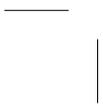


FRAGMENTS
OF MEMORY

From Kolín to Jerusalem



FRAGMENTS
OF MEMORY

From Kolín to Jerusalem

HANA GREENFIELD



Copyright © Gefen Publishing House
Jerusalem 1998/5758. Revised edition 2006

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be translated,
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form
or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or
otherwise, without express written permission from the publishers.

Layout: Marzel A.S. — Jerusalem
Cover Design: Studio Paz, Jerusalem

ISBN: 965 229 379 2

Edition 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Gefen Publishing House Ltd. 6 Hatzvi St. Jerusalem 94386, Israel 972-2-538-0247 orders@gefenpublishing.com	Gefen Books 600 Broadway Lynbrook, NY 11563, USA 1-516-593-1234 orders@gefenpublishing.com
--	--

www.israelbooks.com

Printed in Israel

Send for our free catalogue

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Greenfield, Hana.

Fragments of memory: from Kolin to Jerusalem / Hana Greenfield. — Rev. ed.

p. cm.

ISBN: 965-229-185-4

1. Jews — Persecution — Czech Republic — Kolin. 2. Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945) — Czech Republic — Kolin — Personal narratives. 3. Greenfield, Hana. 4. Holocaust survivors — Biography. 5. Kolin (Czech Republic) — Ethnic relations. I. Title.

DS135.C96K655 1998

940.53'18'094371 — dc21

98-9370

CIP

Whenever I am faced with documents on the Holocaust, on concentration camps, on mass extermination of Jews by Hitler, on racial laws and on endless suffering of the Jewish people during World War II, I feel strangely paralyzed. While knowing that one must not remain silent, I am desperately speechless. It is as if that paralysis suddenly threw me to the very bottom of the perception of human guilt and of my own co-responsibility for human actions and for the condition of the world in which we live and which we build. It is necessary to talk about the suffering of the Jewish people even though it is so difficult to do so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Václav Havel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

— *Václav Havel*
President of the Czech Republic

IN APPRECIATION

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my husband, Murray Greenfield, for his love, understanding and continuous support in all my endeavors.

To my daughter, Meira Partem, who gave me confidence in my ability to learn; and to my sons, Dror ז"ל and Ilan, for helping me in any and every way.

To all my friends for their moral support throughout the years.

To Yad Vashem for giving me permission to use their archives.

Hana Greenfield

CONTENTS

Part 1: A World Disintegrates

Alice	11
Saying Good-Bye...	15
Pen Pals	20
The Last Bowl of Soup.	26
Grandfather.	31
Auschwitz.	34
Final Day in Birkenau	37
The Value of Money	41
Punishment.	45
A Yom Kippur Story	49
Hamburg, Christmas 1944	52
Righteous Gentiles.	56
The Fifteenth of April, 1945.	59
Bergen-Belsen.	66

Part 2: Pieces of the Shattered Puzzle

When Memory Comes...	73
Bread	76
Murder on Yom Kippur	79

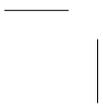
Documentation	84
The Holocaust and Unfinished Mourning	94
Masha	102
No Stars for Jewish Heroes	105
In Memory of Richard Glazar	111
Last Encounter	117
Epilogues	122

Part 3: The Need to Remember

As If It Happened Yesterday	133
Return to Kolín	136
Torah Scrolls and I — Survivors of Kolín	141
Interview with a Journalist	146
Going to Terezín Again!	148
Back from Poland	152
Mother	157
Survivors Break the Silence	160
In Response to “Warplanes over Auschwitz”	165

Part 1

A WORLD
DISINTEGRATES



Alice

Alice was a quiet, shy girl, the only daughter of elderly parents. I was vivacious, lively. In fact, were it not for an unusual set of circumstances, we might never have become friends. We were the same age, studying in different schools at opposite sides of town. We knew of each other's existence only through brief encounters at the annual Jewish High Holy Day services in the only synagogue in town.

And then the world around us started falling apart. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Herr Adolf Hitler signed a peace treaty that denuded Czechoslovakia of her natural border, the Sudetenland, and no sooner was the ink dry on this infamous document, than the German troops marched into Czechoslovakia and occupied it.

That was the end of our carefree childhood. As one decree after another restricting the freedom of the Jewish population was issued by the Nazi regime, Alice and I got to know each other better.

Schools were closed to us, youth movements like Sokol and Scouts would no longer let us participate in their activities. Our bicycles were confiscated, our musical instruments were taken

from us and sent to German youth. We were forbidden to use public transportation or to travel outside our district. Public places, such as swimming pools, tennis courts, movies, theaters, and parks posted new signs announcing that Jews were not wanted there.

Deprived of our normal daily activities, of our school friends, of the freedom of movement we were used to, Alice and I became friends. At first a little shy and awkward, we would meet in different private homes, where clandestine activities for Jewish youth were organized, away from the watchful eyes of the Gestapo agents. As we became closer, we would arrange to meet in our homes to study together.

We were so different — two worlds apart! I liked boys; Alice liked books. I loved clothes; Alice loved music. I liked sports of any kind; Alice liked walking by the Labe (Elbe) River running through our town. Because our lives became so restricted, we compromised our desires and spent many happy hours together, confiding in each other the fears that were descending upon us like heavy clouds. Our dreams of a brighter future boosted our morale, while a yellow star shone from our clothing and our former schoolmates avoided looking at us whenever they would pass us in town.

Meanwhile, the Jewish population of Czechoslovakia was systematically deported to unknown destinations, and town after town became *Judenrein* (free of Jews).

On June 13, 1942, the third and last transport left our town with a cargo of 1,050 Jews, Alice and I among them. She helped her ailing parents, while I stayed close to my mother, sister, grandmother and aunt. It was frightening leaving with just one suitcase containing so little of our possessions, leaving

AA^d
Kolin 13. VII. 42

Alphabetisches Verzeichnis zum Transport AA^d

eingelangt am 13.6.1942

129	Dub	Kola
624	Dub	Vera
429	Dub	Ketler W.
359	Dubovarská- Palkovič Dr.	Hayata
43	Eckstein	Franka
17	Eckstein	Georg
14	Eckstein	Hugo
15	Eckstein	Julie
42	Eckstein	Julius
16	Eckstein	Stella
55	Ehrlich	Alice
65	Ehrlich	Hugo
73	Ehrlich	Oiga

Transport List from Kolin, 1942.

everything behind in our homes as though we were coming back the next day.

But at the same time it was exciting to leave home on a train, leading to an unknown destination — two curious, frightened and brave little girls who had not yet celebrated their sixteenth birthdays.

The train arrived outside Ghetto Terezín, in a place called Bohusovice. There, fifty people were taken off the train. They marched, luggage in hand, into the ghetto — among them my mother, sister and I. The remainder of the transport was sent on to the east, its destination unknown to this day. No one returned and no one knows how they perished.

The only thing that remains of Alice is my memory of her and the number “AAAd 55” next to her name on the transport list that found its way to the archives of the Yad Vashem museum in Jerusalem.

Saying Good-Bye...

AS I am reaching the golden years and don't want to be remembered by my children only by the mess I leave behind, I started cleaning up my old files. And there, one day, I came across a forgotten letter, written to me by a friend, a blue-eyed, black-haired girl by the name of Vera. This letter has its own history. It was written after my last visit to Prague, a very exciting trip for a fourteen-year-old girl traveling by herself to visit her girlfriend in 1941. It was also risky, as I bravely took off my yellow Star of David, bought myself a ticket and boarded a train, at a time when Jews could no longer travel on public transportation without a Gestapo permit. Our town, under the watchful eyes of the Gestapo, was a very restrictive place for a child who grew up in freedom.

When our time came to be deported from our home, I carefully packed the few things that were dear to me, including Vera's last letter. A couple of years later, when I was forced to leave the ghetto for my next destination, I left all these little memorabilia with my sister, who remained in the ghetto. That was fortunate, because in the indescribable world of Auschwitz, we were denuded of all possessions — a

photograph of mother, a little love letter, a favorite poem, even our own hair.

After my liberation from Bergen-Belsen, I returned home where I was reunited with my sister and found the few articles I left with her. These were the only possessions tying me to my past. I read Vera's letter again and cried for this beautiful friend who never had a chance to live and never came home. I took her letter with me when I left for England soon after the war, and later to Israel when I made aliyah. Many years later, when I reread her letter, I understood that Vera knew she was not going to come back. This is what she wrote me in her last letter:

13 May, 1942

Dear Hanka,

Forgive me for not confirming receiving the money for the shoes I purchased for you, you must not be angry with me, because this is the last letter I am writing to you. We have been called for deportation. Six o'clock in the morning the bell rang. I jumped up because I am nearest to the hall, sleeping in the kitchen in the overcrowded apartment. Uncombed and in pajamas, I looked through the peephole and saw a man with a star standing outside. "Is Mr. Kraus in?" asked the man. There were 400 families by the name of Kraus living in Prague at that time. I must have lost my head for a moment, for I left the man with the star standing outside, until he asked timidly: "Can I come in?" Suddenly, I realized: THIS IS IT!

"Transport?" I asked. By then my parents were up already, and we never went back to sleep again.



Deportation to an unknown destination

Otto Ungar

Let me tell you, it is a different world when you find yourself in a transport. In the Jewish community, everybody is asking: "Are you in this one? Leaving? When?" I went to say good-bye to my teacher. She could not grasp that we were being deported. Later, I accompanied my father to the Jewish Community Center to find out what we had to do, what we were allowed to take with us, and a few other errands. We don't know what awaits us, but I am not painting a rosy picture for myself. I know I am leaving for misery, dirt and hunger. A postcard from our friends who left a month ago arrived from Izbice in Poland. They described Izbice as follows: "We eat

like on Yom Kippur, we sleep like on Succot and we dress like on Purim. Everybody who arrives in Terezín Ghetto leaves for Poland.”

I am really sorry we will not see each other any more. We are entering the quarantine on Thursday at 8 in the morning. Remember me sometimes — “the mischievous Verka” — now I am no longer like that. My mood has changed, but in the afternoon I am going to meet my friends, maybe for the last time, and they will cheer me up a little.

In the meantime I am getting used to the thought of leaving, even looking forward to see all my friends and family who are already there, including my boyfriend Harry.

Let me wish you to walk the path of happiness and freedom in the new shoes and remember your friend, Vera.

Vera Kraus
Transport Au-1, 951

Pen Pals

His name was Michael Mahler. He was from the family of the famous musician, Gustav Mahler. How exactly they were related I never found out, as our brief encounters were so loaded with emotion that there was no time for lengthy discussions. We met in unusual times, full of fear and uncertainty. Yet we were more aware of ourselves than of the dark clouds gathering over us on the political horizon of Europe, like the seed of a pea pushing its way above ground and blooming despite everything.

When the war started and we, the Jewish children, could no longer attend school, partake in extracurricular activities, or travel freely because of the anti-Jewish laws, the Jewish community arranged for pen-pals. That gave us an outlet for pent-up frustrations, a chance to get to know how other youngsters fared under similar circumstances, and provided information on what was happening in other Jewish communities in Czechoslovakia.

The first letter I received was from a young boy at a *hachshara* (training farm, preparation for immigration to Palestine). He wrote that he was a Zionist, that he spoke some Hebrew, which

he was learning rapidly, as he wished to be able to speak the language when he made aliyah to Palestine.

I reread the letter several times and wondered about the meaning of the words "Zionist," "*hachshara*" and "*aliyah*" and was not at all certain that this boy was the right pen-pal for me.

As a child of patriotic, assimilated Czech Jews, I looked with suspicion at somebody who was ready to abandon his country. But having been well brought up, I felt obligated to answer his first letter. I wrote about my family, about my town, which was built in the time of Charles IV, about the river Labe (Elbe) that made its way through the town, where I would go swimming in the summer and ice-skating in the winter. I wrote about the restrictions that were imposed on us by the German occupiers and about the hopes I had to study when normal life would return.

Our next letter exchange revealed curiosity on both sides. We wanted to know how the other looked, how old we were and what school we used to go to. In the following letter we exchanged photographs. In the snapshot that arrived, Michael was leaning on a shovel, dressed in odd-looking work clothes. He appeared tall, slim and good-looking. I felt a little awkward sending him my picture, taken by a local photographer as was the fashion then, in my new *Rosh Hashanah* coat, made to order by the best tailor in town, with matching shoes, hat and handbag.

Meanwhile, at home, Jewish women were forced to work in factories, men on the roads. Food was very scarce. We were left without means to buy the little food that was available, as our possessions were systematically confiscated and our bank accounts blocked.

Then another letter came from Michael. He wrote that his

group had been dissolved and he was being sent home. Since a Jew needed a permit from the Gestapo for every journey, Michael asked for and received permission to stop overnight while the train was passing through my town, so we could meet for the first time. With my mother's consent I waited excitedly to get to know my pen-pal.

And Michael arrived — thin, tired and hungry. A beautiful boy with dark hair and blue eyes shaded by endless black lashes, shy, with a charming smile that showed his perfect teeth. I fell in love immediately.

We sat and talked all night. In the early hours of the morning Michael had to leave on the only train going to his town. When we parted, Michael bent down to kiss me. That kiss burned on my lips for a year, until our next encounter in Ghetto Terezín. I was fifteen years old.

Suddenly I became aware of the war raging around us. I listened to stories of anti-Semitic attacks from people who had to leave their homes in Sudetenland and came to look for shelter in our community. I heard the shrill voice of the Führer on the radio and his tirades on the Jews, and trembled with fear.

Under SS *Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia, the situation worsened daily for us Czech Jews. Slovakia proclaimed itself an independent state; Poland fell. Germany occupied Denmark and invaded Norway, and Holland capitulated to the Germans.

As town after town was cleared of Jews being deported to unknown destinations, my family started to prepare itself for a similar fate. The day came only too quickly. After Heydrich's assassination by two Czech partisans in Prague, the Germans sent off a "penalty transport" from my hometown. At the Bohusovice railway station, the train stopped. Fifty persons

were taken off the train and marched, luggage in hand, into the Terezín Ghetto, a journey of three kilometers. The rest of the passengers on the train continued their journey, never to be seen or heard from again.

In Terezín I worked and waited. I waited for the Jews of Michael's town to arrive in the ghetto. After a year, a transport from Hradec Kralove, where Michael lived, arrived, and his name was on the list. We, the ghetto inhabitants, were not permitted to meet the new arrivals. Only when they were brought inside a large hall called the *Schloize* did I manage to slip in.

And there was Michael! Our eyes met and we awkwardly shook hands. Michael introduced me to his parents, a gray-haired lady and a sick man in a wheelchair. Since I worked in the kitchen, I brought along some food I had stolen. They were embarrassed by my gift. They did not yet know what hunger was, and I no longer knew what it meant not to be hungry.

The next time I managed to visit them I found Michael lying on a thin mattress placed on the floor, burning with high fever. His mother was having a hard time coping with a sick son and a disabled husband. It took a couple of days until a doctor was found and brought to see Michael, who was diagnosed as having an inflamed appendix. With a little stolen sugar I bribed someone to have Michael transferred to one of the ill-equipped hospitals in the ghetto.

Since I worked a night shift and then slept through the day, it was not until two days later that I could visit him in the hospital, only to be told that Michael was being operated on, and I was not permitted to see him.

The next day a friend working as a nurse in the hospital came running to tell me that Michael had died during the night

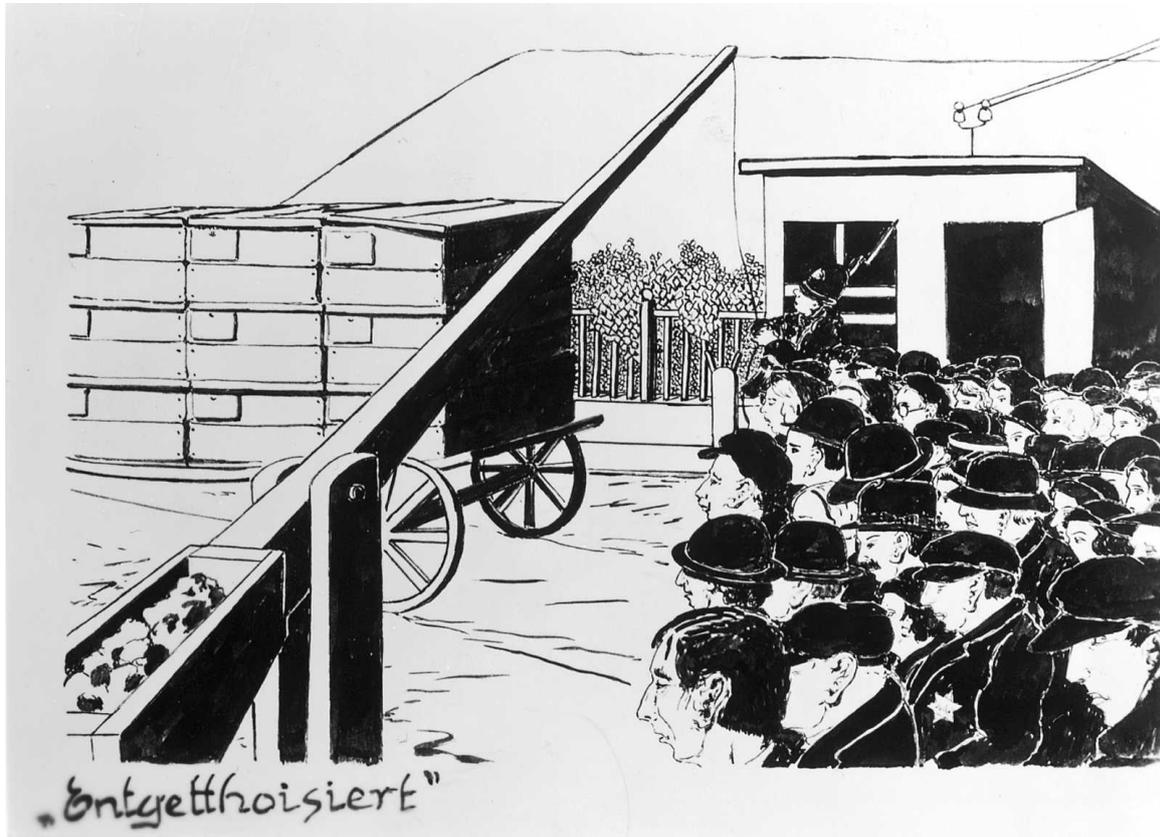
of a ruptured appendix and the funeral was to take place in a few hours.

In a daze I arranged to be relieved from my work and in haste made my way to the mortuary that resembled a factory. Dozens of wooden boxes were piled on top of each other, names were being called rapidly, a rabbi was saying *Kaddish*, the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead.

Michael's mother and I walked together behind the hearse, piled with wooden coffins, pulled by prisoners up to the gate, from where only the dead had the privilege to leave the ghetto. We were strangers, but our love for Michael and the pain of losing him brought us unbelievably close. I gave Michael's

The Last journey

Pavel Fantel



mother our pen-pal letters and we said good-bye, never to meet again. That was on a cold morning, January 7, 1943.

It was I who fulfilled Michael's aspirations. I survived the concentration camps, made aliyah and became a Hebrew-speaking Zionist in my own free country, Israel.

The Last Bowl of Soup

The inscription read: “To the Night Butterfly at No. 112, from Esti. Terezín 15.X.1942.” It was on the reverse side of an old photograph, which miraculously survived, of a young girl in a white blouse. She brings back memories I must commit to paper before they disappear.

In the fall of 1942, Terezín’s overcrowded army barracks — which had until then accommodated all inmates of the ghetto — were opened up. The houses of the inhabitants of the town of Terezín, forcibly transferred to other places, became available to us, the prisoners of the ghetto.

I was allocated space in a small room in an old house, No. 112, which I shared with twenty other women. Here we put down our mattresses and our few belongings on the bare floor and enjoyed relative privacy in comparison to the halls we had lived in before, where 300-400 people were packed together.

Transports with new prisoners were constantly arriving from all over *Judenfrei* Europe, filling up every available space in the ghetto. One day, a new girl, tall and slim, and a little frightened, moved into our room. We, the old-timers, tried to



„Prošrimu motýlkovi“ na číste
112
reimje Edie. Toulon, 15. X. 1942.

make her comfortable by pushing our mattresses closer together, making space for hers.

She and I were close in age, both sixteen, both lonely among so many, and we soon became friends. We commiserated together about the ghetto conditions, talked with nostalgia about our homes and families, about our first love and how it felt to be kissed for the first time. We were young, with a will to live; and hope for a better future sustained us in our dreary daily life, while our stomachs continually rumbled from hunger.

I soon found work in a large kitchen that provided food to thousands of prisoners from the meager supplies allocated to us by the Germans. It was hard physical labor. However, I was no longer hungry, as my fingers always found their way into the pot. Sometimes I even managed to organize (we never called it stealing, as we were not thieves, just hungry) a delicacy of burned flour, sugar and margarine mixed together, a sheer delight that I would bring "home" and share with my new friend, Esti.

We met early in the mornings when I returned from night duty and before she left for her work, and again in the evening, when she returned and I was just about to leave. That is how I came to be called "night butterfly."

