An Odyssey Of Survival

by

Michael W. Klein

TOURO COLLEGE LIBRARY
Midtown

Mazo Publishers
Jerusalem, Israel

MT

An Odyssey Of Survival

Text Copyright © 2006 Michael W. Klein

ISBN 965-7344-06-9

Published by:
Mazo Publishers
P.O. Box 36084
Jerusalem 91360 Israel

Website: www.mazopublishers.com
Email: info@mazopublishers.com

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

Printed In Jerusalem, Israel

1/31/07

Dedicated To The Memory Of

My Parents

Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov and Brandel Klein

and

My Sisters and Brothers

Avraham Yosef
Pinchas David
Shraga Feivus
Bracha
Moshe Aharon
Ester
Goldie
Shlomo

Who Perished In The Holocaust

About The Author

Michael Klein was born into the family of a Chassidic rabbi in a small town in southern Hungary. His secular education ended at sixth grade, but he continued to study at the Yeshiva until the age of 14, when the Germans occupied Hungary in 1944. He had just turned 15 when he was deported with his parents and ten brothers and sisters to the Ghetto, and then to Auschwitz. Only the author and two older sisters survived.



Michael and his sister, Rozi, shortly after the war. Michael is wearing the striped pants of the concentration camp uniform.

By the time the war ended, the author was seriously ill with tuberculosis. He spent the next six years in tuberculosis hospitals, during which time he struggled not only to stay alive, but

also to educate himself, studying English, German, Mathematics and Physics on his own. Finally, in 1952, he entered the University of Colorado, majored in Engineering-Physics, and graduated first in his class. He earned his Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics at Cornell University in 1962, became a professor of Physics, and published scores of scientific articles.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Donald Nelson for many discussions on the topic of this book, and to Ruth Smith for the encouragement to write.

Thanks to Sam Heilman and Sharon Friedman for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

Thanks to Ann Keniston, Sheila Rabinovici, and Sharon Simmer, who helped edit what was still – after many years – an immigrant's English.

Thanks also to my son, Yitzchak, who insisted 30 years ago that I start making notes on these events, long before I was ready to contemplate speaking or writing about them.

MWK

Table Of Contents

Author's Introduction 10

Part One

The End Of Life As We Knew It

The Allied Planes 17
The Passover Seder 22
Leaving My Hometown 28
The Sh'vuot Holiday 34
Trip From The Ghetto To Auschwitz 40
Events In Auschwitz 54
Meeting Father 59
Leaving Auschwitz For Golleschau 65
Camp Golleschau 75
The High Holidays 84
Separation From My Father 91
Another Escape From Death 95
Evacuation Of Golleschau 99
Rescue By Schindler 109
Passover In Schindler's Camp 114
The Last Day Of The War 123

Part Two

Surviving The Evil Plan

Liberation 129
The Struggle To Recover 139
Leaving Budapest 151

Part Three

Post Holocaust Experiences

Paul E. Bartlett 163
A Voice From The Past 171
Breaking Silence 179
Visit To Germany 184
A Visit To My Hometown 194
Epilogue 204

Bill Of Lading 206

Faith and Affirmation

An introduction by the author

"I shall not die, but live to recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has indeed punished me, but He had not left me to die..."
Psalm 118, verse 17

Lo omus ki echye v'asaper: I shall not die, but live and tell the story.

Lo omus: To survive; this has been the hope and prayer of every concentration camp inmate.

V'asaper: To give witness; this has been the sacred vow of every camp inmate to his fellow prisoners.

And yet, I could not fulfill this commitment. By the time I was liberated, I could not speak about it; I could not say a word about it. It had become an experience which I might on occasion share with other survivors, but not with the "outside world," which included everyone else. It was too painful for me to say anything about it, to expose any part of it.

I was afraid that to speak about it might betray the memory of those who gave their lives for the martyrdom by distorting their true feelings, by not truly representing their perceptions of the "evil planet" they had inhabited.

I also feared that speaking about it would set me apart from my friends and my surroundings, would arouse in me the intense discomfort of having people feel sorry for me,

would make me relive my experiences over and over again. This would consume me, would force me to look only backwards, would block out my prospects for a normal future, would disturb the lives of my children, and would forever prevent me from extricating myself from my past. It would also expose my vulnerability to public view, thus revealing not only my physical nakedness: the scars and cuts still on my body even after so many years, but, more painfully, the wounds engraved on my soul as a Jew and as a human being.

So I kept silent for thirty-nine years. Even friends were unaware that I was a survivor. I spoke on the Holocaust in public for the first time in 1984. Only then was I able, for the first time, to summon the strength and force myself to speak about it. The sudden realization that soon all the survivors, of whom I am among the youngest, would be gone, convinced me finally to set aside all my previous reservations and speak out.

But there is yet another reason. At a time when anti-Semitism is rampant again, sometimes under the guise of anti-Zionism, I can no longer keep silent. When some well-meaning Jews join these anti-Zionist groups and support them, even indirectly, I can no longer hold back. When certain of our enemies are trying to deny the Holocaust, or to de-Judaize the *Shoah*, as it is called in Hebrew, I can no longer remain mute.

A Jew's death in the camps is usually associated with the concept of *Kiddush Hashem,* of martyrdom. Kiddush Hashem is the ultimate sacrifice a Jew can bring to sanctify the name of God. A Jew may even pronounce a blessing, incredible as it may sound, upon dying as a martyr. Hence the victims of the Shoah, having died as Jews, gave their lives for Kiddush Hashem. But here I prefer to write, not on Kiddush Hashem, but rather on *K'doshim Tih'yu.* The Jews

– indeed all human beings – become holy by their actions, they become holy by behaving in a manner prescribed by the Torah. I feel that in this sense, Auschwitz has become the locus of *Kedusha*, of sanctity, in its most sublime manifestation, created by martyrs who kept their faith and moral principles in an environment of abysmal loneliness and total abandonment.

God and the Jewish people are inseparably tied by the Covenant, by the agreement they have concluded through their forefather Abraham and through the Torah. In a Covenant both parties need each other and obligate themselves to keep the agreement. In fulfillment of this Covenant, the Jewish people have spread God's message from the time of Abraham and Moses into the present time. They have observed the laws of the Torah and offered its moral code to all mankind as a way to recognize the sanctity of Man and the sanctity of his relationship to his neighbor.

The Jewish people have disseminated these principles in spite of their suffering at the hands of the world's nations through two thousand years of exile. The Jewish people have kept the Covenant and maintained their commitment to the agreement because the Covenant has become an inalienable part of their essential being, a part of their national consciousness. The Jewish people have understood that any abandonment of this Covenant, even for a short period of two generations, could mean the loss of the Torah and its teachings forever, sending mankind back to its primitive lawless origins.

In spite of the Jewish people's commitment to God and to the Covenant, the Shoah represents a time of complete *Hester Panim*, a time of complete isolation, a time in which God had entirely hidden His Face from His people. The reason for this isolation we cannot understand and cannot explain. The theme of Hester Panim appears in Deuteronomy

31 and other places in the Torah and the Prophets. The warning, "I shall hide My Face and they shall be devoured," implies that regardless of the pain and suffering, God's Face will be hidden. God will be isolated from His people. It seems almost as if, once God imposed this isolation upon Himself, He no longer had a choice in the matter!

If it were not for complete isolation, how can one reconcile the contradiction that God, who promised Abraham that he would not destroy Sodom, the place of total evil, if it contained just ten righteous inhabitants, would allow the Nazis to destroy the great European centers of Torah learning? How could He allow the Nazis to murder millions of Jews, including one and a half million children, under the most brutal conditions, if it were not for His complete self-imposed isolation?

But here I want to assert that, in spite of His isolation, in spite of His hidden Face, many of the Jewish people kept the Covenant, kept the faith, and kept their moral and religious principles in Auschwitz. They bore the burden of the Covenant, even when they had to bear it all alone.

Many Jews kept the Torah and its moral principles, even when faced with total annihilation. Many Jews were willing to die for these beliefs and clung to their Covenant, even when they might have stayed alive by repudiating them.

Lo omus ki echye v'asaper: I did not die – I live – and I want to recount the story of those who did not live, that even under the most inhumane and horrible circumstances, they died with hope – hope for *Am Yisrael.* And with faith – faith in the future of Am Yisrael – faith in the teaching of the Torah – faith and belief in God. With superhuman effort many overcame the pain and suffering of their bodies. Their souls stayed intact and unblemished, stayed whole in spite of the atrocities. Many remained committed Jews and they

died as committed Jews. They readily gave their souls for Kiddush Hashem, not understanding why God allowed this to happen, but continuing to believe in Him with total belief – even when God's Face was turned away.

An Odyssey Of Survival

Part One

The End Of Life As We Knew It

The Allied Planes

As I gazed out of our kitchen window at the clear blue sky which stretched out before me, I felt an extraordinary sense of tranquility. I was home. This was my first visit home after nine months of studying at a Chassidic Yeshiva. I walked around the apartment, quietly enjoying the new, unfamiliar quality my home had assumed as a result of my prolonged absence.

Slowly I became aware of a faint hum. It was barely perceptible at first and I paid little attention to it, unable to tell whether it was real or imagined. The noise grew louder and at some point I could no longer ignore it. I ran to the backyard, where the noise seemed to come from, to see what was going on. Father was already outside looking up at the sky with my sisters Lily and Rozi and my brothers Yossie and David. As the noise grew louder an airplane became visible overhead. A few others followed quickly and soon the whole sky was filled with the tiny toy-like shapes. They glistened as the sun's rays caught their silvery frames and we tried our best to count them. There were at least five hundred. They appeared to be flying in from the south, probably from Italy. A news broadcast, blasting from a radio in a nearby building, announced the planes were on their way to bomb the city of Budapest. The newscaster announced repeatedly that residents of Budapest should seek shelter.

Father believed the bombings to be a response to the occupation of Hungary by German forces ten days earlier. Germany had occupied Hungary, a friendly fascist country, on March 19, 1944, in an effort to make sure she would not capitulate to advancing Russian troops as Rumania had done.

I listened closely as my brother Yossie, three years my senior, speculated with Father that Hungary was likely to become a frequent target of Allied bombings as indeed Germany had become. Wanting very much to join in their discussion and feeling suddenly mature in the wake of my fifteenth birthday a few days previously, I wondered aloud whether our own town would be bombed. Father was quick to assure me that no one would want to waste bombs on Janoshalma, a small farm town of 18,000. The roar of Allied planes that filled the skies served to reinforce father's conviction that Germany would lose the war. In 1941, as the Germans were rapidly occupying one country after another in Europe and conquering major parts of Russia and Africa, most Jews of Janoshalma feared that Hitler would win the war. But Father never doubted that the final victory would go to the Allied powers. His optimism seemed to be borne out by the 1943 German defeat at Stalingrad, where several hundred thousand German troops were either captured or annihilated by the Russian army. As the German army was being forced out of Africa and parts of Russia and Italy, Father became ever more convinced that the end of German tyranny in Europe was close at hand.

As I watched the planes overhead, my thoughts were drawn to the pilots who were flying them. I wondered who they were and speculated as to whether they could see us or not. Once I was reassured they would not bomb us, I was happy to watch them from the comfort of our backyard. I was sure that as enemies of the fascist regimes of Germany and Hungary they must somehow be our friends. The planes

seemed close though they were still very far away. I fantasized about them swooping down and carrying us away.

Within a few minutes the planes had disappeared from sight. The skies were clear again. But the calm I had felt just before they announced themselves over our Janoshalma skies, could not be restored. They served as a sharp reminder of the war that was raging in Europe. I felt relieved that the battles and bombings were playing themselves out far away from us. I hoped the war would not affect us directly. It seemed reasonable to assume it would not. After all, even Budapest was approximately 120 miles away. It never occurred to me how quickly and how devastatingly our family would be affected by this distant war.

After the planes had disappeared from sight, the family gradually returned to the house. But my sister Rozi, sixteen months my senior, lingered with me in the backyard. This was the first chance we had to be alone since my return from Yeshiva a few days before. We were excited to be together again and hugged each other joyfully. It struck me that she was still very thin and undernourished, though less so than when I had left for Yeshiva nine months ago. As a young child she had refused to eat despite my parents' pleading. They would try to cajole her into eating a spoonful of soup for each member of the family, but to no avail. She always refused. Often she would just sit in a corner and cry for no apparent reason.

Out of all my siblings, I was closest to Rozi, who was the third child in our family. Even though she was sixteen months older than I, we had been placed in the same grade in the small one-room Jewish school in Janoshalma. Since Rozi had not completed first grade by the time we moved to the town, the Janoshalma education system required her to repeat first grade. Being in the same class we soon became very close. We developed a certain affinity and understand-

ing that made us a team. In sports or snowball fights with other siblings we would always take each other's side, often fighting with single-minded determination to make our opponents surrender. In arguments with the other children we always came to each other's defense.

Yet now, after almost nine months apart, there was a moment's awkwardness. We weren't quite sure how to restart our relationship from where we left off. My sister broke the silence. "I hope you are still interested in the stamp collection," she blurted out. "Would you like to see it?" She ran into the apartment and brought out several stamp albums. We sat on the grass with the stamp collection between us. I was happy to see some of our old stamps again and spent some time examining the new ones that Rozi had added to the collection during my absence.

Our joint stamp collection was more than a hobby, it was a shared passion that at once connected us and diverted us from the harsh reality around us. We both had a passion for geography and we would sometimes borrow the map of Europe or the world map from our teacher. We would hang it up on the large blackboard and study the shapes and contours of different countries, learning names of cities and rivers together. Between the maps and our stamps we would try to fathom what kind of peoples populated these lands. Faraway countries excited us in a way that stirred our imagination and piqued our curiosity. We could not have imagined then how many different lands we would one day pass through together.

We guarded our stamps fiercely and did not let our other siblings touch them. Over time the collection grew to include a great variety of stamps from many different countries. The stamps of Palestine had special meaning for us and were given a place of honor in our albums. We were filled with commitment and love for this land, though we

knew very little about it. What we did know was Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a central motif in all our prayers and in many ways Palestine represented a physical expression of those prayers, perhaps our innermost prayer. I would look at the map of Europe and gauge the distance from Hungary to Palestine, dreaming that one day I would purchase a motorbike and travel to Palestine to help build the Jewish homeland.

Browsing over the albums, our conversation soon turned to our childhood skirmishes and misadventures. We had good memories of our daily half-hour walk to school together. Remembering the endless conversations we had on these walks, it seemed as if we never ran out of things to talk about. We worked together in class and on homework assignments after school. I was better at math, while Rozi excelled in the humanities. Together we were quite a team.

We were ambitious and competitive to the point of risk-taking. Comparing answers under the desk during math exams was par for the course for us. Once, we simply could not agree on the solution to a problem. Rozi tried to persuade me of her solution, but when I insisted my solution was right, she eventually gave in and adjusted her answer to mine, reasoning that I was generally superior in math. When the exam was over and everyone had left the classroom for recess, Rozi showed me how she had solved the problem. I quickly realized my answer was incorrect and after a minute's deliberation we came up with a decisive plan of action. One of us stood guard outside the classroom while the other ran in to correct both papers. We devised warning signals to alert each other of the approaching teacher. We both got A's in the course, but our actions could easily have gotten us expelled from school! Rozi and I were smiling as we recalled how we got away with this unpardonable offense. It was one of those shared moments that drew us together. Ultimately, we were just thankful not to have been caught!

The Passover Seder

I counted the hours impatiently till the beginning of the Passover holiday, which was due to commence that evening. It was a beautiful day. The entire household was impatient to start the Passover proceedings and was involved in the preparation for the holiday.

Everyone in the household was busy. My sisters, Lily and Rozi, were in the kitchen helping Mother to prepare the meals, my brother Yossie was chopping wood to keep the stove going, and I was about to shine the whole family's shoes. I preferred chopping wood. I liked to study the direction of the grain in the wood and always adjusted the log carefully before striking it. It was a challenge and real fun to split the log on the first strike. But Mother had told Yossie, who was three years older and stronger, that he could do a better job chopping the wood and I had to do the shoes instead.

I lined up the shoes with Father's and the boys' shoes on the right and Mother's and the girls' on the left. I polished shoes often enough that this order had become almost a ritual for me. First I worked on Father's shoes, then Mother's, in accordance with the fourth commandment, "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother in order to live a long life." Honoring Father and Mother, even in the smallest ways, was part of my Chassidic background. I interpreted

the commandment as requiring me to honor the older siblings first, who were closer in age to Father and Mother.

While I was polishing the shoes, my younger brother David came over to help me. When I left for the Yeshiva less than a year ago, I thought of David as a little boy. Now he talked almost like a grown-up. He told me that he had heard the young men at the synagogue discussing that the Hungarians might force the Jews to work in the "East." He asked me what I thought about it. I was nearly sure that my younger brother had misunderstood the discussion, so I did not worry about it.

Father and Mother were overjoyed that the whole family was together for Passover. Luckily, Yossie and I had come home for the Passover break from our respective *Yeshivot* where we were studying just about the time the new travel restrictions for Jews had taken effect. Fortunately we were not caught on the way.

The Passover spirit of freedom and liberation permeated the atmosphere. My heart overflowed with joy as I watched the sun's brilliant rays. Even the grass in the backyard seemed to be greener and more beautiful than usual.

During my months away at the Yeshiva I had missed my family, particularly my mother to whom I was very close, all the time. I often hid someplace so no one would see me and I would cry. Now I was with my family, and everyone was well on the afternoon of the most spiritually uplifting evening of the year. My joy was somewhat dampened by my awareness of the uncertain times and of the dangers for the Jews. But I thought that nothing worse could happen than an occasional beating of Jews in some towns. It was possible that someone might even be killed by the police or by hoodlums. These things had happened in Hungary before. I never even considered the possibility of systematic

bodily harm to most of us.

This evening I would hear again the retelling of the ancient miracles which saved the Jews from the slavery and claws of Pharaoh in Egypt. I firmly believed that similar miracles would occur to save the Jews from Hitler's evil clutches and thought, as I so often had in the past, of the Biblical statement, "If you keep the laws of the Torah, life will be good to you, and you will be happy in this world and reap the rewards in the world to come."

I placed the chairs around the kitchen table. Father and I opened the boxes of dishes, used only during the eight days of Passover, and set them neatly on the white tablecloth. We placed the matza, unleavened bread, on the table to remind us that the Jewish people had to leave Egypt in such haste that their dough did not have time to rise. We prepared the bitter herbs to commemorate the bitter times our forefathers had endured as slaves in Egypt, and we placed a roasted piece of chicken on a plate as a symbol of the Pascal lamb our forefathers had in Egypt.

I set the candles into the silver candelabra, ready to be lit before sunset, when the holiday would begin. I was so happy that I felt like dancing. I told myself that the Germans could do whatever they wanted, but God would protect his people. Even though life might be harsh at times, I rejoiced that the Germans were being driven back on many fronts, in Africa, Italy, and Russia. Soon the Jewish people of Europe would be free again.

This year the evening prayers at the synagogue began earlier than usual. The worshippers were afraid of being attacked by the local population and wanted to return home before dark. As soon as we had hurried home, Father put on the traditional white robe – the *Kittel* – worn at the *Seder* on Passover evening. Previous years Father had begun the Seder

as soon as we returned from the synagogue. But this year it was still light. We all sat around the table waiting until one hour after sunset, the time when the Passover Seder begins.

Whenever he had free time, Father devoted himself to the study of the Torah. Now, he took the Book of Exodus off the shelf and started reading the Hebrew text describing the Passover holiday, translating into Yiddish as he went along and explaining each passage to us. He encouraged us to ask questions and his answers relied on the many Jewish commentaries that years of study had made part of his nature. He told us about the miracles witnessed by the Jewish people in ancient times; he discussed the meaning of Passover. He spoke about the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and their great privilege to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. He explained that the Torah had a great deal of meaning not only for the Jewish people but for all mankind. It commanded the observance of moral laws and guided humanity to a better life. These laws, he said, were necessary for mankind to live decently. Then his voice softened and he seemed to be close to crying. These were sad times for Jewish people, he said, and he prayed that we would all be well the next year. He said he did not know what the immediate future would bring, but he was certain that sooner or later the accursed Hitler would be defeated. Still, now that the Germans had taken over Hungary, no one knew what they might do. The Jews of Hungary could even be in great danger.

Rumor had it, Father continued, that many Jews from northern Hungary had been placed in collection centers, called Ghettos. Some of them were even transported from Hungary to unknown destinations. It was claimed that they were being resettled and forced to work in Poland, which was also occupied by the Germans, or in Germany itself. But there was no way to check the truth of these rumors. Father particularly worried about the fate of the Jewish men

whom he thought might be sent to the Russian front. From those who had been sent from our town in previous years very few returned alive. Father felt that it was important that the Germans should not get hold of the men. He did not think the women and children would be harmed.

He also worried that the older children in our family might be separated from the others and forced to work in the German factories. Should this happen, he said, he wanted to give us some guidance on how to act as Jews. He admonished us, regardless of where we were or what we might be doing, to remember our origin, our rich heritage and our responsibilities to the Jewish people, to God, and to the Torah. Our forefather Abraham had made a Covenant with God committing the Jewish people to obey the commandments. He was certain, he said, that if we obeyed the Covenant, God would keep his part of the agreement and the Jewish people would survive this great peril.

Hearing his words, I could not imagine that I would ever have to decide on my own how to behave as a Jew. But I knew that if I had to, I would withstand the test, I would have faith, and keep the Covenant regardless of what happened to me. I knew that being and staying a Jew was more important for me than life itself. Little did I realize that evening how much I could sacrifice and still not waver in my faith in God and the Jewish people and still be devoted to the principles of the Covenant.

Father started the Seder celebration. In a festive voice he chanted the *Kiddush*, the blessing of the holiday. Each child drank a small cup of wine, except for the older children who had to drink, according to *halacha*, the Jewish religious law, the four cups of wine obligatory during the Seder.

All was silent again, as Father started to recite *"Ho Lach'mu An'yo di A'cholo Avosenu...* This is the bread of

affliction which our forefathers ate in the Land of Egypt. May all that are needy join us, may all that are hungry join and eat with us. We are here in exile this year. May the Lord help us that we should be in Jerusalem in freedom next year." These words expressed the age-old longing of the Jew to return to his ancient Land and to the eternal City of Jerusalem.

Father continued with the ceremony as if the times were normal. His voice softened and was full of emotion as he recited the blessing associated with the bitter herbs, in memory of the bitter times the Jews suffered in Egypt.

The rest of the Seder was like any other Passover, except that the amount of matza given to each child was carefully apportioned. Times were bad, and not enough matza and food could be obtained for our family for Passover. But we had long ago learned that even when life was filled with problems and danger, we had to proceed as if all was well. In order for the Jews to survive, they had to continue their celebrations.

Leaving My Hometown

It was the tenth of May, 1944. The synagogue yard was filled with noise and confusion. The several hundred Jews of Janoshalma had gathered with bundles, suitcases, and packages. But the yard was not large enough to hold everyone. People were also standing in the Jewish school yard adjacent to the synagogue yard.

My older brother Yossie chose a place for the family in a corner by the synagogue wall. He told all the smaller children to sit on the grass. Yossie and my two older sisters took turns watching them.

Mother and Father had a very difficult time deciding what to include in our allotted baggage, two pieces per person. After much discussion they had given preference to food rather than clothing. As soon as we learned that we would have to leave our home, Mother started baking bread, then cut it up into slices and re-baked it into zwieback, which would not spoil in the warm May weather. She also made dried noodles and dried fruit that would travel well. In spite of the warm weather, Mother dressed each child in several layers of clothes. She was worried that we would need warmer clothing later on.

We knew we were leaving our hometown, but no one knew where we were being taken. The police had told us we were going to a "collection center" from where we would be

resettled to work in the East. But they did not tell us where these places actually were.

In loud voices, the Hungarian police officers urged us to hand over any gold or silver we were hiding. Even though it was illegal for Jews to keep gold or silver, the policemen assured us that they would take whatever we had without punishing us. But no one gave up anything. Mother had already left behind the silver candelabra in which she lit the Sabbath candles.

After a while the small children began crying. Mother opened a bag of zwieback. After she fed them, she asked Lily, Yossie, Rozi and me to stand with our backs to her so she could breast-feed little six-month-old Shlomo in private. Father had vanished somewhere in the crowd.

I noticed that the family's dear friends, the financially well-off Mrs. Rosenberg and her children were in the yard. I was surprised to see them, since I had heard that they had paid a peasant family to hide them. Six months earlier Mrs. Rosenberg's husband had been taken away to the Jewish forced labor battalion to serve in the Hungarian army. She explained that she had changed her mind at the last minute because she was afraid the peasant family would turn her in to the authorities and, as threatened by the police, they would be shot.

I sat down in the grass with my sister Rozi. She started to cry again because we had not been able to bring along our stamp collection which had taken us many years to put together. For some reason the stamps were the hardest for Rozi and me to give up. Yossie was especially unhappy at leaving our beautiful antique leather-bound volumes of the Talmud. These books had been printed in the eighteenth century and passed down from generation to generation in our family. As the eldest son, Yossie felt it was his duty to care for them.

Soon a large number of horse-led farm wagons appeared

in front of the synagogue yard driven by local peasants. They formed a long line. The policemen started loading in the families. Our family was loaded into two wagons.

In the chaos, family members were often placed into different wagons. I noticed that Father was not with us. I asked my older brother Yossie about it, but he just placed two fingers over his mouth.

My family and I stood in the crowd waiting for our turn. Some of the adults in the wagons were sobbing. Others were silent with their mouth clenched and tears running down their cheeks. It was the first time I had seen so many grown-ups expressing grief so openly. As the wagons started moving southward, the crying increased. But the peasants who were driving us hardly noticed.

We arrived in Bacsalmas, about ten miles south of my hometown Janoshalma, late that afternoon. The heavy wooden pole that barred the entrance was raised and our two wagons entered an enclosed in area called the Ghetto which comprised a few blocks, where all the Jews from the region were being collected. At the gate the police who escorted us from Janoshalma handed us over to the Ghetto police.

The policeman walking beside the two wagons my family and I were on made us stop and get off about a block and a half from the entrance to the Ghetto. He led us into a building and assigned a single room to the twelve of us. As soon as I saw the room I put down my packages and ran back to carry my four-year-old little sister, Esther. I was very attached to her and I didn't want her to have to walk on her own. I loved to study her angelic-looking-face, beautiful blue eyes and blond hair. She held on to me as if her life depended on it.

Mother carried the baby Shlomo and my older siblings

carried the other small children and the rest of our packages. The room was not big enough for all of us to lie on the floor at the same time.

Only when Mother and all the children had finally settled in, did I realize that Father had disappeared. But I knew not to ask too many questions.

When evening arrived, we realized that there was not enough place for all of us to sleep on the floor of the one room. But, as I expected, my older brother Yossie found a solution. He suggested finding sleeping quarters for himself and me some other place. I had complete confidence in my brother that he would manage to do so and I readily agreed to go with him. This confidence was based on the past history of my older brother. He not only excelled in his Torah studies but also in everything from watch repairing to bravery.

There was rarely a situation or gadget that Yossie could not handle, and as his younger brother, I adored and admired him. Nobody ever taught him how to fix a bicycle or sewing machine, he just had a knack for these things. He would fix all the broken windows and furniture around the house and when leather became hard to obtain during the war, he helped Father make wooden-soled shoes for all the children.

As the war approached, walking the streets in our hometown had become increasingly dangerous. We were often attacked and beaten by the Christian youths who would lie in wait for us. We literally could not turn a street corner without first checking to see if it was safe. By the time Yossie turned 14, he stopped being afraid. Confident of his own strength, he was prepared to take on anyone who tackled him. While I would run away as soon as I set eyes on the Christian boys, Yossie would steadfastly stand his ground, fighting and often driving off his attackers.

One day the neighborhood boys lay in wait to attack

him. When he started defending himself, they beat him on the head with sticks. Yossie went home bleeding and seething in anger. He managed to get hold of a pair of brass knuckles and the next time the Christian youths attacked, he sent them fleeing for their lives. He was never troubled by them again.

When Yossie was 15, he was sent to study with a renowned rabbi at a Yeshiva in northern Hungary. The head of the Yeshiva wrote a letter to Father describing Yossie as one of the Yeshiva's bright stars. I was somewhat envious of his achievements. We were very close and loved each other dearly. We shared secret made up games and created a small cozy world that only we understood.

Yossie found a place to sleep for the two of us in the grain mill which was in the Ghetto and was not yet filled with people. There were no blankets or mattresses available and the floor was hard. We slept poorly the first night, but by the second night we were so tired that we slept peacefully in spite of the discomfort. The weather was warm, and no one needed any covers.

Every room in the building where Mother and the children stayed was crowded. We could hear children crying and screaming all day and night. In spite of the crowding throughout the Ghetto, new transports arrived every day.

When we woke up on the third day, Yossie took over. He discovered a public kitchen nearby where a little food could be obtained from time to time. When food arrived, it was distributed to whoever was present to pick it up until it ran out. Then Yossie discovered other kitchens. He spent most of that day and the days afterwards "organizing" food. ("Organizing" meant acquiring food by any means, legal or illegal.) Still, Mother worried about how to feed the children. She realized that even a minimum amount of food was

going to be difficult to acquire. Rumor had it that the Ghetto administration got much more food than was provided, but sold it for profit illegally, though no one in the Ghetto could check the validity of these stories. Mother treasured every morsel of food she had brought from home.

About two and half weeks after we arrived, the police began recruiting people for work. Since there was nothing much to do in the Ghetto, no one minded very much, particularly since we hoped to get extra food at work. My sister Rozi and I were among those who were made to sign up. Even though we had a lot of free time during our first weeks in the Ghetto, Rozi and I had spent little of it together. Because our room was so small Yossie and I often slept in the nearby grain mill. During the day he and I tried to find out what was going on or to locate food. So Rozi and I were happy that at least we would be working together.

The Sh'vuot Holiday

Our first day of work began on Saturday, the Sabbath. It was also the day before the *Sh'vuot* holiday (Feast of the Weeks) would begin. With eight other people, Rozi and I were lined up and led out of the Ghetto by two policemen, one in front, the other in the back. The policemen escorted us through the streets of Bacsalmas. Each had a rifle. The policeman in front walked so fast that I could barely keep up with him.

I was out of breath, but my mind was busy with more important matters. I was quite upset and worried that for the first time in my life I would be forced to work on the holy Sabbath in spite of the Fourth Commandment's strict prohibition.

After about fifteen minutes of walking we arrived at a large building. The sign on the front of the building stated in Hungarian and German that it was the local headquarters of the *Waffen SS*. At the large door, which was the entrance to the building, the policemen handed us over to the SS guards who led us into the building.

It was the first time I had seen the dreaded SS insignia on the lapels of a soldier. We entered the spacious yard surrounded by a wall about six feet high and the guard watched over us. Inside, we waited. Two other SS guards appeared and commanded everyone in the group except Rozi and me

to follow him. Rozi and I were left in the middle of the yard, uncomfortably waiting for something to happen.

