JOURNEY INTO LIFE

ARON GROSSBARD

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"Ask your father and he will tell you,"

(Deutronomy 32:7)

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PROLOGUE

Map of Warsaw, 1940.

Dreams and Impressions

When I think of Warsaw, to which I came to study in the Gerrer Mesivta at the age of 16, and from which I departed as a newlywed seven years later, I picture the city in terms of its three main train stations.

In the heart of the Jewish section of Warsaw was the Danzig Station. Franciskanska, Nalevki, and Gensha streets, where most of the largest Jewish businesses and small industries were located, branched out from the terminal. Among the small industries were those which made clothing, footwear, and headgear for men and women. Jewish institutions had their offices in this neighborhood. Hebrew schools, *chadorim* and *yeshivos* were found in the side streets, alongside the big synagogues and Chassidic *shtiebelach*.

Trains departed for the German border from the Danzig Station. My home town of Mlawa was only half an hour train ride from Yilewo, the first village on the German side of the border. When I was twelve years

old, a friend and I walked from Mlawa to Yilewo. German border officers caught us and put us back on a train to Mlawa.

From Danzig station it took me only a few moments, walking through an empty field, to reach Bonifraterska Street #4, where my rich uncle Pinchas Kupiec lived. Not far from there was a big six-story building with barred windows where they kept mentally incompetent people. In the summertime, when the windows were open, the inmates used to stretch out their hands through the bars and yell out to the passersby.

Dividing Warsaw from the adjacent suburb of Praga was the Vistula River, Poland's longest and deepest. Praga had its own terminal from which trains ran to the eastern part of Poland towards the Russian border. I used the Praga Terminal when going to visit my grandfather Rav Simcha Grossbard in Wyshkova. The train to Wyshkova passed through the famous summer resorts of Otwock, Falenetz, and a group of small towns surrounded by beautiful pine trees called, Lyniah, to which Warsaw's Jews flocked in the summer to escape the heat.

Many times I crossed the Praga Bridge, especially during the summertime. The bridge itself was half a kilometer long with pedestrian walks on both sides. Crossing the bridge and looking down at the water and the passing ferries gave me the feeling of being on a steamship, the recurrent dream of my youth.

On the Praga side of the river were bathing houses built onto the river's edge. They were constructed to let the river water flow into an enclosed area creating a

The Gerrer Rebbe (center) bidding farewell to his followers. Accompanied by his brother-in-law and his son Reb. Simcha Bunim (Gerrer Rebbe from 1978-1992).

swimming pool. There were separate pools for men and women, and that is where I learned to swim.

The most important of Warsaw's train stations was the Vienna Terminal on Marshallkovsko Street. Located in the center of Warsaw, on its most beautiful street, it was used by all the dignitaries who traveled to and from other countries on the international trains. It was also the starting point for all those Jews who left Poland to North America, South America and Palestine.

I was at the Vienna Station in the summer of 1927 to wish the Gerrer Rebbe farewell on the third of his five visits to the Holy Land prior to settling there for good. From there he travelled to Vienna and then to Trieste, before boarding a boat for Haifa. For hours before his train was to depart, his followers jammed the terminal. Thousands of *chassidim*, especially yeshiva boys from Warsaw and from the suburbs, came to see him off and wish him luck on his long journey. The special police had a hard time keeping order, particularly when all the people started to push towards the wagon in which the Rebbe and his entourage rode when it arrived minutes before departure time. For a small coin we were allowed to go out to the tracks where the train was standing ready to leave. Just before the train started to move, the Rebbe came over to the window with a small prayer book in his hand and waved farewell to his followers. His *chassidim* continued to stand there, staring into the distance, long after the train had disappeared.

On a few occasions, I accompanied relatives who were leaving Poland for the United States to the Vienna

Station: first my Aunt Chana Brzosa, who left to live with her older children who were already in Detroit, and some time afterwards, her two other children, Chippa and Moshe, when they followed her. On those occasions, I saw young Jews, *chalutzim*, leaving for Palestine to help build a Jewish homeland.

All my life I had dreamed of going to *Eretz Yisrael* of traveling on a steamer and feeling the ocean spray in my face, and now I actually saw a group of boys my own age about to board a train which would take them to a port where they would board a big steamship. My imagination soared as I pictured them arriving in Jerusalem, visiting all the holy places of *Eretz Yisrael*, working in the fields, building roads, and draining the swamps. But could I, a yeshiva boy learning in one of the largest chassidic *yeshivos* and soon to be ordained as a rabbi, dare imagine myself one of them?

SECTION I

BALTIC SEA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
Niemen
EAST PRUSSIA (GERMANY)
Gdańsk
Oder
Vistula
Warta
Bug
Prypeć
Dniestr
GERMANY
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
RUMANIA
U.S.S.R.
Bydgoszcz
Mława
Łomża
Białystok
Grajewo
Ostrołęka
Warszawa
Płock
Łódź
Kalisz
Poznań
Leszno
Włocławek
Toruń
Konin
Częstochowa
Radom
Kielce
Lublin
Chełm
Zamość
Annopol
Kazimierz nad Wisłą
Puławy
Otwock
Siedlce
Brześć nad Bugiem
Pińsk
Łuck
Równe
Ostróg
Jeziorany Żydowskie
Brody
Lwów
Tarnopol
Stanisławów
Czortków
Chodorów
Rohatyn
Stryj
Drohobycz
Sambor
Przemyśl
Rzeszów
Tarnów
Bielsko
Katowice
Kraków
Żabno
Bochnia
Krynica Zdrój
Nowy Sącz
Jasło
Krosno
Sanok
Kosów
Zaleszczyki
Wołkowysk
Baranowicze
Nowogródek
Wołpa
Lubcza
Mir
Wołożyn
Jeziory
Grodno
Niemenczyn
Nowa-Wilejka
Wilna
Smorgonie
Lachwa
Wysock
Kleszów
Drohiczyn
Wyszków
Ciechanów
Mława
Nasielsk
Wyszków
Orla
Wysokie Litewskie
Szczuczyn
Augustów
Suwałki
Ełk
Olsztyn
Elbląg
Malbork
Tczew
Gniezno
Leszno
Kalisz
Piotrków
Sieradz
Wieluń
Kutno
Płock
Mława
Ostrołęka
Łomża
Białystok
Grajewo
Suwałki
Ełk
Olsztyn
Elbląg
Malbork
Tczew
Gdańsk
Bydgoszcz
Toruń
Włocławek
Konin
Gniezno
Poznań
Leszno
Kalisz
Piotrków
Sieradz
Wieluń
Łódź
Pabianice
Zgierz

Chapter 1

Mlawa

I was born in 1911 in Mlawa, a middle-sized Polish town, about eighty miles northeast of Warsaw and six miles from the Polish—German border. Mlawa at that time had a population of approximately 20,000, of whom 7,000 were Jewish.

Mlawa was considered the bigger city among the surrounding *shtetlach* of Prushnitz, Nashelsk, Chechanowa, Pultusk, and others. From the train station to the city there were about three kilometers of dirt road with beautiful trees on both sides of the road. The train terminal was a large tall brick building with a restaurant and a waiting room.

Not far from the terminal there was a little village there, called Vilko. About fifteen Jewish families lived there and they always had a *minyan* for Sabbath and holidays. My uncle, Itche Rotenberg, lived there and had a grocery store there.

The surrounding countryside was filled with Polish peasants, who would pour into Mlawa on the market days — Tuesday and Friday. On those days, the peasants began streaming into the market from early dawn, their carts harnessed to one or two horses. The carts were loaded with wheat, and baskets full of fruit, geese, ducks, chickens, and turkeys. Here and there a pig or a calf could be seen lying on the floor of a wagon. And some wagons had a colt or a cow hitched to the back.

Others came on foot carrying straw baskets filled with butter, cream, and cheese in earthern pots. One farmer led a cow, another a flock of geese. On those market days half of the people in the city drew their *parnossa.* Even those who had no stores kept merchandise in their homes, and on Tuesdays and Fridays they brought it to the market place to sell. On those two days they were busy dragging out stands early in the morning and bringing them back late in the evening. Whole families were busy with this kind of business, women helping their husbands, children helping their parents. My father, too, looked forward to the market days because the peasants would come into his store to buy herring, flour, sugar, and salt, while on the other days very few customers appeared.

During the winter, the peasants came into town on sleighs rather than wagons. No effort was made to clear the snow, and each snowfall just piled on top of the previous one, leaving huge mountains of snow. As they moved soundlessly through the snow, many of the sleighs

were equipped with bells to alert people so that they would not be run over.

On those cold winter market days, the peasants were bundled up with warm clothes. Some put straw in their boots to keep their feet warm, and to warm up their hands they put glowing charcoals in iron containers which also helped them to warm up hot drinks.

Non-Jews also displayed the merchandise which they produced on their farms: half frozen potatoes, cabbage, apples, etc. There was also livestock, like chickens, ducks, geese, and eggs, and sometimes even a calf or a pig. Some peasants made pottery dishes on their farms which they displayed on the ground of the market.

Very few cars were in Mlawa in my time, maybe five or six cars in the whole city, and they were owned by very rich people. Across the street from where we lived was a man who owned a car. In order to start the car in the morning, he had to crank it up from behind the radiator. That made such a noise that he woke up all the neighbors.

When the horses who were pulling the buggies saw a buggy moving without a horse, they became wild and started to run. It took some effort on the part of the owner to quiet them down.

Our Home

We lived at the beginning of Woitustwa Street, known as the Butchers' Street because most of the Jewish butchers, lived on that street. Our apartment was between that of Mordechai Leib Listopad and his

brother Moshe Ber Listopad. Both were butchers and had grown-up sons who helped them in their business. The two brothers, like almost all the butchers, were *misnagdim* and davened in the old Beis Medrash or in the small butchers' shul which was down the street.

The job of a butcher in those days involved much more than just selling meat. The butcher also had to buy the live animal and bring it to the *shochet* at the slaughterhouse. After it was slaughtered, he had to skin the animal and cut it up. Then it was brought to a large hall with a glass roof where each butcher had his own stall to sell his meat.

The slaughterhouse was located about three kilometers outside Mlawa. Sometimes, to avoid the trouble of taking the calf to the slaughterhouse, the Listopads would bring the calf from the farm straight to our house and Reb Yosef the *shochet* would slaughter it right on our kitchen floor. It was illegal to kill animals outside the slaughterhouse, but, since my father was not a butcher, the authorities had no cause to suspect that any animals were being slaughtered in our house.

I was very young when I first saw, an animal slaughtered. I still remember how they tied the animal and put its head over a big bowl. The *shochet* then cut its throat with a big smooth knife, which he had previously checked to make sure that it had no nicks. With one back-and-forth cut on the throat of the calf, the blood gushed out, and in a matter of seconds the animal was dead. That sight reminded me of the *Chumash's* description of Avraham *Avinu* binding his

son Yitzchak to be slaughtered (*Bereishis 22:1*). After they had finished skinning and cutting up the animal, the Listopads would usually give us a piece of meat for allowing them to use our house.

In the same frame building, in front of the butchers' homes, lived a baker. He had a big brick oven in his front room where he baked bread, *challos*, and cakes. His name was Hirsch Leib Proshnicki, but he was known as "Sima the bakerwoman," because his wife Sima handled the business, while he only did the baking. Sima took all the orders and sold the baked goods.

Reb Hirsch Leib was a very kind person, who always had a smile on his face. I was often in his house, especially during the winter when I warmed myself by his big oven. On Shabbos afternoons, when I would come into his house frozen, he would get up from his warm bed and put me in it to warm up.

On Friday afternoons, Jews who did not have their own ovens would bring their *cholent* pots to Reb Hirsch Leib's big oven to be kept hot. He heated up his oven with big pieces of wood on Friday afternoon. After he took the charcoals out of the oven, the neighbors would bring their *cholents* in round earthenware pots with small covers on top and put them into Reb Hirsch Leib's oven before sunset. These *cholents* consisted of potatoes, beans, and barley. Rich people would put in a piece of fat meat, and even a noodle *kugel* into their *cholents*.

From the outside every *cholent* pot looked alike, but inside the pots there were big differences. I used to watch at noontime on Shabbos when people would come to

collect their *cholents*. Everyone wanted to be sure that he brought home his own *cholent*, but a poor person would not mind if a rich man mistakenly picked up his *cholent* so he could take the rich man's. Even though people made different signs and marks to recognize their *cholent* pots, things like that happened.

On Shabbos, my father always came home late from the Gerrer *shtiebel*, and we waited for him to start the meal. So that our *cholent* would not become cold, especially in the winter days, we would cover it with bedcovers and pillows. When my father finally came home, the *cholent* was still hot.

Sometimes my father would bring home a poor Shabbos "guest." Guests were numerous in those days. During the week, poor men used to walk from one *shtetl* to another collecting *zlotys* or hoping for a piece of bread or a bowl of soup to eat on the spot. On Shabbos, they would stand at the exit of the synagogue or *shtiebel*, hoping to be invited for a Shabbos meal.

In the front of our building, between the Listopad's apartment and ours, was a foyer where an elderly couple lived. They had one son who had a paint store in the marketplace, but he seldom came to visit them, perhaps because they were always arguing with each other. In the summer, she blamed him for not opening the windows and, in the winter, he blamed her for not warming up the food.

Many times I came in to help them light their stove, which was no easy matter. First, I would put in paper. On top of the paper, I would put thin pieces of wood,

and on top of that coal. Since the wood was wet, it did not catch fire easily, so I had to blow air onto it. My eyes would get red and the house would become full of smoke, but finally the fire would catch and their house warmed up a little. The old man would climb out of his bed where he was usually huddling under the blankets, and his wife would cook up a little cereal. All the while, they would curse one another.

Over the outside door of Mordechai Leib Listopad's apartment was a big opening to the attic, which ran over the whole frame building. A ladder stood by the opening, and the tenants used to climb up there to hang their laundry. In the summer, the attic got as hot as an oven, and in the winter as cold as an icebox. Mordechai Leib would take in the ladder every night, but one night he forgot. The next day we found all the laundry had been stolen. In the same foyer, through which tenants of our building entered, in the corner near our door, was the station of the town water carrier. His name was Marneliack. He was a strong man, but completely blind. His wife would lead him to the well to fill up the buckets with water. The well was very deep, and its water was considered the best in town. Even though we had a water pump across from our house, its water was not as soft as the well water. My sisters washed their hair with rain water which came down the gutters after a big rain, but it did not always rain. The well water was perfect for their hair.

Marneliack would carry two big buckets of well water attached by chains to the padded yoke on his shoulders,

and his wife would lead him to the houses where he would empty the water into special white water barrels. At lunchtime, they would stop in our foyer, and he would take off the yoke with the chains and turn the buckets over. He and his wife would then sit down together to eat lunch. After lunch, they would go back to fetching water from the well and delivering it to their customers until evening, when they would return to their home at the other end of the town.

Seasons in Mlawa

The winter in Poland starts early. Right after Sukkos, we started wearing shoes again, while all summer we ran around barefoot. In the winter, children used to make small wooden sleds by tying a rope to the front of a log and dragging it over the snow. Rich children, who could afford skates, went skating in the middle of the street. I had only one skate so I had to skate holding one foot in the air. Other children did not have even one skate. They had fun by sliding downhill on the packed snow, then walking up to slide down again, varying the positions of their bodies.

As soon as the first big frost came, the windows in our house were covered with a layer of ice. Because of the moisture in our house, different frosted figures would form on the window. I used to stare at the windows in amazement at the beautiful figures nature created. The ice-covered windows blocked the sun's rays, and as a result it was very dark inside our house. When the

frost broke, the ice on the windows melted and water accumulated on the windowsills. A few days later a new frost would hit the town, and again the windows would be covered with ice and the house darkened.

This went on the entire winter until spring finally arrived and the sun overpowered the cold. The snow melted gradually, creating muddy roads and flooding the streets. The peasants put away their sleighs and went back to using their wagons.

With the warmer weather came time to clean the house for Pesach. The kitchen had to be painted, the beds taken apart, cleaned and washed, and the straw mattresses filled with new straw. The pillows and bedcovers were taken outside to air out in the sun and to have the winter dampness and dust knocked out of them. The clothing was also taken out and hung for a full day to absorb the freshness of the spring sun. Even the pockets were turned inside out, so as not to leave any dirt inside them. The boys had the job of taking the *seforim* outside the house and leafing through their pages from cover to cover. The girls were busy cleaning the house, including washing and ironing the floormats so that they looked smooth when placed back on the newly washed floor. When Pesach finally came, the house was spotless. The fresh spring breeze blowing in from the open windows added warmth to the house.

The evening prior to the *Seder* night my father would come home early from the *shtiebel* and search for *chometz*, using the light of a candle. He would look all over, even under the beds and covers, but he could

never find any *chometz* nor even a speck of dirt. On the day before Pesach, my sisters became busy preparing food for the *Seder*.

My father prepared wine made from raisins a few weeks before Pesach. First he would soak the raisins, then he would squeeze out the water, and finally, distill it. We baked *matzos* a week before Pesach, using the oven of our next door neighbor, the baker. The *matzos* were then put in a safe place so that they would not be touched by anyone until the *Seder* night. My father also made special *mitzva matzos* which were baked on the eve of Pesach.

Normally, my father was the last one to leave the prayer house. He was known for his diligence in learning and always remained to study after the prayers were finished. We children had to wait and wait until he finally came home. But on the *Seder* night, he was the first one to leave the prayer house in order to start the Seder early so the children would not fall asleep.

Poverty in Mlawa

World War I broke out in 1914 when I was only three years old. The war years were ones of incredible poverty for the Jews of Poland. Mlawa was occupied by the German army. To avoid being caught in the middle of a war zone, we fled to Warsaw for a period of time before returning to Mlawa.

In 1917, my mother Zisa Gittel, of blessed memory, died after a long illness. Though I was only five at the time,

I remember her well. She was a tall, dark-complexioned woman, with an extremely good nature. As I grew up, I frequently heard stories from neighbors of her helping others in times of need.

With my mother's death, my oldest sister Rivka was left with the task of caring for the six children, while my father opened a grocery to support the family.

Even after the Germans were forced to retreat, the situation did not improve substantially. Hunger and disease were rampant. Bread and other food supplies were rationed. The Joint Distribution Committee of the United States helped greatly by sending transports of food and clothing to Poland's Jews. From time to time, we also received packages of food and clothing from my father's sister, Rose Raimi of Detroit, which were greatly appreciated.

For a while, after the war ended, the situation improved. But in 1920 the Bolsheviks invaded Poland and reached Praga. There they were beaten back by the Polish army. My wife's father Reb Moshe Lilliental was killed in Radzimin during the fighting, leaving my wife's mother, Leah, widowed with five children. He had gone outside during an apparent lull in the fighting to tell his neighbor that their small daughter was safe in his house and was struck by stray shrapnel.

After the Bolshevik invasion, the situation in our house became unbearable. We suffered hunger and disease and frequently depended on our neighbors, the baker and the butchers, for food to eat. It was then that my father decided to send two children to America — my

My wife's mother, Leah Lilliental.

oldest brother, Nathan, and my youngest sister, Sarah. They went to New York to my mother's sister, Leah Malka Shapiro, and her daughter, Chava Weberman. My brother Israel followed a few years later to Canada. I cannot imagine my father's feelings when he had to send three children overseas knowing that he would likely never see them again.

My brother Nathan made every effort to save money from his meager wages, and he sent home a few dollars every month. This made a big difference for us. My father was very grateful for this aid. When Nathan was married, my father somehow scraped together enough money to buy him a large sterling silver Chanukah Menorah as a present. I still remember myself wrapping it in old newspapers so that it wouldn't be damaged during shipment.

Polish Anti-Semitism

In my youth, about three million Jews lived in Poland among about ten times as many gentiles. Jews had lived in Poland for almost a thousand years, and played a major role in the development of Poland. Yet, as in all of Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism was endemic.

As a child, I always feared hearing the name "Jew." *Zhidze do Palestina* ("Jews, go to Palestine") was the call of Polish gentile boys. We were lucky if they contented themselves with shouting insults at us and did not also throw stones, as they often did. (I wish we had all listened to them when they urged us to go to Palestine.)

In the winter the mornings were still dark when we went to *cheder* — there was not yet electricity in Mlawa — and I was terrified of gentile boys who chased us and threw stones at us. I used to make a lantern for myself by putting a candle in the bottom of a bottle, in order to light my way so that I did not fall into a pit or knock my foot against the stones with which the streets were paved. On market days, I had difficulties pushing through the marketplace full of peasants with their merchandise, on my way to the *cheder*.

One day, I went to bathe with my friends in a small, man-made lake. While I was swimming in the deep water, a tall, gentile boy swam over to me and pushed me under the water and held me there. I could not escape from his grip. If he had held me down another couple of seconds, I would have drowned.

Another time I was in my house when I heard cries for help from outside. When I looked out the window, I saw two gentile boys clubbing our neighbor Moshe Ber Listopad with wooden clubs until his head was gushing with blood. By the time his sons, who were big strong boys, ran out to help, the gentile boys had run away.

Another anti-Semitic incident involving the Listopads took place about a year before I left Poland. My married sister had rented a summer cottage in the forest about three kilometers outside the city to escape the oppressive heat. One day, I went to visit her, and on the way back I met my neighbors, the Listopads going back to the city with their horse and cart. They gave me a lift and while riding with them on the gravel road, a uniformed Polish

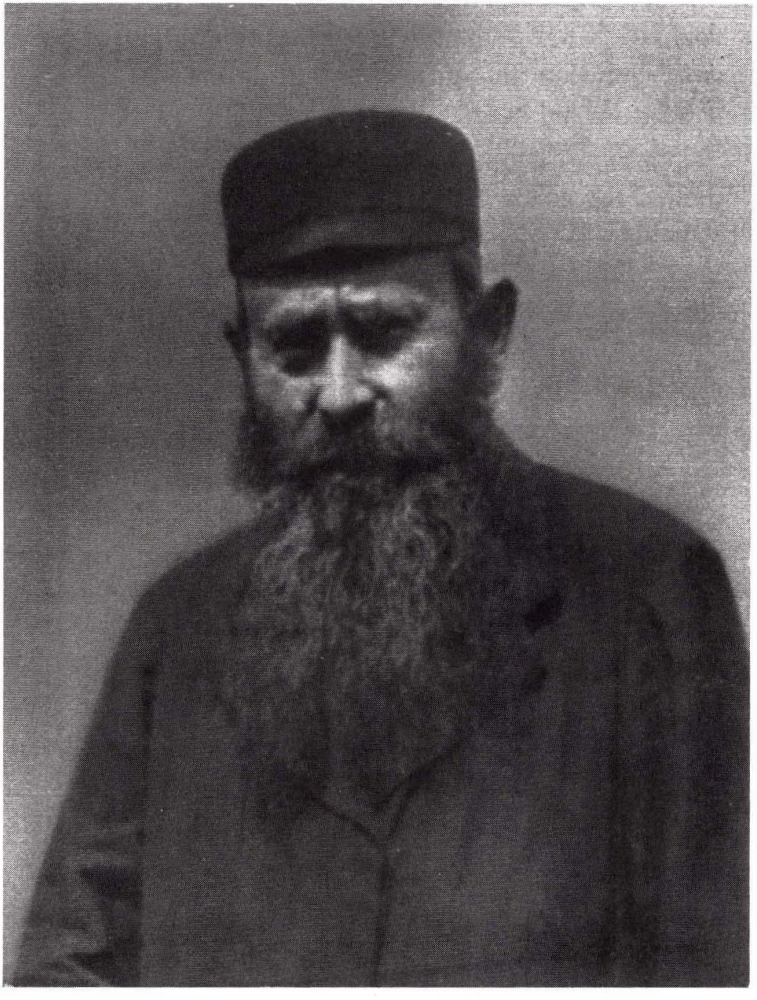
soldier came towards us with a gun cocked and pointed at us. He hollered, *Zhidze do Palestina* ("Jews go to Palestine"), and then he started shooting. One bullet passed between my left arm and body, nicking my arm, not far from my heart.

The two Listopad boys jumped off the cart and knocked the soldier down to the ground. Then they tied his hands, picked him up, and put him into the cart. He was dead drunk and soon fell asleep. We drove into town to the police station, where the police took the soldier off the wagon and wrote everything down. A few weeks before I left Poland, there was a trial at which I had to appear. The soldier was sentenced to several years in jail.

Another time, a Pole who had moved to America and then returned to Mlawa, opened a sporting goods store on one of the main streets. Above the entrance of his store he hung up a big picture of a Jew with a beard, long coat and round hat, fleeing from a dog, which was biting him. Everybody who passed by looked at the picture and laughed. Efforts to persuade the gentile to remove the picture failed.

Religious Life in Mlawa

My father, Eliyahu Dov, was a deeply religious Gerrer *chassid* and a learned man. One of my earliest childhood memories is of him awakening my brothers to learn *Chumash* with him before he left for the early *minyan* at the Gerrer *shtiebel*. I would hear him shouting, "Naftuli!



My father, Eliyahu Dov Grossbard.

Yisruel!" I would turn over to my other side, glad that I was still too young to be called.

The rav in Mlawa was Rabbi Segelovitch. He was the official Jewish religious representative at Polish events, such as the May 3rd Polish Independence Day. I used to learn with Rabbi Segelovitch in his house. He leaned towards the Mizrachi viewpoint and was a staunch fighter for the observance of Shabbos. Friday afternoon before sunset, Rabbi Segelovitch would send out delegations to the few Jewish storekeepers who remained open on Shabbos to warn them to close their shops.

In the hot summer months, the community hired a horse and buggy to take him out for a few hours each day into the big pine forest outside the city to breathe its fresh air, and I used to accompany him on these daily trips.

Rabbi Segelovitch *davened* on Shabbos in the big Shul, which had a balcony for women. Ten steps on each side led up to the tall Holy Ark. There were high windows on both sides of the shul. The shul was never heated, even on the coldest winter days. Except for Shabbos and Yom Tov, the big shul was closed. Twice a year — on the Shabbos afternoon before Pesach and on the Shabbos afternoon before Yom Kippur — the rabbi would give a sermon.

On weekdays, the rabbi *davened* in the old Beis Medrash. There it was always warm and packed with people. Long tables with benches stood at both sides of the long room and people were always studying or praying. In the front, on both sides of the Holy Ark,

were lines of *shtenders* for the rabbi and the community leaders.

In the front yard of the old Beis Medrash was a wooden shack where the community kept a black painted cart used for taking dead people to the cemetery at the end of the city. When I was small, I would run past the shack out of fright when going in to the old Beis Medrash. On the same street, was the new Beis Medrash , which was always empty. People said it had been built on Shabbos, and they did not want to use it as a shul. Some people called it the Zionist Beis Medrash

.

Down the same street was the Gerrer *shtiebel*, consisting of two big rooms with long tables and benches, which were filled with people praying or studying on Shabbos as well as every morning and evening. On the walls were shelves loaded with prayer books, Bibles, and the Talmud and its commentaries. Further down the road was the community bath house, a big modern building built before World War I by the Germans, and to the side of the bathhouse was the *mikvah*. A very narrow river, which dried out almost completely in the summer months, separated these buildings from the Talmud Torah where I went as a boy. Mizrachi had their own Hebrew school elsewhere. Around that time, Sara Shneirer of Krakow founded the Bais Yaakov school system for girls, and Agudas Yisrael in Mlawa built a wood frame Bais Yaakov building behind the red brick building of the Talmud Torah.

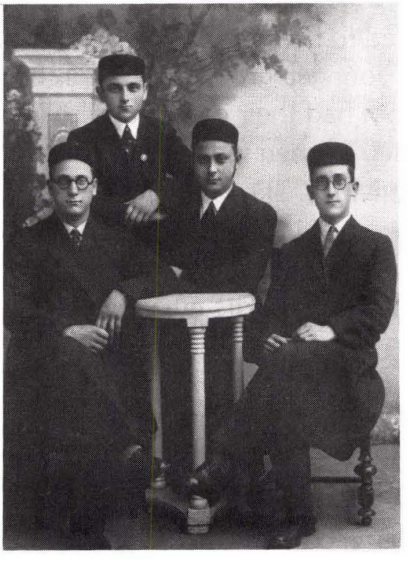
It was quite a long walk from Woitustwa Street, where

we lived, to the Talmud Torah at the other end of the city. My father would give me ten *groshen* every morning. I used nine of them to buy three kaiser rolls at the bakery, and so each day, I had one *groshen* left. Every third day, I was able to buy four Kaiser rolls. I always looked forward to the third day. And in the summer, I would lie in an orchard of fruit trees, which ran behind the Talmud Torah and the old Beis Medrash. As I lay in the shade of the trees bearing delicious apples, pears, and plums, I would look up at the sky and think.

