

My  
**Struggles**  
1939 - 1945

**Under  
the  
German  
Occupation  
of  
Poland**

**Freda Hoffman Zgodzinski**

***My Struggles 1939–1945 Under the German Occupation of Poland***

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## ***A word of thanks to the editing ensemble.***

*Shulim promised to print my writings, when he would retire from his professional work. By now his Linotype is already out of date. So he has become a student again, to learn how to use the computer, and he did the wordprocessing himself.*

*Vivian (Wiesia) helped with the proofreading.*

*David speaks Yiddish pretty well. But he is not able to read and write adequately. So he translated my writings into English, from a tape that I did for this purpose.*

*Rosie is an accomplished graphic artist and she has put in a lot of work to finish the book.*

*So it is truly an "Éditions de la Famille".*

*My memoirs,  
written in great pain and tears,  
I dedicate to the memory  
of my most beloved:*

*Our Parents  
Sheindl and David Hoffman;*

*Our sisters  
Dina-Esther and Rose;*

*Our brothers  
Sziye-Nathan, Anschl and Shimon;*

*Their husbands, wives  
and beautiful, sweet children;*

*And all our dearest Relatives and Friends;*

*their lives so young,  
torn out and extinguished  
by the barbaric Nazi hordes.*



*May 1939: Freda and Shulim  
in Warsaw before the war*

## Introduction

**I**t's already the 50th anniversary of the uprising and revolt in the Ghetto of Warsaw. When have I ever stopped being horrified, thinking about those times? Year in and year out, all kinds of tragic, terribly difficult and bewildering events haunt me. As long as my eyes are still open and there remain traces of memory, I will attempt to describe what I still remember. I know very well that my personal experiences are only like a drop in the ocean, of the horrible tragedies our people suffered — only because we were born Jews.

For my children and my grandchildren, I will attempt to tell my story. More than once, when my children have asked me, how I survived such a merciless war, I have tried to explain to them, what had happened to our people during the war. As I tell them more, in my writing, it should become easier for them to comprehend the puzzle of their parents' nervousness, and also their own tensions.

I hope that there will be kindled in them an interest in our past and they will be proud to learn that, despite all the horrible conditions, most of our people remained morally clean, just and honest, till their bitter end.

# Chapter 1

**W**hen the Germans invaded Poland, on September 1st 1939, they dealt a severe blow to the Polish people and especially to the Jews. People ran through the streets, as if they had been poisoned, with expressions of fear and desperation in their eyes, as if they were asking, each other: “Is it possible that we are really at war?”

Many men had already received their orders of mobilization. Trains full of troops had been heading toward the border of Germany. Suddenly our everyday lives were confused and full of dread. Among the first to be mobilized were also our Shulim and Hana’s husband, Heniek.

In Warsaw, even before the war, in so called “normal” times, we all lived in poverty. We had nothing like the refrigerators, stuffed with food that we have here today. Every day we had to go to the grocery store and buy a little milk, butter and bread, because there was no place to conserve food. So, as soon as the war broke out, we were without food, like thousands of other not so well off people.

Now, suddenly there was a big rush for the stores, but unfortunately there was nothing more left to buy. We would rush off to the bakery and wait long hours in a line, and when we finally, happily approached the sales window, where we expected our dreams of a fresh, warm bread, to be fulfilled — very often it was smashed down, right before our faces, while from inside somebody yelled “No more bread for today.”

During these first few days of the war, while people waited in the lineups for food, there were often harsh arguments and even fights broke out, between Poles and Jews. Sometimes Poles would unashamedly call a German soldier and point out to him that: This one standing here, and that one standing over there, are Jews.

It felt as if the air was charged with gunpowder. In that huge city, Warsaw, a miserable darkness fell in the evenings. It was strongly forbidden even to light a match. We would make our way, in the darkness of the night, guiding

ourselves through the streets by the light of artillery shells exploding overhead to join the long lineups at the bakery, where we stayed for long hours. I will never forget the joy one morning when I returned, cold almost frozen, but carrying a warm loaf of bread and was greeted with a loud “hurrah” from everyone at home.

We all lived together. My oldest sister Esther and her husband Voweck. My sister Rose, who was two years older than me and myself. At that time we also had a guest from London; his name was Mr. Landau. He was an older man, quite deaf and it was said that he was something of a writer. He was extremely naive. We were the only ones who would take him in, so he stayed with us. We lived on the fourth floor and, from the vantage of our apartment, we could see all around us.

Immediately after the outbreak of the war Warsaw was bombed regularly. When we heard the bombers overhead, everyone ran in terror, down the stairs, to the ground floor. We had no bomb shelter, but felt that we would be safer lower down.

We warned Mr Landau not to stay in the apartment, but he answered that it was “such a beautiful, poetic scene around us”, the flames, the fire and all. Since his ears could not hear the terrible crash of the bombs, so it was easier for him, than for us. One day he vanished; and we didn’t have any idea where to look for him, and we never saw him again.

During the second day of the war, our neighbour Leibel came over, looking as pale as a white wall. He said: “Children, we are in great trouble, the Germans are coming at us, like a flow of lava”. These few words have stayed in my memory, because that’s exactly how it was. The Germans advanced so quickly. No one would have believed that in only a few days after the outbreak of the war, they would already be near Warsaw. There was a colossal panic amongst all the citizens of Warsaw and especially the Jews.

Confusion and fear filled the hearts of the people, particularly those of us, who were members in labor unions or involved in one of the different movements that fought for social justice.

We began to destroy and burn loads of our “suspected” books. We stood



there, around the oven, and couldn't believe that, with our own hands, we threw such wonderful books into the fire. "And now what?" we asked each other desperately: "Should we run from here? Just drop everything and run away? People all around us murmured: "as soon as they will enter the city, they will shoot everyone". So the big evacuation to the east began.

On the 7th of September, the whole city of Warsaw was on the march. Men, women and children, young and old, carrying packs and suitcases — in a never ending stream. Day and night they swarmed out of the city.

We encouraged Voweck, Esther's husband, to leave too. There were rumors that Jewish men would be the first to be shot, when the Germans will enter the city. Esther decided not to go. She couldn't bring herself to leave that apartment, which had cost them so much effort and anguish to acquire. Besides, when Voweck would return home in a few weeks, it would be the best place to meet again.

In the end, almost all the men we knew, our dear ones and friends, left the city. The two Shtreitfeld brothers from Przemysl, came over to say goodbye. We knew each other since the times we were very young, in our small village, Wielkie Oczy. They also came to visit us very often in Warsaw. They had been active in the Communist party, dedicated heart and soul to their ideals. There used to be very heated debates and arguments, whenever they came over to our so popular "anarchist" apartment.

As we said goodbye to them, Voweck, my astute brother-in-law, could not let that monstrosity, the Hitler-Stalin pact, go unmentioned. "Here", he shouted at them, "here you have the perfect example of what the communists are capable of doing". But we were far from knowing then, all that the Soviets were able to do, all their obnoxious perfidies.

The battered Polish army retreated nonstop until they gathered around Warsaw to make a stand again. We had received no news from Shulim, or any knowledge of his whereabouts. Then, one day, he suddenly appeared. This was a tremendous, unexpected joy that Shulim was alive and well. We were so happy to see him. He had been at the front lines since the beginning, in the worst battles.

All the terrible experiences he had lived through, had a marked effect on him and he looked miserable, as if he were sick. Only a few days later he was sent again to the frontline to defend Warsaw. But the military situation was already hopeless. The shreds of the Polish army couldn't stand up to the might of the German war machine and Warsaw soon surrendered.

## Chapter 2

**T**he Germans were already in Warsaw. The streets were full with corpses of people and horses. The stench of death all around was awful — mixed with the smoke of burning houses. There were mountains of collapsed buildings everywhere. We began to dig out bodies from beneath the ruins. Thousands had been buried under the rubble. It was a terrible sight.

Our good neighbour, Leibl, spent weeks, working day and night, digging out many members of his family. It hurt us very deeply to see the anguish in the eyes of Leibl and Malke.

The city was left without water, food and electricity. We had no choice except to go very far, down to the Vistula river, which flows by Warsaw, to fetch our water there. We went out in groups, to walk the great distance, between our apartment on Leszno street and the river.

My sister Rose, myself and Shulim's two cousins, once wasted a whole day long to bring home some water. It's ridiculous to talk about hygienic conditions, in Warsaw, at that time. Epidemics became widespread and our own home was not immune. Soon our Esther also contracted stomach typhoid.

We all begged Shulim to get out of Warsaw, while there was still a chance. The Germans had not taken over the city completely, but food was already very, very scarce. Rachel and Hana, Shulim's two sisters, and especially Hana's baby, needed food very badly. Hana's husband, Heniek, had not returned yet from the front.

One day Shulim and I ventured out far from the city to the farmlands, where thousands of others were also hunting for food. We managed to scrape up some potatoes, a few beets and carrots. This "treasure" might have cost us very dearly, as Shulim was threatened by a farmer with an axe. We grabbed what we could and ran, just managing to drag ourselves home, after many long hours of walking.

There were rumors that all the soldiers, who originated from the territories, where the Russian army now occupied — are free to go home. So after much consideration and discussions, Shulim decided to put his uniform back on again — he kept it well hidden, in a secret place, at his previous work-place, for a souvenir. He set out in the direction of Przemysl and Lwow, where our family lived for generations.

There was a lot of talk, about what happened to the crowds that left on the 7th of September and afterward. The Germans bombed all the crowded roads and people fell like flies. As soon as the Polish army surrendered, a new wave of refugees began fleeing to the east.

Cesia, a very good friend of ours, moved in with us. She was a professional nurse and it seemed as if she was born for, to help others. She was always very kind, energetic and in good humour. Her house burned down also, so she came to stay with us. A little later the same thing happened to Rushke — an old, very good friend of Esther and she joined us as well. An additional problem with Rushke was that she also suffered from tuberculosis for many years.

Our sister Rose was becoming incapable of putting up with all the hardships of our present life, which became more bitter every day. We all agreed that it would be preferable for her to leave Warsaw. She got together with some friends, who were in the same mood and they set out to go to Lemberg (Lwow), where our brother Shimon lived with his family.

In comparison with many of our friends, we were still “lucky”. Our house stood undamaged and, so far, none of our dearest ones had been a casualty. Heniek, Hana’s husband, finally also returned from the front and we all were overjoyed. It warmed our hearts to see that happy young couple with their baby boy, all together again.

Two weeks later our Esther again caught typhoid. Soon afterwards Rushke came down with it as well. It was a miracle that Cesia was living with us. She also managed to persuade her good friend, Dr. Asherowa, to come over to visit the sick in our apartment. This was illegal then, because the Germans had put out an order that anyone, who was ill, should be brought straight to the hospital.

The famous Jewish hospital on Czysta street, had been heavily damaged in

the bombings. Almost no real facilities remained to heal the sick. Many people died in the hospital waiting rooms, without receiving any help.

Dr. Asherowa was like an angel for us. We had to be very secretive about her visits. Even friends and neighbours were not told because when she came, she was risking her life for us. Often, after she had done what she could, for our two sufferers, she would sit down to have a cup of tea with us, giving us advice on how to handle our patients and a lot of encouragement. She managed to do all that with a fine, dear smile on her beautiful face.

For years, after the war, I was dismayed that I couldn't find her. I wanted very much to meet again that wonderful person, Dr. Asherowa. She was so dear to us in that bitter, first winter of the cruel war.

Cesia was busy for weeks, administering needles to the sick. Finally she also became worn out. As if to spite us, the winter came very early that year. There was no coal to heat the house. I had to walk many blocks away, to find a friendly dealer, who sold me some coal and to find a way to bring it home. We had one small bedroom, where Esther lay. Rushke had her bed in the kitchen. Cesia and I slept on two very small cots.

The days and nights we spent with the two desperately sick women, were like a nightmare. There were constant feverish mutterings, babblings, vomiting ... One would beg for water, while the other would plead that she was going to vomit. It was a great relief for me when Cesia finally came home, at the end of the very long and hard day.

The few friends that still remained in the city, were afraid to come over to visit us. No one wanted to be exposed to the dangerous disease. When someone would meet me, by chance, on the street, they would warn me that, at all costs, I should take care of myself, or I would become sick as well. I still don't understand how I stayed healthy. All winter long I was breathing in typhoid.

After three weeks Esther began to recover, but Rushke was still very sick. Then Esther suffered a recurrence of her stomach typhoid. The doctor called it Recidive Typhoid.

When Rushke finally pulled through her fight with typhoid — her

tuberculosis flared up again. Esther, after spending six weeks in bed, had to learn how to walk again, like a baby. She was so happy when she was able to go along with Cesia, to escort Rushke to the sanatorium. Rushke spend two months there and after much suffering she finally died. After all our extraordinary efforts and sacrifices, we never saw Rushke stand up again.

One day our sister Rose returned from Lwow. Voweck and the rest of our family there sent word that they were very concerned about us. They had planned to take care of Rose for a while and then together cross the border and travel on to Lwow, where most of our family was living.

At that time life was still “normal” under the Soviet occupation. Unfortunately Esther was so weak that we could not possibly undertake that kind of a risky trip. Rose couldn’t stay any longer either. She was afraid to walk out onto the street and she couldn’t find her place at home either. When she saw the situation and listened to our stories about all the hardships we had lived through — she could hardly believe it. When we parted, she told me that she can not find words, to express the admiration she felt for the help I was giving.

For months now, people wandered over the border into the Russian occupied territory. Every few days we heard warnings that they were going to put an end to the constant wanderings over the border and that would result in our being cut off from our family completely. At that time our friend, Moishe, also decided to cross the border and head for Lwow. I decided to tag along with him and to go as soon as possible.

We were very naive. We thought all we had to do was to cross the border and take the train to Lwow. But our journey was completely different. Even before we arrived at the occupied territories, we encountered people, who just came from the opposite side. They warned us that, from the next day on, the border will be closed for good and that anyone dreaming of getting across, had better turn back fast and right away.

We wandered through a bitterly cold night, in a snowstorm, and got lost. In the morning, in the first village we came in, we met some Jewish people and they warned us that, those were not rumors that we had heard — the border would actually be closed.

We decided to return to Warsaw immediately, though after all our wanderings along the border, we certainly needed some rest. But we could not allow ourselves that luxury. It so happened that the border guards on duty lately, were behaving very brutally. They had shot some people the night before. Moishe worried constantly about his wife and child and I too was much distraught about leaving Esther for so long. So we returned to Warsaw.

Some time later, quite unexpectedly, we received a letter from a prisoner-of-war camp. It was signed with a Polish name, but the handwriting was definitively Shulim's. It had been almost three months since Shulim left us. He took with him all the addresses of our family, in Lwow and Przemysl. He expected to end up there, after a certain time — because there was no normal transportation available then.

The Germans had captured him while he was still in Warsaw — after passing the bridge between Warsaw and Praga (a suburb of Warsaw). They had picked up all the Polish soldiers they could find and sent them away to prisoner-of-war camps in Germany. It took a few months until Shulim had a possibility to send us a sign that he was alive.

We had become so absorbed by our daily miseries and sorrows that it is now very difficult for me to remember exact dates, or to recall details of the major events, which occurred all around us, almost every day. These catastrophes sapped all our strength and left us always anxious and full of dread. Also, a great deal has already been written to describe those events — by people more capable than myself, at remembering events and dates.

## Chapter 3

**A**fter the Germans entered Warsaw, they began to issue series of decrees. The first decree stated that Jews must always wear, on their left sleeves, a white armband with a blue Star of David on it. Sometimes when I would go on an errand, the Post Office, or some such place, and pass by a German soldier, who maybe still had a trace of humanity left in his system, who still saw us as humans and he would say: “She looks like a Gretchen” ... that was to say that I looked just like a German girl and didn’t look like I need to wear an armband.

But we could also see, right from the beginning, what was in store for us. Their wild behaviour threw us all into fear. It was enough just to see two German soldiers coming from a distance — to make everyone on the street scatter for cover.

We all tried hiding to avoid meeting them face to face. They didn’t march down the streets for nothing. Any Jew who passed them by was given a blow in the face or smashed up against the wall. Thus they cleared a path for themselves by kicking people out of their way. Episodes like that I witnessed constantly. Time after time.

These creations of the “master race” behaved like wild beasts, even to children. Young children of all ages sat on the frosty snow-covered sidewalks, wrapped only in rags. They begged with their outstretched little hands for a piece of bread. Some of them were the only providers for the whole family. They might sell shoelaces, pins, buttons and other such *valuables*. When those *sophisticated*, order-loving, heartless soldiers swaggered down the sidewalks they kicked aside the pitiful merchandise with their shiny boots.

We lived at 42 Leszno Street. This building contained also the famous “bazaar”, which stretched all the way to Nowolipie street. In the bazaar you could find anything you needed or wanted. The density of people there, dealers and buyers, was unbelievable. Still it was much safer to walk through the bazaar, than to take Karmelicka street, which lay parallel to the bazaar. On the street it was always possible to meet Germans. They often travelled back and



forth, from the “Paviak”— the famous prison, not far away from our street. Sometimes, for a laugh, on the way to the prison, they would stop on the street and cause all kind of trouble.