A young blond SS guard appeared and told us to follow him. We followed him down the wide stairs to the basement. Many large wooden boxes were placed on the floor. Rozi and I saw that the boxes were packed with cannon shells. Each shell was about two inches in diameter and about twenty-five inches long and each one had been neatly set into wooden boards carved to keep the shells from rolling.

The SS guard ordered each of us to pick up a cannon shell and follow him. He warned us that dropping the shell might be quite dangerous. He spoke in German but it was similar enough to Yiddish that we got the general idea of what he was saying.

For an instant I stood there wondering whether I should disobey his orders and refrain from violating the Sabbath even if I would be harshly punished. But I realized that if I disobeyed he might kill me. I knew that when one's life was in danger, all commandments, except three, could be violated.

Rozi and I each picked up a shell and followed the SS guard up the stairs to the first floor, across the floor to the other side of the building and out into the yard. The shell was heavy, but manageable. Then we were led into a different building and told to place the shell in a large empty wooden box similar to the one from which we had taken it. He told us to continue to transfer the shells as fast as we could.

Rozi and I returned to the basement, each picked up another cannon shell and started to walk quickly. But I could not take my mind off the fact that it was the Sabbath and the day before an especially sanctified Holiday for Jews, as well as for the rest of the world. This was the day the Holy Torah, the "Law" was given to Jews and to all mankind at Mount

Sinai. I believed that without the events of this day, without the law, all men would still be as primitive as the Germans and the Hungarians were today.

Later in the afternoon the SS guard returned with a thin flexible staff in his hand. He played with it, threw it up in the air and caught it, and made a swishing sound as he cut the air with it. He must have been bored. He stood near the top of the stairs and watched Rozi and me as we worked.

It was hot in the building. By now Rozi and I were both very tired. I took off my shirt and felt a little cooler. As we passed the SS guard one more time, he shouted "*loss, loss* – faster, faster," and using all his strength hit my naked back with his staff. I began to run faster. But when I passed the SS guard on my return trip he hit me on my back again with all his strength.

As I ran down the stairs, I touched my back and felt the stripes of swollen flesh. When I passed the SS guard again I ran as fast as I could, but still the SS guard struck again.

I kept running. My back was hurting. I tried to concentrate on the events of Sinai. I tried to tell myself that my physical and spiritual pain were trivial in comparison to the importance of what had happened at Mount Sinai on this day. From my Yeshiva training, I remembered the Hebrew text from the book of Exodus almost verbatim.

> *And Moses went down the mountain to the people and sanctified them, and they washed their garments. And on the third day it was in the morning, and there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and the voice of the shofar (ram's horn) was very strong and getting stronger. And the people trembled before God. And the mountain was full of smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire...*

I was no longer in Ghetto Bacsalmas; instead I saw before me hundreds of thousands of Jews standing beneath Mount Sinai. I saw myself standing with the others, as it is written in the Torah that "not only those that were there now, but also those that were not," a phrase interpreted to mean that the souls of all Jews, even those born many generations later, were also at Sinai. I imagined the mountain trembling as if it were a massive earthquake, heavy thick smoke emanating from it, and thunder and lightning continuing to surround the whole area as the voice of the shofar became stronger and stronger. A voice pierced heaven and earth as well the ears of those standing there. "I am the Lord your God who has taken you out of Egypt," the voice began and proclaimed the Ten Commandments, the laws demanding moral behavior from mankind.

The pain in my back was no longer important. I felt the pain, but what mattered was my happiness. I knew that I was the one who obeyed the Law and the blond SS guard was evil. I would never trade places with him.

As I became aware of these feelings I put down the shell I was carrying and waited for Rozi to catch up with me. I decided to walk slowly near her, and to my great surprise the SS guard stopped hitting me. I soon learned that when I was with my sister again the SS guard no longer hurt me.

By the time we returned to the Ghetto it was dark. Because of the curfew imposed on the whole Ghetto, no one dared even to think of getting together for prayer. The former synagogue of Bacsalmas located in the Ghetto area was off limits because it now housed the mothers with the babies who were born in the Ghetto. Here and there a few people gathered from nearby rooms to pray quietly but there was no holiday spirit anywhere.

I recited the prayers to myself. I felt very sad at the lack of celebrations and wondered why it had to be this way. The Lord could have easily changed the situation. Why did He not if He loved his people of Israel?

I thought of Abraham, the father of all the Jews. How hard it must have been for him to discover the existence of one God, without anybody teaching him. Still Abraham believed in one God and put his trust in Him. He trusted God totally and was willing to do anything He commanded. Although God had rewarded him with riches, with a son Isaac, and with the promise of his descendants becoming a Nation, He also set up difficult tests of Abraham's faith. I knew from the Talmudic commentaries that Abraham was tested ten different times by God. The most difficult of all was God's demand that Abraham sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as an offering to Him. Abraham obeyed the Lord even though he did not understand the purpose of this command and he showed his true faith in each of the other tests the Lord gave him. Apparently God wanted absolute certainty of Abraham's total and dedicated faith.

It must be, I thought, that God is now testing us by setting these difficulties on the Children of Israel, to see whether our faith will prevail in spite of our suffering. I knew that my faith would never be shaken, my faith would never waver. I was no less certain, I thought, that God loved the people of Israel than Abraham was. I thought there might be another reason for our suffering. Jewish mystic sources say, that suffering brings the time of arrival of the Messiah closer and brings the redemption of the people of Israel closer. I did not mind suffering for that. Although I did not understand why things had to be the way they were, I had absolute faith that things were developing according to God's will.

One day many policemen appeared in the Ghetto and

no one was allowed to leave the Ghetto for work. All the young men over 17 were made to line up. They were marched out of the Ghetto to some unknown place. My brother Yossie, who was almost 18, was one of the boys who were taken away. I had no idea to where he was taken but some people thought that he might have been taken to the Hungarian forced labor battalion for Jews. Neither I nor any other family member could say goodbye to him. I greatly missed my brother and hoped that he would be treated well.

We had been in the Ghetto one day short of seven weeks. It was Sabbath again. On Sabbath morning Mother would give each of her children a little more zwieback than on a usual weekday. This time she prepared a whole sack full of zwieback and called together all the children from the neighboring rooms and gave them as much as they wanted to eat. I could not understand why she was so generous, when her own children had little to spare. Neither did I have any idea whether she had any zwieback left over. But I accepted her judgment. I did not even ask her why she distributed the preciously needed food to others.

Trip From The Ghetto To Auschwitz

One Sunday morning my sleep was interrupted by loud shouting. It was a day I did not work, and I wondered what all the noise was about. I looked out the window and saw the Ghetto was saturated with policemen. Their rifles were clearly exhibited on their backs. One of them came banging at my door and shouted that everyone should get ready for a march. No one told us to where we were going.

Father had disappeared. Yossie had been taken from the Ghetto by the Hungarian's forced labor battalion for Jews. Rozi, who was very good in caring for the little children, had been taken from the Ghetto by the SS guards to be a seamstress. I was the senior "man" in our family and knew that Mother needed me. I rushed over to the room where Mother and the small children were sleeping. Everyone was already awake and my oldest sister Lily was helping mother dress the children.

We were told that we could take with us what we could carry in our hands. Since we also had to carry the small children, the daily necessities we could take along were very limited. I kept wondering whether Mother had known the previous day that we were leaving the Ghetto and whether that was the reason she distributed the food we had to the children in the neighboring rooms.

We lined up on the Ghetto streets. After a few hours of waiting, the Jews of Janoshalma and of the surrounding area, including my Mother and nine children, seven of them younger than me, started the march without knowing where we were going. I carried the baby Shlomo in my right hand, a large package in the left hand, plus two smaller ones on my back. As the march dragged on, we shed more and more of our heavy loads, ridding ourselves not only of our badly needed possessions but also of our most precious memories that tied us to our recently abandoned homes. I had to drop one of the packages from my back. By the time we arrived at the train station about two miles away, the road behind us was scattered with indispensables that had to be abandoned because of weight. Looking back we saw the local townspeople picking up the belongings we had left behind.

The trains were already waiting, and before I realized what had happened, eighty to ninety of us were force-loaded into one of the wagons of the long train. The doors were immediately locked from the outside.

My eyes slowly adjusted to the semidarkness. Before we arrived, the wagon had been completely empty, but now every space was occupied. I soon realized that the wagon was transporting cattle. At each of the corners of the cattle-car, a small opening near the top of the wagon let in a little light and a small amount of air. Standing on my toes I could see what was happening outside. Long lines of Jews with yellow stars were still coming and were being loaded into other wagons.

When the wagon door was closed, several parents found to their dismay, that the loading had proceeded so fast that they were separated from their children. They banged on the door to call on one of the policemen, but there was no response from the outside.

Soon we faced a serious problem. Some people had to

relieve themselves and were terribly embarrassed before the others. Finally a man spread a sheet, which someone had, to enclose a small corner of the wagon to hide one's shame and use a pot to accumulate the contents.

It was terribly overcrowded and uncomfortable. Still, I was glad to rest after the long and difficult march from the Ghetto. I had not realized how tired I was. We started guessing where we were being taken. We were told by the police that we would be traveling to the "East." We imagined that it would be to Germany or somewhere near Germany to work for the military.

Except for frequent stops of several hours at a time at various railroad stations, our train moved day and night for the next five days. Often our train waited for a long time until a military transport filled with German soldiers passed us. Soon afterwards we would start moving again. It was the end of June and it was very hot in the cattle-car. Even though the air was very stale, the four small openings allowed enough air into the wagon that we did not suffocate. The lack of water in the hot wagons was even more unbearable than the stale air, particularly for Mother, who had to breast feed the baby Shlomo during the long trip. I was sorry that it had not occurred to me to carry water on the march from the Ghetto to the railroad station. But how could I have known? The grown-ups suffered in silence. They knew it was of no use to complain. The children, however, cried incessantly for water.

We had already been already in the wagon for three days, when our train stopped at one of the stations. Looking out from one of the openings of the wagon, we saw water gushing out of a pipe and spilling down the embankments (the pipe was a standard piece of equipment to fill the steam locomotives in Hungary).

A woman in typical Hungarian peasant dress stood nearby. Mother picked up one of our pots, pushed it out of the little opening at the upper corner of the cattle-car and said, "Lady, there are children here who are very thirsty and need water, would you please fill this for us?" The reply was immediate and devastating: "My Christian conscience would not allow me to give a Jew water." As painful as this was I did not expect anything different from the Hungarians.

The train started moving again. We traveled on and off for another day, and on Wednesday around noontime we arrived at Kassau (Kosice in Czech) in the northern part of Hungary (a town which belonged first to Hungary, then to Czechoslovakia and then to Hungary again). I knew that Kassau was close to the Polish border and hoped that we were getting close to our final destination. Soon the agony of being confined to the wagons would be over.

At Kassau all the wagon doors were opened and from each wagon one person was allowed to bring water from the city water-system located near the train tracks. I was strong and muscular and was chosen to bring water for our wagon.

I hopped down the wagon in a single jump. I felt lightheaded as the fresh air struck my lungs. It made me feel drunk and dizzy at the same time, after being cramped in an airless wagon for over three days. It felt great to stretch. It was a beautiful day. The sky was blue and clear. The sun was shining. I felt like singing for joy as the sun's rays deliciously impinged upon me. Life could still be beautiful.

A large number of containers, bottles, pots and pans were placed at the door of our wagon. I ran to the public water system, about fifty yards away from our wagon. I was among the first ones to reach the water. There were about eight water spouts with the life-giving liquid rapidly flowing from them.

First I cupped my hands and had a long drink. As the water gushed out of the faucets I sprayed my face and neck with the delicious liquid. As fast as I could, I ran back to our wagon with the filled containers, picked up a new set of containers, and ran for water again. I did this over and over again, till everyone had drunk as much as he could and the containers were all filled again. I tried to get the water as fast as I could, for I did not know when the wagon doors would close again.

We stood at Kassau for more than two hours. During the long stop in Kassau, who that brought water moved around freely. We were still supervised by the Hungarian police, who were leisurely talking to each other and paid little attention to us.

It would have been quite easy for me or anyone else to sneak under the train, cross the tracks and escape into the town or the nearby forest. But I was filled with hope that we would soon be at our destination, where we would work. It did not even occur to me that I might want to escape and leave my family.

While our train was waiting, a large group of German SS guards arrived. The Hungarian police left the platform and we were now guarded by the Germans. We assumed that soon we will arrive some place outside Hungary, which was also occupied by the Germans. Naturally, we would then expect to be supervised by German guards and not by the Hungarians. It seemed that all steps the Hungarians and the Germans took were according to the plan outlined to us back home in Janoshalma before we left for the Ghetto. There seemed to be no surprises in what had happened to us. We expected soon to be resettled and work for the Germans in the "East." Even though we were afraid, we were not overly suspicious that anything unexpected would happen.

A signal was given for everyone to return to the train.

The wagon doors were locked again from the outside, this time by the German SS guards. The train started its slow motion, with stopping and moving. Another night passed in the wagons, and early the next afternoon we stopped again near a small town. Through the openings at the top of the wagon, we saw a small sign which read "Auschwitz." We did not give the name a second thought, for it had no significance to us.

While we stood in this village, another train stopped on the tracks next to ours. The engineer of the other train stood near the open window of the train's locomotive. The window happened to coincide with the small opening in our wagon. The engineer, dressed in black, stood very close to us. Mother, who spoke German fluently, asked him where they were taking us.

He did not reply, but stroked his hand across his neck, as if to show that our throats would be cut. No one understood or was certain what he meant, and no one believed that any serious harm would come to us. Even though the engineer was dressed in black, no one thought that he was a messenger of the angel of death.

The train started moving again. A few minutes later it stopped. It was Thursday afternoon, June 29, 1944, the eighth day of *Tammuz* in the Jewish calendar.

I looked out the little opening and saw that we were near a large platform. There were many SS guards on the platform. Some held machine guns, others held vicious-looking dogs on leashes. Also on the platform stood a number of men in striped clothes, separated a certain distance from each other. We waited, hoping to get some fresh air and food.

A loud bang made me aware that our wagon's door had been jerked open suddenly from the outside. The fresh air struck me in the face; it was a joy to inhale it. In no time, two men in striped clothes jumped up into my wagon and

started brutally beating everyone within reach with a thick stick, all the time screaming "*rauss, rauss* – get out, get out." We were forced to leave the cattle-wagon as fast as we could and to abandon our last remaining belongings. As I got out of our wagon and jumped down onto the platform, I realized that all the other wagons had emptied rapidly at the same time.

In the confusion of our rapid descent, I barely realized that everyone was being pushed forward. The several thousand Jews who had just arrived by train were made to walk down a narrow path about fifteen feet wide. The path was formed by the train we had arrived on the right side and a high-voltage barbed wire on the left. The men in the striped clothes repeated over and over in Yiddish: "Women with children, and older men and women should keep to the right, men and women without children should keep to the left." Their heavy sticks beating down on us ensured that everyone obeyed. All this proceeded so fast that I have no recollection of when I was separated from Mother and my siblings.

The wide column, consisting of a giant mass of people, moved down the path almost as if they were tied together. As I moved along I suddenly realized that my brother David, two years younger than I, was walking along near me, contrary to the orders of the Germans, according to which he was supposed to go with Mother and the smaller children.

I said to David, "You are in the wrong place. You are still a child and you were supposed to go with Mother." Without a word of objection from him, I sent him off to the right to look for Mother, who had vanished from my sight into the massive column of human beings. In retrospect, it was impossible to find her anyway. Little did I realize at the time that by obeying the Germans' orders, I sent my brother David to his death.

Along our path were many SS guards in spotless, neatly pressed uniforms. They were all tall and looked dangerous. A number of them wore white gloves and held on to large dogs. Others held machine guns in their hands. As the column moved forward, I arrived at a table where a smiling SS officer, presumably Dr. Mengele, sat. He was surrounded by several SS guards holding machine guns. The SS officer barely looked at the faces of the people as they arrived at his table. With a single movement of his finger, he indicated to each person in which direction he should go.

I was quite tall for my age and was therefore selected to go to the left, joining the men who were capable of work. Those who were sent to the right, including my Mother and the seven children who were younger than I, were never heard from again.

After I passed the table of the SS officer who selected the arriving Jews, I was told to turn left and walk to an area surrounded by high-voltage barbed wires. I reached a large empty space that was completely surrounded by electrified barbed wire. On arrival, I was lined up in a column of five people standing one behind the other. As more and more people arrived, they formed new columns of five next to the ones already there. In the column next to me stood Mr. Stern, a friend of the family from Janoshalma. Mr. Stern looked around and said. "Here are all the SS guards with machine guns, we are also surrounded by high voltage barbed wires; I wonder whether we will ever get out alive from here." For the first time, I realized that our situation might be more precarious than I had perceived it to be.

Surrounded by the high voltage barbed wires and the SS guards with dogs and machine guns, we marched to a large hall with cement floors. We were forced to undress and to abandon all our clothing, except for the shoes and belts, which we were to carry with us.

Many men – dressed in striped clothes – were waiting for us in the large hall. Each had a pair of hair clippers in his hand, picked out a prisoner, and started cutting off the hair on his head with the hand-operated clippers. When the head was clean of hair, he removed all the prisoner's hair from his body, including his pubic hair.

The young man in striped clothes who cut my hair was about 18 years old. He started screaming at me in a strangely accented Yiddish. "You stupid *magyar,*" using the derogatory expression "magyar" for Hungarian, "Why did you come here you idiots! Why didn't you find out what was happening to us Polish Jews."

I was stunned by his outburst and was too exhausted to reply. He took me to one of the windows of the large hall we were in. He pointed to one of the tall chimneys some distance away from the building which was spewing out a dark, thick grayish smoke.

"Do you know what that smoke is?" he asked. When I told him I did not, he said, "You see the gray smoke that comes out of the chimney? Those are the ashes of your parents and brothers and sisters who are now being incinerated there." Even though his words upset me a good deal, I knew that he was talking nonsense. While he shaved my pubic hair he tried to touch my sexual organ again and again. Every time he did that I just jumped backwards, moving away from him. My Chassidic Yeshiva background taught me that anyone who was capable of such an act could not be sane. This unusual behavior convinced me that he must be deranged, that he was only trying to scare me, and his words had no credibility in my eyes.

After I was shaved clean, the young man who shaved me used a piece of wet cloth which had a pungent odor to it. The liquid that made it wet presumably was a disinfectant. He rubbed the cloth into my head and body. Everywhere the

cloth touched my body it gave me a terribly burning sensation. I was told that the burning material put on me was to kill the lice which all Jews were naturally infested with.

After waiting for a while, we were taken to a large room filled with showers. Hot water started spewing from the faucets installed on the ceiling. It felt great to wash my sweaty body with hot water after having been confined to the overheated wagons for so many days. After the shower, a pair of striped pants and jacket were thrown at me. The clothes I received were much too big for me, but there was no way to get another set.

By this time it was late Thursday evening and completely dark. We were ordered to line up in columns of five and start marching. In the wagons we were so cramped that I had slept little during the five days. I was exhausted. For the first time in my life I slept while walking, waking up, and falling asleep again.

We came to a large wooden barrack which was completely filled with people in striped clothes. We were all made to stand while a prisoner on a platform held a shoe in his hand. He started to speak in Hungarian. He explained that an X-ray machine can see everything even through walls and obstructions. He said that very soon we would be passing by an X-ray machine.

He pointed at the heel of the shoe in his hand and explained how X-rays make the inside of the heel clearly visible. If we had gold or diamonds in our shoes, the last piece of clothing which we still retained from home, he ordered us to come forward right now and tell him about it. Even though having precious metals was illegal, no one would be punished for having hidden gold or diamonds in the shoes, provided he gave it up now. If, on the other hand, the X-ray machine were to catch one later on, the person having hid-

den gold or jewelry in his shoes would be shot. He waited for people to volunteer, but nobody did, even after repeated exhortations on the part of the Hungarian.

We were marched into another large building with stone floors. I was exhausted and lay down on the stone floor. It was the first time since leaving the Ghetto at Bacsalmas that I could stretch out. I must have slept for several hours on the stone floor, for by the time I woke up I could see that it was close to dawn Friday morning.

We were again lined up for another selection. An SS officer separated the children who were too young to work hard from the grown-up prisoners. I was selected to be among the children. It was early Friday morning, close to sunrise, by the time we got to a large wooden barrack, the children's barrack. We were told that from now on we would sleep in this barrack and must return there for the night.

The children in the barrack owed their lives to the rapid and imperfect selection process by the SS officers as thousands passed by them in a very short time upon arrival in Auschwitz. Ideally, the Germans wanted to keep only those who were capable of heavy physical labor. These did not include young people below the age of 18.

The wooden barrack was about twenty-five feet wide and about ninety feet long. The floor was made out of concrete. A stone trough, about two and half feet wide, and a foot and a half high, ran down the middle of the barrack. I imagined that it must have been used to heat the barrack during the winter and everyone referred to it as the "heater." On both sides of the heater there was a narrow walkway, each about two feet wide, running parallel to the heater along the whole length of the barrack. Near each of the two walkways the cement floor was elevated by about four inches. About every ten to twelve feet, there was a concrete separa-

tion, about one foot high, running from the walkway all the way back to the barrack wall.

During the daytime, we were allowed to leave the barrack and walk to other barracks within the same camp. I soon went out to explore my surroundings. My camp, or *lager*, was defined by the high voltage barbed wire surrounding it. About fifteen barracks were lined up parallel to each other on each of the two sides of a fifteen to twenty-foot wide asphalt road running along the length of the camp. The barracks looked like giant matchboxes, lined up perpendicular to the road. On the far side of the barracks were the barbed high voltage wires that surrounded the whole camp. On the outer perimeter of the camp were tall watchtowers. These were manned by SS guards who were equipped with searchlights for the night. During the night all were confined to the barracks. Anyone that walked out of the barrack at night was to be shot.

Around 11 o'clock on Friday morning, food was distributed to the prisoners. The area near our barrack was closed off, and prisoners who worked in the camp kitchen brought soup in large containers that looked like giant thermos bottles. The soup was ladled out to the inmates by a prisoner while the SS guard stood by. There were many different sizes and shapes of pots and pans into which the watery soup was ladled out. For each ladleful, consisting of about one half liter of the gray liquid, they counted off two prisoners. For some of the larger pots they counted off as many as ten or twelve, whereas a small container might have been given to a single prisoner. The prisoners who received the soup then sat around in a circle, passing the pot from person to person, each person taking one mouthful of the soup, then passing the pot on to the next, until it was empty. In German, the soup was called *dir-gemuse* (dried-vegetable). The first time

I was given the mush, I could barely eat it. I felt that it was not even suited for pigs.

Later in the afternoon we were lined up for muster, *Zahlappell* in German. I did not realize yet that Zahlappell would be the most dreadful part of the day. It lasted about one and a half hours on that day. All the children from our barrack, as well as prisoners from nearby barracks, were lined up in columns of five, standing behind one another. *Kapos*, with heavy lead-laden rubber hoses, went around brutally beating those that did not line up fast enough, or did not keep the rows or the column straight enough. Many fell to the ground, but the Kapos still beat them without mercy.

When all the prisoners were lined up to the satisfaction of the SS guards, we were called to stand at attention by an SS guard shouting *Achtung* (attention). We stood at attention until an SS officer appeared, walked in front of the prisoners, and counted the total number of columns. When this was completed, we still had to wait a long time. We were dismissed from muster only when the total count of the living from all barracks, added to the number of those killed during the day, agreed with the figures the Germans expected. As soon as we were dismissed, all the prisoners had to go into their respective barracks for the night.

When the children got into their barrack there was not even enough standing room. To accommodate everyone, the *Blockaeltester*, the prisoner commander of the barrack, made the first child sit down on the cement floor and spread his legs, then the next child had to sit down and move as close as possible into the empty space left between the legs of the first child. The next child moved up to the second one as close as possible. This procedure went on till all were seated for the night. Many of the children cried for their mommies and daddies during most of the night.

Since no one was permitted to leave the barrack during

the night, two large round containers were prepared at the back door of the barrack for the children to relieve themselves. Anyone who needed to eliminate had to step over many other children – who cried out in pain – in his path to the back door.

Events In Auschwitz

On my second day in Auschwitz I became ravenously hungry and would have gladly eaten more of the *dir-gemuse* that I had rejected the day before. After I finished my soup, I walked around among the prisoners, found a grown-up, preferably some older person over forty who had a small container of food and therefore ate the soup all by himself. When he had nearly finished, I would step up to him and ask "*Bacsi*," (uncle in Hungarian, the way a youngster addresses a grown-up) "would you eat all of your dir-gemuse?" Very often the man had just arrived at Auschwitz, and did not want to eat the ugly mush anyway. He would hand it to me without any questions asked. Almost every day I found someone who gave me some extra soup. I was determined to eat as much as possible, in order to keep my strength.

This day I had to stand muster from the early afternoon, when the sun was still high in the sky, to late evening when it was already dark. It took hours of counting and recounting of the prisoners until the tally agreed, and we had to stand at attention all of this time. The lower the sun descended on the horizon the redder the whole sky became as the sun's rays were reflected by the thick gray smoke leaving the chimneys. Just before sunset, the whole sky was red

and it looked as if an ocean full of blood had been spilled into the heavens.

From the contaminated dir-gemuse many had diarrhea. Those that could no longer hold back were brutally beaten and I could barely believe it when one prisoner was shot on the spot. Others who soiled their pants were taken out of line and escorted out of camp. It was said that they were taken to the gas chambers. Such abuses induced in me a great deal of fear and trepidation for Zahlappell.

All the barracks in my camp, except for one, looked the same. The one barrack that was different was the latrine barrack. This consisted of three rows of concrete slabs, about two and half feet wide, and close to sixty feet long, running along the length of the barrack. About fifty round holes were cut out of each side of each concrete slab. Each hole served as a toilet seat where the prisoners could relieve themselves.

Daytime, the prisoners could walk freely to the latrines or from barrack to barrack within the same camp. But during the night, two large cylindrical containers, each about thirty inches in diameter and twelve inches high, were kept in the barracks for the prisoners to relieve themselves.

Two big problems troubled me every day in Auschwitz. To keep myself clean and to go to the toilet. The single latrine barrack served the whole camp of about 30,000 prisoners. Many had diarrhea and the latrines were, most of the time, fully occupied. In spite of the urgent need, I often had to wait a long time for my turn.

The latrine barrack also had a number of metal faucets with cold running water where the prisoners could wash their hands, faces, and other parts. This was the only place we could wash ourselves. Since there were only a few faucets for the whole camp, there were always long lines.

During the month of July it was quite hot. Each day

around eleven in the morning we had to leave the barrack in order to have it cleaned. It was much cooler inside the barrack, but we had to stay outside, roasting in the sun while the barracks were cleaned.

Later on, almost from one day to the next, the nights became much colder and by the beginning of August, so did the mornings. The wind made the chilled air feel even colder. We were dressed only in the very thin summery striped camp clothes and we were freezing.

To protect ourselves from the morning cold, the prisoners in the children's barrack lined up in rows, the first row very close to the dark brown wooden shell of the barrack, the next row near the first, the prisoners physically touching each other; the third row touching the second until all the prisoners, except for those in the outer row, were protected from the cold. Every few minutes the prisoners rotated – the people from the outer row moved next to the barrack wall to warm themselves. This way, only one row of people – those standing on the very outside – was completely exposed to the cold wind.

At home I had prayed every morning and evening. It was very dangerous to pray in Auschwitz. Few things enraged the German SS as much as seeing a Jew pray. Anyone caught praying was brutally beaten and often removed from the barracks. No one knew to where they were taken, but some suggested that it was to the gas chambers. In spite of the danger we stood silently and said, without our lips moving, the important *Amida* prayers.

Every Jewish man who observes the Torah Commandments puts on two especially designed phylacteries, *t'fillin,* during the weekday morning prayer. One on his left arm – close to his heart – symbolically to control his desires – the other on his head, close to his brain which controls his ac-

tions. The phylacteries symbolize the devotion of one's heart and mind to the service of God. On the parchment enclosed in the phylacteries is written the *Sh'ma Yisrael*, the belief of the Jewish people in one God. This prayer was proclaimed by many who were martyred for *Kiddush Hashem*, for the sanctification of the name of God through martyrdom for thousands of years in Jewish history.

It was extremely painful to us not to observe this commandment in the camp, for all our belongings had been taken from us. During the seven weeks that I was in Auschwitz, t'fillin were smuggled into our camp twice by the older of the two Schick brothers from the town of Papa, Hungary. He exposed himself to great danger by carrying the t'fillin from barrack to barrack so everyone who wanted could hold them for a few seconds, say a blessing, and pass them on to the next person. In both cases, only the part of the phylactery that one places on one's arm was smuggled in. In spite of the danger this posed to our lives, as soon as it became known that the phylacteries were in camp, long lines formed to fulfill the commandment. For the ten seconds we had the t'fillin on our hand to say the first line of "Sh'ma Yisrael – Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One," we were transformed from prisoners into free men, and nothing mattered but our reunion with God and the Jewish people. The spiritual elevation I felt was exhilarating.

Our camp was divided into two parts by a road running along its length. In the barracks on one side of the road were the Jews, most of whom had arrived recently from Hungary. On the other side of the road the barracks were occupied by Gypsies. Whereas only Jewish men were in this particular camp, the Gypsies had men, women and children living together. Since they were old timers and stayed together with their families in Auschwitz they were considered the "elite."

Most of the time the two groups did not interfere with each other. The Jews had their own muster, Zahlappell, every evening and the Gypsies were counted by a procedure I did not know about. The two groups never mixed.

One night, about two weeks after I arrived at Auschwitz, we were all inside our barracks after muster. Suddenly we heard loud noises nearby. A number of trucks arrived at our camp, with a large number of SS guards with many prisoners. The SS guards were equipped with machine guns and many held dogs on leashes. One of the boys from our barrack looked out of the small cracks in the walls and watched with horror what was happening. The Gypsies were lined up and ordered to enter the trucks. However, they refused to do so. We heard heartrending noises, the women and children screaming all the time in German, "*Wir sind unschuldig, Wir sind unschuldig* – We are innocent, we are innocent." Apparently the Gypsies knew what to expect when they were to be loaded into the trucks. When the Gypsies still refused to climb into the trucks, even though they were lined up and brutally beaten, the SS guards let the dogs loose on the Gypsy children. The vicious dogs tore some of the children apart alive. This act of horror made the Gypsies run from the dogs. They had no other place to run except into the trucks. Those that moved to the side instead of into the trucks, were mowed down with machine guns. This way the SS guards forced the Gypsies into the trucks; apparently they would rather give up their own lives than have their children brutally torn apart by the dogs.