I belonged to the youth group of Agudas Yisrael called Zeirei Agudas Yisrael. For two years, I was the secretary of the local branch. Many young boys whose parents davened in the chassidic *shtiebelach* in Mlawa — Gerrer, Alexander, Strikov, and Amshinov — and even some who were not chassidim — whose parents *davened* in the old Beis Medrash — belonged to the group. We were well organized and even had a younger group called Pirchei Agudas Yisrael. The girls, too, had their own group called Bnos Agudas Yisrael and they learned in the Bais Yaakov school for girls. We had activities, like collecting money for *Eretz Yisrael*, which was called *Keren Hayishuv*, and classes in Talmud and commentaries. We also heard lectures from famous rabbis. Zeirei had its own *minyan* on Shabbos mornings.

On Simchas Torah, the Zeirei *minyan* would take over the old Beis Medrash to hold their *hakafos*. In my youth, I had a beautiful strong voice and often led the singing during the *hakafos*. On one such occasion, my father walked into the Beis Medrash after the Gerrer

Reunion of Zeirei Agudas Yisrael, Mlawa branch, 1930.



With some friends from our Zeirei group, 1933.

shtiebel finished their *hakafos*. My father was not a man given to emotional expression as he was weighed down by worries over supporting his children. But, at that moment, I sensed his *nachas* as he saw me singing and rejoicing with the Torah.

Mlawa had its own branch of the famed Novardhok Yeshiva. All the branches were named Bais Yosef after the founder of the movement, Rabbi Yosef Yozil Horowitz of Novardhok. There were large branches of Bais Yosef in Warsaw, Bialystok, Meztrich, and Ostrow-Mazwietzk. In my time, smaller branches were established in towns around Warsaw.

Besides studying the Talmud, students of Bais Yosef spent a great deal of time learning *mussar* and working on the refinement of their character. They studied such books as *Mesillas Yesharim* and *Chovos Halevavos* intensely.

Not every one approved of the Novardhok approach. They argued that by studying more of the Talmud one would find the same ethics as in the *mussar* texts. Other *yeshivos* limited the *mussar* study to only one half hour a day.

The Mlawa branch of Bais Yosef began in 1928 when Rav Hillel Vitkin came to Mlawa with two of his friends and founded the yeshiva in the old Beis Medrash of our city. Rav Vitkin was a wonderful orator, who spoke with an especially sweet melody. He drew large crowds whenever he spoke. At one time, the Mlawa yeshiva had over one hundred students from the small towns around Mlawa, in addition to the students from Mlawa itself.

Yeshiva Bochurim of Mlawa, 1932.

Despite the presence of the Novardhok Yeshiva in Mlawa, my father decided to send me to the Gerrer Mesivta in Warsaw.

The inner courtyard of a Warsaw apartement building.

Chapter 2

Warsaw

For a young boy of sixteen who had spent almost his entire life in a middle-sized Polish town, Warsaw was overwhelming — the noise of the streetcars, the horses dragging buggies and wagons, the multitudes on the sidewalks, and the beautiful store display windows made my head spin. Signs proliferated everywhere announcing what was being sold or manufactured or advertising the services of doctors, lawyers, dentists, or other professionals.

Warsaw then had a population of a million people, including 300,000 Jews. Its wide boulevards and huge apartment buildings are indelibly engraved in my memory.

There were bazaars where you could buy anything from a needle to a cow, and which contained foodstores packed with anything one could imagine to eat, and bakeries filled with fancy cakes and cookies.

A special attraction were the warm bagels they sold

in the evening when people went home from work. The Warsaw bagels were famous for their good taste. They were twisted and bigger than the American bagels. They sold them when they were still warm, just out of the bakery, three for twenty-five *groshen*. People used to eat them while still walking on the sidewalks.

During my first few days in Warsaw, before the yeshiva started the new summer term, I decided to take a stroll on the beautiful Warsaw streets and look at the fancy display windows. I had never seen anything like these in Mlawa. I made myself a sign to help me remember my starting point, but I became so entranced by the beautiful displays that I lost my way and eventually found myself in a non-Jewish section of the city. I did not even know enough Polish to ask a gentile directions, and I had to hire a *droshko*, a horse and buggy, to take me back. At that time, the principal means of transportation was still horse and buggy. There were only a few motor taxis in all of Warsaw.

The apartment buildings in the Jewish section looked like four-walled fortresses. The buildings were four or five stories high and arranged around an inner courtyard. A gatekeeper sat at the large entrance gates, which were locked at 10:00 p.m. Guests who came after 10:00 p.m. had to identify themselves and tell the gatekeeper who they were visiting. They were then let in through a small door.

Some buildings had over a hundred tenants, and a few even had two hundred or more. Some had one courtyard inside and others had two or three courtyards, with

gateways separating one courtyard from the next. None of these buildings had elevators, and those who lived on the top floor had a long climb to reach their apartments. Of course, there were buildings with elevators, but those were in the fancy sections of Warsaw where the rich people lived.

On weekdays, peddlers used to go into the courtyards calling out in a loud voice that they were buying old clothes or junk. They would even buy potato peelings, and then sell them to farmers who used them for cattle feed.

A few of the large apartment buildings had synagogues located in their inner courtyards. Rabbi Naftali Silberberg, for instance, had a large shul in the inner courtyard of the big apartment building where he lived on Genska Street #6. On the long Friday nights during the winter, I used to go to hear his beautiful sermons on the weekly Torah portion, which he recited with a sweet melody.

The Warsaw religious community, with its synagogues, *shtiebelach*, and communal institutions, was concentrated into two sections. The Nalewki section was filled with large businesses and suppliers for all types of tradesmen. The Grzibow-Twarda section contained the offices of the Jewish community and the famous Noizik Synagogue. Between these two sections were the homes of the city's wealthiest Jews. The Tlomacke synagogue, with its famous library of Judaica, was located in this area.

Jewish Warsaw was a city of contrasts. On the one hand, it was a city where thieves and con men

proliferated. Various legends of ingenuity were told about the thieves of Warsaw. If there would be a school for thieves, Warsaw's thieves would graduate with the highest honors. Such was their reputation, that the city of Warsaw was characterized by the expression "*Warsaw thieves*," like the city of Chelm was characterized by its Chelmer *Chachomim* (wise guys).

The Warsaw thieves robbed people without hurting them. Sometimes the people didn't even know that they had been pickpocketed until they came home. In the streetcars, which were always crowded with passengers, the thieves would surround a person so that he couldn't move momentarily and then, stealthily, pull out his wallet, even from beneath his upper garment. When someone would carry a suitcase or a package of any sort and set it down on the ground, he had to watch it constantly; otherwise it might disappear. They had many other tricks to fool people, especially those who came in from the little *shtetlach* around Warsaw.

There were also people who made their livelihood conducting business on the street by selling different items, such as ties, shoelaces, handkerchiefs, etc. This was illegal. When they saw a policeman coming, they grabbed their stand with the merchandise and ran to the next corner, and they were in business again. Passersby used to buy from them at cheaper prices than in stores because it was second or third-grade merchandise.

On the other hand, Warsaw had many charitable organizations and individuals caring for the poor, sick, and elderly. There was even an organization that cared

for Jewish prisoners. I will never forget Shabbos morning. An organization that cared for the hungry would go through the courtyards and people would throw food — *challos*, fish, and meat — down from their windows into big containers. This food was then distributed to poor people who did not have enough to eat for Shabbos.

Warsaw Relatives

When my father put me on the train to Warsaw, he told one of his friends, who was also going to Warsaw, to keep an eye on me and take me to my Uncle Pinchos Kupiec, whose wife Rochel was my mother's sister. My father gave me a letter to give to my Aunt Rochel and also some money. It was my first time alone on a train, and I felt very proud and grown-up to be going to the big city. But I also felt somewhat apprehensive about the kind of reception I would receive from my aunt and uncle.

Uncle Pinchos lived in the Nalewki section on Bonifraterski #4. When I gave him my father's letter, he looked me up and down and said something to his wife. Afterwards, they argued for a while. She probably told him that I was her sister's son and an orphan, and that I should not be sent away. Uncle Pinchos finally turned to his oldest son and said, "Mendel! Take him to Uncle Bunim on Marianski #8." So I followed Mendel all the way to the Grzibov-Twarda section — passing through Kraskinski Garden and all the other fancy streets — up to the 5th floor of Marianska #8. Uncle Bunim's family

set up a folding bed for me in the kitchen, and that is where I slept my first few weeks in Warsaw.

Uncle Bunim was very poor, which is why he lived on the 5th floor without an elevator. He was short and skinny, but very observant and learned. He spent more time in the Gerrer *shtiebel* than he did at home.

Uncle Kupiec was the opposite of Uncle Bunim. He was rich and aristocratic-looking, with a trimmed beard around his face, and a big stomach. He also *davened* in a Gerrer *shtiebel* on Franciskanska #22 in the Nalewki section.

My Aunt Rochel, my mother's youngest sister, was a prominent member of Warsaw Jewish society, and she always treated me warmly. She knew I enjoyed being together with my relatives and would invite me for Shabbos meals. My Uncle Pinchos, on the other hand, clearly viewed me as a poor relation to be kept at a distance. My uncle's attitude, however, changed dramatically for the better during the extremely cold winter of 1929. That year Warsaw had several days of below zero temperatures. Water pipes burst and many homes, including my Uncle Kupiec's, were left without water. The city opened a few reservoirs for the public to come and get water, and I brought water from one of these reservoirs to Uncle Kupiec's home. He appreciated this kindness and from then on was much warmer towards me.

Uncle Kupiec had an "expedition," which means that he expedited things to the small *shtetls* around Warsaw. If a businessman in the *shtetl* ran out of merchandise

or a tradesman needed a part, he would order it from Warsaw. There were different streets for each type of merchandise: Gensha Street with its huge stores of textile materials, Franeiskouski with its leather goods, Shviento Yerska with its furs, etc.

Middlemen called *shpliters* would go into Warsaw twice a week, buy the parts or materials which were needed, and then take them to my uncle. My uncle had a big truck which he loaded twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays. Each package was wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. Uncle Pinchos delivered all the way to Mlawa and Ciechanowa, a *shtetl* near Mlawa. His son Lazer was the driver of the truck and he would bring the packages to their destinations overnight. My cousin Lazer was also a mechanic and, if something happened to the motor of the truck, he knew how to fix it. Often he had to repair a flat tire on the road.

Sometimes I visited Uncle Kupiec on Mondays or Wednesdays when they were loading their big truck. The place looked like a market. The truck would stand outside on the street near the gate of the building, and packages would be carried out from the house to the truck. Lazer would stand there telling the people where to place the packages on the truck: the ones which were to go out last would be put in first, on the floor of the truck, and the ones to be taken out first, on top. The merchandise had to be balanced so that one side of the truck would not be heavier than the other side. Uncle Kupiec would lean against the truck, with a piece of paper attached to a cardboard, and check off each

package as it went on the truck. After the truck left, everything would quiet down until the next time they loaded the truck.

Lazer was a good-natured boy. He was about eight years older than I, but we liked each other, even though his father looked down on me as a poor relation. Once he offered me a ride to Ciechanowa, which was only a half-hour train ride to Mlawa. I sat with him in the front seat and he kept talking to me to keep himself awake. He talked about many interesting topics, among them the Dreyfus trial and Dreyfus' eventual triumphant return to Paris.

It was the beginning of June, and I had a chance to view the Polish countryside, with its green fields full of wheat, barley, oats, and vegetable gardens, rolling by us. The farmers were just getting up to feed their livestock, chickens, and geese.

I arrived in Mlawa the day before Shavuos. My father was not very happy to see me home. He told me that a yeshiva boy should stay in the yeshiva on Shavuos and learn the entire night. I answered that I had had a free ride and thought the holiday would be a good time to come visit. Unlike my father, my sisters, to whom I was very close, greeted me warmly and were happy to see me.

The Gerrer Mesivta

The Gerrer Mesivta, like most *yeshivos* of that time, did not have a dormitory, and each student had to make his own sleeping arangements. I rented a place

My friend and I (l) walking in Warsaw.

Fellow students of the Mesivta.

with a couple named Steinberg, where I slept with two other boys. The apartment consisted of two long, narrow rooms. The first room, a kitchen, was where we slept. A gas stove stood at one end of the room. At the other end of the room was a window, and near it a table with chairs. Mr. Steinberg used to sit at the table and cut pieces of old leather left over from the shoemakers. He would then glue them together and shape them into the form of a heel for ladies' shoes. Then he would take those heels and sell them back to the shoemakers. Expensive women's shoes, in those days, had heels made out of leather instead of wood.

Mr. Steinberg also had another job. The Polish government wanted to promote the sale of sugar and had therefore banned saccharin. Black marketeers would bring bags of saccharin tablets to Mr. Steinberg, and he would count out a hundred tablets and fill little bottles. Mr. Steinberg's main livelihood, however, was as a barber. He would shave yeshiva boys whose beards had just started to grow with a fine hand clipper. (In those days, there were no electric shavers.) The "barbershop" took up one section of the other long narrow room, the other half was the Steinberg's bedroom.

Some yeshiva boys slept at night in stores. The store owners gained by having a watchman in the store, and the boys not only saved money on rent but were also paid a few *zlotys* a week for their services as watchmen. The only trouble was that the boys had to be locked in from the outside at night and were not able to go out again until the owner opened the store in the morning.

Some boys slept in stores that sold fur coats for ladies, some in bootery stores, others in clothing stores, and still others in wholesale grocery stores. One friend of mine slept in a wholesale cheese store which sold all kinds of hard cheeses imported from Holland and Switzerland. When he came to the yeshiva in the morning, he smelled like cheese, but the owner compensated him by giving him a few slices of Swiss cheese every morning. He shared his cheese with me, and I gave him my two pieces of hard sugar which the Mesivta rationed to its students at breakfast.

Besides being locked in at night, there were other difficulties connected to the night watchman's job. Some of the stores were not heated at night, and when the yeshiva *bochurim* awakened in the morning, they often found the water which they had put near their beds to wash their hands in the morning had frozen. My last year in Warsaw, I slept in a fancy haberdashery store, for which I was paid 15 *zlotys* a week. These *zlotys* proved very handy indeed. During the summer, when Shabbos began Friday evening at 9:00 p.m., I had to be there at 7:00 p.m. when the owner closed the store and locked me in. I could not attend Friday night services or participate in the Friday night meal at the yeshiva. Since there were others like me also, the yeshiva cook prepared for us packages of food consisting of two small *challos*, fish and chicken wrapped in paper. When Shabbos began, I davened by myself, made *kiddush* on the two small *challos*, and ate the meal by myself.

Though the Mesivta did not have a dormitory, it had

its own kitchen where we received a hot meal once a day. (In other *yeshivos*, boys had to eat out in someone's house.) For breakfast, each boy was given a quarter of a round one-kilo loaf of rye bread, two pieces of hard sugar, and hot water from the kitchen. We had to supply the few grains of tea. There were some boys who could afford more and would buy sour pickles, sardines, or half a smoked herring in a nearby grocery store. Some also received food packages from home which they would share with their friends.

While the Lithuanian *yeshivos* in the small towns had their own building or utilized the town's beis medrash, the Warsaw *yeshivos* simply rented one or two apartments on the same floor of a big apartment building. They combined them into one unit, with separate rooms for classes. In the Gerrer Mesivta, every student had a small school desk where he sat and kept his books, not like the Lithuanian *yeshivos* where each boy had his own *shtender* and chair. Some *yeshivos* had long tables and benches.

The Mesivta where I learned rented all the rooms of the second floor of the big apartment building on 18 Shvienta Yorska Street and converted it into a dining room.

The same thing was done by other *yeshivos*. Yeshivas Toras Chaim whose Rosh Yeshiva was Rabbi Herschel Glickson, the son-in-law of Reb Chaim Brisker, was on Gensha Street #45. The Lubavitch Yeshiva, Tomchei Tmimim, was on Mlawska Steet #7. There was also a large branch of the Novardhok Yeshiva Bais Yosef.

Mizrachi also had a yeshiva and rabbinical seminary called Tachkamoni and a girls' high school.

The method of learning in the Polish *yeshivos* was very different from that in the Lithuanian *yeshivos*. The latter concentrated on the quality of understanding. Students would dig deeply and stress analysis in order to understand each line and phrase, and used the commentaries of the *Rishonim* and the *Achronim* to fully comprehend the questions and answers of the Talmud.

In the Gerrer Mesivta where I learned, the emphasis was more on the quantity of learning and completing tractates from beginning to end. Students were encouraged to memorize the text of each page in order to become familiar with the hard Aramaic words in which the Talmud is written. Tests were given each week to assess that recall. Both ways of learning are important: it was a matter of tradition.

There were students in the Mesivta who memorized two or three hundred pages of Talmud during a school year. Rabbi Menachem Zemba, one of the greatest scholars of the day, who was martyred in the Warsaw Ghetto, was for a while the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mesivta, and our instructors included many of the great Talmudic scholars of Warsaw. Rabbi Mendel Hoffer was in charge of each student's attendance and progress. The late Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Yitzchak Yedidia Frankel was one of those students ordained as rabbi in my time in the Mesivta. He was subsequently appointed as *rav* in one of the small towns around Warsaw.

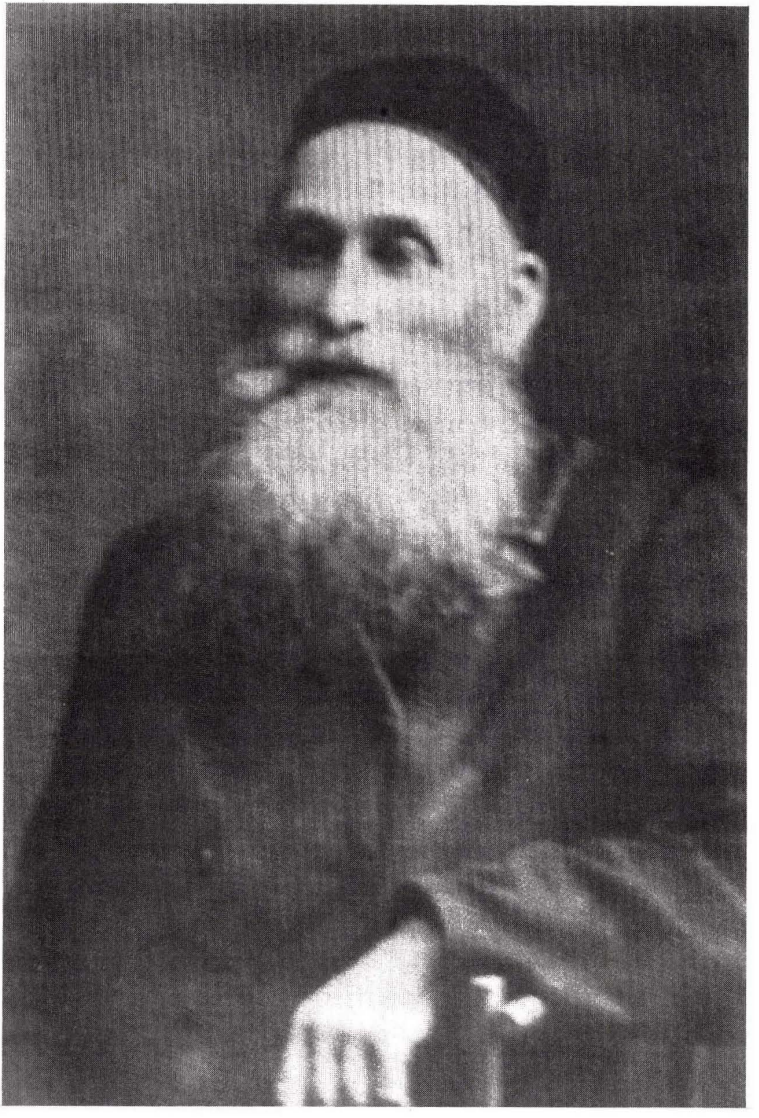
Nalevki, a major street running through the Jewish section in Warsaw.

Religious Life in Warsaw

Warsaw pulsed with all forms of religious life. Many Chassidic Rebbes and their followers lived in Warsaw. In the summertime, when the days were long, I used to go from one Shabbos *tisch* to another, hopping between the Amshinov, Kozenitz, Piasecno, Radizimin, and the Bratzlover *shtiebels*. In the Modhitz *shtiebel* on Nalevki Street, the chassidim used to sing the most beautiful melodies. When the *shtiebel* was filled and there was no more room inside, people used to stand outside on the street to listen to the moving Modhziter melodies.

Warsaw had many *shtiebelach* which were open all night. At Nalevki #19 there was a famous Gerrer *shtiebel* where I and other young chassidim would sit at the tables wearing our traditional garb: a long black coat and a short round black hat, with a small visor in front, called a *dashek*, and study the Talmud all night.

Thursday and Friday nights were especially crowded. By the time I got there, I could barely find a place at a table to sit and learn. On Shabbos morning before *davening*, the yeshiva boys were invited to private homes for tea. Several families kept their doors open for yeshiva boys to come in and help themselves to tea and sugar. On winter days, it was a nice treat.



My grandfather, Rav Simcha Grossbard.

Chapter 3

Shtetls, Hachsharah, Aliyah

My grandfather Rav Simcha Grossbard lived in the small town of Wyshkova, which was a 3-hour bus ride from Warsaw. I often visited my grandfather and other relatives who lived there, travelling either by bus or by train. Wyshkova was a typical Polish *shtetl* of a few hundred Jewish families — both religious and secular — business people, storekeepers, and craftsmen. It had a big synagogue and other houses of worship, with a Jewish school for small children. There were also various youth organizations, Zionist and others, as there were in every Jewish *shtetl* in Poland.

Near the end of the town was the River Bug over which there was a wooden bridge. In the evenings of hot summer, young people would walk on the bridge, enjoying the fresh air and the wonderful smell of pine trees from the nearby woods. The mild breeze of the forest and the freshness of the water relaxed a person.

People from Warsaw used to rent summer cottages in the deep forest filled with tall pines, in a resort area called Skisowa.

I used to walk from Wyshkova to Skisowa over the bridge. Sometimes my cousin Moshe Brzosa and I would rent a canoe and go canoeing on the river. The water of the River Bug was very clean, and we would watch fishermen trolling for fish in its waters. Elderly women used to bring down their laundry to wash on the banks of the river.

Warsaw itself was surrounded by many small towns with Jewish populations. One of these *shtetls* was Radzimin, from where my wife Esther Faiga came. Radzimin was not as big as Wyshkova. A mini-train called a *Koleika* ran from the Praga station in Warsaw to Radzimin.

Radzimin was famous, especially among religous people, for its Grand Rabbi, the Radziminer Rebbe. He was a great *tzaddik*, and people with all kinds of problems would come to him for his blessings and advice. Sick people begged him to pray for their health, poor people for their livelihood, and even business people sought his counsel.

Every town has its market day. The market day of Radzimin was on Wednesday. Every Wednesday, the farmers from the surrounding area would bring their produce, chickens, eggs, cheese, butter, and livestock to market. The townspeople would come out to the marketplace, bargain with the farmers, and buy whatever they needed until the following Wednesday.

The farmers, at the same time, bought all the merchandise they needed from the storekeepers. So every Wednesday, the storekeepers were busy selling their wares, while the rest of the week they were virtually idle. It was the same in almost every *shtetl.*

As a young girl, my wife could not find any employment in Radzimin, so she went to Warsaw to look for a job. She was hired by a woman named Ettel Frumit Morgenstern to help with her linen business. Mrs. Morgenstern sold almost everything on credit, and my wife's job was to collect the weekly or monthly payments which people owed.

Ettel Frumit Morgenstern was not only a business woman but also a kind person, who belonged to several charitable and social organizations. One of these was the Mizrachi Women's Organization. Through Mrs. Morgenstern, my wife got involved with the charitable activities of the Mizrachi Organization. She got to know the leaders of the organization — Warhaftig, Shapira, and Greenberg — who at that time were active with the Jewish Agency in sending young people to what was then Palestine.

My aunt Rochel Kupiec worked together with Ettel Morgenstern in a number of charitable organizations, and it was through them that I met my future wife.

Hachshara

With the British military occupation in Palestine, all immigration to Palestine, except for returning residents, was prohibited. The first of several Immigration

Ordinances to be enacted, dated August 26, 1920, defined basic requirements, such as standards of health, possession of passport, etc. The High Commissioner, the authority which regulated entry, defined several classifications of immigration.

1) Family members of residents.
2) Persons of independent means, commonly known as "capitalists."
3) Persons of religious occupation who were needed and would be financially supported.
4) Persons (laborers) who were guaranteed employment by the Zionist Organization.

Due to various political pressures and considerations, these ordinances were consequently redefined and made stricter. The famous White Paper of 1922 which limited immigration was, in reality, a political statement rather than a change in immigration policy.

The Palestine Zionist Organization was made responsible to survey the needs of the labor market every half a year. The report was then submitted to the Chief Immigration Officer for comment, who in turn submitted it to the High Commissioner. In the end, it was the High Commissioner who decided on the total number of labor certificates to be granted. The Palestine Zionist Executive, of which the Mizrachi was part, was responsible for distribution of these certificates. (A small amount of certificates were retained by the Chief Immigration Officer for specific needs of employers.)

Consequently, Zionist organizations established preparation centers, called *hachshara*, where

chalutzim learned about farming and agriculture, so that when they came to Palestine they would know how to develop the land. Young men who went through *hachshara* became "qualified" laborers and could receive certificates to enter Palestine from the British government, which then ruled Palestine under a League of Nations mandate.

The Mizrachi organization was represented in the Jewish Agency Executive and they too had many *hachshara* centers. The Agudas Yisrael, which was not part of the Zionist Executive, wasn't able to gain any certificates at first. The "official" argument used by the Zionist Executive to deny certificates to Aguda was that their constituents, yeshiva students, had no experience in labor and therefore could not be classified as laborersfor immigration purposes. Eventually, and not without much effort, they were granted a mere 4% of the certificates issued by the Zionist Executive.

Pinchas Mondry, a staunch Gerrer *chassid*, began to push for Aguda to set up its own *hachshara* centers. He was a rich man who owned a hardware store in the market section of Mlawa. While his wife attended to the business, he pursued his organizational work, which took him throughout Poland. He and Fishel Shpitalwitz, the editor of the weekly Jewish paper in Mlawa,"*Unzer Tribuna*," published regular articles about the necessity of organizing *hachshara* programs. As a result, an Aguda *hachshara* center was opened at the farm of a Jew Chorzel, a *shtetl* not far from Mlawa. About fifteen boys went for five months in the summer to learn how to plow,

I'm standing behind Itche Skurka, sitting center. A Hachshara boy, prior to his immigration to Palestine, 1934.

sow, harvest, and milk cows. Among the group were two from Mlawa — Itche Skurka (now in Bnei Brak) and Yankel Gevarter. The rest of the boys came from other *shtetls* around Mlawa.

I visited the farm several times. Once I went with Pinchas Mondry in a hired horse and buggy to greet Rabbis Itche Meir Levin and Alexander Zisha Friedman, the leaders of Agudas Yisrael in Poland, who were coming from Warsaw to visit the center. Reb Itche Meir Levin was the son-in-law of the Gerrer Rebbe and the leader of Aguda's delegation in the first Israeli Knesset. Rabbi Friedman is today best remembered as the author of *Wellsprings of Torah*.

Girls from the Bais Yaakov school had a *hachshara* program in Mlawa itself, where they did all kinds of housework. The idea of Aguda having *hachshara* centers met with much opposition and scorn. The non-religious mocked the idea of chassidic boys doing physical labor, while many Aguda people were uncomfortable with the idea of doing what they considered degrading work on the chance that more certificates could be gained. The internal opposition ceased when it was learned that the Gerrer Rebbe backed Pinchas Mondry in his efforts. The mockery of the non-religious became subdued when the Zionist Executive was forced to raise by 50% the percentage of certificates granted to Aguda.

