WE LIVED IN A GRAVE

by HELEN KOTLAR

Translated with an Introduction

by Dr. Judah Pilch

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WE LIVED IN A GRAVE

FOREWORD

The story of Nazi depravity, cruelty and sadism is the most tragic page in Jewish history, as well as in the annals of mankind. When one reflects on the magnitude of the Nazi genocide one loses faith in Western civilization. It is no wonder that so much has been written on the Jewish catastrophe in Europe. In the last two decades so many books of various types and intelligibility have appeared that there exists an impressive library on the subject. In the course of the last decade, the literature on the Holocaust expanded to include reports of survivors, documentaries and dramatizations on screen and stage. Helen Kotlar's story depicts human endurance, one's ability to bear pain without breaking or surrendering. It differs from other survivors' books in that it is a record of an entire family of four — father, mother and two little girls — who lived at the razor's edge daily for four years, yet remained alive.

The story originally appeared in the Izkor Book, in memory of the town of Kurov, Poland, published in 1955 in Tel Aviv. As other memorial volumes of towns and cities which were destroyed by the Nazis, the Izkor Book of Kurov of 1151 pages contains documents, articles, diaries, reminiscences, portraits, listings of town people who perished, as well as the register of surviving townspeople

scattered throughout the world. Much of the material was prepared by the survivors themselves. Among them we find Helen Kotlar's story, written in Yiddish, as were all the writings in the book. This Izkor Book was brought to me by Helen and her husband, Harry. They asked that I translate into English Helen's story. I was reluctant to accept the assignment as I was engaged busily in a literary work which I was trying to finish. The Kotlars were disappointed. I looked at Helen's sensitive face and changed my mind. I offered to read the manuscript. As it is known, my experience in researching the Holocaust provides me with the tools to evaluate new documents.

When I read Helen's story I became totally engrossed in its contents. I was amazed at the author's ability to recapture both the terror and the fortitude of the martyred victims. Accordingly, I called Helen to accept the assignment.

In this book we read of the author's reconstruction of experiences in detail and in stages. The suddenness of the Nazi invasion of Kurov and its environs, the psychological unpreparedness of the Jewish population, the ways of humiliating, vilifying and enslaving, rounding up for forced labor, pillaging homes and demanding "contributions," confiscating belongings, physical abuse of the worse kind and the constant hunger, murder and rape. The Jews were crushed between the millstones of Nazi fury and the certainty of deportations to the ghettos and eventually to the death camps. All other occurrences of Nazi torment in the Kurov areas are reported carefully by the author whose sensitivities and insights developed in her the talent of a writer.

The ordeal of the Kotlar family was always suffused with a sense of determination to survive. They struggled against hunger which hung constantly over their heads, they suffered from the winter's cold and the summer's heat, they had to accept the fact that the Jew irrevocably was outlawed, not only by the Nazis but also by the majority of the Poles.

The reader will learn from this book the efforts of Helen, the strong-willed woman who with her husband, Hersh, found the means to keep the family hidden in the most unusual out-of-the-way places, such as stables, animal pens, attics, cellars and other enclosures. The most ingenious hiding place was the "grave," a deep underground dungeon dug under the floor of a peasant's home. The driving force for survival was to keep the children safe and the family intact. Even when it became necessary to send the children away, the contact with them was constant.

Many more phases of their struggle and the successful escape from certain death are involved in the recollections of Helen Kotlar. Of special merit is the author's appraisal of the Poles who were sympathetic and helpful and those who manifested an indifferent attitude to the victims of Nazi atrocities. The author reveals the double jeopardy the Jews were exposed to: the Nazi murderers and the anti-Semitic Poles.

The author's description of the anguish, despair and hope, is vividly portrayed and holds the attention of the reader for it is not only a uniquely moving account but also an heroic chronicle of a tormented family who carried its burdens with dignity. The father and mother appear as people endowed with emotional stability and spiritual vigor. These qualities helped the author and her husband to overcome the life-and-death situation for five consecutive years.

All through the years of the Catastrophe the Kotlar family was in close proximity to the Treblinka and Maidanek death camps. Desperate precautions were necessary. The various hiding places and especially the subterranean dungeon which they called the "grave" (they also called it *Kever* in Yiddish) saved them. Their survival as a family is one of the rare phenomena in the history of the Holocaust.

Judah Pilch

INTRODUCTION

I am neither a professional writer, nor have I had a formal education. I have written a book as a Jewish mother who has been sensitive to the suffering of her people ever since she was in a position to understand the impact of bigotry. As a mother who survived the greatest catastrophe in the annals of history, and whose husband and children suffered with her humiliation, disease and constant danger, I consider it a sacred duty to describe our experiences in 1940-1946.

I trust that my immediate family will not only read this book which I dedicate to them, but will call the attention of other children to the contents of this humble volume.

I am neither a prophetess nor the daughter of a prophet, but the visions and intuitions which were mine proved to have been close to reality. The readers of this volume will judge for themselves the unique place of these visions in the general scheme of our struggle to go on living. My father who came to me in a dream and who told me distinctly that the Nazis were coming was, to all intents and purposes, a saving grace. The same is true about my daughter's illness.

May it come to pass that future generations of Jews will find in my story the guiding light which sustained us in the Nazi Gehenna — a will to live and faith in the future.

Helen Kotlar

THE SUDDENNESS OF NAZI ATTACKS

I survived the Nazi Gehenna. I survived together with my husband and our two children — the only family of our town Kurov, Poland to survive in its entirety. Kurov, a small town, situated in the vicinity of Lublin, had about 3000 Jews. The Jewish community, which had been in existence for hundreds of years, was a center of Jewish learning, piety, and reverence for Talmudic scholarship. It housed religious, cultural, social and charitable institutions. In the early stages of Nazi persecution we thought that oppression of Jews applied only to us, the Jews of Poland, but in the days to come we would realize that the Nazi plans included the extermination of all European Jews. We heard about the Nazi theory of German superiority; they considered Jews as subhumans, an inferior race, a menance to humanity. We heard about the Nazi racial laws, their anti-Jewish propaganda and the persecution of Jews in Germany, later on in Austria and Czechoslovakia, but we could not know of their plans to annihilate all the Jews of Europe. We heard of the *Crystal Nacht,* when synagogues were burned, the bonfire of Jewish books, and about Jews being driven out of their economic positions, but we could not fathom the stories of Nazi barbarism, until we in Poland became its victims.

It was the first day of September, 1939. Jews were walking in the streets of the town, looking up at the sky, listening to the roaring of war planes, and sensing that something catastrophic was in store for them. A feeling of uneasiness pervaded the atmosphere. Crowds of people were seen moving on the roads, on foot, on bicycles, on wagons and carts. Seeing the fear and anxiety of these people fleeing their homes cast a great shadow over our own future. Could they save themselves and what will happen to us, what should we do, were thoughts which kept racing through my mind. "Dear God," I uttered. "Help us all."

Since we lived near the highway and saw the mass movement, we were unable to sleep. We worried. We knew that the Nazis were gaining control over much of Poland, and we heard of their plans against the Jewish people.

Everything in the house had been packed and stored in the cellar. September 4th was the last day we spent under our own roof. Living in the house at the time were my mother-in-law, a woman past eighty, my husband and I, and our two children: little Goldele, four-and-a-half-years old, and tiny Baskha, a three-months-old baby. I, myself, was young, immature, and very shy; yet I went about with zeal and determination to plan what to do. Actually, that very same night my husband and I ventured outside to see what was going on. It was as dark and as bleak as the feelings in our hearts. We heard the loud noise of traffic and the roar of warplanes. Lamps in the houses were not lit. That afternoon the police had warned the people not to show any lights. We learned from residents of Demblin and Pulav, two neighboring towns, who came to the house next door, telling the inhabitants that their towns had already been bombarded and that the damage was great. Everything we were hearing spelled disaster for us and our dear ones. Some people who started to flee from Demblin to Rika, were fired upon from low-flying warplanes and killed. The pilots would fly their

planes low, strafing the fleeing men, women and children, killing and maiming many.

We quickly returned indoors and began to discuss ways to escape. We did not sleep a wink that night. We prepared a large bundle in which we put together some things for the children, including a small wagon for the baby to sleep in. At dawn, my husband Hersh hurried to the village to find a peasant with a horse and wagon, but by that time not one peasant was willing to risk himself or his horse leaving home. I waited anxiously for Hersh to return. The children were dressed and ready to go, but I was eager to know what was happening in my father's home. Leaving my children with my mother-in-law, I ran there. I found the rooms overflowing with people, including relatives, who were getting ready to leave. My father stepped outside with me, and stood on the threshold to see what was happening on the street. The street was black with people walking, driving cars, and some on horseback. My father asked them: "Where are you going, Jews?" They answered, "We are moving on. We will keep going until the world provides a haven for Jews, a place of security for us." It seemed to me, that these Jews were refugees from nearby Radom. My father shared their view about the need to find a haven away from Nazi-occupied Poland.

I went to see my older sister. There, too, the house was crowded with people. I remember saying to my brother-in-law, Shmuel, "People are running away in all directions, and you sit at home as though all is well." I did not wait for an answer. I hurried to the peasant who used to drive us to the fairs, hoping to find my husband, but on passing our house I found that my husband had already returned. He had neither horse nor wagon. The Poles in the area were confused and afraid to leave their homes. I took my baby in my arms, my husband took little Goldele by the hand, and my brother, Sane, pulled the little wagon containing housewares. And so

began our wanderings with a child of four-and-one-half and an infant of three months. It was very difficult to walk through the streets. I was walking and crying, burdened by the sense of the great calamity creeping up on us.

On the road we met a good friend, Hershel Kleidman, Pessy's husband. Hersh said, pointing to me, "Look, Hershel, how she weeps." Hershel answered, "She has reason to weep; we cannot fathom what troubles face us." We were entrapped overnight in a defenseless position unprepared to cope with the new, frightening situation.

SALVAGING RELIGIOUS BOOKS

We continued walking across the fields toward a nearby village, where a peasant we knew resided. When we reached the village, we found it already crowded with refugees. I stayed with the children and the men went back to Kurov. We heard the noise of the planes overhead. I was holding a small dish near the mouth of the baby when we heard the thundering crash made by a falling bomb. I fell down with my children and the dish broke. The windows in the house were shattered and glass was scattered all over. This occurred three kilometers from Kurov at twelve o'clock noon on Friday. Soon after, some people came along and reported that our town Kurov was on fire. There were already many casualties and there was much wailing and crying. Soon my husband returned with his mother. He was carrying some of his mother's clothes, and she was carrying in a water pail several holy books — her Bible and her daily prayer book. With these few cherished possessions we came to the nearby village of Simy. My father, my sisters with a small child, and my brother, Sane, came later on. We began to move on by foot, leaning on staffs for support. It was very difficult for

me to walk holding the baby in my arms. On the way we met up with Manis's son, of the Lazer family, and his elderly mother, Sarah. When he saw me, he said: "Take my stick and I will lead my mother by the hand. With the cane it will be easier for you to walk."

In this manner we walked on to a second village. We would have liked to have reached a more distant habitation, but our slow pace made it impossible. We entered the village at night and stopped at a peasant's hut. We lay down on the hard earth floor, weary and exhausted, as if we had been wandering many days. Early in the morning we already heard the airplanes flying and bombing the villages and surrounding woods.

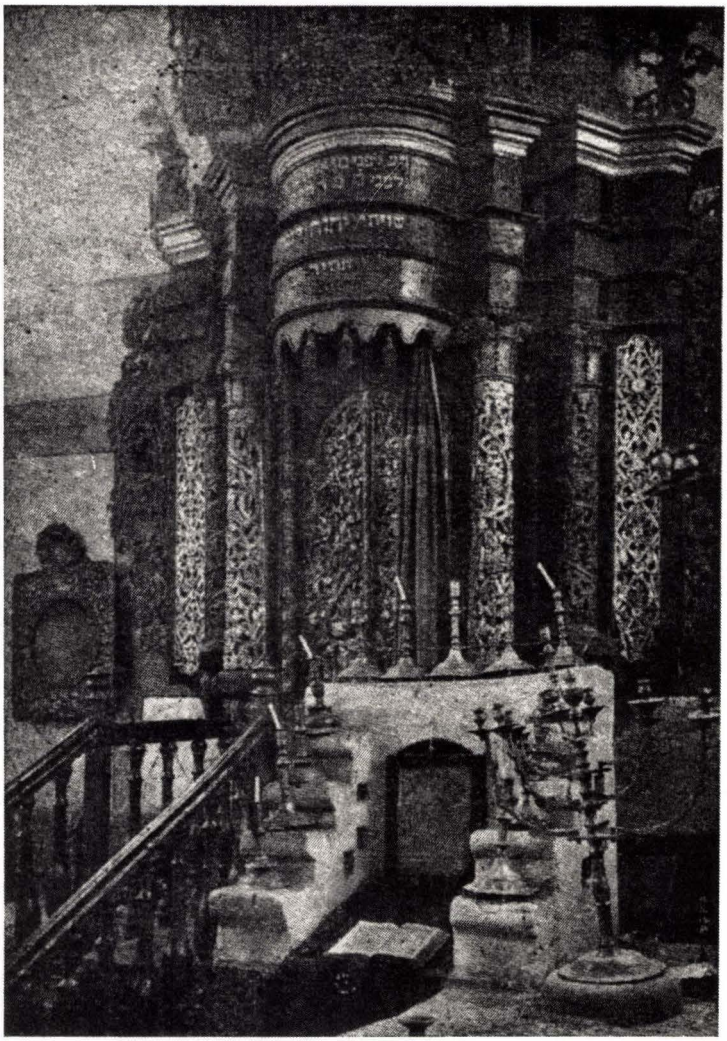
The Polish army passed through Kurov and stationed themselves in the local estate of the Squire (Poretz). In pursuing the Polish army the Germans bombarded and destoryed the city of Kurov. They also bombed the area where we struggled to find a resting place. While we were asleep, roving Polish peasants found our hiding place and robbed us of all possessions; even the clothes we had taken off at night were taken from us. When my baby, Bashka, awakened and I had to dress her, I could not find proper clothes for her and wrapped her in whatever I could find. The thieves also took the men's boots and they had to go barefoot. My brother Sane's clothes were stolen as well. Peasants from other villages came to our benefactor and told him that Jews were not allowed in the village and that we better move on. We started walking again. Masses of other Jews roamed the woods or tried to find shelter in the villages. The Polish soldiers were also on the run — hungry and frightened, they looked forlorn. Chaos seemed to reign everywhere. The Polish soldiers claimed that their comrades-in-arms were being shot in the fields by the hundreds — mowed down like wheat stalks. We experienced great anguish upon hearing their stories.

The bombing started again and I had to hide under the hay stacks with the little baby. My bewilderment and terror were beyond description. Overnight our lives had changed drastically. From a relatively secure and happy life to terror stricken fugitives, robbed of all possessions, not knowing what the next day or hour would bring. I clutched the baby to my breast listening to sounds of shots, alert to every possible danger. My husband lay not far from me with our other child. Ever so often he would raise his head and call out to see whether we were still alive. This went on for several days. At night the bombing stopped, so we would eat what little food we had — by then our bread was gone.

After a few days, Nazi soldiers reached our area. The atmosphere immediately changed for the worse. It took on the fierceness of a pogrom, so well known to the Polish Jews. People were running in all directions. The younger ones took to the road, heading toward the Russian border. They knew of the anti-Jewish measures in the past, and the harassment and murder during the Civil War. But on the other hand, there was a modicum of freedom in Russia and, what is even more important, the possibility of living in peace. Before the war there was contact with people between the borders of Poland and Russia. Furthermore, there also were many Jews in both countries who were related to each other.

YOM KIPPUR SERVICES

It was Yom Kippur. In spite of being exposed to danger, we brought together a *minyan* (a quorum) and conducted services. A non-Jew made available a small room in which we worshipped. Our Kurov synaoguge was destroyed and the sacred Torah scrolls and all the ceremonial objects were reduced to ashes. The Jews were afraid to save holy objects



Holy Ark of the Kurov Synagogue.

and books or to go into town to see if any of their possessions could be salvaged. Poles who came into the village told of the Nazis ransacking the Jewish cellars. Servants from the Kurov estate would come and point out wherever the Jews had something buried. In many a town in Poland there still existed a feudal system left over from the previous era. Many of the peasants whose land belonged to the "lord" (poretz) of the estate were similar to serfs in Russia and other countries. The owner of the estate in Kurov employed 300 people. Many of them joined the German soldiers in looting. The Jews would go late at night to see what could be recovered from the plunder and the fire. Hersh, my father, and my brother, also went late at night to see what happened in our cellar where many of our belongings were hidden. It was then that my husband saw two rowdies coming with the German soldiers pointing out our cellar. They reached the cellar, but could not figure out how to enter it. In the morning my husband and my father hired a few peasants who went to our cellar, removed whatever they could and brought it to us in the village.

However, we were afraid to stay where we were, in the midst of two kinds of enemies — the Polish bigots and the Nazis. So we hastened to the hamlet of Vonvolitz, a neighboring town which we would visit often with family and friends. We found quarters in the home of the *shochet* (ritual slaughterer). By then, the Germans had already entered the villages around Kurov, searched out the Jews and rounded them up for forced labor. My father and brother escaped barefooted from Kurov to Vonvolitz. There, with the help of Yankel Srulke Rimer's (great friends of the family) they found quarters at the home of a Jewish water carrier.

At night during the Sukkot holiday we still were able to light the candles in the Sukkah and together with the shochet and his family we observed the holiday according to tradition. In Vonvolitz we felt somewhat revived. For a short

while people conducted their daily life almost as in the pre-Nazi period. They prepared for the Sabbath, went to prayers, conducted a bit of business — all this done with a deep sense of fear.

Kurov was a destroyed town; its Jewish inhabitants had left. Our family members also were leaving. Their destination was Russia. Only a few of the Kurov Jews remained in and around the town. Among them was Yidel Hersh Stern. Others lived in a part of the shochet's house which was still standing. Also on Novorineck street the house of Yankel Feinstein was only half burned and its several cellars were partly saved. A few people continued to live there. These few were the remnants of a Jewish population of 3,000 souls.

It was during this tragic period that I really began to miss my mother. She was no longer with the family for she had died six months before my wedding. It was in Vonvolitz after we had found living quarters, on the anniversary of my mother's demise, that I decided to visit her grave and "to speak to her." I thought of her and recalled what a great and beautiful lady she was. She spoke four languages: Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, and Polish. I wondered how I could be at her grave in Kurov. Although we had just fled the burning Kurov and the danger was great, I decided to go to my mother's grave. In Kurov, I found my aunt and asked her to go with me to my mother's grave. To this day I remember the experience at my mother's tombstone. I sobbed bitterly telling her of the sufferings and torment of our family and the Jewish People. I felt that she was listening and I knew that she would help me.

A very severe winter set in. Jews continued wandering from village to village, staying in whatever shelter they could find. In most towns in the area very few Jews remained. They feared to be seen walking in the town or journeying outside of it. The Germans kept seeking men for forced labor. It crossed the minds of many of our women how much

easier it would have been if only our men had been women. Each day brought new decrees against the Jews; hauling them in, beating them up and cutting off their beards. To forcibly cut off the beard of a pious Jew is an inhuman act, tantamount to cutting off his very flesh. To most Polish Jews the beard was a symbol of one's following the dictates of Jewish religious teachings. The Germans constantly sought the men for the camps. In Vonvolitz, which was not on the line of the German advancing armies, on the other hand, many felt they were in the "Garden of Eden." Here one could see for a time the Jews observing the Sabbath, people carrying on the usual trade, though fearfully. Hence, life was much easier.

In the large cities like Warsaw the situation was bad. The fighting between the German and Polish armies and partisan groups was more intense and prolonged. There was constant bombing and many people were killed every day. Since there was no food to be had, people died of hunger. When the victorious Germans arrived, the exodus of Jews gained momentum. The young men and women headed for Russia. Among them was my brother, Chaim, who was at that time in Warsaw.

On his way to Russia he stopped in Vonvolitz. My father, David Rosensohn, my two sisters, Hannah and Frandel and their two children, a third married sister, Havele, and my brother, Sane, all traveled to Russia. In addition to the above mentioned group my cousin, Rivkah, with her six children decided to escape to the Ukraine. They secretly hired a teamster. It was winter and it was bitter cold as they left for the Russian border. I was discouraged from joining them with my family because of my tiny infant, Bashka. My husband and children accompanied them for a short distance, bid them goodbye and turned back. I thought to myself, as my heart ached, only God knows if we will ever see each other again. That same day I moved into the

quarters where my dear father had been living. We left all our merchandise securely walled up in the cellar of the shochet's house where we had been living. By this time there were daily robberies by hooligans who stole the Jews' hard-earned belongings.

Unexpectedly new harsh decrees were imposed upon our people. Men were rounded up for a labor force. One dared not go outside even if there was need for a doctor. At night the Germans moved around in the town, forcibly removing people from their homes and sending them off to unknown destinations.