Soon after we met, I contracted typhus and was taken with high fever to an isolation hospital where I fought for my life for several months. In the meantime, with all the upheavals in the ghetto, transports coming and others going to unknown destinations, each carrying another family member or friend, Esti and I lost sight of each other.

In 1944, I was deported with many others to Auschwitz and

Barrel of soup ►
Dinah Gottlieb



there, in this indescribable hell, we met again. It was a few weeks after my arrival, as I began to become accustomed to this non-existence that we lived through, that I discovered that Esti was in the same camp in a “hospital,” which was not equipped to heal the sick.

It was a large building with three-tiered bunk beds filled with half-dead human beings, without medicine, sheets or any comfort one would associate with the concept of a hospital. No inmate ever wanted to end up there, as Auschwitz was not kind to sick people.

There I found Esti lying in one of the bunk beds — in the middle tier, skin and bones, her face just two large eyes — wanting to jump out and run, run away from here even though her body was no longer able to do so. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I would try to visit Esti, sit next to her, sometimes feed her with the watery soup that came once a day, sometimes wash her with a little rag and water I brought with me in a tin pot, wiping away some of the blood she spat out.

On my last visit, I found her mother sitting on her bed. Esti was terribly weak and could no longer talk. Covered with a thin grey blanket which served to outline the contours of her child-like body, she was having difficulty breathing. Just then the daily ration was being distributed, and her mother took Esti’s tin pot to stand in line for the soup. When I looked at Esti, her eyes were open, still, no longer shining. I touched her hand and it fell out of mine.

When her mother returned with the soup, she realized that Esti had left us. She sat down on the edge of the bed, ate Esti’s last soup ration, got up, closed Esti’s eyes, covering her face with the thin grey blanket. Then she sat down and cried...

Grandfather

The story I am about to tell mirrors a part of our life in Ghetto Terezín (Theresienstadt), in Czechoslovakia, during World War II.

The people who were young in the ghetto recall life there with nostalgia, especially in retrospect, after having been in camps such as Auschwitz, Hamburg, Gross Rosen, Bergen-Belsen and others. For the old people it was a different story.

Soon after my arrival in Ghetto Terezín in 1942, it was my good fortune to find work in a kitchen that prepared food for ten thousand people from the meager supplies allocated to the ghetto prisoners by the Germans. To work in any place near food was everyone's dream in the camps.

One day, as part of my kitchen duties, distributing food to the inmates in the Kaserne yard, barracks built in 1878, inside a fortress the Germans turned into Ghetto Terezín, I stood by a barrel of watery soup, ladling the insipid liquid to lines of people queuing in front of me for many hours.

An old man standing before me whispered: "Miss, please give me from the bottom, I am so hungry," hoping that there would be a potato or turnip at the bottom of the barrel. When I



Grandfather

looked up, I recognized the old man as my grandfather, my father's father. Not wishing to humiliate him, I refrained from making any sign of recognition.

That same day, while cleaning the kitchen, I stole two boiled potatoes. I hid them in my brassiere and managed to smuggle them out of the kitchen, in spite of the body searches made on us every time we left the premises.

Immediately after work I ran to visit my grandfather in the small room he shared with many other old men. I sat down next to him on a straw mattress on the floor, which was the area allocated to him for his *Lebensraum* (living space).

I handed my grandfather the two boiled potatoes I had stolen. He took out a pocketknife, peeled the potatoes, cut them in slices and shared the portions with me. We looked at each other with a smile and felt like conspirators. That was a moment of happiness we shared amidst the sad realities of our daily life in the ghetto.

The following day after work, I rushed to see my grandfather again. Upon entering the room, I discovered he was nowhere to be found. When I asked the others where he was, they replied, "He is no more!"

With the same penknife he had used only a day before to peel the stolen potatoes, my grandfather had cut the veins on his wrist to end his unbearable existence.

When the past becomes a dim memory and the future holds no hope, his was the only free choice. Heroism demonstrates itself not only when we fight with guns; there is also heroism in fighting with what is left to us.

I will always remember my grandfather as one of the unknown heroes of the Terezín Ghetto.

Auschwitz

Entering Auschwitz was like entering a gate to hell. No matter how conditioned we were to suffering in the previous camps, nobody was prepared for the visual horrors and harsh treatment that greeted us there.

Arriving at night, tired, hungry and thirsty, searchlights pointing at us, a barbed wire fence surrounding us, we could not see where our luggage was, or where the next blow would come from. Fear propelled us to move on.

From the first moment of arrival, we were pushed by blows and shouts to evacuate the stinking, overcrowded wagons that had brought us there. Some of the prisoners, forced to receive us this way, were friends who had arrived by previous transports to Auschwitz. All this was carried on under the watchful eyes of the SS officers supervising the operation, accompanied by vicious, barking dogs.

My stay in Auschwitz was a nightmare. This was a different world, a place with a life of its own. Here, time was measured by endless *Appells* (roll calls), the inmates having to stand twice a day to be counted over and over again, because by the time

the counting was finished, there were always a few dead bodies confusing the SS, so intent on being exact in their task.

In Auschwitz, time had different dimensions. The outside world, where everything was measured exactly by time, where watches and clocks and calendars were a framework for daily life, seemed far away and foggy in our Auschwitz life. Time here was defined by waiting for the one daily ration of a slice of bread and a bowl of watery soup, which did not always arrive.

People who lived there had no names, just a number branded on their arm, a big hole in their belly filled with hunger, and a shaved head full of fear. In Auschwitz the birds didn't sing, flowers didn't grow, people were not born; they only died there.

Auschwitz was German ingenuity combined with talent for

"Appell"

Mieczyslaw Koscielniak



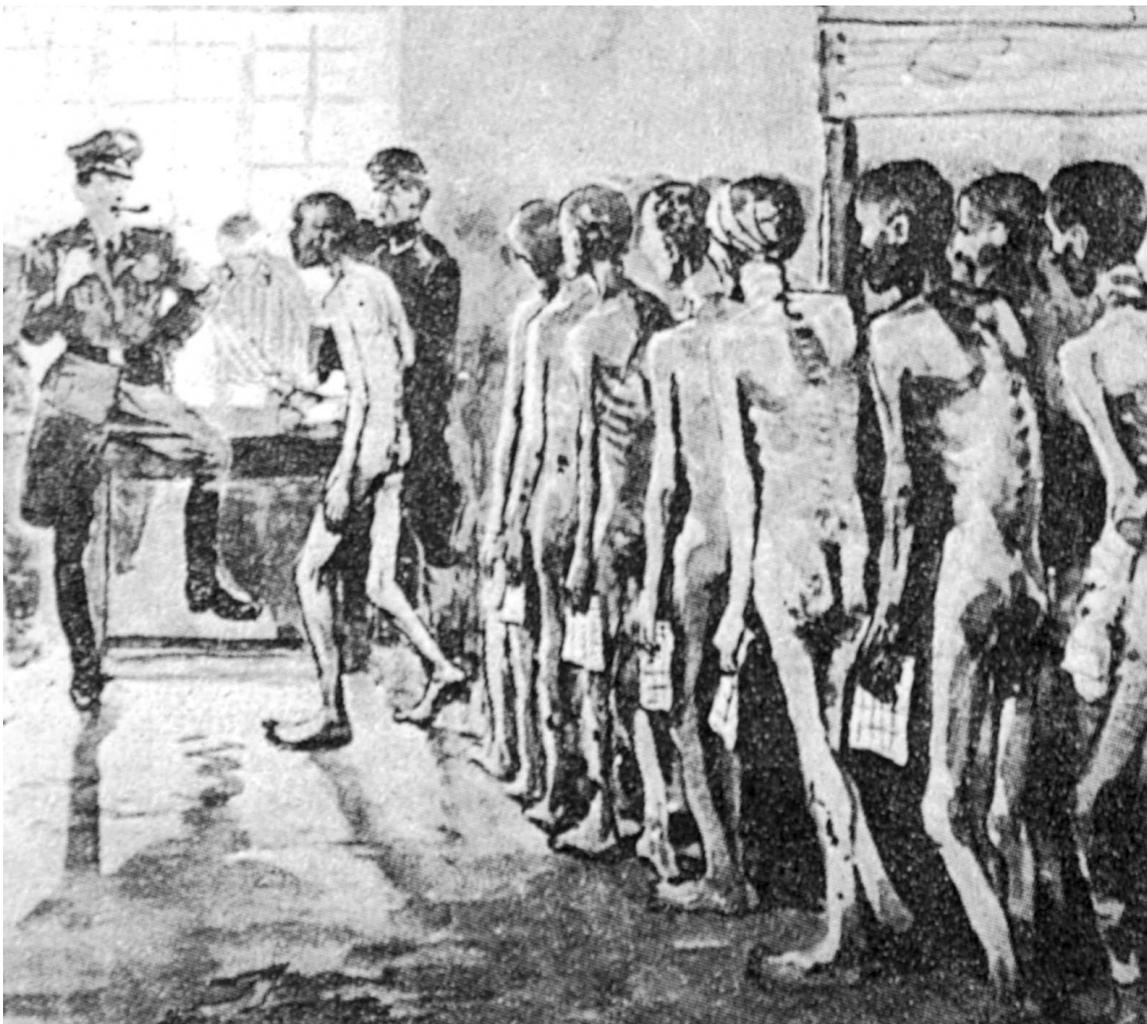
organization that had created the ultimate killing machine, and we became its programmed victims.

We were spectators and victims of a monstrous nightmare from which we could neither awaken nor escape.

While watching the chimney belch out the red smoke, like the last breath of a choking man, with the sweet smell of burning flesh permeating the air, I cried out in desperation: "God, where are you?"

Selection of Women

Jerzy Potrzebowski



Final Day in Birkenau

The atmosphere in our camp, B2B, was electric, almost like the electric wires encircling us. The SS guards were nowhere to be seen inside the camp the entire day, because they were afraid of the inmates, whose lives, which had been extended by six months in the so-called *Familien Lager*, the “family camp,” would be over the next day.

The Czech family camp was an exception among the many camps in the Auschwitz complex that stretched for a couple of kilometers. We were supposed to serve as insurance, the living Jews, to be produced, if necessary, in case there were inquiries by the outside world about the “rumored” systematic murder of Jews that the Germans were carrying out without interruption.

There was a precedent. The previous transport, after a six-month stay, was gassed and five thousand fresh Jews from the Terezín Ghetto were deported to Auschwitz to fill the void. The camp was called *Familien Lager*, for we remained, unlike other camps, men, women and children together.

All the inmates were excited and scared, anxiously attempting to find out what was in store for us the next day. The

optimists believed that our term would be extended, the pessimists were convinced it was our last night; tomorrow we would meet the same fate as the previous transport and be fed into the ever burning chimneys.

I was nearly seventeen, no longer a child but not an adult either, something in between, what the Germans called a *Buckfish*. Alone in Auschwitz, alone in the world, in a place that was a perversion of all human decency and morality.

My father was deported in 1942 with a transport that ended in Maly Trostinec in Poland. My mother accompanied 1,196 Bialystok children to Auschwitz, where they were gassed on Erev Yom Kippur 1943. I had to learn how to take care of myself. I was very brave, always trying to prove to myself that I was not afraid.

That night I was not only afraid; I was terrified. I was so lonely, I wanted somebody to hold me, to tell me that it was only a nightmare from which I would wake again. But there was no one...

Upon our arrival in Auschwitz, in spite of being warned not to take any of our meager possessions with us, I managed to hide a leather cigar holder. In that cigar container I kept my father's passport, a picture of my mother, and a will for four million German marks deposited in a numbered account of a Swiss bank.

After a few weeks, five hundred women were selected from our camp for slave labor in Germany. Knowing that the selections would be made while we were naked, I buried my father's leather container at night, behind our barracks, while watching the chimneys burning with the newly arrived Hungarian Jews.

On the promenade, many of the prisoners were running from one barrack to another, looking for family members so

they could say good-bye to them, or to get some news through the grapevine. At any other time they would not have dared to be outside the barracks.

I didn't want to die. I didn't know how a person dies except for the prisoners I saw throwing themselves at the electric wire that embraced us like an *eruv*. After they touched the electric wire out of desperation, hunger, or whatever other reason that had driven them to this unnatural act, they looked ugly and contorted, and I could not see myself in a similar picture. My grandfather, in Ghetto Terezín, had made a courageous choice at the age of eighty-five to end his life rather than accept the humiliation of his circumstances. And I admired his courage. But this was different. I was young, with a strong will to live in spite of everything. And Auschwitz was so different from Terezín; it was like the end of the world. It was impossible to have any sense of controlling one's own destiny here.

I wanted mother, but she wasn't there. I wanted to be loved, but what was love? Too young, too innocent, and too naive, but courageous and enterprising, I remembered a good-looking young doctor who once gave me his portion of soup and I knew which barrack and bunk he lived in.

While my heart beat like Big Ben, I left the women's barracks, crossed the promenade, entered the men's barracks, and climbed the wooden ladder, silently, until I reached the top bunk. Listening to the men snoring in the dark, I quietly called the young doctor's name. He responded by extending his hand to help me to join him. There wasn't much space as there were three men on his right and three on his left sharing the top bunk with him.

We were silent; there was no need for words. I lay down quietly squeezing myself into what little space remained, feeling

the warmth of another human being. He wrapped his arms around me, holding me tightly. Abandoned by the world, denuded of all possessions, hungry, desolate, lonely, in desperation we made love, saying good-bye to life.

The next day, I was among five hundred women prisoners who departed from Auschwitz for slave labor in Germany, leaving behind the chimneys burning with those who hadn't passed the selection.



Pencil Drawing

Unknown Artist

The Value of Money

My mother, who was married in 1922 in Kolín, Czechoslovakia, by a rabbi, Dr. Richard Feder, later chief rabbi of the republic, was divorced from my father in a civil ceremony in 1937, in the same town. When Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Germans in 1939, my father was banished from our town, while mother, my sister and I, after being evicted from our home, moved to grandmother's house.

On June 13, 1942, our town, Kolín, was emptied of all its Jewish inhabitants as a penalty for the assassination of SS *Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia. A train with a transport marked AAd carrying one thousand fifty deportees was sent in the direction of Poland. At the Bohusovice station, fifty people, my mother, sister and I among them, were taken out of the train, the Germans having ordered the killing of only a thousand Jews as a reprisal. We, the extra fifty, were marched with our suitcases in hand to Terezín, three kilometers away.

Shortly after our arrival in Ghetto Terezín, father, who was already there, having arrived by previous transport, was included in a transport sent to Maly Trostinec in Poland. There

998 people deported with him were killed immediately upon arrival, according to the testimony of one of the two survivors, Hanus Muntz, who told me the sad tale when I met him many years later in Prague.

In Terezín, my mother, who worked as a nurse in a *Seuglingsheim* (home for babies), met a very nice man from Vienna by the name of Rudi Ehrlich. Mother told us that her friend was a lawyer for the well known firm of Julius Meinl, which at the time had stores in many European countries, including Austria and Czechoslovakia. As times were very difficult and one never knew what the next day would bring, mother and her friend decided to marry. But strange as it may seem, that wasn't so simple. The ghetto was under Jewish leadership, so circumcisions and marriage and divorce were conducted according to Jewish law, not that there were many of these events in this transit ghetto.

To their consternation, mother and her friend Rudi found that she could not remarry in Terezín, since she had not been divorced under Jewish law. My father, who could have remedied the situation, was no longer there. Mother and Rudi continued their friendship until she was chosen to accompany a transport of 1,196 children sent to Auschwitz and gassed there on Erev Yom Kippur, October 7, 1943.

Mother's friend Rudi remained in the ghetto and visited us whenever there was an opportunity. He was a great source of comfort to us, as we were alone. It didn't take long before the transports started again. This time, Dr. Rudi Ehrlich was on the list of deportees. When he came to say good-bye to me and my sister, he handed us two documents, powers of attorney bearing his signature, as he had no other relatives. One was for food parcels he was receiving in the ghetto from a non-Jewish friend

in Vienna, with whom he had left a considerable amount of money. (This was allowed from time to time.) The other document was for the sum of four million German marks, which he had deposited in a numbered account in Switzerland prior to his deportation. We stayed with him until the train left, never to see him again.

Soon after, it was my fate to be part of a transport, whose destination, unbeknown to us, was Auschwitz. When I parted from my sister, she kept the power of attorney for the parcels that were supposed to arrive in Terezín. In reality, if they arrived at all, they were delivered half empty.

Among the few belongings that remained with me after my stay in Terezín and the little we were allowed to take with us on our next journey, was the leather container, originally a cigar holder, that held the few documents I still had in my possession: my birth certificate, the receipt from the Gestapo for the jewelry they had confiscated from our family, my father's passport, a photograph of my mother, and my new acquisition, a power of attorney for four million German marks in a numbered Swiss account.

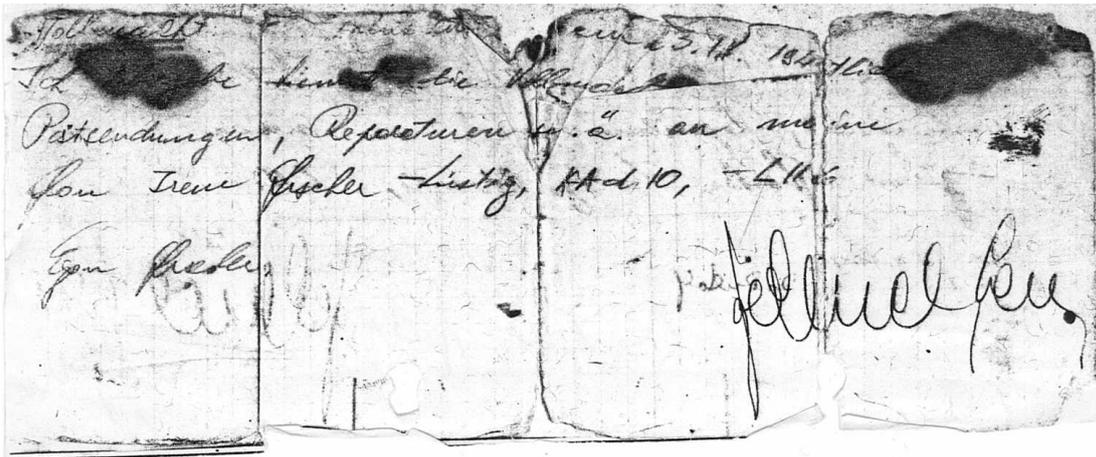
When we arrived in Auschwitz, we were pushed by blows and frightened by shouts to evacuate the stinking, overcrowded wagon that had brought us there. All of our possessions were taken from us except for what we were wearing. Somehow I managed to hold on to my cigar container.

After a few weeks in Auschwitz, when I was selected as one of the five hundred women from our camp being sent to Germany for slave labor, I could no longer keep my leather cigar container. Knowing that the selections would be made while we were naked, I decided to bury it. As soon as darkness fell, I made my way to the back of the barracks, and when I saw that I

was alone, started digging with the only tools I possessed, an old metal spoon and my bare hands. I dug a hole deep enough to hide the precious possessions. It took a long time to accomplish this task, and all the while, I was watching the chimneys burning with the newly arrived Hungarian Jews.

The next day we left Auschwitz in our new sack uniforms and wooden clogs, tattooed like cattle, after the most stringent examinations had been carried out in all parts of our bodies.

I never did retrieve my precious cigar box full of documents, but many times during that long year of slave labor in Hamburg, Germany, while being worked and starved to death, I thought how gladly I would trade the four million German marks for a single loaf of bread.



Last Will

Punishment

Erna will always remain my heroine. How many times I asked myself how I would have taken such heavy punishment. Would I have screamed? Cried? Told anything they wanted to know? Which blow would have been the breaking point? The fifth? The tenth? Would I have survived or remained sane?

Erna was born and brought up in Hamburg, Germany. When evacuation of German Jews was on the agenda, Erna was deported to Ghetto Terezín in Czechoslovakia. When the overcrowded ghetto was being prepared for a Red Cross visit and transport after transport left the ghetto, Erna was placed in one destined for Auschwitz.

At that time, a decision was made by the Nazi government in Berlin to stop killing able-bodied Jews. The Germans realized they needed every hand to continue feeding their war machine. From then on selections were made in Auschwitz and prisoners who passed the test were, for the first time in Auschwitz history, sent to slave labor all over the German Reich.

Erna and I were among the five hundred women who had left the hell of Auschwitz and, by a cynical coincidence, she

arrived back in her hometown, Hamburg, where she had started her sad journey a few years earlier.

Our first incarceration was in Hamburg's port, Freihafen's storage buildings, where ships were loaded and unloaded with the ebb and flow of the river. We women prisoners were sent from there to different parts of the city, which was daily being bombed, to clean up the rubble so that civilian life could continue in Hamburg.

Returning from work one day, we found Freihafen bombed out and were transferred to a different camp in Neugraben, another suburb of Hamburg. Again we were distributed to different places to work wherever the Germans could use us Jewish slaves.

