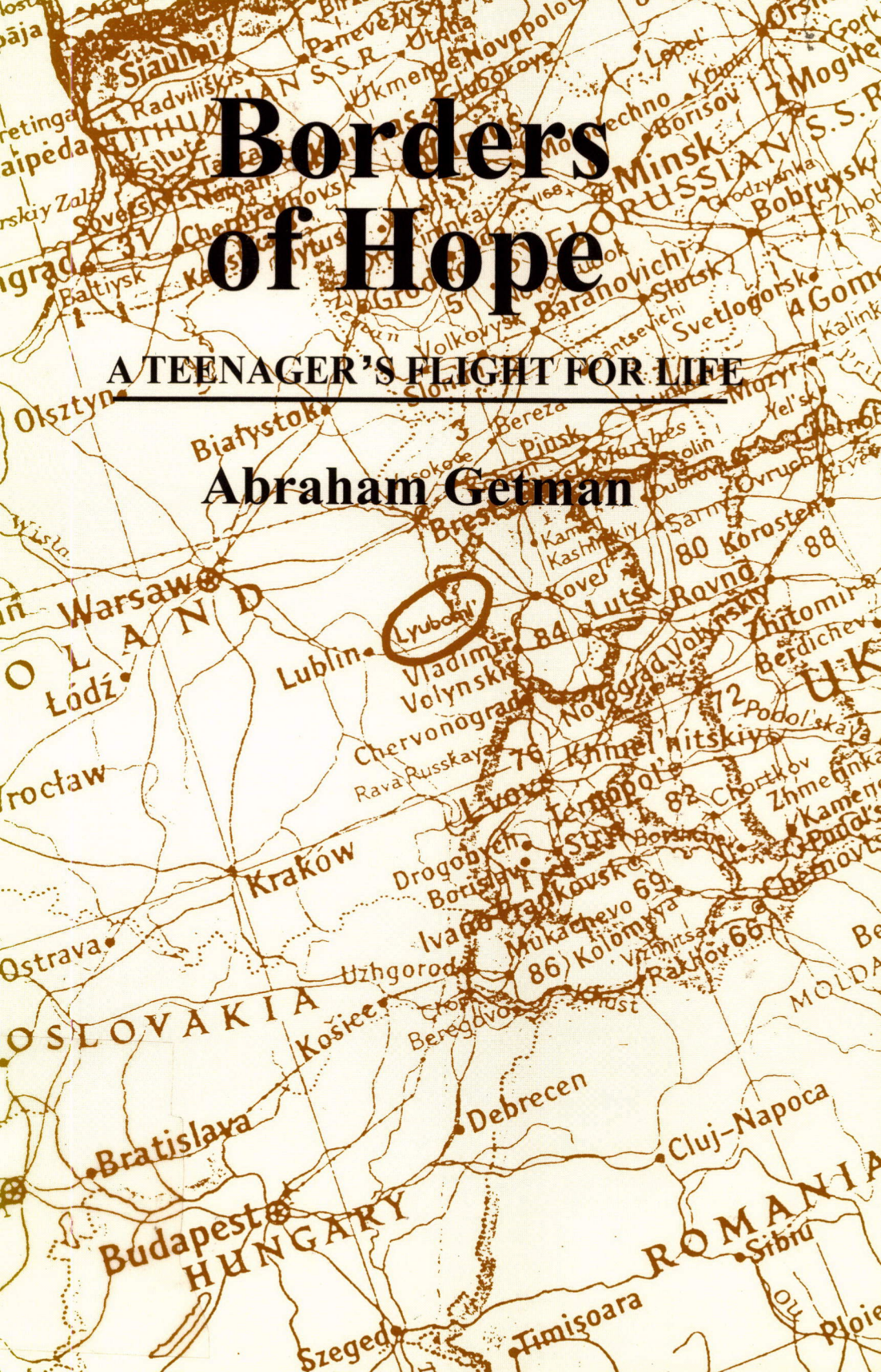

Borders of Hope
A TEENAGER'S FLIGHT FOR LIFE
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Piotrków Trybunalski
Sieradz
Kalisz
Konin
Leszno
Zielona Góra
Gorzów Wielkopolski
Szczecin
Koszalin
Słupsk
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Tczew
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Braniewo
Mragowo
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BORDERS OF HOPE

A Teenager's Flight for Life

Abraham Getman

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2024

VANTAGE PRESS
New York

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2024

FIRST EDITION

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Published by Vantage Press, Inc.
516 West 34th Street, New York, New York 10001

Manufactured in the United States of America
ISBN: 0-533-13297-5

Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 99-96651

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BORDERS OF HOPE

For all the participants who dedicated their time and cooperation helping me write this story:

—My daughter Arlene, for her ability to capture the depths of my emotions and edit my story to this final manuscript
—My sons, Mark and Steven, and my daughter Francine, for typing my story, word for word, from my audiocassettes and notepad scribblings
—Phylis Corbett, for organizing the first draft of my manuscript
—My wife, Muriel, for her support and constant nagging to get this done
—My family in Israel and all my relatives and friends for providing me with the constant encouragement to tell my tale and especially to Aviva Hetman for translating the Hebrew passages
—and for the opportunity to live in America—a country where I can freely express myself . . .
Thank you!

Introduction

In all the generations—they seek to destroy us, but why only us—only the Almighty saved us . . . and why me?

I was more dead than alive and did anything to survive through the Second World War. For years I ran barefoot, without direction, through forests, barriers, gunshots, and across borders. I was cold and starving, but my will was stronger than iron. When I faced danger, I looked fear in its face and did not tremble—not because I had no fear, but because I did not care. At night, I wept for my mother. Every day I told myself, "if I can get past this I will survive."

Every survivor's tale is one of choices—decisions that either spared you or led to death. I survived only by luck. When the war ended and I saw with my own eyes what had occurred, I could not believe what had happened or that anyone else would ever believe me. I thought that everything was lost—even our house had been leveled to the ground. When I thought about my family's and friends' deaths I felt guilty and ashamed to have lived. There was nothing special or outstanding about me. Some people have suggested that there was a mission divinely assigned to me—I was "chosen" to live. Many people wiser, wealthier, or more educated than I who perished would have been better messengers to tell this story about the past and interpret its meaning for the future. I am not a writer or scholar. I did not even receive my high school diploma until I was fifty-seven years old!

I tried to rebuild my life after the war. I went to Israel to fight for independence, to live in peace, and to find a home, but my heart was unsettled. I journeyed to America, a free country, to start a new life, but freedom is a state of mind, and I remained a prisoner of my past. Even today, when I close my eyes to sleep at night, the nightmares conjure up my worst fears.

It is difficult to absolve the world for remaining silent be-

cause only Jews were being killed. Six million Jews were led to agonizing, barbaric, and dehumanizing deaths; their only crime was being Jewish. People say, "The Jews are a smart race. Why didn't they resist?" I cannot answer this. I know only that I was thirteen years old and helpless. I could not believe that I was living through these horrors. No civilized country could do this to us, especially not the Germans, one of the most progressive and cultured societies of the time.

Today, the world appears to be a different place, but some things have not changed. Although Europe and the two Germanys have been reunited, hatred and bigotry still exist. With economies failing, people are looking for scapegoats. The neo-Nazis are resurfacing. Again, people are looking the other way. Serbs are committing atrocities against their neighboring Croats in a chillingly familiar attempt at "ethnic cleansing" of Sarejavo and Bosnia. As much as I might wish, I cannot bring anyone back from the grave, but perhaps I can prevent this and other generations from closing their eyes and ears. It is said that those who do not learn from the past are destined to repeat it. If it happened to me, it can happen to you.

There have been books published claiming that the Holocaust was a hoax—that it never happened. Of my own family in Europe, I am now the sole survivor from a family of more than one hundred members. Some people may question the validity of the pictures of my family and me that appear in this book. How did I gain possession of photos if my family did not survive and I was always on the run? The pictures were given to me by my uncles, who were in the United States during the war, and my oldest brother, Jacob, who was living in Palestine before the war. My story may be shocking, but it is true without exaggeration. It is not something that was fabricated in Hollywood.

A collective damage was done so many years ago to all the Holocaust survivors—invisible scars that cannot heal and will sink with us into our graves. We have blended into society and seemingly have gone on with our lives, but the terror of our pasts haunts us day and night in the caverns of our memories. Daily incidents will trigger a memory. Sometimes, my children's faces remind me of my own brothers and sister. I pray that they will

never experience what I went through. To this day, I have yet to be able to confront them or anyone else, without revealing my pain. The tears in my eyes and the choked-up feeling come flooding back when I attempt to speak of my experience. Perhaps, after all these years, I can heal myself of the shame of survival by taking the responsibility of telling my story. Each survivor's experience is unique, and I now know that it is my responsibility to tell my story—to tell the truth about what happened.

BORDERS OF HOPE

Part I

1

My family was quite large on both sides. My mother's sister, Fayga, married Israel Gonik, and they had six children together. Her brother, Moshe Zuckerman, was considered a playboy but finally married Bella Weinstein right before World War II. My father, Shmuel Hetman, had two sisters and three brothers. The brothers were the lucky ones. They all immigrated to the United States before the war, married, and enjoyed a very good life there. Murray passed away in January 1997, at the age of ninety. The other two brothers, Moshe and Chaim, passed away some years ago. Moshe had the most interesting story. He was living in America when World War II broke out. His wife and six children, who had remained in Europe, all died in the ghetto. After the war, Moshe remained in America. He remarried and had two children, who are now adults with children of their own.

Only three of my relatives in Europe survived the war, my cousins, Sam Getman (my father's sister's son) and Rifka and Pini Lipshitz. Sam escaped to Russia and immigrated to America after the war. Because Rifka was fair-haired, light-eyed and spoke Ukrainian fluently, she was able to flee to a large Ukrainian city by assuming the identity of a gentile (non-Jew). Rifka married a gentile and now lives in Russia. Pini survived the war by hiding with farmers. All of my other family members, grandparents, parents, sister, brothers, uncles, aunt, and cousins, perished in the Holocaust.

Growing up, my grandmother on my father's side, Sarah, lived in our home. She helped my mother take care of us and was also involved in charitable organizations to help the poor. My other grandparents and uncle lived on the same street.

My grandfather on my mother's side was known as "Yizchak

the Americana," because he had lived in America before World War I. Ironically, my father had also lived in America before he married but returned with my grandfather to Poland to marry Yizchak's daughter (my mother), Miriam. My grandfather bought a large building and warehouse in the eastern Poland town of Luboml and made a living as the landlord. He also sold lumber and woodwork. Luboml, a small town in Wolyn located about fifteen kilometers from the Boog River, was sandwiched between the towns of Kovel and Chelm.

I was born in Luboml on July 21, 1926. My given name was Abraham Hetman. When the Russians invaded Poland, my surname, Hetman, became Getman, because there is no "h" sound in the Russian language. (Luboml is now part of the western Ukraine, and my children like to consider their heritage Russian.)

There were six children in my family—five boys and one girl. My brother Jacob was the firstborn, next was my sister, Fayga, then Moshe (the middle child), Chaim, me, and then my little brother, Label. Two other siblings had died of sickness as infants before Jacob's birth. Even with six children, there was a deep sense of love and respect for each member of the family.

My father, who owned a large shoe store, was well respected in town. He dressed impeccably and was pleasant and intelligent. Although he worked long and hard all week to support us, he still always found time to help the less fortunate. His own brothers and sisters could barely earn a living. They lived in the neighboring villages of Nudiz and Podgorodny, approximately fifteen miles from Luboml, and visited us weekly. My father would send his siblings back home with packages consisting of anything from flour and potatoes to clothing to help them, even though it was a great burden for him.

We all looked forward to spending time with my father on the Jewish Sabbath (which begins on Friday at sunset and lasts till sunset on Saturday). The entire family would sit around the living room table and listen to my father spin wonderful tales about his life. One of my father's favorite stories was about how his own father, who had died young. My father became the sole supporter of a large family at the tender age of twelve. At the

time, his family was living in Nudiz. To support everyone, my father brought eggs, bundles of hay, and milk to the market in Luboml to sell. When my father was a little older, he started dealing with cattle and began traveling farther distances by horse and wagon. The traveling led my father through dangerous forests that were occupied by gangs and robbers. My father would describe how he protected himself with a gun (like in the Western movies). He would pretend to reenact how he pointed the gun at the gangs to scare them away.

My father also told us many tales from his army experiences. He had served with the czar's Russian army as a drummer in the army band. We always asked him to play the drums as he had done in the army, and he always responded with a demonstration. Using two wooden spoons—one in each hand—my father would tap the spoons on the table in a rhythmic pattern.

Another one of my father's favorite tales was from his army experiences during World War I. The enemy attacked his group, forcing them to retreat. During the attack, the flag carrier was shot and the flag fell. My father, who was drumming next to the flag carrier, picked up the flag and retreated to the base with the flag in hand. Because he had carried the flag, the Russians recognized my father's troop as allies and allowed them to return safely. My father received a medal for his bravery for returning the flag. He proudly displayed the medal to us. A picture of my father, wearing his medal-clad uniform and beaming with pride, hung on our living room wall.

Memories of my mother are just as fond, though my feelings and love for her are more difficult to describe. Tall, with piercing dark eyes and long, thick, dark hair, she was simply a beautiful woman, who also had an inner beauty. My mother was devoted to our family and was well respected in our town. She cooked, washed, cleaned, and prepared the house for the holidays. Goodhearted and intelligent, she was a source of great strength. She was able to gain the confidence and trust of the needy who were too embarrassed to ask for help. My mother and her friend, Fayga Shliver, who was also rich and beautiful, would go from house to house gathering collections for the poor. No one dared

question them. When Fayga died prematurely of cancer, the whole town mourned her death.

My grandmother, Sarah, was another remarkable woman. My brother Jacob became very ill when he was four. My grandmother had already lost two young grandchildren to infant diseases. Afraid that Jacob would die too, she pledged to God that if he survived, she would fast twice a week for the rest of her life. Jacob lived, and so my grandmother fasted every Monday and Thursday. On these days, my grandmother went through town collecting money to aid the poor.

My father had promised something to God if Jacob survived. He commissioned a special Sefer Torah (Holy Scriptures). A special writer was hired to write the scriptures from start to finish. For these three years, the scroll writer was paid to live in a special house and work on the scriptures. When the torah was completed, a large celebration, similar to a wedding, was held. The scriptures were covered with a ruby-red velvet torah cover intricately hand embroidered with two lion figures. My father's name was woven between the two lion figures. My father donated the torah to the Stephin Synagogue where he was a chasidic member. The torah was highly prized and was taken out of the synagogue's ark only for use on the High Holy Days and for special occasions at my father's request.

At the same time that the torah scrolls were commissioned, a special Megillah—which is read during the Purim holiday, was made from parchment. Jacob was very religious and, when he was older, became adept at reading the torah. On Purim, he would take the Megillah to different Jewish homes and read to their families. I was always excited to accompany my brother for this occasion.

Although everyone was especially proud of Jacob, all of my brothers and my sister were admired by the townspeople. My only sister, Fayga, was treated like a princess by all her brothers, including me. She was very beautiful with light skin and thick, long, wavy, dark-blond hair. She was sweet and quiet and got along well with everyone. Fayga was also very attentive about learning the traditions of the home.

When the war broke out in 1939, Jacob was studying at the

University of Jerusalem in Palestine. The rest of my family was not so lucky. My other brothers and sister were all good children, who died too young. There is not a headstone in any cemetery nor any bone that can ever be found for them or my parents—they were annihilated but will always remain in my memory and heart. My book will serve as the only testimonial to their existence—their kaddish—a remembrance from one generation to the next.

2

My favorite story has always been *Fiddler on the Roof.* When I think about my childhood, images of this type of small-town, turn-of-the-twentieth-century European living are conjured up in my memory. We were considered an orthodox or very observant Jewish family. How we celebrated our holidays and traditions! We were accustomed to songs and prayers for almost everything—thunderstorms, rain, even birds. I loved the old European traditions that were ingrained in our heritage and still deeply miss them. When I was a child, the many holidays filled my life and our town. Some festivals were solemn, and others were joyous, each with its own traditions, significance and prayers. I have never been able to feel the same about any holiday as I did in this now distant place that remains alive only in my memory.

People accepted life as it was. The orthodox lifestyle revolved around acceptance and prayer and hope for better times. We always prayed for the next year to be in Jerusalem. We believed that after death our bones should return to the ground and, if possible, be sent to rest in Israel.

Luboml was one of the oldest Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and had existed since the second half of the fourteenth century. We were very loyal to our country. We had freedom and respected and obeyed the country's law. Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath—our day of rest—and Sunday was the Christian Sabbath. On both days and on national holidays, no one worked, and all businesses were closed. On the president's birthday, we marched from the schools to the synagogues carrying Polish flags and recited prayers to show our respect for our country.

The synagogue, which was constructed at the turn of the seventeenth century and located in the center of town, formed

the nucleus of our community. The main structure was four stories high. It was built like a fortress with a unique Moorish battlement structure that circled the entire perimeter of the roof. The synagogue had been built by King Yagellah and was one of the oldest temples in Europe and, possibly, one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world. It would take a poet's skills to describe the interior beauty with any justice. Graceful wall frescos and paintings of biblical animals, plants and musical instruments adorned the walls. The brightly colored painting of the twelve tribes, which hung over the ark where the torah was read, always left me in awe. A separate balcony was used for women. The main sanctuary was used by the wealthy, who could afford to give money to support the synagogue's upkeep, since there was no other means of support. During the holidays, everybody could come to the main center to dance.

Legend was that ghosts and devils haunted the synagogue. Everyone was afraid to go there at night. The rumors were probably spread to discourage people from entering the synagogue to cause mischief or vandalism. I was very bold, and, even in the dark, I would walk fearlessly from one end of the synagogue's halls to the other.

Adjacent to each side of the synagogue's main building were smaller shtiebls (little prayer houses), where the men prayed during the week. Separated according to profession—shoemakers, businessmen, carpenters, and so forth, each group supported and maintained its own shtiebls. In the winter, the shtiebls were kept warm with fuel or wood.

Our house was located less than thirty feet east of the synagogue. My father's shoe store was set up in the front portion of our house. In the back of the house were four bedrooms: my parents' master bedroom, a room that I shared with my three brothers, one room for my grandmother, and one for my sister. Our house also had a living room and dining room. The bathroom was a separate structure located outside, which was similar to the American "outhouse." If we used the bathroom at night, we used tins and emptied them in the morning.

Our kitchen was quite large, and a delicious aroma always lingered from my mother's cooking and baking. When I played

with neighborhood children who were less fortunate than I, I always brought them food from my home. I still believe that my mother was one of the greatest cooks. She prepared all her own foods and concocted special drinks and desserts just for our family. It was always a special treat to help her make ice cream. She would insert a metal cylinder containing milk and sugar confection into a wooden barrel filled with ice, and we would help her stir the milk and sugar together in the cylinder. As we stirred, the ingredients froze against the sides of the cylinder; then we scraped the product off the sides and let it fall to the bottom. This process was repeated a few times, until the mixture thickened into ice cream. The finished product was a big seller. It always came out sweet and creamy, and the cold ice cream melted dreamily down your throat.

Our house also had a large cellar. My mother used it to make and store her jellies and jams. Because there was no refrigeration, large cubes of ice were purchased in bulk and placed in the basement to keep the other foods cool throughout the summer.

Most houses in the town were made of wood. Some of the houses on the outskirts of town had straw roofs, but the houses in the center of town had roofs made from shingles. This resulted from a new law stating that if a house needed a new roof, it had to be made of tin for fire safety. A brick firewall was built between every two houses to prevent fires from easily spreading from one house to another.

Most houses were heated by the kitchen oven, which could warm several rooms. The more expensive homes had tiled ovens. To save energy, people made roasts and baked potatoes in the same ovens that heated the house. When it was really cold, we warmed our sleeping pillows by propping them against the walls next to the heat of the oven. When our parents put us to bed, they would wrap the heated pillows around us for extra warmth.

Our house was one of a very few with electricity. The power was supplied through a ground mill that lit up only the main streets. The majority of people used kerosene to light their homes. We used lanterns to light our way when we went outside at night. If someone could not afford a lantern, he took a shoe-polish container cover, placed a candle on it, and covered the can-

dle with a bottle that had the bottom cut out. When flashlights were introduced, it was a big deal. People went around flashing the light and showing off as if it were the greatest invention in the world. We were also one of the few families in town who owned a record player. It was nearly fifty years old and had to be cranked by hand. People would stand outside near our windows to listen to the melodies.

There was only one telephone in the entire town, no radios. The first time I actually heard a radio was 1939, just before World War II. Newspapers were also rare. Only a few people received newspapers from the outside world. The papers were sent to them from Warsaw and circulated around town. In later years, small newspaper stands were built.

Luboml had one movie theater. The movies were shown in Polish and sometimes in Jewish. An orchestra always played during intermission. If people could not afford a movie ticket, they would stand outside by the doors and listen to the orchestra. Theater groups would also use the moviehouse to perform live plays.

Breakfast in the morning was always a big deal, especially fresh rolls or pretzels. Beer was a very popular drink, and there was one brewery in town. We used to walk to the wells for water because the houses did not have any running water. The closest well was a half-mile away from our home. We cranked the well and took home buckets for drinking water, cooking, and washing clothes. The water was stored in large barrels. When water was needed, it was scooped into a cup that, in Yiddish, we called a "curt," not knowing that this word came from the English word quart. When I went to the well, I carried home a pail of water in each hand. To show my strength, I always held onto the pails without stopping until I arrived home. One summer day, while on one trip to the well, I heard a little girl's cries. She had fallen into the well. I lowered myself to the bottom of the well to rescue her. I picked her up in my arms, and we both emerged unharmed. Everybody in town was proud of my bravery.

Since there was not much water, it was difficult to keep clean and sanitary. We bathed only once a week for Saturdays and holidays. The rest of the week, we just washed our hands,

face, and feet and tried to keep within the acceptable dress codes, such as "better to have ugly patches than a nice hole in your clothes." Children ran through the streets wearing torn clothing and shoes that were handed down from older to younger siblings. Socks were mended with a needle and thread. In the winter, we slept in heavy shirts and wrapped rags around our feet to stay warm. In the summer, we slept in nightgowns, and the boys' heads were shaved for sanitary reasons.

There were no hospitals in town—only clinics. Luboml had one dentist, two doctors (one Polish and one Jewish), and a midwife. (I can still recall the custom of wrapping up the newborn with the feet close together to ensure that their feet would grow straight.)

Most of the streets were primitively made, using stones laid over dirt. As the horses and wagons passed through the streets, they made a loud knocking sound from the wheels and hooves going over the stone. Certain sounds could tell me who was passing by the street and in what direction they were headed. There was one small railroad station, one bus that went to Wlodawa, a truck that went to Warsaw, one taxi, and one motorcycle. My grandmother's brother owned the bus, and it was always a special treat to ride on it. I used to wait for the bus to come back from Wlodawa, so I could ride it from the station to the garage. Although no one in town owned a bicycle, rentals were available.

Before the German occupation, most of the Jewish people lived in the center of the city, which was known as the marketplace. The gentiles, Ukrainians, and Poles lived on the outskirts of the town. The Jewish people in our town had to rely on one another for continued existence. Our townspeople included shoemakers, carpenters, barbers, blacksmiths, bakers, and business operators.

If somebody had a small business, he could not possibly make a living from this alone. My family was well known and, by our town's standards, considered wealthy. Even so, if my father gave us all five cents to buy ice cream, it was a lot of money. The only time I ever asked my father for money was when I was alone with him. If I managed to find my father in a corner when nobody

was around, he never refused. When this happened, I was the happiest boy in the world.

My father's shoe store was one of the largest in town. He sold two types of shoes: expensive shoes for the upper class and cheap shoes for farmers and villagers with lower incomes. The expensive shoes were made in Warsaw or Radum. My father traveled to these cities once or twice a month to purchase the shoes and resell them in our town. Since there was no such thing as factories, the shoes were manufactured as piecework and given to the other shoemakers. These shoemakers were mostly Ukrainians, who lived on the outskirts of town. The Jewish shoemakers made the upper soles of the shoes, and the Ukrainian shoemakers made the rest of the shoe. Usually ten to fifteen shoemakers worked on the shoes all week. To economize, my father measured the leather and cut it to fit the size of the foot, which also provided a perfect fit.

Jews who worked as undertakers were known as the holy group. They made their living digging graves. Traditionally, there were no caskets, and the holy group carried the dead, who were dressed in white shrouds, into their graves and buried them.

Jews also held city jobs as water carriers. Running water did not exist. Water carriers carried buckets of water on their shoulders to the houses from pumps or springs located out of town.

The ultra-orthodox Yeshiva boys, who were always studying, did not have professions. They worked one day a week in local stores to support themselves. On market day, when strangers were in town, some businessmen paid young Yeshiva students to help them prevent theft in their stores. Strangers often came into the stores wearing large overcoats to hide items they tried to steal. Each piece of merchandise was considered priceless. One item could support an entire family for a week. The Yeshiva students were also assigned to wealthy people's houses for one day a week to eat and study there. This was known as *tug,* which is the Yiddish word for day.

Prior to World War II, one of the Polish government's laws stated that each family (Christians and non-Christians) had to spare one day's work a month to do public work benefitting the

city. This was known as *strahofka.* Those who could afford it hired other people to perform their task—either cleaning the streets, working in federal buildings, or other work benefitting the city. Anyone who could not pay the city's tax was assigned to dig ditches or clean for the city as their contribution.

The Poles held most of the city jobs. Jews were not given government positions, even though the majority of the people living in the town were supposed to be elected by the people. There were different laws and restrictions placed on voting rights, so that the Ukrainian and Polish nationals ended up with a majority to capture the government offices.

There were few policemen in town, but they were treated like kings (as were the Polish and Ukrainian clergies). Although people in our town were dirt poor, I don't remember any thieves within the community. The Poles ran the police, and they were quite good at their job. Once, my father reported a shoe theft, and, within a week, the police had recovered the stolen shoes in another town's market and returned them to us. Theft was greatly frowned upon. Punishment was just as stringent whether someone stole five pennies or five thousand dollars. If a child stole anything, their parents were fined or had to sit in jail if their child did not return the item within an allotted time. Policemen did not have radios or cars. They walked through the streets carrying rifles. They regularly checked to ensure that the streets were swept—especially the main roads. Everybody could spot a policeman from a mile away. Boys passing a policeman would always remove their hats and bow at the waist. Girls dropped down on one knee to curtsy and bowed their heads. The officer would salute back with two fingers.

The town's firemen were Christian Poles and Ukrainians, who lived on the outskirts of town. Most of them earned their living as musicians. They marched and played music at Christian funerals. The fire department was primitive. Their vehicles were horse-drawn wagons containing water pumps on both sides. Everybody volunteered when there was a fire. Buckets of water were passed from hand to hand.

Christians also worked as sanitation removers. The sanitation department requested that each house have garbage boxes

that were four feet deep and six to eight feet long. Usually, garbage was accumulated for a month, and then we would pay someone privately to cart it away. Other Christians earned a living chopping wood that was used for fuel.

Every Monday, village farmers would bring their products to the market, located in the center of our town. This was known as "bazaar" or "market day," and it was the busiest day of the week. Farmers who brought their wagons into the city from other villages were required to pay a tax fee, called *regatke,* for each wagon. Other tradesmen participated in bazaar day as well, including carpenters, tailors, and shoemakers.

Other shoemakers who participated in bazaar day would bring unfinished work to my father's store. We helped my father prepare the shoes for sale by shining them, putting the manufacturer's seal on the shoe soles, boxing them and marking the shoe size and styles on each box. We worked all night Saturday after the Sabbath and all day Sunday to prepare for Monday's bazaar. After I returned from school on Monday afternoons, I would go to my father's store to help him sell shoes at the bazaar.

Farmers preferred to buy products from children rather than adults, because they were more secure that children would not cheat them. Usually, we made a reasonable profit. Bargaining was expected, and a deal for a sale of goods (animals, wagons, fruits, and vegetables) was made with a handshake. Any necessary household goods were purchased at the market on bazaar day. After the farmers completed the deal, both parties shook hands. The farmers would then go to the bars for a drink and snack in celebration of a successful day at the market.

In the winter, the farmers would come into the Jewish families' homes and shops, because the weather was numbing cold and it was impossible to stand outside all day. During this period before the war, the relationship between most Jews and gentiles was quite good. The farmers felt comfortable in our homes. Whenever the farmers had a problem returning to their villages, we would put straw and cloth on the floor, and the farmers, sometimes with their entire families, would sleep over for the night.

Year round, people prepared food from one weekend to an-

other for the entire week. Thursday was baking day. My mother bought the staple foods; flour, oil, sugar, yeast, and potatoes at the market. When she returned home that evening, she would mix the flour to bake. By four o'clock in the morning, the oven was heated. (Our oven was approximately twelve feet long, and six feet wide, with a chimney stack that extended out of the house and let out smoke.) We heated the oven with wood. First, before baking, we made pancakes and rolls under the flames. My mother would wake us up at midnight or early morning to taste the delicious fresh-baked pancakes. In the morning, the cooled ashes were removed and the oven was cleaned in preparation for baking the bread and rolls. Enough pumpernickel, whole wheat, and other breads were prepared to last throughout the week. Challah bread was made expressly for Sabbath.

At about one o'clock in the afternoon, when the breads were usually done baking, the beggars would start coming for food. My mother made rolls especially for the poor to ensure that they had something to eat. The rolls, which resembled pita bread, were baked in oil in a frying pan and mixed with onions and poppy seeds. The beggars would come by the house on Fridays, and my mother would give them each a roll. My grandmother would deliver some food to the poor if they were too ashamed to beg.

Other foods prepared were cooked or baked in ceramic and cast-iron pots. Since most people did not own their own ovens, many of our neighbors brought their food to our house to bake special chulent. Their food was kept sealed in our oven until Saturday afternoon and would then be used for their Sabbath dinner.

Food was also carefully prepared from one season to another. In the summer, my mother bought fruits and vegetables at the bazaar, especially blueberries, plums, cherries, and pickles that she preserved in jars to store for the winter. In the winter, the cucumbers were prepared and barreled to make into mouthwatering sour pickles to sell. My mother sold the smaller pickles for one grush each (equivalent to one cent) and the large pickles for up to five grush each. Many of the town's poor people come to us for pickle juice to fill their stomachs.

When my mother finished her cooking, she lent her large, heavy copper pots and frying pans to other families so that they could also prepare their foods for winter storage. Chicken and geese were bought and fattened up so that we could eat them in the winter. Enough goose fat was also bottled and stored in a cool place to last through the winter. At Chanukah, my mother would fry golden latkes (potato pancakes) in the goose fat. This was considered a delicacy.

Some of the townspeople owned cows. It was always circus-like with everyone's cows coming and going, and it smelled awful. People had to pick up their cows' droppings quickly from the streets, or the police would issue stiff fines. In the winter, the cows were fed grass and straw from the summer's harvest. During the winter, my father woke up daily at four o'clock in the morning to pray, and then he would milk and feed the cows. In the evening, he would pray and then milk the cows again. In the summer, the shepherds took the cows out to graze in the fields twice a day, and, because the cows ate more, my father milked them three times a day. The most wonderful thing was drinking hot milk fresh after the cow's milking. My mother sometimes prepared a special bowl filled with a milk product for our own family. The bowl was filled with milk and placed in the oven overnight. In the morning, when she removed the hot bowl of milk from the oven, a thin brown skin covered the top. It was a delicious treat.

3

Although few in number, my childhood years, just prior to the start of World War II in 1939, were the best years of my life. It was the way our townspeople lived—the traditions, family life, and respect for one another—that made us very rich.

Like any children, we played in the fields and climbed tall trees. We also played ball and skated on frozen fishponds. During the summer, everyone dressed in light clothes and walked barefoot. We especially loved to walk barefoot through town in the rain, when there was mud on the ground. If you stuck your foot in the mud in certain places, it was difficult to pull it out. Only people lucky enough to live in a house with a raised wooden sidewalk leading to the entrance were able to avoid dragging mud inside.

Since we were not near any rivers, on hot summer days, we swam in the *sazefke,* which is similar to a pond. Traditionally, on Saturdays, we napped near the *sazefke* on the green, grassy land among the flowers.

We also played nearby on a well-known little man-made mountain, which was surrounded by water and resembled a fortress. It had been built for King Yagellah. In ancient times, people fought from around the mountainside. We often climbed the mountain's tall trees and played hide and seek or cops and robbers. In the winter, we would use our sleds or skis and slide down the mountain or skate on the frozen water. People who could not afford to buy real skates made their own skates by wrapping wood and wire to form a V shape, which they tied around their shoes to create skate blades. The best time on the ice was at Christmas. The pond was lit up with different-colored holiday lights, and we were allowed to stay there until midnight.

We also had horse-drawn sleds to drag through town in the snow. For fun, people who could afford it rented horses to pull

them around the field on their sleds. Most people made their sleds from wood, but others had manufactured sleds, which were rare and expensive. People were jealous of anyone who owned a manufactured sled.

Most Jewish people did not own dogs or cats, because it was too expensive to feed and care for these pets, and another person could be supported in their place. Instead, we played with pigeons, which could be kept in cages on our rooftops. Trained pigeons, called whistlers, were released and sent to other cages to retrieve other pigeons. Sometimes, we traded pigeons with the townspeople, and sometimes, because pigeons were kosher birds, we ate them.

Sports clubs were quite popular in our town. Poles and Jews each had their own soccer teams. The organized Jewish youth clubs were called ZKS, and the Polish teams were called Harcezy. When were very young, we played soccer in the streets and used a ball that we made ourselves from rubber and cotton rags. The older boys played with a real soccer ball. When I was old enough, I became captain of one of these local street teams. Everybody wanted to join my team. I was considered very courageous and a natural leader.

Playing organized soccer was considered a major achievement. We all dreamed that we would someday play too. The older teams competed against other clubs on real fields, using real balls, and traveled to different towns. Some Jewish clubs did not have the means to support themselves. When they traveled to other towns, instead of taking the train, they started out a day or two before the scheduled match and walked to the game, and their fans would follow them. Most of the young children would sneak into the stadium, but the older fans would pay. The Poles were always difficult to play against, because they did not accept defeat graciously. If they lost, fighting always broke out, and our players quickly left the field when a match ended.

All children started public school at age seven. Even though it was a public system, the classes were segregated by nationalities. There was a very large school at the center of town, which was attended mainly by Jews. We went to school from Monday through Friday and had off on Saturday and Sunday in obser-

vance of the Jewish and Christian Sabbaths. When I started public school, I was taught the Polish language (until this time, I had only spoken Yiddish), geography, history, and sports. Students wore different uniforms and hats based on their year in school (younger or upper grades).

School was very stringent and there was no excuse for lateness. My walk to school was nearly one mile. There were daily cleanliness checkups for the head, ears, and shirt collars. Students were sent home if they were not presentable. Loud noises were not tolerated in class. Students caught talking out of turn were hit over the hand with a ruler or had to stand facing a wall in the corner of the room, which was quite humiliating. Two students shared one bench. Boys and girls were seated at separate benches. One form of punishment was for a boy and girl to share a bench. The greatest punishment was for a boy to share a bench with two girls. For older children, the worst punishment was having a problem reported to their parents, because children feared and respected their mothers and fathers.

My teacher's name was Mrs. Galisovna. Every morning, before classes began, we stood on the street by the schoolyard and raised the Polish flag. Then we would sing the national anthem, thanking God for giving us the day (it was not considered a religious prayer) and recited an interfaith prayer. In the winter, we recited the prayers inside the classroom, and gym class followed.

Jewish organizations helped subsidize the poor children's religious studies. We received assistance from the United States and joint distributors that provided Talmud Torahs for bible study and a Bas Yacob, a school for the girls to learn a trade. Everyone in the Jewish schools was taught in a *chadar* (Hebrew for room), where we learned Hebrew. After studying in the *chadar* in the mornings, we attended public school for the rest of the day. I began attending *chadar* when I was three. There were only about ten children in my class. We sat five on each side on a long low bench with a long table between us. The table and bench were positioned beneath a series of small, low windows.

In *chadar,* we were taught to say prayers every morning and evening. The Hebrew prayer *Sh'ma Yisrael* (Hear O Israel), which reminded us that the Lord is our God and blessed his king-

dom, was recited each evening before going to sleep. The *Modeh Anee,* thanking the Lord for waking us up and returning our souls, was recited each morning. The *chadar* was close to our house. Every morning, my father brought me to the *chadar,* and in the evenings, he took me home. I still remember being brought downstairs to the basement, where Rabbi Menasach taught. Although, in Hebrew, rabbi means teacher, we referred to Rabbi Menasach as *Menache rozeach,* the Hebrew word for murderer, because he would hit the students without mercy. Rabbi Menasach was very strict. We had to sit very still in our seats at the table and learn the alphabet in Yiddish until we knew the prayers and could read. If we wanted to leave even for a minute or needed to use the toilet, special permission was needed. On the opposite side of the street, Rabbi Moshe Shnier taught the older children in a larger *chadar.*

Every Saturday, the rabbi came to our house to test us on that week's lesson. Usually, he came by after my family returned from the synagogue, which was lunch- or dinnertime. This was always an opportunity for the rabbi to have a good meal. Religious leaders were paid little if any salaries. Those congregation members who could afford contributions mostly supported them, while other congregation members provided them with food, clothing, or various supplies. All the rabbis in our town had their own unique traditions. They also earned their keep at the birth of a baby—especially a boy. When we recited the prayers along with the rabbi, the baby's parents would give us bags filled with candy and nuts. The Great Rabbi, who was the top spiritual leader, was never paid any salary and simply received whatever he needed from the community. The Great Rabbi always provided sound advice. Everyone held great faith in his spirituality. If someone were ill, he would wait on a long line to speak with him. If the Great Rabbi gave him a note and said he would recover, he usually did. The Great Rabbi seemed to possess a great hold over our people's spirits and imaginations. He also taught us to respect our elders, obey the laws and traditions, and follow the Ten Commandments—the most important rules governing our lives.

In 1938, when I was in the fifth grade, the school system in

our town changed drastically and permanently. Although many of the Jewish residents had registered their children in the Hebrew school being constructed, the school was never completed. Its license was denied due to the anti-Semitic sentiments that were brewing at the start of World War II. Instead, I was sent to the old Ukrainian and Polish school. My classes, which had always been comprised only of Jewish children, now contained, at the most, two or three Jewish children. It was quite uncomfortable for us. The other students' animosity toward Jews was evident, and fights between the Jews and the Christian majority were frequent (although I was always friendly and got along with everyone). Each morning, the Christian students would stand up and recite their prayers. To show our respect, we stood with them.

On one occasion, my new class went on a field trip to see the inside of a church. One of the frescos was of King Solomon holding the sword to cut the baby in half. I was surprised to learn that the Christians believed in the same Holy Bible. Growing up, I thought that the Christians believed in a different God and Bible. The tour was quite impressive, although I never told my parents, because I would have been punished. When I told my Christian friends my fear of telling my parents, they revealed that their parents had forbidden them to enter a synagogue. Everyone feared that he would lose his unique beliefs and traditions. The cost of religious preservation was ignorance. It was a prelude of what was to come.

