

Chapter 10

The Germans were very pleased with our work at the tailor shop. Some time later, the construction manager called me over and gave me his parade uniform. He provided me with some additional fabric and asked me to sew him a new collar on the jacket. Then he asked me to take in the pant seams and generally make the entire uniform narrower.

I was somewhat overwhelmed by his request because high-quality military tailoring wasn't really my line of work. I wasn't sure how I would be able to sew back all of his many emblems on the collar. I wrote down his instructions, took the uniform, and then gave it to the Lodz tailor to do it. I saw that he was right at home while working on the uniform, and by the following day he was done. I took the completed uniform to the construction manager and he was pleasantly surprised to see how well everything had been made, almost like a brand new uniform. He was so pleased that he even asked me to sit and then invited me to eat along with him at breakfast. At first he offered me some schnapps, something I hadn't seen since the outbreak of the war. There were fine rolls on the table, with butter and eggs. He took a cup of schnapps; I also took some and we drank a toast to each other's health.

During our little meal, he told me that he had a wife, a 17 year old daughter and a 14 year old son. "I really miss my family," he said. So I told him how our families were murdered, and that the few survivors are forced to do back-breaking labor under terrible conditions. "These people's families were all killed, and they are being beaten all the time by the *kappos* and guards," I explained. "Those beasts don't understand that the poor laborers are weak from hunger and feel hopeless because all of their family members perished."

His face turned pale and he thought for a little bit. Then he told me that he will issue an order that would prohibit beatings. "I will also try to relieve the hunger of the people working at my worksite," he added.

I stood up to leave, but he asked me to wait a moment. He went over to the closet and took out a civilian winter coat. "Please adjust this to your own size," he said, "and then you can wear it to keep yourself warm." I thanked him profusely and left.

When I returned to the shop I repeated our conversation to the tailor from Lodz and showed him the warm coat that I received as a gift. I had a sudden idea to sew a coat for the construction manager's 14-year-old son. I opened the seams of the coat, cut the fabric to the size of a typical 14-year-old, and then immediately got to work. We worked together on this project. We used the remaining fabric to sew a matching hat.

The next day, the coat was done and I set it aside. Several days later the manager called me and said that he will be going home, because his wife was ill. He received permission from his commander to take a few days leave, and the person who will take his place will make all of the arrangements according to my requests. I told him that I would be back in a few minutes. I went to the shop and brought the coat and hat. "Please accept this as a gift for your son," I said.

"But I gave this to you so that you shall be warm," he replied.

"I know," I said, "But my heart simply wouldn't allow me to wear a warm coat when my comrades are freezing in the bitter cold every day, while I happen to work in a warm shop. I made this gift for you to show my gratitude for your promise to help these suffering people who are under your supervision."

He told me to wait for a few minutes, and then he returned together with another civilian German who brought three loaves of bread. He gave me the bread to distribute among the younger inmates, or among those who were weak. I thanked him and wished him a safe journey.

When I returned, I cut the three loaves into several pieces and gave some to the tailor's son. During the break at work, I went outside and unobtrusively told the younger and weaker ones to come to the tailor shop. I divided the bread among them fairly.

The next day I met the engineer whose coat I fixed, due to which the tailor shop was opened. He asked me how things were going and told me that they were pleased with my work. I invited him into the shop and he was impressed with how everything was running. Before he left, I thanked him and asked him to help the starving and freezing people.

"The construction manager already ordered a wagon of potatoes and other soup vegetables to be delivered," he replied. Then he asked: "Are they still beating the workers?" I understood from his question that the manager commanded the guards to stop the beatings.

Every day while at work, I would watch the other inmates through the window. One day I saw a group of Jews carrying heavy iron appliances. There was a new guard overseeing the group, and the laborers were also newcomers. One of the Jews was a tall and broad-shouldered man, but he was unable to carry the heavy load. To me it seemed as if they were carrying iron [melting pots] that were used to melt metal. These are extremely heavy pots. In any case, the guard was beating him and kicking him, until the Jew fell to the ground. The guard continued kicking him in the dirt.

After work, on our way back to camp, I stood next to this Jew who was beaten during the day. I inquired about his health, so he told me that just the day before he was finally released from the infirmary where he was kept due to having come down with typhus. Only very few people survived this disease. His supervisors at work assumed that he was physically strong due to his tall and broad physique. He was from Kalish, in Poland, and he happened to also be a tailor by profession.

The next day when I arrived at the worksite I went over to the transport leader, for whom I had done a mending job some time before. I informed him, in the name of the construction manager, that I was entitled to take more tailors as needed. I therefore asked his permission to take an additional tailor. I called over that tall fellow and introduced him to the transport leader. He wrote down his inmate number as requested, and then asked me what was going on.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Sintzinatus," was his reply.

I took him into the tailor shop and told him: "This is where you'll be working from now on." The same scene that took place when I brought in the Lodz tailor now repeated itself. He hugged and kissed me, crying out loud. I calmed him down, and all three of us were crying together. I was thinking to myself: "Oh, G-d, if only I could help all of these Jews!"

I gave him some things to sew and he finally calmed down. At noon we heated some soup and everyone got a bowl of soup with a piece of bread. The Kalish tailor shared his story with us and told us how his family was murdered in Auschwitz. Afterwards we returned to our work to finish the mending that had been brought in to us. Everything was working out beautifully. Those who picked up the finished work usually left us a piece of bread or some soup, and sometimes even a piece of cake that they received in their food packages from home. I did not eat any of it. Instead, when I returned to camp in the evenings I would frequent the infirmary. I recognized one of the patients, a Hungarian Jew named Markowitz with whom I used to work in the past. He was a strong person, but he was highly addicted to cigarettes and would give away his bread for a few cigarettes. I had warned him not to do that but his addiction to smoking was too strong and he couldn't control himself. The inevitable happened and he became sick. I gave him some cake, and gave another piece to one of the other patients. I tried to do whatever I could to save those unfortunates.

There were never any leftover foods in the tailor shop. There were so many hungry and ill people in camp, there was no way I could put away food for ourselves.

Several days later I once again visited the infirmary with some food. I went over to Markowitz, but he didn't respond. I thought that he was sleeping, but the people in the nearby beds told me what really happened. "He died two hours ago, but we won't tell the guards until after they distribute all of the food rations..." When I heard this I was shocked beyond words. I gave the food I brought along to the others and returned sad and

broken to my block, mourning the death of this fine, upstanding Jew Markowitz.

The next day I saw through the window several trucks full of potatoes and sacks of other foods. I understood that the construction manager's promise would be fulfilled. I noticed the manager's substitute out there, and when he saw me he called me over and informed me that all of the foods were for the inmates. "Every day, each person will receive soup with several potatoes," he said. "I will set up a kitchen where the foods will be cooked."

I recommended the Lodz tailor's 18-year-old son as a cook, and he asked me where the boy worked. I told him that he worked at a different worksite, so he requested his inmate number. I entered the tailor shop and told the tailor that they would be cooking soup and whole potatoes every day, and that I arranged for his son to be employed in the kitchen. "All I need is his inmate number," I said.

Upon hearing what I did for his son, he started to cry from sheer joy and thanked me with feeling. "I didn't know that you worried for my son's welfare," he said. He was overjoyed that he would be seeing his son at the same workplace, and he was especially pleased that he would work in the kitchen where extra food was easier to come by.

The next day, the son was already employed at his new job near his father. He helped set up the kitchen and bring in the potatoes. The kitchen was right next to our shop. He brought us two pocketfuls of potatoes and broiled them in our room, and then ate his fill until he was satisfied. Within a few days they were already cooking in the kitchen. Everyone received a liter of hot soup and several potatoes, and the inmates were happy and relieved.

A few tailors that I knew asked me to take them into my tailor shop. They were originally from Sosnowitz and Bendin and worked in the tailor shop in Auschwitz. According to the reports I received about them from those who were together with them in Auschwitz, they were very egoistic and never did any favors for anyone. Besides, they were young and strong and it seemed to me

that they would still be able to endure the difficult conditions. I focused on saving people who were in real danger.

One day, a transport arrived from Silesia. Among the new inmates was my good friend from Sosnowitz, Yankel Kleiner, although he was hard to recognize because he was so weak. I remembered the favors he did for me in the past. He was the head of the Jewish police, which was set up by the Germans. The Jewish police often helped the Germans during the liquidation, but Kleiner was an exception. His life was in danger, because he had returned from Lemberg, and all those who returned were sentenced to death. The Gestapo didn't realize that their own person who supposedly worked along with them was really working against them, and that he himself came from Russia. Because of him, many Jews were able to save themselves. Because he did favors to everyone whenever possible. When Kleiner realized that I had some status in camp he asked me to help him. I took him to my worksite and told my commanding officer that he was my close relative. He gave him a light job.

Kleiner told me that the manager of their mill would certainly send him some food if he only knew of his whereabouts. I introduced him to the engineer and the two of them spoke for a while. Kleiner wrote a letter which the engineer mailed for him to the miller. Several days later the engineer brought him a package and a letter. The package contained bread, margarine, shaving apparatus and medical supplies, as well as vitamins to help keep body and soul together. He wanted to share it with me, but I didn't need any of the things. He received another package from him, but then the packages stopped coming because the Russians conquered that area.

Some acquaintances from my hometown came over to me in camp, among them a grandson of the Chenchiner Rebbe. Most of the people were severely emaciated and had swollen feet. I always gave away my daily soup ration, and sometimes the bread ration as well, because I frequently received bread and often soup from those who picked up their finished garments. I was therefore able to give away my rations.

I often trudged at night in the deep mud, on paths not paved by gravel, groping in the dark without any source of light. It was hard to recognize the blocks of the people I was looking for, so I went from block to block and called out: "Is Glickman here?" After calling his name in several blocks, I finally heard a reply: "Who is calling me?" "Lazerowitz!" I said. When he came to the door, I gave him my ration of soup and bread. He drank the soup on the spot and cried: "You kept me alive!"

The next night, or the night thereafter, I went looking for a different Jew in order to give him my ration.

Meanwhile, the camp commander issued an order that half of each bread ration should be given at the workplace, and the remaining half should be given when the laborers returned to camp. The bread had to cut for all workers, so they gave the job to a Jewish *kappo* from Holland who was required to slice the bread in a corner of our tailor shop and prepare the rations. Sometimes there was even some marmalade, sausage or cheese to add to the meager rations.

I noticed that the *kappo* was cheating with the rations. He took for himself plenty of bread, sausage or cheese and traded it for cigarettes. This went on day after day, while the poor laborers were being denied their bit of extra nourishment. I was burning with indignation. "What a scoundrel!" I thought with disdain. "Every gram of food can save a person's life!"

I went to the engineer and reported everything to him about what the *kappo* from Holland had been doing against the hungry inmates. He became very angry upon hearing this. I asked him to keep the information a secret because the *kappo* in question was a murderer, and I knew he was capable of beating me to death in camp. "Do you know of a person who would be suited for such a job so we could appoint him to take his place?" the engineer asked. I gave him the name of one of my friends, a Jew from Djalowitz who lived for several years in Germany. I gave him his inmate number and he immediately phoned the camp commander, asking him to send the inmate to him the following morning. He also instructed to demote the *kappo*, because he was dishonest.

That evening, when I returned to the camp, I saw the camp commander tearing off the *kappo* badge from the *kappo's* arm, to the accompaniment of two ringing slaps. "From now on you will be a regular laborer!" he declared.

When I entered my block, my friend Yitzchak Gottlieb z"l came over to me. "The camp commander called me," he said. "Initially, I was very frightened." In those days, if someone was called by the commander it usually meant that he was to be punished or even sentenced to death. "I was extremely surprised when he told me that the Merkishe Construction Group appointed me to head their labor group. Moshe, who brought this about?" At first I tried to avoid answering, but he didn't stop badgering me until he finally gave me his promise that not a soul would know what I was to tell him. Then I told him the entire story with the *kappo* from Holland and the bread rations, and how his cheating led to his demotion. "I recommended you for the job," I said. "I know that you can be trusted; you will distribute the rations fairly." He thanked me and promised to do his best for everyone.

The next day, when he took his group out to work, he spoke kindly to everyone. He immediately won the sympathy of his entire group, because most of the *kappos* treated the people strictly.

That very day the construction manager returned from Berlin. He sent someone to call me. When I came into his office, I welcomed him, and was most surprised when he extended his hand in greeting! It was unheard of for a German, especially someone of his status, to greet a Jew and shake hands with him. He thanked me for my gift to his 14-year-old son. He told me that the coat and hat fit him perfectly, and he complimented me that I was one of the best tailors. He then gave me his wife's coat which needed some fixing. He asked me to sit and offered me some schnapps as well as some food. He then gave me a gift – a fine, warm sweater. He also gave me a food package that contained cake, bread, butter and marks. He assured me that he would continue to provide me with bread and medical supplies such as aspirin, bandages, vitamins and shaving supplies, etc.

I thanked him profusely and returned with the package to the tailor shop. I shared the cake, butter and eggs with my two colleagues. Both tailors remarked that the cake reminded them of the good old days. "We haven't tasted such delicacies in ages!" they exclaimed. "With Hashem's help we will soon have good times once more," I said. I told them how friendly the manager was towards me. "I believe that while he was back in Berlin he learned the true state of affairs on the warfront, and he is now convinced more than ever that their downfall is imminent. This must be the reason why he was so friendly towards me and fulfills all of my requests." He was a member of the Nazi party, although I didn't know for how many years he was actively involved with them. Both tailors were uplifted by my account of the meeting and my optimistic interpretation of it.

Everything continued to work out according to plan. The boy from Lodz, who worked in the kitchen, worked until 1:30, and I managed to arrange that he should be allowed to work in the tailor shop in the afternoon. I explained that we were too busy working to bring coal for the oven or clean up the place, and he was employed for us doing just that. Father and son worked together for half a day in the warm shop.

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Due to the unhygienic conditions and the terrible hunger that pervaded the camp, epidemics continued to spread. One day, the Lodz tailor came down with fever. Every morning I would support him under his arm and walk with him to work, a trek of several kilometers in the deep snow. He sat there in the shop and frequently didn't even know where he was or what he was doing. I did my best not to inform the authorities that he was ill. When I dragged him to work each morning in the deep snow I exerted myself so much that I sweated profusely despite the cold.

His condition deteriorated and he could no longer even sit. I gave him some aspirin and lots of fluids, but nothing helped. He lost consciousness and he had to be taken to the infirmary. I visited him every night together with his son. We were told that the sick people would be sent away to a special camp for the ill. Since I didn't trust them about what they would do to the sick

Jews over there, I decided to intervene with the construction manager. I told him that one of the tailors was ill, and I shared his life-story with him, about his wife who perished from hunger and his three children that were murdered. "Please make sure that he wouldn't be sent away," I begged.

He listened to the story with a serious demeanor. Afterwards, he picked up the telephone and called the leader of Camp 11 and spoke to him for a long time. When he hung up the phone he told me sadly that people who suffered from a contagious disease must be sent away. "But if you fear that they are being killed there," he added, "be aware that those times have passed. No medical help is provided and those who are strong enough to survive on their own will remain alive." He promised to intervene on behalf of the sick tailor at the camp for the infirm.

We usually did not work on Sundays and I used the day to meet various people in camp. One day I chanced upon Yosef Baruch Glickman, a grandson of the Chenchiner Rebbe. He was very weakened and his legs were swollen. He shared with me that his grandfather *zt"l* told him and his brother Meir that they would survive Hitler. They had other siblings, but he said this only to the two of them. "Despite my grandfather's assurance," he said, "I feel as if I won't make it. I know nothing about Meir's whereabouts; I have no idea if he is alive or dead."

I tried to boost his spirits and inject him with hope. "The Germans are at the brink of their downfall," I told him. I took him to my block and borrowed a portion of bread from the *shtubendinst*. I smeared some marmalade on it and gave it to him.

Afterwards, I met someone whom I had acquainted in Auschwitz, a nice person named Shteinschneider. In Auschwitz he spent a lot of time crying. I had asked him then: "We are all in the same dire situation; why are you crying more than everyone else?" He shared his life-story with me. He was from a Polish town called Schedlitz, where he lived with his poverty stricken parents. His father apprenticed him to a tailor in their town, and he met a fine girl from a poor family. Several years passed but they had no means to set up a home. So they married and left for Paris where they worked extremely hard for a long time, until

they finally stood on their own feet. His wife gave birth to two beautiful boys. When the Germans conquered France, their wonderful life was uprooted. Towards the end of 1942 he was apprehended in the street and he was brought to Auschwitz, together with many other French Jews. Some time later he learned that his wife and children were brought to Auschwitz on a later transport, and they were sent to the gas chambers.

I always tried to lift people's moods and raise their hopes, so I told him that as long as he didn't see with his own eyes or heard from two reliable witnesses who saw with their own eyes that his wife and children perished, he should not accept this as the truth. After hearing these encouraging words, he became very attached to me.

From then until now we hadn't seen each other. When I saw him now, he appeared very despondent, as if he already gave up on life. "How are you?" I asked him. "My wife and children are more fortunate than I," was his dour response. "They were killed right away while I suffer for years. I am weak and swollen, the labor is excruciating and the conditions are unbearable. If only my miserable life would end!"

Upon hearing his dejected words, I said: "Please come along with my labor group tomorrow." "But they will beat me," he said. "They will look for me at work and when my *kappo* will track me down he will give me a solid beating."

"Don't worry," I assured him. "I will make all the arrangements."

On Monday morning we went to work together. When the transport leader arrived, I informed him that I took a new tailor from a different labor group. It wasn't long before the angry *kappo* appeared, yelling and screaming and showing his fists. Before he could beat my friend, I told him: "Please control yourself; he is now employed at the Merkishe Construction Group." When he heard my confident tone, he realized that I was not afraid, so this gave him pause. He went over to Kappo Gottlieb, whom I placed in that position. He confirmed that the transfer was authorized by the construction company, and then he left.

When we arrived at the workplace I took him to the tailor shop. He stood there in awe and began to cry from joy, just as those who were introduced to this place before him. He slowly got his strength back and the swelling subsided. He was infused with hope and he no longer suffered from hunger. Every day at lunch he received a portion of hot soup and several potatoes, just like the rest of us. In addition, whenever I received some food I shared it with the rest of them.

The days and weeks went by, not as bad as in previous months when the hunger and cold made every day feel like an eternity.

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One day, a German family consisting of a couple and two sons arrived from Berlin. They settled in a trailer in the forest, not far from our tailor shop. The next day, the construction manager called me and told me that the owner of the construction firm arrived with his entire family, due to the bombings in their hometown. "His name is Doctor Rio, and he is a writer," he told me. "His wife is a famous pianist. She needs a new coat; their home was destroyed by fire due to the bombings. I will meet you next to their trailer in two hours."

I washed myself, combed my hair and polished my shoes. I even ironed my pants in preparation of this meeting. I took a tape measure, but there was still some time left before I had to go, so I used the time to share the good news with my fellow Jews about Berlin being so heavily bombed that the owner of the construction group and his family had to come live in the forest near us. "They are upper class people," I said with an ironic smile, "but they need a favor from us poor Jewish slaves, that we should be so kind and give them some clothing." My colleagues smiled at these words.

When I arrived at the trailer, the construction manager introduced me as a master tailor. He then introduced the couple as Doctor Rio and Mrs. Rio.

"What is your name?" the owner asked.

"I ask the good doctor to forgive me," I replied, "My name was eliminated and I received a number, which is 160183. I am afraid that it might be prohibited to say my name." They listened seriously and were obviously at a loss as to how to respond. The construction manager changed the subject and asked Mrs. Rio what type of coat she wanted. She brought a paper with a sketch of a simple pattern and asked me if I could undertake to make something similar to that. I replied that I would do my best to make her happy.

I took her measurements and told her how much fabric she would need to buy. She asked me if she and her husband could visit the tailor shop, so I told them that it would be a tremendous honor for us if they would visit.

When I returned to the shop I told the boy from Lodz to clean up the place somewhat. I also told the other two tailors to wash up and try to make a favorable impression. I told all three of them that when our guests would arrive I will call out "*Achtung!*" and they should all stand up respectfully. I prepared a wooden bench that could seat two people.

When they arrived, I called out "*Achtung!*" and everyone stood up. I introduced them as Herr Doctor Rio and Mrs. Rio, and then I introduced two of my colleagues as Jews from Poland and one person who came from France. The woman asked him in French how long he had been interned, and then she asked the boy some questions. The boy told her that his father was sent away to the camp for the ill. She then asked the Kalish tailor some questions.

Herr Rio listened to all of this in quiet contemplation. I could tell that he was a well-bred personality. Before they left, the wife gave me some fabric and all other supplies. I assured her that within two days the coat would be ready for her to try on. "However," I remembered to add, "I don't have a mirror in the shop."

