

Lebn Un Umkum In Bialistoker Geto/Life And Death In The Bialystoker Ghetto

D. Klementinowski

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LEBN UN UMKUM IN BIALISTOKER GETO
By D. KLEMENTINOWSKI

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לעבן און אומקום
אין ביאליסטאקער געטא
ד. קלעמטיןאָווסקי

נייִיאָרק, 1946



דעם אַנענקען פֿון מיין ליבן פֿאָטער
 יֵהוֹשֻׁעַ הֶשֶׁל קלעמענטיןאָווסקי
 געשטארבן 1941 אין עלטער פֿון 88 יאָר אין
 ביאַליסטאָקער געטאָ

In memory of my dear father
Yehoshua Heshl [Tzvi] Klementinowski
 Died in 1941 at the age of 88
 In the Białystoker Ghetto

גרוס צו די לעבעדיקע עדות פֿון ביאליסטאָקער געטאָ
פֿרוי רחל פֿאַלק, פֿאַלעסטינע
פֿרוי מאַשע קלעמענטינאָווסקי, פֿאַלעסטינע
פֿרוי קאַסאָווסקי, פֿראַנקרייך
פֿרל. מוסיע אָפּענבאַך, פֿאַריז
ה' הערש ליקער, פֿאַריז
און דאַנק פֿאַר זייער ווערטפֿולן מאַטעריאַל.

Greetings to the Living Witnesses of the Bialystoker Ghetto

Mrs. Rachel Falk, Palestine

Mrs. Mashe Klementinowski, Palestine

Mrs. Kosowski, France

Miss Musye Ofenbach, Paris

Mr. Hersh Liker, Paris

...and thank you for your valuable material

Translator's Foreword

"Mama, tell him I'm a good girl and I want to live," my daughter pleads...

Just a few years after the Shoah, some surviving Jews from the Białystoker Ghetto speak out and bear witness. They try to put into words the incomprehensible - the destruction of Jewish

Białystok and the murder of sixty thousand innocent Białystoker martyrs who died at the hands of the German Nazis and their henchmen - simply because they were Jews. They testify to what they saw and experienced with their own eyes, and they accuse.

We learn of traitors in their own ranks, but also of courageous and selfless acts of resistance and solidarity by individuals for all others. We get an idea of the hiding places, the "malines", and the activities of the underground movements.

The eyewitnesses tell their own, highly authentic story. Their eyes and ears provide a harrowing testimony that reveals details and names, and paints a cruel picture.

**This testimony is a warning: Let us be vigilant,
never again fascism, wherever it comes from and however well it disguises itself!
Let's remain compassionate, let's be "a mensch", whatever happens!**

For those interested in other contemporary Białystok, Krynki and Ciechanowiec biographies, I recommend my translations of

"My Childhood Years in the Pyaskes" by Leybl Hindes

"Memoirs of a Woman from Białystok" by Rachel Kositzka

"To the Great World" by ChayeLe Grober

"Krynki in Ruins" by Abraham Soyfer

"Destruction of Białystok" by Srolke Kot

"As It Happened Yesterday" by Yosel Cohen

"A Shtetl in Poland" by Isaac Bloom

"Memoirs and Writings of a Białystoker" by Jacob Jerusalemski

My translations of the mentioned books can be read online for free at [JewishGen - The Home of Jewish Genealogy](#) and [Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu](#). Some are also available as printed books.

Beate Schützmann-Krebs

Translator's note:

Contents in [] are mine. Contents in () are by the author.

The transliteration of Yiddish and Hebrew words mostly follows the YIVO standard or the Yiddish-Ashkenazi pronunciation.

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Songs Of The Ghetto

The Song of The Białystoker Ghetto

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Mother's Will

Photographs

Yehoshue [Yoshua] Heshl Klementinowski

A kindergarten in the Ghetto

The ghetto cemetery

The place where the synagogue stood

Feather Drawings

By the Białystoker artist Benn - Paris

It is to B. Mark that the people of Białystok owe the first copy of a book about the life and tragic fate of their famous Jewish population.

In his description "The Uprising in the Białystoker Ghetto", he recorded, and I quote, "the words of the few survivors who, after the destruction of the ghetto, continued to fight in the neighboring forests".

We greatly appreciate his work, written with as much heart and feeling as if he had been a Białystoker himself. Fortunately, after the publication of his book, some Białystok residents who had escaped from hell and were living witnesses of the events in the ghetto until its last day began to appear.

In Białystok itself, material, especially photographs, came to light, reflecting details of the sorrows and sufferings experienced by the people of Białystok. Everyone saw something different and each survivor remembered something different.

The more details, documents and episodes we acquire, the clearer, more significant and more complete the picture of the Białystok martyrdom becomes for us.

Some of the inhabitants of Białystok, who had returned after having gone through the whole of the "Seven Sections of Hell", told us details of their experiences and clarified facts that were not entirely clear or not recorded at all in B. Mark.

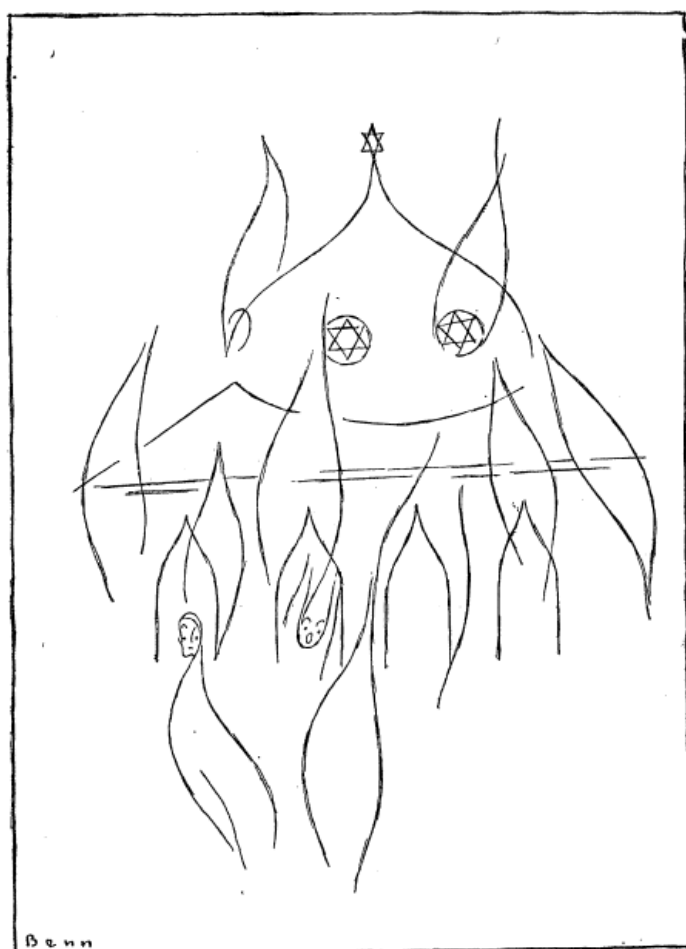
Mashe Klementinowski, the wife of the perished Białystoker surgeon Na[h]um Klementinowski, told us many personal details.

Mrs Rachel Falk-Roznboym sent us a detailed description, especially of the first sad weeks that Białystok went through, and also interesting details about life in the ghetto and in the "malines" [hiding places], where she, Rachel Falk, hid for many months.

Mrs Kosowski gave us a general, brief account of the events. Musye Offenbach, a niece of Dr Yukhnavevski, and Hersch Liker – himself the son of the baker Liker – also told us some episodes and experiences.

On the basis of these stories, and especially on the basis of Rachel Falk's descriptions, which we quote verbatim in some places, we want to give a complementary picture of the history of the Białystoker Ghetto.

Paris, March 1946



1 The First Days Under The German Yoke

The Invasion

On the night of Shabbat to Sunday, June 22, 1941 – the historic date of the German invasion of the Soviet Union – the Jewish population was still in a peaceful and deep sleep. Suddenly, the sound of airplanes can be heard. Frightened, curious people run into the streets to see what has happened. Some think that it is a training exercise of the Soviet air force. Others claim that it is already a German invasion, the beginning of a war between Germany and Russia.

Suddenly, the sounds of bombs exploding give the impression that the whole city is being bombed. Some bombs fall in the city itself. One hits Viskove Street. It hits the building that just houses a Soviet military base. The second one falls on Piotrkov Street (Avnet's Lane), next to the big building of the former old people's home. The third falls in Khazanovitshe's lane, behind Vilbushevitshe's pharmacy.

There are many victims. Among those killed were the old, long-time treasurer of the municipal office, Zalmen Veynraykh with his only daughter, the baker Goldberg, and many others.

This is the first signal for the Jewish population of Białystok, the announcement that the enemy is approaching and will be there any minute. Each individual is faced with the question: what are we going to do?

The Russians make all preparations to leave the city as soon as possible.

The Germans could be coming very soon.

But there is no time to think. Those who are willing and able run with the Russians.

Tragic scenes begin to unfold in the streets. Families that have lived together for dozens of years are separating, perhaps forever.

Mothers say goodbye to their children, brothers to their sisters, wives to their husbands.

Young people are the first to leave.

With energy, speed and determination, they leave the city, already surrounded by the enemy on three sides, and head east.

For five days, until Friday morning, Białystok is a no-man's-land, and there are neither Russians nor Germans in the city. But the fate of the Jews is sealed. The Jewish suffering has already begun. The demolition and looting of the former Soviet product bases begins. Whole crates of butter, sugar, soap and even children's toys are carried out, and finally the Jews are attacked.

They are already afraid to leave their homes and to be seen outside. There is no one to keep order and there are already victims.