The Polish mayor of the city, whom we nicknamed the "Destroying Mayor," soon enacted new laws, and our streets and the way we played changed forever. The mayor passed laws to beautify the streets. The government ordered side houses, built around the main frame of houses, to be torn down. Some people lost everything. This was only the beginning. When a Jew walked past a gentile street to go to the railroad, gentiles began to throw rocks and sometimes commanded their dogs to jump on us. When it was possible, we traveled in groups and carried a stick or rocks in our hand to throw back in case they wanted to fight.

We became fearful of certain holidays. On one holiday simi-

lar to Halloween, non-Jews came into the town and beat the Jews. We all ran for shelter and would not go outside that night. On other occasions, before the gentile boys went into the army, the recruits would cause mischief and try to destroy Jewish property. The strongest Jewish boys were the butchers and wagon-loaders. They organized to fight back together. When the recruits realized who they were confronting, they stopped.

It is difficult to describe anything beyond these childhood memories. As children, all our thoughts were simple and built around happiness and respect for all humankind. We were all naive about the future. We would never have imagined that our lives would change so fast and furiously. Soon, innocent people's blood, people that we knew—family, neighbors, and classmates—would be spilled by the millions, and the troubles the world was facing would be blamed on us—the Jews.

4

Early on in the war, before the September 1, 1939, invasion of Poland, Hitler had already begun attacking neighboring countries. As anti-Semitism against the Jews rose in Poland, pogroms and killings became commonplace. Anti-Semitic laws and regulations were enacted, and we were all affected. Schools were closed to Jews. We were no longer allowed to have books, and eating kosher food was forbidden.

Radios were available for the first time in Poland and we listened daily. News was spreading that Poland would be strong because the Polish army's marshal, Shemigle Ritz, was tough. He would not give up the fight for Poland's independence. Ritz used to say, "We will not give up even a button from our coats." It was also the first time that anyone in our town had ever seen an airplane in the sky. We knew that trouble was coming.

The Jewish people rallied behind the Polish army. Jews organized Zionist groups comprised of people from various organizations: Bethar, Ahaluz, Shomer Zion, and other groups. They taught us not to be silent but to fight back. The dream was to return to Palestine and fight for a homeland. Youngsters in these organizations were taught the Hebrew language. A culture show was also created to entertain and assist others.

Many people, including my uncle Moshe (my mother's brother), signed up as volunteers to serve in the army at the front, thinking the war would not last long. We just prayed that they would not fall into enemy hands. When military personnel came to our schools to collect money to buy machine guns for the Polish army, people generously opened their pockets. Although our town did not have an army post, the soldiers stationed in neighboring towns walked the fifteen miles to our town's marketplace to receive their guns. The soldiers received machine guns from money collected from the schoolchildren.

The war with Germany was short lived. The invasion lasted two weeks, and Poland lost. Every day, thousands of refugees passed through our town to escape the retreat of the Polish army toward Russia. It seemed as if everyone was trying to escape Poland by way of the Russian border. As difficult as our life had been prior to war, we were not prepared for the new hardships placed on our town. Everyone began to fear for his life. Necessities like food, clothing, and housing were scarce. The aged and sick were dying around us, while children from the orphanages, beggars, and street performers were singing in the streets. I can still hear the voices of the orphans singing in Yiddish as they begged for some bread:

It's a cold night and he's almost naked. It's dark all around.
A young boy stands on the corner. He looks suspicious as he looks all around.
The rain falls and chases him closer to the wall.
He holds a charity box. His eyes are hollow as he begs. . . .
"I don't have the strength to walk around the streets.
I'm hungry with torn clothes and wet from the rain.
I drag myself around, and no one gives me a chance to make a profit.
Everyone laughs at me—like I'm a nobody."

He wails,

"Buy, buy Bayin Cigarettes from me. They're dry.
Never got wet in the rain. Buy them cheap. Feel sorry for me.
Buy them from me and save me from starvation.

"Buy, buy old matches from me. Give me encouragement.
I should sell them and not scream in vain.
If no one buys from me, I will die like a dog in the street."

5

The Polish soldiers in our town created an intimidating presence. They wore dark-yellow uniforms with black shiny shoes and round helmets. At first, the soldiers thought poorly of the Jewish people, but, upon being treated to my mother's and other Jewish families' hospitality, their prejudice softened.

Whenever the officers stopped for an overnight visit at our house, my mother made sure they slept comfortably. She gave them each their own mattress and bed, while we slept on the wood floor. In the morning, she made them breakfast. Other people gave the officers bread to take with them. The officers seemed grateful for the great troubles my mother took. Once, they left a bicycle for us as gratitude for the hospitality.

We coped as best as possible. We prepared our town for the military's battle with the enemy by digging ditches for a second front line. With the retreat, we knew the Germans were getting closer to our town. The sounds of airplanes flying overhead on their way to bomb different targets became more frequent.

My father had experienced war as a soldier before and knew what to do. He took our family out of town and rented a place nearby from a farmer named Stephan. We stayed there for several days, not knowing whether the Germans were going to invade. There wasn't anyone around to give us information, and we did not know what would happen.

One day, my parents took the risk of going back to our house in the center of town to take care of business. They left Fayga, Chaim, and me alone in the farmer's house. While waiting for my parents to return, we were frightened by the unexpected sounds of cannons being fired and warplanes bombarding the neighboring houses. We knew that my parents and my other brothers would not be able to reach our hiding place. Chaim and I ran downstairs to the windowless basement and locked the hatch

door. We stayed still, without moving for more than a half-hour. Then we heard shouting upstairs and realized that the house next store had caught fire. We could feel the heat. The fire had spread to our hideaway. Our only choice was to get out. We knocked open the hatch and ran out into the nearby ditches that were surrounded by huge beanstalks. We sat crouched under the stalks until it got dark. If we could wait there until the army had passed through the main section of town (which led to the heart of the country), we thought we would be safe.

Luck was not with us. The enemy attacked from the side that directly crossed our temporary haven. Machine guns spat bullets incessantly for more than an hour, as we lay motionless in the ditches, caught in the crossfire. Finally, the sounds of firing subsided. We heard motorcycles and the voices of people yelling in different languages. We understood that, for now, it was over. We ran from the fields back toward the direction of the hideaway.

By the time we returned, the German army had already arrived. As quick as the snap of your fingers, everything had changed. We were shocked when the Germans would not let us move around freely. Once we calmed down and the town was quiet, we ventured back home to find my parents. When we arrived, our parents were standing in the street, hysterically crying. From our house they could see the hideaway immersed in flames, and they thought that we had all been killed. When my parents spotted us walking toward them, they joyfully ran toward us, along with everyone else in the street. My parents and the mob of people hugged and kissed us. They said it was a miracle that we came out of the scorched town alive.

Miracles and relief were fleeting. As we were being reunited, farmers from the neighboring villages were heading toward our town, intent on looting Jewish businesses. They justified it as a privilege of the German army's invasion. To their disappointment, the Germans warned the farmers not to touch anything and ordered them to leave town or face severe punishment. After this incident, we learned that the Germans were only temporarily occupying our town because of an agreement Hitler had made with Russia. Our town would become a Russian territory, and

the Germans would retreat when the Russian army arrived (which would be a while). In the meantime, the Germans kept busy. They took pictures of all the businesses and landmarks in town—institutions, buildings, synagogues, churches, and so forth, to prepare their strategy for a future invasion.

One night, the Germans quietly left our town for good. We were not even aware of their departure until the morning. The Russians did not arrive until a week later. During this interim period, there was anarchy and chaos. The Leftists and Communists prepared for the Russian army's arrival by hanging banners and displaying floral decorations. They rode bicycles around town to check which direction the Russians would be arriving from, so they could properly welcome them. To their disappointment, instead of the Russian army's arrival, a group from the Polish army returned to town with a brigade of troops. The proclaimed leader of our town, a young man named Kostecky, led them.

That same day, a Jewish fellow named Lederman was one of the Poles' first victims in town. It was rumored that, as Lederman had gone outside to close his window shutters, he was shot. When we heard the news, we panicked. People were afraid that the Poles wanted revenge because they had been waiting for the reception of the Red Army, and the Poles had returned instead.

Everyone thought that the best idea was to run to the churches for help. Mrs. Mialowicka, a well-respected and dignified Polish woman who was a tenant in my grandfather's house, approached members of the Polish army and a local priest to represent the interest of the town's Jews. She tried to persuade them not to harm the Jews. They seemed to listen, but it did not matter much. Within days, the Poles left. They knew the Russian army was close, and so they retreated to the forests. The Poles were going to hide in the forest until they could plan a counterattack when the Russians arrived, but the Poles later surrendered.

Once more, there was anarchy in town. It was just prior to the holiest Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Jews had been locking themselves in their homes, afraid to step outside, but now many Jews, including my family, sneaked out

to pray in the synagogue. The evening following Yom Kippur, airplanes flew overhead, dropping leaflets announcing that the Russian army was arriving in town. At four o'clock in the morning, we awoke to the sounds of marching bands, tanks, and tractors. By mid-morning, the entire market was crowded with loyal communists and townspeople of all nationalities—Jews, Ukrainians, and Poles—to provide the Russian army with a grand reception. It looked as if the Messiah had come to town. Everyone was singing and dancing, hugging and kissing.

By the next morning, the army began organizing the city. Leaders were chosen to run the government, a police department was formed, and even the poorest of people were given jobs. Businessmen and manufacturers were told that they could reopen their stores. The Russians promised that we had nothing to fear. Everything would be as before, and soon we would be able to buy and sell products without worrying. Instead, within one week, the Russians came and bought up everything on the shelves, leaving them bare, with nothing for us. Once supplies ran out, the situation worsened. Everything was rationed. People waited overnight in line for a loaf of bread, clothing, soap, and food. Sometimes, each family member waited on a different store line to purchase all the necessities they needed. Because of shortages, sometimes we would walk away emptyhanded even after having waited all night.

There was no other choice but to adjust to these changes. By law, anyone who was physically able was required to work. Any traces of freedom, democracy, and privatization were gone. People could no longer own their own businesses. Everyone had to find a new means of earning a living. Most businessmen became warehouse managers because of their backgrounds. They bought and sold items for the government. Shoemakers became police officers, and carpenters became clerical workers for the city, even if they could not write.

My family had always owned their own businesses and had to adjust to the new restrictions like everyone else. My uncle, who had owned a small grocery before the war, became a warehouse guard. He resented the Communist regime, because he could not remain in control of his business. My father had a dif-

ferent attitude. Because he could not own a shoe store, he converted his shop into a restaurant of sorts. My mother baked fresh white rolls and sold them to the Russian army, who were willing to pay almost any price. The restaurant was always crowded. We allowed the peasant farmers to sit and eat in our house, because there was not enough room for them in the restaurant. My father also helped my grandmother, Margulya, set up a bakery in her house. She made decent money selling her goods to the soldiers.

We all worked night and day, but it was still difficult to supply enough food for the entire army. To buy enough ingredients needed for the baked goods, we traveled to different towns and paid exuberant prices on the black market (which was illegal even for the government's use). The government looked away as long as we satisfied the army's needs.

Meanwhile, we were hearing stories of how poorly the Germans were treating the people on the other side of the Bug River. Hundreds of Jewish refugees began flooding our town daily, as they fled persecution. At first, the Russians allowed them to stay. The Jews told stories of atrocities being committed by Germans against the Jews on the other side of Poland. Soon after, the Russian army established border patrols and closed the border. Anyone attempting to cross was sent back to the German side. It was an emotional and traumatic time. Many people complained. They were unhappy with the system that the Russians had set up in our town. People were struggling to make ends meet and wanted to return to the German-occupied side of the border. The Russian government soon issued an order for anyone wishing to return to Germany. Those interested could register in the market, and transportation would be provided to take them back. The people who showed up were instead taken to the railroad station and put in cargo wagons.

Since we were considered a border town, strangers could not stay in our town. The Russian army worked with the local police to round up all refugees who were hiding in the neighborhood. The refugees were put on the trains but, instead of being sent to Germany, they were transported to Siberia and other parts deep

in Russia. These people became the lucky ones. They returned after the war to find their houses destroyed and families gone, but they survived through their isolation.

After our town was "cleansed," a new way of life began. Propaganda became widespread against different religious groups. God was dead, and Stalin was the new savior, the liberator, the gladiator. Day and night, songs were sung about Stalin, Lenin, Marx, and Engels.

Every student was demoted one grade to adjust to the more advanced Russian educational system. We were introduced to Communism and all of its history through the daily preaching and propaganda our teachers distributed. Each student also had to write a biography. If the Communist party found it acceptable, the student was coerced into joining the Comsomol Young Pioneers. Children of businessman, though, were labeled "capitalists" and could not join the party.

Other changes in the school system were more drastic. Under Polish occupation, there had been a Jewish school on a separate street that was now moved. The new official language, which had been Polish, was now Russian. Ukrainian and German were also now language requirements for all local citizens, and the new school-language requirements were Russian, German and Yiddish for Jewish students; Russian, German and Ukrainian for Ukrainian students; and Russian, German, Polish, and Ukrainian for Polish students.

We struggled daily to make a living and accept the new teachings. As Jews, this was difficult, but we kept our mouths shut. Otherwise, the punishment was immediate deportation from the town and country in which you had been born, raised and played.

My cousin Motl tested the system. He had a job with the government's building department until he expressed his opinion to one Russian Communist official. Motl was arrested on the spot for calling the official a "Bolshevik." The punishment for speaking against the government was harsh. You were arrested and either moved away from your family or sent to Siberia—never to

be heard from again. Luckily for Motl, my father quickly intervened. My father pleaded with the officer and bribed him to free my cousin. With an apology and a pocketful of money, the officer set Motl free.

6

Even during this Communist period, children were still children. We skated, played ball, and had parties. I was now thirteen, the age of bar mitzvah, which, in the Jewish religion, signifies the start of manhood. A religious ceremony was held in the synagogue and was followed by a large reception in our home.

My greatest joy that day was receiving the *siddur,* my first Hebrew prayerbook. It had an ornately inscribed cover and was simply magnificent. I was truly surprised to receive the prayerbook, because the Russians forbade ownership of all religious items. The book was most memorable, though, because it was a gift from Jacob. He had purchased it in Palestine, where he was studying, and mailed it to me. It was my most cherished possession, but I did not have it for long. It was just six weeks before the war broke out. We did not know it then, but the Germans would change everything when they returned to town.

The Ukrainian population was being torn apart by anti-Semitism and anti-Russian sentiments. The organization of *colchoz* (collective farms) was not well-accepted. The farmers resisted joining the group, because they did not want the government to control them. They draped banners over their horses' saddles (the horses were so skinny that their bones showed) that read, "*His golodu umru net do colchoz nie paydou,*" meaning, "I would rather die of hunger than go to a collective farm." Many horses died.

The Russian government set up antitrust laws and regulations stating that businesspeople, manufacturers, and others would be evacuated from town because the Russian government did not trust them. My family was included on this list. Many children were also evacuated from the schools and forced to attend trade schools, known as FZU. Some students volunteered to

attend FZU. Most of the students who attended FZU were the lucky ones, who survived.

People from our region were considered citizens of the Russian Ukrainian Republic. The Russian army began to mobilize people for military service. All male citizens eighteen years of age or older who took their health exam and declared to be in good shape were drafted into the army. (Prior to the outbreak of the war, some of our citizens who had formerly served in the region had already begun preparing themselves physically.) Although most people did not approve of the idea, there were no alternatives.

It was common knowledge that the Germans were coming, and German spies were prevalent throughout town. They openly walked through our streets, gathering information from the large Ukrainian population sympathetic to their cause. Many Ukrainians hid the Germans to enable them to gather strategic information about the region and layout of the town and region in preparation for an invasion. The Russians arrested and deported anyone caught aiding the Germans. The Russians seemed to know about the Germans' plan. Every day, large Russian army brigades with tanks and trailers would come and go through our town to display their might. It was as if they were proclaiming that they were invincible and would protect the land.

We sensed that something awful was about to happen. The Russians attempted to calm us. They said that everything would be settled by their agreement with the Germans. This was "Russian land," they said. We would be free from harm, and the Germans would keep their word not to invade because they were Russia's allies. As promising as this show of muscle appeared, we kept hearing tales of atrocities that were taking place, especially against the Jews, on the German side of the border. Everybody lived in fear.

All this time, our restaurant remained open for business. Many officials continued to come in for a good meal. We did not suffer as much as some other families did, because we had our own food from the restaurant and money for clothing.

We had also hidden some leather and skins that were left

over from our family's shoe store. It was against the law for us to own it. We were supposed to have sold everything, but, fearing the worst, families had hidden what they could for future survival. Our attic connected to the two houses on either side of us. One house was made of brick, and the other house was made of wood. Between our attic was a small, twelve-inch–by–eighteen-feet crawl space that divided the two walls that touched the neighbors' houses. Since I was still small enough, I was able to sneak into this crawl space and hide our valuables under the floorboards. We never knew when the police would come to the houses to inspect for hidden goods. The police did not need entry permits. They would just bust open the door, look around, and make assumptions based on the occupants' reactions.

7

In the early hours on the morning of June 22, 1941, our family was awakened by the shrill sounds of cannon shots. German airplanes were flying overhead, fearlessly low to the ground. It seemed as if we could almost reach out our windows and touch the planes. The war had begun on all fronts.

My father gathered the family and said we should leave with the retreating Bolshevik army, but my uncle, Israel Gonyck, was adamant that we should not leave with the Bolsheviks. He thought that we would be better off under the German auspices. My father considered leaving all of us behind with our uncle. Although my uncle talked him out of this, my father had an ominous premonition. One evening, my father handed everyone in the family a large sum of money and said, "I am afraid that this will become a large war. We may all be separated perhaps as far as the other half of the world. If you are separated, this will help you to survive on your own." Not only did my father make provisions for each of us, but he also took all the precious money that he had hidden and gave a portion to the relatives who had nothing.

My father was hauntingly correct in his prediction. War came fast and furiously. My brother Chaim, who was two years my senior, decided to flee with a friend whose family was retreating with the Russians. My sister, Fayga, was already in the city of Lwow. The rest of the family moved from our home to an older house, owned by the Zatz family, several blocks away. Because our house was located next to the synagogue, my father feared that the bombardments on landmarks would hit our home. The Zatzes had a large brick house that was more than 100 years old. It had retaining walls that were almost five feet thick. So many families had taken refuge in the Zatzes' house that we all slept head to toe from one corner of the room to the other. Meanwhile,

Chaim returned to town. When he found our house empty, he left town in the confusion. Everyone cried. We thought he was lost forever.

Luboml was located perilously close to the border and fell to the Germans on the third day of fighting between the Germans and Russians. It was the last city in the region to fall. The Germans surrounded the town and immediately began barging into everyone's homes for roundups. All the older men were rounded up. They were taken to the marketplace and locked up in the empty stores.

The Germans came to the Zatzes' house with a barrage of machine guns and shelled the door. My uncle's sister, Simy Inbinder, raised her hands toward the rabbi and wailed the *Sh'ma Yisrael,* a prayer Jews recite before going to sleep each night or when there is life-threatening danger. As they broke the door down, the rabbi's son Moshe prayed to God. My mother pleaded with the officers to spare us. She promised them that if they let us return to our home, she would cook food for the troops. The officers agreed to let my mother and me go to our home with the promise that we would return.

My mother and I hurried back to our house amid the continuous shelling. Everything was on fire. The deserted streets were lit by the flames. As we looked through the windows of the houses as we passed, we could make out the shadows of the German soldiers standing guard inside with their machine guns in hand. Bodies of people who had been shot dead were lying in the streets. An old man with a white beard lay dead with his eyes opened toward heaven. We witnessed an entire family being shelled. They fell to the ground and died together. One of the children, a young girl with flaxen hair, survived but went mad and ran through the streets screaming in horror.

When we finally reached our home, my mother quickly turned on the oven in preparation for baking. Suddenly, there was a large crashing sound at our door as the German soldiers barged in. They took away our bicycles and then dragged me from the house into the street. They forced me to go the water pump to provide the German troops with water to drink and wash their clothes. I ran to the water pump as the shells contin-

ued to fall around me. I was amazed that I was frightened and the Germans were not. By the time I reached the well, there was already a long line of soldiers waiting there. When it was finally my turn, I pumped the water so fast and furiously that I thought I would pass out from exhaustion. When night came, I was allowed to sleep.

By the time I awoke, half the town had burned to the ground. The Germans were already busy removing holy articles from the synagogue. They took the sacred Torah scrolls to the forest and spread them out to use as tablecloths for their lunches. As they feasted, a passing Russian plane dropped a bomb on their picnic site. Several German soldiers were killed in the attack. I was taken along with a few other men to the accident site. We were ordered to take down the victims who had been blasted into the trees and remove body parts that were strewn across the ground. We did as we were told and climbed into the trees to take down the fleshy bodies for burial. Our only consolation was that God had punished the Germans for their wickedness.

Fires continued to rage out of control in parts of town because the houses had straw roofs and wood frames. The Germans were forced to release the men that they had taken prison in the market stores so that they could help stop the fires from spreading.

When my father was released, he went directly to my grandfather's farm a few blocks away to feed the cows. A soldier spotted him and yelled, "Halt!" My father continued on his way, and the German starting shooting. My father leaped over an eight-foot–high fence and survived without a scratch. (I was fourteen years old and thought that was incredible, that a fifty-year-old man could jump that fence.) My father hid between the nearby houses during the day and escaped to our home at night, in the safety of the darkness.

During the time when my father was home, my parents discussed in disbelief what was happening. "The Germans have always been such good people," they said. "Why would they do us such harm?" At the same time, they cried for their missing son and daughter. Although Fayga was nineteen and Chaim was

seventeen, in my parents' eyes, they were still young children. Thanks to God's will, Fayga finally returned from Lwow. She had walked more than two hundred miles—day and night—through forests, villages and back roads to find her way home to her family. My brother Chaim's fate was not known until after the war.

8

Strict regulations and codes of conduct were enforced within weeks of the Germans' occupancy. Every Jew was required to wear a white armband around their left arm. It was approximately three inches in width with a large, blue Jewish star in the center. A curfew was also imposed. We were not allowed to leave our houses from seven o'clock in the evening until six o'clock in the morning.

Food was rationed to one hundred grams a day per person and no more than one kilogram of food per household. If the officials found more than the rationed allowance, the guilty party was shot to death. People stood in long lines all day just for bread. Eventually, the bread lines disappeared and so did most of the food. My mother had a big heart. She divided the food that she cooked between our family and saved a portion for those less fortunate. We also had two cows, which my mother milked daily. She distributed all the milk to the poor children who needed it most.

Jews faced increased humiliation and hardships. We were forced to hand over all our property and valuables, including diamonds, gold, money, and antiques. Anyone disobeying this order was either denied food rations or shot.

A day after the declarations, the Germans gathered all the cripples, crazies, and mentally retarded people and shot them. They distributed propaganda claiming that the town would be safer without these people. One of the victims was the girl with the flaxen hair who had survived the shelling that killed her family. Soon after, everyone in town was talking with great jealousy about Fallic Ginsberg's wife. She was lucky, they said, because she died of natural causes and would be buried in the cemetery.

The Germans were destroying the Jews, but they were also

undermining their support from local collaborators who thought that the Germans would save them. One morning, as I walked through the streets, a Ukrainian farmer approached me. He told me that the Germans had taken his pig and given him a receipt in exchange. The farmer was illiterate and asked me to read it. The receipt said, "I bought a pig from a peasant pig." I handed back the receipt to the farmer and quickly headed home.

As I walked home, I noticed a big celebration in the park. There were a lot of drunks. The Ukrainians and other people were toppling the large statue of Lenin. I ran home to avoid being caught in a riot. I knew that the Jews would be blamed for having erected the statue during the Russian occupation.

After four days of occupation, there was a new order for all males from eighteen to fifty years of age to gather in the center of town. Rather than obey, my father left town and headed toward the new cemetery. On the way, he met his friend Shmuel Wingarten, who was heading to the town center. My father begged him not to go. Shmuel did not listen and reported. From the crowd of men gathered in the center of town, the SS picked out Shmuel and some other men, Myer Ziengold, Jacob Gelibter, Moshe Shtricher, and Shmuel Schuster. They were led to the base of the little mountain and ordered to run up the hill. As they ran, the SS shot them in the back.

After the shooting, I walked to the mountain and saw the men lying dead. An hour later, my father returned from the cemetery and learned of the shooting. SS commander Katz, who had given the order to shoot the men, then gave permission to the Judenrat, our town's Jewish leaders, to bury the men in the cemetery. Katz claimed that the men had been killed in retaliation for cutting off the Germans' telecommunication lines. The truth was that excuses became justifications, and anyone could be accused.

Everyone was personally touched by the war, and my family was no different. The first victims in my family were my father's sister's (Chaya Achtalberg) family. They lived in the neighboring village of Potgorodne. The Germans shot Chaya's son Motel to death in front of her eyes, because he could not lift the heavy luggage that they had forced him to carry. The same day, the Ger-

mans continued their shooting spree by riddling the body of her daughter, Fayga, with shrapnel. Then they shot Fayga's husband to death.

My father took the responsibility of bringing Fayga to a hospital in the town of Machayev to get her doctor's care. Fayga only stayed there for a week, because the hospital would not allow Jews to remain. My father brought Fayga back to our home. Meanwhile, my father also paid off someone with a large sum of money so that we could properly bury Motel's body in the town cemetery. My father, with an open heart, always took care of everyone without expecting anything in return.

The life we had known was quickly fading away. As children, we used to sit outside and watch the early-morning sunrise and warm ourselves in its rays. Now, children from the ages of ten and older were forced to clean the streets, dig ditches for graves, and complete other tasks without pay. School reopened for one day, but the teachers never came.

There were no more flowers or gardens. Day after day, people were beaten and left lying in the streets with their skulls smashed and blood flowing out.

Half the city had been burned to the ground, and people were forced to live with three or four families in one house. Even the synagogues were no longer a safe haven. Anyone that the police caught there was sent to do hard labor. Once, when I was caught, the police sent me to work in a Russian warehouse. While I was cleaning there, I found a gun with some rifle parts and a handful of bullets. I took the gun and hid it in my pants. When I returned home that evening, I noticed that the large house across the street had a broken basement window. I sneaked inside and buried my weapon between the bricks, but I was afraid that, if the officials found it, they would blame the community. A week later, I retrieved the weapon and took it to the top of the little King Yagellah Mountain, where I had played as a child. I placed the gun and ammunition in a grease can and hid it between the roots of a large tree that I used to climb.

9

As the months passed, the Germans added new restrictions almost daily. People were required to perform manual labor to receive a portion of food. The police grabbed and assigned a job to anyone not working voluntarily.

I was assigned work at the railroad. Because the rails were narrower in Germany than in Russia, our job was to reload goods from one train to another while the rail lines were widened to be compatible with the German rail system. Sometimes, some of our coworkers would disappear. Hours later, they would return and shamefully describe the humiliation they experienced. For no apparent reason, the Germans cut off the Jewish men's beards and forced them to run naked in the rain, lie in the mud, or crawl on the ground. The older men were forced to urinate on the ground publicly and were savagely beaten.

I learned a lot about the railroad system and the German mentality from these experiences at the railroad. What I learned probably helped me to survive. If cargo trains passing Luboml were not scheduled to stop at the station, the locomotives just slowed down enough for the conductor to stand on the step and reach out to receive the message ring for the next destination. I also studied each train's cargo carefully. Each cargo box had a label marked with its destination. Trains with cargo labeled for Germany would be headed to the right and trains bound for Russia would be headed to the left. I started to plan my escape to the Russian front in case it became necessary.

One day, while I was working at the railroad, a train transporting Ukrainian prisoners of war stopped at the station. The Germans opened the doors and released the prisoners. As they were dispersing, the leader bellowed, "Boys, look around! If there are any Jews among us, kill them and save Russia!" The prisoners repeated their leader's command till everyone had

heard. I was terrified. What had I done? What had "we" done? I knew that terrible things were about to happen. I began to dream premonitions of running through forests, taking trains, wandering through big towns, passing rivers, and flying in a plane.

I had thought that my working group was lucky. Our foreman was an old German man we had nicknamed "Zady," because he seemed like a kind and gentle grandfather. At first, he was always fair to us, but, when the German officials showed up, Zady cracked down. He began screaming profanities and beat us with a stick.

A few days later, I was passing by the sawmill factory near the railroad, just as Zady was taking out his gun. I watched as he shot the factory manager, Mr. Krout, because he was a Jew. I was less than four feet away and trembled with fear. Maybe Zady would shoot me, too. I ran away and decided never to return to work.

10

July 21, 1941, marked my fifteenth birthday. Early that morning, my brother Moshe was taken to dig ditches in the old cemetery. I stayed home with my parents, Fayga and Label.

My father asked me to accompany him to the synagogue to bring home the Torah scrolls that had been donated in his name. He wanted to hide them between the double walls in the attic. We went to the synagogue and returned home with the scrolls. My father and I were going to bring the scrolls to the attic but my mother asked us to wait until she had finished washing the laundry. That way, we could take the laundry up to the attic to dry and hide the scrolls at the same time.

Meanwhile, a German Gestapo truck pulled up near our house. The Ukrainian police working with them surrounded the neighborhood. The police commander, Sarge Kowalchuk, entered our house and forced my father out to the truck. I looked out the window and could see a German soldier standing by the truck. A ladder was sticking out of the back of the truck for the men being rounded up to use to climb up. I ran outside to be with my father. When my father turned and saw me, he looked at me. With knowing eyes, but with necessary stoicism, he commanded me to leave as he motioned, "Go away now, or they will take you too!" Those were the last words my father ever spoke to me. . . .

Kowalchuk returned to our house and asked my mother for shovels. "What do you need them for?" she asked. He responded, with a nonchalant shrug, "To work." It was a lie that we could do nothing about. Kowalchuk knew exactly where they were going.

I quietly followed them on foot. By the time the truck reached city hall, more trucks, filled with more men, had been gathered. The Gestapo let all the men out of the trucks and assembled them into two lines—one for businessmen and the other for laborers and tradesmen. (Later, my Uncle Moshe told me

that my brother Moshe had been standing with him on the tradesmen's line but had crossed to the other line to be with my father. He thought the tradesmen would be accused of being Communists and would not be safe, but the tradesmen were the ones released.)

The remaining three hundred or so men, including my father and brother, were taken by truck to the new cemetery with the freshly dug ground. I followed and hid behind some bushes as the Ukrainian police surrounded the cemetery. The men were ordered off the truck, lined up, and then coldly and methodically executed by machine gun. I cowered as I heard the guns rapidly firing. I could barely endure listening to the men's agonizing screams as their bodies fell to the soft earth. When the firing ceased, I watched as the trucks drove away from the cemetery empty.

As soon as I thought it was safe, I ran home. Tears streamed down my mother's face as I told her what had happened. My grandfather was shocked by the news. He was unable to speak for three weeks. He had loved his son-in-law very much and would rather have died himself. (My father was forty-nine years old, and Moshe was just eighteen.) My mother grabbed Label and me and held us close to her bosom, all the while screaming and crying, "God help me! Please save my two little boys and reunite them with their brother Jacob in Jerusalem." Then my mother turned to me and said, "Now you are the head of the household, Avram." I was fifteen years old and, with this new responsibility, I became a man.

Meanwhile, the Gestapo celebrated the shootings by getting drunk in the streets of our town. The Germans denied that the three hundred men they had taken away had been shot. They claimed that the men had been taken to Germany to work in the labor camps. I knew the truth. I had been there and had heard the shooting. I went to the gravesite early the next morning and saw the flat mass grave. The men's discarded armbands, along with Aynach the cripple's wooden leg, were scattered on the grass beside the freshly dug earth.

11

For months, my mother and the other women in town held onto the hope that their husbands and sons were not dead. They went to Princess Topka, asking for help. They hoped, from the town's mayor, Commissar Ugde, she could discover what had happened to their loved ones. Topka was the sister of the baron, Misha Compione. She was also the Commissar Ugde's girlfriend. (In 1939, when the Russians had invaded Luboml, the baron had left the German-occupied side of Poland. When the Germans took control of our town, they returned the farm to Baron Compione. Compione took residence with his wife, two children, and Topka on his farm there.)

Princess Topka told the women that she would first need to bring the commissar an expensive gift. The women eagerly gave Topka a large sum of money. Then Topka said that she was going to visit the men at the camps and help gain their release, but more money was needed. Again, the mourning women gave her more money. Each time Topka returned with another excuse for getting money or other valuables from the women. After three months passed, the women saw no signs that their men would return and stopped hoping that Topka could help them.

The townspeople started discussing resistance and survival. Everyone knew that another roundup was imminent. People started to save their money to buy guns, which could easily be obtained from the farmers who had accumulated them from the retreating Russian army. Rumors persisted that Russian POWs who had escaped were hiding in the forests to organize Partisan groups to fight the Germans. We talked about burning down the town so that people would be forced to flee. Some people were against the idea of running away. What difference did it make where they died? Winter was coming, and they would die of cold and starvation. At least in the ghetto, everyone still had homes.

God willing, the war would end soon. The Americans would open the second front and defeat the Germans. This was how this line of thinking went.

It was all wishful thinking. Commissar Ugde issued a new order forcing people to move to certain streets in the ghetto in order to limit the scope of Jewish occupation outside these perimeters. Luckily, our house was within this zone. Most of my relatives moved in with us, including my grandparents, my aunt and her family, Uncle Max's family (Max had left for the United States before the war broke out), and a few other families from the town. There were now almost fifty people living in our home.

Christians whose homes were within the ghetto had to post a large cross in the front right corner of their house. Jews who had homes that neighbored a Christian home were forced to hang a twenty-inch yellow circular banner containing a Jewish star.

Food was rationed. We were not allowed to keep more than five pounds of flour in our home. Only the workers were served bread. The threat of death by shooting was a constant reminder of our precarious situation.

Commissar Ugde also imposed mandatory monetary contributions. He commissioned the workers to build him a custom-made horse's coach from the finest leather and best wood. The best blacksmith in town helped melt a large amount of the townspeople's silver and gold to create the coach's frame. The Judenrat leader—the Jewish ghetto's spokesperson, Mr. Kopelzon, also assisted with the creation of the commissar's coach. In exchange for his help, the commissar granted Mr. Kopelzon permission to bring his daughter and son-in-law, with their families, from the city of Rowno, which was being liquidated, to Luboml.

To help reestablish Compione's farm, Commissar Ugde took cows, horses, wagons, grain, and food from the other farmers and gave them to Compione. It was devastating for the infants and children in town. My mother, who had supplied the children with food and milk from our own cow, no longer had a cow or milk. The food supply was also cut off from the other local farmers. My mother pleaded with Baron Compione to allow us some milk and

grain. He consented in a verbal agreement with my mother that our family would receive a daily liter of milk and some grain. In exchange, we would give him two cows, and I would work for the baron on his farm.

Compione agreed because he felt indebted to my family. The story, as I recall, was that before the Russian Communists took over the town at the onset of World War I, Compione had sold my father some of his land and farm very cheaply and then fled. When the Russians retreated and the Polish government was established, Compione returned, and my father returned the baron's land to him. Compione respected my father for his sense of fairness and felt a kindred spirit toward my family.

The baron took a liking to me. He endearingly called me "Abroomchu" and let me play with his children. His maids also treated me kindly. They fed me and often allowed me to take food home to my family. I worked as a shepherd and as Compione's carriage driver. I was also learning to plow soil and ride horses so that I could become a farmer. My mother was given work cooking and cleaning.

By law, all Jews were required to return to the ghetto every evening after work. At first, we returned home each evening. After a while, under Compione's protection, we slept at his farm every night, which meant that, whenever there was a roundup, I was safe. (I slept near the room of Commissar Ugde, who was living with the Compiones.) The baron also benefitted because we woke up early and worked longer hours.

I do not know why I took chances, but, whenever I worked at the baron's farm, I never wore my required armband. It was my way of protesting. I had no other means to fight back. Sometimes, I did not even wear my armband when I walked home, but I always took the side streets to avoid being seen.

On one trip, as I took Compione's horse out to graze in the field near the farm, I spotted a crippled Polish man, Martin Rozdowich, standing in an open grave. (A year earlier, Martin had been accused of being a Communist and was beaten by the police and thrown into prison. Ever since, whenever I passed the Ukraine police station on my way home from the farm, I could hear Martin moaning and crying in pain.) Now, two Ukrainian

police and a German gendarme surrounded Martin. One of the policemen saw me and chased me away. When I was about one hundred feet away, I heard a loud wail. I turned around and saw the Ukrainians holding Martin still as the gendarme shot him in the back of the head.

12

August brought another roundup of Jews. This time, the police were coming for women—especially the young girls. I watched from our front window as a Chappon truck (catcher of Jews) pulled up in front of our house. Commander Kowalchuk was leading a group of young women from the neighborhood to the truck where the Germans were waiting. It was just before dark when a Ukrainian policeman knocked on our door. I could hear Kowalchuk's voice in the street addressing the officer, "You can leave that house. We have already taken people from there." They left without incident.

My grandmother was paralyzed with fear. She began to scream. My mother started crying and begged my grandmother to be quiet to avoid drawing attention back to our house. The police returned to the house to look for my sister, but their search was futile. When the police had gone, my mother called Fayga down from the attic, where she had been hiding.

The next morning, more men and women were rounded up. I watched as the commander took a young girl that I knew, Tzipora Stern, to the truck. Her mother, Poychi, followed behind, begging the commander to release her daughter. Instead, the commander put Poychi on the truck with her daughter. Nearly three hundred people were taken to the Borky Forest and shot. Again, Commissar Ugde denied the incident and claimed it was just a rumor.

Commissar Ugde enacted stricter laws: Anyone still possessing gold, silver, or other currencies would be shot on the spot. Also, furniture, furs, dishes, and bronze and copper pots and pans had to be turned in. Jews gave their valuables, including expensive bedspreads, clothes, and silver to Christian neighbors and local dignitaries, hoping that, in exchange, they would help us. We gave our family's valuables to our former maid and

gave the Compiones and their maids the rest of our furniture and goods. Our farmland was also handed over to our neighbors. In return, we asked them if we could hide in their home. Their response was, "We can hide your valuables, but we cannot hide you."

Some Christians asked their priests why nothing was being done to help the Jews. The priests responded, "The Jews have sinned and are being punished. Nothing can be done." I thought, "What kind of people could do this? They would gladly save our things but not us." Didn't they believe in the same Ten Commandments as we did? The Commandments state, "Thou shall not kill" and "Love thy neighbor as thyself." The German soldiers wore brass belt buckles with the inscription, "*God is with us.*" At the same time, how could they believe it was right to kill Jews?

We turned to our rabbis for guidance. "Why is this happening to us?" "Why must the righteous suffer?" The rabbis responded, "The righteous must suffer for the sinners." It was still difficult to accept this fate.

13

In September, rumors circulated that everyone under eighteen years of age must return to school. So, I went to school early one morning along with the other children. We waited for hours, but the teachers never came. That was the end of my formal education.

The next day, I went back to work. I was assigned as the horse and wagon driver for a German man who was managing the town's supplies. He was from the German police known as the Vermacht. The Jews nicknamed him "Moishela," a Yiddish name, meaning "a man like one of us." I never learned his real name.