Zysman Citrenbaum (now in Bnai Brak) told me that he and a group of *hachshara* boys once came to Gur for a Shabbos. The Gerrer Rebbe welcomed them in a

very friendly manner and gave them his blessings. They were honored by being allowed to stand in the first row facing the Rebbe and were invited for *kiddush* to the house of Reb Moshe Bezalel, the Rebbe's brother, who was known for his piety. Many more religious Jews could have been saved if the *hachshara* program had started years earlier. Pinchas Mondry himself gave up his thriving business and, together with his whole family, emigrated to Palestine on a capitalist visa in 1935. His youngest son Yeshaya learned there in Yeshivas S'fas Emes, and later became a rabbi in Bnei Brak.

Our Last Days in Poland

Esther and I were married in Warsaw on October 30, 1934. We had decided prior to our marriage to emigrate to Palestine, and were very fortunate to obtain the necessary immigration certificates through my wife's Mizrachi connections. At that time, Mizrachi had a few certificates for yeshiva students who wanted to study in Jerusalem in Mercaz HaRav and we obtained one of these through Israel Shapiro, one of the leaders of Mizrachi, whom my wife knew from her organizational work with Ettel Morgenstern.

With Hitler's rise to power in Germany, Polish anti-Semitism became increasingly overt and oppressive. Only a fraction of those seeking to go to Palestine were permitted to do so by the British, and quota systems on immigrants in other countries, most notably the United States, closed off most other avenues of escape. Anyone able to leave Poland was indeed lucky.

The greatest fear of every 18 year old Jewish boy was to be drafted into the Polish army. Serving in the Polish army for two years, especially the first six months of basic training, was pure torture. Every Polish officer was a confirmed anti-Semite. For the observant and Yeshiva boys, the dread was even greater, for they were forced to eat non-kosher food and profane the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

Jewish boys tried sorts of tricks to escape induction. The most common trick was to lose weight, as the army had a minimum weight requirement. Other exemptions included broken bones which didn't heal properly. Even a crooked finger was enough to fail the test. Poor vision also served as an exemption.

About two months before the annual mid-summer call-up before a commission of army and municipal physicians, the religious boys would gather in the study houses. They would recite the entire 150 chapters of *Psalms*. For the next two months they would take long walks, staying awake all night, night after night without food or drink, in the hope that they would loose enough weight. Some even took laxatives to aid in their "diets." Chassidic boys visited their Rebbes with *kvitelach* asking the Rebbes to pray that they would not be inducted.

Had it not been for a childhood accident, I would probably have been drafted into the Polish army. When I was eight or nine years old, I was playing leapfrog with my friends. A few boys would line up, bending down on their knees with their head down. The last one in line had to jump over the ones in front of him by leaning both

of his hands on the back of the boy in front of him. When it came my turn to jump, the boy in front of me played a trick by dropping to the floor. As a result, when I tried to jump over him, I fell to the ground breaking my left arm below the elbow. Though I felt terrible pain, I never said anything at home. Rather than go to the doctor, I kept my hand straight at my side for a few weeks, suffering excruciating pain. Eventually the arm healed itself.

Years later, when I was summoned for an examination to see if I was fit to serve in the Polish army, the doctor noticed my arm and sent me to Warsaw to an army hospital. The X-ray of my arm showed that it had once been broken and that it had not healed properly. Thus I was exempt from the army. The pain that I suffered from that boyish prank saved me from being drafted into the Polish army and cleared the way for me to obtain an exit visa.

Before leaving Poland, I travelled to Wyshkova to say goodbye to my grandfather. The week of our wedding, I went to the Gerrer Rebbe to receive his blessing on our marriage and for our journey to *Eretz Yisrael*. I was very nervous about this. Though the Rebbe was generally supportive of those going to *Eretz Yisrael*, there had been cases in which he asked those seeking his blessing, "What will you do there?" This was understood as an indication that that person should not go to *Eretz Yisrael*. I wondered how I would react if, after all the months of planning and all the arrangements we had made, the Rebbe were to indicate his displeasure with our plan.

I entered the Rebbe's study filled with apprehension.

I walked over to the Rebbe, who was standing next to a table laden with *seforim*. After saying that I had just gotten married and was about to immigrate, I heard the words I had so longed for, *"Zol zein mit mazel un fur gezunterheit"* — "It your marriage should be with *mazel* and your journey a successful one." I backed out of the Rebbe's study spiritually elated. The Rebbe's words are always before me and have accompanied me throughout my subsequent journey through life.

A week after our wedding, my wife and I were among the few hundred people gathered at the Vienna train station to board the train to Constanta, Romania, on the Black Sea. From there we would board a ship for Palestine. My father and my sisters and my wife's mother and her brother were at the station to see us off. While we were happy to leave Poland, our parents were crying, sensing that they would never see us again. We were too young and innocent to understand their emotions. Also seeing us off were several of our friends, including Ettel Morgenstern, whose good offices had made our trip possible.

SECTION II

Chapter 4

Journey to Palestine

During the train ride my thoughts were so occupied with Mlawa and the past we were leaving behind, that I did not notice the train had slipped into Constanta, the port city on the Black Sea. The train stopped near the water. When we got off, I was amazed at the sight of the ship, the Polonia. It was four or five stories high, with small round windows painted white and red. I never imagined that a ship could be so huge. All my dreams of steamships were nothing compared to what I saw before me.

After we got off the train, we boarded the boat. A tall ladder was lowered down, and all the passengers climbed up. The baggage was lifted with a crane.

It was dark when we finished the embarkation process. Standing on the deck of the ship, in the dark night, with my wife at my side, I turned to her and said, "Surely, we are now on our way to the land of Israel."

Four people were assigned to a cabin, with men and women separate. Since the dining room was not big enough to serve all the passengers at once, meals were served in two shifts.

We went to sleep in our cabins while the ship was still docked. When we awoke the next morning, we found ouselves in the middle of the sea. We could only see sky and water. On the third day, a storm developed and high waves made the ship roll back and forth. Many passengers became seasick and stayed in their cabins. After a short time, the storm calmed down and people emerged from their cabins, went up to the deck, and began talking to each other, breathing in the salty sea air.

As we were moving southward, the air became milder and the sun warmed us, even though it was mid-November. We passed through the Bosporus to the Marmara Sea, and through the Dardanelles to the Aegean Sea, finally reaching the Mediterranean. The beautiful scenery is indelibly etched in my mind even today, almost sixty years later. We also saw beautiful buildings on the mountains on both sides of the waterway.

At one point the ship stopped for a few hours not far from Istanbul. Some peddlers in a little boat threw ropes up to the passengers on the Polonia tied to baskets of oranges to be sold for Polish money. Oranges in Poland were a delicacy affordable only by rich people. Seeing the oranges gave us the feeling that we were getting closer to *Eretz Yisrael* where oranges are plentiful.

It was not long until we finally reached Eretz Yisrael.

From a distance, we could see the houses of Tel Aviv, and everyone started to look in that direction. The boat anchored in Jaffa, the ancient city from which the Prophet Jonah tried to run away from G-d. All the entrance papers were processed on the ship and we prepared to disembark. Since Jaffa is not a deep sea port, the disembarkation was accomplished by climbing down into little landing crafts which had lined up next to the ship. Two Arab workers from the boat grabbed each passenger as he came down the ladder, picked him up, and put him down into the little craft. Twenty people fit into each boat. The small seacraft swung up and down in the wavy water. When a boat was full, it motored away to the dock.

This was the first time I had seen Arabs. They wore wide white pants whose ends were tied around their ankles, and talked and yelled to each other in Arabic. It took only a few minutes and we were at the dock. Again the Arabs picked us up to put us on the dock. With all the noise and excitement, I momentarily forgot that we had just stepped on the Holy Land. We lay down and kissed the earth.

The Jewish Agency arranged lodging in the so-called Absorption Centers for each new immigrant. In addition, everyone received two pounds sterling (about ten dollars) for spending money. As a yeshiva man, I had not contacted the Jewish Agency and therefore did not receive the two pounds sterling. Neither did my wife. Instead, we hired a horse and buggy and went to our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Goldstein, whom we knew from

Warsaw. They lived in the heart of Tel Aviv, on Rechov Shenkin, in a two-bedroom apartment.

Mr. Goldstein had come as a capitalist and tried to establish a business of selling neckties. However, due to the warm climate, people seldom wore neckties or even jackets. Standard attire was short-sleeved shirts and pants. So he was struggling to make a living.

Hebrew was no problem for me. I knew Hebrew from my studies in *cheder* and later the yeshiva. I only had to change from the Ashkenazic pronunciation to the Sephardic, which I learned in the first two days. My wife wondered how I was able to learn the language so quickly.

Chapter 5

Bnei Brak

I had letters of recommendation from Israel Shapiro of Warsaw to Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, Chief Rabbi of Palestine, and to Rabbi Yitzchak Gershtenkorn, the Mayor of Bnei Brak. We went to Rabbi Kook first. After reading the letter, he suggested that I should stay and learn in the Kollel of his yeshiva, Merkaz HaRav. Then we went to Bnei Brak to see Rabbi Gershtenkorn, who urged us to stay in Bnei Brak and help build the city. That is what we decided to do.

In 1923-24, Rabbi Yitzchak Gershtenkorn organized a group consisting mostly of Gerrer *chassidim* from Warsaw, and founded *Bayis Venachala* for the purpose of buying land in *Eretz Yisrael* and settling there. The organization wanted to be independent of the Zionist organization and develop a city for strictly observant Jews. They bought 1,100 dunams of land between Tel

Aviv and Petach Tikvah, not far from Ramat Gan, from a rich Arab. The new settlement was called Bnei Brak, after the ancient city where Rabi Akiva lived and had his yeshiva.

Among the first settlers there were the Meir brothers, Reb Zvi and Reb Shmuel, and Reb Yosef Lieberman. They had been owners of a large textile factory in the town of Zelov near Lodz, the textile center of Poland. With the blessing of the Gerrer Rebbe, they sold their factory, which employed several hundred employees, and emigrated to Palestine with the idea of building a textile factory in Bnei Brak. Their youngest child, Yitzchak was raised in Bnei Brak. (He recently wrote *Al Chomosaich Bnei Brak* describing the first ten years of Bnei Brak. Just reading about their journey from Poland to Palestine makes me feel like our journey ten years later was a pleasure cruise.)

Rav Yitzchak Gershtenkorn was not only the organizer of *Bayis Venachala* in Warsaw, he was also the first settler and mayor of Bnei Brak. When we arrived to Bnei Brak, it was like the Garden of Eden compared to the early years. No wonder Rav Gershtenkorn advised us to make our future life in Bnei Brak.

During the first ten years, many of the initial hardships were overcome: paving the main street, Rabi Akiva Street; constructing the first few wooden shacks for dwellings; building the first shulin which to pray and study, the first *mikvah*, and the first school for the children. All this was done by religious Jews from Warsaw without any financial help from the Zionist Organization, under

conditions which they had never experienced before: boiling hot sun during the day; fierce, cold winds at night; snakes, scorpions, and the howling of wild jackals. When we came to Bnei Brak at the end of November 1934, there were already 2,000 Jews living there, including the Chazon Ish, who had come to *Eretz Yisrael* in July, 1933. My wife became acquainted with his mother.

After spending our first days in Tel Aviv, we moved to Bnei Brak. There were sizeable brick houses and stores on both sides of Rabi Akiva Street, though it was still only half paved. The few side streets were not paved at all. It was the end of November, but people were still wearing light summer clothes. Religious workers were busy making bricks and blocks for the buildings, mixing cement, sand, and tiny stones with water. After work they would assemble in the prayer houses and study the Talmud.

We rented a room on Rabi Akiva Street. We bought two day-beds and were given two chairs by our friends in Tel Aviv. We used our two big suitcases for a table. We bought a few aluminum pots and pans, and we used an oil burner for cooking which we placed on two cement blocks. These were just about our only possessions.

My wife and I were happy and content. The realization that we were in our own land, in *Eretz Yisrael*, filled us with joy, especially when we had a sink with running water in our room and a bathroom just down the hall. In Mlawa, as in other small towns in Poland, we would go outside to the pump, or even a few blocks to the well, to fetch water for the house.

Bnei Brak was surrounded by orange groves, and we arrived just as the oranges were ripening for harvest. We were hired to work on the plantations of Pardes Berman. The women picked the oranges from the trees, while the men dragged the crates to the packing house. Because of the large percentage of unemployed, the labor union which supplied workers to the orange groves refused to give work to more than one person in a family. Initially, my wife said that she was my sister so that we could both work, but they soon found out the truth and she was fired.

Besides picking oranges, which was comparatively easy work but available only during the harvest season, there was other work to be done. When there was no rain and the earth was dry and hard, we had to irrigate the trees by making a pit of about three or four feet wide around the tree and then filling the pit with water. Making the pit was the hardest part. To create the pit we used a shovel with a short handle, with the shovel part bent, to scrape the earth beneath the tree. In order to avoid hitting our heads on the low branches of the tree, we had to do the work while bending down doubled over. After working in this position for eight hours, we could not stand up straight for a whole week. This was done every two or three weeks. When the citrus trees started to blossom around March or April, the air was full of the fine scent from the blossoms.

On Shabbos afternoons we enjoyed taking a walk on the Petach Tikvah Road to Tel Aviv which was only about six kilometers from Bnei Brak. There we

visited friends from Mlawa — the Wishinskis, Frenkels, Mondrys, Reingewirtzes, and Nachtshterens — who had also come about the same time we did.

On these walks, my wife and I passed through the German colony, Saronah. This was an old colony settled by German gentiles before Tel Aviv was built. The Petach Tikvah road bordered Saronah on one side and the Montefiore neighborhood on the other. Once we met a group of young Germans who were visiting Tel Aviv. They were dressed in leather jackets and wore knee-high leather boots, with fitted pants which widened towards the top. They arrogant and looked at us with hatred in their eyes. I would not be surprised if one of them was Eichmann.

The orange-picking season did not last long and soon we were unemployed. Poalei Agudas Yisrael, the organization to which I belonged, arranged work for me in the building trade. At that time building was primitive, and everything was done by hand — from the mixing of the cement to the roofing of the houses. Carrying the bricks or buckets of mortar on your shoulders up to the second or third floor was a job which anyone could do, if he had the strength. Most Jews who came into the land at that time were young, single, or just recently married. As one of them, I became a simple laborer.

This work required special work-clothes, heavy shoes and overalls, which would not tear and get ruined from the cement mixing and the brick carrying. On Rabi Akiva Street, David Freund had a store which sold these clothes on credit. He knew that if someone bought such clothes

he probably had work and would soon get paid, so I was able to buy the clothes on credit.

The hardest work for me was preparing the mortar for the bricklayers by mixing limestone with fine sand, cement, and water in a low box. We used a long-handled rake to move the material in the wooden box from one end to the other several times until it became a sticky, liquid mass, which we then put in buckets and carried to the bricklayers.

They used a device made from a narrow board to carry the bricks to the second or third floor. Twenty to thirty bricks were piled onto the specially constructed boards. The laborer carrying this load had to bend so that the load of bricks leaned against his back. If he straightened up, the bricks would all spill off. In this position and carrying the heavy weight of the bricks, he had to walk up the ramp to the upper floors. Carrying a stack of bricks weighing fifty kilos (110 lbs) on your back was not a picnic either.

When it came time to pour concrete for a foundation or a roof, the non-skilled labor was mobilized. The concrete was made by mixing cement, sand, and gravel with water — either by hand or using a manual mixing machine. The concrete was then poured into buckets and passed from one man to another until it reached the foundation or the roof. There it was emptied out into the wooden bases which had been prepared by the carpenters to hold the concrete. The empty buckets were then passed back to the mixing machine. This went on for a full day until the roof was completed. After the roof

Building Bnei Brak, 1934. Mixing cement on Rabbi Akiva Street.

My wife (t.l.)
with other workers of
Neshei Agudas Yisrael
at Marbek.

was poured, the contractor would treat the workers to wine and make a *l'haim*. Afterwards, the workers went home to wash their hands in oil, to heal them from the burning cement.

I am proud that I helped to build roads and buildings in Bnei Brak.

Later on I learned how to put tiles on the floor and walls of bathrooms and eventually became a specialist in this field. My wife, meanwhile, got a job in Tel-Litwinski, a section not far from Bnei Brak, with a poultry company called Marbek. She and a few other women went by bus in the morning and came back in the evening.

Soon we were able to move to a room on Rabi Tarfon Street. This room also had a kitchen. To move was no problem. We simply hired a two-wheeled wagon drawn by a donkey, put our household goods on it, and moved them over to our new place in no time at all.

Chapter 6

Our First Year in Israel

Bnei Brak was a completely religious town, totally Shabbos-observant. On Friday, workers worked only half a day and stores closed at noon. The women busied themselves cooking and preparing for the Shabbos, and the men rushed home with *challos*, wine, and flowers. Just before sunset, candles were lit. Men went to the prayer houses, while women came out to sit and talk with their neighbors, and to wait for their husbands to come home from the prayer houses. After the Friday night meal, the men assembled on the main street and sang and danced until midnight. During the entire Shabbos, no automobiles were allowed into Bnei Brak. Different people took shifts standing guard at the entrance to Bnei Brak from the Petach Tikvah Road to prevent cars from entering, so that the holy Shabbos would not be descrated. I also did guard duty.

Our first Pesach in Bnei Brak was also our first as

husband and wife. Having our first Seder in Bnei Brak on Rabi Tarfon Street made me feel that the Sages of the Hagaddah were sitting at our table, telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt. In reality, we were very lonely and tired.

My wife had worked hard all week, and especially the day before Pesach, cooking and preparing everything for the seven-day holiday. For the first Seder night of our married life, she made a special effort to prepare as good a meal as the circumstances allowed and to cook a chicken soup that would be remembered. Given the prevailing conditions in Bnei Brak, that was no easy matter.

First we had to buy a live chicken, and then take it to the *shochet*. Afterwards we had to pluck the feathers by hand. After plucking the feathers, there still remained the pinfeathers which cannot be removed by hand. I made a small fire outside from papers, and the flames of the fire burned off the pinfeathers, leaving a smooth and clean chicken. My wife opened the chicken and took out the insides. The liver was put aside to be broiled separately. She cut the chicken and kashered it by soaking it in water for half an hour and then covering it with salt for an hour. Now it was ready to be cooked.

Some Jews have the tradition of eating matzah balls in their chicken soup at the Seder, but *chassidim*, don't eat matzah balls the whole week of Pesach. That custom is called not eating *gebrokts*. Since my wife had to prepare something else for the soup, she made noodles. How do you make noodles without flour? She mixed eggs and

potato starch, fried them in a skillet, rolled them up, and cut them into thin slices. It looked almost like noodles but tasted much better! That was the best chicken soup with noodles I ever ate.

I had also worked hard the week before Pesach. The labor was physically exhausting. After the first two cups of wine, we both fell asleep at the table. This was our first Seder.

A year later, our situation had so improved that we could invite a couple of our friends to participate in our Seder. By then, we had moved down the street to a room on the second floor of a new building. It had a big porch where my wife could hang up the clothes which she washed by hand. A porch was a prized possession in those days. It could be utilized for many different things — a kitchen, a laundry room, or just for sitting. On Succos, the Succah was made there by simply hanging three sheets and putting palm tree branches on top. Having a Succah in Bnei Brak was like breathing fresh air. We were not afraid that gentile boys would throw stones or pour water on top of the Succah as had happened in Poland.

In those days there were no gas or electric stoves — at least not in Bnei Brak. We used a paraffin burner instead. The heat came from thick wicks whose ends were soaked in a bowl of paraffin. On the top was a grid on which to put the pots and pans. There was a small handle to adjust the flame. It was a slow way to cook, but it was economical. We also had a Primus burner which produced a hotter flame but was more expensive to use.

In addition my wife had a "wonder pan," A tube pan with a cover which was placed on top of the burner and, to the "wonder" of everybody, it baked "wonderfully." In it she baked delicious sponge cakes, and even *challos* for Shabbos. She would put *challah* dough braided into two *challos* and leave them on the burner for a couple of hours. When she took them out of the pan, she had two semicircular, beautiful braided challos. They looked funny but they were delicious.

The Building of Zichron Meir

At that time, construction of Zichron Meir was begun. Zichron Meir was a separate section for observant Jews, built in memory of Rav Meir Shapiro, the founder of the *Daf Hayomi*. A fence encircled the entire area so that no car would be able to drive in on Shabbos. Even though Bnei Brak had originally been built for religious people and by observant Jews, there was no way to prevent non-religious Jews from moving in. Zichron Meir was founded by Rav Chaim Yaakov Halperin from Vienna, who bought land on the hill adjacent to Bnei Brak and designated it for yeshivos and religious institutions. It was there that Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, the Ponevezher Rav, later built the Ponevezh Yeshiva, the first big yeshiva in Palestine.

At the entrance to Zichron Meir, Rav Yaakov Halperin put up a big gate with a sign above it which read, "In memory of Rabbi Meir Shapiro." When we stood guard on Shabbos at the entrance to Bnei Brak from the Petach Tikvah road, we often had trouble with the British Police,

who said that it was illegal to block traffic. Zichron Meir did not have that problem because it was considered private property.

Rav Yaakov Halperin was not only a prominent industrialist but also a *talmid chacham* who helped his friend Rav Meir Shapiro spread the idea of the *Daf Hayomi*. He organized a group to study *Daf Hayomi* in the synagogue of Shomrei Hadas in Vienna, and he himself participated in the *Daf Hayomi* every day.

Only *shomer Shabbos* workers were hired for building Zichron Meir. Even the materials which went in the buildings, such as the bricks and the cement, were made in *shomer Shabbos* factories.

The entrance to Zichron Meir from Bnei Brak on Rabi Akiva Street was built by Solel Boneh the Histadrut Labor Federation's construction company. Huge cement mixers mixed cement, crushed stones, fine sand and water, and then poured the concrete into wheelbarrows. I was one of those who wheeled the barrows full of cement to the designated places, poured out the cement, and then wheeled it back to the mixing machine. After eight hours, I would come home tired and dirty, but at least I knew that I was helping to build Bnei Brak.

Chapter 7

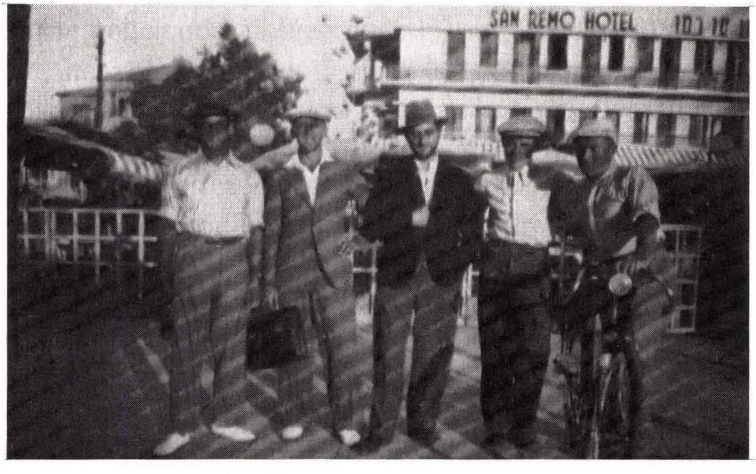
Tel Aviv

Bnei Brak was not only the beginning of our married life, it was also the beginning of our future. We planned to bring over our parents but to our sorrow that plan never materialized. I was corresponding with our parents in Mlawa. They wrote to us of the anti-Semitic outbreaks in Poland and of the organized boycotts of Jewish stores. There were also organized campaigns not to hire Jews.

We were frustrated by the realization that there was nothing we could do to help them. There were a few Jews who had the means and the farsight to sell their businesses and emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*, especially the Gerrer *Chassidim*, who were encouraged by their Rebbe.

Most of my friends from Mlawa and my wife's friends from Warsaw, like the Warhaftigs, Shapiros and Rosenbergs, lived in Tel Aviv. We used to visit them often. Eventually they persuaded us to move to Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv, 1935. Friends from Zeirei Agudas Yisrael of Mlawa.
L. to R.
Gershon Reingewirtz, Itche Skurka, Me, Noson Frankel, Yisroel Reingewirtz.



Pinchas Mondry with a group of Zeirei members in Tel Aviv, 1935.
I'm standing to his right.

It was not easy for us to leave Bnei Brak, but, after living in Bnei Brak for about a year and a half, we moved to Tel Aviv at the end of 1935. Tel Aviv was an offspring of the old biblical port of Jaffa, and its population at the time was almost 100,000 Jews. It was a city of scaffolds, — wherever you walked, you would see scaffolds for the erection of new buildings.

In Bnei Brak we moved three times; in Tel Aviv five times. Our first place was on Rechov Chovevei Zion. We rented a room from an elderly American couple who had no children. It was only a few blocks from the sea. When I wanted to go bathing after work or to immerse myself in the Mediterranean Sea on Friday afternoon for the holy Shabbos, I paid only a half of a *piaster* to enter the area designated for men.

On the other side of the street was the Tel Aviv cemetery. When Tel Aviv was founded in 1909, the city planners set aside a piece of land outside the city for a cemetery. But Tel Aviv grew so rapidly that by the time we came in 1934, the cemetery was in the center of the city.

With the sea in front of us, we did not mind the cemetery in back of us. The sea represented the future of Tel Aviv and the land of Israel. It was the gateway for our people to come back after thousands of years of exile.

When I was a young child in Mlawa, I had always dreamed of the sea, and here I was looking into the distance at the beautiful, blue-green waters touching the blue sky. When walking on the streets of Tel Aviv with

my back to the sea, I would always turn around to look at the sea; it relaxed me. At night, when everything around was quiet, the noise of the waves hitting the shores was like music to my ears.

The construction of new apartment buildings in Tel Aviv went ahead full steam. Only Jewish workers were hired. I was one of them. My wife also worked hard, until she found a job as a waitress in a restaurant on Shenkin Street. Every evening I used to wait for her on Rothschild Boulevard, and after walking home together, we shared the dinner she had brought from the restaurant.

Our friends and neighbors from Mlawa were among the thousands from Poland and other countries who had a part in building this beautiful city. Many of my friends became specialists in the building trade. They became bricklayers and plasterers; they poured concrete, and did carpentry, plumbing, or electrical work. Some even became contractors themselves, and they hired observant Jews to work for them. I was hired by a contractor named Warshanski to do tile work. I was paid thirty-five *piaster* a day, which was considered a fair wage in those days if you worked every day.

Even when we were tired from a hard day of work, we still liked to take a walk in the evening on beautiful Rothschild Boulevard, Allenby Street, or Ben Yehudah Boulevard. The streets were lined on both sides with trees for shade. The city was young, the streets new. Every day new stores opened, displaying their merchandise. And window shopping was a pleasure which needed no money!

After Hitler came to power, the German Jews realized that there was no future for them in Germany, so many of them came to *Eretz Yisrael.* They came with their belongings packed in big wooden containers. They rented or bought apartments and moved in. The empty containers were then bought by poor people and put up on barren lots for their living quarters. Among the German Jews were many professionals — doctors, lawyers, engineers, and scientists. They also brought with them modern appliances, like refrigerators and stove burners which worked on bottled gas. Most At that time people had only iceboxes. A delivery man brought a piece of ice every day or every other day, to places which displayed the word ice on the window.

We could not afford even that luxury. We simply bought a piece of ice on Friday afternoon, put it into a bowl, covered it with a clean rag, and put the piece of fish or meat on it. It was not the best way to live, especially in the hot summer days, but our friends did not live any better. We just thought of Poland where our parents were being discriminated against and sometimes beaten by the Poles. We were much, much better off.

Chapter 8

Succos

When the holy days of Succos came, we were living on beautiful Allenby Street, on the third floor of building #83. Since we had no porch, we made our Succah on the flat roof of the building, as did many others. We invited friends to join us for a meal.

Succos is the best time of the year to tour the country; it is not too hot nor too cold, coming just before the rainy season begins. Many people go to Jerusalem to visit the holy places during Succos, and we decided to join them. We took the train which ran from Jaffa to Jerusalem and stopped in Tel Aviv. The train had a steam locomotive and four or five wagons for passengers — mostly Arabs from Jaffa.

It was the first time I had seen Arab women. They were dressed in black dresses down to the floor, their faces were covered up except for their eyes, and some had rings in their noses and a kind of ornament as their

earrings. The men were dressed in white robes and wore either a *kafiyaha* or *fez*on their heads.

