazoshoz was pleased with my work, as well as from the people I referred to him for work. He invited me to his home several times. He had a wife and a child, a little boy, and we would discuss different things together. I shared parts of my past with him, and he found out that I am single.

Now I will return to the good times and write of the days when I was an eligible young man looking for a *shidduch*. But first I beg forgiveness of my wife and also of my dear children because of the things about my past that I will be mentioning. I am not writing this due to any longing that should disturb my wife or children; I love my family dearly and all my life I was a devoted father to my children and a good husband to my wife. I am writing about this as an accusation of the German beasts because of what they did to the Jewish people. They destroyed every Jew's happiness and ruined all dreams that young people had about their future. Our dreams about the future were full of hope and joy, despite the fact that most Jews were poor. The Polish boycott not to purchase from Jews undermined many Jews' livelihoods, and later on the German beasts destroyed Jewish life of young and old. They suffered hunger and were deported to the ghettos, living under cramped conditions with disease and epidemics raging. May the Germans be destroyed forever along with all of the European nations that helped the German murderers torture Jews and send them off to the gas chambers.

My store sold ladies' coats and other garments. Many customers would come into the store. One day a woman and her

daughter entered. The daughter was a pretty girl, younger than me, with a fine, intelligent appearance. She made a very good impression on me and I inquired after her. I learned that she comes from a fine Jewish family and I thought that I would be very lucky if I would be able to tie my destiny with her. She would pass the store each day at a certain time and I would try to observe her. Although I was interested in her she was completely unaware, and I was embarrassed to befriend her. I knew that I was probably too ordinary for her anyway.

Months and years passed, and I was talked several *shidduchim*. My brother begged me to do a *shidduch* already; after all, we had the means economically. I was suggested a *shidduch* from Czenstrow, a rich girl with lots of money, and I refused the *shidduch* because I felt drawn to the girl who passed my store each day. I didn't share my dreams with anyone, but I couldn't get her out of my mind.

Meanwhile, the war broke out and we all had to fight for survival. I had to worry about my father's house and family, and all thoughts about the girl were pushed aside.

One day, my partner Kazoshoz invited me to his home. When I arrived at the appointed time, he and his wife welcomed me and led me into the living room. As soon as I entered the room, a real shock awaited me. Sitting there was none other than the girl I had thought about so often. I collected myself with much effort. My hosts introduced me and I greeted her. I felt like I was living through a dream. We chatted about odds and ends, about the war and the situations we Jews faced, with everyone giving their opinions. Mrs. Kazoshoz and the girl left the room for several minutes, and Mr. Kazoshoz turned to me and said that he knows her family for many years. "I think this girl would be perfect for you," he said. I told him that I am much too ordinary for her, and he replied that when he told her my name her reaction was the same! "She paled and looked very surprised, and told me openly that she has been interested in you for some time." The women returned and we continued talking until it became quite late. The girl stood up to leave, and I mustered the courage to offer to walk her home. She agreed and I walked her

all the way home. We agreed to meet again on a certain day when both of us will have more time.

After this encounter, I felt like a new person! That night I had a hard time falling asleep; I lay awake in bed thinking about the wonderful future that awaited us together.

The next morning, on Monday, I awoke refreshed, even though I hardly slept. For the other Jews the day was as hard as all other days, but I didn't feel the hardships because of my positive mood. I begged Hashem that my *mazel* should begin to shine and I should no longer be so lonely.

If I were to write about each day – of all the pain and suffering we endured under German rule, and of all the family issues that came up – I would fill up thousands of pages.

Our second meeting was very pleasant. We started to discuss the things that transpired during the previous week, and the new German rules against the Jews. We also discussed Jewish history in general, including the Spanish inquisition and the Chmielnizki pogroms. Then we talked about the philosophies of religious Jews and about irreligious philosophers such as Spinoza, as well as about the non-Jewish philosophers. We discussed Chassidim and their Rebbes, and other similar issues. She asked questions and listened patiently to my opinions and responses. She observed my reactions and manners, and probably wanted to see how educated and knowledgeable I was. She really knew a lot. If I wasn't so clear with my answers she would give her own input and clarify the issue under discussion, but in a gentle way so as not to put me down or show off her knowledge. In one word: a high quality person.

When you think the world of another person, I realized, then your own value is diminished in your eyes. My parents and siblings were refined, wonderful people. My parents' kindheartedness to others was indescribable. We, their children, were a source of pride to my father z"l with our conduct. But despite everything, I felt small and insignificant compared to her, and I was deeply impressed by her.

She asked me why there is a touch of sadness in my eyes even when I smile. I was happy that she brought up the question. Since it was almost the hour when it would be forbidden for Jews to be on the streets, I explained to her that my response to her question would take too much time and I will answer her during our next meeting. On my way home I thought to myself that she is even better than I thought, and I became disheartened, thinking that I would need lots of *mazel* for this to work out. I thought that perhaps my sad life story would impress her, and although by nature I was always proud and dignified, I was prepared to swallow my pride and share this part of my life with her.

Before our next meeting, I prayed to Hashem that He should give me the right words and she should take my story well. I also prayed that my personality should make a positive impression on her and my dreams should be fulfilled.

Once again, our meeting began on a friendly, upbeat note. We spoke about the past week, until we began discussing the issue that we left unfinished during our previous meeting. I began to recount the tragic story of my childhood.

We are four siblings; my sister is the oldest and then there are three brothers including myself. I am the youngest. When the Great War broke out in 1914 I was a young child. My late mother had a brother who had a *pulvork* next to Miechov and Djolowitz. He took us into his *pulvork* thinking that the war battles will be near our hometown, which was close to the German border. We were there for some time, and then traveled to Sendishev, which was a bigger locality. My father did some business there and my sister and oldest brother went to school and *cheder* there. That's how we lived until 1918, when I also started going to *cheder*.

During that year, a Typhus epidemic broke out. My father became ill with high fever. The doctor came over each day to check on him. A week passed, with my late mother waiting at his bedside day and night. One day the doctor told us that the patient reached the crisis point of the illness, when it will be determined whether he will live or die. The fever peeked at 42 degrees. My late mother cried and said that if it is destined for Father to leave this world, then she is prepared to go in his stead.

My father started to recover. Each day, he felt somewhat better until the doctor proclaimed that he is no longer in danger and he will be well. My mother rejoiced and our entire family was delighted. In those days many people died from typhus.

Some time later, my mother became ill. My father was at her bedside, although he was still weak from his own illness. He was very distressed by her illness, and I would sometimes see tears in his eyes as he sat next to my mother's sickbed. He may have had a feeling about the tragedy that awaited us. My father told us to sell all gold items, such as rings and necklaces, in order to save Mother. We did all we could to save our dear, beloved mother. I was a young boy and I didn't leave her bedside – that's how attached I was to her. But nothing could change the decree from Above, and she passed away at the age of 33. My oldest sister was barely 15 years old when we were left to mourn our beloved mother.

I was the youngest of the children. My mother cherished me and always showed me her deepest motherly love. I couldn't accept the fact that my dear mother was no longer alive. I stood by and watched as she was lowered into her grave, and my brothers and I said Kaddish. Until this day I cannot forget the sight of how she was at last covered with earth.

I would wake frequently during the night; I was used to having Mother come and check on me during the night if I was tucked in well. I cried out for her many times but there was no response, until I remembered that my dear mother was no longer alive. I couldn't adjust to the tragic reality.

We settled in Sosnowitz in 1919, when my father married his second wife. It was extremely painful for me to see her take my mother's place. I suffered a lot.

I shared briefly the rest of my experiences until September 1937.

One night I strolled with my late father on Spulna Street, discussing different matters between father and son. He told me that someone suggested a *shidduch* for me and he very much desires to see me engaged. I tried to evade giving an answer

about the *shidduch*. I had no desire to marry the suggested girl. I was too shy to tell anyone that I was thinking of someone else.

I walked my father home to Dekerto Street where he lived, and I returned to my apartment on Spulna Street. I lived together with my brother; my brother had a wife and two children, a boy and a girl. My brother and his wife were at a wedding and I sat and read the newspaper next to the open window.

At 11:30 at night someone knocked on the window. I went over to the window and saw my little sister, from my father's second wife, crying. I was very frightened and asked her what happened. She told me that Father suddenly started feeling very ill. As soon as I heard this I ran up to my father's house. Three doctors were already on the scene; they worked hard on him all night but in the early morning hours my dear father passed away.

This was a very traumatic experience for me. All night I sat at my dear father's bedside until his soul returned to his Maker. I cried so much about this sudden tragedy! I cried into my father's *tallis* and *kittel*, which were being prepared for his burial. The *tallis* became soaked with my tears. The six little children – one boy and five girls – and their mother, stood around and cried along. I was overcome with pity for them.

After the funeral we sat *shivah* in my father's house. I voluntarily took upon myself to care for the house and the children and provide all of their material needs. I also undertook to ensure that the children will receive proper job training when the time comes; in other words, I will step into my father's role. He loved his children dearly; he loved those of us who were born from his first marriage as well as those who were born from his second marriage. My father died young; he wasn't even 60 years old.

I recounted everything that I endured from my childhood until the present time. It is impossible to describe everything on paper, after 33 years and after all the suffering that we endured afterwards during the war. Now as I write it I am already an elderly man, a grandfather, with grey hair, and my memory is no

longer as sharp. But when I shared my life story with the girl, it was all still very fresh in my mind, and I shared all details. She listened to me very carefully. "I believe that this is the reason for my sad eyes," I concluded. "Even when I smile to someone it is hard for me to forget my tragic past."

When I finished my story, I saw that she was wiping the tears from her eyes with a handkerchief. I apologized for making her sad, and she replied that she couldn't imagine how much I had suffered as a child. She also expressed admiration for my devotion to the children and their mother, to whom I was like a father.

It had gotten late, and the time came when Jews were no longer permitted to walk the streets. I walked her home and we made up a time to meet again. On my way home I thought over our entire discussion. She spoke to me mostly in Polish while I spoke in Yiddish, although she understood Yiddish well because her parents spoke Yiddish at home. I was very optimistic and prayed to Hashem that he should help me succeed.

Our next two meetings were equally pleasant. We shared tidings about the past week, during which each day brought new tragedies for our people. I became somewhat disinterested in the goings on around me, including the pain and suffering that the Germans meted out to us as well as the good news that some people would relate about the war coming to a speedy end. My mind was completely preoccupied with these meetings. We continued meeting every week.

The days and weeks passed. I started losing hope about building a future together, because the more I spoke to her, the more impressed I became about her fine manners and I felt very ordinary in comparison. One Sunday, during our meeting, she asked me to meet her parents. I was happily surprised by her invitation and agreed to visit her parents at home. They welcomed me nicely and seemed to know everything about me already, after hearing so much about me from my partner Kazoshoz and from their daughter. We spoke about the war and the Jewish suffering, until the time came when Jews would be forbidden to be in the streets. As I was about to leave, they asked

me to stop by next time and visit them at home. I promised to come, and I felt full of hope, because the meeting had gone well.

I continued visiting them, until I became a member of the household. One day after visiting them, I had to leave earlier than usual. As the girl walked me home, I told her that as happy as I am during my visits to her home, that's how sad I am after taking my leave. She smiled and said: "I have the same reaction. I am glad to tell you that my parents have gotten to know you and with their permission I would be willing to be your life-partner." I cried from emotion and joy that my long-awaited dream is finally becoming fulfilled. That night, I couldn't fall asleep from excitement.

Meanwhile, the war situation was getting worse. On June 21, 1941 the Germans attacked Russia. Many rumors were going around about the Russians winning the battles, but as time went on we found out that the Germans were infiltrating deeply into Russia. The Germans needed strong, young Jews to work for the war effort. They started snatching Jews off the streets. They would be hoarded onto wagons straight off the street and sent off to the camps. Some were sent off to the Russian front to do certain types of work, and many died from cold and hunger.

One day I learned that the Germans were preparing for an *aktzia* to send Jews off to work. I told some of my friends to come to my store right after nightfall through the back door. We were five people together as we sat down. We all knew that there will be an *aktzia* that night. We spoke quietly together in the back of the store; we were downstairs, not in the hidden part of the ceiling. That was still a secret.

Late at night, we heard movement on the street and in the courtyard behind our back door. We heard heavy footsteps approaching our door, followed by loud banging and shouts to "open up!" We could tell that it was the German police. They were about to break the door down when one of them said to the others that this is a store, so they left. We were frightened to death – one of my friends suffered a sever attack of stomach pains from fright.

The next morning we learned that they pulled a few hundred young men from their beds and sent them off. I was covered because I was employed selling tram cards, but I wanted to save the other young men. The Germans were looking for them during the night and since they weren't discovered they were left alone.

I met my girl once more, and she appeared pale and worried. She told me that several Jews from her street were told to leave their homes, and they were not permitted to take along their furniture. She asked me to come to her home, and I went up to her parents who welcomed me heartily. They told me kindly that if the situation with the police becomes difficult, then I should spend the night with them in their special guest room.

The weeks and months passed. As I said before, I dealt illegally with fine jewelry on the black market. When I had the chance to purchase a pretty diamond ring, I bought it. The next time we met, she told me that she suffers from deep emotional pain at work. The Gestapo came to her workplace at the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde and they demanded that the Jewish agency provide them with Jews who should be sent off to work in the camps in Germany. They also demanded lots of monetary contributions and gold, with a tight deadline when everything must be delivered. If everything will not be provided by the deadline, the leaders of the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde will be held responsible.

I told her, "Don't worry, we Jews lived through similar difficult times in the past. Hashem always helped us, and we will also be helped now in the most unexpected ways. Many times religious Jews come into my store and they have interesting things to say about the war. Some say that it has been discovered in ancient *seforim* that the *geulah* is supposed to happen around this time, but we must first endure all of these hardships." I visited her parents, and they told me that things were getting much worse. I tried to lift their mood by telling them that America entered the war and it won't take much longer for them to open a second front. "America, England and the occupied countries that have governments in exile in London, are not sleeping. The Germans will receive a deadly blow from their enemies, so let us all be happy. The Al-mighty who rules over all nations will take pity on His suffering nation Israel, so let us rejoice."

They brought in some food and drinks. When I was alone with the girl, I presented her with a pretty box that contained the ring. She ran to her parents and showed them the gift that I brought. They came to the table and sat down. She put on the ring and they wished us "Mazel Tov!" I gave my wishes for health and happiness to the parents, and to my fiancée I gave my wishes that our life should be lighted by Hashem's kindness, like the sun when it rises in full beauty. We all cried together from joy and emotion, combined with fear and sadness over the difficult times we live in. Even the *simchos* in those days were mostly full of tears and sadness, instead of joy.

I spent a pleasant afternoon, until the time came for me to leave because Jews would be forbidden to walk outside. They were very grateful to me for lifting their spirits and asked me to come in every day. I replied that although I look forward to coming, I am much too busy all week.

The next day, when I was in the store, one of my neighbors came over and told me that the Gestapo was in our apartment building and ordered that all of us must leave our homes within two hours. I quickly called my brothers and sister to come help me. We could only take our clothes and blankets, and a few candlesticks. They did not allow us to take anything else; all our furniture, dishes, and draperies had to be left behind. Now I was left without an apartment, along with 20 other families.

When my fiancée found out through the Cultus Gemeinde about what happened, she came to me to offer support and suggested that I should stay with them. I thanked her but acquired for myself a metal cot that I set up for the night in my store.

The Cultus Gemeinde had a housing department where they appointed housing, meaning that they squeezed families together. If a family lived in a three room apartment, they assigned another family to move in with them. When I came to them, they told me that I am a single person and therefore I will

have to wait until they have assigned apartments to the large families, and then the smaller families, and only then will they worry about the singles. I thought to myself that I have a place to stay meanwhile, in the store, so I didn't press the housing department to assign me an apartment.

The weeks went by. I received packages from my brother who lived in the village, containing important provisions such as fat, butter, wheat flower, a goose, and when he had the chance he sent matzos for Pesach made from wheat that he ground himself and then baked by himself. I brought all of these items to the children and their mother. I went to them each day to make sure they lacked for nothing and had everything they needed.

Time went by. In 1942 the real trouble for the Jews began. The Germans filled up entire trains with Jews, with the help of the Jewish police. They mostly took the poor families - men, women and children – and sent them off; nobody knew where they were being taken. The entire Jewish population became very frightened, knowing that something can happen to them at any moment. Every night I took my sisters and their mother, and the entire family, as well as the people who worked for me and their families, and I led them up over the ceiling. They would sit there all these nights, as large *aktzias* were taking place. The people hiding in the store were safe. I asked my fiancée and her parents to hide out with us, but they told me that they have a friend, a Polish doctor, who offered to hide them.

During these days a meeting was held at the Cultus Gemeinde, with the participation of a certain Jew by the name of Liver. He was a religious person who ran a mill in Bendin, a town near Sosnowitz.

He openly challenged Moshe Meirin, the leader: "Where are the people being sent to?" The reply was that they were being sent to an unknown destination. But Mr. Liver continue asking more and more questions and pinned him to the wall, until he found out that the able-bodied people are sent off to work and the elderly, the women and the children are murdered. He banged on the table and cried: "It is forbidden for you to do this!" Moshe Meirin defended himself by saying that by cooperating with the

Germans they are saving a large part of the Jewish population, but this *frum*, nice person Mr. Liver quoted the Rambam's ruling that one may not deliver a single Jew into the hands of our enemies who wish to kill him, even in order to save a city full of Jews. "You are helping the murderers kill thousands of Jewish men, women and children! This is inexcusable!" With these words, this *frum* and upright Jew z"l stormed out of the meeting.

On the following day I heard about this incident from my partner, Kazoshoz, but it was kept secret from the general populace.

The following events happened quickly. Several days later the Germans fell upon a number of houses, among them was Kazoshoz' apartment. My partner had lots of work at the Cultus Gemeinde and he stayed there during the night. While he was away at work, his wife and child were taken. By the time he found out about it, they were already on the train. He ran to save his wife and child from the transport, but when he arrived he saw that nothing could be done. So he jumped onto the car and was shipped off together with his family.

Afterwards, the Cultus Gemeinde asked me to return the weekly travel cards. I no longer received rent, so I went to the governor and showed him my papers. I explained that I had a clothing store that sold items made in our own warehouse. He agreed to allow me to work in my store and take in exclusively Jewish workers. I placed two machines on the tables; I had the right to hire people. One person named Levine came over to me and asked me to do him a favor and report that he works for me. Every month we had to pay fifty mark per person at the Zonder Beoftrag – a department of the Gestapo – so he was somewhat protected by being employed. This fellow was never a tailor. He used to work with textile and I would occasionally purchase fabric from him. Other people also asked me to hire them. I added on five more people, of which four were never tailors and one was a tailor. After all, someone had to do the work. I personally didn't work; I continued doing what I did before. Jews would come in with some items and I would keep it or sell it, only to really trustworthy people, of course.

Meanwhile, something happened. My 16 year old brother happened to be in the store when an acquaintance of mine who worked for the Jewish police entered. He told me to leave the store immediately because they received an order from the secret police to arrest me. I immediately left through the back door, and I told my brother and the tailor to leave and lock up the store. As they were locking up, two Jewish policemen showed up and asked about my whereabouts. My brother said that I wasn't there, so they took him with them and arrested him until I would turn myself in. He begged them to let him go, saying: "Why should I be responsible for my brother?"

"We must have him!" was the response.

After sitting in the cell for a while, my brother made use of an opportunity when the police were arguing between themselves. The door was left slightly open, so he escaped and went into hiding. Two young policemen came to my father's house to look for him. When they couldn't find him, they took my 10-year-old sister. She was not placed in a cell but they arrested her and kept her in their office. She cried so much until they let her go. I went to one of my acquaintances and told him the entire story. I asked these people in position to find out why they were after me. After hiding for several days, they couldn't tell me what this was all about, but they did let me know that if I won't turn myself in within 24 hours they will round up my entire family and ship them off to Auschwitz.

The secret police had underground cells where they tortured their victims like the Spanish inquisitors. If someone left the secret police alive it was indeed a miracle. I decided to turn myself in.

The next day, I came out of hiding. During the day I went to my fiancée and her parents. I told them the entire story and informed them that I will be turning myself in the following day. They became extremely pale and cried bitterly. I said good-bye in tears. My fiancée took leave of me, her eyes wet with tears. On the following day I told her where some valuables were hidden, along with some materials. I also told her who owed me money.

Everyone was there for me – my stepmother and her children, my oldest sister and brother-in-law, and my brother and sister-in-law. I went through an emotional farewell. I felt terrible for the children, because I was devoted to them like our late father z"l.

I left deep in thought, until I arrived at the Police building. When I entered, I reported to the officer at the front desk. As soon as I told him my name, he gave me a mighty punch in the face with his strong hand, and I was instantly covered with blood.

"We have been looking for you for weeks!" he shouted. He led me into a room where a high-ranking officer sat behind a desk. His first question was: "We called you many times; why didn't you come? Where were you hiding? In which town were you hiding out and in whose house? What's his name and address? If you don't reveal everything right away we will make you regret it, and you will anyway disclose everything in the end."

I replied that from the day I had to move out of my apartment I had remained in Sosnowitz. "I am a tailor chief and my warehouse is open in the center of Modrowgasse (this was how the street was called during the occupation). I took out the papers from the German governor and showed it to him. I told him that I had been at the housing department trying to procure an apartment but they told me that the large families have priority over singles and since I am single I can still wait. "I am still waiting to be notified, and meanwhile I sleep in my store. Every few days I had been at my old apartment and asked the guard if any mail had arrived for me."

As soon as he heard this he became furious at the guard because he had not delivered my mail. Right then and there, in my presence, he wrote a command that I should go bring him in. He gave me a special permission slip to allow me to walk on the streets that were normally off limits for Jews. He told me to wash my face from the blood.

I left to fulfill the order. I was stopped many times on the way by the police because I was wearing the Jewish sign on my

arm, but I showed them the permission slip and I was allowed to continue. When I arrived and the *stroudzh* saw me through the window, he hid from me. I went to his wife, who was just as anti-Semitic as her husband, and showed her the order which commanded her husband to report to the secret police immediately or he would be in deep trouble. She told me that he isn't home.

I returned and told them everything - that I saw him and he hid from me, his wife told me that he wasn't there, and that I showed her the written order and left it with her. I had asked her to sign that she received it but she refused. The officer became enraged. He called in a policeman and ordered him to bring the doorman and his wife. He then turned to me and said that he believes everything I told him. "You are a grown man, and you must understand that during wartime everyone must be reported to us. We are occupying enemy territory and we must have everyone under observation, each and every day. We saw that your daily ration card was being used, so someone must have picked up your ration for you." He told me that he is sentencing me to four weeks in prison in Bendin. I begged him to spare me, because I am completely innocent. He replied that if I will sit in prison those few weeks then he will pardon me. So I told him that he seems to be a very nice person, and I would like to ask for his consideration. "Now I don't have so much work, but later during Easter I will have more work. I am also supporting my mother and her six children through my job." He thought for a few moments and then said, "Never before did I change a sentence, but for you I am making an exception. *Zi zenen frei*! (You are free to go!) Go home and get back to work." Upon hearing these words, tears sprang to my eyes. He told me to sit and asked me to calm down. He even offered me a cigarette. I asked him to come visit me in the store and told him that I would like to have something made especially for him, as a sign of gratitude.

He indeed came to the store and I received many food staples from him. Upon leaving, he gave me his hand in greeting and called me "sir," which was a sign of friendship.

When I returned to my father's house, the joy was indescribable! The children kissed me and cried from joy. I

reopened the store and told everyone that I was free. In those days, this was like returning from the grave. When I met my fiancée and her parents again and told them what happened, they said: "Hashem is with you!"

Chapter 4

The German miller from the apartment where I first lived, the one who told me to move out because he needed my apartment for his own use as an office, that same fellow and his family of five would purchase from me silver items, fur-lined winter coats and jewelry. They would pay me with foodstuffs such as flour, butter and other essentials. This provided crucial sustenance for us because the population suffered real hunger. The rations that the Germans provided were much too little, and they forbade us from doing business so the people were unable to earn money in order to purchase food. Those who had valuables to sell needed an intermediary who was in contact with Poles, VolksDeutchen (German nationals) or Reichs-Deutchen.

I had such customers from Katowitz and from other upper Silesian towns that belonged to Poland before 1939. I had many customers who came from these locations with essential foodstuffs and I would trade it for other items, earning something on the side. If someone wanted to purchase fabric for a suit or woman's coat, I would give the job to a tailor and we would settle on a price, for example: 100 marks. Then I would explain that I don't need the money, but I need 100 marks worth of foodstuffs, according to the regular market value. The same quantity of products would cost 500 marks on the black market. This is how I would conduct business. I needed lots of *mazel* that they should not betray me to the police. The "crime" of doing illegal business was a capital offense punishable by death.

Unfortunately, many people were arrested for the sole crime of trying to earn a living in order to quiet their terrible hunger pangs. Those who were arrested never returned. Mothers and small children were left abandoned, destitute and hungry. This in itself was a terrible tragedy.

The poor suffered the most as soon as the war broke out. The middle-class still had valuables to sell and they would sell their wedding bands to the Poles, as well as their fur coats or furniture.

All along, we hoped that the war wouldn't last too long. Those who were employed in the German shops received very meager wages with which they could not even acquire their full rations, and these meager rations were much too little to live on. The social aid that the Cultus Gemeinde provided was also insignificant. The Germans had confiscated all Jewish businesses, property, savings and bank account, leaving the Jews without any means for survival. Those who found ways to conduct business did so illegally.

I would frequently bring fabric from Bendin, acquiring it from reliable people with whom I did business before the war. One time I missed the last train back to Sosnowitz that allowed Jews on board. The fabric was wrapped around my body, and I was in great danger of being discovered. I began the six-kilometer trek home. I took off my Jewish armband and used the byways, passing through the fields. Sweat was pouring down my face from exertion and fear. I arrived home half an hour after the time when the curfew for Jews began. I took off my clothes, under which I carried fabric for a suit or woman's coat.

This is what life was like in those days. In the beginning we still had some savings from before the war, but as time went on we had less and less. There were many expenses, besides food, such as various briberies that were needed to close the eyes of those who planned our annihilation, or to receive crucial information about forthcoming *aktzias* in order to be able to hide out and avoid deportation.

I received a letter from my brother and partner, which contained some bad news. A German officer visited their village and registered everything they had – rye, wheat, cattle, horses, plow machinery, etc. They also took note of the number of rooms and the servants' quarters. After writing everything down in detail he took the report with him, leaving the family with an ominous feeling.

My brother had brought over to the village our uncle from Pinchev next to Keltz. He was our late father's brother, a very special person, a real *tzaddik*. His wife passed away, and he learned Torah with his nephews - his brother's children and

brother-in-law's children. They all came from the towns, where they had their businesses. When everything was confiscated they took their wives and children and moved into the village, to their father/father-in-law. They lived quite peacefully in the village. There was no shortage of food up to that point.

One day when I visited my fiancée's parents, I told them about the fabric that I smuggle in from Bendin at great personal risk. The father begged me not to do this and promised to support me and my family. They owned foreign currency, including dollars and pounds. He led me into a secret place and showed me where the money was hidden. They didn't keep everything in the same place; they had buried jewelry in the cellar too. He explained that they were still able to keep their apartment by bribing the officials, including the Gestapo men, who liked to receive his presents.

I thanked them for their offer to help me but I told them that I still had the means to support myself, although my resources were fast dwindling. They said: "May Hashem help us live to see the end of this war, with a victory for all Jews! When Hitler's gang will finally be crushed we will no longer have all of these problems." The father added: "I really want to help my children. Please do not risk your life! You are our son!"

His words gave me a warm feeling, but I could not bring myself to accept his kind offer. Even if I would really have needed his help desperately I wouldn't have taken anything.

I will now recount another unpleasant story. One day I happened to be in Bendin. Back in my store, only the tailor was present when the chief of the *zonder-beoftrag* suddenly entered. This fellow, named Katchinski, was a vicious murderer. He was in charge of all labor in the area and would send off people to work in the camps or in the Jewish workstations.

"What is your name?" he asked the tailor.

"My name is Gibsman," was the reply.

"Where is the supervisor, Lazerowitz?" he demanded. "And where are the four other employees?"

Thankfully, the tailor had the presence of mind to reply that I was out delivering items to a customer. The chief told the tailor that I should report to him as soon as I returned.

About half an hour later I returned to the store, and the tailor told me what happened. I became very frightened and forced myself to think clearly. I decided to go, and relied on Hashem that He will be with me once more. First I prepared an address where I had supposedly delivered the clothing so that if the *zonder-beoftrag* would inquire they would receive a reply that corroborated my story.

I went to their office. Katchinski welcomed me with a yelling. "You are employing five people and I only found one tailor! Where were the other four employees? And where were you?" I explained that I was out delivering clothing that we had finished, because the customer was ill. About the four missing workers, I explained that for part of the day I had more work but part of the day there is less work. Sometimes I must first set up the orders and prepare the work so that the tailors can do their jobs, and this is why they were now temporarily absent.

As I spoke to him, I noticed that two buttons of his uniform were hanging loosely and appeared to be falling off at any moment. I offered to fix the buttons for him. He replied, this time in a calm tone of voice, that Jews were not supposed to work for Arians so I should keep it a secret. He took me into a private room and I fixed his buttons. He then told me that he had decided to close up my shop and send me off to a labor camp, but he changed his mind. "You will only have to pay a fine of 100 marks," he declared. I immediately took out the required 100 marks and he told me that I was free to go. I thanked him and left.

Each day, things went from bad to even worse. Every few days they would send off a shipment of many families to an unknown destination. We heard that the same thing was going on in the other towns. We heard reports from the labor camps that the men who work there look like skeletons. We Jews became extremely discouraged. We were living in hell, with new decrees being announced each day.

One day I received an invitation from the *zonder-beoftrag* to come over to discuss several important business and labor issues. That day I learned that all Jews who were self-employed were requested to come to the *zonder-beoftrag*, including tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, locksmiths, plumbers, and all other skilled workers. I met with my brothers and sister to discuss my options. They advised me to fake being ill by calling a doctor and complaining of a headache or stomachache. I drank two tall glasses of black coffee and called for the doctor, who came immediately. The night before I hadn't slept at all. When the doctor arrived, he saw that my heart rate was very fast. I told him that I have a splitting headache and that my stomach and feet hurt. He told me that I should call him again the following day because with the first onset of symptoms he cannot diagnose the problem. He did write a few prescriptions, and with these medicine bottles in hand, my oldest sister went to the *zonder-beoftrag* and told them that I was sick and under a doctor's care. They acknowledged this excuse. When my sister returned, she told us that all work-station owners were there – hundreds of people in all, some whom we knew and many whom we didn't. Some were worried and others were completely calm. Those who were calm trusted the deceitful, murderous Germans.

That evening we heard that all of these people were taken under military guard to the station. They were loaded onto trains and shipped off. They left behind heartbroken and helpless women and children without any means of support or protection.

As it turned out, the story of my so-called tailor shop now evaporated into thin air. I realized that I was left without any protection, so I thought I would find work at one of the shops. I inquired about possible places of work, but I learned that all shops were full to capacity and there were no openings. Finally, I heard that in Dombrowa there was a department of Rosner's Bendin shop. I traveled to Dombrowa and in exchange for two sewing machines and some money that I presented to the shop owner I managed to procure an official paper stating that I was employed at Rosner's workstation, which he managed on behalf of the Germans. This paper gave me some form of protection.

I was assigned to the night shift, at a press machine. I became extremely exhausted from working through the nights. I also realized that all of my co-workers were thin and emaciated. When I asked them if everyone has been sick, they explained that up to the beginning of the war they had their own factories and earned nicely, supporting their families in comfort. But now they were no longer able to work independently, and their machines were confiscated. They no longer had any valuables to sell and they literally suffered from hunger. Some time later I was switched to the daytime shift. During lunch time I saw that many of the workers had nothing to eat for lunch. I shared my food with them, but on occasion I would go over to a Jew named Zugreich who did some illegal business, and I bought from him bread to distribute among the other workers. My heart went out with pity for them.

I set up my younger sister in Held's shop in Sosnowitz. The other children were too young to work. I found out that they were taking away young boys of my brother's age, so I told my brother to come sleep in the store with me, and that is what he did. To ensure that the traitorous Jewish police won't harm my little siblings, I had to pay with money and blood.