NEW DECREES

The long-awaited summer came — there was beauty everywhere — nature was at its best. But not for Jews. One day we heard the sound of drum beats coming from a street in the center of town. An old peasant was standing beating a drum and calling out a decree in Polish: "All Jews must go to work. Anyone who does not go and is found at home, will be shot." The whole town, both men and women, came out to the middle of the street. Several Germans with guns on their shoulders sent the Jews to do hard labor outside of town — to crush stones and to work in the fields. The Germans worked them to exhaustion, kicked and beat them with rubber whips and forced them to run from the mountain (where Vonvolitz was located), down to the fields. The Jews that particularly displeased the German soldiers were nearly killed. The women who were left at home were overcome with fear, anxiously waiting to see their husbands return alive. Even after they came home from work at night, no one was sure what the night would bring. Everyone was alert to the sounds in the streets, to every movement. They constantly shook with

fear. The sound of German boots pierced our Jewish hearts. We lived this way for many months. Beatings, whippings and abuse of all kinds — such was the daily lot of the Jews. The worst assault was made in the town of Pulav. That town was not burned down. Thus most of the Jews were still there. The Germans attacked them one night and chased them half-naked out into the street. There they were beaten with sticks and whips. The German soldiers were lined up in two rows facing each other and the Jews were forced to run the gauntlet while the murderous soldiers showered blows in whatever manner they chose. This was done for sadistic pleasure and satisfaction. They told the Jews that they, the Nazis, have the right to do anything they wish, even to kill them like dogs. The Jews, beaten and robbed, fled in whatever direction they could go. These refugees were in a state of despair and fear. Most of them came to Vonvolitz where we were, since this town was considered to be more peaceful than other communities.

There was a German resident who lived in Vonvolitz for many years. He was a writer but little known to the public. In the early period of the Nazi occupation, he succeeded in deterring the Germans from molesting the Jews. In time he changed his attitude. He felt that it was unbecoming for an Aryan to help Jews who, as the Nazis believed, were a menace to Western civilization and to people of Aryan stock. The writer, therefore, no longer shielded the Jews. This new orientation manifested itself in many other towns where Poles felt free to condemn Jews.

It was in 1941 when the Germans called upon the leading Jews of the community to organize a "Judenrat" (a Jewish council) which would serve as the intermediary between the German occupation forces and the Jewish community. Similar councils were organized in towns and cities in all the occupied territories. They were set up by the Gestapo (the German secret police) in order to facilitate the

Gestapo's control of the destiny of the Jews. The members of the council took pains not to defy the Nazi masters in any way. These "assistants" of the Gestapo were detested by the Jews, especially when the council members "assisted" in sending Jews to the extermination camps. The Judenrat in the early period had to prepare daily lists of Jews to be sent out for forced labor. The Judenrat was anxious to please the Gestapo and followed their instructions. Ever so often groups of Jews were taken away to forced labor camps. There were many ways to avoid being put on the lists of men to be mobilized and thereby to escape this ordeal. The rich could bribe the authorities of the "action." In time the German officers enacted a new decree, i.e., all local Jews were to assemble in the town's public square where the civilian head of town would inform them that all Jews who were newcomers in one town or another must return to the towns or cities from which they had come. This new decree affected us in Vonvolitz. My husband, Hersh, belonged to the category of newcomer. He had to return to Kurov. I was left with my daughters and my mother-in-law. Life became extremely bitter, especially when Jews were prohibited from doing business or owning merchandise. The Jewish community became paralyzed with fear and bewilderment.

As already mentioned, we had taken refuge in the home of the *shochet* and had camouflaged the area in the cellar where our merchandise was hidden. We walled up half of the merchandise and the other half we packed in sacks ready to be taken away. German soldiers arrived and confiscated the yard goods in the sacks, but what we had walled up was not discovered. Someone must have betrayed us. We were fortunate not to have been discovered to be the owners, otherwise we would have been punished and possibly killed. So great were our fears that our limbs seemed frozen. We thanked God that no one had revealed who the owners were.

From day to day our situation became more and more



Forced labor of Jews in Kurov.

precarious. We, therefore, decided to leave Vonvolitz as soon as possible. We could no longer remain in the home of the *shochet,* since he was forced to leave his home so that it could be returned to its Gentile owners. It was in this house in which we built a secret place where we kept much of our goods. I was perplexed as no news had yet come from my husband. I had arranged for a non-Jew who had agreed to remove the remaining dry goods which luckily had not been discovered. But since there were German soliders everywhere it became too dangerous to see this plan through. It was terribly painful for me to have to tell the peasant to return to his home when he came with his wagon to help me out. After much consultation with friends, I managed to get six men to help me transport the merchandise to what we considered a safe place.

In a few days, I too received notice that I had to leave town. My husband now lived in Kurov in a cellar in the home of cousin Perl, the daughter of our Uncle Shlomo. In the middle of the night Hersh sent a friendly peasant accompanied by his sister to Vonvoliz. They stayed at the edge of town for fear of being discovered. I could not sleep all night. At dawn Hersh came to town and called out to me. I grabbed my sleeping children and left. My husband's brother, David, lived in a village called Polinov, near Damba. David took us to this town where we stayed for a few weeks. There, too, we were apprehensive and could not relax. Every day Germans came to the village looking for wood which the peasants would cut in the forests and bring home. If the Nazis did not find what they looked for the peasants would get a beating with rubber truncheons. At night rowdy young peasants would roam the roads and pathways. Once they shattered the windows where my children slept. When the shattered glass fell on my children's beds and injured them, I realized that I could not remain in this village any longer. It became even more difficult to bear the onslaughts. But where to go

now? What to do? In most towns every waking hour the Jew was subjected to indignities, humiliation, fear and physical abuse. We decided to return to the Kurov area, to the home of our friend, Velvel Ginsburg. He lived with Samuel Hanitzman somewhere in a field where they had found a place to hide. These people had been our guests a year ago before anyone could ever dream that life would turn our people into beggars and fugitives. They too had to flee from their home and hide out because the murderous German soldiers who invaded our town were grabbing men in the middle of the night, throwing them out into the snow and beating them to death. Our own Jacob Layser, my brother's good friend, was one of the victims of these murders. Shmuel and Velvel spent the horrible winter in Vonvolitz. They had no place to live, as was the case with so many Jews who had to flee their homes. The same was true with Moshe Neimark. My husband met him and brought him to our place. All this happened during the first winter of the war, when the Nazi plans to exterminate all Jews were not yet known, and the ghettos were not yet established.

One Sabbath, a sizable number of Nazis burst into the synagogue in Vonvolitz, beat up the few Jews who were there, including our beloved, saintly Rabbi, a scholar and a righteous person. They cut off his beard and sadistically cut into his flesh. The Rabbi was bedridden for a long time after this heinous attack. This was in the year of 1940.

BACK TO KUROV

After this horrible event we turned back to Kurov. We lived in a cellar, but it was home. German soldiers continued their torment of Jews, capturing Jewish men and sending them to work camps and to forced labor battalions in far

away places. One night when we were sleeping on the earthen floor in the cellar we were awakened by the screams of my husband's Aunt Esther, "Hersh! Run! Save yourself!" Hersh, Shmuel, Velvel and their two sons barely escaped. They bypassed the German guards. They hid in the fields in the bushes, but a cousin, Haskil Finkelstein, one of Samuel's sons, was caught and sent away. We never heard from him again. Later on , at twilight, some of the men returned, including Label, the son of the *shochet.* He was in hiding during the raid. He and his family found refuge in the cellar of Sholem Goldberg, the Rabbi of Kurov.

I was sitting in Shmuel's house worried and anxious about my husband. All the other men who were with him had returned, except Moishele Ginsburg who was overtaken by the Nazis. Hersh came in on the following day. Great was my relief to see him. He explained his delay in coming later than the other men as follows: He was on his way to the village of Simy when he spotted a barn full of haystacks. He overheard Moishe Blume's voice coming from the haystack. The two of them hid together for a night and a day.

Having heard that the hamlet had become more peaceful, we began to make arrangements to return to Vonvolitz. When we got to Vonvolitz we were able to salvage our merchandise which remained at the place where we had hidden it. We carried the materials around our bodies under our clothes and had to make several trips to Kurov which was 12 kilometers away. We also left some of the goods at the town's priest's house and at the home of other friendly Christians. It took us a few weeks to make these arrangements. We then started to build us a small dwelling on the same location where our house stood before the fire. The town officials gave us permission to build on our old site. We went to a village and bought a stable so we could use its wood. When the stable's lumber was ready to be delivered, we hired 10 peasants who transported the lumber in one load

and deposited it on our old site. Many of the Gentiles looked at us as if we were out of our minds; for they knew that there would no longer be a future for the Jewish people. They knew that the fate of the Jews was sealed. On the other hand, rumors spread that the Russians would not permit the Germans to occupy any more Polish territories to the East. These rumors raised our spirits and we dared to hope for improvement of our desperate situation.

We received a letter from my family who fled to the Ukraine, saying that they wanted to return to Poland. We dissuaded them from returning. We felt that they were better off in the Ukraine since Poland under the Nazis made life unbearable, especially for Jews.

The completion of our "dwelling" made us feel much better in spite of the fact that there was only one room for all of us; Hersh, myself, our two small children, and my mother-in-law. This was still an improvement over the way we were living before, hiding in cellars and going from pillar to post. Floundering around with our two small children was not only difficult but heartbreaking. I wrote to my father that we had built a hut to live in, which made him feel that the situation in our area had improved. It lies heavy on my conscience to this day that I discouraged my father from returning. Maybe he would have survived. Who knows?

THE JEWISH COUNCIL (*JUDENRAT*)

In times a *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) was created which dealt with a somewhat larger population; in and around the town of Kurov. There remained only one brick building in our town which survived the burning. It belonged to Yankel Weinrib and Simka Shaul. There were also a few small huts

on the street. The Judenrat made its quarters in this brick building. The Council consisted of six men who ruled the entire community in the name of the German secret police. A small number of other Jews, I must admit, worked together with the Judenrat. These people would advise the Judenrat about the inhabitants who still had some money, who could be sent to hard labor and those who could be deported whenever the Nazis were in need of additional laborers. I recall sitting in our hut, without heat on a very cold day, and with no money. Hersh had gone to a neighboring village to try to sell something so we could get food. Two men came into our place. One was a well-dressed young man who was once my brother Aryeh's friend. With him was a tall German officer who shouted all the time. My little children became very frightened. I asked these two intruders, "What is it that you want?" Laughing, they demanded 100 zlotys immediately. I asked, "What for?" They said that I had no permit to build this hut and I must pay up. When I said that I was alone with my children, they threatened to remove the door unless I gave them the money. They took the door away and when I ran after them pleading to return the door, for we would freeze, they began throwing stones at me. When they left I dragged the door back and placed it where it should be.

THE JEWISH POLICE

Those were dark and fearsome days. We suffered from the Nazi henchmen and from the Judenrat, their slaves. Since food was scarce, we bartered our goods for such food stuff as potatoes, sugar and flour. A new decree was issued warning Jews not to dare leave the town. Those who disobeyed would be shot. Moty Glazer who walked out of the town was shot and killed. The Judenrat made a list (for the

Gestapo) of names of some young people including Shlomo Mordecai Korona, a man in his mid 60's, who would be candidates for forced labor. Soon they were sent away to work camps. An uncle of mine, a dreamer, was also taken. He was subjected to the Nazi abuse and was turned over to the Ukrainians of German origin who tormented him to death. Such was the cruelty of these people. We knew of these tragedies but had to keep quiet for our own safety. My uncle's wife and daughter ran to the Judenrat weeping and pleading to save this man from a terrible fate, but to no avail. We were all helpless. When the group of young people who were sent away to forced labor returned, we were happy. But Shlomo Mordecai Korona was too old and weak to survive the harsh treatment and had fallen a victim. Sadness again engulfed our people. Those who still had some money were able to save themselves temporarily by bribing the captors.

A Jewish police was formed. They carried clubs and whips to enforce the Gestapo's will. More and more pressure was placed on the Jews who could not escape the forced labor. A group of SS men arrived ordering the Judenrat to assemble all Jews for deportation. The Jewish police assisted the Germans and local Poles in forcing Jews to the jail, where Gestapo officers made decisions regarding Jewish fate.

We were in need of money because my mother-in-law was sick. Hersh and I were bartering dry goods for food, when a German officer and Jewish policeman entered our hut. The Jewish policeman told the German to take my husband, who will make a good worker. Thus, my husband was taken away to the forest to crush stones, dig ditches and do all kinds of hard labor. There Hersh witnessed many atrocities. Physically weak Jews were forced to carry very heavy loads, and immature youth were made to work to extreme exhaustion. In that forest, Hersh met David, Michel's son, a physically weak person. Hersh helped him, whenever the Germans were out of sight, to carry heavy sacks of sand

— otherwise David would not have survived. Fortunately, they were released one night and returned home. Jews were constantly humiliated. The Nazis would slap them around for any reason they saw fit. Hersh, too, experienced humiliation, when, one night leaving the work camp for home, a Nazi guard approached and slapped him viciously across the face, screaming: "How dare you not give the proper greeting to your superior." Hersh took off his cap and tried to greet the Nazi in an acceptable manner. The Nazi slapped him again, ordered him to lie in the snow, kicked him and yelled: "Are you my friend that you greet me?" This was an example of the Nazi treatment of Jews.

NAZI EXPLOITATIONS

As early as 1940 the German officials began to place compulsory taxes upon the Jewish communities of Poland. Jews had to raise money in order to free the hostages the Germans would capture for that purpose. The Judenrat divided the population into special categories with the view to assessing the amount of taxation for the rich, the middle class and the poor. Hersh and I were placed in the category of "the rich." The policy was to make as much money as possible from everyone, whether rich or poor. If we didn't concede to their demands my husband would be taken into custody. We had to abide by the "law" of our enemies.

We tried to live as normally as possible in our hut. The days were very cold in mid-winter. Once on a Saturday, when my mother-in-law was ill in bed, Hersh was washing up and the children were already put to bed, a loud knocking sounded and a young lad (once a neighbor of ours) came in accompanied by a policeman. The police shouted, "Hersh, come with me!" "Where to?" he asked. "You will see, you

will not be alone," was his answer. I grabbed a shawl and followed my husband. Groups of people were on the street huddled together in small groups, no one knowing where he would be taken. Eventually they were taken to jail. I ran back home. On the way I met a member of the Judenrat. When I asked him where they were taking the men who were arrested, he suggested that I ask someone else. This man was warmly dressed and most likely on his way to obtain whiskey. He was very pompous. I knew that he was an affluent man and asked him bluntly: "Do you want money?" When he told me of the sum he required, I shivered and asked the simple question, "Not less?" The man responded: "I know that your husband would refuse to pay. So let him rot in jail, but you are wiser and understand that there is no alternative." The sum was very large. We had to go late at night to get the money, but we managed to pay him off. Hersh was then freed.

THE NAZIS AMUSE THEMSELVES

The severe cold and the events of that day made me ill. I caught a chill and was bedridden for several weeks, suffering repeated relapses. There was no local doctor. The Polish physician who came on call from the town Rubishov did not treat Jews. Hersh convinced him that his effort will be compensated and got him to come to see me. The doctor said that I must go to Lublin because he had neither the proper medication nor the facilities that were needed. I was taken in secrecy to Lublin, a city that was not bombarded by the invading Nazis. There a doctor examined me and gave me the necessary medication. I stayed for a few days in a cousin's home. There a number of Jews from Kurov in Lublin and some of them, all good friends, came to visit me — Pesil and

her husband, Sorele Teitelbaum and Baruch Hine. Baruch who had just come from the Ukraine, brought regards from my father and sister. He described the situation in the Ukraine in a trembling voice — conditions were bad, living facilities overcrowded, and people were generally in a depressed state. He came back to Lublin, unfortunately, to face another hell; for the lot of the Jews in Poland was even worse than that of the Ukraine. It was the last time I saw friends and close members of my family. The year was 1941.

Little by little the Germans began to take away all means of earning a livelihood. Denunciations were frequent occurrences. I returned home to Kurov only partially recovered, back to a world of grabbing, beating, hiding, deportations and hunger. The winter with the severe cold and heavy snow added to our misery. In the night Jews were taken from their homes to remove the snow from the roads and to push large, heavy military vehicles that were frozen. While doing this work, the men were whipped and crippled. Hersh, too, was taken to clear away the snow on the Warsaw highway. They cleared the snow a whole day while German soldiers stood guard and beat them just for the fun of beating a Jew. When the work was completed they ordered the Jews to start running while the Aryan people followed them in vehicles. The Jews ran all the way from Brozvigatch to Markushow, a distance of five kilometers. After such a hard day's work they had to run again, with moving vehicles forcing them to move faster and faster. The Jews came home very late that night, broken in body and spirit.

Again we heard screaming and crying. The Nazis were beating Jews and robbing their homes. Not far from us lived the family Mirl Merimberg. They built themselves a lean-to as a cover for their heads to protect themselves from the severe frosts. She had a very small store with shoe repair equipment. The German soldiers forcibly entered her place



Shovelling snow during one of the harsh winters under the Nazi occupation.

late at night, beat her, smashed her equipment and threw her possessions out into the snow.

On another night, when my children and I were already asleep and my husband was sitting and playing cards with the Jew we had rescued from a prison camp, we suddenly heard loud banging on the door. Should we open the door? It so happened that we had a small quantity of yard goods in the house which was hidden in the beds where the children slept. I jumped out of bed since I knew that the bandits were more interested in men than in women. I opened the door. Two drunk German soldiers came in. I asked them to speak softly since the children were sleeping. In the meantime the men hid their cards, because playing cards was forbidden. In my heart I begged God for help to save us from those who came into the house with the intent to do evil. The Germans went directly to the beds where the children slept. I rushed over to the beds and begged them to speak softly. They answered that my voice was louder than theirs. They moved away from the children towards the men and asked who they were. Hersh said that he was the head of the house. The other man sat still. Realizing the danger to all of us, he got up, approached the Germans and attempted to defend his position as a guest. He spoke German very well. The Germans took him with them and left the house. We were very frightened and followed them immediately to see what would happen. The Germans took his good shoes, beat him up and sent him back to the work camp.

It often happened that soldiers would enter a house at night, take the young, pretty girls from their beds and lead them away, notwithstanding the prohibition against cohabiting with Jewish women. It is not pleasant for me to describe their brutality and their ugly behavior. Such was the situation of the Jewish women when they encountered these German savages.

Another time, in the middle of the night, the inhuman

soldiers entered a home where several elderly religious families were living. Shlomo Tevel Waelchenhauzer and our Shaya Altman were living there together with a young couple and several young girls. The German soldiers beamed their flashlights into the beds. When they saw the young woman with her husband, they ordered them to have sex in front of them while they watched. If they refused, the soldiers threatened to kill all of the people in the house. Such were the bitterly shameful experiences our Jews had to face. To whom could they complain? Would they go to the German leaders to report such actions? Inform the cow about her calf, or the calf about the cow? All of them were the same kind of brutal murderers.

READING THE *MEGILLAH*

We rebuilt a small section of our house in Kurov which stood on a small hill. There were no other houses close by. Our nearest neighbor on one side was the tinsmith's son-in-law, who had seven children. On the other side lived Yidel Hersh Leibish in his old house, and also Avromeleh Nalhoch with his whole family. It was in this place that we came to pray and it was there that Shonon Kaplan had a bakery and lived with his family. They really didn't live — just existed, without a floor, everything in one small room, dark walls and beds put together from odd pieces of boards. It was in this place that we arranged to read the *Megillah* (the Book of Esther). We heard the reading in a melancholy mood. We also made a few groggers (noisemakers) for the children. Here and there in some quiet corner a child sat and made noise with his grogger. Notwithstanding the tragic life of the few Jews who came to hear the Megillah, and in spite of the fear within us, the reading of the story of Purim kindled a

light of hope in our hearts. For a short while the tradition of the Jew overpowered the whips and the guns of the Nazis. Jews, as the custom is, stamped out the memory of Haman with their feet, but through the ages they never realized that a much more dangerous Haman was getting ready to torture them.

During the services several Nazis burst into the room. Some of the Jews escaped through the windows and hid themselves, but Avromele Malhoch was caught. He was a good student, tall with long side curls, a likeable person and a great scholar. Outside it was already dark. They dragged him into the yard and forced him to run around on all fours while they kicked him. They left him lying barely alive.

That same week I was sitting at my front door with my child when I observed German soldiers driving a wagon drawn by two of the squire's estate horses. Around the wagon were many Germans, and in the wagon sat a young Jewish boy. The clothes on his body were wet. He appeared to be 16 or 17 years of age. With his dark, frightened eyes, his face white as snow, he looked confused and was trembling. Many Nazis and local hooligans surrounded the wagon. They were beating the boy, laughing and ridiculing the miserable young Jew. They had driven up to a water trough and forced him into the water, then out again several times. They were parading the wagon with the boy around the streets of the town. I ran to the Jewish council to find out what this was all about. They said that there was no way to help the boy and that one must look and remain silent until it was clear what they finally intend to do with the boy. Everyone was afraid to step forward to beg the Germans to let the boy go. The boy was a member of the Coryerin family from Warsaw. That day he was picked up very early for forced labor and worked long, hard hours without food. Afterwards, he found his way to a nearby deserted hut from which he took a piece of dark bread and left. When the peasant women

caught him eating her bread, she dragged him to the Gestapo (the German secret police) and reported that he stole a piece of bread from her. For this crime the Nazis punished him and made sport of him. When it appeared that the boy was nearly dead, they threw him out of the wagon. For a long time thereafter he was very ill.