Rachel Falk reports: "Friday, June 27, 1941, at 6 o'clock in the morning, I see three Germans with iron helmets on motorcycles coming in through the window of my room.

I hear one of them say to the other: 'Slowly but surely!'

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They were the first German spies.

With quiet steps I walk away from the window, approach my child's cradle with my heart pounding, and sit in dead silence. I'm even afraid to breathe out loud.

The streets are deserted, shutters and doors are closed everywhere.

The only people to be seen in the streets were a few non-Jewish Poles with happy faces.

They rejoiced at the arrival of the bandits, they greeted the murderers with flowers in their hands".

The Shul [Synagogue] Burns

It doesn't take long for the martyrdom of the Bialystoker Jews to begin. At 9 o'clock in the morning, the great shul is already burning. Although the fire is visible, one doesn't know that a terrible tragedy is already taking place in the courtyard of the shul.

A Christian woman who comes from there tells in detail about the murderous activity. She tells with triumph, with an extraordinary joy, "how they beat and burn the 'Zhides' ^[1]".

The Germans, entering through Mazavyetske Street, find the shutters and doors locked. They drag the Jews out of their houses and shoot them on the spot. Later the murderous gang moves to the city clock in the center of the town.

There they dragged 27 people out of a courtyard and shot them on the spot. Among those shot were Ash, a well-known feather and down merchant from Białystok, and his 18-year-old son.

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Like wild animals, the Germans throw themselves on the Jewish houses and set them on fire. And many of those who try to save themselves by fleeing with a few rags are caught and thrown alive into the flames of the burning shul.

They burn along with the Torah scrolls, along with their holiness.

There is extreme panic. The Jewish quarter is in flames. On one side of the city, the courtyard of the synagogue, Legyanove and Surazer [Suraska] Streets, the fish market and the surrounding alleys are in flames. And in the second part of the city, Jewish houses are burning, starting from the Polkovoyen Bes-Medresh, Nadryetshne Street and the surrounding area up to the large post office.

Those who manage to escape hide in cellars. But the Germans also throw hand grenades into the cellars. The Jews run back and forth like mad. They also seek shelter in the Christian streets, which are guarded by firemen to prevent the fire from spreading.

The Christian Poles, however, would not let the Jews in, arguing that the Germans would burn everything where they found Jews.

The city burned without interruption for 24 hours.

On Shabbat morning, the order is given to put out the fire. Once again, Jews are picked up, dragged from their homes and forced to help put out the fire.

Mrs. Falk recounts:

“On Sunday, June 29, I decided to go visit my family, who lived in Boyare [Bojary district]. But the Christian neighbors where I live advised me not to go. They say the road is very dangerous for Jews. I ignore their warning, dress like a Christian and set off. I walk through the ruins of Surazer Street. Everything is burnt down.

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Fire still smolders here and there. The large shul is a pile of ashes. All around, it's hard to tell where a house used to be. I can barely make out Sheynke Katshukovitch's bookstore, where I used to buy textbooks when I was a schoolgirl.

You can still see some books with burned pages. Standing on Surazer [Suraska] Street, I can see the fish market from afar. Everything in between is gone. I walk on through Gumiener [Gumienna], Fabritshne and Senkevitshe [Sienkiewicza] Streets and come to Boyare. All the streets are dead quiet.

All you see are locked and closed doors and shutters. People are afraid to show themselves in the streets.

The Germans are already going around and arresting people for work.

I'm the only Jewish 'child' on the street, and I see that I'm mixing with the Polish gentiles going to church.

As I walk on, I suddenly come face to face with German beasts. My heart is pounding with fear. Fortunately, they don't recognize me. I arrived in Boyare, where my family lives. It is still quiet there. They don't know anything about the terrible tragedy that has taken place in the Jewish quarter. I tell them the details of what happened and after a while I'm on my way back.

A Christian woman passes me and comments: 'Look, a Zhidovke [Jewess] has disguised herself so that the Germans won't notice her'.

I shiver. But at that moment, miraculously, a second Christian woman, who heard this, appears. She insults the traitor, takes me under her protection and accompanies me part of the way so that nothing happens to me.

I return safely to my house, where I am awaited with great anxiety and impatience“.

[1] derogatory term for Jews

They Make Order

Events moved quickly. There was already a German administration in the city, headed by Vladek Riegert, the long-time director of the city's electric power plant. He is a brother of Riegert who fled with the Germans when the Russians occupied Białystok in 1939.

Riegert summons Rabbi Dr. Rozenman and demands that a "Judenrat" be set up immediately. He promises that nothing bad will happen to Białystok. The Jewish population calms down a little when they hear this news. A "Judenrat" is formed, headed by Rabbi Dr. Rozenman and the engineer Barash as chairman.

Barash was the director of the Jewish community before the war. The Judenrat consisted of 24 people, including the long-time community activist Shmuel Punyanski, the factory owner Finkel, Subotnik, Jacob Goldberg, Dr. Segal, Rubinshteyn, Moyshe Shvif, the engineer Lipshits, Limen von Ruzhenoy ^[1] and others.

Jews began to go to work. They also wanted to get small amounts of food, which was becoming scarce in the city. Białystok was not prepared with enough products, because no one expected such a sudden attack by the Germans. Those who went to work brought bread with them. They were given soup and their hunger was satisfied.

There was a feeling that life was beginning to take a normal course, and people began to believe that perhaps under such conditions it would be possible to survive this difficult period until redemption.

^[1] I'm not sure if he had a last name with a "von/of" or if he was **from** the city Rożany

Buried Alive

On Thursday, July 10, the first major roundup takes place. Hundreds of Jewish men are caught and selected on the basis of their hands:

This time, the hands of workers are an amulet - these men are released. All the others are taken to Petrashe [a village near Białystok]. On the way to Vashlikove, not far from Białystok, they are buried alive in pits. Christians say that they were dug up the day before. Among the Jews was the well-known merchant Gottlib, whose documents were later found near Vashlikov, as well as the teachers of the Jewish High School in Białystok.

The "Shabesdike"

After a two-day break, on Shabbat morning, July 12, 1941, there is a cry like a storm that the Germans have sealed off the streets: Zamenhof, Kupetske, Lipove, Surazer, Senkevitshe and the Piaskes.

No one is allowed to pass. The men who go to work very early and don't know anything are the first to fall into [the Germans'] hands and are taken away.

Later the Germans begin to go from house to house and take the men away. Some are shot on the spot. The panic is indescribable. Again they try to hide in Christian houses, but as usual the Poles won't let anyone in.

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Cries can be heard, the cries of women and children whose husbands and fathers have already been taken away.

Sisters are already mourning their brothers. There are heartbreaking scenes in the streets. The roundup lasted three hours.

During this time, the Germans took away 4,000 Jewish men. They were the victims who were called "Shabesdike" in Bialystok.

Immediately after the roads are reopened, people run to the Judenrat building on Gumyener Street. The street is black with people. The Germans explain to the Judenrat that they have arrested the men as hostages.

The men would be released in exchange for money, gold, silver, furs, and other valuables. The Judenrat immediately publishes a notice to this effect among the Jewish population, and money and valuables begin to be brought in from all corners of the city. The necessary contribution is collected within a few hours.

The Jewish property is loaded onto wagons and handed over to the German authorities, and the people wait impatiently for the liberated men.

The night and all of the next day pass without the return of the men.

All these men, the "Shabesdike" victims, were gathered on the sports field near the forest in Sverinyets. People who lived in the area later said that they had heard terrible screams during the night.

Days and nights passed, but the men did not return.

They were never seen again.

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According to the reports of those who were in Auschwitz, one of the "Shabesdike", whose name was said to be Grinshpan, was in this camp. He is said to have reported that a unit of 270 guards drove the arrested "Shabesdike" on foot from Bialystok to the concentration camps. Most of them were shot or died on the way. This report has not yet been confirmed.

Among the "Shabesdike" victims was the doctor Boris Pines, the son of the world-famous ophthalmologist Pines.

According to these reports, Dr. Nachman Prilutski, brother of Noach Prilutski, was in Majdanek.

There is a message from Dr. Koperman that he lives with his daughter in the Soviet Union. A German, his former patient, who helped him escape, is said to have saved him on the way.

Raids like the "Donershtike" and the "Shabesdike" were repeated several times using the same methods. The victims disappeared and it was not known where their remains went. There were never any reports from them or about them.

The Germans once carried out a special "Aktion" against the intelligentsia. They came in a truck and took the lawyers Glinka, Granski, Veyntsier, Tileman and others from their homes. Barash tried to intervene. But this time his efforts were in vain. They were never seen or heard from again.

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New Regulations

A few weeks after the invasion, on July 11, 1941, during the last raid, the order to wear the yellow patch is issued: A yellow Star of David, one on the front of the left breast and one on the back, on the right side of the shoulder.

For the first time, a moral torment is felt. People are ashamed. But we also get used to it. In the blink of an eye, a new calamity arrives.

This time it's "the ghetto". The news of the ghetto is received with fear and horror.

All the Jews of Białystok will have to live isolated in a certain area, crammed together in a certain district, where they will be fenced in and locked up. No one could have imagined that the decision to create a ghetto would be made in such a short time. Many still didn't want to believe it, but unfortunately it soon turned out to be a sad truth.

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2 In The Ghetto

People Move

A few weeks after the Germans conquered Białystok, after weeks of physical annihilation and moral torment, after weeks in which the Jewish population of Białystok had already recorded thousands of victims, the ghetto was created; that cage, that confined space which the German beasts gave the Jews and in which they were allowed to move around in without restriction. The Jews received the ghetto decree with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they feared the isolation and the confinement, they felt that this was simply a prison. They also feared that they would starve to death.