It was in a brick factory that blond Erna caught the eye of one of the German workers who seemed to be a little more human and sympathetic than the rest of our guards. In time this man agreed to take a letter to her sister, who had remained in Hamburg, being married to a Gentile. The day the man brought a small parcel of clothing and food for Erna from her sister, an SS patrol paid our workplace a visit and the parcel was discovered. After some interrogation, it was established that it belonged to Erna.

Returning to our Neugraben camp, we were not allowed to receive our customary meager portion of soup. Instead, we were called immediately for an *Appell* (roll call) and left standing for hours in the open, while Erna was being interrogated in the *Lagerkommandant's* office. Finally, she was brought outside by two SS women. The five hundred women, her co-sufferers, were forced to watch her punishment.

Our *Lagerkommandant*, Spiez, in his smart uniform and highly polished boots, with a whip in his hand and a few armed

SS men in tow, forced Erna to bend down and started whipping this defenseless girl. We, the unwilling witnesses, were frozen to the ground by fear, humiliation and the shame of not being able to help. We listened in silence to the swishes of the whip and the screams that never left Erna's lips. As the force of the whippings escalated, foam formed around the mouth of the *Lagerkommandant* and when he reached his climax, with Erna on the ground, he left.

The girls picked up Erna, brought her inside the barracks where one of us, a doctor, took care of her as best as possible under the circumstances. Erna never revealed the name of her sister nor the man who helped her. She slowly recovered.

When our next camp, Tiefstak, was bombed out by the

Painting by German pupil from the town of Neugraben Helms Museum



Allies, we were again transferred elsewhere. During an exceptionally heavy raid on the railway line that was taking us to Bergen-Belsen, Erna escaped.

Sixty years later, her silent screams continue to wake me from my nightmares.

A Yom Kippur Story

Autumn was waning and the weather was getting chilly. As we owned no underwear, socks or stockings to keep our underfed bodies warm under our blue and gray striped uniforms, we had no protection against the wind and autumn rain. The chattering of our teeth produced an eerie cacophony.

As the weather grew worse and our labor in bombed-out Hamburg was in ever greater demand, our overlords supplied us with old coats that once belonged to women who had in the meantime been transformed into the thick, black smoke wafting over Auschwitz. One sleeve had to be of a different color, and a yellow patch had to adorn the back of the coat. The lucky women had wooden clogs, the unlucky ones wrapped old newspapers or rags around their feet, and tied them up with whatever they could find in the garbage heap.

This made us look like "*strashaks*," scarecrows. No doubt, it was the intention of the Germans to make us look ridiculous so we would stand out among the German population in our unusual attire, thus preventing our escape. Not that our chances of escaping were very great. What with shaved heads, numbers tattooed on our arms, without documents, money or



Katte and the author in Israel

friends in this enemy country, the odds were hopeless and the risks frightening.

It was September 26, 1944, in Hamburg, Germany.

My friend Katte, who had been brought up in an Orthodox home in Vienna, worked in the camp kitchen distributing food to us prisoners upon our return from the various factories located around Hamburg where the Germans forced us to work.

One bright moment in my dreary life was when I stood in line in front of Katte ladling out the evening soup. For me, she dipped deep into the barrel, fishing out whatever solid food was floating there, to fill my shrunken stomach.

This particular evening she whispered to me "Hanko, it is Erev Yom Kippur today. You should fast." At first I looked at her uncomprehendingly, and then I started to laugh. I laughed

so hard that I could not stop. The other girls, fearing punishment, tried to calm me down, for the Germans didn't like it when the Jews laughed. Finally I said to my friend, tears streaming down my cheeks, "Katte, here every day is a Yom Kippur."

We were five hundred young women, slave laborers in Germany, who had been selected in Auschwitz from among the thousands destined for the gas chambers, the first transport ever to leave Auschwitz. Within a year we had dwindled to half that number. Starvation, typhoid, hard labor, bombing, punishments, and later, Bergen-Belsen took their toll.

Katte and I survived. Each made her own way to Israel by different routes and at different times. Today, we both fast on Yom Kippur of our own free will, in our own country, each in our own synagogue.

Hamburg, Christmas 1944

It is still dark outside. I lie on the bunk bed and wonder why I am up so early. Is it the cold that disturbs my sleep? I crawl into myself and my thin body becomes a little bundle, like a baby in its mother's womb. The short, threadbare grey blanket barely covers me. Another prisoner must have torn a piece from its end, probably to create makeshift gloves to protect her hands from frostbite. Suddenly somebody switches on the light, the glare hurting my eyes. We don't have any watches — those were taken away from us a long time ago — but it must be about five in the morning. I peek out from under the cover to see a young SS *Sturmbannführer*. I don't know his name; he never introduced himself to us. He is tall, blond and blue-eyed, and with a bucket of cold water in his hand, he screams his new daily curse in a perfect Hamburg accent, emphasizing the "S" in "*Schweinehunde aufstehen!*" (Pigs, get up). And with a laugh he pours the icy water over us girls lying terrified in the bunk beds.

After that, it doesn't take too long to get dressed. Anyhow, we each own only one piece of clothing, a prisoner's uniform that most of us take off only in order to get washed when and if

we have the opportunity. I climb down from the upper deck, where, luckily, not much of the cold water reached me. Searching under the bed for my pair of wooden clogs, I find that someone has decided during the night that I should share them with her. With one clog on and the other foot wrapped in an old newspaper tied with a string, I am ready for the day's work.

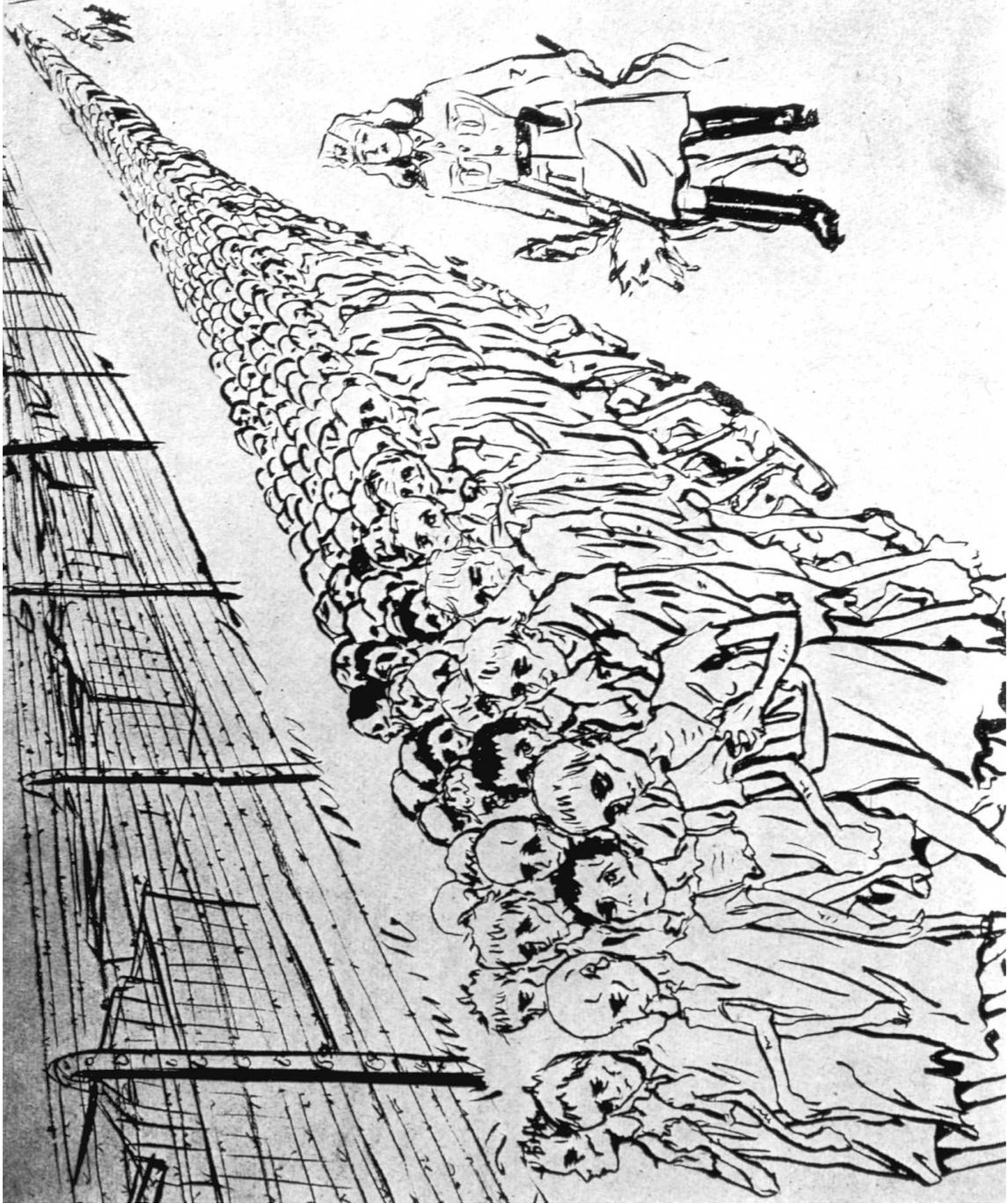
Morning toilet is very simple. No toothbrush, no toothpaste, no comb, no soap. And already we have to stand for an *Appell*. We have to be counted. Whether leaving or entering the camp, we must always be counted, for we, the women slaves, are very precious to the Third Reich. Morning cold penetrates right through our thin clothing and we start to shiver. "Nu," I think to myself, "it is better to start marching already than to stand and freeze to the ground."

Finally the columns move out of the camp. We never know our destination, or who our next employer will be. We go out every morning, some to clean up the rubble of the bombed-out buildings on the streets, others to replace railway lines that were blown up the previous night or to dig frozen ground, in order to repair damaged water pipes. Some women also work in brick factories.

We work all day under the supervision of SS men and SS women dressed in their green uniforms. They come in pairs. They sit around guarding us; they talk and laugh, eat and drink, and when they become bored, they hit us.

Sometimes when we get permission to relieve ourselves, we run to see if there is anything to eat. Maybe a rotten apple under a tree, maybe some potato peels in the garbage. It has to be quick so that the "green ones" don't miss us.

Suddenly the now familiar sound of wailing sirens interrupts the monotony of the work. The "green ones" are



Returning From Work

Dina Gottlied

frightened; they run for cover in deep bomb shelters. We are left alone in the open field. Now we can rest, we can stop working, because nobody is watching us for a while. It doesn't take a minute before a deafening sound is heard. Not far off, a building is blown up. An airplane explodes like a star in the sky. Then all is quiet again and the "green ones" come back.

It is beginning to get dark when we return to camp through Hamburg's suburbs. Through the windows of the houses we can see decorated Christmas trees in every living room. It all looks so inviting, so warm and so beautiful. It all seems so abnormal in our dreary prisoners' life.

Walking wearily in the snow, dragging one tired foot after the other, I become lost in my thoughts: "It would be nice to be a Christian just for one evening. To warm up my frozen feet in that cozy lit living room, to fill my hungry, shrunken stomach with some warm food and maybe fall asleep in a real bed?"

"Marsch, marsch! Schnell, schnell!" the SS women guards start screaming at us, for they also want to get back to the camp. It is Christmas Eve!

Hungry, dirty and exhausted, we reach the gate of the camp in the dark. After another roll call and a body search, a ration of bread and a bowl of watery soup are received by whoever has the strength to stand in line for it. Another day ends.

HEILIGE NACHT... STILLE NACHT... HOLY NIGHT...
SILENT NIGHT...

Righteous Gentiles

It was in the midst of a harsh winter in the year of 1944. The days were long and full of suffering. Without underwear, scarves, hats or gloves, the cold penetrated into every part of our bodies. The feet were the worst. Without socks or stockings, our wooden clogs did not protect us from the frost and snow. As we walked to and from our day's work, the snow would stick to the wooden sole and keep building up until we looked like circus performers, hobbling on stilts. We would stop, bang on the sole of the shoe, scrape the snow off, and continue.

After our camp in Freihafen was leveled by bombs, we were transferred to another one in Neugraben. The miserable living conditions did not change; if anything, they became worse. Instead of working at clearing rubble from bombed-out buildings, we were in the suburbs of Hamburg, repairing frozen water pipes and working in brick and munitions factories.

Because we were working in the open countryside, where there were only a few scattered houses, and since there were no toilets, we were allowed, from time to time, to run into the surrounding area to relieve ourselves among the trees and bushes.

One day, while out of sight of the SS men and women who

guarded us, I mustered all my courage and knocked on the door of a house — its chimney puffing smoke into the cold grey air.

After the second knock, an old woman opened the door, bewildered at what she saw, but no more frightened than I, while words pleading for food came out of my mouth. The woman, after a few moments of hesitation, during which I nearly died of fright, beckoned me in. Guiding me into her kitchen, she spoke briefly to her husband, who sat in a corner repairing shoes. She took out a soup bowl and poured some hot liquid into it. I ate in haste, not wanting to be missed by the guards, for punishment for such a breach of discipline was harsh. I thanked them both and ran. As I was leaving, the old lady whispered to me, "Come again when you can."

A couple of days later, while working at the same site, I managed to slip away. This time I knew my destination. Eagerly, I knocked on the door of the same house, with the nostalgic memory of having my shrunken stomach filled with the delicious liquid of my previous visit.

Again, it was the old woman who opened the door carefully. Upon seeing the same hungry girl in a torn striped uniform with wooden clogs on her feet, she let me in quickly. After serving me a bowl of sweet, thick porridge, she murmured something to her husband and handed me an old pair of men's shoes with new soles that her husband had prepared for me. The shoes were twice the size of my feet, but with old newspaper stuffed inside, I fitted them to my frozen feet and tied them up with string. I thanked them for this priceless gift, and although I would have liked to linger in their warm kitchen a little longer, fear propelled me on. I ran in my new warm shoes, my feet, no longer wet from the snow, slowly defrosting in all

that vacuum. The guards noticed neither my absence nor my new acquisition.

The next day we were sent elsewhere to work and never again returned to that neighborhood. I never learned the names of those good people nor their address, but for the rest of the winter I blessed them, while my frozen feet recovered thanks to their kindness and humanity. These were righteous Gentiles.

When Abraham spoke to God in order to save Sodom from destruction, God answered him: "If you find ten righteous people among its inhabitants, I will save the city" (Genesis 18:32).

In the difficult days I lived through in Hamburg during the war, I found two good people who restored my faith in humanity and made it possible for me to return there again, many years later, at the invitation of the mayor of Hamburg.



The Fifteenth of April, 1945

April 15 is a date forever engraved in my memory. If I mention it to someone today, many years later, a blank expression comes across their faces. What is so special about it? It was the day of our Liberation! How many times did we dream about this day? In how many different ways did we imagine it? It was the hope of living to this day that had sustained us.

We were 500 Czech women, carefully selected by the SS to be sent for slave labor in Germany, the first transport ever to have left behind the gas chambers and the smoking chimneys of Auschwitz.

It was only when we arrived in Hamburg, Germany's largest port city, and saw that we were being housed in Freihafen — storage buildings being bombed day and night by the Allies — that we realized it wasn't the goodwill of the Germans that had brought us out of Auschwitz. And then I understood the stories my rabbi had taught me: We had become slaves, just like the Jews in Egypt in Moses' time.

For more than a year we slaved under unbearable conditions, witnessing the destruction of Hamburg by the American

bombers by day and the British bombers by night. The daily attacks took their toll among us slave laborers as well.

The German population of Hamburg saw us, marked Jews, as we marched daily to and from work in different parts of the city, wherever our labor could be used to the advantage of the Third Reich.

After our camp was bombed out for the second time and it became impossible to take us to work, we were transported to Bergen-Belsen, a name synonymous with hell. No matter what horrors we had been subjected to in the previous camps, such as Terezín, Auschwitz, and Hamburg's slave labor camps, Freihafen, Neugraben, and Tiefstak, Bergen-Belsen surpassed them all in its abomination.

We arrived at the Bergen railway station in a sorry state. Some of our women had been killed and others wounded by an accurate attack on the rail line. Bedraggled and pitiful looking, we were forced to walk from the Bergen station to the Belsen camp. Both sides of the road were strewn with the dead bodies of those who had gone before us on their last walk. Thrown to the side, they lay in every imaginable position. It was like a journey through Dante's inferno. Some were prisoners who had dropped dead on the side of the road from sheer exhaustion, others had been shot when they could no longer keep up with the column and obey the order to keep on moving: "*marsch, marsch.*"

No sooner did we reach the camp — hungry, thirsty, and utterly worn out, hoping to get some water and maybe a little rest after traveling endless hours in closed cattle wagons from bombed-out Hamburg — than the panicked Germans loaded us up, like donkeys, with the contents of their army warehouses. Well stocked with provisions and clothing even in these

last days of the war, the Germans were hoping to salvage these goods before the Allies arrived. Prodding us with guns and blows, we were forced to march back to the Bergen railroad station, along the same road littered with the dead bodies of those who had only recently walked this very path.

The night was cold and in the blackout of the war, it was difficult for the guards to oversee the entire column of hundreds of marching women. With the help of another girl, I managed to remove a couple of army vests from the load we were carrying on our back. We hid them under our threadbare striped uniforms, our only protection from the elements. Few of the women in our column had the strength or the courage to try to escape into the forest on either side of the road. Shots were fired at some of those who did; some were hit, few managed to escape. They took their chances.

After trudging many hours, we reached the Bergen station. There, the goods we were carrying were loaded onto the very train that had brought us from Hamburg. More trains were arriving with similar human cargo, under the same inhumane conditions, from other camps in Germany. Then we started our trek back to Belsen concentration camp. The bombing started again. The Allied planes dropped a few bombs and the Germans were panic-stricken. I don't recollect how we got back to the camp, being utterly exhausted and oblivious to what was happening around us. We were hungry, we were thirsty, but nobody cared.

Some of our girls had fallen into ditches during the darkness, some had managed to escape into the woods. Once we were back in the Bergen-Belsen camp, our nightmare began. Whoever lived through the experience of Bergen-Belsen lived through his own death.



15, April 1945 Day of Liberation in Bergen-Belsen

Bergen-Belsen 15 April 1945

The Living Among The Dead



Next day, we woke up in a barrack, the bare floor covered by women who had nothing to lie on and nothing to cover themselves with. When we ventured outside to relieve ourselves, we encountered the horrors of Bergen-Belsen. Death was everywhere. What we saw were the pitiful *Muselmänner*, emaciated human beings, half naked, with shaven heads, walking to and fro with blank expressions, no longer knowing where they were going.

Everyone was searching for nonexistent food. Our tongues were swollen from lack of water. We were desperately hungry. But there was nothing in Bergen-Belsen: no food was distributed, and the little trickle of water that was there, we were warned not to drink because it was contaminated. Some drank from it, no longer caring.

As soon as we became oriented we started searching around for familiar faces, but they all looked the same. Their heads were like peeled onions, their ribs like an old-fashioned washboard, their eyes deep-set and frightened.

Outside of the camp gate was a ditch with some potatoes covered with straw that were left over from the winter. A large group of hungry women got together and with the sheer weight of their bodies tried to push the wire fence down. Suddenly the gate collapsed and hundreds of women ran out to snatch one or two raw potatoes. At once there were shots, short and sharp, followed by screams. Some of the women fell, others turned around and ran. The guards at the watchtower had their fun!

When I heard that a few prisoners had come from Ghetto Terezín, I started searching for my sister. Walking from barrack to barrack, I called out her name, turned over every dead body I came across, and hoped and feared at the same time that I would find her.

Days turned into nights, and again into days, without my noticing. Every day more and more dead bodies lined the camp, but nobody paid any attention to them or carried them away. Not many SS personnel were visible, there were no *Appells*. Suddenly I realized that we were being left there to die a “natural death.” No shooting, no gas chambers — just left to die, one by one, unless the lice ate us up first.

And then the march of the dead started! An order came that anybody still able to walk had to pick up one of the corpses lying around and carry it to a large ditch far from our camp. You picked up a leg of the corpse and dragged it behind you with what little strength you had left, when suddenly you realized that all you were holding in your hand was a leg. When we got to the mass grave, we pushed the body in and returned for the next one. Some of the survivors, by the time they reached the mass grave, fell in with the corpse they were carrying, unable to pick themselves up any more. This operation went on for days. The clean-up of the camp was ordered by the remaining Germans, who feared the impact the sight of the atrocities would have on the Allies advancing very quickly from Bremen.

At night, we could hear the guns of the advancing armies from Bremen. How much longer could it take before they reached us? How much strength would it take to stay alive until then?

At that point, with my last bit of strength and with an instinctive will to live, I decided to save myself from this nightmare. As darkness neared, I approached the wire fence that separated the camp from the nearby forest. When all became quiet, I dug a hole under the barbed wire and, being very thin by this time, managed to wiggle myself out of the camp. But now what?

It was a very impulsive act; I was alone in the world and had to make a decision about what to do. To go deeper into Germany meant, in my present outfit and with my tattooed arm, laying myself open to immediate recognition by any German I might encounter. Going towards the front was also dangerous at this stage of the war, because I could be shot on the spot if I were caught.