We took a seat near a window where we could see the countryside. During the first half of the ride to Jerusalem, the train passed through bare flat land, with no trees or houses. Occasionally we saw orange groves with green leaves on the trees. They gave the impression of being an oasis in the desert. Coming closer to Jerusalem, the train slowed down considerably as it climbed up between the mountains. For a while it looked like the train did not have the strength to reach the top, but finally we pulled into the Jerusalem train station.

We went to our friends, the Amsterdam family. They were our next-door neighbors in Mlawa and had left two years before we did. They lived outside the Old City in Meah Shearim. In Mlawa we had been very close, like one family, and they were very happy to see us.

Water was very scarce at that time of year in Jerusalem because the only source of water was rain water which accumulated during the rainy season and was stored in cisterns beneath the ground. There were public water reservoirs where people lined up to get water in metal containers. Some people had private reservoirs beneath their houses to accumulate their own rain water. If it happened to be a year with little rain, even they had to buy water from the Arabs who brought water from outside Jerusalem on donkeys, or from Arab women carrying metal containers of water on their heads. We learned that water is precious never to be wasted. The same water which was used to wash the face and hands

was then used to wash clothes, and yet again to wash the floor and courtyards.

Every Jew longs to see the Western Wall, the last remnant of the Holy Temple, but in those days it was not easy to get there. You had to walk through the Arab market in the Old City to reach the Western Wall. We got up before sunrise and walked to Jaffa Gate. After going through the gate, we came into a dark narrow street. On both sides were Arab shops which were still closed because of the early hour. The floor was paved with big stones and every couple of feet there was a step down. Finally we came to an opening where we turned right and then left. There was a tall British policeman, half asleep, standing guard. He looked at us and we looked at him, but he did not say anything.

In front of us was the familiar sight which we had seen on pictures and paintings — the Wailing Wall. I ran over to the Wall and kissed the stones and cried. My wife went to the other end of the Wall and did the same. I took out my pocket prayer book and said some *Psalms*. I prayed for myself, for my father, my wife's mother, and for all the family. I wrote the names of my friends in Mlawa on a piece of paper and put it in one of the cracks in the stones of the Wall. They had asked me to do so when I said goodbye to them before we departed from Poland.

There were a few other men dressed in long black robes and wide-brimmed black hats standing motionless at the Wall and praying. The British policeman watched carefully to ensure that no chair or anything else to sit

on was brought into the area in front of the Wall. There was not much space in front of the Wall; all around were old Arab houses.

We spent about an hour there and then went back towards Jaffa Gate through the same narrow Arab market. By this time, however, the Arabs had begun opening their shops and laying out their merchandise — fruit, vegetables, bread, rolls — in front of their shops. This made the street even narrower.

Suddenly, we faced an Arab with his donkey loaded on both sides with baskets of bread and other merchandise, blocking our way. We could not go through. The Arab tried to pull the donkey to the side but the donkey would not move. The Arab shouted, *"Yallah, yallah,"* but to no effect. Maybe a donkey has long ears, but it does not hear very well. Even when the Arab hit her, the donkey did not budge. Finally, we managed to get through. I was thinking that maybe the donkey was hinting to us that we should stay put because even this Arab street properly belongs to us. Who knows what a donkey thinks?

The next day we arranged to go on a tour of Bethlehem and Hebron. The bus driver was also the guide. The trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem did not take long. It was a straight road without too many curves. On both sides of the road were huge rocks and everywhere we looked were olive trees.

Bethlehem is on top of a mountain. At the bottom of the mountain on the side of the road is Rachel's Tomb. The bus stopped at a small stone building with a domed top. We went in through an arched opening.

Succos in Jerusalem, 1934.

At Rachel's Tomb.

There was a small room with two small windows and a bench covered with a carpet alongside the wall. The other wall had a small opening into the next room and we had to stoop to enter. In the middle of the second room was a huge rectangular stone about eight feet high and eight feet long, covered with a plush rug. On the rug was written, in Hebrew, "And Jacob put a monument on her burial place; this is the monument of Rachel's burial place up to this day" (*Exodus* 35:20). My heart skipped a beat seeing this. Everything I had learned in my childhood about Jacob and Rachel came to mind. Here, too, my wife and I said some *Psalms* and prayers and we left with tears in our eyes.

We all climbed back into the bus and continued our trip to Hebron. The road from Bethlehem to Hebron was full of curves, winding between the mountains. The driver explained to us different points of historical interest.

The Tomb of the Patriarchs in the ancient city of Hebron, which Abraham bought from Ephron for four hundred pieces of silver, is not just a double cave as is written in the Bible, but a tall, long stone building with one dome at the end of each side of the building. In order to go down to the caves, you must first go up about twenty steps and enter the tall building. However at that time the Arabs did not let anyone go higher than seven steps. An Arab standing on the seventh step made sure we did not go farther. We went away disappointed and angry.

The guide took us to a side street where there was a ruined synagogue called Abraham's Synagogue. On the

walls we could still see blood marks of the Arab pogrom of 1929. Among those killed were 39 yeshiva students, whose graves we visited at the cemetery. We left Hebron with great sadness and eyes red from tears.

The following day we took a tour to the Dead Sea which is 1,200 feet below sea level, the lowest place in the world. The bus was running downhill, on rough roads and between bare mountains. Here and there we saw a black Bedouin tent and a shepherd with black sheep searching for grass in the desert. The nearest stop at the Dead Sea is Kalya, where there was a pumping station to pump out the potash and other minerals from the Dead Sea.

Nearby was a wooden house with changing rooms and showers. I went into the water. I felt as if I was in a thick lotion of oil and salt. When I came out and dried off in the sun, I found myself covered with white salt. In the shower, the salt came off easily. Nevertheless, I felt the salt on my body for several days afterwards.

The ride back to Jerusalem went much slower because we were going uphill. On the way back, we visited the ancient cemetery on the lower part of Mount of Olives, some of whose monuments were over two thousand years old.

Before returning to Tel Aviv, we made another visit to the Western Wall. The same policeman was standing at the entrance. Perhaps he wondered why we came back again since we had been there already. But who could explain to him our feelings for the Wall?

At that time (1935), the Gerrer Rebbe was in

Jerusalem on his fifth visit and staying at Yeshivas Sfas Emes. I went in to say, *"Shalom,"* and to show my appreciation for the blessing he had given me before we left Poland.

As I wrote earlier, the Gerrer Rebbe encouraged his followers to go to Palestine and settle there. He himself invested money in Jaffa real estate. Many of his rich *chassidim* from Warsaw and Lodz emigrated to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem with their families. While many succeeded in business and industry, others lost their money and had to work as non-skilled laborers. But at least their lives were saved from Hitler.

Chapter 9

1936 Disturbances

Our first son, Moshe, was born in Hadassah Hospital in Tel Aviv. Hadassah Hospital was then the only hospital in Tel Aviv. My wife had complications during the pregnancy and was admitted to the hospital two weeks before she was due. The management of the hospital was very strict and only let in visitors two or three days a week for one hour in the evening. But I found a way to enter even when visitors were not allowed by crawling under the fence. My wife needed those extra visits because she had neither parents nor relatives. His *bris* was in the hospital and I was allowed to invite only ten people.

An organization called Tipat Chalav helped care for newborn babies. A nurse came over to the house to teach my wife how to handle the new baby, what kind of oil and powder to use, and how to wash and bathe the baby. My wife used to wash the diapers by hand

on the roof. To make sure that they were well-sterilized, she would boil them in a metal container over a fire made from pieces of wood that I collected from around the building. Every few weeks my wife took the baby to Tipat Chalav to be weighed and measured. Moshe was a beautiful baby with black eyes — a real "Sabra." When we took him for a walk in his buggy on Allenby Boulevard, people used to stop and admire him.

At the end of 1936, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem instigated the Arabs to shut the port of Jaffa to Jewish shipping. Jewish immigrants could no longer disembark in Jaffa. Import and export had to go through Haifa and then be transported to Tel Aviv by train or truck. Acts of violence by Arabs against Jews began to increase throughout the country. The British did nothing to protect the Jews from Arabs. To protect themselves, Jews organized the Haganah, a secret self-defense organization.

The Mayor of Tel Aviv, Dizengoff, answered the Arab's boycott with the declaration, "Here will be a seaport!" pointing to North Tel Aviv. The Jewish Agency issued bonds to finance the building of a port in Tel Aviv. Every one had to buy at least one bond which cost five pounds sterling. For us, five pounds was a lot of money, but still we bought one.

Not every place is fit for a deep seaport, including the Tel Aviv shores. It was finally decided to duplicate Jaffa and build a port for small motor boats only. Big ships would anchor far off in the deep sea, and small boats would bring their merchandise to the dock in Tel Aviv.

Large storage houses were built along the dock to store the incoming merchandise. People with experience in boat building, from Salonika, Greece were brought to help build small boats and big barges. A company from Holland was hired to install steel wave breakers, which would keep the waves from reaching the dock. All this took time and money. In the meantime the economic situation was desperate. The closure of Jaffa port caused a scarcity of materials, and building projects decreased. Like many others, I found myself unemployed. My wife could not work because she had to take care of the baby. Not working and having no money left me very depressed.

The port in North Tel Aviv finally opened, and ships started to unload and load off the shore of Tel Aviv. The Tel Aviv port also created opportunities for new jobs. Men were needed as sailors, boat builders, and navigators. They also needed workers to help load or unload the ships. The same work which the Arabs did in Jaffa had to be done in Tel Aviv by Jews. The majority of the workers came from the Histadrut but other labor organizations like the Hapoel-Hamizrachi and Poalei Agudas Yisrael, also demanded work for their members. I obtained one of the two places allocated to Poalei Agudas Yisrael. There were two categories of workers: *sapanim*, who drove the motor boats and *savarim*, who went up on the big ships to load or unload the merchandise.

All the port workers had to pass a swimming test, swimming about five hundred meters back and forth from one point to another in the sea. A boat followed

the swimmers in case someone could not make it. I fancied myself a good swimmer, having learned to swim in Warsaw. I took the test together with several other applicants. When I was about two hundred meters from the starting point, however, I saw I would not be able to make it to the end. I turned back and, with great difficulty, reached the starting point, coming out of the water exhausted and winded. Nevertheless, they accepted me for work and I was hired as a *savar*. Every evening I went to the Histadrut building to see if my name was on the list of workers for the following day. If the sea was stormy, no one could work.

Chapter 10

Work at the Tel Aviv Port

My first day's work consisted of loading Jaffa oranges on a merchant vessel bound for England. A group of fifteen young men went out in a motorboat to the British vessel anchored offshore. Even this short trip made us seasick, but eventually we got used to sea travel. As we approached the merchant vessel, a rope was lowered from the deck above. One at a time, each of us grabbed the rope and the crane lifted us on deck. After we were all on deck, we proceeded to climb down into the bulkhead storage area by side ladders. Soon a whole barge loaded with citrus fruits was brought alongside the vessel and about twenty crates of fruit were lifted up from the barge and lowered into the bulkhead of the ship. This continued until all the cargo was loaded.

Our work consisted of arranging the boxes one on top of the other in straight lines, leaving empty spaces for the air to circulate. There was always a sailor in the

bulkhead directing our work to make sure that the two sides of the boat were loaded evenly. This work lasted the entire day with time out for lunch.

After eight hours of work the process of going home started. We climbed back up the side ladders to the deck. There we held onto a rope and were lowered, one by one, by crane onto the loading barge. When we were all aboard, the barge started back towards shore. This was not work for a yeshiva boy, but I had little choice. It was an honest way to make a living, and I'm proud of doing it.

Ships from many countries stopped at the Tel Aviv port, including passenger ships with Jewish immigrants from Europe. They were processed by Jewish customs officers. In addition, many illegal Jewish immigrants were smuggled in through the Tel Aviv port, past the British border police. Ships bearing heavy equipment, however, went to Haifa's deep sea port. The Tel Aviv port was used more for importing goods than for exporting.

Once, an American vessel carrying red delicious apples arrived. During the unloading of the crates, the rope of the crane snapped and the crates fell to the floor of the storage area. Some crates broke open and apples began rolling all over. We were permitted to eat as many apples as we could, but we could not take any home with us. That was the first time I had ever tasted an American red delicious apple. We used to joke that we tasted the waters of many countries because each boat brought its own drinking water with it.

When the sea was wavy and the boats were swaying

a lot, we all became very seasick. Once we had to load a shipment of wine from Rishon LeTzion. The wine was stored in large barrels, and each barrel contained about a hundred gallons of wine. The barrels had to be stood up on end so they would not roll around. As the barrels came down into the bulkhead and were released from the ropes of the loading crane, they began to roll about with the swaying of the boat. We had to catch the barrels and fasten them down to the floor. One had to be very careful not to be hit and knocked over by these heavy barrels.

My wife was not happy with the type of work I was doing. She argued that it was not fitting for a yeshivah boy — that it was too dangerous and too hard. I countered by saying that I was not any worse off than those who stand on scaffolds adding bricks to a wall or those who ride on a donkey with two containers of kerosene on each side to deliver to homes. She argued that riding a donkey was not dangerous but working on a boat and being pulled up by a rope was. If the rope snapped I would have a long fall into the water. I answered that painters lower themselves from roofs by rope to paint the outsides of buildings. That rope could also snap and they would also have a long fall. We argued about this almost daily until one day an incident occurred which clinched the argument.

We had finished working and were returning to port. The sea was calm and the sky was pitch dark. There were nine of us along with some barrels of chemicals on the barge being pulled by the motorboat back to the docks.

Suddenly the sea became stormy, with mountainous waves rolling in and causing the barge to bob up and down like a roller coaster. We were terrified and held on to each other tightly. Suddenly a big wave, perhaps ten feet high, came crashing down on top of us. We were sure we would drown. Fortunately the captain of the motorboat managed to bring us into port safely. The leader of our group counted us to make sure that none of us had been dragged off into the sea. All of us were drenched and I had lost my cap.

When I came home without a hat and with my clothes soaked with salt water, my wife began asking me questions. I could hardly talk. It took quite a while until I gained sufficient control of myself to explain to her what had happened. She said that enough was enough, and that I should write to my relatives in America (my brother and cousins in New York and my father's sister and her children in Detroit) for help. I was against it.

It just happened that a friend of ours from Mlawa, a daughter of Pinchas Mondry, was going to New York. My wife asked her to see my brother and tell him of our desperate situation. It did not take long until I received word from my brother that the best thing would be for me to come to America.

SECTION III

Chapter 11

Crossing the Atlantic

At that time, it was not easy to get into the United States. There was a quota on the number of people who were permitted to enter, and it had been filled. However, a person with an affidavit from his relatives could still get a visa.

I was still opposed to the whole idea. How could I leave my wife with a six-month-old baby? I refused to go to the American consulate in Jerusalem when they requested that I come in for my visa. But my wife was insistent.

I went to the consulate and pleaded with the consul for a visa for my wife and child also. He promised me that as soon as I arrived in the United States and sent papers for my wife and baby, he would issue them the visas immediately. I was assured it would only be a few months before they could join me in the United States.

I was issued a passport and other papers, and my brother sent me a ticket for Cunard Star Line for which he paid $150. I was to travel by boat from Haifa to Trieste, Italy, and from there by train to Cherbourg, France. From Cherbourg I was to cross the Atlantic to New York.

The time for leaving my wife and child was approaching. It was the end of July, 1938, and I had been in the Holy Land for almost four years. My wife and baby accompanied me to the bus that would take me to Haifa. Needless to say, it is difficult for me to express our feelings at that moment. With tears in our eyes, we said goodbye to each other. I left my wife with only ten dollars, which I had to borrow from friends from Mlawa. I promised her that as soon as I arrived in the *goldene medina*, — America, — I would send her more money.

My wife deserves all the credit for having the courage to let me take this trip alone. Our friend from Mlawa, Yaffa Mondry lived in Haifa. She and her husband accompanied me to the boat, the Galalia. The Galalia, and her sister ship, the Jerusalem, traveled from Haifa to Trieste every other week. The Galalia was not a luxury ship, to put it mildly, but it was a nice-sized passenger ship with comfortable cabins. The floor of the upper deck was made of varnished wood and there were beach chairs on which one could lie down and sunbathe. This was a big difference from the merchant vessels which I used to work on with their gray steel floors. I would walk back and forth on the wooden deck, lean against the guard rail, and look out at the blue waters of the

Mediterranean. All my thoughts were with my wife and baby.

There were not too many passengers on this voyage. When one is on the same boat with the same people, for several days one not only gets to know them, but a feeling of closeness develops. In particular I became friendly with a young man from Jerusalem. We took walks together on the deck and would lean on the guardrail looking out at the water and talking. What else is there to do on a boat? He mentioned that he was going to make a stopover of a few days in Paris to visit his relatives before continuing on to New York. He asked me to take a small package for him to New York, where his relatives would pick it up from me. He said he would bring the package to the hotel room in Paris where I would be staying overnight before traveling on to Cherbourg.

In Trieste, we boarded the train for Paris. It took a whole night via Switzerland to arrive. My friend took a sleeper, while I and some of the other passengers who traveled coach had little sleep that night.

The Cunard Star Line agency arranged for us to stay in a hotel in Paris to rest up from the night's train ride. It was a small hotel in the center of Paris. When I got to my room, I was so tired that I fell asleep immediately. I forgot all about my friend who was supposed to bring me a package. I do not know if he ever came. The other passengers woke me up when it was time to go eat in the kosher restaurant. In the restaurant were some people who were traveling from America on their way to Israel. I felt embarrassed that they were going to the land

that I had just left. I promised myself that I would return there someday.

The train ride from Paris to Cherbourg took only four hours. I usually enjoy train rides, looking out the window and taking in the scenery; but this time my head was spinning with various thoughts. I was thinking of my family in Israel and of my family in Poland. I wondered how they would respond to my leaving my wife and child to go away to a distant country?

In Cherbourg, we boarded the big liner, Aquatania. Before going up on this huge ship, I was examined by an eye doctor to make sure my eyes were healthy. This was done even though my eyes had already been examined at the consulate in Jerusalem. The Aquatania was an old passenger ship and this was to be her last voyage across the Atlantic. Not too many passengers were on the boat. The same group of people who were with me on the Galalia were here also, except for my friend who was staying over in Paris. We all stuck together, talking to each other in Hebrew, while the other passengers talked in various languages which we did not understand at all.

Since I was traveling third class, my cabin was in the lower level and the round window in my room was just above the water. I could see the waves hitting the thick windows. Even though it was mid-July, the sky was cloudy and many people became seasick and stayed inside their cabins. The others assembled in one of the halls, sitting on the leather couches or the easy chairs.

The ship had a rabbi to supervise *kashrus*, and in the

dining room there were several tables reserved for those who kept kosher.

For breakfast they served cornflakes. I had never seen them before — neither in Poland nor Palestine — and had no idea how they should be eaten until someone told me to pour cream over them.

The ship also had a room which was designated for prayer services. I acted as cantor and rabbi, which is what I intended to do for a living in America. I was appreciative of the opportunity to practice for my future profession.

We had a one-hour English class every day. I participated in the lessons but learned very little because we communicated among ourselves only in Hebrew. There was also a big library with many books and magazines, but nothing in Hebrew or Yiddish, the only languages I could read. They also showed movies, but that did not interest me either.

On clear days we took walks on the deck from end to end. I had a chance to observe the huge size of the boat with its two big smokestacks painted in red, white, and blue. Sometimes, when there was fog over the ocean and poor visibility, the fog horns would blow constantly to warn oncoming ships. The blowing of the foghorns left us frightened and depressed.

Chapter 12

New York

I was only eight years old when my oldest brother, Naftali, together with my youngest sister, Sarah, left for America. I had been very attached to my brother. He used to dress me when I was younger and always took care of me. From the time he left, I thought of him constantly. He saved up from his meager wages to send money to us in Poland to keep the family alive. Now, after twenty years of separation, we would be together again, and I would be able to embrace and kiss him.

As these thoughts raced through my head, the ship passed the Statue of Liberty and stopped at New York harbor. My brother and sister were waiting for me as I came off the ship. We kissed each other and cried. My brother said that I should step down on the American soil with my right foot for good luck.

During our conversation, which included a description of my long boat trip, my brother mentioned the arrest

by the French police of a man from Palestine as he was about to deliver a package of concealed hashish to the hotel where I was sleeping. All the New York papers were full of details of the story. Now I understood why this man had never arrived with his package. Though I had come to America with only thirty-five cents in my pocket, I now considered myself very lucky. If I had taken that package and been caught, I could easily have begun life in America in jail.

It was a cloudy, hot and humid July day. I looked out of the taxi window, trying to see the tops of the famous skyscrapers, but could not because of the poor visibility. My brother told me that America is a free country. "What is a free country?" I asked. He explained to me that everyone, Jew or Gentile, has an equal opportunity to advance himself financially and politically, as long as he is honest and obeys the laws. He took some dollar bills out of his pocket and showed me the signature of Henry Morgenthau, a Jew, signed on each bill. Then he told me that the governor of New York, Herbert Lehmann, was also a Jew.

This information filled me with pride. My brother went on telling me how everyone could get a higher education and become a doctor or a lawyer. Even those who worked all day for a living could attend evening school and become educated. My brother said that I, too, would have to go to night school together with other immigrants and learn English, and it would not cost me a penny. This made a big impression upon me.

Our cab finally pulled up in front of my brother's

house on Rutledge Street in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. I lived there for several weeks with my brother, his wife Helen, and their children and was treated nicely. I was also introduced to my mother's relatives, the Webermans, where my sister had lived since her arrival in America.

When I first came to the Webermans' house, the entire family came out to meet me. In the crowd I noticed a fat lady with a white apron, a face that looked like it had been shined with black shoe polish, big white eyes with redness in the corners, thick red lips, and white teeth. I looked at her and she looked at me. I had never seen a black person before in my life. Finally, they explained to me that she was the maid. Later on I became acquainted with the history of the black people of America.

Eva Weberman and her husband Abe, were my first cousins. They had two boys and two girls. My sister Sarah, affectionately known to us as Selma, was raised in their home on Hooper Street. They considered her their daughter.

Abe came from a large family which had come to America many years before. Despite being born in America, he was a strictly Orthodox Jew, and that is how he raised his family. Otherwise my father would not have trusted him to bring up my sister. In general, all the relatives from my mother's side lived in New York and were observant, while the relatives from my father's side lived in Detroit and were mostly non-observant.

The Webermans kept an open house. There, immigrants who came to the United States from Poland,

Hungary, or Germany, found a place where they could eat a meal or sleep for a night. During the hot summer evenings, they all used to sit out on the steps in front of the house and discuss politics. Weberman was active in politics and was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

Abe's wife, Eva, was the daughter of Leah Malka Shapiro, my mother's sister. Leah Malka lived not far from her daughter, together with her unmarried daughter, Rose. My aunt, Leah Malka, also had sons who lived outside of Williamsburg. One of them, Abe Shapiro worked himself up in the dry goods business to become a millionaire. His wife was the national president of the Mizrachi Women's organization of the United States and Canada.

It did not take me very long to get acquainted with my relatives and, after a few days, my brother, Israel, arrived from Toronto to meet me. For one reason or another, he had not been able to immigrate into the United States and had to settle in Toronto. Only years later was he finally allowed to enter America.

I did not forget for a moment my wife and child were still in Tel Aviv, and I expressed my disappointment to my relatives that arrangements for them to come with me were not successful. My relatives gave me many explanations, but none of them made me feel any better.

I started to look for a job. I had no professional training, but since I was an ordained rabbi I looked for openings as a rabbi, Hebrew teacher, Torah reader, or even as a cantor. I looked in the Yiddish papers where

such positions were advertised. I made many long trips on the subways and buses to interviews. Sometimes when I arrived at the interview, I was told to return in the evening when the committee met. And when I returned, I would invariably find many other applicants for the same job.

For one nickel I could change from the BMT to the IRT and ride the subway for a whole day. It was not dangerous in those days to walk or ride the subways even at midnight.

It was the middle of the depression, and many people were unemployed. There was not yet unemployment insurance and many people were hungry. A loaf of bread was only a dime and a bottle of Coca-Cola only a nickel, but many people did not even have that. Under these circumstances, I could not see any way to bring over my family.

During that era the Young Israel organization of America was farming. My brother was among the founders. Agudas Yisrael of America was also founded at that time by Elimelech Tress. But all this did not help me because I did not yet know English.

It was close to the High Holidays when I was finally hired to conduct services in the basement of a big synagogue in Astoria, Long Island, for the three days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I was to be the rabbi, cantor, Torah reader, and shofar blower. For all that, they promised to pay me fifty dollars. Even though I had never conducted services before, they were very impressed with the job I did and gave me a fifteen-dollar

bonus. I was very excited because it was the first money I had earned in America.

Right after the holidays, I sent fifty dollars to my wife. My brother was angry with me. He said, "In America you don't spend all your money: if you earn one dollar, you must save fifty cents." I answered that sending money to my wife was not spending, but I promised him that in the future I would follow his advice.

Chapter 13

Detroit

The High Holidays come only once a year, and I was beginning to think that I did not have any future in New York. Two of my father's sisters, Rosa and Chana, and their families lived in Detroit. They had changed their family names from Reingewirtz to Raimi and from Brasosa to Brose. For some reason, since childhood I had always preferred my father's relatives over my mother's. So my brother suggested that I travel to Detroit and try my luck there.

One afternoon in mid-November, 1938, my brother put me on a Greyhound bus and the following morning I arrived in Detroit. My brother told the driver that I did not speak English, so he should not let me off at any stop until Detroit. The bus went through Buffalo and Niagara Falls, through Canada, and to Detroit. At the border, Canadian customs officers came onto the bus and asked to see my citizenship papers, which, of

course, I did not have. They wanted to take me off the bus and not let me go through Canada. But the driver intervened and told him that he would see to it that I stayed on the bus and did not get off until we arrived in Detroit.

My aunt, Chana Brose, lived on Sturtevant near Dexter. I called her on the phone and told her I was in downtown Detroit and asked for directions to her house. She told me to take the Dexter bus and get off at Sturtevant. I misunderstood and thought she told me to get the sexter bus, which in Yiddish means bus number six. I began to ask for the number six bus, but everyone told me there was no such bus. Finally, I approached a policeman and told him where I wanted to go. He was very friendly, as policemen in America generally are. He walked with me to a bus stop, and showed me the sign which said Dexter and told the bus driver to let me off at Sturtevant. From this I learned that "Dexter" is not "Sexter" and Yiddish is not English.

My Tanta Chana lived in the downstairs flat of a two-family house, together with her son, Itzy. Her married daughter, Chippa and the latter's husband Israel Pine, who was also my first cousin, lived with her. In Wyshkova, Pine's name was Piennik, but he had shortened it like the rest of the family. I never understood why they all shortened their names.

My Tanta Chana recognized me right away and was very happy to see her brother's youngest son. Our last meeting had been in Warsaw at the Vienna Train

Terminal when she left for America about ten years earlier.

Tanta Chana's flat had three bedrooms. She was a widow and slept alone in one of the bedrooms. Itzy was in another bedroom and Chippa and Israel were in the third bedroom. They had a couch in the living room and made a place there for me to sleep. Soon after my arrival my relatives, cousins, *landsmen*, and friends, found out that "Archie, the yeshiva boy from Mlawa," was in Detroit. They all came to see me. We rejoiced and talked until late that night.

The next day I went to visit my father's other sister, Tanta Rose. She and her husband, Sam Raimi, lived with their children on Buena Vista near Dexter in a beautiful two-family house, which they had built themselves. On the top floor lived their daughter, Anna, and her husband, Max Elgot, with their small children.

Sam Raimi, was the first of our family to leave Poland and come to the United States. Before World War I, he left his parents, wife, and children in his home town of Nashelsk, not far from Mlawa, and came to America to begin a new life. His parents were middle-class merchants and very observant Jews, and that's how they raised their children. But Sam was not satisfied with that. Perhaps it was the anti-Semitism in Poland at that time that made him leave Poland and emigrate to America.

Sam Raimi was one of six sons and one daughter born to Berel Reingewirtz. They were all tall, strong men with great ambitions. Uncle Sam had a lot of business acumen. When he came to Detroit in 1919, he started to

peddle Singer sewing machines to farmers. He used to carry the heads of the sewing machines on his shoulders. He worked very hard and saved every penny to bring over his family. When his family came, he rented a store on Michigan Avenue and lived over the store.