ILLNESS

This period witnessed other tragedies — sickness and epidemics. I, myself, was bedridden, as were my mother-in-law and our oldest daughter. This was a time of great ordeal: inflictions of disease, migration from one town to another, and the Gestapo decree called for Jews who left their towns to return to them. These were very painful experiences which suspended us between life and death. We witnessed the horrible wanderings of Jews on foot and in small broken wagons to their native townlets. Those who found themselves in Vonvolitz and Kuzmir, had to return to Kurov. Prior to the exodus there was the difficult and tiring work of packing and trying to please the Judenrat in charge of the migration. Once in a while there were skirmishes between Jew and Jew. The diseases of that winter spread among great numbers of people. Neither doctors nor medical facilities were available. The doctors in the region, as previously mentioned, were forbidden to treat Jews. At that time of dejection, there came another decree — that Jews had to bring their furs to the Judenrat office on pain of death. Jews were rushing to bring their furs to friendly Christians. We owned two furs and knew it to be very dangerous to keep the furs home. We decided to turn them over to the priest, who was a compassionate and friendly human being. It looked as though many Jews had their own Christian

friends, so they thought. Thus the homes of these Christians were packed with the goods of Jewish owners. We Jews were still hopeful that the war would soon be over and life would resume some phase of normalcy. We accepted the disbelief in the possibility of annihilation. Many Jews entertained the illusion that there could not be a Final Solution. How wrong we were became evident as time wore on.

My husband decided to take his very sick mother to Lublin to a Jewish physician. Since no Jew was permitted to use the streets or highways, Hersh removed the white and blue Jewish star that all Jews were forced to wear, donned his coat and took his mother to Lublin. It was a great risk for him but there was no other way, since he had to get help for his ill mother. As Germans were riding taxis and wagons, Hersh decided to stop a taxi and plead with the passengers to take his mother to Lublin. The taxi which stopped had a German captain inside. When Hersh saw the captain he turned and fled. The captain fired shots at Hersh, which was a frightening experience. Still, Hersh did manage to get a ride for his mother after all, as he was not recognized as a Jew. He returned from Lublin with Gentile drivers.

I was also very sick and not getting better. The local practitioner was a non-Jew and was forbidden to treat Jews. Hersh pleaded with him to help. The practitioner came late at night to avoid detection and gave the necessary medication for me and for the entire family. We were afflicted with typhus. The younger people recovered, but my mother-in-law died on a Friday after lighting the Sabbath candles. All her children gathered for the funeral however, there was much difficulty in getting permission from the Judenrat to arrange for burial. They demanded much money and merchandise. They maintained that not all of what was confiscated was turned over to the Germans. We were right to believe that it was the nature of the Judenrat to be greedy. Finally, we were able to give the old woman a proper burial.

PREMATURE HOPES

The pre-Passover period was climatically bad but emotionally hopeful. The very cold weather was very hard on the weak, old and sick, but news that the Nazis may have been beaten in the Ukraine gladdened our hearts and lifted our spirits. Hersh was still in mourning for his mother and, as was the Jewish custom, was saying the Kaddish every morning, late afternoon and evening. To get a quorum to conduct the prescribed services was very difficult, since there was no house large enough to hold ten Jews for prayer. We, therefore, used our very small home to conduct services. Because our house was situated a distance from the cluster of Polish homes in the town, the people who came to worship together with the bereaved welcomed the opportunity to be able to walk a bit farther than their prescribed area. Our humble dwelling was heated and the people welcomed the chance to be, for a while, in a warm place and to enjoy a cup of hot tea prepared by Hersh.

The news of the possible defeat of the German army was premature and once again we were plunged into a dark despairing mood. I, for one, would dream and talk about the defeat of the Germans, when my father and sisters and their children would return and be reunited with us in Poland. But, unfortunately, my dreams were not realized. The Germans were not defeated, the dangerous Jewish existence continued unabated and even worsened. The non-Jews of our town began to look at the Jews in a more sympathetic manner as if anticipating more horrible events to come. Rumors were spreading that no matter what the fortunes of the war may be, the Jews were to be annihilated. Hersh's brother, David, was jailed after being caught selling cloth. While in jail, he was permitted a few minutes of freedom every day. During one of these recesses David came running to us to tell us that he heard from a Ukrainian youngster that

all Jews will be massacred. It just seemed to be unreal and unbelievable. I, however, paid close attention to the news. As a matter of fact, when I noticed how many Gentiles looked at us Jews compassionately, I began to feel more uneasy and very disturbed. When I asked some Gentiles about news they might have, they said, "Be careful, be watchful."

NEWS FROM LUBLIN

Many a night I could not sleep, thinking of possible ways to escape the impending doom. News emanating from Lublin was frightening: We heard that the German armies had overrun the Ukraine and that they were already in central Russia. It looked as though the entire world was locked up. The atrocities in the Ukraine, according to reliable reports, were as barbarous as the gas chamber in Poland. Jewish victims were forced to dig open pits which served as their burial grounds. Such barbarous acts of mass murder ended all Jewish dreams and visions for the future. The torment the Jews endured increased from day to day. In Majdanek, not far from Lublin, the savagery was beyond human comprehension.

The Majdanek concentration camp was situated in close proximity to our town. We knew about its existence as a huge prison where the inmates were tortured, most of them breathing their last in that camp. We also heard about the gassing of Jewish victims. We could not believe the rumors that the gas chambers were disguised as shower room facilities. In time we learned from a number of Poles that Majdanek was a death camp, no one leaves that place alive. When large trucks transporting Jews passed by our hiding place we knew that these miserable people were being taken to the gas chambers. It was hard to grasp the conditions un-

der which these people died. The Majdanek camp was distinguished for achieving great efficiency in the process of killing. Many a time I was asked by my Polish benefactor if the Jews realize what is in store for them, why then do they still carry their belongings? Why don't they revolt? I had no logical answer. I was hurt and humiliated. If only these Poles who spoke to me could have spent ten minutes in Majdanek, they would not ask, "Why?"

The police of the Judenrat grabbed more and more Jews for forced labor in an increasingly angry manner. I began to feel that our people were deceiving themselves with false hopes. Hersh once made a statement to me, saying, "You are more frightened than anyone else." His statement did not quiet my nerves, for my premonitions caused me great anguish. In those days a letter reached us from Lublin telling us to be ready because Jews were being driven out of Lublin and were being shipped to unknown places — though rumors had it that they were taken to death camps. They advised us to be ready to run, hence it was advisable to have warm clothes and enough bread to last for several days. This letter was sent to Sarah, our friend, from her daughter in Lublin, and was delivered by a Gentile friend. I felt intuitively that something very bad was soon to befall us. Of course, some people argued that only those inhabiting large urban centers or those with much money would be evacuated. But the Gentiles who returned from Lublin spoke in no uncertain terms: every day contingents of Jews of approximately 1000 souls each were taken away — these people included many women and children. The sick and very small children were shot or thrown from the train cars and killed. We also heard that these trains led to extermination camps, which was confirmed by a Jewish woman who came to Kurov from Lublin. We were greatly distressed and dismayed. Just before Passover, a Pole came to me to buy cotton for a lining for his fur coat. When I told him the price, he did not bargain with me.

He said: "I don't have to bargain with you. You know little or nothing of what is going on. It is better you sell everything and have only money with you."

BAKING MATZOS

No matter what, the Passover holiday was almost upon us and we got to scrubbing and doing whatever we could to have a Kosher Passover. Baking matzos was, of course, prohibited. Nevertheless, we found a way to have some unleavened bread for the holiday. We went to a Gentile, put the bricks on fire to a glow so as to cleanse the oven frm any remnants of *Hometz* (leavened bread). After a great deal of effort we had our own bakery for matzos. I had to go to this bakery after midnight in stealth to bake the matzos. We all greatly appreciated this help from a non-Jew, who endangered his life by enabling us to bake matzos for our holiday. How good it felt when coming in one night to the bakery to find a number of young Gentiles together with young Jews, their faces pale from fright, but still helping to bake the matzos. I myself baked a few matzos for my family and carried them home as one would carry a treasure. We dared not have a Seder because we could not have lights on in the house. The best we could do was to bless the small holiday candles at sundown. Thus the few doomed Jews observed the Passover holiday in darkness.

Some of the Jews of our area, who were skilled in their respective vocations, volunteered to work for the Nazis. Doing this temporarily improved their life circumstances. The Judenrat, however, was skeptical about the future of these skilled men.

I walked in the street practically every day to hear what people were talking about and what they did. On one of

these walks I saw a Jew beg a Nazi official to permit him to become a policeman of the Judenrat. The Nazi said, "Of course you can become a policeman. Why not? These men will be the very last to go." I registered this statement in my mind and understood its meaning. "Anyway, all the Jews are destined to be sent there," the Nazi soldier continued. I came home and told my husband what I overheard. I also told him that a new factory was being built to manufacture heavy coats to be sent to the army on the Russian front. The Judenrat would be in charge of enlisting competent workers. We learned that these workers were members of their own families. Nevertheless, we appealed to the Judenrat to favor us with the opportunity to work in the new factory. The answer given was, "No, there is no more place. It is full."

FRIENDLINESS — UNFRIENDLINESS

It occurred to me that my brother-in-law's best friend was a member of the Judenrat. His wife was my sister's intimate friend. We went there appealing for a place for my husband in the new government factory. The answer was crude — we were told that he did not remember our names, let alone the story of friendships to which we referred. We also learned that a man who served as bookkeeper in Ulrich's factory in Kurov, the first factory in our region, held a high office in the Gestapo. This man was an engineer, and was in charge of all the work for the German government in the entire area. It was the former bookkeeper who, together with the engineer were in charge of the enterprise. The workers of this project had a longer time to exist before they would be sent away to oblivion. Hersh went to see the former engineer, and to our great surprise was readily accepted as a worker. The engineer said to the Jews in the factory, "This

man will work as do all other workers." More than 20 men we knew worked there and some people from Lublin were also there. One of the Lublin men was close to Ulrich during World War I. He had rescued Ulrich from certain death. Ulrich appointed this Lubliner Jew as head of the fur department where heavy coats were made. Finally Hersh was accepted as a specialist. We believed that this type of worker would be spared.

During the week of Passover, a Gentile woman walked into our house and asked me to step outside with her. She said, "Look, be ready with money. Never leave your children. I know that the position of the Jews is very precarious, all of them will be expelled and we have no idea where to. I am giving you this information, for I am your friend and I want to help you." Her kindness and concern helped us to retain some faith in the human race.

EXAGGERATED OPTIMISM

When this Polish woman left, I repeated to the people in the house what she said. In addition to my family, a number of young people came to see us. They maintained that the woman did not know much and what she said was aimed at getting a special rate on merchandise she was buying. They did not believe her. I, on the other hand, tried to convince my own people that what happened in Lublin could happen to us. "This time," I said, "the Germans mean us." We were shocked when we learned later on that in the course of two years the city of Lublin of 40,000 Jews was completely destroyed. This city, one of the outstanding Jewish communities in Poland prior to the Nazi invasion, became *Judenrein* (free of Jews). Many of the Lublin Jews perished in the nearby death camp, Majdanek, and many others were

left lying in the streets falling victims to death by starvation and pestilence. Perhaps this is what the Nazis meant to be our end. I shared my conviction with my neighbors and every Jew I met. The people, however, did not take me seriously. On the 8th of April, 1941, Hersh was away from the house and the children were outdoors. I heard a noise, the sound was that of passing trucks. "This is it," I thought. At that moment Hersh shouted a warning through an outside window: "Be careful! Something new is happening. the Nazis are surrounding the entire town!" Hersh risked his life by coming to me. A great sense of urgency came over me. Hersh ran immediately to the factory, thinking that this time all the Jews would be taken away. A little boy of nine whom we knew, ran to the front of the house and said to me, "Hayele, it is bad. All the Jews are being expelled." I looked for my children. In a few minutes the little boy approached me and pointed out where they were. I brought the children into the house, dressed them in warm clothes, put warm clothes on myself, took some money and sewed it in my underwear, threw a shawl over my head and shoulders to look like a Gentile peasant woman. I took a cart in which I placed a change of clothing for myself and the children — and thus began our wanderings. I thought of going to the cemetery to my mother's grave, with my children, Bashka, two years of age, and Goldele, five and a half. My terror was so great, the urgency so keen — whom else could I consult but my mother. I felt deep within me that I should go to my mother's grave. Once there, let the Nazis do what they like.

Ukrainian bands of hooligans were running all over town looting, burning and vandalizing. I had taken the key to our place after closing the shutters. A Jewish policeman approached me with a whip in his hand and said, "Go with your children to the Judenrat. Everyone is going there." I looked at him and said, with anger, "Go to hell. Have you nothing else to do? Don't you know that all of us Jews including you will perish?"

THE ACTION: LIQUIDATION

It looked as though the Jewish policeman got frightened himself and ran away. Another one came by shouting: "Where are you going? Why aren't you with the rest of the Jews?" My reply was, "I don't fear you anymore. Now I will go wherever I wish. I know that these are our last minutes of life. Only God knows what may happen to us." I continued walking and discovered a new inner strength within me in addition to the terror. The Judenrat people were running excitedly back and forth, as tension was mounting. The Nazis were running after the Judenrat commanding them to empty the houses of Jews. I went through an alley, not far from the synagogue. There were no people on the roads, but every now and then I saw men, women and children leaving their hiding places. I heard screams and the sounds of gun shots. People passing by informed me that I was going in the wrong direction. A member of our family, Rivkah Ciril Laichter, asked me why I was not going to the Judenrat where everyone else was going. I told her that I was going to my mother's grave where I will lie down with my children and there let God do with us what he wishes.

I continued going my own way. I saw masses of people walking in a soldierly manner led by Nazi officers and soldiers — no longer by Jewish policemen. A Pole who worked together with the Gestapo was driving our friend Beinish Nachenhauser forward, beating him cruelly. Blood was running down his face. He was being clubbed to death. I saw the Nazi soldiers beating the Jews, killing them. I walked by, praying to God that I would *not* be recognized as a Jewess. I asked my children not to speak Yiddish and told them to be quiet. Little by little we came to the highway which led to the cemetery. Coming to the highway, I realized that it would be impossible to cross over because the Nazis were patrolling the road. Not wanting to risk the lives of my



The mass evacuation of Jews, Passover, 1942.

children, I removed the blue and white badge which all Jews were forced to wear and turned back to town.

I did not walk on the main road but on side streets in a Polish neighborhood where I saw masses of Poles running to town rejoicing in the spectacle of the Jewish catastrophe. I meant to reach the factory where my husband worked but changed my mind and walked straight to a Polish house begging to be allowed in. A Polish woman opened the door and immediately said that there were already two Jews in her house and she dared not let more in. I knocked on the door of another house and received the same answer: "We cannot do it." Having no place to go to, I turned again toward the factory where Hersh was working. On the way I found my husband running. His face pale and twisted in anguish and worry. He could hardly breathe. In a voice hardly audible, I heard him say that he had sent a non-Jew with a horse and wagon to fetch me, but found our place locked and no one there. This good-natured Christian worked with Hersh in the factory. Although he was instructed by the Nazi authorities to keep count of all the Jewish workers and to keep track of them this Pole was friendly. It was growing dark. Finding no place to stay I walked into the spacious yard of the factory. The workers began to complain saying they could not allow me to stay in the place. The guards might soon come to take a count of the workers and if I were found with my two children they would all be in great danger. I knew not what to do and became more and more desperate. I decided not to lose courage. The young man from Lublin approached me saying that I must leave the place. I pleaded with the head of the factory and he allowed me to stay. This Gentile remembered me as a little girl. He had dealt with my father for many years. Both of us, discussing my predicament, shed tears together. He told the group of Jews that he would not force them to leave. This is what he said: "I will not throw her out of my courtyard, do what you will."

FRIENDLY CHRISTIANS

I realized that my presence might jeopardize the lives of the entire group of Jews when the count would be taken. I, therefore, asked my husband to keep the older child, and I took the younger one with me and left the yard. Darkness had fallen as I walked among the Polish houses. Near each house was a barn. Suddenly I noticed a broken and dilapidated one. When I entered I found a broken bed. There was plenty of hay. I quickly arranged bedding for the child and instructed her to be quiet — not to cough, not to cry and to be a good little girl. Sitting in the barn next to my sleeping child I heard the noise from the nearby road. There were trucks filled with Jews going by. The Jews were sighing while the Nazis who drove the trucks and guarded the Jews were singing. I was then weeping uncontrollably. I mourned the lot of my people, lamenting the extermination of Jews unable to understand the silence of the world. How could spiritual leaders, writers, scholars, and the governments of the free world remain silent? It was clear that so many members of humanitarian societies did not lift a finger to prevent the Nazi slaughter. While contemplating the world's silence, I saw a woman in a barn getting wood. Soon she was standing in front of me. "Hershkova!" she exclaimed, "Thank God you managed to escape. Do not be afraid, I will do you no evil, I mean to help you." I recognized the woman. She was a fine person who was our customer for many years. I never knew where she lived and by accident I stumbled into her barn for refuge. I soon learned that this woman and her family were poor people. "When it gets very dark, I will bring you some food and a cover for your child," she said.

GOING ON THE FINAL ROAD

She came a little later, brought food and cover. She explained her inability to invite me to her house but promised to come in the morning. During the sleepless night I heard the noise of people and vehicles coming from the road. I was trembling in every fiber of my body. In the morning, the kind Gentile woman walked in. I suggested to her that she move into my house in town. She promised to think about it. I asked her to please find my husband and tell him that we are well. In the middle of the next night, Hersh came in, dressed very shabbily and he looked very tired. We spent a few minutes together and he returned to his assigned place in the factory. Rumors spread that new living quarters would be prepared for the specialist workers. Among them was Hersh. Obviously only the men would live in the quarters. Hersh and I were disturbed about this regulation. We made several inquiries and were told that my two girls and I should go to Warsaw. As a matter of fact, many Jews from different locations in the Kurov section were transported to Warsaw, which became the largest ghetto in Poland. We also learned that the Jews who were driven to Warsaw had stopped over for one night in Konskivalya, a small town near a train station, nine miles from Kurov. From there many of the Jews were transported to the Treblinka gas chambers. The younger people who went on foot to Warsaw tried to run away. Some of them succeeded. Others were caught on the road and shot. On that night the sick who could not walk the distance to Warsaw were also shot. We learned that Shlomo Tevel, a pious Jew we knew, donned a prayer shawl and proclaimed that he would not walk another step. "You can shoot me, I will not walk any more," he declared. The Germans obliged him. Shlomo Finkelstein also wore a prayer shawl on his walk to Warsaw. The Jewish police helped to bring the Jews together into a valley (among them, Shlomo)

and there they were all shot. Nevertheless, my husband reasoned that he would send the children and me to Warsaw because, for the time being, there were no further killings in or around the Warsaw ghetto. But I, being afraid of the big city, decided that I would help myself in another way. A few days later, I learned the real truth about the Warsaw ghetto. The major problems of the Jews in the ghetto were the lack of food and poor health. Malnutrition and epidemic diseases reduced the majority of the inhabitants to ghosts of human beings. The mortality rate of children was very high and multitudes of all ages perished from starvation and epidemics. My personal situation in those days was very difficult. I could not remain in the barn and so looked for another hiding place.

ONLY A FEW SPECIALISTS LEFT

Our tormentors decided that the workers should be housed in the empty dwellings once belonging to the Jews. These houses would be encircled with wire. When the workers moved into the new section, two women who were Jewish friends of Ulrich, the German manager of all factories in the region, were brought in to cook. When my husband learned about it, he began to plan how to bring me in as a cook. He risked his life going to Ulrich to make this request. Fortunately, Ulrich's wife, a Polish woman who used to be one of our customers, was in the house. When Hersh told her that I remained in town, because when all the Jews were evacuated, I wasn't home, the Polish woman suggested that he bring Ulrich an expensive gift. She said that Hersh need not be afraid, since she would talk to him in advance. Hersh met Ulrich and gave him an excellent watch and some money. Ulrich noticed a gold ring on my husband's finger

and asked for it also and received it. When Hersh told me that I would be taken as a cook, I jumped for joy. As for the children — we hoped to solve that problem. I was glad to leave the barn. The Christian woman who had been so good to me went to move into our house in the city, as I suggested that she do, but found someone else had already taken over the place. I went to look for a place for my daughters and was happy to find that a Polish woman was willing to give us a room. I tried to sum up our situation. I thought about all that had befallen our town. Only a few Jews (a little more than 20) remained in the town, out of a population of 3,000. One of them was a woman. Her name was Haya Tuba, and I was she. I thought of Hersh's sister Hinda and her six young and beautiful children. When Kurov was bombed and all the families went in different directions, Hersh's older sister, Hinda and her husband and six children escaped to a small town Machnu, near Kurov. They were very poor and could not manage to get much food. Hersh arranged to send food packages and money every Wednesday with a peasant.

