The story was written in French by Sewek Grundman
and is translated into English by his daughter, Joëlle Grundman in 2024
in honour of what would have been his 100th birthday.

PREFACE

Many books have been written about the 2nd World War, as much by historians as by people who lived it. These are stories, most of them full of horror, memories. There will never be enough to describe everything that happened. The world needs to know and learn from it for the future. We could think it would never happen again. But people are incorrigible. Since the end of the war, terrible things have happened again, and they're still happening - Vietnam, Algeria, South America, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, China, Africa, India-Pakistan are all examples, not to mention terrorist attacks. Genocides are numerous.

We had every right to hope for a better life. But the world has gone mad. It is pure decadence. Progress and inventions, instead of improving living conditions and helping the poorest of the Third World, only serve to further refine the way in which the weak are exterminated and exploited. Nothing has changed, except the methods. It has become more industrial, faster, more modern.

Where are we heading? Will peace ever reign on earth? Let us hope for a better future for mankind.

If I am writing down my memories, it is at the request of my children. They want to know what happened during the war, how I lived through it, how I became a free man. So, it is a personal story, one of many. I have no pretension of turning it into a literary work. I am pleased to know that my memory is of interest to my children. Other parents have not wanted to talk about it, so as not to traumatise their children. I know young people who were born after the war and who blame their parents.

So, I am starting to tell my story. One part will be chronological and another will be made up of miscellaneous facts. I try not to show too much of my feelings, as I was directly affected by this tragedy.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Jews lived in Poland for almost 1,000 years. I say this in the past tense, because there are hardly any Jews left in the country today. On the other hand, unlike other communities, Jews were never driven out of the country.

The first traces of Jews date back to the 10th century (905 - when permission was granted to settle in the country). The first immigrants arrived in the 11th and 12th centuries. They came from Western Europe. The largest waves of immigration occurred in the 13th and 14th centuries. Pogroms, crusades, false accusations of ritual murder, blasphemy of hosts and peasant uprisings in Germany led to their exile into Poland. Poland offered them asylum and opportunities to work as craftsmen and tradesmen. They were an important factor in Poland's economic and cultural life. The first kings guaranteed them religious freedom and judicial autonomy. Their rights were confirmed and strengthened by King Casimir the Great in 1364 with the Statute of Wislicki (the Statute of Wislica), and by subsequent kings.

At the end of the 15th century, the dual monarchy of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which resulted from the merger of these two countries in 1385, contained some 24,000 Jews, of whom 18,000 lived in Poland and 6,000 in Lithuania, representing 0.6% of the total population.

Persecutions in the German Empire, religious wars in Europe and the expulsions of Jews from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1496) prompted new waves of immigration to Poland.

In the 16th century, the Jewish community numbered 150,000 members, and by the end of the 18th century, their numbers had risen to 800,000. They represented three-quarters of the world's Jewish population.

Polish royalty was an ally of the Jews. This alliance weakened in the 16th century. The new ally was the aristocracy, which used them in its struggle against the emerging bourgeoisie. The Jews became property administrators and intermediaries between the nobility and the Ukrainian peasantry. The Church, on the other hand, was anti-Jewish.

Jews brought capital, businessmen, as well as European culture and civilization. The nobility benefited greatly. Cities needed artisans and merchants. Kings needed financiers to manage state affairs. Jews were skilled in all these fields.

The first organised communities were formed in the 13th and 14th centuries in Kraków, Poznań, Sandomierz and Lwów. Since Jews could not join professional associations, which were reserved for Christians, they were granted special privileges - free movement within the country, guaranteed property, authorised professions, etc. The first privilege, granted by the king of Poland, was that of the right to vote. The first privilege, granted by King Bolesław the Pious, known as "of Kalisz", dates back to 1264.

The special statutes were extended to the entire country. Obviously, the Church did not agree with the kings' benevolent policy.

The Jagiellonian Dynasty (1386-1572) unified Poland and Lithuania. The new state became one of the most flourishing in Eastern Europe. The nobility (the "szlachta") was granted extensive privileges. For the Jews, it was a time of prosperity and total security. But there were also less affluent classes - farmers, craftsmen, workers and small shopkeepers. The aristocracy leased their distilling and liquor monopolies to Jews, who paid regular rents. For this reason, many Jews settled in the villages.

The kings granted the Jews their autonomy. Life was organised within the communities - schools, taxes and justice. Grouped by region, these communities formed the "Vaad", the Central Council, which met twice a year, in spring and autumn, at the time of the fairs in Lublin and Jarosław. The Vaad represented the Jewish population to the king. Jews paid a communal tax, as well as a "per capita" tax, as they did not perform military service.

Thousands of young men and women gathered at the fairs. Many weddings were the result.

Jews were very much involved in Polish life. A 16th-century legend has it that one Jew, Abraham Prochownik, declined the honour of being elected King of Poland, and another Jew, Saul Wahl, was King for a single night.

Poland was also the centre of a mystical movement (Kabbala). Shabbatai Zvi (1626-1676) and Jakob Frank were excommunicated.

A saying was that it was better to only eat bread, but to live in peace in Poland. The Hebrew name for Poland, "Polin", was interpreted as "Po-Lin", meaning "this is where you will rest".

The good situation of the Jews was interrupted by the peasant revolt of the Ukrainian Kozaks (Cossacks) in 1648.The hordes attacked towns and villages and massacred thousands of Jews and Poles.

Following the partition of Poland (1772, 1791 and 1795), the Jews suffered differently under the three occupations - Russian, Austrian and Prussian.

Jewish cultural life was highly developed. Many scholars wrote commentaries on the Talmud and other religious books. Wilno (Vilna) had become the Polish-Lithuanian and world Jewish cultural centre. It was called the “Jerusalem of Lithuania”.

Another religious centre was the historic Jewish city of Lublin, home to the "Yeshivat Hahmeî Lublin" ("Yeshiva of the Sages of Lublin"), the crowning glory of Polish-Lithuanian Jewish Orthodoxy.

Polish Jews spoke Yiddish among themselves. Over time, with emancipation, schooling and university studies, they became proficient in Russian, German and Polish under the three occupations and, later, in the foreign languages taught. By the end of the 19th century, modern Hebrew had begun to spread. Until then, Biblical Hebrew had been reserved exclusively for Bible study.

The Jewish press flourished before the 1939 war. There were daily and weekly newspapers and magazines in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. There was Yiddish theatre and a few Yiddish films were made. The Institute for Jewish Research, YIVO, did remarkable work. There were Jewish writers, poets, artists and singers.

At the end of the 1914-1918 war, Poland regained its independence. The age-old antisemitism of the Polish masses raised its head. In 1919, a treaty on the protection of minorities in the new multinational states was concluded in Geneva. Poland was one of the signatories to this treaty. As long as Poland's true leader, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, was alive, Jews were protected and enjoyed full civil rights. But, with his death on 12th May 1935, things changed. Gradually, state antisemitism took hold.

It became dangerous for Jews to walk in certain streets and parks at night. My father's cousin, lawyer Nathan Rosenstein, was stabbed in the back while sitting on a bench in the "New Park".

The last pre-war prime minister, General Sławoj-Składkowski, declared on the radio, "Economic boycott, yes, but no deaths". Pogroms, boycotts, the *numerus clausus* and numerus *nullus* at university for Jews, etc., poisoned our lives. There were around 3.5 million Jews, or 10% of the country's total population.

A few words about my town of Częstochowa and its Jews.

Częstochowa was (and still is) the religious centre of Poland. Every year, thousands of pilgrims come to venerate the medieval painting of the Black Madonna ("*Matka Boska*"). In 1655, the King of Poland declared the painting "the Queen of the Polish Crown", in gratitude for having saved Poland. Indeed, the Swedish army, which had invaded the country, was stopped in front of the fortress-monastery of Jasna Góra, where the holy painting was located - 230 soldiers and monks stood up to the 14,000 Swedish troops and repelled the attack. That was the end of the invasion and the Swedish army left the country. This was considered a miracle, and pilgrims returned in ever-increasing numbers to pray.

Because of its religious character, Częstochowa was more antisemitic than other cities. I remember that, when the pilgrims arrived (very often on foot, from all over the country), between spring and late summer, the Jews rarely went out, for fear of being molested. This happened especially on a spring Sunday, once a year, when students from Poznań, Poland's most antisemitic city, came on a pilgrimage by train. As soon as they got off the train, these students would throw stones at the windows of houses, without knowing whether or not the windows belonged to Jews.

Częstochowa is a major commercial and industrial centre, with industries such as glassmaking, metals, wood, textiles and toys.

In 1939, the city's population had reached 130,000, of whom 30,000-35,000 were Jews.

Jews, who had lived in the city for almost three centuries, played a very important role in the city's commercial, industrial and cultural life. Many important factories were built by Jews.

There were Jewish owners of factories for children's baby carriages and ice skates, wooden and metal toys, sawmills, furniture factories, a glass factory, a hat factory, a pin factory, foundries, textile factories for linen, cotton, wool, etc.

Under the 1919 Minorities Treaty, Jews, like other minority nationalities - Ukrainians, Germans, Byelorussians and Lithuanians - had representatives in the Sejm (National Assembly) and the Senate, as well as on municipal councils. One of my uncles, Leon, a lawyer, was a member of the Częstochowa City Council until the 1939 war, when the Jews had ten councillors.

We had two Jewish high schools, a large vocational school, numerous private schools, *chederim* (religious elementary schools), as well as a hospital (private, of course), an orphanage, an old people's home, two synagogues, numerous *shtiebels* (for prayers), a cemetery, a *mikveh*, charitable organisation, health services for children and adults, the "Lyra" choir, sports clubs, a tourist club and libraries. We also had private banks. Polish banks refused to lend to Jews, so we had to set up our own "specialised" banks for merchants, industrialists and craftsmen. These were cooperative banks.

A special place was occupied by the agricultural farm on the outskirts of the town. Its role was to prepare young Zionists for agricultural work in Palestine at the time. Young candidates for aliyah ("ascension" to Palestine) came from all over Poland, as this was one of the very few places of its kind. Here, future farmers underwent "*hachshara*", to qualify them to work in the *kibbutzim* in Palestine. The agricultural training courses lasted several months.

In commerce, all branches were represented, even the wholesale of religious articles for Catholics.

The Jewish high school, opened in 1917, was one of the first in Poland. Its first director was the world-renowned Professor Majer Bałaban.

The I.L. Perec Yiddish School was of a very high standard. We also had a school for *chazanim* (synagogue cantors), the only one of its kind in Poland. It was based in the New Synagogue premises.

The Częstochowa Jewish community was formally established in 1862. Previously, it had been part of the Janów community. It was responsible for the synagogue, cemetery and charitable institutions.

The Old Synagogue, built in 1855, was renovated in 1928/29. It was demolished at the beginning of the war in 1939. The New Synagogue, one of the most beautiful in Poland, was burnt down at Christmas 1939. The municipal philharmonic hall, inaugurated in 1955, was built on its former site. A

commemorative plaque, now affixed to the building, recalls the site's previous purpose.

In 1938, ORT school classes were opened, but the war brought them to a halt.

At the initiative of my grandfather, Rabbi Asz, a new, modern *mikveh* (*a bath used for ritual immersion in Judaism to achieve ritual purity)* was built in 1904-1905.

As in all cities where Jews settled, their first concern was to have their own cemetery. Częstochowa's cemetery was established in 1799. Until then, Jews were buried in Janów, close to our town. There are around 4,500 graves. They were demolished and the finest marble was shipped to Germany. The cemetery was in operation throughout the war. Soviet soldiers, who died in the prison camp, were also buried here. Victims of the 1943 Purim massacre, those from the "Small Ghetto" and those from the 25th July 1943 selection, buried in communal graves, are also buried here. The last burial took place in 1971.

In the 1960s, the cemetery grounds were absorbed by the Częstochowa (formerly Raków) Foundry complex. In 1981, damaged by pollution and neglected as a result of numerous complaints, it was made accessible to visitors with special permission and accompanied by a guide.

After lengthy negotiations, the Częstochowa Foundry agreed to build the walls and a gate and install lighting. The city, for its part, promised to build a tunnel leading to the main entrance. The city's mayor officially invited VIPs to the unveiling of the commemorative plaques.

Today, without its Jews, the city has a population of 250,000, following the annexation of surrounding localities, and is the capital of a county. Częstochowa has resumed its important economic role in Poland, which was interrupted during the Nazi occupation.

However, we must not forget the three pogroms in Częstochowa - in 1904, in 1919, with its many deaths, and on 22nd June 1937. I lived through the terror of the latter.

MY FAMILY

At my age, my big worries were school and friends. Surrounded by my family, I lived happily, despite the surrounding antisemitism. All this, all this life was wiped out in our city, in the whole of Poland, and in the territories occupied by the Nazis.

I was born on 31st August 1924 in Częstochowa, Poland.

My paternal grandfather, Henoch, was a trader in ferrous and non-ferrous metals (*Eisenwaren*). His store sold items such as files, saws, locks, nails and hammers. My grandmother, Liba, ran the cash register. My youngest aunt, Blimka, also worked there.

There were five children in my father's family. My father, the eldest, had three sisters and a brother - Zosia, Guta, Blimka and Haskiel-Heniek. I had three cousins - Mietek, Mietek and Lucek. The whole family was exterminated, except for my uncle Stasiek, Blimka's husband, who followed the same route as me until the Liberation.

My maternal grandfather, Nachum Asz, was Chief Rabbi of Częstochowa for 43 years - until his death on 12th May 1936. He had previously been rabbi of Nieszawa, near Warsaw. The Częstochowa community called him to the post of Chief Rabbi in 1893. He was a great scholar, known throughout Poland. Very tolerant, he was active as a Mizrachi Zionist.

In 1935, during the antisemitic campaign in Poland against Jewish ritual slaughter, led by *Sejm* MP Janina Prystor, my grandfather published a Polish-language brochure entitled "In Defence of Ritual Slaughter", which was distributed to Polish MPs before the parliamentary session. The brochure was distributed by the Warsaw Jewish community.

Two of my uncles collaborated in the writing of the book - a lawyer and a journalist. At the age of eleven, I helped proofread the book as it came off the press. My grandfather dedicated a copy to me in Hebrew, specifying, "to my collaborator". I was very flattered. Unfortunately, the book disappeared during the deportation, along with everything else.

The children I knew from my maternal grandparents numbered nine (one daughter died very young): four daughters and five sons:

Samuel- Joseph	husband of Gustawa Szabsiewicz, no children
Moshe	husband of Gustawa Fogiel, parents of three children: Szymek married to Ruta, (Elisabeth), of whom Aliza-Elzunia Mila married to Janek, gynaecologist, of whom Irka was born on 23rd August 1939 Ruta married to Leon Jasny including Nachum born in January 1942 in the ghetto Moshe was the Rabbinate secretary
Dora	wife of Izrael Poznanski, had three daughters: Runia married to Lowa Lunski, Cesia married to Janek Rokman, engineer Mira married to Heniek Igra.
Dawid-Hersz	married to Hélène Sadorkiewicz, had four children: Izio born in 1921, Lusia, born in 1923, Mulek born in 1930, and Sewek born on 6th August 1933.
Tonia	my mother
Bluma-Bola	schoolteacher, married to Herman Biderman, mother of Benjamin- Benio, born on 21st February 1931
Mendel Mietek	married to Genia Prawer, journalist, no children
Leon	married to Basia Biderman, no children, lawyer and scholar, city councillor
Fela	single, who lived with us and was deported with my parents and my little sister, Sarenka.

Elisabeth (Elzunia) Asz, Szymek's daughter, born in the ghetto in January 1941, survived the war. I will tell her story in a special chapter.

My uncle Samuel-Joseph lived in Ozorków, near Łódź. He and his wife perished in the spring of 1942, probably gassed by the fumes emanating from hermetically sealed truck exhaust pipes.

Before the war, my aunt and uncle, Dawid and Dora, lived with their families in Łódź. A ghetto had been created in Łódź in November 1939. It was attached to Germany under the name of “Litzmannstadt”. The two families came to join us in Częstochowa. Only Runia and Lowa went to Białystok, under Soviet

occupation, while Cesia and Janek went to Warsaw, where they were later locked up in the ghetto. (Janek was the only member of the family who owned a car. It was a Polski Fiat. Cars were rare in Poland before the war).

I was very close to my maternal grandfather. In spring, when he often went for walks with one of his sons in a horse-drawn carriage, and in winter, when he was well covered up, on a sled, I accompanied him and we talked a lot. I was just a kid and he had fun with me. Almost every evening, my mother and I went to see my grandfather. One evening, a week before he died, we arrived a little later than usual. My grandfather asked me why. I told him that my mother and I had gone to the cinema to see a film called "The Little Colonel", starring Shirley Temple. Although it was a children's movie, he asked me to tell him about it. I did not think he would be interested, but he listened patiently, probably to make me happy.

My grandfather's death came as a terrible shock to me. The centre of the family had broken up. My grandmother had died at the end of January 1928, when I was not yet three and a half years old. I still remember it vaguely.

My father's name was Maurice Grundman and my mother was Tauba Asz. My father ran two wholesale businesses in metal products - nickel anodes, galvanized iron sheets (coated with "noble" metals by catalysis - an electrochemical process), wire, metal beams for construction, etc. One of these businesses belonged to him. As for the second, he was branch manager of a major company in Będzin, a town some 80 km from Czestochowa, where 85% of the inhabitants were Jewish.

Until the age of almost fourteen, I was an only child. On 30th March 1938, my little sister Sara-Sarenka was born. At first, I was not very happy about it. Not only was I no longer an only child, but she was also a sister. Since a child was going to be born, it might as well be a brother and not a sister. But, after three weeks, I realised that I loved her. Over time, my love for her grew. I adored her. And she adored me.

In 1939, I was going to high school. For the first few years, I attended Dr. Axer's private Jewish high school and, in the 1938-39 school year, I attended the Jewish *Gimnazjum* [High School]. The school was co-educational (boys and girls), and there were forty-two of us in my class. We were very good friends and the atmosphere was very good. My grades were also excellent.

Moreover, I had been taking Hebrew lessons at home from an early age.

World War II broke out on 1st September 1939, the day after my fifteenth birthday. My family and I (with the exception of my father, who did not want to leave Częstochowa because he did not believe war was imminent) had been in Łódź for a few days.

BEFORE THE WAR

It was 1939. Nazi Germany was very close. Hitler had been in power since 30th January 1933 and the Jews were trembling. It began in Germany with decrees, the most atrocious of which were the "Nuremberg Laws" of 1935. Restrictions, pogroms, looting, burning of bookshops and ("autodafés") of books banned by Nazi ideology. Jewish factories and stores were "Aryanised", handed over to the Germans. Jews were stripped of their German citizenship. Concentration camps were established for the "enemies of the people" at Dachau and, Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen. These "enemies" included Jews, Catholic priests and political opponents. Common criminals and homosexuals were also imprisoned.

Jews, who could afford it, left Germany, while others were expelled. The Nazis facilitated this emigration in order to get rid of them. You had to leave everything behind, and leave with almost no money.

On 30th November 1938, Jews, of Polish origin, were deported to the Polish border, in complete destitution. The place was called Zbąszyń, in the Poznań region. The Polish authorities would not let these Jews enter Poland. For several weeks, thousands of men, women and children remained in "no-man's-land".

Poland's Jews were moved by the tragic situation. Relief efforts were organised. After many interventions, the Poles allowed these "undesirable" Poles to enter Poland. Those, who had relatives, joined them in their towns. I had some friends amongst the young people who arrived in Częstochowa.

The brutal expulsion to Zbąszyń had shaken Poland's Jews. We felt for them but, at the same time, wondered what would happen to us if the Nazis occupied.

For several months now, we had been experiencing a "war of nerves". Hitler's Germany, having "swallowed up" Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938-1939, had turned its attention to Poland, laying claim to Danzig (Gdańsk) and demanding the construction of a freeway through Polish territory to link East Prussia with the rest of Germany.

From that time on, we lived in fear of imminent war and under the psychosis of gas bombs.

Trenches were dug in streets, parks, gardens and courtyards to protect against air attacks. Cellars also contained anti-aircraft and "anti-gas shelters''. To protect the cellars from gas, covers were put over the doors in order to make them more impermeable. We had prepared them with mattresses and food, so that we could live and sleep in them if need be.

We feared a gas attack and had taken the necessary measures to protect ourselves. As there were not enough gas masks to go around, we went to a chemist and bought some gauze, absorbent cotton and a product called "neutralizing liquid". This had been recommended to us by the newspapers and the government, so that we could make a sort of tampon.

Częstochowa was twenty-three kilometres from the German border and we feared the city's rapid occupation. Łódź was a few hundred kilometres away, so we took refuge with my two maternal aunts and uncles in Łódź (little did we know that Hitler would later occupy Poland!).

We had already stocked up on food (flour, sugar, potatoes, etc.) in anticipation of rationing.

My mother, my little sister Sara (whom we called Sarenka, which means "little deer" in Polish), who was barely a year and a half old, my Aunt Fela and Stasia, our nanny, stayed with my Aunt Dora's family, while I lived with my uncle Dawid.

WAR WITHOUT DECLARATION

On 1st September, by the radio, we learned early of the German attack that night. I still remember when the radio announcer solemnly read the proclamation of the President of the Polish Republic Ignacy Mościcki, "Tonight, the age-old enemy has attacked our homeland...". He gave us hope that the Polish army would be able to defeat him.

As he subsequently did with all the other invaded countries, Hitler attacked Poland without declaring war.

The Germans staged a mock Polish attack on the German radio transmitter in Gliwice (Gleiwitz), in Śląsk (Silesia) near the border. This was used as a pretext to enter Poland. In reality, it was German soldiers dressed in Polish uniforms who had "attacked" the transmitter.

Nervousness set in.

From time to time, sirens sounded as German planes flew overhead, and we had to get down into the air raid shelters. Over the radio, codes were given to the Polish military, for example, Lar-Nia 21. Alerts were short-lived, usually lasting a few minutes. A second siren enabled us to get back into the apartments.

For the first five days, that was how our days went - up and down from the apartment to the cellar. We did not dare to go out into the streets for fear of being caught by a bomb. We were always hooked to the radio, waiting for news of bombings and the fall of other Polish cities.

Częstochowa, evacuated by the Polish army, was occupied by the German army on 3rd September. We were afraid for my father and the family who had stayed behind. Late in the evening of 5th September, from our ground-floor apartment, we heard footsteps and voices in the street.

To find out what was going on, we tried turning on the radio. But this proved impossible. We could not find Radio Łódź. We later learned that it had stopped broadcasting, and that the noises were coming from people joining the Polish army leaving the city on foot.

My uncle Dawid, with whom I was staying, and his son Izio followed them.

The next day, my mother told me that my uncle Israel and his son-in-law, Lowa, had also left. The army, with civilians in tow, was heading for Warsaw, northeast of Łódź (Alain and Simon Cytron were also there).

On the road, the military and civilian columns were overflown by German planes attacking them. There were deaths. The army and some of the civilians continued on to Warsaw, while others were taken prisoner by the Germans and brought back to Łódź, where they were interned in factories which were temporarily used as prisons. This is what happened with my uncle Israel and Lowa, while Dawid and Izio marched towards Warsaw.

From that day on, I had moved and I was living in with my mother, who did not want us to be separated any more, and where there was now more room, as my Aunt Dora's husband and son-in-law had unfortunately left.

Each family hoped that the relative, who had left, had either arrived safely in Warsaw, or had been interned in one of the factories and, above all, had not been killed on the road. Although some people were imprisoned, it was impossible to know their identity. The internees did their best to send some news to their families. Sometimes, people would come to the families and tell them that their loved ones were in a particular factory, and that they had been sent on their behalf to fetch parcels of linen, food, soap and money. But how could we be sure these people were sincere? We could only trust them, or not. Regrettably, the majority of them were scammers who kept, if not all, a large part for themselves. Unfortunately, there will always be dishonest people, who take advantage of other people's distress.

A few days later, Israel and Lowa were liberated and returned home.

As for my uncle Dawid and Izio, they arrived in Warsaw, which was later besieged by the German army. Living conditions were very difficult, as the city was constantly bombed. Water and electricity were cut off, famine reigned and thousands died. After the occupation of Warsaw, my uncle, with his son, returned to Łódź. Between 6th and 8th September, in the absence of any Polish or German authority, the residents of German origin, known as "Volksdeutsche", began their rampage. They made up one-third of the Łódź population, i.e. around 250,000 inhabitants. They wore Nazi armbands (a white circle surrounding a swastika on a red background). They molested the Jewish populace, beating people up in the streets, smashing the windows of Jewish stores, pulling off beards and so on.

The German army entered Łódź on 8th September, generously offering sweets to children. Parents shouted at them not to eat them, lest they be poisoned.

The *Volksdeutsche* welcomed the Germans with open arms and won important positions, mainly in the town halls, because, as they knew the city, they were very useful.

With shouting and blows, they forced Jews to fill in the trenches dug for the air-raid shelters.

One day, on the eve of Yom Kippur, they took me and other Jews to Poniatowski Park and made us work all day without eating. My mother, who had somehow found me, showed them my identity card proving that I was young (15) and could not work. They would not listen. After she insisted, they agreed to release me. Then, they demanded that I return with the others the day after Yom Kippur, the fasting day, which they knew perfectly well. I do not know how my mother managed to get me exempted from it.

On 1st September, the day the war broke out, attempts were made to stop it. Mussolini wanted to act as intermediary between Germany and the Allied Powers, i.e. France and England. The Allies demanded the immediate withdrawal of German troops from Poland, and gave Hitler forty-eight hours to comply. They were acting within the framework of the alliances they had concluded with Poland. On Sunday, 3rd September, when the ultimatum had expired and Hitler had not withdrawn, the Allied governments declared war on him. We were beginning to feel hopeful again.