While deliberating my options, I heard several increasingly loud explosions from the direction of Bremen and decided that, if I could already hear the shooting, the Allies could not be far away. I lay there half the night and, before daybreak, started crawling back into the camp through the same hole that I had dug a few hours earlier.

I almost made it, when I felt a very sharp pain in my leg. I did not stop but continued crawling into the camp. When I limped back into the barracks with the acute pain in my leg getting worse, I realized I had been shot by one of the guards in the watchtower, who had probably spotted some movement near the fence. I borrowed a rusty knife from someone, removed the bullet from my leg, stuffed the wound with a rag and lay down on the floor and passed out. From where I took the courage to do this, I don't know. Self-preservation is one of the strongest instincts in a human being.

The next thing I remember is my friend Margit calling me to come out of the barracks quickly. The first tanks of the British army were rolling in. Through a bullhorn came the announcement in many languages, the sweet words we had waited for, for so long: "YOU ARE FREE... YOU ARE FREE... YOU ARE FREE..." That was April 15, 1945.

Bergen-Belsen

The troops that discovered Bergen-Belsen concentration camp were a combat unit led by British Major Dick Williams, advancing on Berlin. They were paralyzed by the spectacle of inhuman depravity that unfolded before their eyes. The British soldiers entering the camp, upon seeing the starved creatures begging for food, out of the goodness of their hearts, gave us everything they had with them: chocolate, cigarettes, and tins of bully beef, which we ate far too quickly in our state of ravenous hunger.

This inadvertently led to the death of many prisoners, whose stomachs were no longer able to hold and digest food. It took several more days before ambulances with medical equipment arrived, while people around us were dying like flies.

The most wonderful gesture the soldiers made was to set up outdoor showers. All of us women threw off our lice infested rags and stood unashamedly naked under the streams of water, never wanting to get out.

Later on, we broke down the barriers between the various camps, most of us searching for family members and friends. We opened the remaining German army stores and took

whatever we found, like a pair of shoes or a soldier's fur lined winter coat that my friend Margit and I fashioned into a bed. We set up an army tent we found in one of the warehouses; having been a member of the scout movement in my hometown, I immediately and skillfully put up the tent, desperate to get out of the overcrowded and lice-infested barracks in which we were being housed.

The scene around us was unreal. We bedded down in the German army tent, with the fur-lined army coat covering the floor, smoked English cigarettes, and relieved ourselves next to the tent, where three dead bodies were our neighbors. Early in the morning, when I looked outside the tent, I could see a couple of little birds drinking dew from the basin-like stomach of one of the female corpses, her glassy eyes turned toward the sky. The bodies were anonymous: no one looked for them or mourned over them.

Slowly, the Allied soldiers tried to put some order into our camp routine. The German guards and SS women whom they had caught were made to clean the camp and pick up the corpses. Typhus was raging throughout the camp and became a danger for anybody entering it. People were dying from disease and exhaustion.

Some remained alive by sheer willpower; others no longer had the strength to go on. Drinking water was brought into the camp and set up so that everybody would have access to it. Hot soup was distributed to all who had the strength to go and get it. Ambulances took all those unable to walk to a makeshift hospital set up by British army medical personnel. A little later the Americans arrived and helped provide care for the former prisoners.

While all this was happening around me, I realized that I had

to memorize this bizarre, surrealistic, Kafkaesque scene that no ordinary person would believe existed in the twentieth century in a world that called itself civilized.

I approached one of the soldiers, an American, and asked him for paper and pencil. All the soldiers were very sympathetic; they tried to be helpful, for even though they had fought through a nightmarish war, what they saw now surpassed in horror anything they had faced before.

I had never kept a diary before and in the world of the camps there was no opportunity for recording events. Even if writing material had been available, we were too exhausted at the end of the day and were only too glad to fall onto our bunks for some rest. Besides, we had no electric light to see by in the evening, nor, after Auschwitz, any possessions whatsoever.

Now it was different; I was finally free. I could preserve the first raw impressions of the events to which I had been a witness by writing them down on a pad of paper. Every day I scribbled out a few pages about life around me. Within a short time, my friend Margit, with whom I shared the tent, became very ill and I went in search of an ambulance. I rode with her to the hospital, where she was diagnosed with typhoid fever. While delirious, she started beating up other patients without knowing what she was doing.

One day I saw a familiar face in the camp, a woman with a boyish haircut wearing a striped uniform. Suddenly I realized that she was one of the SS women who had been guarding us when we were working in Hamburg. She was in love with one of our girls and had shed her SS uniform so as to be with her friend — or was it to save her own life?

Every day I walked through the camp, trying to orient myself, to figure out where I was. The whole day was mine. I

didn't have to work; I was fed but could not eat. I started getting terrible diarrhea and grew weaker from day to day. It began to rain, but my tent withstood the strong winds, while other tents were swept away in the raging storm. My strength continued to wane, I developed a high fever and finally stopped being aware of what was happening around me.

A medic searching for survivors in the camp picked me up and brought me to a hospital by ambulance. There they washed and disinfected me, as I was full of lice, like the rest of the inmates. My weight was down to just 30 kg. I begged them to shave my hair as I was suffering from a terrible itch. The nurses said it was no longer necessary and sprayed DDT all over my body and head. They undressed me and gave me a clean hospital gown.

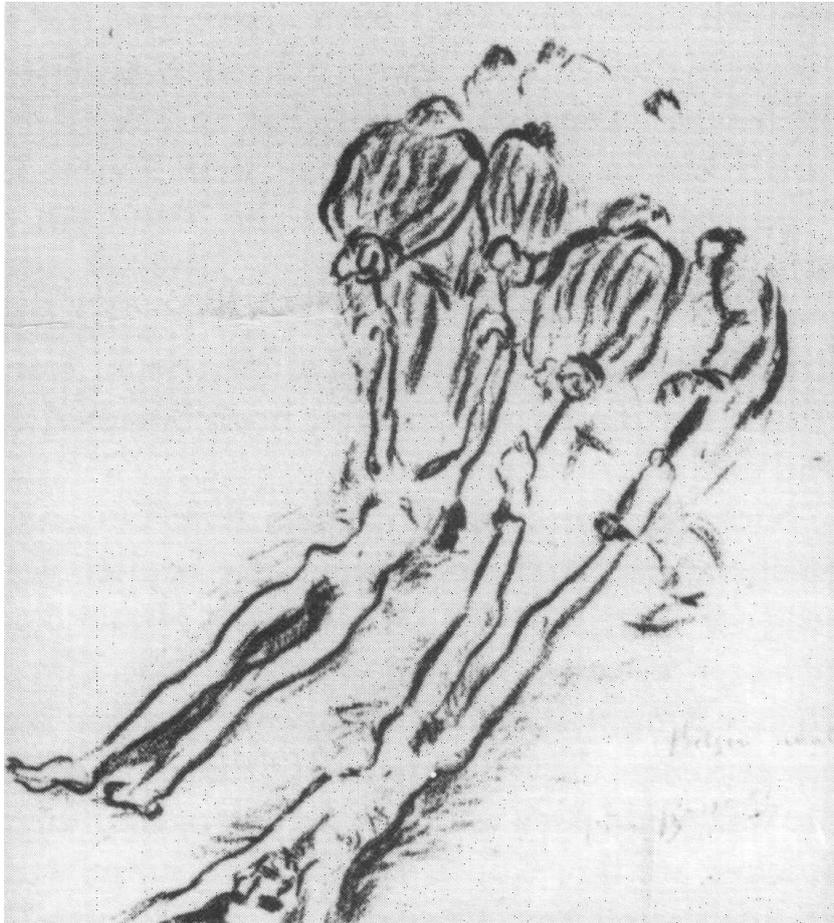
When I was taken to the hospital, the staff had disposed of all my clothing and the meager possessions I had accumulated during the few days since liberation, including the sheets of paper I had filled with my impressions of the last days of Bergen-Belsen. Most of the people taking care of us were nuns; they were kind and devoted, and fought to keep me alive. Apparently, everything I owned, including my diary, had gone up in flames, like the rest of the Belsen camp, which was so badly infested that there was no other way to clean it up.

For many, like Anne Frank, who died in Bergen-Belsen, it had been too late. I lay in the hospital for days, semi-conscious. My luck was that I had contracted typhus while in Terezín and there, for a few months, my mother, a nurse, fought to keep me alive. I had apparently developed immunity to the disease and therefore didn't get infected again.

I remember the day the war ended: May 8, 1945. Lying in the makeshift hospital in Bergen, I heard the roar of guns. A frightening thought went through my mind: the Germans have come

back, this is the end; unbeknown to me, the gunfire was announcing the end of the Second World War. My will to live left me and I turned toward the hospital wall waiting to die.

But those of us who were still alive, while thousands lay dead, no longer having had the strength or the will to live, were now truly free — but were we? And so April 15, 1945, will forever remain engraved in my memory.

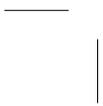


Corpse Removal in Bergen-Belsen before Liberation

Rene Baumer

Part 2

PIECES OF THE
SHATTERED PUZZLE



When Memory Comes...

When I came to England, in January 1946, my uncle, who was a gentle man, a medical doctor and a brilliant scientist, came to receive me at Croydon Airport. Where the passengers descended the ramp of the plane, a hostess was waiting, asking if there was a child aboard the plane that had just landed. She had instructions to receive and take care of a child who arrived alone from Prague.

When I answered to the name she called out, the ground hostess looked at me and thought some mistake in identity must have occurred. There stood a young lady, well dressed, grown up, and very sure of herself.

What a shock this presented to my uncle, who expected a poor, thin, hungry child — a child he remembered from our last meeting at my grandmother's home before the war, in 1938 — ravaged by years in concentration camps.

Nobody realized in those days that we, the survivors, were ravaged in our souls, our emotions, that we were one great pain filling every crevice of our guts. The outside was a camouflage, a protective cover that enabled us to live among normal people.



Had the outside resembled the inside, we would have looked like lepers among the others.

This, of course, presented a problem for my uncle, who didn't know how to cope with the unexpected situation. He was a product of a typical Czech Jewish intellectual family, assimilated to the point where being a Jew was the last thing to play a role in his life, until the day Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia in 1939. He had been caught unprepared, lecturing at Cambridge University at that time, while his wife and child were left in Prague.

While searching for his mother, he found my name as the only member of a large family on the list of Bergen-Belsen survivors. Out of the kindness of his heart he asked me what he could do for me. My answer came without hesitation: "Please get me out of Europe."

As we sat facing each other there at the airport, I pouring out all the horror of the deportations, the terrible suffering the family had been forced to endure, he gently interrupted me and said: "Please don't talk about it when we get home. I don't want my children to know. And you — try to forget."

Life became very difficult for me in his home. In spite of my outside appearance, I was a raped child. I was robbed of my mother and my father, of my home and of the love and warmth to which every child is entitled. I ached with pain and I wanted to talk about it. I wanted to cry and I wanted to scream, and I wanted to be comforted and hugged and understood. Instead I was told to be silent and to forget. FORGET?

◀ *The author upon arrival in England, 1945*

Bread

Walking down the street one morning, I was stopped by the smell of fresh bread. When I looked around to see where it was coming from, my eyes drew me closer to a window display of the most attractive, delicious-looking French breads, croissants, raisin rolls and black and white breads of every imaginable shape: BREAD!

Once bread was the very substance of my life. A small piece of black bread meant another day of remaining alive. When one is very hungry, it isn't luxury one desires, it is that basic piece of bread which dominates the craving to fill the hole in one's stomach. To ease the pain that crawls into every crevice of the body when food is denied for an extended period of time.

How hungry can one get? We can fast on Yom Kippur. We feel the hunger during the day, but we fill the day with prayers, knowing that, at the end of a limited period of time, there will be relief from this temporary discomfort.

Then there is the hunger of the concentration camps, hunger that is continuous, day after day, when one is never full, never satisfied with the rations so meager as to be tormenting, only marginally stilling the obsessive hunger.

And then, there is the hunger of years of food deprivation, when a human being can hardly concentrate on any subject other than how to find a piece of bread to rid himself of that terrible pain hunger causes, pain that becomes an integral part of one's daily life.

There were strange ways we and bread coped.

What is the price of bread? That depends on the market. Today it may be the minimal few cents, pounds or shekels. There were days when bread had value beyond imagination. A diamond for bread? A friendship for a slice of bread? One's body for bread? What is the value of a life when it no longer has the strength to breathe, to think, to function or to enjoy?

A slice of bread could be eaten in the evening, so that the pain would be somewhat relieved and one could fall asleep for a few hours. Or one could keep one's ration of a slice of bread for the whole of the next day, chew on it slowly through a day of hard labor. Or, falling asleep with exhaustion, hide the bread



under one's head, only to wake up finding the treasure gone, stolen by someone else just as hungry.

Hunger is desperation. Hunger is death. A piece of bread will extend life for a day or perhaps a few hours. Gold, money, diamonds — what a laugh! Absurd, worthless, they cannot be eaten!

How can I explain this to my children, while bread is being thrown in the garbage, fed to animals, while everybody tries to eat less bread to keep slim?

I used to have a dream: When this ordeal is over and if I survive it, I want to have ten loaves of bread with me all the time. To see them, to touch them, to nibble on them, forever. That was my vision of paradise. The smell of fresh bread will always bring back these memories.

Murder on Yom Kippur

One sad day in 1943, the 24th of August, an order was received in Ghetto Terezín that all inmates were to remain in their present dwelling places, be it the old army *Kaserne*, large stone barracks, or the overcrowded houses, where twenty to fifty people lived in each room. No one was allowed to look out, even peep from a window, under the threat of severe punishment. Rumors circulated. In fear we asked ourselves: "What now? What new blow have the Germans thought of? What humiliation, what punishment awaited us this time? Another transport to the east? Had somebody succeeded in escaping?"

Suddenly, a column of bedraggled children appeared, hundreds of them between the ages of four to twelve years, holding each other's hands. The older ones helped the small ones, their little bodies moving along in the pouring rain. A column of marching ghosts, with wet rags clinging to their emaciated bodies, accompanied by a large number of SS men.

Were these the enemies of the Third Reich to be so fiercely guarded? The children were led to a building where disinfection and delousing of inmates was performed. Suddenly they started to shout and cry: "Gas! Gas! Gas!" They huddled

together, refusing to be washed or have their wet rags changed for dry clothing. Nobody understood the children's reaction. What kind of children are these? Where did they come from? What are they talking about?

The children, looking like scarecrows, refused to undress. They held on to their dirty clothing, the older ones stepping in front of the young ones, protecting them with their bodies, clutching their hands and comforting those that were crying. Their clothing permeated with lice, their bodies full of sores, these children refused to wash.

In 1943, we, the inmates of Ghetto Terezín, didn't know anything about gas chambers. Locked away, isolated from the outside world, we lived in fear and ignorance of what awaited us once we left the ghetto, advertised by the Germans as "*Die Stadt die Hitler den Juden geschenkt hat*" ("The town which Hitler gave to the Jews").

Prior to the children's arrival, there had been a great deal of rushed work done outside the walls of the ghetto, in a place called *Kreta*. A special group of male inmates, constantly accompanied by SS guards, was putting up wooden barracks for an unknown purpose.

With the ghetto under strict curfew, the best doctors and nurses were picked out from among the inmates of Terezín, all those chosen having worked until then with children of the ghetto in some capacity. They were rounded up and taken outside the ghetto walls to the newly erected barracks to meet these strange children, who had arrived no one knew from where.

Food, clothing, and medicine were immediately delivered to the children, all under the supervision of the SS men. No one was allowed to talk to them. Yet as time went by, the children told their horror stories to the doctors and nurses, who, in time,



Children transport, Terezin 1943

Otto Unger

defying German death threats, smuggled these stories back to the ghetto. Sometimes they hid them in the utensils that brought their food to and from the ghetto.

The children came from Bialystok Ghetto in Poland. They spoke Polish and Yiddish. They were terribly frightened and in a state of shock.

Our family had been sent to Terezín a year and a half earlier. We were a dwindling group. My father was sent away in a transport in 1942, as were my grandmother and aunt and many of my friends. My grandfather, knowing he was too old to survive the daily suffering, had taken his life. Only my mother, sister and I remained.

At Terezín, my mother worked as a nurse in a home for babies. She loved children and felt a deep need to care for those little creatures who could not understand why they did not receive enough food to still their hunger.

One day, when I returned from work, my sister told me that

our mother had been moved outside the ghetto that morning to work in the children's barracks. The move was so sudden that she had to leave her belongings behind and could take only a few things with her.

Only one thought then occupied my mind. How could I get to see mother again?

Through a friend who was in charge of agriculture, I arranged to be included in a work crew growing vegetables for the Germans in the fields outside the ghetto. The first day at work I observed the guards' movements and planned how to approach the children's barracks, which stood behind barbed wire on a hill separated from us by a moat. The next day, wearing a green sweater and a borrowed green skirt for camouflage, I watched the children's compound while I worked, until I saw my mother come out of the barracks. I waited until the guards were not looking my way, crawled to a clump of greenery facing the barracks and called out: "Mother, Mother!"

She could not see me. I called again: "It's me, Hana." She turned in the direction of my voice and I asked how she was and what the children had told her.

"Terrible, terrible," she answered, "I cannot talk."

As she sat down on the grass in her white nurse's outfit, the children around her, her black hair framing her face, she was beautiful. That is the picture I carry of her in my mind. A guard drew near, and I crawled back to my workplace without being discovered.

And then, one day, they all disappeared in the same way they had arrived. On the morning of October 5, 1943, the wooden barracks at *Kreta* were empty. Again, through the ghetto grapevine, we, the inmates, learned that all the doctors and nurses, on leaving the ghetto for an exchange deal, had

been ordered to remove the yellow stars Jews wore on every garment and had been forced to sign a pledge of silence as to what they had seen and lived through; they were on their way to Switzerland to be exchanged through the Red Cross for German prisoners of war.

From that moment my spirits soared. No matter how hard my life became, I believed that my mother was alive, in some safe place, and that we would be reunited after the war.

Six months later, I was transported with five thousand others to Auschwitz. None of us was prepared for the visual horror and harsh treatment that greeted us there. When we asked what happened to the transports that arrived before us, there was a standard answer: "Up the chimney." I consoled myself that at least my mother wasn't there to witness the horror of Auschwitz.

Unknown to us, the prisoners of the ghetto, the sentence had already been pronounced for the Bialystok children and their caretakers by their murderers. Adolf Eichmann, influenced by strong protestation from Haj Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem (the Muslim religious leader of Palestine), that these Jewish children would soon be adults reinforcing the Palestine Jewish community, cancelled the entire operation on express orders from SS *Reichsführer* Himmler.

And so, on Erev Yom Kippur, October 7, 1943, 1,196 children from Bialystok Ghetto in Poland, and fifty-three doctors and nurses from the Terezín Ghetto in Czechoslovakia, who accompanied them to the end, said their last *Shema* in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Documentation

My quest to find out what happened to my mother began the day I was liberated from Bergen-Belsen. The search took me to the files and archives of the Red Cross, the United Nations, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Joint Distribution Committee, and Yad Vashem, and to information centers in the U.S., Europe and Israel. I also conducted many long interviews and arduous correspondence.

As soon as I returned to Prague, I began sending telegrams to the Red Cross in Switzerland, England, and Sweden. The answer was always in the negative. They had never heard of a children's transport from Terezín. For some years, this remained the case. I had witnessed the arrival in Terezín of a large number of children and had seen them being taken away after six weeks of intensive rehabilitation, but I had no evidence to prove it had actually happened.

This is the sum of the evidence I have been able to gather over the years.

1. Finally, material about Terezín began appearing in publications. The first confirmation came in 1953 in a book by

Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Terezín*, which mentioned a transport of children accompanied by doctors and nurses, from Terezín to Auschwitz. Lederer wrote: "The Germans had pretended that this transport would be sent to Switzerland, but according to the evidence given by prisoners working in Oswiecim, the entire transport was taken from the station to the gas chambers. Survivors — 0 (zero)."

Aside from an overstatement of the number of children — Lederer put it at 1,500 — the essence of the story appeared in those few lines. The issue of German motivation heightened the questions in my mind.

2. Two years later, H. G. Adler, in his book *Theresienstadt 1941-1945* (published by J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1955), pages 54 and 151, wrote: "1,200 children were brought to Theresienstadt on August 24, 1943. On Erev Yom Kippur, October 7, 1943, transport Dn/a, consisting of 1,196 children and 53 adults, was sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival in Auschwitz. The children were originally from Bialystok. Their parents were shot during an uprising in the Ghetto in August 1943."

As the facts about the transport became more and more precise, I looked further for an explanation of what the Germans intended to do with the children and why the deal fell through. Eventually I accumulated details that fit together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

3. On the tenth anniversary of the uprising in Ghetto Bialystok, historian Berl Mark wrote in *Biuletyn Lidovskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, published by Kwiecień-Wrzesień, 1953, no. 2-3: "Ten years have passed since the last of the Jewish people's tragedy in Bialystok. On August 16, 1943,

Hitler's murderers entered the Bialystok Ghetto and with the help of tanks and artillery started the ultimate annihilation of the remaining 40,000 Jews. The most refined bestiality was applied to the elderly, to the sick, and to the children.