On the other hand, some of the Jewish population expressed a certain satisfaction because it seemed that this would put an end to arbitrariness. The non-Jewish population would no longer have such power over them, and their thefts and robberies, which had become commonplace in recent weeks, would perhaps cease.

Some even hoped that the home invasions and murders would stop. Others, great optimists, saw it as a stroke of luck, a rescue from doom, a true redemption.

Especially when one saw and heard what was happening around Białystok, in Slonim, Lomzha, and in small towns like Krynki, Zabłudow, Tiktin, Geynovke, Norevke, where Jewish blood was being shed like water, where Jews were being buried alive, and Jewish places were being wiped off the face of the earth.

The feeling that they would now live together, cramped but "snuggled together", gave many the illusion of relief and the ability to overcome difficulties more easily.

The phrase "the sorrow of many is half a consolation" began to take on even more meaning and was seen as some comfort.

But whatever the relationship of the Jewish population to the ghetto, the order, which had not been expected so soon, stirred people up and caused great nervousness in Jewish life. People tried to guess and gather news about which streets the ghetto would occupy, but the Judenrat did not give out any information at all in order to avoid panic among the people who would have to take apartments inside the ghetto from outside.

But since there are no secrets and people eventually found out which streets were designated for the ghetto, the panic could not be prevented.

Those who had previously lived in the "blessed" quarter that later became the ghetto, were lucky. And anyone who had friends or relatives there tried to get a room to secure a place to rest his head.

When it became known that in the area of the ghetto there were some small "Polish" alleys, i.e. alleys inhabited by Christians, which had to be evacuated by order of the Germans, a hunt began among these Christians to exchange apartments. A start was made to secure contracts with the "Polyakn" [Christian Poles] for the time after the war.

Large sums of money were also paid for apartments in the ghetto. Others used violence to gain access to an apartment. A neighborhood office was set up under the direction of Mr. Tat, the son-in-law of Zamenhof Street pharmacist Beker, who was later to ensure order. But the Judenrat could not find a way out.

At first the Germans wanted to hand over to the ghetto the burnt Jewish district of Piaskes, Khanaykes and all the surrounding streets, but after the intervention of the Judenrat and after a proper contribution of money, gold and valuables, they handed over the district including Polne, Tshetstokhovske, Kupyetske, Lipove, Tsheple, Yuravyetske [Jurowiecka], Fabritshne, Bialostotshanske, Nay-Velt and all the surrounding streets.

They were given three days to move into the ghetto. For the first few days they didn't even have anything to move with. Women could be seen dragging their rags on carts. Many carried their belongings on their shoulders. Later, when the "Polyakn" saw that this "smelled" like a source of income, carts began to arrive in the city from the villages.

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They don't ask for money, but let themselves be paid with furniture, clothes and other treasures, and since there is no room in the ghetto for the furniture that has accumulated over the years, they give what is asked for. Almost only women were involved in the move, as the men were forced to work.

For three days there is a real mass migration in Bialystok, and you can't squeeze through the streets you have to pass. They are black with people.

Sinister elements are taking advantage of the situation, attacking Jews in the streets, beating them, robbing them, and sadistic Germans are standing, watching, and taking pictures of the heartbreaking scenes.

They then send the photos to their wives and friends in Germany so that they can enjoy themselves and see exactly how the "Führer's" orders are being carried out.

On the third day, Friday, August 1, at 12 noon, the ghetto was to be completed. The Jews must pay for the fencing themselves and procure the necessary materials. The Jews began to work feverishly.

One person sawed boards, another dug pits for the posts, others set them up, and so the work was done collectively and quickly.

The Jews built their own prison. Three gates were erected. The main gate was on Yuravyetske, on the corner of Senkevitshe, the second gate was on Kupyetske, on the corner of the Market Square, and the third gate was on Tshiste [Czysta] Street. From the inside the gates were guarded by the Jewish police, and on the outside there were German patrols.

The first hours after the erection of the fence and the isolation from the other side were terrifying. People felt so depressed and humiliated that they were ashamed to show their faces to others. It was like meeting in prison after committing a serious crime. Children cried, women suffered convulsions. But, as with all sorrows, the people calmed down and not only resigned themselves to their fate, but everyone began to let sparks of hope and confidence sprout in their hearts that the German defeat would not last long. And they imagined the scene of salvation when they would break through the historic fence and be released from prison.

Food Supply

Hoping that the hour of deliverance would come, they began to organize their lives in confinement and suffering. Food was prepared for a few weeks - God would provide it later. When the peasants learned that Jews were secretly sneaking out of the ghetto and paying with valuables, they came to the city and brought various products, for which the last was paid.

On the first Shabbat in the ghetto, acquaintances began to visit each other. There was a feeling of condolence. For the first few weeks, people sat quietly in their homes. The roundups of Jews had stopped and there was still enough to eat.

But seeing that the situation is not changing and that salvation is still far away, people begin to think about earning a living, about doing business in the ghetto and about going out to work.

An employment office was set up under the direction of Mr. Polyanski. The employment office tries to get certificates for the people. Everyone tries to go to work in the German factories, because then you get a better, more important certificate. Every day the Germans open new factories to work for the "Wehrmacht". Work goes on there day and night, and the Białystoker Jews assumed that the Białystoker [Jewish] community would be saved by the work and productivity of Białystok. To go to work, you had to go through one of the three gates with the checkpoint booths, where the Germans checked you every day as you went in and out.

If the check was "good", you could bring in food and other things from outside. Eggs, butter, milk. This was called "pgorim" [corpses]. These "pgorim" were sold in the ghetto to make a living.

If the inspection was "bad" and something was found, not only were the products confiscated, but the people were beaten, abused, and often shot on the spot.

Social And Cultural Facilities

There was no hunger in the Białystoker Ghetto. Everyone helped each other. The carters played an important role in supplying the Jewish ghetto with food.

They set up a brigade in the ghetto that went out of the ghetto every day and had special hiding places in their wagons where they brought in food. The Judenrat organized a cheap kitchen that served about 4,000 lunches a day. It also distributed soups and dinners to the children who had lost their fathers.

The Judenrat used all the free space in the ghetto for gardening. The work in the nurseries was directed by the gardener Sukhomlinski and supervised by the engineer Khmielnik of the "ORT" [Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades]. The vegetables were used partly for the "kitchen" and partly for the rest of the population. One of the open spaces, not far from Tshiste Lane, was turned into a cemetery. The use of the cemetery increased daily, since the mortality rate in the ghetto was high, although the sanitary conditions were quite satisfactory. The population itself took care of the sanitation and kept the ghetto as clean as possible.

There were 3 pharmacies in the ghetto, on Nay-Velt [New-World], Kupyetske, and Ruzhanske streets - in the "Lines-Hatsedek" [Linias-Hatzedek]. In the "Linias-Hatzedek" building there were also various medical cabins that could provide quick medical assistance to the population, and there was even an X-ray room. On Fabritshne Street, in the building of the former "TOZ" [Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews], there was a well-organized hospital.

In those days there were still good doctors in the ghetto.

Their names: Dr. Naum Klementinowski, Dr. Prilutski, Dr. Lukatshevski, Dr. Shatski, Dr. Savshits, Dr. Gavze, Dr. Landsberg, Dr. Kramazh, Dr. Kaplan, Dr. Zitron [Citron], and Dr. Treivush. Except for Drs. Citron and Treivush, all of these doctors later died. Ophthalmologist Pines and pediatrician David Kagan were arrested during the initial raids.

The engineers and activists of the "ORT", Khmielnik and Shmigelski, continued the vocational training of the ghetto youth as far as they could. The old institutions, the Trade School and the "ORT" courses had to cease to exist, but under the auspices of the Judenrat they organized and conducted locksmithing and electrical engineering courses in the factories where work was being done.

They continued this work until the last day, when they and their students were evacuated from Bialystok during the liquidation of the ghetto and transported to the death camps, where they perished.

As in the Warsaw and Vilna ghettos, the ideology and work of the "ORT" lived on in the Bialystoker Ghetto until its last breath. Mastering a trade, being a good worker, or even being qualified in one's profession often helped Jewish youth to save their lives from violent death, or at least to prolong their lives and thus enable them to survive the enemy.

In this respect, the specialized courses in the workshops were a means of self-protection, but also a policy of defense and resistance.

In the ghetto it was not possible to carry out cultural work on a large scale. The meetings of the Chaltz [pioneer] youth and the socialist and communist youth took place underground and had the character of resistance against the enemy.

It was there that the uprising was prepared, that the contacts between the resistance groups in the ghettos of Vilna, Białystok and Warsaw were organized, and that the Jewish partisans were raised and trained.

Cultural work, however, was done by individuals. Individuals secretly wove and spun Jewish history in their own way, each for himself, underground or in a small room, adding pages to the sad history of the present, writing down the bloody events of the day.

The old editor Peysekh [Pesach] Kaplan, the old historian Hershberg, and the old social activist and founder of Linas-Hatzedek, a veteran of the Zionist movement in Białystok and one of the oldest Zionists in the world, Yehoshua Heshl Klementinowski, wrote down their experiences. They saw and witnessed what was happening to the Jewish community, to the environment in which they led their hard, productive social lives.

Alongside them was the younger generation of writers: Shatski, Zabłudowski, Burshteyn, Gordon and others described in poetry and prose the slow demise of the Jewish population of Białystok.

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The old educated people died in the ghetto and their manuscripts disappeared with them. The younger generation died later, and almost nothing remained of their work.