We were very scared and very quiet in the children's barrack. The trucks drove off and returned repeatedly for another group of Gypsies. The noise, mixed with the roar of the trucks, quieted down later in the night, when all the Gypsies were gone and presumably taken to the gas chambers.

Meeting Father

It was Thursday, seven weeks after I had arrived at Auschwitz. My friend Eli Weissman heard that a new transport had just arrived from Hungary and that a rabbi from Janoshalma was among them. The transport, he told me, was only a few barracks from where I was. I ran to meet the newcomers and was reunited with Father after not having seen him for over three months. We hugged each other for a long time. I repeatedly stepped away from him to look at his face, to make sure it was him, and we hugged each other again and again. I could not believe that we were together again and could not speak from the excitement. He was very pale and had lost a good deal of weight since I saw him last.

Father broke the silence by asking "Do you know where Mother and the children are?" I told Father what I knew, that Mother and I and the other children had arrived together at Auschwitz by train. When we got off the train we were told that women and children should go to the right and men without children to the left. I explained to Father how we had been separated upon our arrival at Auschwitz.

"Have you seen any women and children since you arrived in Auschwitz?" Father asked. "I just arrived this morning and could not observe anything."

After my arrival in Auschwitz, we had walked by a

large empty area, also surrounded by barbed wire, in which were a large number of women and children. They were too far away for me to see whether the women were young or old, particularly since I was nearsighted and had no glasses. Father's face became less tense when I gave him this information.

I described to him our stay in the Bacsalmas Ghetto. I told Father about my sister Rozi being taken from the Ghetto to be a seamstress and my brother Yossie being taken to the Hungarian Jewish labor battalion. Father's questions were inexhaustible. Even though I was anxious to find out what had happened to him, I had to postpone my questions for later.

Father inquired a great deal about my younger brother Feivus and Rozi since he thought that both of them were physically weak and sickly. Our conversation continued for hours. I suddenly realized that I had to run back to the children's barrack before Zahlappell. I was afraid that if I stood for Zahlappell in father's barrack the SS officer counting us might realize that I was from the children's barrack, I would be caught with the grown-ups and would be severely punished.

The next day, early Friday morning, I came to Father's barrack again and filled him in on events in the Ghetto and how we were transported from Hungary to Auschwitz together with, as I thought, all the Jews of Janoshalma. I asked Father where he had spent the last three months and what had happened to him.

"I was always terribly afraid of the Hungarians and the Germans," Father said. "I thought that they might behave reasonably well towards Jewish women and children, but would treat the men much more harshly. As the local rabbi, I would be particularly singled out for punishment. Arbi-

trary deportation for Jewish men could be meted out at the whim of any one of the local officials.

"I tried to avoid sudden surprises. Remember three years ago, Yossie and you and I dug a deep hole in our yard, large enough for one person to stay in, strengthened it with wooden and metallic poles, covered the underground "hideaway" with wooden planks and returned the black earth to the top so that nothing unusual could be seen from the outside. The hideaway had food and water prepared in it. The pipes, almost invisible from the outside, supplied fresh air, so that one could survive in it for a long time.

"I used this hideaway twice before to save my life," Father continued. "Once in April 1941, when the German troops were marching through our town to occupy Yugoslavia. The second time in 1943, when the Hungarians collected 35 young Jewish men from Janoshalma to be sent to the Russian front. My name was on the list, but I hid and reappeared two weeks later when the danger was over and the transport was gone. Many families whose men were taken received death notices marked 'fallen in action.' Much later it became clear that many of the recruits were murdered by the Hungarians and Germans as they were withdrawing on the Russian front. They would line up the Jews and decimate them, i.e. shoot every tenth person in the line, repeating this over and over, until their desire for the torture of the Jews was satisfied.

"In the synagogue yard there were several buildings," Father continued. "In one of them there was a stairway to a narrow hidden alcove which was almost inaccessible and barely visible from the outside. When I mentioned to your brother Yossie that I wanted to hide someplace, he suggested that I hide in that alcove. Just before we were supposed to leave Janoshalma, Yossie and I prepared enough dried food to sustain me for several months. I could obtain water from

the well that was in the synagogue yard. Your brother was a highly responsible and mature young man of 17. When the Allied troops invaded France at the beginning of June, Yossie snuck out of the Ghetto and walked all night from Bacsalmas to Janoshalma, coming to my hiding place to inform me that the invasion had started and the war was likely to be finished earlier than I thought. He knew that if the Hungarians caught him on the way he would be shot. He stayed at my hiding place for the day and walked back to Bacsalmas the next night.

"One night, when I was drawing water from the well, Margit, the former synagogue custodian's wife heard the noise. She ran to the well to investigate and found me. I pleaded with her not betray me, but Margit did not reply.

"The next day, Margit went all over the synagogue yard searching for me. From a small crack in the side-wall facing the yard, I saw Margit's systematic search of every building in the synagogue yard. She was carrying a tall ladder and examined every crack on the roof of each building. I thought that it would be best to confront her, tell her that the war would be over shortly with the Allied victory and that she would be highly rewarded if she did not betray me.

"When I saw her near the well, which was close by, I came out of my hiding place and started talking to her. Without listening to what I said, she called aloud for her husband and her grown son who still lived in the synagogue yard on the property that formerly belonged to the Jewish community. They ran out with axes in their hands and ordered me not to move. Margit hurried to get the police. They beat me brutally, arrested me, and sent me to be interned in a prison in Kistarcsa, Hungary, especially reserved for hidden Jews. A short while later, I was brought here with the rest of the Jews at Kistarcsa.

"We were lucky to meet yesterday, on the first day of

my arrival," Father concluded.

Saturday morning I returned to Father's barrack. I greeted him and inquired how he was. "After you left yesterday, an SS officer appeared in my barrack," Father said. "He made all the newcomers from Hungary line up and undress. From among the strong and healthy looking ones he picked out 150 prisoners, me among them. One prisoner, who was the recording secretary (*Lager-Schreiber*) for the camp, came with documents and wrote down the names and birth dates of all those selected.

"We were then told in German and Yiddish that we would be taken to work at some place away from Auschwitz. The transport was ordered to keep together and wait for further instructions. We are supposed to leave Auschwitz in about two days."

Father and I were very upset at the prospect of becoming separated again after having been together for only two days. I did not want to return to the children's barrack and stay by myself again. I cried very hard and told Father that I wanted to be together with him.

When Father told me that the transport was not yet leaving for another day or two and he would think of something we could do to stay together, I became much calmer. In any case, today was Sabbath – a holiday of joy – and I was not to cry, Father said. He comforted me that we would find a way out of our predicament. Returning to my barrack, I tried to think hard of what we could possibly do, but came up with no clever idea.

On Saturday afternoon I returned to Father's barrack again. Father and I went to each person who had been selected for the transport and asked whether he would like to exchange places with me and stay in Auschwitz instead of going with the transport. We finally found a man who wanted to stay in Auschwitz.

The names of those selected for work were listed. However, the arms of the prisoners were not yet tattooed with a number. This allowed me to assume the man's name. I became Goldberger Arnold, born on September 23, 1914. In one day I became more than 15 years older than my true age.

Leaving Auschwitz For Golleschau

On Sunday morning, I returned to Father's barrack and joined the group that was supposed to leave Auschwitz that afternoon. Goldberger Arnold, the person I exchanged places with and whose name I assumed, left the group of prisoners selected for the transport and vanished among the many thousands in the camp.

I was greatly worried that the Germans would find me out. I also feared that I would forget either my newly assumed name or birth date.

Quietly I repeated over and over to myself, "I am Goldberger Arnold, born September 23, 1914. I am Goldberger Arnold..." In an annoyed voice, Father said, "You have been repeating this silly sentence for the last few hours. You must have said it at least five hundred times."

I am afraid that as soon as I stand before an SS officer, I will suddenly forget my adopted name and give him instead my true name, I replied. "They will discover my deception and that will be the end of me. If I repeat the name and birth date often enough, I will be able to rattle it off to the SS officer and not get into trouble. I'm also worried that they might ask me where Goldberger Arnold was born and I won't be able to answer. What if they look at my face and see right away that I could not be 30 years old?"

"You need not know where Goldberger was born," Father assured me. "When the SS came to select the prisoners

for the work-transport, they made us undress and looked at our bodies to judge whether we had the strength to do hard physical labor. Only the prisoners' names and birth dates were recorded but not their birthplaces. They wrote down the names only to insure that they get the same prisoners as they originally selected for the transport. They don't care what the prisoners names or birthplaces are.

"You should also not worry about looking much younger than Goldberger Arnold's thirty years. No one is going to look at your face. They need people who can do physical labor and they would not have selected you for the transport had they known your age or that you are from the children's barrack. Changing places with Goldberger Arnold gave us the only chance to stay together. Even though it may be somewhat dangerous, we have to take the risk so we can stay together and help each other in whatever may happen in the future.

It was almost noontime. The 150 prisoners selected were confined to a small area in the forward section of the barrack. The temperature in the barrack became less comfortable by the minute, as the hot August sun struck the wooden structure with a vengeance.

I was moving around listening to what people had to say. Some discussed the wonderful food they would have after they were liberated, others talked quietly about our imminent departure. Others were completely silent, contemplating the immediate future.

After a while I sat on the floor near my father and thought about our situation. Are we really going to be taken to a place of work? Or is this just another deception the Germans set up to torture us? Did they tell us that we would go to work only to raise our high hopes and then murder us as some said they would? We all had heard the terrible rumors about the gas chambers in Auschwitz – rumors which

could be neither confirmed nor denied – therefore I was happy to leave Auschwitz, if indeed the Germans would let us. Others, like Goldberger Arnold, wanted to stay in Auschwitz and chose to do so even when they were picked for a work transport and could have left. He apparently did not consider Auschwitz a very dangerous place.

Just before noon, the *Blockaeltester* (the prisoner commander of our barrack) appeared and ordered us to go outside and line up in columns of five, between the two barracks. The surrounding area was cleared of other prisoners. A group of SS guards appeared with machine guns pointed at us, ready for any eventuality. An elderly looking officer appeared. He had a very pale but somewhat handsome face, with grayish hair and a small slightly gray *Fuehrer* style mustache. He seemed to be an almost gentle grandfatherly person. But then I suddenly saw the dreadful SS insignia on his uniform and I knew that his looks were deceptive. He could have never gotten promoted to the level of an SS officer without having excelled in Hitler's evil plans and having had a good deal of Jewish blood on his hands. My expectations of him were confirmed later on.

The officer seemed to be relaxed, but somehow could not stand still. He constantly shifted from one foot to the other, almost as if he were dancing. It seemed as if his feet were bothering him, they must have been injured in the war. His short loud speech in German sounded almost like barking. Except for a word here and there I could not understand what he said. Translated by a prisoner into Yiddish, he told us that he was the Commander of the camp where we were going to; if there was anyone under age 18, he should immediately step out of line, for he wanted only strong prisoners capable of hard work. My better judgment told me not to volunteer; neither did anyone else.

After the speech, a prisoner with a notebook started

calling the names in alphabetical order. When one's name was called he had to walk over to the other side of the area between the barracks and again line up in columns of five. I became more and more nervous as the roll call approached the letter G. I heard the name Goldberger Arnold and was greatly relieved as I walked to the other side without incident. When Klein's name was called, Father lined up several columns away from me. I feared the separation, just in case I had to make some unexpected decision and Father would not be there to tell me what to do.

Soon the SS guards ordered us to march down the street. We passed a number of barracks on the two sides of the street. Lots of prisoners were milling around in between the barracks, their faces seemed to be sad and dejected. The high voltage barbed wires, and the watchtowers manned by SS guards surrounding the whole camp were a constant reminder that we could only get out of here with the approval of the SS.

We approached the exit gate from the camp, a large opening in the electrified barbed wires, in front of which was another SS watchtower. Before leaving the camp we were again counted and the SS officer standing at the gate recorded the count. Upon leaving the camp we were in a large wide area; it was much over a kilometer long and about four to five hundred feet wide. The whole area was again surrounded by high voltage barbed wires. Many Camps similar to the one we had just left had their exit gates into this region. Railroad tracks crisscrossed the area.

Further down on my right I recognized the railroad tracks where I had arrived seven weeks earlier with Mother and the children. I could also see the giant gate where the trains entered. For the first time since my arrival at Auschwitz, I found myself in the area where, looking in this

direction from the children's barrack, I saw transports, sometimes several, arriving daily and marching down to a destination unknown to me. I always wondered where they were going. Each transport had thousands of people. The fact that they wore civilian clothes rather than the striped prisoners' ones indicated that they must have just arrived from their homes.

We were allowed to disperse and rest on the grass. We were each given a piece of bread with margarine.

I was overtaken by fear and I observed terror in most of the prisoner's eyes. The Polish Jews who had been in Auschwitz for several years claimed that those arriving on the trains were taken to their death and cremated at a place not very far from my camp, where the chimneys spewed out smoke.

I really could not believe them. Still, what if they were right? What if the Germans told us that we were selected to go to work only to deceive us and we were really going to be murdered? I tried to console myself with the logical argument that if they had wanted to kill us they would not have wasted on us the precious bread and margarine they gave us earlier. If they were going to kill us, would they march us towards the chimneys to our death on foot or would they take us with trucks and unload us into the killing places? It flashed through my mind that this was what they must have done to the Gypsies who were taken by trucks a few weeks earlier.

My agony was indescribable. Any physical suffering could not have been equal to my spiritual one. It was as if I were in the claws of some evil spirit which I did not understand, before which we were all totally helpless and dependent, over which we had no control. The agony of helplessness, the senselessness of it was unbearable. The agony of

being exposed to the most horrible suffering and having to give up our lives because of some evil design the purpose of which I could not comprehend induced in me an indescribable fear, and resulted in an exhausting spiritual agony and degradation. It also made me angry almost beyond my control. Why not grab the SS man's machine gun and struggle with him to try to kill him? If I got killed in the process I had nothing to lose. I only restrained myself because I did not know the truth about what was going to happen to us, because, as much as I feared it, I still could not believe that they would murder us. We were totally innocent of any crime.

We were ordered to stand at attention. We waited. We heard engine noise and soon saw the trucks from a distance. They stopped near us. SS guards jumped off the trucks. We were ordered to line up in rows of five. About 30 prisoners were counted off and ordered to enter the first truck, the next group into the second, until we were all in the trucks. We were ordered to sit down on the benches riveted to the floor of the truck. When all prisoners sat, two SS guards jumped on the truck and sat down on a short bench near the rear of the truck. Their faces and machine guns were pointed directly at the prisoners. A heavy curtain hung from the ceiling of the truck near the back entrance and was pulled almost closed by the SS guards.

The engines started. My stomach was tied in knots. Were the Gypsies taken to their death in the same trucks? Fear squeezed my heart together. I felt as if my heart was placed in a vise which was being closed tighter and tighter. I knew that if the gas chambers existed they could not be very far. I was prepared to judge what would happen to us by the length of the truck ride. If the ride was of short duration we were most likely being taken to the place of annihilation. On the other hand, if the trip was long, we were quite

likely being taken to work someplace.

I wondered whether being gassed hurts much, then dismissed this question altogether. I did not care whether I suffered a little or a lot, but I could not imagine myself being no longer. Does death come soon or does one go through agony for a long time? I did not want to die. But I knew that if God willed that I should give my life for Kiddush Hashem, for the sanctification of His name, for being a Jew, I would do it without revolting against him. I took solace in that I would be together with Father, who was a Rabbi and a great Talmud scholar and would know what prayers to say before we gave up our lives. But still I could not imagine that I would have to give up my life at age 15, before I had really started living.

We traveled for quite a while and my tense nerves slowly relaxed. According to my interpretation we were being taken to some place to work, instead of the gas chambers. I was sufficiently relaxed that I could finally have a look around me in the truck.

I was sitting in the first row of benches, nearest to the engines, facing the rear of the truck. It gave me a chance to look around and watch the faces of the other prisoners. Most prisoners looked shrunken, almost alike, as if replicas of inferior men. Each prisoner was dressed in the dull striped clothes given to us in Auschwitz and held his *Muetze*, the striped prisoner head cover, in his hand.

I was watching one of the prisoners who had a long nose and thick eyeglasses. His eyes were bloodshot. Either he had not slept for a while, or he was very scared, or he may have been badly beaten by the Germans. His stubble of a coal-black beard must have been several days old. His prisoner uniform had a large dirty spot in front of his chest. He must have gotten it by accidentally pouring dir-gemuse on it while he was slurping the food from one pot with ten other

people like pigs used to do back home. He was terrible looking. A scared skeleton with the human component of fear only. I looked around at the others; they looked not much different, a group of prisoners who seemed to have no dignity.

My eyes wandered around the truck and they rested for an instant on the two SS guards sitting in front of me in the back of the truck. One of them was blond, the other dark. I was close enough to them that I could see the veins pulsating in their necks. Both were over six feet tall. Their boots were like new, shiny and polished. Their pants were ironed with a well defined crease. Their gray helmets were an unnecessary protection for them, since the machine guns in their hands were directed towards the prisoners. Their jackets fitted perfectly to their bodies and seemed to be tailor-made. The feared SS symbol on their collars burned its image into my eyes. They looked calm and rested. I turned my eyes away from them for fear that they would take offense at me for staring at them and would punish me for it. I lowered my eyes and looked down at the floor of the truck. I could not help make comparisons between the looks of the SS guards and the prisoners. These were handsome, the others were not. These were daring, the others were not.

I was greatly troubled by my confusion. I knew that the SS guards could be cruel as any wild animal, they would torture us and tear us apart for the smallest infraction, whereas we would not hurt anybody, human or animal. I struggled to understand, to explain to myself my inner feeling, that in spite of his external looks, I was superior to him.

As a Chassidic Yeshiva student, I knew that the answers to the puzzles of life were to be found in the teachings of the Torah, in Moses' Five Books, in the Prophets, and in the Talmud. I searched my mind and forced myself to think

about what distinguished men from animals, wild or other.

I remembered the story of the creation of men, and recalled the passage from Genesis, "*b'zelem elo'him barah o'tam* – that God created men in His image." Only men were created in the image of God, animals were not. Was the SS guard created in the image of God? Was he created differently than any other human being? Did he carry the image of God on his face? It must be, I concluded, that when he shed his humanity and became an SS guard in Auschwitz he no longer carried the image of God, he ceased to be a human being. He gave up his humanity and became a wild animal. I was convinced that my beliefs in the Torah and the ideas arising from them were eternal and true and his were not. In spite of external appearances I knew that I was in the right and he was not.

A sudden sharp turn of the truck interrupted my thoughts. I concentrated on where I was. Through the crack in the curtains in the back of the truck I saw that we were passing the streets of some town. I saw people walking on the sides of the street. I greatly envied them. I could not imagine that some people were free and could go anywhere they wanted. I longed to have the feeling of freedom at least once more.

Shortly we arrived at a gate. The SS guards inside expected us, opened the gate, and motioned the trucks to enter. We got off the truck and were ordered to line up in columns of five to be counted. Altogether 150 prisoners arrived from Auschwitz.

We were taken to a large room with triple bunk beds. It was an isolated place with no other prisoners. Two people were assigned to sleep on the thin straw-mattress placed on each level. Father and I chose to share a bunk bed. After our bunk beds were assigned we were ordered to leave the large

room and told to go outside into a rectangular area near our building. We were allowed to sit on the grounds and do nothing.

Nobody supervised us. We were inside the camp, surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers hence no one could escape. I finally could talk to Father and some of his friends. I found out that upon leaving Auschwitz everyone had the same fears as I did and we were all relieved to be at some work-camp.

Later on, some prisoners came from the camp and brought us a small portion of bread and margarine. Some people from our group spoke to these prisoners and were told that we were in Camp Golleschau, where we would be put to work, after a quarantine period to make sure that we were not infected by some disease.

Camp Golleschau

We had been in quarantine almost a week and did no work. We got food twice and sometimes three times a day. The food was meager, a small portion of bread with margarine in the morning and in the evening, and sometimes a small portion of soup midday. Still, the food was much better than what we had in Auschwitz.

One afternoon I was resting lazily in the camp area when an SS officer arrived with the Camp Recorder (*Lager-Schreiber*), who held a book in his hand. I recognized the SS officer as the one who had spoken to us before we left Auschwitz.

The Camp Recorder announced in German and Yiddish that all those under the age of 18 years should step out; they would be given *zulage*, additional food, because they were young. Hearing of food, I ran to line up; there were a number of others already in front of me.

The Camp Recorder asked the name of the first boy in line and translated the SS officer's words into Yiddish. "Before you left Auschwitz, I asked that everyone under 18 should step out of line, how come you did not? Twenty-five lashes on your behind!" was the officer's order. The lashes were given with a lead-laden rubber hose and most who received this punishment did not live long afterwards.

I feared for my life, as I advanced step by step in the direction of the SS officer and to my doom. It was August, a little more than one month short of September 23, Goldberger Arnold's birth date. I did some fast thinking before I arrived to the front of the line.

"Your name?"

"Goldberger Arnold."

"Your birthday?"

"September 23, 1926."

I wanted to tell him that I was only one month short of 18 and that is why I did not step out when he asked for prisoners under 18 to do so in Auschwitz, but I still stood in line for the extra food because I was still one month short of 18.

The SS officer started screaming at me, pointing at the book, "Here it says that you were born September 23, 1914." He was ready to punish me, at which time the Camp Recorder said, "He really looks like a young boy, he could not be 30 years old." The officer dismissed me and let me join the other prisoners without being punished. I was greatly relieved that my life was saved this time.

One evening a few days later while I was still in quarantine, we were unexpectedly made to line up for muster. Every time there was something unusual we feared for our lives. An SS officer commanded us to form a single line, in alphabetical order. Since I had exchanged places in Auschwitz with Goldberger Arnold, I had to line up with the "G's." I did not know what to expect and now Father was down the line among the "K's" and I could not consult him. Everyone was handed a pen and a printed form to fill out. The document asked for the prisoner's name and birth date. The Camp Recorder translated the words of the SS officer into Yiddish and said, "All those that gave false names or birth dates before leaving Auschwitz for this new camp

should now correct their personal data and will not incur any punishment."

I was torn with indecision as I moved forward in the line. Should I believe the SS officer and admit that my name was Klein, son of Ignac Klein, or should I use my adopted name of Arnold Goldberger? What if the Germans were only setting up a trap to punish us? After weighing the odds, I finally filled out the form with the name of Goldberger Arnold (it turned out much later that this decision contributed to my survival), but I recorded my birth date as September 23, 1926, making myself 18 years old. The line moved forward slowly. I got to the front of the line where a prisoner tattooed the number B-5746 into my arm. My father, Ignac Klein, received the number B-5785.

I looked at my number. I was branded forever. I felt as if I had stopped existing as a human being. The metamorphosis from a human being to a tattooed number removed the last vestiges of pretense that the Germans considered us to be people. My belief that our principles were far above those of the Germans helped little to alleviate my sadness and fear.

After quarantine, we were moved to the main camp, less than one hundred yards away. The camp yard was confined by a barbed wire fence on three sides and a three story brick building on the fourth side. I was glad to see that the wires were not connected to high voltage electricity as they were in Auschwitz.

My father and I and about twenty-five others were assigned to work in a group called Seilbahn 2, or "cablecart 2." We were supposed to build a cable cart which would deliver rocks from the quarry located in the mountains to the cement factory inside the camp. The rocks were crushed, mixed with chemicals, and baked at high temperatures into

cement. Father and I made sure that the Kapos and the SS guards were unaware that we were father and son, for they could have decided to torture one of us with the other one forced to watch helplessly.

A young Polish Jew named Yakub Shidlowsky was appointed the Kapo, or supervisor, of Seilbahn 2. He spoke an excellent Yiddish and seemed to be well nourished and physically strong. His fluent Yiddish led me to believe that he would be friendly towards us. Little did I realize how wrong I was.

By this time it was late afternoon. The newcomers were lined up for muster. We had stood at attention for quite a while, and did not know what we were waiting for, when a group of prisoners marched in through the entrance gate of the camp. In the booth at the gate sat an SS officer. The prisoners entered with their escort of two SS guards with machine guns. The number entering the camp was reported to the SS guard in the booth; he counted them to corroborate the number.

The prisoners entering the gate were ordered to line up in columns of five next to us. Soon more prisoners arrived. By the time all the prisoners were inside the camp, we filled most of the small camp yard.

I watched the faces of the incoming prisoners. They seemed dispirited and haggard. After a while a Gestapo officer marked by the dreaded skull and crossbones on his lapel, came out of the building. He counted the rows of five rapidly, walked over to an SS officer, Camp Commander Mirbeth, standing in front of the entrance to the building, saluted, and reported the count. I recognized Mirbeth as the SS officer who had spoken to us before we left Auschwitz. The lazy response of Mirbeth made it clear that he was the higher in command.

We were dismissed from muster and marched into a

large hall inside the building. We lined up and inched forward to where the food was distributed. On arrival at the head of the line, five prisoners were counted off and the last one was given a small round black bread and five pieces of margarine.

The bread was precut into five portions, and as best as we could see the portions were not even in size. The five of us stood around the bread. One of the prisoners was asked to turn around so he could not see the bread and another pointed to one of the five portions and asked the prisoner with his back turned to whom it should belong. This way the five portions were distributed by lot. When the portions were distributed, everyone felt that the others got the better deal.

For the first time we were able to talk to the prisoners who had been in Golleschau before us. They had just returned from work and were exhausted. Some had by now lost a lot of weight and the striped concentration camp clothes hung on them loosely. Others looked more like ghosts than human beings. A measure of the well-being of a prisoner was the amount of flesh he had on his face. Those who arrived most recently looked skinny and tired, but otherwise healthy. Others, who had been in Golleschau longer, had protruding cheekbones and almost no flesh on their faces. They were referred to as *musulman* (dead man). With their glassy eyes they looked as if they already belonged to the world of the dead.

The bell rang, calling us to retire for the night. One of the prisoners, who was well nourished and whose clothes fit his body, walked around the camp with a heavy flexible rubber hose in his hand. It was his job to ensure that all was orderly in the camp, according to the best German proscription. Juppe was the *Lager-Aeltester*, the Prisoner Commander

of the camp. From the triangle on his jacket one could see that he was a professional criminal before he was sent to the camps. His presence inspired terror even in the most veteran prisoners.

We were assigned to triple bunk beds, with two prisoners to each bed, six to a bunk bed. Each bed had a thin straw mattress on it. Father and I grabbed the opportunity to share a bunk bed. Each prisoner was given a single blanket and Father and I covered ourselves by spreading the two blankets over both of us.

The shrill bell woke us the next morning at 5 AM. It was still dark outside. At the sound of the bell, the prisoners started the morning rush to the bathrooms. By 5:30, we stood in line to receive our meager breakfast of bread and margarine. By 6:15, we were all lined up to go to work. The Kapo Shidlowsky, stood in the middle of the yard and shouted in Yiddish that Seilbahn 2 should gather near him. When the headcount was completed he proceeded towards the gate, and announced that Seilbahn 2 was reporting for work. Two SS guards were assigned to escort our group. The gate was opened and we marched towards the mountains with the two SS guards, machine guns ready, walking behind the group.

The march up the mountain was easy at first. The incline of the road was shallow. But after a while the road became steep and slippery. We were quite out of breath from climbing the slippery mountains, still we continued at an even pace, with the Kapo urging us to walk faster, striking the prisoners on the back with the thick stick he held in his hand.

It took about three quarters of an hour to arrive at our destination, the place where the concrete supports for the cable cart were supposed to be. We started digging ditches. The Kapo Shidlowsky was always around us, beating us to work faster, to pick up more earth on our shovels each time.

He warned us that if he thought that someone did not work hard enough he would mark down his tattooed number and report him to the Lager-Aeltester, and he would be punished with twenty-five lashes on his behind. Everyone tried to work as hard and as fast as he could, but still the Kapo kept beating us to hurry.

The work was difficult, and soon my empty stomach protested painfully. At noon, lunch was announced by one of the SS guards. The large thermos-like container, carried by two prisoners while marching up the mountains this morning, was opened. A portion of watery soup was ladled out for each prisoner. Some fell hungrily on the soup and ate it as fast as they could. But most of us just tasted a spoonful at a time, savoring each drop. Father and I ate our soup slowly. When there was a little speck of meat in his watery soup Father picked it out and put it into my soup. Never would he eat non kosher food in its pure form even in the camps. We finished our soup and were allowed to sit on the grass and rest till 12:45 PM.

During the noontime rest I had a chance to observe the beautiful scenery. Bundles of sunrays were scattered by small pockets of clouds. Lush evergreen forest surrounded me. The breathtaking beauty of the surroundings only emphasized my predicament and the pain in my heart. The forest, with the birds chirping and pulsating with life, heightened my longing for freedom. I envied the crickets as they moved freely, while we were condemned and enslaved. It was hard for me to believe that nature existed in its magnificence, even at a time when I was condemned to hell on earth. How was it possible that life for others went on as usual when such punishment was perpetrated on God's Chosen People?

Upon a signal from the Kapo we returned to dig. The sun slowly descended towards the West and the warm sun-

shine was replaced by a cool wind blowing over the mountain-range. Laboring hard and fast I was exhausted and time passed slowly. Finally, as the sun was close to setting, the Kapo ordered us to assemble in rows of three and start our descent from the mountains back to camp.

I was surprised that the walk down the mountain was harder than walking up this morning. Arriving at the camp we were counted by the SS guard at the gate and joined those already lined up in columns of five for muster (or Zahlappell). As we lined up in columns of five, no one wanted to stand in the first row. The Lager-Aeltester walked by the rows, and anyone who did not stand straight in the line, or had committed some other real or imaginary infraction, soon felt Juppe's lead-laden rubber hose brutally raining down upon his head and body. We stood at attention for a long time, until the Gestapo officer appeared.

Before the counting proceeded two prisoners' numbers were called out and they had to stand in front of the Juppe. They were "lazy" during the day and their numbers were reported for "not working satisfactorily." The first prisoner was made to bend over on a low horse-like wooden structure and his rear end was tightly held and raised by the strong hands of one of the Kapos. Juppe administered twenty-five lashes with the lead-laden rubber hose. During the first few lashes the prisoner screamed, but he stopped screaming by about the tenth. Still, the Kapo held him tightly till the twenty-five lashes were completed. When the Kapo let him go he fell to the ground unconscious, his kidneys beaten to a pulp. The next prisoner was given the same treatment.

Each morning Father and I marched up the mountains. Klein and Goldberger, side by side, the Germans not knowing that we were father and son. We labored very hard, were often beaten brutally, and subsisted on a very meager diet.

The weather also turned cold and wet as the High Holiday season approached in the beginning of September.

Father's and my thoughts were incessantly occupied with the approaching holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The sanctity of the season permeated our minds. It was inconceivable to us that we would have to work on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Some prisoners believed this was the time of the Messiah and that a miracle would indeed occur to prevent us from working on the High Holidays and having to say our prayers in secret. Any outward expression of prayer was punished by severe beatings which often resulted in internal bleeding, in the weakening of our bodies, and in almost certain death. We approached Rosh Hashana with a great deal of fear and trepidation.