When we were in camp in Kurov, a Polish man came to tell us that the city of Machnu will be evacuated and Hersh's sister and family will pass through Kurov on their way to a concentration camp.

I made arrangements with a Polish woman to buy some food and to look for them on the main highway so that I could give Hinda and her family this package of food.

When we arrived on the highway, I saw five or six Germans leading this whole city of Jews. Hinda's husband Mordechai tried to escape and was shot by the Germans.

I saw Hinda and her six children sitting on a wagon and I gave her this package of food. This was the last time I saw my husband's sister and her six children. They all were taken on a train to a concentration camp. There they perished.

While thinking of the immediate past, the owner of the house, Mr. Janitski, came in and made the following state-

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ment to me: "You see, you will remain as Noah and his Ark. If you have survived the exodus of all Jews, you will certainly be able to remain alive together with your family. Go, cook, eat, and you should know that everything in this house is open to you." "But how can I cook and eat when all the Jews in the factory go hungry?" He consulted with his wife and then said to me again, "You can take all the food in this house and cook for all the Jews until the new place is ready."

BOILED POTATOES

I ran to the factory to tell the men of the promise this Christian gentleman had given me. The men were so touched with this example of human kindness, in contrast to their experiences of inhumane treatment, that their eyes filled with tears. I tried to comfort them and in the name of the benefactor invited them to come to his house for a meal. While the men were waiting for the completion of the new work camp buildings, they cleaned the streets, built roads and did other types of work. Needless to say, they were always hungry. The charitable Christian was a rich man who was known in the entire region. He risked his life in preparing meals for the Jews. He himself baked the bread and donated the potatoes I cooked for the men. The men were permitted to sleep in his very own barn.

The release of tension and the relative peace lasted a few days. When the work camp was completed, two Lubliner women and I did the cooking in the new quarters. Everyday we found one or more Jewish newcomers on the premises, to whom we gave food. Of course, the officials were not informed about it. Daily I left the kitchen tired and exhausted for it was hard work, especially on the very hot days when I

had to worry about the children. A number of other children were under my supervision. We had to keep them hidden in certain nooks in the new quarters. We lived this way for six months. Life was very difficult.

We were worried about having children in the camp, because it was not allowed to keep children and the Germans would take the children away if they saw them.

My husband, Hersh, went to the priest in our city who was a good friend and our former neighbor, to have Goldele adopted by a childless Polish couple. The priest contacted several families and was able to arrange an adoption if Goldele would be baptized as a Christian. After discussing the matter with my husband, we decided that we will never change her religion. We will leave this to God. However, a day or two later, the priest located a Polish couple willing to take Goldele. With tears in my eyes, I packed a little sack with some clothing and dressed her warmly. We knew the couple who came for our daughter. They were our customers. They did not say a word to us and we said nothing to them. We held back our tears, showing no emotions so our child would not cry or be upset. She went with the couple happily as she knew that there was no alternative. We stood and watched our child leaving us. Saying nothing I looked far and long until I could not see her. We did not hear from her but we knew that she was safe with the new family. We had little Bashka to keep us company.

About a week or two later, at lunch time, we were standing in the back yard looking out and we saw Goldele walking toward us. We ran to her and brought her to camp. When we asked her why she came back, she began crying and told us that the couple liked her very much but they were afraid to have a Jewish child as the neighbors knew they did not have children of their own.

Every day after work everyone would break down weeping and sighing. Every day was a sort of Yom Kippur.

More children reached our "haven" and I became the "mother" to fifty people, old and young. We helped each other, always thinking that soon it would be our turn to be killed. We were ready to fight back when they came to take us. The younger people such as Yitzhak Lewinson prepared some weaponry. They looked forward to the possibility of inflicting pain on a Nazi. We all would fantasize acts of revenge. At times I saw Jews from other countries (such as France and Yugoslavia) being driving by foot from one place to another.* Some of them were harnessed to wagons full of corn and barley. The poor Czecholovakian Jews, who were used as horses, fell from exhaustion. Once I succeeded in sending a message that when they passed our section, we would try to get them some food. A few times, when this caravan of miserable Jews passed our section, we gave them hot coffee and bread. When Ulrich, the manager of the work camp, learned about our helping our brethren, he issued strict orders forbidding any future acts of this kind.

We wanted to know the state of affairs in other communities. We were especially eager to learn where all the Jews were being transported and what was being done to them when they reach the place assigned by the Nazis. We found a young Christian boy and a Jewish girl who looked very much like a Polish teenager. They travelled together until they reached Treblinka concentration camp. The Jewish girl learned that Treblinka was an extermination center and that everyday Jews were being put to death. We realized that we must be ready. Since we were now afraid to sleep in the factory quarters, we looked for places to spend the nights. This was a very difficult problem to which there were no easy solutions.

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*Since there were practically no ghettos in western and southern Europe during the Nazi occupation period, many of the Jews of the west were driven to the east, especially to Poland, on foot and mercilessly mistreated.

ANOTHER YOM KIPPUR

It was the eve of Yom Kippur. The group of embittered Jews assembled in one room. I was outside with my children and talked to them about the future. I instructed them how to act in case their father and I would be taken away. Avrahamtshe Goldberg came out to tell me to recite the blessing over the candles. We begged the Almighty to save the remnant of His people. Our supplications and entreaties should have pierced the very heavens. The Kol Nidrei* prayer echoed the anguish of the Jews threatened with complete annihilation. Everybody was crying bitterly. Quietly they continued their prayers. After the services we discussed what to do when the Nazis come to take us away. Moishe Blume said that if they come he would not resist them, but will go the way all other Jews have gone. Yakov Hirsh declared that he, too, would not oppose. If, however, he is shot while others are still alive, his request is that he be buried in the earth of our town, and that those who remain living should come to his grave and tell him when it is Hitler's end. But who knew who would be the first and the last, or where someone's grave would be? The majority of the people were for fighting back.

We spent a few more months in the "domain" where we lived. It was a life of misery, anticipating new disasters daily. On the 8th of November, I came into the kitchen, as usual. My little girl, Bashka, was near me. Our older girl, Goldele, had been entrusted to the guardian of the forest, Mr. Kosak. My husband was working nights. I felt that if anything unforseen should happen, my children and I would not be able to escape. It was this reasoning that made me bring my oldest

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*Kol Nidrei — the prayer ushering in Yom Kippur. Originally written to allow pious Jews to pray with apostates, it retains its deep, emotional meaning to the present day.

child to the home of a non-Jew for safe keeping. She was already seven years old, and luckily the forest guardian took a liking to her and promised to take good care of her. I promised to compensate for keeping Goldele in his place.

LIQUIDATION OF THE REMNANT

It was a normal weekday when all men were at work. Fatsha (the other cook), my little girl, Bashka, and I were in the kitchen. I gave my Bashka a little milk and while looking, by chance, out the window saw a German soldier standing at the door speaking to Avramtsche Shloyme. I became petrified. I wanted to open the door but my child cryingly insisted that I take her with me. I took her, and in passing I heard the German asking Avramtsche "Who is this woman?" I answered immediately in Polish that I have a job in this place. I went back to the kitchen and told Fatsha that we must escape through a window. The window had to be broken. We put the children through the window first and then, we, too, managed to get through. On the outside I saw many Polish people, standing and talking to one another. To me this was a sign that something horrible was about to take place, something we had all dreaded. The very fact that the German soldier was by himself and that it was noon, when the workers come to the kitchen for their food, was sign enough that the Nazis were going to do one of their evacuating jobs. In a short while the building was surrounded by German soldiers. Many of the workers managed to escape through a broken gate, the same gate that Fatsha, the children and I jumped. Everyone was running away from the building. Those who jumped over the wires of the gate hurt their feet. As for Fatsha and I, we ran in two different directions. Since that time, I have never seen Fatsha and her

child again. I ran with my younger child not knowing where to go. While passing the public bath house, I saw some of our men soaking leather skins. Outside the bath house, I saw Motel Mindel's son, a friend of my brother, Sane. I ran to him and informed him of the situation in the work camp. I told him he should not return there. The camp is circled with Germans. "Run where you can," I said. I asked if he knew the whereabouts of my husband and was told that Hersh was working in another place. I began running to find Hersh. On the way I saw wagons filled with bricks taken from our beautiful synagogue which had been demolished. In other wagons a number of peasants had loaded tombstones from our cemeteries, which they took to use for the entrances to their huts. I kept on running, thinking all the time that Hersh must have come to the kitchen to eat and was, no doubt, taken by the Nazis. While running, a little Polish girl pursued me shouting: "Escape! They are about to take away all work-camp Jews. Escape with your child!" I ran, past the Catholic church, saw a young Gentile girl running, (the Nazis had also taken many a young non-Jew for forced labor). Suddenly my child said loudly, "Look Mama, there are the Jews."

ANOTHER ESCAPE

I looked in that direction. Ten Jews were led in a convoy. Two German soldiers with guns were stationed as a watch, one in front and one in the rear. Out of fear, I could recognize no one. I asked the child to look and see if her father was there. My child broke into tears and covered her eyes with her little hands. I ran away not knowing what happened to my husband. It was getting dark, the cold was biting. The child was without a hat. Fortunately, a young

peasant came by, one who had been a former customer. I told him our story very briefly. He took his fur hat and put it on the child's head and warmed up her little body. Walking farther I met Jews whom I knew. They helped me carry the child. I asked about Hersh and was told that he was hiding under a roof of the factory building, together with some other Jewish workers, and that they were now on their way to the forest. Hersh, I was told, had to hide under the hot pipes under the roof of the factory. Had he been there a little longer he would have fainted.

The sound of shots was heard. I worried about my Goldele. To my great surprise, a Jewish boy walked up to me and said that he came from the forest and had seen Goldele, when walking into a house begging for a slice of bread. The boy also mentioned that she was crying. The forest guardian, Mr. Kosak, comforted her by saying that her people will soon come. I was relieved and satisfied that this forest man would keep Goldele unharmed and save her from the Germans. All the people who had been in the workers' quarters were gone. I remained in the forest with my cousin, Frandel, and with the woman from Lublin who worked with me. We had also seen a few men who had escaped and who were wandering about.

I got to thinking about our new predicament and decided to go to the guardian of the forest. When I neared his house the dogs began barking and the woman of the house came out to see who was coming. When she saw me she inquired about my husband. After I explained our situation and asked for shelter for the four of us, she opened the stable door and with a cheerful voice declared, "Here is your husband. He is fine and alive." She added, "Be careful when you see him not to make noise, for there are guests in the house." We were careful to squelch our great joy at seeing each other alive and at being safe for the time being with our little family. It was late at night when she led us into her house and

made up beds for us on the dry earth. She also asked for 5 zlotys per night and instructed us that during the daytime we should stay in the forest. Hersh reconstructed his experiences of the last day. He escaped together with a group of Jews. However, when the Germans left the area he jumped from under the roof, hoping to find out what had happened to me and our child. He paid a special messenger to look for us at the camp. Upon his return, the messenger told Hersh that Poles had told him that they, themselves, had seen a woman with a child lying at the camp, shot to death. This woman and child who were shot were from Radom, and resembled me and Bashka. Hersh was in agony. Somehow, his misery and tears notwithstanding, he had faith in my ability to escape the Nazis. He hurried to find us, met a Gentile woman who scolded him for being in the open, when he could fall into the hands of the Nazis. She shouted: "You foolish Jew. You are going all by yourself to fall into their hands. Don't do what your enemy wants you to do. Run off, run away." But Hersh continued walking to the forest to look for Goldele at the house of the caretaker, Mr. Kosak. On the way to the forest he met Fatsha, whose husband and child were going to spend the night in a non-Jewish home. Weeping bitterly, he told Fatsha that he heard that his wife and youngest child were killed by the Nazis. But Fatsha was happy to tell him that my child, Bashka, and I were alive and somewhere in the forest and he would no doubt find us.

THE BEAUTY OF GOLDELE

Thus, our great anguish and sorrow turned to joy at finding each other alive and being reunited as a family. For a few days we stayed together, parents and children. But shortly afterwards, our kind hosts declared that they no

longer could keep us. Their neighbors could inform the Nazis of our presence and then everyone's life would be endangered. Sheltering Jews was considered a crime punishable by death. However, he would be able to save the life of Goldele, no matter how difficult it might be or whether we pay him for her keep or not.

We considered this Gentile a "good angel." After all he endangered his life, as well as the lives of his wife, his son of seventeen, and his daughter of twenty-one. Goldele was a beautiful child. Her charm captivated the forest guardian and his family. While Goldele lived with them, we were at ease. Mr. Kosak's final words to us were that we must go, but that Goldele should remain as his child.

The woman of Lublin (my co-worker in the kitchen) was back in town. She looked for her father, her husband, a younger brother and a still younger brother-in-law. It was reported that her husband fought his superiors in the work camp where he was punished and shot to death. Avramtsche and his children were stripped of all their clothes, but they managed to flee to the homes of Christian neighbors. Shmuel Yacov also managed to escape. Some of them were able to pay for their shelter, the others, who had no money went to the forest to hide. As for the younger people, most of them became Partisans. Some of them found a hiding place in a cellar in mid-town. My cousin, Frandel, spent a few days with us before returning to the shelter of her Christian friend.

We still had quite a bit of merchandise, which we had left in the homes of Poles. We kept our money, which consisted of gold coins, on our bodies. For the time being the forest served as home. We had no water and no bread. We did not dare to go to the family where Goldele stayed. She and a Polish little boy of a poor family tended the cows together. This Polish child watched Goldele to see that she wouldn't wander off into the forest.

There were many Jews looking for a haven for their children, offering large sums of money, but Mr. Kosak refused to take them. He wanted only our Goldele. It was winter, and while hiding in the snow, deep in the forest, a number of young Jewish boys came upon us. One of them had a slice of dry bread in his pocket and gave it to our child, Bashka, who ate it with great relish. The boys turned to Hersh and suggested that they go together to find some kind of shelter. They left and I remained alone sitting in the snow with the child in my arms. Luckily, they came to a hut, the owner of which knew Hersh, since she used to buy all kinds of merchandise from him. Listening to the story of his travail prompted her to give Hersh some food and drink. When Hersh returned to the place of the charitable woman for help, she told him that he could stay in an empty little hut, but she could not admit the child.

FAVORS OF THE POOR

Once again I remained in the forest with the little girl and once again I encountered a former customer of ours. This customer was a learned man but looked like a criminal, very disheveled and unkempt. He told me his name and explained that he was accused of murder in the pre-Nazi occupation period and is now hunted by the Germans. "I love Jews," he said to me, "and I would like to help them. I already have a hiding place where twelve Jews are staying. But I have a large field nearby where I keep another group of Jews and where you too can stay. Come and see it." I went. It was very cold. The child was asleep on my shoulder. When I walked into the hut, I saw Hayim Tevel, a tall, wild country boy. He was there with his wife and children. People were afraid of him. He always wanted money from the people in

town. Seeing me he burst into laughter and said, "You can stay here with your child." I looked around and saw that the new haven consisted of a dark side room with a roof. It was the roof over the room which made it habitable. In my mind I went over the possibility of staying in this place and decided that I better be in the forest. I thought: "It is better in the woods than with these people. What God will decree, that will be." I told the host that I planned to leave. He became very excited, very angry. Who knows, I thought, a man of his kind could be a real killer.

In the meantime Hersh walked in. How good it was to see him and leave the angry and weird man. Hersh had done a great deal of searching for a hiding place and had finally found one. His story was touching. When he entered a house of a peasant, he heard him say: "Hersh, you look very bad, what can I do to help you? I remember how you and your wife helped me when I was in need. It was bitter cold, we had no more clothes. You brought to this house the yard goods I was in such dire need of." This man spent two months in a forced labor camp because he did not have enough money to pay his taxes. Hersh asked him if he would take our youngest daughter. "She doesn't look Jewish," Hersh said. "You can tell your neighbors that you found her at the door. We will come every month and pay you for your services." The peasant answered immediately that he would take it upon himself to care for the child. Hersh and I were advised to go back to the forest. The kind peasant and his wife had three children: two boys and a girl. The dwelling place looked pitiful: one small window, two broken beds, a very low ceiling, no lamp, one large pot, which served both the pigs and the humans. There was little, if any, bread. The poor peasant had to hire a horse to plow the field since he was too poor to own one. Hersh gave the man (his name was Zazhetski) some money and asked him to buy bread and potatoes, and added: "Give food to our child and to your

family. If we remain among the living, we will give you more money. But in case either my wife or I do not come, go to the Poles who have my merchandise (there is a list) or to the priest who will, no doubt, understand you." I showered kisses on my child. Hersh took her from my arms and went to Mr. Zazhetski whose home was to be Bashka's shelter. The snow was deep, up to his knees. He used a stick to help him walk. Hersh returned a broken man. He had a heartbreaking experience. The child refused to stay in the new place and wept and screamed. She did not understand the language of the people, whom she was seeing for the first time. Mr. Zazhetski managed, however, to calm her and she fell asleep. Bashka was all of two and a half years old when this took place. Hersh left his daughter in the home of kind people, but his heart was aching.

The next day I met my cousin, Frandel, in the forest. I told her about our sad parting with Bashka. Frandel said to me: "Do not sin. The child will be safe and now you better think of yourself." But I hurried to see how the child was. The woman of the house asked me not to let Bashka see me, because she would begin to cry and it would only make matters more difficult. I, therefore, looked in at my baby daughter from the small window. She was eating a cooked beet and the Pole was standing nearby teaching her some Polish words. I motioned to the woman for her to come out. I gave her a winter coat for the child and talked to her very briefly: "In this little coat there are two gold coins. In case we do not return or are unable to go into town, a rich neighbor will exchange these gold pieces for food for my child and your family." These events took place in the winter of 1942.

Leaving Bashka's shelter, I looked for my cousin, Frandel. Suddenly I came across that strange man who frightened people and who had a reputation for robbing and killing. He asked for money; otherwise he threatened to tell

the Gestapo where my two little girls were hidden. I gave him all the money that I carried with me. However, something even more tragic was on my mind, for I had to leave my beloved husband in the house where he had found a hiding place. To my great sorrow they refused to take in another refugee, myself. Hersh and the two girls were in the same area, though separated from each other. Who knew if I would ever see them again? How would I be able to get more money to make payments for my children's lodging and see them again? These thoughts gave me more strength and determination to cling to life.

I found my cousin, Frandel, in the forest. While seeking a place for the night we had to cross a main road and passed a railroad station. German soldiers were coming and going from those places. I was agitated, not knowing what to do — whether to return to the woods and be near my children or to go with Frandel on the road away from the forest. I felt very uneasy leaving the area. Something within me prompted me to return to the forest and be near my children. Though Frandel urged me on, I felt that if I go on to an unfamiliar region, I would be lost and could not get back to my children. Finally, I said to Frandel, "I cannot go with you. I must wander about in the forest, near my children." We parted company. This was the last I ever saw Frandel. She must have been caught and killed by the Germans. I walked to the village which I knew well, for it was situated near our town. There I had a feeling of greater security than I had in the forest. I realized, at the same time, however, that few, if any Poles would want to give me shelter. The Polish population was never friendly; in truth, many of them actively were hostile. Finally, I decided to knock on the door of a Pole who had been our driver to country fairs. When he saw me he said that I could not stay in his house even for a few minutes, since there were Germans around. Again I had to go back to the forest. Dogs were barking and I became very frightened.

I tried to make one more attempt to try to find refuge somewhere, if only for one night, but I was rudely and quickly sent away. The excuse was, "We do not want to suffer because of you."

I UNDERSTAND THEIR FEAR

No matter how hateful the attitudes of these Poles and no matter how hurt and humiliated I was by their treatment of me, I really couldn't blame them much. I knew about the Nazi laws regarding the sheltering of Jews. In most cases it meant death by hanging. As I continued walking, I noticed another farmer chopping wood. Close to him stood his child of four years. I recognized the farmer who had been a driver for us for a number of years. He asked me where I came from and where I was going. I told him briefly the story of my wanderings. I broke down sobbing when I told him that my husband and children were in a peasant's home somewhere in the area. "So what is your wish?" he asked. I remembered that I wanted to spend the night under a roof and then I would return to the forest. This man, too, though a former acquaintance, said what the others had said, that he could not let a Jew stay under his roof. I could not control myself and again burst into tears begging hm to have compassion. The farmer's little girl made her appeal to me not to endanger her father's life: he might get shot if he helped me and she loved him very much. The father embraced the child and said to me, "Go and ask my wife." I walked in to see the woman, who noticing me, embraced me and tearfully bemoaned my fate. "I wish I could help you," she said, "but my child is a wise little girl. She might inform the authorities. So sit down and get warm. You will sleep here and leave in the morning." Her husband brought in a pelt and arranged a

bed for me on the earth. He gave me some milk and bread and insisted that I eat and drink. That night I was his guest, he explained, and in the morning I should find my husband. He said that it was less dangerous for me to be on the outside than it was for my husband. "Go to him," he said solemnly, "and if you can't find him, come back to me and I will try to help you."