A Jewish police force was established to maintain order. At first the relationship with the police was not entirely positive and young boys were not particularly eager to become policemen, but when the well-known factory owner Markus, the long-time commander of the fire brigade, became the head of the police, or rather the militia, people began to trust this authority more and many of Białystok's intelligentsia began to report to the Jewish police.

Markus became the commander of all three police stations. The first was in the Judenrat building on Gumyener Street, the second at Yurovyetser 21 and the third on Ruzhanske Street. Moyshke Berman, the son of the conductor Berman of the Choir School, and Viktor Bubrik were appointed as temporary commanders.

News From The Province

In this way, the Jews organized a more or less normal life. They began to feel safer, and confidently waited for better times to come. Only sad news came from the neighborhood. A number of Jews who had escaped from the German massacres in the Białystoker province and had managed to enter the Białystoker Ghetto told horrible tales of what had happened in Slonim, Lomzha, Tiktin and other neighboring towns.

Many Białystoker families had relatives in these cities and towns. These were the wealthy people of Białystok and the intelligentsia who had left Białystok during the Soviet occupation. They had settled in the surrounding areas and could not return to Białystok. Thus it was learned that the Białystoker leather manufacturer Moreyn and his family had perished in Slonim, as well as the industrialist Eydlman in Tiktin and the paint merchant Veynberg [Weinberg], who had his shop opposite the city clock. This news brought deep sadness to the seemingly quiet life of the ghetto.

Evacuation To Prushany

The Jews of Białystok were not lucky enough to enjoy peace for long. At the beginning of September 1941, the terrible news spread that the Białystoker Ghetto had to be "evacuated". The Germans were of the opinion that the Białystoker Ghetto, which had a population of about 60,000 people, was too small and that part of it - 13,000 people - would have to be deported to Pruzhane [Prushany].

The chairman of the Judenrat, Barash, tried to limit the German authorities' dispositions with the help of new large sums of money and new contributions. He succeeded only in reducing the number of evacuees to 10,000 souls. At the same time, the Germans claimed that the evacuation to Pruzhane was only due to the fact that there was a lot of empty space after the deportation of the population of Pruzhane.

The Judenrat itself has to draw up the list of people to be deported. The people selected for transportation are mainly those who do not have a work certificate. Large sums of money are paid for such certificates, but they are also obtained through patronage.

Finally, some of the poor population who had neither money nor patronage were sent to Pruzhane, including widows whose husbands had already been arrested by the Germans. The evacuation to Pruzhane took about two to three weeks. The people were transported in German trucks. They were allowed to take things with them, but when they got on the trucks they were checked and anything the Germans liked and wanted for themselves was confiscated.

The cost of transportation, which was a large sum, had to be paid by the Judenrat.

In this way, 10,000 Białystok Jews took the first step toward their extermination. A small number of them managed to escape and sneak back into the Białystoker Ghetto. The rest were deported from Pruzhane to the death camps.

These deportations began on January 28, 1943. Every day 2500 souls were deported to Auschwitz. The Jews made the 800-kilometer journey from Pruzhane to Auschwitz in French

freight cars - designed for 8 horses or 40 men - with 120 to 150 people per car. The journey took two days.

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Upon arrival at Auschwitz, 10 to 20 dead people were taken from each wagon. Of those who survived, about 20 percent were young, healthy, able-bodied people who were sent to the work camps. All others were sent directly to the crematoria at Birkenau.

When the first news came from Pruzhane to Białystok that the Jews had actually arrived there and were alive, albeit under difficult conditions, but still alive, the ghetto began to calm down again.

People went back to work and lived in the belief that the harder Białystok worked, the longer the ghetto would last.

Zelikovitsh And His Gang

Perhaps the Judenrat did not always perform its functions as well as it could have, but it did strive to maintain order, to have decrees [of the Germans] revoked, and to ease the fate of the Jews in the ghetto.

For a time, however, the work of the Judenrat came under pressure from the informer and swindler Grisha Zelikovitsh. He had infiltrated the Jewish police and taken on the dangerous task of negotiating with the Gestapo.

Zelikovitsh had five other assistants in the Jewish police. One of them was from Bielsk and his name was Gurland. The ghetto trembled before this gang of informers.

Zelikovitsh himself had the right to go in and out of the ghetto without a yellow badge and had been granted several other privileges by the Gestapo.

40

He had been an adventurer in earlier years, and now he used his special power in his relations with the Gestapo.

He took advantage of the sad situation to line his own pockets and stock up on Jewish goods for later. Knowing that this or that person was doing business in the ghetto, which was forbidden, he or his assistants would come and demand large sums of money. Those who refused were taken out of the ghetto and handed over to the Gestapo.

He used to extort money and jewelry from others, threatening that if they did not comply with his demands, he would turn them over to the German authorities as "active communists".

Later the people learned that he was also behind the idea of evacuating to Pruzhane.

For a long time Barash not only looked on indifferently, but on behalf of the Judenrat often gave Zelikovitsh vouchers for goods, gold, and jewelry, believing that these could be used to obtain a reversal of a Gestapo decree.

But finally, seeing that Zelikovitsh's audacity and demands were increasing, Barash looked for a suitable moment to expose Zelikovitsh, and he found it.

One day the Jews of the ghetto watched with satisfaction as Zelikovitsh was led into the ghetto with his hands raised, beaten, and thrown into the basement of the Judenrat building. The Germans searched his house and found furs and coupons. Sacks of gold, diamonds and foreign currency were found in the brick walls.

41

They also found documents he had prepared for himself and his family to emigrate to Switzerland. When the Gestapo saw that Zelikovitsh had also deceived them, they immediately arrested his wife. Four weeks later, both he and his wife were shot. That was the end of the first traitor from the Białystoker Ghetto.

Work And Forced Labor

After the liberation of the people from this gang - the first group of informers - a certain calm returned to the Białystoker Ghetto. People continued to work and live. Białystok has always been known for its industry and work, and the Białystoker Ghetto kept this good reputation. Industry developed from day to day. One factory produced woollen coats and quilted jackets. Another factory made uniforms for the German military. There was also a pattern factory with 2000 workers, a harness factory, a bandage factory, a tannery, and a knitting factory that made gloves and sweaters.

The factories worked in three shifts. Food was paid for the work, but of special value were the certificates the workers received. They were worth a lifetime. If nothing else, they were an insurance policy against death.

The work and production in the ghetto was expressed and immortalized by several songs that were created and sung in the ghetto.

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Very often a commission of Germans came to inspect the work in the factories. When the commission came, the Jewish police, by order of the Judenrat, closed the streets and let no one pass, so as not to draw attention to the large number of Jews in the ghetto.

The commission was always accompanied by Barash, who showed them what great and important work was being done in the Białystoker Ghetto. The Germans would leave satisfied, and Barash, after such a visit, would gain new confidence that the ghetto would survive them.

Despite the certificates, food and other privileges, many Jews avoided working for the Germans outside the ghetto. The Germans responded by imposing forced labor. Wealthy Jews escaped this through "malokhim" [angels], people who worked for them and were well paid.

Once the Germans demanded 200 women to work in Volkovisk. When the labor office called, no one volunteered. Then raids were carried out at night. 200 women were selected, mostly young girls, and sent to Volkovisk. This had a tremendous effect on the ghetto. People were very worried about the fate of the deported girls, especially since there were rumors that Volkovisk would be evacuated.

But this time the Germans wanted to show that they were "good" people. They wanted to prove that they would keep their word, so that the Jews would have confidence in the "labor transports".

43

They were not supposed to resist the later deportations and death marches. After a month of work in Volkovisk, the 200 women returned to the Białystoker Ghetto.

Underground Work – Messages From Other Ghettos

Immersed in work, isolated from the outside world, waiting for the hour of liberation that must come, the ghetto begins to receive news from time to time; sad reports from the ghettos of Warsaw, Vilna and Grodno. Underground couriers, girls from Białystok, Vilna, and Warsaw, who had shed their outward Jewish appearance and were provided with documents identifying them as pure Aryans, began to tell the truth about what was happening around Białystok.

The partisans Khaye [Chaia] Grosman, Lyonia Kozhibrodzka and others, who are in close contact with Polish and Belarusian partisans, bring news of what is happening in Warsaw and Vilna.

Individual refugees who managed to reach Białystok also confirm these reports.

The Białystoker Jews learn that the people, apparently called to work, are being loaded into locked, sealed wagons and deported to a camp called Treblinka, where they are being killed en masse.

Others even give details about this Treblinka, which is said to be located between Malkin and Warsaw. The unrest in the ghettos grows. Certain illusions begin to disappear. People feel the proximity of a great catastrophe.

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Some say that all children will be taken away. Others say that the greatest danger is for the elderly and people who can no longer work. The Judenrat tries to reassure people who want to know the truth.

As always, Barash relies on the thesis that Białystok is working. Białystok has large factories and brings advantage. But despite the "tranquilizer pills" of the Judenrat, one can feel a near storm in the air.

Białystok Gets Away With A Scare – But The Province With Blood

On the night of November 1, 1942, the ghetto was suddenly surrounded by the Germans and the gates were locked. Even the workers, who were supposed to go to work early in the morning, had to stay in the ghetto.

The evacuation was about to start any minute. People already knew what "evacuation" meant!

Everyone was already imagining the hell of Treblinka, which they had heard so much about. The Judenrat building was once again under siege. Barash leaves in the middle of the night to meet the beasts, with whom he negotiates for a long time. He finally succeeds in postponing the order until three months later. Three more months to live, another ray of hope and confidence that it could be postponed until the minute of liberation. The news from the Russian front that reaches the ghetto is good. The German defeat at Stalingrad is imminent.