We listened to the radio every day and heard about the advance of the German armies. It was also through the radio that we learned of the death of the great Jewish philosopher Sigmund Freud. He had previously fled Nazism.

Poland became increasingly occupied.

THE OCCUPATION

On 17th September, Soviet armies, in turn, invaded Poland, on the pretext of protecting their own people (Byelorussians and Ukrainians) living in Poland.

As we later learned, this was in fulfilment of one of the secret clauses of the German-Soviet pact signed on 23rd August 1939. According to the pact, Germany and the USSR would share Poland between them.

Everyone, especially the Jews, was afraid. Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of people crossed the demarcation line to be on the Soviet side, rather than the German. These were rarely whole families, but mostly young and not-so-young men fleeing the future possibility of forced labour and abuse. The situation was getting worse. Jews were increasingly targeted - their beards were pulled off in the street, they were targeted and shot against a wall (Simon and Alain), they were beaten.

In Częstochowa, political party leaders were arrested and deported to the Dachau concentration camp. I remember one case, where a Jewish family received a letter saying that Mrs. Niemirowski's husband (Samuel) had died following an illness and that, if the family wanted the ashes and clothes, it was possible upon payment of a certain amount of money.

With Poland almost completely occupied, my family and I were thinking of returning to Częstochowa to join my father. There had been no trains since the beginning of the war, as they were now in German hands. We had received no news of my father or the other members of our family, who had remained in Częstochowa. After three weeks, someone my father knew came to tell us that he was still alive. This made us decide to leave.

The only possible means of transport, albeit extremely expensive, was a taxi, which we had to pay for per person. With difficulty (because there were not many), we managed to find a taxi and, finally, on 27th September, we returned home.

On the first day of the war, 1st September 1939, when the Polish army left our city, it was followed by civilians, fleeing in cars and on foot, the last trains having left. German planes, flying very low, fired on them with automatic weapons. The roads were littered with corpses.

On Sunday 3rd September, the day the German soldiers entered the city, tensions were running high. People were reading the first German ordinances in the streets. Soldiers handed out sweets to passers-by.

On Monday 4th September, the occupiers ordered stores to open. All men over the age of fifteen were forced to leave their homes. People were locked in the church and the town hall. Then, they were told to lie down on the ground and soldiers fired at them. It was not difficult to hit the bodies lying on the ground. Around 400 people were killed that day. The father of one of my classmates died a few days later of tetanus. It all happened on the cathedral square, and has gone down in history as "Bloody Monday". The terror was great, and the memory of that terrible day has stayed with us ever since.

Jews were imprisoned and stores were looted.

In addition, under the pretext that German soldiers had been shot at, three Polish houses were set on fire. This was probably done to spread terror.

My uncle Moshe was summoned by the occupation authorities (as secretary of the Rabbinate) and had to provide a list of the pre-war leaders of the Jewish community.

Six personalities were appointed to represent the Jews to the German authorities - Leon Kopiński, L. Bromberg, N-D. Berliner, D. Koniecpoler, Krauze and Engel.

On 16th September 1939, Mr. Kopiński presented the Germans with the list of the Ältestenrat [*Judenrat* - council of elders] (including my uncle Moshe). My uncle learned that the two local rabbis, Klajnplac and Grynfeld, had been arrested[1].

Some of these personalities were held as hostages (including my uncle), while the others had to collect a very large sum of money in a very short time, as ransom to free them. It was not possible to collect the full amount within the deadline, which was therefore deferred. Between the moment of imposition and the moment of payment, great terror reigned throughout the city's Jewish population. The hostages' families trembled for their lives. Finally, the amount of the ransom was reached and handed over to the German authorities. We

[1] [*See "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. 1, col. 701, and Vol. 2, col. 38.*]

called it a "contribution". On two subsequent occasions, we had to hand over a very large sum of money to the Germans.

The hostages were released after a few days' detention.

The occupiers set up an "Ältestenrat" [*Judenrat* - council of elders] in every Polish town. The twenty-four people in charge formed one here.

The "raids" on streets and homes began with forced labour. In winter 1939-40, for example, streets and roads had to be cleared of snow.

The Ältestenrat had to provide manpower for compulsory labour. But the Nazis were also catching Jews in the streets and in their homes.

The Ältestenrat was responsible for representing the city's Jews to the German and Polish authorities. A new administration was set up, rather like a government. There were new departments - the General Secretariat, Housing Department, Legal Department, Financial Department (especially for contributions), Religious Affairs Department, Obligatory Work Department, Health and Social Affairs Department, Education Department, Supply Department (in charge of ration cards), Order Department (to enforce curfews, etc.).

Every day, the situation worsened. New laws and decrees restricted the status of Jews. At the cinema, during newsreels, antisemitic propaganda was rife. As of 15th December, we were forbidden to enter cinemas or to travel by train.

From 15th December 1939, the wearing of the armband (12 cm wide, white, with the blue Star of David, 10 cm long from tip to tip) was imposed throughout the territory of the General-Government. This applied to all Jews aged twelve and over. The Star of David was to be displayed in the windows of Jewish stores.

Towards the end of October 1939, part of the Polish territories occupied by the German army were annexed to Germany. The rest formed the General Government, with Hans Frank as Governor-General, and Kraków as its capital. The territory was made up of four districts - Kraków, Warsaw, Lublin and Radom (to which we belonged), each headed with a governor. Later, a fifth district of Lemberg (Lwów in Polish) was formed, following the occupation of ex-Soviet territories.

Compulsory labour was introduced for Jews, to which all men over the age of sixteen were subjected.

In November, my uncle Dawid's family and my aunt Dora's family, fleeing the Łódź ghetto, joined us in Częstochowa. Dora, her husband Israel and their youngest daughter, Mira, lived with us. Their other daughter, Cesia, was with her husband Janek Rokman in the Warsaw ghetto, and their eldest daughter Runia was in Białystok, with her husband Lowa Lunski.

Dawid, his wife Hela, their children - Izio, Lusia (who, like me, is a survivor, and currently lives in the USA), Mulek and Sewek, moved in with my uncle Leon, a lawyer. He was a member of our city's last city council before the war, and was also, initially, a member of the Ältestenrat's legal department, from which he resigned shortly afterwards.

On Christmas Day 1939, the Poles set fire to the New Synagogue at the instigation of the Germans. The Germans took photos and filmed their action. The photos and films were to be used for Nazi propaganda abroad, to show that the Poles were attacking the Jews and that it was the Germans who were protecting them. The incident led to attacks and looting.

The city's Old Synagogue had already been destroyed, sometime earlier, by the Poles (around 13th September 1939 – Rosh Hashanah).

On 30th September 1939, a law prohibited Jews from owning more than one hundred złoty. Sums in excess of this, as well as jewellery, had to be deposited in a bank.

On 10th October, the Stadthauptmann (German mayor) of Częstochowa announced to Mr. Kopiński, president of the Ältestenrat, that the Jewish population was to take in and accommodate Jews from Berlin, Germany and the area around our city, which had been annexed by Germany.

The provisional mayor of Częstochowa, a *Volksdeutsche* Paul Bölke, an electrical goods merchant in a poor financial position on the eve of the war, behaved in a brutal and arrogant manner towards the Jews. A four-person delegation went to Bishop Kubina to ask for his intervention, as relations with the Poles were poor. But when they arrived at his office, the Jews learned that the bishop was in "police custody".

On a Friday night in January 1940, thousands of men, women and girls were brutally driven from their homes, half-naked. After standing for hours in the freezing cold, the injured and the beaten were released. The others were

transferred to a room and forced to strip completely naked. German officers and soldiers beat them savagely. Some of the girls were raped and then sent to work. The Germans were looking for jewellery.

The Jews suffered more and more. The cruellest of all the Gestapo was a certain Szabelski, a *Volksdeutsch*, feared by Jews and Poles alike. Since March 1940, Częstochowa's Jewish population had increased by several thousand. Refugees or those expelled from other territories (attached to the Reich, while my town was part of the General-Government) had come to join us.

In 1940, a law forbade Jews to own factories and stores. Commissioners (Treuhänder) were appointed to manage them. This was the *Aryanisation* of Jewish economic life. They were *Volksdeutsche* or Poles.

For Passover 1940-1941 and 1942, we received *matzot* from Hungary.

As soon as they entered, the occupiers introduced terror and anti-Jewish laws. Every day brought new demands and restrictions. At the same time, Jews were subjected to physical abuse.

In the early days of the occupation, my father wanted to go to his office. The building had been occupied by the Gestapo. As soon as he approached, the guard snatched his cane (canes were fashionable for men in those days) and savagely beat him. The same cane was used by the henchman to beat another Jew, who was passing in the street - until it broke in two. Other Jews had their beards torn off or shaved off. Terrorised, the Jews did not dare to leave their homes.

We were still in Łódź when my father was beaten. When we got back, my father told my mother about it. I have never been able to find out exactly what happened, because my father did not want to tell us. He said that he would tell us once the war would fortunately be over - it must have been terrible. Why did he not want to talk about it? Was he afraid? He took his secret with him.

One day in October 1939, a young man came to our home. He told us he was the new director of the Częstochowa branch of Ets. Jakub Gutman, of which my father was the director. He was German. His brother, who had appointed him to this position, was himself the director of this important company's head office in Będzin. He wanted my father to tell him the amount of stock and the accounts, etc., but the building, where the company had its head office, was not available.

However, the building, where the company was located had been occupied by the Gestapo (where my father was beaten) from the very first day, and all the papers had been burnt by the Nazis. He gave my father two days to present the figures, which were impossible to provide. He announced to my father, "If you don't, you'll be chilled"!!!! We were very afraid of his threat but, in the end, my father did not divulge anything and nothing happened.

Right from the start, the company's new German administrator set about liquidating existing stock. He sold off the goods and, presumably, put the proceeds into his own pocket. Intermediaries for the sale immediately appeared. My father was approached by potential customers because, it was believed, he must have been in cahoots with the German.

But my father did not want to be an accomplice to theft. He said that he wanted to be able to look the Jewish owners in the eye after the war. His eternal optimism led him to believe that, after the war, despite "momentary" misfortunes, everything would go back to the way it was before. While others were making good money, my father preferred to restrict himself rather than help clear out the stores he had looked after before the war.

When the Germans occupied our town, some apartments, including ours, were searched for who knows what enemy. Doors were broken. My great-grandfather's portrait was even shot at with a revolver. The open doors gave neighbours the opportunity to break into the apartment and steal, as my father was staying with his parents and the rest of the family was in Łódź. Many objects were stolen.

I had a beautiful collection of postage stamps, which disappeared. I did not know who had stolen it. Then, one day, people told me that a neighbour was offering to sell stamps. He did not want to make things difficult for himself by selling the stamps, taken straight from the albums. That is how we came to see my name stamped on the albums. When I learned who had stolen my collection, I wanted to press charges, but we knew that this neighbour "worked" for the Gestapo. Maybe that is why he was not afraid of being reported. He was dangerous, so we decided not to press charges.

This was my first stamp collection. I had started it when I was seven or eight years old. It was very important to me. There were about two thousand stamps, and it was a very nice collection for someone my age. Then, almost immediately after our return from Łódź, I began a new collection. I even had opportunities to

get stamps during the war and, by the time the ghetto was liquidated on 22nd September 1942, I had around six hundred. Not bad, considering the circumstances. I lost this second collection on 22nd September 1942.

After liberation, I began another stamp collection. When I left Poland, I took it with me to Germany, where I significantly enlarged it. Being there, it was easy for me to find German stamps, especially those from the Nazi era, which interested me quite a lot. This third collection was confiscated when I arrived in France. There were around six thousand pieces. Once in France, I started another (fourth!) collection. To date, it stands at over twenty thousand stamps. It is a passion that has lasted for so many years.

Right from the beginning of the occupation, curfews were instituted - for Germans, a little more restricted for Poles and even more restricted for Jews. The curfew changed with the seasons - it ended later in summer and earlier in winter. One day in 1940, I was visiting my friend Mietek, who lived not far from us. Time passed and I did not notice that the curfew was approaching. We were very careful to limit our movements. It was 8 p.m., the limit, and I needed 5-8 minutes to get home. What could I do? I had to get home. So, I left in a hurry, hoping not to run into a Polish policeman along the way. Unfortunately for me, there was one on the way, who stopped me. It was easy to recognise a Jew, as we were wearing armbands with a Star of David. In a matter of minutes, I could have been home. The policeman took me to the Polish police station. They put me in a cell. Meanwhile, my family was worried. Stasia, as a Pole, had the right to travel an hour longer than us. She went looking for me when she heard that I had been arrested. But there was nothing she could do to free me. I spent the night in the cell.

There are many stories of the Nazi occupation. They were written after the liberation. They are memories. Others were written, day by day, during the war. Unfortunately, few of these diaries were found after the war. Most were buried in the Warsaw ghetto, and all others disappeared with the liquidation of Poland's Jewish communities. Among the diaries that have been found are that of Anne Frank, in Amsterdam, a diary by Dr. Janusz Korczak and another by Emmanuel Ringelblum, in Warsaw.

From the very first days of the war, I wrote chronicles in which I recorded all political events and those concerning the persecution of Jews in Poland. My diary stopped on 22nd September 1942, the day of our deportation and the liquidation of the “Big Ghetto”. It disappeared with all our belongings.

CREATION OF THE GHETTO (9th April 1941)

(The “Small Ghetto” was created
after the deportations of September-October 1942.)

Like other Polish cities such Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, etc., Częstochowa had its own ghetto.

For the Nazis, the pretext for creating the ghettos was the danger of epidemics, as well as public order. It would have been preferable, for security reasons, to separate the Jews from the Poles, whose centuries-old antisemitism was known worldwide.

In creating the ghettos, the Nazis took their inspiration from those of the Middle Ages. But the reasons were different.

During the Middle Ages, the reasons for this were mainly religious - Jews were to be separated from gentiles so as to avoid epidemics, to avoid "economic" competitors, to "prevent possible attempts to convert Christians" and so on. The first ghetto was created in Venice in the 16th century.

The Nazis had other interests. By gathering the Jews, they could easily get free slave labour. On the other hand, everything was ready for subsequent deportations. But, of course, we had no idea.

The transfer to the ghetto took place between 9th and 17th April 1941. The ghetto was finally closed off on 23rd April 1941.

Signs were erected at the ghetto's "borders". On the non-Jewish side, the text, written in German and Polish, read, "Jewish residential area, danger of epidemic, entry prohibited". (This prohibition was not respected and non-Jews could, in fact, move around freely.)

On the Jewish side, the text was in four languages - German, Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew. It rea, "Exit strictly forbidden. Violation will be punishable by death". Those working outside had to present an *Ausweis* (pass) to a guard consisting of a Jewish policeman and a German or Polish policeman.

At the end of March 1941, there were 32,744 Jews in Częstochowa.

When the ghetto was created, thousands of people came to join us. They came from the small towns and villages in the surrounding area, from which they had just been expelled.

We were squeezed into a small space. Life was very hard, and getting harder every day. Before the war, there were 29,000 inhabitants in 9,000 rooms. In early April 1941, 48,000 into 4,000.

The Ältestenrat had given my family a one-room apartment with a kitchen. There were five of us - my parents, my little sister, my aunt Fela (my mother's younger sister) and me. Our housekeeper Stasia, who was not Jewish, had to leave us. She would come back to see us from time to time and took my little sister for a walk. Before the creation of the ghetto, we had obtained permission, from the German Labour Office, to employ her as an Aryan in the service of a Jewish family. She lived with us. When the ghetto was formed, she found a room in town and we provided her with furniture and the rest of the household equipment.

We had to leave our old apartment before we could move into the new one in the ghetto. In the meantime, my aunt Zosia, my father's sister, and her husband, Jakub Potok, and their eleven-year-old son, Mietek, put us up for about two weeks, as their apartment was on the territory of the future ghetto. We spent Pesach 1941 with them.

In the house where we were to stay from then on, there was a small Jewish soap factory called “Dziubas and Fiszel”[2]. It had been bought up cheaply by the owner of the house, Lewandowski, who had moved it out of the ghetto.

There were also two residential buildings in the courtyard, each consisting of a ground floor and a first floor. Our accommodation was on the ground floor. A third building overlooked ul. Warszawska No. 41 - our new address. This building housed a pharmacy, which had been moved out of the ghetto. The owner of our buildings decided to build a larger house in its place, having become rich during the war. The building had been demolished and the new construction began before the creation of the ghetto. The ghetto stopped the work. From time to time, Lewandowski came to the ghetto to see what was going on. He was not at all happy about the work being stopped. A great antisemite, he said he would build his house after the Jews were dead! Alas, he was vindicated - his house

[2] [*See “Sefer Częstochowa”, Vol. 1, cols. 588-590.*]

was built after the deportations. And to think that he made his fortune thanks to the Jews!

On 24th December 1941, a decree forbade Jews from owning furs, under penalty of death. The smallest furs were handed over to the authorities within forty-eight hours. At the end of December, five carloads of furs were shipped from Częstochowa. The furs were to be used to make coats for German soldiers on the Eastern Front.

Life in the ghetto had become very difficult. Every day, new orders and requirements made our situation worse. But, little did we know at the time, what lay ahead. Perhaps that is why the resistance was not very strong. Still, we hoped to see the end of the war.

Apart from organised compulsory labour, the Germans would catch people on the streets for various jobs. To avoid being caught, people looked for work, in order to get a German stamp on their work card, which was compulsory for anyone over the age of twelve. In this way, they hoped to avoid being sent to a labour camp since, by working for them, they were being useful to the Germans.

This is how the Jewish Council (Ältestenrat) decided, with the agreement of the German authorities, to set up workshops in the former *Metalurgia* factory on ul. Krótka, where the people, left behind during the deportations in autumn 1942, were later temporarily parked. This was in the spring of 1942.

To equip these workshops, sewing machines were requisitioned from Jews and transported to *Metalurgia*. It was mainly women who sought work there. They had to make clothes for the German army, furs for the Russian front and so on. There was no shortage of applicants for this work. On the contrary, there were more than enough places available. Priority was given to those who supplied the machines. My Aunt Fela hoped to find a job there. It was a great hope for us. But, a few months later, the deportations shattered our illusions. The “cover”, which we thought we had, did not exist. For the Nazis, the liquidation of the Jews came first, even before their needs for the army.

Since the summer of 1941, we had often seen columns of Soviet prisoners crossing the streets of the ghetto. It was forbidden to approach them or to talk to them. They were heavily guarded by German soldiers. Nevertheless, we were able to see the condition they were in. Their uniforms were in a very poor state and they often dragged their bare feet, their eyes haggard, their cheeks hollow.

They were quite miserable. We learned that they died like flies, malnourished and badly treated. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery of our city.

As in every city, we had our share of colourful characters - Rivelè[3], an elderly dwarf, who ran up and down I Aleja, asking people for alms, a Jewish woman. There was also a woman, extravagantly dressed - Mademoiselle Wujcicka, a Polish woman.

During the war, other characters roamed the ghetto. In the streets, for example, we would meet a man wearing a yellow armband "decorated" with three black dots. This armband was usually given to deaf-mutes, to help them get around more easily. Since this man could be seen very often, people whispered that he was a spy working for the Gestapo. People would not be suspicious of a deaf-mute, who could learn things that were not meant for all ears. We never knew where the truth lay. He ended his life, like almost all our Jews.

Another category represented the beggars, who were unfortunately becoming more and more numerous on the streets. It was war and misery. It was a dramatic sight.

A young woman, Helenka Tenenbaum[4], had become the mistress of Degenhardt, the executioner of the Jews of Częstochowa. She was a great help to us as, on several occasions, she was able to intervene on our behalf. We wondered whether she had not been "delegated" by the Jews for this purpose. But her life ended as tragically as all the others.

The Jews were simply trying to survive by any means necessary. The vast majority hoped that, by keeping a low profile, they might miraculously see the end of the war. It was an almost impossible dream. Other Jews left the ghetto with false papers or by hiding with Poles or in convents. Many of them had joined the resistance.

The Germans had posted notices to the Polish population. These warned that Poles who hid Jews were liable to the death penalty, along with their families. On the other hand, if they denounced Jews, they would be rewarded with one or two kilograms of sugar.

Among the "Righteous" who have been honoured by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and awarded medals for helping Jews during the war, the most numerous are

[3] [*See detailed account, with photographs, in "Czenstochow", 1958, supplement to "Czenstochover Yidn", pp. 158-159.*]
[4] [*See "Churban Czenstochow" by Benjamin Orenstein, 1948, p. 247.*]

Poles. The reason is simple. Polish Jews were the most numerous in Europe. On the other hand, proportionally, Poles were the least numerous.

Jews, who were discovered by the German police, were shot. But some were used by the Germans to find other Jews. In exchange for the promise of survival, they had to denounce Jews they knew or met by chance. This is how we learned in the “Small Ghetto”, through the resistance, that the Fiszhalter brothers, along with the wife of a doctor from Częstochowa, were stationed at the Warsaw railway station, watching for passengers arriving by train.

These people hoped to survive. In vain, they were killed when the Germans decided that it was time. I think we should not incriminate these Jews, because they were certainly tortured and wanted to save their lives.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

No Jewish schools and no non-Jewish schools were accepting Jews. Jewish high school teachers organised clandestine high school courses. I took two vocational training courses of ten months each - mechanic-ironmonger and electrician-installer at the city's former Jewish vocational school, where other courses were also run.

Every week, we bought the Polish-language weekly *Gazeta Żydowska*, published in Kraków, where we found news from other ghettos, as well as new laws affecting us.

Lectures were given and libraries continued to function. Cultural life was led by youth and political organisations.

On the social front, the Jewish TOZ organization, which before the war had been concerned with the health of Jewish children, saw its scope of activity broaden. In addition to this work, it now had to feed two thousand needy children.

An underground magazine *Rasta* (Polish for “Jewish council”) appeared. *Satyric* dealt with subjects relating to life in the ghetto. It also sometimes mocked Jewish leaders by caricaturing them. Its editors included members of the Council. Those responsible were sought, but never identified. *Rasta* brightened up our sad lives and amused us.

A home for young people was created - the “świetlica”. A theatre troupe was formed, which later gave several performances in an abandoned movie theatre. My cousin Mira was one of them. The proceeds from these shows, organised by the Jewish Social Fund, went to needy children. The performers were volunteers.

Homeless people, especially refugees, were housed by the Ältestenrat in shelters called “asylums”. They received food rations from the Ältestenrat and the Jewish Social Fund. These organisations also provided free food in canteens for the poor. The Social Fund was headquartered in Kraków, our “capital”. There was an enormous amount of work to be done every day, given the moral and material misery.

In the middle of the war, all populations received ration cards. In occupied Poland, four categories of these cards were distributed - the most favoured

were, of course, the Germans, then the *Volksdeutsche* (Poles of German origin) were entitled to slightly fewer food tickets. Poles came third. Jews were entitled to the minimum ration. Every month, these cards were distributed to us through the Ältestenrat. The amount of food which we received was often reduced. The rations we were allowed to buy were grossly insufficient.

The misery caused by malnutrition and overcrowding led to an epidemic of typhus and typhoid, which ravaged the ghetto. Many people died. German-language signs, warning of the danger of typhus contagion, could often be seen on house entrances. These houses were quarantined, and all their inhabitants were "disinfected", as were all dwellings. Entrance was forbidden.

A pharmacy, belonging to the Ältestenrat, was set up in the premises of a former Polish pharmacy. It was run by my father's cousin Blanka, a pharmacist.

In the premises of a former Polish post office, a Jewish post office operated until the deportations. We were still allowed to correspond with other towns. Mail was censored.

How did we young people pass the time? We had our clandestine high school courses. Moreover, some of us attended vocational courses run by the Ältestenrat, in the old community school. I personally "took" a course in mechanics and another in electricity, each lasting ten months.

With my friends Heniek and Mietek, we often took walks along the Warta River, one of the ghetto's "borders". There were not many people in the area, so we took the opportunity to smoke a "machorkowa" (the cheapest) cigarette, which we bought in dribs and drabs, so as not to have any in our pockets. At other times, we would play poker, with bets of one grosz.

UNDERGROUND HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES

With the German occupation, schools were closed. After a while, elementary schools for Poles were reopened. But there were no schools for Jews.

Częstochowa had a large Jewish school population. Of a total population of 130,000, there were around 35,000 Jews. Before the war, we had two private Jewish high schools, numerous private schools, in addition to state elementary schools, as well as religious schools, *chederim* and a large vocational school.

Our parents, especially those of the high school students, were perplexed. We believed that the war would one day end, and we had no idea what was in store for us. Life went on and high school students had their studies interrupted. This state of affairs had to be remedied. Parents began to consult each other, to organise high school classes. Many of our former teachers remained in the city. It was with them that underground classes were created. We were groups of around six students. Each teacher taught other subjects as well as his or her own.

There were six of us in my group: Heniek, Jurek, Hipek, “Fronczek”-Lolek, Mietek and me. Towards the end of October 1939, we started our third year of high school. The other groups began their studies at the same time. To the “classic” subjects we added German, “to keep up with the times”. Previously, German, taught in all schools, had been boycotted in Jewish high schools since 1933, when Hitler came to power. It was still taught to students, who had begun studying it, but it was replaced each year by English for beginners. Gradually, it was eliminated from the curriculum. For us, it was a new language.

But understanding Yiddish helped us learn the vocabulary. Dr. Szaffer[5], our former history and geography teacher, taught us German and Polish. We used to meet in the students' or teachers' apartments. It was very dangerous, because in times of occupation, meetings of several people were forbidden, and could be considered as acts of conspiracy, even more so when it came to Jews.

Every day, we had a total of two-to-three-hour classes. Each class lasted half an hour. Given the small number of students, that was enough. So, we had to be taught as much as possible. It was very friendly. We were among friends and our relations with the teachers were excellent. Of course, we had to pay for the lessons.