Once, at the time of Passover, on a lovely, sunny spring morning, a friend of mine, Hela, came over and said: “Come on, on a beautiful day like today, we should not stay at home. Let’s have a bit of vacation — let’s go out for a walk”.

We left the house through the bazaar and walked out on Karmelicka street. We enjoyed our walk only a very short time, when all at once, four or five automobiles pulled up and a bunch of SS soldiers jumped out and started shooting left and right, in all directions. Immediately we heard cries of the wounded. People ran and screamed. Luckily it lasted only for a few moments. Soon those crazy devils jumped back in their cars, slammed the doors and drove off. To this day I still can’t understand how it is possible that nothing happened to us then. We had been so close to death. This was how our “wonderful”, springtime walk in the Warsaw Ghetto looked like.

Once I was walking on Leszno street near Zelazna, when the Ghetto had not yet been sealed off completely. Two rampaging soldiers were standing there, having a “good time”. They were torturing an old Jew, ordering him to fall and stand up — all the time hitting him with their rifle-butts. This old Jew looked like a saint. He was very weak and I could see that he was near collapse. The two soldiers were wild with their brute force.

It was horrifying for me to look at that barbaric scene, and yet how could I leave? Usually, when you encountered something like that on the street, you rushed off as quickly as possible. It was always easy to get sucked in into the games those sadists played. But this time my feet were paralyzed. I couldn’t move. I stifled my cry, but I could not tear myself away from the saintly face of this defenseless old Jew. Out of nowhere a Jewish policeman came up and asked me: “Is he a relative of yours? You’d better run away fast. You can’t accomplish anything standing here”.

The old man fell down once more and couldn’t get up again. I cried and cried and couldn’t stop it.

Could this be believed? Could this be understood? In our early years, in

our homes, and in the schools, we always learned to respect and to help the weak, the old ones, the innocent. “What kind of people are these?” We kept asking ourselves.

Among their first decrees, was also an order to give up all our radios. Jews waited in long lines, in the terrible cold — to give away to the robbers and murderers, their most valuable possessions. But what else could we do? This was still easier than a bullet in your head. We had only one radio in our apartment. Cesia brought it with her, when she came to live with us. She refused to give away her radio. She said that we could break it up into small pieces, burn it and bury the remains. And that is what we did.

A small piece of magnet from that radio we kept, and we found it very useful for our sewing — to pick up lost pins. Esther made a beautiful handicraft from it. She embroidered a cover for it and it was completely unrecognizable as a radio magnet.

Another very important decree was issued: Jews could not wear any fur clothing. This was especially hard on the people who owned nothing more than the one fur coat. Thousands of people were already displaced and when they ran from their homes, they had taken with them only one piece of clothing.

The Poles streamed into the Ghetto to buy up those furs for a little nothing. We in our house, were very busy for a long, long time — tearing off fur collars and fur linings and restoring many, many coats and fur jackets.

Though it makes me shiver with horror even now, when I think about it. I have to mention the lice, which descended like an awful plague, on the poor Ghetto population. There was no way to get rid of them. To get through the bazaar, we had to push through the big crowds. Whether we wanted it or not, we brushed against other people. When we came home we always brought in lice. I would never have believed that such huge lice existed, had I not seen them with my own eyes.

When I think about that plague, I am still so terrified. For years after the war, my nightmares were often filled with these disgusting worms, which fed on the weak and starving Jews.

Cesia was an extremely clean person and she had great practical abilities in everyday life. She decided that the only way to combat the lice was to strip completely, after we came in from the street and wash and search ourselves for lice. We all did this and it helped a little.

The bazaar had also one great advantage. The Germans never dared to go in there, because they were afraid that they would be exposed to and contract typhoid.

From our windows we could very often see scenes that I am simply not capable of describing. The saddest thing for me to see was, when someone who had just bought a loaf of bread, would have it grabbed away from under their arms, by one of the many hungry “chappers”, specialists in grabbing things from other people and running away as fast as they could.

The evenings were the only time that we could relax a bit. Then all the dealers would go home. The noise and yelling ceased and we could breathe easier. The children also would go out into the yard to play a little, using their privilege of innocence for a little while.

The Jews who were forced to leave their homes in other parts of the city and move to the Ghetto were, for the most part, very well off. They had to leave their nicely furnished homes and everything in them. Some were lucky enough, to be able to trade places with a Polish family, who was ordered to leave the Ghetto and move to the Polish side. The first question that the Jewish housewife would ask about the apartment was “Ubikatzieh iest” (Do you have a washroom?). This question, pronounced with a Jewish accent, became a popular joke among many silly and insensitive Poles.

At that time, and increasingly later on, the Poles plundered Jewish possessions. For years, long after I had made my way to the Polish side, I would still hear so often that sarcastic joke “Ubikatzie iest?” These jokes were especially frequent, in the most tragic days of our downfall, when smoke from the Ghetto poured into the sky for weeks and weeks announcing our collective death.

Voweck came back home in January 1940. He had a very hard time adjusting to this new way of life. They were constantly grabbing men off the

streets and forcing them into labor gangs, for work outside the city. Sometimes they might be fed some soup, but mostly not even that. They were often beaten and even killed.

After a while Voweck found a job in the Jewish hospital. He was a carpenter, a very good tradesman. Esther found a job as well. The “Joint” (Jewish American relief and welfare organization) established a small clothing workshop. Clara Segalowicz, the famous Jewish actress, was in charge of that shop.

After all the Warsaw Jews had been packed into the Ghetto, we really started to feel the results of the terrible overcrowding. Moreover many Jews kept also streaming in from all the surrounding towns and villages.

We also saw more and more Jews from Germany, wearing yellow patches and carrying packs and suitcases. They believed strongly that their coming to Warsaw was only temporary. They naively thought that they would eventually be allowed to go back to their comfortable homes in Germany.

The hunger and epidemics that resulted spread with such force that they wiped out whole families. Halina Lew, a very good friend of Esther and Voweck, used to visit us quite often. She should be remembered as a true heroine. Her appearance was completely Polish. Before the war she lived with her husband, Shlomo Lew, in Joliborz, the Warsaw suburb, where many of the Polish professional upper class lived.

Halina Lew was very much involved in the political and social work, taking place in the housing cooperative “Szklane Domy” (Houses of Glass). She was always surrounded by groups of students and other young people, who greatly respected and loved her. She had many friends among the Polish intelligentsia and would certainly have been able to find a way out to live on the Polish side. But she and Shlomo decided to come and live in the Ghetto instead and immediately began to look around, to see what they can do, to help out.

Halina helped wherever it was only possible. She had a many ideas about how to make something out of nothing and how to help the sick, hungry and helpless. She started up a sewing shop, where rags were made into acceptable clothing. I went there to work with her. We would have made some progress, if

it hadn't been for the constant thefts and the bitter epidemics among us.

Halina and her husband suddenly disappeared. I made several very intensive searches for them and still, to this day, don't know what became of the Lews.

After tending to so many sufferers, Cesia, contracted typhoid herself. We did everything possible, so that we would not become infected as well. It was much easier, this time around, tending to the sick one than it had been months before. Esther and Voweck went off to work every day, but still there were three healthy people in our house.

Every morning we would see on the sidewalks dead bodies, covered with newspapers. This was an everyday occurrence. So many years have gone by, but to this day, when I see a newspaper spread out in the street, I feel an emotional shudder. Unconsciously it tears at my heart. Long after the war, in my nightmares, I often could still see the naked corpses of dead women, lying on Nowolipie street. Children were standing around, in the cold wind, and didn't want to leave. It was simply beyond me to watch this scene. But I couldn't move.

On the streets and sidewalks of the Ghetto we would constantly see many little children begging for bread. Day by day their faces changed. They would swell and then we could see bacteria growing on them. So many little children with old faces and dull eyes. We have never seen them smiling again.

One of these children became especially etched in my memory. She was about six or seven years old. At first she had a brave little voice, repeating steadily: "Give us a little piece of bread". For a while she disappeared and when I saw her again, she looked very miserable. She told me that she was sick. Every day, all winter long, she sat on the snow, wrapped in rags. After a while we could see that her face was beginning to swell. Her voice became weak. This was a very bad sign. One day I passed by and saw two women trying to feed her some soup. But the child could not open her mouth. She dragged herself down the street, in the snow. There were thousands of incidents like this.

Only very few of our close friends remained in Warsaw. In the beginning we would meet someone, by chance, walking down the street. Everyone was

caught up in their own problems. It was a joy to share someone's company for a few minutes and to find out the latest news about common friends, then we would quickly head off in separate directions — knowing too well that we wouldn't see this friend again, for some time. We didn't have telephones then; we didn't even dream of having one.

After a time we learned that Long Hana, as she was known, whom I met only three or two weeks before, had died of typhoid. Her mother and her younger sister died as well. Renneh suffered the same fate. She lived not far from us and used to come up quite often. Her family of four people all became sick suddenly and they also died very fast, lacking the stamina to resist that terrible sickness that killed people like flies.

It had also been a long time since we had heard any news from Moishe and his wife and child. Then Cesia met him on the street, but she hardly recognized him. Esther and I decided to wait the next day, at the same spot, where Cesia had met him. We waited a long time and finally he came by. We barely convinced him to come up to our apartment for a visit. He looked at us, through two glassy eyes, as if he could not recognize us. When we asked him: "Where is Sally, where's the child?" he answered:

"I don't know."

"Are you sick?"

"I don't know."

"Are you hungry?"

"I don't know."

His feet were swollen like little barrels. He could barely move a step. He smelled terrible. His face was so swollen that it was difficult to make out his eyes, which were covered with a grey film. He was on his last legs. This was what was left of that once so healthy, energetic, dynamic Moishe, who used to have such a sweet, fine life together with his wife and their little boy. There were thousands of zombies like Moishe on the streets of the Ghetto.

It was so very sad to see someone close to us, in such a state and to be absolutely incapable of helping them any more. We were informed that our good friend, Gucia, who lived on Krochmalna Street — she was known as Esther Schneider before the war — had become sick with typhoid. We took turns taking care of her. Esther would go over for a couple of nights, then I would go over to help Gucia for a time. Her sister, Fela, could do nothing more for her, as she also became sick. After a short time Gucia died also.

Whole families died if not from typhoid then from hunger. Estusia Rubinstein was alone with her parents, all the others had gone away. Before the war she was still a student. She was a very warm, lovely girl. She was absolutely unable to adapt to such a miserable, hard life. She could not, for example, like others did, take a basket with small items and try to sell them on the street. There was no work to be found. From the beginning she was always hungry. She had no strength and not a drop of energy. She came often to visit us and we had to argue a lot with her that she should sit down and have some soup with us. After some time Estusia too disappeared, probably starving to her death.

The soups that Voweck brought home from the hospital were almost inedible. The colour was exactly like dishwater. There wasn't a trace of a carrot. A potato would have been a luxury. Once in a while we would find some cabbage or beets in it. Another problem was that it had a stifling, smoky smell. Esther and Cesia could not eat that "soup", so I ate both their portions. For me it was better than starving. But how nourishing could a soup like that have been?

We also had another source of food which I, however, could not stomach. We often bought litres of horse's blood, we poured it into the frying pan and it became like pieces of liver. Esther would close her eyes and eat it. During the war, in the Ghetto, if we ever had any meat at all, it was always horse meat, because it was much cheaper. It did not taste too bad.

During the time of the bombings almost all the women stopped having their periods. This occurred again when hunger became so prevalent in the Ghetto. It was at that time that Esther became pregnant. She had lived with Voweck for about fifteen years. In the beginning they didn't want a child. During the last years, just before the war, Esther had decided that she wanted to

become pregnant, but it had not happened. Finally, in those terrible times, as if to spite herself, she did become pregnant.

We were all very concerned about what would happen now. The situation became increasingly awful, day by day. The overcrowding and the epidemics were catastrophic. One day, when Esther was in her third month of pregnancy, she came home terribly distraught. At work she has heard frightening rumors that the Germans were going to wipe out the Ghetto. Everyone was to be carted out and God knows what else? That same evening she began to have pains. Cesia, our nurse, was spending that night with one of her patients. We couldn't call for help, there was a 7:00 o'clock curfew throughout the war. If someone was caught on the street, after 7, he was shot.

The result was that Esther wrestled with her terrible pain, while Voweck and I could do nothing to help her. At midnight what needed to happen, took place. Esther was relieved and her pains ceased. What came out, was the size of a worm. The next day we had a gynecologist, a friend of our dearest Dr. Asherowa, come over to our house to see Esther.

We were familiar with only two children among our friends and relatives. Zosia Glatt, whose husband had gone away to Russia, had a sunny, beautiful little girl. Esther loved this little child very much.

The second child belonged to Hana — Shulim's sister. After her husband, Heniek, returned from the front, he did the hardest jobs, so that they would not go hungry. When rikshas began to be used as a means of transportation in the Ghetto, Heniek managed to scrape together, borrowing on all sides, the needed money and bought a riksha. He earned a decent wage, but the work was very, very hard. Moving the wheels forward all day long, with two passengers and only his feet as power, was beyond his strength.

We, who lived together in our house, had always enough work to do. But the money we earned was not enough to buy bread every day on the black market. So we hungered. We heard rumors that many young people from the Ghetto, had escaped to the Polish side and had gone on to work for farmers in the countryside. In this way they helped themselves and their families as well, by sending home food packages. Together with our neighbour's daughter, a



good friend of mine, we decided to try and do that.

We inquired as how to go about getting out from the Ghetto. It was a severe crime for a Jew to leave the Ghetto. We were given an address, from where we could be smuggled out. The place was a yard on Ogrodowa street. Half of the building was situated in the Ghetto and the other half on the Polish side. In the middle of the yard a high wall separated the two sides. A lot of smugglers and dealers, on both sides, gathered at the wall.

In the short period of time that I stood there I was shocked and amazed by what I saw and heard. It was the first time in my life that I witnessed such a melee: the noise, the arguments, the arguing over prices. The throwing of packs and sacks and animal carcasses over the wall; cheeses, milk in pots, were flung from one side to the other. All this was done with such speed and hurry that it was impossible to understand what was going on.

My friend and I handed over the five zlotys to the Jewish smuggler. He screamed over the wall to his contact on the other side. He was given a positive answer and immediately we were lifted up high, right over the wall. Seconds later we were both already standing, on our feet, on the Polish side.

This all occurred so suddenly that I almost lost my senses. But I also was very conscious that my mind had to work properly now. The first thing we had to do was to take our armbands off and put ourselves in a different mood. We had to put on smiles on our faces, get away quickly from the scene of those illegal activities and walk as carelessly as possible down the street.

We set out en route to Lublin. We had heard that it was easier to find work with the rich farmers in that area. We walked many miles, from village to village. Occasionally we encountered other people from Warsaw who, like us, had been drawn in the same direction — wandering around to find some relief from hunger and cold.

In those days the farmers were still glad to take in Jews to work for them. It was still legal to have “Zydowkas” (Jewesses) at work. And why not? They didn’t have to pay us any salary, only providing room and board. So it was for them a pretty good thing, to have a Jewess laboring for them.

A farmers work is not easy if you are not used to it. Especially when you are as worn out, as we were, coming out of the starving Ghetto. So I had to keep on changing farms, until I ended up working for a rich farmer, who promised to pay me also a small salary. From all that I only managed to send home two packages.

Being in the countryside, in the fresh air and eating until I was full, put me on my feet again. I became stronger and looked healthy. After this summer, however when I had managed to replenish myself, I began to yearn for home again. There was no way that I could become accustomed to the rural atmosphere then. I couldn't stand the relaxed environment of the farmers. It so disturbed me that, by the end of the summer, I returned to Warsaw.

Many of our friends criticized me strongly for that and told me to my face that I had done a very stupid thing. It made such an enormous contrast from the life on the farm, where food was abundant, to return to the hunger in Ghetto. There were places in the countryside where, throughout the whole war, they had never seen a German. Even when they did, the Polish people in the villages, were treated humanely by the German army.

As harsh as it was to return to the Ghetto, I didn't regret it. Here I was together with my dear ones and in the countryside I felt alone. One time I went with Esther to the hospital kitchen to have some soup. I could not stand the sharp stares from the starving, half dead faces. I had become suntanned and looked healthy and fresh as if I had come from another planet. I stopped going to the kitchen and Esther had to bring me home some soup.

Occasionally we received letters from Shulim. They were addressed to our old friend, Konrad Sroczynski, a Pole who lived not far away from the Ghetto. He was a good friend of Esther and Voweck. His son, Kondek, was a young student. Kondek had a Jewish girlfriend in the Ghetto. It just so happened that the parents of this girl, run a grocery store near us at 42 Leszno street. So Kondek brought over Shulim's letters to that store.

Kondek entered the Ghetto through the Jewish cemetery on Gesia street. The letters which Kondek brought me in the Ghetto were a very big favor for me. At that time we heard nothing any more from our family, who were living

now under Soviet occupation. Also from Mania in Paris we received no letters. However twice, torn small packages of food, from Mania, were delivered to us.

Our group received some more news. Esther became pregnant again. The times were very strained and full of dangerous forebodings. Esther was very worried and the rest of us as well. But we convinced her to do nothing about it. What would happen to all of us — would also happen to the child to be born.