Moishela seemed to like me and always requested me as his driver. The Jews throughout the ghetto respected him because he treated us humanely. Moishela often took me along to the market and allowed me to buy food from the Ukrainian farmers to bring to my family. Sometimes, Moishela gave me food and gifts, and, in exchange, I went to the barracks to wash floors, clean dishes, shine shoes, or feed him. When I finished, I was free to walk in the street or play in his backyard.

One day, while I was in Moishela's yard, I watched as some new Ukrainian police recruits were being trained with rifles at a nearby field. I had always admired army soldiers and walked up to the gate to get a closer look. I recognized one of the recruits. He was from a poor family and lived in a small village near our town. He had been a good friend of mine from public school. I had once shared my sandwiches with him. He noticed me standing there and walked up to the gate. "You dirty Jew," he said. "You may be watching me only training with a rifle now, but next time, this rifle will kill you." I felt sick. I lowered my head as I turned and went back inside the barracks.

14

With the marking of each Jewish holiday, a new order was imposed. On Yom Kippur 1941, an order decreed that all Jews wear a yellow armband three inches in diameter. It replaced the white armband with the blue Star of David that we had been wearing. In addition, the new regulation stated that Jews must wear two yellow patches—one over the chest by the heart, and one on the right side of the back. We were supposed to attach the patches to our clothing with a bobby pin, but I never did. As before, I kept my patches in my pocket. I figured that, if I were caught, I would use the excuse that I had just changed my clothes and forgotten to put them on.

Jews were not allowed to leave the ghetto. As the war dragged on, everyone feared that we would suffer shortages during the long cold Russian winter. At home, we broke up boxes, furniture, and old cardboard to burn in the fireplace for warmth. Our family was lucky to be rewarded for our labor on the farm with food and produce. I always brought home grain, flour, radishes, potatoes, and leaves (which I took from the animals' portions). My mother would grind the food together to create a meal.

The Germans increased their need for workers. Clothing and other necessities were in constant demand, and more cows and horses were being brought in to supply food. Jewish labor was free, and the Germans easily found qualified people to work as butchers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and farmers. Fifteen additional Jews were hired to work on Compione's farm. Most Jews were glad to get work on the farm because it gave them protection from being brought to other work sites where they might disappear.

A Polish boy named Kostecky, who also worked on Compione's farm, befriended me. During the period when the Poles had occupied Luboml before the Germans' arrival, Kostecky's family

had been anti-Semites. Now, the German regime had caused his family to suffer and subjected them to forced labor just like the Jews. I discovered that those who suffer empathize with others who are suffering. As a Christian, Kostecky was allowed to purchase food at the market, and he often gave some food to me. Once, he bought me fresh strawberries and sugar. I hid the items without telling anyone so that no one would steal them from me. I made fresh jam from the delicacies and stored it in a jar. Whenever it was possible, I offered some jam to our rabbi, who was in hiding.

I knew that I was very lucky still to be working at Compione's farm—I ate hot meals and slept in a warm house. Compione did all that he could to help us. He treated us with dignity. When anti-Semites or Ukrainians who were working on the farm humiliated us, Compione would take them aside and beat them.

Commissar Ugde was not as kind as the baron. One snowy night, in mid-February 1942, we had all worked late into the night. It had snowed so much that it was almost as bright as daylight outside. We sensed there was trouble. German officers soon began arriving at the farm with show horses, cows, and bulls. The animals had been confiscated from residents of surrounding villages. Suddenly, we heard Commissar Ugde screaming profanities. One of his favorite horses, a white Siberian with black dots, had disappeared. Commissar Ugde approached us with strict orders to locate his horse. If the horse were not found, one of us would be shot. We were afraid and split up across the farm and to the neighboring woods to find the missing horse. After searching for two hours, we were relieved to find the horse in a little forest near the farm and safely returned it to Ugde. When it was time to go to bed, everyone was exhausted, but no one could sleep. The next day, there was a celebration on the farm, and some of the horses and bulls were formally given to Compione's farm as gifts.

Around the same time, two Volks Deutschen and a commissar of agriculture were assigned to Compione's farm to keep a closer watch on the workers. One Volks Deutsch was a tall brooding blond, and the other man was short with a dark complexion. I thought that they were both evil men.

I was beaten and cursed by the Volks Deutschen and commissar of agriculture on several occasions. Once, there was a dispute between a Ukrainian worker and his wife, who lived in a neighboring village. The blonde Volk Deutsch came to me and told me to act as their interpreter. I was taken along with the Ukrainian worker to the village where his wife was staying. With the little German that I had learned in public school during the Russian occupancy and my Yiddish (which is similar to German), I could guess the gist of the couple's conversation. The Ukrainian and his wife were yelling filthy language at each other. I had never heard these profanities before and feared that I would be beaten if I could not interpret correctly. In the end, somehow the dispute was resolved, and I was thankful that I could return home safely.

15

We soon learned that, for the first time, the Germans had stopped fighting in Stalingrad and had suffered many losses because of the cold weather. People working at the railroad station saw large transports of wounded soldiers returning to Germany. There were rumors that the Second Front would soon open, and the American army would enter the war. It gave us hope that the end of the war and liberation were near. These turned out to be more false hopes.

New orders soon arrived. All sweaters, blankets, feather pillows, wool, and anything else that would keep the German soldiers warm on the front had to be turned in. The Ukrainian police also enforced orders to turn over candlesticks, cooking pots and pans, copper and brass—including removing door handles and ledges from all residences. The doors to our homes had to be kept closed by tying wire strings around hooks in the doorframe. All the metals were melted down and used for armaments. We had nothing left to keep us warm.

Rumors spread from other towns that the ghettos were being liquidated. Refugees soon began to arrive in our town by escaping from their towns that were being liquidated. Many of them had walked for miles through the night or boarded cargo trains illegally. This gave me an idea that maybe I could use the cargo trains to escape from the ghetto.

The winter dragged on with no relief. By March, food shortages were our greatest problem. Many people died from disease and starvation because there weren't any doctors in the ghetto to care for the sick and malnourished.

In the spring, a few hundred Jewish men were rounded up in town and brought to Compione's farm. The men were ordered to bring all the horses, wagons, and other goods, which the Germans had taken from the villagers at the start of the winter, to

the Ukrainian town of Stree, almost seventy kilometers away. When the men finished, they would be allowed to return. The two Volks Deutschen were supposed to guide the men. Instead, only three men managed to return to Luboml—one was my cousin, Pini Lipshitz. The survivors told us that when the men reached the town of Stree, the Volks Deutschen ordered them to continue to head deep into Russia. The men were never seen again.

Although I was saved from these roundups because I was working, my mother worried about Fayga and Label. They were forced to stay at home, because neither one of them had working papers. At any time they could be taken away.

One day, the Germans came for Label during a roundup. They said that they were taking my brother to work. Late that evening, Label still had not returned home. My mother panicked and went to Compione for help. Before Compione could find him, Label was returned home unharmed. It was a relief to see him home safe. This became a new mind game that the Germans played with us. From time to time, they tried to scare people with this trick and sometimes, the workers really never returned home. My cousin Morton was one of the unfortunate ones.

The losses began to take their toll in my family, and there was no end in site. My cousin Yankel, who was a carpenter by trade, was working for a farmer, constructing and repairing buildings on the farm. Yankel would return to the ghetto to bring us food and take care of his family. His sister, who had been hit with shrapnel, was in constant pain. My grandmother had given Yankel a large gold chain, which she hoped he would be able to use to survive. Instead, the farmer found out about the chain and killed Yankel for the gold. Yankel's funeral was unbearable for our family. Everyone had already suffered so many losses—my brother and father, my aunt's two sons, and my Uncle Max's son. Life could not go on like this for us.

All the while, the Germans forced the town's Jews, myself included, to dig a wider and longer extension adjacent to the brick factory. The Germans never said it, but we knew that we were digging our own graves. Mr. Kopelzon went to Commissar Ugde to tell him what the Jews of the ghetto thought about dig-

ging these large graves. The commissar was outraged by Mr. Kopelzon's confrontation and threatened to punish anyone caught spreading these rumors. Ugde also claimed that the ditches were to enlarge the brick factory. It was a lie. By the end of the war, these mass graves were filled with the remains of most of the Jews who had dug them.

16

By the summer of 1942, a number of Jews in the ghetto had escaped to the forest to join the Partisans. My Uncle Moshe Zuckerman took me aside and explained his plan to join them. Moshe, who had been considered a playboy in his youth, had served in the Polish cavalry and was a skilled marksman. As a child, I had followed Moshe through the street when he came home on leave from the cavalry. His sword would glisten in the sun light as it lay pressed against his uniform. I had always been proud of him.

I begged Moshe to take me with him to join the Partisans. Moshe tried to talk me out of it. "It is too dangerous for a young boy," he said. "You should stay by your mother's side with your sister and brother. They will go hide in the village of Nudiz where your mother was born. The farmers have been guests in your home, and you can trust them. Besides, even I have had problems obtaining a weapon. The Partisans will not accept you unless you have one, and it is almost impossible to get one."

I proceeded to tell Moshe about the gun I had hidden on Mount Yagellah under the large tree. "You are the only one who knows," I said. "I did not even tell my mother." He was surprised but pleased to hear my news. He offered to take me with him to join the Partisans if I would give him my gun. I agreed, except that there was a problem. The mountain was located outside of the ghetto. Four Jews had already been shot by this tree. If I got caught at the mountain, especially with a gun, I would be shot on the spot. Nevertheless, I was willing to take the risk.

The next day, while I was working as a shepherd on Compione's farm, I took the cows to a field quite a distance from the farm. I used the excuse that the grass there was better for the cows. While the cows grazed by the mountain, I dug up the gun and brought it to Moshe. When I returned home that night, I told my mother about the agreement that I had made with her

brother. My mother agreed to allow me to go with Moshe if I remained in his custody. Arrangements for what I would take with me and where and when I would meet Moshe would depend upon time and circumstances.

One morning, after returning from an overnight stay in the ghetto, the police stopped me as I was returning to Compione's farm. They had orders to force the Jews to work. I repeatedly told the policemen that I was already working at the Compione's farm. I pleaded with them to allow me to go back there. Because I did not have my permit card with me, which allowed me to work outside of the ghetto, the police forced me to help flatten out the sandy road leading to the town of Chelem.

While I was working on the road, produce farmers passed us on their way to the market. We begged the farmers for food. They told us that they would only give us food if we had money, but none of us had any.

After two hours of work, I ran off and headed back to the Compione's farm. When I arrived, the farm manager was angry that I was late. Once I explained what had happened, he allowed me to return to my job. Later that afternoon, I learned that two sisters from the ghetto, Charne and Ronia Melamed, and one man, Shtricher the cap-maker, were caught buying eggs from a farmer. Commissar Ugde took them not far from the farm and shot them as an example to deter the other Jews from buying food from the farmers.

17

It was now fall 1942. As the days passed, we still hoped for some miracle and continued to pray to God for salvation. While the surrounding ghettos were being liquidated, the Germans promised that we would be left alone because we were needed for work. Mr. Kopelzon told us to be patient and not to run away.

The Jewish holiday of Succoth, commemorating the season of the harvest, was approaching. With each Jewish holiday we feared a new atrocity. On September 30, a day before Hashanah Raba—the last day of Succoth, Compione warned my mother that Topka had learned from the commissar that the ghetto would be liquidated the next day. My mother ran to tell me the bad news. She then returned to the ghetto to get my things so that I would be ready to leave with Moshe to join the Partisans. My mother also told Kopelzon about the liquidation so that he could warn our people. Instead, Kopelzon went to Commissar Ugde with the news. The commissar denied it and said someone just wanted to scare the Jews and that we should not be concerned. My family took the warning seriously. We knew enough to trust Compione's warnings.

It was to be my last day on the farm. A gentile girl that I knew from grade school was at the farm that day. She had some potatoes that she had just baked over a fire, and she shared them with me. I can still savor the taste. It was like manna from heaven. We were interrupted when I saw one of my cows trying to cross the road. As I ran after it, I spotted the commissar and Topka riding toward me in the golden coach that the Jewish people had made for him. The commissar pulled out his long gun from his jacket and aimed for me. I froze. Topka knew me and stopped the commissar from shooting. He put the gun away and rode off with Topka. I dropped to my knees and thanked the

Lord. (Years later, I learned that Topka and the commissar had married and were living in Germany.)

I arrived home in the ghetto at about five o'clock that evening. My mother was there waiting. She handed me some warm clothes for the winter months ahead and a bag filled with items that she thought would be useful to survive. She then placed in my hands her wedding ring, the golden engagement ring that my father had brought back from America, and two golden watches. I then realized that I was being separated from my family. I looked at their faces, and warm tears streamed like rivers down my cheeks as I said goodbye to them one by one—my mother, brother, sister, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. I did not want to go. I sensed that this might be the last time I ever saw them, and I believe my mother knew this. She told me, "Avram, we are sending you away with our only valuables. You must be strong and survive." The words were caught in my throat, and so I shook my head to indicate that I understood. I hugged my mother one last time, and, after taking a final look at my family, I quickly left town to meet my Uncle Moshe at his house.

When I arrived at my uncle's home, he told me to go to the Foxes' home, which was near the old post office. Moshe and my older cousins would meet me there later, and together we would leave to find the Partisans.

It was dark when I arrived at the designated spot. There were about thirty young men and women all under the age of thirty waiting there. Some of them had guns or rifles, and others just had food. I looked around, but I did not see Moshe or my cousins Chaim and Yankel. A rumor began circulating that the Gestapo were headed in our direction, and we could not wait any longer. We decided to break up into smaller groups of five or six and regroup at the new cemetery on the outskirts of town. Then we took off, one group at a time.

Our group was the first to arrive at the new cemetery. While we were waiting for the others to arrive, the Ukrainian police from the surrounding villages were approaching Luboml on their wagons. They were carrying weapons to help the Germans liquidate the ghetto. We hid in the bushes by the cemetery till

they passed. After more than one hour had passed, only one boy showed up. We decided to continue on our journey to the Polapy Forest. We walked in the darkness, cutting through thick bushes with sticks and knives until we reached the forest, around midnight. Finally, we sat down to rest in a muddy area and fell asleep.

As the sun rose, we heard the sounds of people running by. We looked up and saw two Jewish boys from our town, Benjamin Pizzingiz and Arnold Millstein. The boys had decided to flee the ghetto at the last minute. They stopped and joined us, hiding in the bushes. We stayed there all day. Our group had not had anything to eat or drink since leaving Luboml. We were parched, and there was no drinking water around. Luckily, the two boys had brought some bread and pork with them. As a youngster, I had never eaten pork because of prohibitions in the Jewish dietary laws, but because our religion dictates that a person must do whatever is necessary when a life is threatened, without guilt, I took a piece of pork about one inch thick and ate it ravenously along with a slice of bread. For drinking water, we dug a hole in the muddy ground and scooped up the shallow water. We purified the water by using the cotton lining of our coats to strain it. The pork and water were our only nourishment for the day.

There were only ten of us left from the original group. Most likely, some people had gotten lost on their way to meet us. Besides Benjamin and Arnold, in our group were two brothers from the Sokolovsky family, two girls—Fayga Turner and Pessell Pervesa—two brothers who were butchers, and a refugee from Warsaw who at one time had been a ghetto policeman. The refugee had managed to take a gold cigarette case with him, and some of the others had guns and grenades.

That evening, as it grew dark, we continued to march through the forest in an attempt to make contact with the Partisans. We met others who had come from the other end of the town. We would stop to discuss strategies to organize ourselves so that we could plan for the coming winter and best be able to resist if it became necessary to fight back.

We walked deeper and deeper into the forest. In the morn-

ing, we spotted a farmer in the distance. As we got closer, the man saw us and disappeared into the bushes. We continued until we reached a house in the middle of the forest. When we knocked on the door to the house, a man appeared in his nightgown. It was the same farmer whom we had spotted earlier. We asked him for some food and water. He seemed frightened and threatened us and told us to leave. One of the boys in our group pulled out a revolver. The farmer went inside and gave us a loaf of bread and something to drink to share. We thanked him as we left but warned him that, if he told anyone that we had been there, we would return in reprisal.

Without knowing where we were heading, our group covertly continued our journey. We followed any path we found. Eventually, we came near a small housing settlement. We sat down and discussed our plan. Most important, we needed food and directions to find the Partisans. I was only a youngster of fifteen and did not know what to do, so I kept quiet and followed whatever the others decided.

To avoid arousing suspicion, we agreed to send the two girls to beg for food and get information from one of the farmers. We knew that, if one of the boys asked, the farmer might not cooperate, but perhaps they would pity the girls. It was a bad decision. The two girls went to the farmer but never returned. We only had one gun and did not know whether or not the farmer was armed or how many other farmers there were. As terrible as it seems, no one thought of a convincing plan to rescue the girls, and so, after a while, we left without them.

A few miles down the road, we saw another farmer who was alone. We pointed a gun at him and forced him to give us food, water, and warm clothes. Once he gave us what we wanted, we ran for miles without stopping, for fear that the farmers would come after us.

It was always the best time to travel in the dark, and so we continued walking through the night until we reached another house in the woods. Suddenly, we heard people yelling and dogs barking. We turned around and saw the people shining flashlights as they headed toward us with the dogs. As we ran off toward the heavy bushes, which was about a half-mile away, the

group got separated. Only four of us now remained together—the two butcher brothers, the refugee, and me. All day, we sat silently in the bushes while the shepherds passed with their cows and flocks. By some miracle, the shepherds never came close.

That night, the brothers and the refugee had a discussion. They figured that it would be best to return to their hometown and hide with a farmer who had befriended them. None of them mentioned taking me along. It did not really bother me, because I did not trust the farmers. Besides, I had made my own plans. I knew from working at the railroad station that if I could get to the Russian front (with the hopes that the Russians would defeat the Germans), I would be saved.

I set out with the boys toward their hometown. As we reached the main road leading to Luboml, we heard some cars with German-speaking passengers driving by. We hid under one of the little bridges until the cars passed. Once it was quiet, we continued. At about midnight, we arrived at the outskirts of Luboml. From there, the three boys knew the way back to their village, and they separated from me.

I planned to walk to the railroad station. I took a route that was close to the graves where many of our townspeople had been massacred. It was frightening to think about so many people dying, but I maintained my composure. I was getting hungry and decided to find some food before continuing to the railroad station.

By early morning, I made my way to Compione's farm. I pried open one of the windows to his house. There were some small pots (the Russian army called them *minashkes*) on the inside ledge of the windowsill. I reached in and grabbed some of the pots, hoping to find some food, but the pots were empty. Luckily, the hunting dogs were not on the farm that night; otherwise, I would have woken everyone on the farm and been caught.

I continued to walk on the farm until I reached the manager's house. He knew my family, and I thought he might help me. I knocked on his door. When he answered, he looked at me and told me to leave immediately. It was too dangerous for him to

take the risk, and there was no room for me to hide on the farm. If he were caught, the Germans would take me away.

With nowhere else to go, I walked toward the barn where I used to sleep. As I approached, I heard voices and saw lights aimed towards the barn. I ran underneath the barn's support poles that were raised about a foot each off the ground. Another Jewish man, Pinnie Plave, was already hiding under the barn. Pinnie had also worked on the farm and recognized me. He seemed glad to see me and suggested that, in a day or two, we should leave together for another hiding place in the forest. Pinnie had been a lumber dealer before the war and knew the manager of the other place very well. I agreed to go with him, but I was very hungry and wanted to find some food before we left. As I crawled out from beneath the barn, I heard voices and the sounds of cars passing. I ran into the barn and jumped deep into a pile of hay to hide. Still hungry, I fell sound asleep in the hay.

In the morning, I woke up to the sounds of the shepherds opening the door to let the cows out. Some workers walked in to get some hay for the horses just steps away from my hiding spot. I was afraid that they would find me. I did not move an inch or make a sound for hours. At the end of the day, all the workers left and it was silent again. I stayed covered in the straw and hay a while longer, only moving some of it out of my way so that I could breathe more easily. More than another hour passed before I felt safe enough to leave the barn.

I walked directly to the maids' residence at the other end of the farm. The maids had always been kind to me, and they seemed glad to see me again. They told me that, when my mother had left to go hide in the village, they had provided her with some clothes for warmth. I begged the maids for some food. They hid me in the outhouse next to their quarters and promised to return with something to eat. Shortly after, one of the maids came by with a large piece of pork and half a loaf of bread. I thanked her and left.

As I walked toward the apple orchard, I heard shooting in the distance. I turned around and saw lights. Instinctively, I took off, running as fast as I could. I was afraid that one of the

maids had told the Germans that I was at the farm. It was probably my imagination, but I kept running any way.

I stopped running when I reached the railroad station. I jumped behind some bushes to the side of the tracks to hide until a train arrived. Less than fifteen minutes later, a train coming from the west, from the direction of Germany, pulled into the station. From its position, I knew that this train would be headed for Russia. The train slowed down as it reached the station so that the conductor could grab the ring containing his travel instructions. The train then began to move out of the station slowly. I ran after it. As it moved, I grabbed hold of the bottom step of the cargo car and jumped inside. The train quickly gained speed, but I was already safely inside, on my way, I hoped, to the German-Russian front. When the train arrived at the next stop, the mechanics were talking to some workers. While they were checking the train to release pressure on the brakes, another mechanic came into the cargo car, where I was hiding. I panicked and ran. The mechanic chased me, but I was faster than he was and safely jumped to another car.

The train continued until it reached a large station in the town of Kovel. When the cargo door opened, it was daylight outside. Now that I could see what was inside the train, I was surprised to find human cargo—Ukrainian and Russian volunteer workers who had worked in Germany's factories. The workers had been released and were returning to their native homes, because they were sick. Each worker was wearing a patch on his jacket with a triangular symbol. I listened in silence as they whispered stories about where they came from, what they did, and where they were going. While they were distracted with their conversations, I managed to take one of the worker's patches and attach it to my own jacket. Now I would be able to travel with them as if I were part of the group.

Most of the workers in my traveling group changed trains at the next stop, but I stayed with a group that was continuing on the train to Zdolbunow, a main railroad station. By the time we arrived in Zdolbunow, I was starving. It had been days since I had eaten. I got off the train and walked toward the side streets to beg for some food.

I spotted a bright green tomato perched on the window of one of the houses. The owners had probably left it there to ripen. I knocked on the door to the house and a middle-aged man appeared. I begged him for some food, but he claimed he did not have anything. He told me, "A rich family lives over there, and they help people. Go to them, and they will give you food." I thanked him and ran across the street. I should have realized that he suspected I was Jewish, because, when I knocked on his neighbor's door, the man who appeared was a German gendarme. He stood in the doorway, shaving.

"Vat do you vant?" The gendarme growled.

"Forgive me, but I made a mistake. It is the wrong house," I responded in Ukrainian and ran off.

I headed back toward the railroad station. When I got there, I saw a group of the volunteers that I had befriended. They were waiting to continue their trip. I jumped into the open cargo car with them. The train was continuing to Sibatovka. A group of German soldiers was seated in our car. They were eating, smoking, and laughing. I walked over to the soldiers and begged for a cigarette. They lit a cigarette and gave it to me without suspicion. Holding the cigarette between my fingers, I slowly and deeply inhaled each gratifying puff.

We arrived in Sibatovka sometime during the night. We were traveling in the open cargo car, and it was bitterly cold. I fearlessly went up to the conductor, and he allowed me to throw coal in the locomotive oven to run the train's engine, which enabled me to stay warm. The conductor never suspected that I was a Jew. He even gave me hot tea from a community tin to warm my bones.

We arrived at another large railroad station, Kazatin, about midnight. The Russians called it "Wozloviaya Station," meaning central station. Because of the darkness, I could not make out the front of the trains from the back. I would have to wait until morning to get my bearings. I decided that it was best to get off the train and walk a short distance. When I reached a wood footbridge, I jumped down and hid underneath. It was filthy and reeked from human excrement. I found a clean spot and sat there, surrounded by the stench, shivering in the blustery No-

vember Russian winds. As the night wore on, my hands and face grew numb. I crossed my hands inside my jacket and buried my head in my chest. I blew the heat from my mouth down the inside of my shirt in an attempt to warm my body. I stayed awake all night, fearing that I would freeze to death.

At dawn, I heard the sound of people clanking over the bridge (probably on their way to work). After they had passed, I got up from my hiding spot and headed toward town. When I got there, I spotted a store with a handwritten BAKERY sign in one of the windows. People were waiting in a long line to buy bread. I joined the line, but, when it was my turn, the shelves were already empty, and not even crumbs remained. While I was inside, I stood by a little wooden baking oven to warm up. I did not stay long, because I was afraid that people might become suspicious.

I returned to the railroad station and checked the signs to find out which direction the trains were headed. I saw a sign for Kiev and knew that it was the direction that would head toward the front. The train was not scheduled to leave until the evening. My stomach was growling. I had to eat something. I turned around and headed back to the market.

There were already a number of beggars in the market by the time I arrived—many of them had just been released from labor camps. The people in the market were sympathetic and gave the beggars food. They asked the beggars questions about their backgrounds and occupations. I listened carefully and memorized the beggars' responses. When I begged for food and was asked the same questions, I gave the same answers, and, in return, I received bread, cheese, and eggs. My stomach was full, and I could not have been happier.

When it grew dark outside, I headed back to the railroad station to continue my journey. As I got close to the station, I could see people quickly boarding a cargo train. I thought the train was headed to Kiev. I ran until I reached the train and safely boarded. As it began to move, I realized that it was heading towards Romania, which was in the opposite direction from the Russian front. It was too late for me to get off.

In the morning, the train arrived in the town of Vinnitsa. I got off and walked into town. As I looked around the market-

place, I felt a woman's hands wrap around me from behind in a bear hug. "Avram!" the woman shouted. I turned around and was surprised to see Mrs. Mialowicka, the lawyer's wife, who used to rent an apartment in my grandparents' home. I remembered her as a very obese woman with a gentle demeanor. Now she was skin and bones. I asked her what had happened.

"I am a speculator on the black market, Avram," she explained. "I'm just trying to survive, like everyone else."

"Ssshh!" I told her as I looked around. "You mustn't call me by my Jewish name, or we might both be killed! Please, call me André."

"Okay, André," she said, and we began to talk. We were interrupted by an acquaintance of Mrs. Mialowicka's. He came over and asked her who I was. Mrs. Mialowicka looked at me and responded, "This is André. He is a friend who has just been released from a prisoner-of-war camp and is on his way home." The man introduced himself and went on his way.

I talked with Mrs. Mialowicka for a while longer. She explained why the police had been chasing my group on the train from one cargo wagon to another. The train's cargo contained salt, and, because of shortages during the war, salt, kerosene, and tobacco were valuable commodities that could be sold on the black market. Vinnitsa's residents were willing to give away everything to have any of these items. That was why everyone had asked me if I had any salt when I arrived in town. Other passengers on the train had been stealing salt, but I had only wanted a ride to my destination.

Mrs. Mialowicka also told me everything that she knew about what had happened to our townspeople. The men from Luboml who had been brought to Vinnitsa with the horses and wagons had been shot to death along with all the Jews from Vinnitsa. Not long after, more than 10,000 Jews in Luboml were murdered when the Ukrainian police liquidated the ghetto. The slaughter had begun in Luboml's workers' ghetto—everyone had been shot dead. At approximately three in the morning, on October 1, 1942, the Ukrainian police and SS came into the city and surrounded the residents' ghetto. There was no chance of escape. The police entered the ghetto, chased the Jews out of their

homes, rounded the people up, and brought them to the marketplace. From there, the residents were taken to the ditches (the ones that we had been digging) and shot. Their bodies were dumped into the pits. This went on for almost a week, until all the Jews hiding in Luboml had been caught and killed.

She also spoke about Dushohupke. Jews in hiding who were caught were placed in a truck that was actually a death trap. The truck's doors, windows and exhaust pipe were sealed off. When the truck's motor was started, the fumes from the exhaust filled the truck until all the Jewish occupants choked to death.

I begged Mrs. Mialowicka, "Please, take me into your house. I have nowhere else to go."

She looked into my eyes and tearfully responded, "I would do anything for you, but, I cannot. My sister lives with me, and she hates the Jews. She would turn you and me in to the Germans. Go to the town of Zhmerinka in Romania. There is still a Jewish community there—a ghetto. It is best for you." It was getting late, and Mrs. Mialowicka had to leave. She did not have enough time to give me directions to Romania. I hugged her one last time. She quickly headed home.

I went back toward the Kozatin train station to continue my journey. When I reached the station, I tried to look at the cargo trains to determine the direction to Kiev, but it was too dark.

It was too cold to sleep under the bridge again. I would be better off finding a warm hiding place indoors for the night. I walked along the railroad tracks until I reached the central station house. Two Ukrainian policemen were guarding the door. Crowds of people were pushing and shoving each other into the policemen to get through the station door. The police were checking the document papers of each person trying to enter. I waited in the rear. As a large crowd surged toward the officers, I knelt down on my hands and knees and pushed myself between the people's legs until I was safely in the station house.

Inside, hundreds of people were huddled together, sleeping on the floor. I was hungry and cold. I walked straight to the back of the room, where I had spotted a large, elegant restaurant. The restaurant served only German soldiers and officials. I went from table to table and begged the soldiers for food. It was a hu-

miliating experience. The German soldiers pointed to me as they laughed and joked with each other and threw me bones and scraps of bread. I ignored their remarks and ran around picking up whatever they threw my way. I did not know when I would be able to eat again.

When I finished eating, I walked back into the main hall of the station house. The policemen were still walking around, checking papers. I found a space at the top of the steps against a wall and sat down. It would be more difficult for the police to check my documents from this spot, because they would have to step over so many people. To be more inconspicuous, I lay down and covered my head and body with my jacket and tried to sleep. Lying there, I starting thinking about what I would have done if I had been trained for the Mallechine underground. I could have blown up this whole station, including the Germans and their army, and gotten away with it. As I imagined my acts of bravado, I fell into a deep slumber.

I awoke late in the morning. It was a good time to walk around. (The police did not check the papers of people who had slept at the station the previous night, because nobody had been let in or out of the station overnight.) I went back to the Germans to beg for more food. I would take anything—even a glass of water. Once I finished eating, I thought it was best to leave the station for the day. Two policemen posted at the door were checking the papers of the new detainees who were trying to enter the station. I sneaked out the same way I came in.

Once I was back on the street, I ran to the railroad tracks to find my way to the Russian front. There were hundreds of passenger and cargo trains, and it was difficult to figure out which train I needed to take. If I could find the train heading toward Vinnitsa, I would be able to figure it out. As I walked along the railroad tracks, I spotted a cargo train filled with people. The police and Gestapo were standing guard around the train. I walked over to the Gestapo. They told me that the people in the cargo train were volunteers heading to Germany to work in the factories and on the farms. I told them that I wanted to volunteer to work in Germany and asked for permission to board the train. They agreed and put me in an empty cargo train that would be

departing in an hour. I sat in the train with the door opened and waited. Soon, the volunteers who had permits to shop in the town began to return. One of the young men who had taken a seat nearby began to talk.

"Vat are you doing on dis train?" he asked.

"I am volunteering for Germany like you," I responded.

While we talked, I watched as one of his friends got off the train and approached the German officers. I could make out the gist of what the volunteer was saying, and I had a feeling he was talking about me. "That boy, he is not a volunteer. He is a thief! He is only on the train to steal our luggage. He will get off at the next stop and disappear."

My heart dropped to my stomach and was pounding so loudly that I thought everyone heard it. I started to sweat. There was no way to escape. The German officers pulled me out of the train and began to beat me. They cursed me in German and kicked me from head to toe. I blacked out. When I regained consciousness, the officers chased me away. I got up and ran as fast and as far away as I could. I thanked God that they had not killed me.

I was not sure what to do next. I walked along the railroad tracks until I reached the main train station in Kazatin. I jumped from train to train, looking for the one that would take me to the Russian and German front but found none.

I walked to a market to beg for food from the farmers. The farmers wanted to know where I had come from and where was I headed. I repeated the stories that I had heard a few days ago on the trains, that I had been in the labor camps and worked on the farms and in the factories, that the labor camps were surrounded by barbed wire and we had not been free to move around, that the only reason the Germans had released us was that we had become ill, and now, after two years, we were finally returning to our hometown. The farmers believed me and gave me food.

When night came, I walked the streets aimlessly. I could not tell where I was heading and ended up near a German post. A soldier shouted in German, "Halt, who is there?!" I did not answer and turned slowly to walk away. The soldier repeated the question. When I didn't respond, he started to shoot at me. I ran

until I reached the railroad tracks. As I stepped onto the tracks, a train sounded, and I saw a light in the distance. It was coming from the direction from which I had come. I positioned myself by the side of the tracks, and, as the train passed, I safely grabbed on.

I rode the train until early the next morning, when it reached the town of Vinnitsa. I got off and walked from the station to the streets leading to the market. I had been there before and had a clear image of the streets, houses, trees, and the direction of the market. It was a brisk day at the end of November 1942. The sun was shining brightly, and a gentle breeze was blowing through the trees. As I entered the market, farmers were already arriving with their daily produce and spreading it out across the benches. I was tired, hungry and cold. I walked over to an empty bench to lie down and began to cry. What was I doing? Where was my family? I prayed to God to reunite me with my mother if she were still alive and have her hold me in her arms. Even if she were dead, I still wanted to be with her.

A woman passing by with her son stopped and asked me in Russian, "Young man, why are you crying?"

"I don't have a home," I responded in Russian.

The woman was disturbed by my response. She turned to her son, "He is probably a Jew, and that is why he is lonely and crying." She pulled her son and walked away. What she said scared me. I thought that she might turn me in to the Gestapo. I quickly left and headed to the other end of the market so that she would not find me.

As I made my way through the market, I bumped into Mrs. Mialowicka again. Once more, she was very kind to me. I told her what had happened to me and asked for her advice.

"There is nothing I can do for you," she said. "It is better for you to be with your own kind. The town of Zhmerinka is on the other side of the Bug River. Many Jewish people who came from Romania live in the ghetto there. This place is now called Transnistria. Tell me, do you have anything with you?"

"I have some leather and other items my mother gave me."

"I will sell them for you, and you can buy yourself a watch. Wherever you go, different currency will be used. On one side of

the river carborvincis is used and on the other side, it is lire. A watch can be sold anywhere for any kind of currency."

I handed Mrs. Mialowicka all the leather items that my mother had given me—my shoes, belts, and other items. I never mentioned the gold watches and rings that my mother had given me. (I had sewn them into the sleeve of my shirt.) Mrs. Mialowicka sold my valuables on the black market and returned with a simple watch. I do not know if she personally made a profit from the sale, but, at the time, having a watch seemed like a good idea. It would later save my life.

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The streets of the market were filled with all kinds of people—gypsies, beggars, fortunetellers, the blind and merchants. I walked over to a blind fortuneteller and asked him to read my palm.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"André Hetman," I responded, so that it did not sound like a Jewish name.

"When were you born?"

"July 21, 1926."

"You were born under the star of luck," he said as he moved his hand across my palm. "You will travel long distances. You will be in a camp and suffer many hardships, but you will survive this great ordeal, and the years ahead will then be filled with good fortune."

When the blind man finished, I went to a gypsy a few feet away to see if she would tell me the same. "You will be very lucky someday, although you may not realize it," she said. "You will travel across oceans and rivers. Soon, you will meet three close relatives." I interpreted what she said to mean that I might meet my three uncles who were in the United States and my brother Jacob, who was in Palestine. Maybe I would be lucky and survive the war.

As I continued walking around the market, I was accosted by a local street gang. They were homeless and stole, robbed, and picked pockets for money. When they discovered that I was homeless too, they adopted me. Although I was the weak one in the gang, they treated me like family. When we went begging for food, we shared everything. I became good friends with one of the boys. He took me with him to an abadoned store that was boarded up. We broke the wood blocking the store's entrance and slept inside.

Sometimes, when I was sitting in the abandoned store, I took the needle and thread that my mother had given me and tried an old superstition that I had learned in the ghetto to find a sign that my family was alive. I placed four items on the ground in the shape of a cross: bread for west, salt for east, mud for north, and ashes for south. I threaded the needle (approximately twelve inches long) and stuck a stale piece of bread through one end of the thread. Then I dangled the bread by the thread a couple of inches above the cross. If the bread swung in the direction of the bread and salt, it would be a sign that my family was still alive. If the bread swung in the direction of the mud or ashes, it would be a sign of death. Usually when I dangled the bread, it swung in the direction of the bread or salt. I needed to believe that my family was alive.

I adjusted to life as a gang member but knew things would be more difficult as the bitter Russian winter approached. After I had spent a few weeks with the gang, one of the members became suspicious. He told me that he was a half-Jew, and I should not be afraid. I was confused. In my town, you were either a Jew or a non-Jew. I did not respond, and it was not mentioned again. The gang was always watching me. I did not know how I was going to get away. I needed to find a way to continue my journey to survive.

One day, as I was walked through a waterlogged street, my boots fell apart, and the water started to leak into them. They were my only pair of boots. All I had left was a pair of galoshes that Mrs. Mialowicka had bought me. I figured that I would use some of the money that I had gotten from Mrs. Mialowicka to fix the boots.

I walked for what seemed like miles until I reached the edge of town. There, I spotted a SHOEMAKER sign posted in Russian on one of the houses. Inside, I was surprised to see two Ukrainian policemen standing guard as two Jewish shoemakers were busy at work. The Jewish men's lives had been spared in order to keep up with shoe repairs needed for the German police and army. The shoemakers were also able to profit from the extra work.

The policemen asked me what I wanted. I pointed to my feet and explained that I needed my boots repaired. They told me to

give the shoemakers my boots. I handed one of the Jewish men my boots. As I patiently waited, I listened to the shoemakers lament to each other in Yiddish of their fate. The shoemakers did not have enough needles or thread to last much longer. I did not say or do anything. The police would have realized that I was Jewish and killed me. More than half an hour passed, and I was growing impatient. Finally, my boots were finished. The shoemaker handed me my boots. Without another word, I pulled the needle and thread from my pocket and handed it to the shoemaker as a tip along with my payment and quickly left. I was afraid to look back.

By late afternoon, I was back with the gang. The boys were waiting for me outside of the abandoned store. I was glad to see them, but it was not mutual. The boys started to harass me. One of the gang members held me while another boy took my wallet. Everything was in my wallet, all my photographs and money. It was very stupid for me to be carrying around pictures of my family, especially pictures of my father and grandfather, because they had long beards and hats which indicated that I was Jewish. The gang ran off with my wallet, and I ran after them, shouting, "Give it back!" They laughed as they ran, ripping up all my photographs and throwing them in the air. Pieces of the photos floated in the wind and landed scattered across the street. I picked up whatever pieces I could and tried to put the photos back together, but I left the photos of my grandfather and father on the ground.

Disoriented and crying, I walked into a store. The only person there was a middle-aged woman. She asked me what was wrong. I don't know why, but I told her the truth about what had happened. She felt sorry for me and gave me something to eat and drink. Then she told me that I had to leave before someone came. I was Jewish, and she was afraid.

When I walked out, the gang was waiting for me. They were acting friendly again, and I could not get away from them. So I returned with them to the abandoned store.

Early the next morning, I awoke to find that the gang had brought a policeman to me. The policeman said the that the boys had told him that I was Jewish.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"No!"

"What is your name?"

"André Hetman."

"Where is your family?"