[5] [*Dr Gerszon Szefer is mentioned, among others, in “Sefer Częstochowa”, Vol. 1, cols. 262, 454 and 499, and in Vol. 2, col. 39.*]

This is how we studied the courses of the last two *gimnazjum* classes (equivalent to junior high school), 3rd and 4th, between October 1939 and the summer of 1941. When middle school was over, we took the "petit bac" exam. After the war, our teachers were to give us certificates which, we thought, would be recognised by the State. Between September 1941 and the summer of 1942, we attended the first class of *lyceum* [equivalent of senior highs school]. We had one year left, as the *lyceum* had two classes - the 2nd and the 1st. At the beginning of September 1942, we started our final year. Alas, after a few days, our classes were interrupted due to the deportations and liquidation of the "Big Ghetto", which began on 22nd September - the day after Yom Kippur.

War causes people to move. Several of our high school teachers left Częstochowa and returned to their hometowns.

We heard from three of these teachers, two of them after the war. We learned from his daughters, who had returned from the USSR, that our Latin and history teacher, Dr. Güntzburg[6], and his wife had died in the Archangelsk region during the war. The family had been deported to this region of northern Russia, where temperatures reached -60°, and were employed in clearing tundra under difficult conditions. The deportation camp was several hundred kilometres from the nearest town. Dr. Güntzburg fell ill, could not be treated and died. His wife followed him prior to the end of the war. Their two daughters, now on their own, were repatriated to Poland after the war, which they later left.

The second (gymnastics) teacher, Leopold (Poldek) Pfefferberg, was originally from Kraków. He returned there at the start of the war and spent 1939-1945 in the ghetto, ending up in a camp in the former Czechoslovakia. I learned his story through the book and film *Schindler's List*, which he instigated. I met him in Los Angeles during my trip to the United States in 1997.

But the saddest and most moving news which we received was during the war, in 1940. It was my former Hebrew teacher, Isaac Lauer who, back in his hometown of Brody, sent a postcard to Częstochowa, giving news of his family. Brody was occupied by the Soviets. It was believed that people there were quieter than back home, under the Nazi yoke. But our teacher, Dr. Szafer, received this card written in Polish. Mr. Lauer wrote that all was well with them. We were happy to hear that! But the card was signed with the Hebrew words "*Al tichtov*", meaning "Don't write".

[6] [*Prof Boruch-Eliasz Gincburg is mentioned in "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. 1, col. 262.*]

This meant a lot. We did not know how things were going over there, but it did not look good. The Lauer family, like many others, must have had problems. We could see that, even on the “good” Soviet side, things were not easy. Then, in 1941, the former Polish territories were occupied by the German army and, in all probability, our friends had to suffer the fate of all the Jews in the area. They would have been massacred by the Nazis because, even after the war, no news of them reached us.

All the other teachers of our school were deported from Częstochowa and never returned.

FORCED LABOUR

As soon as they arrived in Częstochowa, the occupiers turned their attention to the Jews. It began on the streets. Orthodox Jews had their beards ripped off or brutally cut with scissors, all this with howls and mockery.

German policemen would catch Jews on the streets and take them away to use as free labour, under terror. They also went into Jewish apartments to requisition men.

In this regard, I have to tell a news story. The chief of police and the SS, Captain (Hauptmann) [Friedrich-Wilhelm] Krüger, was known throughout the city as a cruel man. His name alone evoked terror. But, one spring morning in 1940, he came into the courtyard of our house to collect Jews. My father was away and my mother was bedridden. In the apartment, apart from my mother, there was our nanny Stasia, my little sister Sarenka and me.

Upon hearing screams, we looked out the window to see what was happening. We saw an SS officer. It frightened us greatly. The SS officer headed towards the stairwell of our apartment, which was on the first floor. We feared that he might come to our door. But he knocked on the door of our kitchen entrance. He only had to open the door. He entered and went through the apartment until he reached my parents' bedroom. We braced ourselves for the worst. There was a reason to! But strangely, the officer's behaviour changed when he saw my mother in bed. He calmed down and introduced himself - Hauptmann Krüger (the terror of the Jews!!!).

Our Stasia, not understanding German, was afraid. Krüger asked my mother why she was lying down. He stayed in the room for a few minutes, chatting. There was no longer any mention of searching for men to take away. Krüger behaved in a manner befitting a well-mannered man. He left us, wishing my mother a speedy recovery. Incredible coming from such a man.

But it must not be forgotten that he was alone in our house. If he had been accompanied, his behaviour would have been different. The Germans were suspicious of each other. And, above all, one must not be too humane with the Jews.

1) Public Works

The Germans introduced compulsory labour for Jewish males aged 16 to 60 in the General Government (the new name for Poland). This involved working for a day and, in the evening, the workers would return home. Tasks included clearing snow, sweeping barracks, as well as loading or unloading military trains (which I did).

The Nazis demanded that the Council provide them with a specific number of workers according to their needs. Those, who could not or did not want to go to work, had to pay their share. This money was used to pay voluntary workers to go to work in their place. These were obviously very poor Jews, who wanted to earn some money to live.

2) Labour Camps

In early August 1940, the Germans established forced labour camps for young Jews, especially in the Lublin region - Ciechanów, Trawniki, etc. The compulsory labour service of the "Ältestenrat" had to designate and provide the number of people demanded by the Nazis. About 1,000 young people, aged between 16 and 25, were sent there, including my best friend, Mietek Jarząbek, with his brother, Berek. They both returned from Ciechanów and later worked in HASAG. Transferred in 1944 to HASAG-Warta, they were deported when the Germans retreated to Germany in January 1945. Since then, all trace of their existence has disappeared.

The news that families received from these young workers taught us about the tragic conditions in which they lived. The work was more than exhausting, the food almost non-existent, the accommodation primitive and, above all, the treatment was brutal by the Nazis. There were few survivors.

I was once summoned, in 1940, to go work in one of these camps. My parents asked one of our neighbours, working in the compulsory labour service of the Ältestenrat, to exempt me. He simply made my file disappear from the records. That's how I was not sent to that camp.

Later, Jews were sent to other camps in Bliżyn, Skarżysko-Kamienna, where the living conditions and terror were frightening. In Skarżysko, they worked in a munitions factory, also owned by HASAG. Life there was even worse than ours.

A VISIT FROM THE KRIMINALPOLIZEI

Autumn 1941, in the “Big Ghetto”. People, who knew our family, came to my grandfather's store and said that they had been stopped in the street by a German, who asked them if they knew my father and what they thought of him, if he was honest, etc. These individuals wanted to warn us that we were going to receive a visit from this German, who was a policeman in civilian clothes. We were afraid, especially since we did not know what it could be about.

Two nights later, there was a knock on our door. When we asked, "Who is there?", a voice replied, "Kriminalpolizei Sosnowitz [Sosnowiec]. Open up, don't be afraid."

We opened the door. Before us stood a German in plainclothes, who said, in German of course, "Good evening, I would like to speak with Mr. Grundman". Invited to sit down, the policeman apologised for his late visit and asked permission to smoke. He behaved completely normally, like a civilised, educated man, and not like a Nazi facing Jews. It was curious. In the midst of war, in the ghetto, a Nazi policeman was chatting with Jews, like a friend.

Here is the purpose of the policeman's visit. The company "Jacob Gutman S.A." in Będzin, a very important business, had among others, a branch in Częstochowa, where my father was the director. After the German occupation, the city of Będzin, where the company's headquarters were located, was directly annexed to the Reich. Częstochowa, on the other hand, was part of the General Government, under the authority of Hans Frank, residing in Kraków. Like all Jewish property, the company was confiscated by the Germans.

While the store in Czestochowa remained under the control of the German commissioner, the headquarters in Będzin was sold to two German merchants from Hamburg, who founded a new company. Probably, following a denunciation, the German police conducted an investigation into the real value of the business assets in Będzin. The sale price was set after an evaluation by the German commissioner of the company. The policeman told us that the two new owners, as well as the commissioner who had made the appraisal, were imprisoned.

"They stole from the German government!!", he said to us. The value of the business assets had been underestimated, and the three accomplices had divided the difference. It seemed very curious to us. They were thieves, who had

been stolen from. The fact that they had stolen a Jewish business did not count. It was only afterward that the theft began, starting from property of the German government.

The policeman had come to investigate the approximate value of the business. He asked my father if he could provide an estimate. My father did not want to. So, he replied that he had no idea. The policeman gave him some time to think and wanted to see my father again at the police station with the answer. My father was afraid to go there and explained that he could not go because Jews were forbidden from leaving the ghetto without a pass. So, the policeman arranged for my father to meet him at a café in the ghetto.

It was awkward for my father. He feared that Jews would see him with a German. Misinterpretations could have circulated about it. But there was no alternative and my father had to go to the meeting. The conversation lasted a while and my father gave no indication of the value of the assets, the turnover, etc., claiming that, since he was staying in another city, it was impossible for him to see what was happening elsewhere. Yet, he had some information.

During his "visit" to our home, the German policeman behaved as equals, courteous, polite. When he left, he apologised again and wished us a good night. We were all amazed, surprised by his attitude. And we thought that this was possible because he was alone. Had he been accompanied, it would not have happened the same way. The Germans were suspicious of each other and it was not proper, if not dangerous, to be too kind to Jews.

DEPORTATIONS

In 1942, Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland were locked up in ghettos or forced-labour camps. Thousands upon thousands died at the hands of these henchmen - either killed individually or in groups, as hostages, from disease and epidemics, hunger, cold, beatings.

When the German army launched its war against the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1942 and occupied vast territories, hundreds of thousands of Jews fell under the Nazi yoke. Immediately, the abuse and massacre of Jews began. It was the army that inaugurated the massacres, closely followed by the SS "special commandos" (*Einsatzgruppen*). Often, Jews were taken out of towns, where they were forced to strip naked and dig their own mass graves. In the cities, ghettos were created, where the Germans behaved in the same way as here, if not even more cruelly.

On part of the former territories included in the General Government, the Nazis created a 5th district of Lwów (Lemberg), and also a region in Białystok. My cousin Szymek managed to escape from the Lwów ghetto and come to our ghetto in Częstochowa. During the deportation from Częstochowa, he was lucky enough to be spared and, having passed through the “Small Ghetto” and HASAG, with me, he was liberated with me on 17th January 1945. Szymek's wife, who had taken refuge in the Warsaw ghetto with their month-old son, perished with the child. Szymek, like thousands of other Jews, had fled to the eastern part of Poland so as to avoid falling into Nazi hands. At the time of the German occupation of these territories, he was in Lwów.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941, the solution to the Jewish problem became more urgent for the Nazis. They had "inherited" hundreds of thousands of Jews, in addition to those already under their boot.

The famous Wansee conference in January 1942 brought together all the major "specialists" on the Jewish "problem". Kept secret, it decided on the rapid liquidation of European Jewry, under the name of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*). We were to suffer its effects.

My mother's eldest brother, Samuel-Joseph, lived with his wife Gustawa in Ozorków, a small town near Łódź. He was the only member of the family who was not in Częstochowa during the war, and we were in regular contact with

him by letter. We were surprised not to receive a letter for Pesach. It was not normal. The explanation was not long in coming.

In April, rumours were circulating that, in the Łódź region of Warthegau, annexed directly to Germany, where my uncle lived, the Nazis were loading Jews onto military trucks. Hermetically sealed, these trucks emitted carbon monoxide and, once started, the trapped people were suffocated by the combustion gas. I was convinced of this, after the war, by Claude Lanzman's film "Shoah", and by the testimony of a Pole, who lived in the area during the war. He told me that he had seen these trucks. There was also a concentration camp nearby, in Chełmno.

That was how we lost the first members of our family.

In the spring of 1942, we learned of the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto and the deportation of the city's Jews. In June 1942, Degenhardt ordered Jews, between the ages of 16 and 60, to present themselves with their work cards for inspection. Around 20,000 responded. Was this a prelude to the planned deportation from the Częstochowa ghetto?

Every day brought new anti-Jewish laws.

The liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto began on 22nd July 1942. Over 300,000 Jews were deported to Treblinka. The terrible conditions of the deportations have been described at length in chronicles, books, stories and even films. The Warsaw ghetto, the largest of all European ghettos, with its 400,000 inhabitants, has become a symbol of Jewish martyrdom. But the Warsaw ghetto was not the only one. There were many ghettos in Poland, and life was terrible. Living conditions in the Łódź ghetto (called “Litzmannstadt” by the Germans) were probably the worst of all Jewish concentrations. Initially, there were around 300,000 Jews in the ghetto.

When the first news of the Warsaw deportations reached us, we began to wonder. Officially, Jews were being sent east to work. But so many people had been displaced and no news had arrived. One of our neighbours had his whole family in the Warsaw ghetto. It was not normal. No news - it seemed strange. Besides, babies and children were not much use as workers. We were getting very worried. We were thinking that something serious must have happened. Thousands and thousands of people had disappeared! We could not imagine what had become of them in Treblinka, whose name we did not even know.

The deportation from Warsaw lasted over 6-7 weeks. A small ghetto was created for the remaining 40,000. It was here, during another deportation, that the heroic uprising broke out on 19th April 1943.

After the end of the great Warsaw deportation, the Nazis had the "manpower" available to take care of the other cities.

Between June 1941, the date of the invasion of the USSR, and January 1943, some 500,000 Jews were massacred. On 22nd June 1941, 2,000 Jews were killed in Białystok. A few days later, around 6,000 perished in Lwów.

The biggest extermination camps were in Poland - Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, Auschwitz (Oświęcim).

Although the Nazis tried to "camouflage" the killings, horrifying rumours began to circulate. Professor Jan Karski, sent by the Polish resistance to London, brought the news to the Polish government-in-exile, as well as to Jewish organisations in England and the USA. To enable him to give a true account of what was happening, the Warsaw Jewish organisations brought him into the ghetto. As an eyewitness, he described, with tears in his eyes, the misery that reigned there. But no one would believe him. Swiss businessmen, who had come to Germany and Poland, told us that, upon their return, they had heard about the large-scale killings. They, too, were not believed. Even the Jews of Palestine had the same reaction. Nothing was done to stop the Nazi crimes. Alas, the reality was far beyond what anyone could have imagined.

As early as May 1942, social, cultural and political leaders were murdered. The Germans were thus ridding themselves of potential Jewish resistance leaders.

In August 1942, following the end of the great deportation from the Warsaw ghetto, rumours were circulating in our city. Black *Einsatzgruppen* battalions, made up of Germans, Lithuanians and Ukrainians, were said to have been seen in the area. This was not a good omen.

Every day, tension in the ghetto increased. People began to look for ways to avoid deportation. Some wanted to leave the ghetto with false “Aryan papers”, or to hide on the “Aryan side”. Others wanted to find hiding places, which we called "bunkers", in the ghetto itself. Still others bought potassium cyanide, to poison themselves *in extremis*. My mother, who believed all the news, wanted to opt for the latter, but we did nothing. A friend had told my mother that her

family and friends had prepared a bunker on ul. Kawia. She suggested we join them. My mother refused.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, 20th September 1942, we learned that cattle wagons had arrived at the railway station. *"Aktion*" (the name we gave to the deportations) was therefore imminent. Nervous tension was running high. It was hoped that people, working for the Germans, would be indispensable to them, and, therefore, would be protected. My father decided to go to work as a volunteer the next day. He, who had not worked before, decided to work on the holiest day of the Jewish year! It was a matter of trying to save his life. So, we both went out on Yom Kippur and worked all day. Of course, we fasted.

Contradictory news was circulating. On the one hand, we awaited the deportations and, on the other, we were reassured. The Jewish authorities tried to reassure us, saying that the deportation had been postponed or even cancelled. The Germans would have reassured the Ältestenrat. The Nazis spread this news to calm the population. We thought we had gained at least a day. The head of the Ältestenrat office, the German Frenzel, had asserted that there would be no deportation from the Czestochowa ghetto. He had been questioned by members of the Jewish Council.

We did not know exactly what to expect, but we were sure that the children were in danger. What use were they to the Germans? They could not work and were useless mouths to feed. So, we had to get my little sister Sarenka, only four and a half years old, to safety. A solution presented itself - Stasia, our former governess, who raised her. To contact her, we could send Aniela, my paternal grandparents' Catholic housekeeper, who had stayed in the ghetto and could get out. So, Aniela went to Stasia's house, asking her to come and see us as soon as possible. When she could not find Stasia at home, Aniela left her a note.

In the meantime, after a day of fasting, we ate. My parents shared the money we had at home. I received 2,000 złoty. We did not know who would stay in town. It was said that the Jews were going "east" to work for the German army. What was certain was that we might be traveling for a long time. According to my mother, the most important thing was to have something to drink, which was more important than eating. We took water bottles and water flasks with us. My mother wanted me to keep the keys to the apartment, because she was sure I would be staying there myself. We decided to go to bed, perhaps to sleep for the last time in our own beds (which was, unfortunately, the case). Already in bed, we received a visit from Stasia at around 10 o'clock in the evening. She

came in response to the note which she had found at home on her way back from work at the station, and asked why she had been summoned.

We explained the situation to her - that we had to take Sarenka to the countryside to save her. We had already talked to Stasia about this possibility. As far as Stasia was concerned, there was no problem. She would go with my little sister. She had heard about fifty-eight cattle wagons at the railway station, and about the Ukrainians in town. The danger was there!

My parents had prepared some money for Stasia. They were also thinking of giving her some linen and objects, so that she could sell them in case of need. So, they were determined to send Sarenka out of the ghetto. But, at the last minute, they did not want to part with her. They came up with pretexts - they did not want to wake the sleeping child, the latest rumours were rather reassuring, and so on. Stasia did not want to leave without my sister. We talked for a long time, but my parents' decision was final. Stasia went home without Sarenka. If she had been able to take my sister with her, she would probably have survived the war.

A few hours later, we were up and about. We had not been able to sleep. The noise was coming from the street. On the other hand, we sensed that something abnormal was happening. Every night, the city lights were turned off, because it was wartime, and the Germans did not want to give the Allied planes any landmarks. The windows of our apartments did not let in any light at night. And then, all of a sudden, the streets were lit up! It was not for nothing, but to make it harder for the Jews to escape.

At around 4-5 a.m., Jewish policemen would enter people's yards and call out for them to go to ul Krótka, with small pieces of luggage. Everyone had to go without exception. Trembling, we set off. The streets were already full of people. The ghetto was liquidated in five stages, because there were not enough wagons to transport the Jews. Our neighbourhood was the first, as we lived not far from ul. Krótka.

In the crowd, we met my cousin, Ruta, with her husband Leon and their little boy, Nachum, only a few months old, dressed in white clothes. It was so moving! It was the last time I would see them. They moved forward with the crowd and disappeared. Then my mother met a friend, an engineer, and asked him to look after me. She left with my father, my little sister Sarenka and my aunt Fela. I did not even say goodbye to them, not realising what was happening. When I turned

my head to see them again, they were already gone. I think my mother did it on purpose, not wanting it to be a separation too painful. The engineer was preoccupied enough not to think about me. He moved on with his family and I was left alone.

The crowd swept me away and, after a while, I found myself in front of the SS, who were posted on the pavement, cutting across the street at the *Metalurgia* factory. We had to present ourselves, individually, to the SS chief of police, Captain Degenhardt, who was in charge of the deportations and who was also in charge of us afterwards. You had to hold your work card in your hand. Our executioner would glance at the card and at us, and announce his verdict - "Links" or "Rechts" (left, right). This was the selection. On the right, we had to run to the factory gate and enter. On the left, we were surrounded by the SS. It was deportation.

My parents knew that the children would not be left behind. My mother said that she would not let my little sister go alone. My father said he would go with them. I said I would go with them too, that I did not want to be separated from them. That is why my mother had acted in such a way as to leave me alone and disappear into the crowd. I could not follow them and bitterly regretted it. At that moment, I lost my family.

Degenhardt acted according to his mood - to the right, to the left, often at random. Elderly people and children were automatically put on the left. One example made a particular impression on me. In our backyard lived the Winter family - grandparents, parents and their daughter. The grandparents were put on the left. Their granddaughter, aged 18, tall and healthy, was directed to the same side. On the other hand, her parents, aged 42, were left.

When it was my turn to introduce myself, I knew my life was at stake. The Nazi bandit looked at me and said I had to go right and I had to run. A few seconds were enough to decide life or death. Those were terrible moments.

Once in the factory yard, we were directed to a large empty room. We lay down on the cement, exhausted. Often, we heard revolver shots. We later learned that the SS, accompanied by Jewish policemen, would visit apartments and kill the people inside. Some Jews did not want to come forward, knowing what awaited them. They said they would rather die on the spot, for the same result. The shootings went on for several hours. Then it calmed down.

In the meantime, the people on the left were led to the wagons. That day, around 6,000 people were deported to Treblinka.

My aunt Dora, her husband and their daughter Mira, were also on ul. Krótka that day, waiting their turn. Luckily, a Jewish policeman, Heniek Igra, a friend of Mira's, noticed them and hid them. Once the day's selection was complete, he introduced them to the part of the ghetto not yet affected by the deportation. Mira married Heniek and was protected as a policeman's wife. My aunt and uncle passed through the selections and had entered the “Small Ghetto”. Unfortunately, my aunt was deported on 4th January 1943.

We spent the whole night in the factory hall, without eating or sleeping. A Jewish policeman friend gave me an apple. This same policeman was deported with his wife and two sons to Treblinka, during a downsizing.

Everyone was terrified. We thought about our families, what might happen to them and what was in store for us. It was terrible! The night ended in this state of anguish. In the morning, some SS men came to see us and asked for volunteers to go and work in the barracks. Happy to leave this sinister room, many Jews came forward. I was among them.

The selections took place on the following dates:

- 22nd September 1942, the day after Yom Kippur
- 25th September 1942, the eve of Sukkot
- 28th September 1942
- 1st October 1942
- 4th October 1942

The deportees travelled for around twenty hours in horrific conditions. Beaten, thirsty, starving, crammed in with over one hundred people per wagon, relieving themselves on the spot, they arrived at Treblinka. Some people had died in the wagons.

By 5th October 1942,

- around 39,000 people had been deported
- 2,000 people had been killed on the spot or had been discovered hiding places, etc.
- 2,000 people had hidden or had escaped
- 5,000 were left behind as slaves.

After the deportations, young Jews were ordered to clear the streets and apartments of corpses. A large pit was dug in a vacant lot on ul. Kawia for the 2,000 who had been killed. After the war, a plaque was affixed to the site.

During the deportations, Jews were mistreated, beaten and dragged by the SS. At the Jewish hospital, the Nazis arrived, demanding that the doctors and medical staff poison all the patients. The doctors refused to comply, citing ethics. The SS then threatened to kill them along with the sick.

A 300-year-old community had ceased to exist.

I ALEJA 14 – THE ARTISANS' HOUSE (THE “FRANKE HOUSE”)

The Nazi occupiers called on Jewish craftsmen for their personal use. German families had settled in our city and needed to furnish and decorate their new homes.

When the “Big Ghetto” was created, these craftsmen were grouped together in a building at I Aleja 14[7], which we called the "Franke house" (the name of its owner). This house was located on the "Aryan" side and adjoined the ghetto. A pass (*Ausweis*) was required to get there. Craftsmen, their families and some workers were also housed there Officially, there were 187 workers.

There were about twenty workshops in total. Among them were:

- carpentry-mechanics,
- locksmithing,
- sewing,
- tailoring,
- furs,
- lingerie,
- corsetry,
- millinery,
- shoemaking-boot making,
- curtain making.

This house had become a point of contact with the “Aryan side”, as well as a meeting place for the Resistance. Ammunition manufactured at the *Wulkan* foundry, where Jewish workers were employed, was smuggled into the “Small Ghetto”. After the transfer of the workshops, production took place in the mechanical workshop and at ul. Garncarska 44.

The building at I Aleja 14 was extremely useful. Through its inhabitants, some Jews were able to sell items and meet Poles. In December 1941, my parents had my mother's and my Aunt Fela's furs, now forbidden to Jews, delivered to craftsmen friends. My father's coat was given to a Polish customer, Mr. Rutkowski.

I Aleja 14 was liquidated in March 1943 and the workshops were transferred to the “Small Ghetto”. Prior to this, a selection took place and nineteen people

[7] [*There are a great many mentions of the “Craftsmen’s House” in “Churbn Czenstochow”, by Szlomo Waga, Buenos Aires, 1949, including a chapter entitled “The End of the Craftsmen’s House”, pp. 212-219.*]

were deported, at the same time as the fifth deportation on 4th October 1942. Yet Degenhardt had guaranteed the survival of the craftsmen.

STAY AT THE BARRACKS (KASERNE)

Once the great deportation was over in October 1942, all the houses were searched. We were looking for people in hiding, and for any "treasures" that might have been there.

Everything of value was taken away by the Germans, while items of lesser value were sold to the Poles.

The 4,000 or 5,000 Jews left behind to work were "barracked" where they worked. For me, it was at the former Polish army barracks (*Kaserne*), now occupied by the Germans. We were housed in the old whitewashed stables, where bunk beds had been installed. I was sent to the barracks the day after the deportation began, and worked as an electrician's helper with the electrical engineer Mr. Alter as chief.

Life was very hard and the food more than mediocre. On the first Sunday of our stay, we received a thin slice of meat as an extra. I was delighted - it was a change from the ordinary! I was looking forward to the following Sunday. But then I learned that we had received horsemeat. I was disgusted. I preferred to do without it. So, at the next distribution, I gave my ration to a colleague.

We went through several selections. Those chosen by the German police were sent to their deaths. One morning, at the daily roll call, we were lined up as usual, and men over forty were ordered to declare themselves. Several of them stepped out of line. Among them was a friend of my father's, with his twelve-year-old son Jerzyk, whose wife had already been deported. That morning, he was unshaven, which was a handicap. On the other hand, he was tall and well presented. In his forties, he wanted to announce it. I tried to dissuade him, saying he still had time to see. But he was afraid and stepped out of line. He was sent with the others. Jerzyk was left alone. Fortunately, he survived the war.