In the morning I walked to the other side of the forest where my husband was to be found. When Hersh saw me he was happy, saying that had I not come he would have gone out of his mind with worry. "The farmer who befriended me," said Hersh, "had understood our determination to be together and said that he would be killed for harboring one person or two — it is all the same. 'You two can stay here,' he said, 'but do not bring the children. Be on the alert and watch out.' " Thus we succeeded in staying in the farmer's house for several weeks. Of course, we paid our host a large sum of money but we considered him a *tzadik* (a very righteous man). He not only let us stay in his house six weeks, but he attended to us in every way. He even arranged for his five small children not to be near us and he warned them not to say a word to anyone about us. They feared their father and obeyed him completely. One day he came in and excitedly told us that he could not keep us any longer. However, he prepared a place for us in the stable where we would not be easily visible. On one side there was a wall of boards with cracks that led into the barn, so that when the peasant comes to milk the cow, he would also be able to enter and give us something to eat; and through the cracks a bit of air was able to enter. And yet it was like a grave. We became, here, almost inhuman. Two people in straw; we couldn't move, we couldn't sit up. In the same place where we were lying, there was a pot into which to relieve ourselves. At night the peasant took it out. Only one's own father would do the same. When he came into the barn he gave a whistle and a cry "Hey" as if to a horse. That was the sign that he meant us.

That type of living was our lot for a long while until I left the hiding place to take my chances by going to town to get some of our textiles to sell and pay our farmer-redeemer. The cold was extreme as I walked among the people who were dressed in warm clothes with hats and boots. I finally reached the home of a Polish friend who, looking at me and listening to my story, stated that I was in no condition to overcome this ordeal. In fact, I could hardly walk. My feet were half frozen. I was also very weak. Both my husband and I subsisted on a diet of cold potatoes and some water, and only occasionally a slice of bread. When I returned to the tight and miserable space in the barn, I appealed to my husband for us to leave the place. Soon enough Hayim Tevel somehow entered the barn and told the peasant: "I think that you should house Hersh and his wife. I just left the house where their child is staying and was told that she must be taken away from there; the peasant must have more money or else they will turn the child over to the Gestapo." The news about our little girl pierced our hearts. We must leave this barn, the sooner the better, we thought. Our peasant drank more than he ate and came home drunk late at night, talking incoherently. When we told him that we planned to leave because my husband and I were ill, he became very angry. But we were determined to go at a time when the full moon would guide our wanderings. In the meantime he shaved Hersh by the light of the moon. There was no light at all in our stable, so that there would be no danger of being discovered. Once his mother came to visit for a few days and the farmer would take some of the food from her plate saying that he gives the food to the dogs, but he would bring us the food. He did not want to let us go. We were a source of income to this unusual peasant. One night we climbed a ladder and reached the outside. When the peasant, Mr. Chabro, saw us he angrily shouted, "Once a Jew, always a Jew — a Jew remains a Jew. I do not trust a Jew."

We both stood and trembled. We tried to quiet him with good talk and told him that we would be back. We said that we also had to wash out our clothes. "Come," he said. "My wife will wash them for you." We knew that we did not dare live in his stable any longer. Half dead we went off to his wife, if only to get away from him standing in the dark barn. We were afraid that he would kill us because he was in such a drunken state. We explained to his wife that we were sick and had to go to a doctor. "Come back anytime," she said. And we left, thanking God we were able to depart.

ALSO KINDNESS

Again in the woods. It was dark. The snow was so deep that we sank in to our knees. We were in great distress, not only because of Nazi beastialities but also because of hunger, homelessness, constant fear and the worry about our children. We were griefstricken. But we accepted God's punishment without complaining. With melancholy thoughts we struggled on, stumbling through the deep snow, falling, picking ourselves up and hoping we were on the right path to the house in which our Goldele lived. At long last we arrived at our destination. The house was warm. Mr. Kosak's wife, daughter, and our little Goldele were nearby. We must have looked extremely wretched, for they got frightened when they saw us. Mr. Kosak talked to us in a friendly manner, gave us some food and a bit of brandy. Both he and his wife prepared a tub of warm water to wash in. They even gave us their bed for the night. We thought that we had reached Paradise. In the morning we were given breakfast and brought up to the alcove under the roof. Gradually we began to look and feel better. The watchman's son was scheduled to come in a day or two. The two of them,

father and son, would consult each other regarding a hiding place where we, as well as Goldele, could be together. On the third day we were informed that our redeemer and his son worked energetically for two consecutive nights and built a hiding place under the floor, deep in the earth. But if this would save our lives, we were ready to endure another horrible experience. Who knew what our destiny might be? To be placed alive in a deep pit might be real agony, but we could yet be saved for a good future. I will never understand what gave us the strength to keep our hopes in spite of all our unimaginable ordeals. We felt that this forest guardian was an improvement over the past peasant's place, since Mr. Kosak was not a drunk. We were at ease in his presence, although he, too, demanded money. He asked for a good deal of money and was ready to wait until we would go to town to sell some of our merchandise.

Our Polish benefactor, Mr. Kosak, was not a Jew-hater. He and his family were radicals and more intelligent than the average Pole in that section. His family respected him and obeyed him completely. In this circle we spent a few months. The plan that made for secrecy, security, and survival was adhered to religiously. During the day we were in our "grave" — the hole in the ground. At midnight we slept in the house and early in the morning descended again to the pit in the earth. A phase of the plan called for us to prepare our own food. I cooked potatoes, a cereal of groats with a little milk in it. This food sustained us for 18 hours. (It goes without saying that we were expected to pay for the food.) On very cold days, when it was impossible to spend many hours in the depths of the earth, we were permitted in the house. Mr. Kosak stood on guard at the window in case someone came near the house. Whenever someone came we would hurry down to our place which the Pole covered with boards. Fortunately, the Pole's daughter had a sewing machine and we agreed that I help her sew late at night. Our

"landlord" read the newspapers and got to know what was happening to Polish Jewry. He discussed with us the contents of the newspaper and at times became very upset.

Mr. Kosak would frequently leave the house to tend to his duties in the forest. One day he said to us: "I am growing old and I am disturbed. How long can all of this go on? I cannot take it. They take all Jews to the crematoria. The two of you have become sort of close to me. I don't really know why. Sometimes I fantasize that I go with you to town and tell the entire story. But my feet would not take me there. In any event, please go and find yourselves another place." We knew that Mr. Kosak was a very sensitive man, so we remained silent. But in our hearts we felt dread and despair. After a short silence we appealed to him to be a bit more patient. We told him that his was the only house we could trust. We asked him if he would keep us a little longer. While in the pit we overheard him speak to many a passerby, to peasants, other wanderers and our fear and agony was great. One day we heard that two men jumped from a train heading for Russia and asked Mr. Kosak for mercy. The two escapees were of the opinion that the war would no doubt last another year or two. We were utterly miserable, for we were counting the days when the war would end and here we learned of a possible wait of two more years. How would we survive?

PEASANT'S POVERTY

We made monthly visits to the poor Pole who was the official father to my little girl, Bashka. The distance which separated us was about five kilometers. As already mentioned elsewhere, this Pole who cared for Bashka lived in great poverty. At times the members of his family suffered from severe hunger. There was little food, and no clothing fit

for the winter season. The peasant was unfortunate that his fields were unfertile, dusty, and thus unfit to produce decent crops. Our walking into that house gladdened the hearts of its inhabitants. They knew that we were bringing some food for our Bashka and that they would not remain hungry. At times when we came to see our daughter, we found her sleeping. In all likelihood she had gone to sleep on an empty stomach. Ocassionally she used to call out in her sleep: *"Mamashe, Tatashe"* — the two endearing Yiddishized Polish words for mother and father. She already learned to speak Polish. When she wakened, we smothered her with kisses. She was very beautiful. Her haircut given by the peasant added charm to the child. She looked like a typical good-looking little Polish girl. The house folks loved her, but could not translate their love in terms of food. When I put the food on the table, there was an immediate run for it. Our child ate, too, and then went back to sleep. One of the family, the boy of fourteen, would often stand outside as a guard. The father, Zazhetski, informed us that whenever a stranger questioned them about Jews, they would tell them that the members of his family do not know Jews. Our child, Bashka, answered the same way, the peasant told us. She called the peasant "father" and his wife "mother." During one of our visits we told Zazhetski of the addresses of our family in foreign countries. We also informed him that there was money and merchandise distributed in the city. In case we are not around, he should be able to take some of it for food.

One day the poor peasant went to the forest caretaker, Mr. Kosak, and asked him if he knew us, the Hershkos. He would like them to know that he could no longer keep the child and that we should come and take her away. The forest caretaker, Mr. Kosak, told him that he didn't keep the Hershkos, but sometimes they came to him late at night, and if they came he would deliver the message. When we came to Zazhetski, he told us that the head of the village questioned

the wisdom of having a Jewish child hiding in a Polish home, and that this might negatively affect the entire village. While listening to this, the boy of fourteen came in, saying that all the people in the village were aware that his father was sheltering a "Zhiduvka," a Jewess. Where to go now was our dilemma. It was impossible to get a Pole to house a Jewish child. It was easier to manage with an adult who could be hidden away, but a child can cry at any time and give herself away. Our unhappiness knew no bounds; we wept bitterly and the entire family wept with us. We began to try to convince them that nobody would betray them. We looked at our Bashka and saw how she had grown already, and was becoming a very beautiful little girl. Hersh talked to the peasant and told him that his poverty and need had already reached a disastrous stage. Hersh said to him, "If we took the child with us you would receive no aid whatsoever. Let us better fight hunger together." The peasant understood the truth of Hersh's remarks. Taking little Bashka's hands in his, he lovingly uttered these words, "You are our child, you will stay with us." We gave him some money and left with a little lighter heart and feeling of a temporary reprieve. Still — who knew what future trials lay ahead of us? The winter evening was beautiful and invigorating as we walked away from our Bashka's haven. We poured out our hearts to the almighty God. "Why did you, O Lord, turn your eyes away from us? Why, merciful God, have you removed your sheltering wings from us? Why must our little birds suffer? What are their sins?" Then I turned to my husband, "Maybe our efforts are too strenuous. All that we had was taken from us, all of our people, all of the Jews are being exterminated. Why struggle so much? Why such stubborn, teeth-clenching, intensive effort?" Hersh answered, "Many times I have had in mind to tell you that we should turn ourselves in, but the children — they deserve our efforts and struggle. We owe it to them to fight for our existence to the very last

bit of physical and mental strength and to the very last penny we own."

Returning to the home of Mr. Kosak, the guardian of the forest, we learned from him that he was willing to keep our Goldele, until the end of the war, but he could no longer keep us in the "pit," because the earth was getting moist and would endanger our health. Another difficulty, he said, was that many peasants, in preparation for the spring season, come to the forest to cut trees daily. Many of these men stayed at work for several weeks. While working, they often stopped by to see Kosak and spend time in his house. Hence, it would be impossible for the two of us to remain there from now on.

In the meantime we had to get more money, which called for a lengthy walk into town. Hersh went by himself. On the way, the Polish policeman recognized Hersh and pursued him. It was our good fortune that Hersh was near the house of a friendly Pole where our vault was hidden. The Pole happened to be standing outside and when he saw Hersh running, he grabbed him and hid him in his house and then immediately ran to where he was standing before Hersh came on the scene. When the officer came running and asking if he saw a Jew come by — the Pole answered, "You must of had an illusion. There is no Jew anywhere around." Hersh experienced similar narrow escapes whenever he left the security of a hiding place. Once he was followed by a Pole who seemingly knew my husband. "The forest that you want to reach is not far away, go there." The same man, on the morrow came to the house of Kosak. The guest spoke freely, mentioned the fact that he, too, shelters Jews and that he wanted to take Hersh to warm up in his house, but that the Jews themselves objected. He continued his discourse by saying that he and his wife are becoming nervous and that he will have to let the Jews go. We have known that the majority of Poles were indifferent to Jewish sufferings. However, there were also small numbers of humanitarians

among the Poles who were very much disturbed by the Nazi beastialities. Kosak and the visitor who also sheltered Jews were among this group. Having listened to the statement of his visitor, the forest guardian faced us and made the following statement: "People are tiring of the Jews they hide. Since there is no end to the war my patience is at an ebb. You must leave my house." The problem of getting a new haven for survival faced us again. To our great distress and sorrow no doors were open to us. There was no one in the entire region who would house a Jew. In addition to the Nazis who cast a spell of great fear over everyone, there were the bands of Polish "Akavatses" (gangs of Fascist Youth), who were dangerous and whose presence in the area spelled torture and torment. Finally, Kosak opened the top of our hiding place and declared that we must go and find another refuge because his neighbor was already aware of our presence. We better go in peace. We were most grateful that Goldele was permitted to remain. It was on a Friday when we gathered our belongings and started our walk into the forest.

The night was dark and terrifying. Not knowing what to do nor where to go, we decided to go to the peasant with whom we stayed during the first days of our forest wanderings. We reasoned that with the coming of Summer and the days being longer, he might not drink as much and would be less threatening. We crept along as silently as we could, trying to avoid being seen and to escape the barking of the dogs. We knocked quietly on the door. The woman fearfully opened the door and let us in. Her husband was not there. We pleaded with her to permit us to stay in her place for a few weeks, explaining that the reason for our leaving her house was not only because of the severe cold but also the fear of her husband's threats. She listened attentively and murmured that we could spend only two weeks. She made room on the earthen floor for us to sleep. Hersh being very tired fell asleep immediately, but I stayed awake. The next

morning we discussed our situation and decided to dig a large hole in the ground. We had seen Mr. Kosak (the forest guardian) do this and we believed that we could do the same. Working one night we dug once again a "grave" for the still-living Jews. There, every waking hour was real torture.

In time, we felt so cramped that we made up our minds to try to find a corner to live in somewhere else. We learned at that time that a few rich Jews who succeeded in being hidden were helping a few of the wanderers in the forest. Should we go there? But at the time when we were ready to leave the pit, we found out that someone informed the authorities about the forest guardian harboring Goldele. When we heard the turmoil in the forest and from a very narrow corner of the attic we saw some Germans approaching Mr. Kosak's house, Hersh was ready to go and find out what was happening to our daughter. I did not let him go. Shortly thereafter we learned that a number of German officers, led by a secret agent, entered Mr. Kosak's house. Goldele quickly climbed up to the top of the oven (the oven, made of bricks, was built into the wall and provided a flat space on its top) and acted as though she were asleep. The Pole asked her eagerly who she was. Goldele answered that she was a shepherdess, tending the cows. The secret agent smiled, conveying the idea that he knew very well who she was, but at that very moment Mrs. Kosak walked into the house and understanding the meaning of the visit and of the presence of a German agent near Goldele, said calmly, "Yes, she is my shepherdess tending the cows." It seemed as though the man was not convinced that the answers were true, but abandoned the questioning and did not even tell the Germans about Goldele. It was then that Mr. Kosak told us that Goldele must leave his house because the members of his family were terrified. We begged him to let her stay three more days so that we could have time to find a new benefactor. In the meantime we had to abandon our hiding place in

the peasant's house. We felt as though all avenues of escape were closed to us.

Although there was little hope of resolving our problem, with a feeling of despair I ran to a Polish photographer for a false passport of a Polish woman so that I could leave the country. On that day the Nazis with the help of the anti-Semitic Poles killed the remnants of the Jewish people in the area. While running, I saw the corpse of a boy of six — Fatsha's child. I heard shots. I opened the door of a house and was bodily thrown out. In a state of agony I started to run. I heard shots again and again and continued running frantically. In the evening I ran into Fatsha and her husband, Yankel Goldbaum. On that day of horror they were on the street leading to the forest where they were united with Avramtchik's two sons. Noticing a wagon with Germans they all fled in different directions. The Germans saw them running and started shooting, killing Avramtchik's two sons and Fatsha's little boy. With a heavy heart I continued to run. I must have been in a trance. I was not aware that my husband was not with me. I learned later on that night, the tax collector informed the German officials of the cellar where a number of Jews were hiding. All of these Jews were assassinated. In the forest there was confusion, uproar, and tumult. The Nazis surrounded the forest area and it was no longer a safe haven. We felt like hunted animals. I got to the home of Mr. Kosak, to see Goldele who was not in sight. I was thrown out, of course. It was getting dark; should I run to the forest?

I met two Jewish boys who were hiding in the woods and asked them if they had seen my husband. They told me that he had been afraid to remain in the woods and ran away by himself. For three consecutive days I did not know where he was nor what had happened to him. On the fourth day he appeared. The terrified man got lost in the thick of the woods. In the hours of confusion and turmoil, everybody

running, trying to save himself, he, too, started to run and in the darkness fell into a body of water. Upon returning to dry land he saw a light in the distance. He went in that direction and entered the house. The place was empty, but soon a young woman walked in and asked him what he wanted. She explained that many a bandit was in the area and some of the partisans were roaming in the woods. Hersh told her his story and asked for a night's rest. Another woman walked in. She was the mother of the first woman. Seeing Hersh, she remembered buying merchandise from him, but told him that he could not stay overnight because they were two women by themselves. Hersh left the house but the younger woman followed him and asked that he return for a bite of food and to warm up. Hersh walked into a warm house, was given food, dried his wet clothes and got acquainted with the entire family. They asked if he could sew; they had materials and a sewing machine. He was happy to answer positively and thus stayed in the house three days, receiving his remuneration in food and shelter. The older woman was a good-hearted person. She even wept whenever there was talk about the Jews. Hersh looked unkempt, dirty, and bearded. She said to him, "I remember you as a nice-looking merchant, I remember how well you lived; but God alone knows that there is nothing I can do for you."

After Hersh's return from three days of the "good life" we returned to the business of looking for a place for Goldele who had to be taken from Mr. Kosak's house. We consulted with this intelligent Pole, who had cared for Goldele and who had been so good to us. He told us that every peasant who harbored a Jew had to get rid of him. Some of these peasants brought in Germans who would then shoot the Jews. He listed the Jews who were thus exterminated in the various hiding places in the field. The killers were also Polish bandits, so reported Mr. Kosak. We listened and understood the meaning of this report. Life was no longer worth living.

Flashing through our minds was the thought — Is it now our turn? Our child was with us and looked very troubled as she too listened to the report. The following was our statement to Mr. Kosak: "Mr. Kosak, what would you advise us to do?" He commented, "It is bad, I fear more our own bandits than the Germans. I can no longer help you. My brother sheltered Shama Biegelman with his wife and son. They had to move to the brother of the peasant who gave you shelter, and there they were eliminated. A few days ago a number of your people headed by Abraham Oberklied came to me offering a sizable sum of gold coins for a few hiding places in the forest. I had to refuse them. I have no longer the physical strength to go on. I can do no more for you."

Mrs. Kosak gave us an account of the situation in Konscovola. In that town a labor camp was set up where all kinds of workers were being accepted. I was suspicious of this kind of labor camp and understood that this was one way to get the Jews together for the kill. Other people, Jews and Poles, said about the camp that it was a trap. "The Hershkos should not go there," Mrs. Kosak said. Hersh suggested that Goldele and I go to Kovscovola and he would roam in the field so as to be near Bashka. Mrs. Kosak, however, insisted that I, too, go to the fields rather than being close to that camp. It would be advisable to make another effort to find a place in this area and that Goldele could stay with them for another two or three days. We accepted her advice and spent the night in the woods. The climate of the spring time was intoxicating. It was the week of Passover — warm and beautiful, but we could not enjoy it. We walked to see Bashka. Again Hersh suggested that I take Goldele and go to Konscovola. "It is much easier for a woman to escape danger," he said. "It is now our destiny to part ways," he sadly commented. I was aware that we still had a bit of merchandise in a nearby village and some gold coins at the home of the priest, the latter being our treasury in case of extreme urgency.

When we entered the house of Bashka's landlord, we climbed up to the attic under the slanted roof and we noticed that there was no straw and that there were holes in the roof and, no doubt, that the winds had an easy entrance. Seeing the surroundings it occurred to us that this area could be made into a fairly safe hiding place for myself, Hersh and Bashka. No one would suspect its existence, if we prepared it properly. When the peasant came up with a bit of milk and a slice of bread, we asked him to call up his wife because we wanted to discuss with both of them an important matter. She climbed up and we told them that we cannot stay any longer in our present place. We came to see Bashka every month and because we don't want to interrupt the relationship with the child, Hersh would like to stay with Bashka in the attic and I with Goldele will have to go to the camp in Konscovola. As soon as the peasant woman heard this plan, she said to me, "No, Hershkov, (the Polish equivalent of Mrs. Hersh) I cannot let you go there with your child. That is no place for you." She explained, "The camp is only to fool the Jews of the surrounding villages. When they come in, thinking it is a work camp, they are all killed. We are suffering enough, as well. I tell our neighbors that you aren't alive any longer. I can do the child no harm. I tell them that I will not hand her over to the police. She is our little girl and no one can prove that she is a Jewish girl. If you want to," she continued, "gather yourselves together and come to us. We are threatened with death anyway, just for keeping Bashka, so it is all the same, whether we keep one or two or three." It was impossible to remain in the woods with Goldele. The Poles had been promised a sum of money for every Jew they would bring to the Germans. We were told how a Jewish girl went through a village when a peasant caught her and brought her to the police. She was the daughter of Hershl Akun, whom we knew. She was a fine girl and a good student. When she pleaded with the police to

send her to Konscovola, they obliged her and she was never heard from again.