Meanwhile many people were finding work in the newly created German shops. A neighbour of ours, Leizer Rochman, who was a very good tailor, a special fine craftsman. He worked now in Tebens' shop, a large factory where they sewed uniforms for the German army. He arranged also for me to work in that shop too.

Only a few weeks later the first "Action" took place. A simple translation of that word in English would be "roundup". This started on July 19, 1942. This was the largest Action, and it lasted for three months. It began with the terrible news of the suicide of Adam Czerniakow. He had been the president of the Judenrat — a group of prominent Jews, designated by the Germans to run the everyday business of the Ghetto. This news struck everyone in the Ghetto like a thunder from the blue sky. We knew that after this, there would be sweeping changes and so there were.

The Germans mobilized the Jewish police and ordered them to deliver ten people each, per day. Ten "heads". The police carried out the orders. They ran about, like wild dogs, catching anyone in their sight.

Esther was in her seventh month then. Voweck managed to have her admitted to the hospital, as a patient. The hospital was a secure place at that time. I worked on Prosta street, far away from our house, in the smaller Ghetto. I could have been caught fifty times, just going to work. What saved me then, was that the police was ordered, at that time, not to take anyone who worked in a Tebens' shop.

Every day, after work, I would visit the hospital, which was situated on Leszno street, not far from us. Or sometimes Voweck would come to the apartment, to see what was happening with Cesia and myself.

The “Actions” grew in intensity. I could see through a narrow opening in my window a neighbour of mine, a young student, whom I often saw running with his books, being captured. He wrestled and cursed the Policeman and spat in his face. But to no avail. Two more policemen came and threw him into the truck. You had to be made of iron and steel just to look at, what was happening all around.

Three weeks after this action began, Voweck once entered the apartment in a rush. He said that he had to help a friend of his, who lived across the street, to move his family and belongings to the hospital. He had arranged for them to stay in the hospital as well. He was very pleased that his friend would be in a safe place. I called after him as he hurried down the stairs, telling him not to be too long, because I was preparing something to eat for him. He answered that it should not take long. He would soon be back.

We waited all afternoon and into the night. Meanwhile we began to hear a flood of people in the yard, screaming, and the neighbours running to and fro. I understood how bitter it was. Cesia and I sat terrified all night in the dark.

The next morning I ran over to the hospital, but Voweck was not there. This was a terrible tragedy for us. I was too weak to go to Esther’s room and tell her about this horrible occurrence. The Action of the night before was the most terrible to date. Up to that time there had been cases in which, through connections or money, people were released from the “Umschlagplatz” (the gathering place to the trains). But this time, even after the doctors in the hospital did their best to intervene, they could not get Voweck released. Esther sat alone in the hospital, deeply wounded.

Cesia and I went to visit her whenever we could. I had to continue to go to work, even though this blow almost broke me. Esther was in her eighth month. We were frightened about how she would take this new crisis and what would be the result of all these terrible experiences on her health. Luckily she was allowed to stay on in the hospital. All the nurses liked her and they also respected Voweck very much.

One time a nurse came to me, crying. After all kind of sacrifices and efforts, she had managed to free her sisters’ child from the Umschlagplatz. Now

she was desperate to find a way to send the child over to her parents, who worked in the same Tebens' shop, where I worked. I told her, right away that I would take the risk of taking the child with me. She cried and kissed me; "Is it possible, would you really do it?"

To everyone's delight, the trip through the many streets went so easily that day that I myself could not believe it. The frightened parents were amazed and delighted. This was also very satisfying for me. But for how long? I knew that it was possible that in the next Action the child would be taken again, this time together with the parents, maybe.

One morning, after working the night shift, I came home and went to sleep. I was awakened by loud calls and by the, by now too familiar, shouts from the German murderers: "Alle Juden runter", (all Jews come down).

In my half awakened state, I still could realize that it was too late to climb up on the dresser, in the washroom, which we had picked for a hiding place. The voices were coming from the stairs already. I grabbed my coat and the suitcase, which I brought to work, and headed out to the street.

Up to this time when they saw the initials VGT on my lapel which indicated that I worked for Tebens, they would leave me alone. But this time this didn't help me. The street was already black with people. Thousands and thousands were lined up in rows, as wide as the whole Leszno street.

On both sides, with a space of one metre between them, marched the Lithuanian guards. The Ukrainian guards watched as well, all with pointed looks at their rifles and then towards the people. If someone tried to twist his way out of the mass of people, he was shot immediately.

The mass mowed through, street after street, on the way to the Umschlagplatz. All along the way the weak and the sick fell. They were immediately shot. This was the first hellish march that I made. My heart turned to stone. Many people were sobbing and crying. The guards were screaming with inhuman voices. Can you call such cruel devils, people? They sounded like wild, hungry lions.

When we came to the Umschlagplatz, the gates were wide open.

Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Germans, some holding dogs, were lined up in a row. Further on stood the real “craftsmen”, only Germans. Fat, slovenly butchers that looked like murderers, they stood with rolled up sleeves, making selections. Left, right, left, right. When a man hugged his wife or pressed his child to him, he was torn away and there wasn’t even time to look at each other. Hell probably looks like that.

I was thrown in with a group of workers, those with trades. Others were immediately herded into wagons. Thousands of us remained sitting on the ground. We waited. People whispered that maybe they had not brought in enough wagons. We hoped for a miracle. We huddled together in the darkness, preparing to spend the night in the cold yard of the Umschlagplatz.

And then the miracle happened. An order was shouted that all those who worked at Tebens’ and Shultz’ (Shultz was a furmaker for the Germans) — could go home. We all got up and tore out of that damned place. We couldn’t believe it. It was already after the curfew, so we could still have encountered surprises. But who was thinking of that? Overtaken with joy and emotions, I ran straight to the hospital.

The guard at the hospital didn’t want to let me in, even though he knew me well. He was not allowed to let anyone in during the night. When I heatedly told him what had happened to me; that I wanted to tell my sister that I’d just come back from the cursed Umschlagplatz, he did let me in.

At that time they partitioned dwellings for us, on Prosta street and there was talk that they would close off the whole neighbourhood around the shop. Everyone who worked at Tebens’ would stay in this neighbourhood, so that there would not be, any more coming and going, from one Ghetto to the other.

They would also make selections in the building that contained the shop. The old and the weak were chosen and at every selection our hearts beat rapidly for those fateful moments. Specifically, on Yom Kippur, they took away many, many young girls. Who could possibly describe the tragedies, suffered by the parents, who lived through that? And who could understand the methods they would choose? How could you hide from them? Every day we heard more news of further tragedies, which distressed every one.

During all those Actions, Cesia lost her spirit toward everyone and everything. She was completely broken. She sighed that all the efforts made to hide were useless. Nothing would help; we were lost. Our good neighbour, Leizer, managed to persuade the shop foreman to let Cesia come and work with me, on Prosta street. We were all happy that she would have a place there which would be more secure.

We packed two knapsacks with her things and walked over to Prosta street. This was the first time that Cesia had gone for such a long trip. It was always a risky journey and just to spite us, it was a particularly difficult day, to be walking about. It took us almost the whole day to go from Leszno to Prosta street. All day long they were dragging people from the streets. We would go into a house and hide for an hour, then continue walking again for a few minutes, and there they would be catching more people. Through all this we finally arrived at Prosta street in the evening.

We had been allotted a room with a few other people. All the houses were packed full. The next day Cesia stayed at home. She wanted to rest a little, after this difficult trip, before she started to work. I left for work, so glad that she was staying with me. Sitting in the shop, we suddenly heard a lot of noise. An alarm spread that they had taken the wives and children from the houses that had been partitioned for the people, who were working in the shop regularly.

When I returned home from work I saw that doors and gates had been flung open and packs and things thrown about in the yard. There were blood stains in many houses. All the women and children had been taken and with them also our dear, good Cesia.

Visiting Esther in the hospital was becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous. But there were always those who would go out, no matter how difficult or dangerous it was. The Germans heard a rumor that those who travelled from one Ghetto to the other were smugglers doing brisk business. One early morning a small group of us coming from work on the nightshift were detained at the gate and they took away our worker-cards. This was the same as saying that the next day we would be brought down to the infamous Umschlagplatz.

When I came to work the next morning they called me into the office. A lawyer by the name of Warszawski, began to interrogate me: “What business do you have that you make that dangerous trip to the big Ghetto all the time”?

I answered that my sister was about to deliver a baby and that her husband had already been taken away, so I had to go to her. He thundered back that I would pay for my “smuggling”, with a trip to the Umschlagplatz. I cried that it was not true. Everyone knew that I went there to see my sister. He brutally ordered his lackey to throw me out of the office. My fate was sealed. I returned to my machine. I lay my head down and sobbed in desperation.

When my dear friend Leizer saw this, he ran up to me, his face very pale and tried to calm me down. He ran from one foreman to another. They didn't have many craftsmen like Leizer, so they listened to him. They had known Leizer for a few years, so through them he managed to retrieve my card.

The Germans did everything they could to confuse the people and convince them that they were being taken to work-camps. A very small percentage of people in the Ghetto, knew that they were really going to their death; that the wagons full of people went straight to the gas chambers. Many convinced themselves that once they were out of Warsaw, there might be an opportunity to escape to the villages or the woods.

Worn out, with broken hearts, with our last ounces of strength, we sat and worked and we worked very hard, because there was a constant stream of inspectors and controllers. The director of Tebens' shop was a Volksdeutsche, called Jan. He was a tall, angry man, a sadist. When Jan showed up at the shop everyone panicked, running to and fro, whispering: “Jan is coming” ...

Jan didn't walk. He ran from one place to the next, with a whip in his hand. He knew that he would always find someone sitting at their place, doing nothing that he could whip. We were sewing reversible uniforms, with one side colored white, the other green. These were for the Russian front. I sewed the sleeves. As I was a tailor by trade, I made them quickly and well.

Another tailor, a very fine person, sat beside me. A pressing table stood beside our two machines. A man, who was older than all of us, worked at the pressing table. He was about fifty years old. He looked like he had never been a



worker before. He was an extremely dear person, whose gentleness was plainly visible on his face. We were all very friendly with him.

One time, while working the night-shift, I turned to the worker at the neighbouring machine and said: "I can't any more. I need to take a nap". That was our system. You told yourself to wake up in a while and asked a neighbour to watch out for you. A sharp noise and the crackling of the whip woke me up. The murderer, Jan, was standing over that gentle, hunched over, old Jew by the pressing table and beating him ceaselessly, as if he were ready to kill him. Jan's wild eyes had spotted the presser sleeping at the table, but not me. When he was finished with his victim, he went on looking for more.

## Chapter 4

**O**ne day they completely closed off the streets and posted guards all around. This was at the beginning of September 1942. It was useless to think even about going into the big Ghetto. We were told that the final Action was now taking place. Esther was then in her ninth month of pregnancy.

A few days later, at the first opportunity, I entered the big Ghetto again. The hospital was thrown open, completely empty. There was no one to talk to, no one to question. The streets were dark. Packs and rags, feathers from tattered beds, clothes and corpses lay about. The heart could see what had taken place here a few terrible days before.

After all the horrible actions I had seen, I still wasn't prepared for this apocalyptic emptiness. I walked through street after street, all alone. Finally I saw a Jewish policeman. I ran up to him and asked if he knew what had happened with the people from the Hospital. He answered me bitterly that I should go on and ask someone else, because he didn't know. But he said he did not believe that I would find anything.

I walked a great distance until I saw another policeman and asked him if he'd heard anything about the people from the hospital. Yes, he said to me, he thought he'd heard that a portion of the hospital had been established on Electoralna street. I ran back to 7 Electoralna street and, to my great joy, there I found also our Esther.

Her experiences of the previous week were like stories from the 1001 Nights. My blood stream froze for a while just hearing her tell, what she had been through. How could she have lived through all that? Esther, in her ninth month of pregnancy, had been in the middle of that horrible Action on Mila street. She had scraped through for a few days, hiding in holes, here and there, while thousands and thousands were herded, en masse, to the Umschlagplatz. A young boy who worked at the hospital and knew Esther well, had thought of a wonderful idea.

He found a “riksha” somewhere and, putting on a white uniform, he seated Esther in the riksha. He approached a German guard and, with a desperate voice, pleaded; “You can well see that she’s going to give birth any minute now. What do you expect me to do with her?” The German gave him a swat and told him to take her and run away. That was how they eventually ended up at 7 Elektoralna street. Very few people escaped the Action on Mila street. The remainder of the hospital established itself later on Gesia street, between Zamenhofa and Nalewki.

Esther gave birth on the 24th of September. She was a tiny, very cute little girl. The Actions had been temporarily halted and the atmosphere had become more tranquil.

Once, when walking on Leszno street near Zelazna, where a gate to the Polish side was situated, I saw Velwel, a friend of Voweck’s. He was standing with a group, who worked on the Polish side. He also was a carpenter by trade. He promised me to see to it, to find also work for me there.

At that time I dearly wanted to leave Tebens, to be able to get closer to Esther. Velwel did manage to get me the job. A few days later I went out with a work crew, on the Polish side. The women washed windows and floors, while the men were painters, electricians or carpenters. We fixed up homes for the Germans.

Every day, on the way to and from work, we passed by the guards. Every person was searched. The guards consisted of German military police, Polish police and Jewish Ghetto police. All the workers lined up in rows and were searched one by one. There were many work crews, and every day the noise at the guard post sounded like a market place.

The workers bought from the black marketers items such as shoes, old clothes, etc. and took them to sell on the Polish side. The Poles waited for the work crews, because they knew that they could buy quality goods for a few miserable zlotys. Coming back to the Ghetto we brought in food. Some clever and sneaky ones were able to carry on a good trade. I was content if I could bring in some milk, so that Esther would be able to nurse her baby. Sometimes I was lucky, I brought in also some butter and a roll. It had been years since we

had seen such a thing. Usually we could only dream about that type of luxury.

I was so unsuccessful at smuggling that they very often found everything. Quite often they stripped us completely naked. If they took the milk as well, I would try to speak to their conscience and explained to them that it was for a tiny baby. But it seldom helped. They were clearly sadists.

Every day going through the guards, there would be some type of occurrence. Something extraordinary. The first question, even before we arrived at the guard post, would travel from ear to ear: Are the guards easy today? There were all kinds of police; some of them would turn their heads and thus allow some food to be brought into the Ghetto.

Many times we would see corpses of people, who had been shot; people who had attempted to sneak through or who had tried to smuggle in weapons. After such an incident, we knew that we could expect the worst from the guards.

Going out on the Polish side was a big change for me. It gave me more courage. There was a thread of hope that, by making connections with some Poles, I might be able to get out to live on the Polish side, and try to do something to save our little group. At that time the Actions had quieted down considerably and many people were trying to get out to the Polish side. Naturally this took a lot of money and connections, which we lacked completely.

We had no money. Amongst our Polish friends was Kondek, who could barely help the Jewish girl with whom he was in love and Julek, who was in the same situation. He had a Jewish girlfriend as well, Bracha Friedman. Julek and his very close friend, Jozek, had been before the war, members of an anarchist group and our good friends. They would often come to our house. From the small group of Polish anarchists that we knew, we could count only on these two, for some small help.

Julek and Jozek had a small farm, not too far from Warsaw and when the Germans were about to close up the Ghetto, they brought over for us some potatoes, carrots and some other vegetables. This helped us a lot for a while. Jozek also tried to help another of his Jewish friends and bring for them some

food into the Ghetto. Jozek was a wonderful person. He felt very strongly about our troubles and helped out with whatever he could. One time, when he stood near the wall, he was arrested. He spent a long time in prison. We found out later that he was tortured a lot and finally he died there.

Julek was the same way also, but we had not been in contact with him for a long time. Everyone was caught up in their own terrible dilemmas. During the most difficult times I was often asked: “Why are you still sitting here, in the Ghetto? With a face like yours, you should be on the Polish side”. I started to look around, thinking seriously about that possibility.

Yet in the Ghetto, the thought of living on the Polish side frightened us. We knew that it was very hard for Jews who lived there. Jews who hid out on the Polish side suffered all kinds of tragedies. But we could see that it would be even worse for those of us who remained in the Ghetto. I began to be consumed by the idea that I could smuggle the child out of the Ghetto. After that I would start to try to make arrangements with the Polish dealers, with whom I had become acquainted, to find a place for Esther and me to live on the Polish side.

I became certain that a transaction with certain Poles was possible. I finally talked to Esther about it and she became frightened. With dread in her eyes, she said; “It’s not a simple matter to get out into the Polish side, with a child. I can lose you both this way. It’s a huge risk”.

But the idea didn’t leave me. I began to ask wherever I could about the possibilities. It wasn’t so easy. Just the idea of taking such a tiny baby and smuggling it out in the middle of the day, while the Ghetto was so strongly guarded on all sides, was very frightening for us.

I talked about it with Hana and Heniek. We carefully began to make inquiries. I often went to spend the night with them. One day, when I was feeling very tired and ill, I told Hana that I dearly wanted to remain there for the day. Heniek and Hana went to work, taking their child with them. I stayed alone in the apartment.