Another forty-something, Mr. Winter, took a risk and did not show up. He was saved. He and his wife subsequently hid from the Germans and both survived. Their daughter, aged eighteen, had been deported.

On another occasion, we were led, one by one, past a German policeman, presenting our work card and announcing our profession. I was trembling because, while I had a German stamp certifying my employment as an electrician's helper, the first page of the card indicated my status as a high school

student. It was dangerous. The Germans did not need Jewish intellectuals. I opened the card to the right page. The German looked at me and my work overalls, then flipped to the first page of the card.

A moment's hesitation. My fate was at stake. Finally, he said to me, "Forward, run!''. This meant I was not "selected" and had to join the others. The German watched me as I ran. If he had noticed a handicap, he would have changed his mind and directed me towards the group of people who were about to leave.

Throughout the occupation, our fate was in the hands of individuals who decided whether we lived or died.

We stayed in the barracks for about six weeks, from 23rd September to early November 1943, when we were transferred to the “Small Ghetto”.

A painful adventure happened to me in the barracks. On the night of our deportation, my parents shared some money amongst us, in case we got separated. I received 2,000 złoty. When I arrived at the barracks the next day, I wondered how to hide the money, because not only was I afraid of losing it or having it stolen, but we were forbidden to possess it.

I was eighteen and did not know what to do. Among my fellow inmates, I did not know many people. The closest were (or so I thought) two brothers-in-law, Lachman and Weiner (their names meant "laughing" and "crying" in German, a curious coincidence), who were our neighbours in the ghetto. So, I turned to them for advice. The best thing, they told me, was to hide the bills inside the bread ration I was receiving. They took care of inserting them into the crumb of the bread. I did not check, because I trusted them completely.

Only a few weeks later, when I arrived in the "Small Ghetto", I wanted to use the money. But when I opened my bread, I found it was empty. The two accomplices had swindled me and stolen my money!!!!

That taught me a lesson and I did not trust anyone anymore. I was left with nothing. How heartless can you be and steal from a poor boy? Some people will do anything.

WORK AT THE *HEERESBAULEITUNG*

With the creation of the “Small Ghetto”, our stay in the barracks came to an end. Our group stopped working there, and we joined our brothers in misery.

New tasks awaited us. From then on, we left the ghetto in the early hours of the morning and went to work at the other end of city, where there was a German army depot. It was a fairly large plot of land, with a railroad connection. Cement, bricks, putty, coal, iron bars, glass, etc. were stored in barracks. Our job was to load and unload the wagons arriving at the depot, whose name "*Heeresbauleitung*" meant "German Army Works Directorate". There were a few dozen of us. The boss, the *Bauleiter*, was a tall, stern man, but with a human touch.

The work was hard. We were watched over by soldiers. We had to work fast, for hours on end. The land was surrounded by barbed wire. In one place, on the other side of this boundary, Soviet prisoners-of-war were also working, under close surveillance. They were in a miserable state. Certainly, they must have been starving. Compared to them, we were in a better situation. Pitying them, we wanted to throw them pieces of bread (We did not have too much ourselves!), which was forbidden, as was any contact with them. From time to time, we would trick the German guards into throwing a few. The Soviets seemed happy to receive a little food.

Polish children came to watch the Jewish and Soviet "curiosities" at work on the other side of the barbed wire. Some of our friends got in touch with them. Through them, they bought milk, bread and sent letters. This gave me an idea. I wanted to contact Stasia. So, I called a boy and asked him to buy me a postcard, giving him some money. The next day, the boy came back and gave me the card. I indicated where Stasia could visit me every day and asked the boy to post the card, giving him a tip. He promised to do whatever was necessary, but I was not counting on it. For me, it was vital, but for him?

I had proof that he had mailed the card when, a few days later, Stasia came to see me at my place of work. Our meeting was very moving. She was happy to see me again, but could not stop talking about my little sister Sarenka, regretting that my parents did not want her to take care of her, as had been planned. From then on, she came to see me every 2-3 days, depending on her work schedule. She worked at Czestochowa train station, where she distributed meals to the railway workers. Each time, she would bring me a bowl of soup, with whatever

she could find: fatty meat and bread. She would wait patiently for me to finish eating. Sometimes, I would bring some back to the ghetto. We would stand in a corner, trying not to be too "visible".

One day, the *Bauleiter* caught us while I was eating. At first, he screamed and Stasia was frightened, not understanding German. I explained to the *Bauleiter* what she was doing there and he calmed down. He told me I could finish eating, but not too long. So, he was not so bad - I think he felt sorry for me.

When we stopped working at the military depot, I lost contact with Stasia, which I was not able to regain until after liberation.

THE FIRST NEWS FROM TREBLINKA

It was while working at the *Bauleitung* that I first heard the name “Treblinka”, a village near Małkinia Górna in eastern Poland. It was November 1942.

Someone had returned from being deported and recounted the horrors which he had experienced. He had escaped from a place where the deportees had been taken - from the big camps, where the Jews would be burned. They said he had a lot of money. Nobody wanted to believe his stories. It was unbelievable! But why was he telling all this? Or had he gone mad, or was he just trying to make himself interesting? One thing was certain – he had been deported from us, so he must have come back from deportation.

He was in our group when I heard his name, Moniek Brokman, and I was shocked. I knew him very well, because he lived with his family in our house in the “Big Ghetto”, a little older than me. Then I saw him, but did not dare speak to him, fearing to learn from him details of the fate my family had suffered after our separation. It was only after the war, when I met him on a street in Łódź, that I was able to talk to him, but without broaching the subject.

When I saw him for the first time since the deportation, at our workplace, I knew immediately that he had been telling the truth. His eyes were blank, expressionless, frightened by what he had seen. I also knew that he did not have any money, because his family was not rich. Having so much money, you had to wonder - where did it come from? For me, this was further proof that his story was true.

I later learned that Moniek Brokman, who was deported with his parents at the same time as my family, had been selected with his brother to sort through the objects that the deportees had with them when they arrived at Treblinka, whose name nobody knew. His family had been gassed and put through the crematoria. The two brothers, like other prisoners, decided to escape from the camp.

They had found silver and gold in the deportees' luggage, which they hid for the escape. One day, they escaped. It was not an easy thing to do. The camp was guarded by the SS. Only a few of the escapees managed to survive. The others were killed by the SS, and still others were killed by Polish peasants from the Treblinka area, who had robbed them beforehand. As far as I know, Moniek's brother had been killed by the guards and buried by himself.

Moniek survived and, after many ups and downs, made his way to the Częstochowa “Small Ghetto”. The money which Moniek possessed came from the clothes of the killed, which he was responsible for sorting along with other objects. This money, found in the pockets, was hidden and served him during his escape.

TREBLINKA

This camp, located some 100 km east of Warsaw on the Bug River, was established in 1941. Initially, it was a criminal detention camp for Polish peasants, interned for various offences. Later renamed “Treblinka I”, it claimed the lives of around 10,000 Jews and Poles.

When the decision on the "Final Solution" for the Jews was taken at the end of January 1942, at the famous Wannsee conference, the “Treblinka II” extermination camp was created. It existed from 1942 to 1943. According to Polish sources, 750,000-800,000 people were murdered there.

This death camp was designed for Jews from Warsaw and central Poland. However, traces have been found of convoys from Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany. But the majority of these convoys were Polish.

To avoid problems with prisoners when the convoys arrived, a false station had been built. This was intended to calm the spirits of the newcomers. Individual acts of resistance occurred and were easily suppressed by the SS. People were told they were going to work after undressing and showering. Getting off the wagons, people were scared, tired, hungry and thirsty. The SS shouted, "*Schnell, schnell!*” The poor travellers were terrorised. To go faster, they were beaten. The corpses of those who had died during the journey were brought out. From time to time, some people were selected, upon arrival, for chores – maintenance and commercial exploitation of the extermination. All other deportees were gassed.

Clothes, gold, jewellery, gold teeth, hair, valuables and money were collected. This represented a very large volume, which brought the Germans enormous profits. Many trains headed for Germany with the loot.

In one depot, where the Jews were working, the means were found to obtain some weapons and ammunition from Polish peasants. An uprising was decided upon, the date of which was postponed several times. To prepare for the uprising, prisoners assigned to sorting gold, jewellery and silver coins were assigned to hide some of them, which would be used to buy weapons and also to survive after the escape.

In the summer of 1943, the Treblinka camp's workforce was relatively stable, as convoys had stopped arriving. This facilitated preparations for the uprising.

The uprising took place on 2nd August 1943, and was announced by the Polish underground press on 5th August. Hundreds of people lost their lives. Around one hundred managed to escape, after shooting down guards. Among the leaders of the uprising was the engineer, Galewski. I assume that he was from Częstochowa, as I knew an engineer by the name of Galewski in the "Big Ghetto", who was my teacher during the electrical courses I took at the vocational school during the war.

The camp lasted for almost two more months. The SS set fire to a large part of the facility. Wagons full of clothes had been sent to concentration camps in the Lublin area. What had not been burned was destroyed. We had received clothes in a miserable state from Lublin, and I was one of the recipients, among other prisoners.

Among the escapees who managed to survive Treblinka, coming from Częstochowa, we can mention Leon Fogiel, who jumped out of the wagon on the way to Treblinka, arriving first in Warsaw and later in the "Small Ghetto", Moniek Brokman, Abram Bomba[8], Mendel Fiszlewicz and A. Gelbard[9].

Gelbard, deported on 1st October 1942, was left alive to work and remained in Treblinka for nineteen days. Escaping on 21st October, he was attacked by Polish peasants, who stole his clothes and left him in only his underwear. A. Gelbard, helped by a friend, facilitated the escape of several Jews, including four from Częstochowa who survived the war. He himself returned to the "Small Ghetto" in mid-November 1942.

Monuments, bearing the names of the towns from which the convoys came, have been erected on the site of the former death camp, the only trace of the past.

[8] [*See Bomba's account of his stay and escape from Treblinka in "Czenstochow", 1958, pp. 57-60.*]
[9] [*See Gelbard's account of his stay and escape from Treblinka in "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. 2, cols. 158-165.*]

MÖBELLAGER[10]

The Nazi occupiers set up their own administration in each city. Several departments were set up for the use of Germans, including the *Wohnungsamt*, headed by the German Lindermann. My friend Heniek worked there as a gardener until the deportations.

The *Wohnungsamt* requisitioned houses and apartments for German families, obviously some of the most beautiful. Very often, Jews were driven out of their homes. This was in the early days, before the creation of the ghetto.

To furnish these apartments, the Nazis stole furniture. A furniture warehouse, the *Möbellager*, was opened on ul. Wilsona. It was located on the edge of the ghetto. During the deportations, all Jewish workgroups in town were abolished, with the exception of *Möbellager*. Three buildings on ul. Garibaldiego, in the former ghetto, were converted into furniture warehouses.

Around two hundred people worked there. The former workers were spared, while others were incorporated, given the department's expanded scope - the furniture in the apartments of deported Jews. At the head of the depot was Machel Birenzweig, assisted by his brother Pinchas. The two brothers, who hid their own families (wife and mother) inside the depot, practised passive resistance against the Nazi oppressors. Their courage was exceptional.

The depot had its own transport service, which was allowed to move freely around the city. When workers arrived in Jewish apartments to remove furniture, they sometimes found children, whose parents had been deported. These children were transported in vans and hidden inside the warehouse. Food had to be found for them, which was smuggled in. Staff families were also hidden. They were all deported when the *Möbellager* was liquidated. The resistance organization, the Ż.O.B. [Jewish Fighting Organisation], found the depot the best opportunity for contact with the outside world. False papers were also produced there.

Thanks to Machel Birenzweig, many children were hidden in the depot and then placed with Polish families. They survived the war. Hiding people in the depot, which was in German hands, was not easy. One day, a small child escaped his mother's surveillance and was discovered by the Nazis. Under threat, he pointed

[10] [*B. Orenstein dedicates a chapter to the "Möbellager" in "Churban Czenstochow", pp. 121-124.*]

out the location of the bunker. His mother, the children and others were shot on the spot.

On 19th March 1943, the bandit-in-chief Degenhardt and his gang stumbled upon the room where the resistance fighters were meeting. During their search, they found some ammunition. In retaliation, six young people, including three of my comrades, were killed.

On Shavuot 1943, Degenhardt and the *Schupo* (German police) arrived at the depot with the plan to liquidate it. It is assumed that a denunciation had made them aware of the *Möbellager*'s activities.

Degenhardt ordered Machel to present himself together with his family. Understanding what this meant, Machel pretended to obey and disappeared. In response, the Nazis killed his mother and took his wife to the municipal prison, where she too was killed. His brother, Pinchas, was savagely beaten. The Nazis threatened to kill everyone in case anyone tried to escape. Busy searching for Machel, the Nazis forgot about Pinchas, who managed to escape to the “Small Ghetto” with a few other Jews. With the help of false papers, he made his way to Germany, where he was freed at the end of the war.

As for Machel Birenzweig, he remained hidden inside the depot and the Nazis were unable to find him. With the help of friends, he hid with a Polish "friend", who denounced him to the Gestapo. Arrested, he was savagely beaten and killed in prison.

The *Möbellager* epic was over.

THE “SMALL GHETTO”

After the five deportations, the Germans searched every apartment in the "Big Ghetto", looking for hidden Jews. Cellars, bunkers and attics were also searched. In all, some 2,000 people were killed during this period. Jewellery, gold and other valuables were stolen. All objects of some importance were taken for distribution to local Germans or for shipment to Germany. Those of lesser value were sold for very little to the Poles.

Preparing the accommodation area for the remaining Jews took around three weeks. We called it the "Small Ghetto", because it comprised a very small part of the former "Big Ghetto". It was located in the oldest, most miserable part of the city, and was made up of parts of three old streets – ul. Kozia, for women, ul. Nadrzeczna for men and ul. Garncarska, for couples, as well as a few houses on ul. Spadek and ul. Mostowa.

The area became known as a "forced-labour camp for Jews". Almost all its inhabitants left in the early hours of the morning, returning in the late evening. In the morning, we were awakened by an audible call and, in the evening, a curfew announced the end of the day. After we returned from work, the ghetto kitchen distributed soup, ersatz coffee and the daily ration of bread. There were around 6,500 of us, including around 1,500 illegal immigrants.

As for the ghetto's governing body, the Ältestenrat ("Council of Elders"), most of its members and their families were deported. The remaining Council members formed the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) in the “Small “Ghetto. This name was borne by all Jewish institutions in Poland's ghettos.

A small number of Jews remained in the ghetto during the day. They included doctors, members of the *Judenrat*, cooks, policemen, laundry staff and janitors, as well as workers in the ghetto workshops and the factory night shift. Through connections and because of their age, my uncle Israel and my aunt Dora obtained jobs in the ghetto, where work was a little easier than outside it. My uncle became a janitor and my aunt worked in the laundry.

Sergeant Überscher was appointed commander of the ghetto "forced labour camp". As head of the Jewish police, which was reduced from 250 to 50 members, the Polish policeman Majznerowicz was appointed. The "dismissed" policemen were deported with their families in the fifth "action".

Überscher watched as groups of workers left the ghetto ("*wylot*") and, from time to time, caught a Jew here and there with the handle of his cane, sending him to the former butcher's store at the entrance to the ghetto. It served as a temporary holding cell. We called this room the "*jatka*", the butcher's shop. From there, arrestees were sent, in groups, to Skarżysko and Bliżyn. Überscher was often accompanied by Majznerowicz, the notorious head of the Jewish police. Majznerowicz behaved in the same way as Überscher towards the Jews.

At the end of October 1942, the Germans began transferring Jews to the “Small Ghetto, in "*placówki*", or workgroups, where they had previously been housed. I arrived at the beginning of November. For the first few weeks, we were housed in workgroups. It was only at the end of December that the three streets were allocated to men, women or couples.

The appearance of the ghetto was dreadful. Broken doors, windows without panes, old broken furniture, dirty walls, a few old pots and pans, etc. The streets were dirty, narrow and without gutters.

As soon as we arrived, we were registered at the labour office ("*Arbeitseinsatz*") and given metal plates with an engraved Star of David and a number. We no longer had names - we were simply numbers.

The “Small Ghetto” was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded from the outside by German and Polish police, as well as Ukrainian guards.

One day, a guard, probably drunk, shot through the wire and killed one of our friends, a doctor, Dr. Leon Gutman. The doctors and their families were grouped together in a city block, along with members of other professions - lawyers, engineers, etc. Their fate was sealed on 20th March 1943. More on this later.

In January 1943, Jews were arrested and sent to Skarżysko-Kamienna to work in the HASAG munitions factories. Life there was extremely hard, especially at the "C" powder factory. Terror and malnutrition were the order of the day.

Every now and then, on a Sunday, my cousin Szymek and I would have a feast. Somehow, we got hold of some old frozen potatoes. The two of us would use an old grater to grate the potatoes, which we would then fry on a rusty pan in dubious oil. It was our great luxury, and we enjoyed it. It was the best part of the week.

Life went on as best we could. We knew our days were numbered. The only question was how much time did we have? We wanted to make the most of each passing day. Some people led "dissolute" lives. They did not care what people thought, because there was no tomorrow anyway. Fortunately, these people were few in number.

We composed songs from the ghetto. They were about our miserable lives and sad endings, especially when we learned about Treblinka. The ghetto song, which had come to us from Wilno, spread quickly. The song was a hymn of hope.

Religious Jews prepared matzot for Pesach 1943, illegally. Captain Degenhardt, our "landlord", used every trick in the book to uncover the illegal immigrants in the “Small Ghetto”. He knew that many children were hidden. He found a way to catch them. He announced to the *Judenrat* that a crèche would be opened for the little ones, where milk would be distributed to them. The poor things could not be hidden away! They needed a more normal life! How touching this thoughtfulness was...

An "action" took place and many children were taken. The "nursery school" did not last long.

Our food in the “Small Ghetto” was far from adequate. When we left the ghetto to go out to work, there were sometimes opportunities to buy bread or potatoes from Poles. By selling them, you could improve your daily meals a little.

This is how an "illegal immigrant", an uncle of my cousin, offered to lend me some money so that I could buy 10 kg of potatoes and sell them back to him. It was very dangerous. We were going to walk for miles with 10 kg hidden in a bag. It was not easy. But, when we entered the ghetto, we were often searched. How could you hide such a large volume (and weight)? I bought the potatoes and took them back to the ghetto, tired and trembling. The risk was too great - guaranteed death if they were discovered. Luckily for me, everything worked out miraculously and I was able to enter without any problems. I earned a little money, but I did not repeat that feat.

THE SELF-DEFENSE MOVEMENT

From the very first days of the occupation, an illegal group organised to fight the Nazis, in collaboration with young people from Warsaw. On 12th March 1940, the group organised a large (and obviously illegal) meeting in the premises of a former Jewish bank. A leadership was elected. One of the first concerns was to protect workers undergoing forced labour. This was the beginning of resistance in Częstochowa.

By December 1942, resistance to the deportations had begun to organise in the ghetto, under the name of Ż.O.B. (Jewish Fighting Organization). Resistance fighters were in contact with the Warsaw Ż.O.B., as well as with the Polish (left-wing) resistance movement. With money obtained from people who still owned them, the movement had bought, at a premium, a few revolvers, but these proved useless. In the tunnel dug in the ghetto, which led to the outside, ammunition, Molotov cocktails, etc. were prepared. The resistance unit numbered around three hundred members.

Crooks tried to extort money from ghetto residents in the name of the self-defence movement. The resistance condemned and executed them.

Several of my classmates, from before the war, were part of the group. During the events of 4th January 1943, when the tunnel was almost completed, many members of the group were taken, probably as a result of denunciation, and were sent to Radomsko. The tunnel was discovered. The two resistance fighters killed that day, Izio Fajner and Mendel Fiszlewicz, himself an escapee from Treblinka, were among the leaders.

In retaliation for the resistance attempt on 4th January 1943, which was the Ż.O.B.'s first action and which, unfortunately, ended tragically, the Germans, who had become more vigilant, killed 250 children and elderly people.

Another reprisal was the massacre of the ghetto intelligentsia on the day of Purim, 20th March 1943. Many Jews were captured by the Nazis and killed.

Members of the resistance moved to Warsaw, labour camps and Polish resistance movements.

In January 1943, a deportation from the Warsaw ghetto provoked an uprising, which was quickly quelled. The deportation took place.

On 25th June 1943, when the “Small Ghetto” was liquidated, the remaining members of the network were killed.

Already on 21st September 1942, the day of Yom Kippur, to oppose a possible deportation, a conference of political party representatives was to be held, with the participation of delegates from the Warsaw Ż.O.B. The conference was cancelled, however, because unfortunately we had just learned that fifty-eight cattle wagons were at the Częstochowa station. From past experience, we knew that this did not bode well.

Following the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”, three Ż.O.B. groups operated in the forests around Koniecpol.

Jewish resistance was not alone in Poland. Obviously, there was a resistance, or rather several Polish resistances, on the right and on the left. On the extreme right, there was NSZ, anti-communist, nationalist and antisemitic. But there was also, on the right, a movement dependent on the Polish government-in-exile in London. It was the most important Polish resistance group. As for its antisemitism, I think it had nothing to envy NSZ. Its name was A.K. (Armia Krajowa, Home Army).

On the left, there were the communists of Armia Ludowa (People's Army), Peasant Battalions and WRN (Freedom, Equality, Independence), of socialist tendency, also aligned with the Polish government-in-exile in London.

An A.K. group was also operating in the Koniecpol region, as was the Ż.O.B. The Ż.O.B. contacted the A.K., with a view to a common fight against the Germans. The Jews greeted the Poles fraternally, but the Poles fired at them in response. Almost all the Z.O.B. members were killed, except for one, who was wounded.

Everywhere, the A.K. and other right-wing movements massacred Jewish resistance fighters. Paradoxically, while fighting the Nazis, in some cases, they also handed over the Ż.O.B. to them, pointing out places where the Germans could find the Jews. Only the left-wing Polish resistance warmly accepted Jews into their ranks.

It is an inglorious page for the Polish resistance. Instead of uniting to fight the Nazis, a very large part of the movement preferred to fight on two fronts - anti-German and anti-Jewish. Fortunately, another part of the resistance saved its honour by accepting Jews.

At the instigation of the Delegation (name of the representation in Poland) for the country of the London government-in-exile, the Council to Aid Jews (ŻEGOTA) was set up in Warsaw. Composed of eminent representatives of the Polish elite (writers, etc.), it dealt with material aid, supplying false papers, food cards, hiding places, etc. According to Polish information, the Council helped around 30,000 people. But financial aid came mainly from funds provided by Jewish organizations in the USA.

In HASAG, where we lived in very bad conditions (terror at work, revolver fire on Jews, corporal punishment in the Ukrainian militia guardroom), a new resistance had formed. In contact with the Polish (left-wing) resistance, we tried to get Jews out of the camp in ammunition wagons which were manufactured at our plant. Some people managed to escape, while others were caught.

In the 14th April 1956 issue of "Le Monde", I found an insert quoting Radio Warsaw, according to which the remains of three hundred Jews, massacred by the Nazis, had been found in a shelter in the Czestochowa ghetto. It was assumed that they were members of the resistance, who were executed in 1943.

4th JANUARY 1943
THE DEPORTATION OF MY AUNT DORA

I was working in HASAG at the time.

On 4th January 1943, I was unusually in the ghetto, having had a nail removed. I was off work for three days and not at ease, because the German police often came to the ghetto and, from time to time, took people away to “liquidate” them. The Germans felt that people, who stayed in the ghetto during the day, were unproductive, as they were not directly contributing to the war effort. There was a feeling of insecurity and unease.

On the morning of 4th January 1943, the atmosphere in the ghetto was particularly tense. The lights were on and the guards outside were reinforced. You could sense that something was afoot.

After the workers' brigades had left the ghetto, we were ordered to assemble in the square in front of the entrance (the “Warsaw Market”). Rumours were circulating that a deportation of three hundred people was about to take place. The German police had begun selecting people to send to Radomsko, where a ghetto still existed.

The Jewish resistance tried to prevent the deportation. Its leader fired revolver shots at Sergeant Rohn, the ghetto leader. Unfortunately, the revolver was rusty and did not work. The Germans were taken aback. They had not expected any resistance from the Jews. After a short hesitation, they began shooting at us. Sergeant Rohn, whom the Jew Mendel Fiszlewicz had tried to attack, wounded him. Fiszlewicz fell to the ground and tried to knock him down, but Rohn finished him off. A second resistance fighter, Fajner, threw himself at the Germans, using a knife as a weapon. He, too, was killed on the spot. For quite a while, I heard Fiszlewicz's gasps. I was in the front row (there were two row), a few steps away from this incident. They were the only dead Jews whom I had ever seen. Mendel Fiszlewicz was one of the few escapees from the Treblinka death camp.

The Jews selected for deportation tried to escape by penetrating our ranks. It was a total mess. In the meantime, the policemen had called the Gestapo, who arrived shortly afterwards. The Germans resumed the selection process. Those, who could not walk, were loaded onto trucks, while the others had to go on foot. Once the selection was complete, the convoy left. That day, 251 people were deported to Radomsko.

The Gestapo men were in a frenzy, because they were afraid of a general uprising. They ordered us to empty our pockets and raise our arms in the air. They then started to search us. It was very cold and it was difficult to hold on for long with our arms outstretched. Those, who loosened their arms a little, received knocks, with shouts of “Have you become lazy already?”. The search took some time. The Germans were very cautious and operated slowly, looking for weapons. Occasionally, they found a small sum of złoty in someone’s pockets. Suspicious, they would shout, “Where did you get so much money?”

We were terrified and freezing cold. Once the search was over, the Germans chose twenty-five hostages. They were taken to a wall in the ghetto and shot. We were forced to turn in their direction so as to witness their execution. Among the hostages was my father's cousin, the lawyer Nathan Rosenstein.