"My family was killed by the bombings, and I don't have anywhere to live, and so I just go from place to place."

Again he repeated, "Are you Jewish?"

"No!" I said emphatically.

The officer approached me and grabbed the little piece of rope that I had hanging around my neck. "What is this?" He asked as he pulled on the rope.

"I had a cross on it but it fell off," I said. "The piece of rope brings me luck."

Then he told me to say *cocorussa* (popcorn). I knew that this was a test, because Russian Jews said this with a throaty accent. I said, *"Cocorussa,"* like a Ukrainian. He asked me to say oreole (eagle). Again, I said, *"Oreole,"* the Ukrainian way—without using my throat. He still was not satisfied.

"There is one more test," he said. "Pull down your pants!"

It was a check to see if I was circumcised. At that time, only Jews were circumcised. I slowly started to unbuckle my belt. As I opened it, the policeman noticed my watch. It was the watch that Ms. Mialowicka had bought for me. He grabbed my arm and yanked the watch off my wrist. He started tinkering with it, and one of the hands broke off and fell to the floor. As he bent down to pick it up, I turned and jumped out the window. I landed on my feet and ran toward the market. I looked back. No one was following me. It was probably more important to him to have the watch than to have me.

As I ran through the town, the gang saw me and stopped me. Once again, they were friendly.

"Hey, André! Forget it. We were just joking. We need you. We've got a job out of town. There's lots of merchandise for the taking."

"Sure," I said. "It was a joke." I had no choice but to forgive them or at least act as if I did. We left town together like old friends.



My parents, Miriam and Shamuel



Getman family: Abraham, front row, far left (1936).



A view of the great synagogue of Luboml (background); Getman Family home (front, left).



Abraham, eight years old.



Abraham Getman in Israel Defense Force, 1948.



Family at the wedding of Uncle Moshe and Bella; Abraham in the front, second from the right (1938).



Back row, left to right: Abraham, Labil, Chaim, and Moshe. Front, left to right: Brother Jacob (prior to leaving for Palestine), Mother Miriam, Grandmother Sarah, Father Shmuel, and Sister Fage.



Two brothers: Label, 8 years old (left) and Abraham, 10 years old.



Abraham in DP camp in Austria, 1946–47.



Abraham's Bar Mitzvah, July 1939—two months before the start of World War II.



The Jewish children of Luboml Public School, circa 1937–38.



Return to Luboml: Abraham with son, Mark in 1996.



Abraham at 21 years old with dog Mitzi before leaving for Palestine, 1947.



In Poland with fellow survivor,
cousin Sam Getman.



DP camp educational course 1946 Abraham (second row, far left) in



Abraham (fourth from left, front) with United Nations Association representatives, 1946.



Abraham (far left, back row) with soccer team in DP camp, Austria, 1947.

As we walked, one of the boys pointed to a batch of laundry hanging out to dry on a long rope. They told me to go into the house and beg for food so they could steal the laundry.

"What happens to me?" I asked.

"By the time the people come outside and see the laundry is gone, we will be far away and you can disappear."

I knew otherwise. The people would turn me in to the Gestapo. I had another plan. "I won't do it," I said. "I know how to steal, and I can get you the laundry on my own. We can meet in an hour—wherever you want. I'll bring the laundry to you. Then we can sell it." They needed more convincing. "Two of you should go into the house and beg. That way, if there is a problem, you can protect each other and make a getaway."

Finally, the gang agreed. I went over to the laundry line and waited till the boys were in the house. As soon as they entered, I ran off. It was already late afternoon. I had to get back to the train station. I figured I should take a train to the Jewish ghetto at the other end of Transdnister and disappear from the gang.

It seemed to take an eternity for the right train to pull into the station. I was getting anxious. The railroad was a dangerous place. Germans were everywhere. Many of them were unloading cargo, cannons, and other items from trucks onto the trains while the Gestapo stood guard. As I hid between the cargo cars waiting for the right opportunity to jump onto the train, I spotted the boys from the gang. They were looking for me. I panicked and jumped onto the first train that was moving. Luckily, it was heading to the Romanian border. I was now free of the gang and traveling in the right direction.

None of the travelers on the train looked at me suspiciously. These people had permission to go to the border and were free to move around. The last stop on the train before the Bug River was the town of Brahilof. When the train stopped at the station, German soldiers boarded the train and asked everyone to step onto the street so they could check our documents. We all got off the train. The soldiers began checking the older people's documents first. Everyone was nervous. I had a little more time before my turn. I pretended that I had to relieve myself. I walked close to one of the trains and stood by the side of the cargo car and forced

myself to pee. The soldiers stood so close behind me that they were practically brushing against me. I made a gesture to bend down to fix my shoe, but, instead, I climbed under the train and ran off into the fields. The soldiers shouted at me as they fired their guns, but they did not run after me. I was alone, and there were too many other people for them to watch who were lined up.

I ran for miles until it got dark. I stopped a man passing by and asked him for directions to the border.

"You are near the river, young man," he told me. "Be careful. The river is shallow in some places, and in other places, the water is very deep. You will need a boat to cross; however, I know a lot of people escaping to the other side, and I can help you. The trouble is, I work the night shift. If you wait here till early morning, I'll come back and take you across." He patted me on the shoulder and smiled. "Don't worry about anything."

"Thank you," I replied as gratefully as I could. I watched as he walked away and headed directly toward the railroad station. I could not help being suspicious. I felt this way about everyone. I ran off. I stopped about a half-mile away at an orchard and I hid there to catch my breath. Minutes later, I heard shooting and saw flashlights shining everywhere. The bastard had turned me in to the Germans. I stayed put until dawn without moving a muscle.

I awoke to the sound of a train whistling in the distance. My boots were worn out, and I quickly put on my galoshes and ran toward the train. As I ran, one of my galoshes fell off. I hesitated. This could be my only chance to get on the train. I made a run for it without turning back. I grabbed hold of the train's cargo car door and jumped on board. My other boot tumbled to the ground.

It was December, and now, not only was I barefoot, but I did not even know who was on this train—soldiers, cargo—it could be anything. Fortunately, the train was only carrying coal. It was not due to stop until it reached the border by the river. Suddenly, the train began to slow down. I knew that the Germans were searching for people, and I was afraid that they were going to stop and check. But the train was just moving slowly in order to cross the bridge over the river. I breathed a sigh of relief.

The train came to a stop between two other trains in the

town of Zhmerinka. Germans were patrolling the train and cargo on both sides. I waited till the Germans were distracted with the other trains. Then I jumped off and ran underneath the trains and crossed over to the other side of the station where there was a big garbage dump. I jumped into a large dumpster and stayed there all night.

Early in the morning, I awoke to the sounds of horses and wagons passing and farmers discussing buying and selling food in the market. I got out of the dumpster and approached an elderly Christian woman and asked her where they were headed. They were going to the market near the Jewish ghetto, and she invited me to join them. The woman gave me a shiny red apple and told me not to be afraid. I practically devoured the apple as I walked with them to the market. When we reached the outskirts of the ghetto, we parted ways.

I maneuvered my way through the barbed-wire fence and entered the ghetto. I was relieved and felt safe. It had been a while since I had been among Jewish people, where I did not have to fear prejudice. I asked some of the residents if they could direct me to the leader of the ghetto, so that I could find a place to sleep. They sent me to Mr. Goldman. I introduced myself and told him my story: "I have no family and no home—everyone was killed. All I want is to be with Jewish people and survive." I thought that Mr. Goldman would be sympathetic.

He looked me in the eye and sternly replied, "You cannot stay in this ghetto. You must leave now!" Then he hesitated. "Do you have any gold or other valuables?"

I was in tears. "I have nothing—not even a penny. I don't have anything to eat, and I am hungry."

He sighed and gave me a piece of bread and some water. "Go to the next town of Worshilowka. It is five miles from here. Maybe they will accept you."

I had no choice. My only valuables were my parents' gold watches, and I did not think it was wise to let Mr. Goldman know that I had them. Two policemen escorted me out of the ghetto and showed me the direction to Worshilowka.

By the time I arrived in Worshilowka, it was mid-afternoon. I found the Jewish community and repeated the same story to

them that I had told in Zhmerinka. The leader of the village said that he felt very sorry, but he could not help me because there were only a few Jewish families living in town. If the Romanian gendarmes were to check on the families and find me among them, they might turn me and the family hiding me in to the Germans, and we would all be sent to the camps. They fed me and then told me to leave. They did not give me any information about ghettos in any other towns.

The only place that I could think of going was back to Zhmerinka. When I reached the ghetto, it was already late at night. Mr. Goldman was not there. I told an old, native Jewish woman from the ghetto my story. She pitied me and allowed me to sleep at her home for the night. In the morning, the woman brought me to Mr. Goldman to request permission for me to stay with her. When Mr. Goldman saw me, he turned red in the face and began to yell and hit me.

"Why are you here? I told you to leave! I have no choice. I am turning you in to the gendarmes!"

"Please, don't turn me in! I beg you!" I was shaking with fear and started to cry.

"I'll give you one more chance. Get out of this ghetto now, and *never* come back! We don't want to see from you or hear from you again!"

He called some men over. They grabbed my arms, dragged me to the barbed-wire fence, and pushed me out to the other side of the market.

I walked aimlessly through the market. There, I spotted the same old woman whom I had met near the dumpster. I told her what had happened to me in the ghetto. She directed me to another ghetto in Muraffa, which was fifteen to twenty miles away. The people were kind there and would accept me. I thanked her again.

It was now nighttime. I did not know what else to do, and so I walked to the railroad station to see if there was a train that headed in the direction of Muraffa. A conductor was watching me. I did not know if he was German, Russian or Ukrainian, but he looked at me suspiciously and followed me as I left. I was nervous so I walked past the trains and into the fields. I looked

back and saw that the conductor was still following me. I started to run. He chased after me. I tripped over a rock, and the conductor jumped on top of me. We struggled, until I was finally able to push him off of me. I got up and continued to run. Youth was on my side. I sprinted through the fields. The conductor gave up and turned back.

Exhausted and cold, I did not know where I was or what to do next, so I kept walking. Hours later, I reached a little house that had an empty storage shack built near by. I was shivering from the cold and thought only about being indoors. I broke open the shack door and went in. A pair of *valinkes* (cotton boots) were lying on the floor. I put them on my feet. It felt good to wear the warm boots. I fell asleep with them on.

In the morning, I was able to get my bearings to Worshilowka. Wearing the warm *valinkes,* I continued on my journey. When I arrived in Worshilowka, some local townspeople gave me directions to the ghetto in Muraffa.

As I headed to Muraffa, I met a Jewish boy named Shlomo Roiter. We were close in age, and he was from Lutsk, a neighboring town of Luboml. He also had been chased from the ghetto in Zhmerinka, but his stay there had lasted two weeks. We decided we could help each other if we stayed together. I told him that, if he walked a few feet in front of me, I would walk a few feet behind. That way, we could keep an eye on each other until we reached our destination.

As we walked, two of the town boys approached Shlomo. He was afraid and turned to me for help. The boys were much bigger than we were. They took our belts and our money as they yelled, "Gendarmes! Gendarmes!" We ran off as fast as we could.

We kept running until we reached a pond. Shlomo jumped in and started swimming. I hesitated. I did not know how to swim. Shlomo told me to grab onto some wood. I grabbed a large log, jumped into the water, and kicked my feet furiously until I got across. When we got out of the water, we were exhausted and shivering from the frozen water. It was still daylight, and, in the distance, we could see Muraffa in the valley below. We ran toward the town.

We entered Muraffa around four o'clock in the afternoon and

went directly to Dr. Bical, the leader of the ghetto. We had been told that he was a kind and gentle man. Dr. Bical was from the town of Suchava, Romania. Shlomo and I explained to him that we were from Poland; Shlomo had left the Lutsk Ghetto on the final day of its liquidation, and I was an orphan with no home. We wanted to be amongst Jews and pleaded with Dr. Bical to let us stay. He immediately made arrangements for us to stay with a shoemaker, Anach the Cripple. Anach shared his house with the gravedigger Aaaron Lutwac and his family. The house was attached to the Turkish bathhouse, which was used to store the dead bodies.

Once we had cleaned and rested, Dr. Bical invited us to his house for a formal dinner of roast chicken and chicken soup. It was elegant and very formal. I still remember how wonderful this meal tasted. I had not seen or eaten anything like this in years.

We stayed in the gravedigger's bathhouse with many other displaced people through the winter of 1943. Everyone shared one room and a kitchen. Dr. Bical paid the month's rent for us. We settled in comfortably and lived in harmony with the residents. At the beginning, we were content even though we would wait for hours in line to get food and water. We had a warm place to sleep and received daily meals at the soup kitchen, but the bathhouse did not have a sink or a toilet, and the squalor was unbearable, especially in the winter. At least in the summer, you could go to the river under the mountain to wash. Aaron Lutwak, his two children and in-laws lived with us in the kitchen. Aaron's mother slept in a crawl space above the wood-burning oven, and Shlomo and I slept on a small bench in the corner of the room. The other room, which measured approximately ten feet by ten feet, was shared by Anach the Cripple, his wife and three children, a middleaged man, an elderly woman, and a young couple, and their young daughter.

The young couple made their living pickpocketing in the bazaar. The man gave me a job babysitting for his daughter while he and his wife went to the bazaar. The pickpocket was a tall, distinguished-looking man with decent clothes and a nice physique. His wife was petite and stood about half his size. The wife

would pretend to sell newspapers while her husband would pick the unassuming purchaser's pocket. As payment, I received a piece of bread, soup, and, occasionally, the opportunity to warm myself by the pickpocket's potbelly stove.

As time passed, conditions deteriorated. Jews were rounded up from the ghettos and shipped to labor camps. All around, people started to die of starvation and disease. Lice were epidemic. They crawled across my body by the thousands. At night, I took off my underwear and placed it outside to freeze the lice to death. It did not help much, since I had to keep putting on the same dirty shirt, because it was too difficult to get more clothes. Our clothes were made from potato sacks with cut-out holes for our arms and head. We also took clothes and blankets from people who had starved to death and used their blankets to stay warm. They were dead now, and we needed to live.

One of the refugees, Dr. Diamond, who had also escaped from German-occupied Poland, had been a dentist in the town of Lublin. Dr. Diamond had a nice apartment in the ghetto and was able to make a good living fixing the residents' teeth. He took a special interest in me, because I was from Poland. I trusted him and told him about the two gold engagement watches that my mother had given me. He suggested that I bring over the watches for him to weigh and determine their worth. If I agreed, he would keep the watches secure for me. In exchange, whatever amount of money I needed (each gram was equivalent to a dollar), he would give me. I was to keep a written record every time I borrowed money. I do not know if he benefitted from this, but it was very helpful to me, especially in the winter. I always had a home to stay warm in and a meal to eat. Every day, something else seemed to happen to me, and Dr. Diamond was always generous.

One cold winter day, I was begging from house to house for food. Instead of walking, I was running to stay warm. To the police, it probably looked as if I were robbing people. I was stopped and placed under arrest. I told the police officers that I was running to keep warm. I did not have shoes, and I was outside trying to get food. Mr. Diamond vouched for me, and I was set free.

In March, the weather began to warm. With the little bit of money that I had left, Shlomo went with me to buy some pottery

wholesale that we could resell for a profit. We found an alcove to store the pieces. For two months, we tried to sell the pottery but gave up when we could not find a taker. After we gave up our business enterprise, we found some young boys from the town who had learned to pick pockets. I was recruited to camouflage the boys. I would walk between people in the market and distract them by asking them prices and pretending to purchase things while the boys picked their pockets. In return, I received a reasonable share of the money they stole.

Conditions went from bad to worse. More and more people from Romania were being exiled to the occupied territory of Transdnister, where we were staying. Refugees were telling stories about a large labor camp, Pechora, which was close to the Bug River, and other atrocities. Pechora was surrounded by German, Romanian and Ukrainian police, and it was almost impossible to escape. Tens of thousands of people were starving to death. Detainees would cut off breasts of dying women and cook the fleshy substance to eat for nourishment. Some escapees who ran toward our ghetto died along the way. Others who made it went back to retrieve the dead bodies along the way and brought them to our bathhouse. The decomposing bodies were kept in a room without windows or ventilation, until the gravedigger, Aaron, could bury them.

Digging the graves was difficult work, and Aaron was paid according to the number of bodies he buried. To support myself, I worked for very low wages, helping Aaron dig graves. I also cleaned toilets and rooms and fixed things in churches and other residences to survive. One of the residences that I cleaned, Bes Medrich, was around the corner from our house. Most of the people who lived there had escaped the camps. They had no food or clothes, and the young and old alike would pile up on the benches from end to end to sleep. Most of them were neglected and sick—people who had given up on life. The place looked like a garbage dump. The smell alone could kill. It was awful. The residents slept, ate, and relieved themselves in the same place. Refuse was just thrown under the benches. People waited for someone on the benches to die so they could take their spot instead of sleeping on the garbage.

I felt sorry for one young man at Bes Medrich. He had been in good health when he arrived and had become ill. He had no one to care for him. Whenever I worked there, I made sure to visit and brought him food and water. One day, when I went to see him, he was lying dead on the garbage. Someone had pulled him off the bench and taken his place. I almost vomited. I never wanted to return to this place. A horrible thought had crossed my mind: It could happen to me.

I continued to struggle daily, but my will to survive was strong. All I thought about was that maybe someone from my family was alive. I especially hoped that I would be able to reunite with my brother Jacob in Palestine. I remembered my mother's dream of how the family would all one day go to Palestine to be with him.

I managed to get to the Red Cross to give them my brother's name in Jerusalem. I hoped that they could pass on to Jacob information about the suffering here and my experience. The message never made it to Jerusalem. The Red Cross probably never even tried to contact him. At the time, they did not want the world to know what was happening to the Jewish people.

19

Shlomo and I had become best friends. He fed me, and when I had more money, I fed him. Shlomo read Polish, and I often traveled with him to the surrounding villages to read stories to the Polish-speaking residents who were illiterate. In return for his service, he begged for food. The villagers enjoyed the readings and gave Shlomo bread, which he shared with me. Whatever remained, we brought back home to sell at the market. Slowly, Shlomo's health, which had deteriorated, started to improve. He began taking daily trips to the surrounding villages and earned enough money to buy new clothes and live more comfortably.

Meanwhile, the pickpocket, who lived with us in the bathhouse, feared that people knew what he was doing. He was desperate to leave to protect himself, his wife, and daughter. He wanted to go to Mogilev, a large town about twenty miles away, near the Dniester River. He promised to help me to survive if I came along as his daughter's babysitter. If I was not happy, he would pay me for carrying their luggage and daughter to Mogilev. I had nothing to lose, and so I agreed. When we reached Mogilev, the pickpocket found an apartment almost immediately. Just as quickly, he also changed his mind about protecting me. I was left with no choice but to walk back to Muraffa.

As I walked back alone and nearly barefoot, snow began to fall. The storm hit quickly with high, gusty winds and blizzard conditions. The snow began to pile up. I crossed my arms over my chest to keep warm as I trudged and crawled through the snow. The scene reminded me of a Russian film, *Captain Grant.* I started to sing a song that the commoners sang in the movie. "Whoever is happy is always smiling and laughing. Whoever wants something will always get it. Whoever is looking for something will always find it." I now understood what the commoners had been singing about.

Finally, a farmer passing by on his sled, stopped and offered me a ride to his little village of Kapaigorod. I gratefully accepted.

At the village entrance, a number of Romanian gendarmes were standing guard. I was arrested upon my arrival and accused of being a Partisan. The Partisans hated the Romanians. They would come out of hiding and attack Romanian police at night. To convince them otherwise, I told them that I was not a Partisan; I was a Jew. Unconvinced, they took me to a rabbi's house. I explained my story to the rabbi in Yiddish. The rabbi, who was Romanian, said something to the police that I could not understand (perhaps he paid them off), and I was released. I was free to stay at the rabbi's house for the night. In the morning, I walked back to Muraffa.

20

I struggled through the rest of the winter, although I still maintained contact with Dr. Diamond. He continued to give me soup and bread whenever he was able. As spring approached, my health deteriorated. One day in early April, I woke up so ill that I could not move. I was burning up with fever. I did not know if I had scalintina or diphtheria. Dr. Diamond brought me to a hospital and visited me daily. The doctors came to my cot every few hours to take my temperature, but my condition did not change.

A young boy, about my age, who was also from Muraffa, occupied the cot next to mine. He suffered from the same disease, but he was in better shape than I. He laughed and smiled as his relatives from the town came to visit him. This made me lonely. What would happen to me? How would I get out of here? Would anyone ever be there for me ever again? I had not turned to God to be saved or thanked him for saving me from the war. Even the Russian soldiers who had been raised as Communists not to believe in God, turned to Him when they fought the Germans on the front. I had only prayed for my mother. Why couldn't I be with her or reunited with her again in death?

With each day that passed, I grew weaker. One morning when I awoke, the cot next to mine was empty. I figured that the boy had gotten well enough to go home. When I asked the nurse, she told me that he had been put in the icebox. I shivered. I would probably end up the same way. "No!" I told myself again and again. "I must have the courage to survive."

Miraculously, my temperature soon returned to near normal, and I was told to leave the hospital. I was too weak to walk and practically crawled a mile to Dr. Diamond's house. I pounded on his door. He opened it and carried me inside and fed me. I will always remember the warm, buttery bowl of mashed potatoes that he served me. He was afraid to give me anything

else except a little soup to get my strength back. Because I was dirty and his family feared my illness was contagious, he was very apologetic, but he could not let me stay there.

I tried to return to the bathhouse, but they refused me because I had no money. I walked around the back, to the big cold room where two other families, the Scherters and Rotenbergs lived. I pleaded with them to let me stay there. They had pity and gave me a corner spot on the cement floor. It was already May, and the weather was warming but the nights were still cold. Sometimes, they let me sleep by their beds, which were actually benches covered with blankets—at least it kept me warm. To cover myself, each night, I removed the sheets covering the dead bodies awaiting burial. In the morning, I placed the sheets back on the bodies.

One of the family members living in the back room was a young man who befriended me. He told me that he was a businessman. He was well dressed and groomed. Every day he walked to Shigerod to buy soap and groceries for the household. He promised to pay me for my labor if I would travel with him and help carry the packages back. I accepted the offer. I walked with him a few times to the neighboring town and helped carry the items back. In exchange, I slept on the bench with his family to keep warm.

I soon discovered that he had not been totally honest with me. Although he was selling merchandise to people in the market during the day, at night he would break into their stores and steal back the goods. He would bring the merchandise back into Muraffa and resell it on the black market. The young man had started stealing while going begging for food with his father, who was a religious man. While his father begged, the young man entered the people's houses and stole clothes, food, and other items. As time passed, the young man tried to strengthen his business so that his father would not have to travel the distance with him.

When I first started, he told me that I would not have to steal. I only had to carry the merchandise he stole back to Muraffa. Then, one time, he told me to go up the second floor of a house and steal the laundry. I obeyed. As I got the laundry and started to carry it downstairs, the lady of the house saw me. She

started yelling and ran after me. I jumped down the stairs and ran from street to street looking for my young friend. He had disappeared. I finally found him lugging merchandise from another house. We broke into a few more houses and took our goods and we headed back to town. I knew that I had to support myself however necessary—even if it meant stealing, to survive. I agreed to be his accomplice so long as I was able to sleep in his family's residence.

21

We started hearing rumors that the Russians had defeated the Germans in Stalingrad and were advancing closer to Harkov. It became common to dig a hole in the ground and listen for the shells and bombardments to pass. We prayed for the day when we would be liberated.

Partisans began showing up wearing big hats embroidered with a red symbol. They picked fights with the Germans and Romanians. If there were no Germans or Romanians around, the Partisans road into town on their horses to boast. I envied the Partisans and wished to join them. I desperately wanted to fight and take revenge on the Germans and Romanians for what they had done to us.

I spoke at length with Yasha, a young man who lived in Dr. Diamond's house. I had become very close with him during my stay in Transdnister. Yasha had connections with the Partisans, but he refused to help me. "The end is near, my friend," he said. "Let justice serve itself." Looking back, I realize he was probably right.

One day, some Partisans came to town and spent several hours spreading the word that the Russian army was close to liberating us. After they left, someone informed the Romanians that Yasha was connected to the Partisans. The Romanians came to Yasha's house and forced him to leave with them. Keeping my distance, I followed them for several miles. They took Yasha to a cemetery on the outskirts of town near the hospital where I had been sick. I crept over to the bushes and peered through the leaves. One of the Romanian gendarmes ordered Yasha to put his hands over his head. The gendarme lifted his rifle and fired. Yasha fell to the ground. The gendarme gave another command, and the Romanians got back on their horses and rode away.

I ran to Yasha's side. He was barely breathing. I dragged him to the hospital and waited till they administered first aid. I believe he survived, but I do not know for sure. It would not have been wise to be seen aiding Yasha. I was deeply troubled. I ran back to the bathhouse as quickly as possible. To this day, I still think about Yasha and wish I could be reunited with him once more, in this world.

22

Summer came and went. The Red Cross began making arrangements to transport displaced children back to Romania and transport displaced children in Romania to Palestine. Shlomo and I signed up. In August 1943, we were taken to the town of Mogelov and, upon arrival, given a Turkish bath. The boys were bathed first. It felt so good. I wanted to stay in the water as long as possible.

I was still in the bath when about forty naked teenage girls came in the bath. They yelled and screamed when they saw me. I was stunned. I ran out of the bath straight through the door and into the path of a woman who was waiting to disinfect everyone. My group had already been disinfected. I tried to run by her so that I could catch up with the boys, but a gendarme caught me and brought me back.

Once I was disinfected, I was given new clothes. (I never found out which relief agency was responsible for providing this assistance.) Then our documents were collected to verify our ages. I did not have any documents but I gave them my real age—sixteen and a half. They put me in one line, and Shlomo, who was fifteen, was put on the other line. Shlomo was assigned to leave, but I was sent back to Muraffa. They were only taking children under sixteen years. (Almost forty years later, I met Shlomo in Israel. He told me that, on that fateful day, he had been transported to Palestine, where he was reunited with his mother, who had escaped there before the war.)

Once I was back in Muraffa, it was the same as before—nothing to do, nothing to eat or drink. I survived by going from house to house, begging for a little food. At the bakery, I begged for a morsel of bread. I had been so full of hope that I would be on my way to Palestine to see my brother again.

We kept waiting for news of the Russians' progress to liber-

ate us. Meanwhile, the Romanian police starting rounding up people. They took about one hundred people to a labor camp in Trehatti, a village near Odessa. Some of the people managed to escape. They returned to Muraffa with horrible news. People were being shot and killed on site. We feared for our lives.

About a month late, the Romanian police came looking for three hundred more people who they claimed were needed in the labor camps. A ghetto policeman came looking for me. He tried to force the people to reveal where I was hiding, but no one would tell him. (I was hiding in a large kettle, covered with straw and hay in the bath.) The policeman searched fruitlessly. Finally, he spoke to the village elder. If I gave myself up, I would be compensated and shown leniency. The Romanians needed to fill a quota because another boy that they had rounded up had bribed them with money and gold. I agreed to go with them in exchange for ten loaves of bread, a pair of boots, and a jacket. I got what I asked for and gave myself up.

The officers placed us in the horse-drawn wagons and took us to the train station in Woroshilovka. There, we were taken off the wagons and transferred to the train's cargo cars. About a hundred people were crowded into each cargo car. There were no bathrooms. People relieved themselves in their hats. The odor made everyone choke. It was unbelievably disgusting. We rode this way for many hours.

Finally, we came to a stop at a station near the town of Tolchim—infamous to the Jews for its history. Hundreds of Jews had been killed there in a large pogrom. (Pogroms were mass killings by Christian mobs who believed that Jews killed Christian children and drank their blood or used it to make Passover matzoh.) The Romanian gendarmes took us from the train and forced us to walk almost two miles to the labor camp.

Along the way, we walked passed a large group of women and men sitting along the roadside. The people were from the religious sect call "Kacappy." The men had long, scraggly beards, and the women looked haggard. They knew where we were going, and they pitied us. They threw cooked potatoes, apples,

pears, and other vegetables toward us into the muddy road. We picked the food off the ground to eat.

When we reached the labor camp, we were each given work assignments. I was assigned along with some other boys to dig turf which would be used like coal to heat house fires. We cut the turf up into long, brick-shaped pieces. Our meals consisted of small pieces of bread and pea soup. There were a lot of sick horses at the camp. When they died, we were fed horsemeat.

The first two weeks at the camp were the most difficult. The work was hard, but I got used to it. At five o'clock in the morning, we were woken by loud, clanging bells. The sound of the bells and the Romanian police shouting for us to get outside could have woken the whole world. While it was still dark, we would run outside for a daily lineup near the wired entrance. The Romanian police stood guard on both sides of us and marched us off to work, which was about two to three miles away.

We spent all day digging at the turf mines. A Romanian commander named Bugdon oversaw our unit. Whenever he approached, we were forced to sing, "When Bugdon pulls the strings on his guitar, we must work harder and harder." Whenever we did not sing louder or work harder as he approached, Bugdon punished everyone by taking our food away. We worked like this until dark each day and then returned to our barracks.

The barracks were converted stables that had belonged to the Russian cavalry. The makeshift toilets outside were actually holes dug in ditches and covered with branches. Sometimes, people would fall into these ditches and never get out. The barracks walls were made from branches, and the floor was mud.

We all slept together; men, women and children—young and old—on three tiers of wooden benches. There was a single kerosene lamp perched on one of the benches. One night, while everyone slept, the lamp fell and broke, and the barracks went up in flames. The fire spread rapidly. Everyone was screaming and stepping on each other trying to escape. Many people were trapped and burned alive. It took all night to put out the fire. It was a horrifying experience.

A few weeks later, a woman friend whom I knew from Mu-

raffa appeared. She had been a teacher before the war. She recognized me immediately and approached me. I described to her the horrible conditions we were living with and asked her why she was there. She had crawled out from a mass grave in Odessa. Hundreds of bodies of executed men, women, and children had been dumped in the graves after they had been shot to death. She was now traveling from place to place, moving people to temporary safe havens. (I thought that she was quite courageous.) One of the villagers had paid her to bring somebody out of this camp and return them to Muraffa. I had some money that I had gotten by selling the bread that the police had given me as payment for coming to the camp. I offered her the money if she would take me back with her. She agreed and explained the plan; on the way back from the work field, near the little forest, I was to hide by the side of the road and wait there with a few other people, for her signal. Everything went as planned. As promised, she gave the signal at the designated time and place. Together, we all escaped from the camp.

We walked all night for almost sixty miles until we arrived in Muraffa. Everyone was overjoyed to see us. The villagers asked me questions about the camp. What were the conditions? Was anybody they knew there? Did anyone send a message? Dr. Diamond was also glad to see me. He had good news. The Russians were closer than ever to liberating us.

Less than two weeks after I returned to Muraffa, there was a new order recruiting people to work harvesting the tobacco crop for the Ukrainian farmers. The conditions offered were tempting. We would be provided with food and a warm shelter and only be responsible to report to the farmers. I volunteered and was sent to a farm on a village approximately fifteen miles from Muraffa. We worked long hard hours, but, as promised, we returned to the farmer's warm house and were served delicious food and borscht.

By November, the crops were harvested, and the farmers no longer needed us. However, the farmer that I had worked for liked me and kept me there a few extra weeks to help in his house and work with the horses in the fields. By the end of the

month, I reluctantly returned to the bathhouse in Muraffa. I knew I would be facing yet another winter without food and clothes. For the first time in a long time, I turned to God to give me the strength to survive. I dreamed about returning home and being reunited with my family and friends.

23

I was seventeen years old, but I had been a man for some time. One of Muraffa's local townsmen tried to arrange a match for me with a local girl whose father owned a small store in the center of the main street. In exchange for her hand in marriage, her family offered me shelter and anything else I needed until I could care for myself. The girl was beautiful and charming. Although it was an offer I could not afford to refuse, I felt that I was too young to be married and tied down. Liberation was coming soon, and I wanted to rejoin my family. I thanked them for their generous offer but declined.

Once again, I was faced with daily struggles living in the worst of conditions. I had not had any decent clothes for years. My shirt was a potato sack, and I was wearing pieces of leather tied with rags on my feet to keep them warm. I returned to sleeping in the back room of the bathhouse.

Occasionally, I had no choice but to steal. The police, who always thought of me as a bad kid, arrested me on numerous occasions. Once, another young man and I broke into the basement of a house to steal a chicken. To catch the chicken, I grabbed it by its wings. The chicken started to make loud noises as I tried to get out. My partner yelled to me, "Grab it by the neck! The neck!" The man who owned the house heard us and came running out with a shotgun. I panicked and released the chicken. We barely escaped. This was my valuable lesson in chicken-stealing.

I was strongwilled and determined to live. Many people just gave up and died. The only way I was going to survive the winter was by begging from house to house and in the market and collecting potato peels. I cooked the potato peels on the potbelly stove. Usually, I was so hungry that I would eat the peels raw. When I looked into people's houses and saw them cooking potatoes, I begged them just to give me the water from their potatoes.

I would mix the warm water with a little salt and drink it like soup to warm up. I looked through people's garbage, in the street or wherever else I thought there might be scraps of food. I was also a smoker, and I searched the streets for cigarette butts to puff.

24

In January 1944, new rumors circulated that the Russian army was very close to Muraffa and the Germans were retreating. Everything was chaotic. We should have been elated, but we feared that the Germans would liquidate us before the Russians could liberate us.

The Germans had dug trenches in the mountains that surrounded town in order to hold off the Russian advances. Meanwhile, the Romanian gendarmes retreated and the partisans came in and out of town to shoot at the Germans and then retreated back into the hills. Everyone was tense. We did not know if we would be killed by the bombardment, the fighting in the area, or if the Germans would come and shoot us. We dug holes in the ground for shelter and listened to the shelling.

In February, more Germans retreated to Romania. There were rumors that the Russians had reached the Bug River and had stopped to regroup. Small troops of German soldiers would come into our town looking for ground to establish a front. Because they were just soldiers and not SS, we were not harmed.

One February day, in midmorning, the Russian army arrived in town, and the shooting between the two armies began. Russian soldiers barged into the bathhouse. One of the soldiers commanded me to tell him where the German soldiers had dug. Obligingly, I pointed out our window to the trenches on top of the mountain that overlooked the valley and the little river. The soldier positioned himself in the window and began shooting. Another soldier handed me a rifle and told me to shoot with him. I was happy to have the rifle. Standing next to the Russian soldier, I shot out the window at the Germans.

When things calmed down, the Russian soldiers left, and I went back into town. There, for the first time, I was surprised to see a Jewish brigadier from the Red Army. He was quite brave to

be walking into town with bullets flying by from both sides. When there was a break in the shooting, people ran out to hug and kiss him. Everyone knew that liberation would come at any moment. People did not know what else to say or do; so they just kept hugging the brigadier.

Another Russian soldier who was from the same town as Dr. Diamond arrived shortly. Dr. Diamond was happy to see him. As I watched them, I thought that maybe now I would be able to return home and be reunited with my own family. My wish seemed as if it might be granted. After only one day of fighting, the Germans retreated. The Russians progressed further toward Romania, and a statue was erected in honor of an unknown Russian soldier that had fallen in town.

I was anxious to go back to my home town. The next day, I packed a small bag with all my possessions—I did not have much—said goodbye to Dr. Diamond and my friends in Muraffa, and walked to the nearest town with a train station. The train would take me home on the same route that I had taken to get to Muraffa—only, this time, I would be traveling without fear or detours.

On the train ride, I struck up a conversation with someone who knew Dr. Goldman, the leader of the ghetto who had refused to let me stay. The Russian army had hung Dr. Goldman because of his cruelty to people.

I was traveling alone and began to shiver in the night air. An old woman on the train noticed and sat down next to me. She covered me with her coat and held me close like a baby. I had not felt so warm or comforted in a long time. When we got to Vinnitsa, I thanked her and went my own way.

I needed a place to sleep for the night and figured I would go to the police station. I was shocked to find that the policemen staffing the station were the same boys from the street gang who used to force me to steal with them. It was difficult to keep my emotions in check. These boys, who had turned me in to the Ukrainian police, now acted as if they were glad to seem me. They fed me tea and sandwiches and allowed me to sleep at the police station. They acted as if nothing had happened. Deep in my heart I knew they were my enemies. I had survived in spite of

them. They would have thrown me into the ovens. How they ended up on the other side of the law eluded me, but I had no desire to dwell on this. My sole wish was to get home and see what remained.

In the morning, I left for the market, hoping that I would find the lady who had been so kind to me on the train. She was not there, and I did not have her address. Thinking that my town was already liberated, I quickly caught the next freight train headed toward Luboml. While I was traveling on the train, I was informed that Luboml still remained under German occupation.

A Russian officer on the train noticed me huddled and shivering in the corner. He approached me and asked me questions. Where was I going? What was I doing now? How did I survive? He seemed genuinely interested and said that he could get me admitted to a Russian military school. They would give me food, clothing, and a home, since my town was still under siege. I did not know what else I would do, and so I accepted.

I never got to attend the military school. The train stopped in Bialacerkva, one town before Kiev. It was cold and snowing. On the opposite side of the station was another train, carrying Polish soldiers on their way to fight for Poland's liberation. One of the Polish soldiers recognized me. He was a distant relative of my Uncle Gonig and was coming from the town of Rubeszow. He invited me into his cargo wagon and gave me food, a new pair of boots, and a Russian coat. It felt good to be warm.

I looked around. Polish soldiers and officers filled the wagon. It seemed fitting to return home with the Polish army. I did not even care if they drafted me into the Polish army. Meanwhile, someone heard the superior officer approaching and they quickly hid me under the benches. I could hear them discussing what to do with me. They decided to report me to the officer. The officer took me out and questioned me. He did not believe my story. My Uncle Gonig's relative vouched for me, but the officer insisted that I be turned over to the Russian KGB.

A young Polish soldier with a machine gun slung over his shoulder was assigned to walk me to KGB headquarters in Bialacerkva. It was at least a mile away, and I was sweating with fear as the Polish soldier walked behind me. The Poles were

known anti-Semites. It would be just as easy for him to shoot me and return to his post with a report that I had been delivered. I began to speak to him in Polish to ease the tension. He told me to shut up and keep walking. My heart was pounding so hard that I thought it would explode. Finally, we arrived at the KGB headquarters. The Polish soldier took the papers confirming my delivery and left.

None of the superior officers were present to question me, and so the police locked me in a closet until someone was available. I remained there all night. In the morning, I was taken into a stark white room for questioning. I repeated my story; how I had survived, where I was from, my age and family background. After more than an hour of interrogation, the officer determined that I did not pose a security threat and released me.

I returned to the Bialacerkva station to continue my journey. When I arrived, I learned that the Polish army would be stranded there for the next few days because a large storm had shut down their trains. I would have problems if I returned to the cargo train where I had met my uncle's relative. I looked around to figure out my options. I spotted a cargo train approaching in the distance. I waited until it was close enough and jumped on board without being noticed.