"So come to our home," was her reply.

At the designated time, I went over to the trailer and had her try on the coat. When I was about to leave, the husband asked

me to sit. "You did the right thing by refusing to say your name during our first conversation, in the presence of the construction manager," he said. "He is guilty; he is a Nazi! I and my family were harassed because we did not enter the Nazi party. I never allowed my children to join the Hitler Youth groups."

He prepared tea, bread and cheese, and before I left he gave me some bread, butter and cheese. When I returned to the shop, I placed all of the foodstuffs on the table and everyone ate together. I also repeated the conversation I had with the doctor. Everyone was delighted, not just with the food, but even more about the fact that the German gentleman shared his feelings with us Jewish slaves.

The next time I visited them I mentioned the boy's father, the Lodz tailor, with whom we lost contact since he was transferred due to his illness. Herr Rio contacted the infirmary camp and he was told that his condition was quite good. He requested that the tailor should be treated well and he sent regards from his son. When I returned to the shop, I told the boy from Lodz about the regards I received from his father, and he was delighted.

When the coat was finally finished, Mrs. Rio was very pleased with it. Her husband was also pleased with our work and asked me to visit more often. I became quite friendly with them, and during one of my visits he asked me to tell them my name. "In just a short time, you and all of the other inmates will get their real names back, and their freedom as well," he said.

"My name is Moses Lazerowitz," I said.

He knew several Slavic languages, so he had no problem pronouncing my name. I told him the truth that I and my brothers owned a large store that sold fine suits for men and women, as well as a tailor shop. "I studied fashion in Paris and in Katowitz," I said, "and I received two diplomas. In addition, I owned a farm. All of this was taken away from us. My sisters and brothers were murdered with the rest of my family."

He listened sadly, and his wife began to cry about the fate of all those poor, innocent people. I stood up to leave, and he also

stood up. They gave me some foodstuffs and some raw food products which she asked me to distribute among young or sick inmates. I thanked her and returned to camp.

When I entered my block, I gave the foodstuffs to the *shtubendinst*. He was a very fine Romanian person, and he distributed the items among those in need in my presence.

I maintained a connection with the new German family. Every day, they invited several inmates to eat with them. They chose people who appeared to be especially weak.

One day, two Hungarian Jews walked out of the permitted area. A guard apprehended them and charged them with trying to escape from camp. Anyone suspected of trying to escape was put to death.

I saw through the window how the labor-group leader and a guard were leading the two handcuffed Jews to a bunker, where they were locked up. When the guard left, I ran to the labor-group leader and begged him to release them. "They are innocent," I argued. "They had no intention of escaping; they are simple villagers who lost their way."

He thought about it for several moments, and then said: "I already wrote up a report, and the guard witnessed the scene and signed the report, so there really isn't anything I could do. If I won't send the report in, I will face the consequences."

I remembered an incident that took place some time before, when we arrived to this place from the Dachau camp. Something similar happened with two innocent Jews. One day when we finished working, a group of high-ranking Gestapo officers came from Dachau and held a speech to inform us that the punishment for trying to escape would be death. They had erected a makeshift gallows for the two Jews who stood on the side, pale and shaking. They read a written report which charged that they attempted to escape from their workplace. Their names were announced, as well as their nationalities and hometowns. They were ceremonially sentenced to death by hanging and the sentence was carried out immediately. We were forced to watch the gruesome spectacle.

I continued begging the commander and cried to him that he should tear up the report. He told me to go to the head commander and with his permission he will do it. I immediately ran to the head commander and cried to him. He went out to the first commander and asked for the report. Immediately thereafter the two Jews were released from their bunker. After work, I returned to camp together with the two released Jews. I was extremely happy that I was able to save two lives.

Doctor Rio and his wife heard from the manager what I had done, how I had intervened to save two people from certain death. They commended me for putting myself in danger on behalf of others, and for saving people from hunger. "I am writing a book about the war and about the Jewish Question," he said. "You will be mentioned in my book."

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The next morning, when we arrived at work, we saw a group of young women and girls, including some very young girls. It was bitterly cold outside, and these girls had to unload light stuff from the trains. I went to the construction manager and requested that if any of the girls were good seamstresses I would like to hire them to work for me. "I happen to have some hand-stitching that needs to get done," I said.

"How many do you need?" he asked.

I tried to estimate how many girls would fit into our small workspace, and concluded that I could employ five girls. They announced to the girls that all seamstresses should come forward. A large group of girls declared themselves to be seamstresses, and the construction manager chose five of them. It seemed to me that he selected the weaker ones, according to what I could see from the distance where I stood. He cooperated with me, for he obviously understood that I was trying to help these girls. He later told me that he "borrowed" these girls from a different camp for three days.

I went to Doctor Rio and told him that there were several girls whom I temporarily took into the tailor shop with the help of the construction manager. The Doctor and his wife came into the

shop to see the poor girls. They spoke to them for several minutes, and the doctor was so overcome that he began to cry. They left, and an hour later she returned and said that she prepared hot oat cereal with milk for the girls, but she can't have all of them together at the same time. "Two of you should come with me," she said. For the other three, she brought the food to the shop, together with some bread and butter.

During the next three days the girls were somewhat revived. I gave each of them to hold a uniform or other piece of clothing so that they should appear occupied in case anyone from the camp leadership appeared. Occasionally, a camp controller would visit our shop to supervise our work. The camp manager also stopped by and was pleased to see that all five girls were busily at work. He started to show remorse for what was being done to us, for he knew that their downfall was near. He still didn't let on to the other Nazis that he was treating the Jews more leniently.

Mrs. Rio provided the girls with warm clothing and sweaters. When they left, the girls thanked the German family. She supplied them with bread and raw oats for them to cook. They said a tearful goodbye to us and blessed me heartily.

The boy whose father had taken ill was very worried about him. When I mentioned this to Dr. Rio, he spoke to the leader of the camp for the infirm and was assured that the patients were not being harmed. He arranged for the boy to be employed at that camp doing some light work. At the first opportunity the boy went along with a transport that took him to the camp for the ill. He took his farewell from us with mixed feelings. On the one hand he was happy to be going to his father, but on the other hand he knew he would miss us; we were like family to him.

Some time later Dr. Rio informed me that the boy was once again employed in the kitchen at his new place. At this point I realized that I had unlimited abilities, so I took in another tailor and another boy to clean up and heat the shop. Dr. and Mrs. Rio were very pleased with the way I helped the other Jews, and they asked me to visit them more often.

When I returned to camp one day, I met one of the German *oberkappos* whom I knew well. He told me that a certain officer needed a military hat. He brought him over to me, along with some fabric, and two days later I brought him the finished hat. I received a military bread as compensation. I cut the bread into several slices and shared most of it. I took one portion to Glickman, the Chenchiner Rebbe's grandson, but unfortunately I didn't find him in his block. Some of his block-mates said that he had been sick and he was taken to the infirmary, but they knew nothing more. I gave the bread to another Jew.

As I left the block I thought to myself: his grandfather, the Chenchiner Rebbe, promised him and that he and his brother would survive the holocaust, but who knows if he is still alive? On Sunday they usually take out the dead bodies to be buried, and who knows if he won't be among them?

The officer for whom I had made the hat was pleased with it, and other military officers started ordering such hats as well. I told the construction manager that I had many orders for hats placed by officers and guards. Since I was busy with the hats, I needed another tailor to take my place. He gave me permission to take in another tailor, and I went looking once again for a weak tailor. When I found the right candidate I took him into our shop.

I always gave away the bread that the guards gave me for the hats. One day, one of the German kitchen workers told me to come to the gate together with another person, and he gave me a container full of food. I distributed the food among the weaker and younger inmates.

Whenever I delivered the finished hats or other clothing, I asked the Germans to give me the leftovers from the kitchen. From time to time they would inform me that there were leftovers, and I would send some hungry inmates there to eat.

Pesach was approaching. The weather turned mild, but the typhus epidemic continued raging throughout the camp, as well as in the other camps. One day, they did not let us out to work. We remained quarantined in camp, and the days that I ate my fill were now behind me, because I never left any food for the next day. I knew that there were so many hungry Jews waiting for

bread and I could not keep the food away from them. So now I shared the same fate as all other Jews.

One night while I slept, one of the inmates stole the piece of bread that was hidden in my pocket. I was very taken aback. If he would have taken half of the bread and left me at least half, it would have shown that he was still decent at heart.

We were ordered to wash and clean ourselves. We made a fire and held our clothing over the fire to scorch the lice. We then went into the washing barrack and had our hair shaved from all over our bodies so that the lice shouldn't have where to thrive. We also scorched our blankets over the fire. I also think that they gave us some injections against the epidemic.

On Pesach I asked the *shtubendinst* to exchange my bread ration for potatoes and some margarine. The German guards, including those for whom I worked, didn't even show their faces to us during that time. They were afraid of catching the contagious disease from us. Once again, I was able to refrain from eating *chometz*, just as I did on the previous two Pesach holidays, one in Ober-Lodzisk in Silesia and the other one in the Warsaw Ghetto. During those Pesachs I did not suffer from hunger, but on this Pesach it first appeared as if I wouldn't be able to avoid *chometz*. I thought to myself that this was surely the last Pesach under oppression; I would either live to be free next Pesach or, G-d forbid, perish before then. This last thought was a very real fear, because we had heard that the German guards were commanded to kill us before the Allies would arrive and free the Jewish camps.

On Erev Pesach, a group of religious Jews, myself included, went to the washing barrack to prepare ourselves in honor of Yom Tov. We then *davened* Mincha and Maariv and began to recite the Haggadah. This time, we lacked the enthusiasm we had in Warsaw. We were now a group of pitiful, extinguished souls, mostly resigned to our fate after suffering from hunger and typhus for so long. We also feared that the Germans would finish us off before the Allies arrived.

My mood was also pretty low that Pesach, feeling deeply afraid of the Germans' plans for us. In addition, I was very hungry.

On the second day of Pesach I noticed our labor group leader across the fence. I asked him to come closer and we spoke for several minutes. He told me that his wife and children were already occupied by the Americans in Achen, near France, and he was very worried about them. I assured him that the Americans were a peace-loving people and surely wouldn't harm any civilians unnecessarily. His mood lifted, so I told him that I was very hungry. He promised to bring me some bread, but I explained to him that I really needed potatoes. He told me to return to the same place within one hour.

At the appointed time, he brought me a small basket with cooked potatoes. He promised to bring me some more tomorrow, at the same time. When he brought the potatoes the next day he told me that the epidemic was finally under control and we would be permitted to return to work by the following day. Sure enough, the next day we were taken to work. I no longer lacked for any potatoes and the days went by more quickly.

Day after day, the news I heard from Dr. Rio gave me encouragement. Nuremburg was already taken over by the Americans and the British were approaching from the opposite side, taking over more and more German territory. The Russians were marching towards Breslau. Meanwhile, a peace conference was taking place among the Allie leaders in San Francisco, California.

On the following day, we saw many soldiers running helter-skelter from the front. That same day the skies were suddenly covered by American aircraft and sirens began to wail. We were commanded to run to the forest together with the guards. When we reached the forest, we tried to run as far as possible. The group leader and I noticed wide metal pipes that ran on the ground, and both of us climbed inside. As we hid there, we heard the sound of shelling from the aircraft. I ran out of the pipe, the group leader hot on my heels. "Why did you leave this hiding place?" he wanted to know.

"It occurred to me that it might be too dangerous to hide in there," I said. "Since this place has been cleared of trees, the Americans may surmise that this is a construction area and will bomb this place." We ran to a different area and took cover underneath some trees. We stayed there until the bombings stopped and the airplanes left the area. Before we returned to work, the group leader wanted to see the place where we had hid in the pipes. We were both shocked to see that the pipes were riddled with holes! "You saved me from certain death," he said to me. This group leader was not an S.S. member; he was from the Wehrmacht. He once told me that he was appointed as a group leader because he was seriously injured on the Russian front.

Mrs. Rio occasionally gave me some raw foods so that in case we wouldn't be allowed to go to work we shouldn't suffer from hunger. I collected some food for a rainy day, and that day arrived sooner than expected.

On April 24, we stood for roll call in the morning. The Germans ordered us to go back to the blocks, take our blankets and return immediately. When we returned, everyone received some bread and soup and we began to march. It was during the daytime, and the sun's rays kept us warm. We noticed that we were marched in the direction towards Dachau. We continued marching all day.

We had many questions. Why did they instruct the stronger ones to help the weaker ones? Why didn't they kill the weak ones, as was their usual practice?

We spent the night in the open fields. In the darkness, we could see the lights that the Americans reflected on the German positions they were targeting. As we lay there on the ground, we could hear the sounds of strong artillery fire in the distance.

The next morning, we changed direction. Some of the guards told us that we were being taken to Tyrol. Wherever we went, we saw German trucks carrying killed and wounded soldiers away from the front. When we passed a stream, they allowed us to take some water.

At one point, we were allowed to rest in the forest. The people with whom I stayed close in camp built a small fire and we cooked some of the food that I had brought along. We ate together, and then we were ordered to continue marching.

We realized that we were very close to the front, because the shooting was coming from nearby. I noticed the group leader among the guards who accompanied us, and when he spotted me he came over to me.

"Where are you taking us?" I asked.

"We have no special goal," he replied.

"Will we be allowed to live?" I questioned further.

"Of course!" he said with conviction. "Don't you realize? The camp leaders want to remain occupied with the Jewish inmates so that they should be exempt from serving on the front. Through you, it is possible that we will also survive."

That day we arrived at Alach in Beirin, where there was some sort of camp. They gave us a bit of food. We saw trucks that were packed with people, but they were too far away to recognize any faces. The next day we continued marching, but suddenly the skies became full with American aircraft. They dropped down very low, and we waved to them with our coats to show that we were friends. Some of the planes shot at us. The guards stretched out on the ground and some of the Jews ran into the forest. Meanwhile, the Americans turned away from us and went somewhere else, where we could hear them bombing relentlessly. After that episode we saw so many wounded and killed victims that the scene cannot even be described!

A while later, we saw the guards removing their swastikas and their S.S. insignias. Those who knew me as a tailor asked me to help them remove their S.S. emblems. Even though we were still in danger, my joy was so great that I thanked Hashem for living to see that moment. We stamped our feet on the discarded S.S. emblems and swastikas. The Nazi heroes were quaking in their shoes. We realized that they weren't even counting us anymore and they didn't seem to care if some of the Jews

escaped. Some of the guards also escaped; I saw this with my own eyes.

As we continued on our way, I heard a group of Czech Jews say that when we left on April 24, 1945, the German camp leader told the Jewish-Czech *Juden-eltzter* that he will march us towards life, and when the Americans will redeem us we should tell them that he saved our lives. This was the agreement that the two of them had worked out.

During the day, we stopped to rest in a field. We spread out our blankets and stretched out on the ground, and I promptly fell asleep.

Suddenly I was awakened by loud voices. One of my friends shook me awake and cried: "Why are you sleeping through such sweet moments?"

"What's happening?" I asked.

"The German general commanded the camp leader to take us until Bochberg and wait there until the Americans will take us!"

The joy among the Jewish masses was beyond description, but I was still skeptical. I recalled how many times they tried to fool us. They gave pieces of soap to the Jews who were being gassed and told them that they were about to be showered. They used many other dirty tricks to lull their victims into a false sense of security. I said to myself: "When we will be in American hands, only then will I believe that I am free."

We continued until nightfall. We arrived at Bochberg on April 29, 1945 and were taken to a large cinema hall. We were extremely exhausted and so we stretched out on the floor, together with the guards, and fell asleep side by side with our former tormentors.

When we awoke the morning, some of the guards had disappeared. We remained with a limited number of guards and we could easily have overpowered them, but we had nowhere to run to anyway, at least as long as the war was still going on. Besides, the weather was very cold; it was snowing and the frost penetrated our bones. We were exhausted from marching for so

many days with only limited food. For more than a day, we had received nothing to eat. As a matter of fact, we didn't see the guards eating anything either.

We waited in the cinema for liberation, but my heart was heavy. Unfortunately, my heart wasn't lying to me. During the day, a group of S.S. men arrived and surrounded the cinema hall. Their commander, named Mohl, was once in charge of the crematoriums in Auschwitz. He asked to speak to the camp leader and then showed him a written edict that ordered the annihilation of all Jews in his charge. When we found out what was going to happen, we were overcome by helpless despair. Where could we run? Escape wasn't an option.

The camp leader told the S.S. commander that he couldn't hand over all inmates at once. He showed him a group of several hundred Russian inmates and said that when he would be done with them, he should return for the next group of prisoners.

When he left with the first group, we tried to think of something we could do to save ourselves. Perhaps we could run to the forest? The cinema was surrounded by guards with machine guns. The same thought crossed everyone's mind: A German must never be trusted! We had the chance to escape, but now we are doomed, only hours away from liberation! A cold sweat covered our fear-stricken faces.

Night began to fall and the German camp leader appeared. He stood up on a table and signaled for us to be quiet.

"I heard a report on the radio that the entire region where we are in now, Bochburg and Walfordhausen, is surrounded. White flags are hanging all over as a sign of surrender to the American forces. You have nothing to fear! It is best for you to remain here; do not run to the forests because the S.S. soldiers that are swarming in the forests might use their spare bullets on you. From my part, as the camp leader, I hereby declare all of you to be free! I will wait here together with you to be liberated by the American army. It can take until tomorrow for them to arrive, perhaps until about noon."

Upon hearing these words, we all calmed down. Now I finally trusted his words and truly believed that the terrible danger that hung over our heads was finally avoided, thank G-d. We were excited and curious about the arrival of the Americans. No one even spoke about food; we were so wrapped up in our anticipation that we forgot how hungry we were. We joyously discussed the new developments and spoke about our expectations for after liberation. Should each of us return to our country of origin, or would Great Britain open the borders of Eretz Yisroel and permit us to enter? We discussed these possibilities until well into the night.

We had no lights because the electricity was disrupted, and the water supply was also cut off. Some people started to suspect that we weren't really free and the Germans would return to murder us. I told my friends that I would leave the hall to use the facilities and look around really well to see if we were being guarded. I looked around all over when I left the hall, and then did the same upon my return, and I could confirm that we were indeed free. There were no guards in sight.

When my friends heard this, many of them discussed the feasibility of leaving, so I mentioned the bitter cold weather.

Meanwhile, I fell asleep. I dreamed as if I was walking through a field on a beautiful, sunny day. The sky was clear blue and on both sides of the field were large stalks of corn and wheat. I pulled out a stalk of wheat, took out the wheat berries and ate as I walked. Suddenly, my uncle Moshe appeared; he was walking towards me! Uncle Moshe was my late father's older brother. He carried a bundle on his shoulders and he was smiling.

"Look, I've brought you some food," he said. "Come inside and I will set the table."

I woke up and heard my friends still speaking about running away. When I asked them how long I slept, they said that it was for about 15 or 20 minutes. I shared my pleasant dream with them and explained that I would not leave. "My heart is full of joy because we are free," I said, "And no one will harm us. Let's stay here until the Americans arrive."

My friends calmed down from these words and all of us settled down to catch some sleep.

*
It was on Tuesday, Lag B'Omer, May 1, 1945. We woke up and saw that the water supply had already been reconnected. We washed up, feeling happy despite the fact that we had not eaten for two days. One of my friends brought me some ground roasted barley, which the Germans used instead of coffee. I ate some of it and drank a bit of water.

Some of the people left for Walfardshausen. They returned happy and with full stomachs, and told us that they found American army vehicles and tanks. Some of them said that they spoke to several Jewish-American soldiers and officers. When we heard this, some people were so overcome that they were as if in a trance. Could this really be true?

As we sat and discussed these wonderful developments, we noticed a small military jeep along with a large tank approaching the cinema. We all ran outside, and when the jeep stopped and the American Major emerged, we fell upon him and kissed him. We lifted him up with joyous shouts, partly in Yiddish. There were two people among us who spoke English.

He was carried to the table where he stood up and asked that anyone who spoke English should come forward. He then began to speak. First he said a prayer, praising G-d for helping them overcome the vicious Nazi beasts that murdered millions of innocent people and tried to enslave the entire free world under their so-called *herrenvolk*. When these words were translated into Yiddish, the hall erupted into hysterical crying. Some people were so overcome that they actually fainted and had to be revived. The Major cried along with us and we hugged and kissed each other with tears of happiness and sadness combined. Although we were elated beyond words, we were heartbroken over the terrible losses we suffered and saddened that our dearest family members did not live to see this wonderful day of liberation.

Chapter 11

The American Major signaled for us to be quiet in order to let him speak.

"I know that you are starving," he said. "A truck is on the way here with food and medical supplies. Please try to stay away from the forests; the war is still going on."