When it was all over, the Germans took us back to the ghetto. Suddenly, I thought of my aunt and uncle, who must have been with us. What had become of them? There was a lot of commotion. I met my uncle in a panic. “Did you see your aunt?”, he asked. The two of us looked everywhere for her, starting with the laundry, where she worked. But she had already left with the group of deportees.

Those selected had been taken to the Polish police station, from where they were sent to the Radomsko ghetto. My uncle had applied to the *Judenrat* for my aunt's return. Apparently, her name was called, but it was too late, as she was already on her way to Radomsko. Shortly afterwards, the Radomsko ghetto was liquidated and its inhabitants sent to Treblinka, where they were gassed.

My Aunt Dora was the last of my family to remain after the deportations. Very close to my mother, her sister, she looked after me as best she could. Her loss was terrible for me.

That evening, my cousin, Mira, and her husband, Heniek Igra, had returned from their work in the ghetto and joined my uncle, now alone.

On that day, 4th January 1943, the ghetto lost 251 deportees, 25 murdered hostages and 2 killed resistance fighters - a total of 278 people.

5th JANUARY 1943
THE ARRIVAL OF RUNIA AND LOWA

They arrived in our ghetto the day after my aunt, Runia's mother, was deported. Within a day, they could have met again. They knew about the deportations, but they also knew that Runia's parents and Mira were still alive. A reunion in such tragic circumstances would have been wonderful. Alas, they had come too late!

Lowa, originally from Białystok, and Runia had met in Paris, where they were studying economics and medicine respectively. Returning to Poland at the end of their studies, they decided to marry. But, before Lowa could practise medicine, he had to pass examinations in order to obtain a Polish medical diploma. They married and Lowa took his examinations in Wilno (Vilnius) which, at that time, belonged to Poland, before becoming part of Lithuania.

They decided to settle in Częstochowa, where a gynaecological medical practice was vacant. Having settled in our town, we saw them often. That was in 1938.

When war broke out, my cousins left Częstochowa on the last train and joined Runia's parents in Łódź. When the Polish army left the city on the night of 5th-6th September 1939, Lowa followed, along with my uncle and thousands of other men. Taken prisoner by the German army, they were brought back to Łódź and imprisoned in textile factories. The two men returned home. The atmosphere in the city was detestable and, every day, the situation of the Jews worsened.

Lowa and Runia decided to go to Białystok, where his family lived. This town was part of Poland's eastern territories, occupied by the Soviet army, far from the Germans.

As a doctor, Lowa was sent to the countryside. The couple's life was quite good. They were quiet and had enough to eat. In June 1941, the German army occupied the Białystok region on its way to Moscow, following a surprise attack on the Soviet Union on 22nd June.

Under German occupation, the persecution of Jews had spread to the territories of the Soviet Union. The army, followed by the SS and the *Einsatzgruppen*, savagely killed thousands of people. Runia and Lowa were transferred to the newly created Białystok ghetto.

Through Stasia, I had managed to get in touch with them, thanks to the postcards that arrived at her address. That was how they had learned of our family's deportations, but they knew that Runia's parents, and her sister Mira, had remained alive.

Then, one day in December 1942, Stasia came to see me at my workstation at the *Heeresbauleitung*, as usual. She handed me a postcard which my family had sent to Runia and Lowa, with Stasia's name as the sender. The card had come home with the words "*Judenlager aufgehoben*" ("Jewish camp liquidated"). We knew what that could mean. They had probably been killed, so we would have to cross them off our list of surviving family members.

On 5th January 1943, the day after my aunt's deportation, I did not want to take advantage of my sick leave and preferred to return to my job in HASAG, as being in the ghetto during the day was too dangerous. My uncle did the same and went to work with his daughter Mira and son-in-law Heniek in HASAG.

When the day was over, I returned to the ghetto with my group. As was often the case, I visited my cousins Szymek, Ruta and Elżunia, before collecting my soup from the ghetto kitchen. There, a surprise awaited me. I learned that Runia and Lowa were alive and in the ghetto!!!!

What had happened?

The Białystok ghetto, where they had been sent from the nearby Jewish camp, had in turn been liquidated at the end of December 1942. Its inhabitants were put into wagons and sent to Auschwitz. The Germans told them that they were going to the east to work. This was, of course, a lie. They had been told they were going east, but the train was heading south-west. The carriages were guarded by German gendarmes. My cousin, as a doctor, had some freedom of movement, and was able to take his medical kit with him.

After a few days, by a curious coincidence, the train stopped for a while at a suburban station in Częstochowa. My cousins saw Jewish workmen clearing snow from the platforms. On spotting them, my cousins got out of the carriage and asked the workers if they knew the Asz family and if they could give them any news. The Jewish brigadier's first gesture was to tear the fur collar off my cousin's coat, before putting them both in line. He explained to them that fur was forbidden to Jews, under penalty of death. My cousins arrived with the group of Jewish workers in the "Small Ghetto" and were thus saved from death.

How was this possible? How could my cousins have joined the group at the station and then entered the ghetto, where all the columns of workers were counted as they entered and left? That was a mystery to me.

Once in the ghetto, the brigadier contacted my cousins Szymek and Ruta. Ruta went to see Runia and Lowa. Runia's first question was, “How are my parents?”. She knew that they had been spared during the deportations. Ruta did not know what to answer. Runia could still have seen her mother, who had been deported just the day before. Ruta simply said that her parents had gone to work outside the ghetto and would be returning at the end of the day. Lowa had been informed of the tragedy, but not his wife.

When I heard the news that my cousins were with us, I was shocked. On the one hand, I was happy to learn that they were alive, but on the other, I was sad, thinking of my poor aunt.

After a while, my “resurrected” cousins came to Ruta's house, accompanied by the brigadier, with whom they had been staying since their arrival in the ghetto. Our joy at the reunion was immense, but with the exception of Runia, we were all sad, knowing what had happened. I left my cousins, for it was time to fetch my miserable soup from the ghetto kitchen.

When my uncle and his daughter Mira returned from work, the new arrivals heard the sad news about my aunt.

The next morning, they had all gone to work in HASAG. My “new” cousins were now among the Jewish workers.

My cousin Lowa, being illegal in the ghetto, was unable to practise his profession as a doctor. He worked as a labourer until 20th March 1943. On that day, the eve of Purim, the last surviving doctors were taken with their families to the Jewish cemetery and shot. The Germans left only four doctors and two dentists. The time had come to legalise Lowa as a doctor. The Germans were pleased, for they feared disease and epidemics. Lowa was now an “official” doctor, and remained so until liberation.

That day, 5th January 1943, the day of my cousins' “recuperation”, was also my parents' wedding anniversary (twenty years) and the birthday of my cousin Ruta, 24, mother of little Nachum, only a few months old, both deported with Ruta's husband Leon.

20th MARCH 1943 – "BLOODY PURIM"

On 20th March 1943, the eve of Purim and German *Heldengedenktag* (Heroes' Remembrance Day), a tragic event took place.

What was the reason behind Degenhardt's decision to attack Jews once again? Some speculated that he wanted to make a "present" for the Führer for Remembrance Day, while others thought it was to mark the Jewish holiday.

In any case, Degenhardt ordered the *Judenrat* to draw up a list of the "intelligentsia" in the ghetto - doctors, lawyers, engineers, dentists and the remaining members of the *Judenrat* and their families. He claimed that these people were to be "exchanged" for Germans, resident in Palestine under the British Mandate and interned by the authorities.

Those concerned rushed in, hoping that their ghetto nightmare would soon be over. They even pitied all those who remained under the German boot. How could they trust Degenhardt, after all that had happened? The only explanation could be that, in despair, they clung to the hope of escaping death. I remember that an engineer and his young wife, who were not on the list, asked to be included. Of course, their request was granted. Without realising it, they had put themselves into the lion's den.

The Germans left three doctors and two dentists in the ghetto. Secondly, my cousin Lowa (a specialist gynaecologist) with my cousin, Runia, as Lowa was not registered as a doctor. One doctor, Dr. Bressler, was absent from the ghetto that day, sent for the day on a commando mission. On the other hand, his wife, the dentist Anna Nowak, was taken on board. Heroically, this lady, in her forties, jumped out of the German gendarmerie truck and, miraculously, was able to save herself. She managed to get back into the ghetto, where she was reunited with her husband. It was a stroke of luck - a couple, both individually condemned to death (!), survived the war, each in their own way[11].

All those on the "exchange" list were loaded onto German gendarmerie trucks and driven out of the ghetto. But, instead of leaving the city, the trucks headed for the Jewish cemetery. There, they were brutally murdered. It was the Jewish workers who were later responsible for burying them in a communal grave. That day, 127 men, women and children perished, shot in the Jewish cemetery.

[11] [*Dr Bresler is also mentioned in "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. 2, col. 62, and B. Orenstein mentions the incident in "Churban Czenstochow", p. 219, and dedicates a chapter to him there, pp. 270-271.*]

Apart from the dentist Anna Nowak-Bressler, one other person, my friend Władek Kopiński, son of the president of the *Judenrat*, managed to jump out of the truck. He was arrested by the Germans, tortured and brutally murdered.

The widow of the doctor Leon Gutman, who was killed in the “Small Ghetto’ by a stray bullet fired by a Ukrainian guard, was saved along with her son, another friend of mine, because she was no longer part of the group of doctors. They both survived the war.

Only three doctors and a dentist remained in the ghetto, and they were joined by survivors - Mrs. Anna Nowak-Bressler, a dentist, her husband Dr. Bressler, and my cousin Lowa. These seven people formed the ghetto's medical corps. Later, one doctor joined HASAG-Raków, while the others were transferred with us to HASAG-Pelcery.

The news of the massacre in the cemetery came as a terrible shock to the ghetto's residents. We had new proof of German cynicism and, if there were any illusions left, they were gone for good. Morale in the ghetto was already very low. With this latest massacre, we were appalled.

In the spring of 1945, after liberation, a funeral service was held at the Jewish cemetery in Częstochowa, which I attended. During this moving ceremony, a plaque, bearing the names of the 127 victims of the Purim 1943 “action”, was unveiled in the presence of the authorities and a large crowd.

ONE SUNDAY IN APRIL 1943,
ON MY WAY TO WORK FROM THE "SMALL GHETTO" TO HASAG …

It happened on a Sunday in April 1943. An unforgettable memory that hurt so much!

We were living in the "Small Ghetto" after the deportations, the liquidation of the "Big Ghetto" and the loss of my whole family. The conditions, of what we called "a life", were terrible. The "Small Ghetto" was located in a small part of the old ghetto, in old, shabby houses, with the bare minimum of worthless old furniture, which the Germans had despised and left behind.

We were crammed into small rooms, 6-8 people deep. Our house was at ul. Nadrzeczna 66. I was "housed" there with a few friends. I later learned that they were members of the resistance and action network. Unfortunately, they later perished. The name of the group was "66".

So, on that Sunday in April 1943, at around 5:30 a.m., we were headed to HASAG, to our usual workplace. To get there, just a few kilometres from the ghetto, our column had to cross the streets of the former large, uninhabited ghetto. It had been a few months since the liquidation of this ghetto, and the Germans had searched every house, looking for people who might be hiding, as well as for "treasures". Sometime later, the whole area was handed over to the Poles.

The streets were practically empty that Sunday morning. We walked, flanked by German policemen and Ukrainian guards. For once in my life, I was romantic and "poetically" inspired. I was 18 and a half and thinking, "It's spring, the trees are blooming, life is reborn, and where are we? How much longer are we going to survive?". I had become sad, in the face of this promising future for others (not for Jews).

Just then, I spotted a few Poles in the deserted street. What were they doing there so early on a Sunday? Perhaps they were on their way to church, located in the former "Big Ghetto", closed during its existence and recently reopened? In any case, when they saw our marching column, they stopped and said ironically, in Polish, "Moszek (pejorative!), are you still alive? Instead of being sympathetic, they mocked us in the cruellest possible way. It really hurt, just when I was dreaming. Something I would not soon forget. In retrospect, it is not surprising, given the centuries-old antisemitism of the Poles, instilled by the

Church. Even today, in Poland, emptied of virtually all its Jews, antisemitism is as vivid as ever, if not more so.

THE END OF THE "SMALL GHETTO"

The existence of the "Small Ghetto" was short-lived. We were housed there from November 1942 to 25th June 1943. It was a transitional period between the "Big Ghetto" and the barracks at the HASAG factories.

In very difficult conditions, where people were often murdered for trivial reasons, or even for no reason at all, we organised ourselves as best we could, to live and try to survive. The main reason for the "Small Ghetto" was the forced labour of its slave-inhabitants, which took up most of our time. On our return from our workplaces in town, after receiving our soup and bread ration from the ghetto's general kitchen, we would try to forget the hard day's work. In the evening, around 9 p.m., curfew was announced by a trumpet, which played the Last Post (!!!). It was already very depressing.

In the morning, another bell woke us up for work. The work groups formed were counted as we left the ghetto, which bore the official German name of "forced labour camp for Jews". Upon our return to the ghetto, we were counted again to check the number of workers. Sometimes, however, people took advantage of these outings to leave the ghetto for good. The brigadiers of the workers' groups had to arrange for the count to be the same on the way back as on the way out, as they were held responsible. It also happened that people entered from outside the ghetto. This was how my cousins Runia and Lowa came to live with us, after leaving Białystok. Their journey is recounted separately.

We lived temporarily. Despite the miserable situation in which we found ourselves, we wanted to continue living in the "Small Ghetto". It was in our best interest. We knew that any change was not going to make things better. It could only get worse. On the other hand, we feared that the ghetto would be liquidated in the not-too-distant future.

The situation was getting worse. Life was hard. The resistance movement continued its work. It had contacts with the Warsaw ghetto, with the Polish resistance, and was preparing a tunnel to the outside, as well as Molotov cocktails and so on. The idea was to prepare to resist the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto" by any means possible. The resistance was sure that the ghetto would not survive for long.

On 1st May 1943, Labour Day (which was also Nazi Germany Day), we were not allowed to leave the ghetto to go to our workplaces. We were locked inside all

day. The streets were full. We feared the worst - perhaps total or partial deportation. In the end, the day passed without too many problems. The next day, we were delighted to be able to go back to work.

But the Germans got wind of the preparations for the ghetto resistance. There were leaks. At the beginning of June, it seems to me that we were kept inside the ghetto, as we had been on May 1st. The fact remains that, as I remember it, we had a very hectic time. The streets were full of angry people, and there were lots of German policemen.

We were then forced to march slowly past the Jewish police building. At a window on the 1st floor, there was a bloodied man flanked by two German policemen. We had to look at him and tell the policemen at the entrance if we knew him. He was one of the leaders of the resistance, arrested on a denunciation.

Harry Potasiewicz[12], beaten to death, preferred to die rather than reveal the secrets of the resistance. He did not speak and was hung from the police station window. Probably, in order to set an example, we were paraded around, to terrorise us. None of us recognised him. The spectacle, which lasted several hours, frightened us. We sensed that the end was approaching. The resistance was preparing an uprising. Like Potasiewicz, other leaders were arrested and killed. The uprising did not happen.

The Germans had decided to put an end to the ghetto. On 25th June 1943, after a selection process, hundreds of Jews were killed in the city's Jewish cemetery. The rest of the ghetto's population was transferred to the HASAG munitions factories. The Germans were convinced that many Jews were hidden in bunkers. An “amnesty” was proclaimed for those who emerged before 28th June. As a result, two hundred women, children and elderly people were shot in the cemetery and buried in a mass grave.

We were transferred to the HASAG factories. The houses in the “Small Ghetto” were dynamited and completely destroyed. The Jews, who had not come out of their bunkers, lost their lives.

The “Small Ghetto” had come to an end. Its inhabitants had been dispersed to the HASAG factories and now lived in purpose-built barracks.

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[12] [*A chapter is dedicated to him in “Sefer Częstochowa”, Vol. 2, col. 306. There is also a detailed account of the incident in B. Orenstein’s “Churban Czenstochow”, pp. 251-252.*]

A new era had begun.

HASAG - LIFE IN THE BARRACKS

On 25th June 1943, we left the "Small Ghetto", now liquidated, to be housed in the HASAG factories in the city, where we worked.

For me, it was HASAG-Apparatebau (formerly Pelcery), where I continued to paint the gas generators manufactured in the "Assembly" division. Probably nothing had been planned for our "barracks" at the factory. We were provided with disused factory rooms, where we stayed for a few weeks in total discomfort. We were on the spot - we went down in the morning to work and came back up in the evening to go to bed. It was here that I changed my hairstyle. Although I still had a comb, I no longer had a mirror and could no longer part my hair. I had to do my hair differently.

During our stay in the factory building, barracks had been built to house us. An available plot of land was chosen on the outskirts of the factory, right next to the "*Schießstand*", the firing range for the bullets manufactured by the company. On the outside, the paintwork was in the style of German armoured tanks and military cars. Inside, they resembled those seen on TV.

Crammed together, with around three hundred people per barrack, we slept on three levels, 10-20 people per level, which we called "shelves", because, indeed, that is what they looked like. There were paper mattresses, filled with sawdust. From time to time, they were emptied and filled with fresh sawdust. The vermin bit us. It hurt and the crushed bedbugs smelled terrible. Fleas flew and lice settled in.

Life in the barracks was very difficult. There was a lot of us, and the noise and chatter were very annoying. In winter, we had only one stove for everyone, and not much fuel.

Every four months or so, by barrack, we were "disinfected" in the skinning facility. We showered together and our clothes were disinfected in an oven, along with our mattresses. This operation lasted about thirty minutes. By the time we got out, our clothes were hot, cardboardy and brittle. The high temperature had completely burnt them.

To wash every day, we had a room with a long sink, fitted with several taps. Of course, the water was cold. In winter, this was dramatic.

There were about ten barracks. Men and women were, of course, separated. Among the barracks, there was one used as a dispensary and surgical ward, and another for “contagious diseases”. Indeed, in addition to “light” illnesses such as influenza and angina, we also had an epidemic of typhus, typhoid and a fair number of tuberculosis patients. This barrack, called “isolated”, was surrounded by barbed wire. The Germans had a terrible fear of disease. Another “sanitary” barrack was a privileged one - it housed doctors and hospital staff with their husbands or wives. This was the only “mixed” barrack, for men and women. My cousins Lowa and Runia, as well as my uncle Israel, were housed here.

The barracks grounds, surrounded by barbed wire, were guarded by Ukrainians.

We moved into these barracks in August 1943 and remained there until liberation, on the night of 16th-17th January 1945. There were around 2,500 of us and, at the RAKÓW steelworks, around 1,200. Later, two other factories, belonging to the same German HASAG group were opened, with Jews transferred from forced-labour camps of Kraków-Płaszów, Łódź, Skarżysko-Kamienna and Bliżyn. These were Częstochowianka and Warta. In Raków, there was one doctor on site. At home, there were four doctors (including my cousin, Lowa) and two female dentists. Once a week, one of them went to Raków to treat the sick.

At the end of the war, there were 4 forced-labour camp factories in Czestochowa, all belonging to the German HASAG group:

- HASAG-Apparatebau, “formerly Pelcery” - a former textile factory owned by a Belgian company, expropriated by the Germans, now a munitions factory, where I worked.
- HASAG-Raków - blast furnaces and steelworks.

These 2 camps were created at the end of June 1943.

- HASAG – Warta - formerly the “Warta” textile factory, owned by a French company, now a German munitions factory, created in summer 1944.
- HASAG- Częstochowianka - the “La Czenstochovienne”’ former textile factory, owned by a French company, an ammunition factory, also created in summer 1944.

Faith is a powerful driving force. To be able to observe religion, Orthodox Jews did everything they could. So, for example, in conditions as dramatic as they were dangerous, they managed to make matzot in the “Small Ghetto”. And, even in the HASAG camp, they baked “clandestine” matzot. This is worth mentioning.

I was once invited to eat potatoes, obtained somehow by a very close family friend and her niece. It was an extraordinary thing, extremely rare! And it was one of my dreams - to eat potatoes.

HASAG - THE WORK

HASAG is an abbreviation of “Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft”. The company was headquartered in Altenburg, Saxony.

Our HASAG-Pelcery factory was located at the end of ul.1-ego Maja, in the suburb of Stradom. Initially, two sectors operated in this German factory:

- “Rekalibrierung” - where copper casings for cannon bullets were recovered through chemical and mechanical treatments, and
- “Montage” - later replaced by “Infanterie”.

Here, we manufactured boilers for car gas generators. These were built entirely in-house, including reference plate welding and exterior spray painting. At first, I worked on the assembly of these machines and then, for several months, until the manufacturing stopped, I became a spray painter. We had masks at our disposal, but preferred to work without them. The thick black lacquer was mixed with acetone. We bought thin, old, used rubber gloves from the chemical laboratories that had, meanwhile, been set up in the factory. But these old gloves did not give us enough protection, and we had to wash our hands with acetone at the end of the shift. The skin on our hands was white.

While I was working at the “Montage”, a boiler fell on my right arm and dug a deep hole, which became infected. It took me several days to get rid of the infection. The hole left a scar.

I often sat at work, painting the lower parts of the machines. One or two workers would present us with the parts to be painted, twirling them with sticks.

One day, something happened. I was holding my paint pistol, when a Jewish brigadier walked past me. He was wearing a little jacket that his wife had just washed. At that moment, unintentionally, I pressed the device and stained the jacket. Furious, he slapped me. That was the only time I was ever touched physically. I was unhappy about it because, on the one hand, I felt innocent and, on the other, the only time I had ever been hit was by a Jew.

After a few months, the manufacture of gas generators was stopped and replaced by the “Infantry” division, to which I was assigned.

We made bullets for the infantry. I was familiar with the production phases of the time, which have certainly evolved since then. Before the war, cartridge cases were made from copper. But, due to a lack of raw materials, steel replaced copper. This led to changes in process and equipment.

In our case, operations began by drawing the “dice” (future bushes). There were three drawing operations, each of which was followed by a chemical acid bath. The drawn parts were then passed through machines to soak the ends of the bushes. Then, the ends of the bushes were cut and smoothed. The next step was to drill two holes. The bushes were finished. They were transported to the powder division. Here, women “visually” checked their outward appearance, and any cracked or scratched parts were removed. These women worked here under the supervision of young German women, promoted to “forewomen”, who were extremely strict and nasty. The atmosphere was very tense, as the slightest thing could lead to accusations of “sabotage”. Once this operation was complete, the casings were taken to the powder filling room. This was followed by packaging and storage.

Wagons arrived at the docks and the goods were loaded. Workers were subjected to strict body searches, to prevent theft of ammunition. On several occasions, people tried to hide in the wagons, with the complicity of the Polish resistance, in order to escape. Some managed to leave the factory in this way. As for those who were caught, their fate is anyone's guess. The Polish resistance managed to steal bullets for their needs.

Personally, I worked on the machines that soaked the ends of shells. Their name was “*Halsglühmaschinen*”. There were three electric motors. The job consisted in blank-heating the steel casing ends that fell from the tank into a rotating drum, lined up ten by ten. A series of copper resistors would rest on them for a few seconds, just long enough to heat them up. It was a pretty sight - a line of burning candles, whitening, turning red, then blackening as they cooled. When the heating operation was complete, the resistors were raised and the drum moved forward a notch. The resistors came down again, and so on.

Our job was to fill the tank with raw material and empty the processed goods into carts. We had to supervise the work and remove defective parts from the drum. The work was quite tiring, and the heat from the drum made you want to sleep, which was dangerous, especially on the night shift. Our expensive machine was very important for production. Its output fed several subsequent machines. In the event of a breakdown, we were given priority for repairs to

avoid stopping the machines that depended on it. In twelve-hour shifts, we processed around 200,000 casings, working two shifts from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. during the day and from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. at night. At 9 a.m. or 9 p.m., an ersatz coffee was served. At noon or midnight, we had our "meal", a horrible soup made of nauseatingly overcooked beet or rutabaga [swede], etc. Meanwhile, the machines were running.

At first, there was just one machine, then a second as production increased. A few months later, with the advance of the Soviet armies, the factory identical to ours in Skarżysko, belonging to the same German company, was transferred to us. As a "specialist", I was detached from my group and put in charge of the new group of the same soaking machines. I was in charge of three or four people for the same number of machines. I stayed until the end, on 15th January 1945.

One day, my foreman-in-chief came to see me and said, "Come with me". I followed him, wondering what he could possibly want. There was never any peace with the Germans. What was he up to? He did not say a word and headed for his office. He handed me a pack of one hundred "*machorkowe*" cigarettes, and only then said, "Hand these out to your workers". I was relieved and even flattered. It probably proved that he was happy with our work. Coming from a German, that was surprising! At one point, there were around 5,000 people in HASAG (my camp), from Poland, Germany, Austria and the Czechoslovakia. They were partly in transit, moving west towards Germany.

In "Warta" and "Częstochowianka", the workers numbered around 3,000. By the end of 1944, Bartenschlager had become head of the Warta camp. Of sinister memory, he had previously been the head of the Skarżysko-Kamienna camp, which had been liquidated in the face of the advancing Soviet army.

In the spring of 1944, we received a group of three hundred young women from the Łódź ghetto. We called them "the daughters of Rumkowski" - the head of the Łódź *Judenrat.*

The HASAG factories ran like any other business, with its own hierarchy, offices and payroll. A few Jewish girls were employed in the offices. One of their jobs was to draw up pay slips, including those for Jewish slaves. We were paid, like everyone else, fifty groschen per hour, but we did not see any of it. We were the property of the German police, who collected our pay and had to feed us. They made a fortune on our backs. The factory supplied the German army and was paid accordingly. So, it had to pay its workers (or the owner).

In the spring of 1944, we received old clothes from the Jews exterminated by the Nazis in the camps of Trawniki, Majdanek and so on. They were in poor condition and marked on the back with red paint to distinguish Jewish prisoners from others. A distribution took place at our place. I received a pair of used pants and a jacket. We knew what had happened to the previous owners of these clothes and thought sadly of them.