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The three months may bring the final salvation. But the joy was always mixed with sadness. Barash announced that the Białystoker Ghetto had been spared this time with a scare, but he could not stop the evacuation of the province, and the deportations had already begun during the night.

That night, chaos reigned in the small Jewish shtetl. Around the Jewish houses, Christian carts, like funeral carts, suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The Jews had to get out of their beds, quickly get dressed, and get into the carts with their sacks and bags, which took them to certain assembly points. One of these assembly points was the barracks of the "10th Uhlan Regiment" in Białystok. Jewish men and women from Horodok, Zabłudow, Sokolka, Vashlikov and Krynki are unloaded there. The first days are days of horror and confusion. Children are dying of hunger and thirst in their mothers' arms. Young women give birth to children who are left to die so that they will not know the cruelty of their fate. Only after death had claimed a number of victims did the Judenrat succeed in obtaining permission to bring help to the assembled people and even to save some of them. These people were lucky enough to be either members of the Judenrat or other privileged people.

Barash already had in his hand a confirmation list of the people the Germans had promised to liberate, but this time the scum tricked him again. After two cruel weeks in the barracks of the 10th Regiment, everyone, without exception, was loaded onto wagons in the middle of the night and transported to Treblinka.

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When Barash arrived with the list in hand, all he found was a pile of dead little children, abandoned, forgotten, and somewhat faded rags.

Białystok mourned the victims from the Jewish settlements in the neighboring province and could not forget the terrible fate of the "evacuees". But Białystok did not have to wait long for a new enemy provocation, which plunged the ghetto into a new mourning.

Three Gallows

The Germans used to steal small quantities from the large edible oil factory that had belonged to the "Bialol" company before the war and where Jews were now employed. When the thefts

were discovered, the thieves accused the Jews of sabotage in order to divert attention from their own guilt:

One day, after work, the Jewish workers were thoroughly searched. A few nut kernels were found on one of them - the clearest proof that Jews were stealing and sabotaging German production. For this reason, 3 Jews were sentenced to be hanged. One of them was the well-known grain merchant Zalmen Bashnik.

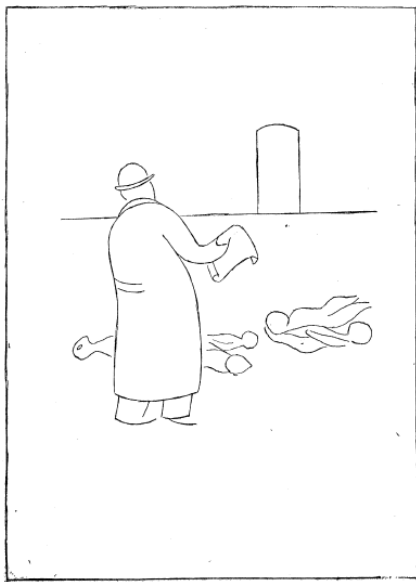
The gallows were erected on Gumyener Street, near the Judenrat. The three Jews were hanged in the presence of the entire Jewish population. The Jewish police, who were to be forced to carry out the death sentence, refused to do so.

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The Jews continued to work. Production took place both inside and outside the ghetto. Meanwhile, the three months that the Germans had allowed the Jews to live were coming to an end. And on February 3, 1943, the night of the final German defeat at Stalingrad, which led to the collapse of the front, the lives of over ten thousand Bialystoker Jews effectively came to an end.

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3 The Beginning Of The End

The First Evacuations

The Judenrat continued to negotiate with the Germans. He pointed out to them that the ghetto had just received large orders and that an evacuation would cause a labor shortage and disrupt production. Barash even managed to get a commission to come to the ghetto to inspect the factories. They were very pleased with the slave labor that the Jews were doing. But the criminals Rosenberg and Himmler had their own policy and demanded their victims. Direct orders came from Berlin and Königsberg - the city of Białystok, which had already been incorporated into East Prussia and counted as a real German city, had to become "judenrein" [free of Jews].

Nothing helped. The Białystoker Gestapo demanded lists from the Judenrat. And in the night from Thursday to Friday, at 4 o'clock in the morning, the first big evacuation from the Białystoker Ghetto began. There was extreme panic. The Judenrat had to hand over ten to fifteen thousand Jews to the Germans, and this time the Jews knew that the road did not lead to a labor camp, as the murderers now tried to claim, but to a concentration camp, directly to the crematoria.

Resistance Against The Enemy

The Jews of Białystok, warned by special messengers of the resistance movement and by some of those who had managed to escape from the Warsaw and Vilna ghettos, decided this time not to move like cattle, but to hide as far as possible in places that had been prepared in advance. These were cellars and so-called "malines". And they wanted to resist the enemy at the first opportunity.

The resistance was not yet prepared, it was still in the stage of organization, but a few brave individuals, who were already facing death, but without fear in their limbs, settled accounts with the enemy with the [biblical] motto:

"תמות נפשי עם פלישתים" [Let my soul die with the Philistines]. They faced the beast armed to the teeth, with their bare hands or with primitive weapons.

This time, the Judenrat, which had been relatively courageous, lost its balance. Although it knew exactly the purpose of the evacuation, Barash and his assistants drew up the list of victims, the list of the dead, and handed it over to the Germans. He soiled his hands by signing the physical extermination of 13,000 Jews, saving only the members of the Judenrat and their families, as well as a certain number of privileged people.

With the blood list in his hand, Barash drives with the criminals to the Gumyener Street and initiates the "Aktion [Reinhard] Pogrom".

The hunt for the Jews lasted eight days. The beasts raged from dawn to dusk. With the help of special technicians, they broke down doors, gates, cellars and hiding places. They were armed with hand grenades, had sniffer dogs, and used water cannons and gas.

But when the Germans attack the yard of the baker Zabludowski on Gumyener Street and begin to drag the Jews out of their houses and hiding places, 30-year-old Yitskhok [Itzhak] Malmed suddenly steps out and pours vitriol at a German officer. He burns his eyes. The second German tries to shoot Malmed with his revolver, but at that moment Malmed snatches the revolver from the murderer's hand and overpowers him. The other Gestapo men pounce on Malmed and kill him ^[1]. Malmed settled the score with two Germans and showed the first example of heroism. He did not give his life in vain.

The Germans wanted to avenge the audacity of the Jews, their willingness to defend themselves, and the killing of two of the "noblest and highest race". They arrested all the inhabitants of the courtyard, about 100 people, including the baker Zabludowski and his entire family. The Jews were taken to the Prague Garden and all of them were shot. The Germans hung Malmed's body in Gumyener Street, where it remained for the entire 8 days of the pogrom.

Alarmed by the Jewish resistance, the Germans now refused the help of Barash and his police and continued the "Aktion" with their own forces.

Feyngold also resisted on Gumyener Street. When he falls into the hands of the enemy, he spits in the face of the German officer and shouts:

"You didn't take Moscow! You didn't take Stalingrad! But in front of us you're playing heroes!"

He is shot on the spot.

There were many such episodes in which the Jews of Białystok, facing the enemy unarmed and feeling weak, used the only weapon they had: they spat in the faces of their murderers, expressing their contempt for them sharply and publicly. In this way they put themselves on the right level [as the enemy].

Three sisters with the maiden name Semyatitski [Siemiatycki] also put up a wonderful, heroic resistance: Rivke Kornyanski, Asna Tsale and Dvora Litvin [Deborah Litwin]. When they see through the window that the Germans are coming, they start pouring gasoline on the entrance from the third floor of their apartment. Firemen are called and they begin to hose the "buntovshchitsy" [rebels] down with water, but they respond with burning gasoline and vitriol.

In the end, the Germans manage to bring them down by force. Two of them are immediately shot, along with their children. The third woman and her 6-year-old son are taken to the

assembly point. With the help of a Jewish policeman, she manages to escape. On the way, however, a Gestapo man recognizes her as one of the three rebels. He takes her back to the transport on which she is sent to Treblinka.

55

The other two sisters who perished were buried in a common grave in the ghetto cemetery. Thus, during the first evacuation, the Bialystoker Ghetto offered elementary resistance to the enemy without any organization or preparation.

[1] Other reports say that Malmédy survived at first and later gave himself up to protect others and was hanged.

The “Malines” [Hiding Places]

As after a battle, the survivors were listed and the total number of casualties was calculated. Thirteen thousand souls were missing. The dead and deported were mainly those who did not have work certificates or who worked outside the ghetto.

Many people also saved themselves during the attack, especially those who hid in the "malines".

Such "malines" were built in different ways. Usually a long channel was dug under the floor leading to the hiding place. The preparation took several weeks. A hearth was placed at the entrance, from which one could lower oneself through a hole into the channel. The entrance was blocked and covered with wood, pots and other utensils.

Mrs. Falk describes how she and her family survived the days of evacuation in their "maline":

"There were 24 of us, sisters, brothers and children. As soon as daylight came, we tried to be completely quiet. We sat in dead silence. We couldn't get up.

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It was terribly dirty because we were lying on the sand, there was no floor. But the most important thing was to stay calm. We lived in constant fear that a child would start screaming, because we knew that the evil beasts were lurking above our heads.

It was the 7th day of the 'Aktion'. We can hear the Germans rumbling around in our apartment above us. Unfortunately, a child starts screaming and the Gestapo men start searching for us. They searched for three hours. They tore the whole apartment apart and couldn't find the place where we were hiding.

At that moment another child begins to scream. The child's voice leads the dogs to the opening of our hiding place. We hear them destroy the hearth and the voice of a Jewish traitor reaches us:

'Come out, or we'll throw a hand grenade.'