On that day the Germans ran around like dog-catchers, capturing people. I sat as still as a mouse, listening to the pounding of my heart. They ripped off one door after another. It was a very long corridor of apartments. As they

neared our door, the caretaker told them: “There is no reason to search here. I saw them going out to work”.

A few weeks before, in the same building, there had been a terrible tragedy with Zluvah’s father. Zluvah was a close friend of Esther and Hana. She was an active and very dedicated member of the “Bund” (Jewish Socialist Party). During an Action in that building, when the Germans yelled “Alle Juden runter”, as they always did, Zluvah’s father would not, or could not come down. When they tore down the door and saw him, they shot him immediately. Then they threw him out of the third story window.

Zluvah’s father was a very intelligent, responsible and pious Jew, who sat in the house, constantly studying scriptures. All the neighbours were extremely distressed when they told me all about what had happened.

At that time either you looked for some place where to go, on the Polish side, or you tried to join a group and build a bunker, in order to hide when the Germans came to the neighbourhood. Once when I was staying with Hana, I saw the kind, poor Heniek come in, barely dragging his feet. He worked very hard all day in Shultz’s shop, on Nowolipie street. In the evenings he would join his neighbours and journey down, through closets and cellars, to build a bunker.

Everything was done in top secret. Their bunker, apparently, was one of the best. It had an exit to the Polish side and it had more comfort than other bunkers.

All winter long various, unexpected Actions had occurred. During the Actions they took the children from the hospital down to the bunker. In order to keep them calm and stop them from crying, they were given morphine. A few times Esther and her child went through this procedure.

You had to be very careful with tiny babies during an Action. When the Germans entered a house and saw a child, they threw it against a wall. Those “cultured sons of the master race”, acted like wild, angry butchers.

The times became more and more strained. We heard all kind of tragic news from the Polish side. The Polish underworld had discovered a new method of making money. They searched high and low for Jews on the Polish side.

When they recognized a Jew, they took everything from him and then gave him over to the Germans. We called them “Shmaltzowniks”, because they took away from the Jews everything of value.

The situation became even worse. A lot of people dared to go out to the Polish side. But the dread and the risk there was very great. One day, after passing the guards, on the way home from work, I met up with a very good friend and neighbour of ours, Jadzia Gorecka. She had a very Polish sounding name, and her appearance as well, was much more Polish than my own. She always was clever and full of energy and she had a very good working position. Also she spoke perfect Polish. But now, as we stood and talked, she was amazed and envious at how mobile and courageous I had become. When I told her that, with a face like hers, she had no need to sit here and wait, she answered with tears in her eyes that she was too much afraid.

For how could you trust the Poles? She told me, crying that a short while before, a tragedy had befallen a member of her family on the Polish side. Every day you heard similar sad facts coming out from there.

An escort of two soldiers brought us to and from work. One marched in front, the other behind. I had to think about tearing myself away from the group and riding over to friends, who had escaped the Ghetto a few months before. They had a very small apartment for themselves.

Pawel looked more or less Polish, but his wife, Edzia, did not. She dyed her hair blonde, but it didn't help very much. She always had to stay in the house. Their apartment consisted of a little front room and a main room. Cooking, washing, sleeping and living were all done in the main room. When a stranger knocked on the door, those who didn't officially live there but who were often in the apartment, would tiptoe into the entrée-room and hide, behind a thick curtain, which hung over the closet. The person who came in, would stand facing us, the hidden ones, but we could not see each other through the curtain. We had devised a signal, a special way of knocking on the door.

I had to begin to do something about finding Polish identification for myself. I spent the night with Pawel and Edzia. The next morning I waited for my work party and mixed in with the group in a way that the soldiers wouldn't

see me. Obviously my co-workers cooperated. They helped me a lot.

As you worked your way in or out of the rows, it was necessary to take off the white armband from your sleeve. This was carefully watched for and spied on, by the “Szmalcownik”, who hung around the work parties. Smugglers and dealers, on the other hand, helped much to mix in with the Poles. When I was more or less sure that no one was following me, I took the tramway and set out for my task again.

One time, in January 1943 unexpectedly, instead of taking us back to the Ghetto — they marched us to the building, which had been the Soviet embassy — which was full of other work-parties. We understood that something was happening in the Ghetto. Actually, for a whole week, a wild Action was taking place. Again thousands of people were taken away.

After a week, when we were taken to the Ghetto again, we saw the by now familiar spectacle, which we had seen so often before, after so many Actions.

The streets were covered with flying feathers and rags; abandoned houses with broken doors hanging down, windows and shutters clapping constantly in their frames — playing in rhythm to the sobbing call of the wind.

Can I find words that are able to express the sorrow and pain which all of us felt? Just looking at the wild, abandoned streets on which I walked, with a beating heart — through the Ghetto, to the Hospital, chilled me with undescrivable desolation. When I entered the Hospital and the guardian told me that Esther and the child had been saved, I could hardly believe him. But when I finally saw them, we both sobbed and cried endlessly.

I began to go every day to work again, normally. I lived not far away from the Hospital so that, almost every evening, “travelling” over the roofs, I managed to go and visit Esther and the child. Velwel, our dear friend, had quite a few contacts among the Polish smugglers. A few of them seemed to be reasonably honest. We began to see that we should seriously start to look for a hideout on the Polish side.

They gave me the address of a caretaker (janitor), who worked in a house which was very close to the orphanage, Dom Boduena, where we had decided



to give the child in. One time I left the work-party again and rode over to this house, where this caretaker worked. He and his wife seemed to be decent people.

We decided that I should bring in the child to his building, leave it in the cellar, near a sack of coal and leave fast. He would take care of calling the police and they would take the child to the Orphanage. Esther knew about two Jewish doctors and a nurse, with Polish identities, who worked in this Orphanage. They were in contact with people from the hospital in the Ghetto and were informed about Esther's child.

I was to pay the caretaker a thousand Zlotys for his help. I waited for a good opportunity to take the child out of the Ghetto. This was our big problem. How could I do this? All too clearly I could see the great danger and the extraordinary hardships that were involved in this attempt. These thoughts bothered me and didn't let me sleep. But I had no other choice.

Heniek, who worked at Shultz' found out from a co-worker of his about a mutual friend who worked in a shop, which had an exit on Nowolipie and Karmelicka that was not too heavily guarded. One day Esther managed to get a ride, in an ambulance, for her and the child to Hana's place. This was the first time that they had seen the child. Bracha also met Heniek often at work. When she found out that Esther and the child were at his house, she too came over there, to see them.

When Bracha found out about our plan for the child, she stressed that I should go and discuss it with Julek. His mother was also a caretaker in a building, in the same neighbourhood as the Dom Boduena. It would have been better to take the child where Julek and his mother lived, because it wouldn't have to cost any money and it would be more secure. It was a good and logical idea, but with time it became difficult.

Again I had to get out on the Polish side, to meet Julek. It took a lot of time, before we met. Meanwhile the child became sick and her illness dragged on, from one cold to another. There were complications in her throat and she had a constant fever. It lasted five or six weeks longer, than we thought it would. I found Julek again and we agreed that when I had everything ready, I

would telephone him. A relative of his, who worked in a place with a telephone, would take a message for Julek.

The times became even more strained. We could feel that the murderers were preparing to commit further atrocities. But nobody knew actually what they would do next or when. The child was getting healthier and we couldn't delay any longer. We decided that I would take the child out at the first opportunity, even if I couldn't telephone Julek ahead of time.

I rode with Esther and the child from the hospital to Hana's place. Heniek had already found out from his co-worker, on which day a "decent" soldier stood guard. As I have already mentioned, even in that ocean of cruelty and evil, you could still, sometimes, find a German that you could speak to.

The child was seven months old at the time. We had to give the girl a Polish name. Esther decided that she should be named after her father, Voweck. Translated in Polish, she became now Wieslawa, or Wiesia.

Hana's six-year-old son was so glad to have a small baby in the house. The neighbour's children as well couldn't tear themselves away from the baby. She was so pretty, blonde with blue eyes. More than once Hana painfully said to me: "If he wasn't circumcised, perhaps there would be some hope for this child too."

## Chapter 5

**T**hat Sunday we rose very early in the morning after a hard, sleepless night and began to prepare. Our hands shook, our hearts were tattered and we weren't capable of saying one word to each other. The child looked very pretty and well dressed. No one would have thought that this was a child from the Ghetto. The date was April the 4th, 1943. It was a frosty, cold morning.

Esther breastfed the baby, dressed her warmly and we took her to the designated spot. Esther sat at the gate, huddled in cold and despair, cuddling the tiny one to her, for the last time. It hurt me so deeply to watch her.

The Jewish policeman walked over to the German, whispered to him, and came back to us. "Take the child and go. Don't waste any time". I kissed Esther, took the child and went through the gate, over to the Polish side. I walked for a while without seeing anyone. Was it possible? Such quiet and calm?

The street was deserted, as if everyone was still sleeping. It appeared that the smugglers, dealers and "szmalcowniks" were sweetly sleeping that Sunday morning. It was a true miracle to have such a cold, frosty morning, to accomplish this task. There wasn't much business to be done, on such a Sunday morning.

I walked a little further and breathed easier, calming myself and taking courage. I got on a tramway. The first one I saw rolling this morning. There were only a few people inside. An old religious woman, a drunk. Nobody paid attention to me and the child. She slept soundly.

After riding for a while I had to change soon tramways. I had studied the route beforehand, so that I shouldn't lose any time, wandering about with the child. I knew very well how difficult it would be to complete the two tasks awaiting me. First I had to succeed in taking the child out from the Ghetto. If this went well, the second task would be even more difficult: How would I set down the child? Would there be a miracle so that no one would see me doing it?

I remember that before the war, we would often read in the papers, about young women deserting their children. It happened frequently that single Polish women, who couldn't or wouldn't raise their babies, would leave them in some apartment house. This was a severe criminal offense.

I still had a long way to go, before I arrived at the designated house, where Julek's mother was the caretaker. Suddenly a policeman came up to me and asked: "You're walking around so early, and with a child as well?" I answered with a smile: "Yes, with a child". And I continued walking.

I began to search for the note, I had prepared, to leave with the child. I couldn't find it. The policeman had confused me and while that occurred, I must have lost the note. I was already quite close to the house.

Wiesia was beginning to move. As I walked through the gate of the house, on one side I could hear someone coming down from the top of the stairs. From the other side, someone else was approaching and just now the child was beginning to cry. It was as if she had timed it perfectly. The whole time she slept, it was like a treasure for me. Now there was not a moment more to lose. I laid the child down, on the stairs, and quickly went out.

I didn't dare to run, so I walked very fast and could hear, from the distance, the child crying. Then I heard voices yelling: "That girl left the baby!". I was certain that they were yelling after me. But as I was walking so quickly, already on the main street, far away from that house, I realized that what I had heard must have been an illusion. I was immensely happy that we had both been saved from mortal danger.

I began to calm myself, because again I had to take a tramway and display a "happy" face, as if nothing at all had happened. I had to play the role of a carefree Polish "shikse". How could I do this, when inside of me everything was boiling? So I wandered about the streets a little more and took the tramway to the Pawels.

When I came in the door, it seemed as if they could see it on me right away. The first question was: "You have done it, already?" I told them that I had problems, because I had lost the note and without the note, the child could be lost. It could be given away for adoption. I stood in a corner and finally it hit

me. I began to cry and cried as if for all the unendurable weeks. I would not stop crying. Everyone who was in the apartment cried as well. In this way we cried out our torments and our pain.

Suddenly, completely unexpected, Kondek came in. I had a flash of an idea that I could write another note, and Kondek could ride over there and leave the note in the gate of the house, where I left the child. I wrote down the name: Wieslawa Rosinska, the date of birth and the few words which the people from the Hospital advised Esther to write: "When I will find a job, I will come back for the baby". This was supposed to mean that the child should not be given away for adoption.

Julek was not at home that morning. When he came home, the whole house was buzzing: "What could this mean? Someone left a child here". There was a tenant there, a woman who didn't have any children of her own. She rushed to the child and began to take care of her and she said that she would take in the child. But after Kondek left the note, she changed her mind, saying: "Maybe it is a Jewish baby". But when they called the police to come over and take the baby, she went with them, to take the child to the nearest orphanage, the Dom Boduena.

The other side of Leszno street, where Hana and Heniek lived, was Polish. We had arranged with Esther that, if everything went according to plan, Julek would come that same evening, and walk down Leszno street, opposite Hana's apartment building. And so it was. We could recognize Julek, even from a distance, because he had a limp.

The next day I returned to work. A few days passed through normally, without any disturbances. About a week later, they led our work party to the Soviet embassy building again, instead of taking us back to the Ghetto. This meant that something was about to take place. A few quiet days passed again. One day, after work, I noticed that a group of people were taking a truck, being driven by a German soldier, and were preparing to head for the big Ghetto. It was April the 18th. In the last moment, when the truck was already moving, I jumped in and rode along.

I stopped at Hana's. The next day, as I wandered through the wild,

abandoned streets, where there still was some possibility to meet an old friend or get to know some new people — I met a man who knew our Esther very well. He asked me where he could meet her. He came from a fine, very intelligent family. All members of the leftist Poalei Zion Party (a Jewish workers Party, much to the left), this family was very popular in the workers' milieu.

There were three tramway conductors in their family. They were probably the only Jewish tramway conductors, in all Warsaw. He told me that he would definitely go over and see Esther, and he wanted also to meet me again as well. He said that the situation was becoming extremely serious and something had to be done. As we said farewell, he called after me, saying that we would surely see each other again and that I should tell Esther that he would come to see her in the next day or two.

In my later thoughts about our calamity, in my imagination, I saw Esther meeting with that good activist friend of hers and both of them fighting together in the Ghetto battles.

I spent a whole afternoon with Esther in the hospital. She told me happily that they had finally found her a place in the hospital bunker. They had to have a reserved place for a hiding spot, in case the worst occurred.

## Chapter 6

**T**hat same night all hell broke loose. I slept in our work party's house. In the middle of the night, around two o'clock, very loud noises woke us up. This appeared to be the real thing. Whole swarms of Germans entered the Ghetto and stood guard everywhere. With the beginning of daylight we could see how bitter and terrible the situation was.

There was no way to go back to work. It was impossible to go see Esther either. Soon the streets became dark with people being herded to the Umschlagplatz. When we finally saw the German soldier who would usually take us to work, we all ran up to him with questions: "What's going to happen"? But he himself was confused and as pale as a white wall. He shivered and couldn't say anything to assure us.

We were spread out among the thousands and thousands and we could constantly hear the wild, doglike voices: "Donnerweter, das ist zum Schmalz" (this is going to garbage). I was already too familiar with these words. I had lived through quite a few selections and actions, but this time it appeared that there was no way to hide and avoid the Umschlagplatz. This time it was as if the earth and the heavens had piled despair onto our hopelessness.

The mass dragged itself slowly, not as organized as usual. Only a few people remained together from our work party. All around us there were shots and from the houses and bunkers there were bursts of fire and thick smoke.

Thus we dragged ourselves to the Umschlagplatz, guarded by drunken Lithuanians, Ukrainians, dogs and Germans. They chased us into one of the buildings, where we were pressed together like ants. We couldn't breathe. There was no food or water, and many people were fainting. Whoever thought of getting help, was wasting his time. You couldn't talk to the guards.

In every corner could be heard rumors that everyone that was here was going straight "zum Schmalz". This was their saying. Our group stayed close together. We began to look around for a piece of iron or tin, to make a "knife", so that we could do something, when we would be already in the wagons.

We had all made a vow to find a way to jump out of the train, but we all come with empty hands. There was no possibility of lying down for a while. There was no room. We sat, pressed up against each other, the whole night long, trying to think of a way to escape from there, or from the train.

What would happen to us if they packed us into sealed wagons? In the morning we were greeted by a strong sunny, beautiful day, almost as if to spite us. It was so bright outside, a wonderful April spring day. For the first time I felt the complete hopelessness of our situation. Was it possible? After so many hardships and struggles would I so soon be taken to my death? We could look out a little, through a window, and we saw hordes of people streaming by. It looked like they ran out of wagons, so they filled every building. Every corner was full of people.

We could also see them herding people with packs and other things. These people were to be sent to the “work camps”. All the rest of us — joked the German guards — were for “Schmalz”.

Suddenly we saw a group of workers from Tebens’ shop on Leszno street. I said to myself that, since they were from Leszno street, it was possible that Hana and Heniek were among them. They were all carrying packages, which meant that they were being taken to work camps. They led them up to separate stairs so they wouldn’t be mixed up with us.

We could see that those of us on this side had already been sentenced. A young boy in our group, who knew those buildings well, came up with the notion that there was a way to get up to the top floor and, in that way, mingle in with the people from Tebens’. First we had to go down to the cellar; there we would find stairs that led up.

He didn’t have to say much more to me; I was first to run. When we were already going up the stairs from the cellar, in the darkness, suddenly a voice shouted in Ukrainian: “Kuda idiosz?” (where are you going?) I answered him, in my long forgotten, Ukrainian language: “I want to be together with my sister and she must be here” and I cried involuntarily. He gave me a slap with the butt of his rifle and said: “Idi k’chortu” (go to the devil). My friends scrambled up with me.