The German factory staff, beginning with the management, had a vested interest in keeping their jobs, as this protected them from being sent to the front. There was a struggle between the SS police, whose aim was the extermination of the Jews, and the German civilian staff, who used us as “cover”.

HASAG – THE SELECTION ON 25th JULY 1943

This happened one month after the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto" on 25th June 1943. It was 25th July 1943, and I was working the night shift. At around 10 p.m., rumours circulated that German policemen had arrived at the factory. What were they going to do at such a late hour? It did not bode well. Indeed, work was interrupted and we were made to double up. I was in the front row of our work division.

Behind our foreman-in-chief, Täuscher, stood policemen. Täuscher had to select men from his group, as happened in other brigades. Täuscher would walk past us and point with his finger to "du" (you). It seemed to me that he had chosen me too, but I was not in too much of a hurry, knowing what lay ahead. It was a good thing that I waited a while, because he was pointing to a man standing behind me. This man stepped out of line and joined the selected people. Täuscher continued the selection further on. I was relieved, because if I had stepped out of line, the Germans would not have turned me away. It was a close call.

This "operation" lasted about two hours. That night, the police picked up around three hundred people. They were put up for the night in the cellar of the Ukrainian guard ("*Werkschutz*") at the factory. Upstairs stood the head of the company's "Building" division, with a hammer in his hand. As people passed him on their way downstairs, he would hit them over the head with his hammer, knocking them unconscious. From that day on, we called this foreman "Little Hammer", instead of his previous nickname "Morsch", as he ordered his workers every morning, instead of "March!"[13].

The next morning, those selected were taken to the Jewish cemetery, shot and buried in a mass grave. According to the testimony of a Polish worker, they were forced to undress before the execution. The execution followed the discovery of the resistance movement, which led to the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto". The Jewish policemen, who were stationed in the old *mikveh*, were taken to the cemetery at the same time as our workers and shot along with them.

After the selected people had left, inscriptions were found on the walls of the cellar, where they had spent the night. Horrifying! They were messages of

[13] [*See regarding this sadist, named Opel, in "Czenstochow", 1958, p. 67, and in B. Orenstein's "Churban Czenstochow", p. 233.*]

farewell, addressed to children and reflections on the fate that awaited them. What these Jews had to endure, knowing they were going to die ...

As for us, the survivors, once again, we were terrorised. We had found that even working for the German war did not protect us from them. At any moment, a new selection could be planned.

As in other cities, we called the German sorting of people “selections” or “segregations”.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

In order to record our daily performance, we were given sheets of paper. It was any kind of paper, drafts, forms and so on. We wrote on the backs of these sheets. One day, for fun, I filled in one of these forms in pencil. It was a worker's form, with name, address, job title, salary and so on. For me, it was an innocent game and, out of a sense of levity, I put it in my wallet. I had forgotten all about it and kept it. I almost paid for that sheet of paper with my life, as the rest proves.

I had managed to keep a leather wallet, which had been given to me by my father. It contained a few family photos. I never opened it and thought there was nothing else in it. In reality, two papers were also in there, completely forgotten, but which turned out to be very compromising. One was the famous worker's card, innocently filled in. The other was a draft of a letter.

This is story of this letter - my father had given one of his customers, outside the ghetto, his fur-lined coat to keep. The possession of fur was forbidden to Jews, under penalty of death. These furs were used by German soldiers on the Eastern Front in the Soviet Union. My father had placed it, along with my mother's and aunt's furs, in a safe place.

As I was in a very wretched state, my uncle, who knew about these furs, suggested, one day in 1944, that I try to recover a “deposit” from my father's friend-client, to be applied against a settlement of the account in better days. My uncle had a friend, who was on very good terms with a German foreman. According to my uncle, this foreman could be entrusted with the collection of the “down payment”. So, I wrote a letter to my father's client, asking him to give the bearer of the letter a sum of money on account. Of course, I did not mention his name or the fur, just that it was “a precious object”. My uncle thought my text was not good enough, so I wrote another one. But I inadvertently kept the first one. It was dangerous, but I was not thinking about the danger. As I have already said, I had completely forgotten about it. At nineteen, you do not think about everything. In any case, it was a serious mistake.

To return to the facts, I kept my wallet carefully. Along with the photographs, it was my only memory of my parents. But one day, when I woke up at midday (I was on the night shift at the time), I noticed that the wallet had disappeared. My first thought was that I would not be able to have my midday soup, because the soup ticket was in the wallet. I would have missed this meagre meal.

Then I remembered the photographs. This was serious! I searched high and low, even asking the “Barackenältester” if he had found anything, but with no results. The wallet had been stolen. I went to see my “Kapo”-brigadier and explained my loss of the ticket. He was a friend of my father's, who knew me. He believed me and gave me the soup.

Time passed. Losing the wallet with the photographs hurt a lot. But little by little, in a life full of mortal danger, I forgot. Then one day, during a morning call, my Kapo said to me, “We need you at the labour office”. There, I was shown one of the photographs, lost some time earlier.

“Is this yours?” Yes, it was. Hope was returning. My photographs had been found!!!! But, I learned, only part of them had been found - no photographs of my parents, nor of my little sister. Nor was the wallet found among the bags of cement, in a room of the factory undergoing transformation, where a German foreman from the “Building” department, had found the photographs. But, I am told, the foreman, who has them now, wants to see me personally, before returning them.

Along with the photos, he had found a draft of a letter, written in Polish, which he had translated into German, as well as a factory printout in German. I was afraid to meet him, but I was reassured that the foreman was not a bad guy and that I would not risk anything with him. He might have wanted a small reward but, when he saw the state that I was in, he would waive it.

I asked Birenholc, the Jewish brigadier in the construction group, to assist me in my meeting with the foreman, whom he knew well. We went to the conversion room, where we thought we would find him. Indeed, he was there. Mr. Birenholc introduced me to him, but we learned that the photographs and the two documents were already in the possession of the foreman-in-chief, who, having seen them, had taken possession of them. So it was to him that we had to turn.

Hearing this, I was terrified. The foreman-in-chief of the “Building” department was nicknamed “*Morsch*”. He was much feared, as he not only shouted, but also beat and sent workers to the “*Wache*”, the Ukrainian factory guard office, the “*Werkschutz*”, for punishment. This was the man I was going to have to deal with! I asked Mr. Birenholc to accompany me to him. Afraid of talking nonsense, I also asked him to be my interpreter.

We looked for the foreman for quite a while and found him in another room. The brigadier introduced me to him, and we began our conversation with translations. The foreman was quite friendly, perhaps because of the brigadier's presence, who probably gave him big “tips”. I forgot that I did not understand German (?) and began answering directly in that language. But then the foreman mentioned the form I had filled in (the worker's card) and asked me what I was going to do with it. No matter how much I explained that it was a game for me, he did not believe it.

“You wanted to escape with this document”, he said. He would not budge. The brigadier, seeing that things were going badly, found an excuse to leave us. With a heavy heart, I was alone with the foreman. We chatted for a while, and the tone changed. He became friendlier, but, repeating to me over and over, “You know, what would happen to you, if I told the guard station?” I knew it. Was it to show me kindness or to scare me? We talked about my letter. I said that I was hungry and wanted a little more to eat.

Then the foreman turned to my photographs. Among them was a very old one with a hundred people in it. He wanted to know who was in it. I pointed to one of my aunts, as a little girl. He thought that he recognised one of his friends in the photograph. I did not object. The atmosphere was pretty good, but he often reminded me of the guard's office. After a while, he asked me, “What will you do with these papers if I give them back to you? I replied, “I will destroy them immediately”.

As I said this, I began to tear up the papers. He snatched them out of my hands and said, “No, they could be glued back together. Go into the next room, where there is an electric oven, and burn them”. He did not have to tell me twice. I ran into the room with the oven, opened it and threw the papers in. Running, I left the room, where workers were at work. They looked at me, astonished, not understanding anything.

After the war, I met one of them, who told me that I had run the risk of being accused of sabotage. In fact, by opening a working electric furnace, I was lowering the temperature and also throwing foreign materials into it. Fortunately, apart from the Jewish workers, nobody saw me. But the foreman-in-chief knew. Did he do it on purpose, to get me caught, or had he not thought of it and wanted to be absolutely sure that the papers would be destroyed? I will never know. He was waiting for me when I got back and simply asked, “Did you burn them?”. He wished me good luck and left me. Phew, I was relieved. It was

a close call. Did the foreman-in-chief, known for his savagery, take pity on me? Was it a moment of generosity on his part? It is impossible to believe such a brute.

Two other photos were found in another part of the factory, by a lady who had recognised someone in my family and gave them to me.

THE GOLDEN COIN

At the beginning of 1944, I was working on the sockets-soaking machine. Above me was the man in charge of the machine, a nice guy, whose whole family had been deported. All he had left was a sister, also the only member of her family, who worked on the same shift as him. She would join him, during the break, for coffee and soup.

We also had two women working with us, who sat on small crates, sorting the raw material from the stretching machine, before handing it over to us. Around them was an empty space (this is where a second machine was later installed).

One evening, at the start of our night shift, I went to the sorters to collect the sorted material to feed our machine. That evening, one of the two women was absent, perhaps ill. I happened to know, very well, the lady who was there. She was a family friend, a former schoolteacher, who owned a perfume shop before the war, and whose husband had left for the USSR at the start of the war.

As we were alone and had a little time to spare, we chatted for a while, standing at the edge of a passageway. The floor was cement and the factory room was not very well lit. By chance, as we talked, I glanced at the floor. Something round was shining under my feet. The woman followed my gaze and said, “Let's see what it is”. I picked up the object and saw a yellow coin, inscribed with Russian characters. I thought that it was an old Russian coin. It was worthless, because this is no time to be collecting, I thought.

But my friend, who was older and more experienced than me, said, “It's worth money. If you agree and trust me, I will show it to my cousin tomorrow morning after work and sell it to him. We will split the proceeds”.

Which was only fair, because if it was, indeed, I who had found the coin, it was thanks to her that I had picked it up. I had no concept of value, and wondered how many rations of bread I could buy with my share - because the reference “currency” was the bread ration. Everything revolved around it. At nineteen, I was starving and the only expectation was the distribution of bread. We received it in the morning at 9 a.m., and we had to “manage” it well for the whole day, not succumbing to the temptation to eat too much at once or too often.

In our rations, once a week or once a fortnight, we received a little granulated sugar and a little beet marmalade. That was all. For the past few weeks, I had been depriving myself of these two foodstuffs and selling them, so as to be able to buy extra rations of bread. I was always hungry.

My big dream was, if I ever survived - which seemed absolutely improbable and unthinkable - to be able to eat potatoes to my heart's content in any form - soup, steamed, mashed. An unimaginable dream!!!

So, the lady took the coin. It was fortunate that there were only two of us that evening, in the absence of the other worker. We did not talk about it anymore and work went on normally all night.

In the morning, I stopped thinking about it. I told myself that my share, if the piece ever had any value, might be worth one or two rations of bread. That would be better than nothing!

When the work was done, I went back to my barrack to sleep. I had completely forgotten about the gold coin.

In the evening, we would start our night shift again. A few minutes before work started, we got the call. Our German foreman-in-chief was checking the headcount, men and women separated. He was in the process of counting us, when my friend came running in, as she was running late. As she passed me, she smiled. It reminded me of the gold coin. Seeing her smile, I told myself there was good news. Could it be the equivalent of three or four rations of bread, instead of one or two?

As soon as I got back to work, I went to get the raw material to feed our machine and to see my friend at the same time. As on the previous evening, she was still alone. She said, “I have some money for you. Guess how much it is?” I didn't answer, because I had no idea. She said again, “Try to find out, just for fun”. I didn't answer, for fear of making a fool of myself.

Seeing that I could not bring myself to answer, she finally said, “There's 2,000 złoty for you”. I was incredulous. She opened her purse and showed me a wad of bills. Still wary, I did not react. She took out the bundle and gave it to me, at the same time offering to keep it until the end of the job. I left the money with my friend, while taking out a 100-złoty bill for my immediate expenses.

I was transformed. Having money fall from the sky gave me strength. I had to go shopping and I had to do it right away. The first thing to do, while working, was to buy four cigarettes in the toilet. I did not smoke but, for me, it was a symbol of power. At one point, a crazy idea crossed my mind. I thought I could get married, because I had money - I had no one in sight, but I felt I had someone. Money is crazy, especially in the situation I was in. The death that lurked around the corner, the harsh living and working conditions, the hunger, the loneliness, the tattered clothes, all these things took a back seat, for a short while. I was forgetting my pitiful situation!

After the cigarettes, I thought I needed a shirt. I bought an old one with holes in it. Then I went to the machine shop to order tin cans with lids - one for the sugar, another for the marmalade for our rations and a third for the night's needs in the barracks. I had decided not to sell my rations of sugar and marmalade, but to buy a little instead. When my colleague offered me his soup ration at midnight, I refused, claiming I was not hungry.

That a miracle happened - a gold coin fell from the sky at my feet. I was happy but, at the same time, a case of conscience made its way into my mind. Indeed, if I had found this coin, it was someone who had lost it (M. de Lapalisse would not have said otherwise). Someone had hidden it and lost it by crossing the aisle of the factory hall. Maybe it was the only coin he had and he needed it. It was his money, not mine. He had to have it back. But how? I didn't know his name. It was illegal and I could not let anyone know. There was a solution - take the money to the Jewish Labour Office and ask them to trace the person and return it to him. But I quickly ruled that out. I could not trust anyone. It would be easy for the managers to tell me that the money had been returned to its owner, and I had no way of controlling it. So, I told myself that between them, who lived and ate better than I did and myself, the money would be more useful to me. With a conscience that was not entirely clear, I decided to keep the money.

While keeping the secret, I needed to distribute some among the few people close to me or in need. Having finished work in the morning, I began my “rounds”. The first person I visited was an older friend, a great intellectual, who was doing very badly. I offered him 100 złoty, saying that I had received some money from the “Aryan side” and wanted to share it with him. He was very proud and refused my money, with thanks. Failure.

Then I went to my uncle Stasiek's barrack and made him the same proposal. Another failure, with thanks. Then it was my cousin Szymek's turn (currently in

Los Angeles). He, too, was doing as well as he could. He was the only person who accepted my help, but presented it “diplomatically”. In the end, I went to see my uncle Israel and my cousins Runia and Lowa. My cousins (he was a doctor) and, with them, my uncle, were in a better “material” situation than I was. They too refused my offer. However, my cousin offered to keep my money, for two reasons - to prevent theft and to keep my money as long as possible. “You will not get money again soon, so keep it as long as you can”, he said. This was very wise and, afterwards, I would only ask for money to buy bread rations. No more fooling around.

It was incredible, a gift from heaven, which not only helped me to survive, but also gave me the courage to endure the harsh living conditions. It was like a ray of sunshine in my sad, miserable life, where every moment spent was a victory over death.

Death lurked around the corner. It could be provoked by selections, which were not lacking and which meant our end. It could also be due to illness, caused by malnutrition, fear and the typhus epidemic that rule our camp, as well as the poor living conditions.

Also, for the slightest “offense” of the rules, men were sent by the German foremen to the *Werkschutz* guard office, “*Hauptwache*”, run by Ukrainian factory guards under German command. There, “malefactors” were “punished” with fifty or seventy-five strokes of the stick. Some victims returned to the barracks in a pitiful state, others were handed over to the Gestapo as “saboteurs”.

The money lasted several months. The initial two thousand złoty represented around four hundred rations of bread (in those days, a ration cost five złoty). To me, it was a fortune.

When I think about it, I realise how lucky I was to improve my life a little “materially”. But, on the other hand, I felt uneasy. I had taken advantage of a piece of gold that did not belong to me. But unfortunately, there was nothing I could do about it. If it had been possible, if I had known its owner, I would have given it back. But the situation did not lend itself to that.

HASAG-SICKNESS IN SUMMER 1944

Early in the summer of 1944, I fell ill. I went to the camp dispensary (we called it an “ambulance”) and, in the corridor used as a waiting room, I lost consciousness. I was revived with a shot of camphor. I told Dr. Bressler, who examined me, that my inner ear hurt. In reality, it was sinusitis. I was given medication and time off work. But, after her visit to my barrack, my cousin Runia advised me to go to hospital, telling me that there would be no one to look after me.

I was afraid of this, because it was dangerous to be ill under the Nazis. Sick people were unproductive and of no use to anyone. They were useless mouths to feed. So, they were the first to be killed. I feared the liquidation of the hospital barracks. This had already happened during the deportations of September-October 1942 and later, at the end of our camp on 16th January 1945. In both cases, patients, who could not stand up and walk, were poisoned on Nazi orders.

I had no choice but to enter the so-called “isolated barrack” hospital. This was a barracks surrounded by barbed wire, where contagious diseases were treated. I was given a white bed with a white cushion, blanket and sheet, things which, for so long, I was not used to anymore. Our food was a little better than in the rest of the camp.

The barrack had two sections - men and women. I felt comfortable in my bed and, as much as I did not want to go to the hospital in the first place, I did not want to leave anymore. The doctor, Dr. Przyrowski, came every day to examine the patients. He was the only doctor to attend to the patients in the barracks. After two-three days, he arrived with my doctor cousin Lowa, who had come especially for me. Lowa did not look after anyone else. Doctor Przyrowski was a little worried about me and called in his friend Lowa. They both examined me and asked me if my back hurt. It did not. The two doctors diagnosed me with a lung problem.

I was given a special ration of a drug (calcium gluconate) by the head doctor, Dr. Szperling. This medication was normally distributed as one per day - one day for the men's ward and another day for the women's ward. As I had my own dose every two days, as prescribed, it did not bother the other patients, who continued to be treated as before.

I was hospitalised for about ten days. Hospital regulations stipulated that patients could be discharged if two successive temperature readings were taken without fever. As I did not feel like leaving the hospital, I tried to artificially raise the fever by rubbing the thermometer and, what is more, under the quilt. Nothing worked. I did not want to leave. Doctor Przyrowski could not help. Every day, the head doctor looked at the fever charts of the patients, because he wanted to have as few as possible. He feared the Nazis' reactions and the risk of liquidation.

My treatment was over, and I left the “isolated” barrack. For several years, traces of my lung disease still appeared on the screen during X-ray sessions, but then disappeared. In any case, I owed a debt of gratitude to my cousin and the doctors who saved my life.

When I left the hospital, I was given a few days off work. My uncle Izrael, Runia's father, told me that I should talk to a lady, who was involved in helping young people. Together with other ladies, she prepared snacks for the youngsters and distributed them alongside our “classic” meals. These snacks consisted of a ration of rice, seasoned with cinnamon and sugar. It was delicious! It gave us moral and physical support.

The snacks lasted a few weeks. I think the funds for these snacks came from American Jewish organisations via the International Red Cross in Geneva. I do not know why this distribution stopped - either the Nazis ordered it to stop or the funds had run out.

LIBERATION
January 1945

At the munitions factory, we worked hard under terror. From 15th December 1944, as an "outer camp", our camp had come under the authority of Auschwitz. The regime had become harsher and there was talk of electrifying the barbed wire which surrounded our camp, the "barracks area" as we called it. The guard was reinforced. The camp commander was an SS man, and there were SS men with the "*Werkschutz*", the Ukrainian factory guard. Striped prison clothes, worn in all the concentration camps, had arrived and would soon be distributed.

Morning roll calls with the camp commandant were no picnic. Each "Kapo" had to introduce his group and indicate the number of workers by saying, "*Ich melde gehorsam*: *X Häftlinge*" ("I obediently declare: X prisoners"). This was new to us. The word "Häftling" ("prisoner") was unknown to our Jews - it was German, not Yiddish. So, some Kapos, having misheard the word, would distort it – funny, but dangerous moments sometimes brightened up these calls. Fortunately, the Germans did not understand or care, as these distortions could have been taken as mockery. So, instead of "Häftlinge", I sometimes heard "Herringe" ("herrings"), "Flüchtlinge" ("escapees") and so on. To hear "so many herrings" or "so many escapees" instead of "prisoners" was not lacking in flavour at times like these[14].

Fortunately for us, this Auschwitz regime only lasted one month, from 15th December 1944 to 16th January 1945, and all the sinister SS plans did not have the time to be carried out.

We knew that a Soviet offensive had begun on 12th January 1945. The front was not far from us, and the Soviets were advancing at a rapid pace. From time to time, summoned by a loud siren, we would go down to the factory air-raid shelter. Soviet planes flew overhead. Despite the danger of bombs that could crush us, we sensed that liberation was at hand (at least for those who would survive).

On 15th January 1945, we underwent the daily morning roll call in the camp, but were not allowed to go to the factory. The night shift had returned. As usual, we were grouped in fives, by work sector of the factory, with our Kapos and work brigadiers. We were told nothing. We stood there for a long time, wondering what was in store for us. The "*Werkschutz*" and the SS surrounded us. The

[14] [*See B. Orenstein's "Churban Czenstochow", p.273.*]

worried German foremen had all come to ask for their workers, but they could not get anything. The SS got their way and the foremen left empty-handed. Making workers work was in their interest, it was their cover. Without it, they risked going to the front. It was the Russian front they feared most.

A small but, for me, miraculous event occurred. After a while, the SS began to move a few groups out of the "barracks area". There was a bit more room. My group was moved and put in front of the entrance to the so-called "sanitary" barrack, which contained a small hospital and dispensary. It had a glass door so that we could see what was going on both inside and out.

In the previous location, under the watchful eye of the guards, we did not dare move or stray from the group. But here, in front of the dispensary entrance, I moved to the rear of the group. Through the glass door at the end of the corridor, I could see my cousin Runia sitting at a table. The wife of a gynaecologist, she was employed at the dispensary as a secretary-receptionist. I thought to myself that this might be the last time I would see her and I wanted to make the most of this opportunity. She saw me too.

After a while, I saw her talking to the hospital's chief physician, Dr. Szperling, who was, incidentally, a friend of my family. The doctor called the doorman, posted at the entrance, and said a few words to him. The doorman returned to his seat, opened the door and said to me, "Are you here for a dressing? Please come in". As I did not have a dressing to do, I replied that I did not. He closed the door. The doctor watched from a distance. The doorman repeated the proposal several times, with the same result. So, the doctor called the doorman back and said something. I saw this, but thought of nothing more than a bandage.

The porter returned to his seat, opened the door again and said, "Come in for a dressing". Then I understood. He was no longer asking me questions, but simply telling me to come in. So, he was protecting me! And me, who was afraid of the head doctor who was known as a very strict man[15]. He was going to try and save me. True, it was thanks to my cousin, Runia, that he had intervened.

Once inside, I was seated on a bench in the corridor, which was usually used as a waiting room. There were already a few people there - relatives of the dispensary staff. The doctor came up to us and asked us not to speak in case the Germans came, but to let him speak. He was going to tell the Germans that we

[15] [*B. Orenstein describes Dr Szperling's strictness in "Churban Czenstochow", p. 270.*]

were sick, waiting to be hospitalised. I was glad of that, because I might have said something that should not have been said. The doctor also said, “I'm trying to save Sewek, but I don't know for how long’’.

No one came to disturb us at the dispensary. We saw my group parked outside the gate, leaving with other groups. The evacuation of the camp had begun.

After a while, the barracks were empty. The head doctor had us transferred to another barrack, known as the “isolation barrack”. This was an annex to the dispensary, where “contagious” patients were hospitalised. This barrack was surrounded by barbed wire.

We stayed there until evening - fully clothed. We were forbidden to go near the windows, so as not to be seen from the outside. In case of a “visit” from the Germans, we had to say that we were new patients, having just arrived in the barrack. Fortunately, no one came. When it was quiet again, we returned to our usual barracks, where we found a great emptiness. So many people had already left.

And then, the SS came looking for us, to load wagons, replacing the workers from the “Transport” division, who had left during the day. We hid from the Germans as best we could. They ran around this vast barrack and caught a few of us. We had no desire to lend a hand. The night passed without too many problems, but we were on our guard.

The next morning, 16th January, we were back on the “barracks ground”, at our call-up point, not knowing whether we were going to work or not. Our foremen were already there, waiting for us. They were trying to regroup their staff. I was the only one of my team left - all the others had been evacuated. When my foreman, Täuscher, saw me, he was delighted, “Ah, there you are!” I was in charge of a group of machines, called “*Halsglühmaschinen*” (machines to soak some of the “future” bullet casings for the infantry).

After roll call, each group went into the workshops. My foreman obtained workers for his machines, to replace my departed comrades. These new workers did not know the job and gave me quite a hard time. We did not get much work done because, on the one hand, the machines were under constant repair and, on the other hand, numerous anti-aircraft alerts interrupted our work. We spent more time running to the underground shelter than to the workshop.

At the workshop, from the Polish workers working with us, we learned that Soviet tanks had already entered the town on the same day, 16th January, and that they had withdrawn. By noon, everything had come to a halt and we were ordered back to our camp inside the factory. The Germans and Ukrainians were losing their minds. They were still watching us, but they were also running in all directions, sometimes abandoning their weapons and uniforms. We could feel the Soviet army approaching. Personally, I did not believe that the Germans would leave us alive in case of a retreat and that, at the last moment, they might kill us simply by blowing up the barracks to get rid of the witnesses to their crimes.

In the afternoon, we circled the camp, awaiting the announced evacuation. The contents of the supply store were distributed. I was lucky enough to get a loaf of bread, which I put in my old jute bag containing my "belongings". The day was drawing to a close. It was dark and the Germans had cut off the electricity. From a distance, we could hear the occasional cannon shot, announcing the proximity of the front, which we could even see moving. We were waiting to be evacuated or for the Germans to leave. There was a rumour that the sick, who could walk, had left the hospital and that the others had been poisoned.