"Babies were killed on the spot by crushing their skulls on the walls. A transport of approximately 2,000 older children was sent to Theresienstadt Ghetto, where murderers in white coats used the children for medical experiments and their blood for transfusion to wounded German soldiers."

4. *Zeszyty Oswiecimske*, published by the museum in Auschwitz, reports: "Copies of handwritten lists of transports arriving in Auschwitz were found. One of the entries reads: '7.10.1943 RSHA transport brought from Ghetto Terezin camp, 1,196 children together with doctors and nurses. They were disposed of on the same day in the gas chambers.'"
5. Josef Lanik, prisoner no. 29162, who escaped from Auschwitz to warn the world, wrote in his book, *Co Dante nevidel* (What Dante didn't see), how he marked down all transports that arrived and were exterminated in Auschwitz, the number of people, and exact date of gassing. In his records he also mentions: 7 October 1943, gassed 1,200 children and about 50 accompanying adults that were brought into the camp. (The book was published by Osveta-Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in 1964.)
6. The testimony of Dr. Tuvia Citron, Yad Vashem Archives, M.M./B 165:

"On Tuesday, August 17, 1943, the Bialystok

Ghetto was in flames after an uprising was started by the Jews who were being deported out of the Ghetto to their annihilation in Treblinka. The SS selected 2,000 children, tearing them away from their parents. The Sienkiewicz Gymnasium, located opposite the Toz Hospital, was emptied and the children were brought in on orders of two Gestapo men, Friedel and his assistant Gibus.

"The wife of the head of the Judenrat, Mrs. Barash, brought me an order to prepare the gymnasium. I was in charge of the children for the next two days. Messrs. Bernstein and Mansach were also with the children.

"That same night the Germans began shooting into the Ghetto, including the building where the children were located. The bullets penetrated the windows of the building, hitting the children standing nearby. Many children were wounded, some were killed.

"On August 19, the situation changed. Dr. Katznelson, a member of the Jewish council in Bialystok, replaced me. Mrs. Sprung, secretary of the Jewish council, and a few women were put in charge of the children. All contact between the Ghetto inmates and the children ceased.

"On Friday, August 20, 1943, after the Germans suppressed the uprising, the children were taken in trains out of Bialystok."

ABTRANSPORT Dn/a

5. 10. 1943

"Besondere Dienstleistungen"
aus Theresienstadt abgereist am 5. Oktober 1943.

Lfd. Nr.	Name und Vorname	Trsp.Nr.	Geb.Dat.
1	✓ Bachricht Blanka	741/AAF	25. 4. 1913
2	✓ Beck Milada	303/X	24. 3. 1890
3	✓ Bienenfeld Edith	473/Ck	9. 7. 1908
4	✓ Bickhardt Käthe S.	104-XII/3	25. 3. 1929
5	✓ Blumenthal Dr. Leo I.	13529-I/93	8. 1. 1895
6	✓ David Ottilie	643/AAW	29. 10. 1883
7	✓ Fischer Martha	830/L	17. 6. 1910
8	✓ Freundenthal Dr. Hans	12-XI/3	13. 8. 1898
9	✓ Freund Ida S.	325-IV/11	11. 3. 1904
10	✓ Gach Dr. Leo	936/AAU	25. 12. 1891
11	✓ Grim Ernestine Marie	755/U	13. 6. 1916
12	✓ Heller Robert	892/Cv	12. 6. 1908
13	✓ Hirsch Elisabeth	48/Bh	23. 10. 1910
14	✓ Hirsch Paula S.	13365-I/98	20. 8. 1921
15	✓ Hirschel Ruth Marianne S.	12-IX/6	31. 1. 1922
16	✓ Homski Mudr. Schmelz I.	509/Bg	25. 7. 1904
17	✓ Jensen Gertrude Marie Hedwig	979/AAI	31. 3. 1907
18	✓ Jonas Anneliese S.	13-XI/3	15. 6. 1908
19	✓ Klement Helene	992/AAI	14. 11. 1905
20	✓ Kohn Käthe S.	579-IV/12	23. 11. 1910
21	✓ Kreitzstein Adolf	217/Ad	24. 12. 1912
22	✓ Kubie Mudr. Alfred	317/Co	14. 3. 1892
23	✓ Landsberg Sofie Henny	258-II/26	8. 4. 1920
24	✓ Levy Ella	608/AAU	9. 9. 1911
25	✓ Lustig Marie	9/AAU	16. 4. 1902
26	✓ Mergolius Mudr. Rudolf	650/Ch	13. 11. 1905
27	✓ Meissner Kurt Salomon	155/De	23. 5. 1913
28	✓ Menozer Adolf I.	995-IV/11	18. 4. 1917
29	✓ Moldovan Lazar	47/Dh	26. 11. 1919
30	✓ Neuberger Esther / Erna / S.	804-XII/3	6. 7. 1921
31	✓ Pápa Ella	692/Ck	15. 6. 1891
32	✓ Pollatschek Marta S.	1203-IV/12	17. 2. 1907
33	✓ Reich Mudr. Walter	369/Co	18. 5. 1911
34	✓ Reinwald Emilie	702/AAU	7. 5. 1904
35	✓ Rosenzweig Etká S.	11-IV/12	3. 6. 1897
36	✓ Saxl Anna	355/Cd	18. 4. 1910
37	✓ Saxl Marie	356/od	28. 5. 1912
38	✓ Sinek Vlasta	143/Y	26. 1. 1895
39	✓ Sonnenschein Therese	427/AAU	14. 7. 1899
40	✓ Sulik Anna	308/Ck	7. 7. 1896
41	✓ Szanto Ernst I.	856-IV/12	21. 10. 1904
42	✓ Szanto Wilhelm I.	855-IV/12	20. 9. 1916
43	✓ Schauer Leo S.	858-IV/12	29. 7. 1904
44	✓ Schluederer Franziska	922/AAU	10. 7. 1906
45	✓ Schwenk Dr. Günther I.	7638-I/65	14. 10. 1895
46	✓ Stoerk Ilse Joh. S.	330-IV/11	13. 5. 1910
47	✓ Tiedler Gertrude	325/AAU	12. 11. 1902

7. The testimony of Andrew Steiner, architect-engineer from Tatranska Lomnice, Slovakia, which I found at the YIVO Institute in New York City and in Yad Vashem archives M5-165, in Jerusalem:

“I was negotiating with the German Adviser for Jewish Affairs at the Slovak government, SS Hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny, member of the German embassy in Bratislava. I was representing Jewish interests and as such was in constant contact with respective places in Switzerland and in Palestine...

“I suggested his [Wisliceny’s] help for saving Jewish children from Poland. At first his reply was negative... I persisted until he promised to present the situation to Eichmann. Several weeks later he informed me that an action of this kind could be carried out in principle, providing we were prepared to pay a considerable sum in dollars and deliver certain consignments from Slovakia to Germany.”

Steiner relates that he promised to meet all conditions in return for the release of a thousand Jewish children to Palestine via Switzerland, taking it for granted that overseas Jewish sources would provide the dollars needed.

“The terrible disappointment cannot be described when we received the notification by the American Joint and by other Jewish agencies... that due to patriotic reasons they were unable to support... a plan to deliver large sums

of dollars that would be equal to direct aid to the enemy.”

According to Steiner, instead of notifying the Germans that the deal was falling through, he decided to stall in the hope of obtaining the money. He asked for proof of German readiness. An agreement was reached: an initial payment to the Germans when the children arrived at Terezín, the balance payable when the children entered Switzerland. Steiner added:

“One day Wisliceny informed me... that the children had arrived in Terezín and asked me for the first payment... Unfortunately, an ill-applied sense of “correctness” won out with our foreign partners and... the dollar payment was denied. I had no choice but to notify Wisliceny... whereupon the children, after several weeks’ stay in Terezín — instead of traveling to beautiful Switzerland and to free Palestine — were sent to Auschwitz and into the gas chambers.”

The testimony seems straightforward: no money, no children.

8. The testimony of Dieter Wisliceny on July 15, 1946, Nuremberg trial documents, Yad Vashem, states:

“[A]t the end of 1942 I tried, at the request of a group, to persuade Eichmann and Himmler to stop exterminating European Jewry and to allow some Jewish children to emigrate to Palestine.

“I had already discussed with representatives

of the Joint in Bratislava the possibility of allowing adults to accompany the transport and we even discussed the number. Later some of the children arrived in Theresienstadt.

“Eichmann then told me to report to him in Berlin. He told me there the matter had come to the notice of the Mufti through his intelligence service in Palestine. Haj Amin el-Husseini, the grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who spent the war in Berlin as guest of the Germans, had protested to Himmler against the scheme, giving as his reason that these Jewish children would be



The Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el Husseini, meeting with Hitler in Berlin to decide the fate of Jewish children

adults in a few years and would reinforce the Palestine Jewish community.

“According to Eichmann, Himmler cancelled the entire operation and even issued an order banning any future occurrences of this nature, so that no Jew would be allowed to go to Palestine from areas under German control.”

Another possibility has been suggested. General Erwin Rommel, after the defeat of his Africa Corps at El Alamein in 1943, returned to Germany and asked Hitler’s approval for a deal to raise the morale of his troops by ransoming thousands of German soldiers captured by the British. The *quid pro quo* would have been Jews, particularly Jewish children, for German soldiers. Far-fetched as this may seem, it could tie in with the Mufti’s learning of the Theresienstadt transport.

9. In an old age home in Israel, I interviewed eighty-seven-year-old Hadassah Lefkowitz, who as secretary to the head of the Bialystok *Judenrat* had been chosen to accompany the children out of Bialystok. Although she wrote an article about this episode in a Yiddish publication in 1948, no one had spoken to her about this incident until our meeting on October 23, 1987.

Hoping to save one four-year-old girl, she pretended to be her mother. The Germans discovered the pretext, and instead of letting the child off the train at Terezín, sent them both to Auschwitz, where the little girl was immediately gassed. Because she knew five languages, Hadassah was put to work in an office at Auschwitz. Six weeks after her arrival she saw an index card noting that a transport of

children had been given “special treatment.” She knew that the Bialystok children were no more.

10. The Yad Vashem archives received material concerning Ghetto Terezín. Among the documents I identified a list, *Abtransport Dn/a 5.10.1943* (5 October 1943), complete with the names of 1,196 children, giving the date, place of birth, and names of both parents. Some families had three or four children in the transport. The oldest was fourteen and the youngest four years old. Mother’s name was among the fifty-three adults accompanying the children, making it clear that this was the list of the Bialystok children.

The Holocaust and Unfinished Mourning

The Holocaust and its history, no matter how often researched, remains a well of never ending discoveries. It was this constant search into the fate of the Bialystok children, as new facts came to light in the course of many years, that directed my attention to the problem of mourning.

My research paper on the fate of the Bialystok children tells about the murder on Yom Kippur, the holiest of the Jewish Holy Days, of 1,196 children from the Bialystok Ghetto in Poland. These children were brought by train from Bialystok to Terezín for six short weeks to await an exchange that never materialized. Instead they were sent with fifty-three accompanying adults from Terezín Ghetto to their death in Auschwitz. The paper about the fate of the Bialystok children was presented at the “Remembering for the Future” conference in Oxford, England, in 1988.

After the initial publication of my book, I received some letters from children of those accompanying adults, their murdered parents.

These children never entered the camps and were never subjected to persecution. Yet, all of them had this yearning to express their pain, sorrow, loss and personal bereavement.

One day I received a call from Yad Vashem that a young English doctor was inquiring about the fate of the Bialystok transport. Dr. Ivor Gach came from England to Israel in search of his father's fate. He knew that his father was interned in Terezín Ghetto. He knew his father was a part of some children's transport, and he knew that his father didn't return.

After reading my book, *From Kolin to Jerusalem*, he realized that the story of the Bialystok children is his father's story. When we eventually met, I gave him my research paper to read, with all the pertinent documentation and the copy of the Dn *Abtransport* list, with his father's name and date of death.

Ivor came from a mixed marriage. His father divorced his mother to save his son. Ivor was brought up not knowing his father's fate. All he had was a photograph of his father and the last letter his father managed to smuggle out of the ghetto, prior to his departure to an unknown destination. The letter hinted that he had been separated from the rest of the Terezín inmates, was leaving the ghetto for a faraway place, and asked that his son say a prayer for him. (In the Jewish religion, a son says *Kaddish* for his deceased father).

Another letter was sent to Gefen, my publisher in Israel, from Prague, the Czech Republic. It was written by Hana Fousova, who had received my book from her son as a Christmas present, because the title in Czech, *From Kolin to Jerusalem*, caught his eye. His grandmother, Hana Fousova's mother, came from Kolín and therefore he thought the book might be of interest to his mother, without realizing the nature of its contents.

And these are Hana's words:

"When I was eight years old, I woke up one morning and mother was gone. My father, who was not Jewish, died in 1940. Therefore my mother was no longer protected, according to the Nuremberg Laws, by a mixed marriage. She was suddenly called up for deportation in the Kolín transport to Terezín in June 1942."

Hana was left with the non-Jewish grandparents. She writes: "I was only eight years old when mother disappeared. I received a letter from her, prior to her departure from Terezín, a very optimistic one, telling me not to worry, that she is leaving for Switzerland. This letter was smuggled out by a Czech policeman, and because of the fear at that time that the courier might be discovered, my grandmother always burned all evidence."

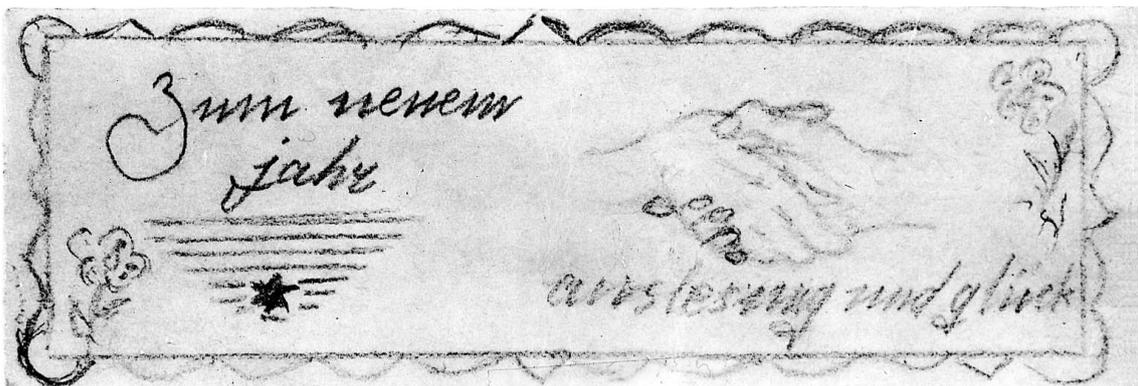
In her last letter the mother, Emilie Reinwald, included a doll made by the Bialystok children and a greeting card for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, that one of the children, Mojzse Treszczanski, whose name I traced on the transport list of the Bialystok children, wrote and decorated for her. It is written in Yiddish, probably the only language they had in common, with grammatical mistakes. Hana hid this little card with good wishes from her grandmother, and today it is **the only known evidence** that remains of the 1,196 children who met their death in the Auschwitz gas chambers on the eve of Yom Kippur 1943.

In this last letter the mother sends warm greetings to her daughter for her ninth birthday and regrets that it is going to be

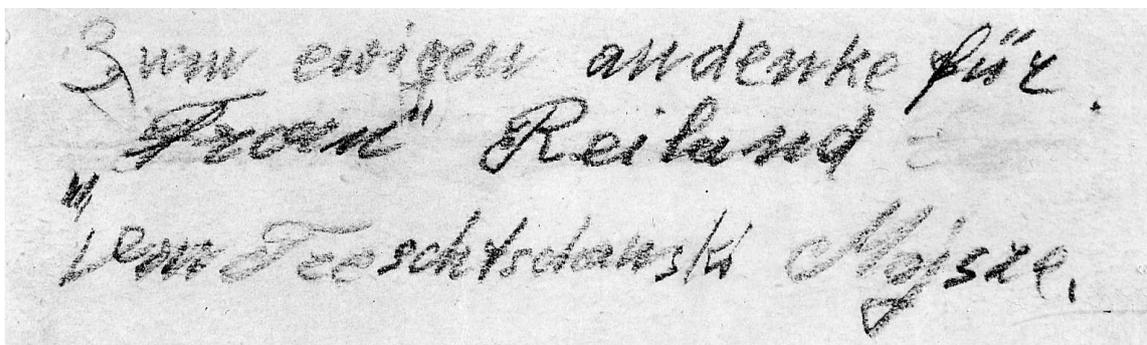
without mother or father. It is interesting to note that she asked her daughter to go to the cemetery and lay a bunch of flowers on her father's grave to observe a *jahrzeit*, in spite of the fact that the father was not Jewish.

After the Velvet Revolution in Prague, when my book was published in Czech, I received a call from the daughters of Otilia David, sister of Franz Kafka, the famous Czech writer.

Helena Rumpoldova and Vera Soudkova were two other children who did not know their mother's fate. Otilia David insisted on divorcing her husband so that he would save their



New year greeting made in Terezin by one of the Bialystok children for Emily Reinwald in 1943



two daughters, Helena and Vera, from deportation to Terezín. Otilia David became one of the nurses who accompanied the children's transport.

When I asked Helena what she did when her mother was deported, she replied: "I prayed and cried for a year." For forty years, until the publication of my book in Czech, they didn't know their mother's fate.

What I found was common to all these children whose parents were murdered was that it left an open wound all these years, a wound that had no chance to heal. There was no finality, no precise knowledge, no place of burial, and no answers to their questions.

Because these children were brought up outside the Jewish community, they lacked the ability to make contact with the community of survivors, who might have helped them to discover at least some facts, which in any case — in the turmoil of the war's aftermath and lack of adequate communications, was difficult at best.

Now these children, whose parents were murdered, have been able to begin the process of mourning by having a definite date, place, and other information about what happened. They finally found something tangible to relate to.

What is the procedure that takes place when someone dies in the family? In the Jewish religion, we have the *shivah*, which means seven days of mourning. The custom is for the bereaved family to take time off from its daily routine and, after the funeral, to sit together, usually in the home of the deceased, wearing soft shoes and ripped clothing, talking about the person who has just died, comforting each other, crying together, saying prayers. Friends, colleagues, neighbors come to participate in the family's sorrow and express their

sympathy. They offer help, bring food, so the bereaved can devote all their time to mourning, contemplation, and eventually relief.

After a week, the family gets up and returns to the routine of daily life. There was pain, there was a funeral, a grave, a time to mourn and remember, and then life continues. Each year on the anniversary of the death, *jahrzeit*, a day of remembering, is observed by lighting a candle, visiting the grave, and reciting a special prayer for the dead, the "*Kaddish*."

The situation with the bereaved of Holocaust victims is entirely different. People were killed, murdered, gassed, tortured to death, shot. There were no bodies, no funerals, no graves, no prayers. A total void filled with pain and no mourning period.

Here are some examples of how survivors mourn the dead:

1. Sometimes when a survivor is attending a funeral, not even of a close friend or relative, he will cry, not for the person being buried but for those who were never buried.
2. When visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau some years ago, three survivors crawled inside the gas chambers, as macabre as it may sound, to scrape some ashes to take home with them.
3. On the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, thousands of survivors dragged themselves to Auschwitz, to this horrible, cursed place, to mourn, to cry, to remember — for they have no other place to go.
4. In the Jewish religious calendar, there is a special date for those whose date of death is not known.



Emilie Reinwald



Marie Lustig



Dr. Leo Gach



Ota Kafka-David

Because of my research, the following people have found solace in establishing the date and place of their parents' death.

- Ivor Gach, son of Dr. Leo Gach, b. 25.12.1891.
- Vera and Helena David, daughters of Otilia Kafka-David, b. 21.6.1906.
- Hana Fousova, daughter of Emilie Reinwald, b. 7.6.1904.
- Irena and Hana Lustig, daughters of Marie Lustig, b. 16.4.1902.

Masha

A Postscript to the Story of the Bialystok Children

(From an article that appeared in the Jewish Chronicle, London, September 17, 1999)

In the course of all the years since the publication of my research and my book, I have never succeeded in finding even one living parent or adult relative of the children from this transport. Then one day I met someone who, after reading my book, *Fragments of Memory*, told me of a woman whose child was deported from Bialystok in 1943. Not wanting to leave any stone unturned I reluctantly agreed to meet Masha, a meeting that was bound to be terribly emotional for both of us, and so it was.

One of the most difficult dilemmas faced by those who experienced the Holocaust was how to save their children. It was not in the Jewish tradition to give up one's most precious gifts, to sacrifice offspring who represented the continuity of our history. But in August 1943, there wasn't much time for deliberation as the ghetto was in turmoil and a decision had to be taken, on the off chance that the children might be saved.