Little by little he was able to expand his business, selling not only sewing machines but also household appliances, such as gas stoves, iceboxes, and wringer washing machines. When their small children grew up, he sent them to high school and college and even Hebrew school for a few hours a day. But in the evenings they had to come and help out in the business. When they got older and married, they went into business themselves, together with their father, and opened more stores in various locations throughout the city. The business expanded to household appliances and furniture. The name of their chain was "Central Stores."

Whenever I would come to their house on Buena Vista, it looked to me like a conference room. There were Sam and his sons and sons-in-law smoking cigarettes and talking business — refrigerators, washing machines, bedrooom sets, etc. At one time, he even began to manufacture his own washing machine.

Sam Raimi had two brothers in Detroit. The older one, Zalman, was a highly-respected, religious man, who never worked on Shabbos. The younger one, Jack, had a wife, Sylvia, whom he called Zysela. She had a sharp business sense. Thanks to her, they had several stores called "Raimi's Curtains." In later years, they often used to come to us on special occasions like Chanukah and

Purim, together with our first cousin, Adela Mondry. We always enjoyed having them.

To my Uncle Sam's credit, he did not care only for himself and his immediate family. He was a good-natured man who worried about his and his wife's relatives in Poland. He brought many of their nephews and nieces to America. Not only did he bring them over from Poland, but he also gave them jobs in his chain of stores and trained them to be good salesmen. He used to say, "When is a salesman a good salesman? When a customer comes in to buy a chair and leaves having bought a refrigerator or a bedroom set. That is a good salesman."

His wife, my Tanta Rosa, had many good deeds to her credit. She helped her father, Rav Simcha Grossbard, by sending him money every month. And she would send packages of food and clothing to my father in Mlawa. I still remember the shoes I used to wear, with the pointed toes that used to be in style in America at that time. Who can forget all the food packages my Tanta Rosa used to send to us? When my father brought home food packages from the post office, there was a holiday atmosphere in the house. All the children would stand around while he opened the package, taking out hard sugar, rice, farina, coffee, condensed milk, and vegetable oil in a metal container. I used to smear the oil on a piece of bread and sprinkle salt on it. What could be tastier?

My Tanta Rosa was an educated lady, well read in *Chumash* and classical Yiddish books. My Tanta Chana was also educated, as was my Tanta Bracha Piennik, who never came to America, but lived with my grandfather in

Wyshkova. I enjoyed discussing with them the portion of the Bible of that particular week and they would even quote sayings from the Talmud. Tanta Rosa kept a kosher home with special dishes for Pesach. But on Shabbos and Jewish holidays the stores were open and business went on as usual.

Uncle Sam argued that in America you have to keep the stores open on Shabbos because that was the main business day. On Shabbos the automobile factories were closed and the workers had time to go shopping. I countered by pointing out to him the Cohen brothers, Isadore and Wolf, who were successful in business, yet strictly observant. My argument made no impression on him. All his salesmen — his nephews, nieces, and other Polish immigrants — were strict Shabbos observers in Poland, yet began to desecrate the Shabbos in America. Uncle Sam saved their lives by bringing them to America, but they lost their souls when they started working in his stores. I never took off my black *yarmulka* when I came to visit any of my relatives. I think they respected me for this.

Chapter 14

Winter, 1938

Uncle Sam did not have the nerve to suggest that I work for him on Shabbos. Yet, to let me off from Friday afternoon until Monday morning would not have been fair to the other workers. So, he rented a room for me with a religious family on Twelfth Street, the district where the Orthodox community was concentrated. The area had many Orthodox shuls and kosher butcher shops and bakeries. He paid $16 a week for my room and board and told me to find a job on my own so I could bring over my family.

There was a private afternoon Hebrew school on Linwood Avenue. The principal was a man named Mr. Lowton who had a reputation as a good teacher. He used a ruler to hit the boys on the palm of their hands if they did not behave, applying the words of *Proverbs* (13:28), "He that spares his rod hates his son; but he that loves him chastens him," but my opinion was that he loved his

students a little too much. Mr. Lowton hired me to help him in his Hebrew school for $12 a week. I was very happy. But he fired me after a few weeks because my English was not yet good enough to communicate with the students.

Again I was filled with fear that I would not be able to bring over my wife and baby.

During this time I associated mainly with the religious people affiliated with the Polishe shul on Pingree and Woodrow Wilson Street. The shul's official name was Congregation Beth Yehuda.

On Thanksgiving, 1938, I was invited for dinner to the home of a religious man from the Polishe shul named Elimelech Lifshitz. He explained to me that Thanksgiving is not a religious holiday, but a national holiday, and also the reason for the custom of serving turkey on that day.

Winter started early in 1938. Already at the beginning of December, Detroit was covered with eight inches of snow. Temperatures fell to almost zero. Schools were closed for several days and many cars got stuck in the deep snow. But the streetcars ran regularly because they ran on tracks, powered by electricity from the wires above. Inside the houses and stores it was warm. They were heated by furnaces located in the basement. Those furnaces heated water in a big boiler, which then flowed up through pipes and heated radiators. These radiators, in turn, warmed up the house. Big apartment buildings had one big furnace in the basement, and the caretaker took care of the furnace and heated up the building. This was called central heating.

Coal was a big business in those days. Everyone who owned a house had to buy enough coal in the summer to last the entire winter. There were a lot of coal yards in Detroit and the coal was delivered to their customers in big red trucks. The house would become somewhat dusty from the coal furnace but it was worth it.

It was a long, cold winter that year with lots of snow. I had some odd jobs in the Eastern Market where I was an inspector for kosher meat. I used to catch the streetcar on Claremont Street and change for another streetcar at Woodward Avenue. The fare cost me a nickel plus an exra penny for a transfer. In the evening, I went to night school to learn English.

Chapter 15

Elgin

Elgin, Illinois, a small city about forty miles northwest of Chicago, had a population of about 38,000, including about a hundred Jewish families. The synagogue, Knesseth Israel, was looking for an assistant rabbi, cantor, teacher, and Torah reader. I applied and was hired after being tested by three important rabbis in Chicago: Rabbi Rubinstein, Rabbi Alshwaug, and Rabbi Swirski. My wages were twenty dollars a week, besides the money I made on High Holidays and from tips, etc. I was very happy to get this job. As the rabbi of a city, I would now be able to secure a visa for my wife and child. The congregation in Elgin gave me the proper papers and, with the help of the HIAS organization in Chicago, the papers were sent to my wife.

I came to Elgin in the spring of 1939. The snow had melted and caused the Fox River, which divides Elgin in two, to overflow. There were big colonial frame houses

on the banks of the river, with big front lawns that were getting greener and greener every day. The big shady trees, the green lawns, and the mild, warm wind made me feel happy.

Elgin had a small downtown section on Douglas Avenue. The building of the famous Elgin Watch Company was located at the end of that street. Small businesses and shops lined both sides of the street. Elgin was a typical small American city, with light industry, including the Elgin Case Company. Long freight trains, and even passenger trains, passing through on their way to Rockford, Illinois, or Madison, Wisconsin, did not bother to stop in Elgin. They just made a lot of noise, interrupting the quiet of the town and stopping the traffic at intersections. Many people commuted from Elgin to Chicago on an electric train which ran on tracks and an electrified third rail. This train, which ran every hour on the half hour took only an hour and a half to reach downtown Chicago.

My job was mainly on Shabbos, conducting services and reading the Torah. On Sunday, I taught some Hebrew reading, and gave bar mitzvah lessons. In fact, among the students to whom I gave bar mitzvah lessons was Marshall Goldman the famous Harvard professor whom we see on television from time to time expressing opinions on developments in the former Soviet Union.

Many of the Jews in Elgin were immigrants from Europe, especially from Lithuania. They were peddlers, buying all kinds of junk from the farmers in the surrounding area and selling it to the big scrap dealers.

They were called "greenhorns," while the natives were called "Yankees." I had more in common with the greenhorns because I could talk to them in Yiddish. They were more observant than the Yankees and participated more in the congregational affairs. They did not work on Shabbos and came to the synagogue for Shabbos services. On weekdays, there was only a *minyan* when someone had *yahrzeit*.

I became especially close with two families in Elgin. One family was that of Mr. and Mrs. Yakov Dovid Burstein, who had seven sons and one daughter. They lived on Cherry Street and had a grocery store at the other end of town. All the boys helped their father in the grocery store, except the one who went to college in Champaigne, Illinois. Mrs. Burstein was always busy cooking and serving meals to her husband and children. They never ate at the same time, because some were tending the store when others came home to eat, and vice versa. Their house was like a restaurant. The other family to which I was close was that of Mrs. Sarah Cohen who had five sons and one daughter.

These two families were strictly observant Jews. When I first came to Elgin, I was taken to these families for their approval. Mr. Burstein was satisfied, while Mrs. Cohen's father, Mr. Chaim Tzvi Goldman, objected because I did not have a beard. But his wife (she was his second wife), said that I was young and I had not begun to grow a beard yet. Chaim Tzvi Goldman (whom everybody called Harris) was an old timer in Elgin, perhaps the first of the religious Jews to settle there.

He came from Lithuania and had several married sons and two daughters who lived in the towns around Elgin. The oldest, David, lived in Rockford, Illinois, and one daughter, Sarah Cohen, lived in Chicago. Another son, Sam, the father of Marshall Goldman, lived in Elgin. The third son, Phil Goldman, took over the business when his father died. Eventually Chaim Tzvi's daughter, Sarah Cohen, who was a widow, moved into her father's big colonial frame house with her five boys and one daughter. The house was close to Fox River where I used to take walks over the bridge which connected both parts of Elgin.

The summer of 1939 was a hot one. Not far from Elgin, on the Fox River, was a summer resort area called Fox River Heights. It had frame cottages and tall trees, and people from Chicago would come out for two or three months to cool off from the hot and humid summer air in Chicago. I was called out there to teach their children Hebrew once or twice a week, so that they would not forget what they learned during the year. The community of Fox River Heights also gave me a letter to the American Consul in Jerusalem saying that I was engaged by them as a rabbi and that a visa should be issued to my wife and child.

The summer of 1939 was also a hot one politically. Hitler was threatening to invade Poland unless he was given Danzig and parts of Poland. Chamberlain was running to Berlin trying to make a deal to prevent war. I was afraid that if a war broke out my wife would not be able to cross the ocean and we would be separated

for years. At every opportunity, I would go to the HIAS offices in Chicago to check on my family's situation. They always discouraged me by saying that it was going to take a long time.

On September 30, riding to Chicago with my friend, I heard on the radio that Germany had attacked Poland, starting World War II. By that time my wife had the visa. I sent her a ticket with the Cunard Star Line, but it was questionable if she should undertake a trans-Atlantic journey at such a dangerous time. Many people tried to talk her out of going, saying that she should not endanger herself and the baby traveling across the ocean when, hopefully, the war would soon be over.

Thank G-d she decided to make the journey. This was one of the last ships to cross the Atlantic before the war. She took a small boat from Haifa to Naples, Italy, and from there she went with the big liner, Saturnia, to New York. On the boat she met other people in the same situation, including Rebbetzin Greineman (the sister of the Chazon Ish) and her children who were travelling to her husband, Rabbi Greineman, in New York.

The Saturnia docked at New York harbor on November 17. I had been separated from my wife and baby for almost a year and a half. I went to New York to meet them at the boat. So did my brother, Naftali, and my sister, Sarah.

When my wife and baby, who was then only 23 months old, came off the boat, I hardly recognized them. My wife had lost a lot of weight and looked very skinny. She told me of the suffering she had gone through since

I left her and how people had said that I had left her for good. The effects of the failure of my rich cousins in New York to arrange for all of us to come together were obvious. When I took my baby, Moshele, in my arms and kissed him and hugged him, he cried. He did not want me. My brother and sister and my wife got to know each other, and we all rejoiced that we were finally reunited.

Moshele took sick as soon as he got off the boat, and had to stay in New York a few more days until he got well. I returned to my job in Elgin alone.

In Elgin, the sisterhood of the congregation, especially Mrs. Burstein, wanted to make a big party to welcome my wife. Mrs. Mary Grinberg was the president of the sisterhood at that time. Her brother, Arthur Goldberg, became a Supreme Court Justice and Ambassador to the United Nations. He often came to Elgin to visit his sister. She and Mrs. Burstein decided to make a shower for my wife when she arrived. Mr. Burstein's son Mickey and his sister Betty, went with me to the Chicago Union Station to meet my wife and baby when they came in from New York.

I had rented a flat in a two-family house on Seneca Street and bought some furniture. Right after we moved into our house, the ladies made the shower in the social hall of the congregation. My wife did not like the idea of the shower. She had never heard of such a thing. But they brought everything which we needed: linen, dishes, pots and pans, and silverware. Everything came in handy. We still have some of the set of Noritake dishes which Mrs. Grinberg gave us.

There was a big Hadassah organization in Elgin, to which almost all of the ladies belonged. When they heard that our baby Moshele was born in Hadassah Hospital in Tel Aviv, they bombarded my wife with questions about the hospital. My wife did not understand English so Mrs. Burstein had to serve as the interpreter between my wife and the ladies. My wife told them how well she had been treated when she gave birth to Moshe. In general, my wife made a good impression on the ladies, and they gave her credit for undertaking such a trip in a time of great danger.

The community was satisfied with us and I was satisfied with them, but my wife felt downhearted and depressed. She had left Tel Aviv, a city full of Jews, with sidewalks crowded with pedestrians talking and laughing. There, even the trees spoke Hebrew, but here the streets were empty. The trees stood straight in total silence. Only once in a while would a car pass by.

When Moshele went out to play with the neighborhood children and saw a cat, he would call out *chatul* (cat in Hebrew). If he saw a dog, he would say *kelev*, and when he looked up in the sky and saw an airplane, he would point up and say, *aviron*. The children repeated after him, "adidon," but he learned more English from them than they learned Hebrew from him. It did not take long until he spoke some English.

Mrs. Burstein lived nearby and my wife became very close with her. She was already a grandmother and my wife felt like she was her mother. In general, the whole Burstein family became our close friends. After Mr. Tzvi

Goldman died, and his daughter, Sarah Cohen, moved in from Chicago, I was able to organize a choir with the help of her five sons to sing various parts of the prayers in the synagogue. The older worshippers appreciated the young sweet voices.

Chapter 16

Chicago

My relatives from Detroit often came to Chicago to attend furniture exhibitions. Sometimes they would also come up to see us in Elgin. My sister Selma (Sarah) from New York came to stay with us for a couple of months to get away from big city life, and to relax in the fresh, unpolluted atmosphere of Elgin.

I often went to Chicago whenever I had a free ride. I would go to the West Side where most of the synagogues, *shtiebelach*, and communal organizations were located. The Orthodox community lived mostly on Independence Boulevard, Douglas Boulevard and Twelfth Street.

I was looking for an auxiliary job to help me support my family better. Even though a four or five-pound live chicken did not cost more than a dollar in those days, still twenty dollars a week was far below the average wage.

Chicago, at that time, was the supplier of meat for

the entire Midwest with its big stockyards and the three big slaughterhouses — Armour, Swift, and Wilson. There were also smaller packing houses for kosher meats. I got a half-day job as a kosher inspector in one of those small packing houses by the name of Barnette. This improved our financial situation.

I commuted every day on the Third Rail Train which stopped at Kedzie Avenue in Chicago. From there, I took a city bus to where I worked. I spent three hours every day on the train which helped me to catch up on my sleep. I also learned to read English, as I was eager to know how the war was proceeding in Europe and concerned with the fate of all our relatives still in Poland. As a rabbi, I got the Elgin daily, "Courier News," free of charge, and on the train I struggled to read as much as I could.

The three big slaughterhouses operated on a large scale. They used to say that a live cow or a steer went in at one end and it came out the other end as hamburgers, hot dogs, and even shoes made from the hide of the animal. The Barnette Company where I worked used only the best meat. After the animal was ritually slaughtered and the lungs and insides were inspected by the *shochet* and by the government-approved veterinarian, it was skinned by the butchers and all the inside parts were taken out. It was then split lengthwise into two parts, and taken by overhead rails to a separate room where it was thoroughly washed with warm water and tied in a long shroud. Then it was pushed into a cold room to cool off overnight. The next day when the shrouds were taken off each side

of beef was cold and smooth without any bumps. It was then pushed into the big cooler where it was cold but not freezing. The United States Department of Agriculture had inspectors who graded the beef and then stamped it "prime," "choice," or "good," accordingly. This grading determined the price of the meat.

My job was in the cooler. I always had to be dressed warmly, in a white coat with a warm lining, and with a white helmet on my head. I stamped or tagged the kosher parts of the beef — rib, brisket, shoulder, flanken, and chuck. The tags had the name of the company, the date when it was slaughtered, and the name of the *shochet*.

The company did business with New York. All the beef was shipped in special train-wagons to a wholesaler in New York for distribution to the kosher butcher shops there.

Business was going on as usual in America, but in Europe the war was in full force. Already almost all of Europe was under Nazi control, and we did not know what had happened to our parents, sisters, and brothers in Mlawa. The last card which we received from my father was written in Yiddish with Latin letters. In it, he wrote that all the Jews were put into a ghetto, and there was not enough food to eat.

My sister, Selma, having tasted the small town life in Elgin, decided she liked it. She stayed with us and got herself a job in downtown Chicago, commuting every day on the "third rail" to Chicago. She became active with the young ladies of the sisterhood from the congregation. There she met Mrs. Cohen's oldest son, Berwin (Boruch),

who was in his grandfather's scrap business. Berwin, a tall husky boy, was observant; he would never miss Shabbos morning services in the Shul.

Selma and Berwin got married and established a home in Elgin. The wedding was in the Loop synagogue in downtown Chicago. It was in the begining of 1941 on one of the coldest days I can remember — 18 degrees below zero. Besides all the relatives from the Cohen and Goldman families from Elgin and the surrounding areas, others who came to the wedding included my brother, Naftali from New York, Tanta Rose and Uncle Sam from Detroit, and our cousins, Abe and Eva Weberman, from New York, with whom my sister had stayed for all those years since she left Poland.

I wished I could have written to my father to tell him that his child, whom he sent away so many years ago to America and whom he had longed for all these years, had gotten married to a nice religious young man and established a home in Elgin. How happy he would have been! He would probably have felt like Jacob when he was told that his son Joseph was alive and ruler over Egypt (*Exodus* 45:26). But there was no way of telling him anything because all the communications with Europe were entirely cut off due to the war.

Chapter 17

The War Effort

Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. I heard President Roosevelt on the radio announcing that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, and had declared war against Japan. The United States had been caught by surprise. A general mobilization started. Draft boards were organized in each city, town, and village, and every young man eighteen years or older had to register with the draft board. America prepared to go to war against Japan and Nazi Germany. Factories in the United States converted to manufacturing ammunition. Elgin Watch Company and Elgin Case Company produced shells and bullets for the War Department. Heavy industry produced tanks, bombers, personnel carriers, and boats. The whole country was one War Department.

Of the five Cohen boys, four were drafted into the army, including my brother-in-law, Berwin. One of them, Jethro (Jacob), never came back. He was killed in the

Pacific. Five of the Burstein's six boys were drafted into the various services — Army, Air Force, and Navy. Some were sent to Europe and others to the Pacific, but they all returned. It is no wonder that Mr. Burstein suffered a heart attack. After that, even though he recovered slightly, he had to stay in the house and was not able to attend to his business. During that time, my wife was very welcome in their house. She kept them company when the house was almost empty, and our children played with their young daughter, Betty.

Our second son Simcha Leib (Steven) was born on Thanksgiving Day, 1942, in St. Joseph Hospital in Elgin. Mrs. Burstein was with my wife as she gave birth to a nice eight-pound, six-ounce boy. My sister Selma was not able to be there, because she herself had just given birth to her first son, Leizer (Lloyd) several days before. Elgin had no *mohel* to perform the *bris*, so I had to bring one in from Chicago. His name was Rabbi Shneurson.

The *bris* was in the hospital, on the eighth day after his birth. Besides the Bursteins, there were only a few others present. When my wife came home with the baby, she could not get any help. She had to do everything by herself, from washing the diapers to cleaning the house. The war had drained the country of manpower. There did not seem to be any end to it. America was fighting on two fronts: in the Pacific under General MacArthur, and in Europe under General Eisenhower. Parents whose children were fighting the enemy were scared to answer the phone, afraid to hear bad news about their loved

ones. At times like that it made no sense to complain about a shortage of certain things.

Elgin Watch Company, which employed a few hundred people, was taken over by the government to train young men in the production of watches and other mechanical devices for the army. Before Pesach, the congregation appealed to its members to invite Jewish soldiers to their homes for the holiday so that they would not have to eat *chometz* and would be able to have *matzos*. Mrs. Cohen invited two soldiers. For the first Seder, she also invited my family and my sister Selma, whose husband was serving in the Pacific.

After the Haggadah, when the meal was served, one of the soldiers, whose name was Rabinovitz, told his story. He had been living in Cleveland and was in the watch repair businesss, when he was drafted into the army and sent to Elgin. He was actually from Poland and had learned in a yeshiva in Warsaw. I looked at him and he looked at me. I asked him if he had a brother, and he said, yes, and I told him that his brother had also learned in the same yeshiva. I remembered that in the first year of my learning in the Mesivta there were two boys who had gone to America with their mother to join their father. What a coincidence! We had both learned in the same yeshiva.

My sister received word from the War Department that her husband, Berwin, had become ill and that he was in a hospital somewhere in the Pacific. He was sick with yellow jaundice and he had to remain hospitalized

for a few weeks. It was bad news but it was also good news — at least he would not be sent to the front.

One day, when I came to work at my part-time job in Chicago at the Barnette Company, I was told that the government had taken over the packing house to supply meat to the army and there would not be any more kosher slaughtering. I had lost my part-time job and the income that went with it. Since I was excluded from the draft because I was clergy, I thought to myself, "Why should I not help America on the home front? After all, America is fighting the Jewish people's biggest enemy, the Nazis." I volunteered to work the night shift at the Elgin Case Company where they produced shells and bullets for the army. I went in at 10 p.m. and came home at 6 a.m. I had a few hours sleep and then went to work at my congregational job.

SECTION IV

Ettel Frumit Morgenstern.

Chapter 18

Mexico City

Ever since we left Poland, we had continued corresponding with my wife's good friend Ettel Morgenstern, who had been responsible for our obtaining the immigration certificates to Israel which helped us to escape Poland. She was presently living in Mexico City with her son Dr. Edward Morgenstern, a famous medical doctor.

My desire to travel to new places and see new countries was aroused, and I started to think of visiting Mexico to see our friend from Warsaw. Here she was living in a neighboring country to the south, where the climate was much warmer than in the windy city of Chicago, and there was no need to cross oceans to see her. I decided to go to Mexico with my family.

In one of the Yiddish papers which I received from New York, I saw an ad that Yeshiva Eitz Chaim in Mexico City was looking for a young man to teach Hebrew and

Talmud, and that those interested should write to Rabbi Braver in Kansas City, Missouri. When I saw this ad, I saw an opportunity to leave Elgin, where there was no day school and no future for our children. So I went to Kansas City and was interviewed by Rabbi Braver, who was the Rosh Yeshiva of Eitz Chaim. I signed a contract for one year, with a good salary and travel expenses for the whole family. My wife was happy. She had wanted to leave Elgin and small town life, and she was excited about seeing Ettel. I went to the Mexican Consulate in Chicago and got a visa for the whole family.

My wife prepared food for the long trip. She took enough cans of baby food for Simchale (Steven) who was two years old, and comic books for Moshele (Moshe) who was seven. Of course, she also took cold cuts, bread, cookies, and cake which she had baked herself. We rented out our apartment for a year, and, on December 10, 1944, ten years after our marriage, we left Elgin to go to Mexico City.

It was a cold December day when we left Elgin. In Chicago, where we changed for a train to St. Louis, it was snowing and windy. On the train, we had a drawing room with a couch which converted into beds at night. In St. Louis we changed again for a train going to Laredo, Texas, on the Mexican border.

As we were traveling south, we noticed the separation in the terminals between whites and blacks. It was strange to us.

In Laredo we got off the train, and all our baggage was thoroughly checked by Mexican customs officials. It

took us a while until we were finally cleared, and then we boarded the train to Mexico City. It was Chanukah and we lit Chanukah candles in our room, using a small *menorah* which we had taken along with us.

The train moved slowly between the tall mountains. The first big city at which we stopped was Monterey. There I sent a telegram telling the Morgensterns the time of our arrival and asking them to wait for us at the station.

Chapter 19

First Impressions

Riding on the train between Monterey and Mexico City, we noted the poverty of the Mexican people. Many of them lived in wooden shacks, some even in old train cars. We saw them standing on the sidetracks as we passed through the various local stations: the men with their sombreros on their heads, the women with their long skirts, and the children crawling around barefoot on the ground. I could not stop wondering why they lived in such poor conditions, since they were only a few miles from the U.S. border and their own country was blessed with all sorts of natural resources: silver, timber, and oil.

While we were riding on the train, our thoughts drifted back to the war in Europe and the Pacific. After the Russians broke the siege around Stalingrad, they continued to chase the Germans back to Germany, recapturing city after city, moving towards Warsaw and

Mlawa. We did not know for sure what had happened to the Jews in Poland and, particularly, in Mlawa, when the Germans occupied Poland and put all the Jews in ghettos, but there were terrible rumors. I had nightmares every night about my father, sisters, and their families.

After the war we found out what had happened to our relatives in Mlawa and to Polish and European Jewry. Hitler and the Germans had put all the Jews into ghettos in each town. Then they squeezed the men, women, and children into cattle cars like cattle and took them to their infamous concentration camps in Auschwitz, Birkenow, Treblinka, etc. Most were gassed and burned in ovens. Others were gathered in open places, told to dig their own graves, and then shot. Some were even thrown into pits and buried alive.

Almighty G-d! How could human beings do things like that? They were not human; they were animals! The anti-Semitic Poles, Ukranians, Russians, and Rumanians were all partners with the Nazis. With their help, six million Jews, including one million small children, were killed.

There was no place for Jews to escape because no country would let them in. America sent back boats with Jewish immigrants, and England blocked the shores of Palestine so that no one could come in. Meanwhile, the Gestapo systematically hunted Jews all over Europe. Whenever they found one, they would either kill him on the spot or send him to the concentration camps. Nevertheless, a few managed to escape into the deep

forests of Poland, where they lived like animals without water or food supplies.

Warsaw, the largest ghetto, organized to fight the Nazis. With great difficulty, they gathered together a few guns and revolvers and surprised the Germans when they came in to take them to the concentration camps. They fought heroically until the last man. The uprising lasted several weeks, and they killed many Germans who came equipped with tanks, and planes.

It is true that some Poles saved Jews, even endangering their own lives by hiding them in their homes or on their farms. (I've included at the end of my book the story of Mordechai Sauerhauft which documents one such episode.) Some did it because they were good-natured, while others did it for money. Some Jews even gave Polish neighbors their babies and small children to raise, with the idea that when the war ended, they would return and take their children back. But they never returned. They were killed in the death camps, and their children were raised as Christians, never to know their real heritage.

All this I found out from reading the news reports after the war and from my friends who visited Mlawa after the war. No one from our family was saved: not my sister Rivka and her husband Itzchak; not my sister Tzipa, her husband Gershon or their children. In my wife's family the same was true: my wife's mother, her sister Rosa and her husband and children, her brother Yaakov, her sister Gittel and husband and children from Radzimin were all killed.

A friend, who visited Mlawa after the war, told me that not a single Jew was left from the 7,000 who had lived there before the War, and every trace of Jewish communal life had been destroyed. The same was true of every other town around Mlawa. Even the Jewish cemeteries, including my mother's grave, had disappeared, and in their stead were housing projects, factories, etc. Centuries of Jews praying, learning, doing kindness, being charitable, were erased without a physical trace.

Why did the Nazis pick Poland to build the death camps? Because they knew the Poles would not object to the killing of Jews. For hundreds of years the Catholics were taught by their priests that the Jews had killed their god. Over centuries they were trained to hate Jews. I had not dared to walk the street in Mlawa on Christmas or Easter. People coming out of the churches were strongly agitated against the Jews.