He wished us well and bade us farewell. Before leaving, he asked us if any Germans were present. When he was already on his jeep, he was approached by the Jewish *lager-eltzter*, the German camp leader, and the chief S.S. doctor. The camp leader claimed that he treated the Jews well on the transport. The Major turned to us and asked: "Is it true?"

We replied that it was true, and he wrote it down for the record. He then left with them.

Half an hour later, several trucks arrived. Everyone received a five-kilo pack of food, the likes of which we hadn't seen in many years. We started cooking lunch. We finally had enough bread, and food was no longer an issue.

We were a group of five friends that stayed together: A certain Lefkowitz from Zichlin near Lodz who lives in Israel today, Gottlieb from Djalowitz who passed away last year in Newark, Meller who also came from Lodz and lives in Newark today, Shteinshneider from Shedlitz in Poland who later moved to Paris, and myself. We moved into an empty apartment that the German owners had abandoned. We opened up our food packages and discovered chocolates, cookies, canned meat, milk, dried fruits, and farina. I turned to my friends and cautioned them not to eat the heavy foods, such as the meat and sardines, and to avoid fats.

"I will cook the farina in milk," I suggested. "It's light and satisfying; it won't harm our digestive systems after all these years of living on a starvation diet."

I prepared a delicious farina with milk and we were revived. Then we drank some tea with cookies. Before retiring

for the night, we bathed and went to sleep in real beds. We spoke to each other quietly from bed; we were very weak and lying down helped us. We finally fell into a peaceful sleep.

In the middle of the night we awoke. We asked each other: "Is it true that we are free?" "Yes, it's true, my friends!" I told them. I lit a candle, and we took out some cigarettes and chocolate from our packages. We ate some of it and then went back to sleep, not before reminding each other that in the morning we should go look for milk on one of the farms.

The next morning, someone went to pick up some milk, bread and butter. When I went outside, I heard lots of moaning. People were suffering from severe stomach pain and many had to be hospitalized because they ate the meat and sardines after days of fasting and after years of being on a very meager diet. They couldn't tolerate such heavy, fatty foods.

I remained with my friends in that apartment until Friday, May 4. When it was sunny, we went outdoors a bit but the rest of the time we rested and slept. Shteinshneider kept on crying over the loss of his wife and two sons. I tried to console him by saying that it's quite possible that they managed to hide in France. In the occupied countries, many citizens helped save the Jews from the German conquerors. Poland was an exception to that. He repeated to me what he told me in Auschwitz, that people had seen his wife and sons on a French transport that was brought to Auschwitz.

We went to Walfsradshausen and there we saw a much bigger American presence with all of their military vehicles and personnel. I spoke to some of the soldiers; some of them spoke a bit of German. Some of the American soldiers were Jewish and we spoke Yiddish to them. They wanted to hear from us about our experiences and asked us many questions. Many of them had tears in their eyes when they heard the details of what the Germans did to us. Before we left, we received packages of food and cigarettes. We had a very positive opinion of the Americans soldiers. They were friendly and helpful.

When we returned to our "home" and washed up a bit. Two days before, we had decided on a place where we would

daven with a *minyan*. We gathered for *davening* and some of the American soldiers joined us there. A young Polish Jew *davened* the Kabbalos Shabbos with a joyous tune, and many of us had tears in our eyes as we prayed along. We were overjoyed at having lived to see this day!

On Shabbos morning we again gathered to *daven*. We even had a *sefer Torah*! We *davened* together just as in the good old days. "Remember how we used to go home after *davening* to our parents and siblings?" we said to each other with painful nostalgia.

As the days went by, our joy slowly dissipated. The thrill of having gained our freedom began to wear off and the enormity of our loss began to sink in. We started to feel the depth of our tragedy and the ache in our hearts intensified each day.

Meanwhile it was announced that those who came from Russian-occupied territories and now wound up under American occupation did not have to return; if they wished, they could remain right where they were until they would find permanent residence in their country of choice. Until then, they would be considered stateless. The announcement was signed by General Eisenhower. It was also announced that people from France, Belgium and Holland would be able to return home within several days.

We had a good friend from Belgium named England. He urged us to come along with him to Belgium, because at that point the borders were all open. Yechiel Lefkowitz and Meller decided to go along with him, but I declined because I wanted to find out if any of my family members survived. I hoped to return to Poland if possible and speak with my brother's Polish maid. Perhaps he had given his children to her for hiding? I also wanted to find out what happened to my *kallah*, and so I decided not to go to Belgium.

Schteinshneider, still crying over his loss, also refused to go to Belgium. He claimed that he had no one in the world but I, his savior, and he begged me to come along with him to Paris. Once again, I had to decline because I couldn't go out into the free world in case it would still be possible to find someone from

my family. We wrote down each other's old addresses and bade each other a tearful farewell. My friends left and I remained behind in the apartment with Kalman Gottlieb. I missed them very much because we had stayed together for many years during the most difficult times.

Two days later was Shavuot and we *davened* together in a Yom Tov atmosphere. But when I returned to the apartment I was overcome by sadness. Life would never be the same again, we realized.

Every day, lists of names were posted at the Office for Jewish Affairs. The next day when I was there and read the newly-posted names, my blood suddenly froze. I found the name Eliezer Lazerowitz from Sosnowitz on the list, with my brother's exact birthdate! It *was* my brother! He was in the DP Camp at Feldafing, and upon my inquiries I was told that it was some 30 kilometers away. I went to the American command center to request permission to travel. They gave me a permit, but it had to be signed by the chief commander of the 20th division, which liberated that area. Another Jew from Sosnowitz discovered that he had a cousin in Feldafing and we agreed to travel together to Walfsradshausen.

We woke up early in the morning on the 30th of May, 1945, and went looking for the chief commander. He signed our permits but he mentioned to us that we would have to travel by foot. There were no other means of transportation available to reach Feldafing at that point, because the region was still ravaged by the war. Military vehicles were not permitted to accept civilians for rides. The best we could do was finding a bicycle.

We started our way on foot, walking in the direction towards Feldafing. It was a beautiful spring day and my mood was buoyant. I was overjoyed at having learned that my brother was alive. After walking for several kilometers, a peasant went by with a horse and buggy. He asked us to where we were headed and when we told him our destination, he offered to take us for three kilometers, until his farm. We gratefully took the lift and then continued walking among the green fields.

The landscape was beautiful and the sky was clear blue. The trees and flowers were in full bloom and we occasionally rested on the grass near gurgling springs of clear water. Not far from us was a forest with picturesque scenery. We took some food from our sacks, which we still carried around from the labor camp. Our clothing, too, was still the prison-clothing we wore at the camp. We ate something and drank from the spring and then rested somewhat. We then continued on our way.

After several kilometers, we were stopped by an American patrol. They requested to see our permits and then let us pass. We continued walking for several hours until we again met a group of military men with army vehicles and tanks. When we came closer, we saw two heavily-armed American soldiers. We stuck our hands into our pockets to withdraw our papers. To our utter surprise, the two soldiers extended their hands with a friendly "Shalom Aleichem!" We stood there in shock, unable to say anything. I remember thinking how ironic the situation was; mere weeks ago, gangs of German beasts stood at these very junctions. No Jew was allowed to breathe the same air as they, and they tortured us to no end until we were no longer worth anything to them due to weakness. Then they finished us off. And now, with G-d's help, we lived to see this wonderful day. American Jewish soldiers were here right near us, after having conquered the wicked Germans.

It took us several minutes to collect ourselves. The Americans told us to sit down at an outdoor table which stood nearby. They had a soldier bring some food and placed sardines, bread and butter on the table. Then they brought fine coffee and some peaches. We *bentched* together, with *mezuman*. They asked us to share our stories with them.

"We have so much to tell you," I said, "But it is painful to listen to and we don't want to trouble you." We did tell them some of our experiences, and before long they were wiping the tears from their eyes. I changed the subject and asked them where they came from.

"We're from Brooklyn," one of them said. "My parents are from Poland." The other soldier's parents came from

Lithuania. They were religious young men and even had a Torah education.

Meanwhile, the skies became overcast and a heavy rain began to fall. We went inside a building to wait out the rain. We told them the purpose of our journey and they gave their best wishes for our success in finding many more family members healthy and well. They issued a written order for the village leader in the next village to give us a place to sleep, and then they gave us some of the finest foods for our journey. We bade them farewell and thanked them for their kindness.

As we left, I still couldn't believe that we met a couple of young Jewish men from Brooklyn, who helped liberate us. It was simply unbelievable! Exactly four weeks ago, the head of the Auschwitz gas chambers named Mohl, with his S.S. dogs, wanted to kill us. And today we were free, speaking leisurely with our Jewish saviors! Who could grasp the enormity of the miracle? It was supernatural and incomprehensible.

When we arrived at the next village, we asked for the village leader, but the villagers offered to put us up for the night. We stopped by at the home of a German peasant and ate the food that the Jewish soldiers from Brooklyn gave us. I refused to sleep there, and asked for a pillow and sheet on which to rest, and a blanket with which to cover myself. We went to sleep in the barn, and slept peacefully through the night.

The next day we ate a breakfast that consisted of milk, bread and butter, and then continued on our way. We were not in a rush; every few kilometers we stopped to rest and eat before continuing our trek.

Late in the afternoon, we finally arrived at Feldafing. The camp had numerous military barracks and I learned that around 5,000 Jews were being housed there. The Jewish residents were given living quarters according to their nationalities and the languages they spoke. The Greek Jews had separate blocks from the Polish Jews, as did the Hungarian, Czech and Rumanian Jews.

I went to the main office and asked about Eliezer Lazerowitz. They looked up their records and replied that there was indeed a Lazerowitz but not with the first name I had given them, and not the same age as I had said. According to them, Lazerowitz came from Bendin.

"I'm just coming from Bochberg," I told them, "And I saw the lists. From the information I was given, I am certain that he is my brother. He had the same first name and birth date as my brother, and his hometown was listed as Sosnowitz."

The office workers were nice people, and upon seeing how agitated I became they tried to calm me down. "We hope you will meet him soon in good health."

I realized that the office was simply unable to deal with the huge influx of information. I accepted their kind words and assured them that we would still see each other. Before I left the office, it occurred to me to ask them to check out the list of people who were in the infirmary, as well as the list of those who perished. They checked, and my brother's name was not on any of those lists.

I dejectedly left the office, taking along the address of the Lazerowitz fellow from Bendin. I found this person; he used to work for us in the coat shop before the war.

I later tried again to look for my brother but I didn't find him. I searched for him in the blocks where the Polish Jews lived, to no avail. Meanwhile, night began to fall. A Polish Jew invited me to come eat with him and sleep in his room. "Tomorrow you will be well rested," he said, "and you'll have more chances for success. Perhaps you made a mistake in Brochberg about your brother's first name," he added.

He was still giving me his advice and best wishes when I interrupted him heatedly. "Hitler and his killers weakened only my physical strength; they did not affect my mental capacities at all! Thank G-d, my mind works perfectly well!"

Two Jews from Slovakia heard our heated argument and came over to inquire what was going on. I told them that I had come here all the way from Brochberg looking for my brother but

he was nowhere to be found. One of them said: "Just a few days ago a group of Polish Jews came here and they were settled in the Czech blocks, because there was no room for them in the Polish blocks. Perhaps you should take a look over there, at Block 5A."

I went there immediately and knocked on every door, asking if there were any people from Sosnowitz. Finally, a certain young man who was from Sosnowitz invited me in and asked me about his brother, with whom I had been in camp. "Yes, he was in my camp," I confirmed. His brother was the fellow about whom I had already written that he was brought back to camp after he was no longer alive. I had felt very sorry for him and had told the people of our block that I still remembered his parents and his entire family. They had a store that sold writing supplies.

"What happened to him?" the brother asked.

I did not reply. He started begging me to tell him the truth, no matter how painful. "Don't worry over the fact that I'm his brother," he said. "I want to know if I should say Kaddish for his *neshama*."

I replied in short that he should say Kaddish. When he asked me how he perished, if it was from a disease or in the gas chambers, I replied that I would tell him some other time.

I left his room and continued going from door to door, asking for people from Sosnowitz. Finally, I met a short, broad-shouldered man who told me that on the next bed was a boy from Sosnowitz. It was already late and the people were getting ready to go to sleep. I turned my head to where the Jew had pointed and recognized the lad in the bed. He looked at me and gave a shout: "I recognize him! He is my brother!!"

He jumped off the bed and ran over to me. I do not have to describe the emotional reunion between us.

My brother prepared some food for me and gave me something to drink. Several Jews joined us and I told them that I had been looking for my brother for hours. "It was so difficult to find him," I said.

I was so tired and I went to sleep together with my brother in his bed. I asked him when and under what circumstances he

left home. He said that when he was deported, my sister and brother-in-law and my brother with his wife and two boys, as well as my four younger sisters between the ages of 8-17, were still in the ghetto. We spoke for so long until I noticed that it was near daybreak. That's when we finally went to sleep.

The next day I went outside with my brother to see the place. We met some acquaintances from Bendin and Sosnowitz. After inspecting the place I told Eliezer that I would like to return to Bochberg together with him, because over there I had a private apartment. Our friends tried to talk me out of traveling to Bochberg, so I stayed with my brother in Feldafig.

We shared our experiences with each other, telling each other which camps we were at and how we made it through the last few days before liberation. He told me that he was in Alach for several days. "We too were taken to Alach at around the same time," I told him. "We saw many transport cars full of people." He told me that he was there on one of those trucks. We had been at the same camp and didn't even know it!

We went for a walk through the forest; sometimes we walked until Sternberger at Eizacha (?), which was over 20 kilometers wide. There were stunning mountain views and beautiful landscapes there. As we walked, we spoke about our camp experiences and reminisced about everything we suffered through.

Several days later, my friend Kalman Gottlieb arrived from Bochberg, together with another friend of mine, Shlomo Rosenholtz. He was a very fine person with a pure Jewish heart. Back in camp, I would frequently see him reciting Tehillim. He purchased a small pocket-sized Tehillim from a newly arrived Hungarian Jew, paying with his meager bread ration. He carried it with him all the times. He always tried to help his fellow laborers and often shared his bread with them. He was originally from Zechotzov, near Lodz, where he had a successful bakery.

Another Jew arrived at Feldafig; his name was Chaim Teitel from Storchovitz, near Skordjiski Komieniu in Poland. He was a *shochet*, and he was a grandson of the Vorker Rebbe. We

stayed together and took walks together as everyone shared his experiences. This is how we passed those days.

Meanwhile the Klausenberger Rebbe arrived from Mildorf Camp. I had been together with the Rebbe back in Warsaw when he was brought there on a transport of Hungarian Jews in May 1944.

On Shabbos, I *davened* with the Klausenberger Rebbe. The room was packed with Jews. We also joined him for *Shalosh Seudos* and listened to the Rebbe's *divrei Torah* until well into the night. He spoke words of encouragement to us forlorn Jews who lost their families, their homes, and their livelihoods. All non-Jewish refugees had where to return to; they had families waiting for them back home. But we had no homes or families, and on top of all that we were stuck on bloody German soil, where we remained stranded as homeless refugees.

The people wept bitterly over this tragic reality. It was true; we had nowhere to go to. We heard that some of the concentration camp survivors who returned to Poland after the war were attacked by their Polish neighbors. Many Jews were murdered after surviving the horrors of the war. The news from Israel wasn't better. The British kept the gates to the country firmly closed and did not permit refugees to enter. Meanwhile, we were being kept in these refugee camps where they gave us some bread and food out of pity for us wretched beggars. We still wore our concentration camp uniforms.

We *davened* Maariv and everyone returned to his block in a dispirited mood. I returned to my brother's room. The next morning I went upstairs to the washroom. On the stairs, I met the fellow from Sosnowitz whom I had told several days before that I had been with his brother in one of the camps and that he perished there. And wonder of wonders! This person was coming down the stairs together with his brother! I was shocked beyond words. They calmed me down and told me the following: When they brought back the dead from the worksite, as I had seen, the camp doctor had to sign a death certificate to mark down the inmate numbers of those who died, before dumping them in the dead-room. To this fellow's luck, the doctor happened to be a

fine Jew and as he examined him he noticed that he still had a weak pulse. He tried to revive him, and was successful! He kept him there for several days until the doctor managed to send him on the next transport to the camp for the infirm. He stayed at the Infirm Camp until liberation. He was then taken to a hospital where he was given proper medical care by American doctors. Just the day before he arrived at Feldafing! He and his brother went looking for me that same day, but I wasn't at my block.

As I listened to this fascinating story, I came to the conclusion that unless one actually saw a person being confirmed dead he can never be sure that he is no longer alive. If only all the others who had been taken to the gas chambers would return alive and well!

One day, a Jew with a beard and long civilian clothes arrived. He had his daughter with him, a young girl. He greeted me and I asked him where he had been during the war. "I hid in the forest," he said. He also stayed with our group. I asked him some questions about his family and I was never satisfied by his answers. This went on for several days. Chaim, the *shochet* who was a grandson of the Vorker Rebbe, tried to speak to him in Torah learning but he always changed the subject and began discussing the weather, the food, or anything else. He remained close to us and lived in the same block, but he got a private room because of his daughter. Nobody paid him any special attention. Once while he *davened* wrapped in his *tallis*, his *tallis* slipped a bit and I could see his eyes closed in deep concentration with a very intense demeanor.

Once during our walks, when this newcomer was not among us, I told my friends that I felt there was some mystery around this person. One of my friends commented that he is probably a simple Jew, but my friend Shlomo agreed with me that the newcomer was deliberately hiding his identity.

Whenever I came into the room unexpectedly, I would find him walking up and down deeply in thought. He wouldn't even notice me until I would call out to him: "Reb Yochanan, please come with us for some fresh air. It is so dark and damp in here!" He would then wake up as if from a trance and follow us

to the lake, near the trees, where the air was clear and pleasant. We sat there and chatted, with everyone adding to the conversation. He would listen quietly and sometimes smile in reaction.

One day, Yankel Kleiner came looking for me. With my help at the workplace, he was able to receive food packages from a Silesian business associate from Katowitz who was assigned to manage their mill in Sosnowitz. He told me that he heard about a large store that carried fine gentlemen and women's clothing, as well as an adjoining warehouse with modern sewing machinery. "Since you are an expert tailor, and I am a graduate of business school, we could open a partnership," he suggested. "I would oversee the business aspect of the operation while you would oversee the clothing and tailoring aspect." I replied that I would think it over and give him my response the next day.

The next morning, a fellow from Sosnowitz came up to me. His name was Shammai Reznick, son-in-law of the Skornitzki family. I had first met him in Feldafing shortly after my arrival. "Where have you been these past few weeks?" I asked him. Instead of a reply, he took something out of his pocket and showed it to me. I was overcome with emotion as I found myself looking at a photograph of myself and my oldest brother, together with a group of friends.

"Where did you find this photograph?" I asked. He explained that he went back to Sosnowitz. "Your sister Ruzhka survived!" he declared. "When I arrived at Sosnowitz, I went to the Jewish Committee every day in order to find out who was still alive. One day while I was there, I recognized your sister; I remembered how she looked because I had once seen her at your store." (His father-in-law's store was right across ours.) He asked my sister if her name was Lazerowitz, and when she told him that he had recognized her correctly he asked her who else survived from her family. She said that, unfortunately, no one had. He didn't want to shock her, so he slowly broke the news to her that one of her brothers was alive on the American side.

She began to cry from joy and asked him which brother was alive. "The youngest one," he said. After she calmed down

from the shock, he gently added: "And your brother Moshe is also alive and he is together with his younger brother." She almost collapsed from joy and shed lots of joyous tears. "Now I won't be alone anymore," she said. She recalled that when our father z"l passed away, I had taken upon myself to support all of the children and their mother. I gave up my carefree youth in exchange for this new responsibility.

She gave Shammai the photograph as a sign that she was indeed alive. I had no idea how she managed to keep that photograph during the war. My brother and I were overjoyed with the news that our sister had survived and we decided that we had to travel to Sosnowitz and bring her over. My brother wanted to come along with me, but I had heard that people of his age were being drafted into the Polish army so I decided to go alone.

I went to the commanding office but they refused to grant me a travel permit. Not one to be easily deterred, I hitched along with a transport train that carried coals. I lay on the coals, having taken along a package of 5 kilos of food as a gift for my sister. I traveled for five days until I arrived at Djeitz, which is between Czechoslovakia and Silesia. A large train-transport center is located in that town with trains traveling in many directions. I had to change trains and find a train to Katowitz. As I waited for a train that would take me to Katowitz, a train arrived from Katowitz that was traveling to Prague in Czechoslovakia. Someone called out to me from the window, calling me by my name: "Your sister Ruzhka found out that you and Eliezer were alive on the American side, and she traveled to meet you!"