I stayed on the train until the town of Berdichev. There were more Polish soldiers to contend with at this station. I had not eaten in a while, and I was starving. I walked over to the soldiers and, in Polish, begged for food. The soldiers quizzed me on my background. I told them that I had been born in Poland, and now I wanted to volunteer because I was naked and barefoot. The soldiers fed me and told me to wait with them until a superior officer arrived. I ate a hearty meal and felt my strength returning. I stayed around and helped the soldiers clean their kitchen and split wood to fuel the fire. When a superior officer arrived, I was brought to a room for questioning. Again, I repeated the same story. The officer said that, because I was eighteen, I had to join the Russian army, even though I had told him that I was Polish Ukrainian. Two Polish soldiers then escorted me to Berdichev and turned me over to the central Russian army headquarters.

I was asked the same questions at the Russian army head-

quarters. Again, I answered the same. They told me that, because I was eighteen, registration for the army was mandatory. I filled out the paperwork and was told to return in two weeks for my assignment. I tried to explain my situation; I had no place to stay and no possessions and hoped that they could arrange some living quarters for me. They laughed, "That's not our problem. Just be here in two weeks." I took the papers and left. I walked outside, not knowing where to go. I decided to do the same thing that I had done before—rip up the papers and throw them away. If anyone asked any questions, I would tell the same story.

I returned to the railroad station just in time to hitch a ride in a cargo car filled with a brigade of female Polish soldiers. I looked wretched, but they shared their food with me any way. In exchange, I helped them to clean and move packages. They promised that I could join them, which would lead me closer to Poland. After a few days, we still had not left the station, and I did not want to wait. I jumped off and grabbed the first train bound for Shivatafka. In 1939, prior to the war, Shivatafka had been the border town between Russia and Poland.

When I finally arrived in Shivatafka, I had renewed determination. I knew that I was very close to my hometown, and I was eager to find out who had survived. It was late at night and I was exhausted. I went inside the railroad station and found an open space on a bench. I removed my boots, placed them like a pillow under my head, and fell into a deep sleep.

When I awoke, my boots were gone. I was outraged. I suspected that the thief was a young boy who had been sleeping nearby. He must have known that they were valuable and stole them. I figured that he would get on the first train out, and I would be there to greet him. When I spotted the boy on the train, I grabbed him and started questioning him about the boots. He denied taking them. I beat him up. I was sure that he was the culprit, but, if he did steal them, he must have sold them because he was barefoot. I punched him over and over until he was so scared he ran away and jumped onto another cargo train. When I looked around, everybody was staring at me with fear. It was the first time that I realized how much anger I was harboring.

I stayed on the cargo train until the town of Zbolbunof.

When the train stopped, it was dark, and there were no station lights. Suddenly, sirens and gunfire sounded. Bombs started dropping from the sky all around us. I rushed off the train and ran into the station's main building. A Russian soldier saw me and shouted, "Stop! Stop! Move and I will shoot!" With no other choice, I raised my hands above my head and followed him to the army headquarters located in the railroad station building.

I was placed in a holding room. After what seemed like an eternity, a high-ranking officer came in to question me—again, the same questions. My story remained the same except, this time, I said that I was sixteen, because I did not want to go in the army. I just wanted to get home. Luckily, the officer was Jewish and believed me. He turned to the other officers in the room and said, "This poor boy buried his whole family. He is alone. Let him go." I was released and provided sleeping quarters for the night in a nearby school.

In the morning, I headed back to the train station. I got on a cargo train headed toward the west Ukraine, another step closer to Luboml.

25

It was a beautiful day in mid-April 1944, when the train pulled into the town of Rowno. I walked down the main street of the town, inhaling the fresh air and taking in all the sights and sounds. Church bells were tolling. It was Passover. The Ukrainians called this Jewish holiday *Passca,* which coincided with Easter time. As I walked toward the church, I noticed a line of beggars waiting by the church entrance. I joined them.

The congregation members were staring at my torn clothes and bare feet. They gave me a large bag filled with pieces of white and dark bread, eggs, and tomatoes. I filled the bag and my pockets to the brim; then, I walked to the market. People who were looking for food bought some of mine. Now, I had some money in my pockets and enough food to last me a few days. All I needed was a place to stay. After asking around, I was directed to the synagogue. Some survivors were already staying there: a young couple with a screaming baby and a few young and elderly people who all appeared to be alone.

After a few days, I went to the Russian authorities to request shelter and work. I was assigned as a plantation laborer on a farm. The Russians directed a woman on the plantation to provide me with housing. She agreed, with the stipulation that she was to receive my salary to pay the rent at the end of the month.

The bombardments on Rowno seemed endless. Almost nightly, as soon as it was dark, the sirens came on, and we ran to the shelter. The Germans were bombing everything—buildings, schools, the synagogue, and railroad station. The railroad was specifically targeted to prevent the Russians' military supplies from reaching the front. The bombarding was so frequent, it became part of our lives. If the bombing was distant enough, we would sit and watch the skies light up like fireworks. The Germans dropped parachutes with lights attached to them to create

added visibility to aim at their targets. From the ground, the Russians would launch antiaircraft cannons and aim machine guns containing powerful Fursfort bullets toward the Germans' planes.

One night, when the bombarding appeared to have stopped for the night, I fell asleep in a large barn, where I had taken shelter. Without warning, a bomb landed on the barn. I was trapped and unable to crawl out. I could hear people trying to remove the rubbish, and the Russian woman whom I was staying with was lamenting. "The poor Jewish boy! He survived the war, and now he is gone!" To their astonishment, I came out alive and unharmed. Everyone cheered, and life went on.

26

Each morning, I awoke before dawn to tend the sheep and plow the field. Once, while plowing barefoot, I stepped on a board containing a rusty nail. I felt a sharp, burning sensation as the warm blood began to flow from my foot. I bent over, held my foot in my hands and, with all the strength I could muster, ripped the nail out of my foot. I hobbled down to the lake, leaving a trail of green grass stained with a bloody red ribbon. I soaked my foot in the cold lake water. Once the bleeding stopped, I ripped off a corner of my shirt and wrapped the cloth around my foot. I was in pain, but, luckily, my foot was not infected. I needed to continue working in order to pay the rent.

Some days later, I was assigned to clean a sewer underneath a large vacant house. I was to report there along with another orphaned Polish boy, who was supporting his sister and brother. The house contained clothes, furniture, pictures, and other expensive items. The former owner had at one time been the town's mayor. He was a collaborator with the Germans and feared that the Russian army was approaching. When the Germans retreated, the mayor had retreated with them. We loaded the wagon with the clothes and moved it to the Polish boy's house. One-third was supposed to be for me and the rest for the boy and his family; but we knew that there was not much room in his place, and so we reported the findings to the police. They came and took what they found but left us some clothes and a few trinkets as a reward. The boy treated me like gold. After that, he often invited me to eat or sleep at his home. I took my portion of the reward items and sold them for black-market prices. I made enough money to buy food, clothing, and a few bottles of vodka.

Now that I had enough money to support myself for a while, I decided to slip out of town and head toward Luboml. There were rumors that the Russian army was liberating my town. I

spotted a small Russian cavalry unit approaching Luboml and began to walk alongside them. One of the soldiers kept turning around and looking at me. Finally, he asked me why I was following them.

"I am going back to my hometown, Luboml. You are heading there, no? This is the only safe way for me. I hear there are still many bands of Ukrainian collaborators and Germans attacking on the back roads."

One of the soldiers turned to me with a smug grin, "I am one of those Ukrainian bandits."

It was like a dagger in my back. I could have killed him. Instead, I retreated and let the soldiers pass.

I walked closer to the roadside and tried to hitch a ride from one of the passing cars or trucks. Nobody stopped. Then, I had an idea. When the next truck passed, I lifted one of my bottles of vodka. A Polish truck loaded with cargo stopped. I spoke to the driver in Polish. He was heading toward a neighboring town and agreed to give me a ride until his destination. I eagerly accepted.

The truckdriver let me off about a mile from Luboml. From the distance, I could see the steeple of the town church. I walked faster, my heart thumping. I was eager to find someone I knew alive. My strength was gone, but I managed to arrive in Luboml before dark. The streets were as quiet as the forest. Occasionally, the silence was broken by the sound of soldiers' footsteps. I could not believe I was back walking the streets and seeing all the places that I had dreamed about for so long. When I reached the center of town, a young man approached me. I recognized him from grammar school.

"Shouldn't you be in the army?" he asked me.

"I am only sixteen," I replied.

The young man let me go. I was amazed that he did not recognize me. Either he did not want to turn me in or he truly did not remember.

I decided to try a few more streets. I walked past the old post office, which was across the street from the house of my second cousin Pini Lipshitz. I turned toward the house and saw the figure of a man crouched over into a ball. He was praying and talking to himself. I walked up to him.

"Pini?" I asked.

He looked up. "Abraham, is it you?"

"Yes! Yes! It's me. What has happened?"

"For two years, I have been hiding under a barn. I cannot even stand straight."

Pini was hunched over like an old man, but he was not more than twenty years old. Pini walked with me into the house. Three other schoolboy friends, Nathan Sobel, Moishe Blumen, and Benjamin Perkal, were inside. They had all survived by hiding out in the forest with some farmers. Another family, Idel Byegises with his sister and her two children, had also survived. They sat me down and slowly began to tell me what had happened to my family.

My sister and my mother had been killed by Ukrainian farmers. My mother would not disclose Fayga's hiding, and Fayga would not consent to sex with one of the farmers who was hiding her. Fayga was twenty years of age, and my mother was forty-seven. Chaim managed to run away but died of starvation in the Russian forest. He was sixteen. My little brother, Label, had been working as a shepherd for a farmer. The pro-Nazi Ukrainian nationalists discovered him there and told Label to tell them the truth because they were the real Partisans. Label told them that he was a Jew, and they shot him to death just one month before the Russian liberation in 1944. He was fifteen.

My Uncle Moishe, who was supposed to join me with the Partisans when the ghetto was liquidated, had instead been hidden with his family by a farmer in the village of Radehof. One day, Moishe heard the Ukrainians searching for him. His infant son started to cry. Moishe stuffed a handkerchief in the baby's mouth to quiet him. When the Ukrainians finally left, Moishe removed the handkerchief from the baby's mouth and found his baby had suffocated to death. Not much later, Moishe was discovered and shot to death along with his wife, Bella.

Pini's brother Mendl had been hiding underground for nearly three years and was now hospitalized. The following morning, I went to visit him. I barely recognized him. He was like a skeleton, all skin and bones. I brought him food, but he could not eat. Mendl recognized me immediately and his face lit

up. "Abe, it's you!" he said. "Thank G-d you are alive! Someday, things will be good for you. You have three uncles in America and a brother in Palestine that you will see again." Then, with glazed eyes, he softly whispered, "Me, I don't think I will make it." The doctors tried everything to save him, but he died a few days later.

In the same hospital was Yudah Krein. Yudah was an orphan who had been like a brother to me when he had stayed with my family years earlier. My mother had treated him like her own child. Before the war, Yudah had been in Palestine while his wife and five-year-old son, Benjamin, had remained in Luboml. He had returned to Luboml for his family before the Polish-Russian war. Two years later, when the war broke out between Russia and Germany, Yudah was trapped in town and mobilized to serve as a medic in the Russian army. In 1944 when the Germans retreated, Yudah had returned with the Russian army. He was injured during the fighting to liberate our town. While recovering in the hospital, he was informed that his wife and son had been killed by the Nazis. He was devastated.

In 1945, Yudah took the first opportunity he could to return to Palestine. I gave him a message that I asked him to deliver to Jacob, but his attempts to locate my brother in Palestine were fruitless. Determined to notify Jacob, he delivered my letter to the United Committee to assist the Jews of Poland, which was located in Jerusalem. My message was published in the daily newspaper, Davar. (In 1973, the letter was reprinted in the "Yizkor Book of Luboml." pg. 355))

> Yudah, you are the only one left for me. Write to my brother, Jacob, in Israel and tell him about our awful tragedy, the horrors of Luboml! Our disaster! Tell him that I am the only survivor of our large family—that the graves of my parents are not together side by side, that our brothers and sister are scattered all over the wild fields of Wolyn, that their graves are open and still bleeding hot blood.
>
> Yudah, please write, write to him that your own innocent son, Benjamin, aged five, was buried naked with his sacred mother, Bella, by murderers. Tell Jacob that his sister, Fayga, was buried at the foot of our mother; kind Christians had mercy

on them both. His father, together with his brother Moshe, were exterminated in 1941, together with your grandfather Kornfeld.

Yudah, write to him about our great grief and mourning. Let him know about our holy Yizkor. Let him know about our terrible pain and anguish, because he must demand revenge!

Write to my brother that I am going to Dombas (Russia) to study mechanics, and later on, I intend to meet him, him—my only brother—alive.

Yudah! You are the father, my guide. You come straight from the front, from the place where you avenged our nation's bleeding blood. You took revenge over our exterminator. Write to my brother and tell him that you were the first to come to the cemetery in Luboml, while still wounded from the battles. And that later on, I found you together with other wounded soldiers of the Red Army, in the hospital. . . .

Tell my brother that I expect his letter. Write to him about your three years of life at the front. Tell him that you left our town with the great Red Army in 1941 and that you were the first to liberate in 1944. Tell him that in six days you are leaving for the place where the heart beats stronger than cannons. There, you'll pay back for your wife, child and for your beautiful sister Bracha and for your grandfather and grandmothers, for my dear mother, for our boyfriends, girlfriends and for all the acquaintances, for the rivers of blood shed from our nation.

Inform the relatives there that their sister is dead, that Joseph's parents are dead, and the Shliva's parents and sisters were also massacred by the same murderers.

Tell them that children—chosen ones—were hidden deep in dungeons and pits for two years; and that out of eight thousand people, no more than twelve people survived!

Tell him that our disaster is worldwide and eternal. That we are the only ones roaming in the town's alleys, we, the miserables, going around the streets of the town and waiting for a live word from him. Let him give regards to all our friends and shake hands with acquaintances in Jerusalem. The only people he knows who survived in Luboml are Moshe Lipshitz and his little brother, Sobol's son (Nathan), Abraham Klein, Jacob Reiss and his son, you and me, and a few more who are now mentally insane.

27

We were on the verge of liberation. Every day, more survivors arrived in Luboml, each one with stories more horrifying and shocking than the next: concentration camps, gas chambers; men, women, and children executed because they were born Jews. The younger survivors did not even remember their families. One day, a boy of about eight years old came to town. Some of his relatives recognized him. They tried to speak Yiddish to him but he could not answer them. He did not know the language. The boy returned to the church where he had hidden during the war. The relatives tried to take him out, but the family who had hidden him refused to let him go. . . .

One day, a young girl from the neighboring Polish-controlled town of Chelm appeared. She was trying to organize a Jewish community and tried to persuade us that we would be better off in Chelm. Many of the boys from Luboml were fighting in the Russian army to help liberate our town, and I did not think that it was the right time to leave.

The following day, I visited one of the farmers who had taken my family's land in the ghetto at the outbreak of the war. I explained to him who I was and my predicament. The farmer seemed sorry enough and promised to support me with food. He gave me a bag of potatoes, but then he said, "I will never return the land. Whatever else you need, I will help." He offered to split the crops with me. I knew that I would have to settle for whatever he offered. Whatever vegetables I could carry, I brought back to the Lipshitzes' home. They were thrilled to see so much food. Pini's sister-in-law, Chana, cooked a meal that was enough to feed all the survivors. I will never forget that meal, especially the borscht. It seemed as if it had a thousand different tastes—one taste more delicious than the next.

My next mission was to visit Compione's farm. My mother

had given Compione's maids on the farm most of her valuables to hide. The maids told me that my mother had taken everything with her when she fled the ghetto. They had given her some bread and pork, and she had left. It was a lie, but I forgave them, because when I had sneaked back from the forest into the ghetto during the war, the maids had not turned me into the Germans when they had an opportunity.

There was still one more place left where I knew we had valuables hidden. I went to confront the farmer who owned a slaughterhouse on the outskirts of town. The farmer threatened to kill me if I did not leave.

I ran away and went to my parents' house, but it was gone. Our home had been razed during the war, because it was near the synagogue, which had been converted to a prison. The house was made of wood and had been used as firewood to keep the army post stationed in town warm. I was devastated. I stood on the grounds where our house had been and began to dig furiously in the places where we had hidden things, but I found nothing. A policeman who must have been watching approached and asked me what I was doing. I told him that my family had hidden money and valuables here during the war. He seemed very interested and started to help me dig. We still found nothing, and I left.

Next, I went to the house that my grandparents owned. Russian authorities blocked my entrance. "What are you doing here?" they asked.

"This was my grandfather's house, and now it is mine," I responded.

"Nothing belongs to you! This is ours now. Get out of here before we arrest you!"

With my head hung low and warm tears rolling down my cheeks, I turned away and slowly started walking back toward the Lipshitzes' house. As I walked, I tried to figure out what to do now. First, I had wanted to volunteer for the army and get whatever revenge I could, but everyone talked me out of it. Instead, I decided that I would go to the neighboring town of Chelm and look for more survivors. The railroad had been destroyed in the bombings, and so I hitched a ride. As the trucks rolled by, I lifted

a bottle of vodka (it had worked before) and within minutes, a trucker carrying ammunition stopped and gave me a ride to Chelm.

I walked the streets of Chelm looking for survivor. When I reached 9 Potchtowa Street, I stopped. A horde of newspaper reporters were crowded around a group of young men and women. The reporters were shouting questions as the men and women were telling tales of their survival through the war and in the death camps. Everyone was talking at once.

"I jumped out of a window when my hiding place was discovered."

"The Germans were shooting children and throwing their bodies from fifth-story windows."

"People were burned alive!"

Other people told tales of revenge.

"We shot at the Germans with smuggled machine guns."

"We took some Germans off the trains and held them as prisoners-of-war."

Some high-ranking Jewish officers in the Polish army spoke of their conversations with civilian Poles upon returning after the liberation. The Jewish officers had asked the civilians what they had done during the war. Not knowing that the officers were Jews, the Poles responded, "Don't you know? We were hunting."

"Hunting what?" the Jewish officers had inquired.

"Hunting Jews! The Germans would give us commodities for every Jew we sold out of hiding. One Jew was worth maybe one cigarette. Two Jews could get you a kilo of salt."

As I got a closer look, I recognized some of the men being interviewed. One of the men was Chaim Petrosnick, from my hometown, and another man was Mr. Ellenberg, a respected Russian writer. (Years later Mr. Ellenberg wrote a book, *A Survivor of Sobibor,* about the resistance and revolt in the Sobibor concentration camp.) Mr. Ellenberg described how seventy people escaped a concentration camp. They convinced the Germans that they would make them shoes and suits and shave them. Instead, they killed the Germans and cut down the barbed and electric wires surrounding the camp to escape.

I remained in Chelm for a few weeks, just listening to other survivors' stories and hoping to learn more of my own family's fate. During this time, the front was still near the Wisla River. Almost 200,000 Polish Jewish survivors were hiding out in the Warsaw and Lodz ghettos, awaiting liberation. The Poles in the capital city of Warsaw were getting anxious and wanted to show that they could liberate themselves. If the Poles caught any Jewish survivors attempting to leave Warsaw, they would be turned over to the Germans.

On August 1, 1944, Lodz ghetto was destroyed, and many Jews were marched to the death camps. The Russians did not want to get involved and maintained their position by the Wisla River. If the Russians had progressed at this time, more than a quarter-million innocent people's lives would have been spared.

28

I traveled on from Chelm to the neighboring town of Lublin. On the brick roadside west of the town's entrance was the Maidanek concentration camp. A sign read, "Work makes life sweet." I spat at the notice and kept walking.

When I arrived in Lublin, I met some Jewish survivors, including another of my kinsfolk from my town, Shimon Kraut. I stayed with him for a few days, but there really was not much for me to do, and so I decided to return to Luboml.

I had received my uniform from the Russian army and could now take the railroad, which was operating again, back to Luboml with some Russian soldiers without problems. When I reached Luboml, the villagers asked me if I had brought any yeast. Yeast, they told me, was very cheap in Poland and could easily be brought here and sold. After spending a little time in town, with no money and nothing to do, I put on my Russian uniform, took some of the townspeople's rubles, and traveled back to Poland to buy yeast. The venture was successful, and it felt good to have money in my pocket. I managed to make a few more trips to Poland before the Russian/Poland border closed, and I remained in Luboml.

Soon after the border closed, the Russians gave orders forcing everyone to work. Jobs were assigned as either manual laborers at the coal mines in Dunbass or assisting the police to round up the collaborators and Germans who were still active in the forest.

It was at this time, in 1944, that one of my mother's cousins came riding his truck into town. Before the war, his family had worked as truckdrivers and mechanics for the Russian government. When the war began he fled with his entire family to deep Russia. They all had managed to survive and were living near the coal mines. My cousin persuaded me to join his family there.

I accepted and worked with my cousin in the town of Lesichansk in Woroshilowgrad and was given training as a truckdriver.

In 1945, the war ended. The front had fallen, and peace had arrived. Everyone was released.

During the years I spent in Lesichansk, I maintained correspondence with friends in Luboml. In 1946, I learned that my friend Nathan Sobel would soon be allowed to leave Poland. (Although Nathan had been born in the western Ukraine he was considered a Polish citizen.) According to the records, I was approaching my eighteenth birthday, and that winter, after work in the evenings, I began military training four times a week.

I kept dreaming about returning to Poland and, from there, going to Palestine. In May 1946, I applied for permission to return to Luboml. My request was denied. I was told that we were still needed to work in the factories and mines. I continued to work as a truckdriver. All along, I kept thinking about how I could disappear and get back to Luboml—after all, I was used to being on my own and finding my way.

While I worked my shift as a truckdriver, I often drove from town to town and observed the railroad system connecting the towns. The small railroad system, known as Wuskakalaica, carried workers to the factories in neighboring towns. If I took the railroad from this station, I could connect almost as far as the main town of Harkov, in the Ukraine.

I planned to use my two weeks of vacation eligibility as a cover to plan my escape. As citizens, we were required to carry a special permit to travel within Russia or be subject to arrest. I planned to request my vacation permit and run away. If stopped, I could use the excuse that I was on my vacation. Although I had requested my two weeks, they were only willing to give me one week. After much pleading, I was granted the second week. I returned to my cousin's home and told them that I was leaving. They had accepted me like a son. Everyone cried openly. They knew that it would be a long time, if ever, before they saw me again.

In the morning, I took the Wuskakalaica train to Harkov. From there, I boarded a passenger train headed toward Germany. As I walked toward the back of the crowded train, I recog-

nized two soldiers who were German prisoners-of-war, sitting silently. They had worked as mechanics at the soda and powder factory in Lesichansk. I had been their truckdriver and used to drive them back and forth from the barracks to the factory. I knew that they recognized me, but they said nothing. I was leaving the border illegally, and they were doing the same to return to Germany.

When we arrived in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, the train stopped, and some passengers debarked. I decided to get off, because I was not sure whether the train would continue or remain in Kiev for a while. Suddenly, I heard shouting.

"German! German!"

I turned around and saw two Russian policemen with handcuffs, running toward me. "No! I am Russian!" I shouted.

Someone must have informed them that the Germans were on the train. I ran to the other side of the train and jumped onto a cargo train that was moving toward Poland.

When the train entered Rowno, I jumped onto another train that was departing for Luboml. By the time we reached Luboml, it was already dark. The police were stopping everyone to check documents. When it was my turn, the police checked my papers and questioned me for almost an hour. I showed them my permit and explained that I was a native of Luboml on a two-week vacation. They took me to a resident of Luboml. He verified my story and I was released.

I walked to 11 Listopada St., where several of my friends were living. When they saw me, we embraced and cried. They were happy and relieved to see me. We went inside to talk.

Since my first visit to Luboml, more survivors had returned to town. Most of them had been injured in the war, including Menachem Erlich and the boys from the Shaintopo family. My father's cousin Moishe Bargroom told me that he had survived by fighting with the Partisans. Moishe planned to go to Poland and, from there, to Palestine. I told him that I also wanted to get to Poland and Palestine. He warned me to leave as soon as possible, because there would soon be trouble. Luboml was a border town. The police were checking papers daily, and they would chase me out. Moishe arranged for me to get papers from the

town community center, which would enable me to legally remain for a month or two. With my papers, I could walk around town freely, but I could not stay too long or I would be drafted into the army.

Citizens born under Polish rule were being granted a permit to leave Russia, but it did not apply to our town. I desperately needed to obtain a permit to Lwow to get out, but I was unsuccessful. Finally, Milly Shaintop, a Jew who had survived the war by posing as a Tartar national, doctored a temporary permit to Lwow for me. He took the raised approval stamp from one document, placed it in a raw potato and transferred the stamp imprint onto my permit. My permit now appeared to be legally signed. It was almost impossible to distinguish it from the original.

I did not have any money. The townspeople collected 2,000 rubles for me and told me not to worry. I was embarrassed. It felt like charity, but I knew that I needed it. With my permit and rubles, I gratefully went on my way.

I took the train to Lwow without incident. When I arrived, I was greeted by Esther Milstein and her daughter Rivka at their home. They were originally from Luboml. Esther's son Abraham had been a close friend of mine in grammar school. The Milsteins invited me to stay with them, and I accepted.

Esther and Rivka told me their story of survival. They had been in the same neighborhood as I had in Transndnister and were caught in Brielov at the same border, near Shmerinca. The women were kept there for two weeks. They were finally released and moved to a village near Muraffa and even frequented the same market that I did near the end of the war. Esther admitted that, even if she had recognized me in the market, she would have ignored me to avoid drawing attention. Now, she was in Lwow waiting for permission to leave Poland.

It was difficult to find work in Lwow, because we only had temporary papers. The Jewish center was managed by Mr. Bergahson, a former brigadier in the Russian army. Mr. Bergahson gave us ration cards and provided daily distributions of food and clothing. More refugees from Russia, mostly men, registered daily for permission to cross to the border to Poland.

It was Passover time, a holiday that, ironically, celebrates the Jews' redemption from slavery. The community donated matzoh and wine for the holidays, and we were able to celebrate Passover together as Jews, for the first time in years. The thoughts that went through our minds were unimaginable. Everyone was crying instead of enjoying the holiday. No one had any family left. All we could remember is how it used to be. The silence amid the sobs was unbearable. We ate our meal, said our prayers, and departed.

I was still hungry. I had most of the money that my kinfolk had collected for me and decided to buy some knishes and other food. On the way to the marketplace, I passed a stand where some men were playing card games. Three cards were laid out on the table. The object of the game was to watch the cards as the card dealer moved the cards around and guess where one of the cards was placed when he stopped. The winner received double his bet. I figured I would take a chance. I won a few hands and lost a few.

As I was ready to walk away, a Russian officer in high command approached me. He said, "Let's play as partners. I put in 100 rubles, and you put in 100. I put in 200 and you put in 200. I know this game, and we will win money." I agreed to play with the officer. At first, we were winning and I was excited. "Let's put in more money," the officer said. So we each put in 300 rubles. Again, we won. We kept playing. We won a few and lost a few. When I had 2000 rubles, he said we should put it all in, and I did. We lost and the officer quickly disappeared. He was probably a partner in the game, trying to scam innocent people's money. I was angry but at the same time felt very bad. People had gone out of their way to collect money for me, and I had lost everything in a sucker card game.

As I walked back to the Milsteins, I told myself that I was lucky I still had a place to stay. When I arrived, I told the Milsteins my story. They were angry that I had done something so stupid. They had treated me like their own child. I felt ashamed, because I was staying there without paying and lost everything. I had been irresponsible and decided to seek assistance in the morning.

The only place for me to go was the Jewish community center that had aided me before. I went there the next morning and explained that I was broke. I met a gentleman named Benjamin Rosensweig (who now lives in America), who tried to guide me. I was promised temporary work through the community until I could get my papers for Poland and assigned work in a beer-manufacturing plant.

A week after I began working, a Russian officer came into the factory to check permit papers. He noticed that my papers permitted me only two weeks' stay in Lwow. He warned me to leave after my two weeks expired. Luboml was a border town, and I would be forced to leave unless I received special permission to reside in town. The officer left, and I returned to my job.

At the end of the following week, the same officer returned to check my permit, which had now expired. As the officer walked toward me, I ran out of the factory, and he chased me. I ran through the streets until I came to a large gate. The officer was still running toward me. As I jumped over the gate, he started shooting at me. When I landed on the other side, I was greeted by a group of border-patrol soldiers pointing machine guns at me. I was captured and thrown in prison.

The officers questioned me all day and night, while I stood on my feet. When I could hardly stand anymore and started to fall asleep, the officers woke me up and continued their questioning. When they finally finished, they placed me in a cell occupied by a young derelict who was carrying brass knuckles. The boy tried to intimidate me and steal from me, but I would not let him. I said, "Don't think about starting with me, because I'll cut you to pieces. I know all of your tricks so don't try anything, or you'll be wishing you never met me." He respected my boldness and left me alone. Within a few hours, he became my "buddy."

While I was incarcerated, I was unable to get a message to the Milsteins. They became worried when I did not show up to sleep for three days. They went to the Jewish center to find out what had happened. Mr. Bergahson knew that I was working in the beer plant and went there to look for me. The plant officials told him that the NKVD had come to check permit papers and that I had been sent to prison for attempting to run away while

carrying expired papers. Mr. Bergahson came to the prison and bribed the officers to release me. The officers warned me to leave town before the week's end. I remember that day well. It was the first of May. The Russians were celebrating their revolution, and I was celebrating my freedom.

Mr. Bergahson took me back to the Jewish center. He told me not to worry about anything. "Soon," he said, "there will be transportation to Poland, and we'll find a way to get you out." I thanked him. I knew that he had done a lot of favors doctoring documents for Russian-born Jews attempting to enter Poland.

I stayed in the Milsteins' house, afraid to leave even to go the marketplace for fear of being stopped. One day, I overheard talk that a train was leaving the station, bound for Poland. I went to the railroad station and asked to register. However, proof was required that I was born in Poland, under the Polish government prior to 1939. By luck, the man who administered the registration was from Luboml. When I said my name was "Getman," he looked at me in surprise. "I knew your mother and father and the whole family!" he said. "Your father had the shoe store. Right?"

"Yes," I responded with relief.

"I am granting you passage." He smiled and placed me on the cargo train to Poland.

About a half-hour later, the Milstein family arrived. They were placed on the same train to Poland. We traveled across the Polish border and into the town of Lodz. I knew that my cousin Pini and his family were living here and had already established a business. I was anxious. I did not have any patience to wait for the Milsteins and eagerly started to look for the Lipshitzes' address. The Milsteins said some words in anger to me because I had started to run off without helping them carry their bags. Before they left, I handed them all the money I had hidden in my shoe (in case I had needed to cross the border) and thanked them. Then I continued toward the Lipshitzes' residence.

My cousins received me with a warm and teary reception. It was good to be with family, but I did not want to impose. I was informed that some Jewish organizations with Betar (youth pioneering movement) and religious groups were established in town. (Betar was not allowed here, and so they used the name Yi-

chud—United Party.) When Jacob was a teenager, he had belonged to Betar, and I had always wanted to join, too. Betar's mission was to liberate Palestine and establish a Jewish state. I walked to the Yichud quarters at 25 Zavatzka St. I was questioned and then accepted as a member of the kibbutz. The Milsteins were disappointed by my choice. They left without me for another town and eventually moved to Germany.

I remained on the kibbutz for a few weeks and was assigned work in the kitchen, mostly cooking and cleaning. Soon, another Yichud post was opened in the town of Chenstachoff, and I would be transferred there to manage this branch. I told Pini the news. We said goodbye and hoped that we would meet again someday in Palestine.

29

I was afraid to ride the train to Poland. A vicious pogrom had just occurred against Jews in the town of Kielce. The Jews were returning to their hometown after miraculously being liberated from the concentration camps. Fearful that the returning Jews would reclaim their lost property, Kielce residents sparked rumors that Jews were murdering Christian children for their blood. On July 4, 1946, in broad daylight, a group of Polish citizens from Kielce mercilessly killed more than forty Jews and injured many others.

In order to procure safe passage, Jews traveling to Poland were disguised as native Poles. There really was no reason for me to be afraid. With my blonde hair and small features, no one would be suspicious.

When I arrived in Chenstochow, I walked to the center of town to the old synagogue to meet with the new division of the Kibbutz Yichud. They assigned me to the main office branch, which was located in Warsaw. I would have to leave for Warsaw by the end of the week.

Meanwhile, Pini sent word to my cousin Sam, who had arrived from Russia, that I was alive and living in Chenstochow. Sam came to persuade me not to go to Warsaw. He told me that a group was being organized near the town of Stolchim, near Szczecin. They would travel to Austria and, from there, continue to Palestine. I hesitated. I had made a commitment. Sam convinced me that it would take me a long time to contact my brother if I stayed with the Yichud organization. So, without notifying anyone, I disappeared with Sam on the next train bound to Stolchim.

There was already a large refugee population in Stolchim when we arrived. All kinds of daily activities and entertainment sere set up, and everyone was assigned to work.

On a few occasions, Sam and I were assigned to a little island near Stolchim to clean houses that the Germans had abandoned when they fled to West Germany. It was not an easy trip. We were sent to the island in a little rowboat. Twenty-foot waves created from the movements of the large ships crashed against our boat. I did not know how to swim, and I prayed for a miracle. Somehow, we managed to make it there intact, but, for the first time, I believe that my prayers had been answered.

Within a few months, the camps were closed, and Sam and I were moved to a private house. It was really pleasant there. Soon after, we were transferred to a large building that had been converted into an apartment complex. I got a job working as a security guard in the building. Because we were Jews, the Polish government provided us with virtually no protection, although I was allowed to carry a rifle.

Soon, rumors began circulating that the Poles were planning a large pogrom against the Jews. Fearing it was true, we made homemade explosives from sand and chalk, and filled bottles with the concoction. If the bottles were thrown from high floors, they would explode like grenades as they hit the pavement. We also prepared Molotov cocktails to use in case we were attacked. We were anxious to get out of Poland as soon as possible.

30

An order soon arrived for all males over eighteen to register for mandatory service in the Polish army. I nervously handed my document to the officer checking papers. If I were called to serve, I would be stuck in the army for two and a half years. The officer handed me a Polish document and told me not to leave town until I was called.

That evening, Sam and I received orders from the kibbutz to mobilize. The following night, a truck would come by to pick us up to cross the border. A beautiful, young Jewish girl was assigned to assist us in crossing the border to Czechoslovakia. It was dark when the truck arrived. We boarded in silence and crouched low in our seats so that no one would spot us. Once we reached the border, we were given orders to get out and walk up the steep mountain in the wilderness to the other side. People would be waiting to receive us on the Czech side of the border.

As we began to climb the mountain, I noticed a young man who was desperately trying to balance carrying his year-old daughter in his arms along with a lot of luggage. Although I did not know this man and I did not see his wife, I offered my assistance, since I only had one bag to carry. He eagerly handed me his daughter. I placed her on my shoulders, and we continued walking up the mountain. After some time, I started to get weary, climbing with the little girl and the luggage. I turned to find her father, but he had disappeared. So, with Sam walking behind me, I continued to climb with the girl and my luggage.

The next day, we finally reached the town of Nachod on the other side of the mountain, not far from the Czech border. I figured the man would return to reclaim his daughter. I spotted the man and his wife watching me from a distance. When he realized that I saw him, he ran away. I kept the girl by my side as we continued traveling through Czechoslovakia.

We had been warned not to speak Yiddish during the trip to avoid being discovered. If questioned, we were to tell the authorities that we were Greeks—the Germans had placed us in labor camps and now we were returning to our homeland. They also suggested that we respond in Hebrew and quote words from prayerbooks and the Bible so that the authorities would not understand us.

Luckily, we took a train to the Czech town of Brotaslov without incident. When we reached our destination, the young girl's parents came forward to reclaim their daughter. They were apologetic for abandoning her and grateful for my assistance.

After staying in Brotaslov for two days, our group boarded a train to Vienna, Austria. In Vienna, we were provided temporary shelter in the Rothschild Hospital which was owned by the famed Rothschild family. We felt safe in Vienna, because we were under the supervision of the Western armies.

A few days later, we were transported to the town of St. Morein and housed in what had been the German army's barracks during the war. It was miserable. Our group was disorganized. We had no food or beds and slept on the soft earth. You could see the look of despair on people's faces. Many of them had given up all hope.

It took more than a month for the organization to establish the DP camps in St. Morein and a few more days after that for the UNRA to register all the camp residents. Once we supplied our name, birthdate, and hometown, we were given two pieces of paper for identification; a certificate stating that we were displaced persons and a document allowing free movement.

We were all assigned jobs. I worked as a policeman. Each evening I patrolled the camp. Sam would follow behind, because he worried about me. I was angry with him, because I thought that I was man enough to take care of myself. I had been doing it for so long. But Sam felt responsible and wanted to help me. He even brought cigarettes back from Russia for me, because I smoked, when he could have sold them for a handsome profit on the black market.

When we moved to Kibbutz Gordonia, I was assigned a posi-

tion as assistant to the Kibbutz commander. Mainly, I monitored young men who had been neglected and had given up hope.

One early morning, while I was patrolling the camp, I spotted a young man from the camp barracks picking apples. I approached him. Frightened that he had done something wrong, he dropped the apples and started crying. He begged me not to harm him. He was probably a concentration-camp survivor. I tried to calm him. I assured him that I didn't care about the apples and was just looking out for his safety. After much convincing, he picked up the apples and thanked me. I continued with my job.

For the first time in years, I felt useful. I had been through a lot and understood the feelings these men were experiencing. I told them to be strong and to take care of their personal appearances, because with time, things would change. We marched with them through the streets and, together, sang a song of encouragement, the "Song of the Partisans":

"Never say that you have reached the very end.
Though leaden skies a bitter future may portend;
And the hour for which we've yearned will yet arrive,
And our marching step will thunder; we survive!

From green palm trees to the land of distant snow,
We are here with our sorrow, our woe,
And wherever our blood was shed in pain,
Our fighting spirits now will resurrect again.

The golden rays of morning sun will dry our tears,
Dispelling bitter agony of yesteryears,
But if the sun and dawn with us will be delayed,
Then let this song ring out to you the call, instead.

Not lead, but blood inscribed this mighty song we sing,
It's not a caroling of birds upon the wing,
But a people midst the crashing fires of hell,
Sang this song with guns in hands, until we fell."

—Hirsch Glik

Although some of these men were older than I, I knew that they trusted me. They needed to believe that they had a future.

31

It was the summer of 1946. In time, we overcame our depression, and the camp began to function as a living, working, and progressive community. Food and clothing were available on a regular basis from the Joint Distribution and UNRA. A hospital was erected to take care of the ill, and injections to prevent diseases were readily available. Jewish doctors and dentists in the community were back in business.

Everyone capable was assigned and expected to work. Some former businessmen opened repair shops. Anyone unskilled could learn a trade from ORT, an organization for rehabilitation through training. Schooling was available for children, and all kinds of Zionist groups were organized; Gordonia, Betar, Hashomer, Ezion, and organizations such as B'nai Akiva that taught us about Zionist history and its leaders.

A dance hall was constructed in the center of town. I went there frequently and learned how to dance. It was there that I met a girl who would become my first true girlfriend, Paulina. She was from Yugoslavia and had come from a neighboring camp to find work.