We had to be extremely careful to arrange our new hiding place in so secretive a manner that there would be no sign of any kind that other human beings were around. It was known that only Bashka was there. We gave Mr. Zazhetski money to buy straw and we began to build our hiding place in the attic. We had to be careful with the neighbor's dogs, for their barking could arouse suspicion. We also had to arrange for our new refuge accordingly. Straw and hay was brought up and we, including Mr. Zazhetski and his wife, had to become builders, architects and mechanics. He also brought us boards and wire so we could begin to build our refuge. The peasant's house had a slanted roof which covered the entire house and barn. The house and barn were attached to each other. The ladder in the barn served as a stairway to a small opening in the ceiling where one could crawl through to get to the attic under the roof. In a small section of the attic near a corner of the roof, we constructed a wall-like separation consisting of wooden slats or boards reinforced with wire. We covered this with hay and straw which gave the impression of a hay stack. We also made a small opening which led into the larger area of the attic. Our tiny cell was our escape hatch if and when anyone came searching for Jews. This was our emergency escape. When all was quiet we spent our time in the larger part of the attic floor which covered both the house area and the barn.

Our new "home" was situated a few kilometers from the forest and about the same distance from the city. Our landlord, Mr. Zazhetski, was known as a poor man. He would frequently go begging for a loaf of bread. He did not own a shirt, let alone a suit of clothes. He and his family lived in great poverty. In his home hunger was commonplace. The neighbors did not visit him in his house.

They stayed away from each other. Hence, our seclusion was almost complete.

After our new living quarters were arranged, I went to get Goldele. Mr. Kosak and his wife were waiting impatiently for our call to take the child. Polish Jew-baiting was growing worse from day to day. Polish bandits and terrorists were as bad as the Nazis. Kosak warned us to be even more careful than before, especially in going to get some of our money. He also informed us that if we needed him, we should come very late at night. Goldele wept when we took her from the home of the Kosak family. She had grown attached to the people and her surroundings. My explanation that we would now be together as a family — parents and children — did not affect her. When I brought her to our corner of the new hideout, I could see that the two sisters did not recognize each other. It had been a year since they had last been together. Bashka argued that she had no sister.

"My sister," she cried, "is no longer among the living."

Both children wept and we with them.* It was difficult to comfort the two girls. Both were used to being outdoors and enjoying the fields and the woods. We could only offer them a crude, makeshift, dark dwelling. Both sisters wept a long time until they fell asleep.

Hersh and I got busy trying to find some way to repair our ragged clothes, which were full of patches upon patches. The clothing which we possessed had long since been stolen from us.

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*When Bashka and her sister were out in the fields we had to give Goldele a Christian name. Bashka's first thought was to name her Tereska. This Christian name confirmed Bashka's belief that her sister was dead.

THE POLES PURSUE THE JEWS AND THE GERMANS ARE AFTER THE POLES

During our first family outing we walked to one of the houses where some of our merchandise was kept. Mr. Kosak directed us to a "smuggler" of Warsaw origin, who was a clever businessman and also a capable politician. This strange person let us come at midnight. We sold him some textiles and got a little money to pay our poor landlord, Mr. Zazhetski. Our life was very dull, unpleasant, and often bitter. The knowledge, however, that we had the children with us, gave us a new lease on life. Our menu consisted of a cold potato with a little milk, which was given to us twice a day. There was no bread. As already intimated, the peasant could not get the precious bread even on Sunday on his way to church. When Germans were in the neighborhood we quickly rushed to our shelter to hide.

The Germans were looking for potential Polish workers in that area, since no more Jews were available for forced labor. Many peasant youths were caught and brought to the Nazi officials, who sent them to labor camps inside Germany. Every now and then the German soldiers would surround the church and would mobilize all young people for hard labor. Not far from the place where we were hiding there lived a peasant, a father of several boys. He lived in fear that the German soldiers would take his boys away to Germany. The soliders looked for these boys every day. This situation prompted us to be on the alert more than ever and to build another hiding place under the ground. We also made a small hole in the roof so that one of us could keep watch. In case of a suspected search by the Germans we would quickly descend to our large hole in the ground, which we called the "grave." Many a time we were buried a full day. When looking at our beautiful girls, I felt pain in

my entire body. "Why did we give life to these darling children to suffer so unbearably?" I silently asked myself. Late at night we learned that during the day the German murderers surrounded the village, had taken a number of inhabitants, including women and children, and shot them.

One day I walked on a main road on my way into town and saw many people watching the Germans hang nine Polish men. The Germans forced the wives and children to see their husbands and fathers die. My heart was aching. I thought of God and of what is happening in His world. I asked the people why did the German hang these men. They told me that these villagers had been working against the Nazis. I knew one of these men. He was a friend and a customer of ours. We remembered him as a courageous man who joined the Polish partisans and had spent a night in our place once while waiting for a fellow partisan. I concluded that the Germans must have been frustrated at not being able to get more young folk to transport to factories in Germany. That terrible day of killings came to an end but not the shooting. Late at night, the peasant called us to come up from our pit. That was when he told us about the atrocities. In a state of peril and helplessness we were destined to suffer from the extreme heat which prevailed under the roof where we were hidden. Water was scarce. Our only consolation was the knowledge that our Bashka was outside with the cows. She, too, became a shepherdess, in spite of her tender age. She had a pair of old, torn boots, a little red coat and a little hat which shielded her from the hot sun. She guarded her treasured possessions. This was her wealth. No matter what the temperature these clothes went with her. She ate the chav which grew in the field. The woman of the house talked to her and she seemed to be in a good frame of mind. At sunset, when she came to our corner under the roof she told us that some people asked her about her father, Hershko. She said to them, "I have no father. My father is Zazhetski and my

mother, Zazhetokova." Everyone marveled at the child and how cleverly she answered people's questions.

Every now and then I found myself dreaming. Most of the time the dreams were close to reality. Once my father appeared in a dream and said: "My daughter, Chayele, be careful, they are riding into the village." I woke up and called to my husband: "Hersh, the Germans are riding into the village." Hersh got up, looked through a crack in the roof and said: "Wake up Goldele, I will go to tell Mr. Zazhetski that the Germans are coming and that they are going in the direction of our house." I dug myself into a large bundle of straw. Hersh and Goldele did the same. I heard the Germans come into the house and ask about the Jews who are hidden somewhere in the yard or in the house. They found Bashka who was still in the house and asked about her mother. We heard the peasant woman say in a loud voice, "Her mother is dead. She is now my child." We heard them breaking the door leading to the barn, and afterward we heard them ask for directions to the town. We were anxious about Bashka. Later on the peasant woman came up and reported that the Germans were searching for the boys of the neighbors. "We were afraid that they wanted you and we were thankful that this was not their goal," she said. The boys, however, had hurried to the field on the way to town after they had spotted the Germans.

THE "PIOUS" POLE

Similar occurrences took place several times. And yet we would not give up hope. We wanted to live and to survive. Our hatred of our enemies would not let us please them by dying. Our benefactors were truly righteous people. They suffered much because of our presence. Their lives, too, were

in constant danger. Little by little we got used to each other. There was a time of relative peace and quiet in the area. We spent long hours talking politics. Our host was a religious person. Many a time he used to say that the Jews were sinful and that therefore God punished us. He actually prophesied that in the future there will be no people who belong to the Jewish faith. When Germans used to come into his house, he used to take his prayerbook, look at the pages and gently turn them. Every third day he used to bring home a newspaper. Late at night the two peasants listened attentively to my reading. They never learned to read or write. The peasant woman was a virtuous person. She used to comfort us, saying that better times are ahead, that the Germans will eventually tumble and collapse.

We lived from day to day. Much terror and great worries were our daily lot. We used to go to various places to look for some bread and sugar. When we succeeded in finding half a loaf of bread and some saccharin we gave our friends, the pious Christians the larger portions. When once in a great while they had enough flour to bake ten loaves of peasant bread our share was only one bread for the four of us, since they had three grown children. It happened that once our host suggested that we give him Hersh's boots. His son could have them and when Hersh needed them, the boots would be returned. The deal was made. The same happened to me. The girl in the house was in need of boots and she took mine. I was given some torn shoes to wear.

Once again a band of German soldiers invaded the village. There was a great deal of turmoil, shooting, burning, putting habitable homes to the torch. Our landlord was afraid to keep Bashka lest the lives of the entire family be in danger. We were very disturbed. What could we do? The peasant woman's sister came and scolded her relatives for keeping a Jewish child. She was unaware of our presence. We, therefore, resolved to go with Bashka to the field during

the daytime and to return to our shelter in the evening. It so happened that the farmers tilled their soil at this time of the year which aggravated our position even more. But we had no alternative. I took little Bashka from her warm bed (she was only three and a half years old at that time) and Hersh took Goldele and we went into the fields for the entire day. A stormy rain met us on the outside. It was also windy. I had no strength to walk in the pouring rain. I just fell into the corn stalks, lay spread out on the earth and tried to protect Bashka as best I could. Thus I lay for the entire day and part of the night. Hersh's lot was as bad as mine. The rain poured down on us without letup. We crawled a few feet away to where the earth was not so wet. Our struggle and misery lasted two weeks.

When the rain stopped we experienced a heat wave and, to make matters worse, we had no water to drink. We scattered over a large space of the field of corn and we learned to eat from the stalks of grain. During the night we stayed in our nook at the peasant's place and had a little drinking water and sometimes we were given a little milk. Thus was our lot: early in the morning to face the elements in the open fields and late at night to return to our small indoor space which seemed like a prison cell. Early in the morning back in the fields we noticed that the rain and the high temperatures had brought out the worms in the earth. We suffered dreadfully from this sort of plague. We had to lay down every now and then in order to stretch our bodies. This was very unpleasant and most painful. Coming to our hiding place we no longer had the little food that was given to us heretofore. The good peasant was afraid to go to town in order to acquire food. We became very desperate. The very fact that even a non-Jew was not free to leave the safety of his house enhanced our worries. Hersh decided to go for help to our old friend the forester, Mr. Kosak. He took Goldele with him. It was raining again. The rags which covered our bodies

were heavy with water. Bashka and I were in sore distress. We kept silent, having no desire or strength to speak. The sounds of shots from the distance were frightening. Suddenly I heard the sound of steps among the corn. It was our kind, pious, peasant, Mr. Zazhetski. "Come," he said. "Come to the house. We cannot see you in such a condition." God knows where Hersh and Goldele might be, I thought. "But how can we go to your place in the middle of the day," I said. "It is raining," he answered, "and there is shooting all around the village. No one will venture out of his house. Fires are burning throughout the village. It should be safe for you to stay in the house."

NOT ONLY FEAR BUT ALSO HUNGER

These were quiet days. Quieter than ever before. We returned to our cell under the roof. I hugged Bashka to me, and held her in my arms. I talked to her about her father, and Goldele, who had not returned from their desperate search for a hiding place at Mr. Kosak's and we knew not where they were. Our pious peasant came in and brought with him a plate full of food, some warm potatoes, a few berries, eggs and bread. I asked him about the source of this sudden wealth. He smiled and said that since quiet reigned everywhere in the area, he ventured into town where he bought all the food we now need. I realized that the money we recently gave him was not wasted. Mr. Zazhetski also told us that the Germans had abandoned Kurov and on the roads of their retreat they destroyed a number of villages and killed many peasants. They accused the peasants of helping the partisans. In some cases they put houses on fire together with their inhabitants. I was so overjoyed to hear of the retreat of the Germans that I grabbed our peasant's hand and

kissed it, saying that I will never forget his kindness to us and his good deeds.

The dogs started to bark. I understood that Hersh and Goldele were coming. Both Hersh and Goldele came in soaked through from the rain. Hersh had a plate in his hands with two boiled potatoes. This is the story Hersh told me: "I went to see Mr. Kosak to ask for refuge for one day only. I was told that I could stay through the day, but by so doing I was endangering my life." "There is a miniature war," he said, "between the Germans assisted by the Polish Fascist Youth and the partisans. I advise you to leave this place this minute because the German soldiers might soon be here." "I left immediately," Hersh continued. "On my way I noticed an empty hut and a stable. I walked in and found straw and hay. But very soon I heard the noise of soliders coming. They surrounded the place, inspected the stable, but Goldele and I were covered up with straw and hay. They did not see us and we were thankful to God for this miracle." As a matter of fact the Germans found a number of hidden Jews in the various hiding places in the forest. They were killed on sight. Among those killed was the boyfriend of Mr. Kosak's daughter. As for the remaining Jews, they had to find new hiding places every day. Most of those killed were old people. The Poles in the village were in real trouble. A few mothers drowned their own children and some choked them rather than have them become victims of the Nazi cruelties. There was one extreme case when a brother choked his sister so that she would not be tortured by the Nazis. At that time the murderous Germans hung two Poles in the sight of their families. Another tragic case occurred in a hiding place where a number of young Poles sought a haven. In another case, a little girl became hysterical and in order to save the people from being discovered her brother strangled her. This happened before the gradual retreat of the German armies.

THE POLES WANT TO INHERIT

During the transition period when the major German armies were evacuating Eastern Poland, and the Russians advancing into Poland, Germans were still to be found in our section of the country. We were fearful of the Nazi enemy and were still in a state of dismay. Hersh ventured out to see the priest. He took with him a farmer to walk ahead to see if it were safe to go to the road leading to the church. Coming to the church grounds, he found many soldiers there. Hersh pretended that he belonged on the church grounds and walked as naturally as he could to the well to draw water. He was ignored by the Germans and thus remained alive.

The only money that was still ours was entrusted to the priest. But it was very difficult to get to him. The priest was a good-natured and just man. He was concerned about the great sufferings of the Jews. Hersh was friendly with the priest. In the early war period, when the Nazis occupied the western area of Poland, Hersh and the priest conducted some business transactions of mutual benefit. They developed a friendship. When the Nazis began to confiscate Jewish belongings and the Polish zlotye was devaluated, Hersh endeavored to exchange both our textile and yardgoods for gold coins. Both of us realized that in the future there will be a need for this type of currency. Having succeeded in selling some of our merchandise for payments in gold, we looked for a place to hide our money as well as the unsold goods. The priest helped us immensely. He hid our gold coins for us in his house.

One day he said to us, "In case I will not be present when you will be in need of the money, it is important that you know the location of the hiding place." He also assured us that only one other person knows about the money. This person, he told us, is an honest man, reliable and

trustworthy. We were happy to find a non-Jew who was ready to help in these hours of the great catastrophe. Had it not been for the good priest we would not have been able to make the payments to the peasants who gave us shelter. The priest was an honest man and was fond of Hersh because he knew of Hersh's good reputation in the community. He also cautioned us to be on the alert against some of the trickery and the hostile behavior of some of the ignorant Poles whom we would encounter.

I went to a woman farmer who was our customer for many years, but I was not admitted. I had the feeling that my presence dirtied her person. She insisted that I do not come near her. Her sons were still wearing the shirts made of the linen material they had purchased from our store on credit. "I need the money that you owe me in order to buy bread for my children," I explained. "I have to pay for boarding my children out in the homes of our good friends." To this argument the answer was, "In any case not a single Jew will remain alive. You have a lot of nerve to come here." I was furious and miserable. I told the woman to return the linen shirts that her sons wore and I would not trouble her any more. The result of this dialogue was the return of two linen shirts and a slice of bread. My tears of humiliation and misery flowed copiously down my cheeks. The night was upon us. We were close to the German barracks which housed the murderers. I carried the piece of bread in my hand and with an aching heart walked into the home close by whose owner was also in debt to us. Then I was given a few zlotys and a slice of bread along with many good wishes offered in a most compassionate manner. It occurred to me that not all Polish women are heartless and cruel.

GOOD POLES

The daily confusion affected the lives of the Christian population. They were fed up with the Nazi torment — their burning, killing, searchings and investigations. And yet, anti-Semitism was all-pervasive. However, there were still some who were willing to help the downtrodden. One of them was Mr. Yanitski, who in the early stages of forced labor decrees, when I worked as one of the cooks in the labor camp, welcomed to his home people of all walks of life and was ready to counsel Jews whenever possible. Once it happened that I had to go to meet Hersh who went to Mr. Yanitski's home to hear the news or get a paper. While going there I got lost momentarily in the darkness. The streets were not recognizable, because many of the buildings were burned. I developed a headache, and stood still for a few minutes. Although it was quiet all around me, the silence was suddenly broken by the sound of steps. The nature of those steps convinced me that the person coming toward me was not a German soldier. Soon enough a person whom I could identify was close to me. I asked the stranger how to cross the highway. The answer was given in a relaxed, calm voice: "You need not fear. I know that you are the daughter of Mr. David Rosensohn and I know where you want to go. I will escort you to that place." He walked me to my destination. In his presence I felt at ease and had no fear. I asked the stranger who he was and what his name was. Unfortunately, he did not give his name. He must have been a local person who was known to many people. The reason that I dared be so bold as to ask his name was that his voice radiated warmth and gentleness. I was happy to find a humane person.

As another winter began creeping in, the cold, strong winds forced us to build a new hiding place in the barn which would afford us opportunities to stay in the warm

house when there was no danger. However, we would be able to rush to our shelter, in case outsiders would come to the house. This place was a space between the house and the barn. Our new haven consisted of paper, straw, rags and hay. The peasant and children helped us to fix this new place up in an artful way. We could not speak in our new location, but had to use the pantomime method to communicate. What cooking we did was done in the peasant's kitchen. Sometimes we used a very small lamp for light. We had to be very careful, lest the neighbors become suspicious seeing smoke coming from the chimney. Mr. Zazhetski and his son gave us two burners with pipes which were connected to the stove in the family's kitchen. We could only cook when they used their stove. We suffered dreadfully from the cold before our new abode was made ready for us to live in. We stayed in the house whenever it was safe to do so, otherwise we entered the tiny section in the hideout which the swines occupied. At times we had to eat together with them. The children would play with the piglets and became used to them. One might say that we, too, lived like swine. We were, however, happy to be alive and to be together and most of all to be hopeful that we might survive this tragic ordeal. We worked out a schedule of activities — when one slept the other kept guard and vice versa. Time was taken up in teaching the children not to cough, to try to stifle a cough just in case someone might come by late at night. We played finger games with each child and we also taught our little one how to remian restful, quiet, and calm, even when there was a search in the peasant's house.

CRUEL POLES

One night when Hersh and the children were sleeping, and I was reading a newspaper by the light of a tiny candle, I heard a loud knocking at the door and a voice exclaiming: "Do not fear, we just want your Jews." I awakened Hersh and told him that Polish bandits were at the door and that we better do something very quickly and very ingeniously to save ourselves. "Let's go up to the nook under the roof — our old hiding place," I said. I gave him Goldele and took Bashka in my arms and we climbed up to the old hiding place. We heard the landlady say, "We do not know of Jews. We are poor beggars, ask the neighbors." Her arguments were to no avail. The vicious bandits broke down the door and forced their way into the house and searched everywhere. They went to the stall, which we had just left. They came close to the alcove, shouting all the while, "Abramtche,* you rich Jew come out!" Hearing no answer to their call, they shouted, "Give us your Jews or you will be shot to death." The peasant, Mr. Zazhetski, talked quietly: "You may shoot me, but I cannot turn over to you any Abramtche, since I do not have Jews. I have a wife and three children. Have you no God in your hearts?" he asked. Since Hersh and I understood that this search was the work of an informer, our hearts were gripped with great fear. The bandits were in the house about an hour. For us it was an eternity. Hersh wanted us to run. I pleaded with him not to do it. Fortunately, my appeal was heeded. Finally, the bandits were convinced that there were no Jews in the house and even said so. They asked for liquor. The peasant gave them the little whiskey that he had which they downed with slices of bread. When the bandits left, Mr. Zazhetski called out to us and when we didn't

*The Ukrainians called Jews "Moishke," the Poles "Abramtche."

answer because of the difficulties involved in getting down from our perch under the roof, he became worried, but was happy to see us. He told us that he had learned that the informer gave information about another Jewish person.