One day the oldest of my younger siblings came to me and told me that during the night they were paid a visit by the Jewish police who were looking for our brother Eliezer. They said that if he won't turn up, they will take the furniture. So I told her, "Let them take the furniture, and let him sleep here with me." I left him in the store, with some food and water, while I traveled to Dombrowa. I went to the office and asked them to hire my 17 year old brother. We negotiated for some time about the cost of this placement, and after offering them several gifts we finally reached an agreement. They gave me an official paper stating that he works at Rosner's. Now he was able to travel with the tram to Bendin and Dombrowa.

One day when we finished the night shift and came home, we learned at the station that they were rounding up families and conducting an *ouszidlung* (deportation). I ran up to the apartment deeply frightened, and told the children to leave the house immediately and come to the store through the back door. Several

minutes later the Jewish police showed up and took the four youngest children to a place on Teatapulna Street, where they concentrated all elderly people, women and children. The entire area was surrounded by the Jewish police. I used all of my connections, running around all day without rest and all night without sleep. I didn't take a bite of food and was utterly heartbroken. Many people were being kept there. I gave some food to a policeman and begged him to give it to the children. I also pressed a banknote into his hand.

There was a small opening that we discovered, and the children escaped from there together with a few other people. I took all of them into the store, prepared some food and put them to sleep in the hideout above the ceiling, where we had prepared straw and long benches. On the following morning, we traveled to work with tremendous fear and trepidation that cannot even be described.

Day after day we traveled to work, until one day when we returned home we learned that all day they were conducting an *aktzia* and taking people out of their homes. They had taken my step-mother and one girl, my ten-year-old sister. We immediately ran to the leaders of the Cultus Gemeinde, and then we ran to the place where the transport was supposed to be waiting. But, alas! We arrived too late... The transport that was loaded with men, women, children and suckling infants had already left. The Jewish traitors planned this deportation during the time when all men and grown sons were at work. That's when they had the opportunity to ship off the defenseless elderly people, women and children and deliver them into the hands of the German murderers to be burned.

The cries of those who returned from work and didn't find their families at home were heartrending! The same thing was going on in our family. The children threw themselves onto the floor and cried bitterly. I had warned my step-mother and the children every day not to leave the store, because nobody knew that they were hiding there. She had gone out of the store and went home to pick up something she needed. My sister ran after her. Just when they happened to be home, the police came in and took them away.

Now we were all especially careful as we continued living in the store. I was very despondent and thought to myself that there was no point in working; we were all doomed anyway! We needed money to survive, yet all of our reserve funds were being used up. Since my brother and I had permission to travel, I used this permission to travel to my acquaintances with whom I had done business during better times. I purchased fabric and took it home, wrapped around my body. I then sold these fabrics to Silesians or Poles whom I knew well, and thus earned some money with which I was able to buy my freedom from time to time or help my hungry fellow Jews. I would pay a weekly fee to the shop and they would mark me down as having worked that week. I had to sign that I received my wages. Every few days I would show up at work; the office would notify me when to come in because there were regular German controllers who arrived and called out the names of the workers. If someone was absent, the person could present a doctor's note indicating that he had taken sick leave that day. The doctor received a half pound of butter, and for that price all was arranged.

More time passed in this manner. One day when we arrived at work, we found only half of the employees in the shop. When we asked the others what happened, they told us that during the night half of the townspeople were rounded up and deported. We became very anxious and asked our superiors: "What guarantee do we have that we won't be next on line? We are working hard for minimal wages, barely enough for water with kasha. Why should we work at all?"

The next day, several German officers arrived and assured us that we were "useful Jews," and that from now on nothing will happen to the remaining townspeople. "Just continue working," they told us. We calmed down somewhat, hanging on to the fact that they deported mostly elderly people.

The Cultus Gemeinde also tried to calm us down by promising us that no harm will befall us. We should just continue working and be reassured, they said. We were indeed reassured, and the children returned home. When Thursday arrived, I decided that we really need to have normal Shabbos table once again. For a change, we should not be hiding over the ceiling and

sit in the dark. While I was in Dombrowa, I visited a certain place where I saw some frum Jews in a fenced-in yard near a Jewish home. A *shochet* prepared two young goats and I purchased several pounds of meat. I had not eaten meat in several years, besides for the kosher goose that my brother had sent me once.

We prepared a Shabbos that was almost like the good old days. I made Kiddush and wanted to enjoy a Shabbos meal without the sadness that constantly filled our hearts, but suddenly all of the children burst out crying. "Where is Mama? Where is our dear sister Rivka'la?" I cried along with them. We ate our food in sadness and tears.

After the meal, the people who lived in the same house - who had suffered just as much - gathered together and we spoke about our hopes for the future. We encouraged each other that Hitler's gangs will be defeated and we will all be redeemed. During that time the Germans were fighting deep in Russian territory. We would frequently see wounded Germans passing by on their return from the battlefront. The German army suffered many casualties.

Purim 1942 approached. During that week I had received two dozen oranges from a Silesian customer for whom I bought fabric and had a beautiful woman's coat custom made for his wife. He was very pleased with my work and paid me with essential foodstuffs, and as an added bonus he gave me the oranges. I put these special fruits away for Purim. I gave some of them to my friends who worked for me before the war, and I gave some oranges for Mishloach Manos to the families that I worked with. Oranges were a very rare fruit in those days and they reminded everyone of the good times. I also brought a nice Mishloach Manos to my fiancée's parents. They asked me why I looked so thin. I did not want to share my pain with them but they urged me to tell them what happened. I told them that my step-mother and my little sister had been deported, and we were very saddened by this. They told me that a German military officer visited them; he marked down all of their furniture and even took pictures. They knew in their hearts that before long they will be required to move out of their home. They had really changed a lot too.

We tried to boost our spirits by reminding each other that the Germans were suffering huge casualties and the war may end very soon. We tried to make merry and wished each other to enjoy Purim in better times.

That very day the Germans hanged four Jews for the crime of having unauthorized possession of fabric, which was rationed and provided only with special cards. They found these unauthorized items on a Jew named Kohn and his son, and they were hanged along with two more Jews. One of them was an acquaintance of mine who sometimes slept in my store. Their execution took place in the center of town, on Purim. It is quite possible that they chose this day to avenge Haman's death. After all, Hitler had said in one of his speeches that Jews will no longer celebrate Purim. We tried to console each other that this may be a sign that Hitler is being defeated on all fronts. Although we were living in terrible times, we assured each other that with Hashem's help we will survive.

We sat at the Purim meal with mixed feelings. We were sad about the present hardships but were joyous about the future. After the meal, my fiancée walked me home.

The execution of Jews on Purim was not an isolated incident. Similar atrocities were taking place in the surrounding towns. The secret police would search homes and businesses, mostly of those who were in business before the war. They understood that the Jews did not report all of their property on the formal records that the Germans had collected in 1939 with the help of the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde. They had probably expected the Jews to perish from hunger and starvation; after all, their property had been confiscated and all forms of business were prohibited. Yet they were seeing a large segment of the Jewish population that continued living as before. This was indeed the truth, that many Jews did not report everything to the Germans. They tried to hide some merchandise and took these hidden items out from time to time to sell them in order to provide some food for their starving families. Some of these Jews naively thought that the war will be over shortly and they will want to reopen their stores. They hid their merchandise in order to have some stock with which to do business once more.

Right across from my store there was a large textile store owned by Yakov Schweitzer. Schweitzer had been married for two years; his father was Leibish Schweitzer, a wealthy merchant. After the incident in which the Jews were hanged on Purim in Sosnowitz, he came looking for me in a very agitated state. He told me that he must discuss an urgent matter with me but it must remain strictly confidential. I took him into my store, where he sat down and told me in tears that he faces the same cruel punishment that had been meted out to the four Jews who were hanged two days before. "But if you will find it in your heart to help me you will be able to save my life! My life is in your hands!" I was surprised to hear these words and became quite curious about what I have to do with all of this.

"I am prepared to help you in every way possible," I assured him, "as long as it depends on me alone."

He confided in me that he had a cellar full of illegal merchandise. At the beginning of the war, the Germans assigned a new commissioner to supervise his store, a rabid anti-Semite. This fellow recently sniffed out the truth that there were lots of hidden merchandise in his cellar, and with every moment wasted he was risking his life. "The merchandise must be taken away still today!" he cried. Since I was right across his place and still had my store, he thought that I would be the perfect person to know of their secret.

I told him that I will think the matter over and reply in fifteen minutes. I went into a side room while he waited in the front of the store.

The first thought that entered my mind was that I was replacing my father z"l and I had a responsibility towards the children. I had to be careful to protect myself and not endanger my life. The second issue that I thought about was my own private illegal business dealings with non-Jewish customers, which carried plenty of risk. Yet despite everything I could not ignore the voice that reminded me that I now had the opportunity to save a Jew from death, and in this merit Hashem will surely help me.

Once I had made this decision my heart was flooded with relief. I returned to the other room and told him that I will gladly help him. I asked him how he will arrange the transfer of merchandise and which people will be involved in this dangerous operation. He replied that I should not worry about this because he and his family already arranged this part completely to ensure that the plan would be carried out perfectly. I took him aside and showed him the hiding place over the ceiling where there was room for plenty of merchandise. He was delighted beyond words. He left, and then returned two hours later, informing me that the plan had been set in motion and the transfer will take place at midnight. He asked me to keep my store completely dark; he will give a light tap on the door and then the transfer of merchandise will begin. I began asking for details, especially how he will ensure that the passing German patrols wouldn't see what was going on. He replied that he will be relying on a few Jewish policemen who came from good homes. Not all of the policemen were evil. The trustworthy policemen were to be stationed on the surrounding blocks, armed with their usual green and red light-signals. They would signal with a green light when the coast was clear and signal with a red light whenever a German patrol or another German would be passing by.

We wished each other heartily that the operation should be successful. I went into the side-room of the store, which had a private door. I lit a candle and began saying Tehillim with intense *kavanah*. Before midnight, I extinguished the candle and opened the door to the main room of the store. I stood close to the door and waited.

At the designated time, there was a light tap on the door. I opened the door and the operation began. Several porters came in one after the other loaded with boxes. They hauled in the boxes and piled them up in both rooms. It took us until four o'clock in the morning until everything was inside the store. The Jewish police took home the porters and I asked Schweitzer to stay with me. We began to put the boxes into the hiding place on top of the ceiling when no one else was looking. We could not put everything up, so we hid some of the merchandise behind the large drapes that hung in my store, where coats and suits used to

be kept. The space was now empty, with just the closed curtains in place.

In the morning, when he went home, he cried with relief and joy and thanked me for saving his life. I was very happy that Hashem protected us and I was able to save a fellow Jew from death.

In time, we found customers for the merchandise. Trustworthy Jews would come into the store and wrap themselves around with fabric underneath their clothes, which they carried off in this manner to the buyers. He paid me nicely, and I didn't argue about the money even though I could have asked him for much more. My goal was to help him and I did not want to take any reward. I was convinced that Hashem will help me and reward me.

All of his merchandise was eventually sold. We parted ways with best wishes for all Jews, that we should all be helped with a complete salvation.

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Pesach 1942 was approaching. Before Pesach there was another *aktzia* in which many families were deported. The official explanation was that those who were unemployed were being sent off. That's how the days and nights passed in fear and insecurity. Every few days the Germans surrounded several large houses, rounded up the residents and shipped them off. I lost my last shred of trust in the Germans' assurances that those who were employed would be safe from deportation, along with their families. After all, the same promises were made to those who had been deported.

During the week of Pesach, they rounded up only young, able-bodied people and they were sent off to the *dulak* in Sosnowitz, a gathering point from where the Germans shipped off the people to various labor camps in Upper Silesia, Lower Silesia or deep within Germany. Two days later they freed a large number of those who had been rounded up and kept in the *dulak*, telling them that they already had enough laborers and did not need any more.

The Jewish Cultus Gemeinde quickly spread the news about the release of the Jews and the German's declaration that no more laborers were needed. Wives and mothers who feared for the safety of their husbands, sons and brothers were overjoyed! They looked forward to celebrating a joyous Pesach with their husbands, sons and brothers who were hiding out in the coal cellars, attics, or other hiding places. When they heard that the Germans sent home so many people from the collection place, the people came out of hiding. They had spent their days miserably hiding on dirty floors, suffering from cold and unsanitary conditions. Now they were finally able to come home!

That day I met Mrs. Gutterman on the street. Her son Avrohom Shlomo had been in hiding, and when she heard the good news from me she ran off to his hiding place to inform him about what was going on. When he heard the good news from his mother, Avrohom Shlomo came home to stretch his weary bones. His young wife was overjoyed; they were in their second year of marriage and she was expecting a child. There was a joyous reunion between the mother, the young wife and the mother's sister, Mrs. Zonenstein.

I was busy all day until evening when the Jewish curfew began. I went to the store with my 17 year old brother. We were hungry, so I cooked some food for ourselves and cleaned the store. I opened the back door that led to the courtyard, because I needed some water in order to wash up and clean out the remaining dirt. We *davened* Maariv, did *bedikas chometz*, and ate in a pleasant atmosphere.

The next morning was Erev Pesach. When we left the store, we saw people crying in the street. Mothers were wringing their hands in anguish. We found out that the Jewish police rounded up many young men, including my friend Avrohom Shlomo who was ordered by the Jewish police to come with them. His young expectant wife begged the police to have some consideration and offered all her jewelry and savings in order to buy his freedom, to no avail. As he was being dragged away and he was forced to part with his crying wife, he told his wife and aunt: "Stop pleading with these Jewish traitors who work along the German murderers! Their hands are also full of blood!" Until

this day I feel terribly guilty for having been the one to tell his mother that it was safe to come out of hiding. After he was sent off, he wrote letters to his mother and wife with a special note for me. After I had gone through the camps, I heard that he had been in Markstat in Lower Silesia. After liberation in 1945 I heard that his pure, tortured soul passed out from hunger and cold on an open-car transport that took him in April 1945 to the heart of Germany. May he forgive me for being the innocent messenger to tell his mother the news which the traitorous Jewish Gemeinde spread in order to supply the Germans with young Jewish men.

On Erev Pesach I visited the children and they said that during the night the police showed up looking for our brother Eliezer, who was sleeping with me in the store.

After every *aktzia* there were several days or weeks of relative calm, so we decided to spend Pesach at home with the children. We received a few matzos for each person. I procured some wine, and one of my old-time customers brought me a sack of potatoes. My brother who lived in the village provided us with some goose-fat and he managed to send us a slaughtered goose when he had the opportunity to go to Dombrowa for coals. In those days the things that I just listed that we prepared for Pesach were considered luxuries.

In the house where we lived, we arranged for a *minyan* to *daven* together. All Jews who assembled for *davening* were heartbroken because a few members from every family were missing. The crying during the prayers was like on Yom Kippur night during Tefilas Zakei before Kol Nidrei. After *davening* we all went home, but not in a joyous mood as on previous Pesach nights, with happy children and a happy world that was celebrating spring, when the trees burst forth with greenery and the sun spreads her glorious rays.

When I came home I made Kiddush. With all my emotional energy, I tried to overcome my sadness and lift the children's spirits. I began to say the Haggadah, but the children could not control their tears. "Where is Mama now?" they cried. "Where is our sister Rivkah'la?" I could not control myself anymore and as I continued saying the Haggadah, I was choking on my tears as I cried along with them.

We finished the first part of the Haggadah and began the meal. I was thinking to myself: 'In the present day and age, in this century, when the nations of the world are so cultured and democratic, preaching nice ideas about freedom and equality, why don't we hear them protesting against the atrocities of the German beasts who murder us and our innocent children, mothers, fathers, and elderly grandparents?' Thinking about the nations who are able to help us but are indifferent to our plight made me so angry that I began to shout "*Shefoch Chamoscha* – Pour out Your wrath on the nations..." The children were frightened by my sudden outburst of anger. We finished the Haggadah and told ourselves that good times will surely come, when we will be rewarded with joy for all of the pain we had suffered.

* * *

After Pesach we heard lots of dreadful news from the surrounding towns that were under the jurisdiction of General Frank's government, of which Cracow was the capital. In some of the smaller localities they had gathered the entire Jewish population at the outskirts of town where several large pits had already been prepared. The Germans ordered the Jews to take off all of their clothing, as on the day that they were born, and shot them all down into the pits, which were then covered. Sometimes a few Jews managed to escape, and they reported that the blood-soaked ground would shift, because some of the victims had been buried alive. The Germans wanted to spare bullets. In fact, in some towns the sadistic Germans demanded that the hapless Jews first pay for the bullets that were to be used for their execution.

Day after day we heard terrible reports from various towns. During that time I heard what happened to my cousin Hershel Rottenberg from Myechov. He had a wife and five children, and all of them had to eat, himself included. He had several Polish acquaintances with whom he did some business before the war. One day he walked in the non-Jewish area without the Jewish armband, because Jews were not supposed to

walk where the Poles lived. A car with two Gestapo men passed by and asked him to show his identification. When they saw that he was a Jew, they shot him on the spot. Back in the ghetto his widow and five orphans were left without any source of income.

A few weeks later I received a letter from my cousin Faigel from Djalowitz; her husband's name was Yosef Lefkowitz. They had six children, the oldest was an18-year- old girl and then they had a 17 year old daughter. Before the war broke out they had gone to school. Their former teacher, a young man (*sheigatz*), offered to hide out the two pretty girls. I replied to their letter that if this fellow would not have had sinful, licentious desires he would not have chosen two pretty, young girls. "After satiating his lust he will deliver them to the Germans," I wrote. "It is far better to die as a pure Jewish daughter than to be defiled by the impure goyim and then die in shame and dishonor." There were many instances in which Poles would take large amounts of money to hide out Jewish families in their stables, granaries, barns, basements or underground hiding places. But after a while they would blackmail the hiding Jews and stop giving them food, demanding more money. Or the devout Catholic, who carried a cross on his heart and whose home may have been full of icons of saints, decided to sin with the young wife or daughter. The Pole understood that he had already taken all of the Jew's money, so he figured that he can now fulfill his sinful desires. The poor Jews would plead for mercy and offer their wedding rings or other precious heirloom jewelry that they still had left from their parents. Many times, the Poles would still deliver the Jews to the Gestapo and for each Jew they turned in they received a kilo of sugar or a bottle of schnapps.

We would frequently hear these stories between 1942 and the first day of March 1943, when I was deported. After the war we further heard about what the Poles did to the Jews who were hiding. Only a very small minority acted with some compassion and decency, in return for the money they received.

My cousin Faigel Lefkowitz managed to illegally cross the border with her children and arrive in Sosnowitz. It appeared then as if the situation in our town was somewhat better. We later

found out that her husband Yosef, who was shot down in his leg while crossing the border and had remained behind, was shipped off to perish in Auschwitz.

Some time later, the traitorous agents of the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde announced that we would now be safe because we were needed for the Third Reich, to replace the Germans who were fighting on the frontlines. We were told that the Germans needed us to do lots of work, and there was plenty of work for both men and woman. This meant that the unemployed would receive jobs and become "useful Jews," and we would all receive better rations and foodstuffs. This is the kind of talk that was going around for a while, lifting our spirits and giving us some form of reassurance.

One day it was publicly announced that the leaders of the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde would like to address the Jewish population. They specified a time and place for a large meeting. When I went there, I met many people who had already gathered, and more people were constantly streaming in. We were all hoping to hear a positive report with receive some reassurance that from now on the situation would improve and the Germans would treat the Jews better. We knew that the Germans were suffering heavy losses in battle; I believe they were at Stalingrad at that time. They could no longer report any victories, but only losses.

A large group of people had gathered, including people who I knew and some who I didn't, and they discussed the situation. Someone said that the war was about to end, and he had heard from a German that there was widespread discontent among the population in Germany. There is much opposition against Hitler and a revolution is about to break out in Germany. Many Germans were being arrested, among them high-ranking officers who were then shot to death.

As we stood there speaking, I glanced at my watch and realized that it was ten minutes after the time when the Jewish representatives were supposed to show up. I told this to the group, so they said in jest that the meeting was called according to "Jewish time." But I was very uneasy about this. I left the

place to stroll around a bit, and I went over to my brother who lived only three houses away. Before I entered his home, I heard the sound of marching soldiers, along with rolling wagons. The Germans arrived and encircled the entire gathering place where everyone stood. They loaded the people onto wagons and sent them away.

My brother and I, and my entire family, along with some other acquaintances, then went into the store to spend the night there. We spoke bitterly about the collaboration of our so-called Jewish representatives with Hitler's henchmen. Some of the people said that a Jewish underground had already been established in our region, and we also heard about Jewish rebels in other areas. We had also heard that the Jewish leader of Warsaw, an engineer named Czernikov, stood up to the Gestapo. They had sent off a transport of Jews from Warsaw, supposedly to work, but a long time passed and nobody had heard of them. When the Gestapo returned to Czernikov and commanded him to supply them with another transport of Jews, he asked where the first transport was, since nobody had heard from them. He was told to obey the German command without question. Czernikov already understood that the Jews were being murdered, so he went into the next room and committed suicide.

At the same time, a revolutionary movement was beginning to take shape in the Warsaw ghetto, as well as in other cities. In Czenstrow there were so many murders with tremendous cruelty that a Jewish opposition was founded to fight with the German beasts. This was also taking place in other cities, including Tornow. By us in Sosnowitz-Bendin a Jewish underground was established and many young men from Galicia and the surrounding towns formed armed partisan groups. In those areas they had many forests which served as their cover. They would blow up German military trains or attack small stations of German police or of their Polish accomplices. They would shoot down the Germans and steal their weapons, and take their food as well, carrying everything off to the forests. They had nothing to lose anyway; the Jews who died in these skirmishes at least died honorably, because Germans were also being killed. In Myechov, as the Germans were taking the Jews

to be shot, a valiant Jew ran up to the S.S. chief, pulled out his knife and stabbed him to death.

I met my fiancée each week. One day I opened my store as usual from the back door, because I did not use the front door anymore. As I entered the store, I noticed a letter peeking out from underneath the front door, which someone must have pushed in during the night. I opened the envelope and saw that it had been typed. The letter from my fiancée delivered some bad news: "Uniformed Germans came into our home yesterday and ordered us to leave our home within two hours. We were only allowed to take along a change of clothing; other than that we were not permitted to take anything." She asked me to come visit them, if possible that very night at the new address.

It was impossible for me to go there in the middle of the week; I was employed at a shop in Dombrowa and my younger brother would come along, as it was somewhat safer to be employed at the German shops. Instead, I went to visit her at the regular time that I would see her each week. They welcomed me, but I could see how dejected they looked. They were given a small apartment with a bit of shabby furniture. I tried to lift their spirits by relaying the positive news reports I had heard through the foreign radio that one of my Polish acquaintances secretly owned. I revived them during my visit, and sometimes I spiced up my words with untruths in order to relieve their depressive mood. They had already heard from my own ordeals when the Germans had thrown me out onto the street. I had told them beforehand to remove as many valuables as they could from their home; they started with the money they had saved up and then the jewelry and furs, which they had given me to sell. I brought them lots of money for all of the valuable items I sold on their behalf. They now thanked me for my advice and were grateful for having listened to me. My fiancée's father was a very upright merchant who always dealt with complete honesty.

They asked me to visit them more frequently because whenever I arrived I lifted their spirits. I knew full well that deep within my heart I was just as morose and pessimistic as everyone, but I acted like the fabled sad artist who put on a show of being happy in order to make his audience happy.

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I received a letter from my oldest brother Yerachmiel, my partner, in which he informed me that the German commissioner who was in charge of our property in the village received orders from Cracow to immediately banish the Jewish property owners. They had left to Djalowitz, a small town located 6 kilometers from the village where we had our property. He wrote in his letter that they were living in very tight quarters and were suffering from hunger and unhygienic conditions that endangered their lives. I tried to send them whatever I could through the peasants who came to Dombrowa to pick up coals with their wagons. Occasionally I was able to send along an outfit or set of clothing, or a piece of gold jewelry which they were able to trade with the peasants for foodstuffs. Money had no value then; the peasants did not trust the value of money.

My brother had two children; the oldest was Sara'la and the second one was a boy named Eliezer Yosef. I sent clothing for the children, but the peasants did not always deliver my packages to my brother. Some of these peasants were so inhumane and heartless that they did not even forward these essential items that I sent to the desperate parents and their little children who suffered from hunger, despite the fact that they were paid handsomely to deliver the packages. I would even pay for the coals or clothing that the peasants came to buy. The Polish thugs realized that we had lost our rights and ability to exist. We could not work or do business. We were forbidden from walking through the Arian streets, and we were squeezed together in very tight quarters. We had a special curfew and if a Jew was seen in the street past that time he was shot on the spot.

According to our history, we had lived in Poland together with our Polish hosts for about 1,000 years. We enriched their country with knowledge, culture, business, medicine, and we helped build up Poland. We helped them develop on every level, but they did not repay us with goodness. During this most tragic time, they showed no mercy or compassion towards their former Jewish neighbors. They would sniff out where Jews were hiding, or where Jews had hidden their valuables. When the Germans had already murdered the Jews, except for a handful who managed to hide, the Poles would run to the Gestapo to reveal these hiding places, causing the Jews to be shot immediately.

This is how time went by with me staying in the store for days and weeks. From time to time the Germans would surround a group of houses and whoever was caught was deported, including those who were employed at the German shops, despite the fact that the Germans really needed their work. This proved to us that the Germans' sole aim was to destroy all of us – the "useful" Jews along with those who weren't considered useful.

One day in the summer of 1942, the Germans announced in Mandjev, a small town near Sosnowitz, that all Jews must congregate at a certain place, together with their families. They were told that they will only be counted and their passports will be stamped. Those who would be found later with unstamped passports, or those who would be caught hiding, will be shot immediately. The Jews had no choice and they all showed up on the appointed day at the designated place. The Gestapo arrived and stamped everyone's passports, and then they were all allowed to return home.

The description of the passport-stamping procedure in Mandjev was related to the Jews of the entire area. Many Jews became suspicious and believed that this was a trick of the cunning Germans and their Jewish lackeys to regain the Jews' trust. We weren't the least bit put at ease but continued hiding out in the attics and cellars. I continued to stay in the store together with a group of friends. Sometimes there were as many as fifty people there, including many friends and acquaintances. We spent our nights in fear.

One night a couple spent the night with us. During the night, the husband began to feel very ill, and his wife cried, "Save my husband!" I happened to have a bottle of valerian drops with me and we gave it to him. We also opened the door from underneath so that he should have some fresh air, and we brought him some fresh water to drink. Thankfully, he started to feel better and we were able to close the door.

The next morning we did not return to our homes, because we saw that the streets were full of police who were

carrying off many families. The shouts of the Germans at their hapless victims combined with the wailing of the Jewish families that were being sent away to an unknown destination. We stayed inside all day without any food to eat. I will never forget how all those Jews *davened* in my store with such broken hearts. Most heartbreaking of all was the *davening* of Reb Kalman Aurbach *z"l*, the Jew with whom I had gone to the Magistrate under German guard in September 1939 when we were commanded to report there, and he had told me then that he doesn't know the *viduy* by heart. He now stood with his *tallis* and *tefillin* and poured out his heart and soul in prayer, with so many tears that I cannot even describe the scene!

It is impossible to fully describe the depth of the tragedy that was taking place. His wife and several children of different ages, including a suckling infant, were all there with us. The infant's cries combined with the cries of the older children, as well as with our own sobbing, creating a heartrending cacophony of wails. The situation in our hiding place was just terrible. Our tears stemmed from the depths of despair. We all knew that we had been sentenced to death and we were beseeching the heavens to accept our prayers and our tears and revoke this terrible decree that hovered over our heads.

That week the Germans emptied out the nearby towns that had been annexed to the German Reich, among them the small town of Alkosh where the Chenchiner Rebbe *zt"l* lived. The Jewish leader, Moshe Merin, helped the Rebbe escape to Sosnowitz. The Rebbe, who was over 80 years old, at first refused to escape; he insisted on going along with everyone. His daughter and her family lived in Sosnowitz. On Shabbos I went to *daven* there and sometimes I also went to *daven* Mincha-Maariv. Jews from the surrounding towns and villages whose families had already been deported would come to the Rebbe. The Rebbe would sit deep in though, a sad expression on his face. He appeared like a heavenly figure with his flowing grey-white beard. When Jews came to ask him about their families, he would tell them to light candles; he spoke with such intensity that we were all gripped by fear. The people coming to him would feel heartened and spiritually uplifted despite the fact that the Rebbe would console them by speaking about the greatness of dying *al Kiddush Hashem*. He would remind the people not to be sad but to pray with joy.

One Shabbos after Mincha, during Shalosh Seudos when it was already dark outside, we were singing the *zemer* Bnei Heicholo with a poignant melody. Suddenly the door opened and a woman entered. Her name was Goldberg; she had a visa to Israel from before, which she was now permitted to use for traveling as part of an exchange of residents between England and Germany. She came to take leave of the Rebbe before departing on her trip. The Rebbe told her that all Jews [in Israel] should go to the holy sites and pray for us, because we need lots of heavenly mercy. We all shuddered upon hearing these words, spoken with such seriousness. The Rebbe blessed her and she left. I do not know what happened to this woman, or to other immigrants who were exchanged in this fashion.

Chapter 5

August/September 1942

A public announcement that was posted in the streets ordered all Jewish families, men women and children, to report within a few days at the sports-field on Leshna Street to have their passports stamped. We were strictly warned that no one should remain at home; those who won't show up will be shot upon sight. We all had to be there by eight o'clock in the morning.

During the following days after the announcement was posted, we were beside ourselves with worry. Some people were optimistic, reminding us that in Mandjev, a small town near Sosnowitz, they also assembled the entire Jewish population to stamp their passports, and afterwards everyone was allowed to return home.

The following day we learned that in Bendin, which had a large Jewish population, and in Dombrowa as well, similar announcements were posted. They too were required to report by 8:00 in the morning.

The smarter Jews were pessimistic; they understood that Mandjev had a tiny Jewish population so the Germans let them return home in order to gain the trust of the Jews in three large nearby towns. People were asking each other: "What should we do? Should we report or not?"

I met with my oldest sister and her husband and with my brother. We discussed the new development, and they declared that they will report as required. If I wouldn't have had to worry about my little siblings I would have felt more secure, because I was heading a branch of the shop. I had been informed that the Germans were not up to liquidating their shops just yet. My only issue was what to do in case they held the children. I was in complete turmoil, until I finally decided that if they allow me to go but they keep the children, I would remain behind with them to share their fate.

It is simply impossible to describe the angst and fear that held us in their claws. None of us were able to sleep the night before we were required to report. We were talking in the courtyard, all neighbors together, until I got very tired and went to lie down.

I fell asleep and dreamed that I was walking with the two youngest children, Chanala and Gittele. I was holding their hands, one on my right side and the other on my left side. Suddenly my father z"l approached me and said: "This is how you should hold the children, just like you're holding their hands now." I awoke with the dream fresh in my mind, remembering it clearly.

The sun rose on that fateful day; it seemed as if the day would be a pleasant one. It was erev Rosh Chodesh Elul 1942. We dressed lightly, and I also put on my *sokil* (?). We all got ready to leave, fulfilling the orders of the Gestapo. As we left our apartment I was thinking, 'Who knows if this isn't the beginning of our final journey?'

Thousands of people were streaming through the streets. Entire Jewish families with their elders and little children came out of their homes. Many people dressed well, and grey-haired women dyed their hair to look younger and more labor-ready. Men also took measures to appear young and able-bodied. We all streamed in one direction, until we arrived at the sports-area. There were no sentries and no sign of the police. The area was fenced in with large boards, and we began filling it up, until over twenty thousand Jews were assembled inside.

Some fifteen minutes later we saw that the entire sports-area was guarded by a strong military presence of S.S. soldiers; the fence was completely surrounded from the outside. It was depressing to see that we were in a trap laid out by the Germans and their Jewish underlings who betrayed us. The area was huge, and the people sat down on the ground in resignation and disappointment, feeling betrayed and expecting the worst.

Meanwhile, the skies turned overcast and before long a full-fledged thunderstorm erupted, complete with heavy rains and bolts of lightening. The assembled Jews were all drenched in

minutes as the rain continued without letup. I took off my top jacket and put it on one child, and then removed my regular jacket and put it on another child. I stayed with my shirt, completely drenched. The people who had dyed their hair to appear younger and able-bodied, well – the rain washed off the dye which dripped onto their faces, giving them a terrible appearance. They looked like the chimney cleaners whose faces were smeared with grimy soot.