Paulina had long, auburn hair and piercing blue eyes. I would often see her in the dance hall standing in a corner, swaying to the music. One day, I got the courage to ask her to dance, and she accepted. I wrapped my arms around her waist and swayed with her. It felt good to smell a woman's scent and feel her bosom pressed against my chest. We danced all night. When we parted, Paulina made me promise to meet her again the next night, and I did—again and again. One day, she disappeared from our camp with no explanation. I never saw her again.

I soon met another girl in our camp, Sima. After a few dates, she invited me to her home to meet her mother, stepfather, and stepbrothers. They took an instant liking to me and treated me

like family. They said that I was always welcome in their home. I eagerly accepted their invitation and often came to Sima's home for a warm, home-cooked meal. But, as young love is fickle, so was our relationship. I caught Sima getting a little too close with a handsome young dentist. He won her over with his promises to provide her with a better life than I could ever be capable of giving her. I was defeated and hurt. Worse, the dentist had been my closest friend. They had both disappointed me. I tried to get over it as best as I could. These emotions I was feeling over a girl were new to me. I could not understand why it bothered me so much after all that I had lost.

Not long after Sima began her new liaison with the dentist, news spread quickly that Sima had been shot. One afternoon, Sima had gone to one of the orchards owned by some Austrian farmers. One of the farmers saw her taking an apple from their tree and, without a warning, he shot her in the buttocks. Sima was taken to the hospital but was expected to recover.

The survivors in the camp were furious. They marched down to the Austrian farm and burned it to the ground. They were ready to kill the farmer and could barely be restrained. The military police had to be called in to intervene. They stayed until the situation was under control. A few hours later, the survivors finally settled down and returned to their homes. They had gotten as close to an eye for an eye as they could.

I continued searching for a way to contact Jacob. One day, the Red Cross came and took down background information from all the survivors in the camp. They were trying to find out if anyone had relatives in America, Australia, and other countries, including Palestine, so that they could resettle the camp residents wherever they felt most connected or interested. I, of course, wanted to be with my brother in Palestine. I explained to them that it had always been my dream for a Jewish state to be established, where I could live. The Red Cross sent in my information and promised to help locate my brother.

Not long after, I received a letter from the Red Cross. They had located Jacob and told me to wait for his reply. Less than a month later, a letter arrived from Jacob postmarked from the Jerusalem police. I was so proud I could boast that my brother was

a policeman with the Jerusalem police. Growing up in Europe, no Jew could have been a policeman. I ripped open the letter. Jacob wrote:

Dear Abe,

I am doing well here and I am so happy to hear that you are alive. I hope someday, hopefully soon, that we will see each other again. Please do not lose hope.

Your loving brother,

Jacob

Circumstances could not have been further from the truth. Jacob was not a policeman. He was not even in Palestine. His letters were actually coming from Africa and transferred to Jerusalem for censorship and then forwarded to me in the Austrian DP camp. I later learned that Jacob had been detained by the British and accused of being a member of the underground Irgun, a group that was fighting against the British. He had been sentenced to four years and deported to Kenya, Africa, where he was being held there as a political prisoner. The following article (reprinted in the *Jerusalem Post* almost fifty years later), described these prisoners' experiences:

In October 1944, while World War II was raging in Europe and in the Pacific, some 250 Jews in the Latrun detention camp were awakened in the middle of the night by their British captors. These Jews of pre-state Palestine, detained by the British Mandatory authorities, were ordered to dress swiftly, then were handcuffed, two men to a pair of shackles and taken to the Lydda Airport. Within minutes, the captives were flown to Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, in East Africa. Palestinian Jewish deportees not only were kept in Eritrea but in similar military prisons in Kenya and the Sudan.

This deportation was carried out against the Jews for "offenses against the Crown." Searchlights and barbed wire ringed the Eritrea camp, which was surrounded by British troops armed with machine guns. Escape was virtually impossible.

None of them were tried in a court of law. They were, according to British archives, "suspects of anti-British terrorism."

32

In the winter of 1946, I became gravely ill. I developed a terrible cough and was sent to the camp's hospital, where I remained for weeks. No matter what the doctors prescribed, I could not stop coughing. I was given new clothes and fed the best of food—even chocolate, which was as rare as caviar. I was told that my experiences were catching up with me, and only time would tell.

When I was feeling a little better, the hospital sent me to a convalescent home in Semerack. It was a small town, located in the Austrian mountains on the outskirts of Gratz. The fresh mountain air would help me recuperate, they said. Finally, I started to improve, and I was released. Back at the barracks, everyone was relieved to see me. I told my friends of my experience. Although I had been very ill, I suggested that if they pretended to be sick perhaps they could also be put in the hospital, receive good food, new clothes, and a vacation!

The camp's composition had changed dramatically since I had been hospitalized. It was more settled and organized. The UNRA provided me with a job as a truck driver. I earned a decent monthly wage and could afford to share a room in a decent apartment in the camp with my cousin Sam and some friends. We also had enough money to go to the movie theater and restaurants.

As we got more settled, we started thinking about the future. Many people were considering immigrating to the United States, and some dreamed of going to Palestine to fight for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. I was very active in the Zionist movement and helped the older organizers with whatever means I had.

The winter passed, and one of the groups that I belonged to, Gordonia, was ready to depart for Palestine. Not everyone could leave though—only a handful were chosen. I was one of the ones left behind and placed in command of the others who remained.

Before they left, we gathered in the garden to rejoice. While everyone watched, I was given the honor of raising the Jewish flag. It was a symbol of hope for our new homeland.

33

In the fall 1947, the DP camps were ordered to dismantle. We were moved to Camp Edmund, a larger camp located in the Alps, where the Germans' military barracks had been stationed during the war.

Most of the survivors were already settled by the time we arrived. Everything was set up; beds, kitchens, magazines, clothing, and food. The survivors were a melting pot of Jewish nationalities: Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, and more—all Jews with Jewish leaders. There was a hospital, kindergarten, cultural center, theater, dance hall, and a movie theater. Intramural sports teams flourished, including volleyball and soccer. I participated in the soccer matches. We would play different cities in Austria, and sometimes, on the weekends, we played against groups from Yugoslavia. ORT set up trade schools to teach us mechanical skills, carpentry, tailoring, and haircutting. People welcomed the opportunity to return to a normal life.

Skiing was very popular in Austria, and we often drove to the Alps to watch the skiing competitions. We also witnessed some of the most breathtaking views from the mountaintops. I still carry the pictures with me today.

On New Year's Eve, we went to a café in town with some local residents to celebrate. This was new for me. Growing up as a Jew in Luboml, I had never celebrated Christian holidays. I was seated at a table with a beautiful young woman. When midnight came, everyone started celebrating by dancing, cheering, hugging, and kissing one another. The girl was looking at me longingly. I was shy and looked away. The following day, I was told that she was very disappointed that I had not kissed her. It was a New Year's Eve tradition. I was embarrassed to see this girl again and felt too ashamed even to return to this café. I was

afraid that the others who had seen what had happened would laugh at me.

I began driving trucks again. One day, I drove past an American military Jeep. The Jeep's passenger was an American military police officer, and his driver was a real dark-skinned man. It was amazing. I had heard stories, but, coming from Western Europe, I had never in my life seen a person with such dark skin. I figured it was my imagination, since they drove by so quickly. I was hoping to see another black man just to satisfy my curiosity but did not. They were only in the American zone, and we were in the zone with the troops from the British army.

I also worked as the camp's ambulance driver and part time as an auto mechanic. I was an excellent driver. Winters were particularly brutal in the Alps. It was very cold and snowy in the mountains. On one occasion, while I was driving an ambulance filled with passengers up the mountain, my brakes failed. I did not tell the passengers that I was having a problem until I made an emergency stop on the way back down the mountain.

In the spring of 1947, the British army moved into camp with armored cars and tanks, and we surrendered the camp to them. The British were informed that there was a black market in the camp, and they would not allow anyone to enter or leave. They were looking for foreign currency, dollars, savings bonds, and so forth.

When the British soldiers entered my residence, I was not worried, because I was broke, but we were still unable to leave until a thorough search of the premises had been completed. One of my friends, Chaim Radomski, had almost three hundred American dollars in his suitcase that relatives in the United States had sent him. Chaim was in a neighboring town on business. I knew that, if the soldiers found his money, they would confiscate it. I sneaked out to our bedroom, took Chaim's money from his luggage, and dumped the dollars underneath the ashes in our potbelly stove. I lit a fire on the stove, took out a frying pan and poured flour batter into the pan so that the smell of pancakes permeated the air. I came out with a stack of pancakes and served the grateful British soldiers. When the soldiers came to

check our room, they saw the smoke and the frying pan from the pancakes and just walked in and out without checking the stove.

The following day, Chaim returned from his trip. The first thing he did was check his luggage for his money. When he could not find it there, he became hysterical. When I came home, I found him sobbing uncontrollably. I told him what happened and took him to the potbelly stove. When I opened it and he saw the money, he was so happy he hugged and kissed me.

Part II

34

1947 was a year of chaos and change. All the camp residents were being resettled to permanent residences. Some people already had received visas to immigrate to Australia, South Africa, America, and England, and others returned to their native countries. Most people who wanted to go to Palestine were denied the required visa. The underground organizations began arranging boat trips through Italy that would end up on the Palestinian shoreline illegally. Some boats made it, and others did not. Boats that were turned away went to Cyprus.

I still harbored dreams of going to Palestine to be reunited with Jacob. It had been ten years since I had seen him. Sam was still with me. I told him that I was going to Palestine to fight in the army for a Jewish homeland. He understood. I walked up to the agency representative and pleaded my cause. The British would allow only 100,000 certificates, mostly for children and the aged. I was placed on the waiting list.

Soon after, in November 1947, a United Nations resolution declared Palestine a free state. There was now an immediate interest to bring young men to fight for possession. I was upgraded to the top of the list of people to be sent to Palestine. Sam was ready to join me, but I told him that we were going to a place where we must fight for freedom. I did not want to be responsible if Sam came with me. I knew that his heart was set on immigrating to the United States. He was insistent that I join him, but I could not. Sam went on to America without me, and I was granted my visa to enter Palestine, because I would be useful as a tank driver or mechanic.

I was first sent to a transitional camp in a border town near Germany and Holland. Two weeks later, I was transferred to a hotel in Marseilles, France. From there, I was placed on the ship *Kadima,* which was setting sail to Palestine. The ship's legal

cargo was two hundred passengers, but six hundred refugees were crammed onto the ship. As a legal passenger, I should have been entitled to a room. Instead, women and children were given the rooms, and I was placed at the bottom level of the ship, near the engines.

It was the beginning of April—Passover. Once we set sail, a holiday seder was prepared. There was matzoh, wine, roast chicken and other savory dishes. I ate like an animal. Many people were seasick and could not eat anything. I waited until they left the table and then polished off their plates as well. Everyone was euphoric. We were celebrating the holidays, and we would soon be in our new homeland, and I was going to see my brother!

Our first port of call was Sicily. The Sicilians were poor and starving. They came up to our ship begging for food. I looked up toward the barracks. The police were beating the people and chasing them away. The Sicilians' experiences were similar to our own, and I pitied them. I started throwing food to them from the ship and did not stop until we left the dock.

We sailed along without incident until we were near Crete. Suddenly, the ship came to a halt in the middle of the sea. The main engine had stalled. Strong gusty winds rocked the ship back and forth. Dishes and glasses swayed and crashed to the floor. We stared at each other in silent fear. The ship's crew told us to put on lifejackets, and we became even more frightened. Tears rolled down many of the refugees' cheeks. We had been through so much. Were we now to have life snuffed out on a journey meant as a new beginning? For a night and a day, we sat huddled together, praying for someone to rescue us. No one ever came, but, as if the Lord had heard our pleas, miraculously, the engine started, and we were once again on our way.

A few days later, we arrived at our destination, the port of Haifa. Representatives from various Zionist organizations greeted the ship. Although Palestine was still under the control of the British Mandate, the British did not restrict the movement of these organizations. They knew that they would soon be leaving the zone as a result of the United Nations petition granting the nation of Israel statehood. I registered with the Betar organization, because a young man whom I had become

acquainted with on the ship, encouraged me to join the fight for a homeland. The young man had been the leader of the Irgun underground in Europe.

I said goodbye to my friends who had decided to go with different organizations and accompanied the young man from the ship to Hotel Shalom, in Haifa. I stayed there for a few days, but I really wanted to go to Tel Aviv. Kinfolk from my hometown were living there, and I knew that they could help me find my brother. I explained this to the young man. He understood and arranged for me to be transferred to a hotel in Tel Aviv. The Irgun would contact me there.

As I rode the bus from Haifa to Tel Aviv, I was awed by what I saw. Not only was the landscape majestic, but the fields were being tilled by Jewish hands! Since I did not speak Hebrew, the local language, I managed to get directions to my hotel in Yiddish from the bus driver. When I arrived at the hotel, I was eagerly greeted by many of my European kinfolk. It took a few days for us to catch up on all of our war stories and individual journeys to Israel.

One of the relatives, Mrs. Fox, heard that I was staying in a Tel Aviv hotel and came with her husband to visit. They insisted that I come live with them. Within hours, my bags were packed, and I had moved in with the Fox family on Wolfson St., Tel Aviv. Mrs. Fox was like a mother to me. She even gave me one of her children's beds and moved the child to the den. It was the closest thing to home for me since I had left my own home so many years ago.

Less than a week later, as I was leaving Mrs. Fox's home, an Irgun representative approached me. He instructed me to wait for my contact on the specified night at a specified street corner. I promised to be there, and I was. An attractive young woman approached me and asked me to state my name.

"Abraham Getman," I responded.

"Come with me, Abraham," she said.

I followed her to a house a few blocks away. We walked up to the second floor. She led me into a dark room with a small window. A single candle perched on the sill produced flickering shadows of light. I heard a man's voice say "hello," but I could

only make out shadows. Then he started questioning me about my background; my family, my reasons for joining the Irgun, and so forth. I explained that, because my brother had been a leader in the Irgun he had been deported by the British to a prison camp in Kenya, and I had survived the war but lost my family. There was a moment of silence. Then, a Bible was placed in front of me, and I was told to swear to obey all orders that I received. Once the ceremony was completed, he told me to go home. Someone would contact me if I was accepted.

A few days later, an Irgun messenger came to my door. He commanded me to come with him. A car was waiting for us. We quickly left. I was dropped off at a field near the Yarkon River, close to Irgun headquarters. (Today, this field is a popular soccer stadium in the city of Ramat Gan.) The field was surrounded by muddy waters. I looked around and saw piles of grenades, rifles, and machine guns. In the distance, I heard the sounds of men marching to what appeared to be military commands. The place was being used as an Irgun training camp. I was shown my quarters and immediately began training.

My first outing with my marching squadron was humbling. It seemed as if everyone was staring and laughing at me. Finally, one of the trainees took me aside and said that I was marching funny. I was swaying my hands from right to left, left to right, while marching—that was the Russian way. The British style, which was their proper form, was to move the arms forward and back while marching. After this incident, I was accepted by the troop. We were all there for the same noble purpose.

The stifling humidity and flies made it difficult to train. My body was often covered with fly bites. Health-care facilities were poor. We were constantly parched from the rigid training and climate, but the murky Yarkon River was unsuitable for drinking water. We were soldiers, and our training was for survival.



View of DP camp in Austria.



Refugees from European countries in DP camp, 1947.



A Jewish Hungarian family in DP camp after World War II.



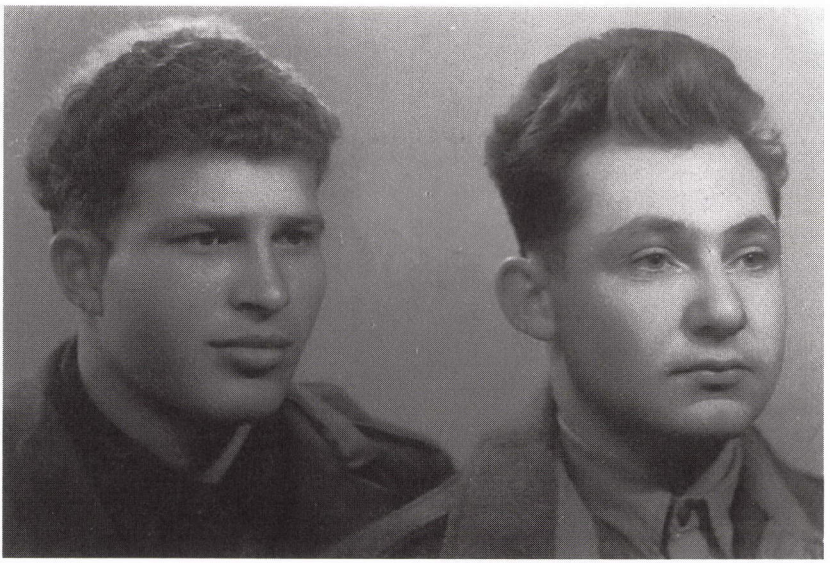
Survivors in Israel in 1949. (Left to right) Three childhood friends: Moshe Bluman, Nathan Sobel, and Abraham Getman.



Israel Defense Force (IDF), 1948—Abraham on the right.



Israel 1996: Abraham in front of Israel Armed Forces and IRGUN monument.



Abraham with friend and fellow survivor Benjamin Perkal in Israel, 1948.



In Jerusalem, 1948.



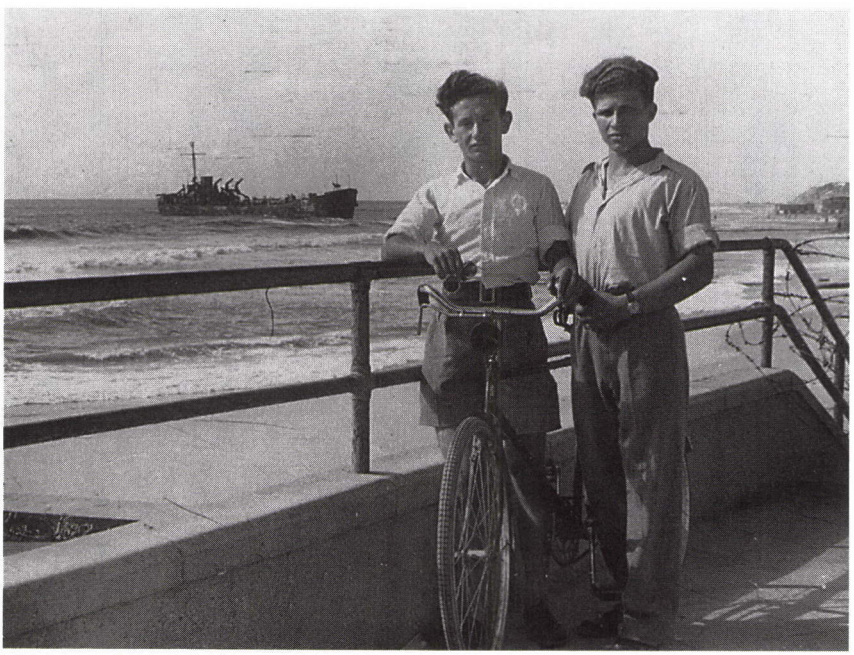
View of Elath from Egypt after liberation, 1949.



In Negev Desert, 1948.



Abraham Getman (front row, second from left) with IDF soldiers on leave with troop entertainers



Nathan Sobel (left) and Abraham; in the background, the grounded ship, Altelena.



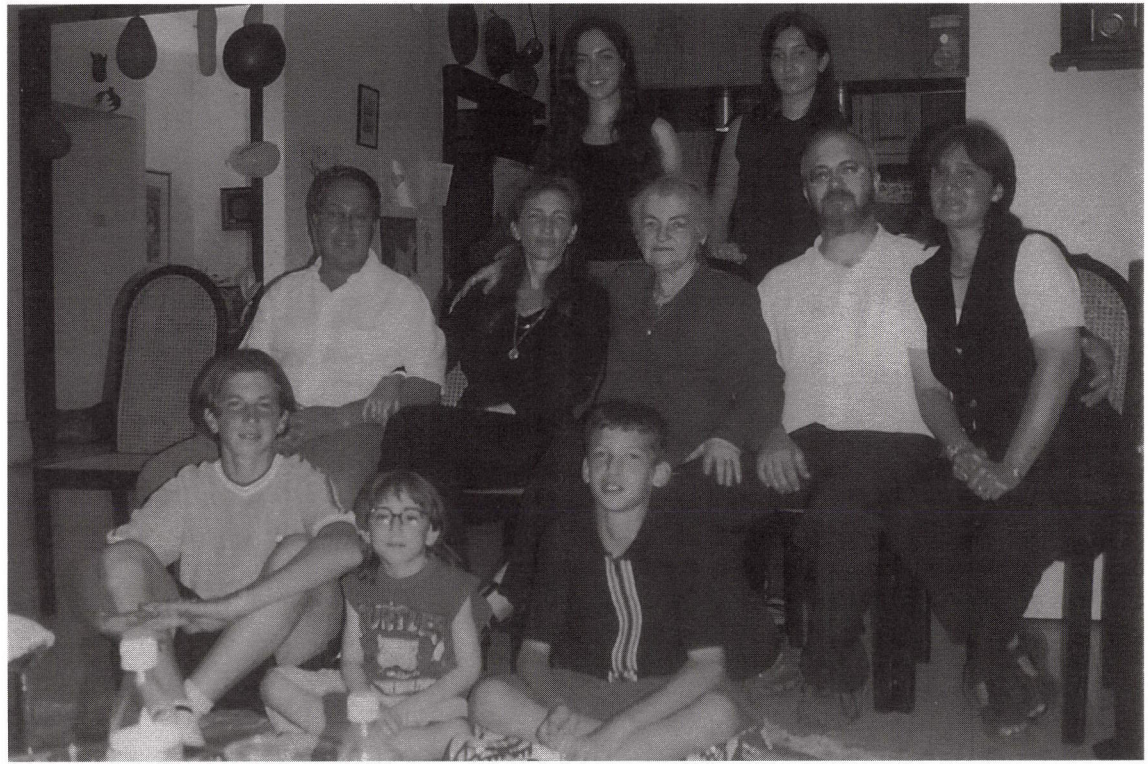
En route to Elath with United Nations inspectors, 1949.



Abraham reunited with Yachov Getman his brother after twelve years apart.



Brother Jacob in British prison in Kenya, 1947.



Brother Yachov's family in Israel. Front (left to right): Yahav Peri, Ohav Peri, and Niv Hetman. Middle (left to right): Arnon Peri, Mimi Hetman-Peri, Aviva Hetman (sister-in-law), Shemi Hetman (nephew), and Miri Hetman. Back (left to right): Aviyah Peri and Inbar Hetman.



The Getman family at Mark and Alina's wedding in 1997. Seated: Muriel and Abraham. Standing (left to right): Steven, Arlene, Alina, Mark, Francine, and Adam.



Granddaughter Melissa, 1998.

35

In May 1948, the United Nations passed a resolution declaring statehood for Israel. Our country's leader, David Ben-Gurion, was hesitating whether or not to declare the statehood officially. The Irgun leaders begged Ben-Gurion to make the declaration. They warned him that, if he did not make the declaration, the Irgun would. Ben-Gurion made the announcement. That day is as indelible in my mind as if it were yesterday. The entire country went crazy with joy. Tens of thousands of people were jumping and dancing in the streets. Restaurants were giving away food and drinks.

The victory was tempered by the first of many incidents of bloodshed with our Arab neighbors. As we celebrated our freedom, neighboring Arabs simultaneously attacked Israel from all the borders.

I was officially assigned as a truckdriver and sent to the village of Be'er Yaakov, to assist on the front line, because there were not enough vehicles. We were positioned near Ramallah. The Haganah supplied us with food, ammunition, and British rifles as a result of an agreement between the Haganah and the Irgun to join together and create one unified Israeli army. But there still was not enough manpower or ammunition to win the battle successfully.

We wore civilian clothes, because there were not enough uniforms. I was on the front line daily, sometimes shooting for hours at a time. It was difficult to get any sleep with all the shooting going on night and day, but, after a while, we grew accustomed to it. At night, we had picnics and sang patriotic songs. I was fueled by the hope for Israel's independence and, with it, my brother's release from the British detention camp. We were real soldiers fighting for a homeland, and we would never again have to experience anti-Semitism.

One cloudy morning, we awoke to a surprise visit from Menachim Begin, the leader of the Irgun. The British had a hefty price on Begin's head, and it was a thrill to be meeting him in person. We pictured him as being a giant man. As I greeted him, I could not believe it. He was scrawny and little, but, as he delivered his speech, he grew gigantic again. He said, "We will unite as one force to defend our country from the Arab nations and any others who threaten harm. The war is at its critical point, and everyone must put their lives on the line to secure the future." We whooped and hollered and vowed to win. Immediately following the speech, we were given our formal assignments. I was sent into the trenches on the front line.

One day, while preparing to exchange positions with the soldiers in the front-line trenches, we were delayed. By the time we reached the trenches, we found rifles there, but no soldiers. They had grown impatient and walked away. As we tried to take our places, the Arab forces attacked. They must have been spying and knew the exact time that we exchanged places. Only our soldiers who had made it into the trenches had rifles. There was no artillery for us to use to defend ourselves. Ten of our men were gunned down, including my superior officer, the lieutenant. It was a difficult loss. His mother, a widow, had only two sons; her first son had been killed in the Haganah and now her second son was gone. She paid a dear price for the establishment of the nation. The Arabs took other soldiers as prisoners and cut off their heads to show as trophies.

I pleaded with my superior officer, Barak, who knew my brother, not to send me back to the front line until I had a chance to see Jacob. It was not that I was afraid. I was faced with the reality of war and wanted to share some happiness with my brother, after so many years of suffering, before I experienced more pain. My request was taken to higher Irgun ranks but was rebuffed. There was a shortage of personnel, and everyone was needed. I continued to fight on the front line.

The Irgun and the government soon reached an agreement for our brigade to join the IDF and combine forces. We went to the Sarafand base to be measured for uniforms and shoes. We also picked up food to bring back to camp. We were glad to be

part of the unified forces. This was the first time that the Irgun would have real uniforms, and we would be proud to wear them like other armies around the world.

Later that month, something strange happened. One afternoon, the Palmach and Haganah surrounded our Irgun camp. They would not let us enter or leave our camp. At first we were confused. Soon, we learned that the Irgun ship the *Altalena,* loaded with a large arsenal of weapons, had arrived off the shore of Kfar Vitkin. This was part of a weapons deal that was struck, and had partaken of earlier, when I was still in Europe. The weapons had been accumulated in Europe and other parts of the world to assist in the state of Israel's liberation.

As the ship arrived in Kfar Vitkin for unloading, the Irgun begged Ben-Gurion and the leaders of the Haganah to send some of these weapons to the Irgun soldiers fighting in Jerusalem. The remaining weapons would be divided equally between the joint IDF forces, who were supposed to form one unified Israeli force. Although an agreement had been reached, Ben-Gurion changed his mind. He wanted all the weapons. He was afraid that the Irgun would be in power if they got hold of the weapons. Consequently, when the Arabs surrounded Jerusalem, there were not enough weapons for our men in the Irgun to defend themselves. The Palmach surrounded the ship and would not help unload the armaments. Their excuse was that they believed the Irgun soldiers were planning to revolt.

The *Altalena* was forced to sail from Kfar Vitkin. As the ship reached the Tel Aviv shore opposite Frishman Street, snipers from Palmach and Haganah aimed canons at our ship. The *Altalena* did not return fire, but the snipers continued shooting through the night and into the early morning. The Palmach had our camp surrounded and ordered us not to leave. They set up barricades and would not move. We left our own positions in the Irgun camp's front line near Ramala and forced our way out of the camp by driving heavy trucks through Palmach's barricades.

We set up temporarily in Tel Aviv at the French Alliance School and waited for orders. Snipers continued shooting at the *Altalena,* while the groups negotiated. Several of our comrades

were injured, and a few men died, including one of the leaders from the ship, Avraham Stavsky.

Menachem Begin, the Irgun leader, vowed not to fight brother against brother, and left the ship. The shooting and bombarding continued until the ship went up in smoke and sank, along with the entire supply of weapons off the shores of Tel Aviv. This left perhaps the saddest impression among us. After all that we had endured through the war, we believed that we would always at least be brothers to each other. Politics seemed more important than brotherhood—even if it meant destroying ourselves.

Although the *Altalena* had sunk, some of the armaments reached the front lines. The same day, Irgun soldiers trained to fight were mobilized to the front line. The soldiers went willingly, knowing it meant putting their lives in jeopardy to fight for the liberation of our country. It was a sad day for the members of the Irgun, especially for our leader, Menachim Begin. We listened with fervor to his speech on the radio and praised his courage for vowing not to fight against fellow Jews. I believed that Begin had a real Jewish soul and that he was a greater patriot than Ben-Gurion. Begin's priority was the survival of the Jewish people, and Ben-Gurion's priority appeared to be for his political party to govern the nation.

The Irgun platoon that I was part of was small, approximately two to three thousand members of the Irgun's soldiers, but our contribution was immeasurable. Our job was to hold the front line near Ramle, parts of Jerusalem, and the Sea of Galilee. We assisted in holding back the Arab armies to prevent them from attacking the Haganah's positions. This was the turning point. We were mobilized by the Israel Defense Force and, again, given new clothes and renewed hope. I wore my uniform with great pride and would have done anything for my new country.

I was assigned to the transport unit because of my prior truckdriving experience. My assistant driver was a young Italian-Jewish immigrant. He did not speak or understand Hebrew or Yiddish, and I did not speak or understand Italian. We tried our best to communicate using hand gestures and facial expressions, but it was frustrating for both of us.

Our first mission was to deliver supplies to the kibbutzim in the Negev. The residents had few soldiers or weapons. They were in urgent need of supplies to defend themselves from the surrounding Egyptian army. To be successful, it was critical to break through the Negev firing lines.

Our transport waited for hours looking for the signal to begin. As we waited, all I could think about was the odd Australian army hats with the long brims that the commando border soldiers were wearing. Then, without warning, we were propelled into action and forged ahead. We were soon joined by Jeeps with mounted machine guns, which were known as Samson's Foxes. The Jeeps went first, shooting and firing cannons to clear the path for our trucks. The battle continued for more than an hour. Although some of our troops broke through the lines, many soldiers were killed. Their bodies lay motionless in their smoldering trucks and Jeeps as the desert dust swirled around. As my truck was about to cross the line amid the incessant shooting, we received orders to return to Rehovot. Frustrated, we turned back.

The following day, I received my new assignment—transportation duty in the Twelfth Negev Division, stationed in Be'er Yaakov. I would not have cared where I was sent. I just wanted to taste freedom. It was so close!

A few days later, news arrived that the British were releasing all the prisoners being held captive at their African camps in Kenya, the Sudan, and Eritrea. Jacob would be among them. I started thinking about the years living in the ghetto. When my father and brother Moshe were shot, my mother had taken Label and me in her arms and prayed that, someday at least, we would be reunited with Jacob in Palestine.

Jacob and the other Irgun prisoners were flown to Cyprus and then transferred to a ship destined for the port of Tel Aviv. The ship arrived in Tel Aviv at noon, and I was there waiting. Jacob knew that I was in Israel. I had written to him while I was in Austria that I would be coming to fight for our people's independence. I had not seen my brother since I was ten years old. Now, almost twelve years later, I was a man dressed in a soldier's uniform for the Israeli army.

I recognized Jacob immediately. With awkward hesitation, I

approached him. He opened his arms and held me silently in a long embrace. My warm tears spilled onto his strong, lean shoulders. Could it really be? I had dreamed of this moment for so long, and now my prayers had been answered.

We went by car to Betar organization's headquarters on King George Street and talked for hours. Jacob asked me many questions about our family and my ordeal. It was difficult for me to discuss. I did not want to remember. Jacob understood. He never really asked me much about it again. It was strange. Jacob barely knew me, but he was devoted to me like a father. It felt so good to have someone to rely on.

Jacob was trying to get back on his feet as well. He was unemployed, and, while he was imprisoned, his fiancée had married his best friend. The Fox family, who had taken me into their home, invited Jacob to stay with them as well. Even though there was a shortage of everything because of the influx of Holocaust survivors, especially housing, the Fox family shared everything with us.

When I returned to the army base in the morning, I felt rejuvenated. Everything would be fine now. I had a family again.

My new assignment was to communicate with walkie-talkies to the troops stationed between the mountains and valleys. I was sent to the Sarafand training camp to receive telecommunication skills training. Even though I had excellent skills, I was reassigned to the Twelfth Negev Division's main transportation unit as the Jeep driver for the division commander, Nachum Sarig, of Kibbutz Beth Ashita. I often stayed overnight at his kibbutz unit and became accustomed to the community lifestyle.

Our unit was stationed at the village of Gedera to the Hazor base, which was near the Negev. Our mission was to capture and liberate the Negev from the Egyptian army's control. Each day, I had an important assignment on a new mission. Occasionally, I was the Jeep driver for the highest-ranking officials, including Yitzhak Sharon, Yitzhak Rabin, and Chaim Laskov. I was given the title "Officer on Duty" which gave me access to places off limits to soldiers without a rank. I transported these officials throughout the country, and was proud of my position. I felt admired and well liked.

By the end of 1948, most of the Negev had been liberated. Our next base was at the British police fortress located in the center of Be'er Sheba. The Czechoslovakian government provided us with new weapons and gave us usage instructions. We also received extensive combat training, because we had to fight, in addition to fulfilling our driving duties. (Cooks and other service positions also received the same training.) Since I gave the impression that I was strong and brave, I was often assigned to special patrols and missions that involved transporting heavy ammunition.

In the last week of December 1948, wearing full combat uniforms, the brigades gathered at the Negev kibbutz of Haluzah for two hours of entertainment. At the conclusion, the commander surprised us with a speech preparing everyone for battle against the Egyptian army in Sinai. Only the top officers knew about the top-secret mission named "Horef"—Hebrew for winter.

We drove through the remnants of what had once been an ancient, dusty, Roman road. We knew that the Egyptians did not think our troops could drive this route. As we drove, our commando cars followed, dragging heavy canvas across our tracks so that our tanks and armory would not sink in the sand. The Egyptians were surprised by our attack. The battle lasted just two hours before they surrendered. Thousands of Egyptians were surrounded and taken as prisoners-of-war.

Our IDF brigades continued deeper into the Sinai. We took up stronger positions at the major Sinai crossroads—Abu Ageila and El-Arish—and advanced toward the Suez Canal. Most of the Egyptians who escaped deep into the desert were captured and forced to surrender.

The Israeli army moved forward to El Arish. One night, on a stop for dinner and sleep, I noticed that one of my friends, Samuel Siegal, was missing. No one knew where he was. I took a commando Jeep and backtracked to search for him. It took a while, but I found him. Samuel's truck had broken down in the part of the desert where the Egyptian soldiers were wandering. He was relieved to see me. He could not believe that I had left to find him without being given a formal order. With my commando Jeep, I pulled his truck back to the camp where we were stationed for

the night. It was Chanukah, the holiday commemorating the miracle of light and hope. Samuel and I sculpted a menorah in the damp sand. We carved out eight awkward grooves to represent candleholders, poured gasoline into each groove and lit each one for all to behold the miracle—past and present. We gazed at the flames until they smoldered.

We were moved to Abu Ageila in the morning. Abu Ageila was incredibly beautiful. It was surrounded by palm trees and had clean basin water that could be used for drinking and bathing. Bedouins often stopped there for water. Since I had not slept the previous evening, I took a nap under one of the palm trees. I was startled awake by the sounds of gunfire. British airplanes, aiding the Egyptians, were launching an artillery attack. I ran for cover under some bushes. When it was clear, I returned to my unit.

The British airfields were located on this Egyptian territory, and the United States and England were mounting pressure on the Israeli government to retreat. I received new orders to aid a group of ten men to blow up all bridges and roads in our path. The operation lasted about two weeks. It was not comforting to be on a mission with just ten men and no backup. Somehow, we managed to complete our mission without losing any men and returned to our base in Be'er Sheba.

36

I had endured a great deal of stress and was finally granted leave to visit my brother. As I boarded the bus bound for Tel Aviv, I noticed that the busdriver was someone from my unit who had taken sick leave before our Sinai assignment. He recognized me and looked away. My blood boiled. It was not the first time he had done this. Here he was, making money, while we were fighting. I said nothing and took my seat.

The next few days, Jacob and I spent time in Tel Aviv looking for an apartment to share. We settled on a small one bedroom on Ein Yaakov 23. It barely had enough room to fit two beds, but the apartment was in a decent neighborhood, and we felt comfortable. Many Jews from Yemen lived in the area. They were friendly, and I enjoyed the ethnic food. On the holidays, I attended services at the Sephardic synagogue. Their style of praying and traditions were different from our European customs, but the books were the same.

Jacob soon found work as the night editor for a Tel Aviv daily newspaper. He also began teaching in the Rishon Lezion high school. (At about the same time, Israel was ready to hold its first election and establish its own government. A number of splinter political factions were organizing in hopes of securing a place in the inaugural government. My brother was revisionist and belonged to the Herut party. He was at the bottom of the list to run for parliament, but his party was unsuccessful in their election bid.) After a while, Jacob was making enough money to move into his own apartment and left the one bedroom for me. Now I had a place to come when I was on army leave. Many of my army buddies did not have anyplace to go, and I was glad to bring them home with me.

37

I returned to my base in March 1949. A cease-fire was in effect. I was assigned as a driver for a young female officer from Jerusalem. She was responsible for delivering top-secret documents with mission information to different officers throughout the country. We started our assignment in the Negev kibbutzim and worked our way north to the villages in Emek, Beit Shaan, and then through the Galilee. It took two days to work our way across the country, but it was an adventure for me. I saw so many beautiful places and met many different people along the way.

The officer never revealed the contents of the documents that she was carrying, but, when I returned to my base, we were mobilized. Our mission, called "Uvdah" (meaning fact) was to take possession of the valley leading to Sodom. We were to capture the southern Negev and reunite the roads from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea and from Masada to Kibbutz Ein Gedi.

We took an old Turkish road through the Turkish mountainside, which was nicknamed, Ma'ale Acrabeem, meaning "ascent of the scorpions." The road zigzagged and curved sharply. Many trucks, some with cannons attached, overturned. They could not handle the sharp curves on the way down the mountain, and there was no way for the trucks to turn back.

My experience driving trucks in the Austrian Alps after World War II was invaluable. I was driving an old British truck with mechanical brakes that were not functioning properly. I reacted to the curves on instinct alone and prayed the whole way down. It was a relief to reach the bottom safely. The surviving units set up camp. In a matter of days, we successfully accomplished our mission and returned to the base in Be'er Sheba. It was a lot easier going back up the mountain.

Soon after, we secured the valley using secret passages in the mountains. The Golani brigade and the Negev brigade had

come from different sides of the Negev and surrounded the Jordanian army. Eilat was liberated without resistance, and the Israeli flag was raised above the former British police post. A few days later, I was sent with supplies to aid United Nations forces and help pitch tents to establish a post. I still have pictures from this event and remember conversing with Sudanese and Egyptian soldiers at the top of this mountain in Eilat.