THE PRIEST'S WISE ADVICE

Time went on. We had no news from anyone. Once Mrs. Zazhetski told the story of a Jew named Abramtche and his daring act. This nervous Jew assembled a band of young peasants with weapons and late at night broke into the home where he had lived before the German attacks. His aim was to get the money that he had hidden in his home. He took his so-called security men and promised to give them half of his wealth. On the very same day the young boys attacked Abramtche, robbed him of all his money, and killed him and his entire family. Poor Abramtche, he did not know that some Polish peasants, when they see money, especially in large quantities, become wild and act without conscience. Our benefactors never knew the exact sum of money that we carried with us. We abided by the advice of the priest that "even the best of peasants should not be shown a great deal of money; he could get excited and kill you." It was our policy to appear as ordinary poor folk. We were satisfied with the patches on our clothes which prevented the Polish peasant from suspecting us of carrying large sums of money. As mentioned previously, much of our money was hidden in the priest's home. When we needed money to pay the "landlords," even if we had the required sum with us, Hersh would say that he would go to a friend in town, sell him some merchandise, at a reduced rate; he would then walk a few hours in the field and upon his return bring the money. This method of keeping from the

peasants the idea that we had an abundance of money was in keeping with the priest's advice, who knew his peasants better than we did. Unfortunately, we had to stoop to such ruses in our great need to survive. One day our impoverished benefactor asked for some textile for his older son. We were already out of merchandise, except for a few yards of goods which we had deposited in the home of a Polish friend in Vonvolitz. We were in a real predicament. How could we get to that town and avoid meeting partisans, bandits or even bands of Nazis? The partisans, among whom there were also Jewish fighters, were anti-Semitic and did not even tolerate their Jewish comrades in arms. It happened when bands of partisans were invading a village to get food, that a fight broke out between the partisans and the peasants. Invariably, in these battles, the victims were Jews. These situations made travel to any place dangerous. A Jew might be hurt or killed even by a vicious partisan. We still had some wares in small quantity in the city, but how did a Jew get there? Hersh was the same height as the Pole's son. He put on the boy's clothes and hat so as to look like one of the young peasants who go to the city to see a doctor. Hersh went through the fields. It was dark. He came to the home of the Pole, knocked on the door. The woman of the house was afraid to open the door. While explaining to her his position and assuring her that there was no one else with him, a group of peasants with rifles surrounded the place. One of them struck Hersh in the chin and caused him to lose two teeth. Another Pole, however, recognized Hersh and spoke to him in a friendly manner. He also prevailed upon the band to leave. The woman in whose house we had left some wares had been robbed several times. Still, she stepped out of the house, carrying our merchandise and gave it to Hersh saying: "Run for your life." Hersh ran. He covered the distance of 15 kilometers and with God's help came through this perilous journey with no further mishap. This trip took seven hours. For our family it seemed like seven years.

Our landlords decided that we should do the sewing of the merchandise we brought to them. We gladly used our warm materials and sewed a coat and a suit. Neither could we refuse to help our saviors, nor did we wish to.

OUR CHILDREN BECOME WILD AND CAUSE US GREAT CONCERN

Throughout our wanderings, drudergy and struggle, we were conscious of the impact of these hardships upon our children. We tried to forestall injury to their bodies and minds. However, our efforts wre not completely successful and a period of crises set in. Our children became unmanageable and wild. The older girl, Goldele, shouted that she was stifled in our hiding place, and that she must get to the outside, otherwise we must go along with the other Jews. "Are we better than all other Jews?" she cried. "If the family does not go, let me go by myself," she argued. The two girls began fighting over trivialities, yelling at one another. We were afraid that their noise might reach the outside and uncover our presence. Hersh tried to punish Goldele by spanking her. This caused her to shout even more frequently and louder. As I became extremely nervous and distraught, I found myself tearing my hair and scratching at the skin of my face. I hoped this action would cause the children to calm down out of compassion and love for their mother. For a while they remained quieter and more controlled and showed tenderness and regret for their behavior. In time they began to mimic me and to laugh at my actions. I was ridiculed and laughed at every waking hour. The older one was angry and argued that we were making new and beautiful clothes for the peasant's daughter and not for her. We soon made a new skirt and shirt only for Goldele. The following day the up-

roar was the same as before. For many a day we made every possible effort to keep our landlord from knowing about this new state of affairs in our famiy, but in time we felt that we must tell them the truth so that they might redouble their watchfulness and, if possible, not let strangers come near the house. The peasant advanced the theory that we should not spank the girl for she is badly afflicted by God, and that as parents we have to suffer with her. He comforted us by saying, "Perhaps God will help — you must be strong and courageous." Both of these Poles were compassionate people and they loved Goldele. She was very beautiful, but circumstances had made her bitter and mean. They were very kind and understanding. Goldele almost became a cripple because she constantly sat on her feet with her legs bent. She caused us great misery and unhappiness because we thought that by sitting in this fashion that she would become deformed. We tried to refuse her food. She, on the other hand, insisted that we go with all the other Jews. At times she asked to be permitted to tend to the cows in the field, and not to be kept in this prison-like cell.

The impact of the discord between parents and children at such a critical time was intolerable and extremely disturbing. Frankly, we didn't know what to do. Bashka was not so demanding and so rebellious as Goldele. When they slept and we would look at them, we would see two lovely, beautiful girls. Our pain, then, would deepen. We suffered for so long a period of time to overcome the dangers in our lives, that our ordeal to survive and to keep our loving family intact was taxing all our ingenuity, strength and endurance. And now when we began to hear rumors of peace, and it seemed as though it would not be too long before our great trials would be lessening, our own children had seemingly reached the end of their endurance and we stood a chance of losing everything we had sacrificed so much to keep our lives with dignity. Hersh made his way to town to

consult with a man who commanded our respect. The advice given was unacceptable.

Two years had elapsed since we came to stay with these very poor but very fine peasants. What were we to do now? Hersh became extremely nervous and began leaving our safe nook more and more. I remained by myself to struggle with the children and to find the money to make the regular payments to our landlord. I was certain that these benevolent peasants would do us no harm. One day, after Hersh returned from his wandering, the peasant declared that he found a place for Goldele, at a farm with decent Gentiles, where she would be able to be a shepherdess. Hersh gave these new acquaintances the agreed fee for two months in advance. We packed most of Goldele's clothes and our girl left to that far away farm as some one happily going to a dance. To her it meant the attainment of liberty, the freeing from the terrible restrictions of the compact, crowded cell. She was already seven years old — a pale beautiful child. As we parted from Goldele we remained weeping with our little Bashka. Bashka already missed her sister and felt unhappy.

A BIT OF LUCK

As usual, Hersh again risked his life to make his way to a peasant who kept some of our belongings. He went this time because our custodian having heard of the march west of the Russian army asked for money more frequently. Hersh had to go to find our material or some cash. The night he left, I saw rockets and airplanes in the skies flying in our direction. Is our salvation coming closer? Will the Russians be our redeemers? Are the sons of past pogromists going to save remnants of the House of Israel? These were my thoughts while listening to the roar of the warplanes coming

from the east. On the way back from his mission, close to Zazhetski's home, Hersh was attacked by a group of bandits, who beat him up. Hersh begged them to free him since he was the head of a family and went to get some food for them. He also offered them one half of a bread which he carried with him. These vandals commanded Hersh to lie down and were about to kill him when another band arrived and wanted to see the man who was about to be killed. Two of the men from the new gang knew Hersh and recognized him. "Get up," they shouted, "these men want to kill you." Hersh got up and heard the two young men calling upon him to hurry off and run "to save your life." These two boys who saved Hersh's life came from Kurov. Although they were in the habit of mistreating Jews, they saved the life of the children's father. At that time I decided that Hersh would no longer go looking for our materials or money. If anyone had to on on this errand I would be the one to do so. The trips became too dangerous for Hersh.

THE MEANING OF ANOTHER DREAM

One night I dreamed that my cousin, Shmuel Shpeizman, came in to our place and informed me that Goldele was very ill and that I must go for medications. However, knowing it was impossible to go to Kurov he would walk me there — so no one would hurt me. I walked with him to the Kurov pharmacy. When I told the dream to Hersh and got ready to go, my husband refused to let me go, saying it was only a dream. I disregarded his statement, got dressed as a Polish peasant woman and started on my journey. Going through the fields I met many a farmer, but they took me for a Polish peasant woman. I crossed the highway, passed the barracks full with German soldiers.

These Nazis did not believe that there could be a Jew who was still alive, as there were no more work camps for Jews. Therefore, no one bothered me. When I came to Yanitski's house, the servant who was the daughter of the farmer who kept our Goldele, asked me the reason for my coming. I answered that I dreamed that my child was sick. The servant said, "Yes, she was. Only yesterday mother asked me to come home because of Goldele's illness. I took her to a doctor in Miyahov. He gave me medications for her. It seems that Goldele had difficulty getting used to the sunlight and the good air. She developed swellings around her eyes and could hardly keep them open. She is much better now and is back in the field with the cow. She is happy and does not even inquire about her parents." I was much relieved and felt less anxious about our Goldele. The maid asked me to wait in the stable while she ran to call the mistress of the house.

THE FRONT COMES CLOSER

The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Yanitski, were in a happy mood when they met me. They were rejoicing — "The front is coming closer each day," they said. "It won't be long and there will be a turn for the good." They brought me a newspaper so I could read for myself about the new developments. I read that, indeed, the Russian armies were on the road to Lublin. I also learned that the son-in-law of the Yanitskis, who did some secretarial work for the Germans in the city hall, their official headquarters, was in hiding now for fear that the retreating Germans would seek him out and kill him. He was then sleeping in the barn and his parents were constantly on the lookout. I began to realize that our salvation would soon come to pass. This news gladdened my heart. Simultaneously, however, the tragic experiences we had endured flashed through my mind — experiences which

defy description. Although I was told that the retreating German armies were destroying all villages in their path and that many farmers were trying to escape the wrath of the Nazis, nonetheless, I was happy in the knowledge that, no matter what, the Germans were on the run.

It was the harvest period. All the farmers were busy harvesting their crops. We would have liked to be in the fields breathing the fresh air, but we were without suitable clothes and still afraid to go outside our refuge. I appealed to the woman who kept Goldele to help me make dresses for the children. I also begged her to keep in mind that in case the Germans put the village on fire and the family had to escape, to remember to take our Goldele with them. She would be compensated for the rescue. The refugee secretary walked in while we were talking. He turned to me and said, "Act intelligently. It will not last much longer." As we were discussing the new developments, a number of Germans, members of the Gestapo, walked in. I became very frightened, but the murders asked how to go to the home of Urlich. My hostess, Mrs. Yanitski, gave them directions and after they left, remarked that no one need be afraid of them now for they have to worry about their own future. On the way home I saw many wagons packed with German women and children who lived in the Ukraine and who now were escaping to the other side of the Vistula river. They hoped to get to their old homeland Germany. The Russians were not friendly to the Germans who established local citizenship in the past. Some of them were helpful to the advancing German armies who occupied most of the European Russian territory. When the German army retreated they took with them their Russo-German brethren.

I hurried back to my family, the newspaper clutched to my chest. There were now no farmers in the fields. They must have been afraid of the warplanes, flying only a few feet above the ground. Some of the German planes were

machine-gunning the people in the fields. I was terribly fearful. When a plane flew close to the ground, I threw myself down where there was an abundance of high corn. I passed the mill when there were no bombers in the sky. Then the miller, our peasant's neighbor, appeared at the door. I trembled and hid under a nearby tiny bridge. I pretended that I had to relieve myself. I feared this man, for on one occasion he told our peasant to give him our child and he in turn would take her to the Germans. I stayed under the bridge for a while, until I was certain that the miller was a long distance from the place. I then rushed to get to our haven. Coming close to the hut I saw the peasant's son on a horse (he must have borrowed) inspecting the surrounding fields. I realized that he was sent to look for me. The peasant was standing on the threshold as I approached with a smile upon his face. He asked about my dream and I gladly told him all that happened and I thanked God that Goldele was already well. In our refuge I gave the newspaper to Hersh. He read the good news and was so happy that he called the peasant and informed him of the flight of the Germans.

Unfortunately, I became ill. Late at night I walked to a Polish woman in town to ask her to take me to Dr. Rokash. After an examination the doctor told me that I needed an operation. He stated that in order to be able to fight on until final victory, I should get this operation. We were now closer to the end of our trials, and closer to our goal of liberation, he said. The doctor spoke in a friendly and fatherly manner. The operation took place. The good Christian woman was nearby and gave me support. I was in bed for a while dressed in my rags. The doctor was compassionate, he did not mind my shabby garments. Going back home, I had to walk very carefully and slowly. When I arrived home, I thanked God for His kindness, having turned me over to just and honorable people who helped us survive. We decided on that day to stay in our despicably dirty place until the day of liberation.

A HAPPY DAY

One night we were awakened by the landlady who told us to go out into the field. What we saw was the flickering of lights of distant planes coming closer. Barrels of benzine and gasoline were thrown from the planes on the crops in the fields causing huge flames to shoot up all around. The planes were German and they destroyed crops as well as homes, spreading wreck and ruin wherever possible. It seemed to us that the Nazis must be in very bad shape if they had to resort to such needless destruction of crops and houses. We heard the sounds of artillery bombardment and knew that the Russians were coming closer. We were happy to tell Bashka that the Russians would soon be coming and we would be free to leave our confinement. Every day Bashka kept asking, "When are the Russians coming?" I answered her with joy and conviction, "Anyday now. Anyday."

While waiting for the Russians our horror and suffering became more and more unbearable. The straw which covered the earth of our cell and which we used to sleep on became full of worms. We discarded the straw and bedded ourselves down on the plain bare earth. Thus we found that the closer we came to liberation the greater became our woes. The anger of the defeated German regiments and the thousands of retreating soldiers caused us great uneasiness. The unhappy mood of defeat would prompt the Nazis to wipe out everything and everybody. We learned of their barbaric actions in Russia, when the Red Army routed them on all fronts. We were anxious lest the Nazis do the same in Poland. They are skilled in the art of killing. They might want to avenge their soldiers who fell in the battles on the Russian soil. We did not know the exact position of the Russian army, nor what direction they would be coming from. We were confused, depressed but hopeful. We were relieved when the strong lights of the Russian planes illuminated the

roads, and hundreds of Russian parachutists landed in the fields. We were glad to see the Russians in our area but also worried about the possibility of a battle.

On a Sunday morning, Mr. Zazhetski went to church and saw on the road a Russian patrol on motorcycles, followed by companies of Russian soldiers. He talked to them and found that the Russian army conquered the city of Lublin and all the towns around. Returning from church he came to our hiding place and stretched his hand through the tiny window, saying to Hersh to give him his hand, calling out: "You are free, all of you! I have seen the Russian soldiers with my own eyes. All the towns in the area are already in Russian hands." We were physically and mentally fatigued and could not absorb the meaning of the news. We felt numb and did not leave the place when we heard the news. But a bit later, looking through the cracks we saw a Russian soldier riding a horse. It was a Russian partisan who called out loudly: "Everyone has a right to beat up a German." This scene gave us a feeling as though we saw the Messiah, our deliverer, and the reality of our deliverance began to dawn upon us. We began to see masses of Russian soldiers, women dancing, singing and rejoicing. Somehow we were still afraid to leave our hideout. Hersh, however, could not control his overwhelming desire to be on the street and to experience for himself this great moment. In town he met Leible Soltes, Shmuel Hanisman, with his son, and a few other Jews.

Upon his return he decided to go to see Goldele the next morning. On the way he encountered many Russian soldiers. One of them informed Hersh that there were Jews among the Russian soldiers and if he would wait he would bring a few of them. A Jew from Warsaw serving as adjutant to the Russian captain embraced and kissed Hersh. Hersh told them that he was on the way to take his little daughter. They suggested that he take with him a few soldiers as an es-



Mr. Zazhetski, benefactor of the Kotlars, with his wife and daughter. (Picture taken after the liberation.)

cort. Hersh was so happy that he started running the two kilometers to the farmer in Mayehov. When he came to Goldele, she wept and was afraid to talk to her father. She was rocking a baby and knew nothing about the Russians driving out the Germans and freeing the area. Hersh explained: "Goldele, you need not be afraid anymore. We are free, you are free! I have come to take you back to the family." Goldele refused to go with Hersh. She insisted upon staying where she was until the family found a home. The woman who kept Goldele reported the difficulties they were having in keeping Goldele. Her oldest daughter did not want to have a Jewess in the house, while her son who was a radical was in favor of harboring the child and protected Goldele. She suggested that Hersh go and that when he finds a home for his family he should come back. There would be no difficulty bringing the girl to her new home. In the interim her son would protect Goldele. On his way home, Hersh got caught in a military operation between the Russians and the retreating Germans. There was a strong bombardment. Hersh had to spend the night in a village where the Russians were encamped. All night, bombs fell on the villages and the fields. Fires were burning throughout Kurov and its environs. The battle lasted all night.

Russian soldiers passed the peasant's house where we were hiding. There were also Polish refugees who left the battlefields and who stopped over in Mr. Zazhetski's house. I had to remain hidden because our peasants did not want the neighbors to know that he harbored Jews. We were still in danger, and had to stay hidden as long as the Polish bigots were around. We had neither food, nor water to drink. This last night was a ghastly nightmare, a night of horror and sorrow. Finally our pious benefactor approached us and suggested we go out to the fields. But I refused to go, since the fields were on fire. We remained in hiding. While hiding, I heard people speaking in Russian. I understood the Russian

soldiers were in the house drinking and celebrating. Our peasant was also drunk. When he came to me again and told me to go out to the fields, I succeeded in persuading him to let me remain a bit longer. I maintained that we were still in danger.

BURYING GERMAN SOLDIERS

It was early in the morning. I heard a gruesome story told by a Pole who just arrived from the city of Kurov. Numerous Nazis were getting ready to make a stand against the Russians. Later on it was said these Germans had barricaded themselves in the City Hall building. But the Russian soldiers with the help of the partisans overpowered the Nazis and rounded them up on an open field. There was a large ditch dug and the Nazis were forced into the ditch. It was reported by many who witnessed this spectacle, including Hersh, that the Nazis were ordered by the Russians to lift their hands in a "Heil Hitler" salute and then were buried alive as they had done to others. When Hersh came home he found many Poles around the house, so he went to the field. He asked the landlord's son to bring his family to the field. The boy brought a ladder to the small enclave and lowered us to the ground and brought us down to a free world.

Having been in the darkness for 28 months we remained alive to see the light. LIGHT! Our little girl, Bashka, was 2½ years old when she came here and now she was five. I was afraid that the sudden bright light would damage her eyes, so we selected a shady place in the corn field in the pre-harvest season. We found Hersh in the field. We were so happy and so moved that we shed tears of joy and thanked God for our liberation.

TO LIFE: *L'HAYIM*

Because of the bombardment we did not want to go to town. Instead we went to the nearby village. We had half a glass of liquor, which Hersh carried with him for a long time, awaiting this occasion. I had a slice of bread that our benefactor gave us when we left our hiding place for the last time. We sat on the ground feasting. A wagon with Russian soldiers passed by, two jumped to the ground running to us, while inquiring if we were Jews. When they heard that we were Jewish survivors they lifted Hersh and congratulated all of us. We embraced each other, kissing and weeping at the same time. There was a great emotional outburst from all of us. Jews who had escaped the Nazi genocide met Russian Jewish soldiers who were happy to take part in the celebration in the open field during the harvest season. The sense of kinship and the feelings of joy were expressed in the one word — *L'Hayim — To Life!* We shared the little bit of liquor with the rest and the Hebrew word *L'Hayim — To Life* permeated the fresh air that we so gladly and freely breathed.

Dressed in patched rags, my child barefoot, a torn, heavy flannel coat over her, we stood in the company of fellow Jews. Hersh was wearing heavy pants with patches of different colors sewn over them. We must have looked like resurrected beggars. But who paid any attention to our attire? God endowed us with added strength to overcome the last hours of misery and deprivation to reach this day of freedom. We had only our rags, but we, body and soul, survived together. We had overcome our enemies and survived to see a Jewish soldier, a free man and to drink with him a *L'Hayim — To Life.* I recited the blessing said by Jews on such occasions. It is known as the blessing of "Shehecheyanu." It reads: "Blessed art thou O Lord our God, King of the universe, who caused us to live, who caused us to exist, and who enabled us to reach this day."

We rejoiced together in the defeat of our enemy and bemoaned and mourned together the loss of our fellow Jews who were so brutally murdered. After the Jewish soldiers departed, we went to see other Jewish survivors. We saw a group of them standing alongside a Russian captain. We were given some food and Bashka was running around in the field like a bird let out of a cage, happy and carefree.

While we happily watched Bashka's reaction to her newfound liberty, a man dressed in a military uniform accompanied by a plainclothesman walked straight to where we were standing. The soldier who was with us explained to this newcomer that he was right in telling him that there were some Jews in this area. The stranger hugged and kissed us with great joy when he heard we were really Jews. He told us that he had travelled 800 miles and could not find a single Jew. Both he and an army General, a Jew, looked very carefully among the people they met to find a Jew but were not successful. He also told us about the Nazi atrocities in Russia, especially in the Jewish communities. There were no concentration camps in Russia. When the Nazi conquered a place of human habitation, they assembled all the Jews who resided there and killed them. He heard about the ghettos and death camps in Poland and the more than 3 million Polish Jews who perished. The Russians generally, and the Jews in particular, would try to destroy the regime and punish the Nazis. He then instructed his aid to let him know if he met other Jews. The military gentleman informed us that his home was in Sostavitch, Poland, where the Nazi murderers had put to death all the members of his family. Words failed us as we tried to express our sympathy. When our fellow Jew asked whether we needed clothes or money, we answered in the negative because we did not want to take money or clothes from a man on the front. He then pleaded with us to permit hm to take our Bashka to the Jewish general. "It would make him so happy to see her," he said.