We were all ecstatic and simply couldn't believe that in that spot, where the Germans sent the scum, to carry out their criminal work for them — there still could be found a person “who had a heart”, to help other human beings.

After a few hours in the evening they began to pack us into the wagons. There were about thirty or forty of us in one car. All of us had decided to jump out. A woman that I worked with said to me: “I have no choice, I have to jump. My two children are on the Polish side and they are waiting for me”.

Long ago I had decided, almost as if I had made a pact with myself that if they ever caught me and shipped me out — I would have to try to jump from the train. It was already dark when the train left the Umschlagplatz. A few younger people tried to determine in which direction we were travelling — Poniatow or Treblinka. If we were headed for Poniatow, that was alright. That meant that they were taking us to a work camp.

Soon they brought in some food: cold water and bread. Everyone was famished after spending two days without even a drop of water in our mouths. Soon everyone felt a little better. We again started to talk about whether or not to jump out. All at once someone said: “Let's check, maybe the door is not locked”. He tried to open it and shouted joyfully: “Believe it or not, the door is not sealed yet”.

I was enveloped by a feeling that I had been reborn. This meant that there was still some hope. When the train was moving quite slowly through a station, a Polish conductor walked by. He shone his flashlight in and shouted: “Chłopi Uchoditah” that meant: “Boys, you had better run”. For me it was as if his voice came from heaven. I will never forget those few words. This meant that there was still a way to escape. They were words of Hope.

Time dragged on and I became more and more restless and nervous. My head throbbed: “What more is there left?” The discussion began again: Was there any sense in going over to the Polish side and facing a certain death, when you had no one there to ask for help. Here maybe we could work for a while in the camp and try to survive until the war would be over. The Germans will soon fall down to their end anyway. As we continued talking like this, almost everyone gave up the idea of jumping out.

It wasn't such a simple matter either. Every wagon had an escort in the rear who would shoot immediately. It was a very great risk. But we had to decide. A few people, including myself, began protesting that we had to try. "So", said one man to me: "Go ahead and try, I will open the door for you". I told him, in a not uncertain way: "Open the door", and I jumped. I became very dizzy and felt much pain all over my body. Suddenly I distinctly heard a loud cry from the woman who had two children waiting for her on the Polish side: "Kobiety ratujcie, zlamalam reke" (women rescue me, I have broken my hand). Soon after that I heard a couple of shots, and then it was quiet.

## Chapter 7

I lost consciousness. Velwel had jumped after the woman. He looked around for me and finally found me lying there, in a very bad position. Velwel shook me up, then took me by the hand and we quietly made our way into the nearest forest. Velwel told me later that I began to talk, asking what had happened, what was it that was happening to me right now and I didn't stop chattering.

It was as if I were completely deranged. Velwel also was badly bruised and blood was running constantly from his hand. He couldn't calm me down. We had to be very quiet, because we were in grave danger. All the Poles and the Germans knew quite well that Jews tried to jump out from the trains. Therefore the whole line was well guarded. The Germans had given harsh orders that any Pole found harboring a Jew who had jumped from the trains would be shot immediately.

Suddenly we could hear from far away footsteps of a soldier with a dog. I was still talking away, so Velwel warned me severely. He was very upset, screaming in a hushed voice, he was begging me: "We are completely lost here. The dog will smell us. You have to stop babbling". All of a sudden the awful fright brought me back to consciousness.

We could hear the soldier walk into a house, with his dog. The window was open and we could see that he washed, put his things away and turned off the light. About a half hour later, we heard two more men walking with a military step. We listened, our hearts skipping a beat, as we followed their progress. We lightened up, as we heard them walk away in the distance.

Our ears became very sensitized as we sat there in silence, in the forest the whole night. Velwel said that the pain in his hand was becoming worse. I too was bruised very badly. When the dawn finally arrived, we could see through the bushes — on the edge of the forest — soldiers washing themselves and joking and clowning around. They were very close to us.

"Do you know where we ended up?" asked Velwel. "This is an army barracks, no more, no less". From the buildings all around us, we could hear the

German language. Officers probably stayed here. They had taken for themselves the most beautiful neighbourhood, the Pine Forests between Srodborow and Otwock.

We began to make our way out of the bushes to head further away from there, as far as we could. After we had walked for about ten minutes, a friend of ours came out from the bushes. He was a co-worker of ours who had jumped out, together with us. You wouldn't have identified him as a Jew, and he wasn't marked very much from jumping out of the train. He was tall and handsome. We were all very happy to see each other.

My face had been badly cut from the rocks on which I fell. My forehead especially was completely covered in blood and felt as if it were black. My left elbow also was hurt badly. I was afraid that it was broken. Velwel's face was also badly bruised, and one of his hands was still dripping blood. We all looked at each other in great relief. We began to walk further in the forest.

Velwel insisted that we should try to find a doctor. The best thing to do would be to go to the nearest village and beg a farmer to bring us to Warsaw. In Warsaw, he said, he had many Polish friends, who would hide us. I didn't have an urge to go into the village. With our battered faces, I felt that they would recognize us immediately.

But Velwel became impatient and we went into the village of Swider. Soon a farmer walked over to us and looked us up and down with penetrating, accusing eyes. He said: "I am the signalman for this village, and I don't have the right to let strangers wander through, just like that. I have to bring every stranger to the Soltys (the village Mayor). That's the law."

Our young friend said to him: "Oh, you can take me wherever you want. I can even work for the Germans". The two of them walked on ahead, with Velwel and myself behind them. A Pole came up to us, from behind, and whispered: "Jesus Christ, he's leading you to your deaths". Velwel became enraged and grabbed me by the hand. "Didn't you hear what he said? We have to get away now and fast". We walked over to the other side, so that the signalman couldn't see us any more. Then we started running and ran, God only knows where until we found a large field, thickly overgrown with bushes.

We couldn't dream of a better hiding place. It was a huge field that stretched far into the distance, with so many broad bushes. We breathed easier and sat there for a couple of hours. Then we could hear, from distance, farmers talking to each other: "These Jews must be here". They searched up and down, running around, and finally they left. God Almighty, how was that possible? It could only have been that our parents, in Heaven prayed for us and protected, and covered up their eyes. Soon a bunch of young punks also came to search. They looked high and low, cursed and insulted us and then they too left.

It seemed as if those bushes were enchanted. I felt very tired and eager to spend the rest of the day right here in the forest. But Velwel had a strong fever and he was very much afraid that his hand was becoming infected. He became more and more nervous about it and anxious to see a doctor.

We could see that we were very close to the main road, because beer trucks were rolling by. Velwel said: "Believe me, it would be a good idea to jump into one of those trucks. Truck drivers are very decent people, they wouldn't say a thing, and they could take us to Warsaw". I felt that we should not do it. But I wouldn't take the responsibility to resist, because of his hand. So I said: "OK, let's try it".

As soon as I raised my head out of the bushes, a young kid screamed, very near us: "Ty Zydowa" (you Jewess). So I said to him: "You yourself, are a Jew"! "Let's go and see about that", he said. "There are some cars with Germans on the road nearby, so let's go over and see, if you are a Jewess, or not".

I whispered to Velwel: "You sit here. You weren't seen". Then I began to run, with all my strength, until I was certain that they weren't following me any more. With my last ounce of strength, I scrambled into another deep thicket of bushes. After I sat there for a while, I noticed that Polish policemen were going by, many on bicycles. I could hear, very clearly, a guard pacing back and forth. I thought: "Again I have ended up in a dangerous place". I knew those places a little and remembered that there was a police station somewhere nearby. I listened carefully and was pretty certain that this was it.

I stayed and sat there very quietly, until it became completely dark. Then I

began slowly to get away from that place, and kept on going, as far as possible. Then I hid again in more thick bushes. It was a very good spot. Here I could breathe easier for a while. I was more than happy to get finally rid of these neighbours. All around me I could here voices of people and children. It was supper time by now. Here the Poles lived like regular people. How good that was, to sit together, parents and children, at a supper table, like normal people. Could any one of us dream of such happiness?

After the meal the children went outside and began to play. Their play would certainly not have bothered me, had they not begun to throw the ball over my head. Their whole game soon happened right around me. It was just a miracle that there weren't any lamps around. I was longing for the moment when the children would go back to their homes and leave me in peace, alone in the darkness of the forest.

When I finally saw the lights go out in the houses, I lay down on the ground and immediately fell into a deep sleep. It was no wonder that after a few sleepless nights, I couldn't feel the cold and dampness of the earth. The night passed so quickly, in a very deep, sweet sleep. I didn't want to go to find some water to wet my lips, having become very frightened of people. My mouth was burning with thirst. But I picked myself up and walked further.

Before the war I had known that area pretty well, but now I couldn't tell exactly where I found myself. The main road was too dangerous. The villages also were out of the question. I dragged myself over to the fields. I scooped up some year-old, forgotten or lost potatoes, to try to quiet my hunger. But it was impossible to eat those bitter, rotten potatoes.

In the distance I could see a farmer's wagon. A woman drove the wagon by herself. I asked if she could take me with her. She said: "OK, but I am not going very far. You probably want to go to Warsaw, but I have to turn off soon".

As I sat down in the wagon, she looked at me and smiled: "Your face is so badly smashed up. What happened to you"? I said: "Oh, it was just stupid, I fell down a flight of stairs". She shook her head and said: "This is the road to Warsaw". She showed me where to go, then headed off in the other direction.

I started to walk on. Here it was Saska Kempa, a suburb of Warsaw. From here I knew, I could take a tramway to the city. I walked for about ten or fifteen minutes. It was very early in the morning yet, and there was no traffic at all. Suddenly I saw a man riding a bicycle, very slowly and as if he were looking at me. Then he turned around, looked at me carefully again and rode off quickly. “Well”, I thought, “that was the first Warsaw “szmalcownik”. He had recognized me and had probably gone back so fast to fetch the police. The road was completely empty. It was outside the city, in an unsettled area, where there was nowhere to hide. I had no choice but to keep on going.

A few minutes later, someone came up from behind and grabbed me by the shoulders. It was Velwel. I wouldn't have recognized him; he wasn't wearing his own clothes. He wore old, torn, filthy rags. I couldn't believe that it was him. How had he gotten here? After I had walked so many miles to get away? He told me now what had happened to him.

Soon after I had run out of the bushes, the day before, some Poles came by, a whole family of them, and found him. They told him right away to hand over his money, or they would bring him to the Germans. He gave them everything he had: his hat and the good jacket that he wore. He had no money, because the morning they took us in, we had expected to go to work. They took everything he had and left.

After them, another Polish family came up, with a man carrying an axe. It sounds like a horror story, but unfortunately every word is true. Velwel would not lie. They yelled at him: “Give us everything you have”. He took off his shoes and socks, his pants, “and you wouldn't believe it”, he said, “but I kissed their hands, so that they would leave me alone, and let me live, and I begged them to, at least, give me some rags to cover myself. That's all they gave me.”

Because they had given him these rags, they bragged that he had come across some “very understanding people”. They told him that the young man that the signalman had taken to the town official, the day before, had been shot. How many times had I heard that young man begging the Polish dealers, near our working places, to give him a contact to the Partisans: “Give me a chance to go out into the forest. I want to do something. I can't just sit here, doing nothing”. But the Poles were deaf to his pleas. The average Poles were like that

and even the Intelligentsia were just about the same.

So many times we had heard about atrocities committed against Jews by the partisans from the AK (Armia Krajowa, the Polish resistance organization). They said openly that they didn't want any Jews joining them. We knew also that they had shot many Jews in the forests. The few guns that had been smuggled into the Ghetto, with great effort and mortal danger, had been bought for a steep price, from the Polish underworld.

Velwel went on to say that after he got the rags, he put them on and slept on the bare ground in the forest. In the morning, by various means, he managed to get to Saska Kempa. On the way, he went into a small cafeteria, to beg for water to drink. Always the great optimist. But this time he actually met a decent Pole. He listened patiently to what Velwel had to tell about how he lived through the last few days. He gave him food and drink and told him to rest for a while.

The Pole took his bicycle and rode to the city, shopping. Velwel stayed in the cafeteria with the Polish family. The Pole returned quickly on his bicycle and happily said to Velwel: "Znalazlem twoja Zydoweczke" (I found your little Jewess). This was the same man who I was so sure was a szmalcownik, when he looked at me so intensely as he rode his bicycle back and forth, on the road.

We took separate tramways and rode into the city. I had to get back to the building of the ancient Soviet embassy, to pick up the things I had left there and some addresses as well. The next day I left the place and walked over to Kondek's place. His room was full of all kind of things, and this was where he also hid his Jewish girlfriend.

I stayed there with them for a few days, and then I rode over to the Pawels. I stayed with Edzia and Pawel for over a week. Then I went to Bracha and Julek. Julek had rented an attic apartment, on Wronia street, when his girlfriend, Bracha Fridman, had also fled from a transport taking them to the Umschlagplatz.

Julek went to meet Velwel, a few times. Only a short time later, the Germans dispensed with all the work parties and shot all the people who had worked for them.



## Chapter 8

**I** was supposed to start a new life, on the Polish side. But how could I? We were surrounded by danger and dread, and inside of me it felt like an open wound.

The nights were horrible. How could I fall asleep when every cell in my mind was filled with terrible thoughts. What happened to Esther? Had she managed to run over to the bunker? If she made it, what happened then?

How were Hanale, Heniek and their child? Did they reach their bunker, which was supposed to be extra safe, with an opening to the Polish side?

Bracha lamented her family. Her two younger sisters had been taken away some time before. But her parents were still in the Ghetto.

So we huddled together with our wounded hearts and minds. We sat there and wiped our eyes, oppressed by the noise of the constant cannonade in the Ghetto.

At night, for many weeks, the sky over Warsaw was red and the choking smoke from the burning Ghetto was everywhere. We knew that what was happening now in Ghetto was not a simple “Action” any more.

The Germans going into the Ghetto were being pushed out by organized Jewish forces. For the first time we could hear the Poles discussing among themselves, in amazement, that German tanks had been burnt in the Ghetto, that many Germans had been killed. The Ghetto was burning all around. Day and night. For weeks and weeks.

Hundreds of transports drove by continuously, carrying people. Those who were left behind died in a horrible way. They died in the bunkers, choking on smoke or burned alive, or they were shot on the spot. Only small groups of fighters managed to get out onto the Polish side, through the sewers. For weeks we could still hear gunfire and explosions, as houses were blown up with dynamite. Only some skeletons of houses remained.

Even much later I always avoided taking the tramway which passed too close to the Ghetto. It hurt too much to look at and I was also much afraid that the passengers would recognize, by my involuntary reactions, who I was.

A new problem came up. I had to do everything possible to obtain a “Kennkarte” (an Identification Card). Every Polish citizen had to have a Kennkarte. I had to go to the German office, with my false identification, to get a Kennkarte. It was impossible to get anyone else to do this for me; it would have cost too much money. I walked around, very troubled, for a few weeks, before I went to this office. I wasn’t sure that I could behave as I should. I was too worn out, not strong enough even to think about it. But then the date came up and I had to go. Everything went very well.

After that I had to begin looking for a job. Julek’s apartment consisted of an attic room, and another small room, on the side. When somebody knocked on the door, Bracha and I went into the side room. The janitor had been made to believe that a single man was living there alone without a family.

A little later Lola joined us. Lola looked typically Jewish and Bracha even more so. As the neighbours thought that there was only one man living there, we couldn’t talk loudly. We talked very quietly, in whispers. This was how we told each other various stories, how we discussed and even how we argued with each other. Since there were people living opposite us, we couldn’t go up to the window, even when we had a strong urge to see some daylight or sunshine.

Julek didn’t have any trade. During the time that we were there, he found a job — gluing envelopes. The pay for that job was very small and Julek had to carry very heavy packages. The whole burden fell on his shoulders. This made me feel very uncomfortable and uneasy. I am not by nature a “hero”. Every extraordinary task which I took upon myself to perform, was accomplished with a great deal of effort and palpitations of my heart. But when I was faced with an indisputable fact, in a situation, where there was no choice, I could convince myself to be stronger, in order to accomplish what was necessary.

I knew that I had to try hard to change myself and become more of an actress. As a child, I used to play a lot with Polish children and I had gone to the same school with them. Later in life, I ended up working together with Poles.

But now it was still another thing completely, to live with them all the time, to live completely their way of life, to go to church, when absolutely necessary. This wasn't easy.

This became a big problem for me. There was always an imminent danger that, sooner or later, a suspicious eye would fall on me. When I was in the Ghetto, the question often arose: how would we be able to make it work, to carry on for a long time such an act. We closed our eyes and were afraid to think about it. In the first place even my Polish speech wasn't excellent. I had to control my accent, with great concentration.

Above all, how could I pass for the typical Polish village girl and display proper behaviour when I would have to work in a household of Polish intelligentsia. This was about the most important thing, on the Polish side — to behave properly.

Esther and Voweck's few Polish friends, before the war, were mostly active syndicalists. But despite all their nice socialist ideals, before the war, they didn't show much will or strength to help friends in their sorrow. One person that we could count on was Julek. Kondok too was an exception. He was the son of an old syndicalist friend. The main thing was to count on yourself. It was too great a risk for my friends and me to go to the orphanage and ask about Wiesia. Pawel had a friend, an older Polish woman, called Vica. She was a lovely woman, whose deceased husband had been a Jew. She was very friendly to Jews. Vica became interested in Wiesia and from time to time, she would visit her. In this way I was able to learn, from a reliable person that everything was fine with the child.