As always after a mission, we received leave time, and I went to Tel Aviv. It was the beginning of May 1949. The city was planning a huge first-anniversary celebration, commemorating Israel's independence. I was excited that I would be there. It turned out much differently from what anyone could have anticipated. The tanks, trucks, and marching soldiers were coming down Allenby Street. The crowds were cheering and pushing like wild. Everyone was excited. Thousands of people just started running into the streets. It was chaotic. We were all just swept up and pushed along through the streets with the crowd. The parade could not move ahead to reach the podium where the dignitaries were waiting and was ended, but the celebration continued. Spontaneous dancing erupted everywhere such as I had never seen before or since. It was incredible to have been a witness to history. Frozen in my memory is the image of myself as a young, carefree soldier. I was pounding my feet in a dizzying frenzy, laughing, crying, dancing the Hora and toasting, "L'chaim"—to life!

38

Although I remained with the Twelfth Army's Negev Brigade, the army was reorganized. Until a new base could be established, I was assigned to the newly formed women's corps known as "Chen," meaning charm—the Hebrew acronym for the women's army. I was the only male soldier among them and had strict orders not to bother with the women, just fulfill my duties.

Once the base was established, I returned to Be'er Sheba for more training and some occasional mission patrols. I was reacquainted with some high- and low-ranking officers that I knew from Europe when I had been their superior officer in the Gordonia Kibbutz. They had gotten their ranks through their political affiliations. When these men had arrived in Palestine, they had joined the Hatganah and I had joined the Irgun instead. Every couple of months, men were being chosen to be corporals and sergeants, but I was always overlooked because I belonged to the wrong party. I thought that my grandfather would have been disappointed with my decision if he was alive. He had served in the Czar's army in the war against Japan. He always told me, "Avram, someday, when you become a man, you will be an officer." When I came to Israel to fight for the establishment of a Jewish State, I thought it was for brotherhood, unity and justice, but politics and power were stronger.

When the Negev Brigade was disbanded, I was sent to a new unit that had just been established in Hatzor. The base served as a training school for his ranking officers who were majors and above. It provided them with crucial military training that they had not received before they became officers. They were stripped of their rank and became trainees for other high-ranking officers.

I was assigned as the driver to the chief of the school. He was a major who had been an officer in the Jewish Brigade under

British rule. The chief was very strict. I always had to salute him and keep everything spotless but, he was friendly and treated me fairly. He often talked with me and was interested in my background. He told me to be smart—join the Labor Party which was the majority political party, get into a school for officers and sign up to join the army permanently. I probably should have listened, but I would have been selling myself short if I just went with the majority to reap the riches. Then, quite suddenly, the chief got ill. He had trouble with his legs and began running the command from his home. I became his messenger and began delivering papers to the command on the base and to the general command in Tel Aviv.

When the officers school closed a short time later, I was reassigned to the main officers school in Jaffa. I was content in my new post. Whenever I was off-duty I traveled with some of my army buddies to visit Jacob. I also visited some of my refugee friends that I knew from Luboml and the DP camps in Europe.

39

In the winter of 1951, Israel suffered its most severe snowstorm in more than sixty years. From the window of my Tel Aviv base, I watched as the weight of the snow broke the tree branches outside. Children were having fun as they laughed and played in the piles of snow. I longed to join them and taste childhood once more, but I was a man now and needed to start making decisions about my future.

My honorable discharge from the army was approaching, and I debated whether to rejoin. I wanted to try civilian life but feared it would be difficult because of the problems the young country was experiencing. There were many immigrants, and a housing and food shortage ensued. People were living in tents and housing camps. I was lucky to have my own apartment. Nathan Sobel tried to convince me to immigrate with him to the United States. I decided not to rejoin the army right away.

Upon my honorable discharge, I was given 40 lira (equivalent to $30 U.S.), coupons for clothing, and the phone number to the Employment Assistance Bureau. I immediately booked an appointment with the bureau. When I arrived, the EAB asked me if I had a "Red Book." I had never heard of this book and asked for information to get one. The "Red Book" had been issued by the Histadrut—the General Federation of Labor, to its members. Since I was not a member, I could not get a book and was refused work. It was easier for people with a profession to get a day of work.

I bought a pickup truck with the aid of my brother and friends. The truck was cheap and in need of repair. I had to keep it on top of a hill and push it down to get it started. The battery was weak, and I could not afford a new one. On warm days, I could easily start the truck. I found work at a trucking agency and made deliveries on commission.

In the meantime, Jacob traveled to the United States to visit our three uncles and their families who had immigrated there years before the Second World War. Jacob was trying to get me a loan to buy a new truck so that I would permanently settle in Israel, but the loan fell through. Jacob was disappointed that he could not help me. He stayed in the States for a few months, hoping to work things out. Then, a letter arrived from his girlfriend, Aviva, in Israel. She was not sure if Jacob was the right person for her, and she was seeing another man. Aviva wanted Jacob to return to Israel and give it another chance. My brother loved Aviva and returned to Israel to ask for her hand in marriage. She accepted, and they made arrangements to be married a few months later.

I was overjoyed. Our family would now be rebuilt. I only wished that my parents and brothers and sister were alive and here to witness the occasion. As a wedding gift, I gave Jacob and Aviva the food coupons that I had received from the army so that they could buy extra meats and fruits for the wedding. Since these foods were still being rationed, my coupons allowed them to purchase these items legally; otherwise, they would have paid dearly on the black market. My brother's wedding was one of the happiest moments in my life. Friends, Holocaust survivors, and family from both sides attended the wedding. Despite the rationing, we all had a great time.

Aviva's parents bought Jacob and Aviva a new condominium in Tel Aviv as a wedding gift, and they moved in immediately. In addition to his job as the night editor for the daily newspaper, Jacob began teaching at the city high school, and Aviva found work as a chemist at the Weizmann Institute, in Rehovot.

In 1952, Aviva gave birth to their first child, a beautiful baby girl. She was named Miriam and nicknamed "Mimi," in remembrance of my mother. The birth was a new beginning, and, to this day, Mimi holds a special place in my heart.

40

Life was not as easy for me as it was for Jacob in the private sector. My early teen years had been spent just struggling for survival, and my later teenage years were spent in DP camps, where I was told what to do and received food and clothing in exchange. It was the same in the army—follow orders, and your basic needs will be fulfilled. Now, I had to think about getting my own job, buying food, paying rent and taxes, and all the other responsibilities. I did not know anything about having a normal life, and it seemed impossible to get ahead.

My pickup truck was not working properly, and I sold it. I took a job as a salaried truckdriver in the same trucking company that I had worked for independently. The owner, Mr. Kuperberg, also owned a "sherut"—taxi service. He agreed to rent the taxi to me in the evenings after I completed my day shift. Transporting wealthy people and diplomats across the country in the sherut enabled me to earn extra income. Six people were allowed in each taxi, and it was my job to insure it was done orderly.

I was invited to my brother's house for lunch on Saturdays for the Sabbath, and I always enjoyed spending time there. At sundown, I would leave for my extra job on Allenby St. with the inter-city sherut service.

My cousin Moshe Lipshitz helped me get employment at a Tel Aviv newspaper. I drove reporters to their interviews, and, after they put the paper to bed, I drove them back home early in the morning. I worked long hours and slept during the day, but the job was always interesting. I was present during interviews with top dignitaries. One especially memorable interview was shared between Golda Meir and Eleanor Roosevelt. I was fascinated and honored to be in their company.

I was almost thirty years old, working hard, and just getting

by. I was also in the army reserve and returned for training once a year. I did not have much time for a social life. Occasionally, I went to the movies or a soccer game or visited friends, but mostly I worked.

My new lifestyle was even less favorable to a social life. My friends and family tried to introduce me to different women. Some of these women were not particularly attractive, but, what they lacked in looks, they made up for in wealth. Others were girls as young as eighteen. People encouraged me to marry one of them so that I would not have to work so hard. I did not want to sell myself as I had when I went to the labor camps. I also met some nice-looking women, but I did not have anything to offer them, because I was poor. One woman refused a second date with me because I did not have parents, property, or a specialized job. Later, she tried to win me back when she discovered who my brother was and the family he had married into. I refused. I told her, "If I was not good enough for you when you knew I was poor, I am still not good enough for you." I continued dating different women, but nothing serious. I kept hoping that, someday, I would meet a woman, fall in love, marry, and start my own family—like my brother.

41

On March 10, 1956, I received a letter from Nathan Sobel, describing his life in America:

1956 March 10

My good friend Avram,

How are you?

I have only been here a short time and have already found work and attend college part-time. I have traveled across the country and visited Mexico. I even own my own car . . . a Cadillac!

You would not believe how good life is here. I hope you will consider coming here to visit me. There are also lots of beautiful girls!

Write soon.

Your friend,

Nathan

I was jealous. I could go to the United States and become successful too—especially with three uncles and family living there. I wrote to my Uncle Murray, who was living in America, asking him if he would sign a certificate vouching to be responsible for me. He mailed the certificate back to me signed. I took my papers and went to the American embassy and applied for immigration.

I was disappointed to learn that I came under the Polish immigration quota. It could take up to six years for me to gain entrance into the United States. I gave up the idea of marrying for the time. If I immigrated to the United States alone and did not like it there, it would be easier for me to return to Israel by myself, without a family.

It would be difficult to tell my brother of my decision to leave. I feared that he would be embarrassed. He was a great pa-

triot. I was too, but I just did not see any chance that I would make any progress in Israel.

Before I had a chance to discuss my decision with Jacob, war broke out, in 1956, between Israel and Egypt. I was called back for army service and was sent to a station in the Negev, near the Egyptian border. Although the war did not last long, Israel had to return Sinai and the Gaza Strip to the Egyptians.

While at my post, I received word from my brother that Aviva had given birth to a baby boy, Shemi. I nearly jumped for joy. I put in a request for leave to attend the ceremonial bris. Because of risky security in the Negev, my request was initially denied. But I convinced my commanding officer of its significance to my family—it would begin the restoration of my family's name. Surprisingly, my request was granted, and I received two days' leave. In full uniform, I hitchhiked across the country until I reached my brother's home. I arrived almost minutes before the bris ceremony was to begin. It was worth everything I had done to get there.

When my leave ended, I returned to the Negev and was assigned to border patrol. After a number of weeks, all was quiet, and the army discharged all the reserve soldiers.

I continued to wait for a response from the American consul. They kept telling me, "Have patience, Mr. Getman, have patience." Finally, in 1958, I was called in for a medical exam. I passed the exam without problems and received papers from the police, stating that I had a clean record. Then I was told that I would have to wait still longer. The United States wanted the Polish quota filled first from the Communist countries and then from the Western countries. It took another year until I was finally called and received my immigration visa. I turned in my papers, stating that I had fulfilled my obligations with the Israeli army and I paid the requested dues to the Israeli government.

On June 28, 1959, Jacob, Aviva, Mimi, and Shemi accompanied me to the airport in Lod. Everyone was very quiet during the drive. When it was time for my flight, we all broke into tears and hugged each other. I turned to Jacob. He nodded in approval, and we hugged again. I promised I would write often and

come back to visit. I would work hard and make him proud—after all, I was a survivor.

42

My flight to America was my first time in an airplane. It was an incredible and strange experience to fly through the sky. The plane landed at New York's Idlewild Airport (now JFK International Airport) on June 29, 1959. My Uncle Murray, along with his wife, Sylvia, and my cousins, Sam and Morty, were all there to greet me.

It was like a dream. We drove through New York City and I could not believe the size of the tall buildings. It was dizzying to look up at them. We had dinner in Manhattan, and I was reunited with the rest of my family; my father's brothers, Max and Hymie, and their families. I went to live with Uncle Max's family in the Bronx until I could get on my own feet.

By 1960, I had a job, my own apartment, and a girlfriend, Muriel Levine, a lovely Jewish girl from the Bronx. On June 2, 1962, Muriel and I were married. That same year, with a loan from the bank and four thousand dollars of my own money that I managed to save, I bought my own business, a restaurant supply store in Manhattan.

In 1963, my first child, a daughter, Francine, was born. On November 23, 1964, in one of my proudest moments, I became a citizen of the United States. My second daughter, Arlene, was born in 1965, and we moved to a house in the suburbs of Long Island. In 1972, my blessings were doubled as twin sons, Steven and Mark, were delivered.

I still visit my Aviva, Mimi, and Shemi in Israel every chance I get. Mimi and Shemi are both prominent doctors and have children of their own. I love them very much, and their children treat me like a dear grandfather.

Epilogue

I have led many lives—through war in Poland, Russia, Transdnister, and Austria and then in Israel, where I fought for its independence and lived for more than a decade. For all of this, my only compensation has been $1,000 dollars for suffering and $600 for loss of jewelry.

I have remained in America since immigrating here in 1959 and have lived a fairly normal existence with little drama, though tragedy did strike once more. In 1973, my dear brother Jacob was part of an education tour in London, invited by the British Council. He was struck and killed by a car as he pulled another woman from its path. Upon hearing the news, my hair turned gray overnight. Jacob was the last link to my immediate family and my childhood.

From 1981 through 1984, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I had the opportunity to confront Serge Kowalchuk, my father's and oldest brother's killer. I was called as a lead witness in Kowalchuk's deportation hearings and trial. He was on trial for "illegally procuring his naturalization by concealment of a material fact or willful misrepresentation of atrocities"—in Kowalchuk's case, it was for war crimes against the Jewish people in Luboml during World War II. He was convicted and sentenced to be stripped of his citizenship and deported. The decision was appealed. In 1994, the United States Court of Appeals reversed the lower court's decision. However, the U.S. Government's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) appealed, and the original conviction was upheld. Kowalchuk unsuccessfully petitioned the decision but both the U.S. Court of Appeals and U.S. Supreme Court upheld the original decision. Deportation was imminent. In 1987, Kowalchuk evaded deportation by fleeing to Paraguay. In 1997, the newly elected president of Paraguay vowed to flush the country of Nazis and would attempt to deport a number of convicted criminals—including Kowalchuk—back to the United

States. I have since learned that Kowalchuk died while awaiting deportation from Paraguay.

In the early 1980s, as I watched my children grow into adults, I realized that time was slipping by. I decided to break my silence and talk about my childhood years and my wartime experiences. I began accepting speaking engagements at a number of local Long Island public grade schools, synagogues, and youth groups. To whoever was willing to listen to me speak, I was willing to talk.

At first, it was difficult to speak candidly to a roomful of strangers, especially children—most of whom were not Jewish. I was afraid that they would not understand or, worse, that they would not care. My words would get caught in my throat, and my eyes would swell with tears as I battled back my emotions to rekindle the past. But the schoolchildren listened in awe. Jews and non-Jews alike were touched by the passion and pain of my story and seemed truly to believe my words.

In the 1990s, thanks to Steven Spielberg's depiction of the Holocaust in the 1993 acclaimed film *Schindler's List,* there was renewed interest and curiosity in our stories of Holocaust survival. I am one of more than seventeen thousand survivors and their families who have been interviewed to date for Spielberg's "Shoah Visual History Foundation." I was also interviewed on camera for his Luboml Shtetl exhibition project. These organizations have provided me with a forum to discuss my life before and during World War II in the shtetl. The testimonials will be on record for the public to access both at exhibits and throughout the world via a Web site on the Internet. My name can also be found among the list of survivors at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and New York City.

It seems like another lifetime—perhaps even someone else's life, since those early years spent growing up in pre–World War II Europe. The turmoil war brought changed my life forever. I was an orphaned Jewish boy who had struggled to survive years of persecution and strife and managed to grow into a man who

could still have hope and believe in the future. But the nightmares remain. They will always be with me.

I was a little boy, once, who wanted nothing more than to taste my mother's baking, fresh from a hot oven, or play on the hills with my brothers. I was poor, but always happy. So much sadness and pain robbed me of my innocence and my youth. That, I will never have back.

Now, as I approach my twilight years, I look to my own children for the joys I was denied. Perhaps, I remind them a little too often not to bicker with each other—how lucky they are to have siblings and a good life! May the Lord's countenance shine on them and keep them safe . . . and may it ***never*** happen again!

Holidays and Traditions

Sabbath

The Jewish Sabbath—beginning on Friday night at sundown and lasting until Saturday at sundown—was a weekly ritual day of rest that was treated as a holy day. (Today, in the United States and around the world, except for Orthodox Jews, no distinction is made between Saturday and the work week.) In Europe, we always realized it was a special day because of the differences and extra care that were taken to separate it from the rest of the week. The reception for the Sabbath was like a weekly family holiday. Even the poorest people anticipated the Sabbath. The Jewish community provided subsidies to enable the poor to celebrate the Sabbath properly with their families.

To prepare, the Jewish community had a man known as a "shamas." He would go from door to door on Fridays, knocking on everyone's window shutters at about 2:00 P.M. to remind people the Sabbath would be starting soon (sundown). People closed their stores and went to take baths. Mothers washed and combed their young children's hair with a special brush.

Children had special Sabbath clothes that were clean and fresh. Friday at sundown, fathers and sons left for the synagogue to pray, while mothers and daughters lit a candle for every living person in the family household to welcome the start of Sabbath. After services, the whole family sat down together to eat dinner and sing Sabbath songs. After the traditional meal, the younger children were sent to bed, and the adults would go for walks to visit friends.

Since we were forbidden by our religion to carry out certain tasks on the Sabbath, our family hired a "Shabbos goy" (non–Jewish worker) to help us on the Sabbath. The goy would

come to our house at night and turn off the lights. (It was quite expensive to keep them lit.) In the winter, he also turned on the ovens to keep us warm.

Early Saturday mornings, before the children woke up, my father brought my mother breakfast in bed to recognize her hard work during the week. Then, he went to the synagogue with my older siblings. My younger brother and I went with my other an hour or two later. My father had a special seat in the synagogue near the east wall. I did not know the meaning of this honor until I was an adult and saw the movie *Fiddler on the Roof.* The seat was for dignitaries of the synagogue and signified the closeness to Jerusalem's Eastern (or "Wailing") Wall, which remains standing today more than 2,000 years after the destruction of the Second Temple.

The synagogue's prayer service lasted until noon. The weekly reading of the Sefer Torah, handwritten biblical scrolls of the Old Testament, followed. Often my father was honored with an aliyah (being called to the stage to read the week's Torah portion). Boys over thirteen years old were also called to read from the Torah.

At the conclusion of the service, we returned home for Sabbath lunch with the family. My father served wine, and my mother served chulent, gefilte fish, and special soda. The rabbi, who taught the children the Hebrew language, would traditionally come to our house to share the meal and show our father what the children had learned. After the meal, my father sent us for beer and seltzer. We would drink, sing songs, and recite prayers (but smoking was forbidden on Sabbath). As a tradition, my father told stories about his life (fighting in the army, going to America, and why he came back). My grandmother got together with the other older women and read stories from the Bible to the children in the neighborhood. After the stories, the children went to play in the grass and nearby mountains. Sometimes my sister and brothers went to visit relatives or played in the garden and climbed trees, or we took a nap for a few hours till the evening.

We went back to the synagogue for the Saturday evening service, the traditional Havdalah ceremony that was concluded

by burning a braided candle, drinking wine, and eating herring and potatoes. After the service, everyone hugged and kissed and said "Shavua Tov" that means "good week." On Sabbath, we would forget our troubles. Thoughts then returned to the coming week and how to make a living. Some people stayed up till midnight, preparing foods and goods for their stores.

Sunday, the Catholics, Ukrainians, and Protestants had their day of rest, and Polish law prohibited citizens from doing any kind of work. The bells would chime from the church through the day in observance. Everybody had to observe the Christian Sabbath; otherwise, there were severe penalties to pay. The Jews had the right to do work only if it was done in a room where no one outside could see. By order of the town committee, if they caught a Jew keeping the door to a store open or doing any type of work, a stiff fine was imposed. Citizens who could not afford to pay were sent to prison. Usually, Jewish shopkeepers made a partition in the main room and worked in the back half on Sundays.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah (meaning "head of the year") marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year. The holiday commemorating the anniversary of the creation of earth occurs on the first and second days of the Jewish calendar of Tishrai (pronounced Tishray). It is a holiday to ask forgiveness from God and from people we may have offended during the year. Although solemn, it is also joyous, a time for Jews to begin the New Year with a clean slate.

Preparations for the holiday were similar to the Sabbath but with different customs. Twice a year, for Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur and Passover, everyone was treated to new clothes to give us a special feeling, different from the rest of the year. The holiday meals were a time to feast and bond with family. Upon returning from synagogue, the large midday meal was served. After dining, we performed the New Year ritual of reciting the prayer for "Tashlich" by an ocean or body of water. Upon reciting

Tashlich, everyone empties his or her pockets as a symbolic casting of their sins into the sea.

Yom Kippur

There are ten days for forgiveness and repentance from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), the holiest day of the year. The Sabbath in between these days is called Shabbat Shuvah (Sabbath of Return). The tenth day, Yom Kippur, is a time to pray for devotion and repentance, to ask G-d for a good year. Whereas, on Rosh Hashanah, we ask to be *inscribed* in the Book of Life, on Yom Kippur, we asked to be *sealed* in the book of life. On Yom Kippur, we must wash, clean, and prepare special foods for the twenty-four–hour fast. Jews fast to dedicate themselves completely to prayer and confess sins from the past year—collectively as a people to gain a better understanding of the plight of the homeless and less fortunate and feel a closeness with G-d. Despite the holiday's solemnity, the pre-fast meal that begins before sundown is festive, and the meal to break the fast is a celebration for the compassion that G-d has shown us.

A day before the fast, everyone would run around to buy a live chicken for the pre-fast tradition of capurot (forgiveness). Traditionally the head of the house would take the chicken in his hands and rotate it around his head several times while saying a prayer for a good life. Then the chicken was brought to the slaughterhouse. (Some people chose to give their chicken to the poor.) The chicken would then be cooked and served for their pre-fast meal. Some who could not afford to buy a chicken used a fish for capurot instead, and others just wrapped a few coins in a towel and recited the prayer. The coins were then placed in the synagogue canisters and donated to schools, orphanages, and other good will.

Kol Nidre, the evening service with which Yom Kippur commenced, was always awe inspiring. The synagogue was packed, and the cantor's voice would resonate throughout the building with songs of forgiveness. When we returned home from the

service, we could not do any means of work or activity, and so we would sit and talk and tell stories to relax.

In the morning, we returned to the synagogue for a full day of praying. (Many people attend service in sneakers or shoes that are not made of leather or animal skin.) We would pray from morning till dark when the first evening star begins to shine. The closing service of Nelah (we all bow down) begins as the sun sets, and the Shofar (ram's horn) is then sounded to signify the end of the holiday and start of a new year. We would briskly walk home with great anticipation for the meal and thanksgiving for another year of life.

Sukkot

As soon as the Yom Kippur ended, people began preparations for Sukkot—a holiday lasting eight days, commemorating the time the Jews spent wandering in the desert. As the temporary dwellings that our ancestors lived in were flimsy, temporary structures for shelter, the Jews build sukkahs—temporary structures with holes in the roof to see the sky. This is a reminder to us that it is G-d's guiding hand that keeps us safe and not our physical shelters.

We tied fruits and decorations to hang down from the rope inside the sukkah; which was made from boughs of evergreens. It looked beautiful with the decorations. People made the sukkahs in different ways. Our house had a special sukkah. On our attic's roof, we strung together heavy ropes tied to two big wheels. When the rope was pulled it would spread open the roof to show the sky. Electricity from the attic lit the shelter. Traditionally, we would eat and sleep in the sukkah and look up at the heavens through the roofs.

Simchat Torah

Sukkot culminates on the twenty-first of the month of

Tishrei with "Simchat Torah" (ending the yearly cycle of reading the Torah scrolls), celebrated by dancing in the streets.

For my family, this was a special holiday. My father had his own scrolls that he had written himself as a memorial to some of my brothers who had died in infancy. This was the only time during the year that we as children could dance the Hafkufot around the tables before the Torah was read, near the Eastern Wall, where my father sat. His Torah was very heavy, and the dancing was exciting.

Shmina Atzeret

Shmina Atzeret takes place on the eighth day of Sukkot to commemorate the start of the harvest season. Prayers for rain and blessings on a fruit and a vegetable (lulav and esrog) are made for a successful harvest.

Chanukah

The next major holiday was Chanukah (meaning dedication). This holiday is also known as the Festival of Lights. The Maccabees liberated the Jews form the Greeks and Syrians in 165 B.C.E., and the second Temple that had been desecrated by the Greeks was rededicated. It also kindles the Jewish spirituality of miracles. When the Jews entered the Temple, there was only enough olive oil to light the Temple's eternal light for one day, but miraculously the oil lasted eight days. In modern times, a new candle is lit on the menorah for each of the eight nights, to commemorate this miracle.

Chanukah mostly had significance for children. We visited our aunts and uncles and received gifts—usually money. We were served a traditional meal of fresh latkes (fried potato pancakes) and apple sauce. Then the children lit the Chanukah menorah for eight nights: one candle the first night, two the second night, and so forth, until all eight candles were lit on the last night. We sang joyous Chanukah songs and hymns. In the

younger grade schools, children performed plays, retelling the story of Chanukah. The adults attended Chanukah balls.

Tu B'Shvat

Commemorating Arbor Day, the day is commemorated in Israel by schoolchildren planting trees. Outside of Israel, it is an occasion for stressing the importance of the upbuilding of Israel by sending donations to plant trees in the homeland. In Europe, we bought figs and dates that were imported from the Holy Land to celebrate.

Purim

Another fun holiday was Purim, which is celebrated on the fourteenth of the Jewish month of Adar. This holiday commemorates the miraculous saving of the Jewish people from pogroms during the Prussian times. It is also the story of the foolish king, Achashvarosh, and his wicked adviser, Haman, who plotted to destroy the Jews. The benevolent Jewish queen, Esther, and her Uncle Mordecai, who pleaded for mercy with the king, were able to save the Jews of the city of Shushan from destruction. (Achashvarosh had Haman hanged.)

On the thirteenth day of Adar (the day before Purim) most elders fasted. People sent gifts of fruit and Homentashin (triangular shaped cookies resembling Haman's three-hat, filled with jelly, prunes or poppy seeds) to each other as a "mitzvah" or good deed. Bands played music and families attended Purim parties. Similar to the American customs of Halloween, children donned different costumes (soldiers, priests, nurses, clowns, etc., and masks) and went from house to house begging for money that was donated to charity.

Culminating the celebration was the reading of the Megillah—the Purim story of Queen Esther and Mordecai in synagogue. Each person was given a "grager"—a tin noise maker that makes a grating sound when you spin the handle. When the

wicked Haman's name is mentioned during the story reading, everyone spins their "grager" to drown out the sound of his name. Once a year, my oldest brother Jacob, came home from his studies in the town of Kovel. People from the town gathered in our home for a special reading by Jacob held in our home. I remember this joyous occasion as if it were yesterday.

Passover

One of the most interesting holidays, Passover, the "festival of freedom," commences on the fifteenth day of the Jewish calendar of Nissan and lasts for eight days. A seder (meaning order) is held on the first two nights of the holiday to retell the Passover story. It embodies the Jewish people's thanksgiving for freedom when they departed from Egypt after four hundred years of bondage. The traditions stemming from the Passover reading have been handed down without change for thousands of years.

In our town, matzoh—the unleavened bread we eat to remember that our forefathers fleeing Egypt did not have enough time to wait for the bread to rise, was baked in an oven a month before Passover. Children visited the bakeries to watch how the matzoh was prepared; rolled, baked, cut and shipped out in white linen for delivery to people's homes.

The closets in our houses were made kosher for Passover. Food from year round and products containing leavened bread were donated to poor non-Jews. Stores prepared special wines and foods for the holiday including eggs, potatoes, and jellies.

For the seder meal, everyone was seated at the table, waiting for my father to make the thanksgiving blessing for the holiday to begin the seder. (This prayer, the shechayanu, is also recited to begin all Jewish holidays and traditional occasions.)

The Passover story is read, and the youngest children participate in the four questions. They ask questions of the meaning of the Passover seder, and the adults read the response. The meal is served as part of the seder's order, and then the story and songs continued until way after two o'clock in the morning. The

youngest children were given special permission to stay up until midnight.

We also had holiday family traditions. My mother had a special pounder, which was used to break the matzohs into flour to make holiday pancakes—a real treat. Our grandparents gave us extra money for Passover and bought us pistachio nuts. We used the nuts to play games with each other; we also used eggs, and, if you cracked one, you would win it.

When my brother Jacob left to study in Israel in 1936, the following year, his seat at the Passover table was left vacant because we felt something was missing without his presence. Although we all were emotional because Jacob was not present, we knew the holiday should be a joyous time, and we celebrated as best we could.

Like Rosh Hashanah, everyone got new clothes and shoes for Passover. Some people had their clothes tailor made, and others store-bought them. Poorer people had their parents handmake their clothes.

Lag B'Omer

We celebrated Lag B'Omer thirty-three days after the conclusion of Passover. Known as the counting of the Omer, the period coincides, some say, with the time the Jews spent preparing to receive the Torah and is a time for reflection and rededication.

Carrying Jewish flags embroidered with the Star of David, we marched with Zionist organizations to the little forest to picnic. As it grew dark, we lit a campfire and gathered around to sing festive songs.

Shavuot

The literal translation of Shavuot is "weeks." Shavuot begins seven weeks after Passover and commemorates the receipt of the Torah—the source of spiritual freedom, from G-d. It is said that G-d went from nation to nation offering His gift—the Torah.

Other nations spurned G-d's offer because of its strict moral code, but the Jews embraced it even before they understood it.

To celebrate the holiday, we decorated our houses with greenery and ate only dairy foods because, when the Jews received the Torah, they ate only dairy until they had mastered the laws of "kashrut"—keeping kosher.

We also stayed up throughout the night studying the Torah and reading the book of Ruth. Ruth's personal acceptance of Torah and acts of kindness triumphed over a spiritual famine. She later gave birth to King David (from whom the Messiah, it is believed, will be descended), who was born and died on Shavuot.

Tisha B'Av

One of the solemn holidays that is often neglected in modern days is Tisha B'Av (the ninth of the Jewish month of Av). It is a day of fasting and lamenting for the destruction of the first and second temples. People are not supposed to go in water or swim, because of the significance of the water's destructive powers that wrought havoc on our enemies when they destroyed the temples.

As children, we commemorated Tisha B'Av by making the adults miserable. People were not supposed to smile, laugh, or be happy. We were mischievous and tried to have fun with the adults. We would spray the men with water from our homemade water guns. The women avoided going in the streets on Tisha B'Av or covered their hair with bonnets, because children would throw pronged wildflowers at their hair. If the flowers got stuck in their hair, they would have to cut them out.

In Memoriam

In memory of those who perished in the Holocaust: my family members, friends, members of the community in my shtetl Luboml and the northeastern Europe Byelorusse Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia—over 2 million executed in mass graves and by firing squads and for the 6 million Jews annihilated throughout Europe in crematoriums, by gassings, rapes, beatings, torture, suffocation, and mutilation from cruel and unusual experimentation

"May their souls be bound in the Book of Everlasting Life."

Name	Relationship	Age	Sex
Getman, Shmuel	father	49	M
Getman, Miriam	mother	47	F
Getman, Fayga	sister	20	F
Getman, Moshe	brother	18	M
Getman, Chaim	brother	16	M
Getman, Label	brother	13	M
Getman, Sura	grandmother (father's mother)	75	F
Zukerman, Yitshag	grandfather (mother's father)	73	M
Zukerman, Margulya	grandmother (mother's mother)	68	F
Zukerman, Moshe	uncle (mother's brother)	33	M
Zukerman, Beyla	aunt (Moshko's wife)	25	F
Zukerman, Abram	first cousin (Moshe's and Beyla's son)	3	M
Gonik, Yosif	uncle (Fayga's husband)	45	M
Gonik, Fayga	aunt (mother's sister)	44	F
Gonik, Chaim	first cousin (Yosif and Fayga's son)	24	M
Gonik, Yankel	first cousin (Yosif and Fayga's son)	20	M
Gonik, Hiska	first cousin (Yosif and Fayga's son)	18	F
Gonik, Mayka	first cousin (Yosif and Fayga's daughter)	16	F
Gonik, Sura	first cousin (Yosif and Fayga's daughter)	13	F
Gonik, Shlomo	first cousin (Yosif and Fayga's son)	6	M

For the other members of my family who were annihilated, forgive me for not knowing their names and ages. I was only a child of thirteen when I last saw them.

Achtalberg Family: Chaya (my father's sister), Zaylig (Chaya's husband) and their five children; Fayga, Motl, Yankel, Doby, and Zipora

Bargrum Family

Frechter Family: Sime-Libe (my grandmother's sister), her husband and children, Berish, Getman, Hannah and her six children (Hannah's husband—my father's brother Max was spared because he was in America during the war)

Langer Family: Moshe, Leah (his wife), Debbie Weisman (Leah's sister) and her three children (Pesl, Malke, and Rifka)

Lipshitz Family (family of six)

Mlamed, Fayga, and her family

Musenzon Family

Shifra, Motel and Yankel

Somens, Rifka and Malke

According to the formal statement drawn up May 20, 1945, by committee chairman, Comrade S. A. Denisyuk, committee members Comrades S. Ye Fedin, I. I. Shidlovskiy and Witnesses Comrades A. V. Borisevich and F. M. Popekvichm, during the period of German occupation, the following civilian citizens of the town of Luboml were executed or shipped to Germany by the German invaders:

	Ukrainians		**Jews**		**Total**
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	
Executed	21	6	2,800	2,500	5,327
Shipped	89	39	—	—	128

Luboml—Children and Teenagers

Ages	Amount
One Year	54
2 Years	60
3 Years	56
4 Years	70
5 Years	66
6 Years	58
7 Years	59
8 Years	116
9 Years	59
10 Years	115
11 Years	35
12 Years	77
13 Years	52
14 Years	104
15 Years	54
16 Years	106
17 Years	70
18 Years	86
19 Years	64
Total	1,361

(Original document is filed in the Ukrainian State Security Committee for the Volynskaya Oblast.)



Memorial monument in Luboml for Jewish people exterminated by the Germans in World War II.

U.S. Department of Justice

JNMausner:sdp
146-2-47-114

Washington, D.C. 20530

November 9, 1981

Abraham Getman
New London Restaurant
Equipment Corp.
260 Bowery St.
New York, NY

Dear Mr. Getman:

I want to thank you once again on behalf of the Justice Department for your aid in the U.S. v. Kowalchuk case.

The government completed its case on October 26; the defendant put on several witnesses during the week of October 26, but requested an adjournment for two weeks in order to put on one more witness. I will let you know as soon as we receive a judgment in the case (which probably won't be for several months). I will also send you a copy of the transcript of your testimony when it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey N. Mausner

Jeffrey N. Mausner
Trial Attorney
Office of Special Investigations
Criminal Division
P.O. Box 28603
Washington, D.C. 20005-0603

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA : CIVIL ACTION

v.

SERGE KOWALCHUK, a/k/a :
SERHIJ KOWALCZUK : NO. 77-118

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
October 21, 1981

Before HON. JOHN P. FULLAM, J.
(non-jury)

THIRD DAY.

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LOUIS RICHARDSON
OFFICIAL COURT REPORTERS
Room 2722
U.S. Courthouse
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

APPEARANCES:

KATHLEEN N. COLEMAN, ESQ.,
JEFFREY N. MAUSNER, ESQ.,
Trial Attorneys,
United States Department of Justice,
Office of Special INvestigations
and
JOHN E. RILEY, ESQ.,
Assistant United States Attorney,
for the Government

JOHN ROGERS CARROLL, ESQ.,
for the Defendant

Convened at 9:40 o'clock a.m.)

(Continued video tape despostion of Shimekon Koret not transcribed.)

MR. RILEY: Your Honor, the Government calls Mr. Abraham Getman to the stand, please.

ABRAHAM GETMAN, sworn.

DIRECT EXAMINATION

BY MR. RILEY:

Q Mr. Getman, what is your date of birth?

A 21st of July, 1926.

Q Where were you born?

A In Lubomyl.

Q That was in Poland at the time, sir?

A At the time Poland.

Q How long did you remain in Lubomyl?

A Until 1st of October, 1942.

Q How many members were in your family?

A Four brothers, one sister, and father and mother and grandmother.

THE COURT: I think if you leaned forward a little bit and talked into the microphone or pull the microphone back towards you it would be helpful.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q Where did your family reside in Lubomyl?

A You mean the street?

Q ¶es.

A Rynek 15.

Q How was your father employed while you were in Lubomyl?

A He had a shoe store.

Q Where was the shoe store located?

A At Rynek 15.

Q The same place as your residence?

A Yes.

Q Where did you go to school in Lubomyl?

A In public school, 11 Listopada. The street is called Listopada where the fire house was.

Q How long did you go to school at that location?

A We went a few years and then later the end of the street and by sections.

Q I am sorry. You went to another school?

A Later grades to another school., then on the same street. They call it secondary school.

MR. CARROLL: Excuse me --

THE WITNESS: It was north --

THE COURT: Could you talk into the microphone?

THE WITNESS: It was north of the street at 11 Listopada.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q It was down the street from the school you originally went to, is that right?

A Right.

Q When did the Russians arrive in Lubomyl?

A In 1939.

Q What happened to your schooling? Did you continue in school?

A Yes. We continued in school until the Germans came in.

Q What happened to your father's business?

A The Russians promised that the business will go on as usual. My father used to buy in Warsaw, the capital of Poland before the war; the Russians lied and they sold everything we had and closed down.

Q So your father went out of business?

A Yes.

THE COURT: When was that about?

THE WITNESS: Right at the beginning when the Russians occupied.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q And what did your family do for business after that for income?

A My mother did some cooking, a restaurant, home cooking in a small restaurant in the same premises where the shoe store was.

Q Now, when approximately did the Germans occupy Lubomyl?

A On June 23, 24.

Q What year?

A Two days after the war broke out in 1941.

Q And after the Germans occupied Lubomyl, what if any restrictions were placed on the Jewish population of Lubomyl?

A We were supposed to wear white armbands with a blue star, Jewish star, and restrictions were enforced. At the end of the day, food.

Q Any --

A Then you are supposed to turn in every valuable item - like jewelry, gold, silver, any valuable possession turn over to the authorities.

Q Any restrictions in terms of your appearance in public, when you could go out?

A We weren't allowed to go out in the evening, 6 in the evening to 6 in the morning.

Q Who was responsible for enforcing those restrictions?

A The Ukrainian police or the gendarms.

Q When did the Ukrainian police appear in Lubomyl?

A The same time when they were occupied from the Germans in the same time a day or two.

Q Did you know an individual in Lubomyl by the name of Serge Kowalchuk?

A Yes.

Q Did you come to know who he was prior to the war breaking out?

THE COURT: Before the war.

THE WITNESS: I don't understand.

THE COURT: Did you know him before the war?

THE WITNESS: I know him occasionally coming into our villa to the shoe store, coming in to buy shoes in our store.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q And did you come to see him and know him after the war, after the Germans occupied the Town of Lubomyl?

A Yes.

Q. And how did you know him after the German occupation and under what circumstances did you come to know him?

A They took out my father to the Germans.

Q What did you understand him to be after the German occupation -- after the Germans occupied Lubomyl?

A To be Kommandant from the Ukraine police.

Q How often or how frequently would you see him after the Germans occupied Lubomyl?

A In the first three months I saw him very often because a branch from the police was near my house.

Q How did you know that he was -- strike that.

What was he wearing when you saw him?

A He was wearing civilian clothes with a belt, a wide belt and narrow belt across his shoulders.