The Germans tried to drag us into their own exodus. You could hear them shouting, "Line up in groups of five – we are going to the wagons". But we were in no hurry, knowing that the Soviets would be here in a few hours. So, it was a question of buying time. With a friend, we tried to get to the back of the procession, hoping that, by some miracle, the Germans would not have time to remove all the Jews still in the camp. But others had the same ideas as us, and we were always at the front. On several occasions, airplanes created havoc and everyone scattered. Each time, we tried to be at the back, always with the same result.

Around midnight, the Germans, who had previously been calling us to follow them, "threatening" us with what awaited us if the Russians arrived, stopped trying to herd us. They were probably thinking to themselves, prophesying the evil that awaited us with the Russians. They simply wanted to take us with them.

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The next day, we learned that they had nevertheless managed to take three hundred people with them, "to carry their suitcases". In this group, which had

headed for the Buchenwald and Dora concentration camps, was my uncle, Stasiek Zalcman, who ended his wanderings in Mauthausen (Austria).

At night, after the Germans and Ukrainian guards had left, a few young people left the camp grounds and went to the factory to scout around. After a while, they returned, announcing in Yiddish, “Jews, you can come out. There is not a single German left here!”.

For my part, I imagined what our liberation would be like, if we were still alive, which seemed impossible to me - people would come and tell us we were free. All in all, it happened just as I had imagined. But, instead of rejoicing, I was indifferent. Curious, I had no reaction. Why was that? Perhaps I was suspicious, not really believing in what was happening? I don't know...

We started out of the camp, skimming the walls in the dark of night. First, we passed the loading wagons, then the workshop gates. We advanced cautiously, for fear of encountering a hidden or lost German.

Where to go in the middle of the night? The battle around the town was still going on and leaving the factory was out of the question. So, we tried to find shelter with some Poles living on the factory estate. It was around 1 a.m. Knocking on the shutters of the ground floor apartments, we hoped to receive a friendly welcome. But, in response to our call, the tenants insulted us and shouted that we should not disturb them in the middle of the night.

Continuing on our way, we went up to the first floor of another building. This was the apartment of the German managing director, who had left the premises with his family. The apartment had two rooms and a kitchen. The beds had already been emptied by people who had arrived before us. The dining room chairs were all occupied by people. In the kitchen, leftover food, placed outside the window (to keep it cool), proved that the tenants had left in a hurry.

I had nothing. I had told myself that, once I was free, I would need everything to live. I helped myself to the kitchen table and took one knife, one fork, one large spoon and one small spoon. It had not occurred to me to take more than I needed. A blanket, found under a mattress in the bedroom, completed my acquisitions.

Everything happened in the dark of night. With my comrades, I moved on to another house. It was a kind of German club. Here too, all the seats were

occupied and we needed to rest. But, on the other hand, it was here that I met up with my cousin, Szymek, currently in Los Angeles.

We stayed together and I regretted my lack of foresight. I had only one set of cutlery and now there were two of us. Why didn't I take a little more cutlery? Too bad!

The night was over and it was light. We learned that a group of young people were trying to organise a militia to enforce discipline.

The German food depot had been found, along with some abandoned weapons.

The “militiamen” had been getting drunk on the spirits which they had found at the depot, and we feared excesses. Some were becoming threatening. It was best to avoid them.

Little by little, we began to leave our refuge. One of my first thoughts was to get - pyjamas. I knew that striped clothes for prisoners were stored in a depot. I went there. The clothes were new, but I was demanding and disdained them!!!! The (paper) fabric was too rough for me and did not suit me. In retrospect, it seems ridiculous. When you have nothing, you have to make do with what you can find. So it was for me, and I had done without my pyjamas.

The sound of planes flying overhead and cannons firing could be heard. People were beginning to leave the HASAG housing estate. For both of us, the question was where to go. We no longer had a home in the city. The only address to which I could go was that of our former maid Stasia, who had raised my little sister Sarenka and me. So, I decided to pay her my first visit. After that, we would see. My cousin Szymek stayed behind, waiting for me.

THE FIRST DAYS OF FREEDOM

I left the factory under the roar of low-flying German planes. I was scared every moment. The walls of the street trembled under the cannon fire that accompanied my walk. We had a long way to go. Our camp and the factory were on the outskirts of town, and Stasia lived in the centre. I made my way from porch to porch, wondering how I was going to get to my destination.

Finally, I did. Luckily, Stasia was there. It was the first time I had been to her house. Until the creation of the ghetto, she lived with us. When we moved into the ghetto, she did not follow us and found a room in town. We could not go to her place. As she had no furniture or household linen, my parents had given her something to live in. When I entered her home, I was shocked. Everything I saw reminded me of our old apartment - the bed, the little table with tablecloth, the bedspread, the towels, etc. I had nothing left, no memory of my family. Here – to some extent, I found myself again. I would have liked to have a memento. But I did not dare ask Stasia. She had nothing to do with the loss of our possessions.

When Stasia saw me, she was happy. We had not been in touch for two years. After the deportation and liquidation of the “Big Ghetto”, I had managed to contact her and, for a while, she even brought me some food. When the place where we met was closed down, our contact ceased. Since then, she did not know what had become of me.

In a few words, I told her what had happened over the past two years. I only wanted one thing - photos of my little sister Sarenka and my parents - I knew she had some. But she would not part with them. They were cherished memories for her, too. She only showed me one photo of Sarenka. I offered to have a copy made by a photographer. She did not trust me and did not want to give it to me. We agreed that she would accompany me to the photographer, which we did. That is how I came to own the only beautiful photo of my sister.

I stayed with Stasia for a while. I had to find my cousin and look for somewhere to stay. So, I came back to HASAG and we both started looking for an apartment.

In my mind, we had to find a place not too far from HASAG, as I imagined that the Russians would want to restart our munitions factory. We were in the middle of a war and it was logical to think that efforts should be made to deliver as much ammunition as possible to the army. And who was the most competent?

Obviously, the oldest workers! But neither the Polish authorities nor the Soviet army were interested in the factory and production was never resumed.

I knew my hometown well, and where German civilians were staying. Whole buildings were requisitioned for their families. After their departure, these buildings were now empty of their occupants.

I chose the building at Aleja Wolności 11, where the families of the *Reichsbahn* (German railways) officials lived. My cousin and I entered a simply furnished three-room apartment with a kitchen. There were already two couples there, and we divided the rooms amongst us. I stayed in this apartment until I left Poland - between 17th January 1945 and 24th May 1946.

ACCOMMODATION FOR SOVIET SOLDIERS

For a moment, allow me to digress. The first few days of our freedom were spent looking for supplies, obtaining identity cards, trying to make contact with relatives abroad (for those who had any), getting onto survivors' lists, and so on.

We had somewhat special contacts with the Russians. That is why I am telling this story.

The streets were full of Soviet soldiers in transit to the West, i.e. to Germany. The troops would stop in the town for one or two days, and rooms had been requisitioned for them.

This is how we had to accommodate soldiers and officers in our homes for several nights. The officers, all the army majors, stayed with us individually, and we had excellent relations with them. My cousin spoke Russian and we could communicate with them. We had a little alcohol and drank together.

For their part, they brought some too. We toasted the Allied victory, the great and democratic Poland, the heroic Red Army and so on. The Soviet officers joined us in all these toasts, but curiously enough, as soon as we mentioned Stalin's name, they fell silent. They did not want to participate. Only one said to us, “Leave him alone. He'll defend himself”. What did this mean? The mystery remains.

The Soviet officers had told us that we were the first Jews they had met. With the horrors of the Nazis, they did not think any of them were still alive. Among them, only one confessed to being Jewish. But he asked us not to divulge it. This proved that antisemitism was rife in the Soviet army.

One evening, we had to take in some soldiers. Their leader, a friendly young sergeant, had asked us for a saucepan and a piece of canvas. They had been given some methylated spirits and wanted to drink it. We gave them what they asked for and the sergeant left the house. The soldiers drank the alcohol and, drunk, wanted to enter our rooms - even though they already had a room and the corridor at their disposal. Our female neighbour in the apartment was scared and we closed our door.

They knocked louder and louder, asking us to open the door. When we refused, they shouted, “We have freed you and you are afraid of us!’’. We did not dare

open the door. Sick of drinking methylated spirits, they made a huge racket and vomited their drinks, soiling the walls and the corridor floor. During the night, their boss returned and, seeing what had happened, came to our building to apologise for his men's behaviour. He was very well-mannered and ashamed, regretting his absence.

Another evening, a more serious incident occurred. We had two (sergeant) majors to accommodate. The first one was a history teacher, who had lost his entire family to starvation during the siege of Leningrad. He had a fierce hatred of the Germans.

The second officer was a twenty-seven-year-old engineer. My cousin and I gave up our room and spent the night in the room of a couple of friends, who already had a young cousin with them. As usual, we chatted and drank with the two officers. After a while, the youngest officer left to get a drink. The professor took the opportunity to slip away. When he returned, the engineer started drinking with us again. We did not drink much ourselves, but he was drunk. The husband, who was not in the habit of drinking, left us to go and sleep with some neighbours.

We were left with five people - the Russian, the roommate's wife, her cousin, my cousin and me. The discussion went on and on. Meanwhile, the second Russian had returned with a Russian woman. He introduced her to us as an old friend whom he had met “by chance” in the streets of Częstochowa. Curious, this meeting of two Russians in Poland... We realised that they wanted to go to bed, so we left our room and moved into the neighbours’ bedroom.

Our engineer was very drunk and talked a lot. He took a liking to me and even offered to go with me, the next day, to join his army unit, which was to continue on its way. He had already been appointed military commander of a German town, and offered me the job of his deputy. He would provide me with a Soviet uniform. I did not contradict him.

As we wanted to go to sleep, our neighbour found nothing better than to go to bed, thinking that our host would understand and leave. But the effect was the opposite. Drunk, he moved his chair closer to the bed. Seeing a woman in bed excited his desires. Our frightened friend asked her cousin to get into bed with her. The officer's eyes shone even brighter. He had no intention of leaving the room.

My cousin finally decided to speak frankly to him and said, “We are going to bed, because the housewife is sleepy”. These words made the Russian jump, “The housewife? Where's the housemaster?” He remembered the husband, who had left. How??? He had been wanting to get into bed with the lady for a long time, and now another man had taken his place, who was not even her husband!

With a sudden jerk, he pulled the cousin out of bed by the hand to take his place. We were all frightened. The cousin ran off, in his underwear, to a neighbour's house, with the Russian at his heels. We took the opportunity to lock the door. We feared the return of the drunken, rampaging man, armed to boot.

As we crossed the room occupied by the other officer, the professor, the drunken man woke him up and made him jump out of bed. The Russian woman ran off and knocked on our door, asking what had happened. On learning that the man was drunk and armed, he took fright and ran after him, to disarm him. After a while, he came back and reassured us. We went back to bed and managed to fall asleep.

The next morning, the professor bade his farewells and excused his colleague, who had left early. Surely, having come to his senses, he must have been ashamed, and did not dare confront us. And so ended our stay with the Soviet soldiers. After this adventure, we asked them not to send us any more “forwarders”.

THE FIRST DAYS OF FREEDOM
(CONTINUED)

With that out of the way, let us continue with the rest of the events.

The city's stores had been looted and provisions were hard to come by. Electricity, cut off before the Germans left, had still not been restored. Fortunately, we had found a few candles, which we saved as much as we could.

From time to time, German planes flew overhead at a very low altitude and were making a lot of noise. We feared bombing raids. There were rumours that the German army was returning to our region. We wondered what would happen if the Germans returned. It would have been a real disaster.

But, fortunately for us, the Germans were repulsed.

A Jewish Committee was set up in Częstochowa, as indeed everywhere else where there were Jews. At its head was elected Mr. Brenner[16], a former teacher at the Medem Yiddish language school. The committee's tasks were manifold. Firstly, as an official body, it certified our identity, enabling us to obtain identity cards, which we lacked.

Secondly, it was in charge of distributing the packages from JOINT (the American Jewish aid organization), which were starting to arrive. There was clothing, food and money. Through the Central Committee of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the Committee sent lists of survivors all over the world. From outside, it received requests from families, who wanted to find out about those who had stayed alive. Grants and scholarships were distributed. At the same time, a religious association was set up in the premises of the former *mikveh*.

The Jewish Committee established:

- a home for single people
- a home for the disabled
- a reading room
- a youth centre
- a supplementary school with supplies and apprenticeships, with around seventy pupils, and
- a home for orphaned children.

[16] [*Liber Brener went on to write the book "Resistance & Destruction in the Częstochowa Ghetto".*]

Hidden children, found after the war, posed problems. Around one hundred children were recovered by their families, and two hundred were housed in the children's home. Pedagogues were hired. The results of their work were positive.

Other committee activities included:

- cultural life, meetings
- food aid
- patients, including many tuberculosis patients treated in hospitals
- help for repatriated people.

With the Committee's help, cooperatives were set up - shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, hairdressers and locksmiths.

Zionist political parties appeared. An "*Ichud*" Zionist youth hostel was founded, which we called the "*Kibuts*". Its role was to prepare young people for *aliyah* to Palestine (future Israel). This home became a meeting place for young people. I used to go there quite often.

Thanks to Mr. Noah Edelist[17], president of the religious party *Agudas Yisroel* (and father of a friend of mine), we were able to have *matzot* in 1945 and 1946.

The Committee's premises, on I Aleja, served as a meeting place for Jews. It was there that news was received. The Committee played a social, administrative and cultural role. It was our protector.

Personally, the Committee did me two great favours - firstly, a scholarship, in the form of payment of my school fees and, secondly, through its intermediary, I found my cousin Ruta, as well as another cousin Mila.

Before leaving the city on 16th January 1945, the Nazis evacuated around six thousand people to the concentration camps of Buchenwald, Gross-Rosen, Ravensbrück and Mauthausen. When liberated, around 5,200 Jews remained in Częstochowa's four factory camps, of whom only around 1,500 were former residents of the city. After the return of some Jews to their hometowns, by May 1945, some 2,000 remained. When former prisoners from German camps returned in July, our city had 6,000 Jews.

[17] [*Noach Edelist contributed various articles to "Sefer Częstochowa", Vols. 1-2.*]

In March 1946, following emigration, we numbered 1,200. In June 1946, there were still 2,167 Jews living in the city, following the arrival of repatriates from the Soviet Union. But incredibly, the Poles learned nothing during the war. The few surviving Jews were still too many. Pogroms and individual murders took place after liberation.

Two major pogroms took place - in August 1945 in Kraków (I was still in Poland) and on 4th July 1946 in Kielce (after my departure). But there were also “small” pogroms and individual massacres.

Just one example - in the building where I lived, there was a family, the parents and their young son. They had been in hiding during the war. When the war was over, they moved into our building. Having reconnected with their family in the United States, they were preparing to emigrate there. But before leaving, they went to the small town near Częstochowa, where they were originally from, to collect their belongings which had been left during the war with their Polish neighbours. Instead of returning their belongings, the Poles killed them.

The Jews were blamed for allowing themselves be killed. We must not forget the power of the Nazis. And nobody could have imagined what was in store for us. Three million Poles were also killed. The Nazis killed twenty million people of different nationalities and religions.

THREE TRIALS OF NAZI CRIMINALS

1 - Among the German police officers, Köstner, a Silesian, and Laszyński were the most sadistic. They even surpassed the commander of the “Small Ghetto”, Sapport.

When the Germans discovered that an attack was being planned by the Jewish resistance, the decision was made to liquidate the “Small Ghetto”. Köstner and Laszyński were assigned to the task. They carried out their mission with enthusiasm.

Following liberation, Köstner was arrested by the Polish police. I attended his trial in Częstochowa, which was open to the public. During the war, he did not want to understand Polish, claiming to be German. But at his trial, he insisted on speaking Polish, hoping that the court would be more lenient towards him.

Köstner could not remember how many people he had killed with his own hands - “Maybe 300, 800”, but admitted to having killed “only” twenty-two people. The testimonies of my former fellow inmates were overwhelming. The evidence of Köstner’s savagery was terrible. Children and old people were killed in cold blood.

Köstner was sentenced to death and hanged. His lawyer, Mr. Idźkowski, appointed by the court, declared that Köstner was just a pawn in Hitler's system. He also declared that the whole world was to blame for allowing Hitler's criminal policies to spread.

2 - “Le Progrès” (French Regional newspaper), of 30th December 1965, announced the opening of the trial, before the Lüneburg (Germany) Court, of those responsible for the massacre of the Jewish population of Częstochowa, including Paul Degenhardt (aged 70), ex-captain of the German SS police, the chief executioner of our city, and two other co-accused. I do not know what the outcome of the trial was, but it was already important that these three bandits were arrested.
[ed: See [ed: https://www.czestochowajews.org/history/degenhardt/]

3 - I found an article in the German press of 1949, announcing the verdict concerning eighteen Nazi executioners from the HASAG Jewish labour camps in Częstochowa. The trial took place in Leipzig, where the company was headquartered. This was already the second trial against HASAG's directors, the

first having concerned the Skarżysko-Kamienna factories. These factories belonged to the Polish state before the war and manufactured armaments and munitions, unlike the textile factories in Częstochowa. The Nazis had, therefore, taken over the previous production directly, while the equipment from the Częstochowa factories had been stored in a forest, where it had rusted away. Brand new equipment was gradually installed in its place.

Living conditions were terrible in Skarżysko-Kamienna, especially in division “C”, the powder works. We already knew this in Częstochowa, as Jews had already been deported there. I have no details of the verdict at the Skarżysko trial, but there is every reason to believe that the sentences were very harsh.

As for the Częstochowa trial, the German newspaper, reporting on it, states that it was widely followed throughout Germany and reminded the world of the Nazi regime's bloody past. Three defendants were sentenced to death, two to life imprisonment, one to twenty years, two to twelve years, one to eleven years, three to eight years, two to three years, one to two-and-a-half years and one to one year. One defendant was acquitted.

I knew four of the defendants, including the general manager and my foreman-in-chief.

The president of the court commented on the verdict, describing HASAG. According to him, no industrial company is covered with as much shame as HASAG, whose international reputation was good before the war. By associating closely with the SS, it lost its good name. The race for profit led HASAG to collaborate with the SS, with a view to the economic exploitation of occupied Polish territories and, more specifically, of Jewish men, women and children, and to their physical destruction.

On the one hand, HASAG had a very cheap labour force at its disposal. On the other, it helped the Nazis to annihilate Jewish prisoners. To this end, the management, foremen and factory guards (*Werkschutz*) were given the right of life and death over their slaves. HASAG had thus become Poland's largest enterprise for the exploitation and extermination of the Jewish population.

Numerous witnesses named the defendants in the trial as having taken part in the murders committed in the HASAG camps.

The defendants were declared war criminals. Crimes against humanity formed the second part of the indictment. The verdict was rendered in this sense.

Not all our torturers were found after the war. It is possible that other criminals were arrested and that other trials took place. Personally, I am only aware of these three. But it is already a relief to know that some of the executioners were able to pay for their crimes.

JEWS IN POLAND AFTER THE WAR

Some 380,000 Polish Jews survived, representing around 12% of the pre-war population. More than half were repatriates from the USSR, the rest were survivors of forced-labour camps, people in hiding or living under false identities, or deportees returning from Germany, Austria, etc.

The majority of survivors left Poland, mostly for Palestine, now Israel. It was believed that the new “democratic” Poland would finally allow Jews to live in peace. But two factors made this impossible - traditional antisemitism and the Communists' “anti-Zionist” policy.

In October 1956, the political “thaw” in Poland triggered new waves of antisemitism. A series of departures left around 30,000 Jews. Then, Israel's victory in June 1967 (“the Six-Day War”) provided a pretext for an antisemitic and “anti-Zionist” campaign, since the Soviets were on the side of the Arabs and the Polish Communists had obviously followed them. This time, the Jews were accused of being the “Zionist fifth column”. The remaining 25,000 Jews in the country were the elderly, the sick and a few specialists.

With the advent of “Solidarity” in 1980, Jews began to hope for better times again. In 1989, with the return of freedom to Poland, an effort at tolerance was made. On the occasion of the commemoration of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa admitted that antisemitism existed in Poland, and asked Poles to recognise the contribution of Jews to Polish history, culture and economy. He begged the Jews' forgiveness for all the wrongs done to them. “Forget the past”, he said. But what was the reality? The Jews were accused of bringing Communism to Poland.

MY PARENTS' HOUSE

I did not have many material resources. When I learned that a law on the restitution of Jewish property, seized by the Germans, had been published, I began to hope for new money. My parents were co-owners of a large house. We lived there from September 1934 until April 1941, when we moved into the ghetto. Almost all the tenants were Jewish. When the ghetto was created, most of the building was left on the “Aryan side” and only the back part was attached to the ghetto. A wall in the middle of the large courtyard separated the two parts.

Like all Jewish property, our building was managed by a Polish administrator. With the new law on restitutions, owners had to put together files with a view to reclaiming their property. The rightful owners hired lawyers to defend their interests. I was perhaps the youngest of the claimants (I was twenty). Not having much money to spend, I could not afford a lawyer. So, I took care of it myself.

To get started, I went to the restitutions department at the town hall to get a list of the documents I needed. I filed all the papers with the appropriate office. The result of my efforts was identical to those of the other applicants' lawyers, and I was proud of it, given my young age. Sometime later, in the street, I met a lawyer I knew. He asked me why I did not contact him about my case. I replied that I could not afford it. He replied that he would have done it for me free of charge. In any case, he was not risking anything, as my file was already at the town hall.

After a while, I received a letter announcing the restitution of my rights as my parents' heir, at the same time as the other co-owners of our building. We were lucky, because our administrator had paid all the taxes during the war, so we owed nothing to the tax authorities when the property was handed over. The tax authorities asked the owners to pay the arrears. Obviously, on the management accounts, there was nothing left of the administrators' management.

I was offered the management of our building. But it was a lot of work and I knew nothing about it. I also had my studies to do. As the management fees were not very high, I preferred to decline the offer.

My income increased slightly through my share of the rents collected. The rents were locked in and the buildings were not earning much.

NICKEL ANODES

Among the items my father sold before the war were anodes. These were nickel plates weighing 3.5 kg, 5 kg and 8 kg, used to galvanise ("nickel plate") iron parts.

My father imported these plates from Czechoslovakia, or more precisely from the Sudetenland. After the Sudetenland was incorporated into the Reich in early October 1938, my father no longer wanted to buy nickel from the Germans (boycott). The last purchases, from 1938 to August 1939, came from England (Birmingham). The very last delivery of 1,000 kg arrived at the end of August 1939, a few days before the war. The plates were temporarily stored with us.

A few weeks after the start of the occupation, the German authorities ordered the delivery of "noble" raw materials, including nickel. My father, knowing that the occupiers might find out about the stocks, decided to hand over some of them. Three of us brought around 150 kg of goods in a small wagon - my father, a former employee and me. We had to travel several kilometres, as the requisitioned materials depot was on the other side of town. In exchange for our delivery, we were given a receipt, upon which it was specified that payment for the goods would be made after the war.

My father was able to sell a small part of the stock, around 200 kg. But there was still the big package to hide. With the agreement of the ground-floor neighbours, we dug a large hole in their cellar and buried the anodes. This was fine but, by the time the ghetto was formed in April 1941, we were forced to leave. We had to look for another place to hide the plates.

My paternal grandparents lived in a building that was to become part of the ghetto. My father rented a cellar in this building and, little by little, we moved the nickel. We were always the same three people - my father, the employee and me. This gave us a lot of work - digging up the plates in the first cellar, transporting them unnoticed and, finally, burying them in the new cellar.

The volume was large, so the hole was big, and it took us a long time to dig it. When everything was finished, we covered the ground with coal, to camouflage the freshly turned earth. All we had to do, we thought, was to wait for the end of the war to bring out the plates.

But fate decided otherwise. The war ended one day, but my father was gone.

After liberation, I remembered the nickel plates and thought that I would get some money back. It was wartime. Rare raw materials were still being requisitioned. I intended to recover the anodes and, carefully, sell them to manufacturers.

It was a question of repeating the operation carried out four years earlier. I could not do the job alone, and I had to be careful when choosing a collaborator. I asked my friend Heniek to assist me, which he readily accepted.

Carefully, we carried two shovels, lent to us by a Jewish association, to my grandparents' old house. Beforehand, I had made arrangements with the owner of the building who, in turn, had asked the tenant of the cellar for permission to enter.

Heniek and I went down to the cellar. I remembered that the corridor had a large drainpipe running through it. In my mind, the cellar I was interested in was the one where the pipe ran. We started digging, made a big hole and found nothing. All that work had been for nothing. Why had not we found the nickel? Had I gone to the wrong cellar or, more likely, had the Germans, searching the ghetto, found our hiding place, aided by the former employee, who knew about the cellar?

And so ended the chapter on nickel anodes. It was a little adventure and I was counting on it for a bit of money. I was disappointed. What hurt the most was to see that all my father's work to save the goods had been for nothing. But who could have foreseen such a tragic end for the Jews, after all we had had to endure?

We had suffered greatly, but hoped for better days. No one could have expected the almost total destruction of Polish Jewry.

HIGH SCHOOL - THE BACCALAUREATE
(High school diploma)

One of my first ideas, following liberation, was to gain my baccalaureate (high school diploma). I told myself that if it had not been for the war, I would have passed and perhaps gone on to higher education. Therefore, it was important to resume the “program”, albeit under far more difficult conditions.

Among my friends, there were a few candidates for study, including two of my old classmates from before the war: Jurek and Bolek. Jurek, who was already enrolled at the state high school, insisted that I join him. He was going to study for his senior year. On reflection, I thought he was in a better intellectual position than me to continue what we had studied before the deportations. He had his two parents and it was said that he had studied a little in the HASAG camp. I was on my own, and with everything that we had been through, I was afraid of going straight into the last class of high school. I preferred to “repeat” the second to last class, before starting the final year.