The gloomy, overcast skies and the rain contributed to the depressive mood. It appeared as if the heavens were crying along with us. We were homeless, without food or clothing, drenched and heartbroken. The children were crying and begging for their beds. Some kids needed to use the bathroom but there were no toilets there. Others got diarrhea from fear, and having no alternative, they had to relieve themselves in these overcrowded conditions. The anguish they felt overweighed their dignity and within a few hours several areas were full of refuse.

I wandered around the place with my family, listening to what the people were saying. From the largest group of people I heard that Moshe Merin, the head of the Judenrat, should have told us openly that he is helpless against the Germans and cannot save us. If he would have said that, we would have taken our lives in our own hands. They argued that Moshe Merin should have done what the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto, the engineer Czarnikov, did when the Gestapo asked him to prepare a second transport of Jews after the first transport was shipped off. He went into a side-room in his office and committed suicide.

It's possible that the Gestapo assured them, and their cronies, that they would remain alive, and for this price they were delivering hundreds and thousands of Jews to be murdered. We had already begun to develop an underground movement between Bendin, Sosnowitz, Dombrowa and the surrounding areas. Some Jews joined the partisans in the woods.

There was another group of frum Jews who claimed that nothing could be done. "This is a heavenly decree, to sanctify Hashem's name!" they said.

I was more inclined with the younger group that included the fighters, who did not want to be led like sheep to the slaughter. I had heard about Jewish partisans who bombed bridges and military convoys that passed on their way to the Russian front. Some of the Jewish partisans fell in battle, but at least they fell honorably and caused the death of many Germans.

Meanwhile, the S.S. prepared a place for the German *Sonderbeaftrag* and for the Gestapo. The *Sonderbeaftrag* was in charge of deciding which Jews were young and able-bodied, or skilled in specific crafts, and should still be used by the Germans until their last drop of blood. The Jews who were not considered fit for labor were sent off by Katchinski, the representative of the *Sonderbeaftrag*, to an unknown destination. "Useful" Jews who had large families were sent to the Gestapo.

There were over twenty thousand Jews and the process started late due to the rain. Night began to fall. I joined a group of Jews and we davened Mincha and Yom Kippur Katan in the open under the pouring rain, which continued non-stop. Only a few paces away were the impure, murderous Germans deciding who should die and who should live temporarily. The day was a Day of Judgment indeed. The crying of the assembled men, women, children and suckling infants is something I simply cannot describe! I cannot convey the depth of the tragedy of the Jews in most parts of Europe, who lived among cultured nations in the twentieth century. In order to fully describe this *churban* we would need a Yirmiyahu Hanavi. There was no help or consolation from any nation in the free world, nor from our own Jewish brothers in the free world.

The night turned dark. I stood with my whole family, including the tired children. I sat down on the wet ground and took a child on my knees and laid her down on my lap. My older sister did the same, and the children fell asleep. That's how we sat until the sun came up.

Our turn arrived to stand in line, where we were to be sentenced to death or temporarily to life. I told my oldest sister Esther to stand with her husband separately from us. I told my eighteen-year-old sister to also stand separately, and then I had

my sixteen-year-old brother Eliezer stand together with a younger sister, fourteen-year-old Hendel. I then took the two youngest children, Chanala and Gittele, one in my right hand and the other in my left hand, just as I had dreamed 24 hours before, when my father z"l told me to hold their hands. I went together with them and prayed to Hashem that the children and I, and the entire family, should be saved, and all Jews should merit salvation.

In front of me stood a woman with six children. The mother and her children were crying desperately. I calmed her down and told her to wipe the tears from their faces, wishing them the best of luck.

My turn arrived. I stood in front of the German beasts and presented my papers which indicated that I was employed at the German firm under Rosner, in Dombrowa. The guy from the *Sonderbeaftrag* questioned me about my skills, and I showed him the documents from the German *burgermeister* in Sosnowitz, which proved that I was the owner of a tailor shop.

"You are free to go," he said.

The Gestapo officer stopped me and asked me where my wife was. I couldn't answer that I was single and that the children's mother had been deported some time before, so I said in reply that I was a tailor chief at Rosner's firm, leading a group of workers. He barked at me:

"*Du dummer kerl* (You stupid nut)! Disappear!"

I was so shocked that I began walking in the wrong direction. The Gestapo officer struck my shoulder with his baton and showed me the door, where I would first have to stamp my passport and those of the children.

When I left the confined place as a free person the children began to cry with relief, and I cried along. It was still raining and it took us half an hour to find our way back. I unlocked the store and took the children into the second room. I gave them fresh clothing to wear and food to eat and drink. I put them to sleep and locked the store behind them as I ran outside looking for the rest of my family.

They released my oldest sister and her husband, and my eighteen-year-old sister Rachel. They did not release my brother Kalman Shlomo with his wife and two boys, nor were my brother Eliezer and my sister Hendel released. I tried contacting various important people among the Jewish representatives, but without success.

Meanwhile, those who were being held were divided into two groups; part of the people was sent to Targova Street and the other part to Kolotaye Street. The Germans filled the emptied houses with men, women and children who were drenched to the core. They were confined in very tight quarters without food or water, and they suffered greatly. I did not know to which place they had taken my family members, so I ran around looking for them, not knowing what to do.

Finally I met a Jewish policeman named Kohn. They were permitted to enter the places where the prisoners were kept. I begged him to take a note to my brother Kalman Shlomo. I quickly wrote a few words: "My dear brother and family! Up until now I worked hard to have you released with your family, but so far without success. I will not rest and I will try to use every connection or opportunity that I will have, to save you and your wife and your dear children. May G-d help me! And if I won't succeed in saving you, *chas v'shalom*, then you should do everything you can from within to escape, because you have nothing to lose."

I wrote the same message to my little brother Eliezer and my little sister Hendel. Several hours later I met the Jewish policeman again and he told me that he delivered my notes into their hands. He informed me that they were in Kolotaye Street, under very difficult conditions. "The people there are heartbroken and pessimistic, and many are crying." He also told me that he heard they were preparing to ship off a transport of the interns to Auschwitz. "It is now Thursday evening and nothing can be done," he said.

I was unable to rest. I ran from one side of the store to the other, back and forth, in deep distress and anguish. On Friday morning I went to some of the important people who had

connections with the Gestapo. I cried and begged them, offering money, all to no avail.

Meanwhile, I met an acquaintance who told me that he heard that my younger brother Eliezer and my sister Hendel had returned home. I ran home immediately and was overjoyed to see them! I took them to the store right away to hide them. They had saved themselves illegally, escaping through the following method:

In the house where they were being kept, several people managed to climb up to the attic above the fourth flour, where they found an opening to the roof. They climbed up to the roof and closed the opening behind them. They stretched out on their bellies, slithering like snakes over the rooftops, until they reached one of the rooftops further away, out of range of the Germans. They found another opening to the attic and climbed in one at a time. They descended the stairs until they were outside in the open!

I gave them their needs in the store and left once more. I wrote a note to my brother telling him of this escape route. I looked up the same Jewish policeman, Kohn, and asked him to deliver the note immediately.

Meanwhile night fell, and there was nothing more to do. I ran around like a trapped animal. On Shabbos I went to the place where my brother and his family were detained. They were under heavy guard, as if they would have been the worst criminals.

Who can describe the scene? There were innocent men, old people and youngsters, mothers and little children including tiny infants. Their only crime was being born Jewish. Inside the houses, the people were dying from hunger and filth and fearing the next moment.

I walked around all over the place, trying to catch sight of my brother and his family. Suddenly, an S.S. officer came over to me and asked me what I was doing there. He suspected that I had escaped from within and demanded to see my passport. I showed it to him, and when he saw that it was stamped by the Gestapo he ordered me to disappear from the place. "If I will see you again I

will arrest you along with the others and then you will be transported to Auschwitz with all of them!" he barked. "And no one will be able to help you."

I left immediately, realizing that by desiring to see my brother I was not helping him, and all I was doing was placing myself in danger.

Shabbos passed without any further progress or success in freeing my relatives. I lay down on a mattress on the floor, thinking feverishly of plans to save my brother and his family. Suddenly I thought of a plan: when I still lived in my apartment, there was a mill there in charge of a German, an important Nazi with many credentials for his activities on behalf of the Nazi Party. He was from Breslow, and he lived there together with his mother and sister. I had already dealt in the past with his mother and sister. I had sold them silverware and fine linens, as well as materials for women's suits and coats. They had paid me well and I often procured essential foodstuffs through them.

I still had in my possession an Omega watch on a golden chain. I couldn't fall asleep due to my anxiousness to act on this idea, and out of fear of losing this last opportunity. We all knew that the transport of doomed captives would be shipped off without delay.

I woke up and *davened* early with great *kavanah*. Immediately after *davening* I went over to them and knocked on their door. Their dog began barking like a lion, and a female voice asked who was at the door. I told her it was me. She asked through the closed door what I wanted, so I said that I came because of something very urgent. It took some time until she opened the door for me. She told me in an annoyed tone of voice that I was disturbing their Sunday rest this early in the day. I apologized profusely and said to her, "We've known each other for some time, and I would occasionally bring you some items to sell. I should have come last week with this pocket watch and the gold chain. I also have a diamond ring to offer. My brother and his wife and children were detained, and now may be the last hour or even minute before they would be transported to Auschwitz. This is what is bringing me to you this early, if you

can please help save my brother and his family. Once again, I ask your forgiveness for this disturbance."

She replied that her brother and mother were away from home for several days. She also told me that all Jews would eventually be killed. "It doesn't pay to work so hard to have them released," she argued, "when a short time later the city would be *Judenrein*." I started to cry and begged her to help me save my brother and his family.

She called a wagon driver, a German, and ordered him to harness two handsome horses to their luxurious coach. She promised to do everything within her power on my behalf.

She dressed elegantly, this young, pretty blond German lady. I left the gold watch with her and told her that when her mother will return from her trip I will bring the diamond ring. I went straight to the street where the Jews were being kept and saw her arriving. Her elegant coach stopped and she went over to the higher-ranking Gestapo officers. Fifteen minutes later I witnessed the Germans leading away masses of men, women and children under heavy guard. The wailing of those who were being sent off on the transport cannot be described. It shattered our hearts. Among the weeping and crying I recognized the voice of R' Shmuel Ahron Pardes z"l. All of us, my father z"l and his sons, *davened* with him since my childhood. I still remember his Mussaf *davening* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, with so much tears! His crying reminded me of all the years that he *davened*. He was now crying for the last time before being led away on his final journey, to be killed *al kiddush Hashem*.

It is estimated that about 60-70 percent of the Jews in the three towns of Sosnowitz, Bendin and Dombrowa were shipped off at that time. May their innocent blood never be forgotten, and may it take revenge on the German murderers and all nations that stood by silently during our suffering.

The Germans also liquidated the hospital, shipping off to Auschwtiz the sick patients, as well as the young mothers with their newborn babies. According to what I know, the S.S. threw the newborn babies through the windows from the second floor,

into the waiting truck. The nurses and some of the doctors joined this ghastly sport.

I was so overcome by what was going on, by the wailing and crying, and I was so heartbroken about the plight of all these people, that I completely forgot why I had come. I asked some of the people about my brother and his family. A woman told me that she saw my sister-in-law and the two boys walking with the other Jews under heavy guard to the transport, but my brother wasn't there. I didn't know if the German lady managed to do something to save my brother and his family.

After the Germans had led all Jews away to the transport, we the bystanders went home. As I was walking, a fellow Jew ran up to me and told me that my brother was looking for me. Several minutes later we met – but he was unrecognizable! He cried bitterly, "Where should I go now? They took away what is dearest to my heart - my dear children and my wife!" He told me that several minutes before the Jews were being sent off, he was called out and his card was stamped. When he asked about his wife and children, all he got was a beating and then he was thrown out of the detaining block.

How could I have consoled him? Who would have been able to console a person in such a situation? They snatched children away from their father; *keracheim av al banim*, a father who takes pity on his children. I myself was extremely depressed. I loved those children dearly, as if I were their father. They were my brother's children; my brother and I looked almost identical and the children took after their father and me.

My brother and I went to my oldest sister Esther and her husband. My sister prepared some food and drinks for us. We tried to console him, to make him feel somewhat better.

Suddenly my brother Eliezer came running in with wonderful news: "Tzurtel and the two children managed to escape the transport during the final moments!" upon hearing this unbelievable piece of news, my brother jumped up with joy. We all followed him as he ran home. When he came home and found his wife and children – well, I cannot describe the joy of the children and their father, my brother! I stayed there for several

hours. He told me that he saw the German lady there and he understood that I had intervened on his behalf, but she couldn't do more than that.

On the following day I met some of the people who were saved from the transport, mostly young people who were employed by the Germans. A girl who worked for me also returned home after being arrested, and there she found the heated oven on which the food was being prepared for when they would return home. Everything remained on the stove, just as her mother had left it in the belief that they would soon return together, but now the house was completely empty. The mother and father, brother and sisters were all gone. Everyone was mourning after their parents and their dear ones. The girl who worked for me told me that after returning home and seeing how everything still stood where her mother had prepared it, she was overcome by such bitter weeping! She was heartbroken over the loss of her mother and father who were sent off to Auschwitz.

At that point, we all knew what Auschwitz meant.

The same thing was going on in all Jewish homes. The S.S. mostly sent off parents and children who were not fit for work and were unemployed. A terrible sadness that cannot even be described overcame the Jewish communities in all of these towns.

It was already getting late when I returned to the store. Underneath the door, I found a letter from my fiancée in which she asked me to come to her parents, who wish to see me.

On the following day I went over to them and told them everything that happened to me and my family. I told them that we managed to save the two youngest children, as well as my brother and his wife and two children who managed to escape. I also told them how my younger brother and sister were saved by slithering on the rooftops. They were amazed to hear all of this and said that Hashem is with me.

Before we were required to report, they had asked me to go with them into hiding by a Christian family, and wait out the *aktzia*. I declined because of my family. They understood that my

efforts to save my family members had cost me lots of money, so they offered to help me out financially if needed. I thanked them but said that I do not need any assistance.

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That's how the days went by. I continued going to Dombrowa with my younger brother. One day I met an acquaintance from Djolowitz, who managed to cross the border illegally, and he told me that my brother Yerachmiel was suffering from hunger. What could I do? Send food with the peasants? They did not forward the packages but took everything for themselves. So it occurred to me to ask this same Jew if he still had family over the border, and if they had money or other valuables. I offered to pay him here, so that his family members back home should give a comparable amount to my brother. This arrangement went on for a while.

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkos went by. The skies were mostly overcast and it rained constantly. Our mood was likewise depressed. A new announcement was posted that a Jewish ghetto was being prepared in Shratzilo, on the outskirts of Sosnowitz. Until then, the area was inhabited by Christians. They were dividing the area into units A, B & C and all working people had to move in there. When it came to the children, they were assigned a tiny room in an attic, with a slanted ceiling.

I hired a horse and wagon and carried out our measly pieces of furniture. There was hardly enough room to set up the wardrobe; I laid out the beds under the low ceiling, where it was impossible to stand. In fact, it was impossible to sit up on the beds. If someone forgot during the night, when it was dark in the room, that the ceiling was coming down so low he banged his head in the ceiling. Some of the things fit into our new quarters, and the rest of things were destroyed outside. I continued living in the store.

Those who remained alive had to eat, so we had to do something to earn money or exchange items for food. If the Germans discovered anyone making such transactions they would arrest his entire family and ship them off to Bendin, where they had a large prison that served as a penitentiary for those who

tried to earn a piece of bread, or those who committed other such crimes. It was considered a serious crime to find a piece of onion or an egg by a Jew, even if those foodstuffs came from the government to the residents of the Third Reich. (After all, our area was annexed to the Third Reich.)

A German-Jewish doctor lived in our area since 1938 or 1939. His name was Kohn and he was known for his excellent skill, besides for his good heart and strict religious observance. On Shabbos he would visit his patients personally by walking to them on foot, and he wouldn't write any prescriptions but would instead visit the pharmacy himself to pick up the necessary medications. He was also arrested and sent to the Bendin prison. The "criminals" from Dombrowa who were caught trying to still their hunger pangs were also sent to Bendin. When the Germans had collected a large group of people they would send them off to Auschwitz. It was said about Doctor Kohn that before the Nierenberg laws were enacted he sold all of his possessions to British citizens; the Gestapo had been searching for him the entire time. When they finally caught him and he was detained with the other Jews, he gave them *chizuk* and boosted their morale, urging them to be proud to be Jews and keep their spirits up. One Shabbos they learned that they would be shipped off on the following morning, on Sunday. They prayed the entire Shabbos and sang *zemiros* together during *shalosh seudos*. Doctor Kohn discussed words of Torah that hinted at the arrival of Moshiach. "We should be cleansing our thoughts and our hearts," he said. "It is a very great privilege to die *al kiddush Hashem*, to atone for the entire Jewish people and hasten the Redemption." The people who were there were extremely uplifted and prepared themselves in holiness. A person who was there and managed to escape described to us all that he had witnessed that Shabbos.

In the small towns and in the ghettos, as well as in the large cities, the Germans' murderous elimination work went on in full swing, with the full participation of the Polish police. In the larger towns they loaded the Jewish families onto transport cars and shipped them off to the gas chambers in Treblinka or to other places. By the time the people arrived at the death camps, many people had already perished on the way from hunger, thirst or suffocation. The old and sick were shot in their homes; the ailing were shot in their beds when the Germans searched the houses and found the suffering people lying there. This is how the annihilation of the Jewish population was being carried out all over Poland.

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One day, around Chanukah time in 1943, I was informed in the street that a Polish peasant was looking for me. When I found him, he gave me a letter from my oldest brother. I read the heartbreaking letter of my refined, wonderful brother and his wife Rivkah, and their two children – the oldest Sarah'la and the younger child Eliezer Yosef. He wrote that on a certain day the S.S. along with the Polish police came in the early morning and surrounded the ghetto in Djolowitz, where the Jews were confined, ordering everyone to gather at a certain place. From that gathering place they led all Jews to the outskirts of the city towards the Jewish cemetery where several large pits had been prepared. The entire Jewish population of the city – children and youngsters, able-bodied adults and elderly people – was shot. My brother, his children and his mother-in-law managed to hide. When night fell, they walked through the byways and returned to the village where we owned our property. They hoped that one of the peasants whom they knew so well for years would help them out, but they had no such luck. So they asked a peasant to come to me in Sosnowitz and request that I send them clothes; he had escaped barefoot and naked, along with the children. The weather was frigid and Sara'la caught a cold; she was coughing and running a fever. His entire family was hiding out in the field, hidden away in a [brodla]. With his last pennies he acquired some bread, and a peasant woman, an acquaintance of theirs, offered them some warm food. They were in extreme danger of being caught, as most Poles would point out the hiding Jews to the Germans, and the Jews were then shot on the spot.

After reading this heartrending letter I was overcome with sadness. I went to my oldest sister and brother and we sat down to think of what to do. To bring them over to us was extremely dangerous. First of all, the border was heavily patrolled by the

Germans and the Polish police. Secondly, we could not register them in our town, and unregistered people who were caught were immediately sent to Auschwitz.

We collected several items to send back to them, such as blankets, sheets, clothing for everyone and money and other valuables. We didn't trust the peasant too much, so we told him that he should discuss the matter with a few other trustworthy village locals and they should take in my brother and his family. We assured him that we will pay for this favor and give them part of our possessions. I also paid him for coming to us with the letter, and gave him additional money to purchase coals. He left us with many promises that he would try his best to do everything on our behalf.

Some time later I got a note from my brother in which he wrote that the peasant told him that on his way back to the village the Germans confiscated everything he had. I had a feeling that this would happen but I had no other choice and had to risk sending the items back with him, in the hope that he would be an exception to the rule and not rob us. Unfortunately, this was not the case; all dogs have the same face and the same nature.

I was utterly broken and my heart was dripping blood about my brother - such a noble, refined young man. He was so good-natured and constantly optimistic, with a good word for everyone. He was the crown of my head. His dear little Sarah'la was named after my mother; she was born in 1933. I used to live with my brother and played with his children from when they were little. I helped care for them and raise them.

I went to sleep in my store, and as I was lying on the couch I remembered my brother Yerachmiel's desperate plight. The couch was soaked with my tears. We humans must be stronger than steel if I was able to bear the pain!

In that same letter my brother informed us that the Germans announced that all Jews who were hiding in the entire area could report voluntarily at Nowi-Radomsk, where employment would be provided for the able-bodied. Otherwise, those who would be sniffed out would be shot immediately. My brother wrote that he decided to report at Nowi-Radomsk. "I

don't have much to lose," he stated, "We are living under such terrible circumstances and risk being caught at every moment. Whatever Hashem will do to us, I will accept with love," he concluded.

This message broke my heart as well. I discussed the issue with many shrewd people and they all gave various opinions, but we couldn't reach a decision about what could be done for my brother. Several days later I received a letter from my brother in Nowi-Radomsk in which he begged us that we should do something to get him out of there because they could see their end coming. My brother's friend attached his own letter as well, to be delivered to his brother-in-law named Tentzer, from whom he requested a reply. He too wanted to be saved from Nowi-Radomsk.

I was inclined to deliver this letter because I wanted to hear what this Tentzer fellow had to say on the matter; he was quite a personality, because whenever there were conflicts in the Sosnowitz community leadership, the *Storosta* (foreman) would assign him as commissioner of the Jewish community. He had a say in all Jewish religious and social problems.

His reply about this issue was that taking them over the border would be impossible, and even if we would somehow bring them over we wouldn't be able to hide them, because all Jews would be required to relocate to the ghetto within several weeks. It would be much too risky. He explained to me that all Jews were doomed and sentenced to death. He told me that we had suffered so much during the past few months, during which three-quarters of the town's population were eliminated. Now they would be holing us up in the ghetto so we should be unable to escape. "It's a matter of days or weeks; we may live a few more weeks or months than our desperate relatives in Nowi-Radomsk," he declared.

My response to Mr. Tentzer was that we should never underestimate the value of a day of life. We Jews live with the constant hope that Hashem can turn everything around in a moment and He can surely save us. Mr. Tentzer was not impressed with my answer and he remained pessimistic.

I wrote back to my brother telling him that we would do everything possible to help him, and he should keep his hopes up. Several days later we heard that the murderous Germans had liquidated Nowi-Radomsk. Some people were sent away and the rest were killed on the spot.

Upon hearing the news, I was utterly heartbroken, but I still hoped that my brother had somehow managed to escape. I waited for a sign of life from him, such as a letter, and each day that passed seemed like a lifetime. Unfortunately, I never again received any letters from my brother, and all my hopes were dashed. I mourned my brother Yerachmiel and his wife Rivkah, their daughter Sara'la and their son Eliezer Yosef. I spent my nights in loneliness in the store, crying my eyes out for them. The same thing happened with my sister and brother, and with the young children; every day the Germans legitimized the people and took some of them away. Most of those who were taken away never returned home.

We Jews went around sad and hopeless, as if waiting for the axe to fall on our heads. We were all worried and frightened, and of course saddened about our close relatives who had been murdered or sent off to an unknown destination.

It was towards the end of December 1942 when the Germans announced that the Jews who still had stores – of which some were open and some were closed – had to surrender the store keys to the German officials. By the first of January 1943, all keys must be submitted. This was a terrible blow for me personally, because whenever I learned about an upcoming *akzia* I hid with my family members and friends in the store. I didn't know what to do; it was obvious that they were tightening the noose around our necks. They wanted to have all of us in one place.

I left the entire store as is, with the furnishings and mirrors, the bedding and everything else, thinking that if worst came to worst I would let myself into the store and hide there. I had a second set of keys for the front and back doors that I still kept for myself.

When I left the store for the last time, I hid the ladder that led to our hiding place and closed off the opening to the hideout that the carpenter had built for me while swearing that it would remain a secret. Many Jews had been hiding out there, and I had thought that I would be able to save all of those people, along with myself and my family, until this terrible war against the Jewish people would finally end.

Three years had already passed from when the hiding place was built. Many Jews who had been hiding out there on and off were no longer alive, and the carpenter was also no longer among the living. Only very few Jews still remained in town.

I bade a quiet farewell to the store, thinking about my brother and partner Yerachmiel, with whom I had discussed everything. I thought of all people who had worked for us and of our Jewish business associates. I looked over the store one more time and then went to give the keys to the Gestapo with a shattered heart. It was then that I understood that Mr. Tentzer was indeed right with his pessimism.

I went to my brother's house, which is where I lived at that time, because he was closer to the place from where I would travel to work. On Shabbos I was in the ghetto. I went to the children and sat with them in their little room in the attic.

At work in Dombrowa, more than half of the Jews were missing and we were unable to work properly. Most of the skilled workers had been taken away during the *auszudlung* - or to speak openly, they were murdered. The production was small and the quality of the labor was very poor. It was obvious to all of us that the shop wouldn't be able to function this way. Each day the number of workers was reduced. We could plainly see that everything was falling apart, and that we weren't needed anymore.

Sometimes the S.S. men would come onto the streetcar and pull some men off to be sent away. Just traveling to work also became dangerous, unlike before when we traveled to work feeling secure that we were useful Jews and none of the Germans would bother us if we showed them our work-papers.

I had a family in Dombrowa whom I knew well. In order to avoid the dangers of the road I sometimes spent the night with them, occasionally even sleeping there for an entire week and coming home only for Shabbos, facing tremendous fear. That's how life continued for us Jews, who were like a flock of sheep among wild tigers and venomous snakes.

I realized that our situation was truly desperate, and that no one who leaves his home can be assured that he would return. When I was with the children, I decided to give them everything I had so they should have the means to live in case I would not return. I sewed a small amount of money into my pants, just in case, and that is all I kept for myself.

One night towards the end of February 1943, as I was sleeping in my brother's home, I had a dream. I saw some S.S. men surrounding me. I managed to escape into a nearby home and I ran up the stairs. Up, up, up I ran, but the stairs collapsed, and I was left with nowhere to go. I couldn't go up, but neither could I go down. At that moment my cousin Shlomo z"l appeared. (He had been killed by the Nazis in 1942 with his entire family, in the town of Miechov.) He helped me come down and told me with a smile: "Have no fear; the Germans will be unable to harm you."

I spent Shabbos with the children. On Friday night we were up until late, sharing memories of the past. We encouraged each other that good times would still come. The reports coming from the Russian front, which was then at Stalingrad, gave us hope that the Germans' end was near. Many transports of heavily wounded German soldiers were being returned from the Russian front, and we no longer heard of any German victories or acquisitions. On the contrary, we kept on hearing that they were being pushed back.

On Shabbos morning we ate together, and once again strengthened each other that the war would soon be over. Mother and Rivka'la, and Yerachmiel and his wife Rivkah and his children Sara'la and Eliezer Yosef would surely come home, along with the other Jews who had been deported. Oh, what joy that would be!

I did not dream that it was my last Shabbos with my dear family.

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That same Shabbos my brother Kalman Shlomo, who still lived in town, came to me and delivered a note that was signed and stamped by the Gestapo. It said that by tomorrow, the first of March, I must report at the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde.

I was inclined to hide out once again, but I still packed my belongings in a small valise and bade the children farewell. I told the older children to take care of the younger ones. We took leave of each other tearfully. As I left them, they followed me with longing in their eyes. After walking for a while I stopped and turned around. I saw them in the distance like small figures. I dropped off my valise at my brother's home and then went to one of my acquaintances who served as the chief of the Jewish police. He was privy to all Gestapo orders. I showed him the paper and he told me that there was nothing he could do, and that I must report. Several hundred Jews received the same type of summons, he informed me. All of them were former entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals. "If you won't report," he told me, showing me the Gestapo order, "they will take one of your brothers or sisters and send them off to Auschwitz."

I went back to my brother and told him, "You should leave your home with your family and stay with your in-laws, because I will not report." I then went to my cousin, planning to hide there, in the hope that I would succeed to evade detection. I stayed there for a while discussing various matters, when suddenly my younger sister appeared and informed me that Kalman Shlomo and his wife were arrested. I took my coat and left my hiding place. I passed my brother's house and saw his two little boys crying outside.

I went to a policeman whom I knew and asked him to go to his chief and tell him not to ship off my brother and sister-in-law in the meantime, because I still must settle a few things and afterwards I will turn myself in. I waited for a response, and he returned to tell me that I can rest assured; nothing will happen to

my brother and his wife during the next few hours. I should take care of whatever needs to be seen to and then I should report. I was assured that upon turning myself in my brother and sister-in-law would be released.

I went to the Rebbe of Chenchin. When I came into the room he was wearing his *tallis* and *tefillin*. I told him what had happened, that I received a command of the Gestapo to report and because I evaded them they arrested my brother and his wife, leaving his two forlorn children crying at home. I had told him beforehand to go to his mother-in-law but he was negligent and therefore he was caught. I also told the Rebbe that I was replacing my father z"l, who left young children alone. Their mother had already been taken away. "What am I supposed to do now?" I asked the Rebbe. "I am afraid that they will now send my brother to Auschwitz. I tried to buy my freedom and tried several other tactics as well, but at this point there is nothing more I could do."

I stood there and waited for the Rebbe's response. The Rebbe was engrossed in thought for several minutes. Then he gave me his hand as if taking his leave and said to me: "*Fahr l'chaim ul'shalom* (Go in life and peace). Hashem will help you that you will live to see *simchas Yisroel* (the joy of the Jewish people)."

I left with the understanding that the Rebbe agrees that it is my duty to report to the Gestapo. My heart was light and full of hope from the Rebbe's blessing.

Afterwards I went to visit my *kallah*. When I arrived, I told the family that I came to bid them farewell. They sat in fearful silence, and then they began to cry. I told them that Hashem will help and we will all see each other in more joyous times. I bade farewell to the parents, who blessed me that I should return home healthy and well, and they should be *zoche* to walk us, their children, to the *chuppah*.

My *kallah* walked me out and told me that she will try to look after the children. I was deeply touched by her words. "Why didn't you introduce me to them, and to their mother, while she was still here?" she asked. "What a shame that I never got to

know them." I explained to her that I feared that the children would worry about me leaving them, and therefore I did not inform them of our engagement. I assured her that our engagement was a source of great comfort to me and our relationship helped me endure these years of suffering. "Thinking of you will boost my spirits wherever I will be," I said. "May these difficult times disappear quickly and may we all be freed. We will then be reunited forever and build our lives together." She was moved to tears and told me that my words of encouragement and kind deeds inspired her greatly. "I hope to follow in your ways," she said emotionally. "It would be my greatest joy to share my life with you. These times are extremely difficult for our people," she continued. "The world thinks that the German nation is a cultured nation, yet they established a theory of anti-Semitism and spread murderous hatred among the other nations as well, inciting them to torture and kill Jews. This makes me think that this is not a historical coincidence; it is a supernatural occurrence. Now, before we bid each other farewell, I want to remind you what we discussed during our second meeting, when you told me your life-story. You shared with me how your late father was sick with typhus and the doctor told your mother that there wasn't anything he could do, because your father had reached the crisis point. The crisis is the peak of the illness, when it is determined whether the patient will live or die. Your mother cried and begged Hashem that if it was destined for your father to be taken away from this world, then Hashem should take her instead.

"I ask the same thing now from Hashem," she said. "If it is *chas v'shalom* destined that I should not see you again, I pray that it should be the other way around instead; my life wouldn't be worth living without you. You suffered a lot from when you were young and now you also suffer more than other people. May Hashem help you wherever you will go."

I begged her tearfully not to speak this way and asked her not to cry. I said words of encouragement to her, urging her to keep her spirits up and lift the spirits of her parents. I told her to believe in the downfall of the Germans and that we Jews will survive them and rejoice in freedom.

"My brother and his wife are in danger of being sent off to Auschwitz," I told her, "and their two young children will be left alone. I must report to the Gestapo immediately." With these words we hastily took leave of each other. As I walked away I kept glancing back and saw her standing as if rooted to the ground, wiping her tears. When I had walked quite far I turned around one last time and saw that she was still standing there.

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I arrived at the place where my brother was being held, not realizing that my face was streaked with tears. I went over to a Jewish policeman I knew, who was in charge of my brother. I told him that I was turning myself in, and he should please release my brother, but I first want to bid him farewell. Within a few minutes they brought my brother and his wife. As soon as they saw me they started to weep.