A few of my friends from Mlawa, like Shuman Kozik, Tzalka Reingewirtz (now Sol Raimi), and others returned to Mlawa when they were freed from Auschwitz. There the Poles met them with hatred and threatened to kill them. And the Russian soldiers occupying Mlawa did not protect them.

Chapter 20

Dr. Edward Morgenstern

Ettel Frumet Morgenstern came to the train station to greet us with her daughter-in-law Esther. Needless to say, Ettel was very happy to see us and, especially, our two children. After kissing my wife, she introduced us to her daughter-in-law. Then she said something in Spanish to the chauffeur, Philippo, who was dressed in a dark chauffeur's suit and hat. We soon found ourselves being driven in their black limousine to their house.

Dr. and Mrs. Morgenstern lived in a section called Chapultapec-Polanco. Rich people lived there in single homes of two or three stories, which were enclosed within iron fences and surrounded by exotic flowers and bushes.

When we arrived, Dr. Morgenstern came outside to the gate and greeted us in Yiddish. He embraced the children and picked them up in his arms. He was a tall, middle-aged man with a black mustache. He told us

that we should feel at home. During the excitement of our arrival, our baby Simcha put a coin into his mouth and tried to swallow it. He began to cough and gag. Everybody just froze and stared at him, not knowing what to do, until Dr. Morgenstern ran over to him, put his fingers in his mouth, and took the coin out from his throat. Simcha started to smile, even while tears were still running from his eyes.

Besides a chauffeur who took care of the car and kept on polishing it any time he was not driving, the Morgensterns also had a gardener who took care of the flowers and bushes around the house and a maid to clean the house and wash the laundry.

Dr. Edward Morgenstern (whose mother still called him by his Yiddish name Yidel) was born in Warsaw at the turn of the century. He received both a religious and a secular education. When he was a young boy, his father went to America with the idea of making some money to bring over his wife and child. But it was not so easy to make money in America at that time. He saved a few dollars and every so often sent his wife some money. But it was not enough to support his wife and child. Since Ettel was a practical woman, she established a business herself by selling household items — linen, towels, and silverware — to her many friends. These sales were made on credit, and she collected the payments on a weekly or monthly basis.

Ettel had many friends in the neighborhood where she lived and few expenses, because she kept all her merchandise in her house. Whatever she made was

pure profit. Among her friends were people who were active in the Mizrachi organization and other charitable institutions. As I mentioned before, my aunt, Rochel Kupiec, was one of her best friends.

Ettel Frumet Morgenstern was part business woman and part charitable matron. Her special interest was an organization called Tomchai Asirim which cared for Jewish inmates.

In 1912, her husband in New York finally decided he could afford to bring over his wife and son, who was then twelve years old. He sent them tickets for the newly built, "unsinkable" ship, the Titanic. She sold all her belongings, and went to France with her son Yidel. When it was time to board, the American Embassy doctor examined her eyes and found that they were infected. He refused to grant her a visa to enter the United States. Very disappointed, she had to return with Yidel to Warsaw.

Everybody knows what happened to the Titanic Ettel's husband in New York saw this as an omen that they were not to be reunited. He sent her a divorce. Ettel never remarried. Instead she devoted all her energy to raising her only son Yidel. She sent him to the best schools in Warsaw. When he finished high school, he was accepted at the University of Warsaw where he majored in medicine. He graduated the university with honors.

Vienna was at that time the center for medical schools and doctors. Yidel, who now called himself Edward, applied to one of those schools and was accepted. After four years of schooling, internship, and residency under

the guidance of the best medical professors in Vienna, he graduated as a doctor of internal medicine.

There was no end to his mother's happiness. To thank the Almighty for having saved them from the Titanic and for her son having become a doctor, she decided to commission a scribe to write a *Sefer Torah*. It took the scribe more than a year to write. As is the custom, the last few lines were left blank, to be filled in by people who would wish to share in the great *mitzvah* of writing a *Sefer Torah* at the festive conclusion of the writing. From her *Sefer Torah* came an unusual *mitzva* — Jewish jail inmates heard the reading of the weekly portion of the Bible.

Dr. Edward Morgenstern decided that he would very much like to see his father, who had meanwhile remarried and was living in New York with his second wife and children. He decided to emigrate to Mexico, which did not have such stringent immigration laws as the United States, and to send for his mother once he was established.

Dr. Morgenstern arrived in Mexico City in the beginning of 1930. He married a girl named Esther, who originally was from Chicago, and opened an office in downtown Mexico City as a specialist in internal diseases. In 1935, after my wife and I had left for Palestine, Mrs. Morgenstern joined him in Mexico. She lived with him until she went to an old age home in Cuernavaco.

Chapter 21

The Jewish Community

Mexico City is about 8,000 feet above sea level. At that time, it had a population of more than eight million people, of whom eighteen thousand were Jews. The chief rabbi was Rabbi David Rafalin whose congregation, Nidchei Israel, had been in existence for many years and was located in the old section of the city. There was also a Sephardi congregation.

The Jewish community was well organized, with various organizations and many shuls. The Yeshiva Eitz Chaim was located in the Hippodromo neighborhood on Amsterdam Avenue. It was a two-story building. The classrooms were upstairs, while downstairs was the Beis Midrash. Not far from the yeshiva was a small park with palm trees, which had trails for walking and benches on which to rest.

The organizers of the yeshiva were people who had fled from Hitler. These newcomers did not mix with

those who had come to Mexico earlier and who had organized Congregation Nidchei Israel. Among these new arrivals were the Sterns, the Levins, the Brachfelds (from Antwerp, Belgium), and the Shtriglers. The newcomers were strictly observant people and many were highly successful in business. Some were in textile manufacture, some produced sweaters, others were in the diamond business, and still others were in the import and export business. They wanted to give their children a traditional Jewish education.

When their children grew up, they wanted them to continue their Jewish education in a real yeshiva. Some of their parents were very learned. Rabbi Braver had been rabbi in Kansas City, Missouri, and the dean of the yeshiva there. These recent refugees hired him to come to Mexico City as the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Eitz Chaim and also as rabbi of their congregation. Rabbi Braver chose me as his assistant in the yeshiva. There was, in addition, a teacher for the lower classes by the name of Mr. Klein.

Dr. Morgenstern begged us to live in his house in Polanco. He enjoyed the laughter the children brought into the house with their young voices. But we refused because it was too far to walk to the yeshiva on Shabbos. We rented a two-bedroom apartment, purchased some furniture, and established a home. We also hired a maid to help my wife and take care of the kids.

In our building there were a few other Jewish families who spoke Yiddish. In fact, in Mexico City almost all the Jews spoke Yiddish at home with their children. There

was a big *"Yiddish shule"* (Jewish speaking school) of over eight hundred students in which all the subjects were taught in Yiddish. I also taught my students in Yiddish. In Detroit, I was fired as a teacher because I only knew Yiddish. Here I was hired because I knew Yiddish.

Downstairs from where we lived was a shop which rented bikes. On our second day there, our Moshele went downstairs, rented a bike, and promptly got lost. The police had to find him. After bringing him home, they warned us not to let him out on the street by himself again.

Yeshiva Eitz Chaim had about thirty students. I taught those who were already after their bar mitzvah. They were well-behaved boys. I enjoyed teaching them, and they enjoyed having me. I prepared some of them for the yeshivas in New York. Some called me rabbi, while others referred to me as *"El Professor"* (teacher in Spanish). But I was not only a teacher to them. I was also a pal. I played ball with them. In Mexico there are two popular sports: bullfighting, their national sport, and soccer. In my boyhood, in Mlawa, I used to play soccer with my friends. I belonged to a team and was a big soccer fan. Now I had a chance to show off my skill in soccer, but after playing for the first time my body ached a whole week.

The Brachfeld brothers, Yaakov and Yechezkel, had emigrated from Belgium, where they had been successful diamond dealers. In Mexico City, they were the officers of the yeshiva. They arranged a welcoming party for Rabbi Braver and myself in a large hall and they invited

all the leaders of the community who made long speeches of greeting. I also said a few words of thanks for having been given the opportunity to be their children's teacher.

Chapter 22

Life in Mexico City

Of Mexico City's population of eight million, there were only two types of people: the very rich and the very poor. There was no middle class. There were high-rise office buildings downtown for businessmen and professionals. Big stores displayed their merchandise in the windows. Hand-made silver goods were very visible, along with American imported goods, like clothing and hosiery. At the same time, one saw young boys covered with newspapers, sleeping on the sidewalk against building walls, and middle-aged women standing on corners selling tortillas.

Labor was very cheap in Mexico. At that time, the dollar was worth twelve *pesos*, and Mexico was not at war as the United States was. The climate was excellent. Even in the winter, when we came, the sun shone every day. Because of the high altitude, the air was brisk and clear. Houses had no heating systems. In the wintertime

some of them had little heaters in the house. Outside, the sun was always warm, and when you were cold in the house, you could warm up outside in the sun. They used to say: When the sunny side of the street is summer, the shady side is spring. The wide boulevards, with statues of their national heroes, like the Pasea de La Reforma, where the big American hotels were located, were the most beautiful I had ever seen.

Transportation was also cheap. Buses with a guaranteed seat cost only one extra *peso*. The other buses were packed with passengers standing not only in the aisles but also on the steps at the entrance of the bus. When the passengers were to be let off, the driver would call out in Spanish, "*Bachan* (get down!)" When he wanted to move on, he called out "*Vamanos* (go!)" Only the very rich had cars. The vast majority of people used public transportation. There were also taxis, with each driver setting his own price. Despite the relatively few cars, the traffic was usually bumper to bumper.

In the winter months when it is a little cold in Mexico City, many people would go to Cuernavaco, a famous resort area 35 miles south of Mexico City. The altitude there is only 5,000 feet above sea level and the climate is semitropical, much warmer than in Mexico City. The winding 35-mile drive takes a couple of hours. The resort has a population of twenty thousand, some living there year-round and others living there just for the winter months.

Dr. Morgenstern had a villa in Cuernavaco with a big swimming pool. Phillippo, the chauffeur, drove us

there a couple of times. The crystal clear air and the scent from the multitude of flowers is indescribable. One of Cuernavaco's year-round residents was Oscar Cohen who had been the "king" of the textile industry in Lodz prior to the Nazi invasion. He left all his factories and ran away to Mexico, settling in Cuernavaco. He told me that Cuernavaco has the best climate of the whole world, the same temperature all year round.

Rav Yankel Brachfeld, his wife, their son, Moshe, and Rav Yechezkel Brachfeld and his family, also rented a villa for a few weeks in Cuernavaco in the winter months. They organized a *minyan* on Shabbos in their villa. I was their cantor and Torah reader. Since I was their children's *rebbe* in the yeshiva, they showed me great respect.

They invited us to join them for the *sedarim*. Passover in Mexico was not easy. *Matzos* and wine had to be imported from New York. But, on the other hand, there was plenty of meat and chicken, ritually slaughtered in Mexico City by the famous Shiya Shochet, an activist in Jewish affairs.

While in Mexico, we also had a chance to visit the thermal springs at Cuatla. We took baths in the natural hot water which comes out from the ground. People come there from all over the world to treat their arthritis and other ailments.

Not far from Mexico City are the Caverns of Cacahuamilpa which we called Socia Milka. It's a series of water channels. People rent out gondolas to float from one channel to another while the guide plays on a

string instrument. "Socia Milka" is also known as "Little Venice." We spent a day there and enjoyed it very much, especially my wife, who had been in the real Venice prior to boarding the Saturnia, on her cross-Atlantic trip to New York.

Mrs. Morgenstern brought her *Sefer Torah* with her to Mexico, and it remained in the house of Dr. Morgenstern. Later on, when they built a shul in his neighborhood, this *Sefer Torah* was again used to read the weekly portion. One Shabbos morning, when I was reading the portion of the week, I noticed that the chandelier was swinging back and forth. I started to feel nauseous as if I were on a rocking boat. It took a couple of moments until my stomach returned to normal. The worshippers told me that it was one of Mexico City's frequent minor earthquakes.

Mexico City was plagued not only with minor earthquakes but also with minor thieves. Housemaids would steal a towel, a fork, a spoon, or other household items. But there were rarely any big robberies or break-ins. Bus passengers innocently looking out the open window would have their hats or pens snatched by a passerby. For the first few weeks I was paid by a check made out to "cash." Once I lost my check, and when I ran to the bank to stop payment, they told me that someone had just cashed the check. The kind people in the yeshiva, however, reimbursed me for the money that I had lost.

Chapter 23

Farewell

The summer of 1945 was coming to an end. I finished preparing a couple more boys to be accepted in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, in Brooklyn. Then I started to get ready for the High Holidays. The yeshiva rented a big hall with a few hundred seats and sold tickets for high holiday worshippers. Those tickets provided the main income for the yeshiva.

I organized a choir of the yeshiva boys, giving several solo parts to our son, Moshele, who had a beautiful soprano voice. The worshippers were very happy with him. But, sometimes, when it came time for him to sing his solo, we first had to look for him. We would find him outside playing with his friends. After all, he was only seven years old.

After the holidays, my wife and I debated our future in Mexico City. My contract with the yeshiva was for one year but they wanted me to continue for another year.

The Morgensterns and my wife's friend, Mrs. Liveraut, and others begged us to remain in Mexico. But I was against it. I pointed out that it had not been easy for us to come to the United States and to stay for another year would cost us our U.S. immigration rights. Even though life in Mexico was easier for us, and especially for my wife who could get all the cheap help she needed, still in the United States there was no need to boil milk or water.

We made preparations to leave Mexico and go back to the United States. Just at that time, our Simchale became ill with a high temperature. Dr. Morgenstern said it was a virus and advised us to give him aspirin every four hours, but it did not help. Dr. Morgenstern then wanted to inject him with a new medicine called penicillin, but I was against it because penicillin was so new that I did not feel it had fully proven itself. It took a few weeks until Simchale recovered completely and was able to make the long trip back to Elgin, Illinois.

It was difficult to leave the yeshiva, the students, all our friends, Rabbi Braver and his family, and especially Dr. and Mrs. Morgenstern and Ettel Morgenstern. Even our Mexican maid cried when we said goodbye to her. During our one-year stay in Mexico City, we had made many close friends.

We returned on the same train that had taken us to Mexico City a year earlier. At the border, U.S. customs officers inspected our baggage. They made a fuss over some handmade silver presents we had bought for friends and relatives, and we had to pay duty on them.

The reader is referred to a two-volume book about Mlawa, published in Israel in 1984, in three languages, Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. It is written by people from Mlawa who were in the "ghetto" and who witnessed all the atrocities of the Nazis and "Gestapo." They commited the atrocities despite their belief in the Old Testament where the prophet Jeremiah said: (*Jeremiah* 16:20) "Shall a man make unto himself gods, and they are no gods?"

Chapter 24

Back in Elgin

We came back to Elgin at the end of 1945. My brother-in-law, Berwin Cohen, came home from the Pacific, as did his brothers, Marvin and Russell, but his younger brother, Jethro (Yankel), was killed on one of the islands in the South Pacific. The Burstein boys all came back, but Mr. Burstein died a couple of months later from the heart condition which was brought on when five of his sons were taken into the army and sent to the front.

Elgin, like the rest of the country, was returning to normal life, as factories shifted back from wartime production. The war had created a shortage of durable goods in America, and it took a long time to catch up. The Chicago stockyards and slaughterhouses were again in operation for domestic needs, and so kosher slaughtering resumed.

We moved back into the same apartment on Douglas

Avenue where we had lived previously, and I commuted every day to a temporary job with the Wilson Company, one of the three big packing houses in Chicago.

Religious life in Elgin was declining. Knesseth Israel, which had been Orthodox when I came to Elgin in 1939, had become Conservative by 1945 when I left. Many of the older generation who had come from Europe died, and the new generation who took over were not so observant. They hired a new rabbi by the name of Rose. I made up my mind not to continue with my job in Elgin.

My sister hired a Hebrew teacher from Chicago, who came twice a week to teach Hebrew and daily prayers to her two boys, Lloyd (Lazer) and Elliot (Eliyahu). Berwin did not like the idea of the shul being Conservative. He stayed out of it as much as possible. On weekdays, when he drove his big truck filled with scrap junk to Chicago, he attended services in one of the Orthodox synagogues on the West Side in Chicago. On Shabbos, he preferred to stay home and read the prayers with his boys. Since he was often in Chicago during the week, he would bring back all the necessary kosher products.

My sister Selma and her husband did not plan to leave Elgin. When Berwin was discharged from the army, he went back to the scrap business together with his uncle Phil who had inherited it from his father Tzvi Goldman. But I was of a different mind. Our boys were growing up and they needed a day school to continue their education. I had two choices: either to move to Chicago and seek work in the slaughterhouses or to move to Detroit where I had all my relatives and friends.

In December 1946, Tanta Chana Brose, my father's sister who lived in Detroit, died after a lengthy illness. She had been the one whom I had accompanied to the Vienna train station in Warsaw when she left for America in 1929. I was called to come to the funeral. She left four sons — Mendel, Itchie, Moshe, and Berel — and two daughters in Detroit — Adela Mondry and Chippa Pine. Her other daughter Beilah was killed by the Nazis together with her husband and children in Wyshkova.

Chapter 25

Back in Detroit

During my six-year absence from Detroit, my cousins, who had been working for Uncle Sam Raimi, opened their own businesses. The Broses had a furniture store, United Outfitting Company, and the Mondrys had an appliance store, Highland Appliances.

I obtained a job in Deleroy, a suburb of Detroit, with Cohen and Levenberg, a kosher slaughterhouse. Now all I needed was a place to live so that I could bring my family from Elgin. But that did not prove so easy. After the war there was a severe housing shortage. Occasionally there was a flat in a two-family house to rent, but they invariably asked more for rent than I could afford.

At that time, the Orthodox Jewish community of Detroit had started to move from Twelfth Street to the Dexter area, but Twelfth Street still retained its charm. There was the Polishe Shul on Pingree and Woodrow Wilson, the big Taylor Street Shul, with Rabbis Eisenman

and Wohlgelehrnter, and the Blaine Street Shul with Rabbi Rabinowitz. There were all kinds of Jewish stores: kosher butcher shops, bakeries, bookstores, etc. The sidewalks were full of Jewish shoppers. On Shabbos, many stores were closed while the owners attended services in one of the synagogues in the neighborhood.

I had a chance to buy a two-flat frame house across the street from the Polishe Shul on Pingree Street together with Leibel Blumenfield, who lived downstairs. The total price was $6,000.00, with monthly payments of only $36.00, my share would only be $18.00. My relatives and friends helped me out with the down payment. Fortunately, I was able to pay them back in a short time.

My wife made the arrangements for moving our furniture and belongings from Elgin. I was worried that perhaps she would not like the place which I had bought, but when we moved in, she was overwhelmed. We had three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and also a front and back porch. The front porch faced the Polishe Shul. Even though the house needed to be painted both inside and out, and the floor needed to be sanded and carpeted, at least we had a place of our own to live in. The rest could come later.

I was glad that I was the owner of my own home, something few even dreamed of in Poland or Palestine. I would look at the steps or other parts of the house with pride. Even if they were black and needed painting, they were mine, and nobody could take them away from me.

Sitting on the front porch on Shabbos and watching the people passing by going to shul was a pleasure

which we did not have either in Elgin or in Mexico City. The porch was the right place to put up a succah. At that time, there were only a few private succos in the whole Twelfth Street area. Most people utilized the shul's succah, where all they did was to make *kiddush*.

That was not for me. All my life, I had eaten in a succah on Succos. Sometimes I even slept in a succah. I was happy with the idea of using the front porch of our upstairs flat to build a succah because the whole family could eat there. What could be a greater *mitzvah* than dwelling in the succah? Other *mitzvos* are done with different parts of your body, but the *mitzvah* of succah is done with your whole body.

In Mlawa it had not been so easy to build a succah. We were always afraid of the non-Jews, and could not even afford the materials. Only the rich people, who owned their own houses, had their own succos. The rest of us would get together with the neighbors and make one succah together.

Since the succah was used by three or four families, only men ate in it. The women would eat in the house and bring out the food for the men in the succah. Each family would show off by sending out their best food, in the nicest dishes and with the best silverware, while those who remained in the house would eat whatever they had left in any kind of dishes.

In Mlawa, the neighbors depended on me to build the succah. Right after breaking the fast of Yom Kippur, I would get busy with the succah. Our neighbors, the Listopads, the butchers, were busy with their meat

business, and their grown-up sons did not mind eating in the house, so the work depended on me, "the yeshiva boy." (My two older brothers and sister were in America already.) The first thing I did was to go to neighbors and collect a few *groshen* to buy nails. Then I bought big nails to put together the walls of the succah, and small nails to hang blankets and bedspreads on the inside. These blankets and bedspreads were hung so that the wind would not blow out the candles; otherwise we would be eating in the dark. For walls, I used the doors of the inner rooms from our home and also from the neighbors' homes. They did not like the idea of taking off their doors, but since it was only for eight days, they could not refuse. The roof of the succah was covered with greens, which we bought from the farmers who used to bring them into town for sale.

The day before the holiday the girls hung the blankets and bedspreads on the walls and the children decorated the succah with colored paper chains, which they prepared long before the holiday. They also hung all kinds of fruits, which were plentiful at that time of the year, from the *schach*. Towards evening, they would sweep the floor, put in tables and chairs, and cover the tables with white tablecloths. The women would then come in with their silver candlesticks and light the candles.

The shiny silver candelabra and candlesticks with the white candles on the tables covered with white, pressed tablecloths, and the smell of the fresh greens from the farms on the top of the succah, added beauty and warmth to the holiday. The first night, when my father

would come home from the *shtiebel* dressed in his silk *kapota* and velvet round hat, he would walk straight into the succah. Our neighbors the Listopads would almost have finished their meal by that time. They would greet my father with *a gut Yom Tov*, and make room for my father and me to sit down at the table.

The difference between the succah which we had in Mlawa and the one which I made on our front porch on Pingree Street in Detroit was that in Mlawa all the neighbors were considered like one big family. We were close to each other, as it says in *Proverbs*: "Better a close neighbor than a distant brother." In America, each family is a unit unto itself. The only place where people get together is in the synagogue or in the *shtiebel*.

Pingree Street was lined with single or two-family frame houses. At the end of the street, on the corner of Woodrow Wilson Street, was the three-story brick building of the Polishe Shul, Beth Yehudah. The top floor was the balcony for the women. There were big windows on three sides of the building. The main floor was the prayer and study area which was lined with tables and benches, with the *bima* in the middle of the room. Downstairs was the social hall and *mikvah*.

On the walls of the shul, between the long windows, were huge paintings of the Wailing Wall, Rachel's Tomb, and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, painted by the then — famous painter Shlomole Kersh. The rabbi of the shul at that time was Rabbi Kleinplatz, but the main officer of the shul was Shmuel *"Shamesh"* Milgrom. He ruled over the members and his word was the law. He was a tall

man with a long beard and dark eyes filled with wisdom and kindness.

The members of Beth Yehudah had come from all over Europe and settled in Detroit years earlier. Most of them were from Poland, which is why it was called the Polishe Shul. Many were Talmudic scholars and Gerrer *chassidim* like Rav Henech Bloom, Moshe Chaim Bodzin, and Melech Lipschitz. You could find them in shul until midnight studying the Talmud. Yankel Soberman, a successful businessman on Twelfth Street, was the cantor for the high holidays.

When my wife went out on Twelfth Street on Thursday afternoon to shop for the Sabbath, she was amazed to see so many Jewish women in the Jewish bakeries, butcher shops, and fish stores. Not since living in Palestine, had she been able to feel the *Yiddishkeit* in the air, and she was thankful for the inner warmth of living in a religious community again.

Yeshiva Beth Yehudah, which at one time was an afternoon Hebrew school on Elmhurst and Linwood, moved to Dexter and Cortland. There it became a full-time day school with the help of two young, energetic talmudic scholars who had moved to Detroit, Rabbi Sholom Goldstein, zt"l, and Rabbi Avrohom Abba Freedman. We sent our son Moshe, who was then eight years old, to Yeshiva Beth Yehuda. Our younger son Simcha (Steven), was then only three years old. He stayed home and played with the Jewish boys of the neighborhood.

Our daughter, Naomi Zysa Leah, was born in

February 1947, at Harper Hospital in Detroit. It was a cold winter that year. The snow, which started to come down in December, did not stop falling the whole winter. It was especially difficult on the side streets, where the snow plows did not come to clear the streets and the cars parked along the sides were buried in snow.

We were delighted that after two boys we now had a girl. We had to keep our flat warm because of the newborn baby. That was not so easy in those days. Our coal furnace was in the basement. I had to supply coal to the furnace and take out the ashes so that the hot air would be pushed up to our flat. It was a big problem on Shabbos to keep the house warm. Some people hired a *Shabbos goy* who would come in Shabbos morning and take care of the furnace, but we did not have one.

I discovered a way to keep the house warm all day Shabbos without the help of a *Shabbos goy*. On Friday, before candlelighting, I put a lot of coal in the furnace. To keep the fire from consuming all the coal during the first few hours, I would cover the coal with wet ashes. On top of the wet ashes, I would put another layer of coal and on top of that more wet ashes. The coal would burn slowly and supply the flat with warm air. It was not the best way to keep the house warm but it was better than hiring a boy to do the job. You could never be sure who was Jewish and who was not. One neighbor who had hired a boy to make the furnace asked him why he did not come one Shabbos. The boy answered that it was his bar mitzvah that Shabbos and so he went to shul.

The ashes were a nuisance when you had to get rid

of them, so the alleys in back of the houses were always full of ashes in the wintertime. Sometimes, however, the ashes came in handy. When the sidewalks were slippery and it was dangerous to walk, especially for elderly people, the owners of the houses would to spread ashes on the ice-covered sidewalks or steps at the entrance to the houses. Some people even kept a shovel and a bushel of ashes in the trunk of their car so that when their car was stuck in the snow with the rear wheels spinning, they could put a couple of shovels — full of ashes beneath the wheels of the car to gain traction.

After the war, many refugees arrived in the United States. Many of them had been freed from the concentration camps with the help of the American and Allied armies. The Jewish organizations helped them resettle in the United States. Some were helped by close relatives or friends. Most of the people came into New York by ship. But a sizable group of refugees from Japan came over via the Pacific Ocean by way of San Francisco. From there they spread out all over the United States. Among them was Dr. Zerach Warhaftig, who had helped us to obtain a certificate to enter Palestine. In Warsaw, he had been the head of the Mizrachi organization, and he later became Israel's Minister of Religious Affairs.

Many books have been written about the miraculous escape from the Nazis of the entire faculty and student body of the famous Mirrer Yeshiva to Shanghai. In Shanghai there were about three hundred students from that yeshiva, along with another two thousand yeshiva students from Bialistok, Novardhok, Kletsk, Baronowitz,

Grodno, Lublin, and other yeshivos. They had found their way to Vilna and Kovno in Lithuania, and from there they traveled by way of Moscow and Vladivostok to Japan.

A Dutch Yeshiva student tried to get a visa to Curacao. He found, much to his astonishment, that to enter Curaco, a Dutch colony in the Carribean Sea, did not require a visa. He applied for a transit visa from Japan.

In 1939 Sanpo Singhara was assigned to Kovno in Lithuania as Japanese Consul. He appeared like an angel of mercy at precisely the right time. Working day and night for two weeks he issued transit visas to thousands of people who had pieces of paper stamped by the Dutch Honorary Consul with the words: "NO VISA TO CURACAO IS REQUIRED." Among the people to receive these visas were the Amshenover Rebbe and his devoted pupil, Rav Yitzchak Kuperman (who later settled in Detroit and whose *shiurim* I attended) and the Modhzitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Shaul Yedidyeh Eliezer Taub, and his family.

Not everyone trusted the Russians to honor the train tickets purchased with American dollars from "Intourist" at the Kovno train station. But they took a chance and, with the help of the Almighty, they were saved. From Vladivostok they took a ship to Kobe, Japan. Among those who escaped Lithuania in this fashion were Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Rabbi Avraham Yaffen, and Rabbi Menachem Zacks.

Rabbi Avrahom Kalmanovitz, Rosh Yeshiva of the

Mirrer Yeshiva in New York, was in constant contact with the leaders of the Mirrer Yeshiva of Europe. Rabbi Kalmanovitz worked day and night to help the yeshiva financially.