Among the Polish people, almost every Sunday, another Saints' day is celebrated. This time it was Swietego Stanislawo Day. In which Polish home could there not be found a Stasia or a Stasiok? Edzia's name was also Stasia now. So they made a party, like everywhere else, in order not to stand out from other people. They invited guests and there was drinking and singing. The windows were opened, so that all the neighbours would know. This was how we had to do things.

Julek and I attended the party as well. Understandably, those with "noses",

such as Bracha and Lola, had to remain in the house ... Felka, Pawel's sister, was there also. She had always been worried and sorrowful. She had a hard time finding a place to work. Before the war she had lived with her parents, and had just finished high school. But now, on the Polish side, the only occupation for a young girl like her was to be a servant. Felka had dyed her hair blond and still, after all her efforts, it was very difficult for her to find a place to work.

Finally, through friends, Felka was able to find an apartment, together with a woman who paid for the place. This woman couldn't show herself in the light of the day; she was very beautiful, but too Jewish-looking. The two women lived well together, and both were very pleased that, after all their efforts, they finally were able to find this place.

At the party, Felka was in a very good mood. She sang and began to drink and ended up becoming drunk. We couldn't let her go home, because of her hysterical crying and screaming. The party ended with a tragedy. Because it was already late at night, they didn't let her go home in that state.

The woman she was sharing the apartment with was waiting for her homecoming. When she saw that Felka wasn't coming home, she understood that Felka had probably been taken away, and if so, she probably concluded, they would soon come for her as well. She opened up the gas outlets and poisoned herself.

The next morning, when Felka came home, another tragedy started. She had to tell the superintendent about what had happened. Everything became topsy turvy and the janitor understood quickly that two Jewesses had been living here. Finally Felka locked the door and returned to her brother's place. Now she had to start working hard for new identification, a process which involved a lot of hardship. Afterwards, she had to start looking for a place to work again.

## Chapter 9

**F**rom all sides we would hear that they had discovered Jews here and there. It had a paralyzing effect on us. But we had to be on guard and go on with our lives. I kept on receiving compliments that my appearance was very Polish looking. This made me feel more sure of myself and that was very helpful. Many rich and educated women, who could speak perfect Polish, would have wished to be in my place — to be able to look like a simple “shikse”, like me, and therefore be able to get a job as a servant girl, on the Polish side.

So I made a great effort and adapted to the role of a servant. My first job was with an old woman, who had very recently returned from a mental hospital. She had supposedly been cured, but in truth she was still very ill. She had a lot of emotional troubles. I instantly recognized that she must be from the Polish upper class, with their typical snobbish mannerisms.

The apartment was very small, consisting of a room and a kitchen. There wasn't too much to clean here. There was no food to prepare either, because we got the meals from the nuns, at a nearby cloister. But still I was very tired every day. Her peculiar games, day and night, would often frighten me.

She couldn't sleep the whole night through. She would wander around, turning on the light on one side of the room and turning it off, on the other side. I was lucky that the kitchen door had a lock, so that I could safely lock it.

Her husband, an elderly man, handsome and very elegant, was busy all week in Warsaw and came home on the weekends only. He was very happy with my work. He told me so quite openly after he carefully observed my attitude towards her.

A neighbour of ours told me that no servant girls had managed to last more than two or three days with her. I could now easily understand why her husband was so happy with me. He could see that he was leaving her in good hands for a whole week.

This place was situated in Laski, a very small town, outside of Warsaw. There was a large Franciscan cloister in town. Attached to the cloister was the famous Institute for the Blind. Here they made all kinds of beautiful handicrafts, particularly wicker goods, which were sent all over Poland.

Every time I went there to pick up a meal, I thought that here would be a very fine place to hide out from the Germans. The nuns treated me very well and seemed to like me, probably because of the influence of my boss. I had a special attachment to Sister Bonaventura. She was a very gentle and fine woman. The blind people also had come to recognize me and the children as well.

The biggest problem for me was going to church on Sundays. Earlier I had learned the most important rituals from the catechism, but unfortunately, my head was so occupied with all kinds of troubles, so I couldn't take in too much of it. I knew that a Pole watching me closely wouldn't believe that I was a Polish woman. I knew that if they caught me, they wouldn't have to dig too deep. They would recognize me right away.

Still, I did know how to do the most elementary things, like how to cross myself, when to beat my heart, when to fall on my knees, when to get up and when to sing. But the singing was not easy. If anyone had listened carefully, I would have been in big trouble. Most of the time I stood in a place from where I could watch the others and not be observed myself.

The problem was that in the atmosphere that prevailed there, I had to go to church. God knows how many times I was observed by suspicious eyes. This worried me a great deal, but still this place seemed like the best for me. For the moment I couldn't dream of something better than here.

When I had a chance I tried to chat with my neighbour, a woman from the next house, to find out what people here thought about me. From her behaviour towards me, I felt that she was my friend and wished me well.

One beautiful, sunny morning, I began to clean out the garden. Suddenly, two German soldiers came up and asked me about a certain person. I answered that I didn't know anyone by that name here. They said goodbye and left. Then my mistress came out and asked me what they had wanted. I very calmly

answered her. She became extremely nervous, took her coat and ran out of the house quickly, and headed straight to the forest. I wanted to run after her, but she screamed that I should not follow her. I stayed in the house and was very upset after observing the condition she was in. I was very much worried that she would do something terrible.

I ran over to my neighbour and told her what had happened. She said to me that, every time my mistress saw a German soldier, she became completely wild, because a short time earlier she had lived through a terrible tragedy. Her only son was killed by the Germans. She didn't explain further why it had happened.

After a couple of hours, when my mistress finally came back, I was overjoyed. The few words that my neighbour had spoken explained a lot of things to me about her behaviour. I was so overcome by such sympathy for her that I was ready to forget all the troubles she had caused me. I waited to embrace her.

While I was waiting, nervously looking out for her return, I felt that I needed to eat something to calm myself. The only thing I could find in the house was an onion. As I finished roasting my onion on the fire, the back door opened, with a bang, and in walked the mistress. When she smelled the onion, she jumped away, with a big gesture, like an actress on stage, and with a squalling voice she yelled: "Zydziatko cebule sobie smazy" (the little Jewess is frying her onions, in my house). I should mention here that Poles like to joke that Jews eat a lot of onions.

Quickly I caught my breath and pretended that I hadn't heard her, that I didn't understand. But those had not been mere words that she had spoken. This was a very serious thing that I had to consider. After those few words that she shouted in my face, I didn't have a peaceful moment any more. I stopped sleeping normally and reconsidered all the many conversations I had heard around me.

Many were stupid jokes about Jews I had heard many times among the Poles. They were tasteless and full of slander. But I had had to swallow them. But those few words that she had directed to me were different. I began to feel

that I must leave her place. Finally, I decided that I would go “home”, to Warsaw, on my next Sunday off. I had to discuss the situation with my friends and figure out with them what to do.

When I went to the Pawels and also talked about it with Bracha and Julek — they yelled at me and told me over and over that I should stay on in that place, as long as it was alright to stay there. So I stayed there and it dragged on for another couple of months.

One day my mistress and her husband told me that they would soon be moving away from there, to his parents’ estate, very far away. They asked me if I would like some kind of souvenir from them. I answered if they could arrange for me to find some work in the convent, I would be very glad. He promised me to do this for me.

He received a word from the Mother Superior that she would give me a job, sewing in the Cloister. What could have been better than that? When I was in the Ghetto I had never even dreamed about a place like that. Maybe somebody with a lot of money, or perhaps someone with exceptional connections, could have arranged such a job. I was very happy and became more relaxed. But, alas, my joy didn’t last for too long.

My Polish name was Franka. There was a girl, more or less my own age, who worked in the same shop, in the Cloister. She was called Franka as well. On the very first day of work I could feel some hostility from her towards me. I couldn’t understand why. Another woman, next to me, told me that she was simply jealous and that was all. Franka had been in the cloister since she was very young, and she felt that she deserved everything.

The same day the nun came in and told me that she had a fine room for me that I would share with the other Franka. I was not too enthusiastic about that. In the evening, when I went to pack my things, my neighbour called me in. I told her about the room the nuns had given me. She said: “Yes, that would be very good, but Franka isn’t very happy about that. She said something really bad about you”.

I said goodnight and started to leave. She called me back and started the talk again, saying that Franka didn’t like me at all and that she had said nasty



things about me. She didn't say exactly what she had said, but she repeated constantly that Franka had been negative about me. It was clear enough for me that this was much more than idle gossip. I told her that I didn't know why Franka talked that way about me, and said goodnight and left. I knew that the next day I would not be there any more.

I went into the house, packed my things once again. I went early to bed, but did not sleep too much that night. The next day, very early in the morning, when it was still dark outside, I left the house. Very quietly I went out on the street, to take the train for Warsaw. At the end of town, in the darkness, a young boy ran after me and yelled: "You Jew". But I kept on walking to the train. When I returned to Warsaw, my friends would not believe what a big mistake I had made. Leaving like that, without saying anything to anyone, was like confirming that I was a Jew. In that way I had ruined my identification.

It was impossible to work out new papers right now. I stayed with Bracha and Julek for a while. I didn't have courage to look for a new job with my compromised identification. A friend of Julek's, who used to visit us, was active in the PPR (Polska Partja Robotnicza — precursor of the Communist Party). Through him Julek was able to make contact with the Jewish Committee, from whom we received a little money every month.

A couple of times I met with a young man from Hashomer Hatzair (a Zionist Youth Organization). Later on we heard that this fine young man had been killed. He had been shot on Aleje Szucha — the place where the Germans dealt with all the captured Jews in Warsaw. A couple of times I met also with the lovely Zosia, a daughter of the well known personality, Berman. We mostly met in a church. She was petite and blonde. It was a pleasure to watch her carry herself. She played her role so well. She came into the church, walking firmly, crossed herself and started to pray. I was convinced that I was a specialist in recognizing our own people, on the Polish side. But I would never had "suspected" Zosia, even for a moment.

We had agreed between us not to use the word "Jewish". Instead of that we said "English". For instance, if one of us came home and said happily: "You know I saw an Englishwoman, on the tramway. She looked so well, so unrecognizable, it was a joy to look at her". Or if one of us said sorrowfully:

“You know, I saw an Englishman run by. He looked so poorly. He will need miracles ... God be with him”.

A couple of months later Julek brought in the underground paper. We read that in the little town of Laski, where I had been in the cloister, ten Jews had been shot by the Germans. It was also distinctly mentioned that a few of the Jews were hidden in the cloister. Also it was noted that this town had a whole nest of “szmalcowniks”, who were always searching for Jews and giving them over to the Germans.

Franka must have belonged to that group. The woman with whom I worked a few days had said that Franka had some very bad friends and that the nuns disliked them intensely. I was so thankful to my Polish neighbour that I had left Laski in time. A few days later might have been too late.

I got a new job through Pawel’s friend. Mr. Kwiatowicz was a famous architect. who had a large family. They were all very fine people, especially Madame Kwiatowicz, who was an exceptionally nice lady. She was a very good, smart woman. They had two daughters. Both of them were nicely brought up and were well behaved.

After a short while, I began to understand that they needed me as much, as I needed them. This family was very much involved in underground activities. Many meetings took place there, very often, though all they told me was that they were having “parties”. One time they were supposedly celebrating one daughter’s birthday, the next time it was the father’s birthday, and so on. It was a very dangerous place. But I didn’t have a choice; there was no way to find something else. And there was a definite advantage for me here, because I felt very comfortable.

Everybody in Poland had to be registered. I went to the office and obtained the forms, but when I filled them out at home, I didn’t want anyone to see my birth certificate, which wasn’t too well worked out. My name was Lancucka — not a very common name. Also there was once a communist deputy, in the Polish Sejm, by the name of Lancucki. My old mistress, who came from the aristocracy, asked me once if I was not from the Lancucki family, who lived near their estate. For Jews it was much better to take a simple name, one that

was common among the people and a name that was easy to remember.

Also the name of the town in my fictitious birth certificate was somewhere in a remote area. I didn't know what to answer when somebody asked me what the nearest town was called, because it wasn't on the map. I did search for it many times but I couldn't find it.

I hid myself and filled out the forms; but I didn't notice the question: "Your mother's maiden name"? When I returned the forms, the woman at the window asked me: "Well, what was your mother's maiden name?" I couldn't remember it at all. I would have remembered my real mother's name, in the middle of a deep sleep. But here I had no answer right away. So I gave the first name that came to my mind. I had many headaches because of this for a long time afterwards. I wondered if they might check out that the name I gave did not fit the document. We were always afraid about the famous German exactitude. But it became obvious to me that even the Germans weren't so completely accurate.

The letters that I received, constantly, from Shulim were very supportive for me. Those letters brought out a strong sentiment in the Poles that I was living with. They could see that my fiancé was a soldier who had fought for the Fatherland and I was always in contact with him. It was well known that there were no more Jewish soldiers left, in the prisoner of war camps. All the Jewish POWs had been taken away, right from the beginning.

Kondek had a high school teacher whose name was professor Lasowicz. It would be a shame not to remember and tell the story of this wonderful man. Many times he risked his own life for others. He did many favours also for Jews. I know well myself one occasion when he took in a Jewish man, whose appearance was very Semitic, to his school. He made him a superintendent, told him to grow a moustache, and in that manner he managed to spend a long time on the Polish side. This man was our good friend Marek Lew. I would bring him over letters from his wife Lola, who was hiding with me at Julek's, on Wronia street.

Professor Lasowicz died in a concentration camp. He was very active in the illegal activities against the Germans. He was so pure and good that he was

ready to do a favor to any stranger on the street who needed help. I remember one time when I came with a letter for Marek. He told the professor about my various problems, at the places where I worked. Prof. Lasowicz found the time to sit down with me, and give me a few lessons in catechism.

It was very important to know the catechism, this was obvious. But it didn't help all the time. The SS, on Aleje Szucha, didn't ask many questions when a Jew, who had been captured on the Polish side was taken to them. To find out if the person was a Jew or not, they only asked: "Who is your family"? This was enough. What kind of person doesn't have a family?

At that time the Germans took away many tramways and buses. As a result it was necessary to wait for long hours on the streets for a tramway. Many Jews fell into the hands of the "szmalcowniks", while waiting for the tramways.

One very frosty day, as I stood at a bus stop, in a large crowd, I noticed a suspicious type, who was measuring me from head to toe with his eyes. As if to warm myself, I began to run back and forth, and then I stopped right beside him. Apparently this gave him second thoughts. Meanwhile a bus arrived and I mixed into the crowd, so when I saw that the szmalcownik had gone already inside, I stayed behind and waited for another bus.

One time I went shopping at the market, where we often bought fish or meat, before the war. Here there used to be many stores owned by Jewish merchants. This was the Hale Mirowskie market. Now one didn't see any Jews there. Everything had gone over to the Poles. Before I went into the market, I noticed a pretty Polish girl, who once was a co-worker of mine. She was standing there, selling soap.

I remembered now that everyone had hated her. It was said that she was a spy for the bosses. I shivered as soon as I saw her. Did she recognize me from earlier times? If she did, I was in big trouble. Quickly I went into the market and wandered over to the meats, then to the vegetables. Now I noticed, for the second time, a small man observing me. When I saw him, piercing me with his eyes, for the third time, I pretended not to notice anything, and asked prices. Then immediately, I mixed in with the dense crowd, and headed outside, into the mass of sellers and buyers, on the street. Suddenly, what joy, a tramway

appeared. I entered quickly and was so happy that the little man had lost me.

In the tramway an old man sat opposite me looking at me constantly. I thought now that the little man in the market had “given me over”, to this one. The trip seemed to last forever. Finally I decided to get out earlier than I had planned. As we approached the stop, I looked around and saw that the man was standing, right behind me, ready to get out. My hands and feet began shivering, waiting for that moment when he would grab my shoulder and say: “Come with me”. But then another miracle — he headed in another direction from me.

I was very fond of Mrs. Kwiatowicz. She was so sweet and kind to me and made me feel so comfortable that I thought that even if she had her suspicions, she would have probably protected me anyhow. In my daydreams, I promised myself that if fate would let me live through the war — the first thing I would do, would be to run over to her and tell her everything. But when the war was over, there was no one to run to. The beautiful city of Warsaw was smashed, burned and deserted.

At Easter they had a large party, for the whole family. All the rooms were full of people. It depressed me to see so many people, in one family. Who could understand it? They all took it as so normal that we were like mice, being chased, hiding in any hole, we could find. Despite all the hardship caused by the war, we prepared a great deal of food and drink for Easter.

The Poles have a custom, on this holiday, to cut up some eggs, and carry them around on a plate, among the guests. Everyone takes a piece of egg; they embrace and wish each other well. My mistress came to me, in the kitchen, happy and a little drunk. She passed me the plate with the eggs and kissed me, and I, instead of taking a piece of egg and eating it, I stood and waited for her to break off a piece of the egg. I thought that one has to do the same as at Christmas, with the Oplatek (Host). They break off a piece of the Host together, wish each other well and kiss each other.