"Please forgive us," they cried. "Because of us you are being taken away!"

I asked them to look after the children; they promised me they will. I told them to go home to their children, and we said an emotional, brotherly farewell under extremely tragic circumstances. We cried and wished each other that we should see each other in freedom.

They left, and I was escorted to the place where the other Jews were being held. I found there many people whom I knew. Some of them were optimistic, believing that we were being taken to work at a labor camp. They discussed several issues while I went to a corner and cried for the children who were left alone and for the sad farewell with my *kallah*. I was heartbroken that I had to leave her there sad and crying, because of my fear for my brother's safety.

Some of my friends came over to me and told me, "Lazerowitz, don't be so sad! We are all in the same situation. Let us not lose hope; we must be strong and full of courage, and be hopeful that we will outlive the German murderers."

They didn't let me sit there in sadness and isolation. Some of the friends and family members of the detainees brought them

food, and they shared the food with each other. I had no appetite after all that just happened and nothing was able to lift my spirits. None of their words of consolations were able to dispel the gloom that enveloped me.

Meanwhile several hundred men had already been collected. A uniform-clad German officer arrived and began calling out our names. We had to respond to our names, and then we were taken out and lined up in rows of three. Behind us were heavily armed German soldiers guarding our every move. I could see the children of my father's house in the distance, and I also saw my fiancée who appeared pale and sad. They were not permitted to come closer to us as we were marched away. We passed the house where my brother and his family lived. I saw my brother and he called out to me: "Go *gezunterheit* (in good health), and come home in good health!"

That was the last time that I saw my brother or heard his voice.

We were taken to Old-Sosnowtza where they had a gathering place. We arrived at a certain building when it was already nightfall. They opened the door for us; the building was completely dark inside. The place was already crowded with people. We couldn't see where we were going because the people were spread out on the floor. We crammed in among the others in great discomfort. There was no air to breath, and we said to each other: "If this is our first welcome in this horrible place, who knows what else awaits us at the hands of the Germans?"

Chapter 6

Suddenly I heard one of the old inmates call me, "Moshke!"

"Who is calling my name?" I asked.

"It's me, Hershel," came the reply. "Come here."

I followed his voice in the dark, excusing myself to the people who were lying on the floor in my way, until I finally reached him. I was very curious to meet him. His brother Yosef Lefkowitz was my brother Yerachmiel's brother-in-law; their wives were sisters.

He told me that he managed to cross the border and reach a distantly related family named Richter. Richter had received an order to report to the Gestapo, while Lefkowitz had no personal documents and was unable to show his face in the street, because the Germans kept tabs on the legitimacy of each person. He therefore reported himself to the Germans in place of his relative Richter, and he told me to be careful and not forget to call him by this name.

He also brought me a report of the Djolowitz ghetto and of my brother Yerachmiel. He told me the tragic story of how his parents and sister were killed, and how he saved himself and managed to get here.

I didn't want to tell him that his brother Yosef was shot from behind as he was crossing the border, and that he was wounded and sent to the crematoriums in Auschwitz. We chatted for a while and agreed to stick together. After all, we were childhood friends. His family owned a farm next to our family's, and his father and my uncle were partners in a forestry business. They would make boards out of the trees, as well as export the trees out of the country. He was a bookkeeper and was engaged to be married to Esther Davinsky from Djolowitz; her family had a mill and supplied electricity to the entire area. His *kallah* was my cousin, so we were related from all sides and from all times.

We both eventually fell asleep. It was impossible to know how long we slept because it was still dark when we heard the Germans command us to get up. The sun was beginning to rise. They brought some lights in and we quickly got dressed. I was able to get dressed so quickly because of the time I served in the Polish army. We washed outside with cold water and ate something, and then we were shoved outside and told to line up according to the precise German instructions. A while later, a group of German civilian factory workers arrived and selected 100 men to work at a factory in Upper-Lodgzisk, which is in Upper Silesian. My friend from Djolowitz and I were both selected among these 100 men.

We were later allowed to return to the building where we had slept the night before. We were able to see through the window countless women and children who came to see their dear ones, their fathers, husbands or brothers. We weren't permitted to open the window.

I recognized among the children my young sisters and also my *kallah*. I do not know if they saw me, and I certainly didn't fathom that I was seeing all of them for the very last time.

Tears sprang to my eyes as I thought about the defenseless children who were left without anyone to look after them. I observed my *kallah* from the window and gazed at her for a long time. I thought about our engagement and the tragedy of our separation. I remembered the words she said the day before when we bade farewell to each other; how she was praying to Hashem that I should survive. Just like my mother offered to take my father's place when his time came to leave this world, she told me that she would give her life for me.

I wept out of despair, thinking about my loneliness as an orphan and how I dreamed of the time when I would finally build my own family. How tragic that my joy was short lived! I prayed that Hashem should have mercy on us, that we should all be saved and merit returning home in good health.

When night fell, we were ordered to go downstairs. We were lined up and led to the train station under heavy guard. As we were being marched away through the streets, I remembered

that in one of the houses that we passed on our way lived my cousin, and in the other house lived my friend's parents. They had already been deported a long time before. The entire way I was thinking about the people who lived in those houses, which I passed each Shabbos.

We arrived at the Warsaw-Viener station, which was in the center of Sosnowtza, not far from our store. I recalled how I walked my brother Yerachmiel to the station one summer many years before, when he went to meet his *kallah* on the farm in Gluzu. Later on we became partners in the business. I remembered how the station was bustling with Jews – businessmen and laborers were traveling from one town to the other. Salespeople, girls who lived in Bendin and worked in Sosnowtza and vice versa, filled up the station. It was *heimish*, full of Jews. Today, no Jews were in sight. Since 1940 it was forbidden for Jews to come to this station. Besides, at this point there were barely any Jews left at all.

As we stood there waiting for the train to Katowitz to arrive, I was thinking, 'May Hashem help that we should all return home as free men, and those who were sent away long ago should also return in freedom. If only everything would return to the way things were in the past, and these few years of suffering would be looked back to as no more than a terrible nightmare!'

The train arrived, we were ordered aboard the passenger cars, and the train began to head towards Katowitz. In Katowitz we disembarked and waited for a connecting rain, which was supposed to take us to Lower-Silesia. We traveled for some time, until the train stopped in a place called Gogolin. At that stop the 100 men, including myself, alighted and were sent to Otmund, not far from Breslow. We marched for many kilometers, until we finally arrived during the early dawn. The remaining several hundred Jews who were with us on the train remained in Gogolin.

In Otmund we saw people going to work. There were Jews from Holland and France who worked to construct barracks. I met a few young men from Sosnowitz; one of them immediately offered to take me along to work the next day. He was a foreman named Tenenbaum; this fellow wasn't known as the most refined young man back home. The other person was Moshe Bornstein; his brother was my good friend during our childhood years. He came from a fine family. He told me to come after work to his block.

That day we didn't work. The Jewish supervisor was a nice Jewish man from Vienna. We were told to cut out a Star of David from our coats. I turned to the Jewish supervisor and told him that I cannot make the Star of David by cutting the fabric because I had a fine new coat. On the one hand he was pleased that we were hopeful enough to care about our clothing, which we then thought we would need after liberation. But he added sadly that we should only live to be fee men and then we would worry about getting new clothes...

That same day we received 25 *deko* of coarse bread and a liter of soup made from unpeeled potatoes and red beets. When we tasted it we realized that it was full of sand from the unwashed potatoes. Some of the Jews from Holland, who were very skilled and professional artists, requested from us that if we couldn't eat the soup we should give it to them, and as payment they would draw by hand a portrait of the person who gave them the soup. It was painful to see these people – among them the most aristocratic Jewish intelligentsia of Holland - so desperately hungry. They told us that when they first arrived they were unable to eat the food for two days, but eventually they got used to the food; they had no choice, because their hunger pangs were a constant torture. "You newcomers will also learn to eat," they said, "but meanwhile give us the food instead of spilling it out."

Afterwards I went to my landsman Moshe Bornstein. He received somewhat better food and he shared it with me. I thanked him, and he replied: "With the fine manners you brought along from home you won't survive here for too long. In this place it is life or death. Remove your 'shame' hat; whatever you are given to eat you shall eat. Life here is harsh. Don't be embarrassed and take whatever you can, and then you may survive the cruel existence in the camps."

I told him that on the following day I will send my friend Hershel Richter to him, and if he will have anything to give him he should share it with him.

The following morning, Mr. Tenenbaum took me along with his labor group. He gave me a hammer and other tools and with these items in hand I walked around the new barrack on my first day of work, quite pleased. The next day I did the same thing, but suddenly a rifle-bearing guard who supervised the area walked up to me and said, "I was here on duty yesterday as well, and you were here too. I see that you're a newcomer but you're not working." He then told me that it doesn't make a difference to him whether I work or don't work, but I should be careful not to be caught by the Jewish foreman or he will beat me to death. "He's done it to other inmates, beating them to death," he added.

It was strange to hear from a German guard that I must watch out from the Jewish foreman; I simply couldn't understand it. I continued talking to the guard and he told me that he fought on the Russian front. He was wounded and lay in the hospital for a while. After being discharged he was assigned as a guard in a Jewish labor camp.

On the following day I asked Tenenbaum to give me some work to do, so that I should work together with everyone else. "Why do you ask for work?" he wanted to know. "I am bored from doing nothing all day," was my reply. The next day I was assigned some work and I saw first hand how he treated his hungry, suffering Jewish brothers. He shouted at them and beat them at work.

The following day I went to work for Moshe Bornstein. Although the work was physically more difficult, I was more content working there. After working there for 16 days we were notified that the 100 men should not go to work on the following day, because we will be taken to Upper-Lodzisk, where we had originally been assigned to work.

Before we were marched away to the station I managed to tell Tenenbaum that he should be careful about what he's doing to his own brothers. "If you will manage to survive, and some of your victims will survive, how will you show your face to them?"

Shortly before we were led away, a girl came out of the kitchen carrying a small package that contained two pieces of bread and some cheese. She gave me the package and explained that her sister worked for me as a salesgirl. I thanked her, and then we were marched away towards the station.

We boarded the train that took us to Glawitz, from there to Katowitz, and from there to Upper-Lodzisk. When we arrived at the labor camp we were counted; we were the first 100 Jews in the camp. The camp-commander spoke to us, telling us that we will be expected to work and accomplish our duties, and if we will be lazy we will be punished harshly. He immediately selected chiefs for each room, as well as foremen at work, and then we were taken to the blocks. We were each assigned a bed to sleep on; there were two bunks one on top of the other. I took the top bed. The beds had fresh straw and military blankets. Sometime later we were apportioned one kilo of bread per three people, and we had to share the food.

On the following morning we stood in line at the *appel* (roll-call) place, where we were counted and divided into separate groups of 10, 30, 40, and 20 in each group. We were then marched off to the worksite, a half-hour walk from the barracks. I was in the group of 40 laborers, and our job was to load the freight cars with bricks. A row of people stood near piles of bricks, spaced several meters apart, in a continuous line that reached the freight cars. The first person threw the brick to the next person, who threw it to the next person, until the last person threw it to the people who loaded the cars. The bricks flew with such speed as if a machine was doing the work! After a day's work we were exhausted to the bone, and hardly had the strength to walk back to the camp. Our skin was badly scraped and many people had bleeding wounds. Later on some people received gloves.

Upon arriving back at camp we were counted again. We washed up and stood in line with our tin bowls that held a liter or a quart of soup. Each of us received some soup which was called *vitlokes*; it was made from a type of *korpiales* that had little nutritional value, along with pieces of unpeeled potatoes. This was our lunch, and of course we were starved – we always

remained hungry. I was unable to make any connections with others to buy additional food, although I had some money.

This was the daily routine for us Jewish laborers.

There was a certain fellow there named Blatt, a very refined religious young man. One day he worked near a large pile of bricks that was several meters high. Instead of climbing up on the pile, he stood on the ground and took the bricks from there. I told him, "Blatt, you shouldn't do that! When you take the bricks from underneath, going deeper into the pile, you are placing yourself in danger. The entire pile of bricks can topple over your head and bury you underneath."

"What's the difference?" he countered. "It is anyway too hard for me to live this life."

Suddenly the German supervisor came over to him and shouted, "*Du dummer kerl*! (You stupid nut!) I don't care if you get killed, but some of the bricks may break if you cause them to fall!"

This is how we worked day after day. In our camp there were many Jews from Mandjev, a town next to Sosnowitz. One of them was a tailor named Felbaum who did some work for one of our German superiors by sewing him a suit. One Sunday he came over to me in my barrack telling me that he was tailoring a suit, and he asked if I could help him. I told him that on Sunday was my chance to wash up for the entire week. He threatened me that he would tell the German commander that I refused to help him. His threatening tone had the opposite effect and I refused to comply with his request. A fellow named Diamant, from Mandjev, came over to me and told me quietly that I should watch out from that person because back home in Mandjev he was a member of the Judenrat and he cooperated with the Germans against his Jewish brothers. I relented and went over to help him. He already had other work to do as well, and I saw that he had some food sitting in his work-corner. I was there for several hours, completing the job he gave me. Several days later I saw him taking the finished suit to the officer and returning with a kilo of bread and a few cigarettes. I told him that I deserve part of his payment, but he simply refused to share it.

Several days before Pesach he was once again commanded to tailor a suit. Once again he asked me to help him and I refused. Again he threatened me, but this time I disregarded his warning. "You can do whatever you want," I said "I have no stomach for this. You will be punished for your callousness; G-d is patient when it comes to exacting retribution."

Pesach arrived and I decided not to eat bread during Yom Tov. One of the people in my room told me that he will bring me a few potatoes each day. When we came back from work, we washed up, then sat down and began to say the Haggadah. We had no matzos or wine, and no family around us; we were broken and despondent as we said the Haggadah. We shed many tears over the tragic happenings.

After finishing the Haggadah I had to serve guard duty on the night-shift. My job was to guard the camp to prevent people from trying to escape. They added this security position because several days before someone escaped by cutting through the barbed wires. He worked quietly and skillfully and went completely unnoticed by the guard. After this incident, the Germans decided that we, the Jewish inmates, would be responsible for each other and would have guard duty each night.

As I stood on duty, I heard a Jew from Holland singing the song '*echad mi yodea*' with a beautiful melody. Several days before they had brought another 100 Jews to our camp, most of them from Poland; this Jew from Holland was among that group. His melody brought me back to the good times, when we celebrated Yom Tov surrounded by our dear family, my beloved brothers and sisters. Oh, how happy we had been! I thought about the children and worried about them. (Several Jews from the camp searched for a Pole who would be able to go to Sosnowitz to bring back some news about our family members and deliver letters to them.)

My shift ended and I returned to the barracks. I slept for what was left of the night and then woke up to go to work just like every day. In the morning, a Silesian worker came over to me and asked in Polish-accented German if I had a shirt to sell him. "What can you offer me?" I asked. "I have money or food,"

was his reply. I told him that I need the food, so he said that he had four hard boiled eggs, a bottle of milk and several kilo of potatoes. I asked him to roast two kilo of potatoes. He told me where he will place the food. At noontime we had a half-hour lunch break, so I went to the pre-arranged place with a fellow Jew and we ate the potatoes together. That day I was sated for the first time since I arrived at the camp.

*

On the following morning when we stood in the *appel* place for roll call, the German commander walked over to Felbaum the tailor. "What happened with that job that I gave you?" he demanded. "You promised to have it ready by yesterday and it's still not done. I stuff you with food and you are not reliable!" He gave him two ringing slaps and ordered him to bring out the unfinished suit. He then asked who else was a tailor. I didn't speak up, but several people pointed at me, so he ordered me to step out. He told everyone to march off to work, and he took me to a new barrack that had only recently been built. There was a table and fresh straw in the corner. I told him that I would need to measure him in order to sew him a white summer jacket. I took his measurements and wrote everything down. I then asked him to bring his medals. He left, and I took out my *siddur* to *daven* and recite Hallel. The wife of the Jewish supervisor, who was from a very religious home, brought me some potato soup with several floating potato pieces. I ate the soup and relieved my hunger pangs.

I started to work on the Jacket. I wasn't really qualified for this type of work, but I sewed him the jacket and embroidered his military rank and other symbols onto the lapels. When he came and tried it one he was pleasantly surprised with my work and exclaimed, "*Du bizt zo ein gutter fachman!* (You have such fine skill!) I did not expect such a favorable reaction. He asked why others had to point out that I was a tailor, so I told him that while I had two diplomas, one from Paris and the other from Katowitz, my specialty was sewing fine women's coats and model costumes. He gave me several cigarettes and promised to compensate me well. I finished sewing the jacket and pressed it nicely. By three o'clock he returned and took the jacket. He told

me to rest, thanked me and left with many promises. I went to lie down and catch some sleep.

My friend with whom I ate the potatoes the day before told the Silesian fellow that I was detained for the day, and I will bring him the shirt on the following day. He then brought back a bottle of milk, four eggs and some more roasted potatoes. I took two of the eggs and a cup of milk to the wife of the Jewish supervisor. They thanked me profusely. I shared the rest of the food with the same friend who ate with me the day before. On the following day I took the shirt with me to work, and the Silesian was most pleased. He brought me each day of Pesach eggs, milk and potatoes. I took this as a sign from Heaven, and each day I became more committed to keeping the *mitzvos* in that hell. I started to wake up a bit earlier each day to put on *tefillin*.

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Two days later the German commander sent the Jewish supervisor to me with a message that I should come to his office. I passed the guards who kept watch around the wire fence that surrounded us; they already knew that I should be permitted to go to the commander. When I arrived at his office I stood at attention like a soldier, greeted him, and reported in military fashion: "I stand to order, *Herr Vach-hobender*!" He smiled, and showed me that he had prepared a kilo of bread for me. I thought to myself that if only he would have given me the bread three days later I would have benefited from it, but now I would lose out. I took the prepared jar of marmalade and a few small pieces of cheese, and thanked him heartily. I took all foodstuffs to my room and told the supervisor of our room that he should distribute the bread among those who were weak and couldn't get by without *chometz*.

Several days later I stood at the *appel* place in the morning among the other groups of laborers. The workers who comprised the smallest group of ten laborers constantly complained that they worked under very harsh conditions. The work was extremely difficult and they were frequently beaten, and nothing could be done to improve the situation. All ten laborers were from Mandjev.

That day, one of the regular workers was unable to join his group and he remained behind in the camp. I don't remember what the reason was, if he was sick or something else. The guard came over to me and took me out of my group, ordering me to go along with the other nine men to their place of work. I tried to object, but it was getting late and he forced me to go along with them. I started to walk to my new job feeling very frightened, but there was nothing I could do. I tried calming myself down with the thought that Hashem would surely be with me in that horrible place as well. The work that I did until then was extremely difficult, so how much worse could it get? I walked along with my new workmates thinking that I didn't have much to lose anyway.

I arrived at the factory and saw that there were many prisoners of various nationalities. There were Russian, British, and French inmates. German foremen went around and selected any number of workers that they needed. A tall German with a red swastika on his arm told me to follow him to his department. The other people were sent to different places.

I was taken to a place where a Swiss company was building an electric-station out of steel and cement. When the cement walls dried the wood beams had to be removed from around the cement. I was ordered to carry the beams up to the next floor. I had to carry each beam on my shoulders, keeping them exactly centered so that the weight should be perfectly balanced on each side. I had to carry these boulders over a large heap of wood, about one meter high, with extreme care.

The first time that I tried carrying such a boulder I was very frightened. The German guard who made sure that we were working properly saw that I wasn't working fast enough. As the guard observed me, the tall German who picked me out yelled at me: "You lazy Jude! If you will be lazy you will be sent to Auschwitz!"

I broke out in a cold sweat and began working with every ounce of strength that I could muster. By twelve noon we had a ten-minute lunch break and everyone stopped to eat. Afterwards, the tall German with the swastika on his arm came over to me

and asked if I had what to eat. Then he asked me what my profession was at home. I didn't tell him that I was a businessman, but instead chose to tell him that I was a tailor and that I try to do my work well. He apologized for yelling at me and threatening me that I would be sent to Auschwitz. "The German guard who supervised you is an evil person and I had to yell at you," he said. He promised to give me an easier job the following day, out of sight of that guard. Then he said, "Go to the right; I prepared some bread for you." Then he was gone.

I went to the place where he had indicated and I found two large pieces of bread spread with butter wrapped up in newspaper. The food and the German's words of appeasement filled me with hope.

When we returned to the camp, they conducted a search on everyone and confiscated whatever they found, including all food and money, and some people were beaten. I had sewn 500 marks into my clothing; thankfully they didn't find it.

The following day I was given an easier job in the building that was under construction, where I wasn't closely supervised. I was required to cut wires to a certain measurement and then carry the wires to the workers who tightened the beams before pouring the cement. During our noon break, the German came over to me with the same package of bread. He told me that he owned a small farm, and that he wasn't a supporter of the Nazis and Hitler's gangs. "I listen to the foreign radio and I know that Hitler is losing the war," he said. I was careful not to say anything, although I felt that he was sincere. He explained that he had to wear the swastika or they would have harassed him and his large family. I decided to give him the 500 marks in my possession. At first he refused to take it, telling me to keep my money. I told him that back in the camp I had many comrades who suffered from hunger, and asked him if he could bring us food from time to time. He promised to do so.

The next day he brought me two kilos of bread, two packages of butter and two packs of cigarettes. I wrapped everything in my sack, and hid the cigarettes deep in my socks. I

sliced the bread and spread one pack of butter on the slices. I spread out the slices among my suit pockets.

On our way back to the camp we passed the guards, but this time they didn't search us, because the day before they had confiscated all our things.

There was a young man from Sosnowitz named Yeshaya Manelo, who owned the Sosnowitz Mikvah. He was caught off the street and was not allowed to return home in order to collect his things, so he arrived here without anything at all. He was suffering terribly, so I gave him some of the bread that the German gave me. I also shared the food with Hershel Richter, my brother's brother-in-law's brother, as well as with a few other suffering people. Every day I would bring back some food and share it with the needy inmates.

Several days later I learned that all of our items, such as suits and clothing, would be confiscated. We will only be permitted to keep one suit, two shirts, one pair of shoes and one sweater (?) for the winter. I discussed the issue with two close friends, Manelo and Richter, and with their consent I carried out to work a few items of clothing each day and gave it to the German so that he should hold it for us. In this manner I managed to take out everything.

A few days later, when I returned to camp after work, I heard that my friend Hershel Richter broke his leg at work due to a mishap in which a heavy iron rod fell on him. I immediately went to visit him in the infirmary, and found him crying. He was desperately afraid for his life, because every few days the Germans would drive around the camp in closed trucks, load up the sick people and take them away to Auschwitz. I brought a pack of cigarettes and some butter as a bribe for the doctor. He was very pleased with the gifts I brought and told us that the foot must be cast in two places; it would then take a long time to heal. "I will try my best to do it, although I don't have the required instruments and medicine." He said that when the truck comes around and they take the sick people, he can sometimes tell them about a patient that his condition will pass, and that the patient is a good worker who is otherwise healthy. This way he can sometimes buy some more time. "They were just here two days ago, and they usually come by every two weeks, so hopefully all will be well," he said. The Doctor was an assimilated Jew from Warsaw named Sochotzolski.

Several days later the German commander sent for me. When I arrived at his home there was a woman next to him holding a coat. The coat wasn't her size, and she asked me what I could do to make it fit her. I told her that I can make it look beautiful on her but I would need a sewing machine and a matching color thread.

Two days later the commander told me to remain in the camp, and then he took me to his home. I worked there for two days, and he and his wife both agreed that I deserved a special reward for my excellent work. So I told them the story of my friend and relative who broke his leg, and that I was afraid that he would be sent to Auschwitz. I cried to him, and he calmed me down. He promised me that no harm would befall my friend who was wounded at work. His wife also said a few kind words, asking her husband to help him out. Before leaving, she gave me bread and a small piece of salami; for my sick friend she gave an additional package of butter and white bread. I thanked her, and he went with me back to the camp. I took the food to my sick friend and told him and the doctor all that happened, and about the promise I received. When my friend heard this he started to weep from joy. "I am assigned as the doctor here," the doctor said, "but your influence is greater than mine, because you found favor in the eyes of the chief commander and his wife."

Some time passed and the Auschwitz agents came to the infirmary. They found Hershel there and asked him how he was feeling. He replied that he was doing much better. They didn't even talk to the doctor, because the commander already told them to leave the patient alone, so they left. Time passed and the foot began to heal. He was allowed to step off the bed with a cane each day. One day the commander appeared and told the doctor that on the following day by 11 o'clock he should make sure that Richter was outside, fully dressed, holding a spade in his hand as if working in the garden. This is what they did each time [the agents came], and they found the infirmary empty. When they

left, Richter returned to the infirmary. All went well, until he was completely healed. The commander then decided to assign him a real job as camp gardener; he knew a lot about gardening because they had a farm back home.

At the place where I worked things were going well. Every day I managed to bring back some food and shared it with Manelo. He told me that a Silesian-German whom he met at work promised to go to Sosnowtza and try to make contact with his family. The fellow succeeded in making contact with them and he brought back money and clothing. Manelo gave me 1500 marks as payment for all of the food that I gave him until then, and also for the food that I would bring in the future.

I immediately gave 1000 mark to the German and sewed the remaining 500 mark into my pants. This is how it went. I received food and brought it back with me. I had given the German enough money and clothes that he owed me food for a couple of years, so I asked him to bring food for all of the ten laborers in our group. I told my fellow workers where they should pick up the food at noon; among them was the tailor Felbaum. We ate together every day and were sated, which was a rarity in the camps. Each day, they brought back some of the food to distribute among the hungry inmates.

Among the ten people in our group was a fellow named Gutberg, a craftsman. He was jealous of me, even though he also ate along with us. One day I came to the factory, which was as big as a large city, and I was assigned to work at a different place. I couldn't know what happened at the other end of the factory where my workmates had gone; I only met up with the other people in my group at night. They were all unusually silent that day and I understood that there was some conspiracy going on against me, either by the tailor Felbaum or Gutberg. I could have gone to the commander and used my connection with him to get to the bottom of things, but he would have harmed them and I didn't want to do that.

Several days later I met "my" German and he asked me if I was feeling better. "I wasn't sick," was my reply. He was most surprised and told me that my fellow workmates had told him that I was sick, and that I had asked them to take the food from him and bring it back with them to camp for me to eat.

Now I understood everything that Gutberg and Felbaum did, and the others were forced to keep quiet. On the following day the German waited for me and immediately took me to work for him. I asked him to take the others as well; I wanted to ignore and forget the whole incident. I decided that if they deserved to be repaid for their deeds, it shouldn't come about through me. I shared my food with them each day and took back food with me to camp; several people survived on the food that I brought them.

Some time later our group was taken, together with a few other Jews, to a factory with very harsh working conditions. The factory developed various chemicals for the war effort, and our job was to clean up the waste. The fumes were terrible, and some of the people came down with hepatitis. I also no longer received any food from the German. He came by occasionally and left a package for me, but he had to be careful to go unnoticed. I started to suffer from hunger.

A group of Jews from the camp discussed the possibility of sending someone to our hometown and bring back news from our families. A Silesian Pole promised to travel on Sunday for a good price. I prepared two letters, one for my father's family and the other one for my *kallah*.

On Monday he returned with letters from the children. The children wrote that my oldest sister was living with them and that my older brother Kalman Shlomo and his family were also in the ghetto. All Jews from Sosnowitz were already in the Shratzila Ghetto. They were crowded together under horrible conditions. Each apartment was crammed with many families. They wanted to send me food, but the Pole didn't want to take it with him. I did not receive a letter from my *kallah* because he couldn't find her at the address I had given him.

The letter I received from my family was written with love and yearning. Even the little ones, Chanala and Gittele, signed their names. I hid the letter among the cracks in the wood ceiling, because it was too dangerous to keep it in my valise

among my other belongings. We were not permitted to have any connection to the outside world.

Several days later, when we returned from work and were counted, they read to us letters of regards from home. Among other letters, they had a letter from my brother Eliezer who wrote that he was in a camp in Korvin in Lower-Silesia. The letters were arranged through the intervention of the Jewish Cultus Gemeinde. We responded to those letters by sending our best regards and assuring our loved ones that we were in the best of health. The fact that we were suffering was not something we could mention. Besides, we didn't write the letters ourselves; the German agents wrote the messages in our names.

Some time passed, and once again we received regards from home. I too received regards from my family and from my *kallah* as well. I now understood that my *kallah* and her family were in the ghetto; during my previous attempt to contact them they must have been hiding with a Polish family, but now they were together with all of the other Jews. I thought to myself that they must have prepared a hiding place for the future, in case a major *aktzia* took place.

We heard that the Germans conducted a brutal children-*aktzia* in the ghetto. When the mothers were at work, the German beasts fell upon the homes and snatched the children away, to be sent off to Auschwitz.

Once again, we sent letters with the same messenger to our families in the ghetto. We waited impatiently for their response, which would come on Monday. That day, as we were working on the construction site, the wind was unusually strong and it blew the smoke from the smoke-stacks onto us. All Jewish faces were blackened with smoke; we were unrecognizable! Somehow, our mood matched our appearance and there was an inexplicable sense of gloom in the air.

Finally, the messenger returned. He reported that during the past three days, from Friday through Sunday, a terribly cruel *aktzia* took place in the ghetto. Many people were shot on the spot. The remaining Jews were crammed tightly together onto transport cars, together with the dead bodies, and sent off to Auschwitz. The entire ghetto was now *Judenrein*, except for a small group of Cultus Gemeinde workers who were sorting the booty for the Germans.

When we heard the terrible news about our families we all broke down and wept bitterly. We were half-crazed with grief. When the Germans took us to work that day, each person to his working group, we couldn't part from each other because our grief united us.

I was assigned to work at a temporary elevator. I was required to load it up with wood on the third floor and then take it up to the fourteenth floor. I was completely disoriented at work because my mind was simply not there. It so happened that I didn't tie the wood together well enough. The supervisor started to yell at me and showered me with curses.

I started shouting back at him angrily. "How do you expect me to work, when my entire family was murdered?! The day of retribution will yet come for all of you, for your terrible cruelty against us and against our innocent families!"

The German guard was within earshot. The British prisoners motioned urgently that I should be quiet because I was risking my life, but I didn't care. I didn't want to live anymore. The guard wrote up a report about the incident. The German who yelled at me during my first day of work in this place came running and intervened with the guard.

"He is a good worker," he said, "but he just heard about what happened to his family. Please look away from his outburst, because he cannot be held responsible. You see that he wants you to kill him! We need good workers, because all of our men are on the front."

The guard was persuaded and he tore up the report.

After work, we were led back to the camp. We were completely heartbroken over the fate of our suffering families. When we came in after being counted, we all went to our barracks and didn't even go to pick up our rations. The Jewish captain went around the barracks and urged us to take our food. "Working so hard without food is the same as committing

suicide," he argued. He came over to me and told me that he was surprised that I cursed the Germans publicly, a crime that incurred the death penalty, and I was spared. I replied bitterly that I would have preferred to be killed, because death would be much better than undergoing so much suffering with no hope for a brighter future.

As we sat down at the table, my comrades tried to calm me down. I hadn't eaten at all that day, because thoughts about my brother Yerachmiel, his wife Rivkah and their children Sarala and Eliezer Yosef occupied my mind. I thought about everything they had endured: They escaped the Djolowitz massacre and ran back to the village. Nobody wanted to take them in. It was in the freezing winter and they were naked and barefoot, without food. They hid in the fields among bundles of straw. The little girl was sick with fever and they had nothing to give her - no water, no medicine. When I learned of their plight and sent them several items, the peasant took it all for himself. And then the Germans tricked the hiding Jews into giving themselves up at Nowi-Radomsk. My suffering brother and his wife and children fell into the trap and they were murdered.

And now this terrible fate also befell my dear oldest sister Esther, with her husband Avrohom, and my dear brother Kalman Shlomo, his wife Tzurtel and their two precious boys, Velvele and Avromele. Oh, how many sleepless nights did I spend worrying for and protecting my father's children, my beloved sisters and brother! How many times did I risk my life for them! When all Jewish families were required to report I held onto Chanala and Gittele's hands. When we were finally released, we wept from joy. And now, look what happened to them! Thinking about their plight made me start weeping all over again.

The people around me tried to calm me down and they brought me my ration, but I couldn't eat. I couldn't get over my loss.