The High Holidays

On Monday September 18, the first morning of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, it was raining hard, the wind was howling. As on every other day, we marched up the mountains in rows of three, the Kapo in front, and the two SS guards with machine guns about twenty feet behind. They were far enough behind so as not to hear our voices in the rain. My father and I marched, as always, side by side. Soon our thin concentration camp clothing was thoroughly soaked from the cold Silesian rain. In spite of the cold and physical discomfort, my father rose spiritually to the occasion. In the customary sad tone (*nusach*) used during the High Holidays, he started to recite quietly, inaudibly to the SS guards, "*Yishtabach Shimcha* – May your name be praised our Lord," part of the Rosh Hashana prayer. He led and I repeated every word.

I still remember him crying out in a muted tone, the prayer "*Mima'ma'akim k'rosicho hashem...*– From the depths I am calling You, my Lord," and repeating King David's desperate prayer for salvation and protection for himself and the Jewish people from the bitter brutal enemies who surrounded him. From *Yishtabach,* he continued to the Sh'ma, the prayer proclaiming the eternal belief in one God, and, with both of us partly out of breath from climbing the slippery mountain, he started reciting the Amida prayer of

the holy day. He recited the Amida, word for word, and each word became engraved in my mind as I repeated it after him.

Following this recital I knew the Rosh Hashana Amida by heart. Arriving at the passage of "*Uv'chen ten pach'decho hashem elokeinu al kol ma'asecho* – O Lord, put Your awe upon all Your creations, may all creations worship You and blend into one brotherhood...," tears ran down his cheeks and were mixed with the rain. In a choking voice, he started over and over again and again: "*Uv'chen ten pach'decho, Uv'chen ten pach'decho hashem elokeinu,*" but his prayer seemed to be deflected with great force from the locked gates of heaven. Then he came to the passage, "*U'vchen zaddikim yir'u v'yismochu* – The righteous will see and rejoice in that evil will be destroyed" and that "justice will prevail for all Mankind." It was clear from his voice that he believed without a shadow of doubt that this horrendous plight of the Jewish people was only temporary, that their time of rejoicing would someday come again.

Yom Kippur was approaching. Silently, unobtrusively, Father and I were preparing spiritually for the holy and fearsome day. We had not consulted rabbinic opinions on what to do on Yom Kippur. By the time we arrived in camp after a long day's work in the mountains, we fell exhausted into our bunks and there was no time for discussions. Still, Father and I and all those I knew, decided to fast on Yom Kippur. When the small portion of bread was handed out on the morning before Yom Kippur, we only ate half of it, saving the other half for the afternoon. For we knew that by the time we arrived back in camp in the evening and got our next portion of bread, Yom Kippur would have already commenced. We did not want to face the choice of breaking our Yom Kippur fast at the very outset of the holy day, or not eating for 37 hours.

The intense pain of hunger and starvation is very difficult to describe to someone who has not experienced it. It had been with us all the time. In spite of the pain it was of utmost importance that our minds dictate our wishes, that our minds control our actions, that our minds conquer the intense desire and physical need to eat the piece of bread.

When I arrived at the camp on the *Kol Nidre* (Yom Kippur) evening, I knew immediately that something unusual was going on for there were many more SS guards present at muster than usual. We stood at attention for a long time, as one of our comrades, Salamon Abshalom was led to the gallows.

Salamon Abshalom believed that the rumors about the gas chambers in Auschwitz were true; and that those of us who survived the initial selection were only left alive temporarily, until such time that the Germans had sapped our last energies to build their war machine. Once we were no longer useful, we would be murdered and our ashes disposed of, like those of our women and children in Auschwitz. He took it as his mission to return to Hungary to let the Hungarian Jews know that the German's claim of "resettlement" of the Jews was a deception and, despite the German claims, they were all being killed. He believed that anyone who could hide back in Hungary should do so, regardless of the risks. At least some would survive! Once they were loaded on the trains they were trapped and there was no hope for them. He escaped from camp Golleschau to return to Hungary and was caught a few days later. He had already crossed the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia but was recognized by his high pitched voice which the SS knew about and publicized in the different stores. He was returned to Golleschau and was brought before the prisoners one evening during Zahlappell. His hair and clothes were red from the blood flowing from the wounds on his head, from the beatings of

the Kapos and the SS.

He stood in front of the prisoners, and tried to stand up straight as if he were to show us how proud he was of what he was trying to do. His tattooed number was called out and he was meted out fifty lashes on his behind with a lead laden rubber hose. He defied the Germans and made no sound during the beating. When the fifty lashes were completed and the Kapo let go of him, he fell on the ground and was carried to an underground bunker nearby. A few days later, Salamon Abshalom was again tortured the same way.

Now, on Kol Nidre evening, he sacrificed his life for his belief. When the rope was placed on his neck, his outcry of "Sh'ma Yisrael... – Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One" was interrupted by the SS guard cutting off his last breath. After his hanging, our spirits and bodies were in a state of exhaustion and our minds in a state of confusion. We were dismissed from muster and sent to our usual quarters. The evening portion of bread was distributed, and we saved it and hid it in our shirts, next to our bodies, for the next evening, for the end of the Yom Kippur fast.

Small groups formed to pray around the bunk beds. Father and I joined a group of people from Debrecen (the city near my father's birthplace) in a small room for the Yom Kippur Kol Nidre prayers. A cantor (*chazan*) from Debrecen, Rabbi Moshe Spitzer, a Chassidic Jew, started singing the Kol Nidre prayer in a beautiful voice, quietly, so no one outside the room could hear.

For a portion of life-giving bread, Reb Moshe Spitzer had obtained a pencil and paper and reconstructed the Yom Kippur prayers from memory. I watched his face and followed every word. With a great deal of effort, we had separated ourselves from our physical sufferings, and we reunited with the Jewish people the world over, to recite the awe-

some Yom Kippur prayers. In my thoughts I was spiritually back in my home, back with my family, united with God. With Father near me, we were not going to let the evil Germans deprive us of what we believed to be of utmost importance. After a while Reb Moshe's voice rang out with the prayer, "*Ya'ale tachninenu me'erev* – Let our pleadings reach the gates of heaven on this holy Yom Kippur evening," and tears streamed down my Father's and my cheeks, as well everybody else's in the room, as we tried to grasp the inexplicable. Many of the people in the room were rabbis, and most were Torah scholars. The spiritual elite of Europe, praying to God, wondering and asking why all this was happening.

As the prayers continued, the door suddenly flew open and the Lager-Aeltester, the Prisoner-Commander of the camp, stormed in and started brutally beating us with a lead-laden rubber hose. Father and I were near the door and we rapidly scrambled out of the room and dispersed among the bunk beds. We were afraid that our prisoner numbers would be written down for having participated in prayer and we would be condemned to severe beatings and almost certain death.

Reb Moshe continued leading in prayer as if nothing had happened. This must have enraged the Lager-Aeltester, for he suddenly started beating Reb Moshe on the head with his lead-laden rubber hose. Reb Moshe carried on his prayers as if nothing happened, until he fell to the ground. The sadist, utilizing his well polished black boots, started kicking him in the face and head while Reb Moshe still continued his prayer lying on the ground, as if challenging God to act. The kicking continued until Reb Moshe became unconscious. He died the next day and his body was sent back to Auschwitz to be cremated.

The next morning was no different than any other, ex-

cept that Father and I and most prisoners I knew, again saved our portions of bread and hiding it under our jackets for the evening. The march up the mountain was, as always, long and tiring. When we got there, everyone started working on assembling the metal structures, part of the cable cart we were constructing. There were several ditches ready, about shoulder deep, into which the metal structures were supposed to be placed. An SS guard picked two people to go down into one of those ditches and to straighten the walls so that the metal structure would fit properly. One of the two prisoners was Reb Baruch Hager, the Vishover Rabbi, a nephew of the eminent Vishnitzer Rebbe. I was the other. The SS guard watched us work for a while and we worked as hard and as fast as we could, but then the SS guard drifted back to the others, leaving us unobserved most of the day.

When the guard disappeared, Reb Baruch Hager started talking about *K'dushat Hayom* – the sanctity of Yom Kippur. Every few minutes he repeated. "*Rebono Shel Olam* – Father in Heaven, if we do not work the Germans will kill us." Still, I would not work on Yom Kippur, but would rather give my life for the sanctity of the Torah and the sanctity of Yom Kippur. I am only working to fulfill the commandment of "*V'chai Ba'hem*," that we should "live by Your commandments," not die by them. If we do not work, the Germans will kill us, and we will have violated this commandment."

He spoke to me about the beauty of Yom Kippur during the time of the Holy Temple. He spoke about the sacrifices, and he said, that for some incomprehensible reason it was almost as if we had taken the place of the sacrifices. He spoke about previous catastrophes that had befallen the Jewish people. He spoke about Torah and Talmud all day long, and about his firm belief that in spite of the fact that the Jewish people were going through a period of terrible suffering, this was only temporary, and the Jewish people would

once again flourish. He talked about our ideas and beliefs, contrasting them with those of the Germans, and he spoke of his Messianic belief that God would create a better world after the Nazi evil was destroyed.

I worked very hard the entire day of Yom Kippur. My hands performed mechanical labor, but my mind acted as if it were separated from my body. My spirits were united with the rest of our fellow Jews all over the world, praying the "*Uv'chen zaddikim yir'u v'yismochu,*" that the "righteous should see again the glory of God." Many a time during the day Rabbi Hager mentioned that his wife and son were in hiding back in Hungary, and he prayed that they would not be caught and would survive.

Evening came. We walked back to camp. We ate the bread hidden in our shirts next to our bodies, breaking our fast. Thus we ended the "*K'dushat Hayom* – the sanctity of the day of Yom Kippur," and elevated the "*K'dushat Am Yisrael* – the sanctity of the Jewish people" to a level no one thought possible. I believe that there was more true sanctity in the concentration camp on that day than in any other place in the world.

Separation From My Father

The weather became very cold. Heavy snow covered the slippery mountainsides. In spite of the snow, we still had to climb up the mountains each morning. In many places the snow froze into ice and we had to hold onto the trees in order not to keep sliding downward. We got to our workplace and started to assemble large metal structures on the ground. The metal pieces were designed in a factory and it was our job put these together with heavy screws. Some of the parts had to be welded together. The assembled structures would later be mounted on the cement supports which the prisoners had prepared previously. Once the metal structures stood erect in their proper place the cables for the cable-cart would be mounted on them.

The wind was howling across the mountain ranges and all day long we had to work in the sub-zero Silesian weather dressed only in our summery concentration camp clothes. There was a lot of fuel around in the coal-rich Silesian mountains and the SS guards allowed us to make a fire, for otherwise everyone would have frozen to death. They let us stand around the fire in shifts; one group worked and the other stood near the fire. The two SS guards also stood around the fire and warmed themselves. It was really too cold to accomplish any useful work. But still, each morning we had to climb up the slippery mountainsides.

Some members of our group built tracks to accommodate the narrow-track lorries used to transport rocks from the mountains to the cement factory located inside the camp. The rocks were crushed, mixed with chemicals and baked at high temperatures into cement.

At the end of September, Father and some other prisoners were transferred from our work group to another. We were both very upset by the separation during daytime, but since the sleeping-quarters for the two groups were close to each other, Father and I continued to sleep in the same bunk. As soon as we arrived at camp in the evening, we sought each other out and stayed near each other during Zahlappell and during the evening, including the time when the food was distributed. Father and I were separated again the next morning when we went to work with our respective groups at different places in the mountains. Each evening we compared notes on the happenings of the day.

An SS guard escorting Father's group somehow found out that he was a rabbi. This gave him a special reason to abuse Father and he encouraged the Kapo to do the same. Father was quite nearsighted and he could practically not see without his eyeglasses. One day the Kapo beat him repeatedly and hit him in the face. His eyeglasses flew off and hit a rock. One of the lenses broke into several pieces. Father picked up the largest piece and was able to fit it back into the frame with a thin piece of wood he found. The wooden part on the bottom of the lens attracted the attention of the brutal overseers. It was painful and terrifying for me to see Father's badly beaten face several days in a row when I met him in the evening.

The SS guard and the Kapo kept constant vigil over Father. They kept abusing him. He had to perform hard physical labor all day while being exposed to the freezing subzero weather on the mountaintop. Coupled with the starva-

tion diet in the camp, Father became weaker and weaker by the day. On a number of occasions Father went to see Dr. Rubinstein, the camp physician, in the evening. They had long discussions. I had no idea what the topic of their conversation was, but I must have been involved because on several of these evenings Dr. Rubinstein called me in to examine my chest in the presence of Father.

Sometime later Father developed a high fever and Dr. Rubinstein put him into the so-called Golleschau "infirmary," a single room with triple bunk beds where no medication was available, not even an aspirin. But at least Father did not have to work on the mountaintops in the terrible Silesian sub-zero weather. I was not allowed to see Father in the infirmary, so I did not know what was happening to him.

On November 28, 1944, I was in the building with all the other Golleschau prisoners. Juppe, the sadistic Lager-Aeltester, called me to go with him. I had no idea why the murderer singled me out, but I was almost certain that this was the end of me. Still, I had no choice but to go with him. He took me to a small room where Father sat on a chair. The Lager-Aeltester told me that Father could not work hard enough anymore. Therefore he was being taken back to Auschwitz.

Father and I hugged each other and we both burst out crying. Father told me that he was freezing. I wanted to ask him many questions. Did he know where he was going? Was he afraid? Did Dr. Rubinstein know what happened to prisoners who were taken back to Auschwitz? How did Father feel? Did something hurt him? Father just said that we should not cry, but have faith in God, still showing his firm belief even at that time. The Lager-Aeltester ordered me to go. I had to leave right away, for otherwise the sadistic commander would have severely punished me.

The prospect of staying alone in Golleschau was frightening. Again I recalled the terrible rumors about what happened to people who were taken back to Auschwitz. But I just could not believe these rumors. I wondered how Father convinced the evil Lager-Aeltester to allow me to see him before we were permanently separated. Did Dr. Rubinstein convince Father to voluntarily go back to Auschwitz? If so, did Dr. Rubinstein know that nothing bad would happen to him? Was this the topic of their discussions over the several evenings they had spent together? Questions which tortured my soul but had no answers.

Another Escape From Death

I continued to work in the mountains. The winds, the snow and ice, and the terrible cold drained me of all my strength. I was rapidly losing weight and often wondered how long I would be able to continue going like that. But I knew that the Russian troops were not too far away and believed that they would arrive one of these days, defeating the SS and the German armies. So I did not give up hope. However I knew I had to be very careful, for any apparent infraction on my side could easily cost me my life.

One day we were loading a lorry with rocks for the cement factory. One of our SS guards was a *schwab,* a person of German origin or descent from Yugoslavia who was generally known as the "killer SS guard." He shot a number of prisoners on the way down from the mountains for minor infractions. Rumors had it that he had been finally reprimanded by the SS when he killed too many of the people who were builders by profession and contributed to the output of cement in Golleschau.

As we were loading the lorry, the killer-schwab thought that I was not lifting heavy enough rocks. He held the metal part of his gun in his hand and started beating me with the wooden part. He struck me so hard that his own hand was injured in the process. Were it not for the recent reprimand he would have probably shot me right then.

Instead, he drove us into the nearby forest and ordered all of us to do push-ups. He commanded rapidly "Up, down, up, down." While commanding the routine for the push-ups, he kept beating me with his gun, trying to force me into the forest and to separate me from the rest of the thirty or so prisoners. If I were in the forest, he could claim that I wanted to run away, and if so, he had orders to shoot me. I realized his plan and no matter how hard he beat me, I always ran towards the center where most of prisoners were. At each fall during the push-ups, I made certain that I fell in such a way that another prisoner would fall on my head. This way he could not shoot me in the head without shooting another prisoner also. I knew that I was in mortal danger and that at any moment, I might be killed, and acted accordingly. The extreme danger made me perceive that time had slowed down to an unbelievably slow rate and almost stopped. Each push-up, which must have taken a couple of seconds at most, seemed to me to extend over a very long time and gave me ample opportunity to think of what to do next. I also had time to pray to God that he should help me make the wise choice of where to fall. The push-ups and beatings went on and on, as I panted for air and hoped it would somehow stop and I would still be alive.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the *Meister*, the civilian engineer for the whole project, appeared. The killer-schwab was embarrassed, stopped the push-ups and ordered us to go back to work. Fortunately for me the killer-schwab escorted another group afterwards.

It was a few days later, in the middle of December. Like on any other day, we walked up the mountains in the terrible cold. This time I was loading stones into a narrow track lorry, when it started moving on the tracks. I did not respond fast enough and it ran over part of my big toe. In spite of the

pain, I continued to work the whole day and walked back to camp in the evening. Otherwise the SS guard might have shot me. I went to sleep without seeing the camp doctor. Though the toe was painful I did not report sick for fear of being sent back from Golleschau to Auschwitz.

By the next morning the pain had became excruciating, but I still had to report for work as usual, because permission to stay in camp had to be obtained the previous night. As I lined up with my group, Dr. Rubinstein, the camp physician, walked by and saw my face distorted with pain. He had known Father and me well before Father was taken back to Auschwitz. Dr. Rubinstein stopped and inquired as to the cause of my pain. I removed my wooden shoe and showed him my injured toe and swollen foot. He ordered me into the so called "infirmary." Even though no medication of any kind was available for prisoners, at least I did not have to march up the mountains and work there all day in the terrible cold. I settled down in my bunk bed. Soon I dared to approach the window to look out. Beyond the barbed wire gate of the camp lay the mountains. They looked awe-inspiring as they rose up towards the sky like a white colossus. The wind made the snow into a swirling white dust, twisting in the sky.

The marching prisoners, among whom I would have been, had Dr. Rubinstein not ordered me to stay in camp, could still be seen at a distance, getting smaller and smaller before they disappeared from view.

I was in a state of total ecstasy about my good fortune of not having to go out into the bitter cold, not having to march up those terrible white mountains covered with snow. The pain in my toe persisted, but that was a small price to pay for basking myself in the sun's rays entering through the window and having the first real rest in a long time. I was simply overjoyed and had even pushed the fear of being taken

back to Auschwitz out of my mind. For the moment life was wonderful.

Several weeks passed and I was still in the infirmary. Dr. Rubinstein must have been protecting me and keeping me there. For some odd reason, which we did not know, no transports were taken back from Golleschau to Auschwitz after January 1945, and the infirmary population grew unusually large. There were close to ninety of us there.

January came and we started to hear noises from a great distance, noises which sounded like cannon fire. At first they were barely perceptible, then became increasingly louder. I knew the Russians were coming. Hope was near.

Evacuation Of Golleschau

On Friday morning, January 19, 1945, I was watching the cold mountains from the infirmary window. Around noontime, I saw long lines of prisoners marching down the mountains back towards the camp. I could not understand why the prisoners were coming back so early. As they got closer I heard a tremendous commotion. It did not take long to realize that no one was entering the camp. The prisoners were being loaded into open coal trains. I heard a great deal of shouting. Shots were ringing out, and I saw the murdered bodies of those who had not moved fast enough thrown into the open wagons. The commotion went on for a while. The inmates were all crouching down in the open coal-wagons to protect themselves from the bitter cold and wind. By the time the train departed the people in each of the open wagons looked like one white mass covered by a blanket of snow. Those that had no place on the train were marched off on foot.

Everyone departed. An ominous silence descended on the camp. Except for the ninety-two of us in the infirmary room, no one seemed to be present. A faint glimmer of hope dared to enter my mind. Had the impossible happened? Was I perhaps free? I was not left to ponder this thought very long. My heart sank as two SS guards stormed in with ma-

TOURO COLLEGE LIBRARY

chine guns in hand and ordered us not to move around. The fear and memory of past stories settled in my stomach. Stories that claimed how in many instances the sick ones left behind were murdered in their beds with a single bullet in the head. Even though I wondered how it would feel, I did not fear pain, but my earlier hope for freedom had been replaced by the fear of death.

It was getting darker in the room and Sabbath was approaching. It had become of utmost importance to me to die as a Jew, to give my life for Kiddush Hashem, for martyrdom, in accordance with our Jewish Heritage. I knew that a dying person had to say *Vidui*, the Prayer of the Dying. What did Vidui consist of? Did one say Vidui on the Sabbath? Or did the joy of the Sabbath take precedence. From my Yeshiva studies I knew many chapters of the *Shulchan Aruch,* the major code of Jewish law, almost by heart, but not the laws for this occasion. Never had I so regretted my lack of knowledge and ignorance.

I decided to say Vidui as best as I could remember. I said it slowly, with concentration, thinking about the meaning of each word. I finished Vidui as best as I knew and was ready for my Maker.

Still, it was Sabbath. The fact that I had not eaten for 24 hours, or the pain of hunger and of fear, were not going to interfere with my last Sabbath on earth. I took control of my emotions and started saying the Sabbath evening prayer by heart. The prayer transported me back to the large synagogue of my Yeshiva in Ujhely. I joined the hundreds of others in the giant synagogue in singing *L'cha dodi*, rejoicing at the entrance of the Sabbath. I was no longer in Golleschau. I was back in Ujhely, celebrating the glory of the Sabbath with my uncle, my rabbi, and all the rest of the Jews.

I was half awake and half not, waking whenever the SS

guard entered and then falling back asleep, and finding myself alternately in the depths of despair in Golleschau and in the highest spirit of the Sabbath at the synagogue of Ujhely.

In a fantasy of the Chassidic Yeshiva boy that I was, my spirits transcended the reality of my world. I saw that none of our lips moved any longer. We were all motionless, but still the voices increased in strength. "*Shalom aleichem mal'achei ha'sharet* – Peace unto you, welcoming the Angels of Heaven." The singing was loud and clear and beautiful. But no longer were we singing and welcoming the *Mal'achei ha'sharet* – the Angels of Heaven. It was instead, the Angels of Heaven who were welcoming the arriving souls of the ninety-two of us.

Two days passed and we were still in our beds in the infirmary. It was by now Sunday noon, January 21. Nothing had changed, only the noise from the heavy Russian guns had increased in strength. Suddenly a number of SS guards with machine guns appeared. They drove us out of the building into the bitter cold. Two cattle-wagons were waiting for us.

The SS guards split the ninety-two prisoners into two groups, to be loaded into the two cattle-wagons standing on the nearby railroad tracks. The "weaker" prisoners who could not walk, were to be carried by the "stronger" ones into the cattle-wagon closest to the building in which the prisoners were housed. Several of my father's and my close friends were put into this wagon. My friend Yossie Krauss had injured his leg working in the quarry. Even though he was otherwise well, he was placed by the SS guards to be among the "weaker" ones because he could not walk. So was Rabbi Joshua Kalish, the Rabbi of Szabadka, a close friend of my father's from Golleschau, who was very weak and sick and could no longer stand up and Simon Eisenstein, also from

Szabadka. Simon had been thrown down three stories by an SS guard and broken several bones in his back. He was almost totally paralyzed and was naturally placed with those who could not walk.

Thirty-four prisoners were loaded into the wagon closest to the building. These were the ones who could neither stand nor walk or sit. They were carried into the cattle-car by the stronger prisoners and placed near each other on the floor in the order in which they were brought in. While this wagon was loaded, the rest of us waited outside, exposed to the subzero Silesian cold and wind.

The skies were gray and cloudy, and it was very cold outside. Our breath froze as soon as it left our mouths. The snow that had fallen during Friday's snowstorm when all the prisoners, except those in the infirmary were evacuated, was now frozen solid; it made a crunching sound each time we stepped on it as we walked towards the wagons. The short road from the building to the wagons was now completely iced over and slippery.

The SS guards then ordered the remaining prisoners to walk into the second wagon. I was glad to be placed among the less sick ones. I was afraid that the SS guard might decide at the last minute to finish off the very sick ones. Just before we entered the wagon, each of us was given a blanket and a portion of bread.

As I walked towards our wagon, I saw two bodies lying in the snow on the side of the road. One of them was the young French cook, handsome, blond and tall. He was known to everyone in the camp for he ladled out the soup every time it was served. Before the transport was to leave Golleschau, he must have decided to hide; he was found afterwards by the SS and shot. Except for the small trickle of frozen blood from his temple where the bullet had entered his skull, he looked as if he were asleep. The two bodies

lying in the snow were carried into the wagon with the weaker prisoners and their cattle car was locked.

Once in the wagon we were protected from the wind; still, it was very cold inside. Most prisoners put their blanket underneath them before they sat down on the cold wooden floor, then tried to wrap the blanket around themselves as best they could.

By early Sunday afternoon we were loaded in. Because of the heavy clouds visibility was poor even before the wagon doors were locked, but with the doors locked an ominous semi-darkness enveloped us. In time our eyes accommodated to the semi dark. We could still discern daylight on the outside.

Only with the doors locked did I dare to look around. I saw familiar faces from the Golleschau infirmary, including that of Mr. Nathan Breuer, a very close friend of my father's who worked with us in Seilbahn 2.

We were greatly relieved to be out of Golleschau alive. Almost all of us were *musulman* by that time, emaciated from hunger and starvation. Everyone was quiet, still not fully believing that the SS guard would let us stay alive, waiting to see whether all this was only another deception. Nothing happened for a long time.

Many in the wagon had diarrhea and had to relieve themselves quite often. Since there were no containers, soon the whole wagon would be soiled. One of the prisoners, of medium height with reddish hair and a coarse reddish face stood up on his healthy foot and proclaimed in a strong Polish-Yiddish accent that he was Shidlowsky and he was going to decide matters in the wagon. Everyone had better listen to him or else. His voice was strong, demanding, and no one dared to contradict him.

The Shidlowsky brothers were known in camp. Both

were Kapos, feared prisoners whom the SS guards appointed to be commanders over other prisoners. The younger Shidlowsky was the Kapo in Seilbahn 2, the work-group my father and I were assigned to when we first arrived at Golleschau. He was brutal and strict. I realized that this one must be the older brother whom I had not met before, but whose reputation preceded him.

Shidlowsky was well nourished and looked healthy except for a bad wound on his left foot. He had been injured when the quarry was mined and detonated to release rocks for the cement production. His physical condition convinced us that he was stronger than any of us. Since none of us could stand up to him we obeyed him.

Shidlowsky proclaimed that without discipline we would all perish from typhoid fever by the spread of feces in our wagon. He used his healthy right foot to hop to the door at the center of the wagon and ordered the prisoners to move away from there and designated the area near the wall opposite the door as the only place where prisoners might relieve themselves. He warned us that anyone disobeying his order would be sorry. Those near the door had no choice but to suffer the stench. Fortunately for them everything froze solid relatively fast in the wagon, diminishing the repugnant odors.

The train still stood at Golleschau. We tensely listened to each little noise to guess what was happening. A moving locomotive approached. Someone stood up to look out of the little opening. Our two wagons were hitched to the locomotive and we started moving. We now hoped that since the Germans were willing to supply a locomotive for us, they would not kill us, but would try to find some place where we could work.

Our train moved for a while, then stopped for several hours. Then it moved again. At one time while we were waiting at a station an open coal-train passed by filled with pris-

oners. The train was similar to the one we saw leaving Golleschau the Friday before. I pondered what would happen to us? For how long would we be on the train? What would happen to those prisoners in the open wagons? Would the Germans let them and us freeze to death?

I was indeed freezing. My blanket did not keep me warm in the sub-zero weather. I decided to eat my portion of bread before I fell sleep. It was in the middle of the night, I was exhausted. Many fell asleep in spite of the cold. By the next morning a few of the people were dead.

Shidlowsky made us move the dead ones near the door, close to where the prisoners relieved themselves. The dead bodies isolated those nearby from the stench. The extra space created in the wagon was a welcome relief for those who were still alive. Some paired up to warm each other and used the two blankets to cover themselves. Others were too lethargic to move in the freezing cold.

By the first morning the walls were covered with a thin sheet of ice from the moisture in our breath which was deposited on the wagon walls. When thirsty, we scraped some ice off the wall and placed it in our mouth. By Monday noon a heavy snow fell. We reached up to the small openings at the top of our wagon for snow to quench our thirst.

On Tuesday and Wednesday the wagons moved from place to place. The locomotive was moved from the front of the wagons to the back, and then after several hours later to the front again. It seemed that we were just moving back and forth, traveling the same distance over and over again. From the small opening we could see the SS guards in the cubicle near the end of the wagon. They directed our train.

By Wednesday afternoon our wagons stopped moving. Shidlowsky kept track of what was going on by ordering a prisoner to look out to explore the scene. The locomotive

was gone and the SS guards seemed to be no longer present. Except for a few farm houses, there was no life to be seen anywhere for miles around, just a white expanse of snow and more snow. Shidlowsky became panicky when he realized that our two wagons had been shunted aside from the main railroad-track and we were locked in and abandoned to die. He screamed in Yiddish, "*Gewalt, Vow*, Jews, we are abandoned, no one is here. We are all going to die, unless we let someone know that we are alive."

By this time, many cared little what was happening. We were too exhausted from starvation and sickness. We had not eaten for four days, and were practically hibernating in the cold. Shidlowsky had brought food for himself, was alert and his will did not diminish. He made us shout aloud in unison, in case someone could hear us. He vowed to murder us unless we all shouted at the same time. When there was no response from us, Shidlowsky hopped around on one foot and beat us brutally with his fists. His Kapo experience had taught him how to do this job with effective results.

Shidlowsky's threat worked. We all shouted in unison with the little strength we had left. He made us shout again about every half hour all day Thursday, but nothing happened. On Friday he repeated this strategy. Late Friday morning, we saw a woman approaching our wagon. Through the opening, Shidlowsky shouted at her and told her that unless she let somebody know that we were locked into the wagons, we would all die.

The prisoners in the other wagon were even more helpless than we. Their fate was described to me by Yossi Krauss after we left the wagons. Not being able to move, each prisioner lay in one place. There was no use complaining since there was no help forthcoming. On Tuesday, while the

train was standing, one of the musulman started to speak. Even with his protruding eyes and cheekbones, those that knew him recognized the Rabbi of Szabadka, Rabbi Yoshua Kalish, who was over six feet tall and walked straight upon arrival in Golleschau. Now he could no longer stand up. His voice was weak, his language a rich Hungarian vocabulary.

He spoke of our desperate situation, that no one knew whether any would survive. He spoke about not understanding why we had been ordained to undergo this suffering, but he was certain that regardless of what happened, the Jewish people and their Torah would continue forever. Their ideas would survive and the ideas of Hitler and his gang of followers would not. He spoke slowly, as though counting his words, because he had no strength to speak.

Next day, Wednesday, he spoke again. He spoke of the many great Jewish martyrs and heroes who, throughout the ages, gave their lives for *Kiddush Hashem*, for the sanctification of the name of God and for their religious convictions, and that the Jewish people lived on. Now too, the Jewish people would live on forever and would again flourish, even if we should all die in the wagons. Each day he consoled the prisoners, gave them encouragement, expressed his belief in God and the Jewish people.