The Mirrer Yeshiva was the only yeshiva that did not disband during the war. Under their Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Finkel, and their *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, they continued to study the Talmud and listen to the wonderful lectures of the *Mashgiach*. Even the occupation of Lithuania by the Russians, did not interfere with their studies. They were confident that the study of Torah would save them. The appearance of the Japanese consul Sanpo Singhara, who freely issued the Japanese transit visas, encouraged them all the more to study and pray constantly without interruption.

They finally reached Vladivostok, after stopping for one week in Moscow, and switched to the Trans-Siberian train. After traveling ten days on the Trans-Siberian train, they reached Kobe in Japan. Eventually they reached Shanghai, China, which was occupied by Japan and was considered an open city, and reestablished their yeshiva in a large shul building. After the war, most of them emigrated either to the United States or to Palestine, which was then under the control of Great Britain.

They were all running away from eastern Poland, which was occupied by Russia. Germany and Russia had divided Poland between themselves; Germany occupied Warsaw and the western part of Poland, while Russia

grabbed eastern Poland and the countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

To a certain extent, the Jews under the Russian occupation were better off than the ones under Nazi Germany. Those Jews who were unfortunate enough to be in the territories occupied by Nazi Germany were put into ghettos and death camps. The Russian Communists, on the other hand, confiscated all Jewish properties in their territories and closed all religious schools while entirely abolishing religion. Yet Jews could still move freely all over Russia and, for American dollars, they could buy exit permits to leave Russia. That is what Rabbi Kalmanovitz was doing in New York, raising money to pay for exit tickets from the Russian "Intourist."

One of the refugees who arrived at that time in Detroit was Rabbi Moshe Rottenberg. He, along with many of his friends in Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, had succeeded in fleeing from Lublin to Vilna when the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939. Vilna for a brief period of time was a neutral city, and two thousand yeshiva boys succeeded in reaching Vilna, where they found themselves under the protection of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski. Moshe Rottenberg and other students of Chachmei Lublin also made their way to Shanghai where they spent the war with the much larger contingent from the Mirrer Yeshiva.

When he reached Detroit, Rabbi Rottenberg reestablished Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin on Linwood and Elmhurst.

After the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and

Nagasaki, and Japan was defeated, Rabbi Kalmanovitz and the Vaad Hatzalah organization worked relentlessly to obtain visas for the yeshiva students, faculty, and their families to emigrate to the United States. It took almost a year for all the yeshiva students of Mirrer and the other *yeshivos* to leave Shanghai, with its unbearable climate and rampant disease. Through the gates of San Francisco entered a highly Torah-educated element of young people who spread all over the United States as teachers for Hebrew schools, rabbis for orthodox congregations, *mashgichim* for kashruth, and roshei yeshiva for new Talmudical Academies which opened up all over the country. New day schools and separate Beis Yaakov schools for girls, were also founded all over the U.S., thanks to the influence of these immigrants. In New York, especially in Brooklyn, where many Chassidic rabbis settled, chassidic *Yeshivos* and seminaries for girls were established.

Detroit was blessed with several of the newcomers from Shanghai, who immensely strengthened the religious life of the community. Among them were Rabbi Leib Bakst, who became Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Beth Yehudah, Rav Yitzchok Kuperman, one of the best students of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, Rav Avraham Gardin, Rav Dovid Bakst, zt"l, and Rav Chatzkel Fein, zt"l.

A committee was organized to build a new *mikvah*, which would belong to the entire community and not to individual congregations. This was especially necessary when the neighborhoods were changing, as the religious

people moved from Twelfth Street and the Dexter Street areas to the suburbs. This committee bought land to build a modern *mikvah* in Oak Park, with the construction under the guidance of Rabbi Sholom Goldstein zt"l and Rabbi Herman Deutsch, zt"l.

Many of Detroit's yeshiva students learned all day in the Yeshiva and then attended college at night. Some became lawyers, doctors, dentists, and accountants; others became physicists, chemists, and teachers in high schools and colleges. In the corridors of hospitals, doctors with white coats and *yarmulkes* on their heads could be seen, and teachers came to teach in public school classrooms with yarmulkes. They were all well respected by their colleagues. And many decided to devote their lives to religious ideals. They became Hebrew teachers, Rabbis, and roshei Yeshiva.

Reb Yosef Borenstein, zt"l who owned a book store on Twelfth Street which he bought from Mr. Chesluk, zt"l sold not only books and religious articles, but also the idea of Agudas Yisrael and the importance of organizing a branch in Detroit. He wanted Detroit to serve as the Midwest headquarters of Agudas Yisrael of America.

Mr. Borenstein neglected his business and devoted all his energies to Agudas Yisrael, working together with Rabbi Eliezer Levin, zt"l, who became president of the local chapter, and Rabbi Chaskel Grubner. They attended the yearly Aguda conventions which were held Thanksgiving weekend in New York and they brought back new ideas for the local organization

The Detroit chapter then consisted of Ben Ahronson,

Meyer Sitzman, Yitzchak Sarnoff, Alex Roberg, and others, and held weekly meetings to discuss how to improve Yiddishkeit in Detroit. They also had their own Beis Medrash, first on Linwood and then on Dexter. There they had study groups and discussions about kashruth and education for the children. They would also go to other Midwest branches such as Cleveland and Chicago for weekend conventions. At one of these, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, came from New York to give a lecture in Talmud.

The ladies also organized themselves as Neshei Agudas Yisrael. They held their meetings, each month in a different home, and they worked hard to collect money to supply the men's organization with tablecloths, towels, and dishes. In the late thirties Agudas Yisrael of America was a small group centered almost exclusively in New York. By the late forties, it had grown into a large organization with branches in every big city. They published a monthly magazine called "Dos Yiddishe Vort."

Rabbi Eliezer Levin, zt"l, who was the president of Detroit's Aguda, was rabbi of Congregation Beis Tikvah on Petoskey Street. I used to be the *baal tefilah* at that shul every holiday, even though it was a long walk from Pingree, where I lived, to Petoskey. The $25.00 I received was a large sum in those days. In addition, I liked to listen to Rabbi Levin's sermons. He used to tell stories about the Chofetz Chaim, zt"l, under whom he had studied in Radin.

These sermons reminded me of the time I was learning

in Warsaw, and the Chofetz Chaim came to Warsaw to intervene with the Polish government against a law which would have harmed the program of the *yeshivos*. He was a very old man and could hardly walk. He stayed in a hotel not far from the government offices. The Chofetz Chaim was carried in a chair to the prime minister's office. He spoke in Yiddish, which was then translated into Polish. Suddenly, the prime minister interrupted the translator and said that he did not need any translator — that just looking at this old Sage had convinced him to do whatever he asked. The Chofetz Chaim had ten people in his hotel room. No one else was allowed to come in. I was always sorry that I got as far as the door, but could not get in to see the Chofetz Chaim.

In the same neighborhood as Rabbi Levin's shul was Congregation Bnai Zion on Humphrey Street. It was much bigger than Beth Tikvah, and also had a *mikvah* in the basement. Every morning after services, Rav Yaakov Mordechai Carmen would conduct a class in Talmud for those who did not have to go to work. In later years, Rabbi Solomon Gruskin became rabbi of that shul.

On Fourteenth Street and Elmhurst, was Congregation Bnai David, called the Russian shul. The rabbi was Rabbi Joshua Sperka, zt"l, who delivered his sermons in English instead of Yiddish — a novelty at that time. In that shul, I attended the first meeting of the Jewish community for the purpose of building a Jewish hospital in Detroit. One of the questions discussed was whether there should be one kosher kitchen for everyone,

even gentiles, or two kitchens, one kosher and one non-kosher.

On Duane at the corner of Holmer, was the Nusach Ari shul, which Rabbi Avrohom Gold led in later years. And on Dexter Boulevard and Collingwood was Bnai Moshe, known as the Hungarian shul. Rabbi Fisher, zt"l, was their spiritual leader. The Magen Abraham shul on Dexter and Cortland was attached to the new Yeshiva Beth Yehudah building, with adjacent classrooms. Two blocks further, at Fullerton, was the Young Israel shul, where Rabbi Samuel Prero was the rabbi, and further up was the shul of Rabbi Rabinovitz, zt"l.

On Linwood and Leslie was the big Galitzianer shul, Beth Abraham. Rabbi Tumim, zt"l, was the rabbi at that time. Rabbi Yitzchok Stollman, zt"l, who later became national president of the Mizrachi organization in America, had a shul called Mishkan Israel. Rabbi Stollman was an excellent speaker and for a time was the head of the Vaad Harabbonim in Detroit.

The Galitzianer shul, besides having their own regular cantor by the name of Bekernov, used to invite famous cantors from New York and arrange concerts for the public. For a dollar ticket, I had the chance to listen to Leibele Waldman, Moshe Kusevitzky, and others. Abe Nusbaum was very active in arranging these concerts. He and the Stollman brothers were among the founders of the Bar Ilan University in Israel.

The Jewish immigrants from Germany had their synagogue, Gemilas Chasadim, on Joy Road and Linwood. Their rabbi was Rabbi Newhouse. Alex Roberg

was their cantor and executive director. On Linwood, were also the Bnai Yaakov shul, and the Bnai Israel shul, which later merged with the Polishe shul Beth Yehudah after it moved to Oak Park.

Shortly after passage of the U.N. resolution establishing the State of Israel on May 15, 1948, a large rally was called by the Jewish community in Detroit. Thousands of people gathered at Central High School on Linwood. With speeches and songs, they hailed the establishment of the State of Israel. At that time I felt all the excitement and the joy of knowing that after almost two millennia we once again had our own country. Ever since we had left what was then Palestine, we had always hoped to return. The land which we had helped to rebuild was always before our eyes and in our hearts.

From 1948 onwards we talked of visiting Israel, but could not imagine going back as long as the Kotel was in Arab hands and we would not be able to pray there. Our contacts with Israel remained at the personal level. Almost every other month we sent packages of food to my wife's first cousins who had gone to Israel after being freed from the concentration camps and parcels of clothing to our former neighbors in Mlawa and to friends in need. All those years, I kept corresponding with friends from Mlawa, especially with Natan Wishinski and his wife Zippora.

June, 1967 changed everything. In the first hours of the war, the Israeli air force knocked out most of the air forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. The Israeli army liberated the Old City of Jerusalem. The Kotel was now in

Jewish hands, and so were the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem. A yearning to visit those holy places filled every Jew. I told my wife that it was now time for us to go back, not to Palestine but to Israel. Emotionally we had never left *Eretz Yisrael*; it was only physically that we were six thousand miles apart.

In September, 1969, we decided to go for the holiday of Succos. After an absence of 31 years we were going home. In the intervening years our three children had all grown and married and had families of their own.

Chapter 26

Trip to Israel

We flew from Detroit to New York. Our son Simcha, who was learning in the Lakewood Kollel, came with his wife Linda to Kennedy Airport to see us off on the K.L.M. flight to Amsterdam and Israel. My wife's first cousins also came to see us off and to say goodbye as we left for Israel.

We were very excited. It was the first time we had gone overseas by plane. Even though we took a night flight, there was no question of our getting any sleep; I couldn't close my eyes for one moment. So many thoughts flashed through my mind of the 31 years since we had left Palestine. Then it had taken us twelve days to go from Tel Aviv to New York via train and boat; now it was only eighteen hours from New York to Tel Aviv.

In Amsterdam we switched planes. Our flight stopped in Munich for a short time. Some of the passengers got off the plane for a few minutes to stretch their feet,

but we did not want our feet to touch the soil of that accursed land, particularly in Munich where Hitler began his rise to power.

After flying a few more hours, we began our descent into Ben Gurion Airport. Through the windows, we could see the beautiful, blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea touching the clear blue sky. I remembered how I used to go bathing there every day after work and taking the swimming test to be accepted for work on the boats at the newly erected Tel Aviv port.

When we got off the plane, we fell to the ground and kissed the earth. This time it was not Palestine, but Israel; and instead of British officials examining our passports, it was young Jews.

It was two days before Succos. Hot air embraced us as we stepped down from the plane. Our friend Natan Wishinski came to meet us in a small van, which he normally used for his business, but in which he was able to make room for a couple of passengers. In his great excitement at meeting us, he lost his way back to Tel Aviv and took the road to Jerusalem instead. The sun went down and it got dark, and Natan had to stop at a gas station to ask directions to Tel Aviv.

The Wishinskis lived on King George Street, at the corner of Dizengoff, in the same apartment they lived in when we left in 1938. At that time, we were their next door neighbors.

Natan and I had been friends since our boyhood in Mlawa. We both belonged to Zeirei Agudas Yisrael. For a time he was the president and I was the secretary of

the local branch. His wife Zippora was my sister Rivka's best friend. We both had emigrated to Palestine in 1934.

The Wishinskis had no children. (They had had a little girl, but she died when she was four years old.) Their apartment consisted of one big living room, a small kitchen and bathroom, and a big closed-in porch, which encircled the whole apartment and which could be used for a dining room or even a bedroom in the summer time. That is the way all the apartments were built in those days. The Modhitzer Rebbe lived downstairs on the first floor and had his Beis Medrash nearby. The rebbe's father was one of those who had escaped through Russia to Japan and spent the war years in Shanghai.

The next day we went to the marketplace to buy the *Arba Minim* for Succos. We walked all the way up King George St. and crossed Allenby Road. I kept thinking that it had been more than thirty years since we last walked here. The streets looked the same, but the buildings had deteriorated — the plaster cracking and the paint peeling off the walls. The sidewalks were full of pedestrians, mainly young people. Many streets had been made one-way to ease the heavy traffic of buses, cars, and trucks. Here and there Yemenite boys offered shoe shines for only half a *grush*. In other places, beggers and cripples asked for donations and passersby threw coins to them. The trees on the sidewalks, which thirty years before had been covered with many green branches, now had only a few branches with discolored leaves. The market place was packed with Jews young and old, each one choosing the nicest esrog he could

find from among the thousands displayed on the tables and stands.

We wanted to go to Jerusalem to spend the holiday among the Gerrer *chassidim* and to visit the Wailing Wall. But the Wishinskis had already made arrangements for all of us to spend the holiday in a hotel in the resort town of Tivon near Haifa. On the way to Tivon, we visited some historic places, including Beit She'arim, which is the burial place of the great sage, Rebi, the compiler of the *Mishnah*.

In Tivon, we had the opportunity to meet with old friends from the group who immigrated to Palestine at the same time we did. We had all belonged to Zeirei Agudas Yisrael or Poale Agudas Yisrael, and had helped to build Bnei Brak and Tel Aviv. Some had been skilled laborers — bricklayers, plasterers, floor tile layers — others unskilled workers, such as mortar or cement mixers and brick carriers.

We reminisced about the old days when we struggled to make a living, to find a day's work. Everyone told his or her story. We also told our story of how one week after our wedding in Warsaw we had come to *Eretz Yisrael*. The main goal then was that Jews should build the land, not Arabs. The concept was called *Avodah Ivrit* (Jewish labor). At night, we joined with the Haganah, taking up posts in the orange orchards to guard against Arabs who sought to infiltrate Jewish settlements.

On the second day of Yom Tov, while my wife and I were still observing the holiday, we were visited by Yaffa Mondry, from Haifa. She had been the leader of Bnos

Agudas Yisrael in Mlawa. Her father Hirsch Mondry was the brother of Pinchas Mondry, and a leader of the Aguda in Mlawa. Yaffa Mondry had organized the group of Orthodox girls from Mlawa and the surrounding towns who went through *hachshara* training in order to receive certificates to enter Palestine. When these girls came to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1934, they worked in Bnei Brak, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, doing all kinds of housework. In that way, they saved themselves from the War and the Nazis. They all had married and established families.

Eating in the beautiful Succah of the hotel and taking walks on the streets of the picturesque town of Tivon gave us unlimited pleasure.

The next day we went up to Jerusalem through the beautiful Judean hills covered with pine trees. The air-conditioned bus slowed down while climbing higher and higher on the newly built divided highway. On the side of the road, we saw destroyed army trucks from the War of Independence.

In Jerusalem, we stayed in a private home in a relatively new section called Bayit Vegan. The first thing we did was to go to the Kotel by taking a number one bus to the Jaffa Gate and walking from there through the narrow streets of the Arab market.

The Kotel was crowded with visitors from all over Israel, as well as tourists from America and Europe. Jews and non-Jews, dressed in modern Western clothes, mingled with traditional Yerushalmis dressed in their long black or striped garments, fur-brimmed hats, and wearing beards and *payos*. The Yerushalmis were invariably

holding large numbers of small children, by the hand who had been waiting for this occasion the whole year. Some of them were going down the wide stone steps to the Kotel, and others were coming back up. Tourists stopped at the Arab stores which were on both sides of the narrow street to buy hand-made jewelry, dresses, and souvenirs.

At the Kotel, we were surprised to see that the small Arab houses which had been near the Kotel years before had been removed and the ground plastered with big stones extending into the courtyard. On the right side, at the end of the Kotel, was a special place for women, separated from the men's section by a *Mechitzah*. No policeman was standing at the entrance to the Kotel, as there had been in the time of the British Mandate thirty years ago. Instead, Israeli army units were stationed with automatic guns on the roof tops of the Old City to make sure that the Arabs who were going in and out of the El-Aksa mosque did not disturb the thousands of Jews who were praying at the Kotel. At the end of the large stone-plastered courtyard, to the left, there was a big Succah, decorated with nice paintings. In the Succah, there were tables and benches where people who had come from outside Jerusalem could sit down and eat the lunches which they had brought along with them.

After Succos we went to the Dead Sea. On the way, we passed the road which goes to Jericho. Farther on, where the road turns right was Kalia, which we had visited thirty-four years earlier. The old wooden shacks were still there, but there was also a modern, stone

building with a cafeteria and a large terrace, with tables and chairs where you could sit and relax while looking at the waters of the Dead Sea. On the other side of the road, across from the building under a tree, an old Arab was waiting with his camel for tourists who wanted to take a picture sitting or riding on a camel. The same road took us to Ein Peshcha, a beach on the Dead Sea. On the right hand side of the road, one could see the tall, bare Qumran mountains in whose deep caves the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

The road continues through the Negev and reaches the southern port city of Eilat on the Red Sea. Among the sites it passes is Kibbutz Ein Gedi which is on a high mountain. A little way further along are the bathhouses of Ein Gedi with the sulphur baths, which relieve pains from rheumatism and arthritis. The same road takes you to Sodom and Ein Boqeq, past the historical fortress of Masada. Young people enjoy climbing up to the fortress before daybreak while their elders take the funicular to near the top.

In Eilat, we stayed in a beautiful, modern hotel. That day the temperature was 108 degrees F, but the hotel was air-conditioned and the windows looked out to the Red Sea. From the distance, we could see the Jordanian port city of Aqaba. Early in the morning, I went down and took a dip in the cold waters of the Red Sea. While swimming in the Red Sea, I thought about how Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt by way of the Red Sea, and how the waters split and the children of Israel walked through the dry sea bed while the Egyptians

were drowned. The words of the beautiful, poetic song of praise which Moses sang after crossing the Sea were on my lips while I was swimming.

We also took a ride on a boat which had a glass bottom, so we could look down and see the coral reefs at the bottom of the Red Sea. There were beautiful fish of different shapes and colors swimming around the reefs in the non-polluted waters. After that, we visited a dairy farm in the Negev where milk cows imported from Holland stood all day under a cold shower to keep them cool in the 100 degree heat.

When we first visited the Tomb of Rachel in 1934, it was in an open field near a road with the familiar tree not far away, as it is pictured in every postcard. This time we found the Tomb on a busy road with stores across the street. Buses, cars, trucks, and taxi cabs ran up and down the street, and there was an iron fence in front with a gate through which one entered and exited. Two Israeli soldiers stood guard on each side of the gate with their automatic guns, and nearby there was a small Arab cemetery with broken monuments. If it had not been for the fact that we recognized the dome on the roof, we would not have known that it was Rachel's Tomb.

We went inside through the iron gate. On the right, there was a fountain with three faucets to wash one's hands before going inside the stone structure with the arched opening. Inside we recognized the same two rooms that had been there on our previous visit. The first room contains two small windows and a stone bench

covered with a carpet and some prayer books on a shelf. The inside had not changed at all since our visit and probably not for centuries before that either. We proceeded to the other room through the low archway, which we had to bend down to get through. Once inside, we faced the huge stone monument covered with a red plush carpet. Two Sephardic women were circling around the monument with a red thread seven times. The thread is supposed to be a charm to help sick people recover. Going back outside we noticed Arab stores across the road, and, on top of the roof, Israeli soldiers with machine guns.

On the road from Bethlehem to Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, we passed a group of settlements called Gush Etzion, which were built by Mizrachi and then destroyed by the Arabs during the War of Independence. With the area now in Israeli hands, it was being rebuilt with industrial facilities, educational institutions, and yeshivas.

Hebron, which was King David's capital city for the first seven years of his rule, did not seem to me like a capital city — neither the first time we saw it nor this time. But there was a major change from our first visit to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. Then an Arab policeman had stood at the entrance and refused to permit us to go higher than the first seven steps. This time there were no Arab policemen, and we could go up all the steps and through the big hall towards the burial places of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Outside of Hebron, we passed through the newly built

town of Kiryat Arba, which was built by religious settlers right after the Six Day War. On both sides of the road are beautiful apartment buildings where many Americans live, including some from our hometown of Detroit.

We had many surprises on our trip. Even though our friends knew that we were coming, they did not know the exact time and place of our visit. Once we were riding on a bus from Bnei Brak to Tel Aviv. In back of us was a couple talking to each other in Yiddish. At one point, I overheard the man say to his wife, "It looks like the people in front of us are Americans from their dress." I turned around said to him, "Are you not Itche Skurka from Mlawa?" He looked at me and said, "You must be Archie and Esther Grossbard." And that's the way we met after more than thirty years of not seeing each other. In fact, they had been on their way to Tel Aviv to meet us at the home of the Wishinskis.

Itche Skurka had been my friend in Mlawa. We both belonged to Zeirei Agudas Yisrael. He and Yankel Gevarter were the first two boys who registered to go on *hachshara* at a farm near Chorzel about fifty kilometers from Mlawa. After they received certificates to emigrate to Palestine in the beginning of 1934, Itchie Skurka settled in Haifa, working as a laborer in construction. He later moved to Bnei Brak, where he now lives with his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

An even greater surprise occurred one day during Succos when I arrived early for *davening* in the Gerrer Beis Medrash in the Geulah section of Jerusalem. There were a few hundred *chassidim* dressed in their traditional

holiday garb, some sitting at tables and studying Talmud while others were just standing around anticipating the beginning of the services.

My American clothes drew attention to me. A man came over to give me *"Shalom Aleichem."* Suddenly he exclaimed, in heavily accented English,"Archie! You are here?" When I did not recognize him, he asked, "Don't you recognize me? I am Citrenbaum." I looked at him more closely, and then I recognized him. We had worked together thirty years before building the first homes in Bnei Brak. He specialized in plastering the inner walls of the houses, while I was the one who made the mortar — a mixture of quicklime, cement, sand and water — in a box outside the building. After making the mortar, I would carry it up in two buckets on makeshift steps to the upper floors where he stood plastering the walls and ceiling.

My wife was the *shadchanit* between him and Chana Lichtenstein, a girl from Bnos Agudas Yisrael in the town of Sherps, not far from Mlawa. As a child, Chana had shown artistic talent, and when she came to Palestine she took courses in painting and became a famous painter. Her pictures have been shown at exhibitions all over the country.

My wife was waiting for me outside the Beis Medrash, sitting on a bench near a bus stop on Rechov Malchei Israel. Citrenbaum was eager to meet my wife, so we both went out and he started to talk to her in Hebrew. My wife told him that she did not understand Hebrew. Finally my wife recognized him and said, "You must be

Zysman Citrenbaum." He told her how happy he was with her *shadchanus*, which had resulted in six sons and one daughter.

We decided to visit his wife to see if she would recognize us. They had rented an apartment for Succos in the Geulah section, a few blocks away from the Beis Medrash. When we entered, she was holding a thick prayer book and davening. We waited until she finished praying. We recognized her right away, though she was some thirty years older and the mother of seven grown children.

Citrenbaum told his wife in Hebrew that we were a couple from America who would like to buy one of her paintings. She said that she did not have her paintings in Jerusalem, but if we came to Bnei Brak we would surely find a picture to our liking. Even after talking for a while, she still did not recognize us.

Finally Zysman said to his wife, "Don't you recognize them? They are Archie and Esther from America." She almost fainted. She fell on my wife and kissed her and hugged her. She told my wife how thankful she was to her for having made it possible to share her life with such a good man and to raise a family of seven children. She invited us to her home in Bnei Brak, which we visited a couple of days later. There we admired her beautiful paintings on the walls of the house.

Being in the big Gerrer Beis Medrash located in the Geulah section of Jerusalem made me recall the Beis Medrash in Gura Kalvaria, called Gur for short. Gur was not far from Warsaw, and was connected by a mini-train

called the *Kalaika*. The Gerrer Beis Medrash in Poland had a large courtyard in front, running the length of the building. In the back there was a much bigger courtyard, with benches around the length and width of the yard.

For Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah, about ten thousand *chassidim* came to Gur, where they filled up the Beis Medrash and both courtyards. The day before holidays, thousands of *chassidim* would pour into Warsaw from all over Poland. From there they would travel by the *Kalaika* to Gur, where they would take up residence in the homes of the townspeople while the owners moved out for a few days. The trip from Warsaw to Gur took about two hours. Even on the train you could already feel the atmosphere of Gur.

In the Gerrer shtiebel in Mlawa, there was a lottery drawing each week to determine who would go that Shabbos to Gur. Each week participants paid one-half *zloty* to participate in the drawing. The winner received enough money for all the expenses to go to Gur and back. In this way, everyone had a chance to visit the Rebbe. My first visit to the Rebbe was as a child when my father won the drawing.

But more than anything else, standing there in the Gerrer Beis Medrash in Geulah made me recall my feelings upon hearing the blessing of the saintly Rebbe, zt"l: *"Zol zein mit mazel, un fur gezunterheit."*

SECTION V

Mordechai Sauerhaft, 1946.

The Mlodnickis, 1978.

The Sauerhaft Story

Among the refugees from Europe who came to Detroit after the war was Mordechai Sauerhaft, who has been a friend and neighbor of ours since 1949. For several years we had a class in Talmud together every Shabbos afternoon. His amazing story is but one example of the miracles experienced by every Jew who survived the conflagration in Europe.

Mordechai Sauerhaft was born in 1909. When World War II broke out in 1939, he was thirty years old. He was well-learned in Talmud. Yet, when his father died, he was forced to help his mother in the family business, a fabric store in the town of Mikolyow. They sold fabric materials to tailors and to private people, to be made into suits, coats, dresses, skirts, etc. In those days in Europe, and especially in Poland, if someone needed a suit of clothes or a coat, he did not buy a ready-made suit. Instead he bought the material in a fabric store and then took it to a tailor who sewed it according to his measurements.

Sauerhaft had many customers, both Jews and non-Jews. He was honest and he treated his customers well, and many became his friends. Among them was a Polish non-Jew by the name of Mlodnicki. Mlodnicki was both the caretaker and the organ player in the local church. He lived with his wife and small children in a house not far from the church.

Mikolyow was a small town in East Galicia, not far from the big city of Lemberg, or Lvov. Of its population of 5,000 people, eighty percent were Ukrainian, ten percent Poles, and ten percent Jews. Even though the Ukrainians and the Poles were always fighting with each other, they were united against the Jews. In essence, ninety percent of the population were anti-Semites.

When the war broke out, in September, 1939, Russia occupied the whole eastern part of Poland, including east Galicia. The Russian invasion made the Ukrainians even more anti-Semitic. They blamed the Jews for the Russian occupation and said that the Jews had founded Communism to rule over the whole world and that they had brought the Communists to the Ukraine to destroy it. The Ukrainians were looking for the opportunity to take revenge upon the Jews.

During the period of the Russian occupation, which lasted until 1941, life was not easy. The Russians nationalized all private property and businesses, closed all religious institutions, and sent people to Siberia for minor transgressions, calling them speculators, Zionists, etc. But those under Russian occupation were much better off than those living under the Germans in Western Poland

where the Jews were put into ghettos and transported to the death camps. During the Russian occupation, Mr. Sauerhaft succeeded in hiding some of his best fabric materials, bolts of wool, cotton, silk, and rayon, in a secure place where no one would be able to find them.