We hesitated for a while, but when we became convinced that he was a gentle person, an ordained rabbi whose father was a communal leader, we let him take Bashka to the general. In an hour and a half he returned with Bashka. He brought with him food, soap, toothbrushes, combs and some kind of a drink that tasted like apple cider. We spent a short time together. I invited him to have a meal with us, and Hersh hurried to bring some liquor for a *L'Hayim.*

POLES STILL WANT TO KILL JEWS

As soon as our guest left, a group of Polish youngsters from Kurov arrived. They began speaking to us, saying that they had heard of our survival and wanted to find out how we were. They asked us about our health as though they were glad we were still alive. We knew they were our enemies and we suspected their intentions. I was afraid they meant harm to us. Hersh noticed the soldier nearby and told him of our fear of these Jew-baiters. The soldier brought an army colonel to give us protection. This person assembled many other Poles, intending to speak to them. In his talk he mentioned the fact that events in Poland eluded any logical explanation. Most of them had seen the Nazi treatment of Jews, he went on, and it was known that many Poles helped the enemy to murder Jews. They should know that these Nazis after having finished the extermination of the Jews, began to murder farmers, priests, and other Christians. Then he went on to say: "Now that we are in your country, we want peace and tranquility. No one has a right to molest or abuse his fellowman. All men are equal and should I learn of any deviation from this statement he or she will be punished." The group of youngsters from Kurov left the place, each one in a different direction, but we knew that

they might come back again. We therefore decided to go to another village.

In the new place we met more Jewish members of the Russian brigade. We got to know a Rumanian Jew, a violinist, who joined a group of artists who entertained the soldiers in the rear of the front. We stayed in this village for the Sabbath. Our friend, the Jewish soldier, accompanied by the Jew from Warsaw, joined us in celebration of the Sabbath. We invited a number of other Red Army Jews and we all dined at one table. The soldiers danced. All of us were in a good mood. Soon after the Sabbath dinner, the soldiers were ready to go to join their company on the Warsaw front lines. I mentioned that the Poles ought to help fight for the liberation of Warsaw; there were no Jews left there. The Jewish soldiers said: "No, we want some kind of revenge. We kill Germans on the front; we are not sorry to kill them; we fire at them more than is needed. But killing is not enough. The Nazis acted like beasts, their atrocities cannot be described in words, nor in any other human expression. Torturing innocent Jews was a sort of 'Thou shalt do' commandment inscribed in the mind of every Nazi. We must eradicate all of them. No more Nazis should remain on the earth." Before they left, our friends among the Russians advised us to go to Lublin. They suggested that we not stay in this region. We followed their advice. On the way to Lublin we passed Kurov. In the field we found a Jew who lived in the region most of the time and who survived as we did.

WE DISCOVER RELATIVES

In the village we had recently entered, not far from Kurov, on the way to Lublin, we implored a Pole to house us for a day or two until we met other Jews. In the meantime the

owner of the house called upon Hersh to come up with him to the attic. Up there, under the roof, the Pole showed Hersh a Jewish child that had stayed there through the war. When Hersh saw the child, he almost fainted. He recognized in the face of the child traces of resemblance to her mother whom we knew. It was the child of Haya Goldberg. The Pole explained to us that the child's mother left the child with him for the night and was killed that night together with the older children. He, the Pole, kept the child who was at that time about three years old. He came down and told me the Pole's story. I hastened up to the attic myself and saw a very tiny child. No one could have believed that this creature was already six or seven years old. The Pole carried the child down, for she could not engage her feet to go down to the house. I bathed the child and clothed her as best as I could. I also sewed for her a shirt and a dress. The material that I used was the shirt of the Jew from Warsaw. Hersh rushed to buy special food for this "baby." We had to feed her slowly, one little bite at a time. The child could not speak, but the blue eyes looked at me in a way that we realized that she knew what it was all about. We were together with the child for several days. The Christian woman of the house accepted our suggestion to put the child outside the house, to get her used to the light and breathe fresh air. We found it difficult to take this tiny human being with us to Lublin. The Polish woman did not want to let the child go, for she knew that there must be relatives somewhere, even in a foreign country, who had money. We were determined not to leave the child with the Poles. By chance we met friends who agreed to go with us to Lublin. The members of this group and also the few Jews originally of Warsaw collected a sum of money to give the Poles so that they would teach the child to walk and feed her properly.

On the highway to Lublin there were low-flying planes bombarding the fields and the woods. Fortunately, we en-

countered Russian soldiers on the highway who helped us get to Lublin. Whenever Russian soldiers met Jews they were ready to serve as escorts. In Lublin there were civil policemen, among them a few Jews. These policemen pointed to a house for wandering Jews. In that house I met a number of Jews from Lublin who had been hidden in the home of an old Pole. Our family and a few other Jews from Kurov were the remanants of the Jewish community of 3000 souls. All of the survivors stayed at a Jewish public house for wanderers. Food was distributed by a special committee. We were also directed to eat in certain restaurants. A few days of this kind of life prompted us to change this type of existence, which seemed so purposeless. Hersh, Shmuel and Hershel Zukerman made inquiries about possibilities of getting private homes. The president of the Jewish Community (not to be confused with the Judenrat) directed the three to a house that had no furniture. There were in each room boards and parts of wooden utensils. We made beds of these boards as well as a table. Since there were three rooms in the house we cast lots to decide who should get which room. We moved into our room with only the clothes on our backs and no money in our pockets. We looked out at the world around us. There were Christians, but where were the Jews? At night we spent time with our neighbors who shared the house. We cried together at the fate of the Jewish people and the loss of relatives and friends.

The war had not, as yet, come to an end. The Germans were still bombarding the entire region and large numbers of Russian soldiers were going to Warsaw, among them Jews. There were also a number of people from Kurov, Vonvolitz and Kasmir. These Jewish newcomers stayed in the courtyard of our dwelling. We established a close relationship with them. There was so much to tell one another. A young boy was very disturbed because his sister was staying with a Pole who would not free her. Rivka Lerman told us that her

brother, a partisan, was killed by his Polish colleagues. There was so much to recount. We sat together for hours, conversing. We could not and dared not forget all of our suffering.

We could not live, however, in an atmosphere of self-imposed leisure. We yearned for constructive work. Hersh went to see the President of the Council and requested a yardgoods shop. His request was granted. The shop was organized near our residence. Hersh also received permission to engage in other types of commerce. For a short while we were in the business of buying and selling prayer books (*sidurim*). Later on, we developed the business of selling ready-made clothes. We were better equipped to engage in this business because in the pre-war period we had a yardgoods store. It was then that we sent a friend to bring our Goldele to us. We kept our promise to call for her when we have a real home. We were waiting impatiently for her coming. She was among Gentiles long enough. Now, thank God, we had the opportunity to have her associate with her own kind. She arrived uncombed, unclean, in torn, dirty clothes. It is interesting to note at this juncture that Mr. Zazhetski refused to return a large pillow that we had given him and was unhappy to return our child. He said at the time: "What will you do if I do not return her? Will you crucify me? Will you do as your forefathers did to our God?" There was still a great deal of hatred toward Jews. Even Zazhetski, a good-natured Pole, could not liberate himself from the seemingly inbred anti-Semitism. It is a fact that the desperate Jews who survived the genocide returned to Poland after liberation to look for some member of their families. Russian soldiers had to stand guard at the places where these liberated Jews temporarily were lodged. We learned that even when we were free we had to remember that the majority of non-Jews did not tolerate our freedom and that we better go (with our children) to places with Jewish inhabitants. When we arrived in Lublin we learned that in that city all businesses were in

the hands of the Poles. The Jews were doing business on a secondary level.

We went to the City Hall Building to take out the needed residence papers so that we could get food from the public kitchen for the little girl (the daughter of the late Haya Shlome) that we left at the peasant's home. From the time we found the tiny, sickly child we had planned to find a better place for her. We had reached an understanding with Levi, the son of Yacov, who lived in Kurov, that he take the child. Hersh was in Levi's house when the little girl walked in saying in Polish that her "father" wants money, otherwise he will not keep her any longer. Hersh, hearing the statement, opened the door, brought the Pole into the house and asked him to let the child stay with him for one night only. His request was granted. A Jewish woman of Warsaw who experienced the agony of the Nazi Holocaust took the newly found child and they spent the night together. The following morning Hersh brought the two to our place in Lublin. They stayed with us a few days during which I enrolled the child in a children's home sponsored by the local Jewish Charity Committee. The personnel treated children kindly, looked after them, attended their health and education. They had the service of a resident doctor. We visited the home frequently. A few days later, the Polish woman of Kurov appeared again and brought a child who was turned over to her by one of the peasants. The child's mother, Faigele, was Velvel's daughter. The Polish woman brought the child to me and I kept her for a time and as soon as it was feasible brought her to the children's home. The other children, a boy and a girl, showed up a few days later. They were the children of Yankel Feinshmid, who came directly to our house when they learned of our residence in Lublin. These two older children were our guests for a number of weeks. We were waiting for the completion of a home for teenagers. In time they were admitted to the new home and visited us

on numerous occasions. These homes were built and visited by the local Jewish Aid Committee organized after the liberation.

Russian Jews as we have learned were not happy with their lot. They wanted to leave Russia. When I was told about the slaughter of Jews in the Ukraine and about the depth of their misery and affliction, I appreciated the anxiety of the Russian Jews to leave their country. They were also having difficulties in perpetuating the Jewish tradition. I had hoped to hear about my parents and relatives who lived in the Ukraine. I walked the streets of Lublin, looked carefully at the faces of the people who recently came from Russia. At times I would ask the passersby about my family, and one man told me that he saw them once in the forest. He added, however, that all of them were exterminated.

A public kitchen was erected to feed the newcomers and I used to come there with my children to continue my inquiries. In the market sections one could find Russians dressed warmly in pants filled with cotton and in heavey winter hats. There were also a few Polish Jews — though not many. These Jews dealt in dairy products, such as butter, eggs, milk, as well as baked goods. A strong inner urge compelled me to buy many of these products. I rushed home in a frenzy — not as a normal person. I had to organize my thoughts. I wondered why I was so restless, as though I was pushed by an invisible hand. After all, I reasoned, my children are with their parents. We are together, we are dressed and fed. My children have breakfast in Zuckerman's room and spend long hours in Shmuel's home. We were surrounded by our people. I arrived home disturbed and upset. At Shmuel's house I discovered Mordecai, the shoemaker's son. As I started to cook, the door opened and Berl Kripnick walked in. Berl, who was of an earnest character and rarely smiled, had a secret smile on his face. He looked at me and said joyously: "I have brought someone to you. Your brother!"

The door opened wider and in came my youngest brother, Sane. I screamed uncontrollably with great joy at seeing my youngest brother alive and well. Laughing and crying at the same time we embraced and kissed one another. I asked: "Who else survived?" He answered, "A child whose name is Goldeshe, daughter of our sister Hannah and Shmuel."

"And what about Chaim?" I asked. Sane was quiet. I repeated my question. Sane then told me the story about my brother Chaim, which has been told and retold by those who knew him.

After Chaim brought the family to Russia, seemingly for safety, he joined the Polish partisans in the Ukraine and became their leader. When an anti-Semitic peasant, in whose home a Jewish family found shelter, betrayed them to the Nazis, Chaim with other Jewish and Polish partisans arrived to avenge the death of innocent Jews. The Germans, however, had set a trap and were waiting for the partisans. After a fierce battle, when Chaim saw that all was lost, he blew himself up with a hand grenade rather than be captured by the despised Nazis. Chaim, full of courage and bravery, has become one of the unsung heroes of that time. Chaim and Sane, my two brothers, fought together as partisans in the Ukraine. Sane, who survived and is now an Israeli citizen, was decorated by Khrushchev and awarded the Red Star for heroism.

I sat on the floor — removed my shoes, and weepingly mourned the death of my brother. Sane helped me rise. I asked him to bring me the orphan Goldeshe.

My brother was sure we had all perished. I was considered to be the weakest of the children and the one most easily frightened. How could I have survived the Nazi atrocities and the morbid aspects of the ghetto condition? My brother brought his friends to our house and great happiness pervaded the atmosphere around us. Sane stayed with us for the High Holidays and then returned to the Ukraine to





Hannah and Shmuel Finkelstein, sister and brother-in-law of Helen Kotlar.



Chaim Rosensohn (brother of Helen Kotlar), a leader in the partisans.

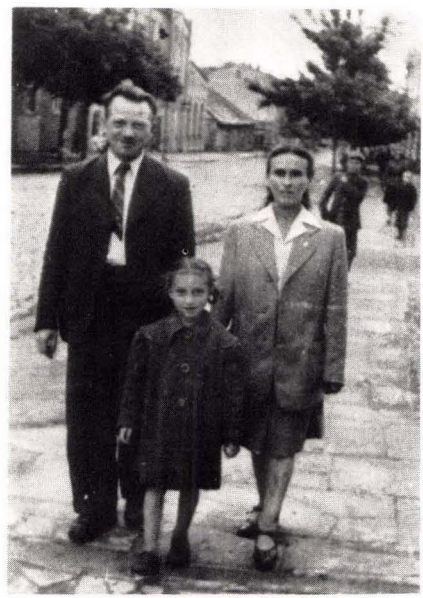
bring back Goldeshe who remained with a Christian family. The child felt at home with them and called the woman of the house "Mother." When Sane returned to fetch Goldeshe the Ukrainian woman refused to let Goldeshe leave and Goldeshe was afraid to go with Sane. Sane returned to us without the child.

This time plans were made for a second trip to the Ukraine. Sane was determined to bring my sister's child to us. He and a number of partisan friends returned to the Christian family who kept Goldeshe. He asked the woman if he could take the child for a walk. The woman permitted Goldeshe to go with Sane and his friends. In this manner Sane was able to take Goldeshe directly to her aunt in Lublin and so Goldeshe was rescued from the Ukrainian peasants and returned to her mother's family. The seven-year-old child, Goldeshe, remained with us. The story of Goldeshe's parents is a very tragic one. At the beginning of the catastrophe they remained in the forest. They could not get food, and suffered a great deal from hunger. They finally found a place for their daughter, Goldeshe, in the home of a Polish farmer. Very shortly after, the farmer heard that the Nazis were searching the homes of Poles who were suspected of hiding Jews. The farmer told the small group of Jews that they had to leave. Shmuel Hune and my young sister, Hannah, were with them at that time. Shmuel walked from house to house, from place to place to find some food. In one of the Ukrainian peasants' home he found a group of Ukrainians who helped the Nazis hunt Jews. They drank heavily and immediately recognized Shmuel as a Jew and shot him. They soon found my two sisters and shot them as well. Goldeshe remained in the home of the Ukrainian peasant. I wept bitterly at the fate that had befallen my dear ones.

My brother, a former Russian partisan, returned to the Ukraine once again. However, the Russian officials took whatever money he had brought from Poland and put him in

jail. Under the Soviet regime citizens must have a special permit to take money from one country to another. Transferring money without a permit was considered a felony. I deeply regretted having permitted him to leave the house. We made a concerted effort to get him out of jail. We sent people to the Ukraine to negotiate his release with the authorities. At last they succeeded and my brother was freed. He once again spent a few days with us in Lublin.

Whenever I speak or think of Lublin, I recall its former glory in the pre-war period. This city was one of the most interesting communities in Poland. The great Yeshiva, the famous schools, the political parties, the cultural societies, its commerce and industry were known all over the Jewish world. In 1946 Lublin was without Jews, save for migrants and immigrants. The Jewish Lublin was destroyed and its Jewry wiped out.



Hersh and Helen Kotlar in Lublin after the liberation. With them is their daughter Bashka.

My brother did not want to remain in Lublin. He and his friends were interested in Eretz Israel. He stimulated the interest in many others in immigration to Palestine. Young people preferred to avoid the discomfort of camps and the lengthy process of getting visas to other countries of the free world. Nor could he and his friends see themselves living in and contributing to a country which had been so inhuman to the Jewish people. Sane wanted to take Goldeshe with him, but Hersh and I felt that he was a young man who would have much to do to build his own life. So I took Goldeshe as *my child* and adopted her.

AWAY! AWAY!

Hatred of Jews was one of the traits of most Polish people. During the period of Russian occupation of much of Eastern Poland, there was no stable government. The anti-Semites had ample opportunity to torment the remnants of Polish Jewry. In Lublin, too, attacks on Jews were frequent occurrences. The few young Jews had abandoned Lublin trying to get to countries where Jews were free, but it was extremely difficult for us, two adults and three children, to cross the border to a country west of Poland. At that period we received a post card from my sister, Frandel, who lived temporarily in Kazachastan, in which she wrote that she, her husband, and child could not get to the West. We felt duty bound to help them. We located a person who often flew there. We gave him 2000 zlotys and he promised to bring the family to Lublin. In the meantime we rented a dwelling place in Lodz and moved out there. Leaving Lublin was a must, because the local vandals spread the rumors of a blood accusation. (Jews using the blood of a Christian child for their rituals.) There could have been a real pogrom in town had it

not been for the Russian army officials who cleansed the streets of these hoodlums — when they heard the rumor. With great fear and anxiety we left Lublin and settled temporarily in Lodz. It was in Lodz that we were given a visa to the United States. A visa to America was the symbol of liberation from tyranny. We were happy to receive the necessary papers to go to America. But we worried about my sister and made plans to get her to Lodz, although in this city, too, Jewish children were molested, beaten in the school yards, and humiliated by the Polish youngsters.

Lodz was the second largest Jewish population center in Poland. It was the textile town in Poland. Its cotton mills provided employment to thousands. The Jews of Lodz were active in all Jewish matters. The Jewish community had a complete range of Jewish institutions. Although the Jews were harassed from time to time, anti-Semitic acts by the Poles were frequent, as was the case everywhere in Poland; nonetheless, the Jews succeeded in conducting their lives normally.

We arrived in Lodz and found there Jews from different countries and provinces. The natives of devastated Lodz who survived the *action* of the Final Solution looked like living corpses. They told the story of the Lodz ghetto, the first to be established in Poland in 1940, where tens of thousands of adults and children died of epidemics, scarcity of food and crowded living conditions.

Listening to the talk of the few native Jews, we recalled our own struggle. More than once all of us shed a tear in reminiscing the tragic events.

I was walking in the street one day, when Hersh, the son of Motel Yosef, announced joyfully that my sister had arrived. I ran as fast as I could to the house and found my sister, her husband and their child. They looked broken, sickly, and unnerved. I asked if they met a flying Pole who promised to give them the money and help them come here.

They said that they had never seen or heard from him. They had come by themselves, taking several weeks going through the forests and over mountains and valleys. No wonder they looked so feeble and exhausted, barefooted and clothed in torn garments. We spent some time with my sister's family prior to their departure to Paris (from there they travelled to Canada, where they live to this day). Finally, we left Lodz and the blood-saturated stones of Poland and went to Stuttgart, Germany. There we waited for our visas to the U.S. Prior to our departure we helped a number of Kurov friends leave and I was very anxious to go to Eretz Israel to join my brothers, and to do there what every Jew should do: build the land, but we could not make it since everything was ready for us to go to the United States. In March 1947 we boarded a ship. To our dismay the waves of the ocean were mountainous. It was so stormy that the ship was damaged and we could not proceed. We were lucky to be close to the English coast. We were still able to get to a British port where a ship was waiting for us. The management presented us with two possibilities: going back to Bremen, Germany, or staying in the British port for a few days and then boarding another ship sailing to America. Nine hundred passengers, including us, elected to wait. During our stay (for 8 consecutive days) on the shores of England the people and the ship management were cordial and helpful.

Every day on board we were happy to be ever farther away from the European continent. Finally, on April 1, 1947, we beheld the Statue of Liberty. We were met at the New York harbor by our Aunt Rachel and Hersh's brother. We stayed with them for four weeks. The Kurov people in the new land arranged a gathering in our honor, where Hersh told the group of our experiences. Our happiness was mingled with sadness. In the land of the free, in the midst of hospitable Americans, we could not forget the silence of the civilized nations who were indifferent to Jewish sufferings in

the ghettos, umoved in the hour of Jewish deportations, and mute in expressing human compassion for the tragedy of the gas chambers and crematoria. A memorial took place in New York in tribute to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust. At the memorial meeting we pledged to ourselves to constantly remember the Holocaust and also the high-minded Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews from death. We spent four weeks in New York. Our uncle, Hayim Berenstein, arrived and took us to California. It was on the first of May when our countrymen escorted us to the train. We were ready to start a new life in a new land and in a new section of that land. We were free. We have survived. We were compensated for all of our tribulations. We came to a country where Jews and all other minorities have equal rights. We are grateful to God for having guided us to the shores of this new land.





Helen and Harry Kotlar in front of the Memorial Lamp erected by them in Hollywood Temple Beth-El, Los Angeles, Calif., in memory of the Six Million Jews who perished in the Holocaust 1939-1945.