Friday came and once again Rabbi Kalish spoke. He said he was dying and bid the rest goodbye. He spoke again of German brutality and Jewish spirituality. He expressed once more his belief and hope for the Jewish people. He asked that if any of us survived, we should go back to his family and congregation and tell them about him. After that he no longer spoke.

We were in the train for another day and a half, eight days in all. On Saturday we heard a locomotive approach and the two wagons were hitched to it and we started moving again. We stopped in some village where houses could

be seen. Space in our wagon had increased because the bodies of those no longer living were piled up in one place near the door.

Rescue By Schindler

Before sunrise, at four o'clock on Sunday morning, January 28th, trucks arrived and stopped near our wagon. We heard noise and commotion outside the wagons. It took a great deal of effort to open the wagon doors which were thickly encrusted with ice. Fire and sparks flew all over as blow torches were used to burn off the thick ice surrounding the doors.

The wagon door opened. Prisoners appeared, we did not know from where, and those alive were given a portion of hot farina with a good deal of soupy hot liquid in it. Those who wanted another portion were readily handed one. The wagon door was kept open for a short while and then closed again. No one moved. We just waited.

Around nine in the morning, the wagon door was opened again and we were given hot farina again. We had arrived at Oscar Schindler's camp. Afterwards, the Schindler prisoners helped everyone who could to walk off the train. Those who could not walk were taken with stretchers. We walked a short distance into a well-heated building and entered a large hall. Several adjacent rooms had showers with hot water spouting from them. We were on our own, inside the building, without supervision. We could spend as much time under the hot showers as we wanted to.

It was an unreal dream. I threw off my prisoner's clothes

with all the stench and dirt and lay down on the warm cement floor heated by the hot water from the showers. I let the hot water caress my frozen bones and my shriveled body. I drank the hot water coming from the shower, slurring it over my mouth as a pig would. It gave me extreme pleasure to drink as much as I wanted, to use as much hot water as I wanted, to wash myself as much as I wanted. My pleasure was heightened when I looked out the windows and saw the terrible piles of snow to which I had been exposed just a short while ago.

Several hours later, prisoners not belonging to our group brought us farina again. We were told that because we had not eaten for days we must be very careful to have only very light meals, otherwise we could die. They also brought us clean prisoners' clothes, trying to fit each with an outfit that was not too large and not too small.

Our sleeping accommodations were in a large hall filled with bunk beds. Everyone got two blankets, and only one prisoner slept in each bunk, a luxury unknown to us.

The hot water "orgy" went on for two days, and was only interrupted for the night. We did nothing but enjoy the pleasures of bathing and eating light meals, and we delighted in the warm accommodations. Our fortune was marred only by the Golleschau prisoners who were too weak to survive.

I knew I could not die now, once I reached this most wonderful camp and where we were told that we would be in quarantine for several weeks. This gave me a respite from work and I hoped that this would allow me to recover and regain my strength.

While I rested in the building assigned to the Golleschau prisoners, Yossie Krauss, who had been in the other wagon, told me about Rabbi Kalish. I wondered who was to be credited with saving us? The "evil" Kapo Shidlowsky, who rose to the occasion, and without whose efforts we would have

all perished? Or the holy Rabbi Kalish who was ready and willing to give his life for Kiddush Hashem, for the sanctification of the name of God, and who had faith, trust and hope for the Jewish people? Was it Rabbi Kalish's prayers that, without his knowledge, induced Shidlowsky to follow the path to save us? Was it a sheer coincidence that our two wagons were found just about the time Rabbi Kalish said his last words?

What happened to our transport became clear to me only later. Oscar Schindler was a German industrialist who had a factory that was a mixture of a work and concentration camp at Bruenlitz, a village near where our train was located on Friday, January 25th.

Before most of the Jews of Poland were killed, Schindler had many business connections with Jews in Plashow, Poland. When the Germans started to murder all the Jews, Schindler opened a factory and took in many of his former Jewish business associates as his factory workers. He was able to bribe the SS officers and convince them to let him set up the factory as a concentration camp. He was allowed to pick "expert" workers from among the Jewish population of the Ghetto. The SS supplied the guards and Schindler ran the factory with about 1,200 Jews who worked for him. Throughout the war Schindler protected them, fed them, clothed them, and saved them from almost certain annihilation. He justified this action to the German SS under the pretext that he was helping the German war effort, without producing anything really useful for the war. He often risked his own life by protecting the Jews against the suspicions of the Gestapo.

When Shidlowsky made us scream in the wagons, our screams were finally heard by a railroad worker who brought the fact of our abandonment to the attention of Schindler's brother-in-law, who, fortunately for us, worked for the Ger-

man railroad near the village of Bruenlitz, where Schindler's camp was located.

Schindler's brother-in-law was attuned to the torture meted out to the Jewish prisoners. He investigated the cries of people in the two wagons shunted aside from the main tracks and detached from the living. When he found out about us he promptly notified Schindler.

Schindler decided to take us in. It took him a great deal of effort to convince the SS commander of his camp, who claimed that we were useless as workers, to accept the prisoners from the two wagons into his camp at Brisau-Bruenlitz. Finally Schindler won out.

Of the ninety-two live prisoners who entered the wagons on Sunday January 21, 1945, about twenty were dead by the time the two cattle cars arrived at Schindler's camp at Bruenlitz. When the Schindler prisoners opened the wagons at four o'clock in the morning on Sunday January 28, 1945, they found the frozen bodies of the dead prisoners piled up near the door as well as the stench from the frozen excrement from the men who had to relieve themselves. Others were frozen, but still alive. Some that were alive had their behinds solidly frozen to the floor of the cattle car.

Many who were alive at the time we arrived at Bruenlitz in January died later from malnutrition, from tuberculosis, and other diseases. By the time Schindler's camp was liberated by the Russian army on May 9, 1945, a day after the war ended, our numbers had declined greatly.

After a while, some of the Golleschau survivors recovered sufficiently that they were able to return to work. Schindler kept his promise to the camp's SS commander that the prisoners would work soon. After about three weeks in quarantine, I started to work in Schindler's factory. I was assigned to operate a power press. I punched out metal cas-

ings that were supposed to be made into bullets for the German army. My task was routine and relatively simple. I took a piece of flat metal and placed it into a well designed space in the power press at the level where my hands could easily reach when sitting. Next I had to use my foot to press down on the large machine, which then struck the metal piece and formed it into a bullet-like casing. I removed the bullet-casing, placed it in a box and repeated the same process over and over again. I had to watch out not to operate the power press with my foot until my hand was removed from the area where the power press struck, for otherwise it would have crushed my hand.

Even though I had to be in the factory all day, no one drove me to work faster or beat me and I could work at a relatively leisurely pace. The only difficulty I had was to lift up the box of bullet-casings, which was heavier than my weight of about seventy pounds, when it was finally filled up. But as always in the Camps, I worked as hard and as fast as I could. Each evening I returned to the building, called the Golleschau building, tired and exhausted.

Passover In Schindler's Camp

I was slowly recovering my strength. The German army was withdrawing further and further into Germany. The war had to end shortly. Now that I reached a camp where I was not beaten, my future looked bright. Still I worried because the Golleschau people just kept on dying. Some looked as if they were well and the next day they were dead. I was afraid that my turn would come soon. The "Golleschau Prisoners" building grew more and more empty as more inmates died. Every once in a while we even had a new addition to the "Golleschau building." As the Germans marched the camp inmates further into Germany in order not to be overtaken by the advancing Russian army, a prisoner sometimes got lost and detached from his camp unit. Since no prisoner was allowed to go free, the Germans would have either shot such a prisoner or sent him to one of the concentration camps. By taking these "stragglers" into his camp, Schindler saved their lives.

Shmulek, one of the Polish Jews caught by the German *Wehrmacht*, was one of the prisoners Schindler accepted at Bruenlitz in the beginning of February 1945. Shmulek was placed in the building of the Golleschau prisoners.

Shmulek was of medium height. His criminal past was clearly marked by his well nourished body. Because he was fat, we were certain that he had cooperated with the Nazis.

The fat under his skin exhibited his criminal disposition. Even his fingers were disgustingly thick and pudgy. Only those who cooperated with our murderers were fed well. He must have been a Kapo, a prisoner in command of other prisoners. The Kapos, to please the German SS and show them their loyalty, often abused and tortured the prisoners in their charge.

Shmulek had a cut harelip and spoke a Polish accented Yiddish with a deep nasal drawl. Everybody tried to stay away from him, because no one trusted his suspicious past.

The day before Passover was beautiful and sunny. The sky reminded me of the beautiful day before Passover of the year before, when we were still in our homes in Janoshalma. A lot had happened since, but my longing for my family stayed with me all the time and became quite overpowering as the end of the war approached. It was painful to think of my family and not to see them; in my subconscious I was hoping to see them soon.

During the year I witnessed many killings. But each time a prisoner was murdered by the Germans, it seemed as if he had violated some rule: he did something which was not permitted; he did not work hard enough; he stole a piece of bread or potato; or he was just plain lazy. It seemed to me that each person killed had done something wrong – according to the German definition – for which, I naturally expected, he would be severely punished. Those who collapsed and died, I rationalized, did so only because they did not have enough food and were too weak to continue to work. However, I thought that innocent women and children were not harmed.

It was the afternoon of the day before Passover. Many prisoners sat on the green grass in front of the Golleschau building. Soon Shmulek sat down near me. Being the young-

est in the group I must have been the least threatening to his guilty past and he chose to join my company.

I directed my face towards the sun and let the sun's delicious rays warm my face and my emaciated cold body. I watched the beautiful healing sun rays in the sky and whispered barely aloud to myself; "How wonderful, the Russians are almost here." Longing overpowered my silence and I mused aloud about the future. "Soon the war will be over and I will meet Mother and Father and the children again," I said to no one in particular.

Shmulek, having overheard what I said, turned to me with an astonished expression in his eyes and said, "Where are you from, boy?"

"I am from Hungary."

"Where did you go when you left Hungary?"

"We were taken with a transport to Auschwitz," I replied.

"Did you have any sisters and brothers, and how old were they?"

"Yes, we were eleven children. The youngest one was a baby and the oldest one was 18."

Shmulek's face became distorted as he confronted me with what seemed to be utter contempt. He applied the derogatory term of *magyar* used by the Polish Jews in the Camps for the Hungarians. You "stupid magyar", he pronounced in his very nasal Yiddish. "Stupid magyar, you don't know what you are talking about."

After all that I had gone through the past year it made me angry that Shmulek talked down to me as if I were a mere child. I shot back "You are a stupid Pollack, and just because you are older and fatter does not mean that you know everything better."

Shmulek's voice softened. "What is your name boy? Did you see any women and children in Auschwitz?"

"Yes," I said. "I clearly saw some when we arrived. They were far away at another end of a camp surrounded by electrified barbed wire."

"Listen boy, those were only kept there for show; to deceive the people who had just arrived into believing that they could also expect to live. I am not interested in lying to you, but I have been in the Camps for close to four years now. At one time I was in Auschwitz, and I know that most of the people who arrived there were immediately sent to the gas chambers. All women with children were immediately gassed and their bodies cremated. My friends worked in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and they got rid of people's bodies after they were gassed. They described to me the process in detail before they were all killed themselves, after having worked in the gas chambers for a while. They told me about the efficiency of disposing of the bodies in the crematorium.

Later on they transferred me from Auschwitz to a smaller camp, which also had a gas chamber and a crematorium. I was assigned to work in the crematorium in this smaller camp.

He lowered his voice and spoke to me in a hushed, strongly nasal voice as if he were trying to keep secret what he said, and continued in a gentle tone. "Look, boy, I don't mean to hurt you. But I don't want you to live with false pretenses. As I told you, in the camp I worked in a unit which emptied the gas chambers of all the bodies after all the people were gassed. They would send in a group of workers to the gas chamber and pull out the bodies after they all died. I often carried out young mothers with babies at their breast." Shmulek moved his arms in front of his chest imitating a mother holding a baby on her arm. "Their faces were so peaceful and calm they looked as if they were only asleep. I knew they were dead, but still was afraid to throw them into

the crematorium, just in case they might still be alive, just in case they still felt. Please believe me that I am telling the truth. I don't want you to get to the end of the war and have these false illusions. It will destroy you and cripple you, unless you realize the truth about what happened, and you would still be willing to live and start anew."

I screamed at him and demanded, "Why are you are lying? Why are you lying to me? What have I done to you?"

At first I did not believe him. But Shmulek was so pained, his description was so vivid, sounded so truthful, so sincere and convincing that, for the first time since I arriving at Auschwitz eleven months ago I started to believe that what Shmulek said might be true. Minute by minute the truth and all that went with it slowly penetrated my soul and spread over my whole being, as poison would spread throughout one's blood from a snakebite. I sat there helplessly, my whole body trembling. It was as though my dearest Mother, Father and all my brothers and sisters had been just murdered by Shmulek this very minute under the most painful circumstances.

I felt like screaming and howling, but I was afraid that all around me would think that I had gone crazy. The SS guard would probably shoot me as if I were a mad dog, as they did all prisoners who went out of their minds.

Silently, I pressed my hands together with all the strength I had, to transfer the pain from my heart to my hands, as silent tears streamed down my face. Once again, my heart felt like it was squeezed by a vise.

As Shmulek described the young woman with the baby at her breast, I saw my dear mother, 39 years old, being dragged out of the gas chamber with babies, Golda and Shlomo, in her arms. After my having been in the concentration camp for close to a year, for the first time the truth entered my consciousness and tore at my soul. Shmulek must

be telling the truth, and all those rumors we heard in Auschwitz must have been true all along.

My heart kept banging against my chest like a giant hammer, unable to contain itself. I thought that I was dying right then and there. I hoped that I would die. I just wanted to get rid of the pain that grabbed my whole being.

I could not stay still. I walked around and around on the grass without going anywhere. I pressed my hand to my heart and held myself back from screaming, from tearing the heavens apart, from attacking everything around me, asking why this had been allowed to happen. I repeated to myself over and over, "My beautiful Mother dead, Father dead, the children dead, all dead! Everyone dead. Why not die right now? I want to be dead, dead, dead." I laid down exhausted and put my face on my hands, shutting out all light. I did not even notice when it became twilight. The sun practically set, when we were ordered to return to our living quarters before darkness set in.

Darkness penetrated from the outside, darkness entered my life from the inside. The evening portion of bread, a slice of bread with margarine was handed out to the prisoners. I struggled with what to do with it. I wanted to force myself not to eat the bread, even though I was starved. Still, it was the first evening of Passover, the holiday of freedom – except for us; a holiday when the eating of bread was not permitted. I was not going to give in to the Germans, but keep my faith. But what was I to eat for the next eight days of Passover? Maybe if I refused to eat, I would die and join all my loved ones?

Soon I decided that under the current circumstances, I was allowed to eat the bread in spite of it being Passover. No! I must eat the bread! The danger to one's life overrides all the commandments except three, and eating bread on Passover was not one of the three. I must also defy the Ger-

mans and, if possible, stay alive. In previous times when the Jewish people were forced to convert to Christianity it was important that they be willing to give their lives for their religion. Now the Nazis were only interested in destroying and annihilating the Jews. Under these circumstances, I felt, it was most important to preserve my physical existence, the physical continuity of the Jew.

While anger arose in me against everyone and the whole world for allowing the Germans to do what they did, I recalled my father's words to us at last year's Passover seder, when we already thought that we might be taken away from our homes. He told us that no one knew what would happen to us in the future. Still, he knew that the guide for life is given by the Torah and not by the Germans. He begged his children that, regardless of what would happen to us, we should know that we are Jews and keep to our beliefs.

I did not understand why God allowed this to happen. But it was Passover and I decided to intertwine my pain with Passover, share my pain with God and the Jewish people.

I climbed up to the third and top bunk bed, which was my normal sleeping place. Being high up and having no one around me, I was able to isolate myself from the rest of the prisoners in the large room. My body was weak from starvation and my soul was pained by the events of the afternoon. I was in a confused and bewildered state as I reached my bunk. I took the piece of bread and made believe that it was the Passover matza.

I sat on my bunk bed and cried bitterly for my loved ones as I started saying the Kiddush, the sanctification of the Passover holiday by heart, using the piece of bread instead of the Passover wine and matza which was non-existent. My mouth recited the Kiddush word for word, but my ears heard and my mind clearly reproduced the Kiddush re-

cited by my father on the previous Passover.

I could not hold back my body from shaking as I started to recite the Passover Haggada, "*Ho Lach'mo Anyo* – This is the bread of affliction, the bread of poverty, which our forefathers ate in Egypt." I continued to recite the Passover Haggada from memory the best I could. I needed no explanation as to "why this night was different from all other nights of the year." I came to the passage in the Haggada of "*Dom V'esh V'timroth A'shan* – blood and fire and smoke," which was predicted by the prophet Joel. I could only think of the blood and fire which consumed all my dear ones and the Jewish people, the reason for which I could find no explanation.

I spent the evening crying, stopped from exhaustion, and continued again as I recovered. In between I fell asleep fitfully for short periods only to wake up crying again, fall asleep again and wake up again in agony.

The next morning, the day I turned 16, I had to go to the factory to work at the power press as usual. I was still making metal casings for bullets to be used in the war, in spite of the fact that we knew that the end was close. My tears kept wetting my face again and kept drying up again. It was not only that the pain penetrated my heart and soul, but my frustration mixed with total helplessness made it impossible for me to find a way out of my sorrow. I felt like a fish that was caught and lifted out of the water, as it threw itself up in the air by its tail with all its force for no purpose, landing here and there, flapping to the right and left, and getting nowhere, as it waited to be slaughtered.

Even though I perceived the events of how Father, Mother and the children gave up their lives, my mind placed a barrier between the event and my imagination. I was not able to bring myself to visualize it. I could not face the way it happened, but still asked myself a million times over and

over; how long did they all suffer? What did my mother think when she realized that her children's end was coming? I was certain that she could only concentrate on the concept of Kiddush Hashem, of sacrificing her and her children's lives, for martyrdom to sanctify God and the Jewish people. I was also certain that once she realized what was happening, she was willing and ready to give her life for Kiddush Hashem, for martyrdom, to sanctify the name of God. Still, I could not calm down for weeks. I could not cope with reality. I could not face what had happened, and did not know how I was going to get over the pain.

The Last Day Of The War

I continued to work in the factory. One day in the middle of April I was operating the power press when the "Italian" SS guard, so called because he was from Italy, approached me and told me that the American people had risen up against the tyrant Roosevelt and they had just murdered him. The fate of the war, he said, would now turn in a completely new direction. The German army would be victorious. Even though the "Italian" did not seem vicious, I was afraid to tell the SS guard that I did not believe his story, for I believed that even if Roosevelt died, the American people would still continue to fight the war till the Nazis were defeated.

On the morning of May 8th, we were confined to our living quarters until further instructions. This news left the prisoners in total silence. Everyone sat in his bunk bed, with those on the upper bunks dangling their feet. An eerie silence descended upon the large room. No one moved or said anything. Everyone pondered and tried to understand the meaning of this development.

Rumors had been around for quite a while that the Russian troops were close by and that the war would soon end. We were somewhat skeptical because we saw no Russian planes and heard no cannon fire.

In a short while the silence was broken. Groups stood

around and discussed why we were made to stay away from work. Lots of ideas were presented as the guessing game went on. Some thought that the SS guards were badly needed on the frontlines and since there were not enough guards, it would be easiest to keep watch over us if we were confined to our quarters. Others thought that the war was ending and the guards were leaving. Still others feared that the SS guards were not going to let us survive the war. They would either burn down the building with all of us locked in it or would line us up and use their machine guns to murder us.

Fear enveloped me. During the past year I almost lost my life in Auschwitz and Golleschau, but miraculously I survived each danger. Now it was close to the end of the war. Would the murderers still extinguish our lives when our hopes for survival were the greatest? Maybe Schindler, the director of the factory, who saved us from death three months ago would not let this happen.

I contemplated whether there was someplace I could hide, but the thick steel door leading to the outside combined with the expectation that the SS guards were still around convinced me that hiding was not an option. There was nothing I could do but hope and pray and resign myself to my fate.

Silently I recited the Yom Kippur prayer composed in the eleventh century and still recited in every synagogue on each Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

This prayer also reminded me of my father. Last Rosh Hashana Father and I worked in the mountains of Golleschau where we built a cable cart to deliver rocks from the mountains to the cement factory in camp. On Rosh Hashana morning we were marching up the mountains to work, Father and I near each other. The SS guards, machine guns in hand, were far enough behind that they could not hear Father reciting the prayers by heart, barely loud enough for me to

hear and repeat every word. The prayers became imprinted in my mind and I still remembered them. I recited them now.

On Rosh Hashana the fate of men is inscribed and on Yom Kippur it is sealed,
Who shall be brought into existence and who shall pass away,
Who shall live and who shall die,
Who shall come to a timely death and who shall not,
Who shall perish by fire and who by water,
Who by the sword and who by the beast,
Who by hunger and who by thirst,
Who by strangling and who by stoning,
Who shall be at ease and who shall wander around,
Who shall find comfort and who shall be tormented.

Early in the afternoon we were told that all the prisoners must gather on the factory floor. We were not informed for what purpose, and I feared that now would be the time when the SS guards would kill us.

When I arrived, the factory was already filled with prisoners; both the day and the night shifts were present and it was crowded. To accommodate everyone, many climbed up the large factory machines to see what was happening. Oscar Schindler appeared and started to speak to us in a loud and clear German.

He informed us that the German army had been defeated and had just capitulated to the Allied Powers. All fighting was to stop that same night and we should consider ourselves free.

He spoke about the terrible cruelties that the Germans did to us. He said, "We murdered your children, your par-

ents, brothers and sisters." He condemned these actions. He had tried to do whatever he could to save us and he was happy that he had succeeded. Most of the prisoners cried as Schindler spoke. Some for joy of having survived, others were choked with emotion now that their pain for their loved ones could be freely expressed for the first time in years.

Schindler asked that we should not judge all Germans as evil. We should remember that he was also a German and still did what he could for the prisoners in his camp. Everyone was free to go now: however he cautioned us to stay around camp for a day or two, just in case some stray German troops who had not heard that the war had ended would shoot if they saw us.

He also said that he had made sure that we would not leave the camp empty-handed. He had something for all of us to take along from his camp.

I returned to the Golleschau building. The unbelievable had happened. The war was over and I was still alive. I still could not grasp that I was free. Until now all my efforts were concentrated on survival. Now that the war was over, I was at a complete loss about what to do next.

I thought that I would be overjoyed to have stayed alive, but now I was deprived even of that feeling. I was too tired and too exhausted and completely numb and emotionless. I was cheated of any such euphoria.

An Odyssey Of Survival

Part Two

Surviving The Evil Plan

Liberation

No one liberated us. The SS disappeared from Schindler's camp on May 8, 1945, the day the German army surrendered unconditionally to the Allied Powers and World War II ended. The next day, on the morning of May 9th, a single Russian officer on a horse rode into camp and told us that we were free.

It was hard for me to perceive that the war had finally ended and, in spite of the odds against it, I was still alive. Most of the time that I was in the camps, I deeply longed to be free, but by this time I was physically and emotionally too exhausted and was not even overjoyed by my freedom.

I left the Golleschau building and walked around the campgrounds, for the first time without the escort of an SS guard. I could now communicate in Yiddish with the 1,200 prisoners whom Schindler had brought with him from Plashow, Poland. They described how Schindler had brought them from Poland to Brisau-Bruenlitz, Czechoslovakia, and saved them from certain death. If Schindler could help it, they told me, nobody was killed, beaten, or physically abused in his camp. The Schindler prisoners, who worked for him for a long time, looked quite well and were not undernourished.

On the other hand, the prisoners who came from Golleschau with me looked quite sickly. Their health had

deteriorated in Golleschau and they had great difficulty recovering from their ordeal. They were dying off one after the other and their number had diminished greatly by the time war ended. Some simply did not wake up from their sleep. Observing that, I still feared for my life, even though there were no Germans around. I was very weak and wondered when my turn would come. But, now that the war ended and I was still alive, I was determined not to give up, but to continue to live.

I was faced with a difficult decision about what to do next. Up to now, I had never had to make any important decisions on my own. Someone else always decided for me. A short time after my fourteenth birthday, my parents sent me to a Chassidic Yeshiva far from my hometown where they lived. Just before I turned 15, I returned home from the Yeshiva for the Passover holiday in March 1944. Soon I was forced into the Ghetto, from there I was taken to Auschwitz, then to Golleschau and from there to Schindler's camp. Now that I was free, I had to decide on my own what to do next. I had no idea what possibilities and options there were for my immediate future.

I listened as the grown-ups in Schindler's camp made their plans. Most of the prisoners in camp were from Poland and many were contemplating going back to their old homes. Others were determined to move to Palestine as soon as they could. Some expressed the wish to emigrate to the United States, Canada, or to Australia. I listened, but I did not know anyone well enough to seek advice.

My situation was made much worse because I felt very weak. I did not realize at the time that I had a high fever, which dampened my appetite and interfered with my ability to move around or think clearly. It did not even occur to me to try to see a physician. I expected that none were avail-

able. Besides, for too long a time I was used to the idea that seeing a physician could result in my being selected out sick, and eliminated by the Germans who had no use for prisoners who could not work. I still could not conceive that I was now free and there would be no selections.

The next day rumors circulated among the prisoners that the Russians wanted to close the camp and everyone would have to leave. Though I did not know where to go, I tried to decide what would be best for me. Where should I go from here? How could I go back to my hometown and to anti-semitic Hungary? But unless I returned to my previous home, I could not find out who in my family remained alive.

What I would do next was strongly influenced by what Shmulek, the prisoner that I came to know in Schindler's camp had told me. He had been a Kapo in Auschwitz and had first hand experience with transports that arrived there. Up to the time I met Shmulek, about a month ago, I was still hoping that my mother and the younger siblings would be alive, but Shmulek convinced me that all those who arrived to Auschwitz and could not work hard, including women and children, had been immediately killed. He convinced me that Mother and the younger children could not have survived Auschwitz. Father, who was with me in Golleschau, had become progressively weaker and had probably been killed after he was taken back to Auschwitz from Golleschau.

I tried to reason logically about who in my family might have survived. I thought that only three of my siblings might have had a chance – my oldest sister Lily, who would be 20, my brother Yossie who would be 19, and Rozi, who would be 17. I was the fourth child of my parents, and unlikely as it was, I had survived.

Rozi was always very weak physically. I assumed that if her ordeal was in any way similar to mine, she most likely could not have survived. But Yossie and Lily were strong,

clever, dynamic, daring, and I held on to the hope that they were both alive.

This strengthened the idea that it would be best to return to my hometown in Hungary. I hoped that other surviving members of my family would do the same and we would find each other. Little did I realize that it would take many long years before I could return to my hometown.

What would I do back in Hungary? I knew that I could not stay in Hungary permanently, where the people and the country hated me and oppressed me because I was a Jew. Where would I go then? I could not think that far ahead. But I longed to find somebody from my family, somebody I could call my own.

To start on my way to Hungary, I first had to get to a city that had a railroad station. The closest such city was Brno, the second largest city in Czechoslovakia, which was only 40 kilometers from Schindler's camp. I inquired how to get to Brno. Some of the adults in the camp suggested that if I could get to the nearby main road, about one kilometer away, which led to Brno, I would probably get a ride into the city.

I left the camp for the road. Still it took me a long time to get there, because I had trouble walking. My left hip had been hit with an iron rod by an SS guard in Camp Golleschau and it hurt me quite a bit. When I reached the road I sat down and waited. Soon an open wagon pulled by a pair of galloping horses appeared. The driver of the wagon saw my striped concentration camp clothes, stopped and asked me in Czech where I wanted to go. Since I had no knowledge of the language, I tried to answer in German and then in Hungarian. The Czech driver pretended not to understand, but he still let me get on. It turned out that he did not want to speak German for fear the Russians might consider him a

collaborator with the Nazis.

I arrived at Brno the same afternoon. A resident of Brno directed me to one of the help-organizations for camp survivors. When the lady who dealt with me saw my emaciated body and found my temperature to be 101 degrees, she sent me to the Brno City Hospital for a medical examination. The next day they fluoroscoped my lungs and told me that I had a bad case of tuberculosis and needed hospitalization. I was admitted as a patient at the Brno City Hospital.

There were no medications for TB patients, but at least I could rest comfortably in the hospital. For the first time in a long time I slept in a bed. My high fever persisted and I had no appetite.

Food was scarce in the hospital. The Czechs fed me sardines a number of times, which were nourishing and must have been acquired from the Americans. Since I was not used to fat food, the sardines spoiled my stomach and I got diarrhea. The physicians were afraid that I would die from the diarrhea and put me on a strict diet of tea and crackers for eight days. The diet cured the diarrhea, but I became much weaker by the end of the eight-day period because of lack of food.

There was a severe shortage of space in the hospital. The corridors were fully occupied with beds. There was also a shortage of beds, even for Czech citizens. After I had been at the hospital for some time, the hospital administration decided that they could not keep foreign patients in the hospital when they had not enough space even for their own citizens. After one month's recuperation, I was told that since I was a Hungarian, I had to leave the hospital. I would be best off, they said, to return to Hungary and be hospitalized there. I was discharged from the hospital in spite of being quite sick and still having a high fever. I had to return to my

native Hungary, a country for which neither the Czechs nor I had much love.

I left the hospital and tried to reach the railroad station at Brno. I had no belongings of any kind, it was therefore relatively easy to get from one place to the other. I had to find out the direction to the railroad station and try to ask some people driving horse-drawn wagons to give me a ride in that direction.

There were practically no automobiles in Brno at that time except for those driven by Russian military personnel. There were no taxis to be hired, but even if there had been any, I had no money to pay for their services. The roads were practically empty except for an occasional horse-drawn wagon. Using my broken German, I asked for directions to the railroad station and, by walking slowly, found my way to one of the roads leading there. I got a ride on horse-drawn wagons in the direction of the train station. After a few hours I arrived at the station.

At the railroad station I found out that there were no train schedules, nor were there any tickets sold. The large number of passengers had waited for the arrival of the next unscheduled train.

I lay down to rest on the sandy ground near the railroad platform and waited with many others for the next train. Fortunately by this time it was close to the end of June and the weather was pleasant and warm. While we were waiting, women from the Refugee Aid Society arrived and served soup and bread to survivors. Even though I had no appetite I forced myself to eat.

During the night I slept on the sandy ground near the railroad tracks and waited till the next day for the train to arrive. As soon as prospective passengers discerned the vibration of the tracks, which could be felt long before one heard the noise of the train, everyone stood up and tried to

get as close to the tracks as possible in expectation of the train's arrival. The crowd filled the large wide and long platform where the train was supposed to stop, about fifteen to twenty men deep.