So it was in Masha's case. And she has provided me with the latest piece of the puzzle concerning the fate of the Bialystok children, which ended tragically in Auschwitz. Masha's testimony confirms that, after the uprising in August 1943, the ghetto inhabitants were shipped off to Treblinka. Before the deportation got under way, negotiations were in progress to exchange two thousand Jewish children for German prisoners of war with the help of the Red Cross. But, by that time, few children were still alive, except in the Bialystok Ghetto.

The Germans included three families with valid Palestinian visas in the transport. That gave hope to parents who — albeit reluctantly and with heart-rending doubts — let their children go. No one knew the exact destination of the transport, but the Gestapo hinted that this lucky group would be likely to survive.

I listened to Masha's story and started to inspect page after page of the *Abtransport* list Dn/a dated October 5, 1943. On page 14, beside number 748, I found the name Deborah K., born 1937, to Naum and Masha, in Bialystok.

Masha survived the camps; her husband, a young doctor, perished. She kept silent about her past and her suffering. My search allowed her to discover her daughter's fate



Masha

and the date of her death, but the pain resulting from her agonizing decision will stay with her forever.

The photograph of Deborah reproduced here is **the only one known** of any of the 1,196 children who perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz on Erev Yom Kippur, 1943.

Abtransport Dn/a "Besondere Dienstleistungen" aus Theresienstadt abgereist am 5. Oktober 1943.						
Lfd. Nr.	Name und Vorname	Trsp.Nr.	Geb.Dat.			
701	Kas. Julak	1933	Grodno	Fajwel	Rywa	
702	Bozentel Szmael	1935	Bialystok	Szaja	Sora	
703	Stolarz Chana	1932	Sokolow	Izrael	Rocheł	
704	Sykarewicz Fejga	1932	Bialystok	Chackiel	Bluma	
705	" Wolf	1935	"	"	"	
706	Suraski Isser	1932	"	Icchok	Pesza	
707	Nowik Hela	1932	"	Wolf	Perla	
708	Notowicz Sonia	1934	"	Dawid	Zysla	
709	Idrycki Sonia	1932	"	Lejb	Chajke	
710	" Zelta	1934	"	"	"	
711	Robotnik Brocha	1935	"	Berl	Sora	
712	" Rachmiel	1935	"	"	"	
713	Krawiecki Berl	1934	"	Ary	Luba	
714	Braun Icchok	1932	Grodno	Berl	Dora	
715	Kantonist Chaim	1932	Bialystok	Ruwin	Szejkin	
716	" Abrasza	1933	"	"	"	
717	Goelman Dasza	1932	"	Benjamin	Sara	
718	Furman Enach	1932	"	Berek	Nachema	
719	Oguszewicz Doba	1932	"	Eli	Szyfra	
720	" Gedale	1934	"	"	"	
721	Myszkowski Chone	1931	"	Daniel	Rejzla	
722	" Fania	1932	"	"	"	
723	Mai strowski Rachel	1932	"	Dawid	Chane	
724	Szymonowicz Luba	1932	"	Szepiel	Elka	
725	" Jankiel	1934	"	"	"	
726	Kaplan Chana	1936	"	Chaim	Chajka	
727	Szychman Rafael	1932	"	Mich	Idza	
728	Abel Fania	1931	"	Szyja	Perla	
729	Siedziowska Dora	1933	"	Gdale	Ida	
730	Koplowicz Pola	1932	"	Jakob	Ida	
731	" Mordche	1933	"	"	"	
732	Surawski Mordche	1935	"	Jankiel	Bobe	
733	Zajdewkier Szymon	1933	"	Izrael	Sara	
734	Kogen Myjesz	1931	"	Jankiel	Bela	
735	Dawinski Jankiel	1931	"	Nochim	Chajka	
736	Starowlanski Abram	1931	"	Jakob	Jenta	
737	" Czerna	1931	"	"	"	
738	Skrande Cal el	1935	"	Fajwel	Elka	
739	" Mejsze	1933	"	"	"	
740	Treszczenski Jankiel	1931	"	Abram	Dyna	
741	Szapiro Chona	1932	"	Kusyel	Chana	
742	Szuster Finie	1936	"	Mojsze	Chana	
743	Kaczerowicz Celel	1933	"	Josef	Perla	
744	Szor Dawid Dawid	1933	"	Jakob	Cyla	
745	Myszkowski Zelik	1932	"	Fajwel	Matla	
746	" Jankiel	1934	"	"	"	
747	Sybiński Sara	1936	"	Wolf	Fredka	
748	Klementyński Debora	1937	"	Naum	Masza	
749	Sulkes Miriel	1933	"	Icchok	Ryska	
750	Okon Benjamin	1933	"	Mejer	Ester	

No Stars for Jewish Heroes

The saga of yet another unsung Jewish hero was brought to a close when, after much research and many inquiries, I received an official letter from the Czech Ministry of Defense, announcing that Capt. Arnost Heller-Horak, my mother's brother, who fell in the Battle of Dukla Pass on the Polish-Slovak border in November 1944, had been posthumously promoted to the rank of major, fifty-five years after the event.

It all began in 1938, when, as a young captain in the Czech army, Arnost wanted to fight and defend his country against the Germans. That army was prevented from going to battle by the ill-fated agreement between Mr. Neville Chamberlain and Mr. Adolf Hitler. The rest is history.

To save her only son from the disaster closing in on us following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, my grandmother bribed the Germans for his safe passage to Palestine. At the time, leaving the country was otherwise impossible.

Arnost and a group of Jewish men, most of them young officers from the now-defunct Czech army, left Prague for Vienna on September 2, 1940. As Vienna was already full of Nazis, they immediately departed for Hungary. From Budapest they went



Captian Arnost Heller-Horak in Palestine

to Yugoslavia, and on September 6, they left Belgrade bound for Russe (Bulgaria). From there they sailed along the Danube to the open sea on a ship called the *Pencho*, full of hope of reaching freedom and ready to fight for that freedom at every opportunity.

In the Bosphorus they boarded a rust bucket of a vessel, the *Milos*, which was to take them on a long journey through waters swarming with German submarines, past Istanbul, the Dardanelles, Athens, Piraeus, Crete, and on to Cyprus.

As soon as they escaped the clutches of the Germans, the men held a meeting and sent a cable to the British Embassy in Bucharest, declaring that they were willing to fight the enemy. In a manifesto dated September 18, sent to Dr. Eduard Beneš, president of the Czech Government-in-Exile in London, this group of Jewish soldiers pledged to fight in any Czech army that might be formed.

They arrived in Palestine nearly three months later, where their hopes of joining the anti-fascist forces were dashed by the policies of the British White Paper. After being forcibly transferred to the *Patria* for deportation back to Europe, they resisted and were grossly mistreated by the British police, soldiers and guards. (This is well documented in Munia M. Mardor's book, *Hagana*). The *Patria*, a French ship seized by the British Royal Navy after the fall of France, was now to carry nineteen hundred immigrants from the shores of the Promised Land back to Hitler's inferno.

Survivors of the episode related that the Hagana, with the help of a group of Czech officers on the ship, planted a small explosive that was supposed to disable the *Patria* and prevent her from leaving port. Unfortunately, the explosion was more devastating than planned, and the *Patria* sank to the bottom of

the sea with 250 passengers aboard on November 25, 1940. Fourteen of the Czech soldiers lost their lives. Arnost swam ashore.

That same day, upon direct orders from Whitehall, the surviving Czech officers were transferred to the Atlit detention camp, where they languished for nine months before being released to join the Eleventh Czech Infantry in Palestine. The other detainees were deported to Mauritius.

For eighteen months, the soldiers trained in Palestine and Egypt. They fought in Syria, Libya, and Tobruk, where Czech Jewish soldiers suffered their first casualties. In May 1942, by order of the Czech Military Mission, the Eleventh Battalion was disbanded and reorganized as a special unit under Colonel Karel Klapalek.

In 1943, the unit sailed through the Mediterranean and the Straits of Gibraltar to the Atlantic Ocean and on to England for further training. When a call came from Czech General Svoboda, commander of the Third Army, for reinforcements of men and officers for the forthcoming invasion of Czechoslovakia from the eastern front, Arnost was among the first officers who volunteered.

News of the annihilation of the Jews in Europe had been trickling in through various publications and broadcasts. Arnost never received any news of his family.

In London, on February 24, 1944, he was issued a new passport, under a new name, Captain Arnost Horak. Some sources say that this was done as a precaution in case a Jew fell into the hands of the enemy; other sources intimated that Jewish names were changed to censor information about the uncommonly high percentage of Jews who served in the Czech combat units and air force.

This group of well-trained officers arrived in Russia (via Iran) from Britain on October 12, 1944, and was immediately sent to the front lines. In Dr. Erich Kulka's book, *Jews in the Czech Army*, a soldier of the Third Czech Brigade, in which Arnost was a commander, described the situation: "The soldiers are physically exhausted; the unit has been in battle seven days without a rest, attacking three times a day, while constantly under fire. Soldiers in the front lines don't get a chance to sleep and are at the end of their endurance. The new officers, who came from completely different circumstances, didn't have time to size up the situation, knew nothing about the morale of the fighting men, of the strategy of the battle, and were even unfamiliar with the weapons being used when they were put in charge of the fighting units and sent to the front lines."

Another member of the force, Ancerl Feierwerger, testified: "From my unit, twenty men were killed immediately. Our protest that we had no cover was disregarded and we got orders to enter unprotected terrain. Only when half the unit was killed, were we allowed to retreat. In spite of the fact that Czech and Russian commanders were aware of the terrible situation, they forced us into the slaughter without considering losses.

"We had the feeling that the Russian command wanted to get rid of us before we reached Czechoslovakia. And the tactics of unnecessary losses continued until the Polish-Slovak border was conquered. We bled to death at Dukla..."

The commander in charge, General Klapalek, wrote in his memoirs: "...it was in the woods under a terrible downpour in the early morning fog; it was a long and tiring climb; Captain Arnost Heller saved my life by acting as a shield and taking the full force of the grenade..."

Arnost Heller-Horak was only one of 1,100 Jewish soldiers

who gave their lives in the Battle of Dukla Pass. Fifty-five years later, I made a pilgrimage to Dukla. At the cemetery, I searched in vain for the grave of Captain Horak. Finally I found his name on one of the common graves. There were many Jewish names, but not a single Star of David. Only crosses marked the graves...



Captian Horak's Grave in Dukla Pass

In Memory of Richard Glazar

My father, whose family lived comfortably in one of the smaller towns in Czechoslovakia, had only one sister, a beautiful girl named Olga. Olga was married very young to a handsome man named Goldschmid. They had an only son, Richard, whom everybody adored, especially my father, who had only daughters. When Olga's marriage didn't work out, she got divorced, moved to Prague and opened a business to support herself. Richard was sent to Kolín, to our grandparents, who lived on father's farm, in the small house he built for them adjacent to our home.

Richard, my sister Irene and I grew up together. We rolled in the hay when it was brought from the fields, chased the hens — snatching their eggs as soon as they were laid — and skated in winter and swam in summer in the Labe (Elbe) River that runs through the town. We milked the goats, teased each other, laughed together, and became the closest of friends.

Aunt Olga remarried a couple of years later and Richard moved to Prague to live with a new father, Quido Bergman — a cousin of Professor Hugo Bergman — and his two stepbrothers. With a newly acquired comfortable life, Richard received the

best education available. He studied several languages, German, French, Latin, and later English, as well as astronomy, geography, history, mathematics, and music. He became a champion tennis and hockey player, enjoying the freedom of growing up in one of the most democratic countries in Europe, in the prosperous and liberal atmosphere in which Czech Jews lived.

In 1937 our grandmother died on the same day as President Masaryk, and we, her grandchildren, felt a double loss and sadness, without realizing that our worry-free childhood was over and our tragedy was about to begin. In 1939, Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia and under the German occupation, Jewish life became unbearable as the result of numerous anti-Jewish laws and restrictions.

In 1941, Richard's parents were deported on the first transport of Prague Jews to the Lodz Ghetto in Poland. One of his stepbrothers, Dasa, had been sent to Denmark with a youth group in October 1939 while this was still possible. His other stepbrother, Karel, a student at Prague University, was arrested and murdered in Mauthausen concentration camp. Richard was taken to Lipa, a work camp not far from Terezín, for agricultural labor. All of Kolín's Jews were deported in June 1942 to the Terezín Ghetto; from there we were sent in different transports to Poland, to unknown destinations.

In September 1942, another transport arrived in Terezín with fresh human cargo and Richard, number Bg-417, was among them. As soon as I found out, I went to meet him in the *Schloize*, where the new arrivals were kept until their fate was decided. It was at this time that our grandfather, Richard's and mine, unable to bear the indignities and the hunger any longer,

Richard with his wife and mother ►



committed suicide. I took Richard to the hospital to see him for the last time.

The following day Richard, mother, my sister Irene and I were to be part of a new transport to the east. Fearing the worst, mother, who worked as a nurse in the ghetto, injected herself with something — I don't know what — and became deathly ill. In this way she managed to get my sister and me out of that particular transport. I remained with Richard all night until the transport was shipped out. I asked him if he needed something. Pointing to his peaked cap, he said: "Don't worry, I took care of it," intimating that he had some gold coins and money sewn in his cap. How innocent we were, how ignorant of what awaited us. The date was October 8, 1942.

I managed to survive the next three years of unspeakable abomination in different camps and was liberated in Bergen-Belsen in 1945. After Auschwitz, I realized that there was very little chance that anybody had survived the 1942 transports.

Back in the Czechoslovak Republic, walking down the main boulevard in Prague, Wencels Platz, on a sunny June day not long after my liberation, I saw a mirage. A young version of my father, in the uniform of an American soldier, was walking towards me, smiling, calling me by my name. I was certain I was going insane.

It was Richard. We embraced and laughed, happy at seeing each other alive. He told me about the horrors of Treblinka, a name I heard for the first time, and about his escape after the heroic uprising there on August 2, 1943.

Soon after, our ways parted. I left for England, while Richard remained in Prague with his fifty-year-old mother, Olga, who miraculously survived four years of concentration camps. Richard continued his studies at the Charles University. In 1947 we

met again briefly while he was visiting England; he came to see me in Cambridge, where I was training as a nurse at Edinburgh Hospital.

Another twenty years passed before we met again, this time during Dubček's Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, when I went there in August 1968 with my husband and our three children to show them where I was born and where my family came from. Richard was by then married to Zdena and had two lovely children, Paulina and little Richard. We drove to Kolín together to see my father's farm and our grandparents' house, or what was left of it, and to share the memories of our youth.

The night our family left for Hungary, the Russian tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia and Richard was trapped again behind the Iron Curtain. It took some months before he managed to escape with his family to Switzerland, which opened its doors to ten thousand Czech intellectuals as an exception to their immigration rules.

A couple of years later we visited Richard in Switzerland, this time in Bern, where he had found employment in town planning and management. We took a trip together to the top of the Jungfrau, exhilarated at being alive and free again.

When the World Holocaust Meeting took place in Jerusalem, I invited Richard and Zdena to visit Israel. As a special surprise, I arranged for all the Treblinka survivors living in Israel to meet with Richard in our home. Here were eight of the heroes of the Treblinka uprising, witnesses to one of the greatest crimes committed against the Jewish people: seven men and one woman, from different countries, speaking different languages, who had been inmates of this wretched place, where, by design, friendships could not be easily formed. When the uprising took place, everyone ran in a different direction to save themselves.

Had they met on the street, they would not have known that they shared the Treblinka experience together. It was an unforgettable occasion.

Richard and I met after the Velvet Revolution, when Czechoslovakia again became a democratic country, at a Holocaust conference held at Terezín where we both presented papers based on our Holocaust experience. By then we had both published memoirs. (Richard's is entitled *Trap with a Green Fence*, published by Northwestern University Press, 1995; originally published in German.)

When my sister Irene decided to be a guide in Terezín and spend her last years in Prague in a Jewish old-age home, she encouraged Richard and Zdena to join her, which they eventually did. Richard was well received for his lectures on the Holocaust at Charles University and in October 1997 was awarded the Tomas Garrigue Masaryk prize for democracy by Czech president Václav Havel.

But Richard, like Primo Levi, and many others before him, reached the point where the burden of his memories became unbearable. As one Treblinka survivor said: "Treblinka is not yet over, Treblinka hasn't ended. It follows us wherever we go..." On December 19, 1997, Treblinka claimed another victim.

Last Encounter

While examining new paintings in the archives of Yad Vashem art museum, I came across scenes depicting, with sarcastic humor, daily life in Ghetto Terezín. I wondered about the artist, Pavel Fantel, who not only had the talent but the guts to capture and sketch for posterity the indignities suffered by the Jewish inmates of the ghetto.

These pitiful scenes show inmates sitting in public lavatories crammed next to one another, wistfully thinking of the luxury and privacy of their own lavatory in better days, or depict the gradual deterioration of body and spirit.

The name Pavel Fantel rang a bell. I had to be sure. I searched the archives of Yad Vashem for the list of transport AAd from Kolín, penalty transport for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia.

And then the memories started to come back...

One morning a messenger came to my grandmother's house, where my mother, sister and I were living after being thrown out of our home by the Nazis. The messenger was from the Jewish community, with an order from the Gestapo headquarters for me to present myself there immediately. My



*I am curious if the beautiful days when I was alone in the lavatory will
ever return!*

Pavel Fantel

mother grew pale, fear gripped her whole being. Her child going to the Gestapo? Alone? What for... What has she done? Will she ever return?

In 1941, we, the Czech Jews, were completely at the mercy of the German occupying forces and had no choice but to obey.

I put on clean underwear, slipped a toothbrush into my pocket, and parted from my mother with a few cheerful words trying to dissipate her fears, while mine were already taking hold of me.

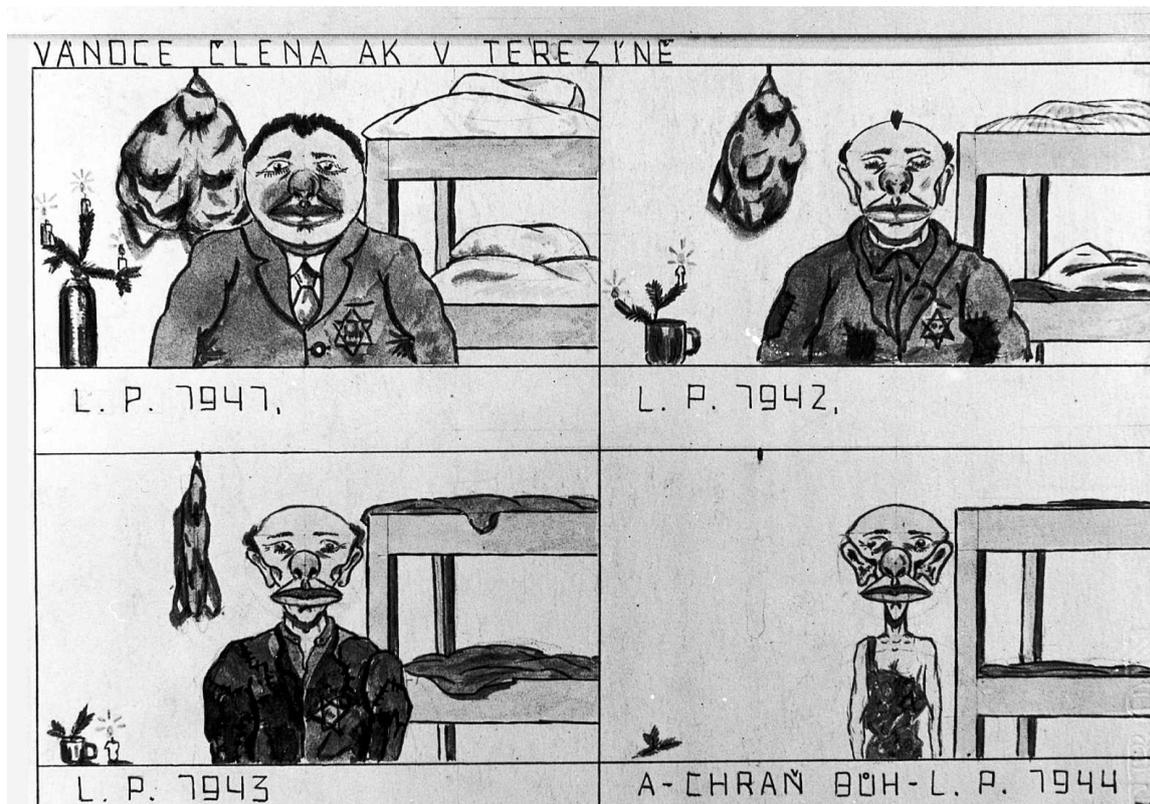
By the time I reached the Gestapo headquarters, I was paralyzed with fear. I had no idea why I was being sent for — and why me — of all the local Jews who were under the supervision of the local Gestapo.

I presented the note-order from the Gestapo to the sentry outside the heavily guarded building and waited for admission. There waited little me, with a Star of David sewn on the left side of my coat, its yellow color screaming out JEW, and I prayed as I had never prayed before.