The Jewish police took an active and sad part in the 'Aktion'. Out of fear, the Germans did not go down alone to search, but sent the Jewish policemen ahead. So as not to attract the enemy's attention by talking, we could only look at each other. The question was on everyone's lips:

What are we going to do? And we all looked at each other with the same expression: Don't go out! Going out means death.

Whatever happens, let it happen right here.

Why should we go out into the freezing cold with small children, without food or water? But the killers and the police don't go away. Some of my family members who were sitting near the exit decided to surrender. They went voluntarily as victims to save the others.

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We can still hear them begging the Germans to let them go, but all we can hear is the sarcastic laughter of the poisonous snake. The rest of us move deeper into the corners of the canal to avoid being noticed.

Once again a policeman comes down and pulls out a 14 year old girl, my niece. We hear her crying terribly. But the policeman takes her by force and says, 'Come, come, girl! Nothing will happen to you!'

We couldn't react in our pain. We can't cry, we can't scream for our nearest and dearest. We sit like in a tomb, not like human beings, but like shadows, like corpses. We know that our hiding place is completely damaged, that the exit is open to us, and we sit suffering and scared to death until it is completely dark.

Suddenly we hear the footsteps again. This time it was some of us. My brother and a brother-in-law are coming. They were hiding in another part of the same house. They could not find their wives and children. An indescribable tragedy unfolded. Some fainted, others had convulsions. There are 12 of us left. The remaining souls must be saved. We must make a plan to live on. We have to find another place to hide. But who will let us in with children? After much effort and energy, we manage to find a place, just for 3 people. In the dark, we went to those who agreed to take us into their 'malines'.

58

We see terrible images. Many bodies are lying in the streets of the ghetto. There was no time to remove them. Windows and doors were smashed to pieces, as if after a terrible pogrom. We sat down in our new 'maline' and strictly observed the commandment of silence.

At 7 o'clock in the morning, the police and the Gestapo begin their search for 'malines' again. For a whole day we hear roofs being torn off, doors and windows being smashed. We also hear the screams of people being dragged from their hiding places.

This was the 8th day of the evacuation - the last. We survived it with great difficulty. It lasted as long as the Jewish exile. Finally, night came. The murderers left the ghetto. We went to see our former 'maline', where some of us had stayed because they had nowhere else to go. They say that the Germans were there again and when they saw the open 'maline' they threw a hand grenade in and left. By some miracle they managed to save themselves".

The pogrom ended in the morning. The Germans reported it to the Judenrat. The beasts were satiated for a while. The Jews began to crawl out of their "malines" and go to their destroyed homes.

The extent of the disaster is now visible. Mothers cannot find their children, children cannot find their mothers. Brothers have lost their sisters. People are beginning to pick up the bodies and take them away in large carts. You can also see carts with dead children, who often died in the "malines" at the hands of their own mothers. They did not want their cries to be heard.

[1] Other sources tell of mothers **accidentally** killing their babies by trying to muffle their cries with pillows.

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10 000 Bialystoker Jews Burned To Death

There were about 1000 dead in the streets and cellars of the Bialystoker Ghetto. 12,000 Jews were deported to Birkenau, near Auschwitz. This was the result of the first evacuation.

Hershl Liker from the bakery at 22 Yuravyetske Street, a boy now 18 years old, was also taken on the transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He miraculously managed to save himself. He says that of the 12,000 souls who arrived in the wagons at Birkenau, at the first call, after the "goods" had been unloaded, it turned out that only 11,000 were alive. 1000 were missing. Some had jumped off on the way and been killed, and the rest were found dead in the wagons, including many who had suffocated. Most had taken their own lives by hanging or other unnatural means.

At the very first roll call, no more than 250 of the 11,000 were separated and sent to Auschwitz for work. More than 10,000 men, women and children were taken directly to the crematoria!

Four weeks later, only 150 of the 250 were still alive. 100 had already died from the strain of hard labor.

"מי ימות ומי יחיה" - [Who will die and who will live]? There are already 13,000 fewer Jews in the Bialystoker Ghetto, and the survivors want to continue to live and work in order to stay alive.

60

However, it was planned that the Bialystoker Ghetto would not become much smaller. Suddenly 10,000 Jews from Grodno arrived in Bialystok. These were the last Jews after the liquidation of the Grodner Ghetto. Once again there was unrest about housing, because the German authorities had issued a decree that the area of the ghetto should be reduced. The cage had to become even smaller, and the rope was tied even tighter around the necks of the Jewish population of Bialystok.

Traitors "Number 2"

After the first evacuation, after the great pogrom and after everyone had barely survived, the Jews in the ghetto faced new suffering: a new gang of terrorists, the Yudkovski brothers. They

had escaped from the Slonim pogrom. Rumor has it that they survived the pogrom only because they were already Gestapo agents there.

In Białystok they walked around without badges. The Jewish population was afraid of them, but the Christian population outside the ghetto was also afraid of them. During the evacuation they went around with the Gestapo and helped to uncover the "malines". The Yudkovski brothers did terrible things in the city. At every opportunity they pressured people and extorted money. They had several lives on their conscience. The furor over them grew and grew.

61

When Yakev [Jacob] Freyman of the resistance group met Yudkovski on Fabritshne Street and stood face to face with him, he decided to rid the ghetto of this plague and shot him. He only wounded him, but a riot broke out over the incident, which came to the attention of the Gestapo. The Judenrat took advantage of the commotion and unmasked the Yudkovski brothers.

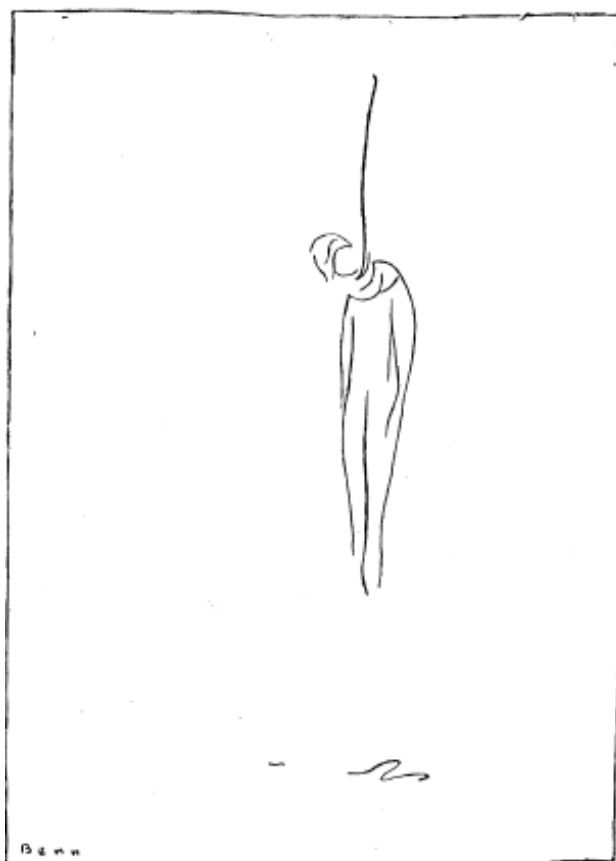
They were suddenly arrested by the leaders they had served. Later they were all shot, along with their entire families.

Only one member of the Yudkovski family, a sister, is believed to be alive. She was in the camp with Mrs. Falk. Her name is Anna Vintsikshtern [Winzigstern]. She was a "Kapo" [a prisoner with special functions, including the supervision of forced labor] and tortured her "subjects" terribly.

Life in the ghetto went on. The Judenrat continued to play its role as protector of Jewish interests. The tax office of the Judenrat, headed by Mr. Tiktin of the Expedition Office, continued to demand taxes, regardless of one's ability to pay. Those who did not pay or had nothing to pay were simply arrested. The people were then sent to the prison on Yatke Street, called "Sing-Sing" in the ghetto.

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4 The Ghetto Is Liquidated

Second Evacuation

For another 6 months the living corpses of Białystok agonized and lived in fear and torment. Confidence gradually disappeared. We felt that something was in the air again. The "Senior Storm Leader" Fridl [Friedel], the real head of the Inquisition, came to the ghetto in person and inspected the fences. A bad sign!

It is clear that the bandits are preparing a new diabolical plan. And on Sunday, August 15, 1943, the murderous order was indeed issued:

"Make Białystok judenrein!"

All the Jews of Białystok were to be deported to a camp. At 12 o'clock that night the ghetto was surrounded. The slogan went around:

"Save yourself if you can! Get to the 'malines' as quickly as possible!"

By order of the Gestapo, all Jews had to be at the assembly point by 6 a.m. Those who had spent the night in the "malines" were informed at daybreak that no violence would be used, but that they should report voluntarily to the designated place. They crawled out of their hiding places and began to think:

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What should we do? Should we go with the transport voluntarily, or should we continue to hide? The members of the Judenrat are seen moving into the Judenrat building with their families. Rumor has it that Barash has nothing more to say, but that the Judenrat is already occupied by Germans.

The Jewish police were ordered to remove their armbands and uniform caps.

Many of them had already done so earlier on their own initiative, when they realized that they would not be able to save their families anyway.

It turned out that only a small number were hiding in the "malines". The rest of the Jewish population left the ghetto through the gates of Yuravyetske and Fabritshne Streets.

At the assembly point, the gathered people stood like a herd of cattle about to be slaughtered, each with a small parcel to take with them to the afterlife.

There are cries of women who have lost their husbands and mothers who have lost their children in the confusion. The panic is indescribable.