Even before the train to Budapest pulled in and stopped I saw that it was completely filled with people, mostly Russian soldiers. Civilians were hanging from the doors, trying to hold on. No one got off and many people wanted to get on. Everyone seemed to be heading towards Hungary and wanted to take the train in the direction of Budapest.

Every passenger coach had an open platform at each end. It was about one yard wide and defined by metal bars. Because of the large number of people, the passengers were tightly squeezed together. In spite of my effort to push, I was still somewhat far from the train. It appeared that I had no chance of getting on. Two blond Russian soldiers jumped off the train and helped me up onto the open platform. I was certain that their attention was drawn to my striped concentration camp uniform and that they wanted to help me. They must have considered me an enemy of the Germans and therefore a friend of the Russians. Everyone deferred to the Russian soldiers who were holding weapons.

The open train-platform was packed solid. I was squeezed so strongly by the passengers on the platform that I feared that I was going to faint from the pressure exerted on my body. I was relieved when the train started moving. It accelerated slowly and was almost past the long wide asphalt platform stretching near the tracks. Suddenly, two Russian soldiers grabbed me, one by my feet the other under my arms, and tried to throw me off the running train. I started screaming and pointing to my concentration camp clothes and the prisoner number on my arm, begging for mercy in Yiddish, since I expected them not to understand Hungarian. My pleading was of no avail as they swung me

across the bars of the platform, off the running train. I found myself in the sand near the tracks. I did not understand what happened until later that afternoon.

When I recovered from my fall, I examined myself. My left arm and left hip were still painful, but not more than before I got on the train. I had some pain in my back, but believed that I had no broken bones from being thrown off the running train. I slowly worked my way back to the railroad station, partly walking and partly crawling.

Only after I went to the toilet later on the same afternoon and found no toilet paper in my pocket, did I reconstruct what must have happened with my encounter with the Russians and the reason for their earlier generosity and subsequent disfavor.

In the concentration camp we had no toilet paper. As a result, when I left the Brno hospital I filled my pockets with toilet paper, a precious commodity indeed. When the two soldiers saw my bulging pockets, they must have thought they were filled with money, so they decided to help me up the train. The crowd of Russians soldiers was crammed so tightly unto the train platform that I did not even feel when the paper was taken from my pockets. When the Russians realized that I had nothing of value, I was no longer of any use to them.

I did not think that another train would arrive soon. I walked away some distance from the tracks and from the waiting passengers to an area where there was some greenery and a water faucet nearby. I wanted to be alone.

By now I was very much afraid of Russian soldiers. I sat in a place isolated from all the people, brooding over my bad luck, waiting for the next train. A Russian officer approached me. My fear was moderated when he offered me a candy and started to speak in Yiddish. He explained that the war was not yet over. Soon another war would start, he told

me, and would continue until the communist armies would defeat all the capitalist countries. I was ignorant of Marxist philosophy and did not understand what his ideas meant. But after my experience with the Russians on the train I was afraid to ask for any explanations.

I assessed the situation and decided that before the next train would arrive I would be in the first row near the tracks regardless of how long I had to wait. A train arrived about six hours later and I pushed as hard as I could and succeeded in getting on. I arrived in Budapest on June 29, 1945, exactly one year to the day after my family and I arrived at Auschwitz from Hungary.

At the Budapest railroad station, women volunteers from the Hungarian Jewish Aid Organizations were helping the concentration camp survivors who arrived at the station. One of the ladies, the official representative of the Budapest Jewish organization, wrote down my name, date of birth and the names of the camps I had been in. She then took me to a house, which was reserved for camp survivors. Five beds in the room were already occupied with camp survivors and I was assigned to the sixth bed, the only empty one in the room. Not far from the house was a public kitchen run by the Jewish organizations, where cooked food was served. The food was tasty and consisted of hot soup, potatoes and vegetables, but no meat. Meat was very scarce in Hungary in those days.

The day after I arrived an official of the help organization came to my room and gave me coupons which entitled me to receive food from the public kitchen. She also gave me 1,500 pengos, Hungarian money. This generous support came from Jewish organizations that collected money for this purpose in the United States. I understood that I was expected to buy clothes with this money, and take off my striped concentration camp suit. I did not know where to

buy any clothes and I was too sick to shop, so I continued to wear the striped suit from the camps.

The following day I was sent to a physician who examined me and determined, as had the physicians in Brno, that I had tuberculosis and had to be hospitalized, possibly for a long time. When I inquired for how long I would have to be hospitalized, they did not answer. The physician informed me that I would be sent to the tuberculosis sanatorium at Budakeszi near Budapest as soon as a bed became vacant, in about a week.

I returned to Hungary to find surviving family and hopefully leave again shortly. Now that I was sick my plans for the future became completely vague and unclear. Would I find anyone? How long would I have to be hospitalized? Where else could I go as a sick person with high fever? But all these worries were overshadowed by the pain of remembering the time a year earlier when I returned home from the Yeshiva and I was still together with my parents and sisters and brothers. It was hard for me to reconcile myself to the idea that I was back in Hungary again and might no longer find any of them. I could not help it, but the painful events of the last year were always uppermost in my mind.

The Struggle To Recover

My fever persisted. I had difficulty walking. It took me a long time to get from my sleeping quarters to the soup kitchen, which had been set up for survivors two blocks away. For the first few days after my arrival in Budapest from Brno, I tried to walk the two blocks without interruption, but my weakened physical condition and high fever made this very difficult. I soon learned that I could manage the short walk more easily if I stopped to rest every few minutes.

Just before noon on a warm sunny day in mid-July, I was on my usual route to the soup kitchen. Exhausted from the strain of walking, I sat down on the curb to rest. To make myself more comfortable I stretched out my legs in the gutter. I was in the former Jewish section of Budapest. Before the war this had been a densely populated area, bustling with activity and traffic. Now, just two months after the end of the war, the streets were empty, the houses dilapidated. As I was in no hurry, I decided to rest for a while before continuing on my way.

A tall, young man turned the corner, looked around and walked over to me. My striped prisoner's uniform must have caught his eye. He stopped in front of me and asked, "Where are you from?" I replied "From Janoshalma." "Do you know Rozi Klein who is now back in Janoshalma?"

I swallowed hard and concentrated all my strength on

not fainting. I was in a state of shock and could not manage to utter a sound. I sat in silence as it slowly dawned on me that my sister Rozi might be alive. It was possible that I was no longer alone in the world. By the time I managed to compose myself the man had disappeared, without my having any idea who he was.

It was hard for me to believe that my frail, sickly sister Rozi could possibly have survived an ordeal similar to that which I had gone through. I was therefore somewhat skeptical about the information I had just received. I sat on the sidewalk for a long time and weighed the likelihood of her survival.

After a while, I made my way to the soup kitchen and asked one of the women helpers where I could get hold of a postcard. She handed me a postcard with a stamp on it. Since I had no idea where Rozi was living, I addressed the postcard to Rozi Klein, the Jewish Synagogue, Janoshalma. I wrote:

> *My Dear Rozi,*
>
> *A man told me that you are alive and in Janoshalma. I very much hope this is true. I arrived in Budapest ten days ago and am very sick with tuberculosis. Starting next week, I will be hospitalized for a long time – I was told – at the Budakeszi TB sanatorium in Budapest. I very much hope that you are well enough to come and visit me.*
>
> *With all my love,*
>
> *Your brother Uri. (Hebrew name)*

A few days later a bed became available at the Budakeszi Sanatorium and the Jewish Aid Society of Budapest arranged for a car to take me there. Though Budakeszi was only eight miles from Budapest, we were

forced to take a long circuitous route around the Danube because the bridges connecting the eastern part of the city to Budakeszi had been destroyed during the war. I finally arrived at the hospital a few hours later. After registering, I was placed in a room with five other patients.

On the way to my room I had a chance to observe the scenery. The hospital grounds were beautiful. The gardens were well kept and there was an abundance of flowers. My bed was comfortable. I was given a pair of pajamas and was told to go to bed. I slept for most of the afternoon. In addition to my high fever I still suffered acute pain in my badly swollen left arm and left hip.

The morning after I arrived in Budakeszi a nurse took me in a wheelchair for a chest examination. Ten patients entered the x-ray room at once. We formed a line and waited in turn to be examined by a young physician named Dr. Boszormenyi.

The x-ray machine was not in use, due to shortages of x-ray films. Instead of x-raying, the physician used a fluoroscope machine to examine our lungs. The equipment was not in good working order, however, and stopped working at some point while one of the patients was behind the screen. There was a great shortage of spare parts in the immediate aftermath of the war.

I was fascinated by the visible movement of the patient's chest cavity, as it appeared on the fluoroscope screen. I had never seen an image of the lungs or chest cavity before. I stood behind the physician facing the fluoroscope screen and watched the ribs and lungs as they expanded and contracted rhythmically with the patient's breathing. I tried to guess where the lungs were damaged, but could not differentiate between the various spots on the screen. The physician sat in front of the screen in silence, giving no explanation of what he was doing.

I wondered how this miraculous machine worked. I imagined the x-rays as tiny intangible bullets, which somehow lit up the screen. I wanted very much to understand how this worked. It did not occur to me at the time, that the field of x-rays would one day comprise but a small portion of my knowledge of the physical world.

When I first saw the fluoroscope image of a patient's bones I was reminded of my first evening in Auschwitz. A man who spoke Hungarian had ordered us to give up any gold, silver, or precious stones we were hiding, warning us that such valuables would be discovered by the x-ray machine and all offenders would be shot. I had not believed that such a machine existed, yet here it was, before my very eyes.

Now that I was settled at the sanatorium and spent most of my time resting, my mind kept drifting back to thoughts of the suffering my parents and younger siblings might have undergone before they died. I found myself spiritually devastated at what had befallen them. Such thoughts accompanied me for most of my waking hours. I felt as if my heart was under great pressure and the pain was so strong it was hard to bear. To alleviate the pain, I forced myself to reflect on the possibility of my sister Rozi being alive. This gave me a new shot of hope with which to face the future.

One morning, about a week after I arrived at the sanatorium, I awoke from my sleep to find my thoughts immediately returning to my family. It was still partially dark in the room, but I could see the sun's rays reflected from the treetops outside. The door to my room opened and a woman walked into the room. I did not pay much attention to her. She seemed to be looking for someone. She drew closer to my bed and I suddenly looked up at her face. I screamed out her name "Rozi, Rozi." She came over to me and hugged

me. I kept repeating "dear Rozi, dear Rozi," over and over but could say nothing more. Rozi sat down on my bed. We were silent as tears of happiness flowed down our cheeks. I was overjoyed to see how healthy and well she looked, though I did not understand how this was possible. The thin features I remembered so well were gone: she was a beautiful girl of 17.

It took us some time before we calmed down sufficiently to tell each other all that had happened since our parting in the Ghetto the summer before. Rozi's story soon unfolded.

One day it had been announced in the Ghetto that the Germans were looking for good seamstresses to work outside the Ghetto. Most of us were starving and my mother saw this as an opportunity for her thin, sickly daughter to work less and receive some extra nourishment. With this in mind she decided to register Rozi.

A short while later, the Hungarian *gendarmes* appeared and told mother that the seamstresses would be leaving the Ghetto in two days. My mother now began to panic. Though originally she had thought it a good idea for Rozi to work outside of the Ghetto, she was now scared to let her go. She frantically tried to find a way to keep Rozi near her. She finally decided she must hide Rozi and claim not to know her whereabouts.

Mother came up with the idea of digging an underground hiding place where she would hide her daughter for a few days until the seamstresses left the Ghetto and the danger passed. Mother tried desperately to obtain shovels to dig the hiding place, but she was ultimately unsuccessful. There were no tools to be had in the Ghetto. She explored the possibility of bringing in tools from outside the Ghetto, but there was no time to connect with anyone there. She finally had to abandon the idea of digging an underground

hiding place.

But still Mother did not give up on keeping Rozi with her. She discovered that the underground waterworks for the village of Bacsalmas were located within the boundaries of the Ghetto. She managed to locate the waterworks and intended Rozi to hide there among the pipes. For some reason this did not work out.

An open truck with an SS guard and SS driver arrived to pick up Rozi. Mother held on to her, she could not bring herself to let go. Finally the SS guard pushed Mother aside and forced Rozi into the back of the open truck.

Mother cried bitterly. When the truck started moving, she screamed out loud, as if she knew she would never see her daughter again. She could not be consoled and continued to cry for days. Slowly, the reality of having to take care of the rest of us forced her back into coping as best she could. But her smile, that we children were so accustomed to, vanished from her face.

On June 24, 1944, when all the Jews from the Ghetto were forced into cattle cars "for resettlement in the east," no one was aware that the seamstresses selected in the Ghetto were attached to the same train as the rest of us. In Kassau, the last city before the border, the train was split into two sections. My mother, my siblings and myself, who had remained in the Ghetto, were taken to Auschwitz, while Rozi and the other seamstresses were taken to a town called Wienerneustadt in Austria, together with some of the people who had formerly been with us in the Ghetto.

As soon as the war ended, Rozi returned to our hometown of Janoshalma in Hungary, hoping to find relatives. At first she slept in the synagogue yard under the open sky. But sometime later the Reichardt family, friends of our parents, who were also on the transport to Wienerneustadt and sur-

vived the war, took her in and she joined their family. When my postcard arrived from Budapest, it was sent to the local police, who located Rozi and delivered it to her.

It was now my turn to relate what happened to me since Rozi left the Ghetto. I told my sister how the 10,000 Jews from the Ghetto had arrived in Auschwitz on a Thursday afternoon, June 29; how the people were driven out of the wagons, leaving all their belongings behind; how I happened to be selected to go with the able-bodied men; how I met Father after being in Auschwitz seven weeks; and how Margit, the synagogue custodian's wife, betrayed our father to the local police, whereupon he was arrested and taken to Auschwitz a short while later. I explained how Father's arrival in Auschwitz precipitated my changing places with a man named Arnold Goldberger, so I could join Father on a transport from Auschwitz to Golleschau, which saved my life. I then told my sister how our Father became sick and was sent back to Auschwitz, probably to the gas chambers. Though my father lost his own life, he was in effect to be credited for saving mine.

Rozi left the sanatorium in the late afternoon. She stayed overnight in Budapest, with the Eisenbergs, friends of the family from before the war. She returned to Janoshalma the next day, promising that she would come again as soon as she could. She worked for the next three weeks at the Reichard family business filling seltzer bottles until she had saved enough money to buy food and return to Budakeszi to visit me. She then traveled for two days in order to visit me for a day. She repeated this cycle every two to three weeks for several months to come.

There had been little change in my life or state of health since my arrival at the Budakeszi sanatorium seven months

ago. All food in Hungary was rationed and even bread was limited. Patients received no meat whatsoever. Fortunately my sister Rozi came to visit me every two or three weeks bringing nourishing food such as dried salami and other non-perishable meats, which were still available in the small farm towns, but not in Budapest. I did not, however, have an appetite and found it difficult to eat the food she brought me.

It was January 1946. My health showed no signs of improvement and my high fever persisted. When I had entered the Budakeszi Sanatorium in July 1945, I had hoped for a rapid recovery, but by now I realized that my expectations had been unrealistic.

My lungs developed wounds or "cavities" from the tuberculosis and the TB bacilli kept these from healing. The continual motion of the lungs from breathing served to further obstruct the healing process. In order to restrict the lung motion, many patients were given "pneumothorax" therapy. This involved forcing pressurized air between the lungs and the pleura, a thin membrane surrounding the lungs. This served to compress the lungs and restrict their movement, allowing the lung to heal more easily.

I had great hopes that pneumothorax therapy would help me, but while in the camps I had contracted pneumonia as a result of which the pleura adhered completely to my lungs. The treatment failed.

Not only had the tuberculosis in my lungs failed to heal, it in fact spread to my muscles, bones and intestines. Each day was a struggle to continue living. Each day I would convince myself anew that I could not die now, not after what I had gone through and survived. My faith helped a great deal in my day-to-day battle to stay alive during this period. I prayed daily for the chance to live and perhaps someday bring a new generation of Jewish people into the world.

By the beginning of 1946, the medical staff at the Budakeszi Sanatorium decided that there was nothing they could do for me. My left arm was quite swollen, as was my left hip. The swellings were caused by fluid that had accumulated from the tuberculosis infection in my soft tissues. I was transferred from Budakeszi Sanatorium to the American Street Hospital in Budapest with the explanation that the sanatorium was not equipped to treat my arm and hip.

At the American Street Hospital my arm was put in a cast and the movement of my left leg was restricted in order to allow healing. The American Street Hospital was, however, a general hospital and did not specialize. I was the only patient with tuberculosis and was given a room by myself to insure that I would not infect other patients. The nurses entered mostly to bring me food. Besides setting my arm in a cast and telling me to keep my leg and hip as still as possible, there was nothing else the hospital could do for me. I was pretty much in isolation and often did not speak to anyone for days at a stretch. I was terribly lonely, but most of the time my high fever kept me in a daze, blurring all feeling including the pain of loneliness.

I had been at the American Street Hospital for about a month, much of which passed in a daze due to my fever. I would fall asleep, wake up in a daze, and drift off to sleep again. My hospital room was almost dark, because the lights were turned off to save electricity.

One afternoon the door opened and I saw the outlines of a woman entering my room. I could not make out who it was in the semidarkness. I watched her approach my bed, which was the only occupied in the room, but it was only when she sat down on my bed that I recognized my oldest sister, Lily. I was in an even greater state of shock than when Rozi had walked into my hospital room in Budakeszi seven months earlier. I had absolutely no idea that Lily was alive.

She sat on my bed, took one look at me and started crying.

I asked her over and over, "Aren't you happy to see me." But her body shook from crying and she could not reply. Much later I realized that my emaciated body must have signaled death to her. The signs of impending death were all too familiar to her from the camps. She knew my days were numbered and she cried.

In time she calmed down and started to talk to me about her life. She was living in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany, where she had been liberated by American troops. She described the beauty of the surrounding area. When she heard that I was alive, she had dropped everything and crossed the border illegally in the middle of the night to reach Hungary. A guide who knew the terrain smuggled a group of people through the forest across the border. He warned them to lie flat on the ground if the searchlight came on, since the guards had orders to shoot anything that moved. By keeping still, they avoided getting shot.

No official postal service had yet been established between Hungary and Germany, but as soon as the war ended, survivors established an underground mail system from Hungary to the Displaced Persons camps in Germany. The letters had to be kept short, so they could be smuggled easily across the borders illegally. Letters written to search for family members were given priority.

Since I was incapacitated, the task of letter-writing fell to Rozi and every few days she would send a letter addressed to "Lily Klein, DP Camps, Germany." She also sent letters to other relatives who she thought might possibly be alive.

When Lily received Rozi's letter about my poor health, she immediately began investigating which hospitals in Germany could cure TB. She told me all about the TB sanatorium in Gauting, Germany, only fifteen miles from where

she lived. The sanatorium was run by Americans and had the best treatment available for TB. She assured me that they could cure me quickly there, no matter how sick I was. Little did I realize at that time that it would still take many years before I could leave the hospitals.

Soon Lily's camp history unfolded. In the first selection in Auschwitz she had been selected to be among the able-bodied to work in the camp. Later she got to work in the kitchen in Auschwitz, where she was able to get enough food to sustain her.

In October 1944, Lily was transferred from Auschwitz to Dachau, the notorious concentration camp operated by the SS since the mid 1930s. She was liberated by the US Army in April 1945, while on a forced march from Dachau to a nearby camp, as the Germans tried to move the prisoners from the front to the German interior.

After liberation, she lived in Feldafing, a displaced persons camp established immediately after the war in Germany's American Zone. Soon after the war ended, Lily met a young man named Joseph who had been a Talmud scholar and a Yeshiva student before the war and was blessed with a beautiful voice. They married shortly after the war and lived in a small house in the Feldafing Displaced Persons camp near Munich.

When Lily received Rozi's letter describing my sickness and our situation, she decided to return to Hungary immediately and try to smuggle us to Germany's American Zone. She believed that in Hungary we would be exposed to vicious anti-Semitism and we would never be able to liberate ourselves from the pain and suffering of the camps, but she felt that our lives could take on a new meaning and direction in a free country in the West.

The next day, Lily took the train to Janoshalma. Rozi was just as surprised and no less overjoyed than I at the sud-

den appearance of our older sister. Lily explained to Rozi her plan to take us to West Germany and Rozi was happy to let Lily take charge. She packed up her belongings and came with Lily to Budapest.

Lily was as capable as she was determined. Before leaving Budapest for Janoshalma she had already contacted a group that smuggled people across the border from Hungary to the American Zone of Vienna, Austria. The fee was $50 per head, which was a fortune in Hungary in those days, but Lily agreed to the $150 fee for the three of us without batting an eyelid.

Leaving Budapest

A few days later, we took a taxi from the hospital to the Budapest railroad station, arriving around ten in the morning. Lily met her contact man, who asked for the $150 to take us across the border. When Lily told him she did not have the money, he refused to take us. Lily pleaded with him. She thrust me before him and showed him my emaciated body. She told him how sick I was and argued passionately that if she left me in Hungary I would die.

When he still refused, Lily showed him the telephone number of the Russian Commander of Budapest, which she had prepared ahead of time. She threatened to expose his entire operation to the Russian authorities, unless he agreed to take us. Finally he allowed us to board the train for nothing. We waited a long time at the border between the Russian and American zones. The Russian border guards had been bribed ahead of time and gave us no trouble. The American border police felt that the border should be open and readily accepted us.

We arrived in Vienna the following morning. Women from the Jewish Aid Society waited at the train station to assist Jews who were smuggled across the border to Vienna. They took us to the Rothschild Hospital in the center of the city. At that time it was a refugee transit camp rather than a

hospital. Food was given to the refugees for free. My two sisters and I were given the luxury of a room to ourselves. This privilege was granted to us because of my sickness. The administrators were afraid to place refugees in a room with a tuberculosis patient.

My stay at the Rothschild Hospital was the most difficult period I spent since being liberated from the camps. I was still unable to eat and continued to lose weight. I became weaker by the day. For the first time since the end of the war I feared that I would give up and die. I had no physical or psychological strength left with which to fight. I had never been so close to giving up, it seemed I no longer had a choice. My will to fight the sickness had weakened and my chances for survival seemed faint.

But my two sisters refused to let me despair. They constantly encouraged me. They would not let me lie in bed all day. They talked to me, made me walk back and forth along the length of the room and made me speak. I now weighed less than seventy pounds and each day Lily lifted me in her arms and carried me from the fourth floor of Rothschild Hospital to the hospital backyard, exposing my body to the warmth of the sun's rays. If not for my sisters' devotion, I would not have survived this period.

A short while later, Lily left for Germany. She had promised her husband Joseph that she would return as soon as possible. By now she had been gone for over a month and felt that she must return to him. She once again smuggled herself across the border, this time from Austria to Germany.

Rozi and I remained at the Rothschild Hospital and looked for a way to cross the border into the American zone of Germany, where I hoped to be accepted as a patient at the Gauting Sanatorium. Rozi was in constant contact with organizations that were trying to help Jews escape from Russian held territories.

Vienna was divided into American, British, French and Russian zones. However, Russian held territory surrounded the whole city of Vienna. To get to the part of Austria which was under Western influence, one had first to cross into the Russian occupied territory and then cross into the American zone.

Finally Rozi found a group that was ready to smuggle us across the border from the Russian occupied territory to the American zone of Austria. We were told that the Russian border guards would be bribed. We were however warned that we could expect trouble with the American border guards, since we had no documentation.

When we arrived at the Russian side of the border, the train stopped, but no one asked us for any documentation. After a short while the train continued across the Enns River bridge to the American side. The instant the train came to a halt for passport control, the entire group of refugees jumped out of the train doors and windows as quickly as they could. Several young men, assigned previously to this task, lay down on the tracks to ensure that the Americans would not return the train back to the Russian zone.

When the American military police, including an American physician, arrived a short while later, they saw that I was completely emaciated from tuberculosis. The Americans were scared of being infected with TB and were not sure what to do with me. Finally, they ordered an ambulance that took me to a TB sanatorium at the village of Bad Goisern.

The sanatorium was nestled in a beautiful valley, surrounded by magnificent snow-capped mountains. The scenery was breathtaking. At the hospital I was assigned a neatly furnished private room. An air of efficiency permeated the hospital. The rooms and corridors gleamed with shiny new equipment and bright clean floors. I felt myself relax. My

spirits lifted and my hopes for recovery were rekindled.

Every sunny day we were led onto a veranda where we were exposed to the healing rays of the sun from the comfort of large reclining chairs. The sanatorium physicians were highly competent and the food was delicious and plentiful. It compared very favorably to the shabby, run down sanatorium in Budakeszi, where the patients practically starved. For me it was a breath of fresh air and fresh hope.

In reality the daily routine and treatment for TB at Bad Goisern was much the same as it had been in Budakeszi. Clean corridors and brand new equipment notwithstanding, there was little to be done for TB in 1946. Short of bed rest and exposure to the sun, there was no known cure for this unpredictable disease. My fever persisted and my appetite showed little sign of improving.

A few days after I arrived to Bad Goisern, my sister Rozi came to join me, determined to be with me and take care of me. She did so at great personal sacrifice. Using the little money Lily had left us, she managed to rent a room with an Austrian family, but had no means of making regular rental payments or of buying the basic necessities she needed to live. I often managed to smuggle her a sandwich or other food from the hospital kitchen and she soon registered with the Joint distribution Committee for assistance. The Joint sent her packages and she used the chocolate and cigarettes she received as hard currency. These commodities fetched a good price on the black market in post-war Austria. Rozi could easily have opted to stay with Lily in Germany, where she would have been in the company of other young Jewish people. Instead she made the decision to be with me at all costs. She knew how important it was for me to have her support and care. She willingly suffered isolation, loneliness and financial hardship on my behalf.

Rozi now began exploring ways of smuggling us across

the border to Germany where we could be with Lily. She finally managed to obtain visitors permits that allowed us to visit our sister Lily in Germany. This was all we needed. We left Austria for good.

Lily's husband Joe welcomed us like a brother would. He was a handsome 30-year-old man and Rozi and I took to him at once. Lily and Joe lived in a tiny but beautiful house in the DP camp at Feldafing. It looked like a doll house and Lily and Joe were very happy there. The remnants of our family were finally together for the first time since having been torn away from our family and our home two and a half years previously.

Rozi found accommodation in one of the residential houses for single girls and I was accepted to be a patient at sanatorium in Gauting. My weight was still around 70 pounds, but from this point on I started to recover slowly. My fever still returned periodically but it was lower now than it had been. I shared a room with two other patients, the rooms were spacious, comfortable and well lit. Now that my health began to improve, I was able to interact with other patients. I made some good friends with whom I would stay in contact for many years.

There were around one thousand TB patients at Gauting, half of them were Jewish survivors and half were refugees fleeing communist controlled eastern Europe. The two groups remained distinct and separate and rumors began to spread that some of the Eastern European refugees were Nazi collaborators. Some of these rumors were borne out, when two such patients were recognized by Ukrainian Jews as having participated in the mass murder of Jews in their home town.

Most of the young Jewish survivors in Gauting had no formal education and found themselves limited, with no serious prospects for the future. For some reason the Jewish

organizations and the United Nations Refugee Relief Organization were either unable or unwilling to address this problem. Many young patients were thus wasting the most crucial years of their lives. Feelings of despair and helplessness began to set in. One group of patients repeatedly appealed to the Ort school in Munich to provide them with a practical course that was not physically taxing. Finally their request was approved and a radio repair class was opened.

I had difficulty obtaining authorization from my physician to attend classes because I was too sick. My physician finally agreed to allow me to participate when I told him that I was willing to risk a relapse in order to further my education. I was still skeletal in appearance. I also remained religiously observant and always went covered my head.

On my first day in class I overheard a conversation in which I was referred to as a skeleton who would not live long. The gossipers also felt I would most likely drop out of the course. I was deeply troubled and pained by these comments and was determined to prove them wrong. It gave me great satisfaction to hear my detractors openly refer to me later on in the course as the top student in the class.

During this period my physical health began to improve but my spirits were low. I often found myself depressed and unhappy. The level of uncertainty regarding my future contributed to my mood. I did not want to end up a worthless burden on society, yet I had no idea how I should proceed or what general direction I should take in order to make something of myself. An older patient and friend, Israel Schwartz suggested I enroll in a mathematics class in Munich that had been set up especially for survivors. I snuck out of the hospital and took the train to Munich where I sat in on the class. This only added to my frustration, as I was unable to follow the class and now began to doubt my own abilities.

Four years had elapsed since the end of World War II

and the United Nations was starting to cut back its refugee support. UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) wanted to start closing the Displaced Persons Camps and hospitals as part of a general strategy to begin phasing out its support for refugees in Germany.

In the United States, President Truman proposed a Refugee immigration bill allowing three hundred thousand displaced persons to immigrate to the USA. Other countries, such as Canada and Australia also agreed to take in refugees. All this meant the United Nations could now begin reducing its support for displaced persons.

The tuberculosis patients of Gauting were faced with a dilemma. Almost no one wanted to stay in Germany, but active TB patients had little chance of emigration. With the exception of Sweden, the only country willing to accept refugees with active tuberculosis was Israel, who accepted all Jewish survivors regardless of their state of health.

In order to help those Gauting patients who still needed hospital treatment and had virtually no chance of emigrating, the American Joint set up two rehabilitation centers for TB patients in conjunction with UNRRA. One was located in the village of Eslingen and the other in Bayerish-Gmain, Bavaria.

The centers were set up as temporary rehabilitation centers for the Gauting Sanatorium patients. They offered patients the opportunity to continue their medical treatment while acquiring what were believed to be marketable skills and training for future employment. After the decision was made to transfer a group of patients from the Sanatorium to the rehabilitation centers, the hospital administration tried without luck to convince the healthier patients to leave for one of the two rehabilitation centers.

Many of the patients had been hospitalized for years and were afraid to leave the sheltered environment of the

sanatorium. As a result, over half the patients chosen for transfer went on a hunger strike. They suspected the rehabilitation centers were being used as a guise to lure them out of the sanatorium. They feared they would soon be turned out of the centers and be forced to manage on their own.

For myself, I was overjoyed to learn that I had been selected for Bayerish-Gmain. The lack of personal initiative and passivity of hospital life was a constant source of anxiety for me. I feared I would eventually be drawn into this lifestyle and not want to work anymore. I was therefore happy for the opportunity to start a more normal life away from the protected environment of the sanatorium. The rehabilitation center at Bayerish-Gmain consisted of a large four-story building with comfortable living quarters and several classrooms. The building itself was located in a beautiful wooded area close to Bad Reichenhall, Bavaria. It was not far from Berchtesgaden, the former mountain headquarters of Hitler.

Bayerish-Gmain offered courses in radio repair, tailoring, cloth cutting, leatherwork, and sewing. I joined the radio repair course, which I had started in Gauting. I hoped this would prove to be an employable skill outside of Germany. To my disappointment, the mathematics was very basic. I was intent on advancing my mathematics in the hope of one day entering university.