The mistress laughed and said: “What do you think? Did you think that is the Oplatek?” After that holiday, I constantly began to think that they were looking at me differently. I had to begin to be used to the idea that I would have to leave, before they would have to tell me to go. This was very difficult for me

to do. It's possible that it would have been a lot better for me, had I stayed on. I would have saved myself a lot of grief later on.

## Chapter 10

**P**awel's friend, Madame Gajewska, the woman who had recommended me to the family Kwiatowicz, said that she wanted me to help with her daughter's new baby. This seemed like a very good thing for me. Her daughter was the wife of a well known union activist, in the Slask area, in the prewar years. During the war, he was very active in the underground activities of the AK. Her son, who was a very successful man, was also active in the AK.

They couldn't take in any Polish girl into their house. So it was good for both sides, for me and for them. But the problem was that they all knew who I was, and that was not so good, all the time. I lived with the mother, in a small apartment. The daughter lived downtown. I had to cook and bring over lunch for her and wash the diapers. The job wasn't too hard physically. But despite their efforts to be polite to me, their hatred for Jews would show itself, at every turn.

Madame Gajewska had the voice and character of a man. She was energetic, decisive and a terrible despot. It was so difficult to be together with her. Many times, when her son would take suitcases full of leaflets, on a trip outside Warsaw, she ordered that he should ride to the train empty-handed, and take the suitcases from me at the rail station. It was better for them that I should take the risk, of travelling on the train through the city with those suitcases. I pretended that I didn't, but I knew only too well what those suitcases contained.

Their angry comments about Jews bothered me a great deal. Especially because they were unionists, idealists. More than once I became very angry about that, and I protested strongly. Her daughter and son-in-law left Warsaw, like thousands of other people, in 1939, for the territories occupied by the Soviets. There they had an opportunity to see how young Jewish communists pushed their weight around and caused trouble for those who had been well-known foes of the communist regime. Their first and foremost victims were other Jews, from the same villages, who they knew too well, were opponents of the regime. Non-Jews suffered too. But were all Jews responsible for that?

Her daughter, who was a professor, would give me grief, for all kind of petty things. Then she would add salt to my wounds by saying that the Germans could get away with what they were doing only with Jews. “They went like sheep”, she would say. Later, in 1944, during the Polish uprising, I would see many times Poles kissing the Germans’ hands and begging, on their knees, not to be chased out of their houses. I could not believe it. They who had lived almost completely normal lives, during the whole war ...

The Jews of the Ghettos, in sharp contrast, had been tormented and persecuted for almost five years. For them it was a life in hell. By the time the “actions” occurred, the people were already similar to zombies, worn out, starving, completely ruined and apathetic.

One time, by accident, I broke a knife. Another time a bottle of oil slipped out of my hands and a little of the oil spilled. It happened because I was very upset and under strain. My mistress then said to me that there exists in the Jewish character a certain indifference for other people’s possessions. She, the intellectual, from the upper echelons of Polish society, who by now already knew me too well, should have known that I felt very responsible for other people’s possessions. She also knew how very sensitive I was about such accusations.

They aggravated me once so much that I grabbed my coat and ran to the door. Her son-in-law, the great unionist, ran desperately after me. His face very pale, he asked me: “In God’s name, where are you going?” He was not really worried about me. He was in a panic, because he feared that I would denounce them. After all I was a Jew ... When I figured out what he was worried about, I laughed bitterly and calmed him saying, I was going to the Juleks for a while.

This great intellectual didn’t know that, even when tortured, I would have never given over anybody. He didn’t know that my parents from the small village, who could barely sign their names, had much higher moral standards and human decency than any of them.

From our youngest years onward, we had been educated by our parents: not to steal, not to cheat, not to denounce. Even through all the hunger and miseries, this remained in my blood. All the “qualities” such as cheating, lying,



abusing someone's possessions, etc. — everything that they expected to see in me — Mrs. Gajewska had herself, in great abundance. She could have sold me and taken the money. I couldn't believe how deceitful she was.

After I had tried very hard to find work somewhere else — they asked me to return, so I went back to work for them. An incident that I lived through when staying with the Gajewska stays in my memory. Early one morning, the Gestapo suddenly closed off our block on Padowska street. It was a very small street, so that the neighbours knew each other well, and they told one another what was happening. In a house, just across the street from us, the Gestapo devils tore down the door and entered. Luckily the people weren't home. From the neighbours we learned that they had come to look for Jews in that house. It took half a day for them to search through everything, while waiting for the people to return home.

Later the Gestapo helpers dragged everything away from this house. Even the heavy furniture. Then they left. All the neighbours from our apartment wandered back and forth, gossiping and enjoying the "show". Even though everything was throbbing inside of me, I had to make an appearance outside, from time to time. The atmosphere in our apartment was very quiet and withdrawn. We waited, for an eternity, for this spectacle to end. When we finally saw the last car pull away, we were too exhausted, to feel any joy. This was how life went on, until the long and bloody Polish uprising.

The Soviets moved closer to Warsaw, at a very quick pace. From all sides we could hear words of hope and encouragement. Things were beginning to move finally. One day when I was out shopping, I saw the German army marching; pulling their heavy equipment and tanks. We could see that they were in a hurry, moving towards the west.

I stood there, breathlessly. I couldn't even shout out my great indescribable joy. Was it a dream, or was it for real? Could I be so blessed, as to see with my own eyes, the Germans dragging themselves away? I couldn't believe it. How many times, in those bitter, hopeless years had we encouraged each other by saying: "The Germans are almost finished. The Soviets will come very soon". All those long years it was only a dream. And now I was standing, all alone, without even somebody near to embrace and cry for joy. Where was Esther?

Where were all my dear ones?

It didn't take too long before we started to hear the Artillery, from battles very close to Warsaw. When the shooting grew more intense, we ran down into the cellar. Even then Mrs. Gajewska didn't miss a chance to needle me: "Yes, these are your Bolchewiks". But I was melting from joy. I can still see now the colours of the rockets which lit up the whole sky.

The next day we found out that the Soviets stood on the other side of the Wisla river, near Praga, a suburb of Warsaw. As usual, I had to take the tramway and ride over to her daughter's place and bring her lunch and other things. No one told me anything beforehand. On my way home, the streets were full of activity. There was an extraordinary feeling in the air.

## Chapter 11

**T**he uprising began. After we had gone about halfway, the tramway suddenly stopped. The shooting started for good. It was difficult to see what was happening, because the tramway was packed with people. We could see broken windows and wounded people already, on the streets. There was screaming and crying. The tramway didn't move any more. Those who could, ran out. I ran into the nearest building. It was already impossible to go further on the street.

This building was very large, and hundreds of people off the street sat there for a whole week. Well to do people lived in this building, so no one went hungry. The uprising raged on at full force. This section of the city was still under German control. Rumors had it that the fighters had advanced a great deal. The areas still under the Germans became hell for the Poles to live in.

The Germans chased the people out of their homes and systematically set fire to one house after another. The people were taken away to a camp outside Warsaw. The camp was in Pruszkow. Together with another few women, I decided not to go to the camp, but rather to find a good hiding place, and stay on where we were. But after a couple of weeks of such a barbaric life—starving, sleeping in a corner, on stairs — we could see how differently each person reacted. Even sitting in a house was not easy, or secure.

No one could have foreseen such a difficult time. Many people cried and sobbed. I was amazed to watch a woman kissing a German soldier's hand, begging him not to chase her out of her house. Another time, right after the war, I had a chance to see a German soldier crawling out of a forest; weak, tattered and dirty, his beard was overgrown and his feet were covered with rags.

He looked exactly like a Jew, after living in the Ghetto, for four years. He begged for food from the farmers. This was how a member of the "Master Race" looked like. And some of the once "proud" Poles, who had wagged their fingers saying that the Germans could allow themselves to do such things only with Jews, were now in the same sorry state.

Our decision not to leave Warsaw was quite risky. One of the women was very strongly in favor of that idea. She lived in the same building herself, and she promised that she would provide everything that we needed, such as food and blankets. This woman very badly did not want to go to the camp. Later I discovered her good reason for that. She had worked for the Gestapo, on "Aleje Szucha". No less, no more ...

When a Jew, on the Polish side, heard the words Aleje Szucha, he was ready to faint. If a Jewish man or woman was caught on the Polish side, they would be taken to Aleje Szucha and they never came back. This blonde woman, called Wanda, spoke Polish very well. She was born in Poland and had gone to Polish schools, but she was a Volksdeutschin. She told us that she had a Polish husband. During the uprising the Germans ordered her to come to work, but she refused. She saw that they were close to capitulation. So much for her career. From then on, she became very Polish.

Wanda knew quite well that if she were found by a German who knew her she would be shot immediately, for her desertion from the job. That's why she always carried with her, a capsule of cyanide. Meanwhile, we were still under German occupation and I had a very good reason still to be afraid of her.

The second woman, Tosia, was a feverish Polish patriot. She was a teacher. Wanda insisted that we were in an ideal place. This building had already been burned out. The servants' entrance, in the middle of the building, was quite large, about the size of a small room. The big cellar was full of many things, including food. It had all belonged to wealthy people, who had been chased out by the Germans.

We gathered food and various other things to keep us alive for another week or so. Wanda and Tosia used to live in neighbouring apartments, and knew each other quite well. When Tosia told me who this Wanda was — it grew dark before my eyes. Is it possible that she, who was so clever, intelligent and refined, and who had so much experience in her Gestapo work, wouldn't recognize me? But what could I do now? It was too late.

It was as if we were all alone in Warsaw. We lived in the remaining section of a wall that was still standing solid. We were always so close, one beside the

other, day and night. I told myself what I'd said, all the previous years: what will be, will be. But I had to continue to play my role, although it was now more difficult than it had been until then. We spent almost all the time lying down, so that we would not be spotted through the burned out remnants of the house. We didn't dare move too much. All day long, Ukrainians wandered around, looking for loot in the cellars.

Apparently, our cellar was full of loot. They marched in and out of there for days. If one of them had, by mistake, climbed two or three steps higher, he would certainly have seen us. Every time that we heard them coming, Wanda grabbed her cyanide and Tosia grabbed her holy rosary, to pray for our safety to the Holy Virgin Mary and I turned to stone ...

We heard often before that the Ukrainians wandered around drunk, often raping women and then handing them over to the Germans. The nights were cool and it was open from all sides, but we had enough rags to cover ourselves. Luckily the Germans and Ukrainians didn't wander around the city at night. Another great fear of mine was that, while sleeping, in my nightmares, I'd yell out some words in Yiddish, while I lay so close to this Gestapo Volksdeutschin, who would understand, right away who I was. It could have been a big problem for me.

Nearby there was a bakery, where they baked bread for the Germans. Wanda went there in the evenings and the workers gave her bread. She knew very well how to take care of herself anywhere. We would also search the cellars in the evenings for something to eat. After three weeks had passed and the Ukrainians had cleaned out everything from our cellar, we were left with very little food to live on.

Wanda got an idea in her head that we should make a hole in the wall in order to make our way into the rich building, next to ours. There was certainly something left to eat there. The wall was so thick that, though we dug with knives and a chisel, we couldn't reach the other side for a long time. In the end we managed to do it though, wondering ourselves, where we had gotten the strength from.

Now when I think back about that time, it's unbelievable for me that we sat

there for around six weeks. When the weather was nice, it wasn't quite so bad — but when it started to rain and the wind blew in, from all sides, it was not so cheerful.

We had also become accustomed to the daily concerts of the anti-aircraft fire, which cut the air over our heads. Yes, it was just like on the front lines. The Soviets fired their artillery, but as they were stopped at the Wisla, they stayed put.

When we finally broke through this wall, the question arose, who would be the first to go through. Maybe the Germans had settled in there. The three of us went in, together. There wasn't a trace of a person, no sign of life at all. But we did find some food there.

The next day we snuck up to the second floor. In one of the bedrooms we saw signs that seemed to indicate that someone had slept there. There was a shaving kit, a towel and even an unfinished cigarette in the ashtray. Someone must have been there not long ago. Surely a German. A whip lay on a chair. We quickly gathered some food, listened carefully, in case someone was coming, then left quickly, with our hearts beating fast.

On the third day we found a bottle of oil. All of a sudden we heard a man's steps, coming up the stairs. We ran upstairs very fast and hid under the beds, lying there for over two hours, until it had become dark and we were sure that the German had already left. We ran off and left the bottle of oil.

Listening carefully we discovered that this German came home every day, around two o'clock. One day I said that I had to go and get that bottle of oil. I went there in the morning, and when I already had the bottle in my hands, I heard someone coming. I climbed fast to the apartment, higher up, and hid under a bed for a few hours. The two women had already cried over me, not knowing what had happened to me. After that occurrence we never went to the next building again.

The shooting in the city quieted down. We knew by now that the Germans had choked off the uprising. The Soviets, stationed on the other side of the Wistula, patiently watched on. We decided to quit our hiding place finally and mix with other people that had still been sent out to the detention camp in

Pruszkow. We sneaked into a neighbouring street, from where they took away the remaining people.

We lost each other in the rows of so many people. Thousands of people flooded in from all sides, but still that march could not be compared, in any way, to our hopeless Jews, marching to the Umschlagplatz. Because of this, it didn't bother me too much.

There were many barracks in the camp of Pruszkow. Immediately I began to search for a way to escape. A little further away from the barracks, there were railroad yards. When we saw a train worker we immediately encircled him and asked if there wasn't some way to escape. Understandably, no one promised anything. They took the younger prisoners to work, marching us into a huge hall, full of mountains of things that we had to sort out.

After some time, a German came in with a man, who brought in a pot of soup and said: "Anyone who has a dish can eat soup". As if they had been delivered from heaven, just before that, I had found two silver spoons. One of them I have kept for a souvenir to this day. I gave the second one to my neighbour. We rummaged around some more and found ourselves some kind of a pot.

We ate and then worked for the rest of the day. We met many young people and talked to them openly about trying to escape. I have learned a lot from the difficult life I have led on the Polish side. I knew how to survive, on my own resources. I now had faith that I could manage, find a solution and live in all kinds of harsh situations. After the incident of jumping from the train, which had worked out relatively well, I became convinced that in the most difficult dilemmas one should always try to escape; maybe the effort would pay off.

In the evening a group of us, mostly young people, went out to have a good look at the fences. The fence was high, with wires strung close to each other. One girl from the group talked to the German guard, drawing his attention away from the rest of us. We feverishly dug underneath the fence, slithered under it and ran over fast to the wall.

They had built the wall far away from the camp, and it was a good distance

to run. As we approached, we looked at each other, frightened, and asked how and by what means could we climb such a high wall. How could we do it? Then the stronger men began to lift each other up, and stand on each other's shoulders. It was completely dark already, when we reached the top of the wall. Then we discovered that there was yet another line of barbed wire to contend with. Five rows of wire, parallel to each other, and four rows diagonal. Each was very close to the others. The hardest battle with the barbed wire took place on top. It seemed impossible to get through.

There were twelve of us. Each one was trying on his own. As we struggled with the barbed wire, on top of the wall, we saw suddenly a row of German cars, driving up below, with reflectors. They shone the beams of light a mile ahead of them. We all stood breathless. We let go of the wires and waited. What would happen? If one of them had seen us, we would have been shot down, like birds. The miracle was that the searchlights shone ahead of the cars, not up to the wall.

Finally the cars moved on and we resumed our fight with the wires. After much struggle, with bloodied hands, we all made it to the ground, on the other side of the wall. We ran through the yards of the houses, in the dark. I ran with three others. We knocked on a farmer's door. He didn't want to open the door, but finally he let us in.

The next day I wandered through the villages and fields, and asked the farmers if they needed someone to help in the fields. It was during the end of the potato harvest. One farmer woman took me in quickly. She needed help. After working for two weeks, I became aware that the neighbours were gossiping about me. Finally my boss broke down and told me that a neighbour of hers told her that I was a Jew. She defended herself and told me that she personally didn't have anything against me staying here, because she liked me a lot. But she was afraid of her neighbours, and she cried. I understood that I could not stay there longer, so I packed the bag that I always carried with me and went on further, to look for work.

When the Germans chased the whole Polish population out of Warsaw, at the time of the Polish uprising, a new tragedy began for many Jews, who had managed to hide until now, on the Polish side. These were the people who could



not dare show themselves in daylight, because of their Jewish appearance. We had to leave Warsaw together with the Polish population. But many were recognized immediately by the Poles. A lot of Jews died at that time, just before liberation, mostly by being pointed out by Poles.

For myself the situation improved a lot. Everywhere I went, I was welcomed, as one of the exiled “Warszawiaki”. It was enough only to mention that I came from Warsaw. I rode closer to Lodz and entered the little town of Koluszki. After a few days I went again to the countryside, to find work on a farm. At least there, I would have enough to eat.

I did find work. I had my own little room there and got along pretty well with the farmer folk. A few times I went along with them to the market. One time, at a market in Skierniewice, I suddenly saw Pola, Lola Lew’s sister. I found out from her news about people who were close to me. It had been so long since I had heard anything about them.