"Who are you?" I asked the stranger on the train.

"I am Greunblatt," he said. He was my sister's cousin from her mother's side. When I heard that she left Sosnowitz I was very disappointed, because I had troubled myself for so many days in order to find her. However, I decided that since I was already this close to my hometown I would visit my birthplace. I took the next train to Katowitz. The Poles and Russians who were on the train sent chills down my spine with their dagger-looks and unfriendly demeanor.

A Russian officer came up to me and demanded that I give him my food package. "It's for my sister," I said. "She survived the concentration camp and I'm taking this to her as a present." The package was tied with a leather string. He ripped open the package and I yelled and cursed at him in Russian, until the train stopped. I yelled out through the window: "Police!" An NKVD officer came up and took the Russian soldier off the train, after I showed the officer my inmate number that was tattooed into my arm.

When I arrived at Katowitz, I went onto a different train that would take me to Sosnowitz. As I looked around, I noticed that the entire area looked normal. There were no signs of significant war-damage or bombings. Many Russian soldiers and officers swarmed the place, and there were also Polish soldiers wearing Polish uniforms. I thought to myself that for these Poles, nothing had really changed. The train personnel were Polish people and they were in their home country. The Poles gave me very unfriendly stares.

When I embarked on the train to Sosnowitz, I saw the Polish passengers pointing at me and murmuring to each other that another Jew had returned from the concentration camp. This comment was accompanied by some hatred-filled epithets on account of the Jews. A chill went down my spine from this inhospitable welcome.

The train arrived at Sosnowitz at sundown. The sky was covered with red streaks and I stood at a corner to get my bearings. I remembered the day that I was deported from my hometown and how I hoped to live to return here. Hashem helped me survive and now I have returned to the town where I was born and where I lived and worked until the Gestapo shipped me off. Back then, this place was homey, full of Jews, but as I stood there on my return, all I saw were unfriendly Polish people.

I walked down the street where our store had stood and met several Jews – strangers who came from other towns. As I continued walking, I met a person I knew; his name was Igra. We greeted each other and I continued walking to the street where my father had lived. I walked around with the package, with no

place to go. Deep in thought, I arrived in front of the building where my family had lived. Suddenly, a Sosnowitz Jew came up to me. We had been together in camp in the beginning, but later on we were separated. He was liberated by the Russians and he settled in Sosnowitz afterwards. He took my package and he me to his home.

I washed up a bit. I remembered that on that very evening was my father's Yartzeit; it was the 4th of Elul. My friend told me that the house of the Radomsker Rebbe was now occupied by England and that every day the Jews gathered there to *daven*, under the Russian occupation. I went to *minyán* and met a few acquaintances. Our joy was very great and we shared some of our experiences with each other. Everyone wanted to know if the others had by chance been together with any of their relatives.

I returned home and ate dinner with my host, after which I went to sleep. The next morning I went to *daven*, and afterwards I went to the Jewish cemetery. I was looking for my father's *kever*, but to my horror I saw that the entire row of gravestones had been uprooted. Only the flat stones on the ground remained. There was no way I could know my father's exact resting place. All I knew was that he was interred several slots near the Pinchiver Rebbe, so I stood there and prayed, pouring out my heart. I then walked around the cemetery and saw that a third of it had been vandalized and destroyed.

I went back into town. As I passed Leshna Street, I met an acquaintance and we asked each other if we knew of any relatives who survived. He told me that my cousin, my mother's brother's daughter, survived and now lived here in Sosnowitz in her uncle's (her mother's brother) house. I immediately went to see her and she cried from joy upon seeing me. Her father had been a partner with my brother Yerachmiel and me in the farm we owned. My brother Yerachmiel married this cousin's sister. Out of nine siblings, only this lone girl survived.

She served me breakfast and we shared our experiences at the camps. She told me that her niece Ruzhka also survived, and that she lived with her.

I decided to go out and start inquiring about my *kallah* and her parents. I went to the Committee and asked them about the family, but they had no information about them. So I went to the Polish family with whom they had been friendly. I introduced myself and they remembered the parents telling them that their daughter was engaged to me. They welcomed me pleasantly and told me that they had made arrangements with their relative, a wealthy farmer, to hide my *kallah's* family. Unfortunately, the plans were delayed due to negligence, or perhaps they didn't want to leave too early. The Polish man was elderly and intelligent. He told me that the Jews were deported in such haste and the ghetto was so well guarded that it was impossible to take anyone out of there at that time. "We sent our daughter to the ghetto to try to take them out," they explained, "but she returned and told us that the Germans refused to let anyone get too close to the ghetto. They threatened to shoot anyone who so much as came near." They expressed their sorrow, and I sadly stood up and left.

I walked towards the ghetto deeply overcome by a flood of memories. I remembered the days that I watched my *kallah* from my store, feeling that we were destined for each other, but being quite sure that my dreams were unrealistic. And then, amazingly, my previous partner Kozuzorz invited me to his home and introduced me to her! We met several times and shared our life stories, and she declared that she was willing to become my life's partner. I had cried from joy, dreaming about a rosy future together.

As these thoughts went through my mind, I suddenly realized that I was now walking on the very same path that I used to walk with her. I remembered how she would greet me joyfully, and a silent hope whispered within me: If only she would appear again and greet me happily! If only everything that happened to me since we last met was nothing more than a terrible nightmare!

I continued walking and remembered that at this spot we bade farewell to each other on the day that my brother and his wife were captured and I turned myself in. I had told her that when I was very young my father had been sick with typhus, and the doctor had given up hope. My mother had prayed to Hashem

and said that if it was destined for my father to die, Hashem should take her life instead. On the day we bade each other farewell, my *kallah* reminded me of this story and told me that she too prayed to Hashem that if I was destined to perish she wants to give her life for me. I couldn't listen to her talking that way and tried to calm her down. I had to rush to the Gestapo in order to turn myself in before they deported my brother and his wife to Auschwitz, and so I left her there with her words echoing in my ears.

Her heartfelt words came back to me now, and I began to cry. I sat down on a nearby tree stump and wiped my tears. "What a pure soul she was!" I mourned. Perhaps the Germans sent her to a labor camp and she will yet return? But in my heart of hearts I felt that such a tender girl surely could not have survived the horrors of the labor camps. That is, if she got that far at all. When she arrived at Auschwitz and the Germans made their selection among the arrivals, she probably refused to leave her elderly parents who were surly sent to the left. She loved them so much and was very attached to them. Perhaps she decided to share their fate.

During all this time I was in contact with various organizations such as the Red Cross and other committees that provided information about survivors. I had also heard that some people managed to hide in bunkers in the hope of surviving the war while remaining hidden from the Germans. They prepared a supply of food, but when their provisions ran out they were forced to go out and look for food. They were either discovered by the Germans in their hiding places or shot on the spot during their food forays. The Poles also helped search for hidden Jews, and were rewarded by the Germans for their services. Any Jew who was found was shot immediately.

I continued inquiring about my *kallah's* family, but I couldn't get any information. I was mostly busy during the day with my inquiries, but at night as I tried to fall asleep the memories would come back to haunt me. My heart ached for all my loved ones, my brothers and sisters with their children and all our other relatives and friends.

I visited the former ghetto and went to the house where my little sisters lived. I told the owner my name, and he invited me inside. As I entered the next room, I immediately recognized the kitchenware that belonged to my older sister Esther. I presume that after her husband was deported, she moved in with the children. I also recognized Esther's furniture. I asked the owner if there were any photographs of my parents, siblings or nieces and nephews in the apartment. He said that when he returned to his former apartment after the Jews were deported, he found that nothing had been left. I could see plainly that he was lying, but I was afraid to confront him and persist with my demands. I knew that he could kill me, just as many other survivors who paid with their lives when they tried to get any of their possessions back. I left empty-handed.

Several years later my sister and my cousin returned to Poland in order to claim back our farm and our house. At that time, they visited this Polish man and for a high price he gave them two framed photographs of my father and mother z"l.

After this encounter, I went to the apartment where I slept and picked up the food package. I needed money, so I sold it for 2,500 zlotys. I then went to visit my own apartment on Spulna Street, where the mill stood. The *strusz* recognized me right way and cried: "How come you survived?" I was flooded by memories of the apartment where I lived with my brother and his wife Rivkah, and their two children Sara'la and Eliezer Yosef. Everything came back to me – the homey atmosphere, the children's tender faces. On this street I used to walk with my brother and discuss various issues. I also took many walks among these same trees with my father z"l. I was so overpowered by emotions and memories that I forgot that my cousin had invited me for lunch.

When I arrived at my cousin's apartment, I met her niece, a girl of about 18. My cousin was about 21 years old at that time. I ate lunch there and I asked her from where she had the money for her daily needs. She told me that when she arrived here after she was liberated by the Russians in the Greenberg Labor Camp near the Czech border, which wasn't very far from Sosnowitz,

she traveled to Gluzh, the village where she had lived before the war, to collect some of her property.

When I heard this, I was aghast. She had placed her life in serious danger. She was hoping to find someone from her family at home, but instead she found a peasant family occupying their house. "What do you want?" they asked her.

"I am the youngest daughter of Zelig Potak, the owner of this property," she declared. "I was born in this house and grew up here with my sisters and brothers, until the Germans forced us to leave."

They had a large dog that was trained to tear apart any stranger. But even after all these years, the dog recognized her and was happy to see her. He came over to lick her hand. The nearby peasants who worked for the Potaks brought her some food and told her that she would only be able to reclaim her property through a court order. So she left for Djalowitz, which was six kilometers from Gluzh. In Djalowitz, there were a number of survivors; some of them had managed to hide out during the war, but the majority of them had been liberated several months ago by the Russians, since Poland was liberated earlier. She knew many of the people in Djalowitz and they provided her with food and a place to sleep.

One night, a group of Poles attacked the Jews and killed some of them. My cousin managed to hide. She shared an apartment with a few other girls, and when they heard shooting and shouting they escaped to the fields. The next day she left for Sosnowitz. Since then, she had been corresponding with two peasant families who had worked for her father. They were both interested in purchasing a plot of land from what she owned, and they were willing to give an advance deposit. She was advised not to accept money, because money was losing its value. People told her she should rather ask for foodstuffs as payment. The peasants brought foodstuffs from the village whenever they came to town.

"I gave over the case to a lawyer named Kerzch, from Mayechov," my cousin concluded her account. "I am very happy that you arrived, because I am too young to handle this issue."

Since you are a partner to the property, you will be able to manage this entire affair much better than me."

As I ate lunch, she told me that the food I was eating came from the fields we owned in Gluzh.

I thanked her and left. I went to the committee office and found some of my acquaintances there, among them a certain fellow who used to work in my tailor shop before the war. During the war, I reported to the *Zunder-beauftrag* that he was employed as a tailor. He had a room in an apartment, and he invited me to sleep with him. I agreed and slept at his place.

The next day I met in the street a friend who came from the American side. He told me that he was interested in purchasing German *reichsmarken*. "How much would you pay for them?" I asked. "250 dollars," was his response. I immediately contacted someone in the know and asked him how much German marks were worth and if they were exchanged for Polish zlotys. He told me that people were buying dollars and also German marks for zlotys. "But don't rush," he told me. "Wait for the opportunity to purchase from the young peasants; they bring the currency from Silesia and will give you a much better price."

I exchanged the \$250 for my friend and got in touch with a reliable boy, whom I instructed to purchase the currency from the young peasants. I assured him that he would earn a nice profit from the deal. I purchased the currency and also bought a cotton blanket. I sewed the marks into the blanket, and a bit later on that same day I sewed several thousand zlotys into the blanket.

The next day I came to my cousin and gave her some money for her daily needs. She didn't want to accept any money from me, but she finally agreed. "I would like to get out of here," she said. She confided that a certain fellow was pestering her in an inappropriate manner. I asked her who he was, and when she told me his name I knew whom she meant. This person was a *kappo* in the first camp where I had been. When I first arrived, he treated me well, but the German guard cautioned me to watch out from this *kappo*, because he was capable of beating inmates to death. Now in Sosnowitz, when that fellow saw me in my

cousin's home, he became pale. I did not get into any discussions with him.

I found out that a survivor, Mrs. Smolarchik from Djashitz, was living on Spulna Street in an apartment that had several rooms. She was the mother-in-law of my brother's brother-in-law. I went over to her and found her there with her daughter. I introduced myself and told her that Zelig Gluzher's individuals were pestering them. "I want them to live with nice ladies," I said. Mrs. Smolarchik told me to send the girls, and she also invited me to live in one of the rooms. "When there's a man in the house, the women feel safer," she explained. She still had an empty room, so I accepted her invitation.

That day, when I went to the apartment of the tailor who had invited me to stay with him, I found to my surprise R' Shlomo Rosenholtz. We were both happy to see each other. He brought regards from my sister and told me that she lived with a group of fine girls. My brother Eliezer took her out on walks every day; they had plenty to tell each other.

I prepared some food for him and invited him to sleep there. He told me that he came to Sosnowitz because he wanted to see me, and he was also hoping to find survivors from his hometown Zsherodov. "I had hidden away some money, banknotes and gold pound-notes, as well as some Jewelry," he said. During war-time he managed to purchase several karats of diamonds. I spent some time with him every day.

One morning, I went up to the apartment where my father lived. As I stood by the door, I was overcome by a flood of memories. All the times I spent in this house went through my mind. I remembered myself as a twelve-year-old boy in my father's house, and recalled many things that happened since then until we were forced into the ghetto. As I stood there lost in my memories, I heard footsteps on the other side of the door. I quickly ran down the stairs and left the building.

Many Jewish families used to live in that building near the *shul*, but now I didn't see a single Jew. Only Poles were in sight. The *shul* was a burnt wreck. The Bais Midrash was

emptied of the dozens of Jews who studied Torah there every night. The sweet sounds as they learned Gemara used to fill the area, but now all that was gone. I left the place feeling downcast and saddened. I felt that the situation was affecting my health.

That day, I went for a walk with R' Shlomo Rosenholtz and we ended up at the place where I had last spoken with my *kallah*. We sat down together on the tree stump and I told him everything about my engagement. "I was so happy during that time," I said. "Even though we lived under German occupation and new decrees were passed every day, I hardly felt the suffering because of our weekly meetings. When the time came for me to say good-bye to her, she told me that she was willing to die instead of me. I left this place and looked back; she was still standing here on this very spot. The distance made her look much smaller." This was the first time that I spoke to someone about this and I wept. R' Shlomo cried along with me. I wiped my eyes and walked back into town.

I went with R' Shlomo to the tailor's apartment. When we arrived, I felt ill due to the day's experiences. I had visited my father's house in the morning, saw the Bais Midrash and relived my personal tragedy. All this affected me strongly and I fainted. They revived me, and the tailor went to my new apartment to tell them that I would be coming to live there the next day because I needed to take care of something that would keep me away until late at night. My friends gave me some homemade remedies. I felt ill until about midnight, when I finally fell asleep.

The next morning I was still weak and I rested as much as possible. At night, I went to my new place. On my way, I met an old acquaintance who used to live next door to my father. His name was Bernstein, and we grew up together. He was accompanied by his oldest sister, a widow whose husband perished in the labor camps.

"We have something important to discuss with you," they told me. "Please come to our apartment." When I sat down at their table, they first said that everything they were about to say was strictly confidential. The sister began to say that before the war she lived in Shchemiashitz, some 30 kilometers from

Sosnowitz. They owned an iron business. In 1941 they were ordered to leave and they were forced into the ghetto that was erected between Slavkov and Shchemiashitz. When they learned that they had very little time left at home, they hid their small fortune into a metal container and buried it in the coal cellar. "We are now destitute," she said, "and we would love to go back and dig up our money. Can you help us?"

I listened carefully and asked for all of the details. Then I told them that I would think it over, and I will try my best to help them. Once I was back home, I thought over the whole thing and worked out a plan how to retrieve the things. Two days later I went to see them and suggested that she and her brother should travel to that town presenting themselves as peddlers. They should bring along some cheap items to sell. The brother should stand outside, while she should go inside and show her wares. She should look around the place and see who owns the house. What does he for a living? Does he have a wife and children?

They did as I instructed them. The next day they returned and told me that the new owner was a shoemaker. They had not seen any children around, and his wife was a simple homemaker. I asked them how tall the Pole and his wife were and instructed them to procure a suit for the husband and a coat for the wife, along with another few things. We decided which day we would travel to that town to visit them again. We planned that it should be during the evening hours. I purchased an axe, took off the head and wrapped it in paper.

We traveled by train and disembarked at an earlier stop in order not to be seen at the village station. We walked through the fields until we arrived at the house. I told them to go inside and tell the couple that she hadn't sold anything that day and was anxious to make a sale. Then she should immediately show them the suit and the coat.

The Polish couple like the clothing, but they said that they had no money to pay for it. As I had instructed her, she then told them that her brother and friend were outside waiting for her, and she invited us in to introduce us. We came inside and greeted the peasants. I had brought along a small flask of vodka. With the

excuse that I felt cold, I took out the vodka and asked for some glasses. I poured everyone a drink; we only took small sips, but they emptied their glasses. I refilled their glasses and then pulled out some food, including salami sandwiches, and offered it to them. They were overjoyed at the feast. I signaled to the Jewish woman and she began to tell the couple that she used to live here when this place was part of the ghetto. "I have some small items in the coal cellar that are of sentimental value to me," she said. "Little items that belonged to my parents, some photographs, and similar things."

I refilled their glasses once more, and they became even more uplifted. The shoemaker followed all of us to the coal cellar. I took out the axe head, and dug up where the woman pointed. I was digging quite deeply but didn't find anything yet, so she showed me a different spot. She whispered to me that her husband hid it, and although she helped him she couldn't remember the exact spot. I started digging up the new place, while someone held a candle for me. As I went deeper, I struck something hard. The other person shoveled away the dirt and I continued digging until I managed to pull out the small container that she and her deceased husband had hidden. I was wearing a long winter jacket that had very deep pockets, so I immediately slipped it into my pocket and then returned to the table, urging everyone to eat and drink. I also told them to give the Polish couple the items they had brought for them.

Now came another tricky part of our mission: we still needed some luck to bring everything back safely, because civilians were only permitted to walk outside until nine o'clock. We walked through the fields for about 3 kilometers until we reached the station. The station-clerk told me that a train to Sosnowitz would be leaving within the hour. I bought a ticket and left. At the time the train was due to arrive, I returned and stayed next to the station. When I actually heard the train, I went onto the train but I didn't enter any of the cars. I chose to go inside one of the small cabins near the cars. I arrived home at around 12 o'clock at night.

In the morning, the brother came to pick up the package. Later, he and his sister came again and gave me several thousand

zlotys as a token of appreciation. They waited to see if I would demand more money, but I thanked them and said our good-byes. "We will be leaving today or tomorrow and said our good-byes. American side of Germany," they told me.

That same day, as I walked in the street, an elegantly-dressed Polish *paruchnik* (lieutenant) came over to me. To my surprise, he began to hug me and kissed me. I thought he must be mistaken; he probably thought I was someone else. But then he called me by my name, and I recognized his voice as that of Feurstein. We had left Sosnowitz together and been in the same camp. He slept near me and I gave him some of my food. In the beginning, when they still gave us meat or salami, I gave him mine. When we left Warsaw on July 28, 1944, 400 Jews were left behind. He was among those who were left, and two days later the Poles made an uprising against the Germans. 396 of the remaining Jews perished in the uprising, but he managed to join a partisan group and survived until the Russians conquered Warsaw six months later. He continued fighting until Berlin fell, and he showed me the medals he received in recognition of his bravery. He lived in Katowitz and was involved in various business deals with the Russian officers. He gave me his address and invited me to come visit him. He also offered to lend me a few thousands zlotys if necessary.

I thanked him and told him that I would visit him. When I came home, I told everyone about my meeting with Feurstein. My cousin's niece was very happy to hear this, because this man was her cousin.

Meanwhile, we received a letter from the lawyer telling us that a date for a hearing had been set in two weeks, on a Wednesday. That Sunday would be the first day of Selichos. I discussed the issue with several people and they warned me not to travel alone, because I would be placing my life in danger. I went with my cousin to the police station and asked for an armed police escort, but they said that they could not appoint a police officer to accompany us to a peaceful court hearing. We told them how many Jewish lives were lost when people tried to get back their property, but they said: "If someone commits a murder

or another crime, our job is to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice."

"Oh, I see," I said sarcastically. "First they have to murder us and then perhaps the criminals would be found." In truth, for the most part such criminals were never found because their friends helped them hide, and after a while the criminals were given amnesty due to the constant changes in government. "Look at this girl," I continued. "She is my cousin, the only survivor of her entire, large family. I also lost my whole family. We must live in order to tell the world what the Germans did to us, with the active help of our 'friendly' neighbors!"