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On the following day I went together with everyone else to work. The German waited for me, the one who always brought me food. He put me to work in a corner and asked me to control myself, because I was placing my life in danger. "It is war time," he said, "but the war won't last much longer. Hitler's gangs will disappear."

I worked where he placed me. At noon, I met up with the other Jews, all of them depressed and discouraged. We ate together silently, our heads bent in mourning. Several days passed in this manner, in stifling sadness. We had no one to send letters to, no one from whom to wait for regards.

I would like to mention the name of a very nice, admirable Yid. His name was Piltzovitz; he was in our barrack together with his fifteen year old son. The son was tall and strong-looking, and he passed himself off as being older than his true age so he was considered a laborer. Piltzovitz frequently came over to my bed, especially on Sundays when we didn't work. He would ask me for news from the outside world and he would pour his heart out to me. He shared his life story with me, telling me everything about his youth and teenage years, until he met his wife. They lived in Germany and were very happy. His business went well and he was happy with life and with his family. "And then tragedy struck," he said, breaking down into bitter sobs, "They took my wife and two of my beautiful children and sent them off to the death-camp Treblinka."

I listened to his story and thought to myself, 'If only I could be consoled over the terrible loss of my dear ones! And now, I should really be the one to console this poor fellow who is sitting next to me on my bed, crying bitterly. But who is able to offer consolation when the tragedy is so deep? We are only temporarily alive and are suffering terribly, so how can we strengthen each other?' But I did try my best by sharing my own childhood story. I told him that my mother passed away when she was 33 years old, and later my father passed away suddenly. I told him how I took over my father's house, how I dreamed about a wonderful future and how it was about to be fulfilled. And now, my entire world had fallen apart!

He listened intently to my story, saw my tears and felt my pain. He felt better upon realizing that he wasn't alone in his troubles. From the free world we received no consolation; the

fact that we were all together in this calamity and every Jew had his own family-tragedy enabled us to bear our pain together.

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Meanwhile, the Germans changed the camp leadership. The new leadership was extremely wicked; they implemented a new manner of discipline and sent along more guards to the workplaces. They started rushing us at work, screaming *"Schnell! Schnell!"* and beat us constantly. They would let us stand for long hours at the *appel* place, until we were finally allowed into the barracks. Sometimes they would come in the middle of the night and inspect our feet. If they found someone who wasn't completely clean they would chase all of us into the washing barrack in the middle of the night, without our clothes on, to wash our feet. Sometimes they made a "dust *appel*." They would pull out a few Jews from the rows and beat them with leather straps that were interlaced with wires. Someone got fifteen lashes, the other person got twenty and a third one got twenty five. Piltzovitz's son was singled out to receive lashes, and the father begged the Germans to beat him instead of his son. When they heard this, they commanded the poor father to stand close by, so that he should see good and well how his son was beaten, and instead of giving the son only 15 lashes they added ten more lashes. The father stood by and cried bitterly as he watched the grisly spectacle.

All members of the "*herrenvolk*" were despicable murderers and sadists; only a very small minority of them was decent. We suffered terribly at the hands of the new camp leadership.

Sometimes a new transport would arrive in the middle of the night, so we would be woken up and rushed off to work, where we were required to unload the transport. The following morning we were required to work as usual. Due to this grueling schedule, some people fell sick, and we feared for their lives. The doctor had no medicine. Those who had German supervisors with whom they had developed some connection would request the necessary medicines that the doctor prescribed, and then we would smuggle it into the camp in order to save the sick.

Some time later I was assigned with a group of Jews to dig out an electrical cable. We worked there for several weeks. One day, an electrical engineer came to do some work there. According to what he told us, he was against Hitler. The first thing he did was give us bread and money. Several days later he advised us to escape, telling us that we had nothing to lose. "They are planning to empty out all of the work-camps and ship the Jews off to the death camps," he explained. We believed him, because he seemed knowledgeable of the Jewish situation, but there was nothing we could do. Where should we run to? Who would take us in? Which country would be hospitable to us, when 95 percent of the surrounding population hated us and worked along with the Germans?

It is important to mention that while we were working in the factory, a Swiss contractor and a team of Swiss personnel were working on some electrical infrastructure. Since we worked there to dig out a large electrical cable, we spoke to them from time to time. We asked them to intervene with the outside world on behalf of the handful of Jews who still survived. Perhaps the Swiss government would help us, we said. At the very least, they should alarm the free democratic world about what was done to our families – how they were shipped off to Auschwitz and Treblinka and other death-camps. "Why is the democratic world silent?" we demanded. "The Germans are planning to finish us off as well!"

We naively thought that they would be horrified to hear about what had happened to our families. But these so-called "upper class" Swiss workers remained cool and aloof. "We are just electrical contractors who were hired to do a specific job," they coldly told us. "It is not our job to get involved with the internal matters of the German government." By building the electrical infrastructure they were helping the German war effort. They didn't acknowledge that they had a role in what was going on. That's how indifferent the nations of the free democratic world were to the Jewish suffering at the hands of the Germans.

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Rosh Hashanah arrived. When we returned from work we washed up in the washing-barrack and took our meager rations. Then we gathered together and *davened* Maariv. We were careful that the sounds of prayer should not be heard outside, and the Germans shouldn't see how we came to wish each other *l'shana tova*. We made Kiddush together on a piece of white bread that someone smuggled into the camp. We ate our meager rations, and each of us shared something about his home and family. There were plenty of tears... We *bentched* although we were not sated with food; we were sated with troubles instead.

Yom Kippur arrived. Once again, we washed ourselves and ate quickly, and then wished each other a *gmar chasima tova*. We gathered for Kol Nidrei. Several Jewish girls were there, as well as the wife of the Jewish supervisor. I cannot describe the heart-wrenching wailing that accompanied our prayers. One of the girls collapsed, and several men also felt faint from crying so much. They needed fresh air; the doctor couldn't do much for them and just told us to control ourselves. He was also crying desperately. We all cried over our murdered families, over our own present suffering and over all of the suffering that still awaited us.

The next day we returned from a hard day of work and didn't take our rations. We immediately started to *daven* and continued until late at night. We said all of the prayers and finished with a heartfelt "*L'shana habah b'Yerushalayim*! (Next year in Jerusalem!)" Then we washed and ate our meager meal, after fasting for 28 hours.

Several days later, after returning from work and eating, I went to lie down for several minutes. I dreamed as if I was in Auschwitz, and then I immediately woke up. I remembered the dream and thought to myself that it was only normal for me to dream of Auschwitz. There were rumors that the Germans were planning to liquidate the Jewish labor camps, including our camp. My dream was a reflection of my thoughts, I surmised.

Two days later, the German who brought me food told me that he heard that they were planning to bring Arian workers, and the Jews would be sent away. He offered to hide me, together

with another Jew with whom I worked. We asked him where he lived.

"It's a large village. Our family has five members, and there are about two thousand people in the village," he said. We thanked him for his kindness and told him that we would think about it and give him our answer. He added that the war will probably be over pretty soon, because the Germans were suffering many losses on all fronts, especially on the Russian front.

We wondered why this German was willing to risk his life to hide us. We came to the conclusion that as an official member of the Nazi Party he was doing this in order to clear his name for the allies, who will eventually march into Germany.

My friend's name was Diamant. We discussed the German's offer in the barrack in hushed tones. I trusted the German and urged my friend to accept his offer. Besides, we had nothing to lose anyway, because if they would indeed liquidate the camp we would suffer the same fate as all other Jews.

By the following morning we had both made up our minds to accept the offer. That day we couldn't speak to the German because we worked in a different part of the worksite. We finally pulled out the electric cable from the ground. It was raining heavily and we were all cold and drenched through and through. When we returned to the camp we placed our clothes around the oven to dry, ate something and fell into an exhausted sleep.

The following day we met the German. He brought us some food, and I gave us our response, telling him that we would like to accept his kind, gracious offer. "We will remember your kindness forever," I promised.

"The timing is perfect," was his reply. "It is already November and by six in the evening it is already completely dark. You will leave work fifteen minutes early through a certain exit that is unguarded. I will walk ahead of you, across the field, and you will follow me. Everything should work out well." He then

told us that he will give us sewing work to do to keep us busy while in hiding.

During that time we worked to place a new electric cable into the ground. The new cable was powered to carry three times the amount of electricity as the old one. We successfully inserted the new cable, closed the open ground and poured cement over some areas. Our German masters were very pleased with our work. They told the guard that we did a great job and should be given proper food, and we should also be rewarded with cigarettes.

We returned to the camp somewhat upbeat, because our German masters were pleased with our work. I was also looking forward to escape and hide out from the Angel of Death. Diamant and I spoke together about our plans, and we decided to make a run for it on the following day, or a day later. I told him that I must go to sleep early that night, because I had guard duty between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. – the last night-guarding shift. We changed shifts every hour; when the first person's hour of duty was up, he woke up the next person.

As I walked around the area thinking about our dangerous escape plan and hoping that we would be able to break away undetected, I decided not to take along my personal possessions. I would only take my *tefillin*, pocket-*siddur* and *tallis katan*. My hour of duty passed and I woke up our barrack. I then *davened* quietly.

We filed out and stood for roll-call as usual, because by six o'clock we were supposed to start working. We were all standing there by 5:30, when the guards would usually appear, but time passed and nobody showed up! It was already six o'clock and we really began to wonder what was going on. Some people surmised that the Germans must have capitulated; we couldn't understand what else could have happened. Everyone gave his opinion and speculated about what was going on; some people were actually happy, thinking that the war must finally be over. I listened to everyone, but my heart was heavy. I had heard at my place of work that we would be replaced with Arian

workers. I also remembered my dream about Auschwitz and understood that it was a vision about the future.

Suddenly, we heard a commotion. A convoy of covered trucks came to a stop in front of us. A small group of S.S. men, armed with machine guns, marched into the camp and ordered us to come out of the barracks with our valises. I took the family photos that I had with me; my *tefillin*, *siddur* and *tallis katan* were already in my pocket in preparation for my escape. But now I realized that it wasn't destined for me to hide. It was a decree from Above that I should go along with everyone to Auschwitz, and that couldn't be changed.

There were 200 Jews, plus the Jewish supervisor, his wife, and several girls who worked in the kitchen and did the laundry. They conducted the *appel* and counted us. The doctor brought out one sick person from the infirmary, as well as the sanitation head, a Jew from Holland.

The camp commander counted everyone and wrote up a detailed report. He then gave us over to the S.S. beasts. They glared at us with hatred-filled eyes and after discussing some issues with the camp leaders they ordered us to board the trucks. There was not enough room for all of us on the trucks, so they started to beat us to squeeze in. Having no choice, we crammed into the trucks like herring, and that's how we started our journey, feeling utterly despondent. Some people said Tehillim, while others said to each other that we will soon be reunited with our dear families.

We knew that our journey was taking us to Auschwitz.

Chapter 7

After traveling for a while, the trucks carrying us downtrodden Jews passed through the imposing gates of the death-camp Auschwitz. We disembarked from the trucks and stood in line until a high-ranking S.S. officer appeared and counted us. He then officially took possession of us, and the S.S. men who brought us left. We were left standing there for a long time.

The place to where we had been brought was called Birkenau; it was one of the sections of Auschwitz. In this section the entire death-machine was stationed, including the gas chambers and the crematoriums.

We saw skeletally thin people wearing striped uniforms and round, striped hats carrying wood and timber on small pushcarts. The scene appeared similar to the eerie descriptions of Gehinom that I had once heard as a child, in which the wicked were punished in the World to Come by being forced to carry the wood with which they were to be burned.

The sick person who came along with us from the labor camp was lying on the ground, because he was unable to stand. We received no food or water; we understood good and well what it meant. Meanwhile night began to fall. We were rushed into a large room with a cement floor. We were crammed in like packed herring. I ran to one of the corners and stretched out my feet. There was a large rock in the corner, so I tiredly put down my head and instantly fell asleep.

I had a terrible dream. In it I saw that my oldest brother's wife Rivkah died, and my brother Yerachmiel and his two children Sara'la and Eliezer Yosef were standing next to their deceased mother, crying bitterly. I too cried along with them.

Morning arrived and we were awakened. My eyes were still wet with tears when I awoke. We were taken to a washing-barrack and told to wash up. I was shivering from cold. We met a couple of people there and spoke to them. One of them told us that we would now be taken to a *selektzia*. Those who would be found able-bodied would be taken to work temporarily. "Your clothes will be taken away, and you will receive the same uniforms that we are wearing," he said. "If any of you have money, make sure to remove it from your clothes. You can purchase a loaf of *lager*-bread for 100 marks."

I took out my 500 marks and bought five loaves of bread, which I shared among the people who didn't have the ability to buy bread. We ate it up on the spot.

We were then lined up, five people abreast. We were joined by groups of Jews who were brought from various small labor camps. I stood among four others; one of them was a baker, a strong, well-built person. Suddenly the officers in charge of making the selections arrived. It is possible that Dr. Mengele was among them, the monster whom the world is still looking for.

The officers stood about ten paces in front of us. The sick person stood in the first row, together with the sanitary worker who kept an eye on him in the old camp. He asked if he should continue watching him, and they agreed.

This is how five people at a time stood before the high-ranking officers, and they showed them where to go – either right or left.

Our turn arrived. The baker was so terrified that he bumped into a rock, and they took him out of line. We had no idea which side was the "good" side and which one was not. After making the selection, they sent our group separately from the other group. We stood in front of a table that was set up outdoors and they wrote down all of our names with each person's year of birth, after which they tattooed numbers into our arms. The number they gave me was 160183. This meant that from then on I no longer had a name; I was called "inmate numbers 160183 – come here and do this or that."

We were then ordered to undress completely. I saw one of the other inmates nearby, so I asked him to please hold my family photographs, *tefillin*, *tallis katan* and pocket *siddur* until I would be done with the washing, shaving and receive my new clothes.

"You idiot, why do you need all of these things?" he scoffed. "Do you think you'll get out of here alive? See the smoke going up over there?" he pointed to the crematoriums. "The people who were separated from your group are burning there right now!" His words only strengthened my resolve to hold on to these holy items until the last moment of my life. I went behind the barrack and hid my things in the ground, covering them with soil.

We were shaved bald; all body hair was also shaved off. We were taken into a large washing barrack and they turned on a cold shower. We shivered under the jets of freezing water. When we came out of there they gave us some clothes to wear. I received a Russian uniform shirt, red-striped pants from a Polish locomotive worker, and a hat from a Polish *zavyadovtza* (station-master). The shoes I was given were simple wooden clogs that were hollowed out in the center to hold the feet. I was given quite big shoes, and as I tried walking in them the clogs fell off.

As soon as I came out of there I went to the place where I had hidden my things and retrieved everything, including my father's *gartel* which he wore during *davening* for many years. We were then left to stand for several hours, hungry and cold. We couldn't recognize each other. Our appearance was so comical that some of us even laughed from the way we looked in our funny clothes. We wondered why the other inmates were given striped uniforms while we received different clothing. The old-timers told us that we will be quarantined for several weeks and the weak ones who would get sick would be taken out by frequent *selektzias*. Then, after a while, the remaining people would be considered fit for labor and would be assigned to work in Birkenau or Auschwitz, and those would receive the striped clothes.

Darkness fell, and we were taken some distance to the place where we would be kept for the meantime. Our barracks looked like an army-stable. There were three levels of narrow bunks on each side; five people slept on each bunk. I was assigned with another four people to sleep on the top bunk. The fellow who slept right next to me was a tall guy, and he didn't appear to be the most refined young man. The block supervisor was a German with a green (uniform?), which indicated that he was a detained criminal – such people were our supervisors.

The supervisor ordered one person from every group of five to come forward, and he would distribute blankets. My neighbor went to him and took the blankets for our group. After he finished giving out the blankets, the supervisor realized that one blanket was missing. He asked which group received an extra blanket, but no one responded. "I will search all bunks and whoever will be found with an extra blanket will be severely punished," he threatened. He went around the barrack until he arrived at our bunk, and discovered the extra blanket next to my neighbor. He ordered me to come down and asked me in a menacing tone: "Why didn't you tell me about the extra blanket?"

"I am innocent," was my reply. "He didn't tell me that he took an extra blanket."

As I was trying to defend myself he punched me in the face, and blood began to gush from my nose and mouth.

"Now lie down over there," he barked, pointing to a brick ledge that ran the entire length of the barrack. I lay down as ordered. He took a heavy piece of wood and began to cudgel me on my back, over my kidneys. After he was through with me, the inmates had to carry me up to my bunk, and I heard some of them say that I would probably die during the night. Even Doctor Sochotzolski said so.

They served some food, but I didn't eat at all. The supervisor then pulled off the next person from our bunk and gave him a sound beating as well. The poor fellow screamed loudly, but he wasn't hit on his kidneys, and besides, the supervisor had already vented his anger on me and wasn't so vicious anymore. This is what could happen if you have a bad neighbor…

The following morning when we were ordered to wake up, I climbed off the bed with my last bit of strength and went outside to wash with the others. My fellow inmates couldn't believe it when they saw this.

When we returned to the block, we received a black liquid that they called coffee. We were then rushed outside amidst loud yelling and cursing, and we were beaten with rubber-lined sticks. Among those who were beating us to move on, I noticed a fellow with a flushed face who helped the Germans rush out the people. I looked into his face and I recognized him! He used to live three houses down the block from where my father lived. He recognized me as well and came over to me, somewhat embarrassed. He was an assistant to the barrack-service. When I asked him why he was doing it, tears sprang to his eyes. "First of all, I was commanded to do this, because I am strong. I receive more food because of my job. I am here for a long time, and during the time that I was here they already sent hundreds of thousands of people to the gas chambers. Those who have some kind of position or are involved with the *shtubendinst* (room-service), the camp-police, kitchen or bakery have better chances for survival. Therefore, I am among them. The urge to live is so great that without meaning to, you become a helper of the German beasts."

I joined my group at the barrack. I held my shoes in my hands and walked barefoot on the cold autumn ground. When I arrived at my place I put my frozen, bare feet into the wooden clogs. The words I just heard began to sink in, and the ordeal of the night before also left its mark. I was aching all over, and I began to feel my body temperature rising. I couldn't stand on my feet. I was among a couple of friends and I told them that I find it impossible to stand. "I feel sick," I said. They let me sit on the ground between them, but even sitting was difficult because my beaten back hurt terribly. I was overcome with sadness and tremendous frustration for not having escaped the labor camp in time.

That's how we stood outside in the freezing cold for several hours. Then the cruel block supervisor arrived and played a sadistic exercise game with us. He made us bend our knees and do other kinds of exercises just to torment us.

Some of the people said, "Let them do whatever they want to do with us right now. Let them kill us sooner rather than later. Why should we suffer needlessly?" I too felt this way.

I noticed a German Jew some distance away. He had arrived several days previously from a small camp in Glawitz. He walked over to the high-voltage electric fence and stuck out his hand to touch it. He was instantly electrocuted to death. This incident made a terrible impression on us, but some people claimed that he was better off than the rest of us.

The S.S. *blakava* arrived and counted us. We were finally permitted to move around. They began distributing from a large pot a watery *bonius* soup, made from a type of produce that we used back home as a decoration for the *sukkah*. Later they removed the *bonius* and discarded the remainder.

I saw them distributing lunch. Everyone waited impatiently to receive some warm food, but not everyone was lucky. There wasn't enough food for everyone and about a third of the people remained hungry. My neighbor, on whose account I had received the deadly beating the day before, saw that I had no food so he mollified me by giving me several spoonfuls from his portion.

When I walked back to the block, I was again forced to hold my clogs in hand, as they were useless on my feet, so I walked back barefoot. Once inside, I took my father's *gartel* and cut it in half, preparing it for the next day to tie the clogs around my feet.

We went back to our bunks, waiting hungrily for the next bread distribution. Time stretched endlessly, until we finally received a small piece of bread, a mere 25 *deko*. Our hunger pangs were torturous, we were cold and barefoot, beaten constantly, and forced to bend our knees and do other gymnastics. It was just awful.

The next day was pretty much the same. We were rushed outside; this time my clogs were tied around my feet with my father's *gartel*. While I stood outside, Doctor Sochotzolsky saw me and said to me in Polish: "You will surely survive the difficult conditions in camp, unless they will purposely kill you. The strong-muscled block supervisor beat you on such a sensitive area, and you are still alive! You are a hero, and this is a miracle.

You must be physically strong to survive such deadly blows!" I thought to myself, 'May Hashem help me bear all this suffering.'

That day, after being counted and receiving the watery *bonius*, I managed to receive some warm food. When I returned to the block and removed my clogs, my feet were bleeding from the *gartel* that ate into my skin. On the following day, one of my friends brought me a beige right shoe. Two days later, Hershel Richter brought me a black high-top left shoe that was laced all the way up. They also found two shoelaces, and so I wore the two mismatched shoes in two different colors and styles.

Meanwhile, someone from the *shtubendinst* brought me some clothing to repair. There was no thread in the camp, so I pulled out a silk thread from the *gartel* and fixed the garment with it. I received a piece of bread for my work, and later I was also given some warm soup. I had remained in the block for a long time to finish the job.

The next day we were permitted to roam freely outside. We went to visit several blocks and met people whom we knew from back home; they had already been interned there for a long time. I walked around with my neighbor Hershel Deutchman, whom I knew well from my childhood. We had arrived in Auschwitz together from the same labor camp. He had a wife and four children, two sons and two daughters. When we walked around the block, his youngest son of about twelve years old suddenly ran over to him and hugged him. Father and son cried together as they clung to each other, and I cried along with them. The son told the father that his mother had been sent to the gas chambers. His oldest sister Gitcha and his brother [I don't remember his name] were sent along with the labor-groups. He didn't know what happened to his other sister who was a year older than him.

The other day I walked outside with Kalman Gottlieb from Dombrowa who had come out here from Djalowitz. A short man walked opposite us, with a very similar figure and walk to Kalman's. Kalman didn't notice him at all, so I told him, "A person that looks very similar to you just passed by." Kalman replied that he had a brother who moved away to Germany

twenty five years ago and he hadn't seen him since. Kalman was still a young boy when he last saw his brother. "Come," I said, "Let's turn around and talk to him."

When we came over to him we found him talking to someone, so we waited until he was finished. Kalman and I went over to him and asked him, "Are you Yitzchak Gottlieb?"

"Yes, that's me," was his reply.

"I am your youngest brother Kalman, from Djalowitz!" my friend exclaimed.

I cannot describe the shouts of happiness that were heard when the two brothers embraced after not having seen each other in 25 years.

Deutchman and Gottlieb continued seeing their relatives each day.

Another day I met some of my acquaintances from Sosnowitz who had been brought to Auschwitz three months before. They recognized me because I hadn't changed much since the year before when we had last seen each other, but they looked painfully thin with sunken eyes and despair etched onto their faces. They asked me what I had to say about their appearance. I knew that they had no mirrors, so I told them, "You look fine!" I didn't want to hurt their feelings.

Several days later I saw a group of sick people being taken to the sick house, where they kept the patients until they had the required quota for the gas chambers. Among them was Elozer Milstein, and he sadly bid me farewell.

Another day, I met one of my old neighbors, Simcha Willtchik. He used to be a wealthy, respected individual who served as president of the Jewish *kehilla* in Sosnowitz. He was a smart, strong person. But now he was bent over, like a condemned man. He was carrying a small pot of soup that someone had given him. He told me that his brother-in-law Menashe Blauvat was also there, and indeed, I found him the next day. He too was extremely thin. For a high price he obtained the job of cleaning and supervising the camp latrines, and there were plenty of inmates who were trying to buy off his job for an

even better price. According to what I understood, some people managed to hide valuables such as jewelry and money the way I had managed to hide my *tallis* and *tefillin* and my family photographs. I could have saved my 500 marks as well, but I had used it to buy five loaves of bread before the first *selektzia*. Those who had gold or expensive watches traded it for special duties in the kitchen or bakery, or even in the latrines; that's how desperate they were to buy some more time for themselves, hoping that meanwhile our longed-for salvation would finally arrive.

Another time, I met my friend from Sosnowitz, Yakov Yeger. I was invited by him for one Pesach Seder in 1942. He used to be close to the Chenchiner Rebbe. He was together with another young man, so I asked him who he was. "This is my daughter's *chosson*," he replied. "I will try to be together with him until their wedding, may it be in a *mazal'dig* hour." I marveled at his hopeful attitude in this death-factory. Yakov continued telling me that he arrived together with the Chenchiner Rebbe to Auschwitz, and the Rebbe perished that same day *al kiddush Hashem*, together with other Sosnowitz Jews. [? The *grochovina*, or tomb-engraver, a *frum* Jew whose name I don't remember, was there, and also someone Rottberg. ?]

After seeing and hearing all of these things, I was somewhat confused. One fellow Jew is troubled by the fact that others want to buy off his job in the latrines, while another fellow Jew is holding on to his daughter's *chosson*. In addition, there was a sizeable unofficial food market going on. As I returned to my block to be back in time for the next roll-call, I contemplated the difference between these two people. One of them waits to be sent to the gas chambers at any moment, while the other one is full of hope and optimism about his imminent freedom. Some people are buying and selling food to be able to exist until the longed-for day of liberation arrived and all of the evil around them will disappear. I was amazed that a person was staying close to his daughter's *chosson* in the hope of leading them to the *chuppah* together with his wife, although he had no clue about the whereabouts of his wife and daughter, the *kallah*.

And where do I stand? I asked myself. I considered myself to be among the more hopeful ones. I thus returned to my

block feeling somewhat uplifted. I had also recovered from the vicious beating I had received. My face cleared up and the sadness slowly disappeared from my eyes. When I returned, my fellow inmates asked how I was feeling and were happy to see that I was doing much better.

We were counted and commanded to return to the block. We piled up on our bunks and waited to receive our rations – the small piece of bread on which we subsisted all day. I hid my shoes under the head-plank so that no one should steal them.

A new day arrived, and I walked outside between the barracks. That day, I hoped to find out what happened to my sisters and brothers. I was told that the Shratzila Ghetto served all three towns – Sosnowitz, Bendin and Dombrowa, as well as the surrounding areas. The Germans were so cruel and murderous that it was impossible to pay attention to what others were going through, because everyone was kept busy with his own suffering and the suffering of his family. I also inquired about my *kallah's* family, and one person told me that he saw them in the ghetto during the last days. "It's possible that they still remained in the ghetto," I was told, "because a very small number of families are still there." A seed of hope was planted in my heart, that my family and my *kallah's* family may still be in the ghetto.

As I passed the kitchen, I met Yakov Schweitzer, the person who carried all of his wares into my store one night back in 1942, to avoid being caught with the illegal merchandise. He embraced and kissed me and promised to support me as much as possible. He worked in the kitchen, so he told me to wait outside. He disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a small red beet. "Come by tomorrow and I will give you some more food," he promised.

As I walked further, I saw a group of women or girls being taken to work under heavy guard, including watchdogs. Suddenly I heard my name being called twice. I looked at the group but couldn't recognize anyone. Their hair was shaven, their eyes pale and sunken. Until this very day I have no idea who called out to me.

The next day, I returned to the kitchen with a small saucepan in order to pick up some food, as Schweitzer told me to do. However, when I arrived I saw swarms of hungry Jews around the kitchen, and the camp police were beating them with their batons. I was afraid to come close and left without food. On the way back, I met my friend Shaul who had owned a tavern in Sosnowitz. His parents hid in my store during one of the large *aktzias* in 1942. His father, who had high blood pressure, passed out while in hiding and his mother had screamed hysterically, 'Save my husband!' placing all of us in danger. I had opened the trapdoor so that fresh air should come in. I also gave him valerian drops and some water until he recovered.

When Shaul saw me he said, "Don't worry, I will help you. I have been assigned to be the block-chief." He told me to wait outside his block and returned with a portion of bread, which revived me. I tried to visit him frequently; he had his separate place in the block. No one bothered me, and each time I received some food.

Several days later, they began to assign us to different working groups. I was assigned with a group of Jews to work at some job not too far from the gas chambers and crematoriums. We were told to cover the muddy paths with gravel. As we worked, we saw the smoke coming out of the ovens where our brethren were being burned. When I returned at night to my block I was in a daze from the day's experiences.

The outhouses were a short distance from the barracks. On my way there I could see that outside every block were dead people who perished from hunger, cold or beatings. The next morning we were told to continue paving the path with gravel. All bodies were removed and taken outside the crematoriums. A special department was in charge of picking up the deceased on push-carts that were much too narrow for the bodies. They piled up the wagons with the bodies hanging on the sides like sacks of grain, heads rolling on the sides of the carts. Those who carried the deceased were themselves half-dead. They unloaded the carts not far from the place where I worked to cover the paths, next to the crematoriums. They heaped the bodies onto the ground in disarray, one body head down, the other body head up or with the feet over the others' heads. The same scene repeated itself each day. I often saw the bodies being dragged on the ground, bumping into the rocks that were strewn about. This often caused pieces of flesh to be torn off. I once told the people to put boards underneath the deceased to preserve their dignity, but they replied, "They are better off than we are..."

Realizing the depth of our people's tragedy, I thought about my family, my brothers and sisters, including my little sisters. Were they already in the same place as these tortured bodies? Were they already in the same place where they burn the newly-arrived families coming from well-off cities, which the German beasts occupied?

One day during work, a car passed by pulling a truck that was loaded with naked Jewish women. The women were wailing and shouting that they were being taken to the gas chambers. "Whoever survives should take revenge on the German murderers for the innocent Jewish blood of our parents, siblings and children, and of our innocent babies!" they called out. "Remember to take revenge! This is our last request!"

I shuddered as I watched this terrible scene. The things I was seeing while working on the paths shook me up completely. I would lay awake at night and moan: "Woe is to our people! Woe is to me that my eyes must see this!" When the lights were turned off I started to cry bitterly. My bunk-mate asked me why I was crying, so I told him that the wounds I received during the beating were hurting me. I didn't want to tell him the real reason for my tears.

I prayed to Hashem that we should all be redeemed and live to be free. All I would need is a dry crust of bread, with a small room and my own bed; I wouldn't need anything more than that – just to live in freedom!

*

Several days later, after the morning roll-call, we were taken some distance away and told to wait outside a certain house. The place was crowded with many people, including Polish Jews as well as Jews from Greece and France. They had

brought to this place all of us who had worked in the labor camps in Upper-Lodzisk, including my friends Hershel Richter, Piltzovich and his son, Duetchman from Sosnowitz, and the young son he found in Auschwitz. We asked each other why we had been brought to this mysterious building. Some people in the group surmised that they would make a *selektzia* and choose who should live for now and who should be sent to the gas chambers.

We didn't have long to wait. A convoy of cars arrived, carrying several high-ranking, decorated S.S. officials. They told us to undress and hold our clothes. We were then commanded to enter the building. The people who entered exited the building from a different doorway so we couldn't see them. We had no idea what was happening to them, until it was our turn to enter. Five of us went in together, and we stood before some S.S. doctors and other officials who examined us and wrote up something about us. We couldn't know what they were writing. We were then marched back to the barracks and assigned various jobs.

That day, I was assigned with a group of people to dig out tree stumps that had been cut down before. As they needed more wood for heating purposes, the Germans made us dig out more stumps. The work was very difficult. We were required to cut the stumps into pieces and carry them into the blocks. Still, I preferred to work hard at the tree stumps rather than working next to the crematoriums.

Our wicked block-chief was pleased with our work. All of us who worked at the woodcutting received some more bread, and he also told us to call him when lunch was being distributed. He made sure to give us some more food, saying: "You should make sure to continue doing such fine work." Each day we received a bit more food because of the hard physical labor we performed.

One day in December 1943 it was announced that those who had been examined several days previously should stand to attention at the *appel* place. Once we were assembled they started calling out names; my name was also called out. Next to me stood a certain fellow from Sosnowitz named Lipman and his

name wasn't called. He became pale and started to cry, so I asked him why he was so upset. "After all," I reasoned, "we have no idea which group will be the lucky one – those who have been called or those who haven't." So he turned to me and said: "I heard that those who are being called will be taken away from Auschwitz, although I do not know where to."