Q Could you describe a little bit in more detail what kind of belt was it, where was it located and what it looked like and how it fit on Mr. Kowalchuk?

A Across the shoulders through the main belt and the stomach. And this usually -- usually just was the sign that this is an official, a kommandant or an officer. Only officers used to wear belts.

Q What if any incident can you recall against the Jews after the Germans occupied Lubomyl?

A A week afer the occupation it was ordered all men should come to the main square in the city.

Q And did you go?

A No. I went with my father and went out of town.

Q Why did you go out of town?

A Because my father didn't want to appear. On the way going there, we met a gentleman named Weingarten. And my

father asked him where he is going.

MR. CARROLL: Objection.

THE COURT: Objection overruled. Go ahead.

THE WITNESS: He said he is going to appear. My father suggested him not to go; but, anyway, he went there.

THE COURT: Just tell us what you saw.

THE WITNESS: Then we come back.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q Come back to your house?

A Yes, from the cemetery.

Q Right. What did you do?

A They told us they took out five people --

MR. CARROLL: Objection.

Q Without telling what they told you, what did you do and what did you observe?

A After they told me they shot five people, I went over to see it.

MR. CARROLL: Objection.

THE COURT: We just want to know what you saw, not what somebody said to you.

THE WITNESS: No, no, I ran over to see it.

THE COURT: Okay, tell us about it.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q All right. Where did you go from your house?

A I went over to the little mountain, Gulanska, and I

saw them carry out five bodies. Beginning to run -- it was like a valley, a place gone down to a valley, and then go up to the mountain. I saw the five bodies carried.

Q Did you return to your house?

A Excuse me?

Q Did you return to your house?

A I have some notation.

Q As to what you observed.

A I observed in between those five people was Mr. Weingarten, who my father spoke to him before.

Q Could you tell us what other if any incidents you observed involving actions against the Jewish population in Lubomyl?

A A month after the occupation --

Q About a month?

A About a month after the occupation a truck appeared in front -- at my house, the corner, not far from my house.

Q Where was your house located in relation to the city?

A Rynek 15 is in the center square.

Q Of the town?

A On the corner near the temple, near the synagogue, the big synagogue.

Q In the center of the town square?

A On the corner from the square near the synagogue.

Q Where were you when the truck pulled up to your house?

A. I was in the house.

Q Who else was with you in the house

A My father, my father, my mother, my grandmother, my little brother and sister.

Q And what observations if any did you make on that occasion?

A Kowalchuk came in and took -- tell my father to get out; and they took him out. And I followed him to the truck. And I was standing nearby where Kowalchuk was standing, and German gendarms. My father told me to get away because they may take me too. On the truck was already some people, and in the meantime they brought other people; the police, the Ukrainian police brought other people.

Q What if anything else happened on that particular occasion?

A He came back to the house.

Q Who came back?

A Kowalchuk.

Q Were you back in the house at that point?

A Yes, because my father told me to go away. He came back in the house and asked for shovels. My mother asked him in Polish, "Serge Kowalchuk, where are you taking him?" He said, "We are taking him to work." From then on I didn't see him anymore.

Q What did you do after Kowalchuk had left your house that day? Where did you go?

A. About a half-hour later the trucks were rolling in the direction for the cemetery. I followed, and I came within a distance of the cemetery. And I saw Ukrainian police. They wouldn't let anybody through. They didn't see me. I was hiding.

Q Which cemetery was this?

A The new cemetery, Jewish cemetery. And I heard shooting.

Q Did you then return to your home?

A I returned home and people didn't believe this would happen. The following day early in the morning I went myself-- I with others. They were buried in the other side from the cemetery. You couldn't recognize anything. You could only see some flesh. The scent was flesh, but all was flat.

Q This was near the location where you had heard the shots?

A Yes, but this was on the other side. I couldn't see because Jewish cemeteries have these big trees where the execution was. It was on the other side from the cemetery.

Q Did you ever see your father after that incident?

A No. My brother was taken too, from another place, the older brother.

THE COURT: The same day or later?

THE WITNESS: The same day.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q But he was not taken from your home?

A No, from work.

Q What was Kowalchuk's first name whom you saw on that day?

A Serge.

Q Could you describe for us, sir, any other incidents where you observed actions against the Jews in Lubomyl during the German occupation?

A A month later.

Q A month after this action you have just described?

A In the afternoon, the same thing, trucks, in the same place where the trucks were standing, and I was looking out the window.

Q Where were you located?

A I was located in my home in the front, and I was facing the trucks.

Q And what if anything did you observe?

A I observed Kowalchuk brought a woman and her mother was screaming: "You should leave her alone. You should release her." And screaming he wouldn't. He took her, too, because the most they were trying to take out were young women. She was an older woman. She didn't want to leave her daughter go, so they took her too. He took them out.

This was going on for two days, for the following days, and they took them out of town and they were all shot.

Q How far away were you from that incident which you described involving the women?

A Maybe 20 feet.

Q What was the woman's name, if you can recall?

A Stern.

Q During the course of immediately after the German occupation, where were you working?

A I worked in the railroad in the warehouses.

Q And who assigned you to that work?

A By order from the police, the Jewish police.

Q How long did you work at the warehouse?

A About a month and loading cars, trains, and unloading.

Q And after a month of work at the railroad, where else did you work during the German occupation?

A I didn't do anything.

Q Pardon?

A I didn't do anything. I went home.

Q What was your next form of employment or work during that period of time?

A I worked with Campoini.

Q Where was Campoini?

A They had a big farm, like a big possession of land.

The Campoini, like a prince, like a lot of rich people.

Q Was Campoini the name of the family that owned that property?

A Yes.

Q Where was that property located?

A East, north from the town.

Q And what were your duties there?

A I was a shepherd.

Q You took care of the animals?

A Cows and horses, cows, outman house.

Q Did there come a time when the Jews had to wear any special clothing?

A Yes.

Q When did that occur?

A Around any Jewish holidays. The orders all came out on Jewish holidays. I imagine this was Yom Kippur time, Jewish holiday.

Q When these laws came out, how would you find out or be notified about them?

A Posters and plaques.

Q What kind of clothing did you have to wear?

A Yellow patch.

Q What kind?

A One in the front and one in the back.

Q Who had to wear those?

A Jewish people.

Q Who would enforce those restrictions or that order?

A Ukrainian police together with the gendarms.

Q Did there come a time, Mr. Getman, when the ghetto was formed in Lubomyl?

A Please repeat.

Q Was a ghetto formed in Lubomyl at some point?

A Yes, restricted streets.

Q Could you tell us approximately when that occurred?

A The same time when the yellow patches -- the patch.

Q Sometime in the fall of 1941?

A '41, yes.

Q Could you tell us what happened when the ghetto was formed? Could you describe what happened?

A They brought a lot of families in one house. They brought them from the villages, from other little towns surrounding our city. And they put in five or six or seven families in a house.

Q What kind of persons were brought into the ghetto, what ethnic background?

A Jewish people.

Q Where was your family located during this period of time?

A The same premises.

Q So your original house was part of the ghetto, is that

right?

A Yes.

Q Could you describe for us how many persons or how many families resided in your house after the formation of the ghetto?

A Around 20 to 22 persons in the house, probably 4 or 5 families.

Q What would happen -- what was your understanding of what would happen if the Jews left the ghetto without authorization?

A They would be shot.

Q Who would enforce those restrictions?

A Ukrainian police.

Q And anyone else?

A The gendarms.

Q Would you tell us whether or not you ever had the occasion to seek Ukrainian police and German gendarms patroling the ghetto?

A I saw them in groups of three and four from my house walking, checking.

Q At the formation of the ghetto, were you working out at the Campoinis as you described? Were you working at the Campoinis?

A Yes.

Q And for the most part where would you stay at nighttime

when you were working at that location?

Q Most of the time I used to stay with the Campoinis because it was a roundup or something. They let me stay there. When it was warm, I used to sleep in the barn. In the winter I used to sleep in the servants' house, and even I slept many times near the Gebietzkommisar's room, near the door from the Gebietzkommisar's room. He used to stay there with a girlfriend, Topka.

Q Topka?

A Campoini's daughter, the old Campoini's daughter.

THE COURT: She was having an affair with the German officer?

THE WITNESS: The Gebietzkommisar, the commander.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q Mr. Getman, do you recall any incidents involving actions against non-Jewish citizens?

A Yes. One day walking home from the Campoini, walking home, I saw a wagon, carriage, and two policemen brought a lady and a man on this wagon in the carriage. Kowalczuk ran out from his office, beat them, and dragged them into the police station.

Q Do you recall, Mr. Getman, when that occurred?

A It occurred in August or September.

Q Of what year?

A 1941.

Q Did you recognize the individual?

A The individual?

Q They attacked.

A Was a Polack and he was crippled, like a hunchback.

Q What did you observe Mr. Kowalchuk do on that occasion?

A He beat him and dragged him into the station there, the police station.

Q What station are you referring to? Where was it located?

A Near me. This was a branch, Serachuk's house.

Q That was a branch of the police?

A Yes, in the beginning.

Q And that was close to your residence at Rynek 15?

A Yes. I saw this commandant at Campoini.

Q Do you know where the main police station in Lubomyl is?

A The main station was in Hotel Zaningold.

Q What used to be the Hotel Zaningold?

A What used to be the Hotel Zaningold?

THE COURT: What was the distance between Campoini estate where you worked and your house in Rynek?

THE WITNESS: I would say about half a mile.

THE COURT: Thank you.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q Did you have occasion to osbserve this Polish cripple after that?

A Yes. I passed by the prison, and I saw him yelling through the grates. Maybe he wasn't -- he was out of his mind. He was yelling and screaming, and I saw him face again.

Q Did there come a time when you saw him again?

A Yes.

Q When was that?

A 1942, around August or September. I was --

Q Where were you?

A I was shepherd, riding a horse and shepherding the cows.

Q Where, at the Campoinis?

A At the Campoinis; and it was not far from the geibeitz-kommisar, about a hundred or a hundred and twenty feet. There appeared two Ukrainian police, one gendarm and this man.

Q The same Polish cripple?

A Yes. They told him to go in the grave. There was a grave ready. Dumped him in the grave. He was yelling, screaming. In the meantime they yelled at me I should get away. I tried to ride away. I heard yelling, screaming. The two police dragged him in the grave, and the German shot him. It was in the back. The German shot him in the back. I ran away.

Q When did you leave Lubomyl?

A The night when I left was October 1.

Q What year?

A 1942.

Q Would you tell us why you left Lubomyl on October 1 or the night of October 1, 1942?

A Mr. Campoini gave my mother the message: "This is the last day. Tomorrow they will liquidate the ghetto."

Q What did you do as a result of that?

A My mother gave me some belongings, jewelry, some belongings, food and everything; and I was supposed to meet my uncle out of town at the Fuches where it used to be an old post office. In the meantime there became rumors that the Gestapo was coming. We went away. We run away to the forest.

Q How long did you remain in the forest?

A A month, two to three weeks, a month. Exactly I can't tell you because all the days was the same to me.

Q And then where did you go from there?

A I came back to the city.

Q You came back to where?

A I came back to the city, and I was hiding on the Campoinis' farm, hiding in the barn.

Q How long did you remain at the Campoinis?

A One night.

Q What did you do?

A One night and one day.

Q Where did you go after that one night and one day?

A The following day when it was dark I went to the servant for Campoini and I beg him for food. And he gave me some food, and he told me, my mother, he gave her food and everything. And I went to the railroad station, and I jumped on the railroad stations and we went East. I wound up in Transmistria.

Q Transmistria?

A Transmistria. It is an occupied Ukrainian territory from the Germans -- by the Rumanians -- I am sorry. This section was occupied by the Rumanian government where they had an agreement with the German government. They called it Transmistra.

Q And briefly, if you could describe what you did for the next two years.

A I was -- there was a ghetto, and I was in the ghetto until the Russians came to the place in March of 1944.

Q Then did you try to go back, to return to Lubomyl?

A Then I tried to go back to my home, home place. When I reached the City of Rowno, because still the war was goig on between the Russians and the Germsns, the Town of Rowno, this was the front line.

Q Did you eventually return, to Lubomyl?

A Yes, around June or July I returned to Lubomyl.

Q Of 1944?

A 1944.

Q Was that under Russian occupation at that time?

A Yes.

Q Do you recall at that point how many Jews remained in Lubomyl?

A Nothing remained, only a few, a few people got together, what came out from different places from hiding.

(Pause.)

Q Now, Mr. Getman, did you have an opportunity at some point to see -- be shown certain photographs by representative of the Government?

A Yes.

Q , Do you recall where that was and approximately when it was?

A It was in my place of business, October 2, on a Friday.

Q Do you recall who gave you the photographs and how they were given to you?

A It was three attorneys presented, and they asked me if I recognized from the pictures there may be somebody I know and maybe I don't know, if I recognized any of those pictures.

Q Do you recall approximately how many pictures you were shown?

A Eight of them.

Q Do you recall identifying any of those pictures?

A I identified one that looked like and one looks familiar to me, and I signed those pictures.

Q When you said you identified "looked like," looked like whom?

A Like Kowalchuk.

Q The first name of Kowalchuk?

A Serge.

Q And you signed those photographs?

A Yes.

Q Could you tell us what you mean when you say the other one looked familiar to you?

A Looked like somebody like from the police or somebody.

Q But you did not know him?

A I can't place him.

(Pause.)

MR. RILEY: Your Honor, may I approach the witness?

THE COURT: Certainly.

BY MR. RILEY:

Q For the record, I am showing you, Mr. Getman, what has been marked as Government Exhibit 27.

Mr. Getman, I would like you, if you would, to take a look at that (handing to witness).

Do you recall Exhibit 27 being the photos that

you were displayed on October 2 of this year?

A Yes.

Q Does your signature appear on the two photographs that you have stated that you pointed to, one of which you said looked like Kowalchuk and one of which you said looked familiar to you?

A He looks like, and he looked familiar.

Q When you say he "looks like," is this the one you said looks like Serge Kowalchuk (indicating)?

A Yes.

Q And what number is that for the record? Which number is placed under that?

A Number 4.

Q Number 4, and that is your signature that appears there?

A Yes.

Q And the date is?

A 10/2/81.

Q And the other picture that you said looks familiar to you?

A Yes.

Q Is number what?

A Number 6.

Q And your signature appears there as well as the date?

A 10/2/81.

Q And did you initial the other photographs as well?

A Yes, "A.G."

Q And are they your initials?

A Right.

(Pause.)

Q Mr. Getman, the incident when you described Mrs. Stern being involved, did you observe other people being taken out?

A Mostly women.

Q And can you tell us and describe for us who were the individuals who were taking mostly the women?

A Ukrainian police.

Q Did you observe any German gendarms on that occasion?

A By the hauler.

Q By the office?

A By the hauler, by the truck.

MR. RILEY: By the truck, okay.

No further questions.

BY THE COURT:

Q I want to clear up one answer I didn't understand.

When you came back from the forest and spent one night at the estate and then took off on the train to go East, you said they told you something about your mother. What was it they told you about your mother?

A The servants told me that my mother was there and they gave food, too, and she had run away for hiding.

Q Did she survive the war?

A No.

THE COURT: Thank you.

CROSS-EXAMINATION

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Mr. Getman, did I understand you to say that you never saw Mr. Kowalchuk wearing a uniform?

A No.

THE COURT: Excuse me. That is not going to be clear on the record.

Did you ever see him wearing a uniform?

THE WITNESS: No.

THE COURT: Okay.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q When you went to the cemetery, which I believe you said was a month or two after the German occupation, and heard shots, you said you saw some Ukrainian police standing at the cemetery not letting people pass.

A I didn't say a month or two. I said a week.

Q Forgive me, a week.

A Yes.

Q On that occasion, were those Ukrainian police wearing any kind of uniform?

A No.

Q How --

A It was because in the beginning they didn't have any

uniforms.

Q How did you identify those people as Ukrainian police?

A They were wearing rifles?

Q They had rifles?

A Yes.

Q Did they have anything else that identified them as police?

A No other people would carry a rifle than the police.

THE COURT: The question is: Did they have anything distinctive about their clothing at all? Did they have belts or armbands or anything like that?

THE WITNESS: No.

THE COURT: Okay.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Did the Ukrainian police in Lubomyl at any time later have uniforms that all or most of the police wore?

A They had different uniforms, and they have any special uniform. They had Polish and they had Russian uniforms, they had different uniforms like this in the beginning. Maybe later on I don't know.

Q You were there until October, the 1st of October of 1942; is that right?

A Right.

Q So that is about a year and three months after the occupation.

During that period of 15 or 16 months, did there evolve any common uniform worn by the local police?

A I didn't look for any uniform. So far I don't remember. Different uniforms I do remember.

Q Did any of them wear a distinctive cap to your recollection?

A No. I don't remember.

Q Any of them, to your knowledge, wear a navy-blue uniform?

A No.

Q You never saw Mr. Kowalchuk in any uniform?

A I saw him in civilian clothes.

Q Only?

A Yes, in the first two months being there.

Q Now, sir, you say that you had seen him before the war in your father's shoe store; is that right?

A Yes.

Q Did you ever see him at any other place to your knowledge?

A Reference where?

Q Any other place besides your father's shoe store?

A No.

Q On how many occasions to your knowledge had you seen him that store?

A Several occasions.

Q Could you put a number on that?

A I can't. I can't put a number. I didn't carry a diary. I didn't mark down the dates and show the times.

Q I understand.

Did you ever see to your knowledge anyone else in his family?

A Yes.

Q Who was that?

A His father and his brother.

Q Could you describe his father as you saw him?

A No.

Q Could you describe his brother as you saw him?

A Young, handsome, tall.

Q Yes?

A That is all I can describe. I didn't --

Q Is there anything else?

A I didn't pay attention. It wasn't to my mind to look at people 40 years ago.

Q Have you ever to your knowledge been shown a photograph --

A No.

Q -- of his brother?

A No.

Q Did you ever see Mr. Kowalchuk's mother?

A No.

Q Do you recall any occasion when he was in your store that he was introduced to you?

A Not to me. My father used to greet him, "Kowalchuk, 'Banikov.'"

Q But nobody introduced you to him?

A I was a child. Why would he have to be introduced to me?

Q What year are you talking about?

A We are talking before the war, '39.

THE COURT: You were 13 in 1939.

THE WITNESS: Right.

THE COURT: Thank you.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q When you saw Mr. Kowalchuk, is it also your testimony that he wore no armband on his arm?

A Please repeat.

Q Yes. Did you ever see Mr. Kowalchuk wearing any kind of an armband?

A No.

Q During the Russian occupation of Lubomyl from 1939 to 1941 after the Hitler-Stalin pact, what happened to the property of the Campoinis?

A The Russians confiscated.

Q What did they do to the owners?

A I think one brother was sent out some place and one

brother came back after the war and all this, Misha Campoini.

Q By "after the war," when you came back in '45?

A No, no, when the Germans came back one brother came back, Campoini. His name is Misha.

Q Is it correct that the Germans just took over the confiscated property? They didn't give it back to Campoini, did they?

A As far as I know, they were given back to them.

Q Do you know that?

A I know that. Iwas working there.

Q Who was your immediate employer?

A Mr. Misha Campoini.

Q He was there, you say, in 1941; is that right?

A He was in 1941, yes.

Q You say he came back then?

A He came back from where he was. I don't know.

Q Some place he had been sent by the Soviets?

A Sent by the Soviets, and he came back.

Q Siberia?

A I don't know.

Q And you say he came back and employed you?

A It cannot be Siberia because Siberia is under the Russians. He probably came back -- from where he came back, I don't know.

Q He came back from wherever the Russians sent him?

A He may come back from this or that, I don't know.

Q Excuse me. Have you finished?

A Yes.

Q I want to ask you seriously --

A Serious.

Q -- did the Russians send him away?

A I don't know. This is what I heard from the family, was sent away. And where Misha was, where he come from, I don't know.

THE COURT: You don't know whether Misha was the one who was sent away?

THE WITNESS: Or another brother. But I know Misha came back. I don't know. Maybe he run away from Poland before the war from the Germans and then came back with the Germans. I don't know.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Okay. From '39 until the Germans came, who occupied the Campoini farm?

A The Russian government.

Q And did the German governor take up residence there when they arrived?

A Can you repeat, please?

Q Did the German personnel and their governor occupy that farm as a headquarters?

A I don't recall.

Q You were there, weren't you, from '41 until October of '42?

A You asked me from the beginning. I told you I didn't work there from the beginning. I worked there three months. Later I started to work there.

Q During the time that you worked there --

A Yes.

Q -- did the Germans occupy that farm as a headquarters?

A There wasn't a headquarters there.

Q You are sure of that?

A I am sure of that.

Q Who all lived there while you worked there?

A Campoini with the servants.

Q Just Misha Campoini?

A Misha Campoini with his wife and two children.

Q That is all?

A And the servants and Topka was a lover.

THE COURT: Topka is the German official? He lived there?

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q I thought you said Topka was the girlfriend.

THE COURT: Which is which?

THE WITNESS: He may confuse me. They had two houses. I am talking about another house, and he is talking about another house.

THE COURT: He said they had two houses.

THE WITNESS: I am talking about the house on the farm, not we are talking about back in the mountains where it was authorities there. I am talking about the house on the farm.

THE COURT: The Campoinis had a property which was occupied by the German authorities?

THE WITNESS: It was occupied by the German authorities, but it was a different part.

THE COURT: Okay.

THE WITNESS: You are talking two different things.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Are you saying, sir, that the house that was on the farm where you worked --

A On the farm, yes.

Q -- where you worked and stayed was occupied by the family Campoini and not by the German authorities?

A Right.

Q And this lady called Topka, who was having some sort of an affair with the German, that was in another house?

A No, the same house.

Q The same house?

A Yes.

Q Did the Germans then live in the same house with the

Campoinis?

A They didn't live in the same house. She used to bring him in the house. She lived there.

THE COURT: He used to visit there a lot?

THE WITNESS: He used to visit there.

THE COURT: Okay.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Your house in Lubomyl, your family house at Rynek 15 --

A Right.

Q --was that in the area that became the ghetto in the fall or winter of '41?

A This was in the ghetto, my house.

Q And what were the streets that bounded the ghetto?

A I don't remember the name. In the back of me was called Skolna Street.

Q Was that one of the streets that was a boundary of the ghetto?

A Yes; it was a boundary.

Q Was it the north, east, south or west boundary?

A My house was facing east.

Q My question is: Is this street --

A East, east, south --

Q I am asking about the corners. I want to know which boundary of the ghetto was the street that you just named.

THE COURT: Skolna

THE WITNESS: I don't understand the question.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Is it correct, sir, that this ghetto was not fenced in?

A No.

Q It just had streets around the perimeter, is that correct?

A I was in the square, living in the square in the town facing my house, facing east, and behind me was the big synagogue.

THE COURT: How many blocks were in the ghetto? How big an area was that?

THE WITNESS: It is a small town. Blocks, it is not blocks or kilometers; little streets. We had our streets.

THE COURT: About how many houses were inthe ghetto? Can you give us any idea?

THE WITNESS: About how many houses, I can't tell you, 50, 100, 200.

THE COURT: Okay.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q How many?

THE COURT: He says he couldn't tell us, 50, 100, 150. He is not sure how many houses.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Isn't it correct there were four streets forming the boundaries of the ghetto? Do you understand my question?

A I understand.

Q All right. Now, my question is simply: Are you able to tell us the names of any of those streets?

A 11 Listopada Street, Chelmsta Street, Skolna Street, the Rynek, and west side from the Rynek -- I mean from the square-- was the ghetto.

Q What square are you talking about?

A The middle of the town there was a square, and that is where I was living.

Q Now, was there more than one square? Was there both a town square and a market square?

A There was a town square, a market square where there was the stores.

Q Which of those squares are you talking about?

A I don't know. I can't call it town square, whatever square you call it. It all was one piece of property. It was one square all around. If you divide it in partitions, you can't estimate east side or west side, or I will tell you what side. I was in the west side from the square, west, south corner.

Q You are now talking about the location of your home?

A Yes.

Q Okay.

A This was the ghetto.

Q How far would you have to walk from the front door of your home to the town square?

A I step out two feet and I am there.

Q On what street?

A On Rynek 15.

THE COURT: Now is there a different square called a market square that is some place else in the town, or is that also the market square?

THE WITNESS: It was before the Russians occupied the whole square was a market, the whole square market. One part was farmers bringing their food and selling eggs--

THE COURT: I understand.

THE WITNESS: -- and food, and when they used to come with the horse and carriages. When the Russians came in, they made it a park. It wasn't a square any more. It wa a part when the Russians occupied.

THE COURT: Okay.

THE WITNESS: The whole section became a park. The people used to come out nighttime and sit with grass and everything. They eliminated it.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q After the Russians turned it into a park, were there stores around the edge of the park?

A Government stores.

Q What kind of government stores, if you know?

A I can't recall; for food, for clothes, for everything. People used to stand in line to get to government stores. It wasn't like private enterprise.

Q So they are regular provision stores but run by the government?

A Yes.

Q Now, sir, was this town built on a kind of a rise, a small hill?

A Mostly flat.

Q Was it elevated at all?

A Not much, maybe one street.

Q Which?

A The 11 Listopada.

Q Which way did that street run, if you recall?

A From north to south.

Q And where was the elevation, which way?

A Starting down to the north side or the middle, close to where the school is this part starts.

Q Are you saying where the school stood?

A Where the school stood.

Q Was elevated?

A Not much, maybe two, three feet. It was not big. It wasn't big hills.

Q Tell me the exact location of the school you are talking about.

A Where the fire house was.

Q And the fire house was near your house, was it?

A No.

Q No?

A It was at 11 Listopada Street.

Q How far from your house was that school and fire house?

A Maybe a quarter of a mile, not far.

Q A quarter of a mile?

A Yes.

Q Now, that was --

A Approximate, I can't tell you exact. I didn't measure it.

Q In the days before 1939 --

A Yes.

Q -- under the Polish rule, wasn't that school reserved for the Jewish population?

A It was Jewish, a Jewish school, only Jewish children went to the school.

Q Okay. And you say that is about a quarter of a mile from your house?

A Yes.

Q And your house wound up being in the ghetto when the Germans created the ghetto?

A Yes.

Q Was the school also in the ghetto?

A The school was closed but opposite was in the ghetto--the street opposite the school was in the ghetto.

Q But it is a quarter of a mile away from your house you say?

A Yes. It was in the ghetto.

Q All right.

A The whole street, Listopada, and the west side of the street was the ghetto. Then you start the other street.

Q Mr. Getman, who was the mayor of the Town of Lubomyl under the German occupation?

A I don't recall. I only recall the authorities, Bulavka, if he was in the administration.

Q What did he do in the administration?

A I don't know.

Q Did he have anything to do with the police to your knowledge?

A I don't know.

Q Do you know any other person who was involved in the town administration during German occupation?

A I don't know.

Q Are you able to name any other person who was a member of what you have described as the local police, the Ukrainian police?

A Repeat, please.

Q Can you name any other Ukrainian policemen during

the German occupation?

A I know by look but not by their name. I know a man. He was a fireman. He was a tall man, and he used -- he was a policeman, too.

Q What is his name?

A I don't remember the name.

Q Did you know the people you saw at the cemetery that time a week after the occupation who you said were Ukrainian police?

A No. I wasn't that close to see them.

Q Did I understand you to say that you saw more than one Ukrainian policeman at the time the women were taken and put in the trucks?

A Yes.

Q Did you recognize those people?

A I didn't pay attention who it is.

Q Is it true, sir, that you were then about 13 or 14?

A I was 15 already.

Q All right. And you had lived in this same town for 15 years?

A Yes.

Q And your family during that time had a shoe store?

A Yes.

Q And you went to school there?

A Yes.

Q To two different schools, right?

A Yes.

Q And you didn't recognize any of the policemen or can't remember any of them besides this Mr. Kowalchuk; is that right?

A I just mentioned I knew another one by face. I know somebody else. I don't remember the name, before Kowalchuk became commandant. Another one he resigned after a week, the police. He was the chief of police, and after a week he resigned and Mr. Kowalchuk took his place and became the head of the police.

Q Can you identify him?

A I don't know the name.

THE COURT: He said he doesn't know his name.

THE WITNESS: I don't remember names.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Tell me what he looked like.

A What difference --

THE COURT: Well, do the best you can.

THE WITNESS: I can't tell you. This is 40 years ago. I know he was a shoemaker.

THE COURT: Do you know what Mr. Kowalchuk's occupation was before the Germans came?

THE WITNESS: No.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Your mother opened a small restaurant in 1939?

A Right.

Q Was that restaurant patronized by Ukrainian local residents?

A No.

Q You indicated there was a branch office of the Ukrainian police --

A Right.

Q -- that was near the ghetto, is that correct?

A Right.

Q Can you give us --

A On Rynek Street.

Q I beg your pardon?

A On Rynek Street.

Q On Rynek?

A Yes.

Q Now, your house was No. 15, right?

A I don't know numbers -- you mean my number house?

THE COURT: Yes.

THE WITNESS: 15, yes.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Right?

A Yes.

Q Now, do you have any idea compared to that what number this other place is that you say was a branch police office?

A I can't give you -- I cannot give you the exact number. It was on the righthand side from my house. I will show you. If you havee a map, I will show you. I would say south, on the south side of the street.

THE COURT: About how many houses away?

THE WITNESS: There is one big -- like one big house. But it was stores in the middle, you know. People used to live in the back, and in front they have the stores. It was one solid -- like a solid block.

THE COURT: A solid block and then beyond that?

THE WITNESS: I was in the front facing the street, on the south side facing the street. I looked east; it was on the righthand side.

THE COURT: Thank you.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Maybe you could tell me before this particular building you talk about became a branch police station what was its function? What was it used for? Was it a store?

A Serachuk family used to live there.

Q Serachuk?

A Yes.

Q Did you know those people?

A They are neighbors.

Q All right. You made a statement a few minutes ago that of these policemen only the officers wore belts, is that

right?

A Repeat, please.

Q I believe you said only the officers wore belts, referring to the Ukrainian police.

A Right.

Q What other officers did you see wearing a belt besides a man you identified as Serge Kowalchuk?

A German officers.

Q Any other police officers?

A No.

Q You said that on October 2 you were shown those eight photographs that Mr. Riley just showed you today?

A Yes.

Q Do you mean October 2, 1981?

A Yes.

Q Okay. But that wasn't your first discussion with the government authorities about this case, was it?

A No.

Q You were talking to the Government over a year ago about Serge Kowalchuk, were you not?

A They took testimony from me.

Q What do you mean by that?

A They questioned me about this case.

Q Did you sign a statement?

A No.

Q Did you talk about the same things that you have been testifying to here today?

A Repeat, please.

Q Yes. Over a year ago when you talked to the government authorities about this case --

A Yes.

Q -- did they question you and did you respond about the same matters that you are testifying?

A Exactly so.

Q All right. But is it your recollection that nobody wrote anything down and asked you to sign it?

A No.

Q Are you saying that is your recollection, that nothing was written down?

MR. RILEY: Objection, Your Honor. The question wasn't written down and signed, he has already asked and answered.

THE COURT: Relax. You didn't sign anything?

THE WITNESS: I didn't sign anything.

THE COURT: Okay.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Did you talk about Mr. Kowalchuk a year ago, a year and two months ago?

A They asked me questions.

Q At that time did you identify him?

A They didn't show me any pictures.

Q I didn't ask you that. Did you identify him?

A By questions I identified him.

Q How did you do that? What did you say to them that made them believe you were identifying Mr. Kowalchuk?

MR. RILEY: Objection, Your Honor.

THE COURT: Overruled.

THE WITNESS: I described him the same what I just told him.

THE COURT: Did you call him by name? Did you know his name?

THE WITNESS: Yes.

THE COURT: Did you know his name before they supplied it to you?

THE WITNESS: Yes.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q But you don't know any other names of police?

A How can I forget this name? This is what happened. This is what he did to my parents. This is memorable forever. I never forget. I am sleeping with nightmares, and he is sitting here free. They are buried, and he is even enjoying living. Can a man forget things like this?

(Pause.)

Q You --

A You think it is a lie, too. Where is my father?

Where is my mother? Where is my brother? Where is my sister? Where is my whole family? Where is the whole town?

THE COURT: Calm down.

THE WITNESS: I --

THE COURT: Wait until a question is asked.

Now what is your next question?

(Pause.)

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Mr. Getman, you said that you witnessed a Polish man who was a cripple being arrested?

A Right.

Q Now, do you know what he was arrested for?

A I don't know.

Q Do you know whether he had been accused of committing any crime?

A I don't know. My family didn't commit crime, too.

THE COURT: Just wait until you are asked a question. Do not volunteer any information. Do not volunteer any information and only answer the question which is asked.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q On the other hand, October 1, 1942, you were told, I understood you to say, that the Gestapo was coming?

A Yes.

Q Now, before October 1, 1942, had there been representatives of the Gestapo in Lubomyl that you saw?

A I don't know.

Q How would you be able to distinguish Gestapo people from gendarms, if you know?

THE COURT: Did they wear different uniforms, the Gestapo?

THE WITNESS: They had uniforms, black uniforms.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Had you seen people in a black uniform between June '41 and October '42?

A Please repeat. I don't remember.

Q During the German occupation, while you were in Lubomyl, did you see black-uniformed people?

A Yes, I saw.

Q Regularly?

A Passing by.

Q Were they there continuously?

A No.

Q Do you know in what numbers they were present?

A I can't give you numbers.

Q Did I understand you to say that in 1939 your family changed its name?

A Yes. They didn't change their name. It is just pronounced different.

Q Didn't the spelling get changed?

A They changed -- they have an H, and in the Russian

language they don't have an H. H reads as a G.

Q Is it correct it became Getman with a G in 1939?

A Right.

Q Before that it had been Etman, without any letter?

A No. H-e-t-m-a-n.

Q The school that you went to in 1939, sir, that was your second school, right?

THE COURT: Does it really matter? What questions do you have that relate to this case, please?

MR. CARROLL: I wanted to ask Mr. Getman if he knew the personnel particularly.

THE COURT: That is fine. Ask him that then. Whether this is the third, fifth or seventeenth school doesn't matter.

Please proceed.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Who was the director of the school you attended in 1939?

A In 1939 -- are you talking about the Russian occupation?

THE COURT: Before the occupation or during the Russian occupation?

MR. CARROLL: I mean during the Russian occupation.

THE COURT: During the Russian occupation, who

was the director of the school you attended?

THE WITNESS: Korotke.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Do you know the first name?

A No, I don't remember.

Q I have just one other question, and it relates to these photographs.

When you signed this photograph No. 4 -- do you have a statement that goes with this, this one No. 4? You can see it?

A Yes.

Q What was it that you said about that photograph?

A What I said?

Q Yes.

A I said it looked like him.

Q It looks like?

A Yes.

Q Now, you signed another photograph, No. 6?

A This face is familiar, too.

Q That is all you said about that face?

A Yes.

Q Do you know who that is, the No. 6 photograph?

A I thought it looks like, I remember, Kowalchuk.

Q Number 6 does?

A On the top right.

MR. RILEY: No. He is talking about --

THE COURT: You have got the numbers wrong again.

THE WITNESS: Number 4.

MR. CARROLL: Okay.

THE COURT: We are not talking about that one. We are talking about No. 6 now.

Who does he look like?

THE WITNESS: He looks familiar, the face.

BY MR. CARROLL:

Q Like Kowalczuk?

(Pause.)

A He looks familiar. Maybe he is his brother, who knows.

Q Is that when you said when you wrote your name on that picture?

A What?

Q That it looks like his brother.

A I may have said it. I don't know.

MR. CARROLL: That is all.

THE COURT: Anything further?

MR. RILEY: I have no other questions, sir.

THE COURT: Thank you. You may step down. Thank you very much, sir.

(Witness excused.)

THE COURT: We will take a brief recess at this point, a 10-minute recess.

(Recess from 3:45 until 4:10 o'clock p.m.)

MR. CARROLL: Your Honor, may I introduce Mr. Walentyn Polywko. He is a member of the New York Bar and who is also an experienced translator in courtrooms in Russian and Ukrainian languages. He is going to help us with respect to the next witness.

THE COURT: Fine.

MR. RILEY: Also, Your Honor, Mr. Edwin Strakna from the Office of Special Investigations is also present and likewise will help us, hopefully, with the translation.

THE COURT: Glad to have you, Mr. Polywko and Mr. Strakna.

MR. RILEY: Sir, at this time we are prepared to play a video tape of the deposition of Petr Kotovich, which was taken in Lutsk in the Ukraine on Thursday, January 22 of 1981; and Government Exhibit G-18, which is the transcript, Your Honor has been handed.

THE COURT: Which witness is this?

MR. RILEY: Petr Kotovich.

THE COURT: Mine says it was taken on Wednesday, January 21.

MR. RILEY: That is correct, sir.

THE COURT: Okay.

MR. RILEY: And Government Exhibit G-18A is the transcript, a copy of which I believe has been handed to Your Honor with corrections, Your Honor, that had been, as I understand it, agreed upon by both Mr. Carroll's expert and the Government's expert who have reviewed it and have made the changes. And they are agreed upon. That will differ from the translations that will appear on the tape.

THE COURT: Proceed.

(The videotape deposition of Petr Kotovich.)

"Q. Citizenship?

"A. (No response.)

"Q. Citizen of what country are you -- you do not understand me, of what country are you a citizen?"

MR. CARROLL: Excuse me, Your Honor. Mr. Richardson isn't getting these corrections.

THE COURT: I know.

MR. CARROLL: We just have to interrupt.

THE COURT: No, you don't. We have an exhibit which has the corrections in it. They can be corrected.

MR. CARROLL: Okay.

(Videotape deposition of Petr Kotovich continued.)

"Q. What part did Serge Kowalchuk take in the torturing?

"A. As the deputy commandant.

"Q. What did he do, specifically?

"A. He beat me; he interrogated me.

"Q. Of the three people who were present, who was in charge?

"A. Kowalchuk."

THE COURT: Suppose we recess at this point. I don't think we will finish this today anyway.

Recess until tomorrow morning at 9:30.

(Adjourned at 5:05 o'clock p.m.)

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Borders of Hope is a Holocaust memoir, a story about the life of Abraham Getman, born in 1926, in one of many Eastern European towns whose identity had changed many times over the centuries as wars were fought and won, then lost again. The Getman family was not rich, but they were comfortable, and they had strong emotional bonds, a social and religious structure to their lives, and a reassuring consistency. After Germany invaded Poland, life began to change. First the changes were minor ones, and the family was patriotically stoic in adapting to what they thought were simply the deprivations of war. But gradually the local attacks became more severe and more focused, and suddenly the Getman family realized that this was not just a war of Germany against Poland or Russia; this was a war against the Jews, a war against them. When Abraham Getman was wrenched from the bosom of his family, he was forced to survive by his wits.

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ABRAHAM GETMAN escaped Poland as the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, besides his brother who emigrated to Palestine (now Israel) in 1936. Abraham immigrated to the United States and became a mechanic. The author is now semi-retired, owning a restaurant-supply store. Married with four grown children, including two daughters and twin sons, and the newest addition to the family, granddaughter Melissa, Mr. Getman enjoys coin collecting, stamp collecting, and acrylic painting from his Long Island home.

ISBN 0-533-13297-5

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