The police chief listened quietly to my sharp words, but gave no reply. When I came home, I repeated the conversation to Mrs. Smolorchick. She had a son who worked in the Warsaw ministry, and she offered to write to her son about this issue to request his help. I explained to her that time was too short for her son to intervene from Warsaw.

Then it occurred to me to visit my friend the *paruchnik*, Feurstein, who had invited me to his home in Katowitz. He had lots of contacts among the Russian officers. My cousin and her niece wanted to accompany me to Katowitz, but I wasn't sure that it was a good idea for them to come along. When Mrs. Smolarchik asked me why, I told her that I noticed that in this state of anarchy after the war, many military men and civilians as well have lost all sense of morality. "How can I undertake to protect two pretty young girls in such a place?" I asked. Mrs. Smolarchik agreed that I was right and that my caution was well placed. She was actually quite impressed by my sense of responsibility for the girls.

Chapter 12

I traveled to Katowitz as planned and met Feurstein that evening while he was in the company of several Russian officers. He introduced me to the Russians as someone who was with him in the concentration camp, and that we are also related. He invited me to sit and we discussed the recent developments.

Feurstein placed some vodka on the table along with other kinds of schnapps and food. I drank a bit and told them that I had to travel to Mayechov to appear in court, but I was afraid that the local Poles would murder me and my cousin, just as had been done to many survivors who returned to take back their stolen property.

"I was at the Sosnowitz police station," I told them, "but the chief told me that their duty is to bring to justice those who commit a murder or another criminal act. This means that first we have to be murdered, and then they'll look for the murderers."

One of the officers stood up angrily when he heard the rude response of the Polish police commissioner. He came to sit next to me and declared empathetically: "We liberated Poland and we rule over Poland! And if you require help I will provide you with as many police escorts as you need." I replied that one soldier armed with a machine gun would be enough.

"You can get 20 armed soldiers and even a tank, if you need it!" he graciously said. I thanked him and took his address and telephone number. He instructed me to come to him the same day that I left for Mayechov and he would give me the armed escort I required. I said good-bye to everyone, and my friend Feurstein walked me out the door. He told me outside that the Russian officer was a Jew from Kiev, and that he was in charge of all of the factories in the entire region. He was a major by rank and he received a number of prestigious medals for his bravery in the war against the Nazis.

When I arrived home, I told my cousin and her niece everything that happened. They were relieved to hear that we would receive protection from the malevolent Poles.

On Sunday, the first day of Selichos, I spoke to R' Shlomo Rosenholtz and introduced him to my cousin. We told him that we would be traveling that week to the courthouse in Mayechov in order to retrieve our property. He tried to dissuade us from going because of the great risk involved, but I told him that we will be accompanied by an armed Russian soldier. He then told us that he had decided that day to travel to Zerodov in order to retrieve his hidden valuables. "Perhaps I'll find someone from my family there," he added. "If I will manage to retrieve my hidden valuables, you will no longer have to worry about financial matters," he assured me. "Whatever I own is yours, too!"

I thanked him for his kindness and we bid each other farewell. He left for his hometown but he promised to return. He took my address, although during that week I stayed at the tailor's house because it was next to the committee office. Every day we saw new people arriving, including Sosnowitz residents as well as strangers who came to purchase German marks. I was able to provide some of them with the currency they needed. I sewed the money into my clothes so that if I would be searched the money would not be discovered.

Another reason why I liked staying in that house was that my middle brother, Kalman Shlomo, lived there with his wife and two little boys. It was because of him that I was forced to turn myself in, after the Gestapo arrested him in order to force me to come out of hiding. Many times when I stood at the outside gate, I remembered the scene when the Germans led us away. My brother and sister-in-law stood at this very spot and wished me to be well. My brother called after me: "Come back healthy and well!" I could not forget his image and his words still echoed in my ears.

Yes, I returned healthy and well, *baruch Hashem*. But you, my dear brother and your beloved family, are no longer here. I turned myself in to save you and your family. I was willing to be sacrificed in your place, but my willingness to die instead of you and your innocent wife and little children did not save you...

That same week, when I once stood at the gate, I saw an American soldier approaching. When he came closer, I saw that he was a lieutenant (*paruchnik*). I was most surprised to see him come over to me with a big smile on his face, and he started to hug and kiss me. I was taken aback and quite confused, so he said to me: "I am Henoch Zlotnik; we were together in the last camp!" That's when I finally remembered him and recalled our many discussions. He was pessimistic about our chances for survival and kept on saying that the Germans would surely murder all of us before they lose the war. I was optimistic during those discussions and I argued that the bigger the murderer was, that's how much more he feared for his own life. "They are cowards. When they will realize that they have lost the war, they will start panicking and they will no longer want to listen to Hitler's orders to murder us. Instead, they will try to save their own skins by enabling us to survive."

I asked him if he remembered those discussions, and he said: "Yes, we were indeed lucky!" He then told me that on April 27, 1945 when the Americans shot at our transport and many of us ran into the woods, he stayed hidden in the woods along with a few other Jews. They were liberated the next day by the American army and he volunteered to fight along with them until May 8th when the war officially ended. "So now I have a position with the army, and in between I'm trying to do a bit of business," he concluded his story.

I met him once more, together with his young sister who also survived. My partner during the beginning of the war, Kuzushorz, was their cousin. They were from a very fine family; Henoch Zlotnik was a very smart and capable person. He later moved to Baltimore and had a wife and one daughter. I visited him several times, because my daughter learned at Bais Yakov of Baltimore. He had changed his name to Silberman. In 1964, he was diagnosed with an incurable disease and he passed away in 1965/66.

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On the appointed day, I traveled to Katowitz with my cousin. I telephoned the Russian officer at his office and he told

me to come to his home. When I arrived there, he was already waiting for me. He told me that his name was Appelbaum from Kiev, and he began to speak to me in Yiddish.

"The hearing will take place tomorrow at 10:30 in Mayechov," I said. "I must travel to Cracow today and spend the night there, and then take an early morning train to Mayechov." He called someone by phone and a tall Russian soldier with a machine gun arrived. He recorded the gun's number and the name of the soldier, commanding him to protect us. "How many bullets do you have?" he asked. The soldier showed him that he had a bag full of bullets, in addition to the bullets that were loaded in the gun. He also had two more bags with spare bullets that he kept in reserve.

I thanked him profusely and we left for the station. We traveled to Cracow where my cousin's brother-in-law's brother lived. His name was Singer; he and his wife survived the war by hiding out in the woods. We went to his home on Shvienta Agnieszka Street where we were given a place to sleep. We ate and drank our fill together with the soldier. They prepared beds for the soldier and me on the floor.

Early the next morning we arrived at Mayechov. We visited the two Lewitt brothers; I was together with one of them in camp. Their father was called Abba Melamed; he was a longtime *melamed* (teacher of young children) who taught three generations of children. He was very famous in Mayechov before the war, having taught grandfathers and their sons and grandchildren.

We waited for the appointed time and then started on our way. We asked the soldier to walk on the side in order not to make it obvious that he was escorting us.

We entered the courthouse and found many of our well-known peasants who used to work on our farm. Later, when the Germans retreated and the region was liberated, Lublin became the Polish capital. The Polish government in Lublin had decided that the farm should be leased to the people who worked on the farm before the war. They should take care of the fields, and one of them should manage the *kolkhoz* (collective farming). The

house that stood on the farm was turned into a school for the peasant children.

I heard the peasants mumbling: "The Jews took advantage of us and sucked our blood, and now they returned to throw us out from our land and suck our blood once more!" Some of them heatedly said that the Jewish blood-suckers must be killed. "We must finish the job that Hitler left in the middle."

There wasn't a single Polish policeman in sight and I was quite afraid of their vicious remarks and hatred-filled glares. When they worked for us before the war, we always treated them well and respectfully, unlike the Polish landowners who exploited their workers and enslaved the peasants just like their grandparents had done in the Middle Ages. And now, instead of approaching us kindly and inquiring about our wellbeing and horrific war experiences, they wanted to devour us alive.

I asked my cousin to follow me. We left through a side door and called the Russian soldier over. "Please come into the building, but not together with us," I said. "Please keep an eye on the violent Poles, but don't look in our direction."

Meanwhile, our names were called out. The lawyer called us over and asked for my cousin's name, as well as some other pertinent questions. He then turned to the peasants and asked them if they worked for the Potak family before the war. "Yes, we did," they replied.

"And do you remember this girl as the daughter of Zelig and Kaila Potak?" the lawyer asked. They all unanimously cried that they did not know the girl. I hastily stood up, my blood boiling, and cried out: "You are even worse than dogs! When this girl returned after liberation to the home where she and all her siblings were born and raised until the Germans evacuated them in 1942 to the Dzashitz Ghetto, the dogs still recognized her after all these years and were happy to see her! Any stranger would be torn to pieces by them, but they licked her hands and face."

My words made a strong impression on the judge and the lawyer, and they began to question everyone separately if they

knew the girl. They admitted that she was the youngest daughter of Zelig and Kaila Potak. There were no further questions to ask.

The judge and his attendants left to a side room and stayed there for about two hours. Finally, he came back and said that he would not deliver his judgment now but he would send it directly to Cracow. Several hours later, we spoke to our lawyer and he told us that the judge confided in him that he was afraid of the peasants and therefore couldn't rule that the entire property should be returned to us; they would murder him. He would forward the paperwork to Cracow and let them take care of it.

We thanked the soldier and told him to return home. The next day we traveled to Cracow and went to the Jewish Committee to inquire about a lawyer. They gave us the address of a good lawyer who came from Sanz. We went to him and he introduced himself as Dr. Zweig. He was a young man with a friendly disposition. We told him the entire story about the court case that ended without a ruling due to the judge's fear of the peasants. "The case was forwarded to Cracow," I said, giving the lawyer copies of the recordings and other legal documents.

"When the paperwork will arrive here, I will look into it," he replied. "Don't worry, you will get everything back."

When I asked him what he charged for his services, he said that we would discuss it later. "I won't rip you off," he assured us. "You'll be happy."

We left and went straight to the station. When I returned home, I continued with my previous petty business dealings. I partnered with Chaim Mansdorf, a nice person who was liberated from Auschwitz. His wife and his entire family perished in the war. He lived on 26 Mondzever Street, and we knew each other from before the war. He never remarried, and he passed away several years ago in Poland.

Several weeks later I received a letter from the Cracow lawyer asking me to come over, because he had something to discuss regarding the court case. I arrived at his office at the appointed time. He told me that he reviewed all paperwork and everything seemed to be in perfect order. "The problem is,

however, that the government leased out all larger properties," he explained. "Elections will be taking place shortly and then this matter will be straightened out. There are currently two governments in Poland – the communist government body that was founded by the first Russian troops when they conquered Lublin in July 1944, and the Warsaw government body which is somewhat more democratic and is led by Nikoleitchek. These two governments are now trying to win the favor of the Polish population, especially the simple peasants. This is why the issue at hand may drag on." He made sure to tell me all of this in person, as he was afraid to write it in a letter.

"Where is justice?" I demanded. "The rich Polish landowners sit on their property, and although part of their land was leased out, they were left with much of their original property. Most importantly, they reside in their own homes and live comfortably. But we Jews, after most of us were gassed to death in the German crematoriums with just a few lone survivors returning, the government plays politics on the backs of these tortured individuals?!"

The lawyer saw how upset I was and said bitterly: "I am also a Jew. I was married for two years to a wonderful young woman. She was expecting our first child. We had to go into hiding, where she gave birth, but she died in childbirth together with the baby. She was buried in the middle of the night in the field that belonged to a peasant." His eyes became full of tears. "Our neighbors refused to help us, and instead they betrayed us."

He started asking me about my cousin, if she was single or engaged to someone. He praised her and mentioned to me that she reminded him of his late wife. I evaded commenting on his words, bade him farewell and left.

I decided to make use of my visit to Cracow and visited the gravesite of the holy Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserlis zt"l. Fortunately, his holy *kever* wasn't ruined. I walked the length and breadth of the cemetery and remembered how I used to visit this place with my father z"l on Lag b'Omer. We used to visit the tombs of many great *tzaddikim*, and my father would *daven* at their resting places wrapped in his *gartel*, quietly beseeching

Hashem. All of these memories came back to me now. At that time, thousands of Jews would gather here from all over Poland and beyond, but today only three Jews were there.

I then visited the Bais Midrash and saw that it was badly neglected. I looked around as if to bid farewell to this place forever. Then I left for the station and returned home. I told my cousin everything the lawyer said, that it could still take a long time until we would get back the property for which we worked and toiled. "They are oiling the wheels of Poland's future with our blood," I remarked. I also mentioned to her the personal story of the Jewish lawyer, a fine young man who lost his wife and newborn. "He expressed an interest in you," I said. She blushed and asked me if he was serious.

"Think about it," I said.

"He is a nice person," she said, "But he is over 20 years older than me! Besides, I have only gone through regular public school. How would he present himself with me? In addition, I come from a religious home, while he is *Postempava* (Reform?)."

When Mrs. Smolarchik asked my opinion of the issue, I said that if a person really wants to, they can learn to become more intelligent and adopt the mannerisms of the higher echelons of society. Not that my cousin didn't have good manners! She was a very refined girl who came from a very special home. We decided to let the matter be for now and see later on if anything would become of it.

Meanwhile, we had to earn money in order to live. I needed winter clothes and shoes, as well as clothing and shoes for the girls. I made contact with Polish peasant boys, purchasing German marks and American dollars from them. I earned a nice profit and was able to purchase garments for myself, as well as for my cousin and her niece.

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One Shabbos night (Motzei Shabbos) when I happened to be in the street, a young Pole with whom I was friendly came over to me and offered to sell me a certain amount of German marks. We went to a corner and counted the money he had for

sale. We figured out the amount I owe him and I paid him in Polish zlotys. We always did these transactions in the street; I never invited these money-changers to my apartment, and they never knew my address.

As I walked away from the transaction, I suddenly heard someone call out to me from behind in Polish: "Stop!" When I turned around, I saw two men, one of them dressed in plainclothes and the other one in a military uniform. "You are under arrest!" they declared. "Come along with us to Katowitz."

I explained that I must first go home and inform my family that I was arrested. My real intention was to pass the Sosnowitz police station and run in to them, because in those days it was extremely dangerous for a Jew to be sent to a different city. They agreed, because they wanted to know my address, in order to be legally permitted to raid my apartment and confiscate whatever money or jewelry I had, or perhaps even arrest a few more Jews and carry them off someplace to be executed.

I led them through various streets and byways, thinking that this was the best option I had. Although I was quite frightened, I had decided to give myself over to the Sosnowitz police. I entered Filsudzkego Street, and right there was the police station. A police officer stood on guard outside the building. When my apprehenders saw that we were passing the police station, they walked to the side so that it should appear as if they have no direct connection with me. As soon as I came near the building, I entered through the open door and informed the officer at the front desk that two people arrested me and wanted to take me to Katowitz. "I was born here, and I lived here until Hitler's gangs took me away," I declared. "If I broke the law and must be prosecuted, I do not want to go anywhere else. I should be arrested and prosecuted in the city where the crime was committed."

The officers said to each other that I was right. Meanwhile, the two people who apprehended me disappeared. The Sosnowitz police officers did not deem it necessary to ask them why they tried to arrest me or even to check their identities

and positions. The police searched me and discovered a large amount of German marks. I tried telling them that I had brought this along with me when I came from Germany, but they put on the record that I bought the currency illegally and was a "speculator" – profiteering in a way that was considered a serious crime. I refused to sign the indictment.

They confiscated everything I had with me, including my personal watch and the Polish money that was in my pocket. They took me downstairs to a dark cell that had no mattress, and I had to sleep on the hard floor. Several hours later they brought me a roommate, a drunk who was arrested for disturbing the peace. When the fellow sobered up and was about to be released, I asked him to go to my apartment and notify the woman of the house about my arrest. I assured him that he would be rewarded for his efforts.

The next morning at about 10 o'clock I was brought upstairs. My two cousins were waiting there for me. I was pleased to see them and felt more secure now that people knew of my whereabouts. I asked them to get in touch with a certain lawyer named Gross whom I knew from before the war. (There used to be two brothers in the law firm. One of them perished in the war, and the other brother managed to remain in hiding.)

That same day, the lawyer phoned the police and argued that they had no right to detain me without evidence of any crime. They called me up and told me to sign the indictment. That evening, they took me to a different cell that was a bit more decent. In the morning, they transferred me to the main Sosnowitz prison. I found myself in the company of former S.S. men and members of the Krayava (?) army, which was a Polish underground that fought against the Russian occupation. They also targeted the Jewish survivors, aiming to prevent the Jews from returning. They killed many Jewish survivors, as well as Russians. The prison also contained its fair share of regular criminals.

My spirits flagged when I found myself in the company of these thugs. Finally, my cousin visited me one day and brought a message from the lawyer. "When they will call you to the office

and ask you to sign the indictment, you should sign the document. 10,000 zlotys will be posted as bail and you will then be released," she said. "I gave the lawyer part of the money, and the rest was given by your partner. We also took some of the money you had at home," she explained. The lawyer had said reassuringly that I would be freed after the case will be heard in court, because I had not dealt with dollars or other foreign currencies. I only had German marks, the currency of a defeated country. Besides, a general amnesty will be declared shortly.

The next afternoon I was brought upstairs. My watch and a few other personal items were returned, and I was released. Once again, I felt as if I had been reborn due to being rescued from those Polish thugs.

When I came home, the joy was very great. I told my relatives what happened that Saturday night, how a young Pole whom I knew sold me some German marks and betrayed me. "I can no longer look at these people," I declared. I did continue doing business here and there, but I never dealt with Poles again. I slowly earned some money back.

When I had free time, I visited the places where my dear once had lived. I went to the apartment of my late sister Esther and thought much about her. I used to visit her very often before the war, and she was always very devoted to me. If I ever felt ill, she cared for me like a mother. I would walk up and down the street thinking of my dear sister Esther and her family. I also thought about her neighbors who were shot by the Germans on the 4th of September 1939, when the Germans invaded Sosnowitz. I was overcome by my thoughts, remembering how homey this neighborhood used to be when the entire street was inhabited only by Jews. Today, only Poles live in all of the apartments and stores. The Poles stared at me, recognizing me as a Jew. They were surprised to see that another Jew returned and looked at me as if I came from a different planet.

The Jews who returned to Poland became more despondent each day. It became clear to us that we wouldn't be able to resettle in our hometowns peacefully. We came to the realization that the 1,000-year-old Jewish history in Poland had

come to a close, and we will have to look for a new home. Catholic Poland was completely poisoned with anti-Semitism; it was obvious that we had no future there.

We were discussing plans to leave. Mrs. Smolarchik said that she had a son in Warsaw, as well as a 20-year-old grandson whose mother, her daughter, was murdered by the Germans. "I will stay here meanwhile, but I will send along my young daughter with you when you leave," she said. "Your cousins will stay together with her and watch over her until I am able to follow you with the rest of my surviving family members. Afterwards, we will decide to which country we shall emigrate."

Meanwhile, I made preparations for our journey. I exchanged my handful of zlotys for German marks; I also acquired marks for the Smolarchik girl and a few dollars as well.

On the day our journey began, I left Sosnowitz with my two cousins and the Smolarchik girl. When we arrived at Djeshitz, which was a border-town between Poland and Czechoslovakia, we met several Jews there who appeared very despondent. "What happened?" I asked them. They told me that the authorities recently searched all of them and their possessions were confiscated. Many people were even arrested. When I heard the news, I told the girls: "We are returning to Sosnowitz."

We arrived in Sosnowitz late at night. When Mrs. Smolarchik answered the door for us, I told her the reason why we returned, and she was pleased that I didn't take the risk.

Life continued... Each day I met newly-returned survivors who were born in Sosnowitz. One day I met a girl named Milstein who used to work for me. I had seen her name on the committee's list of survivors. I also saw the name of another girl who worked for me; her name was Regina Olshevsky and she was living in Beirut, which was on the American side. Meanwhile, I began to worry about my friend R' Shlomo Rosenholtz from Dzerodov, who did not return and didn't even send any letters.

I was in Katowitz several times. Each time I took the tramway, I would meet high-ranking Russian officers. Some of

them asked me questions, and when they heard from my accent that I was a Jew, they began to speak in Yiddish. One time, a *pulkovnik* started asking me about my experiences in the concentration camps. He listened to my horror stories and the Polish people after our return. When we arrived at Katowitz, he asked me to come with him to a café. He wanted to continue hearing about our suffering.

I told him that I had been in Warsaw several months after the ghetto uprising in which the surviving Jews valiantly fought the mighty Germans, not in order to save themselves but in order to die heroically. He wiped his eyes from tears and advised me to leave Poland. "Wait in the occupied part of Germany; a Jewish homeland is being founded in Israel and better times await the Jewish people," he tried to console me. Before I left, he asked me kindly if I needed any financial help. I thanked him and left.