Hershel Richter was called out, as well as Deutchman. His young son wasn't called. Altogether they had singled out 1,000 men, and we were commanded to stand in a separate group. The Deutchman boy cried bitterly, and my heart went out to him. He begged his father to stay with him. "Please, Tatteh, I beg you!" he cried, "Stay here! Don't leave me! I feel secure having you with me!" He cried so much that his face was covered with tears. I stood there in shock, unable to believe how indifferent the father could be in the face of his own son's desperate pleading. As we were transferred by foot from Birkenau to Auschwitz, I saw how the poor boy, ? Deutchman, stood forlornly at the side without taking his eyes off his father.

Once in Auschwitz, we were commanded to undress and told to go into a large washing room. They gave us a hot shower and then marched us outdoors in the freezing cold. It was raining; actually the rain was more like sleet, and it was very windy. We had to walk for some ten minutes, until we finally arrived indoors and received different kinds of clothing. We got dressed quickly and were told to stay there, until the arrival of the train that would take us away. We hadn't the faintest idea to where we would be taken.

Meanwhile, we were hungry. I came there after a difficult day's work, and all others had also worked hard at various jobs, but we did not receive the day's ration. We had no lunch, not even a piece of bread. The hunger pangs were excruciating.

Some people ventured outdoors and met some of their acquaintances. A few managed to receive some food. The place where we waited was called Auschwitz, and the place we came from was Birkenau, which is where the gas chambers were located. In order to fool the public, the Germans would say that they're sending the people to Birkenau, because the people only

knew that Auschwitz was a death-camp. The people from our group who returned after venturing outside informed us that the people in Auschwitz were living under better conditions. In fact, one of them brought back a whole loaf of bread, weighing a full kilo! He told us that he found a friend who worked in the bakery and he gave him the bread. He stood next to me and ate the bread, while my hunger pangs were like knives ripping me apart. I hoped that he would offer me a small piece of bread, because I had shared my food with him many times when we were still in Upper-Lodzisk. Finally, I mustered up the courage and asked him for a piece of bread. His reply was that he couldn't give me any. At that moment I made up my mind to never ask anyone for food.

I stretched out on the cement floor, with my warm grey winter coat underneath, and tried to sleep. However, I was unable to sleep because of the gnawing hunger. Several people spread out next to me, and the news they shared wasn't good. They said that they learned that whenever a transport left from that place, it took several days and then the clothing was sent back. I decided that I didn't care, and finally fell asleep.

When I awoke, the sun had come up. I washed up a bit and then we were commanded to go outside. We could see various labor battalions going to work, including groups of men and women. Many of them were assigned to work in ammunition factories. There was also a tailoring department, as well as a worksite for shoemakers and various other vocations. They looked at us with pity, for they knew that people being sent away from Auschwitz were usually sent to be murdered at some distant place. They went to work and waved sorrowfully to us from a distance.

We were given some hot soup, and a bit later we received some bread. We were then told to board a transport train on which the floors were covered with lime dust. They placed two pails to serve as latrines, and two pails full of drinking water. We were counted and then told to board under heavy S.S. guard. They locked us up inside. The cars were extremely cold. As the train started moving, we could hear what was being said outside. The train made occasional stops, standing idly for hours.

Next to me on the floor sat Piltzovitch and his son, Hershel Richter and a few other friends from Upper-Lodzisk. We tried to stay together like one family. We spoke about the unknown journey we were taking and speculated about the purpose of it. Someone said that we were taken to be killed, but I replied: "Were they ashamed to do that in Auschwitz?" I strongly felt that the fact that we had been examined by doctors and they selected only healthy, able-bodied men proved that they were sending us to work. They did not allow Deutchman's boy and other less-strong people to join us. I further argued that they gave us warm clothing, which showed that they were taking us to a labor camp. "It will most certainly not be a vacation," I said, "but we are not being taken to our annihilation."

Amidst all of these discussions nighttime arrived and we fell asleep, together with our troubles. When we awoke, the sun was peeking in through the cracks. We were speeding to our destination. After several more hours of traveling the train came to a stop. We could hear the Polish language being spoken outside, so one of us asked through the wall, "Where are we?" We heard a reply: "This is Warsaw."

Half an hour later the German guards opened the doors and shouted loudly, "Get out, filthy Jews!" As we stumbled out of the train, we were beaten by their batons and kicked by their boots. They lined us up and counted us. The transport chief asked the senior S.S. commander who welcomed us to sign a receipt for the 1,000 Jews he received. We were then taken under heavy guard towards a large gate. The entire place was fenced in, and we were led inside. We were divided among several blocks; mine was block number 3.

We received new inmate numbers; my Warsaw number was 4455. That day, which happened to be on a Thursday, we learned that 4,000 Jews had already been sent to this camp, and with our arrival the number of Jewish laborers was now 5,000.

We had been taken to the Warsaw Ghetto. In this place lived the largest Jewish community in all of Europe, and it was here that the Germans concentrated all Jews from Warsaw and the surrounding suburbs. The people were crammed into a few

On the following day I received another kilo of bread, and once again I divided it in half and shared it. Now it was my friend's turn to sell his sweater. However, cold days arrived with heavy frost and snow. His coat wasn't as warm as mine and he told me that he was shivering from cold. I didn't press him further to sell his sweater; it really was very cold.

One day at work, a Polish fellow came over to me and asked me if I perhaps knew of someone who could make hats. I told him that I would find out for him and reply the next day. When I came back to the camp I learned that the hat-maker was sick with typhus and he was quarantined.

I managed to acquire a piece of fabric from an old garment, which we sometimes found among the ruins. I created a pattern from an old hat and showed it to the Polish man. I copied the pattern and made a hat, working during the night in my bed. The next day I took the hat to work. He was impressed with my work and he gave me bread. I shared it with my friend; once again my life was restored with the bread.

Time went on and I was again suffering from terrible hunger. People were dying all around us from epidemics of typhus and diphtheria which spread quickly due to the filth. The lice were also sucking our blood, eating us alive.

One Friday night I noticed a young man welcoming Shabbos. I looked out through the window and *davened* along with him by heart. I finished *davening* and thought of my experiences in the first camp, then Auschwitz and now in Warsaw, a city that was known in the entire Jewish world for its large Jewish population. There were scholars and Chassidim, modern writers and poets, lawyers and doctors, and members of various parties including the right-wing, left-wing, Bund, Saim deputies (congressmen), senators, and Gur Chassidim with its Yeshivos. A flourishing Jewish city existed here, and now, after such a short time, everything disappeared.

I noticed that our ranks were thinning out. My fellow prisoners were dying, and I knew all too well that this was a place of death. I was extremely weakened from the heavy labor and minimal food. I thought to myself that I would probably also be

going to the eternal world. Interestingly, when I thought about it I felt relieved; I had a much better vision and feeling of the future than in Auschwitz. Here, where so many had died in purity, their holy souls ascending to Heaven, in this place my soul would unite with their's.

As these thoughts went through my mind, the young man came over to me and said, "Gut Shabbos!" He asked me to come over to his little corner where he made *kiddush*. He told me to wash and gave me a piece of bread. He started asking me where I came from and some other questions. Then he said that he worked together with a Polish Jew at a carpentry stall. He had a good job and had connections with the guards.

We were commanded to go to sleep. The next morning we were again taken to work. I was taken to a new place. The S.S. men had marked several points around a tall, charred building. Our job was to dig up the ground where it had been marked, fill the pits with dynamite and electrical wires and then cover it with earth. We were then commanded to move away from the area as they entered an electrical current that sparked the dynamite, which exploded with such force that the entire building collapsed. Sometimes, the S.S. sounded the alarm to move away from the building when it was already too late, and large chunks of bricks and cement were already flying all over the Jewish laborers. Some were saved but others perished on the spot. I was also wounded there when bricks toppled all over me, but I survived. They washed off the blood that covered me from head to toe and I suffered from pain in my head for a while.

The work was extremely dangerous. It was impossible to evade working there, because we worked directly under the S.S. They didn't trust the Poles with the explosives. Eventually they saw that most of the bricks were destroyed during these explosions and were no longer usable, so they began to use different demolition methods in order to preserve the bricks.

The hunger pangs were excruciating. I returned to work at the lorries, a difficult job as well. A civilian Polish fellow worked nearby. He came over to me and asked me if I would be willing to sell him my coat. I asked him how much he would give me for

it, so he said that he would first try it on. He tried it on and saw that it fit him perfectly, so he agreed to give me 400 zlotys. I was delighted! I could buy 40 kilos of bread with the money. I told him that I would reply the next day. In the meantime he shared a bit of his breakfast with me.

When I returned to the camp, I learned that Piltzovitz was no longer alive; his son was crying bitterly. The chess-player Yossne with whom I shared my bowl of food also died, as well as several other men who had been there with us. The barracks thinned out as the people perished from hunger, and even more commonly from the vicious beatings of our supervisors. I was very discouraged after hearing the sad news. I stood there brokenhearted, remembering the times that Piltzovitz shared all of his feelings and experiences with me, and now he was gone, along with so many others whom I knew.

We were only permitted to use the bathrooms twice per day. When they opened the bathrooms the place was bombarded by many people. Due to the cold and the terrible food we received the people had a hard time holding in. After hearing the terrible news I rushed to the bathroom and tried to get in because I needed it urgently.

The latrine supervisor was a German Jew. He looked at me angrily and asked: "Why the urgency?" I looked at his angry eyes and despicable behavior. He came over to me and gave me a mighty punch in the nose with his fist, and blood started gushing from me. I took off my coat and gave it to Hershel Richter. I emptied out and Hershel told me to wash off the blood from me face. But I leaped towards the person who bloodied me and gave him such a strong punch that he fell to the floor, with blood gushing from his mouth and nose. I continued kicking him with my foot until he was so bruised that he had to be helped up. I had long carried a deep hatred towards the Jewish helpers of the Germans, and it served him right to be beaten by me for a change. I knew that I could expect to be punished but it made no difference to me.

When I returned to the block, the German block supervisor called me over and I told him how the fight broke out.

I was punished with 10 flogs, and I bore the punishment with dignity; it was worth it. Many people came over to me and shook my hand, thanking me for my courage. After this incident that fellow behaved more pleasantly to the people.

I saw all the suffering in that place and I started to feel pessimistic. People were dying in droves, the hunger pangs were unbearable, and we were freezing to death. I contemplated selling my coat. The food I would receive in return would feed me for a long time, but I knew that it would be very dangerous if my superiors would discover that I sold my coat. This would be considered sabotage, a crime for which several people had already been executed. I wasn't as concerned about selling my sweater because I wore it underneath the coat, but the coat was light-grey and it would be very obviously missing.

The next day I told the Pole that I was willing to sell the coat but I needed an old, used coat in a similar color. The following day he told me that he could give me a short black, light jacket, and he would not discuss the issue further. I was in a tight corner. I knew that if I wouldn't eat half a kilo of bread every day I wouldn't be able to survive the hunger and difficult labor.

I returned to the barrack undecided. If I won't sell the coat I wouldn't live much longer, I realized. Finally I decided to sell the coat. The next time that I saw the Pole I told him: "You are getting the coat today." He gave me half a kilo of bread for breakfast and I devoured it in an instant; I was so hungry and very weak from the harsh labor and the bitter cold. We agreed to clinch the deal after work in a certain abandoned house, blocked from view by the outside walls.

After work I went to the agreed-upon house; he was already waiting for me. I gave him my coat and he gave me an old, battered jacket in return which I put on immediately. He gave me 400 zlotys in 20 banknotes. I put 200 in one pocket and 200 in the other pocket and tried to mingle with the other laborers so that I shouldn't stick out, but the foreman noticed my missing coat. He was a Polish Jew named Koth who lived in France for

many years. He didn't behave too badly towards us at work; he was in our camp together with his son.

The Chief Kappo, a German criminal, was walking up and down as if looking for something high and low. He spotted me and told me to come over to him. "Where is your coat?" he asked. "How much money were you paid for it?"

It was already late and we had to go back to the camp, so he left me alone for the meantime. I used this opportunity to remove the money from my pockets. I gave 200 zlotys to a certain fellow named Fineman and the other 200 zlotys to a fellow from Bendin. Several minutes later the Kappo returned and ordered me to give him the money. I told him that I gave the coat as payment to someone for all the food he gave me since I began working here and that he was all paid up already. He searched me and then said: "What a pity on your life; this is the last time that you are seeing the sun going down." I replied that it made no difference to me if I lived or died.

When we arrived at the gates of the camp he gave a report that I traded my coat. I was immediately punched in the nose and two teeth were knocked out. We stood at the *appel* place in the freezing cold. The area was covered with snow. The people around me looked at me sadly. I quietly left instructions that part of the money should be given to the orphaned boy Piltzovitz and my friend Hershel Richter should also receive some of it. The remainder should be distributed among the young boys, the minors. Some of the people cried, but I just prayed to the Ribbono Shel Olam for a miracle. I prayed that if, G-d forbid, my time had come, as it had come for so many other Jews, I should be executed quickly and without pain.

After roll-call they called out: "Inmate number 4455 should step out." I stepped out. I was commanded to come up front to the camp leader who was *Obershturmbandfuerer* (lieutenant colonel) by rank. I marched over to him like a soldier and stood at attention saying, "At your service, Herr Lager Feurer." He looked at the report in his hand and asked me why I traded my coat. "Your coat is camp property," he said.

I replied that I worked at the lorries doing difficult physical labor, and the person to whom I sold my coat gave me food from time to time during breakfast. He had offered to continue giving me food if I would give him my coat in return. I thought about it for several days, and the hunger pangs won. I decided that it would be better to die from the cold, rather than from hunger.

He stood there with his underlings and didn't take his eyes off me. The camp chief asked me: "Would you show us tomorrow which Pole bought your coat?"

"*Jawol, Herr Lager Feurer*," I said. Hearing him mention the word "tomorrow" was a good sign.

"Until this incident," came a new command, "this crime was punishable by death, but I will make an exception for you. You will not be executed, but you will receive 25 lashes on your bottom."

I lay down and a strong S.S. man counted 25 brutal lashes into me. While he was beating me I thought of my deceased father with his long beard, of my mother and my sisters and brothers. Meanwhile he finished with the 25 lashes and the camp chief said: "Give him ten more; we didn't hear him scream! It didn't hurt enough." When I received the next ten lashes I screamed.

They removed me from the execution place where I had received my punishment. The *kappo* who had told me that it was my last day of life, together with another *kappo*, took me to the washing barrack, because I couldn't walk on my own. They removed my pants and placed compresses on my bruised body. They washed off the blood and called in a doctor, who told them to continue with the compresses. Some time later they put some cream on as well. They said to each other that I was a hero and a strong person, because when I received those terrible lashes I didn't move or even moan. When they finished caring for me they took me to my block, placed me on my bed, and ordered to bring me something to eat from the kitchen. They brought me some light food but I couldn't eat; I only drank something, and

told them to give the food to others. I thanked the two Arian *kappos* for their help.

Later, the *shtuben-eltzter* told me that the two German *kappos* were the worst bandits of the camp; they had already beaten many Jews to death. I had noticed that when they brought me into the block the *shtuben-eltzer* called everyone to attention and all inmates stood up for them. They were high-ranking *kappos*.

On the following day two low-ranking S.S. men arrived at the worksite and asked me to show them who the Polish man was. I told them that I didn't see him. They returned a few days later and asked me again, and my reply was the same. One of them slapped me twice, but the other fellow said: "Leave him alone; he already received his punishment. He is still weak from the beating." They did not return again.

Every day I bought some bread and onions. They also started giving more food to the camp inmates.

The Polish workers learned that I had promised to show the Germans who purchased my coat, yet I did not betray him. I earned their esteem and I started to deal with them. They would bring me the items I requested, such as cigarettes and whiskey. The *Ober-Kappo*, the murderer, was already wrapped around my finger because he did illegal business with the Poles. He would sell them copper and other metals. He trusted me because he saw that I was able to keep a secret. The Poles who bought the stuff from him told him that all transactions should go through me, because they did not speak German and the Kappo Yupp did not speak Polish. Therefore they wanted me to serve as the intermediary. When they came to pick up the bricks, he would sneak in the finest metals underneath the top layer. The Polish people gave me plenty of food and the *kappo* also gave me some.

Some time later, the Polish fellow for whom I made the hat came over to me and said that he needed more of such hats. He would pay me nicely, he said, because he had friends who needed them. I acquired some fabric from old items that we found among the ruins. I told him to give me all of the

measurements and I became a professional hat-maker. Every night I completed another hat, charging 15 or 20 zlotys a piece.

The Ober-Kappos learned that I was a hat-maker, so they asked me to make hats for them too. They wanted hats with pull-down flaps to cover their ears. They were very pleased with my hats.

My friends were revived; I would bring a package of 100 cigarettes and gave them some to sell. I also supported the tailor Appelbaum who blackmailed me in the first labor camp. Some of my acquaintances were in the infirmary, so I tried sending them whatever I could. The next day I was told that the German Jew who punched me the other day and I returned the punch, was also in the infirmary. So the next day I sent some food especially for him. When he came out of there he thanked me with tears in his eyes and apologized for the fight. He begged me to forgive him. I gave him my hand and told him to forget about it.

One day the Kappo Yupp arrived and told me that an *untershturmfeurer* (second lieutenant) requested that I make him a military-style hat. He would provide the fabric.

I told him that this would require very precise work and it would be impossible for me to make it perfect by working at night. I suggested that he should allow me to make the hat in the carpentry shop where Mittelman worked. The S.S. man came to the platform and I took his measurements. He told me that I had plenty of time to finish but it should be done right. I worked in Mittelman's place and I was able to *daven* with *tefillin* and eat there. I started to work on the hat; meanwhile I also worked on two more hats for different *kappos*.

After two days, all three hats were done and I gave Kappo Yupp the one to be delivered to the S.S. man. The man asked him, "Where is the hat-maker?" He came into the barrack and someone yelled: "*Achtung*! (Attention!)" Everyone stood up respectfully for him. I went over to him and he said that I did a very nice job. He paid me with two military breads and told me to have someone go along with him together with a large bowl.

The *shtuben-eltzter* sent a boy with a vat, and he returned with a full vat of food from the German kitchen. I gave the bread and the food to the *shtuben-eltzter* in order to distribute it among those who couldn't help themselves anymore. Two days later the two *kappos* for whom I made the other hats came and brought me some bread. I gave it all away. I ate my food outside on the platform. Everyone liked me.

I already had 500 zlotys. 100 had already been used up to buy food. I took 200 zlotys that I earned and sewed it into my pants.

Several weeks went by in this manner. I was doing some business and working, sewing hats and being sated with food. There was still plenty of suffering. I was able to feed some of the people but for the most part the inmates suffered from terrible hunger. The epidemics raged through the labor camp and each day there were less Jews than the day before.

Chapter 8

One day, as the labor groups were returning from work, I noticed that my friend Hershel Richter was covered with blood. "What happened?" I asked in alarm.

"The group I work with has to carry pieces of metal," he told me. "Lately, the German sentries come to our workplace and beat us while we work, screaming '*Schnell*!' We are forced to run fast, but since I broke my leg in our first labor camp, I am unable to run."

I had already made friends with several high-ranking German *kappos*. I spoke to Kappo Yupe and asked him to remove my friend Richter from that group. He told me that he would give me his answer at night. When I went to him later that night he told me that he spoke to the supervisor of the newly-formed labor group that unloaded the supplies that were transported from the city to the camps; this group did light work. He said that he could arrange a transfer to that group, where extra food was also a possibility, but it would cost 350 zlotys. I agreed on the spot and promised to bring the money by the following day. He told me that on the following morning Richter should go along with the transport group. He promised to make sure that the supervisor of the metal group where he worked until then shouldn't look for him, and that Richter's name should be removed from his list.

I returned to our block and told Hershel that he would be going along with the transport group the following morning. Everyone knew that this group had an easier time than the others. They didn't suffer from hunger and didn't work too hard. They mostly traveled and loaded supplies for the camp and for the German guards, as well as for the German garrison in Warsaw.

When Hershel heard what I did for him he cried from joy and kissed me tearfully.

While taking off my clothes before going to sleep, I opened the secret pocket in my pants where I had hidden the 500 zlotys. I removed 350 zlotys and returned the remaining 150 zlotys.

When we returned to the main camp they ordered the doctor to inspect our shirts for lice. This is how they made use of the Jewish intelligentsia. Engineers, famous artists, poets and other high-class people were given the lowliest jobs. The most refined personalities had a hard time keeping their human image intact, due to the terrible hunger, biting cold, and pajama-like clothing, which broke their spirits.

One Sunday, the S.S. men decided to entertain themselves by using us as a sport. After roll call they took out every tenth person to do punishing labor. I was among those who were picked and we were ordered to run to the worksite. Thick snow covered the ground and all we had were shoes with wooden soles. We had to carry a heavy load of bricks that were still partially cemented, and then run with it, while being beaten with the bayonets of their rifles. After working for a long time we were told to stand in line. We had to stand there for a long while until they collected all of the people who collapsed from exhaustion, or were wounded from the beatings.

I stood next to the best doctor of Brussels, Belgium. "I deserve this punishment," he told me. "I was active on behalf of the Zionist movement yet I did not immigrate to Israel. I worked hard to save people regardless of their religion; I had the highest trust in humanity." He lived in my barrack. One morning when we were woken up and people began climbing off their bunks, he continued lying in bed. The room-service worker tried waking him but he did not respond, and he was confirmed dead. That is how known personalities ended their lives - people who dedicated their lives to help other people.

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The days went by and we continued working on the washroom plumbing. I watched closely how the work was to be done and I learned a lot on the job. When the German returned for the second time he was once gain very pleased with our work. Everything went according to plan.

Several days later on a Sunday morning, after roll call, they called out that "Plumber 4455 should step aside." I went out of line with tremendous fear, not knowing what happened. I

walked over to the camp leaders and saw among them a new, uniformed S.S. person. The camp staff told me that I should follow the S.S. man to the place where he will take me; they needed something fixed over there and required a skilled plumber. Upon hearing that I would have to fix some plumbing at the S.S. headquarters in Warsaw, I went cold. I knew that I was in terrible danger because I was not even a real plumber.

I walked through the streets of Warsaw and thought to myself: only a few short years ago these streets on which I am now walking under German guard contained the largest Jewish population in Poland. This place was so *heimish* and happy, bustling with children and adults and *zeidies* and *bubbies*. Alas, those Jews were nowhere to be found! Only Poles and their families were walking through the streets on their way to church. The church bells sounded loudly just as before the war; life hadn't changed for the Poles at all. Only the Jews were struck by tragedy. I thought about my hometown and my family, wondering what happened to them. With these thoughts I walked through the streets of Warsaw until we arrived at the place where I was supposed to work.

As soon as I entered the building someone came over to me and took me to the bathroom. The toilet was clogged and the waste didn't go down. I told him that I would need tools, so he took me to the storehouse that contained various tools, but I couldn't find the things I needed. Finally, I took a piece of wood and tied a rag around it in a way that created a place for air to be suctioned. I fiddled around with this "tool" until finally the toilet was unclogged.

He then took me upstairs to the washroom, where the shower stalls stood. The water was dripping, so I unscrewed the pipe and tied *kanapias* around it. I unclogged the pipes from which the water came too slowly. The S.S. beasts were pleased with my work and gave me white bread, butter and milk. I was sated and then rested a bit, and then I looked for more work, finding several more things to fix. During lunchtime they gave me plenty of food and I finished the plumbing work quite early. They made me work in the kitchen, and I asked the cook for all leftovers to take with me back to camp. I took back with me

several kilos of fried potatoes, and I received a loaf of bread and a jar of (kampitur?). They told me that if they would need more work in the future they would call me again.

I returned to camp without fear of being checked at the gate and asked about the bread and the (?), because I was coming from the bandit headquarters, accompanied by an S.S. guard. My pockets were full of leftover pieces of bread. When I came into my block I cut up the bread and took part of it to my fellow plumbers, along with some potatoes. I gave the remaining food to the room supervisor to distribute among those who were in need. I was very happy that the day I spent working for the S.S. worked out well, and that I was able to eat my fill and bring back some food for other hungry Jews to revive them.

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Epidemics raged through the camp and many people died. Some people claimed that the diseases were spread by the dead bodies of Jewish fighters that were discovered in the cellars. I also found bodies sometimes when we went through the ruins. Every time we started working on a new building they would first send us down to the cellar to look for hidden items. Once we discovered a stock of leather. Several minutes after we went down the S.S. came after us to look for themselves; they were afraid that fighters may still be hiding out in the cellars. If we were too quiet after going down, they would follow us downstairs. Sometimes we found bodies that had been burned or suffocated to death from the gas that the Germans sprayed into the houses during the uprising. Sometimes we found people who had perished from hunger. If we found leather or textiles the S.S. would take it away immediately. I mostly worked on Pavia Street, Gensha Swatcha, and other nearby streets.

One day we were not permitted to go to work. That evening a young boy got lost from his block. It was already late and he came into our room looking for shelter. He was burning with fever, and no one wanted to let him sleep next to them, because they feared that he may be contagious. I picked him up and placed him on my bunk, thinking to myself that I was in Hashem's hands, and that I would rather save his life than worry about my own life.

The next day we were taken to be washed and our clothing was disinfected. The clothing was burned up to destroy the lice and germs. We felt much better in our disinfected clothing because the lice made our lives miserable.

We heard terrible stories about what happened in various camps in the occupied territories. If an epidemic broke out and spread rapidly as in our camp, they would burn the camp together with all inmates. We were afraid that they might decide to do this to us.

They only allowed small groups to go out to work, including my plumbing group. When we arrived at the worksite in the washroom barrack we discussed the situation. My friend, the plumber, was also concerned about the danger that hovered over us if the Germans decided to kill us.

Every day we would take the tools we needed from the nearby warehouse that was located in a cellar. The cellar was locked up and contained the tools and supplies for a section of the ghetto. A Polish fellow from Warsaw was in charge of the warehouse. He came to work every day and he sometimes spoke with me. He asked me what my profession was before the war, so I told him that I was a tailor; I had studied fashion design in Paris and had a diploma in fashion design from Katowitz as well.

He was impressed that I had two diplomas, and I told him that due to hunger and by a stroke of good fortune I became a hat-maker. He became excited and asked me to make him a hat. I took his measurements and he told me that I could work in the cellar without fear. He had his private office there, heated and well lit, and I could work there in peace. On the following day I completed the hat, and he was pleased with my work. "You Jews are multi-talented," he exclaimed. "Look, now you're a plumber!" He brought me a loaf of bread; I ate some of it and took the rest with me to the washroom barrack to share with everyone.

I told the Polish man about the terrible danger we faced if the S.S. decided to kill us. "Now the excuse will be the epidemic," I said, "and if not for the epidemic they would have used us to our least ounce of strength and killed us then." I told him that I really wanted to get away from this horrible place and begged him to hide me out.

"It would be impossible for me to do that," he said. "Firstly, you have a distinctly Jewish face. And secondly, I live in a large building with 50 tenants. You must also bear in mind that there are many Polish traitors who oppose the Germans. The German and Polish police often search our homes, accompanied by dogs. In short, it's impossible for me to help you."

Pesach 1944 was approaching. Several days before Pesach, when the Pole saw me, he asked me to meet him at noon in the storehouse, because there was something important he needed to discuss with me. I was curious to know what he wanted. Perhaps he was willing to save me from this place, I dared to hope.

At the appointed time I met him there and he invited me to eat with him. He then asked me if I would be willing to teach him how to sew. His wife was a seamstress who sewed coats and dresses, running a successful workshop from home. She passed away, and he wanted to continue running the workshop. The people who worked for her were well-trained tailors, and he wanted to rehire them and reopen the business. I responded enthusiastically that I would be glad to teach him how to fashion men's and women's clothing. I told him to bring paper and writing material from the city, and I began teaching him. We arranged that when the German who gave me the job instructions would return, I would be notified immediately. He also assured me that he would take care that I should be covered by the guards.

We started the first lesson, and he caught on immediately when I taught him the measurements and how to set up a pattern. After the first day he gave me 2 kilos of bread with a piece of cheese. I sat in his warm office for most of the day. He gave me permission to heat up some water and wash myself, and even use

a bit of soap. I was completely refreshed. Before leaving I asked him to bring me 5 kilos of wheat flour, because it was close to Pesach and I needed it for baking matzos.

At night I met Meir Mittelman who worked as a carpenter, and I told him about the flour. He was very excited and told me to ask the Pole to bring the flour straight to the carpentry workshop, and he would take care of the baking. The following day the flour was brought to the carpentry workshop, while I continued teaching fashion design in the death camp of Warsaw in 1944.

On the day before Pesach I asked my "student" to bring me eggs and potatoes, as well as a small pot. On Erev Pesach I took some of the hardboiled eggs and cooked potatoes and hid them in the (?mugs), sneaking them into camp. After roll call I washed in honor of Yom Tov and we took our rations. We went into the barracks and *davened* Mincha together. We were not afraid of the S.S.; since the epidemic broke out they hardly visited the Jewish blocks, because some of them caught the diseases from us and one of the brutes died. Because of this we were able to *daven* in peace and conduct our *seder* without fear.

Mittelman *davened* Maariv with the soul-stirring Yom Tov melody, and then we sang Hallel together. The people sat down close to each other on the bunks. Someone made Kiddush on milk that one of the inmates had brought from the construction site and we started to recite the Haggadah.

When we came to the Ma Nishtana and remembered how the children would ask the questions in a childish sing-song, the entire block – *frum* and irreligious alike – broke down and cried. The wailing was so loud that we feared that the guards in the towers on the other side of the fence would hear us. We remembered the joy of Yom Tov at home, together with our beloved families. We recited the Haggadah fervently with heartrending weeping.

After finishing the first part of the Haggadah we gave out a *kezayis matzah* to everyone. Instead of eating the Yom Tov meal, we shared memories of home and our families. The people tried boosting each other's hope and said to each other that the

war would end quickly. Good times would yet come for the survivors, although those who already perished wouldn't be brought back to life.

Some of the people discussed political developments, based on what they heard from the Poles. I shared some good news that I had heard, that the Russian army was pushing the Germans out of the occupied Russian territories, and the Russians already captured parts of Poland, including Lemberg, while they continued to push forward in our direction. The Germans also suffered casualties at the hands of the partisans; the partisan fighters destroyed bridges and ambushed military transports that carried ammunition to the frontlines. There were also Jewish partisan groups in the dense forests, and they valiantly fought the Germans in revenge for all they had done. They would confiscate the weapons and food supplies of the fallen German soldiers, and sometimes they would also strip off the German uniforms and use it to disguise themselves as Germans. They would then take food and blankets out of the stockrooms and shoot the German guards, gaining some more uniforms and weapons. The Jewish partisans were known for their bravery.

Someone from our barrack who participated in the *seder* suggested that before we continue with the second part of the Haggadah we should stand up for a few minutes in honor of those who had perished. He then began to speak: "Today is exactly one year from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which happened in this very place where we are now. The people lived here under inhuman conditions, crammed together and suffering from poverty and illness. Up until April 19, 1943 the Germans had taken away 700,000 Jews to the death camps of Treblinka and Sobibar to be murdered. The small Jewish remnant organized itself to fight their barbaric, cruel oppressors, the blood-enemies of the Jewish nation. It was a superhuman fight for the honor of the suffering Jewish nation and for a better future for the oppressed. The unmatched heroism of the ghetto fighters will be an example of courage and bravery for generations to come, and will show the way for those in similar circumstances.

"We were brought here from Auschwitz 5,000 men, and now there are only about 1,600 of us left. The others perished

from hunger, cold, and difficult labor or were shot to death. We all know that the German murderers plan to burn this camp together with all of us. We should follow the example of the ghetto heroes and do what they did; we shouldn't die by ourselves but we should take the Germans killers with us and kill as many of them as possible! Let us be courageous, let us be strong! Let us be prepared to the best of our ability. And let us remember that if we remain alive, or if some of us remain alive, we should try to remember what the German murderers and their accomplices – the Poles, Ukranians, Lithuanians and others – did to us, and we should write it all down for posterity. Future generations should know what was done to the Jewish nation n the 20th century, among the democratic, cultured nations. And the nations that could help us played deaf and blind; they closed the doors of their large and rich countries that were empty of people.

"Let us all go to our places, and may the holy memory of the ghetto fighters whose first *yartzeit* is today be sanctified forever!"

We *bentched* in a better mood, feeling hopeful that the end of our suffering was near. We continued with the rest of the Haggadah, reciting it with holy fervor. We cried out "Shefoch Chamoscha" (Pour out Your wrath upon the nations) with anger and a strong desire to be able to avenge the death of our innocent relatives, friends and fellow Jews, as well as our own difficult suffering.