On the third day of the mass evacuation, mothers were robbed of their children at the assembly point. The Germans took 1200 children between the ages of 5 and 14 from the square and brought them back to the ghetto. They consoled the mothers that the children were being saved so that they would not have to go through the difficult living conditions when their mothers had to work. Allegedly, the children would be taken care of. The Germans even had the cynical audacity to admit that the children would later be sent abroad and exchanged for German prisoners.

A few weeks later, when Białystok had been "cleansed of Jews," when everything had been liquidated, the "inquisitors" actually kept their word. They sent the children abroad, to Theresienstadt. Later they were taken to Auschwitz, to the gas chambers, where they ended their barely begun lives.

Before the assembled people were loaded for transport to the death camps, the beasts made a selection for the Majdanek camp. An SS man with a stick in his hand pulled 150 younger, healthier, more able-bodied slaves out of the lined-up women. These were the lucky ones, to be used for heavy labor in Majdanek and other camps, and still have a chance of not being sent to a crematorium so quickly. And some of them survived.

All the rest were sent to their deaths in wagons from the assembly point.

Armed Resistance – The Fight For Jewish Honor

As early as December 1941, an anti-fascist resistance committee was formed in the Białystoker Ghetto. Its task was to help the prisoners and to contact the first Jewish partisan group in the forests around Białystok, led by Misha Sibiryak. Their main goal was to create an independent resistance group and to prepare an armed resistance inside and outside the ghetto.

They [the members] had stolen their weapons piece by piece from the German camps. In the heart of the ghetto, at 8 Tshiste [Czysta] Street, they had prepared and set up a workshop where bombs and grenades were manufactured under the supervision of engineer Farber. Kukharevski, Sasha Goldberg and Odel Levin worked there.

The youth, who had recently tried to organize themselves more strictly, decided this time to resist under the leadership of the Anti-Fascist Committee, despite the fact that the enemy was incomparably stronger. They knew that the battle could not be won, but that they could "die like heroes". This was the slogan of the Białystoker Ghetto Uprising.

The youth said goodbye to their families and friends, gathered in one place and lined up to fight. They tore down the ghetto fences, broke through the German guards and heroically opened fire on the enemy.

At that time German blood was flowing in the streets of Białystok. Only with tanks and airplanes could "Greater Germany" suffocate the heroic resistance of 2000 Jewish Macabees. Some of them fell to the glory of the Jewish people. Only a small number managed to escape and joined the Soviet partisans in the forests around Białystok to continue fighting the enemy.

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(*) Details of the preparations for the organization of the uprising and the uprising itself are described in more detail in the publication by B. Mark, "The Uprising in the Białystoker Ghetto".

The Small Ghetto

After the second mass evacuation, i.e. after the Germans had evacuated the entire Jewish population of Białystok to the death camps, about 500-600 Jews remained. They formed the so-called "small ghetto". They were members of the Judenrat with their families, former Jewish policemen with their relatives, and a few others who had managed to escape the hands of the criminals for a short time.

There were more than 500 Jews, to whom the German rulers gave temporary permission to stay in this world with a visa for a few weeks.

The small ghetto was created by the Germans so that the hitherto useful Jews would be the gravediggers of this famous Jewish area before their demise. They, the Jews themselves, must liquidate Jewish life on this piece of land once called Białystok. They must wash away the traces of the blood of the Gestapo murders in the "Jewish-pure, genuine Prussian city of Białystok".

It took four weeks to clean and liquidate the small ghetto. When everything was done, even "the Moor could leave."^[1] The last 500-600 Jews were sent to a labor camp near Lublin. None of them is still alive.

On November 3, 1943, a large massacre took place in the Lublin camp. A large part of the Jewish population of the Białystoker Ghetto was murdered here.

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The Germans did not stop searching for Jews in the "malines" for another four weeks. They knew that there were still Jews in hiding. Those who were found were taken out of town and shot. Many of those hiding in the "malines" had secretly dug their way into the small ghetto. They paid large sums of money to do so. Later they were deported together with the rest of the Jews.

When it became known in the "malines" that the small ghetto was also to be liquidated, they seriously considered whether it would not be better to go with the last transport. The danger of being discovered in the hiding places became greater and the risk that they would not last much longer in the "malines" became more and more obvious.

The Germans turned off the electricity and water, and the situation in the hiding places became more and more unbearable.

In a hiding place at 26 Yuravyetske Street lay the wounded Shmuel Osovyetski, who had taken an active part in the uprising and had been wounded in the leg. He could hardly drag himself to the house where he knew there was a "maline". This "maline" was discovered. Osovyetski asked the Germans to shoot him. They complied with his request.

Even at night, when it used to be quiet because the Germans were afraid to enter the ghetto, patrols were now going around. They had learned that the hiding Jews crawled out of their holes at night.

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Now the Jews were not only afraid during the day, but they trembled even more at night. After the Germans had gotten rid of the living people, they began to take the things out of the houses and to collect the furniture and the remaining Jewish belongings. This work was carried out particularly thoroughly by Belarusians and Ukrainians.

The Bialystoker Ghetto ceased to exist.

^[1] "The Moor has done his duty, the Moor can go", a quote from Friedrich Schiller's "Fiesco's Conspiracy of Genoa"

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5 After The Liquidation

In The Cellar

"Mom, they're shooting! I'm scared! Let's hide in the cellar," Rachel Falk's three-year-old daughter called to her mother. At that moment, 30,000 Jews were already lined up on one side, ready to be transported to Auschwitz and Majdanek. On the other side, 2,000 young Jewish heroes began a battle with the German rulers.

Mrs. Falk reports: "At that moment I made a firm decision. I don't want to go to one side, but I can't go to the other side either, because I feel too weak. So I decided to go down to the 'maline' - me, my husband and my child, and some friends with their wives and children. At that time, we had gone to a lot of trouble and expense to prepare our hideout well. We had built our 'fortress' months before. It was a cellar about four meters long. We entered the cellar through an oven. From there we descended into a channel. From the channel we reached a small room with water and candles. We sat there with 9 adults and 5 children.

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We couldn't lie down or get up. We had to sit all the time. We sat in dead silence for the first 24 hours. We had bread and cold water for the children. We heard people running around above us, searching the apartment. Shots rang out constantly.

After sitting there for two days, we decided to go out late at night to see what news there was in the ghetto. We opened our hiding place and went out into the courtyard. The courtyard was unrecognizable. It was full of bundles that people had thrown away because it was very hot on the day of the evacuation and people didn't have the strength to carry the last of their clothes.

We would go into our apartment to cook food for the children and then go right back down to our 'fortress'. So we went out every night to wash and cook. During the day, we sleep sitting up. But sleep is often disturbed by the heavy footsteps of robbers searching around the house. The children understood the danger and held their breath.

We lived like this for two weeks. Every night we went out and began to meet other people who were also crawling out of their hiding places and looking for food in the empty apartments. We heard news.

Yitskhokl [Itzhakl], a 'kholets' [chalutz, pioneer] from the Vilna Ghetto, used to come to a 'maline' at 26 Yuravyetske Street. He is one of the insurgents.

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He was also Barash's adjutant, and he used to tell the news from the ghetto.

And the news was usually passed from one person to another in the darkness of the sad ghetto, in the underground life of Białystok.

We learned everything. We knew that the Germans had created a small ghetto with the remaining several hundred Jews. We also heard that this small ghetto would be liquidated in the next few days. There was a moment when we considered going out into the open to be taken away on the last transport.

But in the end the will to live prevailed. We decided not to surrender and to continue the passive underground struggle...

And again we went out every night, cooked a little food, mainly to keep the children alive. We had to walk a long way for water, to the Judenrat's garden. One night we suddenly heard shots and human footsteps. We managed to run down to the cellar quickly. Later we learned that a 'maline' had been discovered near us.

We didn't go out to cook for a few nights. The children ate dry bread and drank cold water, which we obtained at great risk to our lives.

More than once we cooked our food with rainwater.

Mrs. Falk continues: "Under these conditions, I once became seriously ill. I had a fever of up to 41 degrees [Celsius] for two weeks. I didn't get any help. Everyone thought I was going to die. I don't know how I recovered and survived.

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My whole life down there was a miracle. Every day a new miracle.

Once we heard people upstairs, in our apartment above our heads, taking things and furniture out. We sat there trembling so that one of the children wouldn't start screaming. Unfortunately for us, it happened that a mouse bit the child's ear while he was sleeping. The child screamed uncontrollably. We heard a Christian woman downstairs say, 'Oh, Jesus, a child's voice!'

The Germans immediately began to break up the floor. But they only hit sand, didn't look any further, and left. That night, four of us went to another place to bake bread. We waited for them all night. Only two came back. A patrol had seen them. My brother-in-law Shloyme Roznboym and a girl, Zina Kosovska, managed to jump from the third floor, save themselves and come back. The other two were taken away.

One of them, his wife and two children stayed with us in the 'maline'. Our family is getting smaller and we miss the two men we lost".

We Leave The "Maline"

"We remained under these conditions until November 2, 1943. One night, it was the night between Shabbat and Sunday, my husband and my brother-in-law went out to cook something. Ten minutes later we heard a shot and a running noise.

We can clearly hear footsteps leaving our yard. A few minutes later, my brother-in-law went out to see what had happened, maybe there was a wounded or dead person, but he didn't find any. Four women, one man and five children remained in our hiding place. Our courage and strength to fight on was dwindling. The water we had in reserve would soon run out. We had no food for the children. We didn't want the last man to risk his life for us, so we decided to go out together at night and try to get out of the ghetto. Maybe good Christians would hide us.

One happy day, Tuesday, we leave our 'fortress'.