One day, I stood near the house where my late brother Kalman had lived (in Sosnowitz). It was the second house on the street, and the courtyard of the building was connected to the neighboring courtyard, which had a back-exit that led to a different street. During the afternoon, a young Polish fellow of about 30 came over to me and asked to speak with me. Next to me stood a young Jewish boy of about 20 who used to purchase German marks for me from the Polish or Silesian people. He would also acquire other merchandise for me. This boy was very quick and handled these dangerous transactions remarkably well. I relied on him, and he protected me from falling into the traps of the police; I was very careful since the incident of my arrest.

The Polish man called me into the building, which had a back door he wasn't aware of, and took out 190 dollars from his pocket. He offered it to me for a cheap price and asked me to buy it. I could tell by his facial expression that he was a secret agent, so I immediately declined the offer and said that I don't deal with these things. However, I signaled to the boy and whispered to him quietly: "Go to Chaim." He understood that I meant my partner Chaim Mansdorf.

I stood nearby and heard the Pole walk up to the boy and ask him if he wanted to purchase the dollars. "I would gladly buy it, but I have no money," the boy cleverly responded. "But I have a Jewish friend who lives in this building, and he would probably be interested in the sale."

When the agent heard this, he was very pleased that he and the other agents who stood around the building would be able to catch the Jew with the contraband and use this as an excuse to confiscate everything he owned. Then they would arrest him and drag him off someplace for who knew how long. I was overcome by a desire to teach these despicable Polish traitors a lesson they would long remember, and to get even with them for torturing me because I had a few miserable German marks in my possession. These marks were worthless in Poland and in many other countries, and they had no reason to outlaw it. In fact, they should have encouraged such sales because it brought American dollars into Poland, as well as gold and English pounds, boosting their economy.

In any case, the agent gave the 190 dollars to the boy and asked him to bring him Polish zlotys. The naïve secret agent didn't know that the building had a back door that led to a different street, and the boy disappeared with the money. After the boy left, I noticed from the place where I stood that two of the agent's colleagues came over to him to wait for the boy. The three of them stood at the gate and waited to pounce on the boy and force him to take them to the person who exchanged the money for him. I heard them joke about the big fish they were about to catch. I walked away thinking that the agent would either lose his job in disgrace, or he would be arrested by the police with the accusation that he kept the dollars for himself.

I knew that it would be dangerous to stand there and wait out the scene, so I went home. I instructed my cousin's niece to go to my partner Chaim Mansdorf, pick up the dollars from him and hide it very well. When she returned, I instructed the girls to pack and be ready to leave. "I will work out a plan so that we should be able to leave safely," I said.

I spent the night at Chaim Mansdorf's home, together with the boy. "Your place is no longer here," I said to him. "The Germans killed you whole family, and now you must risk your freedom in order to earn a living. In the occupied part of Germany, whether you'd be living under the Americans or the British, you'd be able to live without fear and you will have a better opportunity to immigrate to Israel."

He accepted my advice and agreed to leave with us and leave behind the murderous, traitorous Polish people. The next day I heard from some of my acquaintances that the unlucky secret agent was running around begging people to find the boy and ask him to return the money to him. He even promised to pay him well for returning the money, because he was in danger of being arrested on charges of theft, and besides, he was the laughingstock of his friends. I was told that he was looking for me as well. When I heard this, I was very pleased that we were able to put this Polish police agent in his place. These thugs' sole objective was to rob the surviving Jews and lock them up in dank cells together with the worst criminals. Many of those who were arrested never returned. It was rumored that the Poles turned the Jewish prisoners over to the Russian NKVD who in turn sent them to prison camps deep inside Russia or in Siberia, all this for the "crime" of being "speculators."

In contrast, the Polish police did not arrest the Polish murderers who made pogroms against the returning survivors, and those vandals were not handed over to the Russians.

The next day, I left for Katowitz with my cousins and the boy. From Katowitz, we traveled to Reichenback where we stayed for several days. We visited several *kibbutzim* which were formerly used as slave-quarters for hapless Jewish inmates, and now young Jewish survivors used these camps to prepare themselves for emigration to Israel. I also visited Peteswald and stayed at a local *kibbutz* where we spent the night. I was very impressed by the comradeship and the singing. The people advised us to travel through Gerlitz, where we would be able to find smugglers to take us over the border to the Russian-occupied zone, for a hefty fee per person.

When we arrived at Gerlitz, I saw that the smugglers were Polish thugs; two of them were in uniform. They used to take small groups of people over a deep body of water. The bridge that used to span the river had been destroyed when the Germans evacuated the area. Large planks had been spread out above the water instead of the bridge, and the people were supposed to use these planks to cross the river. On the other side of the river began the Russian-occupied zone.

I watched as another group of people made their way across the river using this precarious method. Only two people at a time were able to walk on the same plank, because if more people would get on it was likely to break. There was a whole lineup of planks across the river, one attached to the other, with the two ends being attached to the cement supports of the destroyed bridge. This is how they group went, two people at a time over the snow-covered, slippery planks.

My cousin was scared to cross the river, so we returned to our lodgings where we spent the night. I met an acquaintance of mine who was there together with his sister; both were camp survivors. He confided in me that he had some dollars and German marks. There wasn't much to fear about the marks, but owning dollars was a serious crime. I found him a Jewish artisan who made him a cleverly-designed pitcher that had hollow walls, and he hid the dollars in their. The artisan then completely sealed the pitcher's hidden compartments. We then bought some sweet syrup to use on our bread and filled the pitcher with it.

I showed my friend the border-crossing location, and he agreed with me that the Polish smugglers were not to be trusted. After discussing the issue for a while, we decided to try crossing the makeshift bridge by ourselves. We learned that only unarmed German sentries patrolled the border on the Russian side.

We decided to go before nightfall. When we approached the planks, my friend and his sister were the first to step onto the bridge. He held her hand and they walked together. I followed behind them with my cousin, and behind us walked my cousin's niece and the young boy. We crossed the river fearfully and once we made it across, we continued walking on the other side. After

several minutes of walking, a German guard approached us and told us in a friendly manner: "You are lucky that you saved yourselves from those Polish hooligans. You are now on Russian-occupied territory."

We asked him which direction to take to reach Leptzig, Floeun and Kemnitz. "Go in that direction," he pointed. "Tomorrow morning a train will be leaving towards that area. You can spend the night in a church that has been designated as a temporary lodge for traveling refugees."

We walked in the direction he showed us and reached the church. Each of us received a bed and warm tea; we were not served any food. We left early in the morning and traveled to Leiptzig, where we had to wait for another train. It was mid-December, 1945 and it was snowing heavily. We went to the station and asked where we could purchase bread.

"Every person has a bread-card," we were told. "In addition, you need to pay with marks in order to procure bread."

With a lot of effort, we were finally able to purchase some bread and a bit of watery soup at a bakery for an inflated price. The population was starving, reminding me of the time when we Jews were in the ghetto.

We continued traveling all day. Towards evening, we arrived at a station near the border. On the other side of the border was the town Hoff, which was in the American zone. Our young companion and his sister suggested that we should ask the local residents how we could get to Hoff. They gave us some directions in the manner of the German locals: "Go right, then left..."

The streets were covered with high piles of snow. I declared that the girls were tired, and I was also tired. "Let's find lodgings for the night and tomorrow we will ask around for more detailed information in order to cross the border successfully." My companion was adamant to continue, so I finally relented and we continued walking with our bundles in the deep snow.

The way was obscured by snow and we went in the wrong direction. Before long, we lost our way and started walking over

the stray fields, right into the lion's den. We suddenly heard an order in Russian: "Stop or we will shoot!"

I broke out in a cold sweat, realizing that we have been captured by the Russians. Within minutes, two Russian soldiers, armed with machine guns, appeared and took us to their quarters. "You will remain here until tomorrow morning, when you will be questioned," they said.

We sat down on the wooden bench, shivering from the cold. Half an hour later, two Russian soldiers appeared and demanded that the girls should come with them for questioning.

"But you just told us that the officer who conducts the questioning will be on duty tomorrow morning," I argued.

They became angry with us, but we empathetically declared that we would not turn the girls over to them. "Their parents were murdered by the Nazis," I said, "along with their brothers and sisters. These are my cousins and I am now responsible for them." My friend likewise said that the other girl was his sister and the only survivor of all his siblings. The Russians continued ranting and raving that we were spies who collaborated with the Nazis.

"What does that have to do with the girls?" I demanded.

"Criminals are beyond the law!" they replied.

"The investigation and court proceedings will reveal if we are criminals or not," I said.

The two Russian thugs glared at us, seeing their abominable plans disintegrating. When I realized that they were prepared to take the girls by force, I told my companion: "I am now prepared to lose my life in order to protect these two girls."

"I will also protect my sister with my life, if necessary," he agreed.

The girls began shouting at the Russians: "If you will try coming closer we will fight you tooth and nail! Between the six of us, you will not leave this place alive!"

Hashem performed a miracle for us and even though they were armed while we were defenseless, we were saved in the

nick of time. Just then the time came to change the guards. Several new soldiers arrived and the previous ones immediately left.

The senior officer who wore a double-striped uniform asked us where we came from. When we answered, he realized that we were Jews, so he told us right away: "I am Jewish, and the investigator is also a Jew. The worst he will do is send you back to where you came from."

We told him about the incident with the previous shift of soldiers, and he said: "May they receive the punishment they deserve through someone else's doing..."

In the morning, the investigator arrived. He appeared to be a nice person. After questioning us, he told us that we will have to return to a different area, closer to Poland.

Once again, we were forced to travel all day. When we finally disembarked, we asked around how we could cross the border. This time, we agreed not to try crossing by ourselves but only with one of the local guides. Once again, we were arrested and during the day were made to shovel the snow. We did not receive any food.

I turned to the Ukrainian guard and said: "The treatment you are giving us is similar to that of the Nazis. They too made us work hard without giving us food!"

"Well," the guard replied sharply, "you don't deserve any better. You want to go to the capitalists and leave communist Poland after all the blood we spilled!"

At night, a high-ranking Russian officer arrived. There were many other prisoners there, including Germans and Poles. The officer went over to each one, asked some questions and conducted a search. When he reached my friend and his sister and began searching them, I was overcome with fear as the officer took the pitcher from him, where his dollars were hidden, and inspected it carefully. "What's inside?" he demanded.

"Some syrup for the bread," my friend replied.

The officer asked that someone bring him a spoon. He poured some of the syrup onto the spoon and told my friend to swallow it. My friend complied, and the pitcher was returned to him. I silently breathed a sigh of relief.

The officer continued questioning him: "Why do you want to go to the capitalists?"

"My entire family perished, and then when I tried to settle into my old home, the local Poles embittered our lives," my friend explained. "Many Jews who survived Hitler were murdered after liberation by none other than the Poles."

The officer became angry and began shouting: "I also lost my entire family in the war - some of them on the front, and some of them due to the Fascist bombings! Will I even consider leaving my motherland because of this?! Never! You should do the same. You should remain right here where you were born and fight the Fascists!" He then gave my friend a ringing slap that resounded throughout the room.

When my turn came and he asked me why I was leaving, I said that I was traveling to bring my sister back to Poland. "I am a worker, a tailor," I added. He didn't slap me, but he called over a Russian soldier and instructed him to take the whole lot of us, the three men and three girls, and shoot us outside. The girls started crying, and my cousin wailed: "We lived through such terrible atrocities, and I was the only one to survive from my entire family, along with my niece. And now when we finally lived to be free we would be murdered at such a young age?" She came over to me and said that the time came to say our final good-byes to each other.

I tried calming her down. "I don't believe that they would actually shoot us," I said.

As we were taken outside, I told the two men who were with me: "Let's follow the soldier closely. If he orders us to stand away from him, we should jump upon him and grab his gun. He is only one person while we are six. The fact that only one soldier was commanded to take all of us gives me hope that they are only trying to scare us."

Fortunately, I was right. The soldier walked together with us, not behind us. After walking for fifteen minutes, we arrived at a junction in the road. He told us to follow the road to a nearby village where we should spend the night, and tomorrow we should return home to Poland.

When we were left alone, the girls began crying once more, this time out of relief that their lives were spared. The place we found ourselves in was a German province named Tirengen. We spent the night at an inn; the men slept on the ground and the girls slept on couches. We discussed our situation with the owner of the inn and she advised us to embark on a train that carried German refugees from Lower Silesia. It would appear as if we too were refugees from that area.

We followed her advice and embarked on a packed train that was full of Germans. We traveled in this manner until we arrived right before Gettinger, where the Russian-British border was. The Russians could not read my American papers that I still had with me, and since it was a large transport they didn't make an issue out of it. All of us were enabled to pass freely. The British asked us some questions, but we couldn't reply because we didn't know the language. They did not cause us any trouble and we passed by without incident. We had finally made it!

*

The next morning, we passed a Jewish cemetery. The gate was open and I entered. I found the tombstones untouched and the inscriptions on the graves were all clean and easy to read. I thought to myself that right here in Germany, the country that gave rise to the most vicious form of Jew-hatred, the cemeteries weren't vandalized. I had just come from Poland where most of the Jewish cemeteries were in ruins.

The town of Gettinger was known for its universities. Most universities were breeding grounds for anti-Semitism, and the university students were the most advent worshippers of Hitler and the theories he expressed in his infamous book *Mein Kampf*. The question why the Gettinger cemetery remained untouched has remained unanswered.

As we continued on our way, I met a *paruchnik* (lieutenant) wearing a Polish military uniform. "Where are you from?" he asked us. I told him that we just came from Poland. "Please come with me," he said, "because the *Pulkovnik* (Captain) is interested in first-hand news from Poland."

When we arrived at the Polish military headquarters, I was reminded of the glory of pre-war Poland. The red-and-white Polish flag hung proudly in front of the building. We were welcomed cordially and were shown to a wash room where we shaved, took warm showers and changed our clothes. I came out feeling like a new person! We were offered some food, and then we were taken to the *Pulkovnik's* office.

We introduced ourselves by our names and places of origin. My cousin shared the story of our farm; since he was a landowner himself, the Captain seemed more interested in this story than in the politics we discussed. He did not divulge his name or hometown, telling us that it was a "military secret." He asked us many questions and we answered as best as we could. When we left the premises, a corporal walked us out.

"Now that the war has ended, why do keep an army base here?" we asked him.

He explained that the war was not fully over with the Russian communist government. "We must prepare ourselves for war, until the Soviets will leave Poland and the other occupied countries."

"Who are 'we'?" I questioned further. "Are you referring to Great Britain and America?" He smiled and said that it was a military secret.

We left for the station and took a train to Kasil, the border town in the American zone. The American sentry asked me some questions and I showed him the American papers that I still carried with me. He let all of us pass and embark on a train that took us over to the American side, to Kasil. We arrived at Kasil in the evening, missing a connecting train to Minchen. We had to spend the night in a wooden barrack, because the station building had been destroyed by the Americans during their bombings of

Germany. The night was endless, as we all sat on our pitiful bundles in the freezing cold.

The next morning we took an early train to Minchen. The train cars were packed with passengers and we had to stand for most of the way, due to the crowdedness. As we left the station in Minchen, the boy who accompanied us met his cousin! They had not known about each other's survival, and were overjoyed to meet. Before the boy left I gave him the money that he took from secret police agent in Sosnowitz. He pushed a few dollar bills into my hand in return. I was very pleased to have been able to save him from those Polish bandits. He was lucky to have found his cousin, and to have so much money to boot. At that time, the American dollars in his possession were valued at around 30,000 German marks! Most of all, I was pleased that the trick worked against the Sosnowitz secret police, who tried to ensnare hapless Jewish survivors into illegal activities in order to rob them and arrest them. We had a nice victory over these cunning agents.

We embarked on another train that took us to Feldafing, from where I had left for Poland, leaving behind my brother. I was looking forward to seeing my surviving sister, for whom I had traveled back to Poland, while she traveled to Feldafing upon hearing that her two brothers survived.

When we arrived at Feldafing, all of our previous acquaintances were happy to see us. However, I was impatient to see my sister and brushed off all of the friendly questions. Since there was no mail service from the communist countries, we had no way of staying in touch and I knew that my arrival would surely surprise my siblings, as would the sudden appearance of our two cousins.

When I entered the room that I shared with my brother, everyone was overjoyed to see me, but my brother was not there at the time. He happened to be visiting my sister at her block (the men and women had separate blocks). One of our friends ran to tell them that I arrived, and my brother and sister came running. When my sister saw me for the first time – oh, I cannot describe our reunion! The scene moved everyone who was present to tears. Our cousins embraced my sister, and she made

arrangements for them to stay with her in her room. Afterwards, all of us sat down together and shared our experiences until well into the night. Finally, we walked the girls home to their block.

When I returned to my room, I shared with my brother my concern about R' Shlomo Rosenholtz. "We had seen each other in Sosnowitz," I said. "The same week that I had to travel to the hearing in Mayechov, he left for his hometown, and I couldn't accompany him. He promised to write if he would find someone from his family, and if not, he would return to Sosnowitz as soon as he found his hidden valuables. He wanted to return to Feldafing with me."

All my brother could say was that they too had not received any word from him. "Neither did we hear anything from you," he added, "and I was worried sick. Every day we heard horrifying reports about Jews being murdered in Poland. On Rosh Hashanah, I had a nightmare in which you were shot. I was so frightened! Finally, you've made it back alive, and now you are much safer than you were in Poland."

We went to sleep; I fell into a deep sleep that lasted until well into the next morning. I rested for several days and spent every free moment with my newly found brother, sister and cousins.

Several days later, I left for Minchen in order to make some inquiries about our future. Where should we settle, was my burning question. I also wanted to be productive and do something constructive with my time. When I came to the Jewish district on Mail Strassa, I met many old friends, and they were all happy to see me. I had acquainted most of them during our terrible days of suffering. We reminisced about some of our tragic experiences. One of the people brought a flask of schnapps. We went into a Jewish restaurant and sat down to eat a nice meal. We drank a toast and shared our stories. Some of them thanked me for the help and kind words that I provided for them at the workplace in the labor camp, when I opened my tailor shop. They later found out that I was the one who intervened with the Germans to stop the beatings and to serve some soup and

potatoes to the starving inmates during lunchtime. This had saved many people from death.

One of the people stood up from his place at the table and declared: "During all of our hardships and suffering, most people became apathetic and despondent. This led to egoism and self-centeredness. But this person who is sitting with us, Moshe Lazerowitz, never lost his *tzelem Elokim*. Even under the worst, most horrific circumstances. He never lost his *mentchlichkeit*!"

I didn't like the honor they gave me, but at least my conscience was clear. I had heard about people who were captured and beaten shamefully for their role in helping the German tormentors torture their own Jewish brothers in exchange for an extra portion of soup.

That same day, I partnered with a group of people who dealt with cigarettes, coffee and chocolate. I invested a bit of money in this business. Then I went to the representatives of the Joint in order to see what could be done about our future. They told me that I should wait patiently, because there was a chance I would be able to travel to Israel.

I returned to Feldafing and stayed there for the time being. The camp was a pleasant place, with about 5,000 Jews living there at that time.

Chapter 13

Time went on as we continued living in the Feldafing DP camp.

One night while I slept, I dreamed of a Jew from Sosnowitz named Yakov Olshevsky. His daughter was employed by us in the business I shared with my brothers, working as a seamstress. Sometimes she also worked in the store.

When I awoke, I did not give my dream any more thought and completely forgot about it. Some time later, I once again dreamed about the same person. I awoke in the middle of the night and fell asleep again. Once again, I dreamed about him.

The next morning, when I met my siblings, they told me that Rivtcha, the Olshevsky girl who used to work for us, sent us regards with a certain woman and invited us to come visit her. I had heard that she survived while I was still in Poland. I told my siblings that two other girls who used to work for us also survived.

I remembered the day that Mrs. Olshevsky came with her daughter Rivtcha to our store; it was on the day that she graduated from public school, after completing the seventh grade. She came to us to request that we employ her daughter. She was very capable and all the work we gave her was completed properly and diligently. She became more and more experienced every year and grew up to be a fine girl. When the girls would finish working after dark, I would personally walk them home. She was among the girls whom I walked home frequently. After some time, her family moved to a distant neighborhood and I had to walk her home more often.

The next time that I was in Minchen, my partners told me the news that one of our business-partners was arrested in Nuremberg. They asked me to travel there, together with someone from our group, and intervene on his behalf. We decided to travel the next morning.

When we arrived in Nuremberg, we had to pull many strings and pay lots of money in bribes through influential

people, until we finally managed to secure his release. I was not happy to conduct black-market deals and was hoping to find a better way of earning a living.