If only there would have been an artist there who could have painted the scene! Our apathy disappeared, and despite our physical weakness we were imbued with a sense of spiritual courage; our eyes burned like fire. Perhaps the ghosts of the Jewish heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto who valiantly fought the Germans, although they were weakened from hunger and suffering, had entered us.

We concluded the *seder* with a sense of elation, full of hope. We started singing "Next year we will be fee men" and concluded with "Next year in Jerusalem." We went to sleep with refreshed spirits and renewed hope, feeling spiritually elevated.

As for me, I was very uplifted; my thoughts and imagination were overcome by a mystical sense. It was as if I felt the presence of the spirits of the murdered Jews of Warsaw and the souls of the courageous Jewish fighters who died *al kiddush Hashem*. My sleep was full of peaceful dreams.

Those good hours passed quickly and it wasn't long before they were shouting: "Wake up!" We went to work; something of our good mood of the previous night still remained. We had already completed more than half of the plumbing job.

That day I was informed that I would be switched to a different camp. This was a difficult blow for me, because all of my friends were in the old camp. In the new camp I was assigned to a room full of Greek Jews from Salonika and some Jews from Holland. When I returned from work I didn't have whom to talk to. My old roommates were acquaintances whom I still knew from when we were in our first labor camp. We trusted each other and we all had our close friends; here I was a total stranger.

Several days later they sent some more people from the old camp into the new camp, because they were disinfecting the old camp. We were quite relieved, seeing that we were not in danger of being killed due to the epidemic, because the disease was already under control.

I continued teaching the Polish man how to sew, and he gave me potatoes, eggs and some milk. Pesach went by and I had enough potatoes to eat my fill. I even had some extra potatoes for my hungry workmates, as well as some onions and a kilo of bread. The Pole was so pleased with the fact that he was learning how to sew that he generously gave me these foodstuffs and I was able to refrain from eating *chometz* during all of Pesach.

Several days after Pesach I was called into the office; I went there feeling somewhat frightened. They told me that since the plumbing work was almost done, my co-workers would finish the job and I would be transferred to the tailor shop that had recently been opened. I was now ordered to return to the old camp, because the tailor shop was there. This happened two days after Pesach.

When I heard the new order I was disappointed. First of all, this would mean that I would be cut off from the outside world. At the construction site we would meet the Poles who brought things to sell, and now I would have no further contact with them. Secondly, I hadn't finished the lessons with my Polish student. Summertime arrived and the weather was nice. It was much more pleasant to work outside, instead of working in a stuffy wooden barrack. However, on the other hand I was pleased to return to my old friends.

When I returned to the washing barrack and they heard from me that we wouldn't be seeing each other for much longer, my co-workers were upset. We had become close friends, almost like brothers. Besides, I shared my food with them and relieved their hunger. When the Polish man heard the news that I was to be transferred he was deeply distressed. I told him that I would send him drawings of various patterns and show him different measurements.

On the following day we bid each other farewell. He gave me some bread and promised to help me if needed. I want to mention that other Poles were extremely cruel to the Jewish inmates and showed us no compassion.

When I returned to the camp I asked if I could be assigned to the same old block where I used to live. When I came back there, my old friends welcomed me with hugs and kisses, as if I returned to family. When I came to the tailor shop I found some French Jews who were originally from Poland. They had prepared for us fabric out of which we had to fashion civilian suits as well as striped clothes like the ones we were wearing.

Several days later someone found out that they would be bringing a new transport of 5,000 Jews from Hungary. After work, when I returned to the block, I asked the room-supervisor, a Lithuanian Jew, about these rumors. He told me that he had also heard about it.

In the month of May a transport of 5,000 Hungarian Jews arrived, including *frum* Jews and assimilated Jews. Among them was the Klausenberger Rebbe. Meir Mittelman managed to arrange that the Rebbe should be assigned to the block right next

to ours, together with several *frum* Jews who came with the Rebbe. Every day after work people would go over to the Rebbe to listen to what he had to say. He would say words of encouragement, telling us that things would become better. He said that he heard from the Belzer Rebbe who miraculously escaped from Galicia that they [the Hungarian Jews] wouldn't suffer that many troubles because the Polish Jews already atoned for the Jewish people. "We still have to go through a lot, but it won't take very long," he said. "The downfall of the wicked is getting closer." He urged us to be strong and hopeful that all evil will soon disappear.

Everyone greatly respected the Rebbe. He only ate bread, and some people brought him potatoes from the worksite, or some onions. He was helped at work to make things easier for him. He had a good word for everyone, regardless if the person was *frum* or not.

Among the arrivals in the Hungarian transport there were Jewish farmers and other skilled workers. There were all kinds of characters – refined people and those who were not so refined. Most of them spoke Hungarian, and this angered some of the Polish inmates because they thought that the Hungarians were speaking against them behind their backs. This would cause small quarrels between the Polish and Hungarian Jews. That is how our unfortunate existence continued day after day.

The war didn't stay in one place all this time. We heard about the unsuccessful assassination attempt against Hitler. We were encouraged by this information because it showed us that the German people, and some of their military leaders, were opposed to Hitler. The Russians were also penetrating more deeply into Poland. Lithuania, Latvia and parts of Poland were already occupied by the Russians, and the Americans had landed in Sicily.

There was a Greek Jew from Salonika who worked at the transport labor group. One day he tried to escape during work. As is self understood, he had some help from the Polish workers whom he paid money, or he may have been helped by the underground. As he tried to disappear, the S.S. guards noticed and caught him, but he was a very strong person and he fought back valiantly, punching the guards. The guards called for back-up and the Germans wounded him by shooting. If this would have happened near the camp, and not in the city, they would have shot him to death on the spot. However, at that point the Germans had to be more careful in public, because the Poles realized that the Germans were losing the war.

The Germans took the wounded S.S. men and the Jew to the hospital. Naturally, they placed guards near the Jew until he recovered. The Gestapo then sentenced him to death by hanging. One Sunday we were all ordered to come to the *appel* place, where they had prepared the gallows. A group of high-ranking Gestapo officers arrived, and the condemned man was brought in a truck. The Gestapo chief, his rank was *Obershturmband-feurer*, took out a piece of paper and read the report of the man's crime: "He tried to escape and beat the S.S. guards, and therefore the court sentenced him to death by hanging."

They immediately grabbed the Jew and tied the noose around his neck. The truck drove away, and the Jew was left hanging in the air. The victim's brother had to stand there and see what was being done to his brother.

If anyone would have dared, he would have asked: "Why did they read his sentence? Hadn't they murdered millions who committed no crime and who weren't sentenced?"

We stood there at the execution site, seeing the innocent victim hanging and his brother weeping nearby. We were overcome by a strong sense of courage, resilience, and patience, despite the horror we witnessed. Our thirst for revenge grew each day and we couldn't wait for the day of vengeance to arrive.

I was not satisfied at the tailor shop. My spare zlotys were used up and I began to suffer from hunger. Although my friends offered me bread, I had vowed never to take food from others during the incident in Auschwitz, before we were sent to Warsaw, when a person refused to share his bread with me while I was starving. I suffered from hunger and waited for an opportunity to stop working in the tailor shop.

Several weeks later the S.S. *Obershtormfuerer*, for whom I had sewed a hat, came into the shop and asked for volunteers for a certain job at the outskirts of Warsaw. I was the first one to volunteer, and three others came along to Praga, a suburb of Warsaw. An S.S. man took us in an open truck. In the middle of the way, when we in the center of the city, the truck stopped and the driver and S.S. man went out. All around us there were scores of Polish people. One of them started teasing us in Polish: "Jews, where are your houses and factories, and your deceitful businesses? Filthy Jews, come lets take a walk!" he jeered, seeing that we were captives who wouldn't be allowed to leave.

I struck up the courage to respond. "You despicable bum!" I shot back. "Don't you know that a bitter end awaits you and your anti-Semitic chums?" The S.S. guard stood some distance away and he didn't seem to care, or perhaps he didn't hear what was going on.

Several minutes later we continued on our way until we crossed the bridge that connected Praga with Warsaw. We came to a timber yard and were ordered to load large boards onto trucks, to be taken to the S.S. headquarters in Warsaw. Several Polish workers were there and they asked us where we came from. I spoke for everyone because the others were from France and didn't speak Polish. "I'm from Sosnowitz," I said. One of the Poles told me that he came from a village near Sosnowitz. He then asked me if I could bring him from the ghetto six sets of cutlery – spoons, forks and knives. Those who went through the ruins of the ghetto often came across such items.

Meanwhile, they gave us some food and also gave each of us a cigarette. We didn't know if we would be brought back to work at the timber yard the following day. When we returned to camp, the *Obershorfeurer* ordered that we each be given a double portion for lunch. I gave the cook the cigarette so he gave me some additional food that he was cooking, which happened to be cabbage and potatoes. I ate a generous lunch and was finally full. After I finished eating I went around asking if anyone had spoons and forks. Someone showed me that he had twelve sets of spoons and forks and several knives. He had polished the silverware with sand and it looked very nice. I showed it to the Pole who

requested it, and he gave me 2 kilos of bread. I cut it into four pieces and placed the slices in my pocket. We ate lunch together with the Pole and we again received one cigarette each.

The same Polish man told me the good news that American parachutists landed on French territory and that the British Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, delivered a speech on French territory. The Russians were advancing towards Lublin, he added. I was happier with the news than with the bread.

When I returned to camp I shared the bread that I received for the silverware, and I also shared the good news that I heard from the Pole, who heard it from a secret radio. "The Americans are already in France and the war will end soon!"

Felix, the one in charge of our room, didn't believe me. I gave him my word of honor that everything I said was the truth, according to what the Poles told us. My news lifted everyone's spirits and spread quickly among the inmates. By the following morning everyone had already heard the news.

I noticed that our S.S. guards were more cross with us than usual and treated us even worse than before. During roll call they would beat us. We were walking between two flames. They called us "Jewish communists," and they grumbled about the American president, saying that "The Jew Rosenfeld wants to seize our country and enslave us, together with his American Jewish capitalists!" Instead of calling him by his real name Roosevelt, they called him with a Jewish surname. They harassed us at every possible opportunity.

We learned that the Poles were assassinating Germans in Warsaw and in the surrounding towns. Many Germans fell at the hands of the Polish underground. The Germans arrested many Poles on suspicion of treason. The *appel* place where we stood for roll call each day bordered the Povyak, a well-known prison from before the war. When the Germans occupied Warsaw, the Povyak became like the inquisition headquarters. At first it was used to torture Jews, but after the Jewish uprising and the liquidation of the ghetto they began to use it as a prison for Polish traitors. Every few days they executed many Poles whom they suspected of being involved in underground activities against the

Germans. We could hear the shots through the wall that separated us from the prison, and afterwards we were able to see the smoke that came from the bodies that were burned. They did this very primitively, placing wood boards on the ground and covering them with the bodies of the executed men. Then they would put another layer of wood and on top of that more bodies. They would pour gasoline and other flammable liquids over the whole pile and burn it.

The Polish people were rebellious. We had to work for the S.S. to fortify their buildings with barbed wire, surrounding their places several times. The camp was also wired with electrical fencing a few times around. We were forced to work quickly; we frequently hurt ourselves from the barbed wire.

We had to fortify the places where the German commanders stayed. We were beaten as we worked, which was a sign that their downfall was near.

*

July 1944

Sometimes I was called upon to do some volunteer work, and during those occasions I was usually able to procure some food. One day a transport arrived in the camp and a group of Ukrainian guards called us to unload the three trucks. We unloaded wooden beds and blankets. Many beds had Yiddish writings inscribed on them, with messages such as: "We are in the Lublin camp; it is being liquidated. We do not know what they will do to us. We need heavenly mercy!" Many names were written on the beds, along with the places the people came from. Later we heard that when the Germans evacuated Lublin before the Russians arrived they took all Jewish inmates and shot them to death. One of the Ukrainian guards told us that the Jews put up a brave resistance and wounded many Germans.

Several days later, on a Sunday, the S.S. collected several strong men from each block and gave them hoes and shovels. They indicated several places in the old camp, as well as in the new camp, where they should dig large, deep pits. When the pits were ready according to their exact specifications they took back

all tools. We were most perturbed about this; many of us feared that due to the advancement of the Russians to Warsaw, the Germans were planning to murder us. They took back the tools so that we shouldn't be able to use them as weapons with which to defend ourselves. We felt that the end of our lives was near.

At night we discussed the situation from our beds. We tried to make some plans how to resist the Germans. Several ideas were brought up among the handful of frightened Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto and concentration camp in July of 1944.

On the following Monday morning, when we stood for roll call and prepared to go to our individual working groups, we were surprised to see that they only sent about 25 percent of the laborers to work. The remaining 75 percent of people were ordered to return to their blocks. We sensed that something major was about to happen. We discussed the situation, each person giving his opinion. Some people were apathetic and others were despondent.

The day went by and those who were sent to work returned to camp. They told us that when they left the camp they were accompanied by a double-guard. Up until then there was one guard for every 10 inmates, but now there were two guards for every ten people, and instead of their regular rifles they now had machine guns. In addition, each guard held a hand-grenade, with some more grenades hanging from their belts.

The workers also reported that the Poles carried out armed attacks against the Germans. They had also heard that the Poles were preparing for a full-scale rebellion. Some of us speculated that the Poles might break into our camp and liberate us before the Russians would enter Warsaw. Most of us felt that the Germans would quickly squelch the rebellion. We all came to the conclusion that our lives were in grave danger.

Day followed day with major happenings taking place. On July 26 I woke up in the morning and went to the washing barrack. I met the *shtuben-dinst* (room-service chief), a friendly, upbeat fellow named Felix who was originally from Lithuania. He seemed very perturbed, so I asked him why he was so downcast. He denied that anything was amiss, but I didn't leave

him alone until he finally replied: "Don't tell anyone, but they are planning to kill all of us today." He had heard this from someone on the camp leadership.

Upon hearing these dreadful words my previous good mood instantly dissipated. I returned to the block and met my friend Hershel Lefkowitz (Richter). "Why are you so pale?" he asked. I tried to avoid answering, but he begged me to tell him. "We are friends since childhood, aren't we?" he pressed. "My brother and your brother were brothers-in-law. Why can't you tell me what's bothering you?" I finally answered: "Hershel, let's stay together." I then told him what I had just heard, but he replied: "Don't be discouraged. Hashem can still help us and we will be saved!"

Suddenly a command was shouted: "Everyone to the *appel* place!" As we passed the offices we saw the file-rooms in flames! We stood in rows, each block separately.

All of a sudden we heard terrible screams coming from the infirmary, and then we heard the firing of machine guns. Half an hour later we saw smoke rising from the bodies of those who had just been shot by the German murderers.

When they were finished with the infirmary, they came over to the *appel* place and called out that we would be required to march for a long time. Those who do not have the strength to walk would be taken by wagon, and they should stand aside. We were so dejected that we failed to grasp what was happening.

A young man from Sosnowitz named Garfinkle, who had a textile business on Targova Street, stepped out and stood aside. All men who were promised to be taken by wagon were taken near the infirmary, shot to death, and their bodies were burned. Among the ill who had been shot was a fine lad from Sosnowitz name Mittelman. His father was a famous *feldger* (medicine-man) who knew a lot more than any doctor. His father-in-law was Weinreb. This poor boy was an only child to his parents.

When the German murderers returned from the execution site they order us to march to the new camp. Over there we were ordered to line up in groups of 100 men. There were 5,000 of us

at that time, so we had 50 groups of 100 men. I was in the 36th group, which was mostly comprised of acquaintances from Bendin, Sosnowitz and Mondjev. We talked quietly between ourselves, knowing full well what awaited us, but we were utterly helpless. The Germans had confiscated anything and everything made of metal, such as pocket knives, so that we should have nothing with which to defend ourselves. We were weak and emaciated; even the idea of attacking the Germans with our teeth and biting them before our deaths was not an option, because most of us had at least several teeth knocked out by the guards or by the evil German taskmasters.

We were painfully aware that less than two years previously our brothers stood at this very place and fought bravely until their last drop of blood, killing and wounding many Germans.

Meanwhile, we saw that they took the first group of 100 men to the old camp. We knew that their execution was taking place at those very moments. Many of us had lost all fear of death, but we did have a powerful urge to take revenge on our murderers. Some people prayed that Hashem should perform for us the same miracle He made for Shimshon during the last moments of his life, when he fell together with his Philistine enemies.

A certain *frum* Jew was in our group, and he tried to encourage us to be strong. "Don't give up hope; everything can still be changed for the better! And if, G-d forbid, it isn't meant to be, let's purify our thoughts and be prepared to die *al kiddush Hashem*."

Several more groups of 100 men were taken to the old camp. It took some time between one group and the next. We surmised that they decided not to use the pits we had dug some time before, so that the free world should not discover the terrible crimes they committed against innocent civilians. This is why the execution took some more time, because they first shot everyone and then burned the bodies.

Some people stood and recited *viduy*. I stood next to Hershel Lefkowitz. It was getting late and we had no more

strength to stand, so we sat down on the ground. The weather was pleasant and warm, and we were thirsty; our throats were parched and dry.

As we lay there listlessly on the ground, we were suddenly commanded to return to our blocks. Apparently, they stopped the execution. I searched for my friend Felix, and he told me that an order had arrived from Gestapo headquarters in Warsaw to cancel the execution. Nobody had any idea of what lay in store for us now, but at least we were still alive for the time being.

I remembered the words of the Jew who told us not to lose hope because we could still be saved. Well, our situation *did* turn around for the better. We received something to eat and we had enough water. We went to sleep in a restless state; I lay down on the third bunk and my friend Hershel was on the second bunk. We spoke quietly to each other until we fell asleep for several hours.

The sound of machine-gun fire woke us up. I climbed off my bunk with Hershel and saw that the Germans and Polish insurgents were fighting each other, using grenades and other weapons. Someone said that the Polish insurgents wanted to liberate us, but I couldn't believe that this was their motive. The Polish nation refused to help the Jewish resistance hardly two years before; they most certainly had no intention of helping us now. I always considered the largest part of the Polish nation to be traitorous anti-Semites.

The shooting finally stopped at dawn. The Germans ordered us to get ready to march. When we stood for roll call, my friend Meir Mittelman came over to me and said that 400 Jews would be permitted to remain in the camp. "Do you want to stay?" he asked. "I'm thinking of staying here." I replied: "You're an admirer of the Klausenberger Rebbe, so ask him what to do." I went together with him to the Rebbe, and he told us that we should go along with the majority. We accepted his advice and gave up the notion of staying behind. We stood together with everyone for roll call, were counted, and then they handed out

some food. This was a good sign; it showed us that they weren't planning to kill us.

I think that when we left Warsaw on July 28, 1944 we numbered 4,330 people. We were accompanied by a heavy guard, including Germans on motorcycles and on foot, armed with machine guns and grenades. There were German S.S. guards as well as Ukrainians and Latvians.

As we marched through the streets of Warsaw I thought to myself: what a dramatic change had taken place here! The city of Warsaw had the largest Jewish population in all of Europe and now the city was empty of all Jews.

We marched onto the road that led to Sochotchov. We walked among sown fields, and in some places we could see the peasants harvesting corn and wheat. We saw potato fields and other types of vegetable fields. The scenes of nature lifted my spirits; it brought back memories of the good times, when my brother Yerachmiel and I would travel to our own farm. Oh, how beautiful it was, to see the fields and fruit trees! The natural beauty around us made me want to sing. I walked through the green fields and forests in a good mood. I was so mesmerized that I didn't respond to my friend Hershel's questions; I was so overcome that I simply didn't hear him. The change between the burned ghetto that held so much pain and suffering, and where so many hundreds of people were killed just yesterday, to the beauty of nature was quite drastic.

"Why, oh why do people and nations perpetrate so much evil against each other?" I cried silently. "This criminal nation, the Germans, want to conquer the world and enslave all nations, and they especially stood up to annihilate us Jews for no reason. Our only sin is that we are Jewish." I was full of hope that the German murderers and their helpers would receive their just reward in a short while. May Hashem just help us live to see their downfall, I prayed.

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As we marched, we noticed that the German commanders were quite anxious. They ordered the guards to march us quicker;

the added haste caused many tragedies, as those who were too weak to keep up with the quick pace remained behind and were shot immediately. We were very frightened. My friend Hershel broke his leg at work some 15 months before. The doctor healed him, but now as he marched quickly for such a long time without taking a break his foot began to ache. We marched five in a row; all of us were good friends. Someone supported Hershel on the right and I supported him on the left.

After many hours we were led to a large meadow in a valley, where we finally had a chance to rest. We ate some of the bread that we received before leaving the camp. We had no water and were utterly thirsty due to our long trek in the July heat. We had no idea where they were taking us.

After a while they commanded us to continue marching. They counted us once more and we began to walk with great haste. My previous good mood left me. I was so very thirsty and had no strength to continue; I found it to be very difficult to support Hershel so that he shouldn't fall behind. We were marched onward, and every few minutes we heard a shot that finished off someone who couldn't keep up with the march. Each one of us thought to himself: "Who knows if I would survive this difficult trek?"

I tried to boost my spirits by thinking positive thoughts. I started fantasizing about the wonderful future awaiting the survivors – a future that wasn't too far away, as we could clearly see. I pictured how the American troops surround us and liberate us; how we fall upon our liberators with hugs and kisses. Tears were pouring from my eyes, and my friend Hershel asked me: "What's wrong? Are you in pain?" I told him that I was fine.

Time went by and the sun began to set. We were taken to a large field where we stretched out our tired bodies. We were still overcome by thirst. The German beasts brought several kegs of water, and some of the people received a bit of water. The rest of us received nothing and fell asleep on the field without quenching our thirst.

The next morning, by six o'clock, we stood up and continued marching just as the day before. Every few minutes

another shot rang out. I tried to banish my depressing thoughts with positive images about our future. I forgot about my thirst and fatigue.

At noontime we were taken through a valley that had a flowing stream. We ran to the stream and began drinking. Suddenly we heard shooting from behind us; the German guards who stood on top of the valley began firing their machine guns at us and the bullets hit several people. One of the bullets lightly wounded by right leg. My friends tied a rag around the wound and I continued marching, with their help. We continued just as the day before.

As the day was coming to an end we were taken to a large meadow where we stretched out on the ground. Suddenly we noticed some trucks coming towards us. When they came closer we saw that the Germans were bringing us a bit of soup and some bread.

A young man named Schreiber, a friend of mine from Mandjev (a town near Sosnowitz), had some money with him. He felt very weak, so he went over to the German *kappo* and offered to pay him for better marching conditions. When the Germans heard of the offer they took him out of line, confiscated his money and shot him on the spot.

We slept through the night. The next morning, July 31, 1944, we continued our march at dawn. The skies darkened and it began to rain, along with thunder and lightning. We held up our bowls to catch the rainwater and revived our souls with the drops of water, although we were utterly soaked. The rain continued stronger, and we had plenty of water. We thanked Hashem for the rain, because suffering from thirst was sheer agony.

When it was time for lunch we were taken to a field. We spread out the blankets we had taken along with us from Warsaw. The blankets were soaked, but we covered ourselves with this wetness. Those who still had some food left ate something. We were allowed to rest for longer than usual because they hoped the rain would stop. After a while they commanded us to continue marching.

We were counted once more and we continued our march. After a while we heard from the guards that we had entered the territory of the German Reich. However, when we looked around us we could see that we were actually still on Polish territory. The Germans designed a new map which included many stretches of land in the German Reich. "Okay, so you want to brag that all of these territories belong to you..." I thought derisively. By us in Sosnowitz they did the same thing; they redesigned the map so that Sosnowitz, Bendin, Dombrowa, and all of Zoglembia until part of Likolkush became part of the German Reich.

In truth, all of these things mattered very little to us. Our current situation was so precarious that every hour and every moment was an eternity. Escape wasn't even an option. Even if someone would have managed to escape, there wasn't where to run. The Poles wouldn't welcome him, and they would have pointed out to the Germans where the Jew was hiding.

We understood that the Russians were pushing towards Warsaw and it would take anywhere from several days to several weeks until all surrounding territories would be occupied by the Russians.

Not far from me marched Albert, one of my friends with whom I worked together in the carpentry shop in Warsaw; he was originally from Sedlitz. On the third night of our march, while we all slept in the field, he started crawling on his stomach towards the forest. He crept unnoticed and almost managed to reach his goal when he was caught. The Germans saw that he had prepared civilian clothing. They shot him on the spot, effectively discouraging anyone else who may have planned to escape.

Chapter 9

Today is August 1, 1944. We continued marching today without knowing what our destination would be. The rain stopped, but we were still soaking wet from yesterday's rain. The sun appeared with its warm rays and dried our clothes. Our mood was very low and we were also very weakened physically.

During the day we heard the German guards talking among themselves about a Polish uprising that broke out that day. House-to-house combats were taking place in the streets of Warsaw and there were many casualties on both sides. We now understood why they took us out of Warsaw in such a rush.

We also heard that the Russians already arrived in Praga, a suburb of Warsaw. The Weisel River separates Praga from Warsaw and only a bridge spanning the river connects both cities. When we heard the news our spirits were lifted once more. We understood very well that the German downfall was imminent. The American and British armies were fighting them on one front, and the Russians on another front. We knew, however, that we still needed lots of heavenly mercy to live to see their downfall. We knew all too well, and heard with our own ears, how people were being shot because they had no strength to continue marching.

We had no food or water and trudged on despondently. We were again thirsty; it was very hot and we received no food. We arrived at a Jewish village named Lowitz, but unfortunately there were no longer any Jews left. They marched us towards the outskirts of the town, into a valley that had a large meadow. We stretched out on the ground, tired and utterly thirsty. Our mouths were dry and our throats were parched. The thirst was much worse than the hunger pangs. Some people began to eat grass; others took their spoons, dug up some wet sand and sucked it through a piece of fabric to extract some moisture. The people continued digging deeper, because the ground appeared to be more wet the lower they went. Suddenly we heard an exclamation of joy; a Jew who was digging in the ground discovered a spring of water!

The people flocked to the place where the water was discovered. Everyone wanted to receive some water to quench his terrible thirst and revive himself. A group of people, I among them, took our spoons and decided to try digging at an even lower point. We dug out some earth and luckily all of us found water! At first, the water that was discovered was somewhat unclean and only after waiting for the water to settle did it become drinkable. We drank as much as we needed. This was a real miracle, because the water saved us from dying from thirst. We were also able to wash up and freshen ourselves.

The S.S. guards came over to see what we were doing but they didn't bother us; in fact, they stood there and marveled at the miracle that happened. We had received water through a supernatural way. Many of them decided that G-d was with us. The *Obershturmband Feurer* asked us if we had digging tools, so we showed him our spoons. He and his underlings stood there in amazement and thought about what happened. Finally he said: "The water you discovered may prove very helpful to the Wehrmacht that is retreating due to a change in strategy."

We went to sleep. Some people were afraid that they wouldn't have water the next day so they woke up several times during the night and ran to the spring for a drink. When we awoke in the morning we all went to the spring, washed ourselves and drank our fill again. Suddenly we received the order to prepare ourselves for the next leg of our journey. As we got ready, we heard moaning coming from a distance. I went over to see who was there and I saw an 18-19 year old boy who lived in my block at one point. His name was Charle, an aristocratic looking lad from France. Perhaps the unclean water was too hard on his system, because he had terrible stomach cramps. We tried to help him stand up but he just couldn't stand. After we lined up to continue marching, we were counted, and then a shot rang out. A young, innocent life was snuffed out in its prime. He was such a cheerful boy with a youthful, handsome appearance. We loved him very much. May G-d avenge his innocent blood.

We marched for several hours and then we were told to stop. We were informed that in the evening, or perhaps by the following morning, we would board a train that would take us to

Germany. We sat down on the ground, and as we talked we learned that the place where we had stopped was the famous town of Sochatchov, well-known in the Chassidic world. The Sochatchover Rebbe, Reb Avromele Bornstein, was the son-in-law and disciple of the Rebbe R' Mendel of Kotzk. The roads and byways on which we marched were not too long ago full of Chassidic Jews and simple, pious Jews who traveled to the Rebbe and back. And now, the town was sadly empty. The Rebbe and his Chassidim were murdered; the last Rebbe was named R' Dovid Bornstein.

We sat and talked and remembered the times when Jews inhabited all surrounding towns. A young man mentioned that the Kotzker Rebbe is even mentioned in the Polish Literature and History books. I assume that most probably the Poles mentioned the town in a book about Kotzk's famous Polish forests.

Our hunger pangs tortured us relentlessly. Suddenly we noticed that they were bringing several buckets. We stood in line to receive a tiny portion of watery soup, which only served to increase our appetite. We did not receive any bread.

The skies became overcast and it began to rain again, along with thunder and lightning. Night arrived, and we fell asleep on the wet ground. When we awoke in the morning it was still raining; we were all completely drenched. We removed our clothes and wrung out the water, and did the same with our blankets. Many people shivered from cold in the chilly morning air, especially since the sun didn't pierce the clouds. Our moods matched the overcast, rainy weather.

They told us to line up and then conducted a *selektzia*. They took many people out of line and told them to go in a sideways direction. We were then told to march until we arrived at a large field with many train tracks crisscrossing each other. Several transport wagons waited for us. They told us how many people were supposed to board each car. We lost each other in the crowd, mostly due to the previous *selektzia* during which they took away at least one person from approximately every second row. The lines were rearranged in a different order, so I lost contact with my friend Hershel.

I ended up with a group of Greek Jews, with some Hungarian Jews as well. We had to sit in the cramped train car, and we ended up being squashed together under terrible conditions. Each person had to sit between the legs of the person sitting behind him; the crowdedness was indescribable. The people were tired so they leaned back on those who sat behind them. There were many rows of people, and those sitting in the back bore the weight of everyone sitting in front of them. And then something terrible happened.

The S.S. men shut the doors of the train cars and the train began to move. Hot steam began to rise from our wet clothes. The weather became warm again – it was in the midst of August. We had no air to breathe and all of us felt that if the journey would take much longer we would not survive. It was far better to march on foot, we realized.

We traveled for several hours until the train stopped suddenly. They opened the door and said that whoever needed to step down should come out. A large number of people went out of the cars for a 15-minute reprieve, and then we had to return. A while later they served highly salted canned food with a small piece of bread. They gave us no water, and within a short while our throats were on fire from thirst, aggravated by the salted canned food, the lack of fresh air and the indescribably crowded conditions with people lying on each other. I sat there and contemplated our tragic situation. "I may die right here and no one would even know!" I shuddered.

I sat among a few Greek Jews who were not especially refined. They tried to make themselves more comfortable by leaning on me, and it was very difficult for me to bear the weight of their bodies. All of my limbs screamed from pain. The feet of the person behind me dug into my sides. I heard the people ahead of me saying that those who were shot on the way were far more fortunate than us, because we were made to suffer on the train far more torturously than they.

I cannot describe the heartbreaking crying and moaning of the people. We traveled in this manner for a long time. Several times the transport stopped for a few hours. Our thirst was

torturous, and the crowdedness was unbearable. People were passing out and no one could do anything about it, especially since we had no water. People began to expire like dying flames.

One night, something happened. A group of Jews in one of the train cars managed to unscrew the metal bars of one of the windows. Perhaps they had sneaked in some tools into the wagon. In any case, some Jews jumped off the moving train in the middle of the night and escaped into the darkness. They must have decided that they had nothing to lose anyway. In the morning, the S.S. men entered the car and saw the open window. They counted the people, living and dead, and saw that several men were missing. Those who remained in that car were beaten and bloodied as punishment.

From then on they placed an S.S. guard on each car. The guards sat on chairs next to the doors, and the doors were left open. Finally, we had some air! We breathed in the fresh air and continued our journey until Leipzig.

The train stopped for a while to enable our S.S. guards to eat and drink. We saw groups of Catholic nuns with their black robes bringing lemonade and other drinks, apparently for the wounded soldiers returning from the Russian front. The "goodhearted" Catholic nuns waited for the arrival of trains carrying the heavily-wounded German soldiers and gave them to drink, or applied first aid. When we arrived, the nuns asked the German guards about the people on the train. When they were told that the entire transport contained Jews, they said: "The Jewish war criminals should die!" This was the response of the pious Catholics with their eyes pinned on their messiah's portrait, the one they claimed was crucified by Jews. This was the gentile world's reaction to our plight.