'Mom, don't go,' my child begs me.

But we have no choice. My brother-in-law takes a hoe to break through the fence of the ghetto. The evening is dark, gloomy, but even in the darkness we can see the terrible devastation in the ghetto. Windows and doors are wide open and broken. Inside the houses, everything is torn to pieces. The image of the pogrom, together with the darkness, gives us a picture of horror. Finally we reach the fence. The fence we had helped to build two years ago. We take out a plank and think we are already beyond the ghetto. To our great surprise, however, it turns out to be just the fence of a segregated area where a German medical base was located.

We hear shooting. We are now standing in front of a gate, but we can't get through. We start digging a hole under the gate with a tablespoon. We keep digging until the hole is big enough to push the children through. We adults climb over the fence and are out of the ghetto! Not wanting too many people to walk together, we split into two groups. We walk down the Christian streets. With our hearts pounding, we open the first door of a house. It's so clean, so cozy, so warm. But we only want to warm up the children for a few minutes.

'Hiding Jews is punishable by death,' says the Christian woman.

And we walk on. We see an open toilet. We sneak in so that no one notices us.

We sat there all night. The children ate quietly a piece of bread and drank some cold water that had already begun to freeze. Our hearts ache when we see the children. They understand the situation. They are serious and very often we can hear a deep sigh coming from their chests.

In The Claws Of The Enemy

At dawn, the owner of the courtyard discovers us and orders us to leave as soon as possible.

We walk on. Soon we are at the train station. We want to go to Mazovyetske Street, my street, where everyone knows me.

Maybe someone will let us in. It is 6 o'clock in the morning.

We saw Poles going to work. We were walking without badges, but people started to look at us. Our faces were yellow, the blackness of the night was upon us. Eleven weeks without air

or light. People looked at us as if we were from the afterlife. The day begins to be beautiful. The sun is shining brightly, but we are getting darker by the minute. The children asked us to rest a little. We were in the square of the church of Saint Roch.

Suddenly, from a distance, we hear the enemy, a German with a Belarusian.

'Hands up, you're Jews!'

Of course we confess immediately. The children feel the danger and begin to scream.

'Mama, tell him I'm a good girl, I want to live,' my daughter pleads.

This makes the bandits feel human for a moment. One of them begins to calm the child down and takes us to the police station. The children are given food and hot coffee. It feels so good and warm to sit there. The radio is playing. Through the window I can see people walking and the sun is shining and the world is so beautiful. Meanwhile, the Belarusian tells me a secret: 'You will be taken to prison soon. They'll shoot you at night'.

I am satisfied. I wish it had happened already.

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After several hours of sitting, a record was made. We were ordered to take our bundles and were taken somewhere.

I hadn't seen the streets of Białystok for two years. Everything seemed so strange. Standing on the clock square, I could see the forest from afar. Everything has collapsed, everything has disappeared.

As we walked along, a few people began to gather around us, dressed up women with laughing children.

'Zhizdhi, Zhizdshi! Where did they come from?' they wonder.

We are led into Zamenhof Street. The street is unrecognizable. Bare ruins. People are running after us. The German takes out his revolver to drive the people away. We arrive at the square where Astrovski's Hotel used to be.

Today it's the Gestapo building. We were ordered to stand facing the wall. It was called the Wall of Tears. Jews who were caught with Aryan papers were taken there. They were shot there. Or they had to stand naked until they froze. The Ukrainian points his gun at us.

'Mama, I want to live,' cries my child.

I want to hear the shot.

At that moment I had only one wish. I wanted the first bullet to hit me. We'd been standing there for ten minutes, waiting for death every second. Suddenly he orders us to turn around and come with him. He led us into a cellar. There was a sack of straw on the floor.

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We all drop dead tired and fall asleep. Only I am not overcome by sleep. We stay there until nightfall. The Ukrainian takes 500 marks from us and brings us food for the children. Then a German comes in and demands that we give him the rest of the money.

'Mama, give him everything, we don't need it!'

In Prison And Beyond...

We are ordered to go outside. All around us are Germans with guns, as if they were taking away the biggest criminals. A truck is waiting for us. We are taken away. We are sure that we will be taken outside the city to be shot. But they let us out in the yard of the big Białystoker prison. We are searched. Everything is taken from us and we are led into a dark cell where criminals used to sit.

We fell on hard planks and slept through the night. We were awakened at 6 o'clock in the morning. Black coffee and bread were brought to us. The children threw themselves on the food and asked for more. Suddenly, the door opens and I get out of my cell. A guard comes up to me and looks me in the face:

'Oh, you're here too?' He recognizes me and tells me that my husband is in another cell. He brings me some bread and butter for the children.

In the evening, he takes me to the second cell, where I see my husband.

My joy lasted only a few minutes.

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I know that before us there were many Jews in the prison who had been taken from the 'malines'. They were kept there for a few days, and when a large number of them had gathered, they were taken completely naked to Petrashe near Białystok, where they were shot with machine guns.

Every night we expected the same fate. At the sound of the keys we were ready to go our last way, the way to death.

We spent two weeks in the prison. On the morning of November 14, 1943, we were ordered to pack our bundles and leave. In the corridor I met my husband again. I was happy to be with my husband and my child. Come what may, the main thing is that we are together.

But our happiness didn't last long. Suddenly a German with several Polish women appeared in front of us and took our children away. I don't know what happened at that moment. I didn't even get to say goodbye to my child. My daughter was already in someone else's hands, far away from me. I can still see the last glimpse of my daughter. I started to scream, but the gun hit me. My child was no longer there.

In the prison yard, the 'Chief Inquisitor', Obersturmführer Friedel, made a speech in which he regretted that we were in hiding and had to endure so much pain and suffering in prison. We could have avoided this. We could have been where our sisters and brothers were long ago.

A minute later, I am separated from my husband. I lost two people who meant everything to me forever.

We leave the prison and they begin to drive us forward, chasing us along the highway. We see wagons ahead of us. Men get into one wagon, women into the other.
We head towards the crematoria.“

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6 Once Again...

Białystok, on the border with Germany, on the threshold between Eastern and Western Europe, has often been the scene of great and dangerous battles throughout its history. Much blood of various peoples was shed in the vicinity of the city, but Białystok itself was soaked with Jewish blood in the years 1941-1944, in the battle of darkness against freedom and democracy. The Jewish population of 60,000 was exterminated along with Jewish life and culture.

On July 27, 1944, the Red Army liberated Białystok.

New Jewish life began to sprout on the ruins of Białystok.

And the prediction of the partisans came true:

"And where a splash of our blood fell to the earth,
There our strength and our courage have rebirth."

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[Drawing of the monument to the memory of the 60,000 murdered Jews of Białystok]

Songs Of The Ghetto ^[1]

The Song Of The Bialystoker Ghetto

(Excerpt)

In the Bialystoker Ghetto, Jews, there is a screaming,
In the Bialystoker Ghetto, where our hearts are grieving.

We sit and ask ourselves,
What will become of us?
They are chasing us, pushing us into the streets,
With the "late" [Star of David] on our lapels.

Women running with their children
Straight to the Judenrat,
And ask for their husbands:
When are they coming back?

Rivkele The "Shabedike"

(Excerpt)

Rivkele the Shabesdike toils in the mill,
She weaves one thread around another
Until it becomes a cord.
And the gloomy ghetto lasts so long -
My heart aches, I am so afraid.

Mother's Will

[Excerpt]

In a distant Lithuanian village,
Stands a small house on the side,
Through its windows, which are not large,
Little boys are looking out.

Boys with smooth heads,

Girls with blond braids,
And together with them,
Are looking two black eyes.

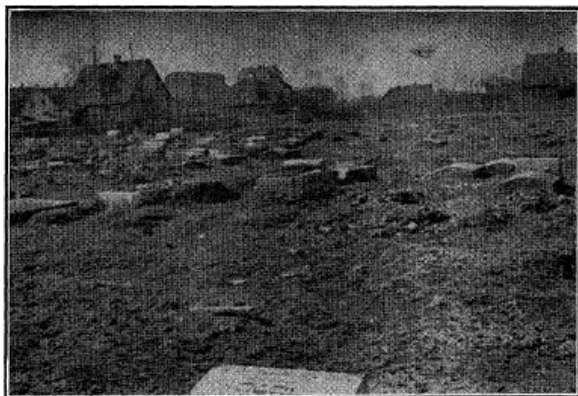
Black eyes full of charm,
And a small little nose,
Lips only good for kissing
And a head of curly hair.

His mother brought him here,
Wrapped him up late at night.
Kissed him, cried and lamented,
And softly she said to him:

Here, my child, will be your place.
Listen to your mother's last words.
That's why I brought you here,
Because your life is in danger over there.

Play well with the children,
And be quiet and obedient.
Not a Yiddish word, not a Yiddish tune,
But remember, my child, you are a Jew.

^[1] Please note that there are different versions of these lyrics. The original song texts contain rhymes.



דער בית-עולם אין געטא

The ghetto cemetery



דער פלאץ וואו די שול איז געשטאנען
(פאטאס גענומען פון ביאליסטאקער שטימע, ניו-יארק)

The place where the synagogue stood
(photos taken from the "Bialystoker Shtime", New York)

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א קינדער-גארטן אין געטא



דאס קינד מיטן ווייסן היטעלע איז די אומגעקומענע טאכטער פון מאשע קלעמענטינאווסקי
(פאטא פון ד"ר לונסקי — פאריז)

A kindergarten in the ghetto
The child with the white cap is the perished daughter of Mashe Klementinowski
(photo by Dr. Lunski, Paris)