By the time I arrived in Bayerish-Gmain, my fever was gone. I had gained a fair amount of weight at Gauting and began to feel like a normal person, despite my tuberculosis. I now felt confident that my health would eventually be restored and I immersed myself in learning the details of radio repair, which I greatly enjoyed.

For all intents and purposes we were still living in a completely protected environment. Food and housing was provided free of charge and we made a little pocket money by selling the chocolates and cigarettes we received once a

month form the American Joint. We used this money for movies and other such trivialities.

I was quite happy at Bayerish-Gmain and made a number of very good friends with whom I spent much of my time. We went for walks, enjoyed each other's company and generally enjoyed life.

In June 1950, UNRRA closed the rehabilitation center for good. By that point I had been there almost a year. Patients still suffering from active tuberculosis were sent on to German hospitals while everyone else was transferred to the large DP camp at Feldafing near Munich. The Feldafing DP camp was a large camp where displaced persons were provided with food and sleeping quarters while waiting to emigrate. Once again no one worked since there were no jobs to be had.

After settling in at Feldafing I began to explore the possibility of getting a job. I figured my best chance for finding work would be through one of the Jewish organizations in Munich.

I went from one Jewish organization to another looking for work and was finally offered a job as a filing clerk at the American Joint Immigration Office. I accepted immediately.

The main function of the American Joint Immigration Office was to find Jewish communities in America willing to sponsor Holocaust survivors who wanted to immigrate. Every refugee needed a sponsor to guarantee that he or she would not become a burden to the United States government. The Office also helped people to obtain the necessary documents and generally deal with the bureaucracy involved in emigrating to Western countries.

I was thrilled to have found a position with which I could support myself, albeit meagerly. For the first time in my life I did not have to take charity from anyone. It was

exhilarating to think of the progress I had made since being liberated. For years I had hovered between life and death, and yet here I was, independent and supporting myself for the first time.

I did not know how my future would unfold, but I knew I would not rest until I was fully independent and self-sufficient. I was confident I would finally overcome the physical burden of tuberculosis. I also felt confident that I would find a way to advance myself and become a useful member of society and of the Jewish people.

An Odyssey Of Survival

Part Three

Post Holocaust Experiences

The survivor never knows what events on a given day will open the healed-over wounds from the Holocaust. In the following section, I write about certain post-Holocaust experiences that have had a profound impact on me.

Paul E. Bartlett

I left the National Jewish Hospital grounds in haste, crossed the wide avenue, and waited for the bus to the center of town. I looked back every few seconds to see if I was being followed. It took some time for me to realize that my guilty conscience created the feeling of being followed, for I had broken the hospital rules and left without permission.

After a half an hour ride, I arrived at the University of Colorado Denver Extension Center. I entered the old building trying to find my way around. On the left, past the entrance door, was a cafeteria. Young students, male and female, were eating and talking to each other cheerfully. How I envied them for their lighthearted chatter and relaxed mood. I approached a young couple near the door and asked where the University Administration offices were. They directed me to the second floor.

I waited in the corridor for a long time trying to figure out what I should do next. Whom should I approach or talk to? How should I go about convincing the Admissions Office to accept me as a student? I wanted to ask information from the receptionist who sat at a desk and typed without looking up. I carefully formed the proper English sentences in my mind. But instead of speaking to her, I changed my mind and went back down to the street.

I walked around the streets near the university and repeated to myself all the arguments I had prepared to convince the admissions office that I could carry an academic load. In my mind I also reviewed the major topics of mathematics and physics which I had studied during the past eight months, just in case they asked me. I walked around just to gain time. Finally I took the decisive step and before I could change my mind, went up to the receptionist and told her, in my broken English, that I would like to speak to someone about enrolling as a student. When I told her that I planned to major in Electrical Engineering, she directed me to wait at the door of Mr. Bartlett's office, the Engineering Advisor, who was now engaged with a student.

Waiting, with a great deal of apprehension, I tried to calm my racing heart. I thought of the past seven months since my arrival at the Denver hospital. All my energies were concentrated on studying physics and mathematics from the two books I had acquired, in order to prepare myself for this important encounter.

The patient's bedside lights at the hospital had to be out by nine in the evening. The daytime hustle and bustle, created by the nurses and doctors and the five other patients in my room, stopped in the evening. No one disturbed me. I would then lock myself into the restroom with my books and try to figure out the solution to the first problem in the section I studied and then compare my result with the answer in the back of the book. It often took me hours to figure out the first problem, but then I gained a good deal of understanding and could usually solve the problems in the remainder of the section with much less difficulty. Now I feared that all my efforts of those long nights would be in jeopardy unless I succeeded in convincing someone in charge to accept me as a student at the university. My hopes for the future depended upon this meeting. If I were to succeed, I

would have a wonderful future, and would do exciting work. Otherwise I would be poor and would have to struggle for the rest of my life doing dull work as I had during the Summer before I came to Denver.

The advisor's door opened and the student left. A tall skinny young man, who seemed just a few years older than I, asked me in, and pointed to a chair. A sign placed on his desk read, "Paul E. Bartlett, Engineering Advisor." I introduced myself. My thoughts raced rapidly, recalled the many selections I went through in Auschwitz and other Camps; a pointing of a finger in which direction to go often deciding whether I was going to live. Now my life was not in danger but still, this handsome tall young man had the power over my future. Despite his friendly smile I was scared, and I forced myself to make every effort to control myself, and try to speak in full English sentences.

I told Mr. Bartlett that I wanted to enroll in the Fall as a student in Electrical Engineering. Mr. Bartlett, pondering my heavy accent, asked me where I graduated from high school. I was afraid that if I told him that I did not graduate, he would dismiss me. I hesitated and then replied, "Well, that is complicated."

"Which way is it complicated?" he asked.

"I really did not finish high school," I replied, "but I believe that I have the equivalent training."

"How many grades did you finish?"

"Formally, only six," I said, "but I taught myself for years. I even attended Brooklyn College in the evenings, for a short while."

"For how long? And why did you stop?"

The questions kept coming. In spite of my previous resolve not to expose too much of my background, I realized now that my chances to attend the university were lost unless I opened up to this seemingly friendly young man. I

was afraid that he would think that I had failed my courses at Brooklyn College.

I was now honest, and told him that I was a survivor of the camps and as a result, I was hospitalized for many years. For years I longed for an education, hoping to attend a university. I told him that I did not fail at Brooklyn College, where I was enrolled in two evening courses. But when I arrived in the United States in June of the past year I had to work long hours in order to earn enough to cover the cost of food and lodgings, and that I had to stay up at nights in order to study. I had little time for sleep and my diet was poor. After two months I was so run down that the tuberculosis was reactivated and I was sent to the National Jewish Hospital at Denver. That is why I had to stop the courses I was taking.

Mr. Bartlett's questions seemed friendly. I wondered whether he considered me odd for wanting to enter the university since I had only a sixth grade formal education. He was silent and showed no sign of favoring my request. In desperation I decided to put all my cards on the table, even though I feared that he would consider me a braggart. I told him that I was always the best student in my elementary school classes, that I taught myself German, English (though I spoke it haltingly), mathematics and physics. I broke the promise I made to myself that I would not do so, and asked him to give me a chance. I told him that I would work hard and assured him, that I would succeed, if he would only give me a chance and help me to be accepted. I had already lost more than six years by being in the camps and the hospitals and that I was too old to lose more time by attending high school. I pleaded with him to consider my special situation. By now I was exhausted and had no more to say.

Mr. Bartlett then asked why I chose electrical engineering and I told him that I was interested in radio repairing

when I was in the Displaced Person's Hospital in Germany. Mr. Bartlett indicated that I would need a good deal of mathematics in electrical engineering and led the discussion towards the topics I needed to study. In the process he indirectly asked me some simple mathematics questions, and then some which were more complicated. Following my response he assured me that he would do all he could to help me. Shortly, he said, the University would give an entrance examination to students who served in the Korean war, who had not completed their high school diplomas. He would allow me to take this examination and if I did well in mathematics, science and English, he would accept me as a special student for the Fall of 1952, two months later. He also told me that considering my circumstance he would not reject me if I performed poorly in English, provided I did well in the sciences. I hoped that I would pass the entrance examination. I thought that I convinced Mr. Bartlett, and I was overjoyed and exhilarated that my daring succeeded. I felt like hugging that tall young engineering advisor, but suppressed my emotion.

I registered at the University for three courses in the Fall of 1952. Engineering drawing, college mathematics, and chemistry. I sat in the chemistry lecture and tried to make sense of the English used, as well as of the atoms, the electron and protons, all of which were strange objects to me. Professor Klooster, a man in his fifties, blondish, about six feet tall with a round face and almost bald, was an enthusiastic lecturer. He lectured clearly and loudly, but to my chagrin a lot of the material was above my head. I worried when the Professor announced that he would give a weekly ten minute multiple choice quiz, in the laboratory. In the first five quizzes my highest grade was twenty out of a hundred. I thought I understood the material, yet, I could not solve

the problems. I stayed up even later into the nights than I usually did, locked myself into the bathroom for the night while I studied chemistry. Still, my grades did not improve. I was terrified that after I had succeeded entering the university, I would be thrown out and that would be the end of my career in engineering and my hopes for a decent future.

My betrayal of Mr. Bartlett weighed heavily on me and troubled me as much as my own failure. I had promised him that I would do well, and now I might fail. He had trusted me and I had deceived him. I never entered a university building without first looking out for Mr. Bartlett. When I saw him coming up one end of the stairs I ran down the other, for I was afraid to meet him. I felt that my past in the camps was repeating and I was just a failure.

During the fifth week into the course, the chemistry professor announced a midterm examination which would consist of fifty problems. He assured us, however, that everyone would have as much time as they wished to solve the problems. I asked him whether he really meant that, and was delighted when he said yes.

I worked for six hours trying to solve the problems. Knowing that I had as much time as I wanted I studied the statement of each problem very carefully. Even though I did not understand some of the English words, I could still make sense of the problems.

When Professor Klooster returned the graded examination a week later I found a red 96 on my paper. He stopped near me and said, "Young man, stop by my office after class." I was terrified. I did not know what the 96 meant and what the total number of points were on the examination. I was certain that he would tell me that my total grade point average was too low for me to pass the course. I expected the worst.

Following the lecture I stopped at Professor Klooster's

office. In his strong deep voice he said to me, "Sit down son, and explain to me what is going on with you. Your highest grade in all your weekly quizzes was thirty percent and now in the midterm examination you received the highest grade in class. Where did you go to school before and where did you take chemistry before?" I told him that I never had chemistry before and gave him a short description of my background. I also explained that in the short weekly examinations I had no time figure out the English, whereas in the midterm examination, I was given enough time to ponder the vocabulary, therefore I could solve the problems. By now, after six weeks in class, I told him, I reached the point where I understood most of the material. Professor Klooster just replied, "OK son." He wrote a letter to the college administration. To my embarrassment, an article, including my picture, appeared in the Denver Post about "a bright young refugee boy who had no education before, was just awarded a scholarship."

Now that I believed that I would make it in college, I had the most unusual feeling. For days I was literally sick from the joy of knowing what had happened. Still, I felt like a beaten dog who happened to find a delicious bone, but questioned whether I deserved it. I had this mixed up complicated feeling, alternating between elation that now I would "make it" and a feeling of doubt, of not deserving it. I did not understand and could not discuss with anyone these complicated feelings.

I also worried that the hospital would find out that I snuck out to attend university without permission. Who knew what might happen? But to my great surprise the social worker, who was originally opposed to the idea that I attend the university and who had wanted me to study a trade at the Denver Opportunity School, called me the next day and told me she would help me continue my university studies. The

hospital administration also wanted to use my name for publicity in its fundraising efforts. I would be an example of what patients at the hospital could accomplish. Everyone reacted differently from my expectations.

By the time I graduated first in my class in Engineering Physics four years later, Paul Bartlett and I were close friends. He was glad that he had given me a chance, and I felt grateful that he had changed my life forever by having had confidence in me.

A Voice From The Past

In 1977, I took a sabbatical to teach at an Israeli University. It was during this time that I decided to spare no effort to locate my family in Jerusalem, people I had heard about from my father when I was a boy in Hungary.

I remembered little about them. I recalled from Father's letters that his relative's name was also Klein and that his address was a post office box in Jerusalem. The best way to locate a person, I thought, was to search for the name in the telephone book. To my dismay, hundreds and hundreds of people in the Jerusalem telephone book were named Klein. This did not discourage me. Going down the list in the telephone book, I called one Klein after the other. But I soon discovered that my complete lack of knowledge about my father's family was a real impediment in finding anyone who might be a relative. After being on the phone with one Klein for a while, the conversation became vague. Neither I nor the party whom I called had enough information to establish whether we might be related. Finally I was forced to give up the search.

One day I was having lunch with a colleague at the university cafeteria. I told him about my search for my relatives and expressed my disappointment that it lead to a dead end. My colleague's father sat with us and listened. He then told me that he met an old gentleman in Jerusalem who knew

all the Hungarians who lived in the city around the turn of the century. He suggested that I talk to this man; that he might be able to give me information. By the way, he said, the old man's name was also Klein, a very common Jewish name in Hungary. I recorded the address and waited for an opportunity to drive from Tel Aviv, where I lived, to Jerusalem and see the old gentleman.

On my next trip to Jerusalem, I decided to visit the man. I drove through the narrow streets of Jerusalem till I reached the *Me'a She'arim* (hundred gates) neighborhood. It is the section of the ultra-religious Chassidic Jews who have lived in this area for at least two centuries. Their long beards and side curls, wide brimmed hats, and long black jackets distinguish them from other Jews. Their wives wear long dresses with long sleeves and tightly tied kerchiefs on their heads. The girl's dresses are also long and modest. The boys wear black suits with long jackets and wide brimmed black hats. Many of them are very poor, but dedicate their lives to the study of Torah.

The Me'a She'arim section is made up of narrow alleys and streets barely wide enough for an automobile to pass. The main street, Me'a She'arim Street, is about one kilometer long. It starts from the Geula section and leads close to the ancient walls of the old City. Since only one car can pass the street at a time, Me'a She'arim Street is one way in the direction of the ancient walls of the Old City. The narrow streets have an even narrower sidewalk, about one foot wide. The people walking the streets represent a strange mixture of cultures and religious inclinations. The locals wear wide brimmed hats, black suits and long jackets in the Chassidic tradition. Tourists from all parts of the world visit there and speak languages which sound like the ones that existed during the time of the Tower of Babel.

On both sides of Me'a She'arim Street one store is next

to the other. Many sell silver candelabras, silver cups, silver *mezuzot*, and other religious items, mostly for tourists. Other stores exhibit books of religious commentary. Some sell used furniture and second hand household items. Many live in utter poverty by choice. They devote themselves to the study of Torah, which they consider much more important than the need to earn a living. The side alleys leading off Me'a She'arim Street are also filled with small stores. Here and there, one finds a small cubicle of a storehouse with a seamstress who mends used clothes, for whom no job is too small. Her husband is most likely dedicated to the study of Torah, and it is her job to raise the children and to provide the meager income for the family. For this they both share in the privileges of *the world to come.*

As one walks through the narrow alleys one often hears children chanting their Torah lessons and their prayers in unison. The teaching methods used in their schools are not different from the ones practiced during the ancient Talmudic times of two thousand years ago.

The apartments in the area are hidden in courts surrounded by walls. The addresses of the people living here are often not marked clearly, and it is difficult to locate the person you want. I walked the narrow streets trying to find the location, often stopping and addressing one of the *Chassidim* in Yiddish to locate the place. I finally arrived and saw the name of Klein on one of the doors. I knocked.

An old gentleman with a very long white beard opened the door and bid me to enter. He was of short stature, had clear blue eyes, and a calm, still young looking, intelligent face. He looked prophetic, visionary and completely satisfied with his life. To my question in Yiddish whether he was Mr. Klein, he replied in the affirmative. We stood facing each other, I started haltingly, "I was told that you knew all the Hungarians from long ago. My father had an uncle..."

The old gentleman interrupted me mid sentence "Are you Yitzchak's son?"

"Yes, that was my father's name." With a sudden motion he turned, his back towards me, and took a few steps towards his desk. He picked up a thick envelope and handed it to me. "This is the last letter your father wrote to me."

The post office box address was still on the envelope. I stood there petrified. I could not understand. My mind raced from one thought to another in a bewildered manner. I could not grasp who this prophetic looking old man was. How did he get this envelope?

My mind raced back thirty-two years to when I saw Father for the last time. It was Tuesday, November 28, 1944, late in the afternoon, just about the time the sun set. The Lager-Aeltester, the prisoner commander of concentration camp Golleschau, where Father and I were imprisoned as slave laborers, ordered me to go with him. I was certain that having been singled out by the sadistic Camp Commander meant my death. Still, I had no choice but to obey the German's order.

He took me into a small room where Father was sitting. The Lager-Aeltester said that Father was being taken back to Auschwitz because he was too sick to work. Father and I embraced and we both cried very hard until the sadistic Lager Aeltester forced me to leave, without getting a chance to say anything to him. All the years since, I was wondering: Did he know where he was being taken? Or that it was the last day of his life?

I had no possessions from my father or members of my family who perished in Auschwitz. Not a picture or any other remnant to hold on to my past. Now I had a long letter. Several large densely written Hebrew pages of it. I could not believe it. It was as if a voice was reaching out from the ashes of Auschwitz.

I removed the letter from the envelope. I recognized Father's delicate Hebrew handwriting. I looked at the date on the letter. It was written thirty-eight years ago. I skimmed the pages. I could not concentrate to read it. I forced myself not to cry. I did not want to be shamed by my emotions. I asked the old man who he was. He was Father's uncle.

I sat down. I was silent for a long time. So this was the Uncle. I was unable to utter a word. My mind raced with many puzzling questions.

I was amazed that Father's uncle kept a 38-year-old letter on his desk, ready to give it to me when I arrived! How did he know that I was coming? What meaning would the letter convey to me? I also feared its contents. In any case, I could not concentrate on reading it.

When I recovered from the surprise, I asked about the fate of the letter over the many years. Uncle explained that he had been the head of a large Torah Academy, *Kollel Shom'rei Ha'chomot,* for close to sixty years. His job was to administer and distribute monies which were sent from many countries of the world to support Yeshivot and Torah study in Jerusalem.

He said, "Now I am an old man and I decided to hand over the position of head of the Yeshiva to someone much younger. About 10 days before you arrived, my young students screened the letters and wanted to throw away many of the old ones, among them the one written by your father."

He said that he insisted that he wanted this letter right next to him, for reasons he could not explain. He felt that he needed it.

He started talking to me about life in Jerusalem around the turn of the century. He described in some detail how his father, my great-grandfather, was involved in Torah studies with the Hungarian Jewish community in Jerusalem, starting from the late 1880s.

I was too exhausted to continue. I promised my great uncle that I would visit him again shortly. I still did not dare to read Father's letter for I knew not what it consisted of. I returned home and sat down with the letter.

Father's letter was a reply to previous correspondence with his uncle. It started with a long rich Hebrew greeting in the Chassidic style. Next it described the situation of the Jews in our hometown Janoshalma in the years 1937 and the beginning of 1938. The letter stated that according to Hungarian law no one was allowed to operate any economic enterprise in Hungary without a government permit. This law was used to take away the livelihood of the Jews of Hungary. Many of the licenses of the Jews to operate as merchants, artisans or repairmen were being withdrawn. This strongly affected the earning capabilities of the Jews. As a result, revenues of the Jewish community had sharply declined, and so had his income as the rabbi of the town.

The severity of the suppression of the Jews was increasing. He was recently brutally beaten by a man named Vajda Bandi, who headed the Hungarian Nazi party in our hometown, and he was unable to get any protection from the local police.

The circuit judge, a professed anti-Semite, had called Father into his office a number of times and demanded that he leave town as soon as he could. Otherwise the judge would see to it that Father would have a lot of trouble, the nature of which was not specified. Much more compelling to leave Hungary than all the above reasons was that Father was terribly afraid that Hitler would extend his rule over Hungary. He was not certain what such a catastrophe would mean for Hungarian Jewry, but he greatly feared the consequences. For all these reasons Father wanted to move to Palestine, regardless of how difficult it would have been. He hoped

that Uncle could help him obtain affidavits (entry permits) to Palestine as soon as possible.

In previous correspondence, Uncle suggested that being a rabbi is a very bad profession in Palestine. He urged Father that he should make certain that his sons learn a trade to be able to make a living in Jerusalem. In reply Father addressed this question in some detail. He stated that he could not allow his sons to learn a trade because they would have to devote themselves to the study of Torah. However, he requested that Uncle describe to him which trade is good in Palestine, to be a shoemaker, a tailor, a watch repairman, or some other tradesman. Father would learn the trade himself and he would earn a living from it to sustain the family.

My wife and I went to visit Uncle every few weeks. We also took our two sons to him. I found out that he was one of the highly respected figures in the community. During Israel's War of Independence, he was elected to be the liaison officer between the British army and the Me'a She'arim section of Jerusalem. Much later he was awarded the title of "*Yakir Yerushalayim* – outstanding citizen of Jerusalem" for his work on behalf of the community. He was also well known in the Jewish communities in the Diaspora for being the Head of a large Torah Academy in Jerusalem.

To my surprise, I found that I knew little about my family. Uncle told me that for many generations the family had been traveling back and forth between Hungary and Jerusalem. My Grandfather, who was his older brother, left Jerusalem for Hungary. His father, Rabbi Ze'ev Klein – after whom I was named – was buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. So were his father's ancestors, going back eight generations. My eighth generation forefather was the Pri Tzaddick, so named after a well-known biblical commentary he published. I was amazed by this information which I

never knew. I lost my family after arriving to Auschwitz from Hungary at age 15, and I did not discuss the family history with my parents. Apparently they must have felt that I was too young to know too much.

I met his children who were Chassidim and much older than I. In one of our visits, Uncle described his life in Jerusalem ever since he was a child around the turn of the century and how his forefathers were involved with Torah learning in Jerusalem starting from the early 1800s.

He told me that he had a wonderful life because he devoted his life to the study of Torah and helped others to do the same. He felt that he was given the privilege to accomplish the purpose for which he was sent to be on this earth. His deep blue eyes, which reminded me of my father's, twinkled mischievously as he was talking. He then proceeded to say, "Now I am an old man and am ready for my Maker."

On my next visit, Uncle was confined to bed. He had troubles with his heart.

When I returned again to see him, I found his apartment empty. I inquired from the neighbors as to his whereabouts and I was told that he was no longer alive.

Breaking Silence

Silence had descended on the middle-class synagogue at Brookline, a suburban community of Boston. The three hundred or so members had waited for the start of the Yom Kippur evening *Kol Nidre* services praying to be released of all vows made during the past year. The congregants' faces were solemn as they were about to start the year's most important prayers.

Men and women sat separately in the Orthodox tradition. Most women were dressed in white and most men wore a *kittel*, a thin white robe, over their suits and were enwrapped in a white tallit, or prayer shawl. Dressing in white was to remind one of shrouds, of the finiteness of human life, of the insignificance of man compared to his creator towards whom his prayer is directed. This day is dedicated for man to do *Tshuva*, to repent and abandon his transgressions and return to the ways described in the Torah.

Yom Kippur was the last of the Ten Days of Repentance. It was a day of prayer, of contemplation, and of fasting from an hour before sunset till the next day after sunset. It was a day when the fate of not only each individual but also mankind was judged and determined for the coming year.

I concentrated on the prayers and forced myself to think of the meaning of each Hebrew word. To unite with my

Creator without interference, I isolated myself from my surroundings by placing the tallit over my head, practically covering my whole face. I struggled to keep my mind only on the prayers, forcing myself to exclude the painful memories which intruded on my thoughts. But as I continued my prayers this became more and more difficult. No matter how hard I tried to avoid it, my mind recalled the Yom Kippur evening of many years ago that I have already related in this book. The details must be retold.

I was back in Golleschau, a satellite camp of Auschwitz, where I was imprisoned forty years earlier during the war. About twenty-five prisoners and I were marching down the slippery mountains to return to camp, with the Kapo leading in front and two SS guards with machine guns in the back. The walk downhill was tiring and difficult after a long day's work in the quarry on the mountains. By the time we got to camp it was completely dark and Yom Kippur had already commenced. Entering the camp yard, an area enclosed by barbed wires, I saw an unusually large number of SS guards waiting for us, with machine guns directed toward the prisoners. Fear penetrated my heart. Could they have possibly decided to murder us all on this Kol Nidre evening?

It was dark on the campground. Only a few lights illuminated the large area surrounded by barbed wires. My eyes searched to find my father who worked in a different group than I, and returned from work in the mountains somewhat earlier. We found each other. Soon all the prisoners were made to line up for muster, to be counted to ascertain that no prisoner was missing. My father and I were standing near each other, tensely awaiting for what the SS had prepared for us on this holy Yom Kippur evening. Our thin, striped summery prisoners' clothing gave little protection against the cold northern wind. Soon we were all freezing as we

stood motionless at attention for another long time in the cold for Zahlappell.

While we stood at attention, a semi-hidden door to the lowest floor of the three story building opened. My friend Salamon Abshalom was let out. He was barely able to walk; his hands were tied behind his back. An SS guard took him to the back of the camp yard. In the semi-darkness I barely discerned the gallows at the other end of the barbed wire, about thirty feet from where I stood. The SS commander of the camp read a proclamation that Salamon Abshalom would be punished for trying to escape. He was led to the gallows and made to climb onto what looked like a stepladder. The noose was tied around his neck. We stood paralyzed, in bewildered despair. How could the Heavens allow this to happen on this holy Yom Kippur evening? Did the Germans set up the execution specifically for Yom Kippur to humiliate the God of Israel and His people? The silence of the Heavens screamed out in our hearts and in our souls. The desecration of the God of Israel, of the people of Israel, of Yom Kippur, and the humiliation of man created in the image of God proceeded in silence as the German hangman, the Camp's SS commander, stood over Salamon Abshalom.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a powerful, high pitched voice rang out over the camp yard. It sent chills down our spines, as we heard the cry of "*Sh'ma Yisrael* – Hear O Israel...," as Salamon Abshalom declaimed the eternal proclamation of the Jewish people's belief in one God. The flow of time seemed to have had suddenly slowed, and those two words seemed to stretch on and on, penetrating our hearts. It seemed to take a long time from the beginning of the two words to the end. The SS hangman, hearing the words, cut off Salamon Abshalom's affirmation of "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One" by extinguishing his last breath.

Our spirits were electrified. In defiance of the Ger-

mans, Salamon Abshalom spoke for all us who stood muster on that holy Yom Kippur evening. He became our spokesman and appointed representative. His outcry of "Sh'ma Yisrael" broke the silence of the Heavens, decried God's failure to interfere, and demonstrated the Godliness of the Jewish People. With his prayer of Sh'ma Yisrael arising from his last breath, he raised all of us standing Zahlappell to the highest spiritual level. Even as his life was extinguished by the brutal murderer to whom nothing was holy, he still proclaimed the eternity of the Jewish People, in defiance of evil, in defiance of the Germans, in defiance of the silence of humanity, and in defiance of the silence of the Heavens. Salamon Abshalom proclaimed the Godliness of the Jewish People even at a time when God seemed to be totally absent.

After the hanging we were dismissed from roll call and sent to our quarters. We saved the evening portion of bread in our shirts, next to our bodies, for the next evening, until the end of the Yom Kippur fast.

It was the thirty-ninth Yom Kippur since that cold and bitter evening when Salamon Abshalom gave his life for Kiddush Hashem, for martyrdom. It was the thirty-ninth Yom Kippur eve that I recited the *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead, for Salamon Abshalom. For each of the last thirty-nine years during the Yom Kippur prayers, I have relived the bitter experiences of that Yom Kippur evening, but, until that time, never spoke about the Shoah or about Salamon Abshalom.

Even though I was now surrounded by people who understood the meaning of Yom Kippur, still I felt totally isolated from them. When I closed my eyes, I was still back in Golleschau. None around me could understand my pain. My loneliness and isolation was overwhelming and almost unbearable. I felt like a stranger among these people, many

of whom were my friends, who never knew Auschwitz, never knew what I went through in Auschwitz, what I was going through that evening.

I slowly calmed my emotions and tried to analyze my thoughts. The Germans murdered Salamon Abshalom, but I was guilty of having been silent in spite of the promise we made to each other in the camps that we would tell the world what happened. I had kept Salamon Abshalom's memory a secret for all these years. I was among the very few who survived Golleschau and therefore it was my duty to let the people know about Salamon Abshalom's sacrifice. By choosing to be silent all these years, I had betrayed Salamon Abshalom and all those that perished by withholding the information even from those who could identify with his actions and cherish his martyrdom. By being silent I had contributed to forgetting them. Thirty-nine years after the event, even the few other Golleschau survivors must have passed on. It was therefore, I felt, my duty let the world know, and that my self-imposed silence must end. This Yom Kippur evening, when we asked to be released of all vows, I vowed that from now on, I would speak and write about the Holocaust and about Salamon Abshalom.

The prayers were nearly finished and I recited the last Kaddish for Salamon Abshalom as I had done on each of the preceding thirty-eight Yom Kippur evenings. But this time I recited Kaddish more fervently than ever before. The realization that it was my duty to let others know of Salamon Abshalom and the Shoah induced fear and trepidation in me. Fear of tearing open my wounds in public, fear of exposing myself as an odd man outside of society, fear of exposing my family to isolation, fear of opening a Pandora's box which I would never be able to close again.

Visit to Germany

After some trouble getting on the highway in the direction of the Rhine, I finally found my way. The Rhine wound northward, meandering to the right and to the left. A four lane highway, two lanes in each direction, and a set of double train tracks ran parallel to the river. As the river and the highway twisted, different villages came into my view: well appointed red roofed houses on clean orderly streets. Here and there castles were built on the high ground near the river. The hillsides on my right were densely covered with trees and beautiful greenery. Many boats filled with cheerful vacationers crisscrossed the river.

Long trains passed by me as I drove north. At Asmanshausen the railroad crossed the highway. The gates on both sides of the road were lowered and a long freight-train traversed in front of me. As I waited for the train to pass I realized how tired I was. I was quite tense about returning to Germany after an absence of thirty-three years and could not fall asleep on my flight from Boston to Frankfurt. I could barely sleep the nights before. When I agreed to give a lecture at an international physics conference near Bonn, I did not realize that returning to Germany would bring to the fore the worst memories of the Holocaust. Now I was mentally and emotionally exhausted.

I turned onto a side road, parked, and rested. To my left

was the Rhine and to the right were busy cafes and restaurants. It was warm and comfortable and the guests were sipping beer. Most of the guests at the cafes were in their sixties, old enough to have had participated in what had happened forty years before. They were lighthearted and laughed and talked loudly.