We continued our journey without receiving anything to eat or drink. The thirst was even worse than the hunger. A Hungarian Jew became hysterical from thirst to the point of losing his sanity. He began to scream: "Water! I demand water!" The German guards sat near the door, together with the German *kappos*. One of them became annoyed and threw something heavy at the screaming Jew. The poor fellow sat several rows

behind me, and when the *kappo* aimed the thing at him it landed on my head. One of the *kappos* remarked: "The thing you threw hit the innocent hat-maker!" One of the beasts brought me some water to wash the blood that was pouring from my wound. As soon as I got the water, I began to drink it. My blood dripped into the bowl so I ended up drinking my own blood, mixed with the little water they gave me. Some of the people begrudged my good fortune that I was wounded and therefore I was fortunate to receive some water to drink with my own blood. This is the tragic situation in which we found ourselves while traveling on that terrible journey.

When the train stopped we were ordered to pile up the dead bodies near the wall. The Germans with their murderous intentions originally planned to provide us with too few transport cars. They would make a *selektzia* and those who wouldn't have enough room on the cars would be butchered in the fields. The remaining Jews would suffer through hunger and thirst and every few hours a few more souls would expire.

The journey took several days, because we stopped frequently for hours on end in order to clear the tracks for transports carrying reinforcements to the front or trains bringing back wounded soldiers from the front. This was probably why our journey took so long.

On the 6th of August, 1944, they opened the doors wide and told us to disembark. I was asleep, or perhaps I fainted, when they ordered us to come out, and the people threw me out onto the ground, thinking I was dead. As soon as I felt the fresh air I woke up. Not far from me was a stream of water. With our last bit of strength we went towards the stream and began to drink. Some people dipped their caps into the stream and drank from these makeshift cups. Others bent towards the stream and drank straight from the ground, and some people washed themselves as well.

Meanwhile I realized that I had only one shoe, on my right foot. The left shoe was removed by someone who thought I was dead. I began to look for my friend Hershel Lefkowitz but I couldn't find him. Finally someone told me that he saw Hershel,

but I had no strength to continue searching for him. Suddenly, I noticed someone walking barefoot; he looked quite similar to Hershel.

"Are you Hershel Lefkowitz?" I asked him. His reply was a stream of incoherent words. I recognized his voice – it was indeed my friend, but he didn't recognize me. I could tell by the way he spoke that he was completely incoherent. I began to cry.

"Hershel," I tried talking to him, "Please remember! I am your childhood friend Moshe. Your brother Yosef and my brother Yerachmiel were brothers-in-law." I took him to the stream and gave him to drink. I helped him wash himself and sat him down on the grass. His mind began to return and he started to remember everything. He told me how much he suffered on the journey, and I told him about my own suffering on the train, as well as the miracle that happened to me when I was wounded in the head and how the water I received saved my life. When I saw that his sanity returned I told him tearfully: "Hashem helped us survive this death transport, so I hope to Hashem that we will yet live to be free."

We learned that we had arrived to the infamous Dachau concentration camp. We sat on the grass and talked until we were commanded to line up and march towards the camp. Several desks stood in a row, marked according to the alphabet. Everyone had to report at the appropriate desk according to his last name. My friend Hershel went along with me to the desk marked with the letter L. "You left Sosnowitz under the name Richter," I reminded Hershel, urging him to report at the desk marked with the letter R. "You smuggled yourself out of Djalowitz and arrived illegally in Sosnowitz. You were in danger of falling into the hands of the Gestapo, who immediately killed all illegal persons. You managed to receive your cousin's papers and reported in his name, and that's how you became Hershel Richter. Just listen to me and keep the name Richter until our liberation."

Hershel listened to me and signed up at the R desk. The people who signed us up were camp inmates. The person who took care of my papers was a Polish pastor. He asked me about

our journey and I told him everything. He replied that the German downfall wasn't far away. Then he said that he was incarcerated not because he committed a crime, but because the Germans discovered that his grandfather was Jewish. I received a new inmate number for the Dachau camp: 88797. After signing me in, he gave me two sugar cubes. I thanked him and said that I shared everything with my friend, so he gave me two more sugar cubes. I immediately looked for Hershel and gave him two of the sugar cubes. We were energized by the sweet snack.

We had to wait there for a while. We learned that the camp inmates were non-Jews who originated from the various countries that the Germans occupied. Most of them were part of the intelligentsia in their respective localities.

We were taken to a washroom where we bathed with warm water. When we left the washroom, Hershel wound up with a different group and we couldn't see each other. I tried so hard to stay together with him, but this time I couldn't stay in touch. I was assigned to Block 16.

They called out to us to take our lunches. For the first time since I was captured by the Germans, we received macaroni and some other food mixture. We were sated by the food. We heard that the Germans treated the non-Jewish inmates quite fairly. In the evening we received a portion of bread with a bit of something else on the side. Somewhat later we were taken to the sleeping barracks. There were no beds prepared for us but they gave us sacks on which to sleep. The room was airy, and there was enough space for me to stretch my tired limbs.

I awoke early in the morning and thought about everything I had undergone recently on the transport from Warsaw to Dachau. It all seemed like a bad dream. I remembered how we passed free-grazing cattle on our journey and many people envied the animals.

We got dressed and we were counted. Then they announced that whoever wanted to could visit the doctor. I went to the doctor and showed him the bullet-wound on my right leg, which I received when the guards shot at us while we drank from the stream. I also showed him the wound on my head. The doctor

bandaged my leg and applied something to prevent infection. They also did something to the wound on my head to help it heal properly. The doctors were themselves inmates. They told me to return a few days later. The doctor explained that Dachau would only be a temporary transit camp for us. "In Bayern there are 21 labor camps for Jews only," he said. He urged me to try to rest as much as possible and allow my wounds to heal.

I remained there for 16 days. Afterwards I was sent with a small transport to Koefring Lager 4, near Landsberg. Our new living quarters were deep underground. There were no windows other than the glass door, and no floor, just a primitive pack of earth. There were no beds either, just two boards lining the walls from end to end. Underneath the boards, the ground was covered with wood chips.

As I took in the dismal scene, my heart plummeted. The difference between Dachau and this horrible place was like the difference between light and darkness. We tried to encourage each other that if we managed to survive until now, Hashem will surely continue to help us. We received some watery soup and 25 deco of bread, and then we went to sleep on the shared bunk.

On the following day we stood for roll call. We were counted and then marched several kilometers towards the construction site. The surrounding scenery was beautiful; the fields were full of greenery and herds of sheep grazed in the meadows. The view of sunrise was breathtaking, and my mood lifted. The town had a nicer view than Poland, with bluer skies that weren't so frequently overcast. I wondered: this murderous nation owns such a beautiful land, yet all they want is to rob the lands of other nations and enslave the inhabitants. They want to steal all their property, their fields and factories, and murder the owners. They did this to Polish non-Jews too, and of course what they did to us Jews is beyond comprehension. First they robbed us of everything we had worked so hard to build for 1,000 years, and then they murdered all of us. We, a small group of bone-weary survivors, are enslaved under terrible conditions, without food. "Hashem!" I cried silently, "Where is justice?"

When we arrived at the construction site we learned that the place belonged to a company called Holzman. They built underground storehouses for the war effort, where they stored large gasoline and benzene tanks. Some of the people said that a short distance away was an ammunition factory. We had to do very difficult work, but at least we worked under the open skies and were no longer in those horrible train cars where we sat squashed together for 96 hours without air, water or food.

After completing the day's work we returned to the camp. After roll call we went to wash up and stood in line for our rations. We received some watery soup and a piece of bread; this was supposed to suffice for 24 hours. We ate the bread, and I could say we drank the soup. I ate half of my 25 deco of bread and hid the other half very well; I had to be careful that no one should notice so it shouldn't be stolen. That's how hungry everyone was.

This is how our existence continued day after day. The fresh air increased our appetite, and as we lay in bed all we could think about and talk about was food. We spoke about the Shabbos'dig *cholent* and *kishke* and all other delicious, homey foods we remembered from home.

Once a week, the Germans served in the Kaufring Lager 4 a somewhat more nutritious lunch and they also gave each person a few whole potatoes cooked in the skin. One week, after completing the day's work we were lined up and marched back to camp, while our mouths watered in anticipation of the lunch we were to receive that day. The guards counted us and saw that one Jew was missing. They questioned us to find out if anyone saw him escape, but none of us knew anything and couldn't give them any information.

They marched us back into camp, and our hearts were full of fear about the impending punishment we were sure awaited us. After all, the Germans considered all of us to be responsible for each other. Someone fearfully said that they may decide to select one Jew out of every ten to be killed. Others had different ideas about what the Germans may do to us. When we finally arrived, the camp leader and his assistants started threatening us that they

would shoot us all to death if we wouldn't tell them who helped him escape. They tortured us for a long time, while we were forced to stand without moving near the watchtowers. The guards shone their projectors on the entire area and surrounded us with their machine guns. The camp leader told us that whoever would so much as move would be subjected to a barrage of bullets. We stood there all night without moving, eating or drinking.

The next morning we were marched back to our workplace. Our feet and all our bones ached, and we were utterly exhausted. When we arrived at the construction site, we learned that the Jew who disappeared the day before was back at work! The poor fellow simply forgot that he belonged to camp four, and he mistakenly returned to camp nine with that camp's work crew that worked at Holtzman. When they counted their inmates, they saw that they had an extra person - the Hungarian Jew from our camp. Perhaps the person was still somewhat confused from his ordeal on the death march.

We knew that there were phones in all camps, so we assumed that camp nine must have contacted the other camps during the evening and discovered that the Jew who wound up in their place came from camp four. If so, why did they let us stand there all night without food? They simply wanted to torture us; they were losing the war and they wanted to show that at least they had power over us. They were being pushed out of all occupied territories and losing many soldiers along the way. They knew that they may even lose their own homeland. Oh, may Hashem give us the strength to endure until then so we should see their downfall!

On the way back to camp we discussed the entire issue with each other, and some of us speculated that surely they would give us yesterday's lunch and a double portion of bread. "Today we will be well sated!" some people said hopefully. But in reality, we learned that they spilled all of yesterday's food. We didn't even receive the previous day's bread ration. We ate our meager portions of watery soup and our pieces of bread with heavy hearts and went to sleep hungry and disappointed.

The world has no idea how sadistic the Germans are. Some people purport that they were indoctrinated this way, but I believe that they all have inborn murderous inclinations. When a German smiles or acts pleasantly and culturally proper, it is due to a learned intelligence. His true inner nature, his instinct, is to be sadistic, vicious and deceitful. There is only a very small minority of upright and honest Germans. This is what I personally learned throughout the years I served as a slave in their camps. They are trying to whitewash their name in the word; they are rich and are paying "*vidur-gutmachung*" money. How can they "make good" the beastly and murderous deeds they committed? How can they erase the hideous crimes they did?

That night as we lay in bed, some people cried out that they needed medical attention. They were so weak and exhausted and they struggled to breathe. Some of them complained that all of their bones ached, and others had swollen feet and were overcome by dizziness. We, the stronger ones, woke up in the morning and left for work. When we returned we didn't find those who stayed behind. Some of us assumed that they were taken to the infirmary.

The days and weeks went by and we became weaker and thinner. One day while we stood for roll call, they selected the stronger ones, myself included, and told us that within several hours we would be taken to Camp 7. We stretched out on the grass to let our weary bones rest. The hunger pangs tortured us without letup. I remember thinking that in Dachau they gave better food and the sleeping arrangements were much better too. I realized that they were careful to treat their non-Jewish inmates decently to protect their world-image, but no one cared about the fate of the Jews.

We were commanded to march, and we walked for several kilometers until we arrived at Camp 7. The block was the same as the one we came from, with the ground serving as a common sleeping bed for everyone. As we spread out on the ground, I felt something hard under my head. I tried to disperse some of the woodchips to make myself more comfortable, and as I rummaged in the chips my hand struck something wet. I pulled out part of it and saw that it was a warm winter shirt. I returned it so that if the person who hid it there would come looking for it he would find it.

The next day we were sent to work at a different place (I don't remember the name of the company). A group of Hungarian Jewish girls were employed at the factory, doing somewhat lighter work. Some were required to unload lightweight metal bars from the trains. We also worked at unloading the trains, but we carried heavier construction materials, including cement. We communicated with them from a distance, being careful that the Germans shouldn't notice. This went on for several days.

The factory supervisor was pleased with our work, so he informed us that they would give us every day at noon some *bunker* soup. Two days later they called over several girls who worked with my group and sent them to work in the kitchen to prepare the soup. Several days later, when the weather began turning cold, one of the girls who worked in the kitchen told me that she needed a warm sweater for her sister. I was reminded of the winter shirt that I found underneath the chips in our block, so I told her that I would be able to tell her the next day if I could find a sweater for her.

When I returned to the block after work, I looked for the shirt and found it in the same place where I had left it. I pulled it out and saw that it was indeed a warm shirt, but it was full of lice. I hid it again and told the girl the next day that I could find her a warm shirt, but it was full of lice. She said that she would wash it in boiling water; since she worked in the kitchen she had the ability to do so.

The following day I gave her the shirt. That very day at noon, when the work area was empty of workers, she came over to me and gave me an entire loaf of military bread, weighing 1 kilo and 60 deco. I couldn't believe my eyes! I was overjoyed with the food and cut the loaf into several pieces. As I ate the bread, I could feel my body being reenergized.

I worked together with a Greek Jew from Salonika. He happened to pass by just then, so I gave him a piece of bread. He was very thankful. We then went together to retrieve our portions

of soup and ate the bread together with the soup. I was revived like a new person! I thought about the whole incident – finding a shirt underneath my head, a young girl who was desperately cold, and how I was able to help her and at the same time be saved from hunger. I understood that this was ordained by Heaven to save me at a time when thousands perished from starvation.

From time to time the girl brought me a bit of heavier soup, and sometimes even a piece of bread. When we returned to the camp we received our ration, which included some soup and a piece of bread. This was supposed to nourish us for a full 24 hours.

Rosh Hashanah was approaching. One day a new transport arrived from Auschwitz, bringing Hungarian Jews. Several *frum* Jews from the transport were assigned to our block. One early morning, when we were still sleeping deeply due to utter exhaustion, I was awakened to the sound of tearful prayers. The Hungarian Jews recited Selichos; their heartfelt recital of the Shelosh Esrei Midos with its special melody brought back memories of the not-too-distant past. I remembered how we used to gather in *shul* or in the *shtiblach*; we were content, sated and happy. Now all that was left of us was a pitiful group of broken and forlorn Jews whose wives and children were murdered and young lads who were left orphaned. The girls working with us were also orphans, and the young women were recently widowed. The tear-filled prayers coming from these broken hearts touched us deeply. Even the non-religious among us prayed along with tears.

During the following nights, we all got up in the middle of the night. We got dressed and recited Selichos in the dark, without prayer-books, for no one managed to procure a *siddur* or *machzor*.

On Rosh Hashanah eve we *davened* Maariv with the ancient Rosh Hashanah melody, and recited L'Dovid Mizmor with heart-wrenching sobs. Instead of wishing each other joyfully a sweet new year, we wished each other well in tears. In the morning, we recited the prayers we knew by heart while working. When we returned to the camp after work, we managed to *daven* with *minyan* Shacharis and Mussaf, as well as Unsaneh Tokef. Everyone cried bitterly when we reached the words: "On Rosh Hashanah it is written..." We all saw with our own eyes those who were burned, those who died from hunger or thirst, those who were shot to death or butchered with knives, those who suffocated to death from gas and those who perished from heat, those who froze to death and those who perished from the raging epidemics of typhus or dysentery. Our faces were bathed in tears; our eyes were red from weeping. Our deep sighs certainly reached the highest Heavens. After spending our tears, our hearts felt lighter.

The second day of Rosh Hashanah was similar to the first. After Rosh Hashanah, we continued waking up each night for Selichos, until Yom Kippur.

Several days before Yom Kippur I went over to the cook, a German Jew who wasn't especially noble, and told him that on the following week when Yom Kippur would arrive, I would like to fast. I asked him to help me out by giving me an extra portion of soup the day before. He recognized me as a long-time inmate and assured me that he would come through. We all had ration cards, and each time we took a portion of soup or bread a hole was punched through the card. He told me that when I would come for my first portion of soup I should make sure to go only to him, and I should not present my card. I should only present my card when taking my second portion of soup.

On Erev Yom Kippur I went to the kitchen as soon as I returned from work. I received very watery soup, because they were only beginning to distribute the rations then and since most of the vegetables settled on the bottom, the first people in line received very light soup. I sat down on my cot and ate the soup with a small piece of bread. When my bowl was empty I went to pick up a second portion of soup, this time with my card. As I stood there, I saw a middle-aged Jew crying. He lost his ration card and he was hungry. He also explained that he wanted to fast on Yom Kippur.

Seeing how desperate he was, I told him to follow me. I took his bowl, presented my card and received a portion of heavy

All of my friends asked me if I could help them in any way. I was helpless regarding the food situation, but I was able to try to get them assigned to work groups where the laborers weren't beaten. Sometimes I was able to make things somewhat easier for them. I was able to arrange through my contacts with the leadership to appoint the former *Juden-eltzter* Gleitman as block-*eltzter*.

There were also some Jewish *kappos* from Auschwitz, and I had my grievances against them. One of them became very involved in our block affairs. One day he commanded me to bring food from the kitchen. He spoke in a commanding tone and showed me the *kappo*-band on his despicable arm. I refused to obey his command, so he told me that I would soon become shorter by a head. One of my friends realized that this could result in serious trouble, so he ran to one of the *Oberkappos* with whom I was friendly; he was a German thug. He knew me from way before and he respected me; I was his Moshek. He came over immediately.

Meanwhile, the former *kappo* from Auschwitz had smacked me. Seeing that my face was red from the blow, the *Oberkappo* asked him who he was and why he did this to me. He replied that he was a *kappo* from Auschwitz. The *Oberkappo* pulled off the *kappo*-band from his arm and said: "I heard that you had the gall to threaten this old-time inmate that you would reduce him with a head. I will do the same to you right now!" So saying, he punched him in the teeth.

I began to plead for his life. The *Oberkappo* let him go, but before he left he commanded him to report to his labor group the following morning. I followed him outside and begged him not to harm him at work, and he promised me that he wouldn't.

This fellow was the same *kappo* who had announced back in Warsaw that I sold my winter coat, when we returned from work. He then said that he was sorry that I would be murdered immediately. When I promised to point out which Pole bought the coat, I was only punished with 35 lashes. Every few days the S.S. came to the workplace; they tortured and beat me to tell them who bought the coat, but I never betrayed the Polish man.

soup. I gave it to this person, who thanked me tearfully and wished me a *gmar chasima tova*. I returned to my block hungry but happy that I was able to save this Jew from hunger. If he would have attempted to fast for two days he would probably not have survived.

We washed up and cleaned ourselves, and then gathered for *davening*. A *frum* Hungarian Jew started Kol Nidrei in the dark, with the ancient melody, and once again everyone broke down in tears. I will never forget that scene for as long as I live.

The next day we all *davened* while working, and we fasted and prayed for a speedy liberation from the hands of the murderous Germans. When we returned from work we received our rations. We *davened* Mincha and then Ne'ilah and Maariv, wished each other a good year and then we ate our piece of bread and bit of soup. We went to sleep after a hard day of working while fasting.

The days and weeks went by without any improvement. We did hear some good news from the frontlines, but our situation only worsened from day to day. The weather turned cold and all we had to wear was our thin camp uniform made from striped linen. They did not give us any spare shirts so the lice found their way into our clothing and constantly sucked our blood. The lice even crawled on our faces, and our clothing was totally infested. They crept all over our bodies and some people even turned yellow from the lice that bit them relentlessly. To add to our troubles, they started giving us moldy bread.

Once again, a typhus epidemic broke out and many of us perished.

One day when we returned from work we saw that a new transport arrived from Onenberg and Markstat, as well as from Auschwitz. Some of the newcomers recognized me, and I recognized some of them from Sosnowitz. Among those who came from Onenberg were the Gleitman brothers; the older one, Shaya, was the *Juden-eltzter* there. He was a grandson of the Chenchiner Rebbe [Yosef Baruch ?], and the son of R' Shmuel Aron Pardas. He told me that he was together with my brother in his previous camp.

This same German *Oberkappo* who now intervened on my behalf was there too, and realizing that I could be trusted with a secret he used me as his confidante in all of his illegal dealings in which he sold coats to the Poles.

As time went on, our camp became nothing but hell itself. Some of the worst brutes arrived from Auschwitz. There was a German inmate named Willie who was promoted to Camp Supervisor. He would beat the hapless inmates to death, killing many people. There was also a Jewish thug from Hungary who was, incidentally, also named Willie. He was a terrible brute. Our situation was simply unbearable; each day was an eternity. We suffered greatly every day.

We had to walk several kilometers daily to work. On our way past the frozen fields we sometimes found some frozen kohlrabies. I once managed to pick up such a kohlrabi and ate it to quiet my hunger pangs. Unfortunately, it was too hard for my system and I came down with dysentery. My friends tried to help me in every way possible by trying some homemade remedies. I lost lots of weight, and still I was forced to work. It was cold outside, and it rained and snowed, but we were dressed in summer clothing.

I felt as if my end was near. 'What can I do?' I thought. 'I will have to share the fate of those who perished before me.' I said to myself that it was a shame to die when the news we kept hearing was all about German losses on the front. I so much wanted to live to see their downfall!

One Shabbos evening in January 1945 I had a dream. In my dream, I was in a field and Gestapo officers were chasing me. I was running as fast as I could, until I reached a large pit which I was unable to cross. I felt utterly lost and frightened, afraid that I would be captured by my murderous pursuers. Suddenly, an elderly, tall Jew with a grey and white beard appeared in front of me. He told me: "Do not be afraid, Moshe." He took my hand and, unbelievably, I found myself on the other side of the pit! That very moment I awoke from my dream.

I got dressed immediately and went outside for roll call. A heavy rain was falling and it was cold outside. We all took our

bowls and covered our heads with it to protect ourselves from the rain. Usually we were made to stand for ten or fifteen minutes each morning, but that day we stood for a long time. During that time I was in frequent need of the bathroom, and the Jewish camp police would constantly harass me and beat me. We stood there for over two hours until we saw a car pass through the gate. Several high-ranking Gestapo men emerged, and we immediately understood that we would be subjected to a *selektzia*. They would now determine who would live temporarily and who would die.

As we stood there in straight lines, they came over to us. I was quite frightened because I had lost lots of weight due to diarrhea and I appeared pale and sickly. They began to select the healthy people, sending them to the right side, and the sick ones were made to stand on the left. My heart was beating fast, because my turn was approaching. Suddenly I noticed among the camp police my friend, the German *Oberkappo*. He and the other police were supposed to keep an eye on us to ensure that none of those who were sent to the left were able to get into the other group. I went over to him and told him that I was a longtime inmate, from his own early days in the camps. "Now I am going through a hardship and I have a sickly appearance. My life is in danger; please help me save myself."

He replied: "Make it quick, I don't see anything." Next to me stood a Polish Jew who used to live in France. We stuck together, so now as I quickly went over to the healthy group, I pulled him along with me. I felt as if a stone was lifted off my chest. A third of the inmates were sentenced to death that day.

Some time later we returned to our blocks, and the people who were selected to die were sent into separate blocks under heavy guard. The guards stood on the towers to keep them under surveillance, and the camp police were also actively watching. That very day they were ordered to undress; they were left only with their blankets. It broke my heart to see those unfortunate Jews.

The next day when we marched to work, we saw large piles of these blankets. Apparently, they were loaded onto the

trucks completely naked and thus taken to Dachau to be murdered, or shot in the fields.

Several days later a large group of inmates, myself included, was sent to Camp 11. From there, we were taken to a new workplace, with a factory named Mechkishe Construction Group. We had to perform various jobs for them, such as unloading cement from the trains. Several days later we began a new job that involved moving the heavy metal train tracks. This job was above my physical abilities. We went in groups of four or six; all people in each group were of equal height. Each group carried one track, but there were unscrupulous people in the middle of the groups who crouched while walking so that the heavy track shouldn't rest on their shoulder, and their fellow group members had to carry the entire burden. Those who stood at the edges of the groups carried the tracks with their last ounce of strength. While dropping the tracks at the new location, it so happened that the heavy track fell on someone's foot. No one applied any first aid.

I later went to the infirmary to visit the person who broke his foot. He received no medical care and was in terrible pain. Several days later I went to visit him again but he was no longer there. The other sick people told me that whoever wasn't back at work within a short time was killed by an injection, and this poor fellow was also killed in this manner. I could not forgive myself, and that night I spoke to the others in our block about this incident. I was very upset and told the people that those who crouched down to avoid carrying the heavy tracks, letting the people who stood at the edges carry the entire burden, they were responsible for the death of this Jew! "Your hands are stained with blood! Because of your unfairness, this person lost his life," I said.

Unfortunately, many survivors managed to remain alive because they took advantage of others. There were also many *kappos* and camp police, bands of Jewish thugs, who helped the German murderers and thus managed to survive. Those brutes often beat me because I stood up for others, but the time came when my fortune turned for the better and those Jewish lowlifes were forced to treat me with respect.

One day I stood doing the heavy work as usual, carrying the heavy loads together with my fellow Jews. I made sure that the tracks were resting on my shoulders so that others should not have to work harder because of me, although I was still weak from my illness. One of the construction supervisors observed me from afar. After putting down our load, he came over to me and introduced himself as an engineer from Berlin. He was from the O.T. party and wore a military uniform, as well as a swastika badge on his arm.

He asked me in a friendly manner from where I came from and what I did before the war. "I come from Sosnowitz," was my reply, "and I was a tailor." He asked me why I looked so sick, so I told him that all we receive is 30 deco of bread and some watery soup for 24 hours. "We have to work very hard and are always hungry," I explained. "One day I found a frozen kohlrabi and ate it, and this caused me to come down with dysentery. But now I'm feeling much better."

Two days later he came looking for me at work and called me aside. He showed me that his long military coat was torn at the shoulders; it had a huge rip, over a yard in length. The coat was made of a hairy fabric. "Can you undertake to fix this for me?" he asked.

"I can do it," I said, "but I need thread in the same color as the coat, as well as a needle." He immediately went into town with his private motorcycle. Half an hour later he was back with all supplies. He took me into a smithy where I sat down and got to work on the coat. I sewed slowly, happy to be warm, and made sure that it took as long as possible. When it was finally done, I took a piece of linen and made it wet. I then went over to the hot oven and used this piece of linen as a makeshift iron to press the new seam that I made on the coat.

When the supervisor came in, I gave him the coat. He looked for the rip but couldn't find it! He was wildly delighted and told me on the spot that I would no longer have to do any hard physical labor, but instead I would work at my profession. He told me to wait and a while later he returned with a kilo of bread, baked in a German bakery. He also gave me a jar of

marmalade to take back to camp. "Don't be afraid of the guards," he assured me. "If anyone tries to harm you, just make sure to let me know."

When I returned to camp in an uplifted mood I took my soup and ate some of the bread with it. I also shared two pieces of bread with my workmates. I felt somewhat satisfied. I gave the marmalade to the *shtubendinst* of my block to put away.

The next day when I went to work, the leader of our labor group told me that the construction manager Keizer had issued an order for me to appear at his office at 9 o'clock. At the specified time I arrived at his office and greeted him in military fashion, calling him "*Herr Hoptman*," which means Captain. He asked me to sit and told me that the engineer Mr. Miller told him the day before that I was an excellent tailor. They decided to open a tailor shop at our workplace, and he wanted me to work only for members of the O.T. party, as well as for the guards and officers. "You will have full authorization to run the tailor shop," he said. "If you need more qualified tailors to work for you, and you know of such people here in camp, just let us know that you need them."

I thanked him and promised him that I would do my best to ensure his satisfaction. We left the office and headed towards the smithy. Our labor chief and the other guards saluted my companion, who was an engineer by profession. He was a tall, handsome German dressed in an elegant military uniform with the insignia of commander. A revolver was fastened to his belt, and the gravel trembled underneath his confident steps. I wondered about his haughty stance. Didn't he know that their downfall was near?

He commanded that a small storeroom should be emptied and all of its contents moved to another location. He also ordered to bring a metal oven, as well as wood and coals, and that the place should be washed and cleaned. Later, I was sent with a guard to a nearby village where I was shown two sewing machines. I picked out the better machine and asked that it be brought back to camp. I then went together with the guard into town and bought sewing-machine needles, regular sewing

needles, thread in various colors, fabric chalk and other essential supplies. By the time we returned I already had to go back to camp, so I had gained another day.

When I came into camp, I received my ration together with everyone – a piece of bread and a bit of soup, and I ate it all up. A bit later, I took my marmalade and smeared some of it on a piece of bread. With every morsel, I felt my body being reinvigorated. My health also improved.

I went to the washing barrack to shave and wash up, and I tried to rid myself somewhat of the lice. The next day when I came to work, I immediately went to my tailor shop and lit the oven, until the room became nice and warm. The first person to enter was Engineer Miller. He brought me something to fix, and told me that there was no rush to get it done. I did the work for him as requested. The leader of the labor groups also brought me something to fix and I did it to his satisfaction. He was very pleased, and this came to good use. Within several days, so much work was brought in by the O.T. party men and the military men that I was unable to meet the demand on my own.

That day, after finishing the day's work, I returned to camp with the other laborers. I happened to stand near a Jew from Lodz who had recently arrived from Auschwitz. I heard him say to another Jew that he was extremely weakened by the cold and the difficult physical labor. He came from the Ghetto in Lodz where he had starved all the time. "In my present situation," he said, "I won't last more than a few days. What bothers me most is that I would be leaving behind my beloved son who is here with me, and I love him with all my heart. He is the only one who is left from my entire family."

I heard him tell the entire story to his friend. His wife perished in the Lodz Ghetto. He had worked for some watery soup, but his wife gave all her food to the small children until she was so weakened that she became very ill. The doctor had said that her intestines had shriveled up from hunger. She passed away, leaving behind four orphans. Shortly after this tragedy took place, the Ghetto was liquidated and they were brought to

Auschwitz, where three of his children – two daughters and a son – were taken from him forever.

When we stood for roll call, I asked him what his profession was before the war. He told me that he had his own tailor shop. I asked him his name and he said it was Markowski. I memorized his inmate number and later, when we returned to the block, I wrote it down somewhere. I thought about him until I fell asleep.

The next morning when I arrived at work I came to the tailor shop and lit the oven. The room became warm, while outside the weather was cold and wet; the cold penetrated everyone's bones. I couldn't enjoy my good fortune while seeing so many pitiful, weak people shivering in the cold. When I saw the construction manager coming to his office, I waited just a bit and then went to see him. I prayed silently that I should succeed.

I knocked on his door. "Come in!" he said. I entered and greeted him. First he told me that the people were very pleased with my work, and I replied that I would try my best to do even better so that everyone should be completely satisfied. "However," I said, "everyone wants their mending to be finished quickly, but it is simply impossible to do this by myself. I already have a pile of work that could take two weeks to complete. I do the work in the order that it is received. The last person who gave me work was told that it would be finished in two weeks."

"If you need more tailors, just take someone," he said. I gave him the inmate number of the Jewish tailor from Lodz, who worked some two kilometers from our place. He called a guard and ordered him to take me to that labor group and pick up that person to work in the tailor shop. I went with the guard. When we arrived, the guard called out the inmate number of the tailor. Hearing his number being called, the Jew came over to us and the guard told him to come along. He was very frightened, so I assured him that he had nothing to fear. "You will be given a new job," I explained. "We will work together." He had no idea what type of job that would be.

When we arrived at the tailor shop, the guard left us alone. The two of us entered the warm shop. "This is where

you'll be working," I told him. When he heard the wonderful news, he hugged me and cried so hard, showering me with blessings, that I cried along. "You don't have to thank me," I said. "This good fortune was destined for you, and I am happy to be Hashem's messenger to bring this about. If I would have been able to help everyone I would be even happier."

I put up a pot of soup that the Germans had given me. Not all Germans ate the soup they were given because most of them received food packages from home. When the soup was hot I served him some with a piece of bread. He ate and was refreshed, but he put aside the bread. I understood that he kept it for his son. "Please finish eating," I said. "I will give you some more bread for your son."

We started working and I was glad to see that he was a highly skilled tailor. He worked quickly, and I was very pleased with his work. I was even more pleased that I was able to save him from the cold, hunger and back-breaking labor.