I learned that there was a “High School for Adults”, a private school. Classes were held in the afternoons, as this school was also for people who were working at the same time.

I enrolled with my Jewish classmates - Bolek, Moniek, Rysia and Róża Glowińska.

The Jewish Committee paid our school fees. We took a kind of “little baccalaureate” examination and chose the “mathematics-physics” cycle of high school courses. I had problems with my Latin teacher, who was not at all happy with my choice of this cycle. He thought that I was very gifted in humanities/literature and wanted me to choose this cycle. He may have been right, but I did quite well in “mathematics”.

There were about forty of us, boys and girls, and we got on well together.

There was only one incident on St. Nicholas's Day, 6th December 1945, when I felt humiliated. But, thanks to some intelligent colleagues, everything turned out well. I do not know whether this was due to antisemitism, but one thing shocked us - my classmate Moniek's surname was Baum. However, our Polish teacher often got it wrong and called him “Holz” (dead wood). He told us he was confusing the two terms. It is hard to believe him. If this was meant to be a joke, it was not a very good one!

But, on the whole, everything went well.

A few weeks into my studies, I had to report to the board of examiners. It was still wartime. Shortly after liberation, I had already gone to present myself, but there was a long line, lasting several hours. I left, postponing my registration until later. I later learned that all those who had come that day had been found fit for service and sent to the front. By chance, I had a narrow escape.

On a Saturday morning, I went to the board of examiners, and it was my turn to go before the commission. A few of us lined up naked in front of three or four people. It was already quite humiliating to be naked in front of people but, on top of that, I suffered another humiliation, as the members of the commission laughed at me, asking me questions such as, “You're very fat. Where did you spend the war? Surely hidden somewhere”.

This was further proof of the Polish population's attitude towards the Jews after the war, after everything that had happened. No compassion - quite the opposite.

I was recognised as fit for military service and then I received a deferment as a student. But, between us, who would have wanted to serve in an antisemitic army?

On 16th February 1946, I graduated from high school and enrolled at the University of Łódź. I ceased my studies in Poland when I left the country at the end of May 1946.

THE RETURN OF LOLEK

Lolek was the only Grundman left in the Częstochowa “Small Ghetto”. He is a cousin of my father's and currently lives in Israel.

His wife and their few months-old son were deported in September 1942. Like all the Jews who remained in Częstochowa, he had joined the “Small Ghetto”.

Sometime later, during a “razzia” [Fr., raid], Lolek was taken by the Nazis and, with several hundreds of Jews, was sent to the Bliżyn forced-labour camp. Life there was a nightmare and many lost their lives.

The war was over and, on one summer day in 1945, I was on my way to the Jewish Committee. To get there, I passed a crossroads leading to the station. A train had just arrived and a crowd of people was crossing the intersection. Quite by chance, I recognised my cousin Lolek. He had just been released from a concentration camp in Germany and was dirty, bearded, tired and wearing a dirty bandage. He had already been travelling for a few days. He had arrived in a city, his own, where no one was expecting him. I offered to take him home with me, which he immediately accepted.

Lolek washed, rested, ate, changed his bandages and shaved. Then he went out into the street.

He met a friend, who probably lent him some money. Lolek found lodgings in our building, put on new clothes and began doing business together with his friend.

From time to time, he came to see me. One day, he told me that he had heard from his brother Moniek, who had settled with his family in Toulon, France. He was delighted. So, they were still alive! I obtained Moniek's address and we got in touch. This came in handy when I arrived in France.

Lolek married Renia and they had a daughter. Lolek visited France, Toulon and Paris, where I guided him, and he returned to Poland. In 1958, with his wife and their daughter, they emigrated to Israel, via Toulon. My wife and I met them there on our honeymoon.

CESIA & JANEK, MIRA and HENIEK

My aunt Dora had three daughters who, at the beginning of the war, were scattered throughout Poland. Runia, married to Lowa, had fled with her husband to Białystok, which was under Soviet occupation. Cesia and her husband Janek were in the Warsaw ghetto. At the end of 1939, the youngest daughter, Mira, came from Łódź to Czestochowa with her parents.

Mira, aged twenty, took part in several revues organised by the Social Service for the benefit of ghetto children, and did so as a singer. Among her many friends, she found her future husband, Heniek. He was a member of the police force, and it was thanks to him that my Aunt Dora and Uncle Izrael were saved during the deportation on 22nd September 1942. Heniek was "dismissed" from the police force and married Mira. Both worked in HASAG.

On 4th January 1943, my Aunt Dora was deported from the "Small Ghetto". The next day, Runia arrived with Lowa. Mira and Heniek decided to leave the ghetto, as it was clear that it would not last long.

With false "Aryan" papers, Mira and Heniek went to Warsaw in the spring of 1943, where they joined Cesia and Janek, who had also left their ghetto and were living on the "Aryan side", also with false papers.

The Nazis knew that many Jews were hiding on the Polish side of Warsaw. They found a way to stop them. Posters were put up in the city, addressed to the Jews. They said that the Germans knew about this and were offering to exchange the Jews for Germans who had been interned by the British in Palestine. Hotel Polski was designated to receive them.

People seized the opportunity to escape from the Nazis and the hotel quickly filled up. Fortunately, not all the Jews believed them, because, as in other cases, they were decoys. The hotel was guarded and no one was allowed to leave. My cousin Mila told me that, one day, she walked past the hotel. She saw people at the windows. They seemed to feel sorry for the people on the street. They had been saved, but those who remained ...

The internees in the Hotel Polski were held over for a few weeks. From there, they were sent to Vittel. After a while, all these people were part of a convoy to Buchenwald.

After the war, Buchenwald returnees told as how they had heard Mira singing in the camp. There were no traces of my cousins and that was the last news we had.

“THE MIRACLES” - CHILDREN SAVED

The war and the Nazi atrocities passed and six million Jews perished.

Those, who survived, were simply lucky. They survived in different ways - in the camps, in the forests, hidden in Polish homes, with false Aryan papers. Some had gone to Germany to work in agriculture (obviously, as Poles).

I know of one case (a cousin of my cousin), where a man hid in the ranks of the ... SS!!! They say the best hiding place is in the lion's den, but still ... He was extremely lucky not to have been discovered.

There were also children hidden with Polish families, in orphanages or Catholic schools, with false papers.

After the war, some children were recovered by surviving family members or Jewish organisations. But how many others, too young to be aware of their Jewish identity at the time of separation, remained with their adoptive families, unaware of their origins?

For me, the rescue and recovery of the Jewish children hidden in Poland is a miracle. That is why I am recounting here three different cases, two of which concern my two great-cousins.

MILA AND IRKA

A fairy-tale story happened to my cousin Mila during the war.

Mila married her cousin Janek on 22nd December 1936. He had studied in Paris and, after retaking his diploma in Poznań, Poland, became a gynaecologist.

The young couple settled in the small town of Pilica, near Kraków, where we had family. A little girl, Irenka, was born on 23rd August 1939, a week before the war.

When the war broke out, they were living in this little town, where they remained during the occupation. Of course, there was a *Judenrat* and all the anti-Jewish laws. My cousins managed to get by not too badly on the food front, thanks to payments in kind for medical procedures by peasant patients.

In the summer of 1942, following the deportations to Poland, my cousins began to look for a way to protect themselves. With false papers, my cousin Mila left with Irka for Warsaw, bringing with them, in addition to money, linen and objects that could have been sold if money had run out. My cousin Janek was to join them later.

Mila found accommodation in Warsaw. Unfortunately, her landlords knew she was Jewish and, sometime after she had settled in, when they felt her resources were exhausted, they let her know. Mila realised that she could no longer stay with them. But where to go? With no money, there was only one solution - return to her husband.

With her daughter, Mila set off on the return journey. There was no railroad station in Pilica. To get there, you had to stop at a station and travel from there in a horse-drawn carriage. There were always carriages in front of the station, waiting for customers. They were the ancestors of cabs. When Mila got off the train, she was surprised by the total absence of horse-drawn carriages. In answer to her question, she was told that people were terrified, because the day before, the Nazis had shot the few remaining Jews in Pilica.

It was a terrible blow for Mila. What to do, where to go? During the deportations, the Nazis had left a handful of Jews in Pilica, including my cousin Janek, to empty the Jewish apartments. Now, they were all being killed. Terrorised, destitute, with a three-year-old child, she turned to the Polish doctor she knew in Pilica. It was evening. She rang the doorbell and, when the doctor

saw her, he shouted, “Go away! I don't want to die because of you”. My cousin begged him to let her spend the night with her daughter at his place. He agreed, on condition that she left his house at dawn. Which she did.

Where could she go? She could no longer expect her husband to join them. With Irenka, Mila returned to Warsaw. She placed her daughter with a Polish family, as she had to travel to earn a living for herself and Irenka. From time to time, she went to visit her daughter. Of course, on each visit, she would bring gifts ‘’for eating’’ for Irenka and the family's two children. She had noticed that her daughter was not too well fed, but she could not say anything, already happy to have a shelter for Irka.

And so, 1943 and part of 1944 passed. On 1st August 1944, when she tried to visit her daughter, who lived on the other side of town, she was stopped - “No one gets through!”

She had just learned that an uprising had broken out in Warsaw. From then on, contact with Irenka was lost. The Warsaw Uprising lasted two months, ending on 1st October 1944. The population fought heroically against the occupiers. Thousands were killed and the city was reduced to rubble. The entire Polish population was expelled. Many young people were sent to work in Germany. A camp, for those expelled, was set up in Pruszków, a suburb of Warsaw. The Nazis wanted to wipe Warsaw off the map.

It was in Pruszków that Mila met Franek, a second lieutenant in the Polish army in 1939. Mila had not told him that she was Jewish, nor that she had been married, nor that she had a child.

They married. For Mila, this meant having an “Aryan” document as well, a “real” one.

After liberation, Mila came to Częstochowa, to try to find some family. She had to take precautions so that Franek would not learn of her Jewish origins. For a start, she had not told him that she had been born in Częstochowa, nor that she had any family there.

Discreetly, she went to the Jewish Committee, where she learned that I was still alive. She contacted me and told me what had happened to her. She was about seven months pregnant. She and her husband were living in a small apartment, and Franek was waiting to be appointed for a position.

In the meantime, rumours were circulating of epidemics spreading through Warsaw, following the many dead buried there. My cousin had left her daughter in Warsaw and did not know what had become of her. The city had been totally destroyed, thousands of its inhabitants had died, but Mila was certain that Irka was alive. It was important to find her as soon as possible and save her.

But how could this be done? Rail communications were very difficult. Trains were uncomfortable and crowded. The journey was long and tiring. It was not possible for Mila to undertake such a journey in her condition. On the other hand, when she arrived in Warsaw, she might have to walk a long way to find her daughter.

There was only one option - to send Franek in her place. But Franek did not know she had a daughter. He did not even know that she had been married before! Very worried about the alleged epidemic, she asked Franek to go to Warsaw, to find Irka. When he said, “You never told me you had a daughter”, she replied that she would explain everything later, when she got back. The brave Franek went to Warsaw. During his trip, Mila stayed with us.

Franek's absence (he did not know I existed) lasted a few days. Without news from him, Mila was very nervous and impatient. Not hearing from him meant that her search had come to nothing. On the other hand, it was not easy to communicate. Mail took a long time to arrive and we did not have a telephone.

Finally, Franek returned. He recounted his journey. Arriving in Warsaw, he went to the address given by Mila, where Irka's host family had been living before the uprising. Like almost all the houses in Warsaw, this one had been demolished. But at the far end of the courtyard, part of the building was still standing. It was here that Franek found the family, who had returned to the house after liberation - the grandfather, the janitor, his daughter and her two children.

Franek asked about Irka. He was told she was not there. Franek showed the child's baptismal certificate (a forged document), which Mila had given him to prove his entitlement, should the need arise. The family told him that Irka had been lost on the road, during the exodus.

“How can you lose a child?”, asked Franek. “Oh, it was a Jewish child...” came the reply. But how? A Jewish child to his wife? What an insult! Franek was shown the road where Irka would get lost.

Franek set off again in search of Irka. He stopped in several villages, asking if a five-year-old child had been found the previous October. Everywhere, the answer was negative. After four or five days, he wanted to temporarily abandon the search. He arrived in the last village of his “tour”. By chance, he met an old comrade-in-arms from September 1939.

“What are you doing here?”, he asked. “I got married and I live here. And you?” Franek said that he was looking for his wife's daughter, who had been lost during the October exodus. “Isn't there a five-year-old child here, who was found nearby in October?” The friend did not know, but he invited Franek to come with him to the house, where he asked his wife the question.

Franek followed his friend home and learned from his wife that, indeed, a child had been found in the forest near the village at the time, but he must have been only three or four years old, not five. Irka, who had lived in fear and was undernourished, did not look five years old.

How was Irka found? It was her own story that gave the answer. The concierge's family had left Warsaw, expelled by the Nazis like all the Polish inhabitants, at the beginning of October 1944. They had walked a long way, through a forest. The children were tired. The grandfather took one in his arms, the mother took the second. That left Irka with no one to carry her. So, they sat her down under a tree and gave her three tomatoes, saying they were going to fetch her mother. The little girl waited wisely against the tree. Night came, and she was hungry. She ate the tomatoes. She was scared and cold. Her mother still was not there. She cried and waited.

The next morning, the village teacher went to the forest to pick mushrooms and found the little girl frozen and crying. She told the teacher that she was waiting for her mother. The teacher took the sick child home. Being single, she was not used to children. She turned to her neighbours for advice. It was decided to entrust the child to a peasant family, where there were already children. This family was very poor, and everyone pitched in to pay for the child's upkeep. It was a great act of solidarity.

The child was very ill, after a cold night. A doctor was called, who diagnosed pneumonia and refused to look after her, saying she was lost. But the stubborn peasants would not give up, so they called in another doctor. He took care of the child, who recovered her health.

Months went by and Irka, now cured, thanks to the perseverance of her new guardians, stayed with the family. Together with the other children, she learned to peel potatoes and help the mother. Butter was unknown, and potatoes had to be peeled as economically as possible, as the family was very poor. I had the opportunity to see the way she peeled potatoes, when her mother brought her to our house.

Once the meal was over, the friend took Franek to Irka's host family. Franek noticed that a little girl hid in the housewife's skirts when she saw a stranger arrive. Franek said that he came from the little girl's mother, who was temporarily unable to move about herself. She was having trouble tracing her daughter, who had been lost during the exodus from Warsaw the previous October.

The peasant woman denied having taken in a child, but Franek was sure of it, seeing the child's strange behaviour. The peasant persisted in her denial, so Franek showed her Irka's baptismal certificate. After a while, the woman admitted she had taken in Irka, but would not part with her. Irka had become the daughter of the family. Besides, what kind of mother would have abandoned her child under the circumstances? She was an unworthy mother! Franek managed to convince the peasant woman of the mother's good faith and promised to bring her to the village as soon as possible.

Two weeks later, Franek returned to Irka's host family with Easter presents for the children and parents. This was also to keep in touch before Mila's visit.

While Franek was away, I had to accompany Mila to the maternity ward in the middle of the night. It was wartime and there was a curfew. It was easier to get to the maternity hospital, which was quite far from my home, as I was accompanying a pregnant woman, who was about to give birth. (We went, of course, on foot). But to go back, alone, I had to wait until morning, when curfew ended.

Mila gave birth to a baby boy. After Franek's return to Częstochowa, Mila left the maternity ward and they returned to their apartment. A few weeks later, Mila, accompanied by Franek, visited her host family. With great sorrow, the family agreed to return Irka to her mother.

Franek found work in Zabrze, Śląsk, as a supply manager in a coal mine. The family moved to Zabrze.

During their stay in Częstochowa, I often saw Mila, who came to my house with Irka. At first, Irka was always very sad and scared. She did not want to eat butter, as she had not been used to it for a long time. Little by little, her smile returned and she began to eat normally.

Before I left Poland, I saw Mila, who came from Zabrze several times. One day, she told me that she still had not told her husband that she was Jewish. Franek often met up with friends, and Mila went with him. Franek's friends often spoke ill of Jews. Mila could only keep quiet. But one day, when she could not stand it any longer, she said to Franek, “I am a dirty Jew”. She was ready to leave the house. Franek smiled in response. Mila told herself he did not believe it. And so life went on...

But similar situations arose again and again, and Mila had had enough. Franek never said a bad word. It was his friends who denigrated the Jews. The same scene was repeated, and Mila told him once again, “I'm a dirty Jew!” This time, Franek smiled and said calmly, “I know that.” Mila was stunned. “How do you know?” Franek confessed to her that, one day, before going to Warsaw to pick up Irka, he had found a piece of paper in her bag with an address in Warsaw-Praga on it, with initials: “C.K.J.P.” (Polish abbreviation for “Central Committee of Polish Jews”.)

Indeed, not knowing Irka's whereabouts and worried about her health, Mila had been asking, since liberation, whether there was a centre where Jewish children could be handed over by Poles. She had intended to go to Warsaw to look for traces of Irka, but her condition would not allow it. In her mind, the initials alone, on the piece of paper, must have protected her from mentioning the word “Jew”. How had Franek guessed Mila's Jewish origin? That is a mystery. Perhaps he knew from the start?

In any case, Franek behaved like a father to Irka right from the start. He adopted her. In 1949, the couple had a daughter, Grażyna. I always kept in touch with Mila. I sent her several food parcels and even medicines that she had asked for.

In her letters, she told me about her family's life and her daughters' studies. Grażyna was a good student, but it was Irka who took up most of her letters. She knew that her real father was a doctor, and she wanted to follow in his footsteps. Irka was very gifted and studied medicine, which she passed. Grażyna was also gifted and studied engineering. Mila had a heart condition. Not surprising, given

all that had happened to her since the war. Franek was still a very kind husband and father.

Mila later developed cancer and suffered greatly. It was at this time that she had told Irka that she was Jewish, which she had hidden so as not to traumatise her.

It was through a letter from Irka that I learned the sad news of Mila's death, in the spring of 1959. Irka had just taken her final medical examinations and was unhappy that her mother, who had devoted her whole life to Irka's studies, had died just before the long-awaited graduation day.

Irka married an engineer and, since then, I have lost track of her and Grażyna, despite the many searches that I have undertaken. Perhaps she is afraid of people finding out about her Jewish origins? How sad...

ELZUNIA AND MARYLKA

A) Elzunia

I had a cousin, Szymek (Simon), married to Ruta. They had a little girl, Aliza, born in the ghetto in January 1941.

After the liquidation of the "Big Ghetto" in September-October 1942, they were lucky to stay alive. I would visit them quite often, because it was the only place where there was a family home. Living conditions in the "Small Ghetto" were extremely difficult. Our lives were very much at risk, and we risked death at any moment. We knew that this state of affairs would not last long. But how could we save ourselves?

Some people managed to leave the ghetto, to hide on the "Aryan side", or to join the resistance. Others were caught. The "Small Ghetto" existed for 8-9 months, until it was liquidated on 25th June 1943. We were all rounded up at our workplaces, and the Germans blew up the houses with dynamite, killing many of the Jews hiding there.

My cousins decided to leave the "Small Ghetto". They needed false Aryan papers, but the hardest part was finding a place for their two-year-old daughter. They had a Christian friend, a gynaecologist, through whom they managed to place the child in an orphanage.

Then, in April 1943, my cousin left the ghetto with false papers and went to work as a Polish farm labourer in Austria which, at the time, was part of Germany. As for my cousin, he was also due to leave, but was reluctant to do so for fear of being recognised by German policemen. At the end of July, he was taken to the city's Jewish cemetery and shot along with others.

Little Aliza, now called Elzunia, remained at the orphanage. The doctor friend watched over her from afar. One day, a couple, with a son, came to the orphanage to choose a little sister for their son. Of all the little girls they had seen, the boy liked only one - Elzunia. But her "guardian" had asked that she not be adopted, so that he could keep a better eye on her.

So, the boy was offered other children. He wanted nothing to do with it. It was precisely this little girl whom he wanted for a sister, and not any other. Faced with this insistence, the orphanage management contacted the "guardian". It

was difficult to object, as it might have looked suspicious. The “guardian” made a little inquiry about the family. He learned that they were a wealthy industrial family and gave the go-ahead.

I did not know what had become of my cousin since the “Small Ghetto”. Unfortunately, with all that had happened since then, there was a good chance that she had perished. So, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that one more member of my family had survived.

My cousin was staying with some lawyer friends. As soon as I heard the news, I went to see them. The joy of our reunion was immense. We began to tell each other what had happened. I learned that Ruta had been in Austria. She had been in constant contact with the doctor-friend, Elzunia's “guardian”. From him, she had learned of her husband's death and of Elzunia's adoption. Ruta had not heard from me, but she said that she was sure that I had survived. Why is a mystery to me.

She had left with false papers, as a Polish farm worker in Austria, annexed by Germany, near the Swiss border. Among the farm workers, my cousin found a young Jewish girl, camouflaged like her. Together, they organised to leave Austria one night, crossing the border lake. In Switzerland, they were interned as Poles. They remained in the camp until the end of the war. When the Polish embassy in Berne reopened, my cousin and her friend found jobs there.

My cousin had returned to Poland in the summer of 1945, just as the Jews were leaving the country. After graduating from high school, I wanted to leave Poland too. I was afraid that I would wake up one morning and find myself the last Jew. Polish antisemitism, which dated back centuries, did not even slow down during Hitler's occupation. Yet we had a common enemy...

Even part of the Polish right-wing resistance handed Jews over to the German enemy - those who had escaped from the ghettos and camps and sought refuge with those whom they believed to be allies. After the war, pogroms took place in Poland, as well as individual murders. There was only one solution left for Polish Jews - to leave the country as quickly as possible. And they left in droves.

When I saw my cousin in Częstochowa, I thought that she had come to Poland on vacation to pick up her daughter. She had a good place in Switzerland. But, to my astonishment, she replied that she had come back “to help rebuild our

democratic homeland”! Just as the Jews were leaving Poland, she was returning. It is true that, at the time, people believed in democracy …

Ruta asked me about my plans for the future. I told her that I wanted to graduate from high school and then leave Poland. “Ah, no, you don't know what exile is! You'll go to university and change your name (...). You'll have a home with me”.

It was incredible. Throughout the war, I had kept my name (whereas some people had changed it, to get false “Aryan” papers, to hide) and it was not now that, free, I was going to have a false name. Staying in Poland was out of the question. I was determined to leave after my high school graduation.

As for my cousin, with her family, she later moved to Palestine, where a distant cousin, Edward Asz, Honorary Consul of Poland, employed her at the consulate. She remarried there, then returned with her family to Poland, which she left for good in autumn 1957, to emigrate to Venezuela, where her husband had a brother. They passed through Paris and I had the opportunity to see them again.

My cousin, who had returned to Częstochowa in the summer of 1945, contacted the family, who had adopted her daughter, Aliza - Elzunia.

At first, Elzunia's new parents did not want to hear about the return of the child, who was four and a half years old. Then, they agreed, on condition that they gently prepare the little girl for the fact of having a new mother, and their son for the loss of his little sister. My cousin began by visiting her daughter, taking her for walks. This went on for a few months. The child began to grow attached to her, and the day came when my cousin introduced herself as her mother. Elzunia was returned to her mother, not without heartbreak for the adoptive family. She kept in touch with her new family.

B) <u>Marylka</u>

Another little girl was also part of my cousin's family, Marylka. This little girl, aged around six at the time of the deportations, was the adopted daughter of an uncle of my cousin, Elzunia's father.

Her mother had already been deported, and her father was hiding with her in a bunker in the “Small Ghetto”. He, too, wanted to save his child through the gynaecologist. My cousin found a place for little Marylka Fogiel. It was not the same orphanage as Elzunia's, but an institution for deaf-mutes (!). The reason

was that Marylka was in danger of being arrested because of her Yiddish accent in Polish, which was that of her parents'. As a deaf-mute child, she would have less contact with the outside world.

Marylka remained in this institution until the end of the war. My cousin, who had returned to Częstochowa, took her and Elzunia to Palestine in the summer of 1946. She later returned to Poland to study electrical engineering. When my cousin left Poland for Venezuela in 1957. Marylka finished her studies, married and remained in Poland.

GOTTLIEB

A chance at survival did not come along every day. This is what happened to a little Jewish boy in the Warsaw ghetto, aged around ten, whose family had been deported.

Before the war, there was a family in Warsaw, consisting of parents and two boys. The father had managed to emigrate to Palestine just before the war. The British, who held a League of Nations mandate over Palestine, were very stingy when it came to issuing visas (called “certificates”), which they issued very sparingly. The rest of the family had to wait their turn. In the meantime, war had broken out and all contact had been severed.

For his part, the father had continued his efforts to bring his family to Palestine. These steps had become more urgent, because of the situation of the Jews in Poland. They were successful and, by the end of 1942, visas for all three family members had arrived in the Warsaw ghetto, where the family was staying.

But, in the meantime, one of the two boys had been deported. It was already an enormous stroke of luck that the other two family members had remained alive, after all that had happened. The mother was about to set off with her surviving child, when someone suggested that she take a boy with her, in place of her missing child. It was an opportunity to save a Jewish child, destined to be killed.

So, the mother took a neighbour's child, Eli, who was the only child left in the family, and declared him to be hers. In this extremely rare case, a Jewish family, rescued from the ghetto in the middle of a war of death, was able to save a Jewish child.

The survivors of the Jewish massacre arrived in Palestine, where the family was almost reformed (one deported child missing). The neighbours' rescued young child, Gottlieb, turned out to be very gifted. He changed his surname to Ben-Elissar[18] and held very high political positions. Among others, he was Israel's first ambassador to Egypt, then to the United States and to France.

I met him in Roanne, the same evening I met my future wife. At the time, Ben-Elissar was studying political science in Geneva and had come to Roanne for the Rosh-Hashanah celebrations.

[18] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliyahu_Ben-Elissar