At that moment I realized that I was not a child any longer. I became familiar with fear, a fear that didn't leave me for many years.

During the time I was forced to work for the Gestapo, I met Dr. Pavel Fantel, a former military doctor in the regular Czech army. In 1940, when Jews were forced to leave their places of residence and work, for whatever reason the Germans found justifiable at the time, Dr. Fantel moved to Kolín with his wife Marta, his mother, and his small son, Tomy.

He worked in an index card complex, where every Jew from the entire district was identified by a photograph and a complete history of his life, as well as an up-to-date account of all of his activities. This information was gathered by the many



Hunger in Terezín

Pavel Fantel

collaborators that the Germans recruited among the Czech population, many of them with greedy eyes on prospective Jewish property.

Dr. Fantel taught me how to destroy the card of a Jew who succeeded in escaping, so that no trace of him could be found. He taught me how to smuggle notes or a little food to Jews who were being held by the Gestapo for interrogation, how to get messages transmitted to and from people who had been arrested and not been heard from since.

Pavel Fantel was a slight, unimposing man — bright, intelligent, courageous, and talented. His wonderful sense of humor helped sustain us during the difficult hours we spent together at the Gestapo.

We met again briefly in Terezín in an isolation building called Sokolovna, where I was a typhoid patient and he was a

medical doctor in charge of the hospital. When time permitted, he would bring us news of what was happening outside of the ghetto walls. With his ingenuity, even in those difficult days, he found ways to keep in touch with the outside world.

According to his friend, Adi Löbl, whose portrait is among the collection of Fantel's paintings in Yad Vashem, these paintings were smuggled out of Ghetto Terezín prior to Fantel's departure for Auschwitz. They were hidden and kept by a Czech friend, who returned them, after the war, to Fantel's mother.

Dr. Pavel Fantel, his wife, and his son Tomy did not return from the camps. But his paintings are a reminder of the bravery of the individual and the spirit that could not be crushed under the horrible persecution by the Germans.

We Will Not Forget

Pavel Fantel



Epilogues

Dr. Pavel Fantel

I never knew that Dr. Pavel Fantel had a brother; we never spoke of personal matters. It was while I was invited to speak in Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue in London, a recipient of one of the Kolín Torah scrolls, that someone from the audience approached me to tell me about Fantel's brother. He escaped in time from Czechoslovakia and achieved a magnificent



Dr. Pavel Fantel ►

Terjén 28. 9. 1943 *Fantel*

record as a flier with the R.A.F., receiving the Czech War Cross, the Czech Order of Merit, and the Order of the British Empire for his bravery.

It took another ten years before my book reached Fantel's brother through his cousin, living in Eilat. I received a wonderful letter from this 92-year-old man, which I have translated here for the reader:

Dear Hana,

My cousin Miriam sent me your book and your address. I would like to thank you. You are the only one that put up a well-deserved monument for my brother. Your words are warmer and more honest than the rehabilitating document or the promotion to colonel that my brother received from the Czech authorities.

I admire you, my cousin, and all the other young girls, whose youth was stolen, the loveliest part of one's life.

Pavel was my best friend, my colleague, critic and moral support. He wasn't so crazy and gypsy-like as I, rather he was solid, reliable, intransigent in all his actions. My Pavel was shot in Silesia, someplace near Hirschberg on the day of his 42nd birthday, the 7th of January 1945.

In gratitude and with many thanks,
Yours, Ernst Fantel,

Konstanz

Michael Mahler

When I visited Israel for the first time in 1950, I tried to find Michael Mahler's sister, who made aliyah in 1939 from Czechoslovakia. That was all the information in my possession at that time. I asked wherever I went, and whenever I met people who had come to Palestine before the war from Czechoslovakia, but never found her.

Many years later I had a call from a friend, who after reading my book, told me she was from the same town as Michael, and that she knows his married sister, a member of Kibbutz Neot Mordechai in the Galilee. I immediately contacted her and we met. She confirmed what an exceptionally talented boy Michael was, writing poetry from an early age in Czech, English, and Hebrew. I was able to give her an account about the last days of Michael's life. She gave me a snapshot of Michael the way I remembered him, which she had taken with her to Palestine when she left home.



Michael Mahler ▶

Art as Evidence

Unique evidence in Holocaust history are five paintings, drawn by different artists on the same day, depicting the procession of the Bialystok children walking through Terezín. Unaware of each other, these artists drew the children's arrival, each recording this unusual event in his own style.

One is by Ernest Morgan, a lawyer residing in Australia, who was a ghetto *Wachmann* (watchman) in Terezín. He painted out of a need to record and never painted again. Immediately after the liberation, Morgan reconstructed and painted all the impressions he had drawn in Terezín, which were lost in Auschwitz upon his arrival. He donated all of his paintings to the Yad Vashem Art Museum in Jerusalem. His portrayal is of tired-looking children in oversized old clothing, accompanied by Czech policemen and a few ghetto *Wachmänner*, with yellow Stars of David on their coats. In the background we see a blocked street with people standing and watching the transport pass by, while all the windows in all the houses are closed tight.

Otto Unger was a professional painter, a well known artist and an art teacher in Brno prior to the war. He was seized for painting the gradual degradation of the inmates in the ghetto and was sent to the Terezín Small Fortress, Gestapo headquarters, where his wife and daughter were also interned under terrible conditions. Unger died of typhus and exhaustion in Buchenwald hospital, a month after liberation.

According to Leo Haas, his paintings were found buried under the floor in one of the barracks in Terezín. Other paintings by Fritta, Fleishman, and Unger, hidden between two walls in Terezín, were also found after the war, unharmed.



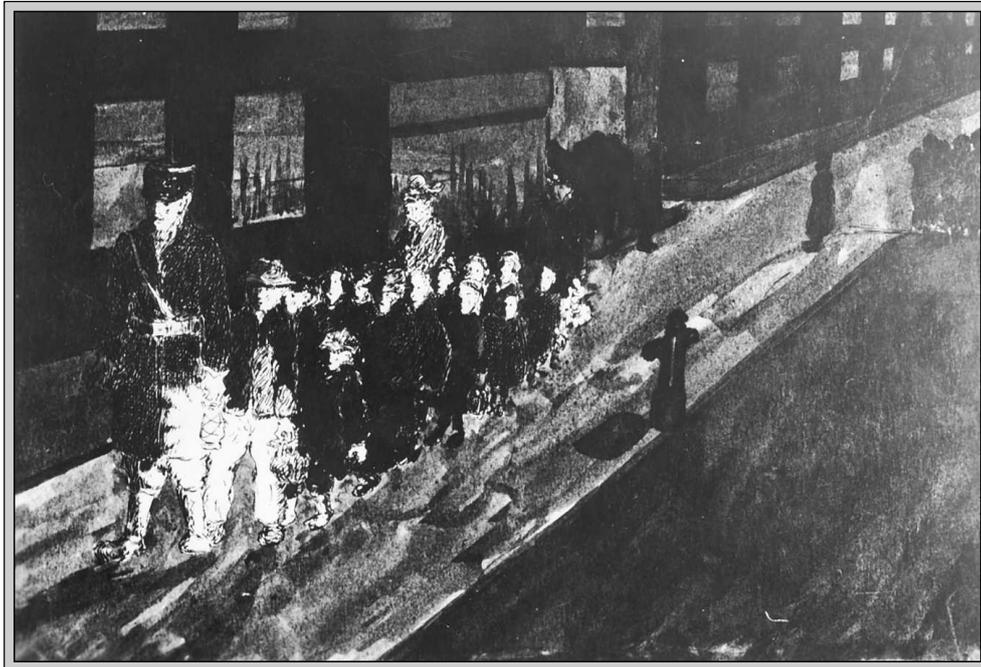
Children transport, Terezin 1943

Helga Hoskova, 14 years old

Children transport, Terezin 1943

Leo Haas





Children transport, Terezin 1943

Pavel Fantel

Children transport, Terezin 1943

Ernest Morgan



Unger's painting depicts the ghetto walls, the children carrying small packages, and a nurse in a white uniform leading the column, while a policeman is marching alongside.

The third painting is by Pavel Fantel, a doctor and former major in the Czech army, who because of his expertise in bacteriology became the head of Sokolovna children's isolation hospital for typhus patients, immediately upon his arrival in Terezín. Dr. Fantel was shot on a death march in Hirschberg, Silesia, in January 1945. Fantel was a talented amateur satirist and a caricaturist. Painting was his hobby.

Fantel's paintings were smuggled out of Terezín prior to his deportation to Auschwitz in October 1944 and hidden in Prague. Today they are part of the Yad Vashem art collection in Israel.

His painting is of dark, misty figures, hardly discernible. Only the children's faces, without features, are like small lights shining in the night. The street is deserted; the column is headed by a ghetto *Wachmann*, followed by an SS man whose SS cap is prominent.

I discovered the drawing by Leo Haas in a catalogue of Sotheby's auction house in Israel, in 1997, a drawing that had not been seen before in public and was untitled. It was sold with three other drawings from Terezín by Leo Haas, to an anonymous collector.

The drawing shows the Terezín style barracks, a tree without leaves in the background, many faces looking at the children's transport from behind closed windows. It depicts the large figure of a soldier with a gun towering over a group of tiny children in oversized clothing, being led by a person from the disinfection department, clad in a white overall.

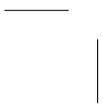
The fifth, childish drawing is by Helga Hoskova, made on

August 24, 1943, on her third floor bunk bed, from where she could see the children walking in the street accompanied by a policeman, while a ghetto *Wachmann*, arms spread out, with a yellow star and *Wachmann's* hat, is preventing people behind him from coming closer to the children who are walking by. Especially touching is fourteen-year-old Olga's portrayal of an older boy protectively holding the hand of a little girl, probably his younger sister.

The horror that strikes us from all five paintings is how heavily guarded these parentless, frightened children were.

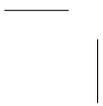
As a result of my research into the fate of the Bialystok children I was able to identify these paintings. Today Morgan's and Fantel's paintings of the Bialystok children are exhibited at Yad Vashem, while Otto Unger's is in my private collection.

These paintings are the unique material evidence of the Bialystok children's fate in the history of the Holocaust.



Part 3

THE NEED
TO REMEMBER



As If It Happened Yesterday

On October 7, 1942, while in Terezín, my mother, sister and I were scheduled to be included in a transport of a thousand inmates leaving the ghetto for some unknown place in the east. This was the transport from which my mother, a nurse, saved the three of us by injecting herself and becoming deathly ill. This saved our lives temporarily. That transport was sent to Treblinka and my cousin Richard was its only survivor.

From him I heard of the horrors of Treblinka.

I have read about Treblinka. Yet when the trial started in Jerusalem — “Criminal Case Number 86, State of Israel versus Ivan (John), son of Nicolai Demjanjuk” — I felt compelled to attend.

Inside the packed courtroom, I listened to the proceedings. I pondered, as I had many times before, how the world is divided into two kinds of people: those who were there and those who were not.

The prosecutor could not understand what he was asking, and the words of the witnesses could not describe what they had lived through.

The witnesses were competent and calm most of the time,

describing what they had seen. But the horrors, the pain and the fear came through only at those rare moments when the survivors broke down, choking on their unspeakable memories.

Each day as I entered the courtroom, I forgot the world outside, for I entered the other world, a world forever living inside me, no matter where I am or how much time distances me from there. I entered the other world of barbed wire, bunk beds, *Appellplatz* (parade ground), prisoners' uniforms, blows, and endless hunger. It all comes back as if it happened yesterday.

And I, who cannot remember where I put my glasses, where I left my keys, or the name of someone I met yesterday, remember every night with the greatest clarity as I enter the

Treblinka



other world, the places, the faces, the humiliations, and the pain.

And the next day, when I again sit in the courtroom listening to the civilized proceedings of a trial, conducted in a democratic country, listening to the defense counsel repeatedly asking the witness, "And what position were you in when you were looking at the *Schlauch* (a fenced-in pathway leading to the gas chamber), watching the poor wretches being driven into the gas chambers?" I dig my nails into my palms and bite my lips hard, because everything in me wants to SCREAM.



Return to Kolín

“Kolíne, Kolíne, you are situated in a charming plain where I spent my youth among my friends...” This is the refrain of a very popular Czech song about the town of my birth.

When I revisited Kolín after the Velvet Revolution, I was interviewed on Czech television and asked questions such as: “It must be difficult for you to come back and confront the terrible memories of your youth.” But I have the most wonderful memories of growing up in Kolín. I was born and grew up in freedom in a democratic country, which, between the First and Second World Wars, was under the leadership of a great liberal statesman, President Tomas Garrigue Masaryk.

Ours was a Jewish oriented community, though most were well integrated into the Czech way of life, as is so well expressed in the Czech national anthem: “Among the Czechs is my home” (Mezi Cechy domov muj)... And so it was for six hundred years.

Searching for facts to confirm my memories, I hesitatingly returned to the country of my birth, to the town, and to the very house where I was born. The day I arrived it was raining so

hard, I felt as if the whole world was crying with me over the sad fate of the Jewish community I had been born into.

Kolín is a charming old town in the heart of Bohemia, sixty kilometers east of Prague. In the Middle Ages, in the time of King Charles IV, it was a walled city with an imposing Gothic church and the second largest Jewish community outside of Prague.

Kolín had a continuous Jewish presence from 1376. The large, jungle-like cemetery in the town dating from 1418 is proof of this fact. Professor Josef Vavra, in his book on the history of the King's City of Kolín on the Labe (Elbe) River (published in 1886), writes that — as indeed appears in the town registry — Jews already lived and owned property in Kolín during that time. In 1512 there was already mention of a Jewish school and a flourishing Jewish community.

I found our beautiful, large synagogue with its magnificent stained glass windows, hidden behind an ordinary street entrance in the old Jewish quarter, locked, unused and badly neglected. Yet the Ark was still there, with its Ten Commandments shining through dimness and eerie silence.

Closing my tear-filled eyes for a moment, I suddenly heard the rich voice of our cantor, Mr. Reichner, the sermon of my teacher and esteemed rabbi, Dr. Richard Feder, the chanting of prayers by the congregants, and the children, of whom I was one, running in and out of the synagogue, visiting parents and grandparents, and playing outside.

I opened my eyes to the emptiness and the dead silence, and as I got used to the darkness, I realized that all the chandeliers, which used to light up the synagogue each holiday with their brilliance, were missing. They are now a part of the collection belonging to the Jewish Museum in Prague.



Monument in Kolin Jewish Cemetery erected after the war

With a heavy heart, I made my way in the steady downpour to the new cemetery at the other end of the town, over the bridge that spans the Labe River, to pay my respects to those buried there and to those memorialized in a communal monument erected after the war, their graves unknown. Even this new cemetery, dating from 1880, is unattended and overgrown, yet so green and peaceful. My grandfather (my mother's father, who died before I was born), grandmother, and many members of my family are buried there. I found their graves by the imposing black marble tombstones and gold lettering.

The Jewish community of Kolín (including the surrounding villages), under the leadership of Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder since

1917, numbered close to three thousand Jews. That is until the day, when in reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich — appointed by Hitler to be *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia — not only the village of Lidice was eliminated, but also a thousand Jews of Kolín were sent to Trawniki, Poland, where they were murdered upon arrival — a fact that was never publicized.

Only a handful of Kolín's Jews returned from the concentration camps after the war. Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder was among the few.

Walking through the town, ignoring the rain, I realized that half the stores had been Jewish-owned. Most of them are still selling the same type of merchandise, but the names of the original owners are no longer there. Lovely baroque houses frame the town's piazza. There was the general store owned by the Eisner family. Whenever I would pass by, they would invite me in and treat me to some exotic nuts. Here is the office of my mother's lawyer, a member of the Ornstein family, and there the shop belonging to the Kodicek family, where we would get new shoes for each Jewish holiday. And there is Aunt Heller's house, where I could expect to get a few coins for an ice cream cone whenever I came by. And this is where the Roubicek family lived. I studied Hebrew and Jewish history with their son every Saturday afternoon in the home of Dr. Feder.

I passed by my school, where I was the only Jewish child in the class, the playground where I spent many happy hours until the sign *Jews Are Not Wanted Here* appeared. I passed the homes of my friends who never returned, the park, the tennis court. It is all there.

It was an eerie experience coming back to my hometown, where life continues without the Jews, who were for so long a

part of its history. I felt like a ghost. Leaving town, I wondered how different our fate might have been if the Czech people had stood up for the Jews who for centuries had thought they were an integral part of that nation.



Author's grandmothers (H. Hellerova) house in Kolin built in 1700's.

Torah Scrolls and I — Survivors of Kolín

Jewish life was never easy in Kolín — the second oldest Jewish community after Prague. Following the big fire in which the old city of Prague was destroyed, Jews were accused of having cooperated with the Turks in setting the fire. Having been made the scapegoats, they were expelled under the order of Ferdinand I. A few years later, Jews were allowed to return, since they were a very positive influence in the fields of commerce and development in the town of Kolín.

In 1634, two officers of the emperor started a fire that burned forty houses in Kolín. By checking records, I discovered that the house that my grandmother bought in 1900 in Prazska Ulice, located in the center of town and connected with the Jewish quarter, was sold as a burned house in 1635, only a year after the fire.

In 1848, thirty Jews, who were members of a unit of the National Guard, went to aid the revolution in Prague. Kolín was known for its yeshiva, which in the nineteenth century was renovated and was called “*Beth Hamidrash-Anstalt*” (Insti-



tution). Moses Montefiore was impressed by it during his first visit in 1885 and endowed a foundation for its students.

The Jewish community of Kolín also had its incidence of blood libel. In 1913 a young woman, made pregnant by a Roman Catholic priest, committed suicide. The young priest, by the name of Hrachovsky, tried to implicate the Jews in a blood libel, but fortunately they were ultimately exonerated.

The Jewish presence continued in Kolín. Between the two world wars, the city was a stronghold of the Czech-Jewish movement. There was an interesting episode involving about six hundred Jews who organized themselves for collective emigration when they saw the atmosphere deteriorating in the face of growing antisemitism; they were offered the support of the French government in establishing a settlement in the French colony New Caledonia, but the project was aborted when World War II erupted.

Between the two world wars, the Jewish community of Kolín prospered. We thought of ourselves as part of the Czech nation, differentiated only by our faith, until the outbreak of the Second World War, when Czechoslovakia was occupied by Germany. As early as January 1940, Jewish shops had already been confiscated and Jewish women — including my sister and myself — were forced to work in the local soap factory, Hellada.

Today the sole remnants of that rich community are an abandoned synagogue and two graveyards, evidence of six hundred years of Jewish presence.

But the Torah scrolls from Kolín were miraculously preserved in Prague, together with the rest of the collection of ceremonial objects collected by the Germans from each of the

153 “disappearing communities,” as soon as each one was eliminated. Today they form the largest collection of Jewish ceremonial objects in the world. Some of them are on permanent display in the Jewish Museum in Prague.

The 1,564 Torah scrolls found in Prague after the war as part of the loot seized by the Germans were acquired by the Westminster Synagogue in London, England. With loving care they have repaired and restored many of them and redistributed them among many synagogues throughout the free world.

One of Kolín’s Torah scrolls found a new home in the Northwood Pinner Synagogue, also in London, where, under the leadership of Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, a symposium was held on how to preserve the memory of the Jewish communities that perished in the Holocaust. To make it meaningful to the present generation, translations of letters by Rabbi Feder and a paper by



Kolín's old cemetery from 1418

a student researching a particular chapter in the history of Kolín's Jews were presented. A panel was chaired by a surviving member of the Kolín community — myself.

And so the twenty-five scrolls from Kolín, the last remnant of that community, are scattered today among synagogues from Australia to Israel, to serve as a continuous reminder of the Kolín Jewish community for future generations. These are the Kolín scrolls whose locations are currently known:

- Tiffereth Shalom, Ramat Aviv, Israel
- Northwood and Pinner Synagogue, Middlesex, England
- South London Liberal Synagogue, London, England
- Temple Shir Shalom, West Bloomfield, Michigan
- Temple Shalom, Floral Park, New York, New York
- Temple Beth Shalom, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- Temple Isaiah, Lexington, Massachusetts
- Beth Torah, North Miami Beach, Florida
- Reform Temple of Putnam Valley, New York, New York
- Temple Shaare Tefilah, Norwood, Massachusetts
- Neve Shalom Congregation, Belair Bowie, Maryland
- Temple Emanuel, Denver, Colorado
- Congregation B'nai Yehoshua Beth Elohim, Glenview, Illinois
- Temple Emanuel Woolahra, New South Wales, Australia

Interview with a Journalist

In June 2002, while attending a ceremony in Kolín commemorating the deportation of the Jews from Kolín sixty years earlier a journalist asked me the following question:

Question: How lucky were you to survive?

Answer: I have lived a very long, interesting, difficult, and successful life. And yet, every night when I go to



*Zyklon B Gas
Manufactured
in Kolín,
Czechoslovakia*

sleep, I visualize my mother's last moments in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, choking slowly on the Zyklon-B gas, produced in my hometown, Kolín, the town where mother was born, educated, married, and from which she was deported; mother was murdered by the Zyklon-B gas manufactured in Kolín's chemical factory.