At the time of the Polish uprising in Warsaw, everyone tried to run over to the territory that has been liberated. At the end of the uprising, those who had an obviously Jewish appearance, such as Bracha and Lola, had to go fast into bunkers. There were forty people in their bunker.

By following Pola’s instructions, I managed to meet with Julek and Marek. Everyone was spread out, far away from each other. As they left Warsaw, by chance, one headed for Cracow, another towards Lodz, another near Warsaw, and so on. Everyone was worried about the fate of their loved ones, who had stayed behind in the bunkers. The battles between the Germans and Russians stopped completely along the Warsaw front for the whole winter. The Polish people saw, bitterly, that the Soviets had let them bleed in the uprising, for nothing.

When the war was over, I met with Bracha and Lola and they told me about their bitter experiences, in the bunker. They had spent three winter months in burned out and abandoned Warsaw, exchanging the days for night, and nights for day. They slept by day and cooked at night, so that the smoke from the bunker would not be seen. At night they left the bunker and went through the abandoned houses that hadn’t been burned out, looking for food.

One night, right at the beginning, Bracha went out with a few others looking for food. She found a small, dying little puppy. She picked it up and brought it with her into the bunker. Lola was the only one to know about it. They wanted at first to see how the dog would behave. After the trial time, they would show the dog to the others and see how they felt about the dog staying there with them. The dog was quiet for a few days, so finally they showed everybody their secret.

At first almost everyone was frightened. "You must be kidding, a dog here, in a secret place". But the dog was so very cute and quiet, so they decided to let it stay on, for a while longer, to see how it would behave. It was as if the dog understood the situation. It stayed very quiet. They never heard it bark, and everyone fell in love with the little puppy. It was like a ray of sunlight for them, in that deep, dark cellar underground, the bunker.

They had to be extremely careful. There were always stories going around about great tragedies in other bunkers. They were in contact with people from other bunkers through their nightly wanderings. But towards the end, almost all of them lost their strength and will to go on, because in a short period of time, they heard about too many tragedies. They had lost so many loved ones and close friends. So they didn't have the energy to go out. They stayed in the bunker and waited in dread. Each of them knew that sooner or later, it would be their turn.

Then the Germans didn't appear on the streets of Warsaw for three days. The people underground didn't even know that they were already free ... This was the beginning of January, 1945. When they finally found out the wonderful news, they all started to scream and shout, and cry. Suddenly the little puppy, for the first time in his life, barked as well. Everyone was beside themselves, in wonderment.

They called the little puppy "Bunker". Some time later, Julek, Bracha's husband, took the dog on the street, for a walk. He forgot to take the chain with him. A car ran over the dog. It's hard to describe what Bracha went through, after the loss of her dear little Bunkerl.

When Bracha and Lola left the bunker, they were completely broken and

sick. They were lucky that it hadn't lasted longer, through the winter. How they managed to live through it is inconceivable. The smoke from their "furnace", almost choked them. Many people in the bunkers were asphyxiated by smoke.

I had a much easier time of it than they had. The farmers knew that I was one of the exiles from Warsaw, and that was enough. They were very friendly towards me. But I didn't like their drinking every day. Any time they drank, they would invite me too for the party. It was like some kind of punishment for me. I couldn't take their banal discussions and their carefree moods either. And I had to be very careful not to say anything that I shouldn't. They also laughed a lot, but how could I, when my heart was so troubled.

Luckily for me, as soon as they poured some of the "bimber" (that was the name for the home brewed liquor), into a glass, they would drink it down. Then they would pour in another one, right away. Their wives drank like that as well. I would keep my glass in my hand until finally I'd pour it under the table, on my dress, or my pants. Obviously I had to manoeuvre adroitly so that nobody would catch me in the act.

It was easier for me at this place especially because this farmer's wife was good looking, and she was very involved with one of her husband's friends. They were having a fairly open romance, and her husband also knew about everything. In a word, my existence was not all that important, in that household. I was completely in the shadow, and that was what I really needed.

The Germans carried out a search in our village, completely unexpected. Usually the village was very quiet. They didn't suffer very much from the Germans. Just on that day Julek came to visit me. They took him in as well. After a few hours, they let all the people from the village go, and Julek as well. I was sent away, with all the exiles from Warsaw, to a camp in Czestochowa.

At that time the Germans hated all the Warsaw exiles. We were heading for a transit camp, where they rounded up whole transports of workers to be sent to Germany. Nobody wanted to go to Germany at that time, near the end of the war and, also because by now, Germany was bombed constantly.

Two years earlier, if they had taken me away, it might have been better for me. Many times in his letters, Shulim let me understand that life would have

been much easier for me there. The Poles could recognize Jews more easily than the Germans could.

We knew that the trains heading west were being heavily bombed. The first day that they took us through the streets, I tried to escape. But I didn't succeed and as a result, the Volksdeutsche who led us knew already that the little one, "in the blue pants", was trying to escape. So they had their eyes on me. Day by day, to my great sorrow, I could see that I wouldn't be able to escape, like I had done in the past.

So I spent almost two weeks in Czestochowa. Every day more and more people arrived, and every day they sent out transports to Germany. One day I spotted a couple of Warsaw boys, among the new arrivals. I didn't like them at all. They looked definitely like criminal types to me. The way they talked and behaved showed it. It was enough just to watch them measuring up people and winking at each other to know. It was almost certain that a great danger was lurking there.

Around eight o'clock every morning, the guards let us into the chapel, near the camp, to say our prayers. Obviously I prayed along with the others and sang as much as I knew how. The next day I noticed that the two troublemakers were observing me. They winked at each other, and even criticized my singing. I stood as if I were paralyzed. For so long I had felt almost secure, and now this again.

First of all I decided that when the time came to go to the chapel, the next day, I would say that I was sick. There was no doubt that they had recognized me. I did so, and then sat down and worried about what I would do the next day. Finally I decided that I would go to the chapel. Maybe it would be better that way. My head was pounding, as I worried about what I should do. The next day I went into the chapel and saw that the two boys weren't there. I asked laughingly: "Where are those cute boys from Warsaw"?

The neighbours around told me that, they had taken them away the night before. Another miracle then happened to me, one of the hundreds until then. The next morning a Volksdeutsche came in and, with a shrill voice, announced that he needed three seamstresses. Seeing in my file that I was registered as a

seamstress, they took me right away.

The same day Julek, our dear friend Julek, came to Czestochowa to see me. He came to the gate and talked to me, saying that I should try to escape, by any means. He gave me an address of an uncle of his, who lived in the city. I took the address, but told him sadly that this time there was no way to escape. What would be, would be. What could I do?

A few hours later the soldiers were to take us to the train. Julek came to the gate in the evening and said, "You know what, I'm going to find something for you to eat on the trip". Meanwhile a soldier, a Volksdeutsche, came up and began to yell that it was already late, and everybody should start to line up. We had no choice, so we did it, and started on our way immediately, so we wouldn't miss the train.

As we marched I observed the Volksdeutsche. He didn't seem all that bright. He laughed and flirted with two cute Polish women, while we marched. I thought to myself that I should try to see my way out. No one in the rows paid much attention to me. I maneuvered further and further back, through the rows. At the first turn of a street, I moved out of the rows altogether.

It was already dusk, and the timing helped me a great deal. I ran away quickly, and about ten blocks away, I entered the first house on the block, and climbed to the top floor. I tapped quietly on a door that was open. I could see an old man, sitting in the darkness inside. He looked like a poet to me. I told him that I was going to the train, and they were going to ship us to Germany, but I had escaped.

I begged him to let me sit there for a while because I didn't have the strength to keep on walking. Later on I would go and find the address that Julek gave me, where I would probably spend the night. The man allowed me to stay. He didn't say a word although he looked very sympathetic.

A couple of hours later I arrived at Julek's uncle's place, and a little later Julek showed up too. He told us what had happened after I escaped. When Julek returned with the package of food for me, he saw the Volksdeutsche screaming in anger, like a wild animal. When Julek came up, he screamed at him: "I'm going to take you now and send you away". The people there defended Julek

and explained to the guard: “If he had known anything about her escaping, would he have come back here, to look for trouble from you? Can’t you see that he’s completely innocent, and a clubfoot besides, let him go”. Their pleading helped. The Volksdeutsche had to meet the train and it was getting late. They let Julek go home.

I didn’t return to my farmer’s the next day. I looked for work somewhere else. The days were becoming more joyful. Something was approaching, you could feel it in the air. Every day the news were full of hope and happiness. It was simply unbelievable that soon, any day, any hour, we would be rid of them. Was it not really like a fairy tale — that one nice morning, we would see the Russians riding the streets, instead of the Germans?

## Chapter 12

**T**oday we saw the first Russian tanks rolling in. With tears in my eyes, I strained to see a Jewish face amongst the Russian soldiers. I couldn't stay in the countryside any more. I waited for the first opportunity to take a train. I sat for days and days, waiting for the first train to Warsaw. Finally we went. At one station, a Jewish boy, fifteen or sixteen years old, came into the train. My heart jumped. This was the first Jewish face, not disguised that I'd seen. His face was yellow, like wax, with deep tragic black eyes and he was skinny like a stick. He hesitated first and then quietly sat down in a corner, still frightened.

My neighbours, the Polish passengers, began to look him up and down and whispered to each other. A woman beside me spoke into my ear: "Look, they're still here, those Jews. Now you see them, like mice, crawling out of their holes. Who would have believed that so many of them were still left"? It is impossible to describe how deeply this hurt me. Those few words burned into me so much that I could not restrain myself any more. I yelled at them, and gave them all a good piece of my mind.

Then they started on an opposite track. They had compliments for the Jews and begged my pardon, saying that I looked so fine, just like a Polish woman, not like a Jewess at all. All of a sudden they had all had good Jewish friends and neighbours in past times. They became sickly sweet.

This wasn't the only such occasion. It wasn't the only time I had to tell them off. During the war, I had to act as if I didn't hear anything, or didn't understand. Many times my heart was torn, listening to their sick jokes and groundless fabrications about Jews.

When the Soviets finally pushed the German army completely to the west, it became possible to ride into Warsaw. Finally I met up with Bracha and Julek; Lola and her husband Marek; Pawel and Edzia; Paula and Mietek. We found two apartments and all of us moved into them. A few weeks later we moved to Lodz. As soon as Bracha and Lola left their bunker, they were sent to a sanatorium, run by the "Joint". Their state of health was very poor.

I immediately began to inquire about the whereabouts of the orphanage, where Wiesia had been. The building had been burned out and it was very difficult to find out where the institution had been relocated. They sent me around, from one place to another, until I finally learned that the “Dom Boduena” orphanage had been moved, during the time of the Polish uprising, far away, to the Carpathian mountains, in the town of Zakopane.

At that time it was almost impossible for a young woman to travel alone. Lola and Marek lived, by now, in Krakow, not too far away from Zakopane. I wrote them a letter, explaining the situation. So they took Wiesia out of the orphanage. Lola then spent a lot of time and energy, trying hard to get some strength back into the child. During the war the children in the orphanage had also suffered hunger and deprivation. Wiesia had gone through epidemic sicknesses as well.

Two months later, when Lola brought the child to me, in Lodz, Wiesia looked pretty well. But she could just barely walk and she couldn't talk yet. She was already two and a half years old. I was so happy and thankful that the child had stayed alive. This became a very important event in my life.

With body and soul, I did all I could to make the child feel good; to give her the warmth that a mother would have given her. It was a very long time before I told her that she could call me mother. It was too difficult for me and heartbreaking. But when I finally gave up all hope that maybe, through some miracle, Esther had somehow stayed alive, with a broken, pained heart, I finally accepted the name “Mamma”.

Our friends, who knew our tragic history, told me so often: “Who, if not you, should be called a mother to this child?” Wiesia had strong resemblances to both of her parents. I could see a lot of Esther and also of Voweck, in her. She was a very pretty and lovely child. When I walked with her, on the street, strangers would stop me and ask wonderingly: “Where did you hide such a sweetie? She is as pretty as a doll”. At that time we didn't suffer too much from hunger. Wiesia could eat what she wanted and she found her strength.

Until now I hadn't heard anything from Shulim. Often we could see many soldiers in the streets — POWs who had returned from Germany. I looked after



them, all the time uneasily, searching. Many times I would stop someone and ask a lot of questions, with no results.

Later I found out that a Jewish Committee had been organized. I went there immediately and registered myself and Wiesia. Our Mania, in Paris, found us later through this Committee. Shulim remembered Mania's address and found us through her. Later on, when our youngest brother, Issie, returned from Russia — he also came to Lodz and found us right away, through the Jewish Committee. Out of our very large family, after all our searchings and asking all around, only the three of us were alive in Poland — Issie, myself and Esther's child, Wiesia.

All the roads had been taken over by the Soviet army, which was now pushing on, with all its strength, on to Berlin. The Soviet soldiers, in general, behaved in a brutal, uncivilized manner. In many places, we could hear about the disgusting things that they did. They raped women; took food and drink and stole from people. I knew of one occasion, when a soldier stopped an elderly Jew, passing by on the street, and told him to take off his coat and give it over. The old Jew gave him his coat and the soldier went off, unashamed.

I myself witnessed an occurrence, which I would never have believed, had it been told to me. But I saw it with my own eyes. A Soviet soldier sat down beside a Polish woman, on a train. I sat opposite them nearby. When the train stopped, at the station, the soldier politely said to the woman that, since she had two small children with her and she was alone, he wanted to help her. The woman was so happy. I also thought to myself, how wonderful it was that we were dealing with people from a Socialist country. I was so charmed to see what a gentleman he was. I went out after them.

The woman and her two children descended the stairs from the train and then the "gentleman", with the two suitcases, ran off in the opposite direction. The station was crowded, so we couldn't see where the soldier had gone. The woman began to scream and wail, but who could help her?

Right from the beginning, after the Soviets entered Warsaw, we could see very often loaded trucks, full of different materials, heading out. They took away everything from the big stores and factories that the Germans had not

finished off yet. Right from the beginning also, because of this, the Polish people hated them, giving them the nickname: “Czerwona Pluskwa” (the red bedbugs). That’s what we called them.

These were our “Liberators”, for whom we had waited so many years? Nothing was left of Jewish Warsaw — not a sign or a trace of what it used to be. It was levelled to the earth and plowed under. Our eyes couldn’t believe what they saw, after we finally had our freedom.

Our parents used to be very healthy people, not yet old. They lived a peaceful, humble life, in their small village. After the war, we learned from people who used to be our neighbours, or knew our family very well that our parents had been herded, together with all the Jews of our village, to a neighbouring town. Who knows in what circumstances they ended their honest and decent lives?

I had assumed always that right after the war would end, I would go to our village, to look for some sign of life from our dear parents and the whole family of ours. Once, walking on the street in Lodz, I met by chance a very good friend of mine, Freda Strassberg, with whom I had gone to school. She told me a horrible story of an incident that had occurred in our village, right after the war.

A young man, whom I remembered so well, Yoine Richter, returned from the partisans in the forests, to our village. He had always been very liked in the village, both by Jews and non-Jews alike. He used to go out a lot with his non-Jewish friends. He had a very hard and dangerous life as a partisan fighter, against the Germans. Coming home, he didn’t find anybody from his family. They also had been a very large, fine family. One of his sisters had been in my class in school.

He had illusions that his Polish friends would be happy to see him alive and well, and would hug him enthusiastically. During the war the Poles took away all the Jewish possessions. Now they had no urge to give them back. After the war, when a Jew returned home to his village, where he had been born and where his family had lived for many, many generations — the Poles would murder them on the first night of their arrival. That was exactly what happened to Yoine Richter, and they call themselves Christians. They went to church and

said prayers, full of beautiful words, about “love thy neighbour as thyself” ...

There were eight children in our family — four brothers and four sisters. Esther had been the oldest. Three of my brothers had been married to nice, lovely women. They had many sweet children, whom we adored and loved. Nothing was left of them. Not a sign, not a trace. My sister Mania lived out the war in Paris, France. She got by with false identification papers, and a lot of help from her French friends. We don't know when or where our sister Rose died. We know that she lived with our brother, Shimon, and his family, in Lemberg, just before the Germans came in.

Issie, our youngest brother, was mobilized to the Russian army. That was how he survived. The only ones from our large family, who survived on Polish soil, were myself and Wiesia, Esther's and Voweck's little girl.

Shulim lived out the war as a Polish POW in Germany. It's evident that he had a very difficult and dangerous life. He was together with Poles all the time, in extremely dangerous situations. He constantly had to maneuver, in different ways, so as not to be recognized, for who he really was.

This is another story to tell. Maybe he should.

We had aunts and uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins — on our mother's and father's side of the family. No trace remained of them all. No one showed themselves. We had also countless good, close friends. We had lived in Wielkie Oczy, Przemysl, Lwow (Lemberg) and in Warsaw. In all these places, after a few years, we had many close friends. After the war only a handful remained — those who had fled to Russia. All the others died in the most horrible, cruel ways. In the Ghettos, in the death camps, or in the forests.

God Almighty, who is also the Great Bookkeeper of humanity, will certainly judge and punish their murderers! ...



*"Tyle z Nas zostalo"  
The two of us are all that's left.*