At the Nuremburg train station, where I waited for the return-train to Minchen, I saw a sign that indicated which train traveled to Bayruth. That's when I recalled seeing in the Sosnowitz committee headquarters a list of names of survivors, and Regina Olshevsky was listed as living in Bayruth. I told my partner to return by himself and tell my siblings that I traveled to Bayruth.

I embarked on the train to Bayruth, happy to be traveling to meet an acquaintance who worked for us for many years and was saved from Hitler. When I arrived in Bayruth, a former Nazi-German city, I did not see any Jews. I asked a German passerby where I could find the Jewish community, and he gave me the address of the Jewish committee. When I arrived there, I asked about Regina Olshevsky, and I was told that she lived with her three brothers on Partzufal Strassa.

When I arrived at the designated address, I saw an upscale apartment that was truly elegant. I approached the door and verified that the address was correct. I rang the bell and it was opened by a girl whom I recognized as a native from Sosnowitz named Esther Voidislovski; I knew her family well. She invited me inside and asked me to sit. "Have you seen any of my family members?" was the first thing she wanted to know. Meanwhile, Regina Olshevsky entered the room, and Esther told her: "Look, we have a guest from Sosnowitz." When she saw me, she was so shocked that she turned pale.

"How are you, Rivtcha?" I asked. She was too overcome to reply.

After several minutes, she began to prepare some food. I asked her if I could first wash up, and they prepared a hot bath for me. Then I *davened*, and meanwhile her brothers arrived. We sat down to eat together and shared our troubles and joys. The hours went by as we shared our meal in friendly companionship. Afterwards, they prepared a room for me with a comfortable bed. I went to sleep and awoke very well rested.

The next morning I went for a walk through the city and we met a few other acquaintances from Lodz, Bendin and also from Sosnowitz, including two sisters from our hometown. I also found out that in the nearby town of Minchberg there were some more Jews from Sonowtiz. A textile industry was established there and the people from Sosnowitz were the main managers of the factories. I traveled there and they were very happy to see me. I stayed at the home of Chapelsky (?). Before the war, I used to buy fabric from his father. I purchased some fabric remnants and returned to Bayruth.

In Bayruth, the Jews didn't live in camps; they lived in private apartments. I liked this arrangement much more than the conditions at Feldafing. I stayed there for two days and returned to Feldafing with new plans.

On the first day that I returned, I managed to sell the fabrics that I had bought. I made additional contacts in Minchen and realized that I could get a business off the ground. I met with Yankel Kleiner, who had once suggested that I establish with him a similar line of business by purchasing a store with a large inventory and a sizeable warehouse, complete with trucks and machinery. At that time, I heard that my sister survived and was in Poland, so I halted all of my plans and traveled to see her. Meanwhile, he went into a different business and began running a hotel and restaurant. When I came to him he said to me: "You're too late! I took over a hotel, of which a large wing was damaged in the war. I plan to rebuild it as economically as possible, but in the meantime I am earning money." He then told me that whenever I would be in Minchen I should stay in his hotel; it was located right near the station and was called Greenwald. "And if you need some seed money with which to start your business, I will gladly lend it to you, because you deserve it!" he added.

I replied that when I helped him in camp, just as I helped others, I had no intention of getting anything from him in return. I thanked him and left for the housing committee in an attempt to procure proper housing for ourselves. They told me to come back later, and this was repeated several times. It took a few weeks, but finally I was given a nice room at the home of a woman and her son, on Numfenburger Strassa, the nicest street that had

beautiful trees lining both sides of the road. I needed the room mostly to keep the fabrics that I would purchase in Minchen.

The next morning I once again left for Bayruth and visited the housing committee. I requested an apartment for five people. It took several weeks until we received a furnished apartment. There were two bedrooms upstairs and we shared the kitchen with a German. When I returned to Feldafing, I told my family that we will be moving to Bayruth, where I had an apartment waiting for us.

My cousin's daughter said that she wouldn't come along, because she was dating a young man and she didn't want to leave him. She introduced the young man to me; he was a nice person coming from a small Polish *shtetl*. We drank some schnapps together, and he presented the girl with a gift, formally declaring their engagement. He told me that he planned to travel to Israel illegally.

Several weeks later they came over to us and went under the *chuppah*. It was a Friday wedding; on Friday night some twenty couples ate with us. We prepared a festive meal with many delicacies. The Shabbos Sheva Brachos was also a very festive occasion. They stayed with us for several more days, and then they left for Minchen. From there, they joined a group called Exodus and left for Israel. The British caught the boat and took the refugees to Cyprus, where they stayed until the State of Israel was founded and they were finally released.

My brother began to learn dentistry and he also took classes in English. I was pleased with his decisions and supported him financially. I traveled to Bayruth with my sister and cousin. They were happy to settle there, because it was a very nice town with a small number of Jewish people with whom we quickly became friendly. That's how we lived, mostly happily.

One day, the bodies of 55 girls were brought to our town. These unfortunate girls were thrown off a transport near Minchberg towards the end of the war and were murdered by the SS men. The black coffins containing the bodies were given a funeral. We, the Jewish townsmen, carried the coffins of these tortured girls. During the funeral, most of the men broke down

and cried, including myself. A representative of the military governor was present, as well as some other high-ranking American officers. An American military chaplain was also there, as were some German clergymen. In their speeches, all of them lamented the tragedy that befell the Jewish people. The German clergymen condemned the Nazis and promised that "such cruelty will never happen again!" We stood there, heads bowed in sorrow, and cried until the girls were buried anonymously in a collective grave. We recited Kaddish and Keil Malei Rachamim, and then left with hearts full of grief.

In the beginning, we gathered to *daven* in the committee headquarters, until the *shul* was renovated. One Shabbos after *davening*, a handsome young man came over to me and said: "You are from Sosnowitz, right? There are two sisters living here who come from Sosnowitz, and I am dating one of them. Would you be able to tell me some more about her?" He began asking me questions about her past. Was her family wealthy, as he assumed? He understood that they owned several houses and properties in Sosnowitz. I replied: "Not only did they own several houses in Sosnowitz, but they also owned properties in nearby towns. The girls were very young when the war broke out. Their father was murdered immediately after the Germans occupied Sosnowitz at the outbreak of the war, and all Jewish properties were confiscated shortly thereafter. The girls probably never knew about the properties they owned in other towns."

This was a little fib, because in truth these girls came from a poor family, but they were very fine, honest people. Hashem helped them and these young girls didn't share the fate of the 55 girls and the other hundreds and thousands of Jewish girls who were brutally murdered during the war. All of us who survived the concentration camps were equally penniless. What difference did it make who was wealthy before the war? The young man was very happy to hear that his future *kallah* was from a rich family. Well, so be it...

I met a Polish Jew named Lichter who survived the death-camp Treblinka. He told me about his experiences in that part of hell and related how the inmates plotted, behind the backs of their SS tormentors, to cut open the barbed wire fence that imprisoned

them. They secretly prepared knives and axes for this purpose. One night, they cut the telephone and electricity lines in the camp. Then they killed some of the SS guards with the axes and crossbars they had collected, and then confiscated the murdered guards' weapons. By this time, open fighting broke out between the inmates and the SS guards, during which some of the Jews managed to escape to the nearby forests. The next day, the SS surrounded the forests. They caught several Jews, but those who managed to penetrate deeply into the forests were not caught. That's how Lichter was saved, along with a number of other Jews from Treblinka, by living with the partisans until the Russians liberated the region.

Another fellow by the name of Lerner told me that he had been sent to the death-camp of Sobibor. He was employed as a tailor for the SS guards and their superiors. In his camp, the Jewish prisoners also staged an uprising, similar to the one that took place in Treblinka. They plotted to first murder the camp leader. Lerner was sewing some kind of uniform for him and he asked him to come to the tailor shop in the evening in order to try on the new garment. As the SS monster tried on the garment, the tailor assaulted him from behind with his heavy tailoring scissors. The camp leader fell to the floor, mortally wounded, and he later died. His weapons were confiscated. The other insurgents darkened the camp by cutting the electric wires and disrupting the telephone lines. They broke into the storage room where the weapons were kept and began shooting at the guards, killing many of them. Some of the Jews managed to escape to the nearby forests and eventually joined the partisans. Some of the Jews who escaped later perished from hunger and cold or at the hands of the traitorous Polish people who pointed out their hiding places to the Germans, especially when the Jews visited the Polish villages in search of food. Some Jews, however, managed to survive.

Another Jew told me that when the Russians occupied Lemberg, they arrested him for the crime of being a capitalist and shipped him off to Siberia. His heart was weakened by the constant cold and difficult labor. He told me: "When I was taken for questioning, I argued with the Russian *Nacholtva*: 'Is it my

fault that my father bequeathed me a large fortune? I never exploited anyone! You can ask all of my employees if I treated them well!' They replied: 'Be quiet, you capitalist dog!'"

This is how we shared our tragic stories with each other.

*

Several weeks before I settled in Bayruth, a nice young man named Akiva Pitlok arrived in town. When I joined the small community, we met and befriended each other. He was from Kresen, near Baronowich. His older brother had a wife and little girl when the war broke out. Shortly after the Germans invaded Russia in June of 1941, they shot many innocent Jewish people, with the active help of the local Catholic or *Proveslavna* residents. Not much after that, the surviving Jews were expelled from their homes and confined to a ghetto, from where they were led daily under heavy guard to perform various difficult jobs. Many Jews were beaten to death at work. In 1942, they began the full-scale extermination process.

This fellow's brother had a Christian business-acquaintance, and he decided to entrust this friend with his little girl, paying him a fortune of money for his kindness. The parents also paid off a different non-Jewish family, giving them a small fortune, and hid with them for some time, but eventually they were tipped off that their hiding place had been discovered. Having no other choice, they ran to the forest. It was in the midst of a freezing winter; the forest was bitterly cold and covered with snow, yet they slept under the open skies without shelter. During the night, they were forced to trek back to the village in search of food. This was extremely dangerous.

Finally, they managed to find a group of partisans in the forest. They were given some weapons and entrusted with various missions. They bombed bridges and transport trains. Sometimes they broke into German command offices and shot the Germans who were there, confiscating their weapons and all food provisions. They also took food from the affluent peasants of the nearby villages. During one of these dangerous missions, his brother was killed in action. When his young wife was told the sad news, she was heartbroken. Eventually she became ill and

passed away in the forest. This was how things were for the "lucky ones" who joined the partisans. Their hideouts were frequently attacked and raided by the Germans, and they were forced to run from place to place until the day of liberation finally arrived.

"Towards the end of the war, the Russians took me into their army," Akiva continued telling his tale. "I fought along with them until we reached Berlin, and after the war I remained here in Germany." Then he turned to me and asked: "Please tell me: how can I release my brother's little girl from captivity?"

I told him that when I heard that my sister survived, I immediately left for Poland, and I managed to rescue my two cousins from there by smuggling them across the border. "Go and save your brother's child from the hands of the Christians!" I encouraged him.

He left the next day and returned several weeks later. "When I arrived at my hometown, I found that only a small number of Jews survived," he recounted. "They all told me that the Christians would never give up the girl, just as they refused to return the other Jewish children to their surviving family members. They wanted to secure a place in Paradise by turning these precious Jewish souls into devout Christians."

Akiva thought of a plan. He knew that it would be much too dangerous to go alone to the village where the child was hidden. Besides, as soon as the family would find out that the child's uncle survived and was looking for her, they would hide her in some unknown village. So he befriended a Jewish-Russian officer and told him the entire story. Together, they worked out a plan: the Russian officer would stand aside, some distance from the house, while the uncle would go in and see if the child was still there and if he recognized her, because the girl could have changed quite a lot from 1942 when she was still a 15-month-old baby. Now, in 1946, she was almost 5 ½ years old. He would offer the peasant family a substantial amount of money to get the child back, despite the fact that the child's parents had paid them a small fortune for safekeeping the girl. If they would refuse to return the child, he would leave the house, but shortly afterwards

the Russian officer would enter their home and take the parents with him by force on some pretext. The uncle would have a horse and wagon ready and waiting and he would quickly take the girl to the train station. He would hide with the girl in a different town, while the Russian officer would keep the parents in confinement. In those days, it was common for the Russians to arrest people who were suspected of having collaborated with the Germans.

"The plan worked out very well," Akiva continued. "I went to the family that kept my little niece. As soon as I set my eyes upon her, I almost lost my mind! She resembled my brother so closely that I had no doubt about her identity. She wore a large cross on a chain around her neck. I could not contain myself and I began to hug and kiss her tearfully. The girl asked in Polish: 'Mommy, who is this man?' The mother replied: 'He is a Jewish stranger.' When the girl heard that I am a Jew, she pulled away from me as if I had a contagious disease. Obviously, she had already been indoctrinated with anti-Semitic stories about Jews. I told the woman that I would pay her handsomely to get the girl back, but she said: 'I won't give this child back to you Jews, not for money and not even through a court order or by police force!'

"I tried talking to her. 'My deceased brother and sister-in-law paid you handsomely to shelter and feed the child only until the Nazis would be vanquished. Unfortunately, they did not live to see this day, but I came here today to fulfill their last request.' She callously replied: 'What a shame that you survived! I will not return the child to you alive!' Upon hearing such words, I left the house. The Russian officer soon entered and arrested the woman. I waited for them to leave and then I entered the house and told the child: 'Your mother wants to harm you because you are a Jewish child! Your father was my brother. I am your uncle!' I showed her some pretty dresses that I had bought for her, and I gave her some chocolates and other sweets. She followed me outside to the waiting wagon and we left together; I used the first available opportunity to leave Poland. The girl warmed up to me and agreed to remove the cross from her neck. It was a difficult process, but it was well worth it!"

This man lives in Cleveland today. The little girl with the cross that he rescued is today an upstanding, well-educated Jewish woman who is married to a nice Jewish gentleman. I believe that they already have grown children.

*

One day when I walked in the street, I met Regina Olshevsky's oldest brother. We chatted for several minutes, and he told me that he was in Minchen and brought back with him a Sosnowitz girl. "I would like to establish a family with her," he said. "After all, my wife and children will not return to life."

"Mazel tov!" I wished him heartily.

"Well, what are your plans?" he pressed. "You have been single even before the war."

"I'm afraid that I'm too old to marry," I said. "Besides, I first want to see my sister and cousin happily married."

"If they are not too picky," he said, "then they'd easily find nice *shidduchim* within a month."

Before we parted ways, he added: "You know my sister well; after all, she worked for you for many years. In those days, our society had classes – there were rich and poor people. Today, we are all equally poor, having survived hell with the same fortunes. My sister is getting many worthy marriage offers from nice young men, but she has so far refused all of them. Perhaps I'd be able to set you up with her?"

Someone else walked over to us just then, thereby saving me from giving an immediate reply. After I left, I began to think about his suggestion. I remembered the girl and how I used to walk her home every evening. I had no special interest in any of the girls whom I accompanied home, but she did make a very favorable impression on me even then.

When I visited Regensburg, I met an acquaintance from Sosnowitz. He told me that he lost his entire family, including his wife and child. I likewise shared with him my own experiences. Then I told him about this girl who was suggested for me. "When

she worked for us, she was about 15 years old," I said. "She is quite a number of years younger than me. What do you say?"

"We must rebuild our lives," was his take on it. "I am also looking for a *shidduch*."

When I was in Minchen, another friend urged me to stop mourning the past and begin to build a future for myself. These words went along the same lines of what all of my friends were telling me: "Don't cry over your losses anymore. It's time to go forward in life and establish a family. This will help you turn over a new leaf and forget the tragic past."

Although I agreed that their advice was logically sound, sound logic doesn't always agree with the emotions. I was still unable to move on. I contacted various organizations that helped track people down, such as the Red Cross and other refugee institutions that were searching for survivors. They helped find people who originated from German-occupied Europe and had immigrated to other countries. Towards the end of the war, some countries opened their borders for young or ill refugees. Some Jews were thus able to enter Sweden or Switzerland. Others left for France, Holland, Belgium or Italy immediately after the war. Many people just wanted to get as far away as possible from the anti-Semitic climate of Europe.

Despite all of my inquiries, I could not find any information about my *kallah's* family. With a broken heart, I realized that it was time to give up my search. It was almost two years after the war ended, and most survivors had found each other within a short time after liberation. Only a very small percentage of survivors were still finding family members; as a matter of fact, we still hear of such incidents today, albeit very infrequently.

Everywhere I went, I saw people celebrating weddings. The people wanted to forget their pain, losses and their suffering during the Hitler-epoch. I was invited to many weddings, among them to the marriages of friends who had families before the war and had lost their dearest ones. Unlike them, I had been lonesome since the day my late mother passed away. Now, after losing most of my siblings and their families, I was wandering about

lonely and forlornly. It was very difficult for me, and I finally decided that it was time to find someone with whom to share my life.

It was difficult to come to this decision and in my thoughts I bade farewell to my dear *kallah*: "If only I would have shared your fate! I mourn for your young, precious life which the German murderers snuffed out, among the other millions who perished *al kiddush Hashem*. My mother passed away at age 33, when I was only 9 years old. But at least there is a grave marking her resting place. As a young, heartbroken orphan I would frequently visit my mother's *kever* and cry to her. But there is no grave for you, my dear *kallah*. Since my mother's passing until the time I met you, I had not tasted true joy, but when you came into my life, everything changed. Even though we suffered terribly under German rule, I hardly felt the pain. I will never forget you! During all of my wanderings, in all of the death camps and on the death march, your image kept me going. Rest in peace, Rivkah bas Gershon Shimonov, and your dear parents and beloved sister whom I didn't even know should also rest in peace. And now, after paying proper respect to your memory, I can think about rebuilding my life and establishing a new family."

*

Meanwhile, something terrible happened. My business partners were followed by the police and the storage-room where we kept all of our merchandise was discovered. All of our wares were confiscated, and our friend who happened to be there at that time was arrested. It cost us quite an amount of money to gain the release of our friend, after which I was left with a mere several thousand marks. The money that we earned from selling the fabrics was needed to purchase clothing and food, and everything was quite expensive in those days.

At about the same time that I suffered this monetary loss, I had a visitor. This person lived in a town near Minchen; he was a young man, and his father was an exceptionally fine person who lived in Sosnowitz. I wrote about him in these memoirs. In 1942, when I hid some people in my store, he was among the

people who came to me with his whole family. He now asked me to help him with some money because he went through something similar to what I and my partners just endured - his wares were also confiscated.

He stayed with me for Shabbos, and before he left on Sunday I told him that the authorities confiscated all of my wares as well. "But don't worry," I assured him. "I will share with you whatever money I have left and give you half of everything I possess." He left happily.

Some time went by. One night when I was in Minchen, I couldn't fall asleep. I was quite worried, because I had to provide for my sister and cousin, as well as for my brother. Our little business had been doing quite well, and suddenly the rug was pulled out from under my feet. And to top it all off, the son of my dear friend came to me asking for help, but how could I help him in this situation?

I fell asleep, and dreamed of this person's father, R' Kalman, who told me joyfully: "Moshe, don't worry! All will be well!" When I awoke, I thought to myself that whatever we think during the day gets involved in our dreams.

The next morning, I went out and bought about 100 grams of cream chocolate, some cigarettes and coffee, and divided it into 10-kilo bags. I sent these packages to various addresses of Germans with whom I had made some business contacts.

The next morning, before I left the house, my landlady, [Frau Van Bortel?] waited for me. "Do you have a spare minute?" she asked. "There is something I would like to discuss with you."

She invited me into her home and told me her life-story, about her childhood until she married her husband. Her husband had a son and a daughter from a previous marriage, and they had another son together. Her husband's son was an active member of the Nazi party and he had been arrested after the war for war-crimes. She told me that she was a catholic and had no part in what Hitler did to the Jews. "Don't be angry at me just because I am a German," she implored. "Not all Germans are guilty of

murdering Jews." She then asked me to provide her with coffee and chocolate, and a few other products. She pulled out a pile of jewelry, including two diamond rings. I sold one diamond ring for 50,000 marks and put away the other ring. I brought the required products to my landlady, paying about 10,000 marks to get it.

When I returned to Bayruth on Thursday, Regina Olshevsky was at the station together with my sister and cousin, who always waited for me whenever I was due to arrive home. We walked home together and ate a pleasant dinner. After dinner, I walked Regina home. As we walked, she began reminiscing about the time when I would walk her home every evening, so many years ago. She continued reminiscing about my father's house and my siblings. When I walked back home by myself, I thought about the discussion we had and I understood her intentions.

Some time later, when I already had some more money, I discussed the issue with my sister and cousin when I returned home for Shabbos. "What do you think of Regina?" I asked. "Do you think she would make a suitable wife for me?"

My sister said that she had known her for years and she never once saw her angry. "She would make a wonderful life-partner for you!" she declared.