The picture changed entirely in 1941 when Hitler attacked Russia. German forces captured many territories which had previously been ceded to Russia under the Molotov—Ribbentrop Pact. The Nazis succeded in occupying almost all of Europe. At that time, Mikolyow and all the other towns in Eastern Galicia came under the rule of the Nazis. The Ukrainians did not wait for the Gestapo to come in before they took their hate out revenge on the Jews. They did the Gestapo's work for them.

On the second day after the Germans came into Mikolyow, the Ukrainians gathered all the Jewish men into the city hall, keeping them there for 24 hours without food or drink. Afterwards, they let the Jews out and put them to work at the most backbreaking and disgusting manual labor imaginable. That was just the beginning.

A Jewish committee, the Judenrat, was organized with three Jewish policemen who had to supply Jewish men to work for the Nazis every morning. Each Jewish worker received a labor permit to show that he was employed by the Germans. The work crews fixed roads and did other hard labor from 8:00 a.m. until the evening. Their wives had to sell their clothes, jewelry, and other belongings in order to feed their husbands and children. Those who did not have labor permits were arrested and

sent to Belsitz, which contained a death camp. No one came back from there.

By September, 1942, all the Jews had been removed from the towns around Kolonroyov. Sauerhaft knew that the same thing was going to happen to Mikolyow, so he decided to give away his best fabric materials to his friend and customer Mlodnicki, the caretaker of the church. Several times, Mr. Mlodnicki came in the middle of the night, and took bolts of fabric to his house. Sauerhaft calculated that if the Germans killed him, at least they would not inherit anything from him.

Two weeks before the High Holidays of 1942, Mr. Sauerhaft came home from the forced labor brigade. He lay down and tried to fall asleep, but he could not sleep for fear of what would happen in the coming days. Suddenly he heard a fierce knocking on the boarded-up windows and someone calling out, "Save yourself, because they are taking us away!" The voice belonged to his unmarried aunt who lived nearby. He and his mother and younger sister took whatever they could. They broke the boarded-up windows and jumped out, each one running in a different direction. In the backyard there was a shack used as a toilet which had an attic. He climbed onto the roof, took away a few of the shingles, and crawled into the attic, putting back the shingles so that it would not be noticeable that someone was there. He could not stand up or even sit up — he had to lie flat.

During the day he was burned by the heat and at night he was freezing cold, but he could hear what was

going on in his house and in those of his neighbors. Then he heard shootings. The Ukrainian police were searching for people trying to hide and shooting them. He heard the police talking among themselves and boasting of the neighbors whom they had shot. Among the names he heard was the aunt who had awakened them and told them to run for their lives. Mordechai lay in that attic for three days and three nights without food or water. He heard the Ukrainians looting all the Jewish houses of everything they could carry. From their conversation, he could tell that they were still looking for Jews.

On the third day it was quiet so Saurhaft, climbed down from his hiding place. He could barely stand on his feet. He crawled into his house and saw all about only destructon. Doors and windows were broken open and all the valuables were taken out of his house and those of his neighbors. Lying outside on the ground were torn religious Hebrew books and kitchen utensils. Not a single Jewish soul was to be seen anywhere. Mordechai did not know if he was the only Jew left in the city.

He found a piece of old bread and some water which he drank mixed with his tears. He felt that he could not stand on his feet any longer and lay down on a broken bed and fell asleep, sleeping for twenty-four hours. When he awakened he did not know where he was. He thought that he was dreaming, but little by little he came to himself. So great was his hunger that he felt he would die immediately if he did not find something to eat.

One of the members of the Judenrat lived not far

from him. He decided to go over to him. Perhaps he was still alive. Maybe he would find something to eat there. As he approached the house, he saw that the doors and windows were boarded and locked. He figured that this was a good sign. After knocking hard on the door and identifying himself, he was let in. First he was given something to eat. Only afterwards was he told that almost all the Jews had been transported to Belsitz; only the six members of the Jewish Committee were left - the three Jewish policemen and three other Jews who delivered raw materials to the Nazis for their war factories. (Their wives and children had been transported to Belsitz.) The Ukrainians found many Jews in hiding and had shot them on the spot. Among those transported to the camps were Mordechai's mother and sister, his brother, with his wife and child, and the rest of his relatives. He thought, however that Mordechai's Aunt Sima had saved herself because she had not been seen on the transport.

When Mordechai heard this, he ran to his aunt's house. After knocking hard on the door, she let him in. When he saw her, Mordechai almost fainted. She looked like a dead person, trembling from fear. She told him how by miracle she had escaped detection by the rampaging Ukranians. Mordechai and his aunt cried for a long time. From their family of over thirty people, they were the only two left. Mordechai's aunt gave him a room in her house and they lived together in anguish and fear. In the middle of the night, he carried to his aunt's home the rest of the fabric material which he had hidden. The next day he went to the Jewish Committee to find out

if anyone else had saved himself and what was going to happen next.

The building was locked. Outside in the backyard, there were a few other Jews standing in a corner, scared to death, talking more with their eyes than with their mouths. Each spoke of his miraculous escape and wondered what would happen next.

Every day Saurhaft and the surviving Jews went there. After talking briefly, they would disperse again. Of 160 Jewish families who had lived in their town, only sixty people were left alive. And even those who had survived were more dead than alive.

The Nazis needed raw materials for their ammunition factories, and therefore left alive those Jews who supplied them. They even issued special identification papers to the suppliers of the raw materials. Some Jews were optimists and believed that the identification papers would save them. Those who still had some money bought identification papers. Sauerhaft was not that kind of optimist. He did not believe in the identification papers and did not try to buy them.

A few days later, the remaining Jews decided to find out what had happened to those who had been placed on transports. They learned that they had been driven to the next big city, Stree. There all the Jews from Stree and the surrounding small towns were gathered together and from there they were transported to Belsitz. (During the ordeal, many had died from hunger and thirst.) They already knew that Belsitz was the end of the line, but many still could not believe that the Germans would kill

innocent men, women, and children. They hoped that they were being taken for forced labor and that after the war they would come back.

They decided to hire a non-Jew and send him to Belsitz to find out the truth. He came back and told them that he was unable to go into Belsitz but he did go to the nearest town, Raba Ruska. There the Jewish committee told him that every day transports of Jews to Belsitz passed by. He himself saw transports of clothing and shoes and other things coming back from Belsitz. Then they knew for sure that there was no more hope.

Sauerhaft felt that his days and those of the remaining Jews were numbered. He gave his friend Mlodnicki the rest of the fabric material which he had hidden in his aunt's house.

A few days passed and nothing happened. A minyan gathered for the High Holidays in the headquarters of the Jewish Committee. Two people stood guard in front and in back.

After a few weeks, an order came that all the remaining Jews were to leave and go to the ghetto in Stree. Since they already knew what the ghetto in Stree meant, no one rushed to obey the order. Saurhaft was in a group fixing the roads and was still going to work every morning. It was hard labor, but it was better than doing nothing. It helped them forget what had happened, and helped them not to think of the future. The leader of the group was a Polish non-Jew, with whom Saurhaft was friendly, and who even allowed him to skip work on

Shabbos and Jewish holidays in return for a few Polish zlotys.

This went on for several months, until February, 1943. One day, when they came back from work on the roads, they saw notices written with big letters that within three days every Jew must be in Stree. Any Jew found after that would be shot. The only exception was for the group fixing the roads. A few days later, in the middle of the night, the Ukrainian police rounded up the remaining Jews and put them on a truck to transport them to the ghetto in Stree. After this action the whole town of Mikolyow was declared to be free of Jews, except for the brigade of eleven people who worked on the roads and who were "legal." There were also a few more Jews who had succeeded in hiding themselves or who had run away from the ghetto in Stree.

One day, going to work, Mordechai heard the "news" that during the previous night the remaining illegal Jews had been caught and had been taken to the cemetery. There a mass grave had already been dug, and the Jews were shot and dumped into it. Those remaining alive knew that the same was going to happen to them, but they did not see any way to save themselves. All their thoughts were occupied with plans for escape, and hopes that the Allies might still win the war before they were killed.

One day while going to work, passing by the little jail house near the city hall, the work gang heard voices crying for help. The voices came from the wife of Yehoshua Tanne, one of the eleven people in the labor

brigade. She and her two children had been hiding with the Polish jail guard but he told the accursed Gestapo about them, and the next day they were to be taken out to the cemetery and shot.

One morning before they went to work, a Ukrainian policeman came in and told the work brigade to come with him. They were sure that their end was near. The Ukranian policeman took them to the train tracks and made them pick up the dead bodies of those who had jumped off the train to escape from the transports as they were taken to Belsitz.

By now, the Nazis could already see that they were going to lose the war. The German army was retreating on all fronts. Yet, the closer they came to defeat, the greater the effort to exterminate Jews.

Mr. Sauerhaft's labor group of eleven people was housed in a half-deserted house. They were guarded by a Polish policeman with a rifle and shotgun who took them to work in the morning and brought them back in the evening. When they were being marched to work, Ukrainians would approach them asking them for whatever they might have hidden since they were going to be killed anyway.

Mordechai had told one of his friends in the group that he had given some valuable fabric material to Mlodnicki. The friend told him that he should ask Mlodnicki if he would be willing to hide two people. Sauerhaft refused because he did not believe that it was possible to hide a person, and he had no guarantee that Mlodnicki would not betray him to the Gestapo.

But the suggestion touched off an internal debate within Mordechai: Should he remain with the labor brigade as long as they were still "legal" or should he try to escape to Mlodnicki to be hidden like an object, unable to go outside and breathe the fresh air and liable to be discovered at any time and shot. Mordechai wondered if he would ever experience freedom again. Despite the German retreat on all fronts, he could hardly believe that he would still be alive when the war was over.

One day he met Mlodnicki and, on the spur of the moment, decided to ask him if he would hide him in his house. How surprised he was when Mlodnicki told him that there were already four Jews hidden in his house. Mlodnicki told him that if the Jews he was already hiding were not against it, he would also hide him there, but that he should come and ask them himself.

In the middle of the night, he snuck out of the house where the labor brigade slept and went to Mlodnicki's house. There he found Mendel Ehrenzweig and his wife and Ehrenzweig's sister, Devorah Haselnus, and Melech Shpigler who had jumped from the train on the way to Belsitz. They had waited up for him, because they were told that he was coming. Mendel Ehrenzweig and his wife were in their middle fifties. They had owned a large wholesale fabric business in town before the War and had been quite wealthy. Devorah Haselnus' husband was in the labor brigade with Mr. Sauerhaft. The Haselnuses were a young couple and had owned the biggest grocery store in town. The group had already been hiding in Mlodnicki's house for a few months.

Mr. Mlodnicki's house consisted of one bedroom, which he had given over to the Ehrenzweigs, and another very large room where he kept an assortment of things from the church, a smaller room where he kept house tools, and a big kitchen. In the kitchen there was a long table with benches on either side. On the wall was a day bed, which was extended at night for the children to sleep on. There was a coal stove with six burners and an oven to bake bread, which people usually did in the small towns and farms. Close to the door was a window which was covered with a curtain. The inhabitants could look out, but no one could look in. Anyone who wanted to come into the house had to pass the window, and someone was always sitting by the window watching to see who wanted to come in. Mlodnicki also had a big dog at the door. If a stranger wanted to enter, the dog would bark very loudly.

The Mlodnickis had three children, aged three, four, and five. They also raised his brother's child, a girl of ten. Mr. and Mrs. Mlodnicki were very kind, young people, who treated the Jews hiding with them with great respect, as though they were honored guests. They always addressed those they were hiding as "Sir" or "Madam." Their children never played with other children and were taught never to mention a word to anyone about strangers living in their house. They kept their promise.

There was no plumbing in the house, as in all the small towns in Europe. The outhouse was outside in the back yard, but the Jews did not dare go outside even for

a second. The Mlodnickis had to carry the human waste outside themselves.

Mr. Mlodnicki also dug a deep pit in the big utility room as a hiding place in case of emergency and put two benches in there. He covered the pit with the boards of the floor and put some furniture on top. Each person paid 800 zlotys (about $10.00) a month to the Mlodnickis for hiding him or her, besides their food expenses. In Poland, each town had its market day when the farmers would bring their products into town. Mrs. Mlodnicki would go once a week on the market day and buy enough fruits, vegetables, and groceries, for all those hidden in the house.

Mlodnicki was given American dollars, gold pieces, or fabric materials and would then go to the big city of Lvov and exchange on the black market whatever he had been given for Polish zlotys. The Jews then used that money to pay him. In addition, the Jews cooked and prepared the food by themselves on the big stove and baked bread in the oven.

Sauerhaft returned to his labor brigade after his nighttime visit to Mlodnicki. He told no one where he had gone. Even after the Jews hidden with Mlodnicki agreed to take him into their hiding place, he could not make up his mind whether or not to join them. He felt like he was walking on a tightrope.

The Polish policeman who guarded the eleven men at night did not even notice Mordechai's absence. Even if he had known, he would not have told anyone because Sauerhaft was his friend. Every few days Sauerhaft gave

him some Polish zlotys to let him off work on Shabbos.

Spring, 1943. Even though he had no calendar, Mordechai knew exactly when it was the first day of Passover, and he decided that he was not going to work that day. The Polish policeman warned him that the Gestapo might make an inspection that very day and he would be shot for not being there. Still, he and another Jew stayed away from work. By that time the constant living in fear of the Gestapo had lost its affect on Mordechai, especially when he heard that the Nazis had begun killing all the remaining Jews, even those in labor brigades.

One day, standing alone while fixing a hole in the main highway, Mordechai found himself imagining himself already hidden into the Mlodnicki house. Just then, Mlodnicki passed by, and asked him if he wanted to be hidden with the others rather than just wait to be shot. The next night he left the labor brigade and came to Mlodnicki, who made a place for him to sleep on the floor of the big utility room.

There were now five Jews hidden in the house. A week later, Reuven Haselnus, Devorah Haselnus' husband, fled the labor brigade to come hide with his wife.

Three days later, Mlodnicki brought them the news that the Nazis had killed everyone in the labor brigade while they were standing at work. Two weeks later, in the middle of the night, they heard a strong knocking at the door. They were sure that they had been discovered and that the Nazis had come to take them all out to be killed. But, it was Gedaliah Ehrenzweig, Mendel's and

Devorah's brother who had run away from a labor camp when the Nazis killed everyone. Knowing his brother's hiding place, he had come there with great difficulty. Now there were seven hidden Jews.

Mordechai had always been a pessimist, and his pessimism did not lessen now that there were seven Jews being hidden by one Polish family. Each day that passed without being discovered was a miracle in itself. The only hope for survival lay in the fact that the Germans were losing ground every day.

Mlodnicki provided them with Polish newspapers and maps. The men would sit in the kitchen at the long table, reading the newspapers and studying the maps. They took turns expressing their opinions on the strategies of the Allied and German forces. Meanwhile the women were busy preparing the food and squabbling. When the one who was sitting watch at the window saw someone at the door, he would give a sign and they would all clear the kitchen, go into the utility room, and wait there until the danger was over. Mlodnicki continued making his monthly trips to Lvov to the black market. He would bring back zlotys with which the Jews paid him for hiding them.

There were now thirteen people occupying the Mlodnicki home; seven Jews, Mr. and Mrs. Mlodnicki, their three small children, and the ten-year-old niece they were raising. The Mlodnickis continued to treat the Jews as honored guests. Once, when the ten-year-old girl called one of them "Zidzy" (Jew), she was made to apologize. The effects of being locked up all the time

with the same people, all day and every day, and the reports from Mlodnicki of Jews being found and taken to the cemetery to be shot, caused much tension. Once they were standing at the window when they saw Beth Sheininger, with her beautiful daughter, being driven out to the cemetery to be killed after the Pole who had been hiding her turned her in to the Gestapo. At such moments, they felt that the same thing would happen to them the next day and the bickering would stop for a few days.

Once when a quarrel broke out between the women, Sauerhaft warned them that if they continued, he would run away into the woods. He told them that he would rather die by the hands of the Nazis than through his fellow Jews. His words had their desired effect.

One day, Mrs. Mlodnicki told them that she was going away for a few days to visit her brother, who lived in the nearby city of Stanislaw. They did not like the idea of her leaving the house but there was nothing they could do about it.

A couple of days later, a nicely-dressed Polish priest appeared at the door. They immediately cleared out the kitchen and went into the big room where the church furniture was standing. Mlodnicki invited the priest in. When a couple of hours had passed by and the priest still had not left, they were sure that their end was near. Each minute seemed to them like an hour and each hour like a year. Finally, Mlodnicki came in and told them that the priest was his wife's brother whom she had gone to visit. She had sent him to say that she had developed

heart trouble from constant fear and that they must leave the house. But Mlodnicki told him that he could not go back on his promise to hide them, and if his wife could not take the fear, she should stay away as long as she wanted. His "guests" thanked him effusively for that.

When a couple more days had passed and the priest still had not left, they told Mlodnicki that they wanted to talk to the priest themselves. He agreed. Mendel Ehrenzweig took on the role of group spokesman. He pleaded with the priest and explained to him that if they left the house for even a moment they would surely be caught and shot. He also gave the priest several bolts of Sauerhaft's fabric material for a suit of clothes. The priest's manner became milder and he promised that he would try to convince his sister to come back. The next day he left and a day later Mrs. Mlodnicki returned. Again, she referred to the Jews as "my guests."

Winter, 1943-1944. At the front, the Russians were fast approaching east Galicia; they were now only fifty miles from Toronopol. The Germans needed people to man the factories. With the Jews gone, they began catching Poles, especially those found around the black market, and transporting them to Germany as slave laborers.

The Jews hiding with Mlodnicki needed money again to pay for their hiding. Again they sent Mlodnicki to Lvov with American dollars and manufactured materials to exchange for Polish currency. They knew he would be in danger, but there was no choice. Three days passed by and he still had not returned. They were sure that he had been caught by the Nazis and sent to Germany.

They remonstrated bitterly with themselves for sending him.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mlodnicki did all the work in the house. In the past, they had never been left alone in the house without either Mr. or Mrs. Mlodnicki. But now, when Mrs. Mlodnicki had to go out to buy something, the three-year-old girl sat at the window watching. Once a Ukrainian policeman knocked at the door and when no one answered, went over to the window and asked the girl if anybody was home. They were sure that all was lost! How surprised and relieved they were when the three-year-old girl said that there was no one in the house and he walked away.

After a week of waiting, Mlodnicki returned. There was no end to their happiness. He had been caught by the Germans and was being transported to Germany. But he had managed to escape and return home. He added that perhaps it was in their merit that he had been able to return safely.

Time crawled. Each day seemed like a few years. Twelve months had already passed since Mordechai had settled with the Mlodnickis. During that time almost all the Germans had been driven from the Ukraine. The mayor of the city called a gathering of all the citizens and appealed to them to make a full-scale effort to find any remaining Jews. He told them that when the Bolsheviks will recapture the town, the Jews will tell the victors how the Ukrainians had sided with the Germans and the locals will all be deported to Siberia. Mr. Mlodnicki was

also at that gathering and he told his "guests" what the mayor had said.

Passover, 1944, approached. Sauerhaft asked Mlodnicki to buy him only supplies which were not chometz — potatoes, carrots, onions, and fruits. Again he did not have matzos, but at least he did not eat chometz either. He celebrated the holiday of "freedom" in hiding, with the fear of death hanging over him every minute.

Suddenly a new fight broke out among those in hiding. One of the group did not have any more money to pay the monthly payment of 800 zlotys. The argument lasted a few days until Mlodnicki told them that he would not charge for keep while Sauerhaft offered to pay for food.

May, 1944. The battlefront was only fifty miles from their town. But just when they were sure that in a few more days they would be saved, the Russian army decided to regroup before undertaking a new offensive.

Since there were no more Jews, the Ukrainians now turned their wrath on their Polish neighbors. They wanted to turn the city into one which was purely Ukrainian. The Poles were thrown into a panic when three Poles were found murdered on the street. The Poles all made preparations to leave the city, and move to West Galicia where the vast majority of people were Poles. The Germans supplied them with transportation.

The church where Mlodnicki was the caretaker closed and the priest left town. Mlodnicki and his wife were very nervous. Mlodnicki told his guests that he too would run

away, but he could not leave them and to take them with him was impossible.

Mlodnicki's neighbors were suspicious and asked him why he did not make preparations to leave since the Polish church was already closed and the priest had left town. He answered that with small children it was not easy to travel. He began going to the Ukrainian church and speaking sharply against Jews so that they would think that he was one of them.

German troops, retreating from the Russians, entered the town and began requisitioning houses on their way. Mlodnicki was afraid that they would requisition his house. He prepared knives and other sharp instruments so that they would be able to defend themselves in case of a fight. He wanted to steal weapons from the nearby school where the Germans kept guns, rifles, and hand grenades, but Sauerhaft talked him out of that.

For three months they had lived in a perpetual high state of terror. Finally at the beginning of August, the Russians started their offensive again. It was Shabbos, Tisha B'Av. They were awakened by a heavy bombardment. Each hour the bombardment came closer and closer. (To their ears it was the most beautiful music.) The shells began to fall near their house and the windows started to break. Some shells fell into the house. Together with the Mlodnicki family, they all went underground into the pit, which he had dug in case of emergency. From time to time Mlodnicki went up to see what was going on. In the afternoon, the shelling was so

heavy that they thought that the house was falling apart and they would be buried alive.

Around four o'clock in the afternoon, the shelling stopped. Mlodnicki went up and then came right back down with the good news that he saw a Russian tank passing by their house. When they heard that, they fell on each other and kissed each other. They embraced the Mlodnickis and kissed and thanked them. At the same time, they cried for all their relatives and friends who had not lived to see that moment. They all went up from the pit. After three years living with the fear of death, they relished the taste of being free people. They stayed with the Mlodnickis until the next day.

On Sunday morning, when Mordechai went outside and breathed the fresh air, he could not stay on his feet. His head was dizzy, and he thought he was dreaming. He could hardly believe that it was real - that what so many millions of Jews had dreamed of, he had actually lived to see. He could not believe he was walking around in the street and that no one would catch him and shoot him. It took him a little time to get used to his new life.

On that Sunday morning, when Mordechai went out to the market place which had been ninety percent Jewish before the War, he did not see even one Jew.

All the Jewish businesses and homes had been taken over by Ukrainians, and those left empty had been largely gutted by vandals. Mordechai entered the house where he and his mother and sister had lived. It had been vandalized and all its contents stolen. In the garbage he found pages from holy books. Each nook and cranny of

the house reminded him of his mother and other relatives killed by the Nazis or Ukrainains. In his mind, he relived again and again the entire tragedy. Afraid that he would break down, he went out again into the street.

The market street was full of Russian soldiers. No civilians could be seen, even though it was Sunday when all the Ukrainian youth used to walk around. In the middle of the market place lay three dead Germans, their military uniforms smeared with blood. Looking at them, Sauerhaft felt a certain satisfaction that he had lived to see them defeated.

A Russian officer, who looked Jewish, came over and asked him if he could call a few Ukrainians to carry away the bodies of the dead Germans. Sauerhaft told him that he was afraid to go alone, so the officer sent a Russian soldier along with him. He went to the most virulent anti-Semite in town, who was sitting with his friends eating his Sunday meal. Seeing Sauerhaft accompanied by a Russian soldier, he almost fell off his chair, and, with fire in his eyes, he asked Sauerhaft what he wanted. Sauerhaft told them in the name of the Russian military command that they should go bury the three dead Germans in the market place. They refused on the grounds that it was their rest day. But Sauerhaft retorted that when it came to killing Jews they had never rested on Sunday. He told them that he would report their refusal to the military command. This scared them and they went to do the job. Looking at them dragging the bodies to the grave, Sauerhaft felt for the first time the sweet taste of revenge.

Joining the seven Jews hidden by Mlodnicki were a husband and wife, who had been hidden by a non-Jew in a nearby village and six young men who had hidden in the deep forest, living like animals. A seventh member of the group had been killed three days earlier when some Ukrainians tricked them into a trap and shot one of them. Of six hundred Jews prior to the War only fifteen were left alive.

Even though Mlodnicki told them that his house was still open for them, they went to the Russian military commander, who gave them a Jewish house nearby. They were afraid that the Ukrainians would attack them at night, which they often did to those they considered Russian sympathizers.

Every day thousands of captured German soldiers were brought into town. Since the Russians could not communicate with them, Mr. Sauerhaft became their translator. When the Germans asked him what the Russians were going to do to them, he answered that the Russians planned to do just what they had done to the Jews. They started to cry and they begged him to have pity on their wives and children. It was a pleasure to see the proud Aryans reduced to begging for their lives. Too bad that only a few Jews were left to see them in their downfall!

On the third day after they were freed, the Jews decided to go into the woods to find the corpse of the Jew whom the Ukrainians had killed a few days before. Even though it was a dangerous mission since the murderers were still hiding in the forest, they wanted

to bring him back and fulfill the commandment not to leave a Jew unburied. After searching for a while they found him covered with worms and, since they did not have the tools to dig a grave, they had to leave him.

A week passed since they were freed. The front was still only a few miles from their town. In the middle of the night, they heard loud noises coming from the neighboring military command. Fearing that they were packing and making preparations to leave, they began getting dressed to leave with them. If the Germans were mounting a counter-offensive and the Russians retreating, they would have to go with the Russians. They stood packed and ready to leave the whole night, but in the morning they found that it had only been their imagination.

After two weeks, the Russians mobilized all the local men from the age of 18 to 35. After a brief training period, they were sent to the front battle line to fight the Germans as a punishment for having sided with the Germans. To show that all were equal, the Russians also mobilized the few remaining Jews. The six younger Jews had volunteered almost as soon as they were freed in order to take revenge on the Germans. They were sent to the front lines and two were killed right away. The rest were over forty years old and therefore exempted. Sauerhaft was the only one to be mobilized, and he too was released because of his age.

Meanwhile, the holiday of Rosh Hashana approached. There was not even a minyan of Jews. Nor could they find a machzor or shofar. Mordechai prayed alone saying whatever prayers he remembered by heart. Afterwards

he decided that he must leave this town where there were not even ten Jews. He decided to go to Adish in West Galicia. There he would find enough Jews for a minyan, at least for Yom Kippur.

He went to Mlodnicki and he took back whatever fabrics were left over. With great difficulty he managed to reach Yareslav where there were two hundred Jews who had miraculously saved themselves from the death camps. The majority of them did not have a place to live because the hundreds of Jewish houses had been taken over by the Poles.

Sauerhaft also did not have a place to sleep the first night. Without having a place to sleep one could not get identification papers as an inhabitant of that city. Without such papers, one was subject to being driven from the city any time.

Finally he found a non-Jew from his town who had also fled there and bribed him to permit him stay in his house for a few days. Using the gentile's address, he registered as a resident.

All the synagogues and prayer houses, including the Jewish community offices, had been converted into clubs by the Poles. But with the help of a Jewish Russian officer they secured permission to daven on Yom Kippur in one of the converted synagogues. Later, they succeeded through bribes and connections, in winning the right to use part of the Jewish community offices. There ten people lived together in one room.

The Poles were even more anti-Semitic than they had been before the War. Before the War, they said, "Jews

go to Palestine." Now they asked, "Why did Hitler leave any Jews, and not kill all of them?"

Sauerhaft spent the whole winter of 1944-45 in Yareslav. But before Passover of that year the Poles started to kill Jews in different towns, such as Kielce. In Yareslav, too, a Jew was found murdered on the street.

Sauerhaft decided that it was time to leave the accursed Poland. He "obtained" a passport and wandered around Europe for four years, traveling through Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Eventually he came to the United States in 1949 and settled in Detroit where he raised an Orthodox family. His two daughters went to the girls division of Yeshivath Beth Yehudah and married Orthodox boys from Chicago, where they are active in the Orthodox communal life.

Mr. Sauerhaft still corresponds with Mlodnicki very often, and frequently sends him a nice gift. Mlodnicki still lives in the same place. Of the seven Jews he hid, two women are still living in New York. One man was killed on the Russian front fighting the Germans, one died in Israel, and two died in New York. Mr. Sauerhaft told me this story in December, 1975. It demonstrates that even though the Poles were by and large vicious anti-Semites, there were still individuals who had mercy in their hearts and saved Jews. Such people are called by the Talmud righteous gentiles, and they too have a place in the World-to-Come.

בס"ד ויקרא