I paused, and then turned the tables on my interviewer:

Question: Did you say I was lucky?

Answer: Silence.

Going to Terezín Again!

Prague, October 21, 1991

The bus is full of nice old ladies and a not-so-young gentleman. Excitedly we try to recognize one another from behind the glasses, gray hair, and nametags that don't necessarily display the names we remember. We get very emotional when we find somebody who shared a bunk with us or knew our mother or brother years ago.

We are driving to Terezín, the ghetto where the Germans imprisoned us, the place where we suffered hunger, illness, and loss of family members. But it is also the place where we emerged from adolescence, where we spent rare happy hours among friends, even laughing at our own misery during the many satirical performances put on by the talented people living among us.

Going to Terezín again? Of our own free will? There is a reason for this outing: it is fifty years since the establishment of the ghetto and all of us gathered here passed through it at some stage in our imprisonment.

We, the few who survived the ghetto and the subsequent



the Author in a survivors reuneon in Terezin, 1991

long years in various concentration camps, have come together from places near and far, from countries that let us rebuild our lives after the Holocaust, from Chile and Brazil, England and France, America, Germany, Denmark, and Switzerland, a large group from Israel, and nearly all of the Czech Jews who remained here since their liberation. We came to be together, to cry, to laugh, to remember!

Walking the streets of the former ghetto, we try to orient ourselves, to remember where we lived, where we worked when we arrived and from where we left.

The town of Terezín looks so clean, so green, and so strangely empty of people. Today the town's population is around five thousand, but during the time it served as a ghetto, sixty thousand people were crammed into its houses. It is only when I enter the backyard of an old house and notice the unpainted walls, run-down staircases, and the smell of garbage that the picture of misery returns, what the talented artists of Terezín like Bedrich Fritta, Leo Haas, and Otto Unger portrayed so capably in their drawings.

As we listened to the opening speeches, under a sea of umbrellas, our tears mixed with the raindrops.

Lunch was served to us in the Czech army officers' mess in Terezín. Ironed white tablecloths, clean plates, forks and knives, napkins and flowers decorated the tables and the hot soup smelled delicious! I could not help remembering the hunger that was our constant companion during our sojourn in Terezín and how happy we would have been fifty years ago with the leftovers that remained on the plates after that meal!

Later we walked in the parks and gardens we had been forbidden to enter in those days, meeting friends, recollecting our

common past. It is these survivors and our shared memories that have replaced our lost families.

We attended the opening of the exhibition at the new Terezín museum. Put together with great sensitivity and artistic creativity under the direction of Dr. Munk and Dr. Blodik, it stands as a monument to the Czech Jews who perished.

The highlight of the reunion was the performance of Verdi's *Requiem* at the Smetana Hall in Prague, with a 250-voice choir and an orchestra of 150 musicians in the presence of President Chaim Herzog of Israel and President Václav Havel of the Czech Republic. It was performed in memory of another *Requiem*, put on in Ghetto Terezín by Jewish singers and musicians under the baton of one of the most accomplished Jewish musicians, Rafael Shachter, for representatives of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. While the choir sang: "Libera me" in a thunderous forte, the Nazi rulers decided on their fate: immediately after the performance, the entire cast — singers, musicians, and conductor — were deported to the gas chambers in Auschwitz.

On this occasion, President Václav Havel declared: "I am ashamed, if I may say so, of the human race, of mankind, of man. I feel that this is his crime and disgrace, and thus also my crime and disgrace. It is necessary to talk about the suffering of the Jewish people even though it is so difficult to do so."

Back from Poland

This was my third visit to a country that represents the largest Jewish graveyard in the world.

Neither of my previous visits was a pleasure trip. The first was a journey into an inferno called Auschwitz-Birkenau. Alone, without my mother and father, I traveled with strangers in a sealed cattle wagon. So close physically, yet lonely among so many. That was my first trip abroad from the country of my birth, Czechoslovakia, and I didn't need a passport, visa, or ticket. All that was taken care of by the Germans.

The second time I traveled to Poland was many years later, when for the first time I acquired a passport, could afford to pay for the trip, and found the time to travel.

Driven by a force that would not let me rest, I wanted to revisit and reconstruct the nightmares that had haunted me at night, and sometimes even in the daytime, for years. I wanted to see for myself what I had lived through then, locked in like an animal in a cage, not knowing where I was being sent, how I got there, what time of the day or night it was, what day of the week or which month of the year.

And so this second time I traveled to Poland to confront the

fear that lived within me. With my husband at my side, I flew to Warsaw, rode on a train for eight hours to Krakow, took a taxi to Auschwitz, and walked the three kilometers to Birkenau.

And there it was: the never-ending camps, the electric wire fences, the railway reaching all the way into the camp to the platform where selections of who would live and who would die were made. The guard post and one original barrack standing intact in a sea of hundreds of blackened chimneys reminded us of the vastness of the camp, of all the barracks once standing there.

We were alone then, not a soul around us. Under the communists, people were taken to Auschwitz, where the history of the *Polish Holocaust* was presented to them. Very few visitors knew about the Jewish section called Birkenau.

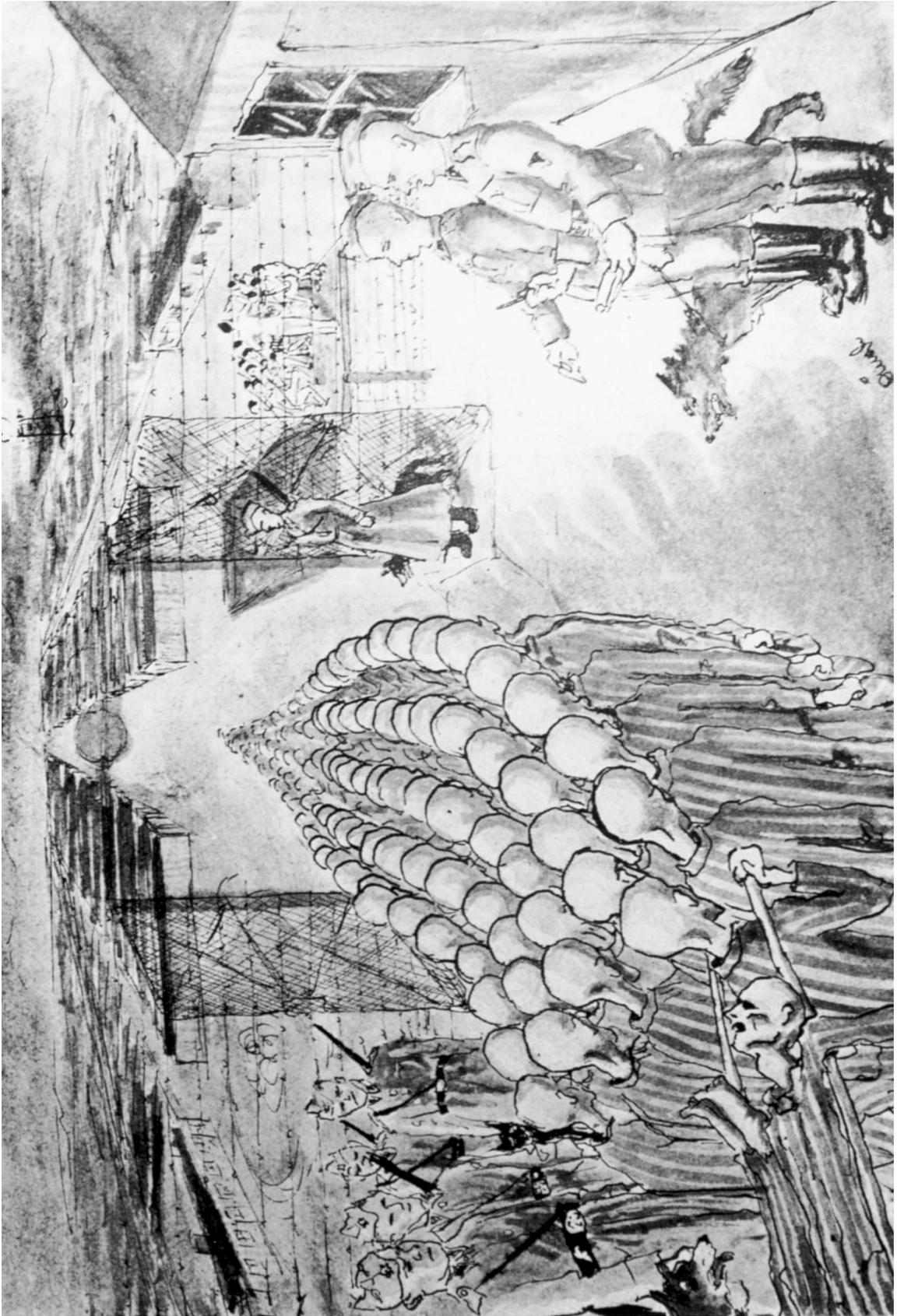
We searched and walked until we came to the remains of the gas chambers, blown up by the retreating Germans in January 1945. Only then did I realize how close I had been to them, when incarcerated in camp B2B in 1944. Yet I had no idea where they were and how they were operated.

We examined the ruins of these monstrous devices that devoured over two million people, human beings, Jews, my mother among them.

Emotionally drained, we got back to the waiting taxi, returned to Krakow, boarded a train and left Poland.

During the next ten years, having done research on different aspects of the Holocaust, speaking and working at Yad Vashem, I learned about Treblinka, Belzec, Chelm and Majdanek, about the Bialystok, Warsaw and Lodz ghettos, and of the full Jewish life of the three and a half million Jews in Poland before the Second World War.

My third trip to Poland was with a tour organized by Yad



Vashem, covering some of these concentration camps. For me this time was more of an academic venture: to study the extent of the destruction of the Jews from all European countries under German occupation that took place on Polish soil.

First we visited Treblinka, situated in a huge isolated field, with seventeen thousand broken stones, reminders of the destroyed communities. Its starkness and simplicity have a devastating effect.

Next stop was Majdanek, the one camp which remains almost as it was then. In its swift advance in the fall of 1944, the Russian army surprised the Germans, who had no time to destroy the evidence. Here the gas chambers are intact and could be reactivated any time — so chillingly real.

The third camp we saw was Auschwitz. With a special guide provided for our group, we spent three and a half hours in Auschwitz, hearing about the Polish Holocaust, the suffering of the Polish prisoners, the Polish uprising, Polish martyrdom. With the red brick Carmelite Monastery hovering over the camp and a large cross protruding high above the wall, stating in no uncertain terms who occupies this place, I asked our guide when we would get to the other part of Auschwitz, called Birkenau.

There were three Auschwitz survivors among our group. When we reached the ruins of the gas chambers, all three of us broke down and, holding on to each other, we cried. Each lit a candle of remembrance and said her own prayer. Then each tried to locate the exact camp where she had been housed while enslaved there. Everyone had come from a different place, arrived at a different time, lived in a different camp. Yet all three

of us lived through the same Auschwitz experience, which played havoc with our lives for the rest of our days.

After Auschwitz, there was nothing more I wanted to see in Poland. A free day in Warsaw, and we were ready to leave this land soaked in Jewish blood.

As our group had a common visa, everything took a long time. Adding to the confusion, Warsaw's small airport had no English signs anywhere in those days. Our luggage was finally weighed and we proceeded to the bus to take us to a small Lot Airlines plane.

When everybody was seated, my name was called. It seems that in the rush and confusion at the airport, I omitted some formality that at almost any other airport would have been solved courteously within minutes.

Instead, I was taken off the plane and driven back to the terminal, where my passport and ticket were taken from me. I was told that I would not be allowed to proceed to Israel with my group.

And there I was, again alone in Poland, without a passport or a ticket, without money or friends, in a country that had no diplomatic relations with Israel, shouted at as if I were a criminal, about some foolish oversight in getting a custom stamp on my luggage.

Trying to keep calm, I used my wits and humor to extract myself from this very unpleasant situation. After an hour I was driven back to the plane that had been kept waiting on the runway all this time.

Back in my seat, headed for Israel, I realized that those of us who have a number branded on our arm, like a page of history that all the rubbing can never wash away — as a reminder of Auschwitz — we can neither forgive nor forget...

Mother

How many times did I wait for you, look for you, cry for you, in desperate situations, and in my happiest moments that I wanted to share with you? How many times did I need your advice or just a kind word of encouragement, or long for your loving stroke on my head? You were always there in my thoughts, but never in the realities of my life, of my daily struggles.

In August 1943, a transport of parentless children from the Bialystok Ghetto arrived in Terezín and my mother was among the fifty-three adults chosen to take care of them. These children came to Terezín from the hell of Poland's Bialystok Ghetto, where an uprising of the Jews had just taken place; in its aftermath, the parents were deported to the Treblinka death camp. After the failure of negotiations to save these children through an exchange for German prisoners of war, it was decided — on the highest level in the German government — to kill them.

Mother accompanied these children on their last journey to Auschwitz, quieting their fears, longings, and cries for their own mothers.

What were her last thoughts while the children desperately



The author with her mother

dug their nails into her naked body inside the gas chambers, choking on the Zyklon-B gas, I will never know.

When asked to accompany 150 students on a summer educational tour through Europe's Jewish historic sites, Auschwitz among them, I agreed, even though on my last trip there, I had promised myself never to return to this cursed place. Yet my desire to come as close to the site that I could call mother's grave prompted me to accept.

Mother had no funeral. There was no *shivah*. Nobody left to mourn with. Inside me, the mourning never ended.

Reaching Auschwitz, my legs became paralyzed and I was unable to walk the remaining distance from there to Birkenau, to the ruins of the gas chambers blown up by the retreating German army in January 1945. A kind person found a wheelchair and another volunteered to push me, wobbling, on the unpaved road.

There I crawled inside the ruins of the gas chamber and used my hands to scrape together some of the earth mixed with ashes to bring back to Israel. I said good-bye to mother, but the mourning inside me will never end.

Survivors Break the Silence

The war ended and the concentration camps were opened. The people who inhabited those awful places and managed to stay alive through years of humiliation were freed. But were they? The freedom they had anticipated, for which they had fought to stay alive, was an illusion, for the reality of the world they had to face wasn't the same one they had left behind.

That world was shattered. It no longer existed. They could not return to the countries in which they were born — for political and other reasons. The homes they grew up in were nonexistent. The fiber of the family unit was destroyed, the family members brutally murdered. The population amongst which they had grown up did not stand up for them when they were taken away by the Germans to concentration camps; those people could no longer be trusted.

The world, the Western world, in which they had placed their confidence and their hopes, forgot them soon after the war was won and the shock over the horrors of the camps abated. Instead, what the word "freedom" meant to the survivors was very unrealistic in the realm of the political world of 1945.

No one waited for us — the survivors. There were no

flowers, no celebrations, no bottles of champagne toasting our very survival. Instead there were D.P. (displaced persons) camps, Cyprus camps, long lines at different embassies and consulates of people trying to rebuild their destroyed lives wherever the world would let them. Most countries were not interested. And so the survivors had to go about picking up the pieces wherever and in whichever way they could. It was not an easy task.

Most survivors were not well equipped to start a new existence. The majority were young people — old ones had been killed or didn't survive the harsh realities of a prisoner's daily life. They lacked education, professions, academic qualifications. The health of many was also damaged. They had no money and no one to support them — as in a normal family. Many of them lacked even the language with which to function, as survivors moved from country to country.

The fight for economic survival took precedence over everything else. People had to go to work, to make a living, to eat.

The problems were immense. The loneliness, the lack of family support, the lack of moral support. The accents that accompanied them wherever they lived, the lack of a normal lifestyle — having friends from school, clubs, army, universities, communities. The difficulty of entering new societies with which they had no common language. Many survivors who came to Israel experienced feelings of separateness from the local population.

The survivors, carrying their background like a piece of luggage on their backs, were different. They thought differently, they felt differently, and they could not talk, for their language was not understood, and if it was, they immediately became a sensation, an object of pity, or were looked down upon.

Many could not accept the new freedom and ended their lives. Others fought like tigers to stay alive and build new lives for themselves, never mentioning their past to anybody. Very few entered academic life. That required financial support during studies, and long years before one could become independent. In spite of that, some managed to overcome even these obstacles. Most survivors went to work for a living. They worked hard, they married, had children, and remained silent.

Some wrote books or stories when they no longer could keep the horrors within themselves. Some of what they wrote was published, some was not, perhaps because the public was no longer interested. Some told their families, some could not even do that. And yet, most of the survivors had a tremendous need to tell; some had promised themselves, if they survived, it was their duty to tell. Some promised others who didn't survive to carry their message.

And then, in the sixties, Israel caught one of the major Nazi criminals, Adolf Eichmann, and brought him to trial. It was a turning point in the lives of the survivors. Suddenly they were called to be witnesses in front of the entire world; it became legitimate to tell... and the silence began to be broken.

Having attended the Eichmann trial, and meeting and listening to other survivors, I realized that my feelings of despair, fear, disillusion, loneliness, and the need to tell were shared by so many others with a similar past. I was not abnormal or mentally deranged. Simply, my life was shattered and I need not be ashamed of my feelings.

Once that silence was broken, survivors were no longer looked upon as "sheep going to slaughter." Stories of unprecedented heroism became known through research and personal

accounts. The Holocaust became a subject to be studied and accepted.

Suddenly, survivors were in demand in schools, army units, educational institutions. Few were prepared for the task. Language difficulties, fear of breaking down while describing their suffering, lack of self-confidence — all were ample reasons to keep the survivor from speaking in public.

And I — I started very hesitatingly, first in the children's school, terrified that I might not be able to go through with it. I prepared slides on the Holocaust, accompanied by my explanations. Because of questions from the audience, I saw the need for wider knowledge of the subject, and slowly started to study the Holocaust. I voraciously read all literature connected with the Holocaust, to be more knowledgeable and informative and to give dimension to my personal story.

While traveling and speaking to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, I saw how important it was to bear witness. Meeting many survivors from various countries and different camps, I learned that every story was different, that the Holocaust had many faces, many of them still unknown. As much as we already knew, so much was still untold. And the survivors are the last people who can tell.

I created a program for teaching, coaching and directing survivors, eyewitnesses to the Holocaust, how to present their experiences in public for educational purposes. It was based on personal experience, research, acquaintance with many survivors, and years of experience of practical implementation in different educational institutions to various audiences.

By using Yad Vashem exhibits as part of the teaching process, we have achieved great success. Success in this case means that

we have assisted hundreds of survivors to be able to bear witness in public.

They gain confidence in their own ability to present their stories in public in a coherent and dignified way. Time marches on; today the youngest of the survivors are in retirement. They have more time to devote to public causes, they are financially more independent, and as memories are returning, it is also very therapeutic for the survivor to go out and tell... fulfilling a promise he or she made but only now has the chance to carry out.

In Response to “Warplanes over Auschwitz”

In an article that appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, “Warplanes over Auschwitz,” the correspondent describing the symbolic flyover of Israeli Air Force planes chose to criticize the event in venomous terms as a “scene worthy of Disneyland, a mawkish spectacle.”

Yet this flight of three F-15 fighters by three Israeli pilots, descendants of three Holocaust survivors, had more than symbolic significance. It served as a reminder of the Allied forces’ refusal even as late as 1944 to bomb the rail lines leading to the gas chambers that devoured multitudes of European Jewry — my mother among them.

What was Auschwitz?

Auschwitz was a different world, a planet with a life of its own.

We had no control over the clothes we wore, the food we ate or the work we did. Often, too, we had no choice about when we could relieve ourselves. We had no choice but to submit to

brutality and humiliation, and to frequently observe others in like submission.

We were continually hungry. The evening ration of a slice of bread was eaten right away. The morning tea did not assuage our hunger and the bowl of soup was like a drop of water on a hot stone. We thought of food all the time, talked about food all the time, and the longing for food penetrated our dreams.

We were sustained by the faith that one day the human spirit would prevail and humankind would see the evil and condemn it forever.

How we had changed. Those of us who had been fat were now skinny. Those who had been thin changed into living skeletons. Round bellies were now wrinkled aprons and what had once been large, full breasts looked like a pair of prunes.

Auschwitz had no birds, no flowers, and no sunshine. When I was there, the sky was always gray. People who lived there had no parents, no children. They had no names, just a number burned onto their left arms, like cattle; they had a big hole in their bellies filled with hunger and a shaved head full of fear. In Auschwitz, people were not born, they only died. Dr. Mengele used to say: "Here they come through the doors, but leave only through the chimney."

While watching the blazing chimneys, with the sweet smell of burning flesh permeating the air I cried out: "God, where are you?"

Auschwitz was a monstrous nightmare. German technology and organizational talent, combined with German ingenuity and precision and a hatred for Jews, had created the ultimate factory for killing human beings. And we, the Jews, were its programmed victims, for whom there was no escape.

And where was the world? Where was the world that is now

so loud and vocal in its condemnation of Israel and the Jewish people while six million Jews, one and a half million of them children, were slaughtered all over Europe?!

Yes, we do take pride in being free and able to defend ourselves, and we are not ashamed to show it by the kind of meaningful demonstration described above.