Several days later, Regina and her family, along with some other friends came to visit us. We had set out whiskey and cookies on the table, along with some other light foods. I poured schnapps for everyone, took out the diamond ring I had set aside for this purpose, and presented it to Regina. Everyone was happily surprised, especially the new *kallah*! They wished us Mazel Tov and felt truly happy for us.

When I walked my new *kallah* home, we spoke at length. She confided that I had always made a good impression on her, even back then when she was just 15 years old. "I always thought about you and dreamed about sharing my life with you, and now Hashem helped fulfill my dreams," she said.

I told her about my dreams of her father, which was actually what made me visit her the first time. I walked home as if in a trance, thinking about everything I went through. I had once before felt this type of happiness, but then it was an elusive dream, brutally destroyed by the Germans. Now, I felt within me that my new *kallah* was my true *zivug*.

Several days later, as I walked in the street, a car stopped besides me. Two Jews were sitting in the car and asked me how to find a certain office, as well as where to procure kosher food. I gave them my address, inviting them to come and eat by me. I then told my sister and cousin to expect two guests for lunch, and I also invited my *kallah* to join us.

At lunch time, the two people arrived. One of them was named Hildsenrat from Kolomei, Poland, and the other person was named Haber, also from Galicia. Hildsenrat worked with textile fabrics and Haber dealt in grains. We ate together and shared our war experiences. Before they left, they invited us to return the visit.

Some time later, around Pesach time, when I was in Minchen, I visited Hildsenrat. I was warmly welcomed and I spent quite a while there. When he asked me when my wedding will be, I replied that it will take place in the summer. He offered me his apartment and his support and friendship. When I returned home, I told the girls that Hildsenrat offered to give us his apartment, which was spacious and comfortable. We discussed the issue and came to the decision that since many of our friends lived in Minchen or in the nearby towns, it wouldn't be a bad idea to move there as well. Another reason to move there was that Minchen had a Rav.

*

Our wedding was set for Lag B'Omer. I took this as a good sign, because I had been liberated on Lag B'Omer, exactly two years before. We prepared a wedding feast for over a hundred people with many fine dishes. Rav Lazerovski was our *mesader kiddushin* (he currently lives in Philadelphia). The people who walked us to the Chuppah were our friends who had been reunited with their wives after the war. It was very rare for

both husband and wife to have survived the war and it was considered quite miraculous.

The special moment when we were walked to the *chuppah* is forever etched into my memory. It was a time for serious reflection, considering the fact that our parents were not there to lead us to the *chuppah*, and that most of our dear siblings were not there to rejoice with us. The *kallah* cried so much that all who were present cried along. Everyone lost there dearest relatives and could understand our feelings.

Since it was Lag B'Omer, it wasn't necessary to recite Keil Malei Rachamim for our parents four times, and so we avoided some more tears. The ceremony concluded with great *simcha*. The wedding guests rejoiced with us until late at night.

We stayed in Minchen for several days and then we traveled to a nice resort called Gormisht, where we vacationed for a while before returning home. After several weeks went by, I realized that I was truly lucky and that I had found a very wonderful wife. My wife respected me and treated me very well. She is a happy person by nature and very easy to please. If I ever suffered a loss in the business, she always made me feel good about what happened, and continues to do so until this very day.

*

I had several German acquaintances in Bayruth, none of them Nazis. One of them was a business associate who used to supply fuel for many German industries before the war. His wife was Jewish, and he therefore suffered a lot during the Nazi era. Due to that, he moved to Holland, his wife's birthplace. After the war, he returned to Bayruth.

One evening, his wife drove over to our house with her car and my wife invited her inside. She told us that a certain German who was expelled from Czechoslovakia was their friend. He was a lawyer and was helping many refugees. He had hidden many valuables in the garden near his home back in Czechoslovakia. He was afraid to take the valuables with him because the Czech authorities thoroughly searched the Germans who were being expelled. "He would like to retrieve his

valuables," she said, "and he offered to give half of the valuables to the person who would undertake bring it over the border."

"How much money are we talking about?" I asked.

"There are about 60 karats of diamonds, 10 kilo of gold, 100 gold 20-dollar notes and some additional valuables."

She arranged for me to meet the German. At the appointed time, I went to their home and they introduced me to the Czech-German lawyer. We made some light talk, until I felt that I had gained his trust. He then asked me if I would undertake to retrieve his valuables.

"I come from Poland," was my response. "But I have several friends who come from Czechoslovakia or Slovakia, and they know the local language. I think it would be best to use a Czech native for this mission, but I will supervise the operation and plan it out in detail." He was pleased with my response and took out a sketched map of the house and garden. He showed me the exact spot where the valuables were hidden.

"I will get in touch with my friends from Minchen," I said, "and I'll discuss the entire issue with them. I will give you a final answer in one week."

I immediately traveled to Landsberg, where I had a business acquaintance who had already taken various items over the Czech border. He also had a Czech passport, which would come in handy. I discussed the issue with him, and he assured me that he would be able to do it, but he would need a few more people who should stand on guard while he digs up the treasure. I went to Minchen and spoke to Meir Mittelman, with whom I was in the Warsaw Ghetto. I trusted him completely, and I gave him all details. He told me that he would respond the next day.

The next day he told me that he agreed to undertake the mission and he would come along with me to Bayruth. We met with the lawyer and I introduced him to my friend Mittelman. The lawyer was impressed with his character and they began to converse in the Czech language, as well as in Hungarian, because in that region the people also spoke Hungarian. We then

discussed our plans in detail. I had received a map where the exact hiding spot was clearly marked.

We bade farewell to the lawyer and returned to my home, where we finalized the details. We decided which digging tools to take and planned that the fellow from Landsburg should go there together with Meir and me. My wife insisted that my younger brother should go there instead of me, and I had to concede to her request.

My brother traveled with Meir to Schwandarf, where the fellow from Landsburg was waiting for them, and from there they traveled to Czechoslovakia. They arrived at the town where the valuables were hidden and surveyed the area well. They visited the location and examined the garden, and were happy to see that it was a quiet area. Their activities would attract minimal attention and it would be quite easy to unnoticeably dig up the valuables.

After surveying the area for two days, they decided to carry out their mission late that night. They arrived there at night and began to dig, when suddenly a tall person appeared as if from nowhere and began to scream in Czech that he would arrest all of them! Mittelman and my brother managed to escape, but the person from Landsberg was apprehended. Mittelman left his *tallis* and *tefillin* behind in his rush to escape.

Mittelman and my brother were somewhat surprised with how easy it was for them to get away from the Czech policeman, who didn't even try to run after them. We informed the Landsberg fellow's wife of her husband's arrest, but she didn't appear frightened or anxious.

Eight days later, the fellow from Landsberg came to Mittelman and told him that he suffered many hardships since his arrest, until he was finally released. Mittelman detected that he was in a good mood, despite his alleged difficulties. He was even distributing sweets to the children.

Some time later, Mittelman informed me that this fellow became one of the largest textile importers in Germany, and he also dealt with some other merchandise. Some weeks later I was

in Minchen with my wife and we met the Landsberg couple, dressed in the finest clothing. The wife's fingers were covered with large diamonds of 2-3 karats in size. She wore the finest blue and white diamond jewelry.

The next time that I met Mittelman he told me that it seemed to him that the fellow from Landsberg staged his "arrest". He must have privately arranged for a secret agent to apprehend them just as they were digging up the valuables. While the two others escaped, he and the agent dug up the fortune and split the profits, which is how he became wealthy overnight.

I went with Mittelman to an influential Jewish person and recounted the entire story. "They planned this out in order to rob us," we said. His opinion was that nothing could be done and we should just forget about it.

I was deeply distressed and overcome by frustration, but my wife spoke soothingly and said: "Let this financial loss redeem us from any troubles or illness that may have been destined for us!"

Around that time, I met a Jew from Zeredov who only recently arrived from his hometown. I inquired after my friend R' Shlomo Rosenholtz, and he said that something terrible happened to him some eighteen months ago. "He went back to his hometown to retrieve some of his valuables. The local Polish peasants followed him discreetly in order to see where the money was hidden. After he already retrieved it, they shot him to death and robbed all of his money."

Needless to say, I was devastated by the news. My friend survived so many difficulties, and when he finally returned home after so much suffering he was murdered due to having retrieved the hard-earned money for which he had worked for many years, dealing in silk and furs. He also worked very hard at a family bakery. I shared the news with my wife and told her that R' Shlomo wanted me to accompany him to Zeredov, but I was unable to go with him due to our upcoming hearing. He traveled alone, after promising to return to Sosnowitz immediately, unless he would find some of his family members, in which case he would send a letter. I did not see him or receive any letters from

him and frequently thought about him. I never imagined that my dear friend Shlomo was no longer alive.

When the Jew from Zeredov left, my wife said: "It is better to lose money, because it saves a person from death or illness. When you have frequent monetary losses it is a good sign that it will redeem us from worse troubles."

The next day we traveled to Bayruth. We found a letter waiting for us from the lawyer in Poland. He wrote that we should come back to Poland and we would get our property back. My wife refused to let me travel, but my cousin badly wanted to go. "I want to retrieve the property that my father worked for, as well as your share of the property," she declared. "We must get it back! Several families are now traveling to Poland, and we will stay together. I will return here as soon as everything is taken care of." I could not dissuade her from going. I gave her some money and accompanied her until Regensburg.

She wrote to us from Poland that the lawyer informed her that the next hearing would take place in several weeks. A short while later we received a letter from the people with whom she was staying, who wrote to inform us that she was ill. When my sister received the news, she decided to go to Poland to be at her side. I could not hold her back because the two of them were like sisters. I gave her some money and valuables so that she should be able to manage for a while. I also used every opportunity to send them money with people who traveled to Poland.

Several weeks later I received a letter from them. "The hearing took place," they wrote, "and they ruled that since the fields had been leased to the local peasants and the house was turned into a public school for the local children, we will receive a property of comparable value in the German-occupied zone." The Poles were extremely crafty and knew only too well that no Jew would settle in that zone to live among the devilish Polish bandits, and that we would not find a customer for the property in any case. This is how they resolved the issue, to their own advantage.

Time didn't stand still while all this was going on. 15 months passed from our wedding and my wife gave birth to a son

on Shabbos, the 10th of July 1948. This was the first baby born that was born among the Jewish families in Bayruth since the end of the war. I brought a *mohel* from Weitzen to stay with us on Shabbos. On Friday night, the local Jews gathered in our home. We ate and drank together, and sang *zemiros* until late into the night. On Shabbos morning the entire Jewish community of Bayruth attended the *bris*. We prepared a large feast and everyone rejoiced with us at the *simcha*. We named our son Yakov after my wife's father z"l.

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My German landlady called me once more and asked me if I could find her a customer who would be interested in buying some property from her. "What are you selling?" I asked. She told me that she owned a chemical factory in Regensburg, where several hundred people were employed. There were also apartments near the factory, which provided housing for its employees. The apartments were owned by the factory. After her husband's death, she rented out the apartments. "The lease is now due to expire," she said, "and I do not want to extend it."

"How much would you like to receive for the property?" I asked.

"My husband paid 3,000,000 marks for it, but that was quite a number of years ago," she said. "The property is now in lesser shape, so I would like to receive half of that amount - 1,500,000 marks."

This conversation took place on a Thursday. I told her that I would find a wealthy person who would be interested in buying the property. She asked me to keep the entire issue confidential. She had no idea that at that time the value of the mark had fallen to a drastic low. A pack of cigarettes cost 100 marks. I would have been able to purchase half of the property with my own money.

I visited my new friend Hildsenrat and told him everything. He immediately expressed interest in the deal and traveled with me to Regensburg in his car. When we arrived and saw the large property, Hildsenrat suggested that we should buy

the property together in partnership, and I would receive a half-million marks as commission.

"I don't think we should rush back today with a positive answer," Hildsenrat said. "She may realize that she offered us a bargain and refuse to sell it at this price. I think we should wait until Monday and close the deal then."

I returned home from Regensburg by train. On Friday, I prepared the money I would need for my share of the deal. On Motzei Shabbos I traveled to her with my sister, after wrapping up the money in her clothing.

When we arrived at her home, we were met by two nuns dressed in black. On Sunday we found out that the German woman who wanted to sell her property to us collapsed and she died two days later. When I spoke to her son some time after her death about the deal, he refused to sell the property.

Around that time, the State of Israel was founded and the borders were opened for refugees. My plan was to settle there. I had an old childhood friend who moved to Israel in 1936, and he wrote me a letter urging me to wait. Countless refugees were flooding the state and they were living under appalling conditions. After all, it was impossible to settle everyone properly.

Meanwhile, throughout Germany, various Nazi groups began to raise their heads. I no longer wanted to stay there, although I was financially comfortable. My German acquaintances, who weren't Nazis, urged me to open a store of men's and women's clothing. They told me that with my experience I would surely be successful. But I did not want to continue living with such a murderous nation who killed 6,000,000 innocent Jews, among them my entire family.

When I was in Minchen, I heard that President Truman decided to allow 100,000 survivors of the Nazi concentration camps who lived in German to enter the United States. I immediately went to register for immigration to America.

Meanwhile, I received letters from several friends who traveled to America the year before. Some of them had family

there before the war and went to join them. They wrote that they were quite disappointed with America. "It is a time of crisis, and anti-Semitism can be found here as well," they wrote.

Time went by, and I was finally notified that I would receive my American visa.

Some time later, when I was in *shul* on Shabbos during *davening*, I suddenly felt very ill. A fellow named Alper asked me why I was so pale. I suffered from terrible pain in the right side of my abdomen and decided to seek out a doctor immediately. The doctor told me to go to the hospital right away, suspecting a [hernia/appendicitis?], which was called in Poland *shleppa kishka*.

Before going to the hospital I went home and carefully told my wife that I was going to the hospital. I said goodbye to my little boy, and my wife came along with me. I was taken to the operating room, and as I was laying there I once again had an attack of terrible pains that were also felt in my back. The doctor ordered an x-ray and then told me that I had kidney stones. The pain was unbearable but the hospital offered no pain relief. I called for the doctor and asked him if they didn't have anything to give me for the pain. He replied that since the war began many medications became impossible to find, but he did order an injection of pain medication. I received the injection, but after several hours it wore off and I was once again in terrible pain.

I asked my wife to contact a certain American-Jewish doctor and ask his advice. He gave her some pills and told me to take it every four hours. This helped reduce the pain significantly. I realized that I was being treated in the German hospital not as a regular patient, but as a Jew.

After six days, I finally passed a stone. The doctor made another x-ray and said that several stones were still left. One day, an American soldier came into my hospital room and told me that he received permission from the German doctor to speak with me for a few minutes. He came to discuss my immigration application and he asked several questions.

After ten days in the hospital, I was finally discharged. Several weeks later I received the necessary papers that would enable us to enter the United States. I wrote a letter to my friend in Israel asking his advice. I always dreamed of living in Israel and I couldn't decide what I should do at that time. He replied that Israel would let me enter even if I came from the United States. "Israel will build itself meanwhile, so that you should have where to settle when the right time comes," he wrote.

As I was deliberating, I met a person who had traveled to America in 1946 and had returned to Germany. He told me not to go to America. "You will have to work very hard there, if you will be lucky enough to find work," he said. "Stay here for the time being. We have some rights here because of what the Germans did to us." My wife also urged me to stay and not to rush, due to the *reichsmark's* increase in value. Building materials were imported from America and lots of reconstruction was taking place. The economy was growing and people were gainfully employed and earning nicely. But I was adamant to leave. I did not want to continue living on bloody soil.

I received letters from my sister and cousin who wrote that they were dating two young men. I wrote to them that they should not agree to any *shidduch* before I would meet the young men, because there were many shady individuals who put on a charming appearance in order to attract nice young ladies. They sent me the names of the young men and the names of their parents, and wrote passionately about them. The young men also wrote to me, asking for my blessing for the match. Finally, I sent them my best wishes and both of them got married. It was difficult to leave Poland at that time, so they settled down as best as possible. My brother, on the other hand, traveled to Israel in 1948 and fought in the War of Independence.

The day of our departure to America approached. I sold my stock of textiles and other merchandise for a low price, because the markets were quite regulated. The German mark gained value as a reliable currency.

We set out on our journey towards the end of July 1949. We were held up in Bremen until October 18, because they were

doing a very thorough examination of my papers. They did not send us by boat; instead we traveled by plane because my wife was expecting and was almost due.

On October 21, 1949 we arrived in Cincinnati. No one was waiting for us at the airport. I couldn't speak English, so I hailed a taxi and showed him a paper with the address of the Joint. When we arrived at the Joint office we were told to wait, until they finally brought a girl who spoke Yiddish to interpret for us. Her name was Miss Bilinkoff. I asked her about our living arrangements and my job, because I was notified while still in Germany that I would receive an apartment and a job in Cincinnati. She explained that the notification was sent to us only to enable us to immigrate, but it was not really true. We would stay with Mrs. Bernwald for the meantime, until I would find an apartment and a job. Before I left, I told her that I ate only kosher food, to which she replied: "Of course! Mrs. Bernwald is a Jewish woman!"

We were taken to Mrs. Bernwald's home, where we washed up and were served breakfast. We were shown to our room which was to be our residence for the time. My wife and I, and our little toddler too, were very tired from the plane ride and from traveling all night from Newark to Cincinnati by train. We slept all day until evening, and then we ate something and returned to bed.

The next day was Friday. We ate breakfast and then went out to tour the city. My wife and I spoke about the fulfillment of our dreams. We finally reached a free country and were about to begin a new chapter in our lives. We hoped to find happiness in America, which was a land of endless opportunities. We also spoke about our dream to settle in Israel when the right time would come.

On Friday night I went to *daven* in a nearby *shul*. I was surprised to see the men and women praying together. The women even said Kaddish along with everyone. When I returned home for the Shabbos meal, we were served a regular weekday meal - a light breakfast. I whispered to my wife that this place lacked Jewish traditions. We went outside to a park where we

spent a few hours. When we returned home after *mincha*, I saw that some of the people were already eating dinner. I didn't recognize the meat they were serving so I asked one of the men what he was eating. He calmly replied that this was swine meat.

I was aghast! I went upstairs to my wife and told her that the food wasn't kosher and I would no longer eat anything there. The Bilinkoff girl lied to us! I had told her that I was religious and ate only kosher food. We spoke bitterly about this terrible injustice. Since the day that the war ended and we left the concentration camps, we had been most careful not to eat *treif* food. During the first few months that I was in the camps I also didn't touch the meat. We finally survived such a terrible war and arrived at a free country, and here we were being served *treif* food?!

Mrs. Bernwald came upstairs to ask us why we weren't coming down to eat. I told her that I ate only kosher food and that Miss Bilinkoff betrayed us. We went downstairs and ate some bread, eggs, butter and tea. In the evening, another Jew arrived from Germany with his wife and child. When I spoke to him I realized that he was also religious. He ate breakfast together with me and he too was fooled into thinking that the place was kosher.

We went to the Rabbi and complained to him about what happened. "Instead of being given a kosher place to stay at, the Joint sent us to a *treif* place!"

He replied that when a Jew comes to a new town, his first stop should be at the Rabbi's house.

"In Poland, where I come from," I retorted, "it was the *kehilla's* duty to ensure that Jewish soldiers and even Jewish criminals received kosher food. And here as well, the Rabbi should be the one coming to us survivors who went through such a horrific war, in order to console us and see if we needed anything!"

He gave us the phone number of a kosher station. I called the place, but they had no room for us, so they advised us to go into town and eat our daily lunch at a kosher restaurant. I replied

that it was impossible for us to do that, because my wife was already due any day, and we also had a 16-month-old toddler.

I returned to our room empty-handed, unwilling to believe that a *frum*, orthodox Rabbi would say such things to us. I couldn't make sense of what was happening around me. I came to America with only the Joint's address in my pocket. Was I really supposed to go visit the local Rabbi with my wife and child and our entire luggage, when stepping off the train after a long and difficult journey? Wasn't it the Rabbi's responsibility to make arrangements with the Joint for the religious needs of the survivors who arrived from Germany?

We subsisted on bread, eggs and milk for several weeks, but this wasn't our only problem. We were informed that everyone must work on Shabbos. Someone told me that at Schwartz's tailor shop an elderly employee just retired, and perhaps they would have an opening for me. I went over to them and told them that I was looking for work. They asked me some questions about my work experience, and I told them that I was a professional tailor, but I did not work at this profession for several years. "Still, I hope you will be pleased with my work," I said. "But I have one condition: I cannot work on Shabbos and Yom Tov." They told me to wait while they discussed the issue with the Jewish foreman. Finally, they replied that if I would pass the exam that the foreman would give me, I would receive the job. I began working there on Monday, November 15, 1949.