I began to fall asleep as another train passed. Its clattering noise brought back memories of forty years before. I was inside a cattle car with my family en route to Auschwitz. It was the middle of June and hot. The children were crying from thirst. We stopped at a station. We saw water, used to fill the steam locomotives, running down a pipe. A Hungarian peasant woman was standing nearby. Mother asked for some water. She refused, saying "My conscience does not allow me to give a Jew water."

I fell asleep and dreamed that my family was locked in a large concrete room and gas was pouring in. Everyone was screaming, but the SS guards outside were laughing as the voices of those inside became fainter. All I could hear was the SS guards' loud laughter. I forced myself awake and heard loud laughter from the cafes. I was still half asleep as I looked up the mountain to my right. I froze when I saw a cable car moving at the top.

Was I really in Golleschau, the concentration camp where my father and I had worked building a cable-cart for the German SS and where Father was killed?

I tried to force myself back to the present. I got out of the car and walked. I told myself that even though I was in Germany I was free. Still, I decided not to stay in Asmanshausen where there were so many Germans who must have participated in the war. But where should I go?

I started driving back towards Frankfurt. Maybe I could still get there before sunset, before the start of the Sabbath, so that I could observe the Sabbath with the Frankfurt Jew-

ish community. When I got as far as Rudesheim, a town about five km from Asmanshausen, I pulled over to rest beside the road. Maybe it was already too late to get back to Frankfurt in time. I would be in violation of the Sabbath if I got there too late.

I was near a hotel with vacancies. I longed for a bed. It would be easiest to stay in Rudesheim, so I registered. My room looked out on the beautiful Rhine and on the railroad tracks running parallel to the river. I lay down to rest and fell into a deep disturbed sleep. I woke up as the sun was setting.

The Sabbath was about to commence, the holy day that had sustained my spirits during the most terrible times. Even in the Camps I took great risks by working as little as possible during the Sabbath. Now I was determined not to let my stay in Germany disturb the sanctity of the Sabbath. I had to separate myself from my surroundings and create a Sabbath atmosphere for myself.

I located the two candles my wife had prepared for me and set them in a metal ashtray on my nightstand. I covered the table with a clean white towel and placed on it the small bottle of wine and the two *challot* (loaves of braided bread especially baked for the Sabbath) my wife had packed for me. I lit the candles and started saying the Friday evening prayers, welcoming the angels of the Sabbath to join my table in peace.

With the glass of wine in my hand I recited the Kiddush, the prayer for the sanctification of the Sabbath. I opened several conserves, fish, and salami I had brought from home, and ate them thinking of my Sabbath table at home with my wife and children. When I finished the meal I quietly sang Sabbath songs. I left for last the song we used to sing as we danced for hours at my Rabbi's table at the Yeshiva back in Hungary. I felt very lonely. I went to sleep.

The hotel was surrounded by restaurants and beer halls. Each was full with guests who noisily sang and celebrated. I fell into a half-sleep. About every half hour a train passed in front of the hotel. Each time, I dreamed that I was being transported to Auschwitz again, and my heart beat fast, as if it were all real. In the middle of the night a train woke me. I got up and looked out the window. My heart raced with fear when I saw that it was filled with tanks. I closed my eyes and reopened them. I was relieved to see that instead of German, they were clearly marked as US Army tanks.

Downstairs the guests were sitting outside and singing loudly. I went down to complain but I was told that this was the annual wine festival in Rudesheim and that no one would go to sleep until the early morning. Those who wanted to sleep did not come to Rudesheim. All night I felt surrounded by enemies.

When I woke up in the morning, even though I was tired, I was no longer hallucinating. I still felt surrounded by enemies, but was more calm. Reflecting on the previous night, I felt upset with myself. Had I become completely paranoid? I was in a small peaceful German town, where the people were interested only in their wine festival, and I was turning them into criminals. What had the people of this town really done during the war? I felt an inexplicable drive to find out, to convince myself that my suspicions were unjustified.

I went out and entered the first store I came to. I used my best German to tell the owner that I was a professor – I avoided mentioning that I was not a history professor – from the United States interested in the history of the Rhine region. Was there some way I could find out about the history of the town? The store owner directed me to Herr Schmitt, who, he said, was Mayor of Rudesheim from 1933 until 1964 and had written a book on the town's history. When I lo-

cated Herr Schmitt I told him the same story. My questions on the Jews of Rudesheim would have to be indirect. If I approached the subject directly, Herr Schmitt, who, as mayor during the Nazi years, must have been a supporter of Hitler, might freeze up and tell me nothing.

Herr Schmitt invited me in. I sat down at the table with him, his wife and his blond buxom daughter of about forty-five. He told me the history of Rudesheim going back to the year 900. When I asked whether Rudesheim had been affected by the Second World War, Herr Schmitt related that in 1944, near the end of the war, "The brutal American air force bombed this innocent town with only civilians, destroyed a large number of buildings and killed about two hundred people."

Was there any industry in or near the town? His daughter started to reply, but Herr Schmitt cut her off rudely and told her in a local dialect he thought I would not understand to keep her mouth shut. My repeated questions about what she meant and what Herr Schmitt had said to her were answered with "Oh, nothing".

Herr Schmitt suggested that I buy his book to get more information. I asked whether the stores were open the next day, and was told no, not on Sunday. I was in a dilemma. I could not buy the book that day, for as an orthodox Jew I could not purchase anything on Saturday, and I had to leave the next day for the conference. I asked Herr Schmitt whether he would be kind enough to buy the book for me today for it was not convenient for me to do so.

Herr Schmitt asked "Are you a Jew?" Yes, I told him. We agreed to meet on Sunday morning, when he would show me around town, explain its history and give me the book. We departed on friendly terms.

I was obsessed by how I could find out more about the Jews of Rudesheim. I walked the streets for a while, then sat

in a chair in front of my hotel watching the boats on the Rhine. The beauty of the surroundings calmed me somewhat.

I was struck by the irony of my situation. I was trying to isolate myself from the Germans and surround myself with the Sabbath, but my Sabbath was disturbed and I had become involved with the people I was trying to avoid. I was overwhelmed by the desire to find out more even if I had to ask Herr Schmitt some very direct questions.

The next morning the first thing Herr Schmitt said was, "You were really interested in matters related to Jews in Rudesheim". Yes, I was. He would show me the places I might be interested in first. Later on we would take my car around town and discuss its history. Herr Schmitt took me first to what was the *Judengasse* (the Jews' street), a narrow street about eight feet wide, where all the Jews were forced to live until 1870.

I wanted to find the synagogue of Rudesheim. Herr Schmitt took me two blocks to a parking lot. "This was where the synagogue was. In November 1938, on Kristallnacht, the SA (Hitler's storm troopers) came from Wiesbaden and burned down the synagogue. Three days later they removed the remains and built this parking lot, and it is still kept that way."

Even though he had been mayor of the town then, Herr Schmitt claimed to have had no part in all this. What else happened on that day? The SA made the Jews stand all day in front of their houses and forced the Rudesheim population to beat them. The people of Rudesheim had not intended to do it, he said. It was all the work of the SA, who forced the population of Rudesheim, against their wishes, to abuse their Jews. The SA destroyed the Jews' furniture, cut open the pillows and scattered the feathers in the streets, and did some other unpleasant things to them. But Herr Schmitt again

emphasized that the Rudesheim residents had been unwilling participants.

I asked him about his daughter's remark the previous day and why he had objected to it. Yes, there had been industry nearby, a women's concentration camp in Geisenheim, five kilometers from Rudesheim. About one thousand Jewish women prisoners worked there in a factory. They were supervised mostly by women guards who were very fine people and were very nice to the Jewish prisoners. This generosity was confirmed after the war, when the guards were freed by the German courts without any penalty.

I inquired about the cable car. It was built during the war. Was it built by prisoners who may have been in camp Geisenheim nearby? No, he said, it was built by Germans and designed by German engineers. I felt relieved.

After Herr Schmitt's tenure as mayor he had become the Archivist for the town of Rudesheim. He had the keys to the Archives in his pocket. Would I be interested in seeing pictures of the synagogue? We took a short walk and entered. Herr Schmitt took a book off the shelf. It contained numerous photos of different parts of the synagogue, of the entrance, the walls, the Torah scrolls and other religious items. He wanted to return the book to the shelf, but he reluctantly agreed to let me leaf through it. There were lists of members of the Rudesheim Jewish community going back to 1840. Entries like "A Jew with such-and-such a name converted to Christianity at such-and-such a date." I continued to turn the pages to the 1940s. Lists of Jewish families, with birthdays, and the dates when they were deported to Auschwitz, Buchenwald and other annihilation camps.

Next door to the entrance was a large room filled with bookcases from floor to ceiling, holding many rows of oversized books. Herr Schmitt told me that those were copies of the *Rudesheim Journal*, a weekly newspaper going back to

1840. I searched for the November 1938 issue, the date of Kristallnacht, but the *Journal* volumes stopped in October 1938. When I requested the volume from Herr Schmitt, he informed me that somehow all the volumes from November 1938 to May 1945 had vanished. Even though he was in charge of the Archives, he claimed that "No one knew who had taken them or where they were now."

I wanted photocopies of the lists of deported Jews. Since no store in Rudesheim was open on Sunday I asked Herr Schmitt whether he would photocopy the 1940s pages and send them to me. Yes, he would. I handed him money to cover the expense. In spite of my insistence he refused to accept the money. His face became dark and stern and he said, "We, the people of Rudesheim, owe our Jews much more than the few deutschemarks it costs to photocopy the documents."

What else could he tell me about the Jews of Rudesheim? Who else in Rudesheim had participated in Kristallnacht and in the deportation of the Jews? Only the SA storm troopers.

I walked with Herr Schmitt back to his house. I was standing outside talking to him when Frau Schmitt joined us. She had a big smile on her face as she said "You are a Jew, but in spite of that, you seem to be quite decent." I promptly replied, "Believe me, Frau Schmitt, that my parents and eight brothers and sisters who were murdered by the Germans in the gas chambers of Auschwitz looked just as decent as I do." Frau Schmitt's smile froze on her face as I turned and walked away.

I had fallen into this town accidentally. My paranoia had made me research its history. Now that I had learned that the town's inhabitants had probably participated in the murder of their fellow citizens, the Jews, I felt I had to find out what had really happened. I did not believe Herr Schmitt

when he claimed that the SA storm troopers had done it all.

It was time for me to leave for the conference. My only hope was to speak to a young German born after the war who would not feel any involvement in the 1940s events. I told the receptionist at the hotel, a young German woman with whom I had friendly conversations during the two day's stay, that I wanted to know what had happened to the Jews of Rudesheim in 1938-1945. Would she object to talking to me when I passed Rudesheim on my way back from the conference? She said, she would be happy to find out.

When I met her again on Thursday morning on my way back from the conference she had prepared a speech for me. She said she was not responsible for what had happened and she did not want to know or talk about it. The Jews were spreading terrible stories throughout the world about the Germans and she wanted to have nothing to do with it or with me.

Greatly disappointed, I walked towards my car. A woman got out of the car parked next to mine. I saw a pendant with a star hanging on her neck. My hopes rekindled as I said to her, "Excuse me, are you Jewish?" She said, "No, why would you think so?" I mentioned the star on her pendant, which I had taken to be the six-pointed star of David, but she showed me that it was a German medal with a five-pointed star. I apologized for my error. She replied "Never mind, I do not get so easily insulted."

About two months later I received the photocopies I had requested from Herr Schmitt. I wrote him a polite impersonal thank-you note. Another letter arrived a few months later. Herr Schmitt suggested that we correspond about Rudesheim. I took this to mean that he wanted me to forgive him and the Rudesheim citizens for what they had done to their Jews.

It took a good deal of soul searching before I could

reply to Herr Schmitt. Should the people of Rudesheim be forgiven or not? Under what circumstances should any people be forgiven for their crimes? A necessary first step, I thought, would be for them to feel true remorse for their deeds. Did Herr Schmitt feel remorse? Did Frau Schmitt who was surprised that a Jew could look decent? Did the Rudesheim citizenry? Had I not appeared on the scene, none of the people of Rudesheim would have imagined that they needed to be forgiven.

What kind of remorse and penance should the citizens of Rudesheim undergo? Maybe they should rebuild the synagogue and put a plaque on it "This synagogue was destroyed by the people of Rudesheim who unjustly abused their Jewish neighbors." But for whom would the synagogue be rebuilt? For the dead souls who no longer needed it? For the Christian citizenry of Rudesheim? I was certain that they would not appreciate having a synagogue in their midst to remind them of their evil deeds.

I came to realize that I was pondering an irrelevant part of the situation. Who was I to forgive or not forgive? What right did I have to speak for the Jewish residents of Rudesheim? What right did I have, just because I was a survivor, to act in the name of those who perished? Did I have the right to set Herr Schmitt's mind at ease because I was also a Jew?

My reply to Herr Schmitt was short. I wrote to him that I saw no useful purpose to a future correspondence.

A Visit To My Hometown

It was forty-one years since I had last seen my hometown, Janoshalma. For years I had wanted to go back, to walk the streets where my parents, brothers, and sisters had walked, to reconstruct my childhood memories of the town I was torn away from on a sunny day in May 1944, and taken to the Ghetto. I had no possessions from my family, not a picture, not a book, nor any personal items to remember them by. It had all vanished when we arrived to Auschwitz on June 29, 1944.

I often felt that not having been back to my town had left an important part of my life incomplete. Still, I was afraid to return.

Recently, I met in New York City my childhood friend and classmate Miriam, whose brother Sam lived in Budapest. When Miriam told me that all the buildings in the synagogue yard were still standing and were intact the way they were in 1944, I finally decided on a return visit. I had to see if my father's hiding place was still intact.

I knew that Father was taken away by the police from the synagogue yard and he had no chance to take along any of his belongings. Now that I was told by Miriam that the buildings were still standing and I knew precisely where Father's hiding-place was, I was hoping that I would find some of Father's personal belongings. I felt certain that he

must have had left his T'fillin as well as a number of Hebrew books at his hiding-place and hoped to find them.

My wife, Lea, and I arrived in Budapest and checked in at the Forum Hotel, a modern western-style hotel built by the Kadar regime to attract tourists to Budapest. The Hotel was on the shore of the Danube River, which wound its way majestically through the city. The river, with its seven bridges, presented a beautiful sight to the visitor. In spite of the relative poverty in Communist Hungary, the Danube and the City was pulsating with life. People by the thousands were filling the streets and were quite cheerful.

Budapest is a magnificent looking city. No wonder it was called the Paris of the East. It has wide avenues with electric trolley cars crisscrossing the major traffic routes. In spite of the beautiful view of the Danube, I could not enjoy it. My brother Yossie was shot and killed by the Hungarian Nazis on October 15, 1944, and his body was thrown into the Danube in Budapest.

The next day, Miriam's brother Sam, and his wife Eta, met us at the hotel. Sam and his wife had been living in Budapest since the end of Second World War. Sam insisted on driving us to Janoshalma. We did not want to take advantage of his friendship and hospitality, but he convinced us that he wanted to go to Janoshalma anyway to visit his mother's grave who was buried in the Jewish cemetery there.

We started out on the 115-mile-drive from Budapest early in the morning. On the way we passed many small towns that had significant Jewish communities before the war. Our first stop was in Kiskoros, a village of several thousand inhabitants. Sam was familiar with the town. We went to the synagogue, but Sam had no keys to enter. The lonely synagogue had been standing there for over forty years with no worshippers. We then drove to the old abandoned Jewish

cemetery. Sam paid the caretaker who kept the cemetery neat, the grass cut, and the gravestones clean. In the absence of loved ones, Sam took on the task of caring for the cemetery. We had similar visits to the Jewish cemeteries of Kiskunmajsa and Kiskunhalas, small towns on the road to Janoshalma.

Kiskunhalas was about ten miles north of Janoshalma. My parents had a number of very close friends in this town, who vanished when the Jewish population was annihilated by the Nazis. Only the abandoned synagogues and the Hebrew inscriptions on the gravestones were the reminders that Jews once lived here.

While traveling, Sam and I were reminiscing about old times in Hungary and about how difficult life was for the Jews in our town. We continued our drive south on a paved road, with one lane in each direction. My tension heightened when we unexpectedly saw a highway sign announcing the city-limits of Janoshalma.

By this time we were quite hungry and we stopped at a restaurant to have a bite. My wife and I were limited to a Kosher diet. We ordered soft boiled eggs, bread and butter.

Sitting at the restaurant, I spoke about what I remembered of the town. I recalled a giant church-steeple in front of Mr. Rosenfeld's watch repair and jewelry store. Sam told me that the restaurant we were sitting at was at one time Rosenfeld's house and the jewelry store. The church was right in front of the building, Sam told me. I walked out of the building to look. The church's shape looked like the one I remembered from my childhood. But it seemed to have shrunk, for it was much smaller than I remembered it.

Standing in front of the church I realized that I was close to the synagogue, where I spent so much of my life as a child. I observed the surroundings. I recognized the buildings on my right. On my left was a park with benches which

I could not recall – there was something missing in the surroundings. At first I did not know what it was. I suddenly realized that the town market used to be in the place where the park was. During the summer the peasants brought their fruits, grapes, and vegetables here. Many times I stopped here on my way home from the morning prayers at the synagogue and loaded up with fruit.

Being so close to the synagogue I had no patience to eat. I took my wife's arm for support and we started walking the short block towards the synagogue. I watched the houses on the right. I walked past a large hardware store, now closed. My childhood schoolmate and friend, Agi Rosenfeld, lived here with her parents, who owned the hardware store. The next building was the home and office of Dr. Klein, the local Jewish physician who provided free medical care to anyone who could not afford it. At the end of the block, on the left-hand side, I recognized the town's public elementary school. I always avoided this place. When the Christian children came out of school, they were looking for Jewish boys to beat up. I often experienced their anger on my body.

We reached the end of the block. Across the street in front of us, I recognized the stucco wall, about six feet tall, which surrounded the synagogue yard. The wall still had the yellow color I remembered. Inside the wall was the synagogue, the school for the Jewish children, an apartment for the teacher and another for the synagogue caretaker. I walked slowly and deliberately on the sidewalk along the yellow wall. Each step increased my trepidation of what I would find. I entered the gate. The first landmark that caught my attention was the well, filled with painful memories. This was where my father was denounced by Margit and beaten by the police.

Beyond the well, I saw the tall synagogue. I stood there mesmerized. I recalled the early morning hours, much be-

fore sunrise, on the day before Rosh Hashana, 1942, when Father and Mother and my older siblings walked to the synagogue to recite the *slichot* (penitent) prayers. With my eyes closed, I could see, even now, as my parents entered the synagogue yard. I stood there transfixed. I was standing on the ground that they walked on. The ground they stepped on felt holy to me. How I longed for the days when my loved ones were still with me. I could see Mother's small shoes and her refined features. Her intelligent, beautiful face represented the many generations of well known scholars and rabbis she descended from. Even after forty-one years, I could not believe that all those dear to me were extinguished when the brutal SS officer inserted the poison into the gas chamber in Auschwitz.

My wife and I continued to move forward. We stood in front of the synagogue. The white outer wall of the synagogue that I remembered so well was now covered with marble tablets, put up by the Jews who returned to Janoshalma after the Holocaust. Rows and rows of names cut into the marble, names of Jews from our town that perished in the Holocaust. In one small part of the marble memorial appeared the names of my parents and eight of my brothers and sisters. Reading the names, I tried to recall how they looked. It was very painful, yet I had no choice but to face reality.

I stood facing the memorial for a long time. I was leaning on my wife as all my strength left me. But I had to move on. I entered the synagogue. I walked to Father's seat. As I closed my eyes, I saw him near me with his *tallit* (prayer shawl) covering his head. As in old times, it covered part of his face so no one could observe him. Silently, he was chanting his prayers and silently he cried when the suffering of the Jews became too painful.

The benches were separated by wooden planks. Each

seat had a lectern in front of it, with a wooden drawer for the prayer books. The cover for each drawer opened on the top. I opened the drawer at my father's seat and turned up the wooden cover. On the bottom part of the cover I found writing, deeply engraved with a ball point pen. It read, "Klein Vilmos (which was my name at that time), Friday, September 1, 1939. The war broke out today in Poland. I hope this will not be bad for the Jews." I sat in my father's seat, and recreated the happy times when my family was still together and alive. I longed to turn the clock back forty-one years just to see them once more.

I stood up. My wife and I started opening the covers of the prayer boxes of the other lecterns. On one them was the signature of my brother David, two years younger than I. Below David's signature appeared a short interpretation of the Torah reading of the week. I touched the handwriting and kept my hand on it, trying to make physical contact with my brother, in whose death I felt partly an accomplice.

Like a drunkard, I ran from lectern to lectern, thirsting for more contact with my loved ones, for more information, turning over the covers and reading them. There were many comments by my brother David and myself.

> *"Klein Vilmos, April 1942. Thirty-four Jews from Janoshalma were taken away today to be transported to the Russian front."*

> *"Klein David, April 30, 1944. Stern Hershi and Reichard Maier and some other big boys in the synagogue were discussing the resettlement of the Jews in the 'East'. Some said that we should hide, rather than allow them to resettle us. Others argued that the war will soon be over. It would not hurt us if we would work for the Germans for a few*

months until the war ends."

I returned to my father's lectern. I looked for a prayer book which may have had his name or handwriting on it. None. I sat again in his seat for a long time.

There were still a number of old prayer books in the synagogue. I looked at each one, just in case I might find Father's handwriting on one of them. I found nothing.

My wife and I walked up to the second floor of the synagogue to the women's section. I found my mother's seat and sat down in her chair.

Images of my mother came flooding back to me. As a young Yeshiva student in the town of Ujhely, my mother's birthplace, I often came across people who had known my mother as a young girl. Family members and friends remembered how she had impressed those around her with her beauty and poise. As a 14-year-old boy, I felt a great sense of pride at being the son of such a charming and accomplished young woman. She was the beloved and beautiful daughter of a locally known Talmud scholar with seven children. Her father, determined to make a good match for her, soon began searching for a suitable husband. He would settle for nothing less than an outstanding Torah scholar with special character traits.

Torah study was not just a pastime in my mother's family – it was the central and most significant force of their lives. It was ingrained in their history and constituted the core of their existence. One of my mother's ancestors, Rabbi Yechiel Heilprin from Kovno, had been the leading Talmudic scholar in Eastern Europe in the seventeenth century. One of his major works "The Order of the Generations" can be found in the homes of Torah scholars as well as in university libraries to this day. Yechiel Heilprin left a legacy of Torah study and piety that reached down the generations. It was little wonder that my grandfather insisted on a true To-

rah scholar for his most beloved daughter. My father was considered an excellent candidate for this position and the two were married at age 18.

My mother wrote and read several languages. She taught me German and Gothic writing. Her devotion to her children was total and absolute. She taught us and cared for us tirelessly and took much pride in our achievements both in Torah and secular studies.

I watched my mother struggle as the decrees against Jews working in certain professions became effective in our hometown. The community became poor and could no longer afford to pay my father sufficient wages as Rabbi of the community. My mother became worn out from poverty and hard work. Sometimes when she would hear us squabble over who should do a certain chore she would start to cry. At the age of 10, I found myself identifying strongly with her pain. I resolved never to cause her pain by refusing her requests or arguing over such things with my siblings.

After the war, it was a source of comfort and strength to me, to know that I had always done her bidding and gone out of my way to ease her load.

As I sat in her seat I tried desperately to skip over the 40 years that had elapsed from the day we were sent to Auschwitz. I tried to return to the time she had been by my side. But try as I might, all I could see was the image of my beautiful 38-year-old mother desperately hanging on to her children, as an SS officer dropped the canister of poison gas into the gas chamber and extinguished her young life.

I returned to the men's section. Sam arrived. He had the keys to the sanctuary where the Torah scrolls were held. All eleven Torah scrolls were still there, unused for many many years. I opened some of them and studied their condition. As I unrolled the Torah, I saw that the different parts of the parchment stuck together after not having been used for

so many years. I could see my older brother Yossie, and Father making a blessing over the Torah, now unusable because over the years the letters had become stuck together.

I walked out and returned to the synagogue yard. I told Sam that the alcove where Father had hidden himself was above the Kosher butcher shop located in the yard. Sam informed me that about ten years earlier, part of the building had collapsed. So had the alcove above the butcher shop. I was very upset when I discovered that the place Father had hidden had collapsed and I could not recover anything from Father.

My wife and I ascended into the attic, next to where the alcove was located. We saw where the wall collapsed. We found nothing from my father.

I walked back to the well. Facing the street, the butcher shop was supposed to be on the right side. Now I saw that it was gone. I stood at the well and thought of Father, as he stood here forty-one years ago. I recalled the minutest details of his story that he related to me after I met him in Auschwitz. I also recalled the last time I saw Father before he was returned from Camp Golleschau, where he and I worked, to Auschwitz and to his death.

I inquired from Sam whether Margit and her husband, the former synagogue custodian, were still alive. No, they died a long time ago. In fact their only two sons, including the one that betrayed Father, died in the battle of Hungary close to the end of World War II, while their parents were still alive. I could not decide whether this information should make me happy or not. But I felt that fate has had its own retribution which the family had well deserved.

I overcame my impulse to leave town immediately. I wanted to enter the small Jewish School in the synagogue yard, where I had spent my happiest childhood years. The fence leading from the synagogue yard to the school had

been replaced by a wall. It now belonged to one of the state institutions and was not accessible to visitors.

I looked for the house we lived in. I knew it was near the lake and I asked Sam to help me get there. The lake had been drained many years before and the house where we lived no longer existed. I walked up and down, recalling the streets I shared with my parents and siblings. I came across a familiar intersection which I recognized, but could not immediately place. I strained my memory to remember what happened here. The proximity to Mr. Rakosi's grocery store where I used to shop helped jog my memory. It was here, when seven years old, that a policeman had found me riding my brother's bicycle without a reflector, a round red glass about an inch and half in diameter. He arrested me and put me in a jail cell. I was terrified because I had heard that jail cells were infested with rats that attack people. I screamed and banged on the door of jail cell all afternoon. Finally, as it was getting dark several hours later, I was released. My father was later summoned before the district judge and was given a heavy fine for my crime. The judge threatened my father that he should leave town "or else." It was never fully understood what "else" signified.

I left my hometown feeling that there was nothing for me there.

Epilogue

By the end of 1950, five years after being liberated from the camps, I became well enough to emigrate to the United States of America. I was hoping to find a life of hope and fulfillment that I so badly craved after the long years I had spent suffering, first in the camps, and afterwards in the hospitals.

After I arrived in the United States in June 1951, all of my efforts were concentrated on finding an opportunity to obtain a higher education. I registered as a student for two non-matriculating evening courses at Brooklyn College; one in elementary physics and the other in algebra. The concentrated effort I had made to read books and educate myself had now paid off.

During the day, I performed hard physical labor trying to support myself, evenings I took the courses, and nights I stayed up studying. After about a month of this rigorous schedule, my tuberculosis had reactivated and I was sent to be a patient at the National Jewish Hospital for tuberculosis patients at Denver, Colorado.

The recurrence of my TB deeply discouraged me. I had spent the last six years in hospitals, and when I finally thought I could start my education, I had a new setback and still could not plan any kind of future for myself. I decided not to despair and to prepare myself so that at some time in the future, I might be able to enroll at the university. I dedicated my free time at the hospital to solving problems in physics

and learning from a mathematics book that I bought at Brooklyn College. When I solved a problem, I compared the answer to the one listed in the back of the book.

In August 1952, I was allowed to take an entrance examination at the University of Colorado and was accepted as a student majoring in Physics. I completed my Bachelors of Science in Engineering Physics in 1956 and was awarded my Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics at Cornell University in 1961.

By the time I was awarded my Ph.D. in 1961, my wife Lea, also a survivor of the camps, and I had two sons. Somewhat later, when my research works were found in every major science library in the world, I was appointed a Visiting Professor of Physics at one of the well-known universities in the Eastern United States.

By this time I felt fortunate that I defeated Hitler's evil plans for me and for the Jewish people. I survived the war with a broken physical constitution, spent six years in hospitals to recover, arrived to the USA in 1951 with a sixth grade elementary education and ten years later in 1961, I completed my Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics. I was fortunate to have become a useful member of society, having been able to leave my terrible past behind.

Raising a new generation of children and grandchildren in the spirit of my Chassidic parents was much more important to me than my own recovery.

In 1979, I was appointed professor and head of the physics department of a well-known engineering and science-oriented university in the eastern United States. It was my greatest joy to teach and direct the research of my graduate students for the next eighteen years. I retired from the university in 1996 and moved to Israel in 1997, fulfilling my childhood dream of living in Jerusalem.

Bill Of Lading

January 22, 1945: Michael Klein was one of ninety-two Hungarian Jewish prisoners who, while working at a quarry at Golleschau, Germany, were sealed inside two cattle wagons.

On the opposite page is a copy of the original bill of lading, preserved in the Yad Vashem archives in Jerusalem, that describes the contents of the wagons as "property of the SS." It is a two-page document that was stamped by various station-masters who refused to accept delivery. As the train traveled aimlessly for eight days, many of the prisoners froze to death or starved to death.

Near Bruenlitz, Germany, the cattle wagons were detached from the train and left at the station. When Oscar Schindler became aware of the wagons, he had the bill of lading altered to read "Final Destination – Schindler Factory, Bruenlitz."

After unsealing the cars at his factory, Schindler freed the prisoners, helped many of them recover, and put them to work in his factory. Michael Klein was one of the prisoners who survived because of Schindler's decision.

Archives
Yad Vashem, Israel
The Central Archives
for the Disaster and the Heroism

Frachtbrief

Kurs
Nr.
Wagen Nr.
Eigentumsmerkmal

abgefertigt nach
über

Vom Absender nur auszufüllen, wenn er selbst verlädt

Wagen

G oder O (*)	Nummer	Eigentumsmerkmal	Ladegewicht kg	Wiegegewicht bei Privatwagen kg
G	113264	France		

An
in
Straße und Hausnummer

Bestimmungsbahnhof

etwaige Vorschrift über Weitersendung (*)
anliegende ausgefüllte Erklärungen (*)
für die Eisenbahn unverbindliche Absendervermerke (*)

Wirtschafts-Hauptamt
Amt II/1
Posen, Wilhelm-Gustloff-Str. 3

Golleschau, den 22. Jan. 45

Vorname und Name sowie Wohnung des Absenders
Golleschauer Portland-Zementfabrik
Aktiengesellschaft

Nachnahme
km
Barvorschuß RM Nr.
Barvorschußgebühr
Fracht (bis
F B Nr.

Abgangsbuch Nr.
Verrechnungskarte Nr.
benachrichtigt durch Fernsprecher, Postk., Telegramm, Boten oder: bereitgestellt
am Uhr
lagerstandgeldfrei bis
ausgeliefert am
Std.
durch

Kleines Frachtbrief (Muster E) A 4 4.a Königsberg 30 000 A/0120